

Vatican denounces racism in new document

By Greg Erlandson
NC News

VATICAN CITY — A new Vatican document condemns racism in a variety of forms and warns that recent developments in genetic engineering and artificial procreation might lead to "eugenic racism."

It called for laws to prevent genetic abuses.

Racial prejudice "blasphemes the Creator" and is a sin against Christ's message of love, the Vatican document said.

Titled "The Church and Racism: Toward a More Fraternal Society," the document stressed the church's opposition to all forms of racism and said legislation and the personal witness of Christians are needed to combat prejudice.

Released Feb. 10, the 42-page document was produced by the Pontifical Justice and Peace Commission and signed by Cardinal Roger Etchegaray and Bishop Jorge Mejia, the commission's president and vice president. It is the first Vatican document to focus solely on racism.

The commission broadly defined "racial prejudice" as the notion of "the biologically determined superiority of one's own race or ethnic group" and said it often is directed against people whose "ethnic origin, language, religion or customs make them appear different."

Despite the lessons of the past, including the "murderous folly" of the Nazis, "troubling new manifestations" of racism are appearing today, the document said.

One such manifestation is a resurgence of anti-Semitism, which it called "the most tragic form that racist ideology has assumed in our century."

While distinguishing between anti-Zionism which "questions the state of Israel and its policies" and anti-Semitism, the document warned that anti-Zionism can

serve as a "screen for anti-Semitism, feeding on it and leading to it."

The Vatican document warned that one form of racism on the horizon is the use of genetic manipulation and artificial procreation techniques to "produce" human beings selected according to racial criteria or any other characteristic.

The document called for laws limiting such techniques so that they do not allow a "resurgence of the deadly myth of eugenic racism." It also warned against abortion and sterilization campaigns targeted at one social or ethnic category.

Other examples of modern racism cited by the justice and peace document include:

- "institutionalized racism" sanctioned by law and supported by an "erroneous interpretation of the Bible," exemplified by South Africa's apartheid system.

- discrimination against aboriginal peoples, many of whom are themselves "survivors of veritable genocides carried out in the not too distant past."

- restrictions on religious minorities, particularly when they differ ethnically from the majority. One example of such discriminatory behavior is the application of the Islamic "Shariah" legal code to non-Moslems living in the same country, it said.

- ethnocentric and tribal prejudices, as in the case of Africa and Asia, where the end of colonial rule has been followed by tribal and ethnic conflict. Other victims of such prejudices include refugees as well as those people who live on their own land but "are subjected to humiliating conditions," such as the Palestinians.

- "social racism," including exploitation of peasants by landowners, which it called one of the "new forms of slavery" in the Third World.

"There is no great difference between those who consider others their inferiors

because of their race and those who treat their fellow citizens as inferiors by exploiting them as a work force," it said.

- "spontaneous racism," a phenomenon of countries with high rates of immigration, where the presence of foreigners leads to an "exaggerated nationalism" which in turn can "degenerate into xenophobia or even racial hatred."

Christianity responds to racism by affirming the "equal dignity of all persons," the document said.

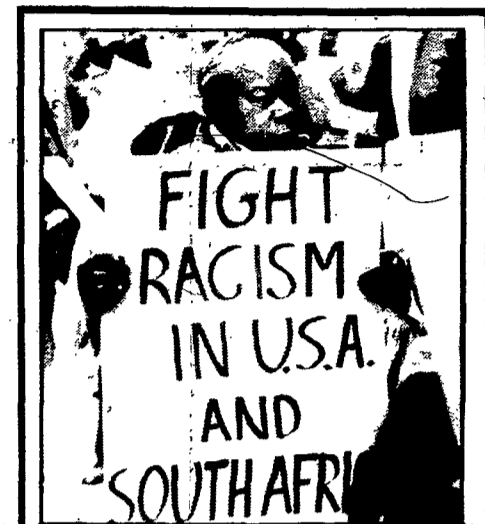
"The belief that God is at the origin of humankind" is the "most radical affirmation of the equal dignity of all persons in God."

The document cited the activities of the U.S. and southern African bishops' conferences as examples of local Christian communities responding to racism in their societies.

It called the U.S. bishops' 1979 pastoral letter on racism, "Brothers and Sisters to Us," the "most important document of the last decade." Yet of the United States, the document said that "despite ongoing efforts, much still remains to be done to eliminate completely racial prejudice and behavior even in what can be considered

one of the most interracial nations in the world."

The document called for the uprooting of racial prejudice not only through laws, but by internalizing the values that inspire such laws.



NC News
A protester in Cleveland urges action opposing racism during a demonstration against polices in South Africa.

D.C. high schools consolidate

By Cindy Wooden
NC News

WASHINGTON — Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington said he knows "the pain and the sorrow" which accompany news that a school will close, but as head of the archdiocese he has a responsibility to give students the best education possible.

By consolidating its Catholic high schools, the Archdiocese of Washington will be able to give students "our very best," the cardinal said during a Feb. 7 interview with National Catholic News Service.

"I'd like to turn away from the tears and look at the values of a quality education," he said.

The cardinal announced Feb. 2 that because of rising costs and declining enrollments, the all-boys Archbishop Carroll High School will be coeducational next fall and will accommodate students from the three schools which are being closed.

The archdiocesan-run Mackin Catholic High School for boys, Holy Spirit High School for girls and All Saints High School for girls will not reopen next fall.

The new Carroll high school, which will operate at its present site and also use the campus of nearby All Saints, will give students "our best facilities, our best teachers" and expanded programs and class offerings, Cardinal Hickey said.



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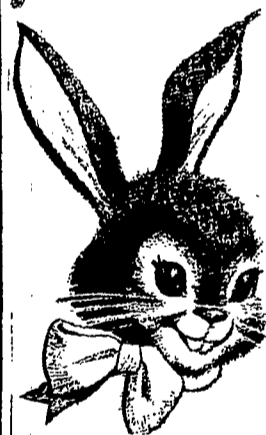
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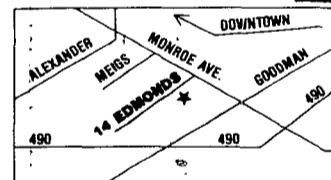
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