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The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

4 December 1985

My dear Prime Minister,

FAITH IN THE CITY

1 We exchanged a few words at the service for Charles Douglas-Home the other week and I thought it might be helpful if I wrote to you briefly.

2 The Church believes that it has itself so far failed to recognise or to respond to the needs of the poor. It has little confidence that, on its present record, it would hear at the last judgment the words of Our Lord to the righteous,

"For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." (Matthew 25, vv35 and 36).

3 It confesses this freely: and it intends to do its best to comfort, sustain and enrich those who are the victims of what I believe is an historic sea-change in the character of the Western economy, on a par with comparable changes of the past.

4 In this intention, the Church does not make a butt of the Government. Its focus is rather the twin questions of what purposes our democratic society exists to serve; and of how those in work and comparatively well endowed with goods and opportunities can best fulfil the collective obligation towards and provide for those who have no work and who are poorly endowed with goods and opportunities.

5 I doubt whether any of us can see a way through the current economic change or can predict how long it will take for the economy to stabilise itself at a new level of maximum feasible employment. All that we can see is, I believe, that the change is profound and extensive; that it will probably leave the West with large numbers of long-term unemployed; that we thus face a real risk of establishing a new social "under" class, with little hope of betterment; and that, more and more, we shall depend on such agencies as the police to bear grievous burdens of stress and anxiety created by the misery and despair of the poor.

6 The Church cannot and does not pretend that it has easy answers. But because the last judgment is the judgment of nations (Matthew 25, v 32), and much more important because Our Lord has no-one but us all to be His ministers to the poor, the Church has a duty to prick the conscience of the nation; and to provoke and join in a debate about the type of society which is being created by economic change and economic policies.

7 Please be assured that my colleagues and I undertake this duty in no partisan spirit, or in the belief that we are holier or better than the Government or any of the Parties. Nor do we believe that throwing money at problems is the right answer. I know that you care for those who suffer. We wish to promote a sense of duty in the nation and its expression in appropriate public action, including appropriate public expenditure. We cannot but believe that this is an aim which you and we have in common.

Forgive this rather personal and religious
letter - but I do care very much for my
country - and I believe St Paul is
trying to do so in supporting
his initiative outlined in
'Faith in the City'.

ALAN WEBSTER

I remain your devoted servant -
Yours very sincerely
Alan Webster.