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“Racial Discrimination Can in No Way Be Justified”: The Vatican and Desegregation in the South, 1946–1968

MARK NEWMAN 

Although the Vatican pragmatically accepted the establishment of segregated Catholic institutions in the Jim Crow South during the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, its condemnation of Nazi and fascist racism and espousal of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ rejected racial distinctions. This article argues that Rome’s postwar transnational interest in countering international communism and appealing to the global South also encouraged its support for racial equality, integration and the civil rights movement, and denial of religious legitimacy to segregationists. Yet Catholic desegregation in the South was largely token and one-sided, and closed many black institutions.

Pope Paul VI ended his sermon on Palm Sunday in 1968 with a lengthy tribute to Martin Luther King Jr., who had been assassinated days earlier on 4 April. The pontiff described the Baptist clergyman as a “Christian preacher who did so much to promote the human and civil standing of his Negro people on American soil.” Paul VI recalled granting King an audience a few years before and condemned his “cowardly and brutal murder,” linking it to “the tragic story of Christ’s Passion.” According to the *Clarion Herald*, the newspaper of the Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans, the Pope’s words were an “unprecedented expression of anguish for a particular person during the formal ceremonies of Holy Week.” This article argues that the pontiff’s public identification of Rome with King and the civil rights struggle reflected the outcome of a decades-long process in which the Vatican grappled with conflicts between church teachings about the universality and inclusiveness of the faith, segregation in Catholic institutions in the American South,

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and demands from African Americans in the region for the removal of racial discrimination in the religious and secular realms. Historians have given insufficient attention to the Vatican's interest in and public pronouncements about the civil rights movement in the American South, which reflected not only the church's teachings but Rome's transnational concerns about the negative impact of racial discrimination on the church's worldwide missionary endeavor and on countering the appeal of communism in the global South during the Cold War.¹

Scholars have explored aspects of the Vatican's long-held interest in African Americans, particularly regarding evangelism and racial injustice, which provide context for understanding the background to and evolution of Rome's approach regarding desegregation in the South. Stephen J. Ochs's study of the first decades of the Society of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart or Josephites, a largely white-staffed missionary order to African Americans founded in 1893, recounts periodic and often frustrated efforts by the Vatican to pressure American prelates to give more attention to evangelizing African Americans, adopt a coordinated approach, and train and ordain African American clergy. In an article examining the period between 1866 and 1919, Cyprian Davis OSB emphasizes "Rome's pastoral concern for Blacks and its constant effort to insure racial justice in the America Church." However, Davis's evidence suggests periodic rather than sustained Vatican effort, and he also notes that between 1912 and 1922 Archbishop Giovanni Bonzano, the apostolic delegate to the United States – that is, Rome's representative – characterized African Americans in racist terms. Davis's article was a foretaste of his later history of black Catholics in the United States, which terminates in the mid-twentieth century with only a brief mention of the civil rights movement and none of Rome's interest in its progress.²

Subsequent work has focussed more on the impact of the Vatican's interest in African Americans on northern Catholicism. John T. McGreevy's study of

¹ "Pope's Easter Message to the World," *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edn in English, 3 (18 April 1968), 1–2 (first, second and third quotations at 2); James C. O'Neill, "Grieving Pope Links Dr. King Death with Tragic Passion Story," *Clarion Herald*, 11 April 1968, 1 (fourth quotation), 10; O'Neill, "Pope Associates King's Slaying with 'Passion of Christ' in Sermon," *Texas Catholic*, 13 April 1968, 1.

² Stephen J. Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871–1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); Cyprian Davis, OSB, "The Holy See and American Black Catholics: A Forgotten Chapter in the History of the American Church," *US Catholic Historian*, 7, 2–3 (Spring–Summer 1988), 157–81, 179; Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad, 1990); "Giovanni Vincenzo Cardinal Bonzano," at www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bbonzano.html (accessed 7 Oct. 2021).

Catholics and race in the twentieth-century urban North acknowledges Vatican exhortations to American prelates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to address racial injustice and commit more resources to evangelizing African Americans. McGreevy observes that after World War I African American and liberal white Catholics interpreted papal exhortations, aimed mostly at China and Africa, for the development and acceptance of an indigenous clergy as relevant for the United States, where few seminaries admitted any African Americans, and black clergy were scarce. “Such hopes,” McGreevy writes, “were supported by the publication of articles on African-American Catholics in the Vatican newspaper and support from the apostolic delegate,” but often largely dashed by reluctant bishops. Despite the church’s hierarchical structure, Rome allowed prelates virtual autonomy, which often enabled them to exercise discretion when the Vatican adopted approaches or positions with which they disagreed or felt unready to adopt and implement.³

Equally importantly, McGreevy discusses how that the Vatican’s changing theological understanding had a lasting impact on how some members of the episcopacy, clergy and laity perceived race. He demonstrates that in the urban North and Midwest Catholic advocates of racial equality, including some bishops, draw inspiration from growing theological attention to the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. The doctrine, which Pope Pius XII later endorsed in a 1943 encyclical, argued that all Catholics were members and all non-Catholics potential members of the Mystical Body because the Catholic Church was universal and humans were created in the image of God. Any injustice committed against a member or potential member of the Mystical Body was an injustice against Christ. In the 1930s, papal declarations that emphasized the unity of humanity and universality of the faith, and condemned Nazi racism, also provided Catholic advocates of racial equality with inspiration and justification. Such Catholic teachings and further papal condemnations of racism in the 1960s, notably the 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), motivated Catholic interracialism and, along with the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), which condemned racial inequality and called on Catholics to engage with the world’s problems, encouraged some Catholics to participate in the civil rights movement in the urban North. Similarly inspired, in 1965 many Catholics were among hundreds of mostly white and northern religious and laity from the major denominations who journeyed to the South to participate in the Selma, Alabama voting rights

³ John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 7, 8–9 (quotation at 9).

protests at the invitation of Martin Luther King Jr. Focussed on the North and northerners who went to Selma, McGreevy does not address the Vatican's approach to segregation in the South and its impact there, or consider the development of Catholic interracialism in the South that also took inspiration from the Vatican and the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ.⁴

Recent scholarship has largely maintained a northern focus by concentrating on Chicago, which was both a center of Catholic interracialism and black Catholic innovation. While such work is important for understanding how Catholics interpreted and applied their faith, the Vatican assumes secondary importance in these studies, although Catholics prided themselves on being members of a universal, transnational faith. Karen J. Johnson's case study focusses on the laity and away from the Vatican. She contends that in Chicago "laypeople, not trained theologians, popularized the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ several years before Pope Pius XII gave added legitimacy to their efforts." Laypersons spearheaded Catholic interracialism and civil rights efforts in Chicago and regarded Vatican support for racial equality and the civil rights movement as additional vindication. "Lay activists," Johnson explains, "often worked independently of – and at times against – the hierarchy, but still used it for rhetorical clout by quoting encyclicals and other statements." They regarded the Second Vatican Council's "reforms as an affirmation of their decades-old emphases, and they increased their militancy."⁵ In a study of black Catholics in Chicago since the Great Migration of African Americans from the South, Matthew J. Cressler explores how in the late 1960s and the 1970s some African American Catholics in the Windy City drew on the Second Vatican Council's reforms and black power to develop black liturgical forms, despite opposition from black Catholics who preferred the traditional Latin Mass.⁶

While McGreevy, Johnson and Cressler focus on the North, my book on the Catholic Church in the South and desegregation includes some discussion of Vatican influence, especially regarding evangelism in the period before 1945, and several references to Vatican responses to desegregation and the African American struggle for equality.⁷ This article builds on that work by providing

⁴ *Ibid.*, 50–52, 151, 152, 154, 155–207.

⁵ Karen J. Johnson, *One in Christ: Chicago Catholics and the Quest for Interracial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 4–5.

⁶ Matthew J. Cressler, "Black Power, Vatican II, and the Emergence of Black Catholic Liturgies," *USCH*, 32, 4 (Fall 2014), 99–119; Matthew J. Cressler, *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: The Rise of Black Catholicism in the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

⁷ Mark Newman, *Desegregating Dixie: The Catholic Church in the South and Desegregation, 1945–1992* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018).

a detailed investigation and analysis of the Vatican’s response to desegregation and the southern civil rights movement after World War II. It argues that in its appointment of prelates to southern dioceses and in its public pronouncements, the Vatican sought to encourage and facilitate Catholic acceptance of religious and secular desegregation in the South by the region’s Catholic bishops, clergy, sisters and laity. Although Rome denied Catholic segregationists religious legitimacy and its words bolstered Catholic integrationists, delay, evasion and tokenism limited Catholic desegregation. Sensitive to local conditions, Rome did not order desegregation and accorded prelates autonomy to address the issue as they saw fit, leading to differences in their inauguration and implementation of desegregation in the South’s Catholic dioceses. Catholic desegregation was largely token and one-sided, mostly involving the closure of black Catholic institutions.

After tentative beginnings in the mid-1930s, the postwar Vatican increasingly urged often hesitant, and sometimes resistant, southern prelates to end institutional segregation, while continuing to grant them autonomy over such matters. Pontiffs also publicly condemned racism, emphasized the universality of Catholicism, and exhibited a growing interest in African Americans. Having condemned Nazi and fascist racism in the late 1930s and endorsed the inclusive doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, Rome became increasingly concerned that segregation in the South and in southern Catholicism hindered the conversion of African Americans, provided damning material for Communist propaganda in the Cold War, and undermined the church’s missionary work in Africa as the continent began to cast off European colonial rule. As a transnational institution with worldwide concerns, the Vatican viewed race relations in the United States in a global perspective that recognized how racial discrimination in the American South and southern Catholicism negatively impacted on the church’s interests in combating communism around the world and in appealing to the peoples of the global South as they sought and gained independence.

When many southern whites, both Protestant and Catholic, opposed desegregation as the civil rights movement gained momentum in the 1950s and 1960s, the Vatican rejected racism and segregationist resistance through public and private channels. Rome thereby provided encouragement, theological justification, and legitimation for integrationists within the Catholic Church in the South, denied the same to segregationists who tried to claim Vatican support, exerted pressure on southern prelates to desegregate, and called for acceptance of both Catholic and secular desegregation. In doing so, the Vatican made a supportive and largely neglected contribution to desegregation and the struggle for civil rights in the South, where Catholics constituted nearly 11 percent of the population. Catholics were most numerous in Texas, Louisiana, Florida and Virginia, with southern Louisiana and the

Diocese of Galveston–Houston containing the largest concentrations of African American Catholics. By 1964, there were 4,452,015 Catholics in the former Confederate states, more than 280,000 of whom were African American.⁸

Rome's perspective appeared in papal statements and encyclicals, and in declarations made by the Second Vatican Council. All of these were widely reported in leading secular, as well as diocesan and other Catholic, newspapers and magazines in the United States. Vatican thinking also appeared in comments made by its spokesmen, in Vatican Radio broadcasts and in the Vatican's daily newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano* (The Roman Observer), all of which were accessible to southern clergy, sisters and laity through reports in the diocesan and secular press. Lay Catholics also learned of the Vatican's response to the civil rights movement through pastoral letters issued individually and collectively by their prelates and read in church.

