



To His Grace

The Most Reverend Dr Frederick Donald Coggan

Archbishop of Canterbury

We write in answer to your letter of 9 July last. We have many times had occasion to express to your revered predecessor, and more lately to yourself, our gratitude to God and our consolation at the growth of understanding between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion and to acknowledge the devoted work both in theological dialogue and reflection and in Christian collaboration which promotes and witnesses to this growth.

It is indeed within this setting of confidence and candour that we see your presentation of the problem raised by the developments within the Anglican Communion concerning the ordination of women to the priesthood.

Your Grace is of course well aware of the Catholic Church's position on this question. She holds that it is not admissible to ordain women to the priesthood, for very fundamental reasons. These reasons include: the example recorded in the Sacred Scriptures of Christ choosing his Apostles only from among men; the constant practice of the Church, which has imitated Christ in choosing only men; and her living teaching authority which has consistently held that the exclusion of women from

the priesthood is in accordance with God's plan for his Church.

The Joint Commission between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church, which has been at work since 1966, is charged with presenting in due time a final report. We must regretfully recognize that a new course taken by the Anglican Communion in admitting women to the ordained priesthood cannot fail to introduce into this dialogue an element of grave difficulty which those involved will have to take seriously into account.

Obstacles do not destroy mutual commitment to a search for reconciliation. We learn with satisfaction of a first informal discussion of the question between Anglican representatives and those of our Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, at which the fundamental theological importance of the question was agreed on. It is our hope that this beginning may lead to further common counsel and growth of understanding.

Once again we extend every fraternal good wish in Christ our Lord.

From the Vatican, 30 November 1975

*Paulus P. P. VI.*