Supremely Human: The Civil Rights Activism of Memphis Catholics, 1961-1968

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What does the Church think of man? What needs to be recommended for the upbuilding of contemporary society? What is the ultimate significance of human activity throughout the world? People are waiting for an answer to these questions. From the answers it will be increasingly clear that the People of God and the human race in whose midst it lives render service to each other. Thus the mission of the Church will show its religious, and by that very fact, its supremely human character.[1]

This passage from the Catholic Church's 1965 statement on the Church in the Modern World encapsulates the struggles that not only the church, but also people throughout the United States were asking themselves as the Civil Rights Movement challenged them to reconsider injustices in modern society. In Memphis, a small group of Catholics applied their religious convictions about the dignity inherent in all humankind to further the cause of racial justice. In the process, they discovered the very human character, both positive and negative, of the Church as an institution.

As Memphians struggled to undo decades of racial discrimination in the 1950s and 60s, members of the Catholic Church in Memphis struggled along with it, sometimes leading the way. Although Catholics comprised only 2.2% of the state's population in 1966,[2] their activism had a significant impact on the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis. A motivated group of clergy and laypeople banded together in the Memphis Catholic

[1] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern world. 7 December 1965. Reprinted at the website of the Vatican, "Documents of the II Vatican Council." http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

[2] David M. Cheney, "Statistics, Diocese of Nashville," www.catholic-hierarchy.org. http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dnash.html

Human Relations Council to work for change through causes including school integration, inner-city poverty, and the 1968 Sanitation Workers' Strike.[3]

The Church would have to come a long way, however, before it could set itself as an example in the crusade for racial justice. A series of theological changes, known collectively as the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), helped to communicate the church's social teachings in a way that encouraged activism among Catholics. In Tennessee, a change in church leadership exemplified this change in theology when in 1963 a new bishop, Joseph Durick, was appointed to the diocese. This new bishop, in decided contrast to the former leadership, embodied the reforming spirit of the Second Vatican Council and applied that spirit to the Civil Rights Movement.

This essay examines the activism among Memphis Catholics in issues of racial justice and the religious forces behind their motivation. It argues that the conjunction of the Second Vatican Council and the Civil Rights Movement in American society was crucial in creating a culture of change within the church. Catholics looked both inward to examine problems in the church, and outward to address issues in the larger social order. Their work was as much about changing the church as it was about changing society.

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Vatican II: A Theological Revolution

American society underwent an upheaval in the years following World War II, and, in this regard, the Catholic Church was no different. Aware that the church's liturgy and social teaching needed modernizing, Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican

[3] Catholic Human Relations Council Papers, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library [hereinafter MSCR].

Council (1962-1965) to address the church's role in a changing world.[4] Among the most dramatic changes were shifts towards greater involvement of laypeople and an expectation for the individual to take greater responsibility for the direction of his or her spiritual life. For a church organized on the principle of hierarchical obedience, the implications of the changes called for in the council were far-reaching.

In his work on the effects of Vatican II, Richard P. McBrien defines two sets of characteristics of the church according to whether one is referring to before or after the Council. He terms these two periods "preconciliar" and "postconciliar." The preconciliar Catholic is concerned with authority and obedience. One might emphasize devotion to Mary, view the Catholic Church as the one true church, believe in the infallibility of the pope, and have a high sense of reverence for priests and nuns. Postconciliar Catholics, on the other hand, are likely to put more stress on freedom and responsibility. One would look to Jesus as a role model, view service as an important Christian ministry, and recognize the crucial roles of the laity, including women, in the work of the church.[5]

The organized activism of Catholic clergy and laity during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s was only possible because of the crucial conjunction of the ideals of Vatican II and the societal movement for racial justice. The new emphasis on social problems and ministries of service led many Catholics to view racial justice as a religious calling. However, progressive Catholics realized that they first had to remove the wooden beam of racism from their own eye before they could confront the

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[4] Richard P. McBrien, *Report on the Church: Catholicism After Vatican II*. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), p.xvii.
[5] *Ibid*., p.1.

splinter of institutionalized racism in America.[6] The seed of Civil Rights activism among Catholics began with recognizing the elements of racism within the church itself.

Catholicism in Memphis

Catholicism was brought to Memphis by white Irish, German, and Italian immigrants in the nineteenth century. The first Mass, or Catholic worship service, was celebrated in 1839, and the construction of several churches followed, largely built by and for each respective ethnic group. A group of Dominican priests from St. Peter's Church founded a parish for freed slaves in 1875; however, it did not last. The first sizable African-American Catholic population in Memphis developed in the early 1900s, following white Catholic congregations by about 65 years.[7] The two parishes established in the twentieth century for African-Americans would be successful: St. Anthony's, founded in 1909 along with a school on the corner of Hill and Concord Streets (where St. Jude Hospital is now), and St. Augustine Parish, established by Franciscan fathers in 1937. St. Augustine, located on Walker Street near the present site of LeMoyne-Owen College, served those living south of Madison Avenue, while St. Anthony's ministered to those north of Madison.[8]

While Catholicism was well-established in Memphis by the twentieth century, it was by no means the most prominent Christian denomination. The South, especially Tennessee, was a Protestant-dominated culture. Catholics were sparse: in 1950, for example, there were only 37,501 Catholics in the state, accounting for 1.2% of the

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[6] Reference to Matthew 7:3 (The New American Bible).
[7] Perre Magness. "Catholic ties grew in 20th Century," *Commercial Appeal*, 27 June 1996.
[8] Milton J. Guthrie, "Beginnings of the Community of White and African American Catholics in West Tennessee: A Sketch," in *Between the Rivers: The Catholic Heritage of West Tennessee* (Memphis: The Catholic Diocese of Memphis, 1996), pp.438-439.

population.[9] Memphis and Nashville, as Tennessee's main centers of European immigration in the nineteenth century, contained the bulk of them. While the church was not known for its size, it did have a reputation for its work in the community. Most notable were its schools and hospitals, which admitted students and patients regardless of their religious affiliation. "The Catholic church has a very good image in Memphis," said Father Greenspun, a Paulist priest who specialized in inner-city ministry, in 1968. "I think it goes back to the yellow fever thing when so many priests and nuns died here. This is still in the consciousness."[10]

