



Lambeth Palace London SE1 7JU

6th August 1988

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

Your Holiness,

At the close of the twelfth Lambeth Conference of the Bishops of the Anglican Communion, I write to you to thank you for the presence of the Catholic Observers, for your personal letter assuring the Conference of your prayers, and to inform you directly of the results of our deliberations.

One of the happy features of our Conference has been the presence of Observers and Speakers from many churches. Among the speakers it was a particular pleasure to welcome Father Pierre Duprey, Secretary of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, who delivered an important response to my own opening address. Father Duprey carried your letter to the Conference and I read it to the plenary assembly of Bishops. The tactful courtesy in the manner of your reference to the known obstacle of the ordination of women was deeply appreciated.

Although the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate has been in the forefront of our deliberations, the principal issue before the Conference has actually been the underlying question of authority, the developing tradition of the Church, and ecclesiology. I spoke at some length to the Conference of this, including the structures required for unity: the episcopate, conciliarity and primacy. I spoke specifically of the primacy you demonstrated in Assisi in 1986 in convoking the Day of Prayer for Peace. Of your office as

His Holiness Pope John Paul II.

Bishop of Rome I asked:

"could not all Christians come to reconsider the kind of primacy exercised within the Early Church, a 'presiding in love' for the sake of the unity of the Churches"?

But the ecumenical pilgrimage has not yet reached this stage. In the meantime urgent questions have to be faced, new problems addressed and the mission of the Church exercised even in our separation. Thus in a number of Provinces of the Anglican Communion the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood, and now episcopate, arises. The Lambeth Conference has no juridical authority over the Anglican Communion. Nor do I. All the Provinces have the canonical authority to implement the mission of the Church as they deem right in their own culture. So the matter of the ordination of women, especially to the episcopate, has been deeply divisive.

Nevertheless, the overall ethos of the Lambeth Conference has been one of unity and communion despite deeply held differences. It is probable that some provinces, especially in North America, may shortly elect and consecrate a woman bishop. The Lambeth Conference resolved to respect this decision even if not all other bishops and provinces can yet recognize such a woman bishop. There will be the pain of some impairment of communion. Difficult as this is, it is, in the judgement of this Conference, a more acceptable solution than a schism within the Anglican Communion. We are now urgently to examine the relations between Provinces which differ in practice on this matter. We recognize the ecumenical implications of this debate but know that the Catholic Church would also see a split in the Anglican Communion as a grave ecumenical obstacle.

I acknowledge that there is need for much more study of the question of women's ordination. I also feel that this study should be conducted on an ecumenical basis. I was glad that this view was re-echoed in the response made to my opening address by Metropolitan John of Pergamos who is Co-Chairman of the Anglican/Orthodox dialogue and, of course, a member of the Catholic/Orthodox International Commission. He called

for an exhaustive theological debate on this matter and said:

"It seems to me that we have not even begun to treat the issue of the ordination of women as a theological problem at an ecumenical level."

It is my prayer that such ecumenical debate, involving all Christians, may be taken up and carried out in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect.

The Conference went on to consider the responses of 23 autonomous Provinces to the Final Report of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission. One of the most important tasks of the Conference was to pronounce the consensus of the Anglican Communion on the Agreed Statements of the dialogue established by our predecessors in 1966. The Bishops, by a very large majority, recognized the ARCIC Agreed Statements on the eucharist and the ordained ministry as "consonant in substance with the faith of Anglicans". On authority the Agreed Statements were welcomed as "a firm basis" for the future dialogue. The complete text of these very positive Resolutions is in the hands of the Catholic Observers. They represent a very strong affirmation by the Anglican Communion about the results of our dialogue.

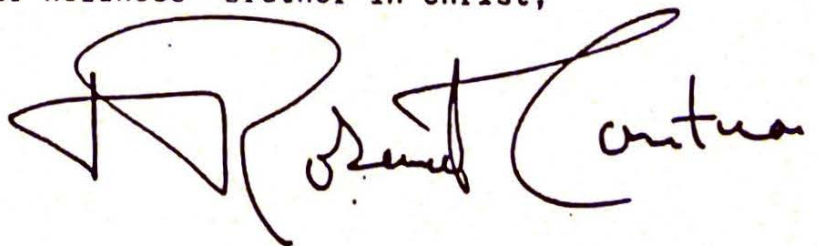
While the Bishops of the Anglican Communion realize that there will be no easy solution to the difficult question of the ordination of women, I see this strong affirmation of the work of ARCIC-I as a significant Anglican step towards "the mutual recognition of the ministries of our two Communion^s" of which we spoke in Canterbury together in May 1982.

svb

In spite of obstacles the Bishops of the Anglican Communion are determined to continue to seek the unity Our Lord wills and to pursue the quest for the full visible unity to which our two Communion^s are committed.

May God bestow upon us this gift and the grace to receive it.

Your Holiness' Brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Robert Runcie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'R' and a long, sweeping underline.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II

A large, handwritten flourish or signature in dark ink, consisting of a long, sweeping curve that starts from the left and ends on the right, positioned below the name of the Pope.