



Father Francis Gilligan

and the STRUGGLE for CIVIL RIGHTS

TOM BEER AND TOM O'CONNELL

ON SEPTEMBER 22, 1955, two hundred of Minnesota's political and civic elite gathered in St. Paul's Lowry Hotel to honor Father Francis J. Gilligan on his retirement as chairman of the Governor's Interracial Commission—a position he had held under four governors since the commission was established in 1943. All four of those governors were present, as were leaders of the civil rights coalition he had helped build: colleagues from the Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the labor movement, and fellow clergy. One by one, leaders delivered their heartfelt appreciation, saluting their friend for his persistent, effective pursuit of social equality. Referring to Gilligan's legendary skills at bridge-building and persuasion, Senator Hubert Humphrey declared, "He has quelled emotion and exalted reason . . . [he is] a pioneer in the most difficult field of all—human relations." Citing his "courage and undying devotion to equality," black

civil rights leader Maj. Samuel J. Ransom added, "Minnesota and every state needs an Interracial Commission and a Father Gilligan."¹

The story of Francis Gilligan's emergence as a civil rights advocate is rooted in the intersections of person and history, social action and faith. Almost from the day of his 1928 arrival in St. Paul as a young priest and professor of moral theology, Gilligan put a Catholic face on efforts to address economic and racial injustice. In so doing, he helped connect the growing power of the labor movement to the energy of the emerging civil rights movement in Minnesota. Along the way, he taught, cajoled, and challenged students and citizens—Catholic and non-Catholic alike—to confront their prejudices and embrace social justice.

Gilligan was born in Fall River, Massachusetts, on April 26, 1898, and raised by his aunt and uncle

after his parents died when he was five. The family was upper-middle-class; his father had owned and operated a local mill. Fall River was a hardscrabble working-class town. Conditions in the cotton mills were harsh, giving rise to militant labor-union organizing.²

Young Frank, as his sisters liked to call him, witnessed both the ethnic diversity and the hard living conditions of the city. While working summers as a cashier on the Old Fall River steamship line, he befriended black crew members and heard their stories of discrimination and struggle. Looking back on those days, he recalled "racial discrimination against Negroes, and also industrial problems. Someplace or other it was in my blood."

By the time he graduated from high school, Gilligan appeared to be marked for scholarship or perhaps the priesthood—not the mills. After

FACING: Francis J. Gilligan, professor of moral theology at St. Paul Seminary and civil rights advocate, about 1942

Tom O'Connell, a professor of political studies at Metropolitan State University, St. Paul, is a student of Minnesota's populist and progressive political traditions. Tom Beer worked as a community organizer and union business agent, lobbyist, and political director. He remembers Gilligan's visits to his father's hardware store in St. Mark's parish.

attending Holy Cross College in Worcester, he completed bachelor's and master's degrees at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore in preparation for the priesthood. In 1924 he was ordained a priest of the Fall River diocese and, given his academic talent, sent to Catholic University in Washington, D.C., for a Ph.D. in moral theology.

GILLIGAN'S LIFELONG encounter with Minnesota began when Archbishop Austin Dowling, leader of the St. Paul archdiocese, turned to Fall River for an infusion of clerical talent. Dowling had succeeded the legendary John Ireland, who had transformed the church in Minnesota from a frontier backwater to a major center of American Catholicism. Seeing little chance for an academic career in the Fall River diocese, Gilligan persuaded his bishop to release him to Dowling. Thus, the young priest was assigned to teach moral theology at the St. Paul Seminary following completion of his doctoral degree.³



Archbishop Austin Dowling, who brought Gilligan to St. Paul, about 1919

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While at Catholic University, Gilligan developed a close relationship with Fr. John A. Ryan, the nation's most influential proponent of Catholic social-justice teaching. Himself a Minnesotan, Ryan had taught moral theology at St. Paul Seminary from 1902 through 1915. In a career that foreshadowed Gilligan's own, Ryan developed close ties with the state's labor and social-reform movements, playing an influential role in the passage of Minnesota's minimum-wage legislation in 1912. A writer and aca-

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remembered, to examine American racism with a focus on blacks. "If you have any courage, take it up. It's an undeveloped field." The resulting thesis, published in 1928 as *The Morality of the Color Line*, was the first extended treatment of the race question by an American Catholic. In what would become a characteristic of his approach, Gilligan combined a sociological exploration of discrimination with a sharp moral critique based on Catholic social teaching. Racism, Gilligan argued, was a grave sin. Racial prejudice was a social creation, rooted in slavery and reinforced through social custom and economic exclusion. He advocated a gradualist approach to ending segregation, particularly in the South, arguing that abrupt efforts to end it in public facilities could lead to serious disturbances of public order. Later, Gilligan would be apologetic about some of his more cautious, even paternalistic, views on such issues as interracial marriage and social mixing. His own attitudes would change as he learned from experience.⁵

But if Gilligan was sanguine about the prospects for an early end to the most entrenched forms of social segregation, he was very clear about the public actions necessary to attack racial injustice in both the North and the South. He advocated anti-lynching laws, an end to unjust arrests and biased courts, increased spending for black education, municipal services, and housing. Applying the teachings of Catholic reformers like Ryan, he suggested that the rights of labor ought to be extended to blacks and that society embrace programs based on the principles of distributive justice, financed through a tax system based on the ability to pay.

