



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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1. Since the announcement of the Government's proposals for a referendum on divorce, I have had the opportunity of speaking to three Vatican officials who follow Irish affairs, Msgr. Diarmuid Martin in the Pontifical Council for the Family, Fr. Brian Farrell in the Secretariat of State and Msgr. Giuseppe Lazzarotto, Irish desk officer in the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church. While these conversations dealt at some length with the referendum, understandably perhaps these three officials were more guarded in their comments on divorce than they have been with me on previous occasions.

2. Msgr. Martin keeps himself well informed on Irish matters and has a good understanding of the changes which are taking place in Irish society, although clearly he has little liking for them. From his work in the Pontifical Council for the Family, he is also well informed on the question of divorce. Indeed I understand from another source that he was involved in the preparation of the recent submission by the Irish bishops to the Government on the subject (although he has been careful to avoid any questions on his role, there is nothing very unusual in it: one of the jobs of the Council for the Family is to advise national hierarchies on "family" issues. Clearly, however, he would not be anxious for the Vatican to be perceived to be involved in a sensitive domestic political issue). He has little time for Bishops McNamara and Newman, regarding them not only as too conservative but also injudicious in their statements and in their support for extreme groups such as "Family Solidarity". He pointed out to me, however, that whatever divisions existed in the Irish hierarchy between liberals and conservatives, there was a common opposition to the introduction of divorce. While he recognised that the Government's proposals were restrictive, he also made the bishops' point that the "no fault" system of divorce was the basis for the most unrestricted forms of divorce and that it was better for a relatively small number of people to suffer the consequences of marital breakdown in the interests of the common good.

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3. Msgr. Martin felt sure that ^{if} the new Ambassador were to arrive near to the referendum, the Holy Father would mention the question during the speeches at the presentation of credentials, given his rather idealised perception of Irish society and his very strong views on social issues. This is certainly probable: it is not unusual for these speeches (later printed in L'Osservatore Romano) to refer to points of disagreement but any criticism is very oblique and buried in courtesies. Twice in the past month the Holy Father has spoken out strongly on the family. In his first speech, he said that "nothing which harms the family can ever be a social

good" and in the second that "situations which are religiously and sometimes civilly irregular pose difficult pastoral problems for the Church because of the serious consequences which derive from them and which cannot leave indifferent those who have the care of the souls at heart".

4. Fr. Brian Farrell, who works on Irish matters in the Secretariat of State, is conservative and on previous occasions when I have mentioned the likelihood of the introduction of divorce in Ireland, has appeared rather shocked. On this occasion, however, he pointed out that there were degrees of evil and that the Government's proposals were very restrictive. He felt that it would be better in a way if the current proposals were adopted now rather than later when a less restrictive proposal might be introduced.

5. Msgr. Lazzarotto, the Irish desk officer in the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church, is quite objective in his analysis of the situation in Ireland and recognises that the country is undergoing change. He has told me on previous occasions that he thought divorce was "unfortunately inevitable". He hoped in particular that the referendum would be conducted calmly and that there would not be a repeat of the damaging campaign witnessed before the last referendum which had left much bitterness. He also felt that it would be wrong to link the issue to attitudes of people in Northern Ireland (in reply to this I said that while of course the matter had to be judged on its own merits, the Government had to be concerned about the creation of an Ireland in which all Irish people, whatever their religion or whether they lived in the North or the South, could feel comfortable).

6. To a greater or lesser extent, these three recognise the pressure for change in Ireland on the question of divorce and the restrictive nature of the Government's proposals. All of them see the desirability of avoiding any destructive Church-State conflict, especially after the last referendum. This is probably the best that can be hoped for: obviously no one in the Vatican is going to welcome the introduction of divorce in Ireland or endorse the Government's proposals.

7. Last week in the English language edition of L'osservatore Romano (dated 12th May 1986) there appeared a speech (copy attached) by Archbishop McNamara, originally delivered to the Knights of Columbanus on 28th September 1985, under the heading "The Role of the Laity in the Church" which contains an attack on pluralism, "civil divorce and remarriage" and by implication the Government.

This is the second speech by Archbishop McNamara critical of the Government to be published this year in L'Osservatore Romano's English edition. On both occasions I have rung the deputy editor Fr. Seamus O'Byrne, ostensibly to ask when and where the speech was first delivered, but also to point out that these were controversial speech on sensitive topics. Fr. O'Byrne has explained that some months ago he asked a number of English-speaking bishops for material for the paper to make it more topical and to boost its circulation and that they are published as space allows. Clearly the publication of this second speech at this time is more than coincidental but perhaps not surprising when both the editor and deputy editor are Irish. As only 800 copies are sold in Ireland a week, it is unlikely to make much impact.

Coffey Keating

Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

C.C.: P.S.S.

Ambassador B. Dillon, Paris

Colm Ó Floinn, Anglo-Irish Division

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