

**Transcript:**

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What I thought I'd do is to start off by talking a little bit about what the situation was like in the South in 1945. So, we started this period at the end of the Second World War. And what we find is that Catholic institutions in the South are segregated. So, whether we're talking about churches or schools, or indeed, if we're talking about hospitals, even Catholic prelates didn't criticize Jim Crow segregation. African Americans attended either separate parishes, which were called special parishes, or they attended territorial parishes in which they were segregated. That's to say they were assigned to seats that might be in the rear of a church or in the side aisles of a church. And they received communion after whites. So, this was a common pattern that we see over and over again. In some smaller communities, there would be a white Catholic church and a black Catholic church in close proximity, other churches reflected a residential segregation of their areas.

Whites attended territorial parishes, which, as they sound, were geographically determined. So a parish would be for a particular locality. Special parishes, as they were called for African Americans, were racially defined. And these were often for an entire town or in larger towns or cities, or for of a town or city. Usually, territorial parishes were served by diocese and clergy and special parishes were usually served by members of religious orders. Most of those religious orders were composed of white priests. There were very few black priests at this time. Most seminaries did not admit African-Americans. Very few bishops were willing to receive black priests as well. There were a few of them scattered around and always assigned to black parish missions. There were three black orders, African American orders of nuns or sisters the Sisters of the Holy Family, the Oblate Sisters of Providence, and the Franciscan Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary. And they staffed black Catholic institutions, especially schools. And some of the schools also had black lay teachers as well. Most of the African American Catholic schools were actually taught by members of white or predominantly white sisterhoods. The largest of those in terms of teaching African American Catholics were the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

And it's worth noting that the Sisters of Blessed Sacrament excluded African Americans. And so what we find is sometimes even orders that were devoted to teaching or staffing missions for African Americans were themselves exclusionary towards them when it came to their own membership. If we look at Catholic numbers in the South during the civil rights era, from the late forties through to the mid to late 1960s, Catholics increased as a whole to about 10% of the southern population. Part of that increase, we see come, came from the Sunbelt migration -- from the north and west of the country. With some exceptions especially in southern Louisiana, Catholics mostly lived in urban areas. If we look at African American Catholics in 1945, about 140,000 of them in Southern states. And when I'm talking about South for the purposes of today, I'm essentially talking about the former Confederate states, 11 former

Confederate states (Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia). I realized that definitions of the South were open to open discussion, but that's the basis I'm going to work from. They were a part of the 140,000 who were attending black churches' missions and a small number attending predominantly white churches, but in segregated fashion.

Black Catholics were most numerous in southern Louisiana along the Gulf Coast. So that takes in Mobile, Alabama, and the Mississippi Coast. And we increasingly get a growth of black Catholics in the Diocese of Galveston as more migrated from Southern Louisiana to areas of southeast Texas and off across into Houston and to Galveston. But overall, African-American Catholics were a tiny proportion of the overall Catholic population. An overall kind of argument here when we look at the prelates is to say that apart from the religious values, they had core commitments to three key areas, which I think inform the approach desegregation as we look through this period from 1945 onwards. Essentially, the core commitments were to a) law, b) to democracy, and c) despite existence of Catholic schools, to public education. The reason for support for public education was the belief that it was important for a) people's individual development, b) for the perpetuation of democracy, and c) for people's economic security and for the economic growth of the country. In most states, segregation laws did not apply to private institutions. Regardless of that, most prelates were unwilling to defy segregationist majority opinion whether that was Protestant or whether that was Catholic. There was a risk of opposition. And the primary duty, as many prelates saw, was to preserve and, of course, expand the faith. So they were aware about anything that might undermine that mission.

Some ordinaries and many priests accepted or tolerated segregation, but there were other Catholic prelates, some clergy, and a white laity who were troubled by discrimination. Discrimination, of course, that was inherent in Southern segregation. And there was a growing appreciation that Jim Crow segregation laws conflicted with Vatican condemnations of racism the adoption of the Mystical Body of Christ. It was in 1943 that Pope Pius XII endorsed the Mystical Body of Christ in an encyclical. And the Mystical Body of Christ, along alongside the development of the Civil Rights movement, would help inspire Catholic integrationists in the South and elsewhere in the nation to speak and organize against segregation. As we go into the late 1940s, 50s, 60s, the basis of the Mystical Body of Christ came from St. Paul's words in Corinthians that essentially argue that all Catholics were, and all non-Catholics were potential members of the Catholic church. That was Christ's Mystical Body on earth. All humans were created in the image of God. Any injustice against a member or a potential member of the Mystical Body of Christ was an injustice against Christ as the head of that mystical body,