Despite modest circulation, Gilligan's book established him as a member of a small but influential group of Catholics who were concerned about the race issue. By 1931 Gilligan was writing articles for *America*, the influential, Jesuit-published Catholic weekly, and the *Interracial Review*. In 1939 the National Catholic Welfare Council published a widely read distillation of his views, *The Black Worker in White America*. He became a close associate of the Jesuit theologian John LaFarge, the church's most prominent racial-justice advocate.⁶ These national connections linked Gilligan to the larger effort, but it was in Minnesota that he had his greatest influence.

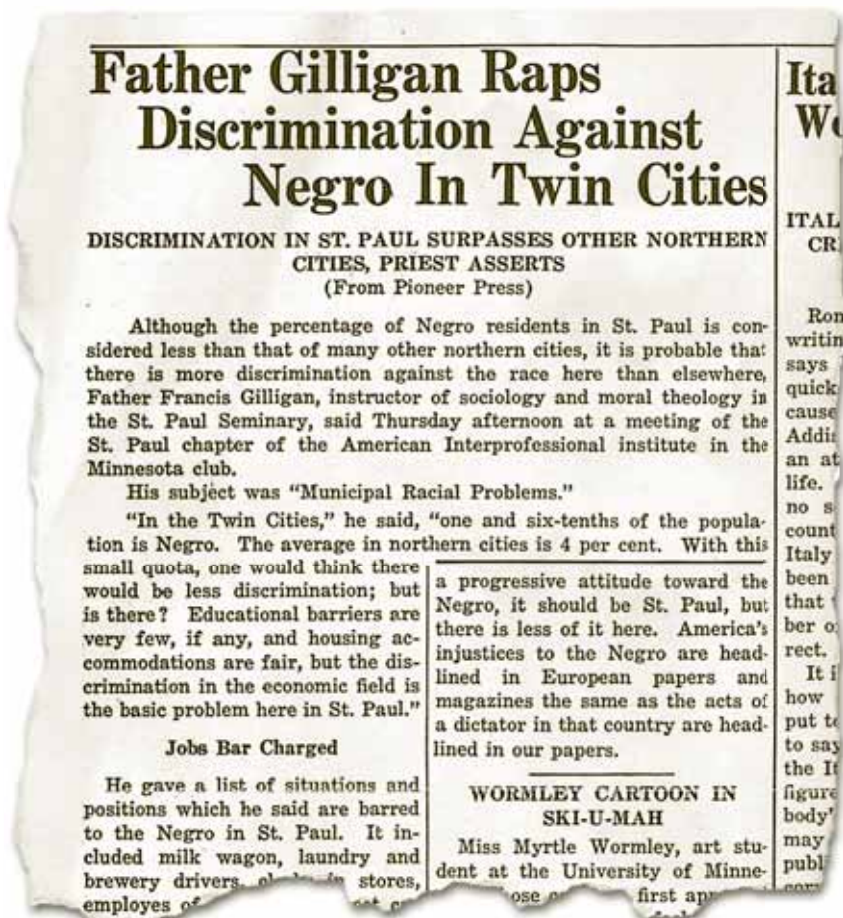
GILLIGAN'S COMMITMENT to racial and, more broadly, social justice flowed from his understanding of Catholic social teaching. Neither his nor the church's teaching was particularly radical. In fact, the church was deeply anti-Communist and suspicious of other socialist movements as well; a well-ordered society included the rights of both labor and capital. As a young priest, Gilligan worried about the church becoming too distant from its people, as had happened in France. Mere opposition to Communism, thought Gilligan, was a losing battle. Something constructive was needed: economic and social reforms based on social-justice principles. His comments to a largely black Twin Cities audience in 1937 on race issues paralleled his concerns about class divisions in America: "If I were colored and not a Christian, I imagine I would be very receptive towards the Soviet government."⁷

Gilligan conveyed this Catholic

approach to social justice through his powerful role as professor of moral theology at St. Paul Seminary. It was hard to ignore Fr. Francis Gilligan. He projected natural authority based on obvious conviction. "We knew," remembered a former student, "how active he was in the community." He made the subject—whether moral theology, sociology, or economics—serve his larger purpose. He impressed on three generations of future priests that the quest of ordinary people for economic and racial justice involved profound moral issues at the heart of Catholic teaching. Not every seminarian fully embraced the message, but few remained untouched.⁸

