



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Conversation with the Bishop of Clogher

I had lunch with Dr. Joseph Duffy, Bishop of Clogher, in Dublin today. He was attending the French Episcopal Conference in Lourdes last weekend and only heard of the Enniskillen explosion on Monday. On his return, he visited the hospital. He said he was well received but was conscious that behind the kind expressions of welcome were feelings of hurt and anger. It was thought prudent that the Cardinal should not visit Enniskillen immediately. In consultation with him, the Bishop arranged last night's Mass in memory of the dead which provided an appropriate opportunity for the Cardinal to visit.

He had known the Wilsons during his time as a priest in Enniskillen. They and the others who were caught in the explosion were representative of the clean-living, church-going, hard-working and decent sort of Protestant. Gordon Wilson had been a catalyst for the remarkable display by the Protestant community of Christian charity and forgiveness. The Methodist and Presbyterian Ministers had taken their cue, as they would have been expected to do, from the families. Canon McCarthy of the Church of Ireland had been the only clergyman to let go a salvo at the IRA, but by Tuesday any further expression along those lines was unthinkable. I said I had noted press reports that hundreds of Protestants had attended the mass last evening. The Bishop said he would not like to say how many were there but he agreed "hundreds" was a fair description. He went on to caution against too optimistic a view of the Protestant reaction. It had to do essentially with their own strong religious views. Getting the participation of Enniskillen Protestants in ecumenical gatherings had been hard going in his time in Enniskillen (he remarked humorously that he had had to encourage the Catholics to stay home to even up the numbers at meetings). The Wilsons would have been among those more willing to attend but even they would not have attended frequently. Furthermore, he had no doubt that the reaction would have been quite different if what he called "the riff-raff type" had been involved (the Bishop would see the DUP as representing the "riff-raff type"). In short, the Bishop is worried that the response of the Unionist community in Fermanagh will change and in particular that their view of the Catholic church as a support to the IRA will come to the fore. In this respect, he hoped the stern message of the Bishops that support for the IRA was sinful which would be read in all churches on Sunday would have a good effect on Protestants.

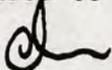
He will be seeing the RUC by previous arrangement in Enniskillen next week (he has polite relations with the RUC Commander, Ian Gardner). He believes that

the flow of information from the nationalist community which has been improving in recent years, can be increased further provided the police are discreet. He also believes that there are quite a number of Sinn Fein supporters in his diocese who are decent people and can be weaned from support for the IRA. Certain of his clergy in whom he has particular confidence are already using opportunities such as funerals, people's difficulties with the police etc. to make the case for non-violence. He is now planning to carry this further by means of systematic pastoral visits by these priests to the houses of certain Sinn Fein supporters and others whom it is believed the Church can influence.

The Bishop asked me if there were things which I thought he should ask of the RUC. I suggested that if the atmosphere was right for a fairly frank exchange, he might encourage the RUC to insist on accompaniment of the UDR and to increase their efforts to assist the local Catholic population in regard to ordinary crime. The Bishop said there had already been an improvement in this regard in the Enniskillen area and that Catholics there were turning more often now to the RUC. I suggested that he say that some flesh should be put on the new Code of Conduct by showing greater respect for and interest in Irish language and culture. The Bishop agreed. He felt he should point out the need for less hostility by the RUC to all features of the Catholic population's life which reflect their aspiration to Irish unity, excepting, of course, violence. I suggested he raise the practice of setting up checkpoints near Churches on Sundays (we have previously raised this point in the Secretariat in respect of Rosslea which is in the Bishop's diocese).

The Bishop was sympathetic to the difficulties of his fellow Bishop in Derry, Dr. Daly, in regard to IRA funerals. He emphasised the importance of the local clergy working hard on the families of the deceased to ensure that promises were kept. He accepted, however, that in the hardest cases in places like Derry and West Belfast, the families could be merely cyphers without influence and that the clergy could not place too much faith in assurances. Even in the easier circumstances of his own diocese, the IRA had broken assurances to some degree in the Lynagh funeral by "goose-stepping" behind the procession led by the priest in Church. I provided information on the exchanges which had already taken place in the Secretariat. He said he would reflect on this problem further.

The Bishop noted with a nod of approval press reports that the Government intended to allow the Extradition Act to commence but would provide safeguards.


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