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Father Louis Twomey and the Fight for Labor and Civil Rights at Loyola

By Cody R. Melcher, Ph.D.

In addition to his right to organize, every man has the obligation...to protest the security of his economic interests. In the defense of his union...workers are exercising their God-given right.

Statement of The Catholic Committee of the South, New Orleans, 1953

Father Louis Twomey, S.J., a 1951 graduate of Loyola University New Orleans, served as the rector of the university's law school from 1947 until his death in 1969. Upon returning to Loyola in 1947, Fr. Twomey had been associated with the Joseph Church, 1802 Tulane Avenue, as an assistant priest. Under other circumstances, he might have been a distinguished writer, a poet, or a scholar. He might have been someone of many other considerations, but in the South he was not particularly interested in writing the class struggle.

Almost from the beginning, businesses refused to send representatives to the crucial course of meetings, conceiving every concept of organizing with workers as a group as too "pro-labor." So, Twomey and his institute became what capitalist theory knew of, a center which prepared workers to organize and fight for their rights as workers and human beings. Courses in the institute were open to workers regardless of race, the first instance of integrated education on a college campus in the deep South since Reconstruction.

Twomey did not stop at integrating the Institute. He, along the side of Loyola's sociology department, Father Joseph F. Fitter, S.J., worked tirelessly to integrate the entire university, eventually succeeding in 1952 when the law school accepted its first Black applicant. Twomey had first attempted to integrate the university in 1949, but failed after the administration yielded to student demands to keep the school segregated.

Twomey was deeply involved in areas of deep economic dependency. Disproportionately Black sugar cane workers throughout the 1950s. The cane workers, often sharecroppers, whose homes were on planter-owned sugar plantations, attempted to organize and fight for their rights as workers and human beings. Courses at the Institute were open to workers regardless of race, the first instance of integrated education on a college campus in the deep South since Reconstruction.

We are hiring!

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