

# Can't be Catholic in Alabama

COURIER-JOURNAL  
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New York — (RNS) — A Catholic priest, relieved of his post as pastor of a Negro parish in Selma, Ala., at the order of Archbishop Thomas J. Toolen of Mobile-Birmingham, has charged that the prelate "doesn't understand the first thing about the civil rights movement" and "has a lot of foreign priests in the diocese who seem to approve of segregation."

Father Maurice F. Ouellet, S.S.E., writing in the August issue of Jubilee, a magazine published by laymen, said:

"I can't understand, for instance, how the Irish, whose people were oppressed for centuries, can come here and after a year become so imbued with prejudice against the Negro. But many Irish priests do just that."

"On the other hand," Father Ouellet said, "a lot of other priests in Alabama are working quietly for integration. They have gone underground to escape the bishop's notice and they keep silent, but they are doing their best."

In his article, Father Ouellet commented on an attack upon Negro boys on the steps of Assumption church, Selma's major Catholic parish, on Sunday, Oct. 24, 1964. The attack was also described in intimate detail by Air Force Sgt. James O. Burke, a Catholic assigned to a nearby air base, in the same issue of Jubilee.

In noting some limited progress in race relations at Selma, Father Ouellet said he hoped this will continue, "but most liberal Catholics in Selma are

afraid to speak out, as they were when those children were beaten on the steps of Assumption church. I was in the hospital at the time but afterward I went to see the pastor to find out if there had been an investigation. There hadn't and he resented my interference, so I wrote to the archbishop about the incident.

"He answered, saying briefly that he would ask the pastor of Assumption to look into the matter, and then he wrote several paragraphs lecturing me for being a radical and not minding my own business."

In his article, Sgt. Burke, who is white, described harassment suffered by himself and his family because of their sympathy for Selma's Negroes, then described the incident at the predominantly white Our Lady of Assumption church.

"That morning (Sunday, Oct. 24, 1964) my two sons and I went to the 10 o'clock Mass. Up front there were several colored kids who attended regularly and several who did not. During Mass I saw one of the regular churchmen twist and pull one of the little colored boy's ears. After Mass ended

the congregation filed out and my sons and I proceeded to our car; as I reached it I heard someone scream and turning around, I saw three white men beating two little colored boys.

"They had knocked them down and were kicking them."

"Tears came into my eyes. 'Oh my God,' I said. I ran as fast as I could toward them and shouted at the men, 'Don't beat the kids, beat me instead.' I knew they were cowards and only had the courage to beat children. They left them alone then . . ."

"The smaller of the two colored boys," Sgt. Burke added, "had to be carried away by the bigger boy."

"I went and talked to the priest then but I saw in his eyes the same fear that I had seen so many times before in other people. He could give no real reason for this terrible thing that had happened on Sunday morning."

Sgt. Burke, in recounting attacks upon himself, his family and his property (according to his account, he later escaped murder when his young son shot one of four men beating him outside his home), said:

"It is impossible to live in Alabama and practice the Catholic religion. At one time I was even told by Father (Charles) Aucola of Our Lady of Assumption church, where the boys were beaten, not to go to Mass at his church but to go on the Base."

(Sgt. Burke reported that four suspects were picked up in the attack at his home and face trial in October.)

FATHER OUELLET, white pastor of St. Elizabeth's at Selma until relieved of his post in June, said in his Jubilee article that "in the South, the Church really didn't have much choice; if it was going to work with the Negro it almost had to do it on a segregated basis."

"In Alabama, with the state laws the way they were, it seemed to be the only way we could approach the Negro. Personally, I wish we had taken a stand against segregation at the beginning, though I know that's easy enough to say now. In any case, a Negro could always go to Mass in our churches, while the Protestant churches would not let him enter. Furthermore, the Church went right into the Negro community and worked

there. So, looking at the positive side of it, the Church has done a great deal, but on a segregated basis."

The Edmundite priest said involvement in the civil rights movement in Selma "helped the Church and ecumenism."

"For a long time the Church was conspicuous by its absence in the movement. We were good at analyzing things but when it came to doing something we didn't. But now, especially since the march on Montgomery, we can talk with other ministers in a way we never could before."

Father Ouellet said he had learned a "great deal" about "love and forgiveness" from civil rights leaders.

"At first," he said, "the white people in Selma made me very angry. I disliked them and almost came to hate them. Then I started to pity them and now I want to help them."

"They need help. So does the archbishop. He's the one who is in trouble, not I. Still, I feel sad about leaving Selma, of course. I think a lot of those people. I won't forget them and if I can help them at all I will."