Over a long career, Gilligan re-

mained committed to forging practical approaches to achieving his morally based social goals. Fr. Ryan had set him on his intellectual course; now, Fr. Humphrey Moynihan, rector of the seminary, provided Gilligan with the social connections necessary to test his theories in the give-and-take of human relationships. Moynihan was well connected with both Catholic and non-Catholic figures in St. Paul's professional and business classes. A willing mentor to the promising young cleric, Moynihan introduced Gilligan to members of the city's upper crust in their homes on Summit Avenue and in biweekly meetings of the Informal Club, comprised mostly of



Front-page news in the Minneapolis Spokesman, a Twin Cities' black newspaper, March 12, 1937

non-Catholic businessmen in “the First National Bank crowd,” Gilligan remembered. The rector opened himself to Gilligan’s suggestions as well, often attending the interracial social gatherings that the younger man had already begun to organize. Moynihan’s well-heeled contacts at a luncheon that Gilligan staged to honor black actors helped make the event a success.⁹

Gilligan proved a master at working across race and class boundaries. Contemporaries described him as a man with natural bearing. He was smart and witty, and he leavened his deeply held social beliefs with self-deprecating humor. Being a “man of the cloth” didn’t hurt, either. Black community leaders appreciated the connections he provided to the wider community, while labor leaders were thrilled to have his blessing—not only for his eloquent and persistent support, but for the legitimacy he conveyed to its Catholic membership base.¹⁰

Gilligan’s civil rights work took root as the Great Depression entered its fifth year and continued to grip the nation. By the mid-1930s he had developed significant relationships in local civil rights circles. In 1935 he hosted a dinner at the St. Paul Hotel for James Weldon Johnson, a prominent black poet and author from Jacksonville, Florida, who served as the first national organizer for the NAACP. Following dinner, Johnson lectured to an interracial crowd of 450 at the YWCA—“the most representative and most successful meeting of its kind,” according to Urban League minutes.¹¹

Gatherings like these, tame as they may seem to a modern audience, were part of Gilligan’s intentional process of interracial trust

building. As his contacts developed, so did his tactics. Black guests visiting St. Paul would often witness Gilligan in action. Having made the traveler’s room reservation himself, Gilligan would show up at the hotel as the guest arrived. If the guest was denied a room, the priest would announce it was he who had made the reservation, cajoling management to honor its agreement. As often as not, the visitor got the room.¹²

Although Gilligan developed a wide range of connections with black organizations, the most important was with the St. Paul Urban League. The league was committed to cultivating strong alliances with white community leaders. Gilligan enjoyed a long and fruitful association with the organization, beginning with informal connections in the 1930s and moving to board membership from 1943 to 1950 and board presidency from 1950 through 1955.¹³

There was a natural convergence between Gilligan’s evolving philosophy on racial issues and the Urban

that required an end to economic and social segregation.¹⁴

Through the Urban League, Gilligan had the opportunity to work closely with some of Minnesota’s most effective champions of civil rights. Taken together, their accomplishments illustrate the brick-by-brick dismantling of segregated institutions and cultural practices in Minnesota. Samuel Ransom was a World War I veteran who led the fight to desegregate the National Guard. S. Vincent Owens, executive director of the Urban League from 1942 to 1950, achieved monumental breakthroughs in employment opportunities for blacks. Clifford E. Rucker had directed the state relief agency under Farmer-Labor governor Elmer Benson (1936–38), the most responsible position held by an African American in state government up to that time. He would join Gilligan in the mid-1940s to run the Governor’s Interracial Council during its most effective years as a force for racial justice.¹⁵

Gilligan proved a master at working across race and class boundaries.

League’s program and ideology. The league’s slogan, “Not Alms, but Opportunity,” reflected the essentially middle-class nature of its leadership as well as Gilligan’s own ideals and social position. Racial progress was a two-way street. In keeping with emerging sociological theories about urban life, league leaders emphasized education and uplift to orient poor southern black migrants to the values, customs, and rhythms of the northern industrial city. They also understood, however, that uplift was impossible without opportunity. And

Gilligan’s deepest relationship, however, was with Clarence Mitchell Jr., a promising young social worker from Baltimore who served as the St. Paul Urban League’s executive director from 1938 to 1941 before becoming one of the nation’s most powerful civil rights leaders as chief lobbyist for the NAACP in Washington, D.C. In his brief but formative tenure in St. Paul, Mitchell worked closely with Gilligan to open up employment opportunities, integrate labor unions, and end racial discrimination in automobile insurance. Acknowledg-



Major Samuel Ransom (left) shaking hands with Governor Harold Stassen, about 1942; General Ellard A. Walsh of the Minnesota National Guard looks on.

ing Gilligan's key role in local civil rights struggles, Mitchell fondly referred to him as "the Secretary of War." Years later, Mitchell would appoint Gilligan to the labor committee of the NAACP—recognition of both Gilligan's stature and the importance of Catholic support for the civil rights cause.¹⁶

