"BRING GOD TO THE NEGRO, BRING THE NEGRO TO GOD": THOMAS JOSEPH TOOLEN, ARCHBISHOP OF MOBILE (1927-1969), HIS CULTURE, HIS RELIGION, AND HIS MISSION

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Keith Robert Claridy, son of Nancy K (Morin) Claridy, was born June 22, 1983, in Phenix City, Alabama. He graduated from Smiths Station High School fourth in his class in 2001. He attended Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama, in August, 2001, and graduated *summa cum laude* with a Bachelor of Art degree in History in August, 2004. He immediately entered Graduate School, Auburn University, in August, 2004.

THESIS ABSTRACT

"BRING GOD TO THE NEGRO, BRING THE NEGRO TO GOD": THOMAS JOSEPH TOOLEN, ARCHBISHOP OF MOBILE (1927-1969), HIS CULTURE, HIS RELIGION, AND HIS MISSION

Keith Robert Claridy

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Archbishop Thomas Joseph Toolen was the Bishop of Mobile through some rather turbulent times for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Mobile. One of the most frequently occurring questions he had to deal with was the question of race. During the early decades of his episcopate, Toolen carried out his mission of saving the souls of Alabama's African Americans by establishing separate missions, thereby expanding the South's only truly biracial religion while also respecting societal norms crystallized in the Jim Crow laws of segregation. When the atmosphere was such that it was practical, Toolen acted quietly to integrate all levels of Catholic education which included Spring Hill College in 1954 and the parochial school system in 1964. As the Civil Rights Movement brought turbulence and violence to the State of Alabama, Toolen responded by condemning the activists' methods, not their goals.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

During his tenure as Bishop of Mobile from 1927 to 1969, Archbishop Thomas Joseph Toolen was influential, controversial, productive, and, at times, bold. He was a prominent religious leader in the deepest of the Deep South during some of the most turbulent times for his diocese and for the nation. Archbishop Toolen shared many of the core values of the white southern culture in which he lived. Yet, as a Roman Catholic, he was regarded as an outsider by the Protestant majority. The tensions between immersion and rejection manifested themselves throughout his episcopate.

In the early years, Toolen worked for the social uplift of blacks[1] through building churches, schools, hospitals (where black doctors were allowed to practice their craft alongside white colleagues), and orphanages; he also integrated the diocesan school system and the Catholic university in his diocese before most of the secular white institutions followed suit. Then, when the Civil Rights Movement exploded on his doorstep, Toolen praised the aims of the Movement while denouncing its tactics. This balancing act dissatisfied many on both sides of the divide and placed the Archbishop in an unflattering spotlight.

Toolen's record on race and civil rights exemplifies the difficulties that the Catholic Church historically experienced in pursuing its spiritual and social mission without unduly antagonizing southern white Protestants, who generally were hostile

[1] Throughout this work, the nomenclature for African Americans from the time period will be used, which includes black, colored, and Negro. This is in an effort to preserve the fluidity between analysis and quoted sources.

toward Catholics, their beliefs, and their institutions. By working for the social and spiritual uplift for the blacks of his diocese within the constraints of Jim Crow, Toolen not only displayed his own talent for accomplishing tasks no matter what the difficulties, but he also fulfilled his number one duty, the expansion of the Church in his diocese and the salvation of souls. Toolen worked quietly behind the scenes to integrate all levels of Catholic education in his diocese many years before any other white secular institutions did the same. In the cases of Spring Hill College and the parochial school system, Toolen showed his commitment to racial equality in education and moved his diocese toward that goal as soon as it was practical. Unfortunately for him, when the Civil Rights Movement heated up, his attitude of working within the system came to be seen as outdated. Toolen's legacy is generally based upon his record during the Civil Rights Movement, especially his reactions to the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965. This is rather unfair since focusing on only one episode fails to take the fullness of his record in race relations into account, which turned out to be rather decent considering his situation.

Background of Thomas Joseph Toolen

Thomas Joseph Toolen was born on February 28, 1886, in Baltimore, Maryland, to Thomas and Mary Dowd Toolen, natives of Roscommon, Ireland. The young Thomas went to Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic elementary school, Loyola High School and Loyola College. When he decided that his calling lay in the priesthood, Toolen attended St. Mary Minor and Major Seminaries in Baltimore, as well as the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Toolen was ordained into the priesthood on September 27, 1910, by James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, in the Basilica of the Assumption. In the years before his elevation to Bishop of Mobile, Toolen served in the

Archdiocese of Baltimore first as assistant at St. Bernard Parish for fifteen years and then as Diocesan Director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith for two years. When Bishop Edward L. Allen of Mobile died, Pope Pius XI chose Father Toolen to become the sixth Bishop of Mobile on February 28, 1927.[2]

Father Toolen was consecrated as Bishop by Archbishop Michael Curley of Baltimore; Bishop Michael J. Keyes of Savannah, Georgia; and Bishop Richard O. Gerow of Natchez, Mississippi, in the Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore. The new Bishop of Mobile arrived in his diocese on May 18, 1927. During his long episcopate, Toolen received many honors. Pope Pius XII gave Toolen the title "Assistant at the Papal Throne" in October 1949. Then, in July 1954, Pius XII raised Toolen to the rank of Archbishop and re-designated the Diocese of Mobile as the Diocese of Mobile-Birmingham. Bishop Joseph A. Durick was assigned as Toolen's Auxiliary Bishop in January 1955 by Pius XII.[3] Toolen retired as Archbishop of Mobile in 1969.

When Toolen arrived in Mobile, he became the inheritor of many problems that Catholics in the South had been dealing with for generations. During his tenure, he worked tirelessly to carry out his mission of saving souls in spite of the problems he faced. A short examination of those problematic "hand-me-downs" would be beneficial to understanding Toolen's challenges and motivations.

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[2] *Solemn Observance of the Fortieth Episcopal Anniversary and the Fifty-seventh Sacerdotal Anniversary of the Most Reverend Thomas Joseph Toolen, D.D., LL.D., Litt.D., Archbishop-Bishop of the Diocese of Mobile-Birmingham, Wednesday, October 25th, 1967* (Mobile, AL: Catholic Week Publications, 25 October 1967), 1.

[3] Ibid.

I. "RUM AND ROMANISM": THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE SOUTH

The Catholic faith came to Southeastern North America with the Spanish explorers. Antiquity notwithstanding, the Catholic Church in the South has typically "lacked the numbers, wealth, and internal strength to stride with confidence into political and social controversy."[4] This was especially true in the nineteenth century. Unlike its Northern counterpart, the Catholic Church in the South did not receive large influxes of immigrants from Europe to bolster its numbers.[5] In addition, as sectional tensions between North and South heightened, and as nativism and anti-Catholicism flourished in the 1840s and 1850s, Catholic leaders grew evermore "sensitive to the Church's minority status in the Protestant South."[6] Whereas Baptist churches had a congregational polity, and Methodists and Presbyterians (to take only the three largest southern denominations) had American leadership hierarchies, authority in the Catholic Church emanated from the Holy Roman Pontiff in Rome. This supra-southern loyalty and foreign infrastructure attracted suspicion to the Church.[7] As a result, Church leaders attempted to blend into southern society as much as possible, because "in the Old South to be different was…to

[4] Randall M. Miller, "The Failed Mission: The Catholic Church and Black Catholics in the Old South," in *Catholics in the Old South: Essays on Church and Culture*, eds. Randall M. Miller and Jon L. Wakelyn (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1983), 156.

[5] Randall M. Miller, "A Church in Cultural Captivity: Some Speculations on Catholic Identity in the Old South," in *Catholics in the Old South: Essays on Church and Culture*, eds. Randall M. Miller and Jon L. Wakelyn (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1983), 13.

[6] Miller, "The Failed Mission," 156.

[7] Miller, "A Church in Cultural Captivity," 13.

be damned."[8] Most important, the Church found a stance on race acceptable to most southern whites. Before the Civil War, this meant handling slavery. After Reconstruction, segregation became the main racial issue. In both cases, Church leaders declared that racial subordination was a matter "outside the Church's province. They absolved themselves of any moral responsibility to pass judgment on the social world in which they lived." Churchmen saw themselves as "obligated to support the state" and they did so by "retreating to…conservative tradition."[9] During the Civil War, for example, the Church allowed Catholics to "follow their section."[10]

Protestant antagonism was in some ways more difficult to manage. Catholics and Protestants differed in numerous ways and distrusted each other. According to Baptist historian Hosea Holcombe, "the 'whole apparatus' of Catholicism and the Church of England—'catechisms, creeds, and books of prayer,' 'laws and formularies'—designed to control individual Christian conscience was regarded…as an 'unhallowed innovation on the moral and intellectual property of man.'"[11] Catholic deference to the Pope prompted accusations that Catholics were trying to subvert the American way of life.[12]

While many Protestant groups morally opposed alcohol consumption, the Catholic Church countenanced drinking that stopped short of inebriation.[13] Also, most

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[8] Miller, "The Failed Mission," 156.

[9] Miller, "A Church in Cultural Captivity," 15.

[10] Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 263.

[11] Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 5-6.

[12] Ibid., 54

[13] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 611.

Catholics in the United States were either fresh from Europe—including Germans, Irish, Italians and more—or they were first or second generation hyphenated Americans. Most of these immigrants' cultures were quite comfortable with alcohol consumption and most Protestants felt that they drank to excess. When Catholics failed to support temperance movements or other social reform movements, the Church was "condemned in the eyes of the Protestant reformers."[14] Therefore, Catholicism became known as the religion of the "whiskey seller." It was said that "rum and Romanism went together."[15]

These immigrant Catholics helped stoke the flames of xenophobia in the nineteenth century. The main cause for political and religious concern was the "Catholic practice of establishing their own parochial schools." On its own, this may not have been such a problem, but Catholics also lobbied for public funds to be spent in support of these schools.[16] This was seen as a most serious violation of the American principle of the separation of church and state by many Protestant groups. Catholics felt that separate schools were necessary in order to protect their children from the "vicious lies" that they would be exposed to in the public schools. One of the biggest points of contention was the mandatory use of the King James Version of the Bible in public schools. Catholics could not condone their children reading a book that referred to the pope as a "man of sin" in its preface.[17] Since a Catholic education was not easily obtainable by all, the Catholic Church in America continued its efforts to have mandatory use of the King

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[14] Thomas J. Curran, *Xenophobia and Immigration, 1820-1930* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1975): 25.

[15] Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 232

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[16] Curran, *Xenophobia and Immigration*, 32.

[17] Frank S. Ravitch, *School Prayer and Discrimination: The Civil Rights of Religious Minorities and Dissenters* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999), 5.

James Bible in public schools discontinued.[18] All this movement accomplished was the heightening of anti-Catholic bias and vitriol in public schools and American politics. A result was the "strict enforcement of laws, school board policies, and unofficial practices throughout the country that…were sometimes created…and often enforced to discriminate against Catholics."[19]

Political xenophobia manifested itself in two main organizations—the nineteenth century Know-Nothing Party and the twentieth century Ku Klux Klan. The latter had its genesis in the Reconstruction South while the former was a product of the antebellum nativist movement. The Know-Nothings were staunchly nativist and opposed Catholics to the point of stealing the stone Pope Pius IX contributed to the building of the Washington Monument. The Klan was most successful in "areas where the largest percentage of Old American stock lived: the South, Southwest, Oregon, and the Midwest."[20] The Klan's message was simple; it "stood for Protestantism as opposed to the alien creeds of Catholicism and Judaism."[21] Jews, a fellow minority group to the Catholics, were treated with more toleration, though, due to the millennial beliefs of many Southern Protestants.[22] The charge leveled against Catholics most often was they surrendered their will to the papacy in Rome, and almost nothing would change these xenophobes' minds. In 1908, a papal declaration was issued saying that the Catholic Church in the United States of America was now a full-fledged national church. This

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[18] Curran, *Xenophobia and Immigration*, 35.

[19] Ravitch, *School Prayer and Discrimination*, 5.

[20] Curran, *Xenophobia and Immigration*, 140.

[21] Ibid., 141.

[22] Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 233.

event could very well have been seen as proof that Rome's control over American Catholics had been overestimated. Instead, it was seen as a strengthening international threat posed by the Catholic Church in the United States.[23]

Anti-Catholic sentiments led to what were seen by many as outrageous lies to be propagated in Protestant denominational newspapers as well as secular forms of media. It was said that Catholicism was unfit due to the "prevailing Romish system of luxurious profligacy, opulent vice and bloated sensuality."[24] The editor of the *Alabama Baptist* wrote that "fornication and adultery were common among Catholics, who treated the Sabbath more as holiday than holy day."[25] The Klan asserted that "the Roman Catholic Church and its immigrant supporters are 'the chief leaders of alienism, and the most dangerous alien power with a foothold inside our boundaries.'"[26] These views and sentiments persisted until the post-World War II era and even beyond.

One of the worst cases of anti-Catholic action took place in 1921 Birmingham, Alabama. The story began the year before when the pastor of Saint Paul's Catholic Church, Father James E. Coyle, "wrote a rebuttal to a Baptist preacher's anti-Catholic essay."[27] This sparked a deluge of death threats against Father Coyle and threats of damage against his church. The unfortunate situation quickly became an atrocity. On the

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[23] Dale T. Knobel, *"America for the Americans": The Nativist Movement in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 231.

[24] *Philadelphia Daily Sun*, 14 May 1844, p.2, col. 1, quoted in Curran, *Xenophobia and Immigration*, 37.

[25] Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 232.

[26] Hiram Wesley Evans, "Imperial Wizard, the Klan's Fight for Americanism," *North American Review*, CCXXIII (1926), 43; Hiram Wesley Evans, "The Klan: Defender of Americanism," 812; C.M. Rork, "A Defense of the Ku Klux Klan," *Literary Digest*, LXXVI (January 1923), 19, quoted in Curran, *Xenophobia and Immigration*, 141.

[27] Wayne Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), 469.

evening of August 11, a Methodist minister and Klansman named Rev. E.R. Stephenson shot Father Coyle to death in front of Saint Paul's parsonage. Stephenson's reasons were both personal and theological. Apparently, Father Coyle had performed the wedding ceremony uniting Stephenson's daughter with a Catholic from Puerto Rico, who was suspected of being part black.[28] Stephenson's defense attorney was Baptist deacon and fellow Klansman, Hugo Black. Black argued that the murder was justified[29] due to Father Coyle's sins against racial and religious barriers. Stephenson was acquitted and the national press condemned Birmingham as the "American hotbed of anti-Catholic fanaticism." It was a city where the "murder of a priest had been added to the achievements of bigotry."[30]

This was the state of affairs in Alabama when Thomas J. Toolen arrived in Mobile to take over as Bishop and shepherd of the Catholic flock in the diocese of Mobile. In 1926, there were 119 Catholic churches in the state of Alabama compared to 2,083 Baptist churches (and Baptists outnumbered Catholics 272,000 to 36,000).[31] Alabama was a place where Catholics were in the minority, were distrusted, and could even be justifiably killed under the right circumstances. All these feelings lasted well into Toolen's episcopate. Toolen used to tell a story illustrating how the Church and her hierarchy remained misunderstood in Alabama. Toolen recounted that, during his confirmation tour, he was met on the train platform by a man who asked him to remove his hat and shoes so he could see if Toolen really had horns and cloven feet. Apparently,

[28] Ibid.

[29] Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 356.

[30] Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 469.

[31] Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 355.

the man had been told that Bishop Toolen was the devil in disguise and the man believed it.[32]

[32] Father Thomas D. Weise, interview by author, Phenix City, Alabama, 8 April 2003.

II. "THE NEGRO APOSTOLATE": SOCIAL UPLIFT IN THE EPISCOPACY OF ARCHBISHOP TOOLEN

When Bishop Toolen arrived in the Diocese of Mobile, one of his most daunting tasks was to continue and expand upon the social uplift that the Catholic Church had been performing in the South. This task was complicated by the social constraints in which Toolen found himself, but fortunately for him, the Church had been performing rather well in these conditions since the nineteenth century, in spite of the apathy of the majority of white Southerners toward their goal.

