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Just Discrimination: Arkansas Parochial Schools and the Defense of Segregation

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Just Discrimination :
Arkansas Parochial Schools and the Defense of Segregation

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in History

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the continued segregation of parochial schools in the Little Rock Catholic Diocese after the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. The thesis compares the failure of the parochial schools in Little Rock to integrate to the success of integration in Arkansas's southern neighbors, St. Louis and New Orleans. In those cities, integration occurred after the appointment of new head prelates who threatened excommunication when confronted with segregationist protests and threats of violence. Bishop Albert Fletcher, the head of the Little Rock Diocese, has been perceived as supportive of integration efforts and aligned with his fellow southern prelates. This thesis concludes that Bishop Fletcher's reputation is inaccurate as no efforts were made to integrate parochial schools, beyond token integration, until his retirement in 1972. The Little Rock Diocese's defense of segregation was not in accord with the actions of other southern dioceses and provided a means whereby the white population could avoid federally mandated racial integration.

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Introduction

The Little Rock desegregation crisis, which began in September 1957, was a pivotal moment in the rise of massive resistance to integration. The events there captured wide attention then and have generated substantial scholarship since. Absent from any discussion, however, is consideration of the failure of Catholic schools in the city to integrate. Indeed, the desegregation of Catholic schools in southern cities is a subject of considerable importance but has generated little historical scholarship. This thesis will address the failure of Little Rock's Catholic schools to integrate and examine it in the context of what occurred in two other large southern cities: St. Louis and New Orleans. Parochial schools in St. Louis were integrated in 1947 under the leadership of an activist archbishop who threatened to excommunicate the laity who dissented. Although New Orleans had an activist archbishop, at the time of the Supreme Court ruling, he was aging and ill and was not strong enough to take on a virulent opposition who denounced support of civil rights as a communist inspired plot. But the appointment of a new archbishop in 1962 realized the goal of parochial school integration. Unlike New Orleans and St. Louis, Little Rock did not have an activist bishop who pursued integration and instead defended segregation as the city's parochial schools experienced unprecedented growth.

In September 1957, Little Rock Arkansas was catapulted into the front lines of the Civil Rights movement when the Governor, Orval Faubus, ordered the National Guard to block the entry of nine African American students to the formerly all-white Central High School. It was the city's first attempt to integrate a public school following the Supreme

Court's historic 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, which declared racial segregation unconstitutional. In addition to being blocked by gun-wielding soldiers, the African American students faced insults and the threat of physical violence from the angry white crowds gathered outside of the high school to protest their admittance. President Eisenhower eventually had to federalize the National Guard and send in regular Army troops to allow the students to enter the high school and attend class, although their presence at the school was never really accepted. As a result, Little Rock became the national and international face of massive resistance and an inspiration for other Southern states to resist the Supreme Court ordered decree to integrate public schools with all deliberate speed. The following year, the public high schools were closed by order of the Little Rock school board to prevent further integration. There is an abundance of scholarship chronicling the details of the crisis. Roy Reed's biography of Governor Faubus details the white power politics behind the crisis and how the Governor rode a tidal wave of support throughout, making appeals that were rooted in fear and anger. *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, details the involvement and politics of the NAACP to bring about school integration in Arkansas and the primary role of Daisy Bates, the president of the local chapter of the NAACP and her husband, L.C. Bates, the owner of the *Arkansas State Press*, the state's only newspaper for African Americans. Elizabeth Jacoway's book, *Turn Away They Son: Little Rock, The Crisis That Shocked the Nation*, provides background information on events leading up to the crisis and gives a detailed accounting of the actions taken by the Governor, school board, NAACP, judges and other prominent actors in the drama. Sondra Gordy's, *Finding the Lost Year: What Happened When Little Rock Closed its Public Schools* examines in great detail the maneuverings of the various organizations that

conspired to both thwart integration and reopen the schools. Karen Anderson's article, "The Little Rock School Desegregation Crisis: Moderation and Social Conflict", which appeared in the *Journal of Southern History*, advanced the theory that the integration crisis was one born of class conflict between affluent and poor whites. The essay also detailed the efforts of the city's power-wielding businessmen to gain control of the situation, in order to keep the economy flourishing in the capital city.¹

For all of the scholarship on the Little Rock crisis, there is an overlooked aspect that warrants further investigation. Mark Newman's article, "The Catholic Church in Arkansas and Desegregation, 1946-1988," published in the *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* makes an important contribution on the struggle for integration in the Catholic Schools in the state but underplays the segregationist tendency of Bishop Albert Fletcher, the presiding bishop in the Arkansas Diocese. By examining the role of the presiding archbishops in Louisiana and New Orleans, my thesis throws Fletcher's reluctance into sharp relief.² Throughout the public school crisis, the state's second largest school system, Catholic parochial schools, continued operating unimpeded in its segregated fashion. By 1960, the Catholic Diocese of Arkansas maintained a total of fifty-seven elementary parochial schools and seven high

¹Roy Reed, *Faubus: The Life and Times of an American Prodigal* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1997); Jacoway, *Turn Away They Son: Little Rock, the Crisis that Shocked the Nation* (New York: Free Press, 2007); Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1986); Sondra Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year: What Happened When Little Rock Closed its Public Schools* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2009); John A. Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-1970* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002); John A. Kirk, *Beyond Little Rock: The Origins and Legacies of the Central High Crisis*. (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2007); Karen Anderson, "The Little Rock School Desegregation Crisis: Moderation and Social Conflict," *The Journal of Southern History* Volume LXX, No. 3, (August 2004).

²Mark Newman, "The Catholic Church in Arkansas and Desegregation, 1946-1988," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* LXVI, no. 3 (Autumn 2007): 293-319.

schools throughout the state. In Little Rock and Pine Bluff, two parishes with the largest number of African-Americans, there were a total of seven grade schools and two high schools for black students.³ Since the schools were private, they were outside the purview of the Supreme Court decree, but the Arkansas Diocese asserted that it only had separate schools for the races due to custom and law.⁴ Since the law had changed, would the Catholic schools integrate?

The Catholic Church is generally perceived as having been supportive of the Supreme Court ruling and favorable to integration.⁵ Newman's article is the first substantive analysis of the reaction of the Catholic Church in Arkansas to desegregation and ultimately, he also concludes that the Church was friendly to integration, despite the fact that parochial schools in the diocese only ever achieved token integration. Newman interprets Bishop Fletcher's gradualism as illustrative of civil rights advances in the Church, instead of as a continuation of resistance to integration. To Newman, Fletcher favored integration but understood the opposition too well to press the issue. Fletcher, a native Arkansan, embraced segregationist philosophy rather than attempting to moderate extremist sentiments. Although Catholics in Arkansas were a small minority in a majority Protestant state the Catholic schools were pivotal, in that they provided a segregated alternative to public schools. The response of the Catholic Church in Arkansas to integration needs to be re-examined, as it was neither friendly, nor supportive, of integration.

³ James Woods, *Mission and Memory: A History of the Catholic Church in Arkansas* (Little Rock: August House, 1993), 240.

⁴ *The Guardian*, August 13, 1954.

⁵ David L. Chappell, "Diversity within a Racial Group: White People in Little Rock 1957-59," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, LIV, no. 4, (Winter 1995): 448-449; Woods, *Mission and Memory*, 240-242.

When the public schools were closed and the community was enflamed by racial tension, the lay editor of the Arkansas Diocese newspaper, *The Guardian*, published a series of editorials with the permission of the bishop, analyzing America's race problem. The editorials blatantly claimed that the inferiority of African-Americans justified discrimination and segregation and that while total integration was the goal it would not be possible until there was formal acknowledgement from the Supreme Court of the cultural differences between the races and a declaration that integration would not be allowed to lower the educational or cultural standards of the "American" [i.e. White] community.⁶ In his article, Newman concedes the racist undertones of the editorials, but curiously assigns fault to the lay editor, William O'Donnell. However, it is clearly stated in the editorials that they were written with the permission of Bishop Fletcher. It would stand to reason that Bishop Fletcher would not have given his permission to print a series of editorials that did not represent his viewpoints. The opinions expressed in the editorials, therefore, cannot be judged separate from Bishop Fletcher. Contemporaries viewed the editorials as inflammatory and in response Bishop Fletcher penned a catechism entitled, "An Elementary Catechism on the Morality of Segregation and Racial Discrimination." The catechism was praised for its headline grabbing declaration that "Segregation as we know it in Arkansas is Immoral."⁷ In his analysis as well, Newman views the catechism as a refutation, rather than a moderated affirmation, of O'Donnell's editorials.⁸ Despite Bishop Fletcher's declaration that segregation is immoral, the bishop contended in the catechism

⁶ *Guardian*, September 6, 1957.

⁷ *Time Magazine*, 1960. "Segregation is Immoral," April 25; Albert L. Fletcher, "An Elementary Catholic Catechism on the Morality of Segregation and Racial Discrimination," 3.

⁸ Newman, "The Catholic Church and Desegregation," 307.

that segregation would continue to be practiced in the diocese because the “special needs” of the majority of blacks warranted “special facilities” for them.⁹ Moreover, it was practically impossible and would be seriously harmful to abolish or discontinue the separate facilities.¹⁰ Bishop Fletcher is credited with standing against segregation while simultaneously upholding and defending segregation. The Arkansas Diocese reaction to the crisis in its own backyard, stands apart from the response of its neighboring diocese to the North and South. In St. Louis, parochial schools were integrated following World War II, nearly a decade before the Supreme Court ruling. Predictably, there were protests from parents, but once threatened with excommunication, the laity accepted the decree of the archbishop. In New Orleans, the parent diocese of Arkansas, the archbishop announced his intention to integrate the parochial schools following the Supreme Court ruling and expressed his desire to have the schools integrated before the public schools.¹¹ The archbishop’s plans were foiled by reactions from ardent segregationists and his advancing age and failing health, but under the succeeding archbishop, and also under threat of excommunication, the parochial schools in New Orleans were integrated in 1962. But in Arkansas, minimal attempt was made to integrate parochial schools until 1972, when a new bishop was installed. Instead, during the public school crisis, the diocese went to great lengths to defend segregation and justify discrimination.

The civil rights legacy of activism and resistance is reflected in the Catholic Church’s approach to the integration of parochial schools. Throughout the twentieth century, many within the Church hierarchy pushed for the Church to be more engaged in promoting civil

⁹ Fletcher, “An Elementary Catholic Catechism,” 13.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Diane T. Manning and Perry Rogers, “Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools,” *Journal of Negro Education*, 71, no. ½, (Winter-Spring 2002), 33.

rights for African Americans and end segregated practices. However, there was also a contingent of priests who resisted such changes and sought to maintain the segregated norms of southern society. The southern diocese of St. Louis, New Orleans, and Little Rock, ranged in response from implementing integration to defending segregation. The response and action that each diocese took in regards to the integration of parochial schools influenced their respective communities response to integration efforts. Chapter One examines the integration of the parochial schools in St. Louis and New Orleans. Chapter Two details the defense of segregation in Little Rock's parochial schools and Chapter Three examines the legacy of the failure to integrate parochial schools in Little Rock.