Because it was a minority church with significant and noticeable ministries in the city, the Catholic Church in Memphis was in a unique position to enter into the Civil Rights Movement. While its followers were few in number, the church had the potential to reach a greater number of Memphians through the numerous institutions associated with it. In addition, the structured and hierarchical nature of Catholicism facilitated organization of racial justice groups across parish and diocesan lines, allowing local groups to draw membership from numerous parishes within the city and then affiliate themselves with national groups, such as the National Catholic Council for Interracial Justice. The emphasis on obedience within the hierarchy also meant that a bishop had the power to define and enforce racial policies for his entire diocese. (The Diocese of Nashville included the entire state of Tennessee until 1970, when the Diocese of Memphis was formed to oversee the western portion of the state.). However, the opinions of American bishops on issues of race ranged as widely in the 1950s and 1960s as did the opinions of individuals in society at large. Many older clergy who had been

[9] Cheney,

[10] Greenspun interview, Sanitation Workers Strike Collection, Mississippi Valley Special Collection, University of Memphis [hereinafter MVSC], Box 21, Folder 79.

raised in the Jim Crow South held a more conservative view, favoring segregation, while others with a wider scope, possibly influenced by the social teachings of the Second Vatican Council, were more focused on eradicating the social injustices of a segregated culture. This dichotomy between conservative and progressive was especially pronounced in the struggle for racial justice among Memphis Catholics.

"A Chalice of Consecrated Catholicism:"[11] The Conservative Reign of Bishop Adrian

Bishop William Lawrence Adrian, who headed the diocese of Nashville (the entire state of Tennessee) from 1936 to 1969, did not have a progressive agenda for the church. His ideas about the mission of the Catholic Church were very "old school," as one Memphis Catholic, who has been active in the church since the 1950s, put it.[12] Catholic scholar Thomas Stritch, author of *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, wrote that Bishop Adrian "looked askance…at Vatican Council II." Although all American bishops were invited to participate in the three years of the council, Adrian chose not to attend any of its sessions.[13]

Adrian was intent on maintaining the preconciliar principles of obedience to authority, even well into the 1960s. In an encyclical published in the diocesan newspaper, *The Tennessee Register,* in 1964, Adrian argued that obedience to church

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[11] Reference to Bishop Adrian at his retirement in 1969. *The Tennessee Register*, 19 September 1969. The quotation is embedded in an article focusing on the newly appointed progressive Bishop Durick, and reads: "With the valued and harmonious help of all, Bishop Adrian has fashioned a chalice of consecrated Catholicism and offered it here in the Volunteer State…"
[12] Loyce Winfield, interview with the author, 5 July 2006.
[13] Thomas Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee: The Sesquicentennial Story* (Nashville: The Catholic Center, 1987), p.320.

authority would have prevented much of the violence of the Civil Rights Movement.[14] At the same time that Catholic progressives were citing the life of Christ as an example of anti-establishmentarianism, Adrian used the Vatican II pronouncement of Pope Paul VI that renewal of the church should be brought about through "assimilating interiorly her true spirit of obedience to Christ" to argue for a greater obedience of laypeople to church clergy. He cited Romans 13:2, that "all lawful authority is from God," and "He who resists this authority resists the ordinance of God; and they that resist, bring on themselves condemnation," to explain that Catholics are bound to respect the authority of "the Pope, the Bishop, the pastor, the religious superior, the civil authority, the parent, and the teacher."[15]

Adrian's view on racial justice is best conveyed in his policy towards Catholic school integration. After the 1954-1955 Supreme Court decisions ordering public school integration "with all deliberate speed," Bishop Adrian knew that Catholic schools in his diocese would have to react. Corresponding to his views on obedience to authority, Adrian did not give his opinion, but instead proclaimed, "This is the law of the land, and it must be obeyed."[16] Adrian was not an advocate of swift change. According to Stritch, he allowed the four deans, or head priests, of the Nashville Diocese to decide "how deliberate their compliance with the law would be,"[17] most likely with strong instruction from the bishop himself. In Nashville, plans for gradual integration did not begin until

[14] *The Tennessee Register*, 9 October 1964.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] Stritch, p.334.
[17] *Ibid.*

the spring of 1963 and culminated in the fall of 1966 with the integration of high schools.[18]

In Memphis, integration of Catholic schools took even longer, with the first integration occurring in 1967 at St. Therese of Little Flower School Elementary School, and the first major integration of a high school in 1970 at Catholic High School.[19] Father Joseph Leppert, pastor of St. Therese of Little Flower Church at the time, was in favor of a faster and more intentional integration. "The bishop asked the pastors of Memphis to discuss the program of integration and the majority of them decided they would follow the plan of the public schools. A few of us were in the minority group, but we followed the decision of the majority…the bishop recommended that."[20] However, when the African-American parish of St. Anthony's closed in 1965, Father Leppert had his chance to informally integrate both his church and school by welcoming the members of St. Anthony's to worship and fellowship with Little Flower Parish.

"A Strong and Determined Spirit"[21]: Father Leppert and Integration of Little Flower Parish

Father Leppert's decision to integrate St. Therese of Little Flower Parish in 1965 was radical, representing the first time a Catholic church in Memphis was intentionally integrated. Although, in Leppert's words, "the church has been integrated always,"[22] meaning that blacks had never been barred from attending a white church, very few chose

[18] Dr. Joan Zurhellen, Archivist of Diocese of Memphis. Email correspondence with the author, 10 July 2006.
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] Leppert Interview, 1968, "Sanitation Workers Strike Collection," MVSC, Box 22, Folder 144.
[21] Reference to description of Leppert in *Between the Rivers: The Catholic Heritage of Tennessee*, p.440.
[22] Leppert Interview, 1968, "Sanitation Workers Strike Collection," MVSC, Box 22, Folder 144.

to attend them because there were separate parishes designated for African-Americans. Those who did were not welcomed by most of the white congregations, nor many of the pastors.

Even before the full integration of St. Therese Parish in 1965, Father Leppert was constantly finding small, yet meaningful ways to break down the racism that existed within his own congregation. Bettye Donahue, an African-American who grew up in Memphis, first met Father Leppert during a summer vacation from her college in Washington, D.C. Donahue's family was not Catholic, but she attended Catholic school and converted to Catholicism on her own at the age of 18. Her family lived in the Vollentine neighborhood near Little Flower Church, so Donahue walked there to Mass instead of traveling to St. Anthony's. "I was very impressed with him because he welcomed me and anybody else who came there, even though his church was predominantly white." She told him that she had been active in the Legion of Mary, a Catholic prayer group, at college, and Fr. Leppert invited her to a meeting of the Legion of Mary at Little Flower to speak about her involvement at school. "I don't think that he told them that I was black, though, because when I came to the meeting in the rectory they were shocked, you know, to see me there. But after we knelt and prayed a few minutes everybody sort of calmed down."[23]