Whatever their views on segregation and integration, many southern Catholics claimed Vatican support for their positions, indicative of the significance that Rome's approach to the issue had for the laity, as well as clergy. As Vatican statements became stronger in their condemnation of racial discrimination and segregationist massive resistance, they deprived Catholic segregationists of religious support and correspondingly encouraged Catholic support for, or at least acquiescence in, desegregation. However, many white lay Catholics relinquished segregation reluctantly, while preserving much of its substance by accepting token church and parochial school desegregation or moving to the suburbs beyond its reach.

The Pope was the authority for Catholic theology and teachings, and he appointed and exercised leadership over cardinals, archbishops and bishops. Rome also appointed the apostolic delegate to the United States who, in turn, advised the Vatican on appointments to the American episcopacy and served as "an intermediary between the hierarchy of the country and the Holy See," holding precedence over all Catholic clergy except cardinals.⁹ Prelates had considerable latitude in running their dioceses, providing they did not differ from church doctrine, which, concerned with matters

⁸ *The Official Catholic Directory Anno Domini 1954* (New York: P. J. Kenedy and Sons, 1964), General Summary, 2; *Our Negro and Indian Missions: Annual Report of the Secretary of the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and the Indians*, Jan. 1964, Jan. 1966, 21–22, Archives of the Society of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart, Baltimore, Maryland.

⁹ "Archbishop Vagnozzi Is the Seventh Apostolic Delegate to the U.S.," *Catholic Banner*, 24 April 1960, 1A. Diocesan bishops suggested prospective episcopal candidates to their archbishop, who sent the names to the apostolic delegate for transmission to Rome after due consideration. The Pope made the final decision. Edward B. Fiske, "U.S. Bishops Form Nominating Panel," *New York Times*, 12 Nov. 1969, 1.

affecting the worldwide community of Catholics, did not address racial segregation. Rome allowed southern prelates to establish special parishes for African Americans and separate parochial schools in the late nineteenth century, and for more than half of the twentieth, in a pragmatic adjustment to local segregationist mores and as a means of evangelizing African Americans. Apart from three African American orders, most sisters, like all but a handful of priests, were white, with some orders focussed on serving African Americans.¹⁰

Responsible to the Pope, prelates exercised “his delegated authority in their dioceses,” which brought disparity in their approaches to desegregation. Southern bishops were often cautious and hesitant to act because of their sensitivity to the many segregationists within and outside Catholic ranks in the region, and for this reason prelates often tied parochial school desegregation, especially but not exclusively in the Deep South, to federal court-ordered public-school desegregation. Although the Vatican was sympathetic to the civil rights movement and racial equality, respectful of prelates’ autonomy, it did not mandate desegregation.¹¹

THE VATICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICANS TO 1945

For decades before the civil rights movement, Rome had often expressed concern for African Americans and encouraged American bishops to address their welfare. Adopting a suggestion from Archbishop Martin J. Spalding of Baltimore, in 1866 the Vatican’s Congregation of the

¹⁰ Richard J. Roche, *Catholic Colleges and the Negro Student* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1948), 14–15; R. Bentley Anderson, *Black, White, and Catholic: New Orleans Interracialism, 1947–1956* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), xvi; Dolores Egger Labbé, *Jim Crow Comes to Church* (New York: Arno Press, 1978; first published Lafayette, 1971), 2–4, 27–85; James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3–4, 169–90, 193–207, 209, 216–17, 220–28; Andrew S. Moore, *The South’s Tolerable Alien: Roman Catholics in Alabama and Georgia, 1945–1970* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 116; Charles B. McLaughlin, “Much Progress Has Been Made ... There Is Still Work to Be Done,” *North Carolina Catholic*, 9 Feb. 1964, 8A. Sisters from the three African American orders—the Oblate Sisters of Providence, based in Baltimore; the Sisters of the Holy Family, based in New Orleans; and the Franciscan Handmaidens of the Most Pure Heart of Mary, based in New York City—taught in southern black Catholic schools, but most of these schools were staffed by members of mostly or entirely white orders, such as the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, that were mostly headquartered in the North and recruited primarily from outside the South. Ronald L. Sharps, “Black Catholics in the United States: A Historical Chronology,” *USCH*, 12, 1 (Winter 1994), 119–41, 122, 123, 126, 128; Bennett, 154–55, 174–75, 199–200.

¹¹ Roche, 14–15; Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, 3d edn (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1992), 97; M. F. Everett, “No Race, Color Bar in Church,” *Catholic Action of the South*, 14 May 1961, 1A, 4A; Reed Sarratt, *The Ordeal of Desegregation: The First Decade* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 278–81.

Propaganda, which oversaw the United States as a mission territory until 1907, called on the American Catholic hierarchy's meeting at the Second Plenary Council in Baltimore to appoint a prefect apostolic, with authority akin to that of a bishop, to supervise black evangelization following slavery's abolition. Fearful of challenges to or diminution of their authority, the bishops rejected the idea and most opposed training black priests to add to the three Healy brothers, the offspring of a Georgia slaveholder and his slave, who had been educated in the North but did not identify themselves with the black community. Instead, the council called on missionary orders from Europe to come to America to evangelize African Americans. In the 1870s, the Mill Hill Fathers from England and the Holy Ghost Fathers, a German order, answered the call and staffed some of the handful of black Catholic churches, some of which were founded at the request of African Americans in preference to the discrimination and segregation they experienced in white-dominated churches.¹²

Concerned in part by widespread neglect of black evangelization, the Congregation of the Propaganda convened the Third Plenary Council in 1884 and ensured that it agreed to an annual collection from each diocese to fund Native American and African American evangelism. Responding to Vatican pressure for a common policy, the council also called for separate churches and schools for African Americans as a means of evangelism because of discrimination in predominantly white churches. Legislation segregating public accommodations in southern states further encouraged bishops to segregate Catholic institutions. Separate Catholic churches and schools for African Americans grew in the late nineteenth century and became commonplace in the first half of the twentieth, including in some northern cities. African Americans who attended predominantly white churches were routinely relegated to the back or side pews of the church and given communion after whites.¹³

The council did not address training black priests. However, in 1886 Augustine Tolton, who had been ordained in Rome, became the first Catholic priest in the United States who identified as black. Although sceptical about the calibre of African Americans, the Mill Hill Fathers ordained Charles William Uncles in 1891 and, after separating from their English parent order by forming the Josephites in 1893, eventually ordained another African American priest, John Henry Dorsey, in 1902. Dissatisfied by their treatment, African American laity held a series of congresses between 1889 and 1894 that

¹² Davis, *History of Black Catholics in the United States*, 116–22, 125–32, 146–52; Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar*, 38–62.

¹³ Davis, *History of Black Catholics in the United States*, 132–35; Ochs, 62–63.

criticized racial discrimination in church and society, but found the American Catholic hierarchy unresponsive.¹⁴

Religious orders staffed most of the growing number of black Catholic churches and schools, some of which were funded in part by Katherine Drexel. A Philadelphia heiress, Drexel founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, a white order, in 1891 to open and staff African American and Native American Catholic schools after Pope Leo XIII had earlier suggested she become a missionary. In the early 1900s, the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and the Society of African Missions, both European orders, sent priests to help staff African American missions and churches.¹⁵

In 1904, the Congregation of the Propaganda expressed concern to Archbishop Diomedeo Falconio, the apostolic delegate to the United States, about the humiliating treatment of African American Catholics, and called on the nation’s archbishops to remedy it. Although the archbishops forwarded Rome’s letter to the bishops for action, none followed, and the archbishops sought to reassure the Propaganda that its concerns were unwarranted. Pope Pius X publicly expressed “his loving care to every race without exception” and called, without discernible impact, for “all Catholics to be friendly to Negroes.” The Vatican continued to accept the establishment of black churches as a means of evangelism. The American archbishops created the ineffective Catholic Board for Mission Work among the Colored People in 1906, but the small number of African American ordinations tailed off, with many prelates and white clergy unconvinced of black suitability for the priesthood.¹⁶

Rome made further periodic enquiries about, and efforts to foster, black evangelism and the training of black priests in the United States but with minimal result. In 1914, Archbishop Giovanni Bonzano, the apostolic delegate to the United States, wrote to the Vatican, “very few Blacks would succeed in being in good priests on account of the character of the black race, their rather low moral qualities and their limited intellect.” When the Vatican raised the issue with him again in 1921, Bonzano replied that he would encourage “the

¹⁴ Davis, *History of Black Catholics in the United States*, 152–94; Ochs, 3, 56, 64–66, 70–71, 76, 81–82, 95–97, 100–1, 123, 124; David Spalding, CFX, “The Negro Catholic Congresses, 1889–1894,” *Catholic Historical Review*, 55, 3 (Oct. 1969), 337–57.

¹⁵ Davis, *History of Black Catholics in the United States*, 112, 135–36, 159; Newman, 9. On the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament see Sr. Patricia Lynch, SBS, *Sharing the Bread in Service: Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, 1891–1991*, vols. 1–2 (Bensalem, PA: Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, 2001; first published 1998).

¹⁶ Ochs, 141 (quotations), 142–43, 161–75, 456.

formation of an indigenous clergy,” but a year later he began a new posting in Rome.¹⁷

The American Catholic hierarchy was also resistant. Following a wave of race riots in northern cities, the Vatican urged the bishops to address the violence when they convened their first annual meeting in November 1919. Although they condemned “all attempts at stirring up racial hatred,” the bishops balked at Rome’s request that they also denounce lynching, once more demonstrating their autonomy and their willingness to ignore direction from Rome that they disagreed with.¹⁸

In the same month, Pope Benedict XV’s encyclical *Maximum Illud*, directed at missionary fields, called for the training of indigenous clergy. Heartened by its release, the Divine Word missionaries opened Sacred Heart College in Greenville, Mississippi, to train African Americans for the priesthood. After encountering white opposition, the facility moved to Bay St. Louis, on the more Catholic Mississippi coast, where it opened, with a letter of endorsement from Pope Pius XI, as St. Augustine’s Seminary. The seminary trained African American clergy when few seminaries, even in the North, would admit blacks. In 1934, it produced four African American priests, the seminary’s first cohort. Under pressure from apostolic delegate Archbishop Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, Bishop Jules B. Jeanmard of Lafayette, a native Louisianan, eventually agreed to accept the priests and assigned them to a specially created black parish, Immaculate Heart of Mary, in north Lafayette.¹⁹

In May 1935, Cicognani asked Joseph F. Rummel, the German-born but northern-raised Archbishop of New Orleans, for the southern bishops’ response to recommendations made by the Consistorial Congregation in Rome for desegregated schools and seminaries. Rummel replied that state law made school desegregation impractical in Louisiana and southern bishops opposed desegregation of diocesan seminaries. In September 1936, the congregation issued an instruction to the American hierarchy calling for

¹⁷ Davis, “Holy See and American Black Catholics,” 170–78 (first quotation at 176, second quotation at 178); Ochs, 175–79.

¹⁸ Davis, *History of Black Catholics in the United States*, 215–17 (quotation on 217), 313 n. 76; Ochs, 228.