African Americans and the Catholic Church in the South

In 1875, Canon Peter Benoit traveled the South to observe the condition of the recently freed slaves to find out how best to serve them.[33] During his travels, he found himself on a riverboat on the Mississippi. When asked, Benoit told the captain the purpose for his travels and the captain told Benoit,

> Your object is a most useless one, it is a sheer loss of time and money to attempt anything for the Negro. I know him well, having been brought up among the blacks and I even like him: for he is simple and docile. But as for doing anything to raise him above what he is now, [it] is a lost labor. God Almighty has made him what he is and you cannot change God's work. He has scarcely any brains, he is a thief, a liar and not virtuous…he ought to have remained in Africa; he cannot compete with the white man and he will die out in time.[34]

[33] Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 126.

[34] Ibid., 127.

Roman Catholic clergy seeking to spiritually uplift the freed slaves often faced such sentiments. The riverboat captain's opinion was rather widespread in the South for nearly a century, from the end of the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement. These views of black inferiority led to legislation being passed in Southern states, popularly referred to as "Jim Crow" laws. Jim Crow demanded the segregation of blacks and whites in almost every aspect of life, and many whites carried this sentiment into the church with them on Sundays. Blacks were relegated to cramped back or side pews or even balconies in some churches, a humiliation which led some blacks to leave the Church and opt for a Protestant denomination, which had established churches exclusively for blacks. In order to "stem the leakage,"[35] some Catholic bishops began to advocate the establishment of parish churches exclusively for blacks. This was the American Hierarchy's response rather than fighting to have segregationist laws changed. This was not necessarily due to some sort of cowardice or timidity on the Church's part; rather the Church had a long understanding of its own minority status in the South and had an equally long memory of what happened when it tried having laws overturned in the past.

In the eyes of some, the American Church ignored its obligations to blacks.[36] If it did, then the Holy See compensated for its deficiencies. Rome began to explore the possibilities of proselytizing blacks as an organized effort as early as 1863. When it began to look as if the Union had the War Between the States won, the Holy See's agent, Henry Binsse, told the Congregation of the Propaganda that if and when the slavery

[35] Ibid., 208.

[36] Miller and Wakelyn, *Catholics in the Old South*, 37.

question was resolved, the American Church could no longer "maintain a policy of reticence and abstention"[37] regarding Negroes. In 1866, the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore was called, and the Vatican appointed Martin J. Spalding, Archbishop of Baltimore, as its apostolic delegate. Spalding wanted many issues dealt with at the council; one among them was "the evangelization of the African Americans."[38] Rome approved of this agenda and the difficulties ensued.

In council, Spalding suggested to the bishops "Rome's plan for a national coordinator of evangelization for blacks." The bishops' responses were varied. The Bishop of Savannah, Augustin Verot, embraced the plan.[39] Bishop McGill of Richmond wanted to know why so much focus was being placed on the blacks when there were others who were "derelict and neglected." Peter Kenrick, Archbishop of St. Louis, worried that the Church may look bad because establishing something new at that point would be tantamount to admitting dereliction of duty.[40] Ultimately, the American bishops rejected the idea and the issue was left unresolved. While agreeing on the need for black proselytization, the bishops remained at odds on how to get the job done.[41] The pastoral letter that came out of the 1866 Plenary Council expressed wishes for a "more gradual system of emancipation"[42] and illustrated the apathy much of the American Hierarchy also held towards the emancipation of the slaves.

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[37] Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 116.

[38] Ibid., 118.

[39] Ibid., 119.

[40] Ibid., 120.

[41] Ibid.

Rome initiated the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884 to deal with issues left unresolved in the Second Plenary Council of 1866. The Curia demanded that ministry to blacks be discussed.[43] At the Council's end, it was decided that a collection would be taken on the first Sunday of Lent for Indian and Negro Missions.[44] Even so, there were still no recommendations on how to use the money for uplifting the black members of its flock. The issue of separate churches, which would allow African Americans to worship in the absence of prejudice, was left unresolved.

Hierarchical concerns for the welfare of blacks in America continued to flow out of Rome after the Third Plenary Council. In his encyclical, *Sertum Laetitiae*, celebrating the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of an official American Catholic Hierarchy, Pope Pius XII first praised the continuance of the Indian and Negro Missions that was approved by the Third Plenary Council. His Holiness "confirm[ed] and recommend[ed]" the Missions because they were "imposed by a very particular charity toward" them.[45] The Pope also admitted to feeling a "special paternal affection…for the Negro people" because "they need special care and comfort and are very deserving of it."[46]

What came to be very important in accomplishing the goals set out by the Roman Curia and praised by Pope Pius XII was the establishment of separate churches for

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[42] Ibid., 121

[43] Ibid., 132.

[44] Ibid., 133.

[45] Pope Pius XII, *Sertum Laetitiae*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/P12SERTU.HTM>, 1 November 1939 [accessed 10 April 2003]: paragraph 8.

[46] Ibid., paragraph 9.

blacks. One of the most apparent reasons for separate black churches was the deeply held prejudice of whites. When the Jim Crow laws were enacted, prejudice and segregation were now sanctioned by statute. When "Jim Crow [came] to Church,"[47] many blacks were not happy about being confined to a "totally inadequate number of pews."[48] Another consequence of segregation that posed problems for blacks was their being barred from officially participating in church ceremonies and their inability to join the parish choir and other church groups.[49] These humiliating conditions for blacks ran counter to the idea of Catholic life proposed by European theologian, W. Schwer. Schwer said that people should be involved in the Church's life through parish societies, the choir, and other social activities.[50] With Jim Crow keeping blacks from experiencing the fullness of a Catholic life, many left the Church.

The Roman Catholic Church, since its earliest days, had set aside certain days when attendance at Mass is mandatory "under pain of mortal sin" (i.e. Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation). The same holds true in regard to the manner in which God is worshipped, with the same consequences. When white prejudice kept blacks from following the correct procedures on the correct days, then the prejudice became, according to one author, "doubly wrong."[51] Sadly, there were some cases where even the priest would "encourage" blacks to go elsewhere, thereby preventing them from

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[47] Dolores Egger Labbe, *Jim Crow Comes to Church* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), ix.

[48] John T. Gillard, *The Catholic Church and the American Negro* (Baltimore: St. Joseph's Society Press, 1929), 215.

[49] Labbe, *When Jim Crow Comes to Church*, 33.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Gillard, *The Catholic Church and the American Negro*, 214-215.

following Canon Law.[52] When black Catholics' coreligionists in the Protestant traditions encountered the same conditions, they simply broke away and formed their own churches. With the hierarchical nature of the Catholic Church, black Catholics were unable to imitate their Protestant brethren unless they had express approval from the local bishop.[53] This limitation led many blacks to leave the Church and join the Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists, and others, thereby "voting with their feet," and defeating the purpose of the Indian and Negro fund established by the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884. After some time, a select few bishops finally saw the need to "stem the leakage from the Church"[54] and established separate churches for blacks in the form of missions. The results of this practice were astounding. In areas where separate churches for black Catholics were established, membership increased; and where white and black Catholics attended the same church, "there was a loss precisely because of the humiliation of segregated seating and prejudicial treatment."[55] The success of this practice gained approval from the highest levels of the Catholic Hierarchy. In his encyclical, *Sertum Laetitiae*, Pope Pius XII gave special apostolic blessings to the work being carried out and to those doing the work. He also prayed for its continued success.[56]

When it came to proselytizing the blacks in the Deep South, there has been reluctance on both sides. Due to the prominence of prejudices in the South, many Church leaders believed that there was "little hope of any substantial good being done among the

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[52] Father Thomas D. Weise, interview by author, Phenix City, Alabama, 8 April 2003.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 208.

[55] Ibid., 200-201.

[56] Pope Pius XII, *Sertum Laetitiae*, paragraph 9.

Negroes" because the "antipathy" towards the blacks was "ineradicable."[57] Blacks were wary of converting because, for one, "Catholicism had little religious attraction to blacks."[58] In addition to that, many Southerners despised Catholics and Jews more than they did African Americans.[59] Father Thomas Weise tells a supposedly true anecdote that illustrates this point.

> There was once a priest newly arrived in Albany, Georgia, and he was lost. This priest could not find Albany's Catholic Church and everyone he asked either refused to tell him or feigned ignorance. Finally, the priest asked a black boy of about eight where to find the church and the boy gave him precise directions on how to get there. The priest was very grateful and told the boy, "You're the first person in this town to tell me where to find the church. Tell me, are you Catholic?"
>
> The boy looked up at the priest and said, "Naw, sir. It's hard enough just being black in this town."[60]

Whether or not this incident really happened is debatable, what is not, though, is the point that in the South, a "universal obstacle" to better success evangelizing the blacks has been the "social stigma usually attached to profession of the Catholic Faith."[61]

Early Efforts at Social and Spiritual Uplift in the Episcopacy of Bishop Toolen

As a priest, Father Toolen worked in Baltimore, Maryland, the site of the two Plenary Councils dealing with African American proselytizing and the diocese whose bishop was the main administrator of the Indian and Negro Fund. With this background in addition to a quite extensive education, Toolen set about his important task of uplifting

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[57] Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 127.

[58] Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 465.

[59] Ibid., 354.

[60] Father Thomas D. Weise, interview by author, Phenix City, Alabama, 8 April 2003.

[61] Gillard, *The Catholic Church and the American Negro*, 212.

the colored flock of the Diocese of Mobile. The work that he sought to undertake and build upon was not an inexpensive venture. The main mechanism to fund this work had been set up at the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884. When the Indian and Negro Mission Board had collected money from around the country, then it would redistribute the money according to need. To help them distribute the money equitably, the commission needed to know how many Indians and Negroes were in each diocese, their spiritual state, and any other information that would aid the commission in its appointed task.[62] In the Diocese of Mobile, this information was gathered by way of annual parish reports which each parish in the diocese was required to send to Mobile every year. The report inquired about the many aspects of the parish such as the numbers of baptisms, confirmations, marriages, deaths for the past year, and number of Catholics in the parish; then the report required a breakdown of that number into "white" and "colored."[63]

Each year, letters would be sent out to all the parishes in each diocese asking for support of the Negro and Indian Mission Fund. Those letters would employ various tactics to encourage the people's donations. These included appealing to the Catholics' sense of duty because "Divine Providence has evidently placed [the Negroes] under our care, for they live amongst us" and that they should dig deep down and give because "charity rightly begins with those closest to us."[64] When collections began to wane,

[62] Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 133.

[63] Annual Report to the Diocese of Mobile from Saint Patrick's Church in Phenix City, Alabama, 1930, Archdiocese of Mobile Archives, Mobile, Alabama.

[64] Letter from the Negro and Indian Missions Commission to Parishioners making the appeal for the annual collection, Letter is undated, but was found in Bishop Toolen's papers from the late 1930s, Archdiocese of Mobile Archives, Mobile, Alabama.

Toolen invoked their devotion to the Holy Father because the collection was close to the Pope's heart.[65] When all else failed, the people's own parochialism was played upon. Many people will not give money to a cause if they fail to perceive a benefit tangible to themselves. Therefore, the Catholics of the Diocese of Mobile were told that there was an excellent possibility much of their money would be returning to their diocese. Why would it not when there were more than one million African Americans in the diocese, a fraction of which were Catholic. Though it would seem that the "vast mission field" in the diocese had been neglected, many new missions had been opened using the money received from the Negro and Indian Mission Fund.[66]

Judging from their written communications, the relationship between Bishop Toolen and J.B. Tennelly, the secretary for the Board of Negro and Indian Missions, appeared to be quite cordial. Father Tennelly served in his post for two decades or more. Most importantly, he was the secretary of the Negro and Indian Mission, which was based in Baltimore, Maryland, while Toolen was still a priest in the Baltimore diocese. It seems quite probable that Toolen was well connected with the highest echelons of Catholic administration in Baltimore, which would include J.B. Tennelly in the office of Negro and Indian missions. The communications between Tennelly and Toolen stretch back to the earliest days of Toolen's episcopate and seem to indicate at least a close working relationship between the two men, if not a friendship. In 1929, Tennelly told Toolen, "The progress of the Negro work in Mobile will be gratifying to everyone

[65] Letter of appeal for the Indian and Negro Mission collection from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile, 30 January 1934, Toolen Papers.

[66] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile, appealing for support of the Negro and Indian Mission collection, 6 February 1939, Toolen Papers.

interested in this phase of Catholic work. I assure you that I shall do what I can to direct any assistance your way."[67] Toolen was not shy about asking Tennelly for extra help. In one instance, Toolen asked for a "special gift" to help get a new mission in Maysville, Alabama up and running.

> We have put a good bit of money into this place and we are expecting fine returns. I am asking for a special gift for Maysville in order to buy new furniture for the school and some things that are very necessary for the church…The Board has been very kind and generous to us and I do not like to be asking too much, but we need the help badly.[68]

While most of the funding for the "colored work" came from the Negro and Indian Missions Commission, another very important source of income was from numerous private individual donors. The donation amounts would range from just a few dollars to several thousand.[69] In spite of all the sources of funding coming into the Diocese of Mobile, there was not enough for all the work that Toolen wanted to accomplish. When asked what he needed for his work among blacks, Toolen responded, "I suppose that our need is the need of all those engaged in colored work—more money."[70]

When establishing missions for blacks, Bishop Toolen would urge religious orders to come into the diocese to do the work because he felt that they understood the

[67] Letter from J.B. Tennelly, Secretary for the Negro and Indian Missions Commission to Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile, 2 April 1929, Toolen Papers.

[68] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to J.B. Tennelly, Secretary for the Negro and Indian Commission, 27 June 1929, Toolen Papers.

[69] Archbishop Thomas J. Toolen Papers, Archdiocese of Mobile Archives.

[70] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to J.B. Tennelly, Secretary for the Negro and Indian Commission, 14 September 1935, Toolen Papers.

work better than diocesan priests did.[71] He would warn those whom he was asking for help that "it is a hard, unthankful job to work among the negroes [sic] and only the best…should undertake it."[72] Unfortunately, there were times when the religious orders showed that they also could be biased, in spite of the important work they were engaged in. In one instance, there was some mix-up between the Sisters of Notre Dame and a book company of Chicago over a book bill of $13.90. Apparently, the Sisters were accused of delinquency of payment when the responsibility for payment lay with someone else. In a letter explaining all of this to the Chancellor, Philip Cullen, the Sisters concluded their *mea culpa* thusly: "we should not like to have you think, that while dealing constantly with the Negro we might have adopted some of his color which in this case might be interpreted as red or yellow."[73] The Sisters were referring to the stereotype that African Americans are not responsible when it comes to paying their debts. The nuns did not want the chancellor to think that these so-called habits were "rubbing off" on them, but to know that they were responsible whites who paid their own way.

Bishop Toolen saw the use of religious orders in work among blacks as desirable due to their extra dedication and sacrifice compared to diocesan religious. Toolen said that when it came to colored work, "unless generous souls offer themselves wholeheartedly, amid great sacrifice, this work shall never be done."[74] However, even

[71] Father Thomas D. Weise, interview by author, Phenix City, Alabama, 8 April 2003.

[72] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to M.J. Gallagher, D.D., Bishop of Detroit, 15 April 1935, Toolen Papers.

[73] Letter from Sister M. Miriam, Sisters of Notre Dame to Philip Cullen, Chancellor of Diocese of Mobile, 5 June 1939, Toolen Papers.

some members of the religious orders were reluctant to come south to engage in the colored work. One such priest was Father Arnold Vetter, a member of the Passionist Fathers, which was one of the first orders that had agreed to undertake colored work in Alabama. Father Vetter wrote to Bishop Toolen explaining his reluctance because he claimed to "know nothing of the work"; therefore he "naturally 'begged to be excused,' but without success."[75] Since members of religious orders are beholden to their superiors in the order, not local bishops, Vetter would have had no other reason to tell Toolen this unless he was trying for one last way to get out of coming south. By trying to convince Toolen that he was too incompetent for the job, Vetter would have hoped that Toolen would contact his superiors requesting a different priest for the assignment.

Toolen began his practice of bringing in religious orders to engage in the colored work by bringing in the Holy Ghost Fathers in 1929, the first male religious community Toolen brought into the diocese.[76] The Holy Ghost Fathers were offered and accepted to "take charge of the colored work, the University work and the white parish in Tuscaloosa and also the colored mission in Birmingham" in order to emphasize their "desire to be of help to the colored cause."[77] Toolen was quite pleased to hear the news, for in his response he told the priests' Provincial, "I am certainly delighted to welcome into the

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[74] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to Reverend Mother M. Ignatia, Superior General of the Vincentian Sisters of Charity, 10 October 1939, Toolen Papers.