When the black parish of St. Anthony's was closed due to the building of St. Jude's Hospital, the congregation built a smaller church on Vollentine Street. The congregation lost some members in the move, and eventually Bishop Adrian decided that the parish was too small to employ a full-time priest, so he shut it down.[24] The majority

[23] Bettye Donahue, interview with the author, 11 July 2006.
[24] *Ibid*.

of the members went to St. Augustine, the other black parish, where they felt more comfortable, but Fr. Leppert made sure to welcome them to Little Flower, and many decided to become members. "He saw this as what Christ would have done," remarked one Little Flower parishioner.[25]

> "Monsignor [Leppert] said that he felt segregation was a moral issue…and that as Catholics, the church should not wait for the courts to desegregate all public accommodations in Memphis, but that the church should set an example… they should show the non-religious community that we wanted to do the right thing. His goal was to desegregate the church at Little Flower and every organization in the church."[26]

Fr. Leppert was not ignorant of the issues of racial justice outside of the church. Instead, he was wise to realize that at this point in time, his sphere of influence was greater within the church. By successfully integrating all the Catholic facilities and organizations under his control, he could prove that peaceful integration was possible, and use his parish as an example for others. He, and other members who supported integration, believed that this was one of the best ways to be a Christian witness in 1960s Memphis.

Reaction to Little Flower Integration

The reaction from the white population of St. Therese of Little Flower parish was mixed. Some families showed their disapproval by discontinuing their monetary contributions or joining the white flight to the suburbs of east Memphis. Some who stayed, but did not support integration, simply did not speak to the African-American parishioners. "There was a lot of resistance," Bettye Donahue remembers.[27]

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[25] Loyce Winfield, interview with the author, 5 July 2006.
[26] Bettye Donahue, interview with the author, 11 July 2006.
[27] *Ibid*.

According to an article by Rev. Milton Guthrie in *Between the Rivers: The Catholic Heritage of West Tennessee*, there was quite a stir the first Sunday that a large number of African-Americans attended Mass at St. Therese. After they sat down, some white parishioners got up from their pews and moved to seats in front of them, reasoning that "No black person is going to be in front of me."[28] These parishioners had become so accustomed to the "lawful" segregation which pervaded the American south that they could not see past skin color to accept even Catholic African-Americans as equals in the church.

Before integration, St. Therese was one of the largest parishes in the city, but white-flight and integration took its toll and the parish population dropped significantly. Those who were against integration learned quickly that they would either have to learn to get along with African-Americans in their church or leave. "There were very heated discussions about the desegregation issue," Donahue remembers. "People met in the cafeteria of the school, and there was yelling and screaming, that sort of thing. Monsignor [Leppert] was very calm and patient and didn't let anything disturb him." He remained firm throughout these meetings, explaining that the church would be desegregated, and "that's all there was to it."[29]

Loyce Winfield was an atypical white Catholic in that she and her husband chose to go to St. Therese *because* of its commitment to desegregation. The Winfields had been active in Holy Rosary Parish, located on Park Avenue, but felt they "couldn't give witness to what [they] believed in" at the "all white" parish. They bought property in the

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[28] Guthrie, "Beginnings of the Community," p.440.
[29] Bettye Donahue, interview with the author, 11 July 2006.

Vollentine-Evergreen neighborhood, which was suffering from white flight, so that their children could attend an integrated school and grow up in an integrated society.[30]

Mrs. Winfield was also one of the teachers of the first integrated classes at Little Flower School in 1967. They had a shortage of teachers, most likely because of the fear associated with teaching in a newly integrated school, so Father Leppert recruited Loyce to teach even though she was not a certified teacher. One of the Sisters who ran the school told Loyce that she would help her paperwork along by reporting her status as "degree pending."[31]

The sixth grade classroom that Mrs. Winfield walked into on the first day of school contained 45 students. In the 1960s, Catholic schools were still parochial, meaning that only families who lived within the geographical boundaries of the parish or who had special permission could attend. "We had a few students in our school, black students, who were there because their pastors gerrymandered their parish boundaries in such a way that these children would be blocked out and couldn't attend." In addition to African-American students, Little Flower also had a large population of Cuban refugees fleeing Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution. "I taught Cubans, Italians, Irish, blacks, all different nationalities," Mrs. Winfield recollects. "Little Flower was a multi-cultural parish at a time when it was not popular to be multi-cultural."[32]

Formation of the Memphis Catholic Human Relations Council

Because of the impending need for multi-cultural understanding and the problems of poverty and justice associated with racial integration, a group of concerned Catholics

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[30] Loyce Winfield, interview with the author, 5 July 2006.
[31] *Ibid.*h
[32] Loyce Winfield, telephone interview with the author, 29 June 2006.

began to meet with Father Leppert in the early 1960s to discuss these issues. This group became the Memphis Catholic Human Relations Council when they affiliated with the National Catholic Council of Interracial Justice based out of Chicago, but at first they were simply an informal interracial group.[33]

Undoubtedly, many Memphis Catholics who joined the Catholic Human Relations Council (CHRC) were influenced by the teachings and practices of Leppert. The first meetings were held at Little Flower Parish, but also included the pastor of St. Augustine Church, some St. Augustine parishioners, and some men from St. Anthony's parish.[34] From the beginning, the council intentionally included Catholics of different races and backgrounds and from different areas of the city.

The purpose of the Council, as stated in the CHRC Constitution, was "A) To promote an appreciation of man's dignity among all the elements of our community, B) To teach interracial justice and charity and their practical applications, and C) To cooperate with public and private agencies in the pursuit of decent human relations."[35] Their mission was highly educational and focused on productive change. They were far-sighted and knew that integration was only the beginning of the societal changes that the church and the wider community would have to deal with in the coming years. At the outset, however, black-white relations within the church were their main concern, because it was the most pressing issue. Fr. Leppert emphasized that this was not their

[33] Leppert Interview, 1968, "Sanitation Workers Strike Collection," MVSC, Box 22, Folder 144. Because the council began informally, there is no one conclusive date of their formation. Dates given in sources range from 1961 to 1963.
[34] *Ibid.*
[35] CHRC, *Constitution*, "Catholic Human Relations Council Papers," MSCR, Folder B.

exclusive function, "but because of the numbers of Negroes in our community, we felt that was a major concern. And it has been practically our whole concern…"[36]

Bettye Donahue remembers that the first members of the CHRC largely came from the membership of VECA, the Vollentine-Evergreen Community Association, which was working to stop white flight in Vollentine-Evergreen by encouraging fairness in bank-lending and real-estate sales. This group, though not entirely Catholic, held its meetings at Little Flower.[37] Ann Shafer, a former member of Holy Rosary Parish, the CHRC, and a community activist, recalls that there were so few activists and so many causes that membership lists always overlapped and sometimes were almost identical. "We were all members of the same groups…We were all radicals in that day and age."[38] CHRC members were committed to at least two things: the church and change. One of the basic reasons the group was formed was "to smoothly integrate Catholic institutions."[39] St. Joseph's Catholic hospital was still segregated at the time of their formation, as were Memphis Catholic schools.[40]

