

POPE AND ARCHBISHOP EXCHANGE VIEWS ON ORDINATION OF WOMEN

Pope John Paul II and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Robert Runcie, have exchanged letters on the ordination of women to the priesthood within the Anglican Communion. The correspondence dates from 20th December 1984 to 17th June 1986.

The Pope's letter to the Archbishop reiterates that the ordination of women is seen by the Roman Catholic Church as introducing "an element of grave difficulty" into the unity discussions between the two Churches.

The Archbishop of Canterbury took the unusual step of consulting the Primates of the Anglican Communion about this letter and they in turn consulted their Churches. In replying to Pope John Paul II the Archbishop welcomed "the constructive and frank character" of the Pope's letter.

The Archbishop went on to report that those Churches in the Anglican Communion which have ordained women have done so "for serious doctrinal reasons". The Archbishop set out these reasons more fully in a separate letter to Cardinal Willebrands, President of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

The Archbishop proposed that the matter should now be discussed within the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission - the official joint body responsible for unity discussions between the two Churches at world level.

Cardinal Willebrands has now replied to the Archbishop and agrees that the International Commission should deal with the issue especially as it affects the mutual recognition of the ordained ministries of the two Churches. The Cardinal also sets out some considerations why the Roman Catholic Church "does not consider herself to be authorized to admit women to priestly ordination".

The full text of all three letters is to be published on Monday, 30th June 1986. Embargoed for 1600 hrs Monday, 30th June 1986.

Contact: Mrs Eve Keatley

01-928 8282