

South African Bishops Have Long Fought Against Racism

By A.K. Donnelly

Cape Town, South Africa (NC) — The Catholic Church in South Africa has been in conflict with racism for decades — even the racism it admits has existed within the church.

The first European callers to the territory were India-bound Catholic Portuguese who built a small church on the southern African coast in 1501. However, the first permanent colonizers, in the 1650s, were Dutch Calvinists who banned public existence of the Catholic Church until 1804.

In the 19th century, South Africa was a mission country. Most missionaries, like the rest of society, conformed with "European" and "native" divisions in church institutions, although individual bishops spoke out against the system.

However, when the white supremacist National Party came to power in 1948, the social segregation which had been assumed was written into law. The Immorality Act made sex between people of different race punishable by imprisonment and outlawed marriages of whites to people of any other ethnic group. The Group Areas Act enforced residential apartheid and gave rise to wholesale social engineering, such as enforced relocation of several million people — mostly black.

In 1951 a church hierarchy was set up, with dioceses established. In 1952, the bishops issued their first pastoral letter, calling for Christian values in race relations.

"Non-Europeans" were urged to prepare themselves for the duties connected with the rights they hoped to enjoy. Discrimination on the grounds of color was said to be an offense against human dignity.

Five years later, noting that since their earlier statement nothing had changed, the bishops issued another pastoral letter. White supremacy, they said, had become an absolute.

"It overrides justice, it transcends the teaching of Christ," they said. "It is a purpose dwarfing every other purpose, an

end justifying any means."

"Separate development," as apartheid was called, was equated by the bishops with the "blasphemy of thus attributing to God the offenses against charity and justice that are apartheid's necessary injustice."

The bishops said that "profound differences" between sections of the population made immediate integration impossible, and change would have to be gradual.

"It is a sin to humiliate one's fellow man," they said. "A change must come, otherwise our country faces a disastrous future."

In that letter, the bishops admitted that there was segregation in church groups, schools, seminaries, convents, hospitals and social life.

"We are hypocrites if we condemn apartheid in South African society and condone it in our own institutions," the bishops said. White South Africans were urged to consider apartheid's "evil and un-Christian character, the injustice that flows from it, the resentment and bitterness it arouses, the harvest of disaster that it must produce."

In 1960 — the year when nearly 70 blacks were killed by police near Sharpeville — the bishops of South Africa and neighboring countries cited a need for just wages and higher education opportunities for blacks. They noted the evils of migratory labor, under which millions of blacks were allowed to travel to the cities to work but were not allowed to have their families with them.

They also condemned legislation limiting the free association of persons of equal educational standing on grounds of color.

Two years later, the bishops said they "dare not remain silent and passive" in the face of the racial injustices in the country. After the Second Vatican Council, the bishops claimed council support for their opposition to apartheid.

In the early 1970s, the bishops ended the legally enforceable apartheid at the country's main major seminary in Pretoria by admit-

ting black students for the priesthood. There were no repercussions. Since then, the bishops have continued to speak and act against racial discrimination.

Here are some of the highlights of the hierarchy's actions:

— 1972: The bishops issued their "Call to Conscience" in which they said: "The record shows that we have failed to cope with racialism and reduce discrimination. But a bold and sustained effort is not yet beyond us, even at this stage. While the evil exists, no one may rest."

— 1975: Catholic schools accepted black students, and schools of other denominations followed. After a period of confrontation with the government, the situation was accepted. State schools remained segregated.

In a letter on reconciliation that same year, the bishops said that whites — with their power and wealth — had to take the first step toward racial reconciliation, but that blacks also needed to forgive.

— 1976-77: Black youths boycotted schools. The bishops said the disturbances that followed reflected a wider frustration of black youths unwilling to grow up in a separate society.

They condemned alleged police torture and killings and said, "It is clear that the black people of the republic have passed the point of no return, and no temporary suppression by violence can give hope of any safety for the children and prevent the horrors of civil war in the future."

The bishops also committed themselves to eradicating racial discrimination against persons in church institutions and in private homes and to suppress church seating arranged in racially reserved blocks.

— 1980: Blacks boycotted schools and universities to protest unequal educational facilities, and the bishops spoke in favor of a unified educational system.

— 1981: St. Peter Seminary, formerly the black twin of Pretoria's St. John Vianney Seminary for whites, was reopened after a period of campus disturbances. Students of all races are now at both seminaries.

Later that year, the bishops' conference executive board said most South Africans saw no cause to celebrate the nation's Republic Day and withheld church participation in the 20th anniversary of

secession from the British Commonwealth.

As winter began, Auxiliary Bishop Stephen Naidoo of Cape Town pleaded with the government concerning the plight of thousands of homeless squatters around the city. Soon afterward, Archbishop Denis Hurley of Durban, president of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, led several thousand people in rain and cold in an ecumenical service to protest the forced relocation of blacks from their homes near Durban.

— 1982: At a meeting of bishops in Pretoria, Archbishop Hurley said that the evolution of the church was "a fact of our time."

"The evolution...from declarations, resolutions, findings and recommendations to implementation and action is painful and precarious," he said. "Social attitudes are among the toughest fibers in the world."

Later that year, Archbishop Hurley led a delegation of bishops which created a stir by declaring that most people in Namibia backed guerillas who had been fighting a prolonged war against the South African army. The government began prosecution against the archbishop for saying inhabitants blamed atrocities on government troops, but the charges later were withdrawn.

The Southern African Council of Priests asked the bishops to help black and white priests to know one another, perhaps by sharing accommodations.

— 1983: Led by Cardinal Owen McCann of Cape Town, the bishops wrote Defense Minister Magnus Malan to defend the rights of conscientious objectors to the draft. A month later they denounced a new constitution which gave limited parliamentary representation to Colored and Indian South Africans but excluded blacks, the majority.