Chapter 1

Parochial School Integration in St. Louis and New Orleans

In both St. Louis and New Orleans, parochial school integration was delayed based on a myriad of excuses. However, after the installment of new archbishops, in both dioceses, integration of parochial schools was achieved almost immediately. In St. Louis, integration was achieved before the Supreme Court made it a legal requirement for public schools. In New Orleans, integration was achieved after nearly ten years of delays. And in both dioceses the archbishop's used excommunication to coerce the laity into accepting integration. The Catholic Church had the potential to be a powerful ally in the Civil Rights movement in the South given its hierarchal structure and weapon of excommunication, but only if there was a willing and able bishop. In St. Louis, and also in New Orleans when the leadership of the diocese changed, parochial school integration was achieved, proving that it was not conditions outside of the diocese that dictated when integration would occur, but conditions within the diocese.

Historically, Roman Catholics in the United States did not suffer from a sectional division over slavery. In fact, slavery was viewed as something that could be tolerated, even accepted, as Catholics did not view slavery as intrinsically evil. As a result of slavery however, the Catholic clergy believed that the character of African Americans had been weakened and as society moved towards segregation following the Civil War, so did the

Catholic Church. And as happened in secular society, the segregation of the races both fueled and confirmed white Catholics' belief in the social inferiority of African Americans.¹²

American Catholics took up the cause of black evangelization because of the perceived moral depravity of African Americans. They saw the Catholic Church as being able to address the needs of African Americans in a post Civil War society. While never a large contingent within the Catholic Church, the conversion of African Americans caused a gradual change within the Catholic hierarchy, as African American Catholics drew attention to practices of discrimination and agitated for leadership positions within the Church. In 1933, a white clergyman, John LaFarge, formed the Catholic Interracial Council in New York (CICNY). LaFarge believed that the council would resolve race issues within the church, and advance the cause of interracial harmony in American society. The CICNY would go on to influence all subsequent Catholic interracial organizations in the United States. The council's publication, *Interracial Review* became the official organ of Catholic interracialism and provided a public platform to foster racial harmony and educate Catholics on racial matters.¹³

The Catholic reform movement spread to the South in 1939, when a group of Catholic clergy and laity organized the Catholic Committee of the South (CCS). The impetus for the formation of the CCS derived from Howard Odum's 1936 book, *Southern Regions of the United States*, and President Franklin Roosevelt, who in 1938 echoed Odum's findings in declaring the South the nation's number one economic problem. The CCS sought to link the

¹²R. Bentley Anderson, *Black, White and Catholic: New Orleans Interracialism, 1947-1956* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press), 2-3; Stephen J Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1990), 80-81.

¹³Anderson, *Black, White and Catholic*, 14; Ochs, *Desegregating the Alter*, 347-48.

region's economic problems with moral principles and envisioned social action as an aggressive search for the causes of poverty and powerlessness. At the first annual convention held in 1940, CCS delegates established five departments for study and action: Industrial, Rural, Education, Race and Youth. Over the next sixteen years, the CCS met annually and promoted an increasingly liberal approach to race relations.¹⁴

At the 1946 convention held in New Orleans, San Antonio Archbishop Robert E. Lucey, made a plea for racial justice. Archbishop Lucey urged members to form interracial councils, encouraged labor leaders to eliminate racial discrimination from their unions, and advocated teaching the doctrine of racial justice in Catholic schools. Moreover, two years later the CCS recommended that Catholic schools take a lead in eliminating segregated school systems. In 1951, the CCS resolved to integrate all members of the Church into the religious, cultural, and economic life of the United States, so that regardless of race, all members could enjoy their rights as children of God.¹⁵ Although the CCS was a minority movement among Southern Catholics, it demonstrated that there was an interested and a growing movement among Southern clergy and laity to address issues of racial injustice, prejudice and segregation. St. Louis became the first southern diocese to answer the CCS's call to integrate parochial schools.

In the summer of 1947 the newly appointed Archbishop of St. Louis, Joseph E. Ritter, announced that Catholic high schools in St. Louis would integrate in the fall. The given reason for the integration was the overcrowding of the city's only all black Catholic high

¹⁴Katherine Martensen, "Region, Religion, and Social Action: The Catholic Committee of the South, 1939-1956". *Catholic Historical Review*, LXVII, No. 2, (April 1982): 249-267.

¹⁵Ibid, 249-267. Anderson, *Black, White and Catholic*, 14-15.

school, St. Joseph's.¹⁶ Ritter's announcement came before any other southern diocese had integrated their schools and before the Supreme Court had ruled segregation unconstitutional. The Catholic laity, who vehemently protested the integration plans, was not prepared to accept the change. The laity's reaction was not surprising given that the previous head of the diocese, Cardinal John J. Glennon, had accepted segregation and had made no serious attempts to challenge the practice during his tenure. In fact, Archbishop Glennon had been quarreling with Jesuit priests in the diocese over his staunch segregationist attitude. In the first half of the twentieth century, there was an exodus of blacks out of the Deep South to more northern cities, such as St. Louis. The black population of St. Louis was 43,960 in 1910 and increased to 69,854 in 1920. At the beginning of World War II the black population was 125,000 and by 1945 the population had jumped to 180,000.¹⁷ The dramatic increase in the black population changed the racial makeup of neighborhoods in St. Louis that had been traditionally white. Many of the younger clergy saw the potential for converts in the burgeoning black population, but recognized that conversion was difficult in the face of the Church's racial discrimination. In a 1927 report to the United States Apostolic Delegate, Amleto Cicognani, Archbishop Glennon stated that there was a strong current among black people "Expecting and demanding equal rights in the churches, eliminating the color line altogether." However, Archbishop Glennon asserted that such a proposal was "Impractical for the present at least in a city such as St. Louis which is by tradition a Southern City."¹⁸ Making claims of

¹⁶R. Bentley Anderson, "Prelates, Protest and Public Opinion: Catholic Opposition to Desegregation, 1947-1955," *Journal of Church and State*, no. 3, (2004).

¹⁷Donald J Kemper, "Catholic Integration in St. Louis, 1935-1947," *The Missouri Historical Review*, 73, (October 1978-July 1979): 2.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

“impracticality” or upholding cultural norms was a common defense used to maintain the racial status quo in the South.

In 1944, the Jesuit priests orchestrated the integration of Catholic colleges, despite the disapproval of Archbishop Glennon.¹⁹ The following year the priests organized an appeal to the apostolic delegate when Archbishop Glennon refused to allow a black student to attend his all white neighborhood parochial school. The mother of the boy seeking admittance to the school was very light skinned and often mistaken for white. When she met with Archbishop Glennon, she did not reveal that her child was darker skinned and her transcribed notes of the meeting laid bare the archbishop’s racism. He accused blacks of being violent, irresponsible, ungrateful, and underserving of any greater generosity than they already received. He also expressed his fear that integration would lead to miscegenation. Upon revealing her race to the archbishop, the mother was roughly escorted out the door, but in her appeal to Cicognani, she included her transcribed notes from her meeting with Archbishop Glennon. Cicognani then included the mother’s notes in his letter to Archbishop Glennon and inquired how he should reply to the mother.²⁰ In his reply, Archbishop Glennon wrote that while the time was not yet right for integration, “Eventually it [integration] will come, and it can be done without trouble, if prudence will be used.”²¹ This was a small concession for the archbishop to make, as he was able to appear supportive of integration, while still maintaining his commitment to segregation of parochial schools.

¹⁹Kemper, “Catholic Integration in St. Louis,” 9-13.

²⁰ Ibid, 13-17.

²¹Ibid, 16.

Shortly thereafter, in the spring of 1946, Archbishop Glennon was elected a Cardinal and died while in Rome receiving his new credentials. Although the machinations behind a bishop's appointment is shrouded in secrecy, clearly the Catholic hierarchy was aware of the racial tensions in the St. Louis diocese and the efforts of the Jesuit priests to end segregation. Archbishop Ritter, who had integrated the parochial schools in Indianapolis, made a departure from Archbishop Glennon's segregationist policies.²² Archbishop Ritter quickly and effectively integrated the parochial schools in St. Louis, threatening to excommunicate any dissenters. Archbishop Ritter was representative of a new generation of Catholic leaders, who like LaFarge, challenged the Church's discriminatory practices.

In response to Archbishop Ritter's integration decree, parishioners founded the "Catholic Parents Association of Saint Louis and Saint Louis County" to oppose the archbishop's plan to integrate the high schools and sent letters of protest to the archbishop. In the letters, the parishioners pledged support for the education of black students as long it remained separate from white children, even committing to raise funds to build a new all black high school.²³ In response, Archbishop Ritter raised the stakes and issued a statement, delivered by parish priests, that all parochial schools-high school and grammar-would be integrated. The organized lay dissenters voted to retain legal counsel to halt the desegregation of the parochial schools. The open challenge to the diocese and the archbishop, who received his authority from the Pope, was a clear violation of canon law. In response, Archbishop Ritter threatened the dissenters with excommunication. The protestors countered by appealing to Apostolic Delegate Amleto Cicognani. In a letter to

²²Anderson, "Prelates, Protest, and Public Opinion," 618-621; Kemper, "Catholic Integration in St. Louis," 6, 18.

²³Kemper, "Catholic Integration in St. Louis," 4.

Cicognani, the protest leaders questioned the ability of Archbishop Ritter to threaten excommunication and pledged themselves to the education of African American Catholics, so long as it remained separate from the education of white children, pleading that it was more advantageous to African Americans. Archbishop Cicognani replied that there was nothing that he could do and counseled the protestors to abide by the policy set forth by Archbishop Ritter. In truth, the apostolic delegate could have instructed Archbishop Ritter to change his policy, but by not doing so, he sent a clear message that the Pope supported Archbishop Ritter and his decree to integrate the parochial schools. Shortly before his election as Pope, Eugenio Pacelli, toured the United States. Concerned with the conditions of African-Americans, his first papal directive to the United States bishops in 1939 contained the advice that the black population “Needs special care and comfort...and we pray fruitful success for those whose generous zeal is devoted to their welfare.”²⁴

After intense debate, the Catholic Parents Association of Saint Louis and Saint Louis County disbanded at a meeting attended by over 800 people on October 5, 1947. The chairman, John P. Barrett, told the crowd, “My religion comes first, if it gets to the point where I have to sit beside the Negro to keep my religion I’ll do it.”²⁵ Many parents did not concede quietly and threatened to stop supporting the church financially and enroll their children in public schools, although it is not known how many actually did so.²⁶

In 1947 all of the parochial schools in the diocese were integrated, without violence, disproving his Archbishop Glennon’s claim that conditions were not right for such drastic change. A 1956 report by the St. Louis Public Schools Instruction Department credits the

²⁴Kemper, “Catholic Integration in St. Louis,” 19.

²⁵Anderson, “Prelates, Protest, and Public Opinion,” 626.