One of the ways CHRC members brought about racial understanding was by attending Mass together as a council at various churches where the pastors were resistant to integration. They did this quarterly and notified the pastors in advance of their intention to visit.[41] They knew that some pastors would not encourage a visit from the interracial group because of their potential to broach heated issues. One pastor in the Frazier community blatantly told them not to come. The council respected the pastor's

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[36] Leppert Interview, 1968, "Sanitation Workers Strike Collection," MVSC, Box 22, Folder 144.
[37] Bettye Donahue, "Working to become the beloved Community," *West Tennessee Catholic*, 17 February 2005.
[38] Ann Shafer, interview with the author, 28 June 2006. Ann is Caucasian.
[39] Loyce Winfield, interview with the author, 5 July 2006.
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] CHRC council minutes, June 1966. "Catholic Human Relations Council Papers," MSCR, Folder F.

wishes, accepting that the parish was not ready for a group like the CHRC. "It was not unusual," Bettye Donahue remembers. Other churches accepted them, but Donahue could tell that some people were uncomfortable.[42]

The parish visits were valuable because they uncovered the deep-seated prejudice that some Catholics did not know they had. Publicity and education were key concerns early on. Members volunteered to speak at other organizations or events in the city to disseminate information about their mission, and the council also sponsored visiting speakers.[43] Father Walter Clancy from the Little Rock CHRC was one such speaker. "We must bring our fellow Catholics to an awareness," he stated in his 1965 address. "Only recently could any institution—including the church—have moved against injustice."[44]

Issues Supported by the Catholic Human Relations Council

The work of the Catholic Human Relations Council fell into three main categories: integrating church institutions, improving human relations in the city of Memphis, and education to bring about understanding, including ecumenism. The council was concerned with school integration even before the 1967 integration of Little Flower Elementary School. In September of 1965, Allegra Turner, an African-American council member and wife of the local NAACP president, picketed Immaculate Conception High School for refusing to admit her son Eric Michael. Turner, a fifth-generation Catholic, had enrolled her son at the school the previous spring. During the summer, boundary lines were redrawn for the parochial schools, putting the Turner's

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[42] Bettye Donahue, interview with the author, 11 July 2006.
[43] CHRC council minutes, June 1966. "Catholic Human Relations Council Papers," MSCR, Folder F.
[44] *Ibid.*, 11 June 1965.

home in the district for the predominantly African-American St. Thomas parish instead of the majority-Caucasian Immaculate Conception parish. After several days of protests in which Turner was joined by other Catholics, as well as members of the NAACP, she enrolled Eric Michael in another desegregated Catholic school. She decided to stop the protests because she felt that "we have accomplished our purpose, namely, to publicize the extent to which deliberate injustice was leveled at a child, whose parents represented the real target."[45] Other African-American students had been rejected from Immaculate Conception School earlier that summer. In June, Margaret Dichtel reported to the CHRC that two girls had been rejected.[46] Telephone calls to the school about the girls' admission were not answered. The council wrote to Bishop Adrian about the problem, and in August both of the girls were admitted.[47] The redrawing of parish lines had effectually segregated parochial schools by race, but the work of the CHRC ensured that those students of color who lived within the official parish boundaries would still be allowed to attend the majority-Caucasian school.

In the years before the official instructions came from the bishop to desegregate Catholic schools, the CHRC did what they could to publicize the problems of segregation in schools, such as the Immaculate Conception debate. The council also worked to eliminate racial discrimination in the hiring of teachers. In July of 1965 they discussed the need to hire "qualified negro teachers" for the still-segregated schools.[48] The following year they petitioned Bishop Durick, who had been appointed co-adjutor to help

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[45] "Catholic Mother Pickets School," *The Tri-State Defender*, 11 September 1965. Also "School is Picketed," *Commercial Appeal*,. 2 September 1965.
[46] CHRC meeting minutes. 4 June 1965. "Catholic Human Relations Council Papers," MSCR, Folder F. Dichtel was Caucasian.
[47] *Ibid*.. 6 August 1965.
[48] *Ibid.*, 9 July 1965.

Bishop Adrian, asking him to write a letter to all pastors in the diocese encouraging them to observe the federal equal opportunity employment policy and place special emphasis on hiring African-American teachers.[49] Bishop Durick responded to their request, instructing all Catholic schools in the diocese that racial discrimination would not be permitted in the hiring of teachers.[50] The council also encouraged the education of African-American students who would not normally be able to attend Catholic schools by providing scholarships.[51]

The CHRC also supported issues that would affect the larger community, such as fair housing policies and inner-city poverty. In 1965 they took on improvement of the Fowler Homes housing project, organizing a day care center for the 1400 children living in the area. Later in the year they led a food drive and Thanksgiving celebration for residents.[52] Fair housing had always been one of their concerns, from the beginning of the council in the Vollentine-Evergreen neighborhood. The council tried to curb white flight by recruiting Catholic real estate agents to support open housing. Through fair policies in real estate sales, they hoped to shape attitudes of white residents so that "panic selling" would not occur.[53] To support this issue through legislation, they petitioned Tennessee Congressmen Robert Everett and Thomas Murray to back passage of the Fair Housing Bill,[54] (the bill would eventually be passed into law in 1968, after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. brought greater attention to the Civil Rights Movement).

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[49] *Ibid*., June 1966.
[50] *Ibid.*, 8 July 1966.
[51] *Ibid.*, June 1966.
[52] *Ibid.*, 10 September 1965, 12 November 1965, 10 December 1965.
[53] *Ibid.*, 14 July 1967.
[54] *Ibid.,* 1 July 1966.

In terms of ecumenicalism, they worked together with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and other Protestant and Jewish groups to encourage tolerance and understanding. In 1968 they helped to sponsor a Rearing Children of Goodwill workshop. Locally, the workshop was a non-denominational effort by Memphis women to educate mothers on how to raise their children without instilling in them the racial prejudices that abounded in society. The program was part of a larger national effort for which the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice trained leaders.[55] To ease relations between Catholics and Jews, which was also one of the aims of the Second Vatican Council, the CHRC co-hosted a Jewish-Catholic dialogue with local Jewish congregations in 1966.[56] And when the Protestant SCLC held a national meeting in Memphis in late 1968, the CHRC offered housing and use of buildings to the group.[57] However, the majority of their education efforts concentrated on reaching Catholics. They hosted numerous Masses for peace and speakers on justice and poverty so that Catholics would understand and join their mission.[58] Education among Catholics was critical, because in the early 1960s, many did not understand the seriousness of the issues driving the Civil Rights Movement.