As the Great Depression ground on, the Urban League looked beyond cultivating voluntary relationships with white employers to engaging broader coalitions and embracing New Deal government programs. There was massive unemployment generally; blacks, with an already restricted job base, suffered dramatically. An Urban League report in 1938 indicated that 68 percent of Twin Cities blacks were either on direct assistance or working in the New Deal's WPA programs. In Minnesota, a militant labor movement had won the right to organize in industry

after industry. If unions would open up their ranks to blacks (and other minorities), a major impediment to racial progress could be eliminated when the long-awaited recovery finally came.¹⁷

Here, Gilligan was uniquely qualified to help. Known affectionately in union circles as Minnesota's labor priest, he had earned a deep reservoir of respect among union leaders as the Catholic Church's most public advocate for labor rights. The respect had not come automatically. Reflecting on his first contacts with labor in the mid-1930s, Gilligan remembered being greeted with suspicion. On one particularly cold winter night, he recalled being told to wait outside the Labor Temple before being allowed to address the group. "I was tempted to walk off. But I asked myself what St. Paul [the apostle] would have done if the door had been closed in his face."¹⁸

By the end of the decade, Gilligan no longer needed to wait outside in the cold. Beginning with biweekly meetings with union business agents in 1937, he soon became a regular guest at union meetings. He was widely known in labor circles for his ability to mediate labor-management disputes and for his Catholic labor schools. Classes, held in the evenings at Catholic schools and parishes in the Twin Cities, were taught by union officials, Catholic clergy, and lay experts. Here, the faithful learned the church's teachings on the rights of labor and the practical arts of union organizing. Gilligan's closest relationships were with the AFL craft unions and their Central Labor Union bodies in St. Paul and Minneapolis. But he cultivated relationships as best he could with the rival CIO as well—an especially important fact, given the more advanced position on racial issues held by some industrial unions.¹⁹

Gilligan's hard-won connections with the labor movement had practical impact on the anti-discrimination cause. In 1938 he supported black waiters at the St. Paul Hotel after white patron complaints got them fired. Gilligan joined Urban League director Mitchell in negotiating a settlement between hotel management and the unions. When Gilligan helped secure a walk-out threat from unions that provided other critical services to the hotel, management relented. The ousted blacks returned to work.²⁰

By the end of the 1930s, a genuine civil rights alliance was in place in Minnesota. Anchored by the Urban League and NAACP, promoted by black papers like the *Minneapolis Spokesman* and *St. Paul Recorder*, supported by progressive clergy, labor, and middle-class reformers, the Minnesota effort



St. Paul Urban League event, about 1945; Gilligan is second from right.

mirrored a quiet revolution that was taking place in northern cities across the country. The key term linking these struggles was “rights.” As an ideal, if not always practice, New Deal leaders promoted an activist government that would guarantee rights to jobs, income, and a decent home. In an era before the mass protests of the 1960s civil rights movement, interracial organizing in multiple forms yielded important victories that challenged—though did not end—racial inequality in the North. As a prominent member of this coalition, Francis Gilligan had written, taught, spoken out, and acted to end racial discrimination in St. Paul and beyond. With the coming of a new decade and a second world war, Gilligan was poised to play an even greater role.²¹

IN DECEMBER 1943 Republican Governor Edward J. Thye established the Governor’s Interracial Commission of Minnesota and named Gilligan its chair. For the next 12

years, he served in that post as the commission’s driving force. “I appointed him,” reflected Thye, because “he seemed to be the one man available at the time who could go in and sit down with labor, racial groups, and religious or social groups and find gracious acceptance of them all.”²²

Operating out of the governor’s office with only minimal staff support while also teaching full time at the seminary, Gilligan developed the commission into a strong force for advocacy and education. He and executive director Clifford Rucker traveled throughout Minnesota, gathering information, attending conciliation sessions, and speaking before schools, colleges, and civic groups. A review of commission actions reveals the pervasiveness of discriminatory attitudes and practices at the time. Under Gilligan’s direction, the commission added its support to campaigns to win admission of blacks into the National Guard, end segregation of veterans’ burial plots at Fort Snelling National Cemetery, fight racial discrimination at

St. Cloud Reformatory, and challenge the racial-exclusion policies of the American Bowling League. The commission backed successful legislation banning exclusionary covenants in housing, affirming human rights, and establishing Minnesota’s Fair Employment Practices Commission.²³

On a broader level, the governor’s commission symbolized the emergence of a new era in race relations in Minnesota. Through workshops, pamphlets, curriculum guides, and public programs, anti-racist educators engaged thousands of citizens in discussions on the causes and impact of racial discrimination. As Minnesota’s most visible embodiment of this effort, the commission represented a new social coalition committed to advancing a racial-justice agenda. Its board included Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish clergy, representatives from the Urban League, and a cross section of Minnesota’s civic leaders.²⁴