¹⁹ Davis, *History of Black Catholics in the United States*, 231; Ochs, 6, 179–81, 229, 246–54, 256–57, 266–73, 289, 321, 322–43, 345; Bennett, 3, 9, 163, 193–207, 216–17, 220–28; Sharps, 128–29; Albert S. Foley, *God’s Men of Color: The Colored Catholic Priests of the United States, 1854–1954* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1955), 124–62; Thaddeus C. Boucree, “Negro Priests, American Apostolate,” *Our Colored Missions*, 39, 5 (May 1953), 70, 72, 70.

more schools, churches and priests, including black vocations in diocesan seminaries, to serve African Americans, but segregation continued.²⁰

At the same time, Nazi and Fascist racial policies and practices brought papal condemnations of racism. In his March 1937 encyclical to the German people, *Mit brennender Sorge* (With Burning Concern), Pius XI condemned the “myth of race and blood.” In 1938, he denounced Fascist racism in Italy, declaring, “There is no room for special races.” In June that year, the Pope asked American Jesuit John LaFarge, a Rhode Island native and chaplain of the New York Catholic Interracial Council, and Gustave Gundlach, a German Jesuit, to prepare an encyclical, *Humani Generis Unitas* (On the Unity of the Human Race), which condemned racism in America and Europe. However, Pius XI’s death in February 1939 prevented the encyclical’s release.²¹ Although more cautious than his predecessor in commenting on European developments, in October 1939 Pope Pius XII issued a similar encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus* (On the Unity of Human Society). In November, *Sertum Laetitiae*, the new pope’s first encyclical letter to the American hierarchy, declared the pontiff’s “special paternal affection ... for the Negro people” and their need for “special care and comfort.”²²

United States entry into World War II in December 1941, revulsion at Nazi racism, and *Sertum Laetitiae* led the nation’s Catholic archbishops and bishops to call in November 1942 for “acknowledgement and respect” of the rights of “our colored fellow citizens” in the annual statement issued on their behalf by the Administrative Board of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC). The statement also declared that African Americans “should enjoy the full measure of economic opportunities and advantages.” A year later, the American Catholic hierarchy called for African Americans to be accorded their constitutional rights.²³

²⁰ “Archbishop Buried in Cathedral Crypt,” *Mississippi Register*, 20 Nov. 1964, 1; Ochs, 349–50, 352–54.

²¹ “The Bishop’s Teaching Authority,” *American Ecclesiastical Review*, 134 (April 1956), 274 (first quotation); Sister Frances Jerome Woods, “The Popes on Minority Rights,” 7–8 (second quotation at 8), Folder 11, Box 20, Louis J. Twomey Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Loyola University Library, Loyola University New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana; McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 50–51.

²² “The Unity of Human Society (*Summi Pontificatus*),” *Catholic Mind*, 37, 885 (8 Nov. 1939), 890–918; “Progress and Problems of the American Church (*Sertum Laetitiae*),” *Catholic Mind*, 37, 886 (22 Nov. 1939), 923–40, 927 (first and second quotations).

²³ *Victory and Peace: Statement Issued by the Archbishops and Bishops of the United States, November 14, 1942* (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1942), 4–5 (quotations at 5), 7, Folder 31, Box 64, National Catholic Welfare Conference Collection, American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC (hereafter NCWCC); “Toward a Good Peace,” *Catholic Virginian*, Dec. 1943, 46.

Catholic advocates of racial equality drew on the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. In his June 1943 encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, endorsing the doctrine, Pope Pius XII declared that “all men of every race are united to Christ in a bond of brotherhood,” and “Our paternal love embraces all peoples, whatever their nationality and race.” The pontiff explained, “Men may be separated by nationality and race, but Our Saviour poured out His blood to reconcile all men to God through the Cross, and to bid them unite in one Body.” At Rome’s direction, the apostolic delegate began reviewing the racial views of potential bishops to ensure integrationist appointees sympathetic to the Mystical Body doctrine. Bishops appointed by the Vatican after such screening often proved more willing to institute desegregation than earlier appointees, who nevertheless usually remained in post until their retirement or death.²⁴

THE EARLY POSTWAR YEARS

In the postwar era, the Vatican paid more sustained attention to racial discrimination in southern dioceses. In 1946, Cicognani asked Cardinal Samuel A. Stritch of New York, the chairman of the American Board of Catholic Missions, to move southern bishops towards acceptance of black priests. Accordingly, Stritch secured a meeting with the South’s prelates in New Orleans in September. Stritch told them that the Vatican expected them to increase their outreach to African Americans. The prelates agreed to accept suitable black candidates for the diocesan clergy and to increase the number of black parochial schools, a key means of recruiting converts since most of their students were from Protestant families. In November, Archbishop Rummel called another meeting of southern prelates, which unanimously approved a resolution favoring diocesan “negro priests” and promising “mutual cooperation” in training and supporting black clergy. However, progress was minimal, despite Rummel providing a lead. In September 1946, he had accepted African American Aubrey Osborn for training for the archdiocese’s clergy and personally ordained him in May 1953. Jeanmard ordained the South’s first black diocesan priest, Louis V. LeDoux, in December 1952. Yet only three more African Americans became diocesan priests in the South during the remainder of the 1950s, one in the Diocese of Alexandria, Louisiana and two in the Diocese of Raleigh.²⁵

²⁴ Pope Pius XII, “*Mystici Corporis Christi*,” *Catholic Mind*, 41, 971 (Nov. 1943), 1–44 (first and second quotations at 3; third quotation at 37); Charles Harbutt, “The Church and Integration,” *Jubilee*, 6, 10 (Feb. 1959), 6–15, 8.

²⁵ C. P. Greco, “Minutes of Meeting of Southern Bishops, November 14, 1946,” 16 May 1947, 1–2 (quotations at 2), folder “Catholic Committee of the South,” no box, Bishop Peter

In March 1950, the Vatican’s Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, which held responsibility for missionary work, warned, “Any thought of a wide, general conversion of the Negroes to the Catholic Church is an illusion until and unless the attitude of American Catholics – clergy and laity – is completely purified of approval of the segregation policy.” Appealing to Catholics’ anticommunism in the midst of the Cold War and the domestic Red Scare, the congregation added that “a weak and compromising attitude [regarding desegregation] ... on the part of Catholics, not only plays into the hands of Communists in America; it is food for Communist propaganda throughout the world.”²⁶

Southern Catholic bishops, and clergy and laity interested in regional improvement met annually in the Catholic Committee of the South (CCS). At its convention held in Columbia, South Carolina in January 1951, a race relations workshop quoted the Sacred Congregation’s claim that the “major obstacle to the conversion of the American Negro is the attitude of white Catholics themselves.” Eleven prelates, headed by Rummel the committee’s outgoing episcopal chairman, approved a resolution calling for “the ultimate integration of all members of our Church, in accordance with the ideals set forth by Our Holy Father” Pius XII in *Summi Pontificatus*. Cicognani’s presence at the convention acted as incentive to accept the resolution.²⁷

Several dioceses in the outer South, including San Antonio, Nashville, Raleigh and Richmond, desegregated all or some of their parochial schools in 1954, largely influenced by the United States Supreme Court’s May 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that declared public-school segregation unconstitutional. However, many southern white Catholics favored segregation, with those in the Deep South most committed to its retention. Southern prelates allowed the CCS to wither

L. Ireton Papers, Archives of the Diocese of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia; “Commission Notes,” *Christian Impact*, 3, 8 (June 1953), 1, Folder 1, Box 4, Series 20, “Negro Priests of the United States, September, 1960,” Folder 8, Box 4, Series 21, National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice Records, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (hereafter NCCIJR); Ochs, 403–5, 459; McLaughlin, “Much Progress Has Been Made,” 8A; Boucree, 70.

²⁶ Casimir Marcevicus, “Negro Priests and Seminarians,” *Interracial Review*, 24, 9 (Sept. 1951), 138.

²⁷ John J. McCann, “The Catholic Committee of the South Department of Race Relations Convention Workshop Report” 1951, 1–7 (first quotation at 6), Folder 20, Box 2, Catholic Committee of the South Papers, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, Louisiana; “The Catholic Committee of the South,” 24 Jan. 1951, 1–2, 6–7 (second quotation at 7), Folder 1, Box 4, Series 20, NCCIJR; “CCS Starts Drive for Social Action,” *Catholic Action of the South*, 1 Feb. 1951, 9.

as the white South increasingly adopted massive resistance to public-school desegregation.²⁸

In October 1955, Archbishop Rummel received a reminder of the depth of segregationist commitment when some parishioners in Jesuit Bend, sixteen miles from New Orleans, refused to let a black Panamanian SVD priest, Father Gerald P. Lewis, perform Sunday Mass at St. Cecilia's Chapel in the absence of its regular, white priest. In response, Rummel suspended services at the chapel using an interdict and permitted only one Mass at neighbouring churches in Myrtle Grove and Belle Chasse until the area's Catholics indicated "their willingness to accept for service in these churches whatever priest or priests we find it possible to send them." The archbishop kept this instruction in force as white residents in the area formed a Citizens' Council to defend segregation.²⁹

L'Osservatore Romano praised Rummel's action as "prompt, [and] admirable," and declared, "Racial exclusiveness is a sin against the nature of Catholicism." The editorial endorsed "the right to social and political equality" and affirmed, "In the United States the struggle against such inhuman and barbarous prejudice ... must be aided by all citizens ... Catholics are obliged by their religion and patriotism to aid and cooperate in this struggle by all available means." *Catholic Action of the South*, the archdiocesan newspaper, published the editorial in full. Jesuit Father Louis J. Twomey, who directed the Institute of Industrial Relations at Loyola University of the South in New Orleans, welcomed the editorial as "an effective instrument to silence those Catholics (and there are many with priests and nuns included) who insist that the practice of white supremacy is not in conflict with the orthodox practices of the Church." After discussing the editorial with Rummel, Twomey claimed that because of its publication the archbishop "now feels much greater security in the steps he has taken and is taking." Rummel told

²⁸ John LaFarge, *The Catholic Viewpoint on Race Relations* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1956), 98–99; Sarratt, *The Ordeal of Desegregation*, 278; Katherine Ann Martensen, "Region, Religion and Social Action: The Catholic Committee of the South, 1939–1956," master's thesis, University of New Orleans, 1978, 69, 71, 73, 75–76.

²⁹ "Attitude in Jesuit Bend Not Seen in Other Places," *Catholic Action of the South*, 6 Nov. 1955, 4A; "Church Services Are Suspended for Irreverence to Priest," *Catholic Action of the South*, 16 Oct. 1955, 4A (quotation); "Vatican City Daily Praises Archbishop's Action in Condemning Racial Prejudice," *Catholic Action of the South*, 23 Oct. 1955, 1A; "Action at Jesuit Bend Misinterpreted by Group," *Catholic Action of the South*, 20 Nov. 1955, 4A; "Full Text of Archbishop's and Pastor's Messages Refutes False Statements," *Catholic Action of the South*, 18 Dec. 1955, 4A–5A; "Negro Priest Barred; Mission Is Rebuked," *New York Times*, 15 Oct. 1955, 1; "Integration Lags for New Orleans," *New York Times*, 25 Aug. 1957, 53; Stephen P. Ryan, "After Jesuit Bend," *Interracial Review*, 29, 2 (Feb. 1956), 28–31, 29; "An Historic Document," *Interracial Review*, 28, 12 (Dec. 1955), 202–3.