²⁶Ibid, 617-630.

integration of the parochial schools in St. Louis is for the peaceful integration of the public schools that followed the *Brown* ruling.²⁷ St. Louis was one of the first southern cities to integrate its public schools following the Supreme Court ruling and by 1956, 80 percent of African American students had been integrated.²⁸ Integration in the city took place with none of the violence and resistance that occurred in other southern school districts. Integrated parochial schools perhaps made the people of St. Louis less fearful of the effects of integrated public schools, but more importantly, integrated parochial schools meant that there was no alternative for those seeking to avoid integration. The only conditions that had changed in St. Louis that made it more conducive to integration was the archbishop. Therefore, it was the leadership of the diocese that determined the integration of the parochial schools and not the community. However, an activist record and support for racial justice did not always equate with a willingness to risk turmoil within the diocese for the cause of integration.

In New Orleans, the only predominantly Catholic city in the South and home to more than half the South's Catholics, Archbishop Joseph Rummel expressed his intent to integrate the parochial schools immediately following the Supreme Court ruling.²⁹ Archbishop Rummel was a prominent leader of the CCS, and his absence, due to illness, from the 1954 convention is cited as one of the reasons for the demise of the

²⁷*Guardian*, August 23, 1957, 8; Arkansas Council on Human Relations, Special Collections Division, University of Arkansas, Libraries, Fayetteville, box 9, folder 91, hereinafter cited as ACHR Papers.

²⁸*New York Times*, March 18, 1956. Accessed May 4, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1956/03/13/94287355.html?pageNumber=17>.

²⁹Manning and Rogers, "Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools."

organization.³⁰ In his diocese, Archbishop Rummel had supported integrationist measures since 1949, when he refused to attend a partially segregated service, and had “White” and “Colored” notices taken off of church pews.³¹ The archbishop also cancelled a holy hour observance because city park commissioners insisted on racial segregation.³² Despite his commitment to racial justice, Archbishop Rummel faltered in his response to integration when tested, which fomented resistance by white Catholics and gave rise to a pattern of stall, delay and resist that was effectively used to prevent parochial school integration.

In 1955, in Jesuit Bend, Louisiana, white Catholics physically restrained and refused the entry of an African American priest who had been sent to minister their church.³³ In response, Archbishop Rummel issued an interdict for the laity’s behavior and closed the church until the laity repented. The Catholic Church in Jesuit Bend remained closed for two years and was only reopened after a handful of the dissenters signed a letter of repentance and the diocese made assurances that only white priests would be assigned to their church. While a compromise of sorts was reached, it is clear that Archbishop Rummel did not wield the weapon of excommunication to rein in the revolting Jesuit Bend parishioners. Instead the archbishop and the community entered in to a two-year standoff, with many community leaders forming a local chapter of the Citizens’ Council to resist any form of integration in the Church.³⁴ Archbishop Rummel’s response to the Jesuit Bend crisis set the stage for a pattern of stall, delay and resist.

³⁰Martensen, “Region, Religion, and Social Action,” 263.

³¹Manning and Rogers, “Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools,” 32.

³²*New York Times*, Oct. 15, 1955. Accessed May 4, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1955/10/15/92846163.html?pageNumber=1>.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴R. Bentley Anderson, “Prelates, Protest, and Public Opinion,” 630-635.

Despite voicing his support for integration following the *Brown* ruling, in August 1955, Archbishop Rummel announced that parochial school integration would not occur until the following school year. The archbishop noted that the Supreme Court ruling ordering integration of the public schools was in accord with the principles and teachings of the Catholic Church, but it was not practical or prudent to integrate the parochial schools at the time.³⁵ In February 1956, Archbishop Rummel condemned segregation as “morally wrong and sinful” in a pastoral letter that was read in all the parishes throughout the archdiocese.³⁶ The letter indicated the archbishop’s intent to integrate the parochial schools but did not offer any details for when integration would occur. The announcement of plans to integrate, but the failure to implement, allowed time for the formation of a virulent opposition. Since New Orleans was home to the largest number of Catholics, many of the state legislators were Catholic. In an editorial in the diocesan newspaper, Catholic legislators were warned that they would face excommunication if they continued to pursue legislation that would place parochial schools under government control in order to maintain segregation.³⁷ In March 1956, one of the legislators, and public school board member, Emile Wagner, formed the Association of Catholic Laymen (ACL) to vigorously oppose parochial school integration.³⁸ Under threat of excommunication, the group

³⁵*New York Times*, August 27, 1955. Accessed May 12, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1955/08/27/84154646.html?pageNumber=17>

³⁶*New York Times*, February 20, 1956. Accessed May 10, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1956/02/20/84877920.html?pageNumber=15>.

³⁷*New York Times*, February 25, 1956, accessed May 10, 2017. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1956/02/25/313815222.html?pageNumber=1>.

³⁸Manning and Rogers, “Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools,” 33. *New York Times*, March 19, 1956, accessed May 12, 2017,

disbanded a few months later, but promised to appeal directly to the Pope.³⁹ Shortly thereafter, an eight-foot cross was burned on the lawn at Archbishop Rummel's residence.⁴⁰ In July 1956, Archbishop Rummel announced that "certain difficulties" made immediate school integration impossible and that it would be postponed again, until at least September 1957.⁴¹ The massive resistance in New Orleans was effective in once again delaying integration of the parochial schools and once again extenuating circumstances were blamed for the delay. Clearly the archbishop was willing to threaten dissenters with excommunication but unwilling or unable to integrate the parochial schools. In its appeal to Pope Pius XII, the ACL questioned how Archbishop Rummel could declare segregation to be immoral and sinful if the diocese itself practiced segregation.⁴²

For the next three years, there were no further announcements from the diocese regarding the integration of the parochial schools. In 1959, Archbishop Rummel said in a TIME magazine article that proceeding with parochial school integration would be "Too explosive."⁴³ In the meantime, former ACL members and other segregationists reframed the Church's position and declared that Archbishop Rummel had only noted that discrimination, and not segregation, was wrong. In response, the archdiocese issued an official statement:

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1956/03/19/86549260.html?pageNumber=23>.

³⁹Manning and Rogers, "Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools," 33.

⁴⁰*New York Times*, May 18, 1956, accessed May 13, 2017, .

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1956/05/18/84696007.html?pageNumber=16>.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*New York Times*, August 9, 1957, accessed May 12, 2017,

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1957/08/09/90832059.html?pageNumber=1>.

⁴³Manning and Rogers, "Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools," 33.

“Segregation is morally wrong and sinful. It is the sentiment and opinion of the Archbishop that integration in education will come. Just when it will come is very difficult to forecast at the present time, but certainly...it will come at the earliest possible opportunity and definitely that time will not be later than when the public schools are integrated.”⁴⁴

There were no further announcements from the archdiocese regarding parochial school integration. By 1960, the public schools began to desegregate and the Church had lost the opportunity to be the first school system to desegregate.⁴⁵ Even in a climate with an archbishop supportive of integration, the New Orleans Archdiocese was unable to effectively integrate the parochial schools. Part of the problem was the advancing age and declining health of Archbishop Rummel. As already noted, his absence from the 1954 CCS conference due to illness was a contributing factor in the dissolution of that organization and in 1959, the archbishop was eighty-two, legally blind and largely unable to move around without assistance.⁴⁶ There was also the virulent reaction of whites to any proposed integration and the concerns about financial and political retribution. For example, when four first grade girls integrated two elementary public schools in 1960, within a matter of days, almost all the white students had been withdrawn and the remaining students had to pass an angry group of women every morning who spit, cursed and screamed at them. The fathers of remaining students were fired from their jobs and financial and social pressures eventually forced out most of the white families who tried to remain.⁴⁷ The turmoil experienced by public school integration made priests, who did not

⁴⁴Manning and Rogers, “Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools,” 34. *New York Times*, July 8, 1959, accessed May 12, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1959/07/08/80592274.html?pageNumber=20>.

⁴⁵Manning and Rogers, “Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools,” 34.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷Manning and Rogers, “Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools,” 37.

want to subject their students and schools to the same turmoil, begin to resist integration more openly.⁴⁸ Segregationists also weaved cold-war rhetoric into their arguments, asserting that integration was a communist inspired plot. The exact reason for the archbishop's delay is not clear but it was clear that segregationists had prevailed in preventing parochial school integration in New Orleans. The more that parochial school integration was delayed, the more virulent the resistance became, making it harder to implement integration. Despite his activist roots, Archbishop Rummel was unable to integrate the parochial schools.

In 1961, John P. Cody, who had served as Chancellor for the St. Louis Diocese under Archbishop Rummel, and was a former student of Apostolic Delegate Cicognani, was appointed as the coadjutor Archbishop since the eighty-four year old Archbishop Rummel was not ready to retire.⁴⁹ At the beginning of 1962, presumably because of Cody's presence, Archbishop Rummel suddenly announced that the 116 elementary schools and thirty-seven high schools in the Archdiocese would finally integrate the following school year.⁵⁰ Predictably, there were protests from ardent segregationists. Most notable among the lay protestors were Leander Perez, an Assistant Attorney General and powerful political boss, State Representative Rodney Buras, and Mrs. B.J. Gaillot Jr., director of a militant segregationist organization called Save our Nation, Inc.⁵¹ The three were threatened with excommunication and ordered to desist in their segregationist activities.

According to the *New York Times*, upon receipt of the letter from the archdiocese

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Manning and Rogers, "Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools," 34.

⁵⁰*New York Times*, March 28, 1962, accessed May 16, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1962/03/28/83219887.html?pageNumber=1>.

⁵¹Manning and Rogers, "Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools," 38.

threatening excommunication, Buras stated his emphatic support for segregation but that as a Catholic, he had to abide by the laws and decisions of the diocese. In the same article, Gaillot, blamed the integration decree on Archbishop Cody, claiming that Archbishop Rummel only ordered parochial schools integrated after Archbishop Cody's arrival.⁵² Gaillot and Perez continued their support for segregation and were swiftly excommunicated, as was Jackson Ricau, president of the White Citizens Council.⁵³ On May 24, it was announced that Archbishop Cody would replace Archbishop Rummel as the head of the diocese.⁵⁴ Archbishop Rummel retired on his sixtieth anniversary of becoming a priest and is credited with ordering the integration of New Orleans parochial schools. However, it seems clear that it was the coadjutor, Archbishop Cody, who orchestrated the integration. After seven years of delay, Archbishop Cody integrated the parochial schools within one year of his arrival in the archdiocese. The integration of the parochial schools in New Orleans followed in the same pattern as the integration of the schools in St. Louis: a specific date for integration was announced, excommunication was threatened for those that dissented, and the schools were integrated without much further resistance. In the fall

⁵²*New York Times*, April 3, 1962, accessed May 16, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1962/04/03/82041805.html?pageNumber=27>.

⁵³Manning and Rogers, "Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools," 39. *New York Times*, April 17, 1962, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1962/04/17/94099504.html?pageNumber=1>.