Central to the commission’s work was the development and dissemination of several key reports that would raise awareness of racial issues in Minnesota. In the early years, the task of organizing the research and writing the reports fell largely to Gilligan. The first and perhaps most influential one, *The Negro Worker in Minnesota*, was issued in March 1945. Drawing on data from an extensive survey of employers and labor unions, and supplemented by the first-hand testimony of Urban League field workers, the report documented both significant progress and enduring racial discrimination. At stake was a question of enormous consequence: Would the dramatic gains in black employment that resulted from war production continue in the postwar era? Or would the restrictive hiring practices still

in place in many nondefense-related industries plunge black employment back to prewar levels?²⁵

The report begins by acknowledging the positive impact of war production on black employment. The largest employer of black labor by far was the Twin Cities Ordnance Plant, which hired 1,000 men and women in 32 job classifications. Other noted employers included Northwest Airlines, Munsingwear, Brown and Bigelow, International Harvester, and Honeywell.

Not all companies were equal-opportunity employers, however. Discreetly omitting specific company names, the report listed areas where blacks had limited opportunities, including department stores, breweries, public utilities, mail-order companies, mills, and other industries. In analyzing why some whites continued to discriminate, Gilligan forthrightly asserted that practices were “either actively deliberate or calcified in the form of inert custom.”

If a Negro seeks a job, the employer sees—not an individual applicant whose qualifications must be ascertained—but the American Race Problem. Immediately, he goes through a mental process quite different from that when the applicant is white. Figuratively, he puts on a different robe, a different mask, and plays an entirely different role. He views this applicant in the light of the American race dilemma and usually he refuses employment.²⁶

The report also documented the attitudes that undergirded job discrimination, using quotes from returned questionnaires. On personal conviction: “The Negro is definitely

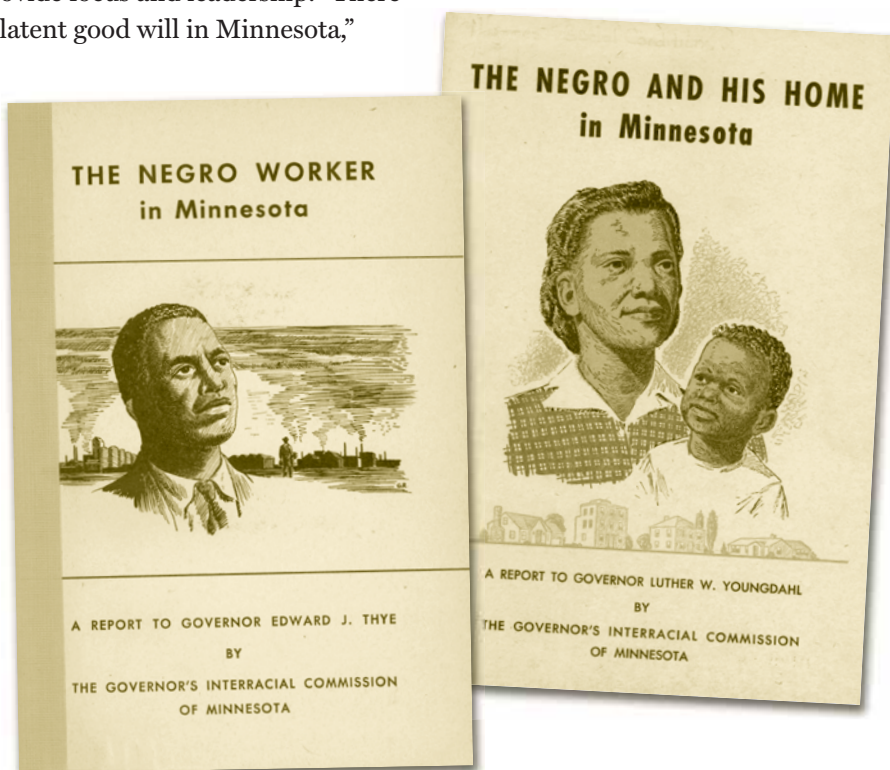
quite a different person from the white person . . . to change [his racial heritage] appears to be as tough a job as making a white person out of a Jap.” On employee opposition: “If a Negro having seniority rights were placed in authority over white men, trouble might result” and “We believe that white employees don’t like to use the same rest rooms as the colored people.” Customer opposition: “In our business of dealing directly with 99 percent white housewives, I am afraid Negroes would not be acceptable.”²⁷

The commission report ended on a positive note, reflecting faith in the combined power of education, moral suasion, and government action. It called for a broad civic coalition to champion the cause: labor, employer, and trade groups, women’s clubs, religious groups, and veterans’ organizations. It encouraged schools to develop classes in intercultural education, while acknowledging the special role of state government to provide focus and leadership. “There is latent good will in Minnesota,”