The Church and Communism

In the 1960s, the United States was in the midst of a Cold War with Soviet Russia. Many Americans were fearful of military confrontation and infiltration of communist sympathizers and spies. The Catholic Church publicly opposed communism because of

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[55] *Ibid.*, 2 August 1968.
[56] *Ibid.*, 14 January 1966.
[57] *Ibid.*, 2 August 1968.
[58] For examples, see CHRC meeting minutes 14 March 1966 and 15 April 1966. "Catholic Human Relations Council Papers," MSCR, Folder F.

its atheistic worldview. However, pastors and other church leaders handled the issue with varying degrees of vigor. One of the most adamant was Fr. Edward J. Cleary of St. Paul's Church in Whitehaven, a suburb of Memphis. "The Catholic Church hates atheistic communism," he reported to the *Whitehaven Press* in 1964. "The Pope has called it 'intrinsically evil.' There can be no co-existence… even if the alternative be nuclear war and total annihilation of the human race."[59] A flurry of newspaper articles covered Fr. Cleary's views after he controversially spoke favorably about the John Birch Society in a sermon.[60]

Cleary's comments were controversial because the Catholic Church does not allow priests to use the pulpit to circulate political views.[61] For instance, during the presidential campaign of John F. Kennedy, who was a practicing Catholic, priests were told that they could encourage their congregants to vote, but could not speak in support of any particular candidate or political party.[62] Cleary, who had been holding "educational" classes on communism and how to combat it for three years,[63] defended himself by arguing that the John Birch Society was not a political organization because it had no political candidates and did not seek political offices.[64] In previous years, however, Cleary had written a series of overtly political epistles which he published in the Sunday bulletins of St. Paul's church. In 1963, for example, he warned against John F. Kennedy

[59] Sallie Willis. "Cleric Pursues Fight Against Communism." *Whitehaven Press*, 22 October 1964.
[60] The John Birch Society was an ultra-conservative group dedicated to preserving the U.S. Constitution. Some members in the 1960s opposed the Civil Rights movement because they associated appeals for equal opportunity with a socialistic state. "John Birch Society," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Birch_Society
[61] "Bishop Clears Father Cleary," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, 9-19-64.
[62] Eleanor Kelley, "Pastor's Political Opinions Can't Always Be Expressed," *Commercial Appeal*, 12 September 1964.
[63] Sallie Willis, "Cleric Pursues Fight."
[64] "Bishop Says Priest Violated No Ethics," *Commercial Appeal*, 19 September 1964.

and his program of social liberalism, claiming that the president is "leading us into Socialism."[65]

Since the bishop is the ultimate authority when it comes to managing the priests in his diocese, Bishop Adrian had the power to censure Fr. Cleary. However, the conservative bishop condoned Cleary's outspoken views on the Birch Society instead. "Is the John Birch Society a political organization?" the bishop asked in a letter responding to the debate. "You answer that. It is an open question." To further absolve Cleary of any wrongdoing, he added that popes have "urged our bishops and priests to instruct our people on the evils of communism."[66] Bishop Adrian's apparent support for Cleary and members of the John Birch Society would impair the relationship between the Catholic Human Relations Council and the bishop when, in the following year, the CHRC itself would come under attack by members of the John Birch Society.

The Catholic Human Relations Council Under Attack

The Catholic Human Relations Council was a group fighting to change the establishment. As such, they were vulnerable to being labeled communist sympathizers. Loyce Winfield remembers that CHRC member Ann Shafer was labeled as a communist because she was outspoken against Fr. Cleary's support of the John Birch Society.[67] The persecution she faced from Fr. Cleary gave Shafer more reason to persevere. "Cleary, then, gets down on us in the CHRC because we were organized to oppose him,

[65] "The Epistle of the Pastor to the Parishoners of St. Paul," Parish Bulletin of St. Paul's Catholic Church, November 3, 1963.
[66] "Bishop Says Priest Violated No Ethnics."
[67] Loyce Winfield, interview with the author, 5 July 2006.

and he knew that."[68] Shafer recalls one particular CHRC meeting when Cleary and a group of men from Whitehaven showed up and called her out by name for her activism.[69] Rumors about this meeting spread as Memphis priests, parishioners, and CHRC members shared their opinions with Bishop Adrian.

Evidence of these meetings can be found in a series of letters that circulated among the CHRC and church officials in late June of 1965. A letter from Emory J. Geary, president, to Bishop Adrian, explains the council's view of the disruptive meeting:[70]

> "The Memphis Council was operated very quietly until April, 1965, when we were suddenly overrun by a group of Whitehaven people. These people from Whitehaven said quite openly that they intend to take over the Council. One of their more asinine reasons was that the Council is integrated."

Geary goes on to explain that the group from Whitehaven came in numbers large enough to overpower the regular CHRC members, and that they were very rude to the guest speakers who were talking about their work with Catholic Action at the University of Mississippi. Any Memphis-area Catholic could apply for membership in the CHRC, and five from the Whitehaven group were council members.

The first letter in the CHRC papers regarding this issue, dated 18 June 1965, is a letter of praise for the council from Edward J. Meeman, editor of the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* and president of the Memphis Committee on Community Relations, and is addressed to Bishop Adrian. He states that "several members of the Memphis CHRC"

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[68] Ann Shafer, interview with the author, 28 June 2006.
[69] *Ibid.*
[70] Correspondence from Geary to Adrian, 22 June 1965. "Catholic Human Relations Council Papers," MSCR, Folder G.

have asked him to give testimony about the group. He relates that he is impressed with the council and is "grateful to these Catholics for giving light and spreading Christian love…"[71] Meeman's position within the community and detachment from the inner-workings of the council lent him a certain objective authority to report the Memphis happenings to the bishop in Nashville. A June 23 letter from Rev. Edwin J. Wallin to Bishop Adrian describes recent past meetings in which members of the John Birch Society were "rude" and "impolite in their conduct" to the CHRC officers and priests, and "heckled continuously" during a presentation by two guest speakers. Wallin infers that these individuals are Catholics and says that the council believes they are there "to disband as well as disrupt the organization."[72] Mrs. David P. Guinle also wrote to both Bishop Adrian (and Fr. Leppert) about the same meeting, which, incidentally, was her first visit to the council. "My first visit to the Human Relations Council appalled me because of the flagrant disrespect shown a member of the clergy. The venom and hatred that emanated from some of the members almost made me ill. It was not only un-Catholic, it was un-Christian and uncharitable."[73] Mrs. Guinle withdrew her membership.

