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AMBASÁID NA hÉIREANN
AMBASSADE D'IRLANDE EMBASSY OF IRELAND

P.R.17/88 - Holy See

24th August 1988

Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin

Archbishop Edward Cassidy, Substitute in the Secretariat of State.

As indicated in my PR 15/88 I called recently on the newly appointed Sostituto, or Substitute in the Secretariat of State. It should be noted that this is a separate role in the Secretariat of State, and the holder is not the deputy of the Secretary of State, he is the most senior official after him, but with a job of his own to do. There is no parallel in civil administration. The Vatican has a way of dividing competences that may be difficult to understand, until you appreciate that it reinforces the administrative authority of the Pope.

The office of Substitute is a very powerful one. No one else, I would think, sees the Pope as often as he does; he is in and out of his office all day, that is to say when he is in Rome. By and large, he decides what the Pope will see, and who gets to see him, including resident Cardinals. In due course he will be a Cardinal either in Rome or in his own country. It is he who holds open house on Thursday and Saturday mornings, when any Ambassador is free to call on him without an appointment.

Archbishop Edward Cassidy, an Australian of near Irish origin, born 1924, entered the Vatican Diplomatic Service after studies in Australia and Rome. In a junior capacity he has served in, successively, India, Ireland, El Salvador and Argentina. He was Pro-Nuncio in Taiwan, and then in Bangladesh. He was subsequently Apostolic Delegate in Lesotho. Before coming to Rome he was Pro-Nuncio in the Netherlands.

Archbishop Cassidy is the first non-Latin to be the Substitute. His immediate predecessor was Spanish, the others Italian, and none of them had his extraordinarily widespread experience, which was both in largely Catholic countries and also in places where the Catholic Church counts for little or nothing in local society. This suggests the possibility of a new and more realistic outlook in the Secretariat, and his appointment is another indication of the Pope's determination to reflect the universal character of the Church in the Roman administration. Although it can hardly

have been welcomed by the Italians in the Curia, it is practically a guarantee, and a soothing concession to them, that the successor to Cardinal Casaroli, as Secretary of State, will be of that nationality, quite probably Cardinal Silvestrini.

In appearance, with his ruddy, freckled complexion and his shrewd, darting eyes, Archbishop Cassidy is obviously of Irish origin. He speaks in an enthusiastic, open and even impulsive, way; he is said to believe that there is more to life than work; he played a lot of golf in Ireland. The sour, or should I say envious, comment on him here, where such comments are frequent, is that he is not the Substitute yet, implying that, when he begins to feel the weight of his office on his shoulders, this happy disposition will fade away. It is early days yet, but somehow I doubt that will happen and his natural resilience will see him through. After all, he has been through an exceptionally difficult period as Pro-Nuncio in the Netherlands.

Cassidy was in Ireland for about five years, leaving in 1967. Our conversation was about current developments in Anglo-Irish affairs. Although he is quite familiar with the historical background to the troubles in Northern Ireland, he left Dublin before the present round began in earnest, and he is a little out of touch with events since then. For example, on the question of violence he said he could understand an exasperated man throwing a brick because it was the only expression he could give to his feeling. I had to explain that even throwing bricks was not acceptable and that violence had gone well beyond that stage. Accordingly, I tried, in some detail, to explain our hopes for the Anglo-Irish Agreement, about the problems created by the administration of justice in Great Britain, policing in Northern Ireland, and discrimination, in employment against Catholics. I shall make a special point of seeing that he is kept up to date on these issues.

We have to accept that the Holy See attaches great importance to its relations with London, and the recent restoration (1982) of full diplomatic relations, broken off in the reign of Henry VIII, is greatly appreciated here, after all the efforts, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, to curry favour with the British, even to the point of condemning aspects of the independence movement in Ireland. The fact that the major terrorist, as opposed to political, violence comes from members of the Nationalist Catholic community tends to put the Holy See

on the defensive when dealing with the British Embassy here, and makes it easier for the latter to present their position in a good light. My purpose is to make that more difficult for them by an even presentation, without polemics or anti-British comments, of our case, on matters such as extradition and border security. For example, I have circulated to my usual contacts an extract from the statement of the Minister of State, introducing the Revised Estimate on 17th June, in which he described the principles on which our foreign policy is based, and the Anglo-Irish relationship. With Archbishop Cassidy as Substitute it will be all the easier to ensure that our views get across, and, in that way, the Secretariat of State will, I would hope, be in a better position to assess accurately what they hear from our British friends.

The man is like a breath of fresh air in the stuffy atmosphere of the Secretariat of State. Hopefully, the need to be on guard against detractors - and they are thick on the ground here - will not cramp his style.

Brendan Dillon
Ambassador