Whatever their personal feelings about segregation, and with very few exceptions, most prelates ordered desegregation in the post-war decades only, an only in anticipation of or to correlate with public school desegregation and the enactment of federal law on behalf of desegregation. I would argue it until at least the mid 1960s, most Southern, white Catholics favored overt segregation. And we have some opinion polls to support this interpretation. So I'm not going to give any more stats, but I think it's useful for this exercise to do that. So there was an opinion poll in 1956 of white southerners. And what

their opinion poll found in 1956 was that 80% of white Southerners supported segregation. So 80%, a huge number, and perhaps surprisingly, 16% favored integration. There was another poll in the same year of 1956, and this was a poll of Catholics. That poll found that 76% of southern white Catholics supported segregation and 19% opposed it. So we can see quite a correlation between southern white Catholic lay opinion and general southern white opinion.

But when we look at segregationists, they're not all the same. They varied in their degrees of commitment to segregation. So essentially, I'd argue that one group of segregationist were what I call militants. I think they were a minority of segregationist. And the militants argued that segregation was God's will. Sometimes they drew on biblical passages, which they claimed supported segregation provided scriptural justification. Many of them simply asserted that God had created different races and therefore they should not be changed. Others sometimes made comparisons with the natural world and said, there were separate species of birds that didn't intermingle, and therefore people shouldn't do that. A larger group of segregationists, I would suggest were moderate segregationists. And by that I mean these were segregationist who accepted segregation as a custom in Catholic and secular institutions. That's what they were used to, that's what they had grown up with. Many of them believed that's how things had always been, which historically is not accurate. But there was this widespread belief that was the case. Moderate segregationist didn't claim a religious justification for segregation. They argued that desegregation wasn't a matter for religion, wasn't a matter of any moral issue.

Like many of the militants, moderate segregationist said that secular desegregation was a political matter, and they couldn't understand why the church was abandoning a practice, which they believed it had long upheld. So often they said, why segregation wrong now, if it wasn't in the past? It was an argument, they often utilized. What I think is quite interesting is as law [abiding] Catholics, when prelates began to desegregate, many of the moderates accepted that even if they disagreed with it. They accepted it out of duty to obey the authority of the church and to accept the teaching authority of the church.

I'd argue there was a third group among southern white Catholics at this point, whom I call progressives. Progressives were a minority. They were overtly against racial discrimination and favored integration. Even before we get to 1954, when the Supreme Court issued the Brown School desegregation decision that declared segregation as unconstitutional in public schools, even before we get to that point, there were some progressives who publicly opposed segregation. There were some bishops who also opposed segregation in public. Before we get to Brown, the progressive clergy, bishops, and laypeople disseminated their views in the Catholic press and in organizations they founded -- often Catholic interracial councils, which organized interracial activities such as meetings, public speaking, visiting churches in biracial groups. Some progressives either supported, joined, or worked with the National Association for Advancement to Colored people, the NAACP. And in the 1960s, some also cooperated with other civil rights groups, and a few participated in civil rights protests and civil rights demonstrations, public marches, for example.

Where does a Vatican fit in this? We find if we go from the 1930s on, we get more and more condemnations of racism by of Vatican. Partly this a response to Nazi racism and fascist racism. But also I think a recognition too, of the importance of African missions as well. And the church's own history, which of course included Africa as a central part of it. Despite that, Rome allowed bishops to administer their diocese as they saw fit according to local circumstances. So that in effect, allowed for gradualism. When it came to desegregation, that was really a matter for local bishops to decide for themselves. In 1963, we get "Pacem in Terris," Peace on Earth and the Second Vatican Council in the first half 1960s, which both condemned racial discrimination. So, this is a public condemnation of segregation that was widely disseminated. So of course, it also encouraged expectations for change and a motivation to create that change alongside the background of Mystical Body of Christ that I was talking about earlier.

One of the features we see in the post second World War era, was the migration to the Sunbelt. So, it is often white Catholics, some African-American Catholics, but lot of white Catholics going to from the northwest to growing Sunbelt areas of the south and southwest. Some of those brought with them an abhorrence of segregation, and that had some influence, but not always. There were some who migrated from Northwest who were also segregationists as well. And so that's worth remembering. There is no clear cut north-south divide when we look at these issues.