The struggles of the Catholic Human Relations Council against charges of communism were yet another front of opposition that emerged from within the church. It seemed quite probable that the Bishop would forbid the council to continue. Members

[71] Correspondence from Edward J. Meeman to Bishop William L. Adrian, 18 June 1965. "Catholic Human Relations Council Papers," MSCR, Folder G.
[72] Correspondence from Rev. Edwin J. Wallin to Bishop William L. Adrian, 23 June 1965. "Catholic Human Relations Council Papers," MSCR, Folder G.
[73] Correspondence from Mrs. David P. Guinle to Father Leppert, cc: Bishop Adrian, 24 June 1965. "Catholic Human Relations Council Papers," MSCR, Folder G.

would look back on these times as the fiercest opposition they ever faced.[74] However, the appointment of a new bishop, Joseph A. Durick, would ease many of the CHRC's hardships.

Bishop Durick: From "Birmingham Jail" to the Streets of Memphis

The appointment of Rev. Joseph Durick as coadjutor bishop in December of 1963 signified the transformation of the diocese of Nashville from a preconciliar to a postconciliar state. The position of coadjutor bishop is used within the church only in cases in which the original bishop needs assistance as leader of a diocese. The coadjutor serves alongside the incumbent and has right of succession if the incumbent resigns or dies. Joseph Durick served as a complement to the aging Bishop Adrian: in addition to embodying the reformist spirit of Vatican II, Durick was a crusader for racial justice and used his position in Tennessee to exemplify the life of an activist leader.

Although Durick's legacy would be one of racial reconciliation,[75] he began his career as a conformist. In the spring of 1963, while serving as auxiliary bishop in the diocese of Mobile-Birmingham, Alabama, he and five other Birmingham clergymen wrote a letter to Martin Luther King, Jr., requesting that King postpone his demonstrations in the city until the new municipal government had a chance to enact change on their own initiative. Their letter demonstrates the stance that many socially

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[74] Father Leppert refers to this subject in a 1968 interview with Joan Beifuss [Leppert Interview, 1968, "Sanitation Workers Strike Collection," MVSC, Box 22, Folder 144.] "…Some think it [the CHRC] is communistic because of their own personal interpretation of the Council and the issues. And for a while we had quite a bit of static…you might speak of it in those terms, and opposition, and misunderstanding, false impressions…. Many, many letters were sent into the Chancery office with regard to the Council (garbled words) and the like. So the bishop appointed a committee to look into the matter and after a thorough investigation the bishop gave his complete approval. And then Bishop Durrick came into the diocese and he was all for progress and the furtherance of human relations and he gave it his full support and since that time we have had a little happier experience."

[75] "Bishop Durick Dies at 79; Was Advocate for Racial Harmony," *Commercial Appeal*, 28 June 1994.

conservative clergy were taking at the time in regard to integration—that the process should come about in its own time, slowly and peacefully. "We were in good faith then, and whatever conviction we had we were sincere in trying to be helpful because we knew of the explosive nature," Bishop Durick would say about that letter five years later in May 1968, after he had eulogized King and marched in his memorial procession in Memphis.[76]

The letter which Durick co-wrote resulted in King's now famous "Letter from the Birmingham Jail."[77] In his response, King explains his contradictory views in terms analogous to that of postconciliar Catholicism. In his argument of just and unjust laws, he challenges legalistic obedience to authority in favor of a humanistic view based on morality. "Segregation… substitutes an 'I-it' relationship for an 'I-thou' relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things."[78] Durick would later paraphrase this same statement of King's as the most important teaching of the Second Vatican Council. "[King was] a great American and a great world citizen, one who uplifted the consciences of all who would listen so far as human dignity is concerned, which was a great lesson as I understand it of Vatican Two. To try to restore human dignity to every man…"[79] King called for Christians to engage their personal conscience and "come to the aid of justice" instead of defending the morally reprehensible status quo in relation to racial segregation.[80] Joseph Durick would meet King's challenge, later citing this letter as

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[76] Durick Interview, 1968, "Sanitation Workers Strike Collection," MVSC, Box 21, Folder 63.
[77] Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Reprinted at http://almaz.com/nobel/peace/MLK-jail.html
[78] *Ibid*.
[79] Durick interview.
[80] Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Reprinted at http://almaz.com/nobel/peace/MLK-jail.html

influential in his transformation.[81] As Bishop of the Nashville Diocese, Durick would march with Dr. King in Memphis in support of the striking sanitation workers. Bettye Donahue recalled her shock at learning about the letter: "I was very surprised [that Durick co-wrote the letter to King] because by the time that Bishop Durick was assigned to be Bishop of Tennessee…, *he was a changed man*."[82]

The Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike

The Sanitation Workers' Strike marked a turn-around in race relations in the city as well as a rededication of the CHRC to racial justice in the city. The strike, which began on February 28, 1968, was an attempt by the city's sanitation workers to gain a small pay increase (which would still quality them for welfare), recognition of their union, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and an end to deferential treatment by race within the department. The strike escalated into a combat along racial lines when the mayor, Henry Loeb, refused to negotiate with the largely African-American sanitation workers. Because public employees were not permitted to strike, he reasoned, the strike was illegal. The strike would gain national recognition due to the involvement of Dr. Martin Luther King, beginning with a March 18 rally and ending with his assassination in Memphis on April 4, 1968.[83]

Memphis religious leaders first became involved in the dispute as a non-partisan group to help with mediation. Churches and synagogues were such a large part of the culture of the city that involvement of ministers in one way or another was almost

[81] "Bishop Durick dies at 79."
[82] Bettye Donahue, interview with the author, 11 July 2006. Italics mine.
[83] Beverly G. Bond and Janann Sherman. *Memphis in Black and White*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2003), p.137.

inevitable. In 1968 the Chamber of Commerce listed 700 churches in the city and 1,161 clergymen. To encourage inter-faith cooperation, ministers organized into ecumenical councils. The Memphis Ministers Association was an integrated group of about one hundred ministers, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish (The city of Memphis was approximately 10% Catholic, 88% Protestant, and 2% Jewish). Father Leppert, as well as other Catholic priests, was a member. They had already touched upon race relations in their work, starting an inner-city ministry group and celebrating Race Relations Sunday the week before the strike began. The Baptist Pastors Alliance was another large association of ministers in Memphis, but was majority African-American. After the strike was announced, the Baptist Pastors Alliance approached the Memphis Ministers Association about investigating the strike together and the possible involvement of ministers. The group would eventually decide to support the strikers.[84]