⁵⁴*New York Times*, May 25, 1962, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1962/05/25/82763483.html?pageNumber=25>.

of 1962, the parochial schools of New Orleans were at last integrated. Approximately 150-200 black students were integrated at 32 schools.⁵⁵

Although Archbishop Rummel had a clear record of commitment to racial justice his acquiescence in the face of massive resistance only served to embolden segregationists. His advancing age and failing health most likely were reasons he repeatedly delayed his announced integration plans. Financial concerns were also likely a consideration as Catholic legislators threatened to withhold money from parochial schools and the laity threatened boycotts of the schools and the collection plate. Cold war politics may have also contributed, since integration was occurring at the height of the cold war, and integrationists were frequently accused of being communist sympathizers. Moreover, the Supreme Court's *Brown v Board* ruling requiring integration created a powerful and influential political platform of massive resistance in the south. As such, the social and political landscape of New Orleans was different from that of St. Louis a decade earlier. However, integration occurred in a similar fashion with the arrival of a new Archbishop. Archbishop Cody, who had served under Archbishop Ritter in St. Louis during the parochial school integration, employed the same strategy as his former prelate to integrate the parochial schools in New Orleans; a definitive date for integration announced and the threat of excommunication issued to those who dissented. Only in the case of New Orleans, the archbishop did actually have to excommunicate members of the Church. When the newly integrated parochial schools opened for the 1962 school year, there was minimal

⁵⁵Manning and Rogers, "Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools," 39-40; *New York Times*, September 8, 1962, accessed May 15, 2017 <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1962/09/08/83521138.html?number=11>.

resistance and attendance did not drop off significantly.⁵⁶ Most of the laity quietly accepted the laws and decisions of the diocese. Therefore, the actions of the head of the diocese set the tone for the reactions of the laity. When Archbishop Rummel hedged in his plans to integrate the parochial schools, segregationists interpreted each delay as a success and increased their resistance efforts. However, when Archbishop Cody forced dissenters to choose between their religion, and their segregationist activities, most chose to quietly accept integration. Only Perez, who had been excommunicated from the Church, continued to actively protest the integration of parochial schools.⁵⁷

While outside forces were often blamed for delays in integration, it seems obvious that the problem was once again rooted within the diocese. When the diocese hesitated in its plans to integrate, so did the laity. But when the diocese firmly implemented integration, the laity acquiesced. It is also obvious that the Catholic hierarchy was effecting change and propagating an agenda of racial justice in the South, by its appointments of integrationist prelates to dioceses that had fallen into racial discord.

The successful implementation of integration in the St. Louis and New Orleans diocese's were wholly dependent on the actions of the archbishop. The hierarchal nature of the Catholic Church commanded the laity to follow the policies and decisions of the diocesan head. Once threatened with excommunication in St. Louis, and in New Orleans the laity quietly accepted integration when it was forced to, rather than sacrifice their religion. In both cities, segregationist leaders who resisted integration openly admitted

⁵⁶*New York Times*, October 7, 1962, accessed May 16, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1962/10/07/121475905.html?pageNumber=58>.

⁵⁷*New York Times*, September 2, 1962, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1962/09/02/83515874.html?pageNumber=44>.

that they would follow the rules of set forth by their diocese rather than forsake their religion for segregation. The Church therefore, was uniquely poised to be the harbinger of integration in the South, but only if it had a leader who supported the cause.

Chapter 2

Little Rock and the Defense of Segregation

While the Vatican called for an end to racial segregation in the Church and the Archdiocese of St. Louis and New Orleans implemented integration, there was in fact, no uniformity in the Catholic response to the challenge of racial desegregation.⁵⁸ Prior to the Second Vatican Council the leaders of the church in the United States did not meet on a regular basis nor did they deliberate as a body and so the Church did not speak with one voice. Bishops and archbishops addressed church issues within their own diocese as they saw fit.⁵⁹ While the public schools were motivated by law to integrate, parochial schools were private, and so the impetus for integration was a moral one. The head of the diocese in Little Rock, Bishop Albert Fletcher, has been credited with being supportive of integration, especially during the public school crisis. However, on closer inspection, it is clear that this claim is misplaced and Bishop Fletcher's failure to integrate the parochial schools in Little Rock perpetuated massive resistance in the city.

Prior to the public school crisis, Little Rock prided itself on being a moderate southern city and perhaps no one was more surprised by the violent, reactionary response to the integration of Central High than Little Rock residents. The trouble surrounding the integration of Central High was blamed on outside agitators and political opportunists.

⁵⁸*New York Times*, August 10, 1957, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1957/08/10/90832741.html?pageNumber=1>.

⁵⁹R. Bentley Anderson, "Prelates, protest, and Public Opinion," 643-44.

However, an examination of race relations in Little Rock in the decades prior to the public school crisis reveals that the virulent response should not have come as a surprise and had in fact been building throughout the twentieth century. Certainly the activities of the Little Rock chapter of the NAACP revealed a long campaign to secure the right to vote and to end segregation. Activists L.C. and Daisy Bates, both members of the NAACP, expanded their focus to labor issues and incurred the wrath of local courts. The Little Rock chapter, which was founded in 1918, functioned like other southern chapters: it initially served as a social club rather than a political organization. However, it supported black attorney Scipio Jones and the efforts of the national organization to represent twelve black men who had been sentenced to death for the death of whites during the 1919 Elaine massacre. The national organization was unhappy with the amount the local chapter contributed and believed their commitment was lackluster. One member, John Robinson founded a separate organization, the Arkansas Negro Democratic Association (ANDA), to bring a case against the white primary in Arkansas. His suit failed and his organization languished but in 1940 Harold Flowers founded the Committee on Negro Organizations (CNO) and resumed Robinson's battle for the ballot. White officials in Arkansas had opposed them at every turn, and Arkansas representatives to Congress and state legislators, meanwhile had refused to support a federal anti-lynching bill.⁶⁰ Clearly, Arkansas's reputation as a moderate state must be reexamined.

⁶⁰ For a history of black activism and white resistance in Little Rock see John Kirk, *Beyond Little Rock: The Origins and Legacies of the Central High Crisis*, (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2007); John Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-1970*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida); Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1986); Roy Reed, *Faubus: The Life and Times of an American Prodigal*, (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1997); John William Graves, "Jim Crow in Arkansas: A Reconsideration of

Complicit in the labeling of Little Rock as a moderate city is the Catholic Church. The Church's response to integration is also in need of reexamination, as the diocese was not as supportive of integration as has been assumed. Following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, an article appeared in *The Guardian*, the official newspaper of the Arkansas Diocese, titled "Few White or Negro Catholics Attending Public Schools in Arkansas". The article claimed that since the majority of the State's Catholic children were enrolled in parochial schools, and not public schools, they would not be affected by the High Court's ruling. This implied that there was no plan to integrate parochial schools in the diocese. At the time, the diocese maintained eight black elementary schools and two black high schools, located in Pine Bluff and Little Rock. The schools enrolled a total of 954 black students, of which only 197 were Catholic.⁶¹ The majority of students attending black parochial schools were Protestant. The Catholic Church had established black schools as an evangelizing effort to gain converts to the Church.⁶² Many black families perceived parochial schools as a better educational opportunity than state funded public schools. The first address that Bishop Fletcher made on the topic of integration was in a pastoral letter that was read by the priests throughout the diocese in August 1954. The letter emphasized that segregation by race went against the teachings of the Church but was accommodated in places where it was required by law and custom. The letter also maintained that it was a mistake to assume that Catholic schools would continue the practice of racial segregation, as it was contrary to the teachings of the Church. The letter proclaimed that no Catholic child would be denied a Catholic school education on account of race or color. However, in

Urban Race Reactions in the Post-Reconstruction South," *Journal of Southern History* 55, no. 3 (August 1989): 421-448.

⁶¹*Guardian*, May 21, 1954.

⁶²Woods, *Mission and Memory*, 183-187.

areas where there were large concentrations of blacks, separate schools for the races would remain intact. Bishop Fletcher maintained that it was practically impossible for integration to occur immediately and to attempt such a thing would be the height of folly. However, it was urgently necessary for Catholic Negro children to be admitted to any Catholic school available in places where there was no Catholic school especially for them and that during this time of transition, the goal of the Church in the diocese was that no Catholic student be refused admission to a Catholic school on account of race or color.⁶³ This pastoral letter is the primary reason why the Catholic Church is credited with being supportive of integration efforts and for the next five years, Bishop Fletcher would refer to his pastoral letter when questioned about the diocese's position on integration.⁶⁴

On the surface, the pastoral letter appeared to be in favor of supporting integration, but it warrants a closer look. In the state of Arkansas, Catholics were a minority and black Catholics were an even greater minority. In the entire state, according to the Church's 1954 records, there were 900 black Catholics. The largest concentration of African-Americans lived in Pine Bluff, Hot Springs and Little Rock. In those cities, the diocese maintained separate schools for African Americans.⁶⁵ Therefore, while it appeared enlightened to say that no Catholic child would be denied an education based on color or race, it was unlikely

⁶³*Guardian*, August 13, 1954.

⁶⁴The Arkansas Catholic Diocese would not allow the author to access records directly due to personal information contained within the diocesan records. Instead, copies of letters and other information that was deemed relevant was mailed from the diocese. Hereinafter, these records will be referred to as Arkansas Diocese Records. Letter from Bishop Fletcher to Clotye Murdock, Associate Editor of *Ebony Magazine*, October 8, 1954; Letter from Chancellor Joseph. A. Murray to Mrs. Patrick Leonard, October 15, 1958; Letter from Bishop Fletcher to Frater Peter Schwartz, December 9, 1958; Letter from Chancellor Joseph. A. Murray to Michael J. O'Meara, April 8, 1959; *Time Magazine*, "Segregation is Immoral," April 20, 1965; David Chappell, "Diversity within a Racial Group: White People in Little Rock," 448.

⁶⁵*Guardian*, May 21, 1954. Arkansas Diocese Records, School Census 1955-1974.

that there would actually be a black Catholic child wanting to attend a parochial school in an area that did not already have a black Catholic school. However, if a black Catholic child did need to attend a white parochial school, then Bishop Fletcher instructed that a letter from the priest would need to be written to the Bishop explaining why the child should either be allowed to attend the parochial school or permitted to attend the public school.⁶⁶ It is unclear if the bishop was ever presented with such a petition from a priest. The Bishop was trying to have it both ways. He implied that he favored integration by asserting that the diocese would not deny a black Catholic admission to its schools while, at the same time, maintaining segregated schools.

The crucial figure in the failure to integrate Catholic schools in Arkansas was Bishop Fletcher, who had been installed as Arkansas's fourth bishop on February 11, 1947. Bishop Fletcher was born in 1896 in Little Rock to parents who converted to Catholicism upon their marriage.⁶⁷ Bishop Fletcher was the first Arkansan ever raised to the Roman Catholic hierarchy and aside from a few summers spent at the University of Chicago, received his entire education in Arkansas. Interestingly, Bishop Fletcher's cousin, Adolphine Fletcher Terry, was a prominent activist in Little Rock and was founder of the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools (WEC), which was instrumental in recalling segregationist school board members and reopening Little Rock's public high schools.⁶⁸ But Bishop Fletcher was not a member of any organizations that promoted racial justice. In fact, he

⁶⁶*Guardian*, August 13, 1954.