Catholic Action of the South of his surprise that “this incident has attracted the attention of *L’Osservatore Romano*,” and added, “I feel gratified over the reaction it expresses.” He kept the interdict in place until 1958, when the signature of a few families on a letter of repentance led him to reopen the chapel for services.³⁰

Despite Twomey’s hopes, many Catholics remained committed to segregation. In November 1955, Bishop Jeanmard excommunicated two white women who had assaulted a white teacher in Erath because of unfounded rumours that religion classes at Our Lady of Lourdes would be integrated as a prelude to a wider policy of desegregating Catholic institutions. The two women repented within days, Jeanmard removed their excommunication, and catechetical classes restarted. Cicognani wrote to Jeanmard praising his “prompt and wise action.”³¹

In addition to condemning Catholic opposition to desegregation, the Vatican denounced wider segregationist opposition to public-school desegregation. After a segregationist mob attacked African American students who had desegregated Clinton High School in Clinton, Tennessee in August 1956, *L’Osservatore Romano* declared, “Violence and racial discrimination is a sin against the nature of the great American nation.” The Vatican’s unequivocal response was significant because, according to a poll published in the *Catholic Digest* two months earlier, 76 percent of southern white Catholics favored segregation, 19 percent opposed it and 5 percent had no opinion.³²

Lay Catholic segregationist opposition took organized form in New Orleans. In 1956, militant Catholic segregationists in metropolitan New

³⁰ “Complete Text of ‘Touches of Color,’” *Catholic Action of the South*, 6 Nov. 1955, 1A (first and second quotations), 5A (third and fourth quotations); “Integration Lags in New Orleans,” *New York Times*, 25 Aug. 1957, 53; Louis J. Twomey to A. Gerard Fineran, 25 Oct. 1955 (fifth and sixth quotations), Folder 15, Box 19, Twomey Papers; “Vatican City Daily Praises Archbishop’s Action in Condemning Racial Prejudice,” 1 (seventh and eighth quotations).

³¹ “Church Ousts Erath Trio for Attack on Teacher,” *Daily Advertiser* (Lafayette, LA), 28 Nov. 1955, 1–2; “Bishop Jeanmard Letter of Excommunication,” *Daily Advertiser* (Lafayette, LA), 28 Nov. 1955, 1–2; Peter Buckley, “Erath Priest Refuses to Air Views on Assault Incident,” *Daily Advertiser* (Lafayette, LA), 29 Nov. 1955, 1–2; “Erath Women Expected to Make Amends,” *Daily Advertiser* (Lafayette, LA), 30 Nov. 1955, 2; “Excommunication Ban Is Lifted by Bishop from Women of Erath,” *Daily Advertiser* (Lafayette, LA), 1 Dec. 1955, 1, 4; Jules B. Jeanmard, “A Decree,” attached to Jules B. Jeanmard to the “Parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes Church,” 26 Nov. 1955, A. G. Cicognani to Jules B. Jeanmard, 29 Dec. 1955 (quotation), folder “Lourdes OL, Erath – Racial Incident 1955,” Archives of the Diocese of Lafayette, Lafayette, Louisiana.

³² Edward R. Vales, Robert L’Hoste and André Pilé to *The Tablet*, 22 Oct. 1957 (quotation), Folder AF/2012/10973, “Association of Catholic Laymen: Emile A. Wagner 1956–1957,” Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana (hereafter AANO); “The White–Negro Problem,” *Catholic Digest*, 20, 8 (June 1956), 4.

Orleans organized the Association of Catholic Laymen after Rummel had condemned segregation in a pastoral letter that indicated his intention to desegregate Catholic schools and cited the Mystical Body of Christ in justification. The association's members obeyed Rummel's order to discontinue the organization or suffer excommunication, but segregationist Catholics, including association members, continued to oppose parochial-school desegregation by working through the Greater New Orleans Citizens' Council, which claimed 50,000 members, and a splinter group, the South Louisiana Citizens' Council. Rummel postponed parochial-school desegregation.³³

In July 1957, more than a year after Rummel had forced the association officially to cease operations, Wagner cowrote its written appeal to Pius XII. In a covering letter, Wagner objected to Rummel's "strange new doctrine ... that the segregation of the white and Negro races is 'morally wrong and sinful,'" noting that "the Clergy and the Church itself have participated and are participating in the perpetuation of this type of segregation by ... sanctioning the establishment and maintenance of separate churches and schools." The appeal asked the Pope to provide instruction "on the morality of racial segregation, and on the authority of bishops to define matters of morals," to rescind Rummel's ban on the association, and to compel the archbishop's retirement.³⁴

In remarks reported in the Catholic press and the *New York Times*, a "high Vatican source" criticized the association for making its appeal public and argued that its content committed a "grave error." *Time* magazine reported that a Vatican source had exclaimed, "It is utterly disquieting that there should be Catholics so ignorant of Christian doctrine and fundamentals." *L'Osservatore Romano* declared that "the Church is completely and unalterably opposed to all forms of discrimination – in New Orleans as much as in

³³ "Articles of Incorporation of Association of Catholic Laymen," Emile A. Wagner Jr. to Joseph Francis Rummel, 1 May 1956, Folder 9, Box 83, Joseph F. Rummel to Emile A. Wagner Jr., 19, 28 March 1956, Folder 3, Box 20, Jackson G. Ricau to Joseph Francis Rummel, 12 April 1956, Joseph F. Rummel telegram to Jackson G. Ricau, 14 April [1956], Joseph F. Rummel to Jackson G. Ricau, 23 April 1956, Emile A. Wagner Jr. to "Dear Member," 30 April 1956, Folder 4, Box 20, Twomey Papers; "Racial Problem Study to Be Aim," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 18 March 1956, 19; "Association of Catholic Laymen," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 28 March 1956, 5; "Pro-Segregation Catholics Disband on Cleric's Order," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 5 May 1956, 1; "Excommunication Threat Halted Activities – Wagner," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 6 May 1956, 1; "South Is Ready to 'Battle for Rights,' Griffin Says," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 18 May 1956, 1, 3; "Council Denies Church Insult," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 25 May 1956, 6; "Foe of Integration Heads a New Group," *New York Times*, 19 March 1956, 23; "Catholics Assail Ban," *New York Times*, 6 May 1956, 70.

³⁴ Emile A. Wagner to Pope Pius XII, 24 July 1957 (first and second quotations), "In the Matter of an Appeal to His Holiness, Pope Pius XII by the Association of Catholic Laymen," July 1957, 1–11 (third quotation at 11), Folder 10, Box 83, Twomey Papers.

the Union of South Africa.” The Pope made no response to the appeal, which under church rules should have been addressed to the Vatican’s Sacred Congregation of the Council, responsible for the “universal discipline of the secular clergy and the Christian people,” and made in confidence.³⁵

L’Osservatore Romano reiterated the Vatican’s rejection of southern racism during the Little Rock school desegregation crisis in September 1957, when Arkansas governor Orval Faubus deployed the National Guard to prevent entry of African American students to Central High School, and President Dwight D. Eisenhower enforced a federal court desegregation order. The paper’s editorial declared,

Whoever professes racist principles and whoever defends them and applies them under any pretexts should not be admitted to the exercise of political duties. Even less should he be eligible for any public office ... Because there is no crime more serious than this, which contradicts the nature, character and inspiration of (U.S.) laws.³⁶

In the wake of the Little Rock crisis, Father John F. Cronin, a Sulpician Father from upstate New York who served as assistant director of the NCWC’s Social Action Department in Washington, DC, drafted a statement condemning segregation and racial discrimination for consideration by the NCWC Administrative Board. Prompted by Cronin, Archbishop Patrick A. O’Boyle of Washington, DC, who had desegregated parochial schools in the district in 1950, asked his fellow prelates on the board for their response and found that “they didn’t want it brought up.”³⁷

In August 1958, Cronin attended the first convention of the National Catholic Conference of Interracial Justice (NCCIJ) in Chicago, a meeting of delegates from Catholic interracial councils which were mainly located in northern and western states. Although the NCCIJ was not an official Catholic organization directly controlled by the American Catholic hierarchy, Monsignor Angelo Dell’Acqua, acting papal secretary of state, conveyed Pius XII’s congratulations to the delegates. Dell’Acqua stated, “The Holy Father

³⁵ Arnaldo Cortesi, “Vatican Assails Segregation Bid,” *New York Times*, 10 Aug. 1957, 1 (first and second quotations), 16 (fifth quotation); “The Morals of Integration,” *Time*, 19 Aug. 1957, 54 (third quotation); “Integration Lags for New Orleans,” *New York Times*, 25 Aug. 1957, 53; Vales, L’Hoste and Pilé to *The Tablet*, 22 Oct. 1957 (fourth quotation).

³⁶ “Faubus’ Acts Criticized at Vatican,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 7 Sept. 1957, A3.

³⁷ John T. Donovan, *Crusader in the Cold War: A Biography of Fr. John F. Cronin, S.S. (1908–1994)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 5–7, 97–98; memorandum, George G. Higgins to Monsignor Carroll, 4 Nov. 1957, “Suggested Draft on Race Question,” November 1957, “mjb” note to “Thel,” 15 Nov. 1957 (quotation), John F. Cronin to Edward Mooney, 4 Sept. 1958, Folder 13, Box 89, NCWCC; John F. Cronin, SS, “Religion and Race,” *America* 150 (30 June 1984), 472; Albert S. Foley, “Catholic Desegregation in the Nation’s Capital,” 1, 3–4, Folder 14, Box 83, Twomey Papers.

... expresses warm commendation for the praiseworthy work of the Catholic interracial councils of the United States.”³⁸

Impressed by the conference, Cronin resubmitted his draft statement on race to the NCWC Administrative Board. In September, Archbishop Joseph E. Ritter of St. Louis wrote to Cronin, “I am in complete agreement about the Bishops’ Statement this year being on the race question. This is a moral question which demands leadership which only the Bishops can give. I know this is the view of the Holy Father too.” Bishop Paul Tanner, the NCWC general secretary, sent Cicognani the draft. After forwarding it to the Vatican, Cicognani received a cable from Pius XII in October: “Statement approved. Let Bishops issue it at once.” The pontiff died a day later. When Cicognani called a meeting with the American hierarchy to discuss the statement, some bishops complained that it had been sent to Rome without their first seeing it.³⁹

Nevertheless, when the United States prelates held their annual meeting in Washington, DC in November 1958, and O’Boyle proposed adoption of Cronin’s statement “Racial Discrimination and the Christian Conscience,” they approved it, with John J. Russell, the Baltimore-born and recently appointed Bishop of Richmond, as seconder. The statement maintained that “segregation in our country has led to oppressive conditions and the denial of basic human rights for the Negro,” and noted that just two months before, Pius XII had claimed, “The Church has always been energetically opposed to attempts of genocide or practices arising from what is called the ‘color bar.’”⁴⁰

The statement cautioned, “Changes in deep-rooted attitudes are not made overnight,” and advocated a middle ground between “a gradualism that is merely a cloak for inaction” and “rash impetuosity that would sacrifice the achievements of decades in ill-timed and ill-considered ventures.” However, it did not discuss segregation and racial discrimination in Catholic institutions or, in recognition of prelates’ diocesan autonomy, provide or recommend a timetable for their removal. Whatever its shortcomings, the widely reported

³⁸ Donovan, 101; Will Lissner, “Catholics Urged to Aid Minorities,” *New York Times*, 31 Aug. 1958, 37 (quotation); “Interracial Justice Convention,” *Colored Harvest*, 70, 10 (Nov. 1958), 2.

