

ARCHBISHOP'S RESIDENCE
2809 S. CARROLLTON AVENUE
NEW ORLEANS 18, LOUISIANA

February 11, 1956

THE MORALITY OF
RACIAL SEGREGATION

TO THE CLERGY, RELIGIOUS AND LAITY,
ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW ORLEANS.

Dearly beloved in Christ:

Difficult indeed is the approach to a propitious solution according to Christian principles of justice and charity of the problem of racial integration in our schools, especially in the Deep South where for more than a century and a half segregation has been accepted without serious question or challenge.

For months we have prayed, studied and consulted about the problem with a sense of our responsibility for the welfare of all souls that constitute the spiritual family for which in virtue of our office as Archbishop we are responsible before God. With an appeal to the Holy Spirit we now submit for careful consideration the following results, especially regarding the moral difficulties which segregation presents.

1. Racial segregation as such is morally wrong and sinful because it is a denial of the unity and solidarity of the human race as conceived by God in the creation of man in Adam and Eve. Male and female He created them and breathed into them the spirit of life and commanded them to increase and multiply and fill the earth. Throughout the pages of the Old Testament and the New there is constant recurrence of this truth, that all mankind has in Adam and Eve one common father and mother and one common destiny, namely to serve God in this world and find eternal happiness with Him in the world to come.

In 1954 Pope Pius XII directed attention to the fact that Christ gave to all the Apostles the mandate to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even unto the
(Matt. XXVIII, 19)

consummation of the world". From this the Holy Father concludes that Bishops too share the teaching authority of the Pope, the Successor of St. Peter, that all men, all truth, dogmatic, moral and social, fall within the purview of that teaching authority, and that when their teaching is in communion with that of the Holy See, they enjoy the pledge of His divine presence and guidance "all days, even unto the consummation of the world". The Holy Father in the same document indicates that Christ "sent His Apostles, as He had been sent by the Father, to teach all nations everything they had heard from Him (cf. Matt. XXVIII, 19-20). The Apostles are, therefore, by divine right the true doctors and teachers in the Church." In the same allocution Pope Pius XII also states that under the guidance of the Holy Father and the Bishops religious teachings may be worked out by capable priests, who as specialists apply the principles of Canon Law and Moral Theology to such questions. When their conclusions are approved by higher authority, they are regarded as safe norms of conscience and conduct. This is precisely the procedure which we must apply to the problem of race segregation.

2. Racial segregation is morally wrong and sinful because it is a denial of the unity and universality of the Redemption. The Eternal Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, came into the world to redeem and save all men, to die for all men on the cross, to make the life of grace available through the Church and the Sacraments for all men, to embrace all men in His Mystical Body on earth and in the life of glory in heaven. Racial segregation would draw the color line across the inspiring plan of the Redemption and thus sin against the divine providence, the love and the mercy that conceived and carried out the wonderful Mystery.

Speaking for the Old Testament on this unity of the human race we have the Prophet Malachy stating: "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us? Why then doth every one of us despise his brother, violating the covenant of our fathers?" (Malachy 2:10)

And St. Paul has these pregnant words to offer for the New Testament in his letter to the Corinthians: "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether

Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free; and in one Spirit we have all been made to drink." And our present Holy Father Pope Pius XII refers in a recent allocution (I Corinthians XII, 13) to ".....that law of human solidarity and charity which is dictated and imposed by our common origin and by the equality of rational nature in all men, to whatever people they belong..... A marvelous vision", the Holy Father calls it, "which makes us see the human race in the unity of one common origin in God, 'one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all and in us all'; in the unity of nature which in every man is equally composed of material body and spiritual, immortal soul; in the unity of dwelling place, the earth, of whose resources all men can by natural right avail themselves, to sustain and develop life; in the unity of the supernatural end, God Himself, to Whom all should tend, in the unity of means to secure that end". (cf. On the Function of the State in the Modern World p. 11, ed. Paulist Press.)