⁶⁷*Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, "Albert Lewis Fletcher," accessed April 5, 2017, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=341>.

⁶⁸Woods, *Mission and Memory*, 242; Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, 42-43.

denied a petition from laymen who wanted to form a Catholic Interracial Council.⁶⁹ Having been born and raised in the South, Bishop Fletcher generally accepted the segregated norms that were prevalent throughout the region.⁷⁰

Aside from the statement issued in *The Guardian* after the *Brown v Board of Education* decision, Bishop Fletcher refrained from issuing any further public statement on the desegregation of parochial schools until 1959. Throughout the public school crisis, the most the Arkansas Diocese did was join in a cross-denominational call for prayer and peace. In coordination with Protestant churches, Bishop Fletcher requested that October 12, 1957 (Columbus Day), be set aside as a time for special services for peace and understanding.⁷¹ Throughout the public school crisis, the diocese received letters inquiring about the integration of parochial schools. In a letter dated April 8, 1959, Chancellor Joseph A. Murray confirmed that no Catholic schools in Little Rock were integrated due to the fact that black children had their own schools and made the claim that no requests had been made by black children to attend the all white parochial schools. The letter restated the 1954 pastoral decree that Catholic schools were available in the colored parishes throughout the State and asserted that in the cases where a separate school was not available, black Catholic children could attend the parish school.⁷² In 1958, the year that Little Rock public schools were closed, Bishop Fletcher responded in a letter that it was practically impossible to make any statement at the time that would serve a constructive

⁶⁹ACHR Papers, box7, folder, 67, "Catholic Laymen's Protest Succeeds."

⁷⁰Woods, *Mission and Memory*, 231-232.

⁷¹*Guardian* October 11, 1957. *New York Times*, October 7, 1957, accessed May 9, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1957/10/07/84769986.html?pageNumber=1>.

⁷²Arkansas Diocese Records, Letter from Chancellor Joseph A. Murray to Michael J. O'Meera, Jr. April 8, 1959.

purpose. Instead, the bishop wrote that he chose to quietly work for understanding and cooperation. Bishop Fletcher did acknowledge that he was contemplating issuing a statement that would expound on the statement issued by the Conference of American Catholic Bishops after their first annual meeting in Washington DC.⁷³ This meeting was the first time that American Bishops met to discuss Church policies as a collective body. The conference issued a seven-page statement titled, "Racial Discrimination and the Christian Conscience." The statement reasoned that racial segregation could not be reconciled with the Christian conscience because by its nature, segregation imposed a stigma of inferiority upon the segregated people, creating oppressive conditions and denying them basic human rights. The bishops issued a call to action to end the practice of racial segregation.⁷⁴

In July 1959, the *Guardian* announced that a series of six editorials would be forthcoming analyzing America's race problem. The editorials may have been a response to the Conference of American Bishop's statement on Race and the Christian Conscience. Certainly, they were a result of increasing pressure on Bishop Fletcher and the diocese to issue a statement on public school situation in Little Rock. Rather than continue to comply with integration, Governor Faubus closed all of Little Rock's public high schools for the 1958-59 school year. This left a large population of youth in Little Rock without access to public education.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, the Catholic schools, which remained open and segregated, experienced a surge in the white student population while the black catholic school

⁷³Arkansas Diocese Records, Letter from Bishop Albert Fletcher to Frater Peter Schwartz, December 9, 1958.

⁷⁴The Bishops of the United States of America, "Racial Discrimination and the Christian Conscience," American Catholic History Classroom, accessed April 30, 2017, <http://cuomeka.wrlc.org/items/show/912>.

⁷⁵Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*.

maintained a steady rate of enrollment.⁷⁶ The latter was probably due to relatively high tuition and the lack of physical space. As a result of the overcrowded conditions at the white Catholic boys high school, a new building campaign was launched in the fall of 1958.⁷⁷ The Catholic schools profited from the closure of the public high schools as white students sought an alternative education. It is interesting to consider if the parochial schools had been integrated before the public schools, as they were in St. Louis, whether the resistance to public school integration in Little Rock would have been as fierce. After such a long silence on the state of affairs in Little Rock and the many references to the Church's 1954 position, that no Catholic child would be denied a Catholic school education based on race, which had been interpreted as supportive of integration and was certainly promoted by the bishop himself as being favorable to integration, the editorials read as a clear defense of segregation and employed many of the same arguments used by segregationists at the time.

William O'Donnell, the managing editor of the newspaper, with the permission of Bishop Fletcher, wrote the editorials. The first editorial was published in the *Guardian* on July 31. O'Donnell claimed that although it was unjust that Little Rock was stigmatized as the pulsating heart of racism in America, it was appropriate that given the city's unfortunate notoriety, the initiative for eliminating racism should come from the southern city since its residents were most familiar with the country's race problem. Moreover, many of the problems Little Rock experienced stemmed from a simple failure to properly define terms. Specifically the editorial argued that "unjust discrimination" and

⁷⁶Office of Catholic Schools, Diocese of Little Rock, Annual Reports, 1955-1979. The school census reports were provided by the office of the superintendent for parochial schools located at the Diocese of Little Rock.

⁷⁷*Guardian*, September 19, 1958.

“segregation” were not synonymous, and that the existence of “unjust discrimination” implied that there must be “just discrimination.” Rather than being the same, segregation was a result of both just and unjust discrimination. Interestingly, Catholics in New Orleans, who were fighting against parish school integration, used the same argument that segregation and discrimination were not synonymous.⁷⁸ The editorial then referenced the Supreme Court’s 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling, which affirmed separate coach laws and gave rise to “separate but equal” facilities as the beginning of a number of segregation statutes in the south. The editorial claimed that the court ruling was the cause of racial animosity, rather than a result of racial animosity. The editorial concluded by making the case that segregationist philosophy was rooted in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling and that just because the court overturned itself, declaring separate but equal unconstitutional, a change in the law could not be expected to change a philosophy.⁷⁹

The second editorial, published August 7, 1959, continued the case against the *Brown v Board of Education* ruling by asserting, “...Obedience to law is binding only when the law is just. But southern opposition to racial integration is convinced that the 1954 Supreme Court decision is wrong, and, therefore, is unjust.”⁸⁰ O’Donnell reasoned that segregationists firmly believed that integration would ruin the nation’s white culture and lead to social chaos. Segregationists opposed the intermingling of the races because of the obvious “primitiveness” of the majority of blacks, as distinguished from a more cultured minority of blacks.⁸¹ This distinction between the primitive majority versus the cultured minority is a concession to token integration and an argument against total integration.

⁷⁸Manning and Rogers, “Desegregation of the New Orleans Parochial Schools,” 34.

⁷⁹*Guardian*, July 31, 1959.

⁸⁰*Guardian*, August 7, 1959.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

Although the author concedes that segregation is partially responsible for the “animalistic living conditions and physical filth” of blacks, these differences nevertheless, could not be ignored.⁸²

The third editorial, published August 14, 1959, further examined the misappropriation of the terms “Unjust discrimination” and “Segregation.” The editorial re-emphasized that these two terms were not synonymous and that the term “Unjust discrimination” implied that there must also exist “Just discrimination.” The editorial argued that the Catholic Church taught that segregation was morally wrong when it stemmed from unjust discrimination. However, in America, segregation was not based solely on skin color and was consequently not unjust discrimination. Race, by and of itself, was not the sole cause of segregation in America. Rather, “The Catholic Church does not and cannot teach that one must expose himself or his children to physical or moral dangers in the interests of racial peace or justice. And this is what the southern segregationist sincerely believes he would be doing. Segregation for these reasons is JUST discrimination.”⁸³ Apparently, if southerners discriminated because of socio-economic conditions then it was just, but it was unjust to discriminate solely based on race. This is a convenient way to ignore the fact that discrimination based solely on race created the vast disparity in socio-economic conditions between whites and blacks.

Having established the case for just discrimination, the following editorial, published August 21, 1959, argued that the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling outlawed compulsory segregation, but did not order compulsory general integration. In actual fact, the editorial asserted, the ruling was not as much of a departure from

⁸²*Guardian*, August 7, 1959.

⁸³*Guardian*, August 14, 1959.

established norms as people thought and that the high court said that only blacks culturally ready for integration needed to be integrated. "So, in effect, 'Equal but Separate' educational facilities continue to be the law of the land for the great mass of Negroes."⁸⁴ Moreover, O'Donnell interpreted the Court's instruction that integration occur with "all deliberate speed" to mean gradual integration until blacks were socially and culturally equal to whites. What is unclear is how blacks could become socially and culturally equal to whites, when that would happen, and who would determine when blacks were culturally equal to whites? There was only the vague reference to it happening "someday."⁸⁵

The fifth editorial, published August 28, 1959, continued to express grievances with the 1954 Supreme Court ruling and asserted the right of states to oppose the ruling. The editorial argued that delaying tactics were appropriate as long as it was done in good conscience. O'Donnell then contradicts himself by stating that in the interest of domestic tranquility and to avoid violence, Federal officials should exercise tolerance even in cases where local officials were prejudiced and bigoted and presumably not acting in good conscience. Rather than interpreting the 1954 Supreme Court ruling as a means of furthering a civil rights agenda that had been building throughout the twentieth century, the editorial claimed that the high court's decision arrested inter-racial progress. The editorial again claimed that the Supreme Court conceded to segregationists by not insisting on total integration, which made token integration acceptable. However, the South made concessions as well, having introduced token integration in school districts where "Negro masses do not present cultural problems."⁸⁶ This supported the diocese 1954 decree that

⁸⁴*Guardian*, August 21, 1959.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁸⁶*Guardian*, August 28, 1959.

no Catholic child would be denied an education based on race, but separate schools would be available in areas with large populations of blacks [i.e. Little Rock, Pine Bluff, Hot Springs]. Presumably, in those cities, the majority of blacks were still culturally inferior to whites, but it raises the question how Catholic schools were preparing black students to be culturally equivalent to whites?

The final editorial was published on September 4, 1959 at the start of a new school year. After being closed the previous year, the Little Rock public schools were reopened on August 12 on a token integration basis. Only 6 black students were admitted to two white high schools. The black students were subjected to a pupil-placement law and were not assigned by attendance zone. This was an even fewer number of blacks than had been admitted to Central High in 1957. Nevertheless there was backlash from the Little Rock community, and anti-integration marches that turned into a mob, with firemen using high-pressure fire hoses on the crowd, and twenty-four people arrested.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the Catholic schools opened on September 11 with a record high attendance.⁸⁸ The last editorial proposed a massive, long-range civic effort to improve blacks as a solution to America's race problem. The areas singled out for improvement were black moral standards, cleanliness, ambition, civic pride, education and willingness to carry a full share of their tax and other civic burdens. And if this could be accomplished to the point where blacks would discriminate against other blacks that violated such elements of civilized culture, like whites did, then it would be obvious that blacks had achieved a civilized culture. This goal of cultural enlightenment for blacks, would not happen overnight and

⁸⁷Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*.