[75] Letter from Father Arnold Vetter to Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile, 19 December 1937, Toolen Papers.

[76] *Solemn Observance of the Fortieth Episcopal Anniversary and the Fifty-seventh Sacerdotal Anniversary of the Most Reverend Thomas Joseph Toolen, D.D., LL.D., Litt.D., Archbishop-Bishop of the Diocese of Mobile-Birmingham, Wednesday, October 25th, 1967* (Mobile, AL: Catholic Week Publications, 25 October 1967): 31.

[77] Letter from Eugene Phelan, Provincial of the Holy Ghost Fathers to Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile, 1 October 1929, Toolen Papers.

Diocese the Holy Ghost Fathers and I am sure that many opportunities will be found to do good."[78]

During the first decade of his episcopate, Toolen was carrying out his "Negro work" on his own in a somewhat haphazard manner. Even so, the headway that was made was commendable. He had invited many new religious orders to carry out the Church's mission and he had already established quite a few institutions that were great steps in the right direction toward realizing Toolen's ultimate goals. In the mid- to late-1930s, though, Toolen would set up the apparatuses necessary to carry out the work in a more efficient manner.

Organizing the Efforts: The City of St. Jude and the Diocese's Catholic Clergy Conference on Negro Welfare

Among the religious orders that Bishop Toolen invited to engage in the colored work were the Passionists. In 1937, it would be a former Passionist, Father Harold Purcell, who would open one of the most important institutions intended for the exclusive care of the Negro Apostolate—the City of St. Jude in Montgomery, Alabama. Father Purcell had envisioned a project like St. Jude for quite some time. He was born in Raven Run, Pennsylvania, in 1881 and was ordained a Passionist priest in 1904. In 1906, Purcell began gaining his first experiences as a missionary priest. He traveled to some of the United States' largest cities and was "amazed at the plight of the poor, especially Blacks, in the ghettoes where they lived." He saw so much deprivation that he felt he just had to try to do something about it.[79] In the late 1930s, Purcell would be given his

[78] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to Eugene Phelan, Provincial of the Holy Ghost Fathers, 17 October 1929, Toolen Papers.

chance by Toolen. Prior to the opening of St. Jude, Toolen had been engaged in various efforts to aid blacks in his diocese as mentioned above, but the City of St. Jude was to be different. It was to be a center of Negro work in the Diocese of Mobile. While other Southern dioceses were also doing work for blacks, it does not seem that any of them opened an operation quite like the City of St. Jude.[80]

Before opening the City, Father Purcell recognized the power of the press and convinced the Provincial of his order to allow him to publish a magazine. Starting in July 1921, *The Sign*, under Father Purcell's direction became an instant success.[81] He wrote many articles and editorials on social injustice and eventually gained a readership of over three hundred thousand.[82] While working on the magazine, "he became convinced that the most important issue in the United States was the racial question."[83]

Eventually, Father Purcell left *The Sign* and began to pursue his vision of "establishing in the South a center for the religious, charitable, educational and industrial advancement of the Negro people,"[84] in a word, the City of St. Jude. Purcell met with Bishop Toolen in March 1934 and asked his permission to realize his dream. Toolen agreed, so Father Purcell then turned to the Provincial of his order for his permission. When the Provincial denied Purcell's request, rather than give up, Purcell asked for, and

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[79] "The City of St. Jude, Montgomery," *Catholic Week*, 23 November 1979, seventy-seven.

[80] Roger Baudier, *The Catholic Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans: Louisiana Library Association, Public Library Section, 1972) and Richard C. Madden, *Catholics in South Carolina: A Record* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1985).

[81] "History of the City of St. Jude," <http://www.angelfire.com/me2/kulacoco/father.html> [accessed 1 February 2005].

[82] "The City of St. Jude, Montgomery," *Catholic Week.*

[83] "History of the City of St. Jude," <http://www.angelfire.com/me2/kulacoco/father.html>.

[84] Ibid.

was granted, a dispensation from his vows with the Passionists and became a diocesan priest for the Diocese of Mobile.[85] In May 1934, Father Purcell remodeled a large white frame house on Holt Street in Montgomery to house "a chapel, a clinic, an office, and living quarters for three lay people and two priests."[86] This was the humble beginning of a grand institution what would become nationally famous for caring for the blacks of the Diocese of Mobile.

Father Purcell eventually purchased forty acres of land on Fairview Avenue to expand the City of St. Jude far beyond its original white frame house.[87] On that land, Purcell erected a church with classrooms in the basement,[88] a dispensary to fulfill the "great and grievously needed medical mission among these poor people,"[89] a school, and a "165 bed hospital…[which was] completely integrated."[90] The school was "designed by Negro architects and built by Negro labor,"[91] thereby allowing the blacks of the Montgomery area to have a hand in the work toward their own betterment.

While Father Purcell was getting the first phase of his vision established, colored work was ongoing in the rest of the diocese. Many new religious orders were coming to the diocese to carry on the noble work fostered by Bishop Toolen. In 1937, just as the City of St. Jude was coming to fruition, Toolen was making way for the Passionists to

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[85] Ibid.

[86] The City of St. Jude, Montgomery," *Catholic Week*.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] "Dispensary Operated By Fr. Purcell For Montgomery Colored," *Catholic Week*, 10 November 1935, 1.

[90] The City of St. Jude, Montgomery," *Catholic Week*.

[91] "Bishop Dedicates, Blesses 'City of St. Jude' School," *Catholic Week*, 26 March 1948, 1.

start colored work in Ensley, near Birmingham, Alabama. Toolen explained to a diocesan priest in the area that the Passionists were coming to Birmingham "not as a favor to the Diocese but rather to do God's work in every possible way."[92] At the same time, Toolen was getting requests from members of religious orders asking him if they could come down and help in tending the Negro Apostolate. For example, a group of Ursuline nuns asked Toolen if they could start a foundation in the diocese. Toolen admitted that he needed all the help he could get, but these nuns apparently wanted to break away from the rest of the Ursuline order. Therefore, Toolen was hesitant because "the negro [sic] work is progressing rapidly and we need help but I want to obtain it in an honorable way."[93]

In his annual report to the Negro and Indian Missions commission for 1937, Toolen was very upbeat. He told Father Tennelly, the commission's secretary, that "things never looked better for real work in the evangelization of the colored." Toolen related the news of the new missions that had opened, the City of St. Jude's construction that was under way, the new religious orders that had come in, and the continued success of the previously established missions. Again, Toolen asked for more money to help along the work. "Our difficulty as that of every southern diocese is more money to carry on this great work among the colored." He then pointed out the dangers of stopping short of the goal. Toolen warned that "we must win them [blacks] now or lose them forever"

[92] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to Father Cornelius, C.P. of Birmingham, 10 June 1937, Toolen Papers.

[93] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to Most Reverend Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, D.D., Apostolic Delegate to the United States, 11 June 1937, Toolen Papers.

and that people must "awake to the danger of losing the negro [sic], not only losing him but making him an enemy of the Church."[94]

In 1939, Bishop Toolen invited members of the religious communities that had been doing work in the colored missions to come to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Mobile in order to form the "Catholic Clergy Conference on Negro Welfare for the Diocese of Mobile." The main objective of the Conference was to "co-ordinate all the forces of the Diocese of Mobile interested in the spiritual and physical needs of the Colored race."[95] Other dioceses around the United States had similar organizations, but the Diocese of Mobile's differed somewhat "in that the Bishop of the Diocese is the treasurer, and all the priests engaged in pastoral work among Negroes belong to it."[96] Although all clergy already engaged in the work were default members of the Conference, at the first meeting "it was emphasized that an invitation be extended to all the clergy of the diocese to join in the work proposed."[97]

One would think that Father Harold Purcell would be the natural choice to lead such a conference due to his zeal for the work and all that he had already accomplished at that point. Unfortunately for him, Toolen did not think him right for the job. It seems that Purcell had become a little arrogant when it came to his own self-importance. Toolen explained, "We all know how very enthusiastic and energetic he is but he has not

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[94] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to J.B. Tennelly, Secretary for the Negro and Indian Commission, 25 September 1937, Toolen Papers.

[95] "Clergy Conference on Negro Welfare in Diocese, Founded," *Catholic Week*, 20 October 1939, 1.

[96] Thomas J. Harte, C.Ss.R., M.A., *Catholic Organizations Promoting Negro-White Race Relations in the United States: A Dissertation* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 142.

[97] "Clergy Conference on Negro Welfare in Diocese, Founded," *Catholic Week.*

won the favor of the clergy down here because of the fact that he has taken the attitude that no one has done anything for the negro [sic] until he came."[98] This was the first evidence of a growing disagreement that began between Father Purcell and Bishop Toolen. The discontent further manifested itself in later episodes. So, rather than Purcell, Father Vincent D. Warren was chairman of the first conference[99] and was elected permanent chairman for future meetings of the Conference.[100]

Even though Purcell was not chairman of the Catholic Clergy Conference on Negro Welfare for the Diocese of Mobile, he was still the Director of the City of St. Jude and as such he had many responsibilities. One of the most important was to identify areas of the diocese that needed mission work and then work with the Bishop and religious orders to get a mission started. Sometimes, there would be people writing the Bishop asking for such a mission. In 1939, there was a black couple from Pratt City, Alabama, Anna and William Hawkins, who first wrote to Lafayette, Louisiana, asking for a Catholic mission for colored.[101] There was a white church in the city, but the couple said that it was not large enough for the whites and the blacks. It seems, though, that the black Catholics of Pratt City were facing the same kind of discrimination in church from the white parishioners that they were facing in the secular world. Later in the year, William Hawkins wrote to Bishop Toolen asking for his help in their endeavor. They explained the situation to him.

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[98] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to George J. Collins, C.S. Sp., 21 January 1939, Toolen Papers.

[99] Ibid.

[100] "Clergy Conference on Negro Welfare in Diocese, Founded," *Catholic Week*.

[101] Letter from William and Anna Hawkins to L.H. Boudreaux, 14 June 1939, Toolen Papers.

> Sometime we ask Father Suiter of St. Catherine Church to let us bring some of the colored up there to hear Mass but that belong to the white people and there is no room for them to attend. So Bishop, please if there is any way to help us do so many colored wandering around here out of church my heart just cry [sic]. I long to see the time when there'll be a Catholic [church] for the Colored. I know of about 28 colored people who are really Interest [sic] in our church but for the like of care fore they can't attend church offend [often]. Help us please.[102]

Toolen responded to Mr. Hawkins and told him that he would have been perfectly within his rights to attend the white church in town, but he also recognized the difficulty facing the Hawkins' and other blacks. He told them, "I feel that you would rather have your own church and I hope that will come with time."[103]

Expanding the Work Amid Tensions: Our Mother Mary Mission, Phenix City, Alabama

During one of Father Purcell's searches for an area in need of a mission, he found a place—Phenix City, Alabama—that had the same problem Pratt City had. In Phenix City, Father Purcell found "8-10,000 Colored People living in dire need."[104] There had been a Catholic church in Phenix City since 1911—St. Patrick's church. St. Patrick's had historically ministered to the white Catholic population of Phenix City and had historically been hostile to blacks attending. Therefore, Purcell decided that Phenix City would do well to have a mission church for its blacks and that church came to be known as Our Mother Mary Mission. In keeping with Toolen's tradition of getting religious orders to work among the blacks, Purcell wanted to bring in the Vincentian Sisters of

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[102] Letter from William Hawkins to Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile, 19 December 1939, Toolen Papers.

[103] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to William Hawkins, 22 December 1939, Toolen Papers.

[104] Stationery of Our Mother Mary Mission upon which is a letter from Father George B. Schmuelling to Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile, 18 September 1940, Toolen Papers.

Charity from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. After making arrangements with their superiors and the Bishop of Pittsburgh, Father Purcell reported to Bishop Toolen on his progress and that the Vincentians had agreed to allow some of their Sisters to come south to take charge of the mission.[105] It was over the status of these nuns when they were to finally arrive in Phenix City that the growing tensions between Purcell and Toolen were manifested once again.

Purcell thought the Vincentians would come and start a new order for the Diocese of Mobile, which apparently came as a surprise to Toolen. "When I was told of the Sisters' coming by Father Purcell I understood that the house to be established down here was to be a branch of the Pittsburgh house and its work was to be for the colored and especially those in the rural districts…Now I find that a new order entirely is contemplated."[106] The difference is that if a new order was established, then the Diocese of Mobile would be financially responsible for the nuns, but if they continued on as a branch of the mother house in Pittsburgh, then the Vincentian order would be responsible. Toolen was not hesitant on the grounds of the work they were proposing to do; rather he wanted to be sure of their status when they did arrive.[107] Toolen, always the administrator, wanted to go slow and make sure that the proper procedures were followed. This stood in contrast to Purcell, whom Toolen described to Bishop Boyle of Pittsburgh as "very enthusiastic and impetuous and wants things done at once."[108]

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[105] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to Reverend Mother M. Ignatia, Superior General of the Vincentian Sisters of Charity, 10 October 1939, Toolen Papers.

[106] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to Hugh C. Boyle, Bishop of Pittsburgh, 5 December 1939, Toolen Papers.

[107] Ibid.

Eventually, Toolen's model won out and he was delighted. He sent word to both Mother Ignatia, the Vincentian Sisters' Superior General, and Bishop Boyle lauding them for allowing some of their nuns to come down to his diocese and laying down the law on just what the nuns would be doing in Phenix City. He told Mother Ignatia that the new house her nuns would be establishing would be devoted exclusively to the mission work among Negroes.[109] He reassured Bishop Boyle that the Sisters would be "exclusively devoted to the body and soul welfare of our poor Negro people."[110] Toolen wanted it to be clear exactly what the status of the nuns would be since there had been a "misunderstanding" between himself and Purcell.[111]

While the proper arrangements were being made and the Vincentian Sisters were readying themselves for their odyssey to the South, there were many matters that needed to be attended to before the Sisters could settle in properly. One such matter involved the site on which this new mission would be situated. Toolen voiced some concerns about the site and the possible dangers that could be posed to the religious working there. Also, he wanted to make sure that the site would be optimal to the mission's purpose, namely working among the blacks. So, he asked Father Purcell, "How many darkies are in the immediate neighborhood?"[112] While Toolen's choice of words may have been poor, it

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[108] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to Hugh C. Boyle, Bishop of Pittsburgh, December 1939, Toolen Papers.

[109] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to Reverend Mother M. Ignatia, Superior General of the Vincentian Sisters of Charity, 10 October 1939, Toolen Papers.

[110] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to Hugh C. Boyle, Bishop of Pittsburgh, 10 October 1939, Toolen Papers.

[111] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to Reverend Mother M. Ignatia, Superior General of the Vincentian Sisters of Charity, 10 October 1939, Toolen Papers.

demonstrates that even though he was working to help blacks, he still thought it acceptable to refer to them by derogatory nomenclatures in private.

The priest that Father Purcell sent to Phenix City to begin the work of opening the mission was Father George B. Schmuelling. Schmuelling was a capable priest who had worked with Father Purcell in other projects similar to the one he was now assigned. A major obstacle that he had to face was financial problems from both Mobile and uncharitable Phenix City locals. The purse strings of the diocese were pulled tight for this project, which might have been a result of the disagreements between Toolen and Purcell mentioned above. The first major financial impasse came during Schmuelling's dealing with an uncharitable Phenix City man. Schmuelling was trying desperately to purchase his present lot consisting of "three acres of land, a good and substantial house, and three Negro shacks." Unfortunately for Father Schmuelling, "a certain Mr. Roy Martin" owned the lot. Roy Martin was more interested in buying up the land in the black area of Phenix City to build an amusement park for the white population rather than caring for the well being of Phenix City's black population. Father Schmuelling was adamant with Martin that the mission was to be established on that lot, so Martin gave Schmuelling a non-negotiable price of $3,500 with a down payment of $500 and the balance to be paid within a year. If it were to take longer than a year to pay the balance, then Martin demanded that the local bank's interest rate be paid.[113]

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[112] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to Father Harold Purcell, Director of the City of St. Jude, 13 October 1939, Toolen Papers.

[113] Letter from Father George B. Schmuelling to Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile, 12 November 1939, Toolen Papers.