The lay-led Catholic Human Relations Council also wanted to show public support for the strike. On the weekend of March 28, when demonstrations led by King became violent and white opposition hardened, members decided that "they would have to move immediately to support the strike or not bother at all."[85] They did not hold a meeting that weekend, but instead relied on telephone calls among members to come to a consensus. By Sunday night they had sent letters to Mayor Loeb, the City Council, and the *Commercial Appeal* declaring their support of union recognition and improved race relations. The CHRC was the second of only three integrated church groups to publicly

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[84] Joan Turner Beifuss, *At the River I Stand,* (Memphis, TN: B&W Books, 1985), pp.*59*-60, 62.
[85] *Ibid.*, p.174. Joan Beifuss was a member of the CHRC.

support the strike. The Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship was first, and the Presbytery Committee on Social Justice of the Presbyterian Church followed the CHRC by a week.[86]

Father Leppert was not happy with the CHRC's sudden announcement. He was aware from his work in the Ministers Association that the strike was a divisive issue, and thus he had counseled the CHRC to wait. His position as a priest within the Catholic Church still subjected him to obedience to the bishop,[87] and he wanted to at least inform the bishop of the CHRC's stance before making an announcement. Some of the members "were ready to fight if there were any clerical attempt to put restrictions on their right to write letters or take stands."[88] They were tired of waiting for the church officials to approve what they believed was the right thing to do. They were using their own understanding of the social calling of the gospels and wanted to practice the Vatican II definition of the church as "the people of God"[89] to make the church a leader in race relations. "They would not seek prior approval from the Bishop. This was the Vatican II Church," Joan Beifuss commented in *At the River I Stand*.[90]

Most of the members who were able did march in the protests staged by Dr. King.[91] Individual Catholic clergy also participated. Father Leppert, as well as Frs. Graham, Manuel, Greenspun, and Gary, were present the first night that King spoke in Memphis. Because they were representatives of the church, each priest cleared his decision to march with the bishop before participating. By 1968 Bishop Durick was in charge of overseeing the priests in the diocese, and he encouraged priests to march as

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[86] *Ibid.*
[87] Leppert Interview, 1968, "Sanitation Workers Strike Collection," MVSC, Box 22, Folder 144.
[88] Beifuss, p.175.
[89] Stritch, p.358.
[90] Beifuss, p.175.
[91] Loyce Winfield, interview with the author, 5 July 2006.

their consciences led them. While neither the priests nor the bishop could speak for the entire Catholic Church or take sides in the dispute, they could and did act as individuals in choosing to participate. In fact, after the first unsuccessful march, Father Leppert again asked Bishop Durick about the wisdom of participating in a march that had the potential for violence. Durick assured Leppert that he was concerned about the welfare of the people and of the community, and agreed to march alongside the Memphis priests in the second march. "I was very happy to hear that because it gave me encouragement," Leppert said. "We were together in the second march all the way."[92] Although priests were answerable to their bishop, some Protestant ministers considered the priests' position enviable compared to their own. One such minister noted that a Protestant clergyman would generally have to be approved by a board at every church where he served and represent the values of his congregation in order to keep his job, whereas a Catholic priest could "preach the gospel and be fired only by the bishop."[93] Father Paul Clunan, pastor of St. Louis parish who also marched with the sanitation workers, mirrored this sentiment. "It (my activism) was not popular with my parish, but they eventually accepted it. They needed someone to guide them. Many of them became great supporters and leaders of integration."[94]

In addition to priests, men and women in religious orders also participated in protests.[95] After Dr. King's death, but before the strike was settled, Sister Adrian Marie

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[92] Leppert Interview, 1968, "Sanitation Workers Strike Collection," MVSC, Box 22, Folder 144.
[93] Milton J. Guthrie, "Continuings: Social Justice and Catholics in West Tennessee: A Sketch," in *Between the Rivers: The Catholic Heritage of West Tennessee* (Memphis: The Catholic Diocese of Memphis, 1996), p.446.
[94]Christine Arpe Gang. "Closing a Chapter: Clunan heeds call to a new role." *Commercial Appeal*, 9 February 1992.
[95] Leppert Interview, 1968, "Sanitation Workers Strike Collection," MVSC, Box 22, Folder 144. None of my sources were able to identity who the brothers and sisters were, or how many, but several different sources alluded to their presence.

Hofstetter, a professor of biology at Siena College, along with five others, staged a sit-in at Mayor Loeb's office to encourage Loeb to settle the strike. "That was the first time I can really recall Loeb showing real strain," said reporter Joe Sweat.[96] Loeb was worried about the safety of the five, but especially Sister Adrian Marie. The preconciliar reverence for nuns was still strong, even among non-Catholics. "We can't put this nun out…We just can't throw a nun out on the street!" said Mayor Loeb.[97] The sit-in lasted for a week. At some point, Bishop Durick asked Sister Adrian Marie to witness at St. Louis church instead of city hall, because she was attracting so much attention,[98] but she, along with eight students from Southwestern College, continued supporting the sit-in at the Mayor's office.[99]

The CHRC's announcement to support the strikers provoked some vehement opposition from both the city and the Catholic community. "A few bold nuns and priests participated in marches, but it was not the kind of thing that average white Catholics approved of."[100] They knew what they were standing for was extremely controversial and potentially dangerous. At one particular CHRC meeting Loyce Winfield recalled Father Leppert warning them of the risk involved. "'Each one of us has to be willing to answer one question—Are we willing to die?'…It was just that serious."[101] The most outspoken of the members, who were known in the city for their activism, received threats. Ann Shafer had garbage dumped in her front yard. The Winfields' car was

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[96] Beifuss, p.322.
[97] Beifuss, pp322-323.
[98] Durick Interview, 1968, "Sanitation Workers Strike Collection," MVSC, Box 21, Folder 63.
[99] Beifuss, p.323.
[100] Bettye Donahue interview.
[101] Loyce Winfield, interview, 5 July 2006.

burned outside of their house. Both received "engraved invitations to their death" in the mail from segregationists.[102]

Bishop Durick faced pressure from the Catholic community when he decided to use diocesan funds to help feed the striking sanitation workers and pay their bills until they could work again. After the Priest Association of Memphis voted to go on record as supporting the strikers, Frs. James Driscoll and Theron Walker telephoned Durick from Fr. Clunan's office to ask that he make a donation of one thousand dollars to the fund to support the strikers. They hoped the humanitarian gesture would show "the good will of the official Catholic leadership."[103] "In our, I presume, simplicity, we gave it to the people representing the union and said, 'This is for the poor amongst you…' It was given that simply," said Bishop Durick. "And then is when I began to join Rabbi Wax [Jewish leader at Temple Israel] in being two of the most hated men in the area."[104]