⁸⁸*Guardian*, September 4, 1959.

could even take “Generations.”⁸⁹ In the meantime, token integration would be possible but only if the South could be guaranteed protection against the destruction or diminution of its white culture. The editorial suggested that the work of enlightening the black population be left to private groups and a government agency such as the Department of Health, Education and Welfare or the Civil Rights Commission. However, it was imperative that the government agency seek clarification from the Supreme Court, namely acknowledgment of the cultural differences between the black and white races, a declaration that the 1954 ruling not be allowed to lower the educational or cultural standards of the American [i.e. white] community, and a declaration that total integration was the ideal but that token integration was the law until the cultures of the two races were equal, however remote that day may be.⁹⁰

These series of editorials rebuked the Conference of American Bishop’s statement by painstakingly making the case for why a Christian, acting in good conscience, could believe in and practice discrimination and segregation. The editorials clearly mistook the effects of segregation and inequality as the causes and left no doubt that Catholic institutions in Arkansas would remain, aside from some instances of token integration, segregated. The Arkansas Diocese was under the purview of the Archdiocese of New Orleans and it is reasonable to assume that Bishop Fletcher would have been aware of Archbishop Rummel’s fight for interracial justice and declarations to integrate the Catholic schools in New Orleans. Bishop Fletcher would have also been aware of the backlash of the segregationists. But the editorials go beyond merely an acquiescence of segregationist behavior to avoid civil unrest and violence, and instead defend the segregationist belief

⁸⁹*Guardian*, September 4, 1959.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

that blacks were culturally and socially inferior to whites and therefore discrimination and segregation were acceptable.

Three weeks after the publication of the last editorial, *The Guardian* published responses to the editorials in the Letters to the Editor section. O'Donnell claimed that the editorials received a lot of response, most of which were supportive and congratulatory but for four consecutive weeks *The Guardian* printed critiques. The critiques were dismissed by O'Donnell with the claim that they misinterpreted or misrepresented the editorials and readers were urged to purchase a copy of the bound editorials in order to compare the critiques with the original text. The first criticism published was from a prominent black Catholic who asked that his name be withheld. He questioned how the editorials, and the sincere white southerner, could claim that blacks were filthy and lacked ambition, but not question why those conditions existed amongst the majority of blacks. The critique maintained that discrimination in the South was based solely on race and skin color. He argued that people with black skin were routinely prohibited from seeking public office and institutionally kept at the bottom of the economic ladder. Therefore there could be no "Just discrimination" because the conditions created for such just discrimination were as a result of unjust discrimination based on race and skin color. The author also boldly refuted the claim of low morals amongst blacks by asserting that white masters began the practice of integration by invading the bedrooms of their slaves.⁹¹

The following week a critique of the editorials was published from the editors of the *St. Augustine Catholic Messenger*. St. Augustine's seminary, located in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi was founded in 1920 for the education of black men for the Catholic priesthood.

⁹¹*Guardian*, September 25, 1959.

In 1934, the seminary ordained four black priests and by 1960, almost all black Catholic priests in the United States had been trained at St. Augustine's.⁹² *The Messenger* editors emphatically disagreed with the conclusions reached in the editorials, going so far as to call them unchristian. Specifically, the editors pointed out the fallacy of *The Guardian* editorials argument that the cultural inferiority of blacks released southern white people from granting any social demands to blacks and that white people were acting in good conscience in their discrimination against blacks. The authors of the critique expressed their regret that the editorials were published in a booklet form, which allowed for wider distribution, and asked that circulation of the booklet be halted. They also requested that William O'Donnell, publisher of *The Guardian*, issue an apology to black Catholics, as they would have been deeply offended by his treatment of America's race problem. The editor of *The Guardian*, who had promised not to refute the published criticisms, inserted a brief comment that the interpretation of the editorials offered by the editors of *The Messenger* was a "complete misstatement of the thesis advanced by *The Guardian* in its editorial series."⁹³

A fellow Catholic lay editor, Donald J. Thorman, also wrote a critique of the editorials. Thorman was the writer and editor of ACT (Christian Family Movement), managing editor of *The Voice of St. Jude* and *Ave Maria* and in 1965, became the publisher of the *National Catholic Reporter*, a newspaper devoted to investigating and reporting on

⁹²Saint Augustine's seminary, accessed, April 4, 2017, <http://www.svdsouth.com/st.-augustine-seminary.html>.

⁹³*Guardian*, October 2, 1959.

social issues within the Catholic Church.⁹⁴ In his critique, Thorman expressed his belief that O'Donnell's editorials presented a potentially dangerous defense of the status quo and did untold harm to the Christian cause of integration in both the North and the South. He raised the question that if blacks were so inferior to whites, who would decide when blacks were equal? Thorman asserted that the editorials were in violation of the American bishop's 1958 statement that enforced segregation could not be reconciled with a Christian view of man. Thorman also questioned how blacks were to ever become equal to whites if they were kept separate and argued that the two races were constitutionally equal, regardless of any so-called cultural inferiority.⁹⁵ There were also published critiques from lay Catholics across the region. One woman wrote that she believed that it was illogical to claim that discrimination resulted from anything but race and skin color and that disparity between the races only existed because of the difference in skin color. A reader from Holt Summit, Missouri, wrote to ask why white culture, which was to blame for the depravity of black culture, was not asked to change as part of the solution. Moreover, the reader bemoaned the lack of absolute moral standards in the Catholic Church since one lay editor could declare an act immoral while another Catholic editor could declare the same act moral.⁹⁶

Following the published critiques, *The Guardian* printed letters that commended the editorials. Judge Frank Voelker of Lake Providence Louisiana, wrote that he was so impressed by the convincing analysis of the editorials that he wanted permission to

⁹⁴*The Washington Post*, December 1, 1977, accessed March 25, 2017, <http://archives.nd.edu/findaids/ead/xml/djt.xml>; *National Catholic Reporter*, accessed March 25, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/about-us>.

⁹⁵*Guardian*, October 23, 1959.

⁹⁶*Guardian* October 16, 1959, Oct. 23, 1959 pg. 5.

republish them in several newspapers in Louisiana.⁹⁷ In 1962, Judge Voelker gained national attention when he blocked a United States district judge's order to register twenty-eight black voters in East Carroll Parish. The registration of black voters was the first of its kind under the Civil Rights Act of 1960 and would have been the first time that blacks were allowed to vote in East Carroll Parish since 1922.⁹⁸ In addition to Judge Voelker's letter, there were letters from priests in Washington DC, South Carolina, and Mobile, Alabama and lay support in Chicago and Pennsylvania. The last letter published, from a woman in Houston, requested a copy of the editorials after reading an account of the criticism they received from the editors of *The Messenger*. Certain that the analysis had been distorted, she wanted her own copy to determine what the editorials really said. This was a not so subtle reminder to *Guardian* readers to analyze the text of the editorials for themselves, as O'Donnell maintained that many of the criticisms misinterpreted and misrepresented the publication.⁹⁹

From the published responses, it is hard to believe that the editorials were misinterpreted or misrepresented. The people and organizations that voiced a critique of the editorials were a prominent Little Rock black Catholic, priest-editors of a newspaper for a seminary that was founded for the education and training of black priests and a lay Catholic editor who advocated for social justice within the Catholic Church. The only prominent letter published commending the editorials analysis was from a judge that would later gain national attention for defying the Civil Rights Act of 1960. Readers at the time correctly perceived that *The Guardian*, the official newspaper of the Arkansas Diocese,

⁹⁷*Guardian*, October 30, 1959.

⁹⁸*New York Times*, July 21, 1962, accessed May 2, 2017, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1962/07/21/102748244.html>.

⁹⁹*Guardian*, October 30, 1959.

made a defense for the continuation of segregation and discrimination. In Little Rock, the group of Catholic laymen who had petitioned Bishop Fletcher for recognition of a Catholic Interracial Council felt that the editorials were intended to undermine their efforts. The group widely distributed the editorials to arouse righteous indignation amongst Catholics and in the fall of 1959, Bishop Fletcher formally recognized the CIC.¹⁰⁰ Clearly, there was outrage and pressure put upon the diocese, as a response to the editorials, to force Bishop Fletcher to make concessions to the cause of interracial justice, which he had been unwilling to do prior to the publication of the editorials.

In the spring of 1960, Bishop Fletcher issued “An Elementary Catholic Catechism on the Morality of Segregation and Racial Discrimination”. It was a tempered follow-up to *The Guardian* editorials, whose publication was financed by the newly recognized CIC.¹⁰¹ The catechism received positive national press for its pronouncement that segregation in Arkansas was immoral.¹⁰² This appeared to be a refutation of the previously published editorials. While the headline was attention grabbing and the catechism did declare that “Segregation as we know it in Arkansas is immoral” it wasn’t as big of a departure from the editorials as it appeared.¹⁰³ Prepared for Lent, and distributed throughout the diocese, the catechism is written in a question and answer style presentation. The first part of the catechism addressed the nature, causes and morality of segregation. In addition to declaring that segregation was immoral, the catechism also refuted the editorials in stating that the acceptance of the inferiority of blacks to whites was a false philosophy. Moreover, the catechism was forthright in positing the Church’s condemnation of racism as being

¹⁰⁰ACHR Papers, box7, folder, 67, “Catholic Laymen’s Protest Succeeds.”

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²*Time Magazine*, April 25, 1960.

¹⁰³Fletcher, *An Elementary Catholic Catechism*, 3.

contrary to its teaching that all men are inherently and naturally equal. However, the following section, which addressed the “Personal Morality of Discrimination on the Basis of Color Alone,” revisited the position of the editorials that there could be just and unjust discrimination. The catechism states that a person does wrong when he/she discriminates on the basis of what is untrue or false, such as the notion that one race is by its nature superior to other races. However, a person does not do wrong when he/she discriminates on the basis of truth. As an example, the catechism claimed that “A person discriminates truthfully on the basis of race alone when he says: “The Negro race is different but essentially equal to the white race.”¹⁰⁴ Moreover, one of the principle causes for unjust discrimination was racial prejudice, which implied that there could be just discrimination that was not based on racial prejudice but the truthful acknowledgment of differences between the races.¹⁰⁵ The most compelling section of the catechism was its discussion of the Church and segregation in Arkansas. Bishop Fletcher claimed the special needs of blacks warranted special facilities for them which was done in accord with charity and not opposed to it and was the given reason why, even though segregation was immoral, the Church maintained separate schools and churches. In addition, to abolish or discontinue the special facilities were practically impossible and would be seriously harmful.¹⁰⁶ It is unclear what the special needs of blacks were and why it was impossible to abolish separate facilities and whom it would harm by doing so. Bishop Fletcher then invoked his 1954 statement that the ideal Catholic arrangement was one in which no Catholic student would be refused admission to a Catholic school on account of race or color, but maintained

¹⁰⁴Fletcher, *An Elementary Catholic Catechism*, 5.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Fletcher, *An Elementary Catholic Catechism*, 13.

that the ideal arrangement could not be put into effect because more time and patience was needed to implement change that was contrary to long standing law and custom. He also used a bit of creative license in quoting from the Conference of American Bishops 1958 statement, which implored Catholics to take action against segregation, to defend the segregated parochial schools.¹⁰⁷ One of the more revealing questions asked was, “Is the report true which has been circulated that ‘Catholic schools in Arkansas will never be integrated?’”¹⁰⁸ The answer was that there was no authoritative foundation for such a report, but the question revealed an existing belief that parochial schools would always be segregated. The catechism claimed that it was not wrong for the Church to continue separate schools and churches since it was the best the Church could do under the circumstances. It did not elaborate what those “circumstances” were, but it did clarify that only the Bishop of the Diocese, after prayerful and serious consultation and study, could decide when the circumstances were such that black Catholics could be admitted to formerly all white Catholic schools.¹⁰⁹ Although the catechism generated national attention for its declaration that segregation in Arkansas was immoral, it is clear that parochial schools would remain segregated in Arkansas for the foreseeable future. Much like his 1954 pastoral letter, Bishop Fletcher was once again trying to have it both ways. He gained

¹⁰⁷Ibid; Bishop Fletcher quotes from the American Bishops’ Statement “the (racial) problems we inherit today are rooted in decades, even centuries of custom and cultural patterns. Changes in deep-rooted attitudes are not made overnight. When we are confronted with complex and far-reaching evils, it is not a sign of weakness or timidity to distinguish among remedies and reforms. Some changes are more necessary than others. Some are relatively easy to achieve. Others seem impossible at this time.” On it’s own, this statement appears to support Bishop Fletcher’s position of delaying integration, but it was taken out of context of the seven page statement which argued that Catholics had a moral and religious obligation to end segregation and discrimination within the Church.