— 1984: The bishops said they would like to see racially separated Catholic women's groups united.

In midyear, five black priests protested Pope John Paul II's gift of a medal to Prime Minister Pieter Botha. They said they would deny the pope a cup of water if he visited their parishes. Archbishop Hurley reminded one of the priests that even Jesus had dinner with sinners, and a month later the pope repeated his condemnation of South Africa's racial policies.

Hispanic Catholics:

The Problem of Finding Vocations

By Moises Sandoval
NC News Service

Hispanics today long to evangelize. All over the country many are seeking lay ministries. In the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas, hundreds volunteered. Though less than 3 percent of all U.S. priests, sisters and brothers are Hispanic, those who work with youth insist the vocations are there. Some 800 Hispanics have been ordained to the permanent diaconate.

Yet, according to pastoral workers, Hispanics are being frustrated in their desire to be more than the objects of evangelization.

Father Rutilio del Riego, who has made several vocation studies, said that Hispanics in Protestant seminaries outnumber those in Catholic seminaries by 5-to-1. Getting more Hispanics into ministry is one of the church's toughest challenges.

Bishop Lawrence Welsh, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Vocations, said: "When you look at the high percentage of Hispanics and the few priests who are Hispanics, there is grave concern." In the Diocese of San Jose, Calif., where at least half of the Catholics are Hispanics, there is only one Hispanic pastor.

Special efforts are being made to increase vocations. Archbishop Patricio Flores of San Antonio has recruited nearly 20 young men from Mexico who have been ordained to serve in the United States.

Seminaries such as St. Meinrad in Indiana, St. Thomas in Denver and The Josephinum in Ohio have special programs for Hispanic ministry. To avoid taking students out of their home environment, Divine Word Father Gary Riebe established Casa Guadalupe in a Hispanic neighborhood in East Los Angeles. It is a house of formation where young men interested in the priesthood live and work as they attend area colleges.

Despite all these special efforts, the number of native-born Hispanic priests has not increased.

Many reasons are given for the poor participation of Hispanics in the priesthood and religious life. Perhaps the most important is that they have no priestly tradition.

When the U.S. church took over the spiritual administration of the Southwest from Mexico in the middle of the 19th century, the new shepherds found the faith in a deplorable state. For generations, they judged the population to be too poorly evangelized to generate vocations. Missionary bishops from France, then Germany and finally Ireland were content to bring priests from Europe.

When seminaries were finally established 100 years later, Hispanics were not recruited. Father Paul Baca from Albuquerque, N.M., recalled in a talk at the First Encuentro in 1972 how when he was a deacon at St. Thomas Seminary in Denver the archbishop said to the students during a visit, "The reason I don't have Mexican seminarians is that they just don't meet my standards."

Hispanics until recent years had the impression that the priesthood was not for them. Some had not even seen an Hispanic priest. "I grew up with the idea that to be a priest you had to be Irish because those were the only priests I knew," said Hector Madrigal, a seminarian from Brownsville now in theological studies at St. Meinrad Seminary.

Archbishop Roberto Sanchez of Santa Fe, N.M., said that Hispanic bishops have an important role to play in that respect. "We provide a role model, showing our youth that priesthood is available to them, and we try to establish cultural sensitivity in our seminaries."

Hispanic vocations to the priesthood have increased at a very slow rate. In 1925, according to data from the Mexican American Cultural Center, only 1.1 percent of priests in the United States were Hispanics. In the next half century, they increased only to 2.5 percent, thanks largely to missionaries who came from Spain and immigrants from Latin America.

Of the 1,500 Hispanic priests, only 185 are native-born, down from 200 in 1970. In one of numerous talks he has given on vocations, Archbishop Flores said: "Vocations are better than they have been but in terms of need, they are hardly a drop in the bucket."

Still, the news is not all bad. Father Juan Romero, a priest from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles who is coordinator of the Third Encuentro, a two-year consultation culminating with a national meeting in August, said that 45 percent of the high school seminarians in Los Angeles are Hispanics.

In Chicago 24.8 percent of the students at Chicago's Quigley South Preparatory Seminary and 33 percent of those at Quigley North are Hispanics. There are 269 Latino students in both seminaries. And the best news, Father John Klein, the rector at Quigley South said, is that the percentage going on to the college seminary (40 percent) is twice as high as for non-Hispanics (20 percent).

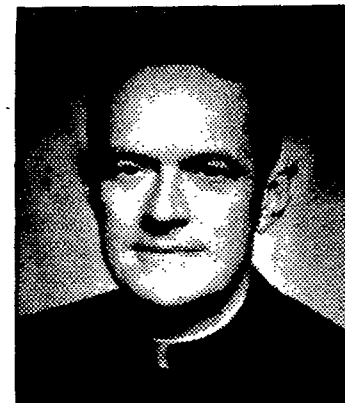
Let me help you provide for your future . . . and the future of others

A Gift Annuity with the Propagation of the Faith gives you a generous lifetime income and helps the work of the Church in the Missions.

Your investment is safe and guaranteed. It also gives you substantial tax savings.

Would you like to know more? If you are 50 years of age or older, write to me.

I'll be happy to send you further information. Of course, I will keep your inquiry in total confidence.



Monique McCormack
Monsignor William J. McCormack
National Director

Dear Monsignor McCormack,

Please send me detailed information about a Gift Annuity with the Propagation of the Faith.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone () _____ Amount Considered: \$ _____

Date of Birth (required information) _____

Please mail coupon to me:

Monsignor William J. McCormack
National Director, Propagation of the Faith
G.P.O. Box 1950, New York, NY 10116



THE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH

Supporting the Church's worldwide mission work