When we look at the patterns of desegregation, quite often what we see is the church following behind secular developments. Some prelates were reluctant to desegregate until they felt compelled to act. When secular desegregation became inevitable, they felt they needed to act because they have the background of Vatican teachings, have the background of the Mystical Body of Christ, and African-American Catholics themselves call for desegregation. And when we get the overturning of segregation laws, then many prelates felt free to act against desegregation and compelled to act. So, these things often operated in tandem. We have developments among Catholics, but we also get the significance of secular change.

Catholics prelates believed in the rule of law as a religious democratic, a patriotic duty. So, when we have the Brown decision, the Supreme Court decision of 1954, when we get the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, the '64 Act desegregated public accommodations, the '65 Act overturned racial discrimination in the vote. When we get change in the federal law, we see ordinaries, that is bishops and prelates calling for obedience, quite often, to those changes. Equally important, I think there's a commitment to public education, and so that, of course, led prelates to either endorse the Brown decision or to oppose attempts to stop the implementation of that decision.

It's also worth pointing out that some bishops were very reluctant to act, and often it takes federal pressure to lead them to act. And federal pressure is not operated directly, it's more a case of persuasion. If you think of President John F. Kennedy -- in 1963 called in religious leaders, white religious leaders to the White House, and called on them to support the Civil Rights bill that he was proposing. And of course, Kennedy was a Catholic, as we all know. So that created even more pressure on the prelates to try and respond to that.

But we also got more direct pressure as well. An example of that is the Civil Rights Act in 1964 included a mandate that any federal aid to education had to be to schools that had non-discrimination. That also applied to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Federal fund funding was tied to desegregation. So was the case with Medicare and Medicaid that came in as part of Johnson's Great Society. If hospitals wanted to get federal funds, then they had to be non-discriminatory. So of course, we have Catholic children. Catholic schools are in receipt of federal monies and Catholic hospitals in receipt of federal monies. If they want those monies, they have to end discrimination. So, there are those pressures as well.

When we look at religious orders, certainly we see racism among members, white members of religious orders. Certainly, we see this quite a lot. We also see at, with his orders, trying to press bishops to desegregate. So it's not all a one way, one way street. When we look at these as we get into the 1960s, there's an increasing decline in vocations, often in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. There is a rise in tuition costs in Catholic schools, and those pressures of a loss of teachers with a decline of vocations, rising costs of running schools created another pressure to, to desegregate schools. Why run a black school or a white school when they could be merged? So quite often, we get this kind of additional pressure, at least for schools being merged. But quite often, Black Catholic schools are being closed and their pupils, their students are being assigned to white Catholic schools, at least the opportunity, in theory, to go to them. In practice, it's a bit more complicated than that. Quite often, black Catholics could not afford the tuition fees in the white Catholic schools, which were better funded and better equipped on the basis of their tuition are better support acquired from by the diocese.

Public schools for themselves are desegregating, so more African Americans went to those public schools who had previously been Catholic schools.

It's worth pointing out, I think here, is that when we look at African American Catholic schools in the South, and I think it's true more widely, quite often, and I think in a large majority of cases, the enrollment of African American Catholic schools was in fact Protestant, or if you prefer non-Catholic. And when we see the pattern of Catholic school desegregation in the South, what prelates often say is that white Catholic schools will admit all Catholics regardless of race. What in effect that does, of course, is to exclude Black Protestant children who had been enrolled in Black Catholic schools. So that has the effect of limiting the practical desegregation of formerly white Catholic schools very significantly. So, we get a lot of token change when we look at the actual patterns on the ground as desegregation began to be implemented.

So that's a kind of a broad picture. What I'd like to do now is to talk a little bit more about the chronology of this to see the pattern in which desegregation began to be approached and how it was implemented.

Essentially, what I think we see here are three main stages.

The first of these from 1945 through to 1954.

The second of them between the brown is issue of 1954 and 1965.

And the third and final one from 1966 on through to the early 1970s.

The first stage, 1945 to 1954, the Brown decision was seen a few dioceses, mostly in the peripheral south. And when I talk about the peripheral south, I mean the seven states that surround the deep south ([https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Deep\\_South](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Deep_South)). So in the peripheral south, a few diocese begin to have limited piecemeal desegregation. In the second stage, between 1954 and 1965, every southern diocese began parochial school desegregation. Those in the deep south usually acted only alongside and sometimes after the public schools who began to desegregate under federal court orders. In the third stage, which takes us from 1966 through the early 1970s, all diocese attempted to achieve desegregation in all of their institutions. Sometimes they closed Black Catholic schools and churches as part of this drive to desegregate. Sometimes they've paired Black Catholics and white schools together, but it's a kind complicated picture when we look on the ground.