It seems that the disagreement between Toolen and Purcell that had first surfaced over the establishment of the Catholic Clergy Conference on Negro Welfare for the Diocese of Mobile manifested itself again when it came to financing this new mission. To outsiders, such as Mother Ignatia, the Superior General of the Vincentian Sisters, Toolen couched his unwillingness to pay in the cloak of diocesan poverty. He told Mother Ignatia that the needs of the diocese were "many and pressing" and the diocese's poverty was such that he could not help financially, but that he was confident that the Good Lord would "provide whatever may be necessary."[114] To insiders like Father Schmuelling, Toolen made absolutely clear his intentions when it came to financing this new mission.

> My plan has been not to go into debt for these colored missions because of the fact that there is never any means of support, except what you get by begging, and the same stands for Our Mother Mary Mission. I am not going to borrow money for this mission…Unless some means of support can be obtained either through the City of St. Jude or through appeals…it looks like the mission will have to close, because I will not go into any debt for it.[115]

As mentioned above, Father Purcell had gotten a little arrogant about his own self worth and had the attitude that no one else had done anything substantive for the Diocese of Mobile's colored flock until he arrived. Now, when it came to financing Purcell's new pet project, Toolen seems to have taken the attitude that Purcell could now either work to justify his attitude or lose his mission. Caught in the crossfire of this dispute was Father Schmuelling who was trying desperately to make his newest assignment work out. So, he set about raising money through other avenues. He sent out over twelve thousand letters

[114] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to Reverend Mother M. Ignatia, Superior General of the Vincentian Sisters of Charity, 18 October 1939, Toolen Papers.

[115] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile to Father George B. Schmuelling, 25 January 1940, Toolen Papers.

to "prospective benefactors"; he lined up churches where the pastors gave him permission to ask for help[116] and he went on a "begging tour" in St. Louis.[117]

All of this was taking place between 1939 and 1940, some of the last years of the Great Depression. While it may be true that the diocese was not exactly wealthy, Toolen had been establishing new missions in the Mobile diocese throughout the Depression era. As an effective administrator, it is doubtful that Toolen would have been willing to go into debt for any of them, but his goal in carrying out this work was the conversion of African Americans through their social and spiritual uplift. He said that the purpose of this work was "to bring God to the Negro and to bring the Negro to God."[118]

Eventually, Fathers Schmuelling and Purcell were able to make all the necessary arrangements and raise all the necessary funds. The nuns from the Vincentian Sisters of Charity arrived on Thursday, September 12, 1940, and immediately set about their work.[119] That work included caring for the sick in the Mission's general and pre-natal clinic, feeding "undernourished children…a well-balanced meal" in the soup kitchen, and handing out clothes to the poor in the clothing dispensary. The Sisters and Father Schmuelling also ran a chapel and a school on the grounds.[120]

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[116] Letter from Father George B. Schmuelling to Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile, 12 November 1939, Toolen Papers.

[117] Letter from Father George B. Schmuelling to Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile, 14 February 1940, Toolen Papers.

[118] "'Bring God To Negro, Bring Negro To God,' Priest's Dream Now True," *Catholic Week*, 22 November 1963, 9.

[119] Letter from Father George B. Schmuelling to Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile, 18 September 1940, Toolen Papers.

[120] Stationery of Our Mother Mary Mission upon which is a letter from Father George B. Schmuelling to Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile, 18 September 1940, Toolen Papers.

Mother Mary Mission still stands and is still open. Though it is not exclusively for the Negro Apostolate anymore, blacks still account for most of its church membership and school enrollment, but the Vincentian Sisters of Charity are no longer administering it. As mentioned earlier, in Phenix City there are two Catholic churches. There is St. Patrick's Church, which has historically ministered to the white Catholic population of Phenix City, and there is Mother Mary Mission. The two churches lie less than five miles apart, but sadly over the years, racial prejudice has kept the two churches half a world away from one another. Due to a shortage of priests, the two churches have shared the same priest from 1999-2006, but even with this strong commonality, it is hard to get the two parishes to coalesce. The informal understanding throughout the years has been that St. Patrick's was for the whites and that Mother Mary Mission was for the blacks and the two should not mix.

Through his work for the social uplift of the colored of his flock, Bishop Toolen was continuing a practice begun long before he became Bishop of Mobile. In 1893, it was reported by Toolen's predecessor, Bishop Jeremiah O'Sullivan, to the Indian and Negro Mission Board that there were 2,500 colored Catholics in the Diocese of Mobile.[121] In 1969, the last year of Toolen's episcopate, it was reported that there were 12,500 Catholics in the diocese who were Negro.[122] The quintupling of the number of colored Catholics in the Mobile Diocese was a testament to the effectiveness of the work carried out by Toolen. By establishing separate institutions for blacks, he was actually

[121] Jeremiah O'Sullivan, Bishop of Mobile, Report to Indian and Negro Mission Board, 21 August 1893, Archdiocese of Mobile Archives.

[122] "1969 Report on Special Work for the Negro in the Diocese of Mobile-Birmingham," 1969, Toolen Papers.

furthering the Southern practice of racial segregation. Yet, due to the nature of the Roman Catholic Church, Toolen was also expanding the only truly biracial religion of the South. Toolen was doing his best to carry out the Church's mission in Alabama while working within the confines of Alabama's societal norms. In private instances, such as referring to African Americans as "darkies," he showed that he was not too far removed from other mainstream whites of his day. By undertaking substantial projects to socially and spiritually uplift the colored of his flock, however, Toolen set himself apart from white Southerners in a more important way than the superficial commonality he may have had with them in conversation.

III. "AFTER ALL, I AM STILL BISHOP OF MOBILE": ARCHBISHOP TOOLEN AND SCHOOL INTEGRATION

The first half of Toolen's tenure was spent trying to raise up the colored of his flock while not posing an affront to conservative white societal norms. Starting in the 1950s, Toolen worked toward integrating Catholic education in his diocese. Only through integration could his vision of Catholic education for every Catholic child in the state of Alabama be realized. He began working toward this goal with the desegregation of Spring Hill College, which was achieved nearly a decade before Alabama's secular institutions of higher education followed suit. Years later, Toolen again set the standard by integrating the diocesan parochial school system years before Alabama's public schools ended segregation. He accomplished both instances of integration without causing a public outcry.

Desegregation at Spring Hill College, 1947-1954

The year 1954 witnessed two momentous events in the annals of Civil Rights history: the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated schools were unconstitutional; in Mobile, Spring Hill College was desegregated "without hysteria or unnecessary disturbance."[123] Though one event followed the other chronologically, the decisions were made separately; yet both were the culmination of a long, arduous process that taken years. The *Brown v. Board* decision

[123] Charles Stephen Padgett, "'Without Hysteria or Unnecessary Disturbance': Desegregation of Spring Hill College, Mobile, Alabama, 1948-1954," *History of Education Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2001): Title.

received extensive press coverage and is considered the beginning of the modern Civil Rights Movement. The desegregation of Spring Hill College, on the other hand, merited barely a mention in even the local press and is treated as barely a footnote in Civil Rights history, though it is recalled once by Martin Luther King, Jr. in his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail": "I commend the Catholic leaders of this state for integrating Spring Hill College several years ago."[124] The Catholic leaders that Martin Luther King speaks of include two successive Presidents of Spring Hill College (W. Patrick Donnelly, S.J., and Andrew C. Smith, S.J.); a professor and leading activist at the College, Albert S. Foley, S.J.; and Thomas Joseph Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile.

Spring Hill College dates back nearly to the beginning of Alabama's statehood. The Right Reverend Michael Portier, D.D., the first Bishop of Mobile, founded the nucleus that would become Spring Hill College in Mobile in February 1830.[125] At about the same time, Bishop Portier was also choosing the epicenter of his nascent diocese. He chose Mobile for his administration and his college for the same reasons.

> Mobile is today the most considerable city of Alabama, and it is destined in my judgment to have a rapid expansion and to become one of the most important cities in the South and West of the American Republic. Situated on the Bay from which it takes its commercial relations to all points of the Florida peninsula. By its position at the entrance of a great river it is the emporium of an extensive commerce of imports and exports.[126]

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[124] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," <http://www.shc.edu/integration/resources/document.2004-06-24.7043127567>, 16 April 1963 [accessed 1 March 2005].

[125] Michael Kenny, S.J., *Catholic Culture in Alabama: Centenary Story of Spring Hill College, 1830-1930* (New York: The American Press, 1931), 48.

[126] Ibid., 49.

On July 2, 1830, Spring Hill College, "the first college in Alabama and the first permanent Catholic college in the Southland," officially opened.[127] In 1847, after much wrangling and dealing, the Society of Jesus (more commonly known as the Jesuits) were entrusted with the governance of Spring Hill College and have been in charge ever since.[128]

The Society of Jesus or Jesuit Order was founded by St. Ignatius Loyola and had gained papal approval in 1540.[129] The new Order was instrumental in fighting the effects of the Protestant Reformation and reforming the image of the Church itself. One of the main ways the Society accomplished this was through education.[130] Jesuit education was distinctive due to its innovation and underlying philosophy that education "must focus on the whole person." Jesuits have and still do believe that "moral education is as important as intellectual education…graduates should not be simply successful careerists, but also responsible citizens, concerned especially for the poor and the marginalized."[131] Because Spring Hill College was a Jesuit-run institution since 1847, the faculty and administrators of the College were first answerable to the head of the Society of Jesus. With the College's location in the Diocese of Mobile, though, the local bishop also had a say in the

[127] Ibid., 54.

[128] Ibid.,137.

[129] Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1979), 249.

[130] Ibid., 257.

[131] Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J., "Jesuit Education in America," in *The Jesuit Tradition in Education and Missions: A 450-Year Perspective*, ed. Christopher Chapple (Scranton, Pennsylvania: University of Scranton Press, 1993), 145.

way certain issues were handled. The Jesuits were bound by solemn vows to obey both.[132]

When discussing the process of desegregating Spring Hill College, Toolen does not enter the narrative in a substantive manner until 1947. In 1946, Albert S. Foley, S.J., an instructor at Spring Hill College, was selected by a group of Jesuits from the New Orleans Province (in which, Mobile lies) to head the province's Interracial Committee.[133] Interracial Committees had been formed all over the United States in various forms. Their main purpose was to be an area's "instrument of organized social action in interracial relations."[134] Foley and Patrick Donnelly, S.J., President of Spring Hill College, met with Bishop Toolen to inform him of this new endeavor. After pontificating about "radicals who agitated among African Americans," Toolen granted permission to carry out the work. Toolen concluded the meeting by forbidding the "promotion of social mixing between the races."[135]

In 1947, soon after the meeting the year before, Father Foley organized "joint meetings of Catholic war veterans and sodality groups from three all-white Catholic girls' high schools."[136] By design, these meetings placed white females in the same room with black males. When Foley planned to take the groups to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, for a

[132] Charles Stephen Padgett, "Hidden from History, Shielded from Harm: Desegregation at Spring Hill College, 1954-1957," *Alabama Review* 56, no. 4 (October 2003): 281-82.

[133] Padgett, "Without Hysteria," 178.

[134] Harte, *Catholic Organizations Promoting Negro-White Relations*, 19.

[135] Ibid., 179.

[136] Ibid.

retreat, Toolen received calls from the females' concerned parents.[137] The source of the parents' concern most likely stemmed from their girls being of high school age (14-18) and the black men being older (they were war veterans). Foley was organizing this function as a natural part of his work as provincial head of the Interracial Committee, but Toolen had warned him about social mixing of the races. If the meetings organized by Foley had involved consenting white female adults rather than high school white girls, there might not have been such an outcry. Since the parents of the girls voiced disapproval, Toolen responded by dissolving the meetings, and he encouraged President Donnelly to have Foley transferred.[138] It is said by some historians that Toolen's actions were "indicative of the white majority's attitude toward violations of the racial status quo, as well as Toolen's personal position."[139] When writing about the event later, Foley concluded that he was probably "too radical to be tolerated in the South."[140]

Foley may have been correct in his assessment, but there are alternative explanations. At a time when the Ku Klux Klan was still fairly active, placing white females in the same meeting space as black males could be dangerous. A major concern of whites at that time was the protection of "white female purity." Therefore, "any who dared challenge racial prejudice could be sure of quick reprisals in the form of threats, violence, economic harassment or all three."[141] This was also a time when anti-Catholicism was still strong in the United States. If Catholics remained targets for hate

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[137] Ibid. and Padgett, "Hidden from History," 282-83.

[138] Padgett, "Hidden from History," 282-83.

[139] Ibid., 283.

[140] Padgett, "Without Hysteria," 179.

[141] "Selma Aftermath: Segregationists take over after the marchers leave," *Jubilee*, August 1965, 16.

and violence, then Catholic clergy challenging these societal norms could prove dangerous, even deadly.

Toolen's decisions were not entirely his own to make. In 1935, the "Most Reverend Bishops of the New Orleans Province" (of which, Toolen would have been a member) met and discussed the "Colored Problem in the South."[142] (It is interesting to note that the bishops defined the issue as the "Colored Problem," rather than placing blame with prejudiced whites.) The assembled bishops discussed the possibility of integrated schools and found it impossible due to its illegality. Their assessment was that "any attempt at violation of the law…would probably prove disastrous."[143] Toolen most likely took this decision and applied it to Foley's actions of holding integrated meetings, especially after receiving calls from the parents of the white girls.

Another factor to consider is that Toolen was a strict administrator who liked being in control of, or at least aware of, events happening in his diocese. He was regarded as a conservative within the hierarchy[144] and expected things to be cleared through "proper channels." In a letter written to Father Andrew Smith, S.J., in 1954, Toolen said much about Father Foley that would have been applicable seven years before.

> We have in the city and the diocese a Youth Director and an Assistant here in Mobile…I think that they should be told of any event that is going on concerning the youth of Mobile. They are the ones that I hold responsible and yet they never hear of anything from the priest in charge of the Sodality, in fact, as far as I know,

[142] Letter from Joseph Francis Rummel, Archbishop of New Orleans to Cardinal Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, Apostolic Delegate to the United States, 11 November 1935, Toolen Papers.

[143] Ibid.

[144] "Priests and Nuns Scored in Alabama," *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 March 1965.

> he has never been appointed by me as Sodality director and I might say that we are not too much pleased with the activities of Father Foley.
> Father Foley has no right to be taking an active part in some of the things that he has without consulting me.[145]

Though this letter was written in 1954, Toolen was interested in keeping control of his diocese at all times. If events took place that he did not approve of, he made sure that disciplinary actions were taken, whether by suspending diocesan clergy who participated in the Selma to Montgomery March[146] or pressuring President Donnelly to exile Foley.[147]

This is not to say that Toolen would have approved of racial social mixing had Foley come to him and apprised him of the situation. Administrative objections were raised to mask the fact that Toolen was not willing to blatantly challenge the racial barriers that were in place. He had warned Foley not to socially mix races when Foley first told him of his new work as the province's Interracial Committee director. When Foley disregarded this warning, Toolen took what he saw as appropriate actions and reasserted his primacy: "After all, I am still Bishop of Mobile"[148]

In his 1948 commencement address, Father Donnelly responded to President Truman's overtures in support for civil rights[149] by publicly announcing his intention to desegregate Spring Hill College.

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[145] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile to Andrew J. Smith, S.J., President of Spring Hill College, 2 April 1954, Toolen Papers.

[146]Father William James, interview by author, Robertsdale, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[147] Padgett, "Hidden from History," 283.

[148] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile to Andrew J. Smith, S.J., President of Spring Hill College, 2 April 1954, Toolen Papers.

[149] David W. Southern, *John LaFarge and the Limits of Catholic Interracialism, 1911-1963* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 304.

> Let the college that was the first institution of higher learning to raise the torch of education in Alabama also light the way to full democracy in Alabama and the Southland. Civil Rights? Spring Hill College is for them. For ourselves and for every other citizen, regardless of creed or color.[150]

The lofty goals expressed by Father Donnelly were forced to wait longer than he would have liked. Though he could have made the move to desegregate more or less unilaterally, Spring Hill College's Board of Consultors warned, "While we agree in the principle underlying the move, we must be regulated by local customs."[151]

In 1952, when Donnelly was still pushing for integration but still being regulated by local customs, Spring Hill College became coeducational for the first time in its history. This occurred not because Donnelly especially cared for it (Spring Hill College "housed the philosophy school for training Jesuit seminarians"[152]), but because Toolen wanted to offer the females of Mobile a chance at higher education.[153] Toolen's motives may have been varied, but most likely his support for coeducation was an extension of his goals with the parochial school system, which was to provide a Catholic education to all the young people of his diocese at all levels of education. While being a change from the norm, it was not as radical as racial integration would have been. Indeed, the move was well received and described as not just a "wise move, but…[as] another forward step in the rapid progress of Christ's Church in the Diocese of Mobile under [Toolen's] leadership."[154]

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[150] Jeff Amy, "Quietly opening the doors," *Mobile Register*, 21 February 2005, 4A.