³⁹ Joseph E. Ritter to John F. Cronin, 12 Sept. 1958 (first quotation), Folder 13, Box 89, NCWCC; Cronin, “Religion and Race,” 472; Donovan, *Crusader in the Cold War*, 101–3 (second quotation at 103).

⁴⁰ “Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Bishops of the United States,” 12 Nov. 1958, 3–5, 7 (first quotation), American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives; “Discrimination and [the] Christian Conscience,” *Catholic Virginian*, 21 Nov. 1958, 10 (second and third quotations).

statement put the Catholic Church in the United States on record against segregation.⁴¹

The Vatican also continued to exert pressure. In July 1959, Vatican Radio urged America’s Catholics to “play a decisive role” in the elimination of the country’s “profound racial discrimination.” The broadcast declared, “It is of vital importance to act now and with decision. Everything must be done calmly and with courage before it is too late.”⁴²

THE VATICAN AND SOUTHERN RACIAL EQUALITY IN THE 1960S

Impatient for change, thousands of young African Americans in the South turned to direct-action protests. In early 1960, sit-ins against segregated lunch counters spread from Greensboro, North Carolina to many other southern cities. *Voice*, the newspaper of the Diocese of Miami, reported that Pope John XXIII’s Easter message lamented “racial strife.” In his address, which the diocesan paper published in full, the pontiff expressed sorrow for those “who are suffering because of race or economic conditions . . . or through limitation of the exercise of their natural and civil rights.”⁴³

The Pope’s representative in the United States emphasized the papacy’s concern for African Americans. In May 1961, apostolic delegate Archbishop Egidio Vagnozzi visited St. Augustine Seminary and ordained seven Divine Word missionaries, including five African Americans, the largest group of blacks yet ordained together in the United States. Visiting Rummel the following day, Vagnozzi said he had ordained the group “to show the concern of the Holy See and the Church for the welfare of all people, regardless of color or race.” He added, “It is gratifying to realize that in the United States, which had only seven Negro priests 20 years ago, there are now 112. There should be many more, but this increase shows the proper trend.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ “Text of U.S. Bishops on ‘Enforced Segregation,’” *Guardian*, 21 Nov. 1958, 1, 7; “Bishops See Race Question as Mainly Moral, Religious,” *Catholic Virginian*, 21 Nov. 1958, 1, 16; “Hatred Must Not Divide Nation,” *North Carolina Catholic*, 23 Nov. 1958, 1A, 6A; “Communications Coverage of Two 1958 Statements of U.S. Catholic Bishops,” 23 Feb. 1959, 1–8, Folder 10, Box 65, NCWCC; “Text of Catholic Bishops’ Call for Action on Negro Rights,” *New York Times*, 14 Nov. 1958, 16; “The Bishops Speak,” *Washington Post*, 14 Nov. 1958, A18.

⁴² “Catholics in America Asked to Help End Racial Discrimination,” *Catholic Telegraph-Register*, 24 July 1959, press clipping, Folder 15, Box 1, Series 21, NCCIJR.

⁴³ “Pope’s Easter Talk Laments Racial Strife,” *Voice*, 22 April 1960, 1 (first quotation), 11; “Text of Pope John’s Easter Message to the World,” *Voice*, 22 April 1960, 11 (second quotation).

⁴⁴ Everett, “No Race, Color Bar in Church,” 1A.

Vagnozzi also addressed integration, praising the American hierarchy's 1958 statement as "the position of the church, a position to which every good, right-thinking Catholic must subscribe." Although he conceded that "changes cannot be made too suddenly," Vagnozzi declared that "it is essential to progress in the line of integration without ever going back." However, he also indicated that the Vatican believed that individual bishops were the best judges of conditions in their dioceses and would remain free to shape their policies accordingly.⁴⁵

Racial incidents in the United States continued to bring condemnation from the Vatican. In May 1961, civil rights activists began a biracial Freedom Ride from Washington, DC to New Orleans to test desegregation of terminals serving interstate buses. Segregationists beat the Freedom Riders in Anniston, Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama. *L'Osservatore Romano* condemned the attacks as "brutal force full of pettiness and selfishness against an irresistible and just movement." Despite such incidents, editor Raimondo Manzini maintained that "the movement for integration and racial equality ... grows and spreads in the United States with determined and unstoppable vigor."⁴⁶

A year later, Pope John XXIII declared, "There is no color bar in the Catholic Church." Yet in reality many southern Catholic churches still segregated African Americans, and all of the Deep South's dioceses continued to operate segregated parochial schools, despite their ongoing desegregation in much of the peripheral South.⁴⁷

Eighteen months after initially troubled public-school desegregation had begun in the city of New Orleans, Archbishop Rummel announced in March 1962 that all of his archdiocese's parochial schools would desegregate in September. In April, he excommunicated three outspoken segregationists – Leander Perez, president of the Plaquemines Parish Council; Jackson Ricau, executive director of the South Louisiana Citizens' Council; and Una Gaillot, head of a small group called Save Our Nation, Inc. – for trying to "provoke" opposition to parochial school desegregation. A Vatican spokesman stated that Rummel had no choice but to excommunicate those who defied the Church. *L'Osservatore Romano* commended the archbishop's decision as "admirable." Gaillot twice wrote to John XXIII appealing her excommunication, which nevertheless remained in place. *Time* magazine reported, "Both the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4A.

⁴⁶ "Vatican City Daily Scores Race Riots," press clipping, no date, Folder 2, Box 1, Series 33, NCCIJR.

⁴⁷ "Pope Affirms Church Holds No Color Bar," *Catholic Action of the South*, 8 April 1962, 1A (quotation); Sarratt, *Ordeal of Desegregation*, 279–80.

Vatican and the apostolic delegate in Washington said they would refer her complaints right back to New Orleans’ spiritual leader.”⁴⁸

Rome was concerned not only with the negative effects of Jim Crow within the United States, but increasingly also with its international impact. Whereas the Vatican had argued during the early Cold War that southern segregation hindered the conversion of African Americans and aided Communism in America and internationally, Archbishop Paul J. Hallinan of Atlanta noted in May 1962 that “Rome is becoming more and more concerned about the American solution of the [race] problem because of the African mission situation.” Racial segregation in the American South and its Catholic institutions negatively impacted on the church’s efforts to appeal to Africans, especially as newly independent countries emerged with decolonization.⁴⁹

Influenced in part perhaps by such concerns, in April 1963 Pope John XXIII denounced racism in the world in the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. The pontiff argued that “racial discrimination can in no way be justified,” called for “the elimination of every trace of racism,” and declared that “men cannot by nature be superior to others since all enjoy an equal natural dignity.” The encyclical also asserted the duty of the oppressed to claim their rights.⁵⁰

In the South, Catholic opponents of segregation frequently cited the encyclical. Father Roland Inkel of Midfield’s St. Theresa Church wrote to the *Catholic Week*, the Diocese of Mobile–Birmingham’s newspaper, in May 1963, “We cannot do less than give strength to his words; by word and action we must offer our Negro Citizens strong, vigorous, and effective means to attain their goal – respect for person.” In the same month, the annual meeting in Mobile, Alabama of the Gulf Coast Conference of the

⁴⁸ “School Rolls Are Open to All Catholics,” *Catholic Action of the South*, 1 April 1962, 1A; “U.S. Court Orders Pupil Integration for New Orleans,” *New York Times*, 4 April 1962, 1; “Excommunication Warning,” *States Item* (New Orleans), 6 April 1962, press clipping, Folder 9, Box 83; Claude Sitton, “Ruling ‘Disaster’ to New Orleans,” *New York Times*, 7 April 1962, 12; Claude Sitton, “3 Racists Excommunicated by Louisiana Archbishop,” *New York Times*, 17 April 1962 1 (first quotation); Frank Brutto, “Vatican Backs Archbishop in Excommunication of 3,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 18 April 1962, 16; “Ousted Segregationist Asks Pope to Hear Her Position,” *New York Times*, 5 Nov. 1962, 46; Mrs. B. J. Gaillot Jr. (Una Gaillot) to Pope John XXIII, 19 Sept. 1962, folder “Desegregation Institute (1956–1967),” 03-038, Box 2, “Desegregation, Office of Catholic Schools, Corres. + Reports (1954–1976),” AANO; Charlotte Hays, “Visits with 2 Famous Segs,” *Figaro*, 17 Dec. 1975, 10–11; “The Archbishop Stands Firm,” *Time*, 27 April 1962, 45–46 (second and third quotations at 46).

⁴⁹ Paul J. Hallinan to Vincent P. Brennan, 15 May 1962, Folder 11, Box 015/2, Archives of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, Atlanta, GA.

⁵⁰ *Pacem in Terris: Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII, April 11, 1963* (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1963), 12 (first quotation), 22 (second and third quotations).

Knights of Peter Claver, a lay African American men's Catholic fraternal and insurance group, adopted a resolution that urged Archbishop Thomas J. Toolen of Mobile–Birmingham “to effect immediate desegregation of our Paroachial [*sic*] Schools, Hospitals, Orphanages and Institutions for the Ageing,” and quoted *Pacem in Terris* in justification. Toolen, a Baltimore native installed in 1927, dismissed the resolution, replying, “You take care of the Knights of St. Peter Claver and I will take care of the Church.”⁵¹ Toolen also resisted pressure to desegregate from Vagnozzi. Although St. Joseph's, an African American Catholic elementary school in Huntsville, admitted twelve white children in September 1963, token parochial-school desegregation did not begin elsewhere in Alabama until 1964, a year after it began in several of the state's public-school systems under federal court order.⁵²

In June 1963, the more amenable Bishop Thomas J. McDonough, a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania native installed in 1960, informed Vagnozzi that he would shortly issue a pastoral letter announcing that all of the Diocese of Savannah's schools would desegregate in September. Vagnozzi congratulated him on the decision, timed to coincide with the beginning of gradual public-school desegregation under federal court order. After receiving a letter of protest from some African American Catholics in Memphis, Tennessee, Vagnozzi successfully pressured Bishop William L. Adrian, an Iowan installed in 1936, to begin desegregation of parochial schools there in September 1963, two years after public-school desegregation had begun in the city. A month before parochial-school desegregation commenced, Adrian issued a pastoral letter that opposed segregation and discrimination and quoted extensively from *Pacem in Terris*.⁵³

⁵¹ Roland J. P.-M. Inkel to the *Catholic Week*, 24 May 1963, 7 (first quotation); James B. Johnson and Charles S. Smoot, untitled resolution, Gulf Coast Conference of the Knights of Peter Claver, 5 May 1963 (second quotation), James B. Johnson to Thomas J. Toolen, 17 May 1963, T. J. Toolen to James B. Johnson, 24 May 1963 (third quotation), folder “Knights of St. Peter Claver,” no box, Archbishop Thomas J. Toolen Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Mobile, Mobile, AL; “Archbishop T. J. Toolen Eulogized by Sheen at Funeral in Alabama,” *New York Times*, 10 Dec. 1976, 99.