So that's a kind of a broad look at the chronology of it. So, I'd like to kind of fill in a few more details. Give, give a few examples of that, and having done that draw some kind of conclusions as well.

I'd like to look at this first stage now.

If we take the first stage, which is from 1945 through to 1954, a few Catholic prelates in the South began to criticize and criticize publicly segregation, and it began the first tentative steps to removing segregation from their diocese. They also began to express, with caution, the idea of having African-American admitted to seminaries and have African-American priests in a diocese. They're always conceived of African-American priests serving African-American Catholic churches' missions rather than serving Catholics regardless of race.

Interestingly enough, I think in late 1940s, the apostolic delegate to United States, who was of course Rome's representative of the country – the apostolic delegate began to vet the racial views of potential candidates to be appointed as bishops. So, that has a long-term consequence, of course. And we do find the apostolic delegates making public declarations against segregation, as well as a few of the bishops in peripheral south.

And a few of the bishops went beyond words. So, we have examples of the prelates in New Orleans, in Galveston, Houston, and Raleigh, North Carolina ordering an end to segregation in churches. So, this takes us into the early 1950s, but we see very little efforts at enforcement and very little monetary of compliance. So, the words are there, sometimes where a pastoral letters issued calling for an end to segregation of churches. There isn't a great deal of enforcement.

There's one famous example where there was, and that was bishop's Bishop Walters in Raleigh, who went to a small church in Newton to preside over desegregating the church. And there was white lay opposition. There were people, mobs, gathered outside the church, and Walters went to the church, braved the mobs outside the church and desegregation went ahead.

But in fact, even a few years later, African Americans and whites sat on opposite sides of that church. So a church that was normally desegregated was, in practice, still segregated. In 1953, Archbishop Robert Lucey of San Antonio asked religious orders to desegregate their schools in his archdiocese, but he only asked them to desegregate the schools which was single sex reasoning that there'd be less opposition. Because one of the fears of white segregationists try to stroke was this idea that if black and white children went to school together, eventually they would have children together. So since in single sex schools there's no question of the sexes meeting in those schools. So, Lucey thought that would be a good way to, to start.

But when Lucey did this, he only asked for Catholics to be admitted to formally white Catholic schools regardless of race. So again, it was a quite limited--the impact of desegregation. And there were very few African American Catholics in the Archdiocese of San Antonio, so we're talking about quite small numbers here.

Most Southern prelates didn't comment on racial issues before Brown, either because they didn't feel discomfort about segregation, or they didn't have moral qualms about Jim Crow, or because they feared raising divisive issues. Some of them also feared exposing the church and its members to opposition and discrimination. Some of the older prelates - some who had been appointed in the 1920s -- remembered the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, which of course was not only anti African American, it was also anti-Catholic. They were concerned they would put Catholics at risk if they desegregated Catholic institutions when there was no secular change in their diocese at that time. By early 1954, the NAACP was arguing cases that would lead to a Brown decision. So, everybody knew that Supreme Court was going to have to rule about rule on desegregation in the public school system.

In May 1954, which is just before the Brown decision was issued, Bishop Peter Ireton of Richmond said that he would desegregate Catholic schools in the city of Richmond Catholic high schools in the city of Richmond in September in the fall. So, he knew of course, there was going to be change, and he was kind of preparing people for that change.

In most cases, we don't see much change until we get to the aftermath of the Brown decision. So that takes us into the second stage. Catholic church ordinaries called for obedience to the law for respectful authority. And accordingly, no Catholic prelates and no diocesan newspaper condemned the Brown decision, and some prelates supported it. That was usually in the peripheral southern states. The only exception when an archbishop or bishop expressed support for Brown within the Deep South was in New Orleans. {There is an} interesting quote, I think from Bishop William Adrian of Nashville in response to Brown. What Adrian said was, "This is the law of the land, and it must be obeyed."

The Deep South bishops and diocesan newspapers didn't comment on Brown, recognized it was a divisive issue and didn't take a stance. It's also true in the deep South, when we look at popular population ratios, there were high numbers of African-American populations in the deep South, which seem to contribute to this segregationist sentiment of many white Catholics in those states as well as whites more generally.

The Catholic Church met annually as a body, but said nothing on segregation, not in 1954; nothing until 1958--so four years after Brown. And I think it's worth looking at the statement they issued, the Catholic hierarchy issued in November of 1958, which was called "Racial Discrimination and the Christian Conscience." What the statement said was - it expressed the hope that the overwhelming majority of whites would support full rights for African Americans, whether we're talking about the Constitution, whether we're talking about voting, -- that full rights for African Americans were part of America's democratic tradition, and they should have that share in that tradition.

