

LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION: MEMORIA OF BLESSED EDMUND: 5th MAY, 2017

Until 1844, the Catholics of Ireland had little if any trust in the Commissioners for Charitable Donations and Bequests. The majority of the actual commissioners were not Catholic and the provisions of the law on charities at the time resulted in Catholics donating and bequeathing less to Catholic charities than they would have done otherwise.

This distrust notwithstanding, Catholics, lay and cleric, *did* leave money and/or property for Catholic objects and depended on their respective executors to ensure the Commissioners would be given no reason and no opportunity to intervene. Throughout his life, Blessed Edmund was nominated as an executor in wills and many relied on him to deal with any difficulty arising with the Commissioners or, indeed, with any other body or person, relatives of the deceased included. This shows that he was held in exceptionally high regard in his day as a man of affairs. It indicates, too, that, as well as respecting his kind heart, the Catholics of Waterford, priests and people, respected his hard head, and, on foot of that respect, charged him with the oversight of funds amounting over his lifetime to something of the order of hundreds of thousands of euros in today's money.

His correspondence for, e.g., 1817, shows that, in discharging his duties in this regard, Blessed Edmund was honest indeed, but was also prudent, shrewd and determinedly effective in ensuring that, on his watch, so to speak, beneficiaries got what was due to them. Not even the prospect of a legal challenge deterred him and he drew on himself the strong disapproval of some, at least, of his confreres in religion for what they regarded as his excessive involvement in litigation.

For those of us who, in the service of the Catholic school, are required at times to give as much – if not, indeed, more – attention to administration as to education, there is here a lesson to be learned, an example to be followed, a template to be adopted. Br. Edmund Ignatius Rice was declared Blessed because he was deemed by the Church to have, to a heroic degree, loved God above all for his own sake and his neighbour as himself for the love of God. This he did by living his life as a religious in complete conformity, first, with the Rule of the aboriginal and undivided Society of the Presentation, then, with that of the Society of Religious Brothers, in effect, the Christian Brothers. This he did, also, though, by discharging to the very best of his considerable abilities the responsibilities he had undertaken to ensure Catholic initiatives and institutions, especially those serving the “least”, had the financial wherewithal to survive and, indeed, to thrive. His involvement in administration, and, even, in litigation, was, in fact, another of the means by which he exercised the virtues of justice, of mercy and of charity towards those who suffered corporal and/or spiritual deprivations and afflictions. His tenacity – some might say his pugnacity - his effective deployment of his knowledge and skills as a businessman in his dealings with, e.g., the Commissioners for Charitable Donations and Bequests, his willingness to go to law if he had to, were as much manifestations of his commitment to the poor as were his bakery and his tailors' shop at Mount Sion.

None of us glories in bureaucracy. However, as in the days of Blessed Edmund, so in ours, if the interests of the marginalised are to be recognised and addressed, bureaucrats we must be, men and women well-versed in the intricacies of administration, national and international, to the end that “the least” may have all they are entitled to and, with God's help, all they need. That was Edmund's way to holiness and to heaven. With his intercession and after his example, may it be ours too.