

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



<b>Reference Code:</b>	2012/59/1597
<b>Creation Date(s):</b>	12 October 1981
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	2 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs
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12 October, 1981.

Oifig an Taoisigh  
Office of the Taoiseach

RECEIVED  
15 OCT 1981  
MINISTER'S OFFICE

Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich,  
Maynooth College,  
Maynooth,  
Co. Kildare.

Your Eminence,

I know that the Bishops meeting in Maynooth over these few days share with the Government and myself the desire to do everything possible to bring about peace and reconciliation between people of different persuasions in Ireland.

I think, however, that you and your colleagues will agree that the effects of twelve years of violence in Northern Ireland have entrenched attitudes and raised fears to such a pitch that any move by the Government alone is likely to be insufficient. Progress will depend on actions and attitudes over a much wider area.

For years now, I have been struck, as I am sure many people have, by the persistence with which representatives of the majority in Northern Ireland point to what they say are the consequences in this State of the Catholic Church's regulations on inter-church marriages, which, I understand, the Bishops will be considering at their present meeting. There is, I know, well documented research which concludes that these consequences are not at all what they are often stated to be; and I am aware of the liberalisation in the Church's attitude in recent years, leading, in many dioceses, to a mild and gentle application of the rules - a development which has not, perhaps, received the recognition it deserves.

The Government and I are particularly concerned lest any re-formulation of the regulations at the present time might have an adverse effect on community relations, especially within Northern Ireland, if it were not felt possible yet to take account, in practical terms in such a reformulation, of the developing situation, as it emerged in the conclusion of the Synod of Bishops. There is presumably a possibility that the conclusions of the meeting might in the foreseeable future be given concrete application by the Holy See in a revision of Matrimonia Mixta. We have also noted the variations in interpretation of the existing provisions by Bishops' Conferences in, for example, Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands - where the same inter-community tensions as in Northern Ireland do not exist.

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Oifig an Taoisigh  
Office of the Taoiseach

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Against this background of a developing position at the level of the universal Church, and widely varying practices at present, some much more liberal than others, as between Bishops' Conferences, we would like to indicate our concern about this matter, and to raise the possibility that, especially in the light of the Holy Father's statement when in Ireland about the special urgency of reconciliation between Christians, the Holy See might not perhaps be disposed to take special account of the Irish situation if invited to do so.

I trust that Your Eminence will appreciate and understand the motives that have led me to write to you at this time in these terms, in full recognition of the separate roles of Church and State.

Yours sincerely,

*Janet FitzGerald*  
Taoiseach.