⁵² Henry Cabirac to Mathew Ahmann, 5 Sept. 1963, John P. Sisson “Trip to Birmingham, Dec. 26, 1963,” Folder 2, Box 1, Series 33, NCCIJR; “Former Negro School Enrolls 12 White Pupils,” *Catholic Virginian*, 11 Sept. 1963, 2; “Alabama Catholics Desegregate,” *Catholic Week*, 1 May 1964, 6; Sarratt, 168.

⁵³ Thomas J. McDonough to Egidio Vagnozzi, 22 June 1963, Egidio Vagnozzi to Thomas J. McDonough, 24 June 1963, Folder 2, Box 25, Archives of the Diocese of Savannah, Savannah, GA; “Catholics to Integrate Schools in September,” *Savannah Morning News*, 24 June 1963, 8B; “Louisville to Be Third See for New Archbishop,” *Southern Cross*, 2 March 1967, 1; “Report on August 30 [1963] Memphis Trip,” Folder 3, Box 6, Series 11, NCCIJR; “Memphis Area Schools to Be Integrated,” *Tennessee Register*, 12 April

In 1963, the papacy publicly declared its support for civil rights in the United States. In July, newly elected pontiff Pope Paul VI granted an audience to President John F. Kennedy, who had recently proposed a civil rights bill to outlaw segregation in public accommodations. The Pope told Kennedy that he prayed for an end to racism in the United States and declared, “We are ever mindful in Our prayers of the efforts to ensure to all your citizens the equal benefits of citizenship, which have as their foundation the equality of all men because of their dignity as persons and children of God.”⁵⁴

The Pope’s words encouraged American Catholic prelates to address racial discrimination more strongly. In July 1963, Bishop Russell issued a pastoral letter calling on Catholics “to recognize the right of the Negro people to secure proper housing, equal opportunity for work, full participation in educational facilities, both public and private, and the right to equal accommodation.” In support, Russell quoted from *Pacem in Terris* and Paul VI’s words to Kennedy.⁵⁵

In August 1963, the nation’s prelates issued a widely publicized joint pastoral letter “On Racial Harmony,” written by Father Cronin, which reaffirmed their 1958 statement against segregation, quoted extensively from *Pacem in Terris*, and urged Catholics “to make the quest for racial harmony a matter of personal involvement.” Many prelates ordered the pastoral to be read by priests at Sunday Mass in their churches. A week later, Archbishop O’Boyle gave the invocation at the civil rights movement’s March on Washington, after successfully pressuring John Lewis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee to tone down his speech criticizing the federal government. Over 200,000 people attended the event, an estimated 10,000 of them Catholic clergy and laity. The NCCIJ served as one of the march’s organizers.⁵⁶

1963, 1; William L. Adrian, pastoral letter, 21 Aug. 1963, *Tennessee Register*, 30 Aug. 1963, 1–2.

⁵⁴ “Pope Touches on Race Relations, Space, Peace,” *Southern Cross*, 4 July 1963, 1 (quotation); “Pope Prays for End to Racism in U.S.,” *Clarion Herald*, 11 July 1963, 1; “The Force of Conscience,” *Time*, 12 July 1963, 17.

⁵⁵ “Work for Racial Justice in Spirit of Christian Charity, Bishop Urges,” *Catholic Virginian*, 12 July 1963, 1.

⁵⁶ Donovan, *Crusader in the Cold War*, 149; “On Racial Harmony Joint Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of the United States – 1963” (quotations), Folder 5, Box 17, Archbishop John P. Cody, “To the Clergy, Religious and Laity of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction,” 25 Aug. 1963, Folder 4, Box 8, Series 33, NCCIJR; “Text of Race Pastoral,” *Southern Cross*, 22 Aug. 1963, 1–2; Russell Shaw, “Hierarchy Repeats 1958 Query on Racial Justice,” *Southern Cross*, 22 Aug. 1963, 1–2; “Bishops Ask Personal Involvement in Quest for Racial Harmony,” *Catholic Virginian*, 23 Aug. 1963, 1, 16; “Richmond, Northern Virginia Councils Prepare for ‘March,’” *Catholic Virginian*, 22 Aug. 1963, 1; “Text of U.S. Bishops’ Statement on Racial

On the day of the march, Vatican Radio declared that Catholic participation had the support of “Christian principles and the teachings of the Church.” Its broadcast mentioned the United States bishops’ pastoral letter, as well as Paul VI’s words to President Kennedy. The station stated, “All the moral authority of the principles of Christianity and of the teachings of the Church stand at the side of those who work to overcome every prejudice and every racist formula in the relations between men.” Many southern diocesan newspapers reported the broadcast, as well as Catholic participation in the march.⁵⁷

In September, four children died in the bombing of an African American Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. In response, Archbishop Toolen issued a pastoral letter that deplored “this shameful act” and urged “every decent citizen to do his part in bringing to justice those guilty of killing and destroying.” In an editorial, reprinted in the *Catholic Week*, *L’Osservatore Romano* described the murders as a “slaughter of innocents” by “the racist insanity of some fanatical adherents of segregation.” The Vatican daily declared, “The Noble American Nation, committed by its highest authorities to combatting the ruinous error of segregation, will draw from today’s bloody misdeed an irresistible [*sic*] drive to conquer and prevail in the just battle for integration.”⁵⁸

A month later, Bishop Robert E. Tracy of Baton Rouge, a New Orleans native installed two years before, spoke on behalf of the American bishops attending the Second Vatican Council, a gathering in Rome of the Church’s worldwide hierarchy convened by John XXIII in October 1962 to renew and reform the church for the modern era. Tracy asked the council to state unequivocally that the church recognized no inequality among human beings based on race. His appeal generated spontaneous applause, and, as Tracy requested, the Constitution *De Ecclesia* (On the Church) was amended to declare, “There is, therefore, in Christ and in the church no

Harmony,” *Catholic Commentator*, 23 Aug. 1963, 3; “Get Personally Involved in Promoting Race Harmony,” *North Carolina Catholic*, 25 Aug. 1963, 1; “Bishops Stress ‘Crucial Test of Love,’” *Alamo Messenger*, 23 Aug. 1963, 1; “Prayer for Divine Guidance Climaxes Huge Rights March,” *Guardian*, 30 Aug. 1963, 1, 6, 9; “Archbishop O’Boyle Prays for Guidance at Rights March,” *Catholic Virginian*, 30 Aug. 1963, 16; Russell Shaw, “August 28: It Was a Day to Be Remembered,” *Alamo Messenger*, 6 Sept. 1963, 1A.

⁵⁷ “Vatican Radio Lauds U.S. Catholics for Taking Part in March for Civil Rights,” *Catholic Week*, 6 Sept. 1963, 4; “Vatican Radio Praises Catholics Who Marched,” *Alamo Messenger*, 6 Sept. 1963, 11A; “Vatican Radio Lauds Catholic Role in March,” *Catholic Virginian*, 6 Sept. 1963, 5.

⁵⁸ “Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself Seems to Be a Forgotten Law in Alabama,” *Catholic Week*, 20 Sept. 1963, 1 (first and second quotations); “Vatican City Daily Calls Birmingham Church Bombing ‘True Slaughter of the Innocents’ By ‘Racist Insanity,’” *Catholic Week*, 20 Sept. 1963, 1 (third, fourth and fifth quotations).

inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex.” However, the cautious Tracy only began parochial-school desegregation in 1964, a year after federal court-ordered public-school desegregation started in his diocese.⁵⁹

In February 1964, African American Catholics in Mississippi, calling themselves the Committee for True Catholicism in Race Relations, wrote to Bishop Richard O. Gerow of Natchez-Jackson, a Mobile, Alabama native installed in 1924, “it is impossible to see your reasoning behind maintaining complete segregation of Catholics of color,” given the late Pope John XXIII’s statement in *Pacem in Terris* that it is “not true that some human beings are by nature superior and others inferior.” There is no record of a response from Gerow, but in August he announced that parochial-school desegregation would begin in September, timed to coincide with public-school desegregation under federal court order.⁶⁰

As well as African American Catholics, Rome’s support for racial equality encouraged some priests and prelates in the South to endorse civil rights. In January 1964, the bulletin of the Institute of Social Order of the Jesuit New Orleans Province, which encompassed much of the South, declared, after discussing *Pacem in Terris*, that “it is difficult to find any sound moral basis for condemning direct action techniques” to achieve African American rights “under God and under the Constitution.” In May, Archbishop Robert E. Lucey of San Antonio, a Los Angeles native installed in 1941, issued a pastoral letter appealing for Catholics to support the federal civil rights bill that mandated desegregation of public accommodations. Lucey, who ordered his priests to give a sermon on the bill’s necessity, noted that *Pacem in Terris*, which he quoted, had “condemned racism and said some very pointed things about human rights and duties.” Native Texans Bishop Wendelin J. Nold of Galveston–Houston and Coadjutor Bishop John L. Morkovsky, and two hundred diocesan priests, signed a statement supporting the civil rights bill that drew on the encyclical. Father Thomas Delaney also quoted

⁵⁹ William F. Sunderland, “Council Urged to Condemn Racial Bias,” *Shreveport Times*, 25 Oct., 1963, 10A; “Council Adopts ‘Little Statement’ on Jews,” *North Carolina Catholic*, 27 Sept. 1964, 1; “Text of Vatican Council’s Constitution ‘De Ecclesia,’ as Proclaimed by Pope Paul VI,” *New York Times*, 23 Nov. 1964, 18 (quotation); Robert E. Tracey, “Full Text of Bishop Tracy’s Pastoral on Racial Justice,” *Catholic Commentator*, 28 May 1965, 1; “Louisiana Bishop Orders Integration of 4 Schools,” *Southern Cross*, 1 Aug. 1963, 1; Sarratt, 103.