[151] Padgett, "Without Hysteria," 180.

[152] Ibid.

[153] "Coeds to Attend Spring Hill College," *Catholic Week*, 29 March 1952, 1.

[154] Letter from Edward J. Adler to Thomas J. Toolen, Bishop of Mobile, 21 March 1952, Toolen Papers.

Finally in 1954 Donnelly's vision was to be realized under the presidency of Andrew C. Smith, S.J. On May 7, 1954, the Board of Consultors' minutes read: "An application to the College has been received from Julia Ponquinette, colored, who has been attending Loyola University in Chicago—Consultors thought this a good one to begin the great experiment into the new world in the South."[155] Smith and the Consultors decided to pursue a policy of reticence and not broadcast the momentous decision. The fact that Spring Hill College had gone coeducational first could quite possibly have had the effect of facilitating Spring Hill College's eventual integration. The Board of Consultors would have had a much harder time beginning their integration with the admission of a black female if white females had not had the same privilege first. In essence, the integration of Spring Hill College was then a two step process: first, allow white females to matriculate, then second, admit black females to do the same, thereby integrating the institution.

Ten days later, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* that "separate but equal" was anything but and declared it unconstitutional. In his commencement address of May 25, 1954, President Smith proclaimed

> It is equally our duty to work loyally and fearlessly toward such practical arrangements as will implement the Christian philosophy of race relations and be in perfect harmony with the spirit and the letter of American law, without hysteria or unnecessary disturbance of any kind.
> It is too early to spell out the implications of this statement for private education, but it is clearly the duty of educators, public and private, to hail the decision of May 17, 1954. It goes without saying that this historic college, always the champion of social justice, stands ready to play its part together with all its sister

[155] Padgett, "Without Hysteria," 184.

> colleges dedicated alike to teaching God's truth and promoting justice and charity among all mankind.[156]

While praising the Supreme Court's decision, Smith never hinted that Spring Hill College had already made a commensurate decision, independent of the high court. Later on, during the summer, the Board of Consultors decided that applications from African Americans would be handled on a case-by-case basis.[157] The Consultors decided that this would be the best way to handle something as sensitive as the desegregation of an institution of higher learning.

When the fall semester of 1954 began, eight black students attended classes, joining a total enrollment of about one thousand,[158] nine years before Governor George Wallace would stand in the schoolhouse door to prevent a similar event at the University of Alabama. Spring Hill College was able to desegregate without causing a stir. The College did not trumpet the decision to integrate as it did the decision to go coeducational. It was a full week before the local press became aware of the story. When asked about it, Father Smith feigned ignorance saying, "We never asked them if they were white or Negro. We are not making an issue of it."[159] Once the story was widely known, there was no reaction. Since Spring Hill College was a private institution, there was no perceived danger of this kind of action spreading to the public universities of Alabama.

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[156] Ibid., 184-85.

[157] Ibid., 186.

[158] Ibid., 167.

[159] Ibid., 186.

Some wonder why Archbishop Toolen kept quiet when Spring Hill College's integration became known. Some theorize that since coeducation was important to Toolen and integration was important to the Jesuits, they "made a trade." When asked about it, one scholar, Stephen Padgett, who has done research into this event said, "I just have to surmise all this. There's very little evidence."[160] This explanation would account for Toolen's non-reaction to an event that seemed to have happened without his express approval. Another possibility is that since the press did not make a huge brouhaha about the integration and there were no public outcries over it, Toolen decided to permit it.

The Integration of Parochial Schools, 1964

One author, Andrew S. Moore, has written briefly about Archbishop Toolen and his decision to integrate the parochial school system of the Archdiocese of Mobile-Birmingham. In his discussion, he basically equates Toolen and Governor George C. Wallace. Moore says that with Governor Wallace vowing "segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!" in his inauguration speech, white Alabamians could rest easy that their segregated way of life would be protected. He then contends that white Catholics could be just as assured that Toolen could be "trusted not to waiver in the face of public pressure. Yet bowing to the inevitable," Toolen announced the integration of parochial schools on May 1, 1964.[161] The flaw in Moore's argument is that he says Toolen could be trusted to maintain segregation based on what he said about the Selma to Montgomery March which took place in 1965, a year after the integration of

[160] Jeff Amy, "Quietly opening the doors," *Mobile Register*, 21 February 2005, 4A.

[161] Andrew S. Moore, "Anti-Catholicism, Anti-Protestantism, and Race in Civil Rights Era Alabama and Georgia," *Journal of Southern Religion* 8, <http://jsr.fsu.edu/Volume8/Moore.htm>, 2005 [accessed 15 January 2006].

the parochial school system. Therefore, based on Moore's criterion, it would have been impossible for white Catholics to feel secure about the school situation prior to its integration. There is nothing Toolen had said publicly that would have given the impression that he was steadfastly committed to school segregation.

Moore describes the pastoral letter Toolen wrote announcing the decision as "terse," but not many of his letters were long. Toolen generally would get to the point without much verbiage. Toolen's pastoral letter reads as follows:

> After much prayer, consultation and advice, we have decided to integrate all the schools of our diocese in September.
> I know this will not meet with the approval of many of our people, but in justice and charity, this must be done.
> I ask all our people to accept this decision as best for God and country. No matter what personal feelings are, the common good of all must come first.
> In the diocese we have always tried to give our Negro people everything that we have given to our white people, especially in the way of education.
> The procedure for admission will be determined by the pastors and by Rt. Rev. J. Edwin Stuardi, superintendent of schools.
> Again I ask all of our people to accept this regulation as best for God and country.[162]

The Archbishop did not treat this move as some kind of momentous decision or event in the annals of Civil Rights history, but more like a mundane, yet slightly controversial administrative decision. He gives a little explanation, but his attitude as administrator and the decision being his prerogative is evident in the letter.

The decision was met with very little opposition. As a matter of fact, it seems that the decision to integrate was a success. White parents did not withdraw their children from Catholic schools, nor were there people imitating Governor Wallace and standing in the schoolhouse door. Actually, enrollment reached a record high. "The schools of the diocese, both elementary and secondary, opened…with the largest enrollment in the

[162] "Archbishop's Letter On Integration of Schools," *Catholic Week*, 1 May 1964, 1.

history of the diocese."[163] This is not to say that every parochial school in the diocese opened its doors for the start of the 1964-65 school year with black and white students. In reality, the process was a long one and actual integration occurred at a slower pace. Even so, Toolen's intention was that there would be no more bureaucratic barriers for black children who wanted to attend white Catholic schools. This may account for the absence of some kind of backlash against the Archdiocese because Toolen was not forcing the issue.

In both cases of educational integration, Toolen played some role. While not a figure ardently fighting for equal rights for all of Alabama's citizens, Toolen worked to quietly move Catholic education in his diocese towards integration. In the case of Spring Hill College, the real decision lay with the Jesuits who ran the institution, but Toolen would have been well within his rights to exert pressure and influence to prevent the move to integration. The decision to integrate the diocesan school system was Toolen's alone to make. Spring Hill College, the oldest institution of higher learning in the state of Alabama integrated nearly a decade before the rest of Alabama colleges, and Toolen did not try to prevent it. The diocesan school system was integrated one year after some public schools in key cities in Alabama, yet many years before the rest of the public school system in the state.

[163] "Enrollment Record High in Diocese," *Catholic Week*, 11 September 1964, 1.

IV. "THERE ARE OBLIGATIONS AS WELL AS RIGHTS": ARCHBISHOP TOOLEN AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The South of the 1960s was a hotbed for the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, and the focus of the movement seemed to settle on the state of Alabama time and again. Indeed, many of *the* most famous episodes of the entire movement took place in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Mobile-Birmingham: the Montgomery bus boycott, the Birmingham bombings, the beating of Freedom Riders, the use of fire hoses and police dogs against rioters in Birmingham, and the Selma to Montgomery March. The two events that raised the ire of Archbishop Toolen the most, though for different reasons, were the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham in 1963 and the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965.

Violence and Turmoil in Birmingham: The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombing

The city of Birmingham had been the scene of numerous racially charged bombings within its limits throughout the 1950s and on into the early 1960s. There were so many of these incidents that Birmingham became known as "Bombingham." The year 1963 would see the worst of such bombings. 1963 began with the inauguration speech of the newly elected Governor, George Corley Wallace. In that speech, Wallace proclaimed, "I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny

and I say segregation today, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever."[164] The line in the dust was over the integration of schools, and Wallace was vowing to disobey school integration orders coming from Federal Courts.

Three days after Wallace's address, eleven of the top clergymen in the state of Alabama signed a statement urging the people of Alabama not to be defiant in the face of lawful court orders. The statement said in its entirety:

> 1. That hatred and violence have no sanction in our religious and political traditions.
> 2. That there may be disagreement concerning laws and social change without advocating defiance, anarchy, and subversion.
> 3. That laws may be tested in courts or changed by legislatures, but not ignored by whims of individuals.
> 4. That constitutions may be amended or judges impeached by proper action, but our American way of life depends upon obedience to the decisions of courts of competent jurisdiction in the meantime.
> 5. That no person's freedom is safe unless every person's freedom is equally protected.
> 6. That freedom of speech must at all costs be preserved and exercised, without fear of recrimination or harassment.
> 7. That every human being is created in the image of God and is entitled to respect as a fellow human being with all basic rights, privileges and responsibilities which belong to humanity.[165]

Archbishop Toolen was not among the signers of this statement, but his Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham, Joseph A. Durick, signed the statement with Toolen's authorization.[166] Durick did not sign any public resolution or make any public statements without consulting Archbishop Toolen. Durick would often ask Toolen, "Can I sign your name next to mine?" Toolen would respond, "Nah, you sign it, Joe. Leave my name off."[167]

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[164] "Alabama Religious Leaders Say Defiance Not Solution," *Catholic Week*, 25 January 1963, 1.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid.

The joint statement from the religious leaders is significant because even though Toolen did not sign the statement personally, he did approve of its message, which was obedience to the law and proper courses of action. The statement was addressed to all of Alabama's citizens—white and black.

In April 1963, Eugene "Bull" Connor lost his bid for mayor of Birmingham and Martin Luther King, Jr. declared Birmingham, Alabama, to be the world's "most segregated city." To help Birmingham end this reputation, King decided to come to the city and begin protests for voting rights and desegregation, a move that would lead to his arrest and his penning of the now famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail." The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church became the headquarters of Birmingham's Civil Rights Movement. It was from this church that protesters would leave to participate in sit-ins at restaurants and kneel-ins at churches.[168] After kneel-ins on Easter Sunday, some religious leaders in Alabama again appealed to the people. This time, they asked Birmingham's black population to not support these demonstrations and to "unite for a peaceful Birmingham." Auxiliary Bishop Durick was among the signers of this statement, again with Archbishop Toolen's permission. This statement reiterated the necessary commitment to obeying court orders even if they were not agreeable to some. The religious leaders stated their understanding of the impatience shown by the people, but declared the demonstrations to be "unwise and untimely." The signers disapproved of the fact that "outsiders" such as King were involved in mobilizing the people for these protests and said, "We believe that

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[167] S. Jonathan Bass, *Blessed are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King Jr., Eight White Religious Leader, and the "Letter from Birmingham Jail"* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 59.

[168] Elizabeth H. Cobbs and Petric J. Smith, *Long Time Coming: An Insider's Story of the Birmingham Church Bombing that Rocked the World* (Birmingham, Alabama: Crane Hill Publishers, 1994), 80.

this kind of facing of issues can best be accomplished by citizens of our own metropolitan area, white and Negro, meeting with their knowledge and experience of the local situation." The statement concluded with the support of the demonstrators' goals, not their methods. "When rights are consistently denied, a cause should be pressed in the courts and negotiations among local leaders, not in the streets."[169] Toolen's consent to these statements implied his agreement with what the religious leaders were saying and asking the citizenry for.

Despite some of Alabama's religious leaders' best efforts, racial demonstrations continued. On May 10, 1963, Bishop Durick issued a statement personally appealing to the citizens of his city for obedience to the law and the pursuit of appropriate avenues of change. He told them, "We also have to give thought not only to what is being sought but, also, as to how it is to be done most effectively. At times, in fact, we are impelled to tolerate one evil for a time, lest by seeking to correct it, far greater evils be unleashed."[170] Durick was alluding to the bombings perpetrated by angry whites in response to the Civil Rights activism that was being carried out in Birmingham.

Two days after Bishop Durick's statement, May 12, Mother's Day, there were two bombings, six buildings burned, a police officer stabbed and several fights in the streets.[171] Durick issued another statement deploring the violence and characterized it as "not only a gross injustice against the victims themselves, but…an insult to all the citizenry of goodwill" in Birmingham. The violence was being aggravated by a power

[169] "Negro Citizenry Urged To Withdraw Support From Racial Demonstrators," *Catholic Week*, 19 April 1963, 1 and 13.

[170] "Bishop Durick's Statement On Racial Tensions," *Catholic Week*, 10 May 1963, 1.

[171] "Negroes Reminded That Obligations Accompany Rights," *Catholic Week*, 17 May 1963, 1.

vacuum in Birmingham resulting from the uncertainty of whether or not the mayor-city council form of city government that had been recently approved by the voters, would be declared legal by the courts. Durick asked that a "moratorium be declared until the legitimate civil government has been determined."[172] It was after this spate of violence that Archbishop Toolen finally broke his silence. On May 13, he issued a statement denouncing the violence that had occurred in his diocese and urged blacks to take stock of their own actions.

> We deplore that this violence has taken place. Whoever did this should be punished for the destruction caused. Our people have been asked to pray for peace, and as Catholics we cannot harbor hate in our hearts for our Negro brethren. Our people are not taking part in this. We would like to see it all settled. We are glad that Negroes are obtaining some rights, but do not approve of some of their methods. In the area of racial justice, there are obligations as well as rights, and those in the civil rights field should remind the Negro race of their obligation to their fellowmen.[173]

What the Archbishop was saying was that, while not opposed to the goals of the Civil Rights activism in Birmingham, he disapproved of how they were pursuing them. The actions of the activists were inflaming intolerant whites who were responding with violence. While deploring these violent acts, Toolen placed blame with the activists who were not taking their obligations to their fellowmen into account before they acted. Therefore, they needed to understand that obligations accompanied the rights they were pursuing. He also wanted to make sure that it was known that Catholics had no part in either side of the disturbances. Toolen's comments on this issue garnered no public outcry, yet comments along these same lines made two years later would do just that.

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[172] "Moratorium Urged By Bp. Durick," *Catholic Week*, 17 May 1963, 1.

[173] "Negroes Reminded That Obligations Accompany Rights," *Catholic Week*, 17 May 1963, 1.

In the meantime, outrage over the violence in Birmingham came in from all over the world, including Vatican City. Pope John XXIII issued an encyclical entitled *Pacem In Terris*. While not mentioning Alabama specifically, Pope John did condemn racism. He declared, "The conviction that all men are equal by reason of their natural dignity has been generally accepted. Hence racial discrimination can in no way be justified, at least doctrinally or in theory."[174] His Holiness went on to justify part of Toolen's remarks on the situation. "If a man becomes conscious of his rights, he must become equally aware of his duties."[175]

1963 was a year of school desegregation for the state of Alabama. On June 11, Governor George Wallace stood in the door at the University of Alabama in an abortive attempt to bar the admission of black students. As grade schools began their new school year in September, federal law was forcing the integration of three Birmingham schools. Auxiliary Bishop Durick knew that this move would be unpopular and, gauging from past actions, violence was highly possible. Therefore, he joined in with other clergymen from Birmingham begging for restraint, order, and obedience of the law. In his own statements, Durick invoked the words of Archbishop Toolen, "Our Archbishop…has affirmed again and again the need for us all to respect the law and lawful authority. He has pointed out a need for responsibility by all who are involved or affected in any way by this historic transition."[176]

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[174] Pope John XXIII, *Pacem In Terris*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/John23/j23pacem.htm>, 11 April 1963 [accessed 20 February 2004]: paragraph 44.