¹⁰⁸Fletcher, *An Elementary Catholic Catechism*, 13-14.

¹⁰⁹Fletcher, *An Elementary Catholic Catechism*, 13-14.

notoriety for his condemnation of segregation while simultaneously affirming the continuation of segregation. The catechism therefore was more of a censured version of the editorials, than a refutation.

Bishop Fletcher's continued defense of segregation and discrimination acquitted the community of their moral and legal obligation to accept equality and provided the means and the justification to resist the burgeoning civil rights movement. The Catholic Church in Arkansas should not be considered as a moderate, or even passive voice, in Little Rock's struggle for integration. Instead, the Church should be considered as a hindrance to advancing Civil Rights, for its customs and institutions perpetuated racial inequality. Moreover, the failure to integrate rests solely on Bishop Fletcher, as he claimed in his own catechism, that it was dependent on the Bishop to decide when the time was right for integration.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰Fletcher, *An Elementary Catholic Catechism*, 13-14.

Chapter 3

The Arkansas Diocese Failure to Integrate

Separate Catholic facilities for African-Americans existed for the remainder of Bishop Fletcher's tenure. The diocese did not issue any more statements on race, nor was there any attempt to fully integrate parochial schools. In 1971, an incident in Pine Bluff sparked outrage amongst the laity and the sisters tasked with running St. Joseph's parochial school, the school for white children. Sister Paschal Maria, the principal of St. Joseph's school, accepted an African American student into the seventh grade. The lay school board vehemently protested and demanded that the student be dismissed. The principal appealed to the priest for support, but the priest sided with the school board and also insisted that the African American student be dismissed. Sister Maria refused to dismiss the student, and she was consequently fired. All of the sisters on staff at St. Joseph's resigned in protest. When the priest wrote to the motherhouse in Kentucky and asked for a new contingent of sisters to run the school, Mother Lucille Russell refused the request. She further stipulated, likely as a result of Vatican II, that sisters now had greater autonomy in selecting in which schools they taught. "Given the situation in Pine Bluff," Mother Lucille doubted any would want to teach there.¹¹¹ It's clear from this incident that even until the 1970's, well after other southern diocese and the public schools had integrated, the Little Rock diocese was intent on maintaining segregated schools. It is

¹¹¹ Dr. Jeannie Whyne research notes.

unknown if what followed next was related to the Pine Bluff incident, but the timing is certainly curious. In January 1972, Bishop Fletcher was informed that he was required to submit his resignation, as it was Papal policy that bishops retire at the age of seventy-five. Bishop Fletcher did not want to retire and was surprised to learn his resignation was a requirement and not a recommendation.¹¹² Certainly, there were other bishops, such as Bishop Rummel in New Orleans, who served well past the age of seventy-five. The Pope accepted Bishop Fletcher's resignation in June, and Monsignor Andrew Joseph McDonald, from the Diocese of Savannah, Georgia, was announced as Bishop Fletcher's successor.¹¹³

As in St. Louis and New Orleans, the installment of a new prelate, marked a radical shift in favor of integration and racial justice. In April 1973, Bishop McDonald announced that the black and white Catholic schools in Pine Bluff would be consolidated.¹¹⁴ Overcrowded conditions at St. Peter's, the school for black children, was the obvious reason for the consolidation, but Bishop McDonald also acknowledged his hope that the consolidation of the two schools would help solve problems in the relationships between blacks and whites.¹¹⁵ Predictably, the laity in Pine Bluff protested Bishop McDonald's proposed consolidation. They had after all, been conditioned by his predecessor to accept and uphold segregation. The consolidation plan failed and within two years both Catholic schools in Pine Bluff closed.¹¹⁶ In 1973, St. Bartholomew's school announced that it would only teach grades PreK-3, having taught up to the eighth grade the previous year. This downsizing was due to the fact that the religious sisters tasked with administering to the

¹¹² Woods, *Mission and Memory*, 258-259.

¹¹³ Ibid; *Guardian*, July 7, 1972.

¹¹⁴ *Guardian*, April 27, 1973. 1

¹¹⁵ *Guardian*, May 11, 1973.

¹¹⁶ Woods, *Mission and Memory*, 292-293, 295; Office of Catholic Schools, Diocese of Little Rock, Annual Reports St. Bartholomew School 1973-74.

school announced that they would not be returning. It was decided that Catholic students attending St. Bartholomew's could attend another Catholic school in the diocese.¹¹⁷ For the 1972-73 school year, there were a total of 252 black students enrolled at St. Bartholomew's, only 42 of whom were Catholic. Therefore, only a small number of students were eligible to attend another diocesan school, while the majority of the students had to find an alternative school.¹¹⁸ Perhaps, this was the best arrangement Bishop MacDonald could negotiate with a reluctant clergy and laity, which was to uphold Bishop Fletcher's 1954 pastoral letter that no Catholic student would be denied an education based on race or color. While parochial schools seemed reluctant to admit black non-Catholic students, it is clear from diocese records that the white non-Catholic population at parochial schools dramatically increased. So, while only black Catholics were admitted to parochial schools, the same was not true for whites. The diocese school records track enrollment by race beginning in 1971. For Mount St. Mary's Academy, the all-girls' school, there were a total of 590 students enrolled, 14 of whom were black. Three of the black students were not Catholic. Comparatively, there were 573 presumably white students and curiously all of them were Catholic.¹¹⁹ The following year, the enrollment of black students decreased to ten, two of whom were not Catholic. While the number of non-Catholic white students increased to 60. For the 1973-74 school year, there were a total of 16 black students, 4 of whom were not Catholic, while the number of non-Catholic white students nearly doubled to 110. It could be that there was a mistake in the recording of non-Catholic

¹¹⁷ *Guardian*, May 11 1973.

¹¹⁸ Woods, *Mission and Memory*, 295; Office of Catholic Schools, Diocese of Little Rock, Annual Reports St. Bartholomew School 1972-73.

¹¹⁹ The schools records list ethnic backgrounds as American Indian, American Negro, Oriental American, Spanish-surnamed American, and All Others. The "All Others" are presumably white students.

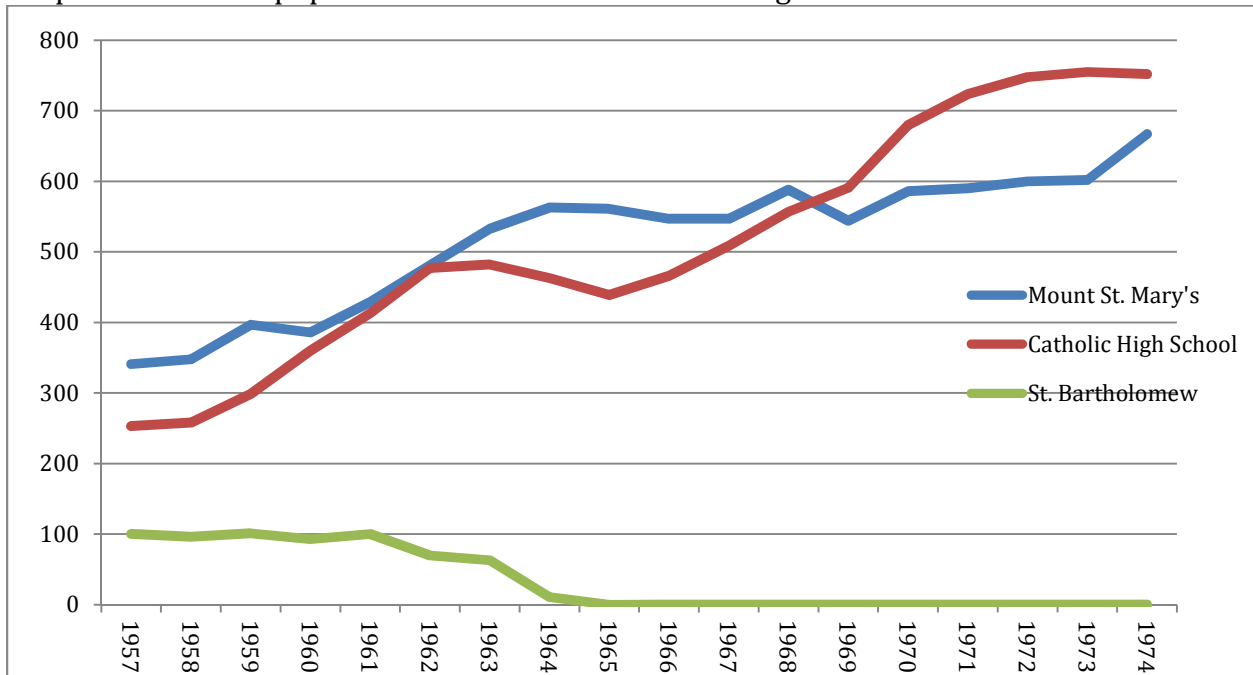
whites for the 1970 school year, but it is clear that the rate of enrollment for non-Catholic blacks held steady at 2-4 students, while the rate of enrollment for non-Catholic whites, skyrocketed. The same pattern holds when the enrollment records of Catholic High School, the all boys' high school, are examined. For the 1971 school year, there were a total of 15 black students enrolled, three of whom were non-Catholic, compared to a total of 707 white students, 181 of whom were non-Catholic. There are no records available for the following year, but for the 1973 school year, there were a total of 17 enrolled black students, 5 of whom were non-Catholic and a total enrollment of 736 white students, 192 of whom were non-Catholic. The following school year, the numbers stayed steady with 4 non-Catholic black students enrolled and 192 non-Catholic white students enrolled. Again, there may have been a mistake made with the enrollment numbers for Mount St. Mary's school, but it is interesting that there was such a dramatic increase in the non-Catholic white student enrollment for the girls school and not the boys schools. During the public school crisis, Bishop Fletcher suggested that if the public schools would segregate by sex, there would not be so much angst regarding school integration.¹²⁰ The reasoning seems to be based on the belief that black men were licentious and needed to be kept separate from white women and the fear that integration would lead to miscegenation and the decline of the white race. Perhaps this is a reason for the dramatic increase in female non-Catholic students, as public school integration was increasing, Catholic schools were a option for affluent white families to educate their daughters separate from African-American males.