⁶⁰ Committee for True Catholicism in Race Relations to Richard O. Gerow, 13 Feb. 1964, Folder 11, Box 11, Series 33, NCCIJR; “Bishop Richard O. Gerow,” *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, 14 Oct. 1964, 3; “Mississippi Faces New School Step,” *New York Times*, 10 Aug. 1964, 17. The letter rendered the spirit rather than the precise wording of *Pacem in Terris*. *Pacem in Terris*, 22.

from it in a June 1964 sermon at the Co-Cathedral of St. Peter the Apostle in Jackson, Mississippi that condemned racial discrimination and was reprinted in the diocesan newspaper, the *Mississippi Register*.⁶¹

After passage of the civil rights bill in July 1964, many southern bishops called for compliance with its provisions. In calling for “an attitude of calmness and responsibility,” the *Texas Catholic Herald*, the Galveston–Houston diocesan newspaper, noted that “John XXIII said in ‘Pacem in Terris’ that human rights are inherent in man’s nature and it is not the purpose of the law to bestow such rights but to protect these God-given rights.” The Vatican City weekly magazine *L’Osservatore della Domenica* welcomed the Civil Rights Act, claiming that “the noble battle begun by Kennedy is concluded” and affirming that now “is more than ever the hour for moral forces and above all the hour for Christians” to “remind (all) of the message of love and brotherhood which is found in the Gospel.” Some Catholic laypeople also responded positively to the Act and cited papal pronouncements in justification. Henry L. Stille of San Antonio wrote to the *Alamo Messenger*, the Archdiocese of San Antonio’s newspaper, “Pope John and Pope Paul have spoken loudly and clearly against segregation.”⁶²

Paul VI’s support for civil rights was reaffirmed when, in August 1964, he met with three leaders of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, Edler G. Hawkins, Eugene Carson Blake and Richard I. Davies, in the spirit of the ongoing Second Vatican Council’s interest in ecumenical cooperation and social justice. Afterwards, a Vatican communiqué stated the pontiff’s desire for further ecumenical dialogue and his interest in racial justice efforts in the United States. Hawkins commented on the Pope’s “concern for Christian cooperation in the struggle for equal rights among all men.” Three weeks later, the Pope gave an audience to Martin Luther King, who said afterwards, “The Pope made it palpably clear that he is a friend of the

⁶¹ “The Social Encyclicals: Key to Peace with Justice and Charity (6),” *Christ’s Blueprint for the South*, 16, 4 (Jan. 1964), 2–4 (first and second quotations at 3); “Archbishop Endorses Civil Rights Proposal,” *Alamo Messenger*, 22 May 1964, 1 (third quotation); “Archbishop Lucey Urges Support of Rights Bill,” *Texas Catholic*, 30 May 1964, press clipping, Lucey Scrapbook #8, Archives of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, San Antonio, TX; “Statement on ‘rights,’” *Texas Catholic Herald*, 4 June 1964, 1–2; “Priest Tells Why ‘Discrimination Immoral,’” *Mississippi Register*, 12 June 1964, Folder 4, Box 2, Series 21, NCCIJR.

⁶² “Churchmen Call on Americans to Respect Civil Rights Law,” *Catholic Week*, 10 July 1964, 7; “Bishops Speak on the Civil Rights Law,” *Josephite Harvest*, 76 (July–Aug. 1964), 1; “New era in human relations,” *Texas Catholic Herald*, 2 July 1964, 4 (first and second quotations); “Vatican Weekly Hails Civil Rights Passage,” *Clarion-Herald*, 16 July 1964, 3 (third, fourth and fifth quotations); “Vatican City Weekly Hails Civil Rights Bill Passage,” *Voice*, 17 July 1964, 3; Henry L. Stille to the *Alamo Messenger*, 31 July 1964, 4 (sixth quotation).

Negro people, and asked me to tell the American Negroes that he is committed to the cause of civil rights in the United States.”⁶³

In March 1965, hundreds of clergy and laity from the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faiths converged on Selma, Alabama in answer to King’s call for them to support a voting rights campaign after state troopers had attacked several hundred protesters attempting to march to Montgomery. After an abortive second march, racists killed white Boston Unitarian minister James J. Reeb and beat two other ministers. Paul VI responded by urging a noon crowd in St. Peter’s Square to pray for “countries ... where discord because of race and color creates hatred, victims and disorders.” That same day, a *L’Osservatore Romano* editorial entitled “Racist Infamy” denounced the “bestial violence” in Alabama, deplored Reeb’s murder, and considered it “significant that Catholic priests and religious persons of every confession stand side by side in ... defense of human values.” Vatican Radio found in the “indignation and emotion aroused throughout the world by the assassination at Selma ... reasons for comfort” and approvingly noted the presence of Catholic sisters at Reeb’s funeral. However, the sisters and the vast majority of Catholic clergy who went to Selma did so from dioceses outside the South, with the NCCIJ helping to coordinate Catholic involvement.⁶⁴

While he deplored Reeb’s murder, Archbishop Toolen condemned the Selma protests and the participation of priests and sisters, arguing that “their place is at home doing God’s work.” Whatever their views of the protests, many Catholic prelates in the South were unwilling to incur Toolen’s wrath by sanctioning their clergy’s participation in Selma. Lucey, one of the few ordinaries in the region to permit priests to participate, defended Catholic involvement on the *Alamo Messenger*’s front page by quoting extensively from *Pacem in Terris*, including its admonition that “he who possesses certain rights has ... the duty to claim those rights as marks of his dignity, while all others have the obligation to acknowledge those rights and respect them.” Lucey also noted that “L’Osservatore Romano declared that discrimination is morally wrong and is being maintained in Alabama by bestial and uncivilized tactics.”⁶⁵

⁶³ “Pope Voices Deep Concern over Rights,” *Alamo Messenger*, 28 Aug. 1964, 9 (first quotation); Paul Hofman, “Pope and Dr. King Confer on Rights,” *New York Times*, 19 Sept. 1964, 3 (second quotation).

⁶⁴ “Invoke Mary for Racial Peace, Paul VI Pleads,” *Guardian*, 19 March 1965, 1 (first quotation), 3; “End Race Strife, Pope’s Plea,” *Voice*, 19 March 1965, 1; “‘Osservatore’ Deplores Selma Conflict,” *Pittsburgh Catholic*, press clipping, dated 18 March 1965 (second through fifth quotations), Folder 13, Box 25, Series 20, NCCIJR; Paul L. Montgomery, “Catholics Moved by Rights Actions,” *New York Times*, 21 March 1965, 1.

⁶⁵ “Archbishop Toolen Criticizes Presence of Priests, Sisters in Demonstrations,” *Catholic Week*, 19 March 1965, 1 (first quotation), 12; “Archbishop Toolen Mourns Death of

Many of the Catholics who went to Selma were inspired by *Pacem in Terris* and the Second Vatican Council's reforms that, as Archbishop Hallinan explained, encouraged "priests, nuns and brothers to go into society and become involved in its problems."⁶⁶ The council, which concluded in December 1965, also had long-term repercussions for African American Catholics by permitting church liturgy to be adapted "to the culture and traditions of peoples," so that it respected and fostered "the genius and talents of the various races and peoples." In subsequent decades, this led to the development in many African American congregations of a distinctive black liturgy that incorporated African dress, drums and gospel music.⁶⁷ The council also approved the restoration of the permanent diaconate, which black Catholics hoped might help compensate for a continued lack of African American priests. Deacons could perform most of the functions of a priest except offer Mass or hear confessions. The Vatican addressed the absence of an African American in the American episcopacy by appointing Father Harold R. Perry, SVD, a native of Lake Charles, Louisiana, auxiliary bishop of New Orleans. In January 1966, Vagnozzi consecrated Perry, the first African American bishop appointed in the United States in the twentieth century.⁶⁸

Two Louisiana dioceses, Lafayette and Alexandria, had retained segregated Catholic school systems, but, during the 1965–66 school year they became the last Catholic dioceses in the South to begin parochial desegregation, acting in step with public schools subject to federal court order. By 1966, most Catholic

Beaten Minister," *Catholic Week*, 19 March 1965, 1; Robert E. Lucey, "Murder in Alabama," *Alamo Messenger*, 19 March 1965, 1 (second and third quotations); "Deceased Minister and Priests Inspire March for Justice," *Alamo Messenger*, 19 March 1965, 4; *Pacem in Terris*, 12.

⁶⁶ "Wherever They Go Christians Witness for Christ," *Our Sunday Visitor*, 24 July 1966, 4. The Second Vatican Council also argued that "every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent." "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium Et Spes* Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965," at www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (accessed 8 May 2021).

⁶⁷ "Diversity within the Roman Rite's Fundamental Unity," *North Carolina Catholic*, 29 July 2001, 5A (quotations); Roy Reed, "Black Catholic Churches Are Mixing Jazz with Their Traditional Services," *New York Times*, 6 Aug. 1972, 35; "New Roman Catholic Hymnal Aimed at Black Parishioners," *New York Times*, 10 Nov. 1986, A17; Kevin Bell, "Mass Changes: African-American Catholics Are Celebrating Their Heritage in Church," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 18 Aug. 1991, A1; Clarence-Rufus J. Rivers, "Freeing the Spirit: Very Personal Reflections on One Man's Search for the Spirit on Worship," *USCH*, 19, 2 (Spring 2001), 95–143. The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy permitted liturgical adaptation.

⁶⁸ "Council Approves Deacon, Larger Role for Bishops," *Catholic Commentator*, 8 Nov. 1963, 1; Newell Schindler, "Bishop Perry Is Consecrated as Auxiliary of New Orleans," *Texas Catholic Herald*, 7 Jan. 1966, 2.

hospitals in the South had also desegregated, largely prompted by federal civil rights compliance required for Medicare eligibility.⁶⁹

The Vatican maintained its interest in American civil rights. In the summer of 1967, Whitney M. Young Jr., executive director of the National Urban League, met Paul VI in Rome who told him, “All men are brothers under the fatherhood of one God and all have human rights of self-development and perfection which must be not only respected but fostered, promoted and defended.” In April 1968, the Pope devoted part of his Palm Sunday sermon to praising Martin Luther King, expressing “Our sorrow over his tragic death” and deploring “this crime.” The pontiff declared, “May the strife of to-day and the unjust discriminations of race give place to the equal enjoyment of justice and freedom as of right.” After King’s death, a Vatican Radio broadcast affirmed, “He was a man who preached justice and peace. Let everyone at last meditate on his words.”⁷⁰

AFTERMATH

Although southern prelates condemned King’s assassination and many attended memorial services for him, their dioceses struggled to implement the Pope’s vision. Tokenism characterized most of Catholic institutional desegregation in the South. Divided by residential segregation, including suburban white flight, many African American and white Catholics in the region attended different churches and schools from each other, even though southern dioceses began closing black parishes and schools in the late 1960s on behalf of integration and in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council’s rejection of racial inequality. However, the one-sided implementation of integration led many African Americans in the South to leave Catholicism altogether.⁷¹

Influenced by King’s murder, by black power and by the Second Vatican Council’s openness to new liturgical forms and encouragement of greater

⁶⁹ “Lafayette Diocese Will ‘Open Schools to All,’” *Catholic Commentator*, 4 June 1965, 1; “Bishop Stresses Value of Catholic Education,” *North-Central Louisiana Register*, 3 Sept. 1965, 1–2; William A. Osbourne, *The Segregated Covenant: Race Relations and American Catholics* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 52, 57–58.

⁷⁰ Whitney M. Young Jr., “For a Moral Crusade,” *Josephite Harvest*, 79 (Sept.–Oct. 1967), 17 (first quotation); “Pope’s Easter Message to the World,” 2 (second, third and fourth quotations); Steve Landregan, “Martin Luther King,” *Texas Catholic*, 13 April 1968, 4 (fifth quotation).

