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Secretary,

You asked for a note on the implications of the Papal visit for North/South relations.

The immediate question which arises is whether the Pope should include Northern Ireland in his itinerary. A programme which goes beyond a visit centred on Knock and involves pastoral functions in many different parts of this State puts us in something of a dilemma:

To omit the primatial See of Armagh from such a visit to Ireland would not be normal. Paisley has already pledged himself to prevent such a visit. As he will be organising protest meetings irrespective of the Pope's itinerary he will represent the absence of the Pope from Northern Ireland as another triumph in his defence of Protestant Ulster, thus enhancing his prestige with his followers and reinforcing the sense of isolation of the Catholic minority. From a diplomatic point of view the omission of Armagh might appear to represent a move by the Pope away from the present unity of Ireland in ecclesiastical matters. From a psychological point of view it appears to confirm the impression of a Catholic South and a Protestant North. It could lend itself to exploitation of extremists as another British-inspired injustice against the minority in Northern Ireland. On the other hand a visit by His Holiness to Armagh would give rise to great problems. The central one is that of the Pope's personal safety, although with the use of helicopters etc. this should prove no more insuperable than, say, on the occasion of the Queen's visit last year. There would be a serious risk of rioting from the Paisley-led demonstrations which could certainly be expected and clearly great tact would be required by the security forces, as well as great restraint among Catholics, if ugly incidents were to be avoided. While more serious violence arising from intercommunal tension could not be ruled out it appears unlikely that the mainstream Loyalist paramilitaries, at present in the 'independent Ulster' phase would want to get involved.

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The wishes of the Pope himself and the advice of Cardinal Ó Fiaich will be the determining factor in shaping the itinerary. There are risks involved in either option. Both the risks themselves and the blame the Government could attract will be increased if we are seen to favour either option. In private contacts with Cardinal Ó Fiaich we may be asked to state our preference. I believe that the risks involved in a visit to Armagh are essentially security risks. If these can be managed the political risks are not great. Paisley has not many worlds left to conquer in terms of Northern Ireland Protestant extremists. If the visit is handled properly the gains to him from confrontation would be outweighed by the prospect of his blusterings being ignored, and the encouragement this would give the minority and moderates generally. If our advice is sought I feel that we might underline that it is primarily a matter for His Holiness. As regards the political implications, while we would not expect any gesture implying support for Irish unity, we would equally well be anxious to avoid anything which might appear to be a gesture in the opposite direction. In a programme which covered many different parts of Ireland we think it would be normal to include Armagh, provided his Holiness so desired it and the British Government were satisfied as to the security aspects. Given the great delicacy of the question I do not think we could take any more active role in the matter than an informal response to a request for advice. It would be most important that any contacts between ourselves and Cardinal Ó Fiaich on this issue should be in the strictest confidence, and that the itinerary, whatever it is should be seen as due

exclusively to the Pope's wishes.

Seán Ó Huiginn

24 July 1979