[175] Ibid.

[176] "As Public Schools Are Desegregated, Bishop Durick Joins in Appeal for Order," *Catholic Week*, 9 September 1963, 1.

Unfortunately, unknown to Bishop Durick and the other religious leaders who joined him in appealing to law and order, there were some who were plotting nefarious deeds in response to the desegregation. On September 11, the house of Arthur Shores, an attorney who was also a civil rights activist in the Birmingham area was bombed. Durick and other clergymen issued another statement saying, "We condemn anew the dastardly act of bombing which has not only imperiled human life but has also enkindled anew a potentially explosive situation."[177] The following Saturday night, September 14, a few angry Klansmen went to the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, the headquarters of the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham, and planted a bomb.[178]

On Sunday morning, September 15, 1963, at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Sunday school let out around ten o'clock. Four young black girls, Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Carol Robertson, and Addie Mae Collins, were in a downstairs lounge putting on choir robes.[179] While the girls were putting on makeup, the bomb planted the night before detonated with a report that "sounded like a score of supersonic jet planes had simultaneously broken the sound barrier."[180] The explosion tore through the building and sent stained glass, plaster, and splinters of wood flying. A priest, Father William James, the Diocesan Confraternity Director, was three blocks away from the church when the bomb went off and arrived on the scene a few minutes later. He described the area of the church where the bomb was planted, "On the east side of the church where previously

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[177] "Bishop Durick Joins In Appeal For Order, Compliance To Law," *Catholic Week*, 13 September 1963, 1 and 12.

[178] Ibid., 90.

[179] Patsy Sims, *The Klan* (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1978): 143.

[180] "Priest Eye-Witness To Aftermath of Bombing," *Catholic Week*, 20 September 1963, 1.

had been a doorway and stairs leading to it was now an opening large enough to drive a big truck through. What had been the basement now looked like remnants of war-torn buildings I had seen in pictures."[181] Father James went on to describe the reactions of the crowd and their stoning of police cars and the pastor of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church pleading with the crowd for order and restraint.

Another priest, Father Edward L. Foster, Director of the North Alabama Missions, was still dressed in his Mass cassock and was one of the first people to arrive on the scene. He was helping one woman look for her three children who were in the church at the time of the explosion. What is not well-known is that while helping her, he uncovered one of the murdered girls.[182] In all, there were four children slain by the bomb that tore through the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church: Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Carol Robertson, and Addie Mae Collins. The bombing of the church was the fourth in the last few weeks and the fiftieth in the last twenty years. In the other bombings before, human life had not been taken. This is what set this bombing apart from the others; four innocent girls unwillingly became martyrs of the cause for Civil Rights. That night terror filled the streets. National guardsmen had to be called up to help keep order. By morning, two more black children were dead, one was shot to death by police while he threw rocks at a carload of white kids and the other was shot while riding his bicycle by white kids on a motorcycle.[183]

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[181] Ibid., 12.

[182] Edward L. Foster, "Priest Reflects on Meeting a Mother Seeking Her Children," *Catholic Week*, 20 September 1963, 1.

[183]Ibid., 97.

Reactions to the bombing poured in from all over the world. The Vatican City's newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, wrote, "A sense of dismay overwhelms us at the news…of a true slaughter of innocents in an American church by the racist insanity of some fanatical adherents of segregation."[184] Bishop Durick extended his sympathy to the families of the children and attended the funeral that was held for three of the four girls.[185] In a statement, Durick described the event as the culmination of the violence of past weeks. "The undermining of respect for the due process of law, which has gone on in increasingly dramatic fashion in our community in these last few weeks, has finally brought on the eruption of satanic hoodlumism which has claimed the lives of four innocent children and injured scores of others."[186]

Archbishop Toolen weighed in with a pastoral letter that was to be read in all Catholic churches of the Archdiocese the following Sunday and was printed in the *Catholic Week.*

> I am sure all are shocked, amazed and grieved by the dastardly act of bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church of Birmingham. It is difficult to understand how a civilized human being could have in his heart so much hatred for a fellow human being as to desire or want to destroy life because a man's color is different from his own. This hate becomes more abhorrent when it destroys innocent children…"Love thy Neighbor as thyself" seems to be a forgotten law in the State of Alabama. We are much ashamed before our fellow countrymen and before the world because of the lawlessness of our State and its people as seen in recent events in Birmingham and elsewhere…Our law officers are much overworked but does this fact justify so many bombings with no one found accountable for these lawless acts?...If our efforts are not sufficient, then extraordinary means must be taken that justice may be done…Let us all remain calm and reasonable. Violence should not beget violence. With our meek and humble Saviour let us pray for

[184] "Vatican City Daily Calls Birmingham Church Bombing 'True Slaughter of Innocents' By 'Racist Insanity,'" *Catholic Week,* 20 September 1963, 1.

[185] "Priests Attend Funeral for Slain Children," *Catholic Week*, 20 September 1963, 1.

[186] "Bishop Extends Condolences to Grieving Families," *Catholic Week*, 20 September 1963, 1.

> peace and harmony in our country and state that our Union may remain strong and free.[187]

Just as he had in the past, Archbishop Toolen was once again denouncing racism as evil because it is, at its deepest foundations, hatred. As a clergyman, Toolen could not condone such hatred since he was supposed to be an advocate for Christian love. While asking the people to obey lawful authority, Toolen was also alluding to the possibility that the police were not performing their duties as well as they ought. Essentially, he was asking for the people to obey lawful authority, not to act out of vengeance, and for the Catholics of the diocese to stay out of trouble. The comments made after these events did not garner any kind of reaction from others. There were no letters pouring into the Bishop's residence because Toolen's sentiments seemed justified in light of the recent tragic events. This would not be the case when Toolen's similar sentiments were applied to a somewhat different situation two years later.

Opposition to Methods, Not Goals: Toolen and the Selma to Montgomery March

The other major Civil Rights era event to cause the Archbishop to speak out publicly was the Selma to Montgomery March for Voting Rights. The successful Selma to Montgomery March that lasted from March 21-25, 1965, was actually the last of three marches that spring.[188] The entire chain of events around Selma actually had its genesis in Marion, Alabama, which lies to the northwest. On the night of February 18, 1965, a

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[187] "Archbishop Toolen, Denouncing Hatred, Charges 'Love Thy Neighbor As Thyself Seems To Be a Forgotten Law in Alabama,' Calls For Prayers For Bombers of Baptist Church," *Catholic Week*, 20 September 1963, 1.

[188] Mark Grossman, *The ABC-CLIO companion to the Civil Rights Movement* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1993), 179.

group of black marchers were protesting the lack of voting rights for blacks in Marion. As they marched, Alabama state troopers

> shut off the street lights and drove marchers from the streets. They tracked Viola Jackson, her son, Jimmie Lee Jackson, and his 82-year-old grandfather, Cager Lee Jackson, into Mack's Café. They hit Viola and Cager Lee Jackson several times before Jimmie Lee Jackson leaped to their defense. The troopers beat him with billy clubs and shot him in the stomach.[189]

Jimmie Lee Jackson died on February 26, 1965, from the gunshot wound. This event brought legions of supporters to Alabama.[190] Martin Luther King once again came to Alabama and attended Jimmie's funeral. Soon thereafter, he made plans to lead a voting rights march in Jimmie's memory.[191] When Governor Wallace first heard of the plans, he thought about letting the march go on in the hope that logistics would prevent the marchers from making it to Montgomery, thereby becoming "the laughing stock of the nation." In the end, he changed his mind.[192]

The first of the three Selma marches took place on March 7, 1965, when Hosea Williams led a column of about six hundred marchers out of Selma and towards Montgomery. Alabama state troopers, who were sent there by Governor Wallace to "halt the march in the name of public safety,"[193] met the marchers at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. They set upon the marchers with billy clubs and tear gas[194] with what the

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[189] Robert E. Luker, *Historical Dictionary of the Civil Rights Movement* (Lanham, Maryland and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997), 231.

[190] Townsend Davis, *Weary Feet, Rested Souls: A Guides History of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 92.

[191] Luker, *Historical Dictionary*, 232.

[192] Davis, *Weary Feet, Rested Souls*, 94.

[193] Ibid.

[194] Grossman, *The ABC-CLIO companion*, 179.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) characterized as "Gestapo-like brutality."[195] The troopers' attack was filmed by television cameras for the evening news and the event became known as "Bloody Sunday."[196]

After the events of Bloody Sunday, Martin Luther King immediately returned to Selma and called for another march to be held on March 9, 1965. A federal court ordered it halted until a hearing was held. King had never defied a federal court order before, so there was talk as to whether or not the march would go on regardless. A compromise was quietly worked out with intermediaries from the White House, and on Tuesday, March 9, 1965, King led a column of nearly two thousand marchers over the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Once again, they were met by state troopers. This time, however, the marchers knelt, prayed, and marched back from whence they came. This march became known as "Turnaround Tuesday."[197] The peacefulness of the march helped to temper the negative publicity generated by the events of Bloody Sunday.[198]

On March 16, 1965, Martin Luther King and James Forman, an activist for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), were attacked during a voting rights rally. This prompted District Judge Frank M. Johnson, who had issued the first injunction against marching, to issue another injunction, this one for the purpose of

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[195] National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Report of the Executive Director for the month of March 1965, Auburn University Library, Papers of the NAACP, Supplement to part 1, 1966-1970, Meetings of the Board of Directors, records of annual conferences, major speeches, and special reports, on microfilm, reel 01, 2.

[196] Luker, *Historical Dictionary*, 232.

[197] Davis, *Weary Feet, Rested Souls*, 95-96.

[198] Grossman, *The ABC-CLIO companion*, 179.

"barring the state or local police from hindering a third Selma to Montgomery march."[199] Four days later, on March 20, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson "nationalized four thousand Alabama National Guardsmen and mobilized regular troops, FBI agents, and federal marshals to secure the route for the march."[200]

The third and final march began on Sunday, March 21, 1965, and ended at the State Capitol building where a mass rally was held on March 25.[201] The marchers camped out each night along the way at various locations, including the City of St. Jude on the night of March 24.[202] The Executive Director of the NAACP joined the marchers at the City of St. Jude and marched the last stretch and attended the mass rally at the Capitol building.[203] At the steps of the Capitol building, King

> gave one of his most memorable addresses. "How long?" would it take to reach the promised land, he asked. "Not long. Because the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice. How long? Not long, 'cause mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord…"[204]

King was right. They did not have to wait long for the promised land (of voting rights, at least) because the United States Senate passed the Voting Rights Act by a vote of seventy-seven to nineteen on May 26, 1965. The House of Representatives "passed it

[199] Ibid., 180.

[200] Luker, *Historical Dictionary*, 232.

[201] NAACP, Report of the Executive Director, 4.

[202] Luker, *Historical Dictionary*, 232.

[203] NAACP, Report of the Executive Director, 4.

[204] Luker, *Historical Dictionary*, 232-233.

overwhelmingly on 9 July" and President Lyndon B. Johnson signed it into law on August 6.[205]

Many people around the country including politicians and church leaders supported the Selma to Montgomery March, but there were also a great many others who disapproved and condemned it, including Archbishop Toolen. He felt that he and other Alabamians could handle things in his diocese without outside involvement.[206] This view has not garnered much adoration for Toolen over the years. He generally gets labeled as an ultra-conservative or someone who had passed his prime. If one were to look at his attitude in the light of the violence in Birmingham in 1963, Toolen's problems with the marches of 1965 can be better understood. In 1963, Birmingham was wracked by violence and bombings, which many people blamed on the interference of outside "agitators" such as Martin Luther King and others. The perception was that most local blacks understood the situation and could be patient waiting for things to work themselves out in their own time, but then came people from outside the state of Alabama who stirred things up. There is a great deal of recent scholarship to disprove this "outsider as troublemaker" argument, but sometimes what the people at the time were thinking is more important than what was actually the case since perception fuels decisions and actions.[207] In 1963, leading up to the unspeakable violence that plagued

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[205] Grossman, *The ABC-CLIO companion*, 180.

[206] Father William James, interview by author, Robertsdale, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[207] Some of the recent historiography to illuminate this point includes Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Liberties: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); Aldon Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984); Robert J. Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The*

Birmingham and ended in the death of four little girls, King and his associates had gathered in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and would then spread out around the city to agitate for desegregation, voting rights, and would try to get service at lunch counters.[208] With the tragedy that had taken place still on his mind, Toolen's reservations about outsiders coming and participating in these demonstrations can be more easily understood. When Toolen then saw pictures in the newspapers of Roman Catholic priests and nuns joining in the protests, he was infuriated.[209]

Up until this point, the Catholic Church had not been a visible participant in the Civil Rights Movement.[210] When Catholic priests and nuns became visible participants in this demonstration, Toolen was quite upset. He had "forbidden the priests and nuns in his diocese from participating in civil rights demonstrations"[211] or they would face ecclesiastical suspension.[212] After the brutalities of Bloody Sunday, the Archbishop's concerns could be seen as justified. Some officials from the chancery in Mobile offered to go to Selma, but they were told by Toolen, "No, I want you here."[213] Toolen had hoped that the situation was settled. Unfortunately for him, he soon saw pictures of nuns and priests leading columns of marchers in Selma on the front page of the *Mobile*

Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee (New York: Knopf, 1985); Fred Powledge, *Free At Last?: The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It* (Boston: Little Brown, 1991); and many others.

[208] Cobbs and Smith, *Long Time Coming*, 78-81.

[209] Rex Thomas, "Night Walk Is Staged At Selma," *Mobile Register*, 11 March 1965, 1 and 12.

[210] Andrew S. Moore, "Anti-Catholicism, Anti-Protestantism, and Race in Civil Rights Era Alabama and Georgia," *Journal of Southern Religion* 8, <http://jsr.fsu.edu/Volume8/Moore.htm>, 2005 [accessed 15 January 2006].

[211] "Priests and Nuns Scored In Alabama," *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 March 1965.

[212] Father William James, interview by author, Robertsdale, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[213] Oscar H. Lipscomb, Archbishop of Mobile, interview by author, Mobile, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

Register.[214] These priests and nuns had come from all over the country and even from Canada to participate in the demonstrations.

Up to the time of the Selma to Montgomery March, it had been a tradition, a kind of "gentlemen's agreement" among bishops, that if a person of the cloth was going to a different diocese for a public demonstration, then that person would get permission from his/her bishop to go and ask permission of the receiving bishop to go to his diocese.[215] The clergy who participated in the marches never asked Toolen's permission.[216] Toolen was upset by this because these people were in his diocese making "a public expression of the Catholic faith without any reference to himself who represented the Catholic faith in this diocese."[217] One may then wonder that if the simple act of seeking permission could have possibly made such a difference, then why not do it? The answer is that "if they would have asked, [Toolen] probably would not have given it."[218] They knew that would be the case[219] and they more than likely subscribed to the old adage that it is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission.[220] That the tradition of asking permission was beginning to fall out of practice is evidenced by a spokesman for the Archdiocese of New York who said that "explicit permission was not required for religious to participate in

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[214] Rex Thomas, "Night Walk Is Staged At Selma," *Mobile Register*, 11 March 1965, 1.

[215] Oscar H. Lipscomb, Archbishop of Mobile, interview by author, Mobile, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[216] "Priests and Nuns Scored In Alabama," *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 March 1965.

[217] Oscar H. Lipscomb, Archbishop of Mobile, interview by author, Mobile, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[218] Ibid.

[219] Father William James, interview by author, Robertsdale, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[220] Father Thomas Weise, interview by author, Phenix City, Alabama, 18 February 2004.

demonstrations."[221] Toolen, the conservative that he was, felt that this was still his privilege.

If Toolen was so against the march, then why were the marchers allowed to camp out at the City of St. Jude on the last night of their journey? Oscar H. Lipscomb, successor to Toolen as Archbishop of Mobile and member of Toolen's staff in 1965, responded to this query by observing:

> Because St. Jude was a largely black facility. It represented the best asset they had in terms of a gathering place and an organizational center for the marchers once they came to Montgomery. Monsignor Paul Mullaney, pastor of the church, presented the case to the Archbishop and he agreed.[222]

The case presented by Monsignor Mullaney most likely included logistical reasons why the marchers should stay there. The City of St. Jude was directly in the marchers' path from Selma to the Capitol Building. Also, the grounds at St. Jude would help provide not only shelter, but also protection from angry whites who may have wanted to thwart their efforts in a like manner that occurred in Birmingham just a few short years before. Whatever the case, Toolen agreed with Mullaney and consented to the marchers using the City of St. Jude.