3. Racial segregation is morally wrong and sinful because it is basically a violation of the dictates of justice and the mandate of love, which in obedience to God's will must regulate the relations between all men. To deny to members of a certain race, just because they are members of that race, certain rights and opportunities, civic or economic, educational or religious, recreational or social, imposes upon them definite hardships and humiliations, frustrations and impediments to progress which condemn them to perpetual degradation which is only a step removed from slavery. Such indignities are grievous violations of Christian justice and charity, which cannot be justified in this modern age of enlightenment and loudly proclaimed democracy. Of violations of charity St. Thomas Aquinas says in his work about the Two Precepts of Charity: That men having the same nature are morally bound to love one another. It is Thomas' teaching that "...'every animal loves its like' (Eccles. XIII, 19), wherefore since all men are alike in nature, they ought to love one another. Therefore to hate one's neighbor is contrary to, not only the divine law, but also the law of nature."

4. Because the emancipation during the War between the States involved certain physical and economic hardships, Racial segregation was regarded with toleration but never justifiable as a permanent racial adjustment. Even the Catholic Church considered it wise and necessary to give separate church and school facilities to Negroes to afford them the opportunity to practice their faith more freely and educate their children more fully than was often possible in mixed congregations, but this arrangement was never intended to be permanent. This is attested by Most Reverend Archbishop Francis Janssens, D.D., who initiated the program with the remark that he did so very reluctantly and in the hope that it would be possible after a brief period to have all Catholics worship under the same roof.

We come now to the reasons for segregation at least in the school. These reasons are for the most part unwarranted generalizations in which it is aimed to give the impression that all members of the Negro race and especially all Negro children are tainted with virtually all the alleged defects. The amazing fact is that "as a race" they are not still more generally lacking in mental ability, culture, moral self-control, immunity from social diseases, criminal propensities, etc., when you consider the neglect and barriers to which they have been exposed in education, general culture, economic opportunities, respectable housing facilities, contact with stable social institutions and the more dignified ways of life. Although living and moving in the maelstrom of city or rural life, the laws and customs built up around the mystic term "segregation" have practically relegated Negroes to an island-like existence. They emerge to work, toil and serve even in the intimacy of the white home and family, but "segregation" cuts off the free avenues to progress in the better things of life that are synonymous with Christian civilization. This condition in itself is an indictment against continuing segregation 'indefinitely' as its advocates envision.

This statement would become unbearably long were we to analyze even briefly the alleged mental defects, moral and criminal propensities, economic shortcomings and

social disabilities and dangers which form the general basis for continuing segregation. We are having these allegations examined objectively by competent judges and may announce the result in due time. For the present we can only state that there are differences between the races on these points, but there is also much generalization and much emotionalism.

We wish to assure the Clergy, the Religious and the laity of the Archdiocese that we are giving to this important problem our most serious thought, study and consultation not to speak of the many prayers which we offer daily for Divine light and guidance, because we realize the importance of the issue which is involved. Nothing would please us more than to be able at the present moment to render a decision that would serve as a guide for priests, teachers and parents. However, there are still many vital circumstances which require further study and consideration if our decision is to be based upon wisdom, prudence and the genuine spiritual welfare of all concerned. Hence, we plead with all of you for perseverance in prayer in order that the final decision may be in conformity with the will of Christ and the highest interest of souls according to the mind of Holy Mother Church. May we likewise unite in prayer that the decision, when made, will be accepted in the spirit of Christian charity and justice and in that unity of mind, heart and will which must always characterize the family of God. This is a problem which should be worked out not in an atmosphere of wrangling or contention or discord or hatred but in a spirit of conciliation and with a desire to achieve peace through justice and charity. Prayer and calmness of spirit are much needed in all our hearts, and for these we plead in the name of the Divine Prince of Peace: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; (John XIV, 27) not as the world gives do I give to you."

May this peace be shared by all of us now and during the time of deliberation, and may it endure in our midst for all time! Such is the prayer of

Your Shepherd in Christ,

+ JOSEPH FRANCIS RUMMEL

Archbishop of New Orleans.

Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes,

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