⁷¹ “State Memorial Services Honor Slain Dr. King,” *Catholic Virginian*, 12 April 1968, 1; “Violence, Eulogies Follow Death of Martin Luther King,” *Guardian*, 12 April 1968, 1; “Bishop Fletcher Praises Doctor King,” *Guardian*, 12 April 1968, 3; Newman, *Desegregating Dixie*, 200, 245, 275.

lay and clergy assertiveness, many of the African Americans who remained in the church sought a greater role within it and some also focussed on infusing black culture and identity into Catholicism. Within days of King's assassination and also in response to violent suppression of the riots that followed, Father Herman Porter, an African American clergyman in the Diocese of Rockford, Illinois, invited the nation's black Catholic clergy to a private meeting in Detroit. Fifty-eight of the nation's 166 African American priests and brothers attended and formed the Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, which issued a statement that characterized the American Catholic Church as "primarily a white racist institution." The statement called for the elimination of racism from the church, the appointment of black clergy to positions of authority, the creation of a black Catholic department in the United States Catholic Conference, and black direction of the Catholic Church in the black community. In the meeting's aftermath, Sister Mary Martin de Porres Grey (Patricia Grey Tyree), an observer who had been the only African American woman present, called a gathering of black sisters, who founded the National Black Sisters' Conference. Black laity formed the National Black Lay Catholic Caucus and seminarians the National Black Catholic Seminarians Association.⁷²

At first, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) ignored the Black Catholic Clergy Caucus's demands, but in November 1969 it agreed to fund a National Office for Black Catholics (NOBC) that the caucus would establish. A year later, the NCCB decided to provide the NOBC with only \$150,000 of the \$659,000 the office had requested. Brother Joseph Davis, SM, the NOBC's executive director, initially rejected the grant and declared that "until we have black bishops who can speak with authority on our behalf, who are sensitive to our needs and who are not fearful in pursuing them, then we have little or no place in the American Catholic church."⁷³

Father Lawrence Lucas, a Harlem pastor and president of the renamed National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, claimed that "there is no organ of communication, much less responsiveness, between the black people of

⁷² "Statement of Black Catholic Clergy Caucus – April 18, 1968," 1–2, 1, Folder 9, Box 5, Series 16, NCCIJR; Newman, 196–97; Katrina M. Sanders, "Black Catholic Clergy and the Struggle for Civil Rights: Winds of Change," in M. Shawn Copeland, ed., with LaReine-Marie Moosely SND and Albert J. Raboteau, *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 82–83; M. Shawn Copeland, "A Cadre of Women Religious Committed to Black Liberation: The National Black Sisters' Conference," *USCH*, 14, 1 (Winter 1996), 128–30.

⁷³ John C. Haughey, "Black Catholicism," *America*, 120, 12 (22 March 1969), 325; "Bishops Okay Office for Black Catholics," *National Catholic Reporter*, 6, 4 (19 Nov. 1969), 7; "U.S. Bishops Form Nominating Panel," *New York Times*, 12 Nov. 1969, 1; "Prelate Defends Black Fund Grant," *New York Times*, 21 Nov. 1970, 34 (quotation).

America and the Vatican. They have been – and I will not say deliberately – but nonetheless they have been totally misled by the white American hierarchy.” Lucas added, “The over-all distortion is that the church in America is doing a great job both spiritually and – to the limit of resources – materially for the blacks, which is as far from the truth as you could be.” Lucas claimed that the apostolic delegate was “equally insensitive” as the American Catholic bishops and had not answered letters from himself and the presidents of the National Black Sisters’ Conference and the National Black Lay Catholic Caucus, meaning that Rome was ill-informed, if not misleadingly informed, about African American Catholics.⁷⁴

In an effort to communicate their concerns directly to the Vatican, in October 1971 the leaders of the NOBC, the National Black Sisters’ Conference, the National Black Lay Catholic Caucus, and the Baltimore Black Catholic Caucus went to Rome with the intention of seeing Pope Paul VI “to present the problems of the church in the black community and the problems of Black Catholics in the church.” Denied a papal audience, the delegation had meetings with Archbishop Giovanni Benelli, the Vatican’s deputy secretary of state, and other high Vatican officials, in which they called for the appointment of an African American Archbishop of Washington, DC, to succeed the retiring Cardinal Patrick O’Boyle, and presented a list of ten names for consideration. According to Brother Joseph Davis, Vatican officials “pointed out that it is the American hierarchy who nominate men to head dioceses,” indicative of Rome’s unwillingness to intervene directly and bypass the structures of ecclesiastical authority it had established. In 1973, O’Boyle was succeeded by another white man, Bishop William Wakefield Baum.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, the delegation’s widely reported visit to Rome may have had some impact on other nominations and appointments. In November 1972, Father Joseph L. Howze became only the second African American Catholic bishop in the United States when the Vatican appointed him auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Natchez–Jackson. A third followed in 1974 with Father Eugene A. Marino’s appointment as auxiliary bishop of Washington. By 1984, there were ten African American Catholic bishops in the United States but only one of them, Joseph L. Howze, installed as Bishop of Biloxi in 1977, headed a diocese. In September, they issued a pastoral letter on

⁷⁴ Gary MacEoin, “Blacks in Rome: ‘To Tell Things the Way They Are’,” *National Catholic Reporter*, 7, 44 (22 Oct. 1971), 10–11, 10 (quotations).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 10 (first quotation); Joseph Davis, “Black Catholics in Rome: Stating the Case in Person,” *National Catholic Reporter*, 8, 5 (26 Nov. 1971), 9 (second quotation); Edward M. Fiske, “U.S. Negro Catholics Present Grievances at Vatican Meeting,” *New York Times*, 9 Oct. 1971, 3.

evangelization in which they lamented that “Blacks and other minorities still remain absent from many aspects of Catholic life and are only meagerly represented on the decision-making level,” and encouraged greater incorporation of “the African-American idiom into the expression of the Roman liturgy.” However, African American Catholics were often divided about the adoption of black liturgy, with some enthusiastic and others wedded to traditional forms of worship.⁷⁶

To share experiences and ideas and to better represent black Catholic interests and concerns, in May 1987 African American bishops, clergy, sisters and laity held the first National Black Catholic Congress since 1894. The National Black Pastoral Plan agreed by the congress included calls for developing black liturgy, the infusion of black history and culture into Catholic institutions and training, and the preservation of black Catholic schools and churches. The delegates adopted a resolution calling for the appointment of more African Americans, besides Howze, as diocesan bishops. In a message to the congress, Agostino Casaroli, the Vatican’s Cardinal Secretary of State, declared that Pope John Paul II joined “his voice with that of his brother Bishops in rejecting every form of racial discrimination.”⁷⁷

In September, the Pope visited New Orleans, where he addressed an audience of 1,800 African American clergy, sisters and laity. Nearly twenty years after Paul VI’s eulogy for Martin Luther King, Pope John Paul II praised King’s contribution “to the rightful human betterment of black Americans and therefore, to the improvement of American society itself.” Representing his fellow African American bishops, Howze declared that “racism is a major hindrance to full development of black leadership within the Church.” African American Catholics continued to struggle against racial discrimination in a church that had historically relegated them to a second-class, dependent status. The legacy of the Vatican’s pragmatic compromise with segregation in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth and its postwar efforts to encourage, but not mandate, its removal meant that much remained to be done to undo the effects of historic and continuing racism in Catholicism and wider society. By allowing prelates autonomy in running their dioceses and in nominating candidates for the episcopacy for

⁷⁶ “*What We Have Seen and Heard*”: *A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization From the Black Bishops of the United States* (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1984), 20 (first quotation), 31 (second quotation), at www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/resources/upload/what-we-have-seen-and-heard.pdf (accessed 6 Oct. 2021); Newman, 248, 250, 255, 260–61.

⁷⁷ “The Pastoral Plan,” *In a Word*, 5, 7–8 (July–Aug. 1987), 3–11; “Resolutions Passed by General Assembly,” *In a Word*, 5, 7–8 (July–Aug. 1987), 12; Edward K. Braxton, “The National Black Catholic Congress: An Event of the Century,” *USCH*, 7, 2 (Spring–Summer 1988), 301–6, 302 (quotation).

Rome’s consideration, the Vatican, despite its postwar public support for racial equality and the southern civil rights movement and instruction to the apostolic delegate to veto segregationist nominees for bishoprics, ensured that it was white bishops who would oversee the church’s response to efforts to desegregate church and society in the South and the rest of the nation.⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

Incorporating the Vatican’s perspective on the southern civil rights movement and desegregation of southern Catholicism illustrates the limits of Rome’s willingness and ability to effect change directly, while also demonstrating its efforts to use the “soft power” of pronouncements, declarations and Vatican press and radio to encourage support for racial equality and acceptance of desegregation. By joining white flight to the suburbs, many Catholics continued to attend mostly white or entirely white Catholic churches and schools, without openly contravening church teachings about the Mystical Body, universalism and racial equality.

Many Catholics were also selective in their adherence to church teachings in other areas of life without resorting to public defiance. Rome was unable to ensure widespread adherence in the United States to its teachings against the use of artificial contraception and abortion, such as Pope Pius VI’s encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life) issued in July 1968. Laity who practiced birth control and supported or chose abortion could do so privately and remain within the church, and even public avowals of these practices did not ensure exclusion from the sacraments. A Gallup poll in August 1968 found that only 28 percent of American Catholics agreed with the encyclical, and by 1970 two-thirds of American Catholic women used birth control methods that the church disapproved of. Although some conservative American Catholic bishops called for President Joe Biden to be denied communion in 2021 because of his support for abortion and reproductive rights, he continued to receive the Eucharist as two-thirds of the nation’s Catholics, a poll suggested, thought he should. Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Washington, DC, an African American, would not order priests in his archdiocese to refuse Biden communion, arguing instead, “We should be a church in dialogue, even with those with whom we have some serious disagreements.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ “Address to the Pope by a Black Bishop, and John Paul’s Reply,” *New York Times*, 13 Sep. 1987, 33 (quotations); “Mrs. Consuella M. Broussard, Supreme Lady,” *Clavortite*, 68, 2 (Dec. 1987), 4.

⁷⁹ “Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* of the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI,” at www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html

For the Vatican, the issues of birth control, abortion and racial discrimination were universal. Scholars have increasingly investigated the links between the African American freedom struggle and antiracist and anticolonial struggles in other parts of the world, and those of some of their opponents. Many activists in the United States, such as Martin Luther King and members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, connected the struggle against racism and poverty in America with a transnational struggle against white dominance and oppression. Attention to the Vatican, which viewed the southern civil rights movement and segregation in southern Catholicism through the context of its missionary endeavours and the Cold War, demonstrates how a transnational consideration of religion can also tell us more about the struggle for racial equality and resistance to it in the United States. Southern white opponents of racial equality within and outside southern Catholicism sought to enlist transnational support. Segregationists in the citizens' councils forged links with apartheid South Africa and Rhodesia, while some southern Catholic lay segregationists tried but failed to enlist support from Rome.⁸⁰

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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