So, by March 17, 1965, Saint Patrick's Day, the first two unsuccessful marches, known as Bloody Sunday and Turnaround Tuesday had already taken place. The day before, March 16, District Judge Frank M. Johnson had issued his injunction "barring the state or local police from hindering a third Selma to Montgomery March."[223] Toolen and the staff at the chancery in Mobile discussed their plan of action. "We had decided that

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[221] "Priests and Nuns Scored In Alabama," *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 March 1965.

[222] Oscar H. Lipscomb, Archbishop of Mobile, interview by author, Mobile, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[223] Grossman, *The ABC-CLIO companion*, 180.

there would be no formal statements until we had time to weigh the matter carefully,"[224] remembered Archbishop Lipscomb, who was a member of Toolen's staff at the time. The night of March 17, Archbishop Toolen attended a St. Patrick's Day banquet at the Hotel Admiral Semmes hosted by the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick.[225] Also in attendance was Louis Michot, Jr., a layman from Lafayette, Louisiana, "who talked about race relations and how important it was to work for them."[226] Michot said that "racial difficulties [could] be solved only 'if we have the proper type of leadership.'"[227] He was saying that it was time "to start making changes in the South that hadn't been made since forever."[228]

When Michot sat down, Toolen stood up and gave what amounted to "a full-fledged policy statement on the Selma to Montgomery March and the involvement of the clergy."[229] Archbishop Toolen stated before more than four hundred men in attendance that he believed that these demonstrations were "not helping things at all."[230] Commenting on the involvement of Catholic clergy from outside the diocese, Toolen said,

> They ask me why do priests and Sisters come from outside the state and even from Canada to take part in these demonstrations? Certainly the Sisters are out of place in these demonstrations; their place is at home doing God's work. I would

[224] Oscar H. Lipscomb, Archbishop of Mobile, interview by author, Mobile, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[225] John Will, "Toolen Hits Outsiders Demonstrating in State," *Mobile Register*, 18 March 1965, 1.

[226] Father William James, interview by author, Robertsdale, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[227] John Will, "Toolen Hits Outsiders Demonstrating in State," *Mobile Register*, 18 March 1965, 1.

[228] Father William James, interview by author, Robertsdale, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[229] Oscar H. Lipscomb, Archbishop of Mobile, interview by author, Mobile, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[230] "Archbishop Toolen Criticizes Presence of Priests, Sisters in Demonstration," *Catholic Week*, 19 March 1965, 1.

> say that the same is true of the priests. As to whether they have permission to come in—they have not asked for it. It is customary to ask permission in such cases. What do they know about conditions in the South? I am afraid they are only eager beavers who feel this is a holy cause.[231]

Toolen said that he had been told that there were as many as two hundred priests and fifty nuns from outside the state in Selma. In his remarks, he said that he had "instructed priests and nuns resident at Selma not to take part in the demonstrations,"[232] but he had also "put out the word that *any* priest from his diocese that went Selma would be suspended."[233] When Toolen said that the religious' place was at home doing God's work, he meant that the nuns should have been in the schools teaching and the priests should have been in their churches saying Mass and hearing confessions.[234] In this part of his statement, Archbishop Toolen was right in line with his conservative white coreligionists in Protestant faiths. Those conservative white Protestants, in opposing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, were adamant in their stance that the proper role of the church was to "save souls, not society."[235]

His instruction to his clergy not to take part in the demonstrations also reflects the attitudes of other white Southern clergymen. After Bloody Sunday, Leon Macon, editor of the *Alabama Baptist*, told the chairman of the Christian Life Commission that "no Scripture instructed Baptists to join reform movements or solve social problems."[236] This

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[231] Ibid.

[232] John Will, "Toolen Hits Outsiders Demonstrating in State," *Mobile Register*, 18 March 1965, 10.

[233] Father Thomas Weise, interview by author, Phenix City, Alabama, 18 February 2004 and Father William James, interview by author, Robertsdale, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[234] Father Thomas Weise, interview by author, Phenix City, Alabama, 18 February 2004.

[235] Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 458-459.

was basically Toolen's stance on the issue, although he believed that he had been doing a pretty good job of handling the social problems of his diocese in his own way. Many Baptists of the time also believed that they had great relationships with black Baptists.[237] The same was most likely true of Toolen, though his belief was probably on better foundation considering his past record of working for the social uplift of blacks in his diocese.

Toolen qualified his opposition to clergy coming in from outside Alabama on grounds of proper etiquette and said that all Catholic clergy should be at home doing God's work. Those clergy who participated in the marches were committing, in Toolen's eyes, the "Heresy of Action." This idea of the Heresy of Action came from Pope Pius XII and was defined by him in an "Apostolic Exhortation…to the Clergy of the Entire World." In this exhortation, Pius XII discussed the problem as he saw it.

> We cannot abstain from expressing our pre-occupation and our anxiety for those who on account of the special circumstances of the moment have become so engulfed in the vortex of external activity that they neglect the chief duty of the priest, his own sanctification. We have already stated publicly in writing that those who presume the world can be saved by what has been rightly called "the heresy of action" must be made to exercise better judgment. The heresy of action is that activity which is not based upon the help of grace and does not make constant use of the means necessary to the pursuit of sanctity given us by Christ.[238]

Pope Pius made this exhortation in 1950, but such instructions from a Pope are meant to be binding until they are changed. The instructions clearly state that clergy who commit this heresy of action should be made to "exercise better judgment," which is exactly what

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[236] Ibid., 462.

[237] Ibid., 464.

[238] Pope Pius XII, *Menti Nostrae: Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Pius XII to the Clergy of the Entire World*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/P12CLERG.HTM>, 23 September 1950 [accessed 16 February 2006].

Toolen felt he was doing by threatening his clergy with ecclesiastical suspension if they were to participate in the marches. He had hoped that other bishops would have acted the same way to keep their own clergy in line. Since they did not, he bemoaned the impropriety of it all on grounds of etiquette, which would have been easier to explain in public remarks than the idea of the heresy of action.

One of the major figures organizing and participating in the Selma to Montgomery March was Martin Luther King, whom Toolen did not fail to mention in his remarks. Considering King's involvement in events that had sparked violence before, Toolen was not happy with him. The Archbishop said that he respected King as a religious man and a minister, but he felt King was "trying to divide the people."[239] He criticized King for keeping children out of school for the demonstrations and asserted that King was "hurting the cause of the Negro rather than helping it."[240] He held up Mobile as an example of progress without demonstrations.

> Here in Mobile, where the problem has been handled sensibly, we have had no trouble. Sane and sensible Negroes realize we are trying to bring them up to the standards they should have. But do we need crusaders coming in from other states to show us how to run the state of Alabama?[241]

Again, Toolen's sentiments were right in step with those of his white Protestant brethren who contended that the violence in Selma "resulted from outsiders (including many ministers) plus the agitation of communists."[242] While Toolen did not approve of the

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[239] "Archbishop Toolen Criticizes Presence of Priests, Sisters in Demonstration," *Catholic Week*, 19 March 1965, 1.

[240] John Will, "Toolen Hits Outsiders Demonstrating in State," *Mobile Register*, 18 March 1965, 10.

[241] "Archbishop Toolen Criticizes Presence of Priests, Sisters in Demonstration," *Catholic Week*, 19 March 1965, 12.

[242] Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 462.

interference from outside Catholics, Alabama Baptists were more vehement in their response when Georgia Baptists claimed to be guilty of silence when violence broke out in Alabama and the Alabama Baptists told them to "mind their own business."[243]

Toolen's choice of words has the potential to give some pause. He said, "Sane and sensible Negroes realize we are trying to bring them up to the standards they should have." On its face, it makes him sound extremely paternalistic. Toolen seems to be portraying the goodly white man carrying out the white man's burden and making sure that Negroes are given the rights that *whites think* they should have. Usually, this would mean that the whites felt that the rights of the blacks should be somewhere below those of whites. Based on his past actions and remarks, this is not what Toolen was alluding to at all. Toolen felt that all people, black and white, should have equal rights. The year before, when he announced the integration of the parochial school system, Toolen declared, "In the diocese we have always tried to give our Negro people everything that we have given to our white people."[244] This is what he meant by "the standards they should have."

What he did not agree with was the methods employed by blacks to gain these rights. In 1963, he reminded African Americans that there were responsibilities that accompanied rights, and he elucidated this once again in his St. Patrick's Day remarks.

> We know that all men regardless of race or color are made after the image of God. We know that all men are redeemed by the blood of Christ. All citizens are

[243] Ibid.

[244] "Archbishop's Letter On Integration of Schools," *Catholic Week*, 1 May 1964, 1.

> entitled to equal rights and privileges under the constitution. But these problems must be solved in a lawful way.[245]

These remarks were what set him apart from many of his white Protestant brethren. As a minority himself in the Jim Crow South, he worked within the law to uplift the Negro people of his diocese by giving them separate and much closer to equal facilities in which to function. Conservative white Protestants, on the other hand, claimed that "although the cross of Christ guaranteed Jew and Gentile equal access to God, it did not destroy the laudable race differences between blacks and whites, without which racial amalgamation would result."[246] This fundamental difference on the issue of racial equality was lost on Baptists who feared the success of Catholic missions like the ones built by Toolen in converting blacks. Actually, "Catholicism had little intrinsic religious attraction to blacks. Its appeal resulted primarily from the racial inclusiveness and sense of social justice espoused by Catholics."[247] This sense of inclusiveness was not shared by many Protestants.

The year 1965 was in the very latter days of the Jim Crow era. Even though the United States Constitution had been amended at the end of the Civil War to guarantee blacks the right to vote, Southern states had passed laws that made it very difficult for blacks to exercise that right. Impeding measures included tests that everyone, in theory, had to take in order to register to vote, but were, in fact, designed to keep blacks from voting. Toolen recognized that the tests were inherently unfair and the questions

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[245] "Archbishop Toolen Criticizes Presence of Priests, Sisters in Demonstration," *Catholic Week*, 19 March 1965, 12.

[246] Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 392.

[247] Ibid., 465.

deliberately made difficult to answer. In his St. Patrick's Day remarks, "the Archbishop gave his opinion that [the questions] should be simplified and he remarked that 'if I took one of the examinations, I would probably fail.'"[248]

Toolen recognized the injustices of his day,[249] but he was also concerned with how the state of Alabama was being portrayed in the media. After the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in 1963, Birmingham and the state of Alabama were attacked in the press for being bigoted, racist, and violent. Toolen feared that the same was happening due to the violence surrounding the Selma to Montgomery March.

> I feel that a great injustice is being done to Alabama. We are pilloried before the world as savages. No thought is given to those in this state who are really trying to work out a solution. No credit is given to people who are trying to solve the question.[250]

This was also true of Toolen's remarks where the more "negative" aspects were accentuated and the more positive signs were largely ignored. The Selma to Montgomery March might have gone down as a minor footnote in Civil Rights history if not for the violence of Bloody Sunday. Because of the violent responses that these kinds of demonstrations had historically elicited, Toolen felt that public demonstrations were not the correct way to effect changes. "Those were violent times"[251] and the Archbishop felt that there were "crazy people on both sides," whom good citizens should try to control.[252]

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[248] John Will, "Toolen Hits Outsiders Demonstrating in State," *Mobile Register*, 18 March 1965, 10.

[249] Oscar H. Lipscomb, Archbishop of Mobile, interview by author, Mobile, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[250] "Archbishop Toolen Criticizes Presence of Priests, Sisters in Demonstration," *Catholic Week*, 19 March 1965, 1.

[251] Father William James, interview by author, Robertsdale, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[252] "Archbishop Toolen Criticizes Presence of Priests, Sisters in Demonstration," *Catholic Week*, 19 March 1965, 12.

Roman Catholics, in general, are "devotees of order" and a conservative Archbishop would definitely fall in this category. During the Civil Rights Movement, most white Catholics "rejected nonviolent action as a means to black equality."[253] There were other Catholic leaders who had been much more activist than Toolen when it came to black equality who also denounced the methods of the demonstrators. One such person was Father John LaFarge, who was a prolific writer and proponent of interracial cooperation. Where King asked "how long?" in his speech at the Capitol Building, LaFarge argued that "a 'long Baptism'…was a prerequisite for change. To those who called for action, he advised more contemplation and prayer. 'Prayer is action...the highest and most transcendent form of action.'"[254] Men such as LaFarge and Toolen "contended that segregation would inevitably collapse under its own poisonous weight…justice was certain, but its swiftness was not paramount."[255]

Toolen's St. Patrick's Day remarks were faithfully recorded by journalist John Will of the *Mobile Register*. As Toolen was talking, Will was so astounded at what he was hearing that he asked his editor if the meeting was closed, thereby making the remarks off the record. His editor replied that since Toolen did not say so, he was considering it open.[256] Father William James, who was in attendance at the banquet, has said, "I remember walking out with John Will, and one of the monsignors said, 'John, you can't print that. It's very damaging.' And John said, 'I've gotta print it, it's big

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[253] David W. Southern, *John LaFarge and the Limits of Catholic Interracialism, 1911-1963* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 293.

[254] Ibid., 297.

[255] Ibid., 307.

[256] Oscar H. Lipscomb, Archbishop of Mobile, interview by author, Mobile, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

news.'"[257] As it turned out, Will was correct. The story was picked up by the Associated Press and went out all over the country. The article showed Toolen's remarks to be a "condemnation of the march as it stood."[258] The next day, when his remarks were on the front page of America's newspapers, Toolen asked his chancellor, Monsignor Phillip Cullen, what he thought about all the brouhaha. The Chancellor looked at the Archbishop and said, "It's the most unfortunate thing you've ever done in your life."[259] This is not to say that Cullen was especially prescient and knew the uproar that was about to be unleashed as a result of what the Archbishop said, but he knew that Toolen had committed a gaffe and everyone knew about it.

"Silence is Golden": Reactions to Toolen's St. Patrick's Day Speech

The story by John Will "sparked hundreds of letters"[260] written either supporting or denouncing Toolen for his statement. Correspondence poured in to the chancery from all over the United States, from New York to Los Angeles, and even from Canada. A majority of the letters were written in support of those parts of Toolen's remarks that placed him in the same camp with other white conservative Southerners. The others were caustic and vitriolic responses to those same parts. Virtually none of the correspondence mentioned those parts of Toolen's speech where he affirmed his support for the goals of civil rights activism or his belief in racial equality.

Toolen's attackers expressed many and varied concerns, many of which stemmed from Toolen's position in the Church hierarchy. A Catholic from Oklahoma expressed

[257] Father William James, interview by author, Robertsdale, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[258] Oscar H. Lipscomb, Archbishop of Mobile, interview by author, Mobile, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

[259] Father Thomas Weise, interview by author, Phenix City, Alabama, 18 February 2004.

[260] Oscar H. Lipscomb, Archbishop of Mobile, interview by author, Mobile, Alabama, 16 February 2004.

shame that a "man who has achieved such a high place in the Church could make a statement showing so little regard for human dignity."[261] Another concern stemmed from that fact that part and parcel of Toolen's position in the hierarchy was his capacity as teacher. "All archbishops consider themselves teachers" either in academic or ecclesiastical capacities.[262] A black Catholic from California fervently believed that Toolen's position "certainly cannot be considered as one of Church Teaching."[263] He hoped not because he felt that it was an "INSULT and affront to all decent men everywhere and especially to all Catholics who still consider themselves such."[264]

Toolen's sentiments over clerical participation in the marches proved to be the most fertile ground for disapproval. Toolen's ban against Catholic clerics participating in the Selma to Montgomery March left many feeling that "the only level of hierarchy in this Diocese permitted to voice disagreement [was] the order of laymen."[265] The laymen did so unabashedly.

> I am strenuously renouncing what I consider a most unChristian [sic] attitude on your part in regard to the participation of those beloved priests and nuns in a very righteous march.
> These Religious and others having the same brand of Christian charity spoken of in St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, girded up their loins and decided to respond to the call from heaven itself to march forth with these American citizens

[261] Letter from Norman F. Rowland to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 19 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[262] Thomas J. Reese, S.J., *Archbishop: Inside the Power Structure of the American Catholic Church* (San Francisco, California: Harper& Row Publishers, 1989), 86-91.