Gilligan wrote. “It needs to be spark-plugged into action.”²⁸

Job discrimination was not the only area that needed a spark plug. In July 1947 the commission issued a report on an equally vexing problem: housing segregation. Once again, *The Negro and His Home in Minnesota* featured a combination of empirical facts and moral commentary. This time, Gilligan applied the techniques of the emerging science of polling to elucidate the issue. The commission contracted with the Minnesota Poll to conduct a random-sample survey that would measure attitudes toward housing integration. A headline in the *Minneapolis Tribune* broadcast its most dramatic finding: “60 Per Cent Approve of Jim Crow Areas.” And, as the story revealed, 63 percent would not sell their property to a black person, even if he offered a higher price.²⁹

The report carefully documented the racial disparity in housing conditions and sharply criticized the use



of racial covenants, which forbade homeowners from selling to blacks, and other discriminatory real estate practices. Declaring that forced segregation was a violation of basic rights, the commission advocated legislative action to ban restrictive covenants and, more fundamentally, called for a broad change in white attitudes.³⁰

What was at the root of white resistance to neighborhood integration? Here, once again, the voice of Gilligan the moralist comes through. Acknowledging the intense emotions of white opponents, the commission asserted that blacks, just like other Americans, had “a very definite moral right” to the freedom to choose a home. “In every instance in which the conflict is between a clear natural right on one hand and intense feeling on the other, responsible people decide in favor of the moral law and insist that such feelings or emotions must be suppressed.”

And how could progress be made? Reflecting the ideas of intergroup-relations advocates and a newly emerging “open housing movement,” Gilligan recommended that churches and neighborhood associations foster direct interracial contact and other peer-to-peer efforts to encourage attitudinal changes. A social-psychological rather than political approach to race-based inequality, the report reveals Gilligan the sociologist. But, ever the student of John A. Ryan, he also understood that changes in laws must accompany and reinforce changes in attitudes.

The culmination of Gilligan’s career as civil rights champion was the long and eventually suc-

cessful fight to establish a state Fair Employment Practices Commission. The battle began in 1947, when the Governor’s Interracial Commission recommended the establishment of a state FEPC, and reached its successful conclusion eight years later in 1955 when the legislature finally enacted the measure. The FEPC, a vindication of the interracial alliance-building that had characterized Gilligan’s method throughout his career, passed with the support of a broad civic coalition stretching from labor

cess to employment in the postwar era, civil rights coalitions and their liberal allies in Congress championed the establishment of a national FEPC. Fourteen fair-employment bills were submitted to Congress between 1944 and 1963. A coalition of pro-business Republicans and southern segregationist Democrats was able to strangle the bill in the U.S. Senate.³²

While FEPC legislation stalled at the national level, 11 states outside the South enacted fair-employment-

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to civil rights groups, the League of Women’s Voters to the Cooperative League. Republican Governor Luther Youngdahl made it a priority. It was Orville L. Freeman, however, a Democratic-Farmer-Labor governor, who won legislative authorization to establish the FEPC, making Minnesota the tenth state to do so.³¹

The effort in Minnesota paralleled the national struggle for employment rights. The drive for a fair-employment commission was rooted in the dramatic confrontation between civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph and President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941. Determined to ensure that blacks had access to the vast employment opportunities created by a wartime economy, Randolph threatened to mobilize 100,000 to march on Washington. Bowing to pressure, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 in 1941, banning racial discrimination in war production. Concerned that blacks would once again be denied full ac-

cess to employment in the postwar era, civil rights coalitions and their liberal allies in Congress championed the establishment of a national FEPC. Fourteen fair-employment bills were submitted to Congress between 1944 and 1963. A coalition of pro-business Republicans and southern segregationist Democrats was able to strangle the bill in the U.S. Senate.³²

Gilligan himself, whether through belief (he was, after all, a practiced mediator) or political realism, supported the plan’s emphasis on mediation. Not all fair-employment advocates agreed. Concerned that many individuals would lack the time or money to pursue a case through the courts, Albert Allers, president of the Minneapolis branch of the NAACP, worried that a weak law “without teeth” would be worse than no law at all. Gilligan’s role in the FEPC campaign, like the legislation itself, proved controversial. Opponents, including more than a few Catholic businessmen, thought Fr. Gilligan was getting “too high handed and thought

he was God,” according to chronicler Arthur C. McWatt. Others, like Allers, thought he was standing in the way of a stronger bill.³⁴