Declarations assert that all people were equal in the sight of God and argue that segregation by its very nature was discriminatory. But, there's an important caveat here. The bishop's caution that changes in what they called "deep-rooted attitudes" are not made overnight. They advocated what they saw as a middle ground between gradualism, which they said could be a cloak for inaction, but against what they also call called a rash impetuosity. They did not discuss racial segregation and discrimination in Catholic institutions at all and they didn't suggest any timetable for ending those discriminations either.

And the statement also suggested almost a parody between civil rights activists who are trying to get their constitutional rights and segregationists who are trying to deny those rights. So, the statement said that we need to seize the mantel of leadership from the agitator, meaning civil rights activists, and from the racists. Despite its shortcomings, what the statement did was put the Catholic Church as a body on a side of racial equality and desegregation for the first time. And progressive Catholics often were able to cite that statement in justification for their views. So. it was important as a justification and, for some, a motivation as well. And it did leave some Catholics to consider racial attitudes in the way they had not done before.

We also get in 1960s, 1963, we get "Pacem in Terris." Pope John XXIII said that racial discrimination can in no way be justified, and he also asserted a duty of those who were oppressed to claim their rights. And those statements were widely disseminating through pastoral letters. When we look at bishops in the peripheral south, it's worth noting too that the Catholic bishops issued a collective statement in August of 1963. So, a few months after "Pacem in Terris," which they called for equal rights in voting, jobs, housing, so forth.

And Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle of Washington gave the invocation at the Civil Rights March on Washington in August 1963, the famous march in which Martin Luther King gave the 'I Have a Dream' speech. Over 200,000 people attended that Mass, and the estimates are, that at least 10,000 of them were Catholic, and that included clergy and laity as well. Most prelates, though, were ambivalent, if not hostile to civil rights demonstrations. So, we always have to weigh these different aspects when we look at this picture. Famously, Archbishop Toolen in Alabama opposed a Selma civil rights demonstrations in 1965 although many Catholic laity from outside the south and some clergy from outside of south did participate in those demonstrations with Martin Luther King called on religious of the nation to converge on Selma to show their support.

The third stage, and to finish and come to a conclusion, is from 1966 onward. And there we see an acceleration of desegregation by bishops who had begun the process and the first school desegregation by bishops who hadn't. So the last bishops in the South to desegregate the schools were the dioceses of Alexandria and Diocese of Lafayette. And this takes us into 1965. We have the pressure of civil rights after 1964 and federal funds are attached to this. We get accelerating public school desegregation, and what happens in Lafayette and Alexandria -- it's a response to the federal court orders that segregated public schools are to follow, and they time the implementation of Catholic school desegregation with the implementation of public school desegregation. In the late 1960s, the federal government began to tighten up more in desegregating schools; to put in more regulations or more court decisions, and that created additional pressure to desegregate Catholic schools and not to be seen being behind what the public school system was doing.

But increasingly the way in which Catholic bishops desegregated schools and also churches was to close African-American churches and schools. And so desegregation came at a great cost because often, of course, Black Catholic church and schools were centers of the African-American community where families and communities were nurtured. And so there was a lot of opposition to those closings as well. Some African-American accepted the closures as a regrettable price, but a price to pay to get integration. Others were more critical. And we do see quite a few African-American Catholics, particularly among the young, leave because they're so disillusioned by the way in which desegregation is implemented -- really at the cost of African-American institutions.

Many whites, Catholics were not willing to accept desegregation. Some of them joined white flight beyond the reach of desegregation. That meant they could go to Catholic schools that were largely white. There were some white Catholics who had enrolled their children in public schools to avoid Catholic school desegregation, who then enrolled them back into Catholic schools because they were less desegregated than the public schools.

What I think we can find by the early 1970s is that overt support for segregation virtually disappears. Very few white Catholics are prepared to say they support segregation, but we still see a great deal of residential segregation. That reflects in church segregation in effect and, in effect, de facto school segregation. And we have a lot of token school desegregation, not so much the actual fact of it. There's still an awful long, long way to go when we get to that point. But there also, as a closing point, there was some formally militant segregationists who did change their views change their views in response to secular change, but also to what progressives were saying about the teachings of the church. So, there were some people who did have a change of heart. So, it's not all a negative picture, but there's still a great deal of a long way to go. It's, by no means, the end of the story, but that is the end of the story I'm going to tell today.