[263] Letter from Peter Guidry to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 27 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[264] Ibid.

[265] Letter from Catholic Laymen for Church Reform to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 21 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

> demanding rights that are rightfully theirs—the right to vote for those who are to govern them.[266]

In response to Toolen's assertion that the priests and nuns should stay home and do God's work,[267] he was pointedly asked,

> is not the dignity of the human being God's work?...That those priests came 'from outside the state and even from Canada' testifies to the universality of the Church and to the unity of her mind: it is unfortunate that the priests and nuns of this Diocese could not walk with them.[268]

Some laymen also felt that Toolen would have at least been better off not publicizing his feelings about the Selma to Montgomery March and imparted to him some advice: "It would seem that in your capacity as Bishop, you would deem it more appropriate to offer a prayer for and the hope that what is just and right will finally eventuate. OR, there is a saying: 'Silence is Golden.'"[269]

Toolen's critics also questioned his record of helping the blacks of his diocese. Much of this criticism came from people outside the diocese who had no firsthand knowledge of the Archbishop's previous record. Rather, they were basing their assertions on what they read about Toolen's remarks in the newspaper. One man informed Toolen, "You have done nothing to enhance the cause of the Negro in your state and their plight rest [sic] with YOU."[270] Another person asked him,

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[266] Letter from Georgiana C. Mottley to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 24 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[267] "Archbishop Toolen Criticizes Presence of Priests, Sisters in Demonstration," *Catholic Week*, 19 March 1965, 1.

[268] Letter from Catholic Laymen for Church Reform to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 21 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[269] Letter from St. Jude and St. John the Baptist Parishes in Montgomery, Alabama to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 21 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

> What are your real desires and intentions, do you want these atrocities to continue? What have you ever done to correct them? We have never heard from you before. Do you not believe in equality? Or justice for all our citizens?[271]

Some went so far as to claim that Toolen's remarks actually hurt the cause of the Civil Rights Movement and that they "have done more harm to us than a thousand lashes by Wallace or his troopers."[272] A man from Kansas took this a step further and, after telling the Archbishop, "You stink," asked him

> Why the hell don't you and other racists secede from the United States—maybe a few lice from Kansas would want to move to your new sovereign nation of Alabama—we wouldn't miss them—in fact wish they would leave as we have racists in this state—even in the See City.[273]

Toolen had lamented in his remarks that a "great injustice is being done to Alabama. We are pilloried before the world as savages."[274] The comments from the Kansan above helped to legitimize this worry. There were others from outside Alabama who condemned the whole state based on the violent images they saw on their televisions and read about in their newspapers.

> From all I have *heard* of the state of Alabama, it shall ever remain a place of horror in my mind unless it does a turn about face and amends its base and inhuman treatment of people who are better Americans in every sense of the word, action and deed than the one and others like him who misguide the state of Alabama.[275]

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[270] Letter from Peter Guidry to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 27 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[271] Letter from James H. Meade to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 19 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[272] Letter from Mrs. William Payne to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 18 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[273] Letter from William H. Zeidler to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 24 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[274] "Archbishop Toolen Criticizes Presence of Priests, Sisters in Demonstration," *Catholic Week*, 19 March 1965, 1.

In the end, Toolen's critics seem to have basically hoped for statements that were more forward thinking to come from a Roman Catholic Archbishop. What they found instead were those remarks from Toolen on the front pages of their hometown newspapers which portrayed Toolen in a way that made him seem backward and paternalist.

For every letter thrashing Toolen over his remarks, there were about three or four written thanking him for what he said and supporting him in his stance. These supporters ranged from fellow archbishops to congressmen to laymen. Unfortunately, most of Toolen's supporters focused on the same points that his critics did. Again, no one commented on the positive things that Toolen said.

Bob Sikes, United States Representative for Florida's first district extended to Toolen congratulations for his "courageous and very proper stand taken in connection with the racial problems" in Alabama. He continued, "I am heartened that a man of your stature has presented the racial situation…in its true light."[276] Within the state of Alabama, Toolen's support reached the highest levels of state government. The Alabama legislature "warmly praise[d] His Excellency, Archbishop Toolen, for the public statements he has made and commend[ed] him on his wise guidance."[277] There were others who wished that Toolen had gone into government himself.

> It is a pity a man such as yourself could not have found his way to the White House and become the leader of our great country. We need a leader who is

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[275] Letter from Georgiana C. Mottley to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 24 March 1965, Toolen Papers (italics are mine).

[276] Letter from Bob Sikes, United States Representative to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 26 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[277] Alabama State Senate Joint Resolution No. 30, Archbishop Thomas J. Toolen Papers, 22 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

> capable of deep thinking, a man calm, cool, and of wisdom, and sanely just in dealing with any problem that arises in this great land of ours.[278]

Toolen's support also came from his fellow archbishops, including Cardinal McIntyre, Archbishop of Los Angeles. McIntyre told Toolen, "Our attitude is entirely with you in this matter, and we share with you a great deal of apprehension of the possibilities from the existing turmoil."[279] As the leader of a large and potentially racially explosive diocese himself, Cardinal McIntyre was pleased to see a fellow archbishop appeal to law and order. McIntyre also agreed with Toolen's stance on clerical participation in public civil rights demonstrations.

> I fear that the question of demonstration will be an active and disturbing one for some time to us all, and I am confident that the action of some of our clergy and nuns going to Selma was not helpful to either cause. It is obvious that the promoters were anxious to use "religion" in all its publicity.[280]

The last sentence of McIntyre's statement was exactly right. There were people on both sides of the conflict who used religion to their advantage and felt that God was on their side. Segregationists and others who sought to deny African Americans their rights would point to the Bible and say that it supported the status quo. The civil rights activists, on the other hand, used religion and its institutions even more. Since churches were often the only place blacks could safely meet, they evolved into bases of operations for demonstrators. The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham was a prime example.

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[278] Letter from Charlene Yates to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 19 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[279] Letter from James Francis Louis Cardinal McIntyre, Archbishop of Los Angeles to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 31 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[280] Letter from James Francis Louis Cardinal McIntyre, Archbishop of Los Angeles to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 31 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

Many of Toolen's supporters wondered why the outside clergy did not begin working for better conditions in their own dioceses or how they could set aside their duties in order to participate in the demonstrations. Toolen said that the clergy's place was at home doing God's work and many heartily agreed. One lady said, "If one is fired with such missionary zeal what is wrong with starting in one's own back yard?"[281] Others wondered how they were getting away with not performing God's work back home. "Have they no duties of their own? Assuming they have, are these being neglected or shoved off on someone else?...These traveling nuns would make better use of their time in the faithful execution of the duties assigned to *them*."[282] Toolen, as evidenced by his statement on St. Patrick's Day, would have agreed. Another lady was so sure that parish duties were so heavy that there should not be any time for "Priests or Nuns to leave their spiritual duties to go gallivanting all over the country in so undignified manner [sic]."[283] The tack taken by these supporters was not a valid one since the operations of the Church and its personnel were such that a few clergy members taking some time off would not have adversely affected its daily functions. Even so, they felt they were taking their cue from Toolen.

Many people were more concerned about what they considered a tarnishing of the image of Catholic clergy. There were some who said they were "shocked and scandalized" to see pictures of nuns marching in the demonstrations.[284] Most of these

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[281] Letter from Mrs. Ogden W. Lafaye to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 19 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[282] Letter from Mary M. Kerlin to Egidio Vagnozzi, Apostolic Delegate, 22 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[283] Letter from Pearl A. Mason to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 19 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

people were more offended over the nuns' participation than they were over that of the priests. Since nuns were seen as supposed to be following the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary in their chastity, obedience to God, and their love for the Church, their participation in the marches gave the impression that they were falling short of this ideal.

> I and many others feel that our priests and other religious men are exposing themselves in a most undignified manner, and are doing a great damage to their image and religion…But to see nuns demonstrating is really disgusting… [although there were relatively few in attendance,] the few have been so obvious and their presence certainly has dimmed the luster of the majority.[285]

One lady was so taken aback that she wrote to the Mother Superior of one of the religious orders represented at Selma. She told the Mother Superior that she would "have to answer before the Throne of God for letting women who are supposed to be following in the footsteps of…our lovely Blessed Mother, come to Alabama and mix in such goings on."[286] Much of this furor over the nuns demonstrating most likely stemmed from the letter writers' inherent racism. This line of protest stems from the feelings about protecting the flower of white female purity. If white nuns were marching with black men, then this boundary was no longer stark, and the letter writers feared that it could potentially be violated. A letter to the *Birmingham-Post* explained this position in a less than forward manner.

> We all tend to build honored images from past experience and knowledge of some religious groups. I hold such an image for Catholic nuns. Their long history of healing, teaching, and caring for mankind in an unobtrusive way…has gained for

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[284] Letter from Frank Scanlan, Jr. to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 16 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[285] Letter from A.N. Manucy to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 20 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[286] Letter from Joan B. Thyson to the Mother Superior of the Mary Knoll Sisters, 17 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

> them a place of dignity and respect. [Their participation in the Selma to Montgomery March] cast a shadow on an image I am reluctant to lose.[287]

These people felt that the nuns' participation in the Selma to Montgomery March ran counter to everything they ever knew about nuns. One person thought that the idea was so impossible that she wrote, "I even thought perhaps outsiders may have donned the Nuns' attire to give this impression."[288]

The repercussions felt by Toolen due to his comments were varied. In the following months, he found himself defending his position and his record with blacks. Even so, he remained unrepentant. In a letter seeking donations for the continuance of his colored work he bemoaned the reactions to his stance.

> You know that I have been crucified during the past year because of the speech on the trouble in Selma, but if I had it to do over again, I would do the same thing. If outside agitators would leave us alone we would work it out better than is being done now…Where were all these eager beavers thirty-five years ago when the Negro needed help, direction and assistance even more than they do now…Being on the job, knowing conditions, I think I am best able to know what should be done for God and His Church and His people.[289]

Therein lay the crux of the problem he thought he had with the outsiders. They were Johnny-come-latelies who had found a particular issue that resonated with the world at large at the moment. Such a view overlooked those local activists who had also been working on the problems for quite some time, but Toolen either did not know about them or did not think them all that influential. Archbishop Toolen, on the other hand, had been "on the job" for thirty-eight years working to give blacks in Alabama direction, help, and

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[287] Sam C. Ballard, "Shadow is Cast on an Image," *Birmingham-Post Herald*, 19 March 1965.

[288] Letter from Lynn Toney to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 19 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

[289] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham to J.B. Tennelly, Secretary for the Negro and Indian Missions Commission, 10 September 1965, Toolen Papers.

assistance in the forms of missions, hospitals, orphanages, and more. He also tried to prove that he was correct in the assertion that these marches were unnecessary and troublesome.

> I objected to the priests and sisters joining this howling mob to break all order to obtain their end. I talked here with the Federal Judge on three different occasions and a way was shown in which this march could have been avoided and their ends obtained, but they did not want this. They were determined to march, no matter what happened.[290]

Toolen was most likely correct that there were other avenues by which to pursue voting rights, but those ways probably would not have galvanized the country in ways the Selma to Montgomery March did. Necessary or not, the Selma to Montgomery March did push Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act and President Johnson to sign it into law.

One of the unintentional side-effects of the Selma to Montgomery March was the drying up of donations. They were withheld, in what can only be described as a classic "damned if you do, damned if you don't" scenario, due both to Toolen's St. Patrick's Day statement and the utilization of the City of St. Jude as a last resting stop for the marchers en route to Montgomery. Many contributors told the Archbishop that they would no longer send money to him because "charity should be directed to a cause which would be more representative of the universal love Christ expects from His Church."[291] This was another example of someone focusing their attention on an incomplete reading of Toolen's statement. Even so, the donors sought to make their displeasure known where it would really hurt—in the wallet. A glimmer of hope was offered, though. Toolen was

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[290] Letter from Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham to Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, Archbishop of Baltimore, 22 April 1965, Toolen Papers.

[291] Letter from Reverend N.L. Goebel to Thomas J. Toolen, Archbishop of Mobile-Birmingham, 26 March 1965, Toolen Papers.

told, “When I see that you are more universal in your interest, my help will again be extended financially as well as prayerfully.”[292]

The City of St. Jude also experienced a downturn in donations due to the role it played in the Selma to Montgomery March. The situation got so bad that those who ran the City of St. Jude contemplated closing down the whole operation. It seems that contributors had no qualms with helping with the uplift of the black people of Alabama so long as they did not take to the streets to voice their complaints. Even though the City of St. Jude was *the* black facility in the state of Alabama, contributors did not want to see their donated money going to an organization that would aid and abet such behavior.

[292] Ibid.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The long episcopate of Archbishop Thomas Joseph Toolen was one that saw some interesting times for Alabama and the nation. Toolen guided the Catholic flock of Alabama through the Great Depression, World War II, McCarthyism, and the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout the entire time, there was at least one constant theme Toolen dealt with—race relations. Being the Roman Catholic prelate of a diocese in the deepest of the Deep South, race-related questions were a constant concern. Toolen faced these questions unflinchingly and dealt with them using a mixture of his own instincts and precedents set by others.

The early decades of Toolen's tenure were marked by relative calm for the Diocese of Mobile. Toolen spent much of this time building missions for the colored of his flock. As an administrator, it would have been much cheaper if he could have merely forced the integration of the many white parishes already in existence. Yet, as a matter of practicality for a Roman Catholic trying to cope in the days of Jim Crow, black missions were the easiest answer to a daunting problem. The practice of separate missions was begun long before Toolen began his career in the Catholic Church. In carrying on the tradition, though, Toolen worked toward establishing facilities for blacks that were very much separate, but much more equal than secular society was willing to provide. He also went beyond merely building churches. Toolen's building program included hospitals (where black doctors were allowed to practice their craft alongside white colleagues),

schools, orphanages, convents, retirement homes, and much more. His institution building was so prolific, in fact, that there were some who referred to him as the "Nigger Bishop."[293]

Toolen's conviction that all men, regardless of race, are created equal was shown through his role in the integration of Catholic education in his diocese. Spring Hill College wanted to integrate in the late 1940s, but the Board of Consultors felt that it would be wiser to wait for a more accommodating atmosphere. In 1952, Toolen convinced Spring Hill College's administrators to admit females into its classrooms in an effort to provide equal education for whites, which had the effect, intentional or not, of making the process of integration much smoother. In 1954, eight African American students joined the Spring Hill College student body of one thousand. This move was not publicized, was not decried by the white students, the white population of Alabama, or more importantly, Archbishop Toolen. A decade later, Toolen again moved quietly to steer Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Mobile-Birmingham toward total equality. In a short pastoral letter, he told the Catholics of the Archdiocese that the parochial school system would no longer be segregated at the beginning of the 1964-65 school year. Both instances of educational integration came years before secular institutions followed suit.

When the Civil Rights Movement exploded on his doorstep, it seemed that the times had finally moved beyond Archbishop Toolen. People felt that the 1960s were a time of action and demonstration and that these were the only means of meeting and accomplishing their goals. When these activist demonstrations were met with violence

[293] Father Thomas Weise, interview by author, Phenix City, Alabama, 18 February 2004.

from ultra-conservative whites, Toolen spoke up. He called for both sides to use common sense and to obey the law. Never once did Toolen say that he disagreed with the goals of the Civil Rights demonstrators, but he stridently opposed their methods. Though it was not actually the case, Toolen blamed much of the violence on "outside agitators" and felt that people such as himself working with "sane and sensible Negroes" could achieve the same goals through less public means.

Privately, Toolen was much like other whites of his day. He had no problem telling derogatory stories and jokes about blacks. He also had very close, special relationships with some black people. One example was his chauffeur/photographer who was a black man whom Toolen was very close to. Their friendship was such that Toolen cried effusively at the man's funeral.[294] Toolen believed in the social and spiritual uplift of Alabama's black population. The conservative paternalist in him disagreed with that same population when it pursued its rights through public demonstrations. Toolen was of the mind that these sorts of things must be allowed to run their natural course, which would end in total equality, but the issue should not be forced. Yet, through it all, whether it be institution building or integration of schools or quietly working for Civil Rights, Toolen's driving philosophy was always "to bring God to the Negro and to bring the Negro to God."[295]

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[294] Ibid.

[295] "'Bring God to Negro, Bring Negro to God,' Priest's Dream Now True," *Catholic Week*, 22 November 1963, 9.

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