The struggle for an FEPC—with or without teeth—in Minnesota was a long one. Over the eight-year period, employer opposition gradually yielded to increasing public support. From its first introduction, the bill enjoyed broad backing from DFLers. The Republican Party, however, faced internal conflict. Governors Thye and Youngdahl represented a moderate brand of Republicanism that had wrested power from the left-wing Farmer-Labor Party in the late 1930s. They, like their national counterparts, favored the FEPC. As in the nation, however, key Republican interest groups, including chambers of commerce and manufacturing associations, resisted the Minnesota legislation. By 1955 enough members of the state’s Conservative (mostly Republican) legislative caucus joined with the Liberal (mostly DFL) caucus to win passage. (Until 1974 state lawmakers were elected on a nonpartisan basis.) The bill’s unlikely Senate author was Gerald T. Mullin, a North Minneapolis DFLer who caucused with the Conservatives and was most famous for his support of the utility industry. His backing of the FEPC stemmed from his close relationship with Gilligan, a relationship rooted in the Catholic Church and stretching back to the 1940s when Gilligan had recruited him to teach labor law in his Catholic labor schools.³⁵

For Gilligan, the passage of the FEPC legislation represented a culmination of almost 30 years of civil rights work. Less than two months after its passage, he announced his retirement as chair of the interracial commission. The following year,



Governor Luther Youngdahl (right) with his predecessor, Edward Thye, 1947

Orville Freeman reconstituted that body as the Governor’s Commission on Human Rights. Under the forceful leadership of Rucker, the new commission carried on—and in some cases, expanded—the civil rights advocacy pioneered by Gilligan and his associates. The myriad laws, commissions, reports, and public-education efforts growing from their work created the framework for the civil rights institutions and practices that continue in Minnesota to this day.³⁶

Gilligan’s retirement coincided with the emergence of a militant national civil rights movement that overshadowed the conciliatory work of prior decades. If the activist priest held strong opinions about generational and strategic shifts in advocacy, the record seems silent. In 1957, at age 59, Gilligan retired from the seminary to assume a major role as pastor of St. Paul’s thriving St. Mark’s parish. He made this career shift with apparent ease and again quickly asserted a leadership role in community affairs. Fifteen years later, Gilligan was appointed director of the archdiocese’s Center of the Propagation of the

Faith. Although his focus was now on the institutional church, he continued to speak proudly of his work in the civil rights and labor movements. He died on April 6, 1997, at the age of 98, a much-beloved figure to those he had touched as a pastor, teacher, ally, and friend.³⁷

FR. GILLIGAN’S CIVIL RIGHTS legacy includes tangible gains: laws passed, institutions desegregated, job opportunities opened. It also represents opened minds and changed attitudes. Today, it is difficult to imagine a Minnesota with white-only hotels, employment options for African Americans restricted to a handful of service jobs, and racially segregated burial plots. The civil rights coalition Gilligan helped build reduced (though hardly ended) overt social and economic discrimination in Minnesota. It paved the way for the establishment of a strong black middle class. The priests he taught and the laity he inspired would carry the Catholic social-justice tradition to the movements of the 1960s and beyond.³⁸

Yet in Minnesota, as in the nation, race-based socioeconomic inequality remains. Looking back, Gilligan’s studied gradualism, his yen for conciliation, and his deep faith in moral education might seem naïve to some. But there was nothing soft about his insistence on a socially engaged church. He resisted radicalism, but his steady assertion that racial and economic justice were inseparable remains as relevant today as it was then. History yields, but it never yields completely. There remains the man. “His life,” declared Clarence Mitchell Jr., “is a sermon on the power of a good man over evil.”³⁹ □

Notes

1. *Minneapolis Star*, Sept. 22, 1955, p. 17.

2. Here and two paragraphs below, "A Catholic Vision of Social Justice: Msgr. Francis Gilligan," conference panel, The Face of the People of God: A History of the Archdioceses of St. Paul-Minneapolis, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Oct. 16, 2000, author's notes; Francis J. Gilligan, interview by Dr. Robert Fogerty and Dr. Joseph Connors, Apr. 20, 1983, transcript, p. 1, Gilligan Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, O'Shaughnessy Frey Library, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul; Phillip T. Silvia Jr., "The Position of the New Immigrants in the Fall River Textile Industry," *International Migration Review* 10 (Summer 1976): 221–32; Jessica Resnick-Ault, "Fall River: Through the Mill, from the Ashes," *Providence Journal*, Sept. 5, 2003, p. 1–5, www.projo.com/news/content/projo.

3. Dowling was a mentor to Gilligan before and after he arrived in St. Paul; Dowling letters, box 1, 1925–28, Msgr. Francis Gilligan Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis; Gilligan interview transcript, 1.

4. Unchecked exploitation by capitalism and the fear of workers' acceptance of socialism lay behind the encyclical. *Rerum novarum* (Of New Things) condemned the industrialization that drove rural people off the land and into urban factories. Ryan's book, *Distributive Justice: The Right and Wrong of our Present Distribution of Wealth* (New York: MacMillan, 1916) also focused on morality.

5. Here and below, Francis J. Gilligan, *The Morality of the Color Line, An Examination of the Right and the Wrong of the Discriminations Against the Negro in the United States* (St. Paul: The Archdiocese, 1928). Gilligan dedicated his thesis to Dowling, "in reverence and gratitude." On Gilligan's later view of this work—and the views of others—see David W. Southern, *John LaLarge and the Limits of Catholic Interracialism, 1911–1963* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1996), 99; Gilligan interview transcript, 3–4 (quote).

