LORD CHANCELLOR

OF LORDS,
LONDON SW1A 0PW

10 June 1988

Tom Jeffery Esq
Private Secretary to the Secretary of State
Department of Education and Science
Elizabeth House
York Road
LONDON SE1 7PH

Dear Tom,

CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The Lord Chancellor, the Lord Privy Seal and Lord Denham today met Lord Home to discuss the amendments on Christian Religious Education and Christian Collective Worship.

The Lord Chancellor showed Lord Home the draft amendments which the Bishop of London intends to table and pointed out that the Churches had moved a very great distance. The danger was that if the requirements on Christian Education were drawn too tightly many more pupils would opt out. What the Bishop had tried to do was to put in a Christian standard and to ensure that members of other religions would be taught if they sought religious education. He believed that the other Churches, and possibly the Chief Rabbi, would endorse these amendments.

Lord Home said that the Churches were to some extent to blame for the pressure under which they had been put because of their attitude over many years. Lord Boyd-Carpenter had asked him to support Baroness Cox's amendments and although he was not prepared to support the Collective Worship amendment he was prepared to support the Religious Education amendment and had given them authority to include his name on it. Having now seen the Bishop's amendments, however, he thought that they were preferable to Baroness Cox's amendments and that it would be much better if we could carry the Churches with us. He thought that the Bishop's amendment was one which Baroness Cox could accept but would be interested to know both what her views were and the views of Lord Thorneycroft.

Lord Home said that in his view it would not be possible for Baroness Cox to carry the House for her amendment against the Bishop's. However, she was seen as the champion on this issue and so she will continue to have support. In his view, if the Duke of Norfolk were to support the Bishop's amendment that would make a considerable difference.

The Lord Privy Seal told Lord Home that the Bishop would be seeing his Board of Education next Monday and that your Secretary of State would thereafter be seeing Baroness Cox.

In summary, there appears to be a real possibility that Lord Home could be detached from Baroness Cox's camp but much will depend upon her reaction at her meeting with your Secretary of State, Lord Thorneycroft's reaction and how far other Churches can be seen to be lining up in support of the Bishop's amendment. Subject to those conditions, Lord Home might well speak on Baroness Cox's amendment, suggesting that it be withdrawn in favour of the Bishop's.

For the moment neither the Lord Chancellor nor the Lord Privy Seal will take any further steps. Both Nick Gibbons and I would, however, be very grateful to know as soon as possible what happens at the meeting so that our respective ministers can consider what to do next.

I am copying this letter to Nigel Wicks and Nick Gibbons.

Yours, Paul

Paul Stockton