¹²⁰ *Guardian*, September 4, 1959.

There was a general trend for increasing student enrollment in the white parochial high schools in Little Rock, while the black high school was marked by decline and closure.

Graph 3.1 illustrates the student population for each Little Rock parochial high school.

Graph 3.1. Student population for Little Rock Catholic high schools 1957-1973¹²¹



It is evident that the population for the white boys and girls high schools dramatically increased in the decade after public school integration began in the capital city. In 1954, *The Guardian* claimed that the majority of Catholic students in Arkansas were enrolled in a parochial school and would therefore be unaffected by the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. That obviously was not the case, as the student population at Catholic high schools dramatically increased after the public school crisis and the subsequent integration of the public schools. While some of the growth can be attributed to non-Catholic students, there was a marked increase in the Catholic population as well. For example, Catholic High had a total of 284 Catholic students enrolled in 1959, by 1974, that number had grown to 555.

¹²¹ Office of Catholic Schools, Diocese of Little Rock, Annual Reports for Mount St. Mary's High School, Catholic High School, St. Bartholomew's School, 1957-1974.

The same is true for Mount St. Mary's high school, which had a Catholic student population of 326 in 1959, which grew to 488 in 1973. During the time of public school integration in Little Rock, the Catholic high schools experienced unprecedented growth, suggesting that the parochial schools were a means whereby families could avoid integration. Segregation in Arkansas may have been immoral, but it was profitable for the Catholic schools.

It is little wonder then, that Bishop Fletcher's successor, Bishop McDonald, faced hostility when he attempted to "consolidate" the black and white parochial schools in Pine Bluff and that within two years, the schools were closed. From the reaction of the lay school board and the priest to the principal's attempt to admit a black student in 1971, it is clear that neither the clergy, nor the laity, supported integration. After Bishop McDonald announced plans to consolidate the schools in Pine Bluff, he published an article in *The Guardian*, presumably questioning the conditions in Little Rock, where some schools thrived because they had a lot of money and their students received a better education, while other schools, in poorer parts of the city, struggled and the students received an inferior education. Bishop McDonald proposed to *The Guardian* readers his "Power of an Idea" suggesting that Catholic families give up their spot in a parish school, which had waiting lists, to a poor and disadvantaged non-Catholic child who would otherwise not receive a Christ-centered education.¹²² Although the bishop claimed it was not intended as such, based on the critical responses from readers, his appeal was clearly interpreted as a request for a white Catholic family to forsake their child's parochial school education for a poor, black, non-Catholic child.¹²³ It was an interesting, and very unsuccessful, attempt at voluntary integration. Months later, Bishop McDonald happily announced in a *Guardian*

¹²²*Guardian*, May 4 1973

¹²³*Guardian*, May 18, 1973.

article that he finally had one family contact him, willing to give up their children's Catholic school education in favor of a disadvantaged non-Catholic student. Ominously, the bishop announced that the family's name would be kept secret for fear of reprisals.¹²⁴ By 1976 all of the schools for African-Americans were closed. For the first time in ninety-five years, the Arkansas Diocese had no schools exclusively for the education of black children.¹²⁵ Catholic schools in Arkansas finally met the standards set forth in Bishop Fletcher's 1954 decree that no Catholic student would be denied a Catholic education on account of color or race. Integration had arrived for Catholic schools in Arkansas more than twenty years after it was constitutionally required of public schools.

It has been claimed that Bishop Fletcher, as head of a religious minority, moved slowly on racial matters because he was concerned about stirring up religious and racial animosities and giving anti-Catholics in Arkansas more ammunition to attack the Church.¹²⁶ As integration progressed in the public schools, it is clear from the enrollment numbers, that many non-Catholic white families felt comfortable sending their children to Catholic schools. It appears then that some non-Catholics were more hostile towards integration than they were towards Catholicism. Moreover, the dioceses of St. Louis and New Orleans, faced violence and revolt when integration was announced and yet the parochial schools in both cities were still able to successfully integrate. Therefore, the threat of violence and unrest should not be viewed as a valid reason for the delay of integration. Under Bishop Fletcher, the Arkansas Diocese never achieved more than token integration. In the 1960's there were a few black students accepted into previously white schools in Fort Smith and

¹²⁴*Guardian*, July 27, 1973.

¹²⁵Woods, *Mission and Memory*, 295.

¹²⁶Woods, *Mission and Memory*, 241. Mark Newman, "The Catholic Church and Desegregation," 318-319.

black students were allowed to apply for admission to Mount St. Mary's and Catholic High School in Little Rock, but integration was never achieved beyond tokenism.¹²⁷

Bishop Fletcher's gradualist policies and acquiescence of token integration should not be conflated with advocacy for integration. The editorials published in *The Guardian*, clearly stated that token integration had to be accepted until the majority of blacks were culturally equivalent to whites. Therefore, it was never a question if Bishop Fletcher would accept token integration of parochial schools, but more of a question, when the diocese would move beyond token integration. The acceptance and preponderance of token integration reinforced the notion that the majority of blacks were not culturally, and socially, equivalent to whites and still had special needs that required special institutions. In his article, Newman views Bishop Fletcher's tokenism as a "commitment to gradual desegregation" rather than as an implicit support of segregation.¹²⁸ When compared to St. Louis and New Orleans, it is clear that the gradualism and tokenism promoted by Bishop Fletcher did not exemplify support of integration. The St. Louis and New Orleans dioceses demonstrated that the Catholic Church had a proven, and effective way, to implement integration of the parochial schools, which was simply just to announce a date for its implementation. The nature of the Church, which could utilize the threat of excommunication, proved that the decree would be followed and the laity would acquiesce to the laws and decisions made by the prelate. Conversely, Bishop Fletcher failed to integrate parochial schools in Arkansas and his continued support of segregation and defense of "just discrimination" equated to the community's acceptance of the Church's laws and customs. The Catholic Church's actions, under Bishop Fletcher should be viewed

¹²⁷Mark Newman, "The Catholic Church in Arkansas and Desegregation," 308.

¹²⁸Ibid, 307.

as actively resistant to integration rather than quietly sympathetic. In his article, Newman details the resistance to integration in the Diocese, in particular Bishop Fletcher's reluctant support of the CIC and the effective silencing of an outspoken clergyman on the CIC who made the claim that "Our religion at Little Rock has almost capitulated to segregation. It is not religion then; it is hypocrisy."¹²⁹ Yet Newman does not effectively address this discord in his article. Rather he states that Bishop Fletcher had the outspoken clergyman transferred out of Little Rock and replaced with two of his own men and then makes the claim that "For all his guardedness, Fletcher identified himself with the goals of the civil rights movement."¹³⁰ Moreover, Newman illustrates that the laity thought Bishop Fletcher was a hindrance to their integration efforts with Catholic activist Kathleen Woods, the president of the Little Rock CIC, complaining that Bishop Fletcher was "so intransigent that he almost has to have a ton of bricks fall on his head before he will do anything."¹³¹ Yet, Newman maintains that Fletcher was a "cautious gradualist" who placated the CIC by publicly supporting their membership drives but not supporting their agenda of integrating the Knights of Columbus or closing black parochial schools for the purpose of integration.¹³² It seems misguided to view Bishop Fletcher's concessions to gradual integration as anything other than a preservation of segregation. Beginning with his 1954 pastoral letter, following the *Brown v Board of Education* ruling, Bishop Fletcher attempted to have it both ways; publicly appearing in support of integration efforts, while privately maintain the segregation of the church's institutions. Newman sees a continuation in Bishop Fletcher's policies and those of his successor, Bishop McDonald. Newman equates

¹²⁹Mark Newman, "The Catholic Church and Desegregation," 309

¹³⁰Ibid, 310.

¹³¹Ibid, 314.

¹³²Ibid, 310, 314.

Bishop McDonald's consolidation of the black and white Catholic schools in Pine Bluff, as being aligned with Bishop Fletcher's maintenance of separate black schools. It is unclear how Newman arrived at this conclusion, as it seems apparent that Bishop McDonald's actions to consolidate the schools was in direct conflict with Bishop Fletcher's policies, which upheld the firing of the all white school's principal for the admittance of a black child. In his final analysis, Newman surmises that the "Arkansas Catholic experience of desegregation was comparable to that found elsewhere among the peripheral South's Catholic population, notwithstanding some differences in timing and in rhetoric, emphases and personal style of Catholic prelates."¹³³ This seems to be a misunderstanding of how desegregation occurred elsewhere in the South. Certainly, when compared to St. Louis, another peripheral southern city, integration preceded much differently than it did in Arkansas. Perhaps if Archbishop Glennon had remained in place, then integration would have mirrored Arkansas, as Archbishop Glennon's gradualist policy of integration was clearly was one of indifference, if not outright hostility. But Archbishop Ritter's declaration to integrate parochial schools completely, and prior to the public schools, in no way reflects the policies of the Little Rock Diocese. Moreover, in Arkansas's parent diocese, New Orleans, integration was more analogous to St. Louis than it was to Little Rock. The Little Rock Diocese's defense and support for segregation should be judged as inconsistent, rather than representative, of the regions response to integration.

¹³³Ibid, 319.

Conclusion

The impetus for integration of parochial schools in the south was clearly dependent on the willingness of the prelate to confront hostility and even violence of the laity and the community. The institutionalized segregation of the South was unlikely to end without resistance and volatility. The Catholic Church however, was in a unique position to be a harbinger of integration, as it was not subject to laws requiring segregation and its hierarchal nature required compliance to church policies and decisions. In St. Louis, the diocese's early adoption of integration equated to less violence and resistance to federally mandated integration of the public schools. In New Orleans, integration efforts both within and outside of the diocese were met with violence and hostility. Nevertheless, the diocese prevailed in integrating the parochial schools soon after the public schools began integration, without much further fanfare. In Little Rock however, the virulent massive resistance is often blamed for the bishop's reluctance to integrate the Church's institutions. But as the examples of St. Louis and New Orleans exemplify, hostilities and the threat of violence did not prevent those dioceses from integrating, and so it should no longer be accepted as an excuse for Little Rock's failure to integrate. The responsibility for the Arkansas Diocese's failure to integrate resides solely in the policies of Bishop Fletcher. Moreover, the bishop's continuation and support of segregated institutions within the diocese provided tacit approval for the community's continued acceptance and practice of segregation. If, like in St. Louis, the parochial schools in Little Rock had integrated prior to

the Supreme Court ruling, it seems that Little Rock could have saved itself from becoming synonymous with massive resistance.

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