The criticism that the Bishop received from Catholics concerning the donation was severe. Many viewed it as a sign that the church was pro-labor and anti-municipal government. To Durick, the donation only meant that "the Catholic church had always been interested in the poor and would continue to be." Durick pointed out that the municipal government had supplied $15,000 in food stamps to the sanitation workers, which could not logically signify that they were anti-government. [105]

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[102] Loyce Winfield, interview, 5 July 2006.
[103] Milton J. Guthrie, "Beginnings of the Community." p.442.
[104] Durick Interview, 1968, "Sanitation Workers Strike Collection," MVSC, Box 21, Folder 63.
[105] *Ibid.*

Effect of King's Death on Catholic Community

The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968 in the midst of the Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike, made race relations in Memphis a public spectacle. *Time* magazine's report on King's death emphasized the destructive nature of the struggle on the city: "The proximate cause of his death was, ironically, a minor labor dispute in a Southern backwater; the two-month-old strike of 1,300 predominantly Negro garbage collectors in the decaying Mississippi river town of Memphis."[106]

King's death had a powerful effect on the faith of many Memphis Catholics. The memorial march on the first anniversary of King's death fell on Good Friday, the day that Catholics commemorate Jesus' passion and death.[107] The Bishop would normally lead services from the Cathedral in Nashville throughout the week, as the symbolic head of his diocese. Instead, Bishop Durick chose to travel to Memphis to march in King's memorial procession and eulogize the slain leader. Bettye Donahue remembers that some Catholics criticized Durick for not leading services at the Cathedral.[108] However, as a postconciliar leader, Durick's decision to be in Memphis signaled his value of social justice over traditional Catholic ceremony.

Father Greenspun analyzed King's death in terms synonymous with Catholic theology. "It hit me very strongly…the tie into this crucifixion of this Christian witness. [King's death reaffirmed] like nothing else the presence of the risen Christ. It reaffirmed my own faith too." He also recognized a theological tie to Mary, the mother of Jesus. "That she [Coretta Scott King] did not always understand Martin, she did not always

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[106] *Time* magazine as quoted in Beverly G. Bond and Janann Sherman. *Memphis in Black and White*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2003), p.137.
[107] S. Jonathon Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the "Letter from Birmingham Jail,"* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2001), p.193.
[108] Bettye Donahue interview, 11 July 2006.

know what he was doing, but now she does—it was very, very, Mary-like… It was a scriptural statement."[109] He recognized that the strike was a humanizing experience for the sanitation workers, which Bishop Durick had recognized as the mark of Vatican II theology. "The other thing that really is more significant that came out of it…this sense of personhood it gave them. It began to reawaken within the consciousness of these people. 'My god, I am a person!'" Unlike earlier legalistic Catholic leaders who would have claimed that all lawful authority came from God, Greenspun was "convinced that Christ was here [with the strikers], *not with the establishment*."[110] Greenspun articulated so well what other activist Catholic clergy demonstrated with their actions: that obedience to authority must always be checked by personal conscience with regard to the gospel. The Civil Rights Movement in America was one of the most significant examples of this Vatican II theology being put into practice.

In the wake of Catholic involvement in the Sanitation Workers' Strike, Bishop Durick became even more dedicated to social justice and church reform. A 1970 *New York Times* article reported that even though his disposition had led the media to label him 'The Happy Priest,' "few clergymen in the South are as troubled as Bishop Durick." Although the article outlines the criticism he has received for his stance on racial justice, it also notes his unwavering commitment to a new direction for the church. "His personal turning point…came when he attended the Second Ecumenical Council in Rome," the

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[109] Greenspun interview, 1968, "Sanitation Workers Strike Collection," MVSC, Box 21, Folder 80.
[110] Greenspun interview, 1968, "Sanitation Workers Strike Collection," MVSC, Box 21, Folder 80. Italics mine.

article reported. "'The message we got from Vatican II," Durick explained, "was to go out in the world and restore the dignity of man.'" [111]

Conclusion: A New Era

By the 1970s, most of the members of the Memphis Catholic Human Relations Council felt that their best work was behind them. They had weathered labels of communism, intolerant pastors, resistance to integration, and riotous demonstrations. They had also seen the fruits of their labors. The creation of the new Diocese of Memphis in 1970, under the direction of Bishop Carroll T. Dozier, ensured that Catholics in western Tennessee would have a leader in tune with their particular needs. In fact, one of the first issues that Bishop Dozier tackled in Memphis was "white flight" from the Memphis Public Schools when court ordered busing of students began. He was adamant that Catholic schools would not become "a haven for those who wish to flee the problems of busing and integration."[112] Most members of the council felt that Catholic churches and schools were accepting of blacks and other minorities. At the very least, all Catholic institutions now admitted African-Americans.[113]

The council officially closed in the mid-1970s.[114] Accounts differ as to why it shut down. Some claim Bishop Dozier asked them to stop meeting because he felt there was no need for a lay human relations council within the church and their efforts would

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[111]Jon Nordheimer, "An Activist Bishop Angers Tennessee Catholics," *New York Times,* n.d., circa 1970, clipping from private collection of Ann Shafer.
[112] Betty Roy, "Study Planned of Catholic Schools." *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, 11 August 1971. Also reiterated in email correspondence with Dr. Joan Zurhellen.
[113] Bettye Donahue, interview with the author, 11 July 2006.
[114] CHRC newsletters in the CHRC Papers of the Memphis and Shelby Co. Room continue until 1975. A 1977 form letter to former CHRC members (in the private collection of Ann Shafer) proposed a vote to transfer the CHRC bank balance to Pax Christi, a Catholic organization for peace.

be better placed elsewhere.[115] Another former member remembers that the group voted to close the council with "no pressure from the bishop."[116] However it happened, the members who were passionate about their commitment to racial justice continued their work without the council.

Although former members agree that racial relations can be improved,[117] the Catholic Human Relations Council accomplished what it originally set out to do: members helped to smoothly integrate Catholic institutions as well as leaving their mark on racial relations in the city of Memphis. And throughout the process, they lived the teachings of the universal dignity of humankind that the church was attempting to promulgate through the Second Vatican Council.

[115] Consensus of interviews with Ann Shafer and Loyce Winfield.
[116] Bettye Donahue, interview with the author, 11 July 2006.
[117] Consensus of interviews with Bettye Donahue, Ann Shafer, and Loyce Winfield.