In a separate article, "Selma Aftermath," Jubilee magazine, said that Archbishop Toolen and Archbishop Egidio Vagnozzi, Apostolic Delegate to the U.S., have received "over 2,000 individual letters" of protest from "a host of Negroes, rich and poor, Catholic and Protestant."

An appeal by Archbishop Toolen, directed by mail to priests of the country, recently asked funds to aid missions of the Mobile-Birmingham diocese. After quoting the passage from St. John, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," it continued:

"As people all over the world are demonstrating, legislating and dying for FREEDOM, these oft quoted words . . . remind us that true and lasting FREEDOM comes only from the mutual love shared by all men in the knowledge that Christ died to save us all and is the Brother of us all.

"This is the TRUTH which our priests, Sisters and lay apostle tirelessly strive to bring to all people of this Missionary Diocese. . . . The highly publicized racial conflicts which recently occurred in this State evidence the crying need for this TRUTH and our need for your assistance in teaching it. . . ."

"Teaching the TRUTH of Christ in this 'Deep South' Diocese never has been an easy task; nor, perhaps, has there ever been a greater need for it — but it still is not easy. Please help us bring this TRUTH to all people of this vast Diocese."



## LBJ Greets Nuns at White House

Washington — (RNS) — President Johnson make a special point to greet nuns among delegates attending a White House Conference on the Status of Women. Delegates were received by the President on the South Lawn of the White House. In an address to the conference Mr. Johnson urged the women to strengthen family ties in the city, suburbs and rural areas. "Our Society and its success is built around the family unit," he said. In a surprise remark, the President said he had considered naming a woman to fill the Supreme Court vacancy to which Washington lawyer Abe Fortas was appointed. He implied that he still might name a woman to the nation's highest tribunal.

## Negroes Given OK for Church

Canton, Miss. — (RNS) — The Canton City Board voted unanimously here to authorize a new church building for a Negro Catholic congregation which had experienced many delays in securing a building permit.

It voted to grant Father Luke Mikschl, pastor, authority under city zoning regulations to proceed with the construction at the Holy Child of Jesus Mission, reversing a board action of March when it refused to issue a permit.

The denial came shortly after the priest testified before the U.S. Civil Rights Commission under subpoena on racial conditions in Canton.

The mission had bought land for the church in 1954, adjoining its present operation begun 20 years ago. The staff includes nine nuns.

## New Era at Hand

# No More Compromise

San Francisco — (RNS) — Members of the Knights of St. Peter Claver, a Catholic Negro fraternal society, were challenged by their chaplain to "join the Negro freedom movement" and commit themselves as leaders and teachers in the struggle for racial justice.

Addressing the society's national convention, Father Harold Perry, S.V.D., first Negro superior of the Divine Word Southern Province, urged the knights to "initiate planned efforts by Negro Catholics and the missionaries who serve them to end segregated churches."

"It is evident," he said, "that the Negro freedom movement will put our dual church system to a test and it will be found wanting in Christian love and social justice."

In a balanced criticism of the Catholic record in racial matters, Father Perry said that for various reasons there had been no wide-spread popular action among church members in earlier times.

"The injustices to the Negro were recognized," he continued, "but the power to deal with them was either not at hand

or seldom applied. The result is that in recent years, after a long period of compromise and some confusion, there has been a more active participation of Catholics in the movement to overcome racism."

While statements concerning racial equality and brotherhood have been made "in abundance," he said, "now it is time for us to join the Negro freedom movement."

He pointed out that "social customs, especially in our Southland, are so strongly entrenched that they will not pass away without deliberate planned programs on our part."

Observing that "the job is not an easy one for several reasons," Father Perry said that "Negroes for the most part have only been reluctantly welcomed to Catholic community life."

"This slow acceptance," the priest stated, "has resulted in a history of paternal relationships between the Church and Negro Catholics. This policy of non-encouragement and consequent paternalism has produced a strong conservatism, fear and a distrust among Negro Catholics when faced with opportunities to promote

better race relations within the Church.

"This in turn has limited the influence of Catholic social teachings on Negroes in general, as is evident in the current Negro freedom movement. Moreover, this has minimized the great inspirational impact that Negro Catholics and Catholics in general have exerted on the growing Church in Africa."

## Publicity For Paulists

New York — (RNS) — A publicity office was organized and a public relations firm retained here by the Paulist Fathers, an American community of priests dedicated to use of modern communications technique in its apostolate.

Named first director of public relations was Father Edward J. Gorry, C.S.P., who since 1968 has been director of development, the order's central office for fun-raising efforts.

Retained as public relations counsel was Thomas F. Greene & Associates of New York.



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