6. See, for example, Francis J. Gilligan, "Jim Crow and the White Worker," *America*, Apr. 4, 1931. From 1926 to 1963 LaFarge was writer, associate editor, and editor of *America*. He praised Gilligan's early work on race and encouraged him to continue writing on civil rights and labor unions; Francis J. Gilligan Correspondence and Clippings, John LaFarge, SJ Papers, Georgetown University Library, Special Collections Division, Washington, D.C. He later called Gilligan one of the great apostles of the social teachings of the church and authored a complimentary profile on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Gilligan's ordination; *America*, Dec. 12, 1949.

7. *Minneapolis Spokesman*, Mar. 12, 1937, p. 1.

8. Revs. Frederick Mertz and Edward Flahavan, interviews by authors, St. Paul, Dec. 9 and July 28, 2009, respectively, author notes. Mertz, a student of Gilligan, described him as widely read, practical, not a theorist, a very good teacher. Flahavan affirmed that Gilligan's commitment to racial-justice issues in both the classroom and community combined with an orthodox view of Catholic teaching on marriage and sexuality; see also student and parent letters, box 1, 1928–1938, Gilligan papers, Archdiocese archives. Marvin R. O'Connell, *Pilgrims to the Northland: The Archdiocese of St. Paul, 1840–1962* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 465–66: "Classes with Father Gilligan were always memorable . . . the raspy voice, which never quite lost its New England twang, the choppy hand motions, the ruddy face beneath in his later years a shock of white hair, and the remarkable, beautiful smile which however didn't always intimate good humor."

9. Gilligan interview transcript, 6–7, 22 (quote). Moynihan was secretary to John Ireland and president of St. Thomas College before becoming rector. The Informal Club met to discuss issues of the day. Moynihan always attended. Gilligan said the club was so-named because members did not dress formally for dinner.

10. On Gilligan's skills see, for example, *Minneapolis Spokesman*, Mar. 12, 1937, p. 1, May 21, 1937, p. 1; *Minneapolis Labor Review*, Apr. 12, 1940, p. 2, Apr. 19, 1940, p. 1; Mary Lethert Wingerd, *Claiming the City: Politics, Faith and the Power of Place in St. Paul* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 266–67, also noting that most labor leaders in St. Paul were Catholic and held equal allegiance to church and union.

11. St. Paul Urban League, board minutes, Feb. 28, 1935, St. Paul Urban League Records, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS).

12. *Fall River Anchor*, June 19, 1987, p. 21. To be safe, Gilligan had a white colleague check on room availability before the black guest arrived.

13. St. Paul Urban League Records, MHS.

14. St. Paul Urban League, *Annual Reports*, 1943–96. For an insightful analysis of the league's evolution, see Touré F. Reed, *Not Alms But Opportunity: The Urban League and Racial Uplift, 1910–1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). For the early years of the local league, see Whitney M. Young, "History of the St. Paul Urban League" (master's thesis, University of Minnesota, 1947).

15. On Ransom, Owens, and Rucker, see Arthur C. McWatt, *Crusaders for Justice: A Chronicle of Protest by Agitators, Advo-*

cates and Activists . . . St. Paul, Minnesota, 1802–1985 (St. Paul: Papyrus for NAACP, 2009), 44, 89, 104–07, 117, 130.

16. Denton L. Watson, *Lion in the Lobby: Clarence Mitchell, Jr.'s Struggle for the Passage of Civil Rights Laws* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: University Press of America, 2002). Gilligan's and Mitchell's collaboration often was covered by the black press; see, for example, *Minneapolis Spokesman*, Mar. 24, 1939, p. 1, Apr. 21, 1939, p. 1.

17. St. Paul Urban League, Employment and Industrial Committee report, Oct. 12, 1935, Urban League Records, MHS. On coming to St. Paul, Mitchell said his goal was to open up labor unions to blacks and sell blacks on the value of unions; Watson, *Lion in the Lobby*, 114.

18. *St. Paul Dispatch*, July 25, 1974, p. 30.

19. Wingerd, *Claiming the City*, 266–67; *Minneapolis Labor Review*, June 14, 1940, p. 2; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Dec. 14, 1947, p. 11. Gilligan's connection to the AFL was cemented by friendships with Ray Wentz, St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly organizer, and George Lawson, Minnesota AFL secretary and chief lobbyist at the state capitol. Gilligan attended the first CIO state convention and had friends in CIO unions, but his connection with the AFL was always stronger. Gilligan mediated a number of labor-management disputes over the years; in his most famous effort, he was credited with helping end one of the state's most bitter labor conflicts—the 1938 Duluth newspaper strike. See *Duluth News Tribune* and *St. Paul Dispatch*, both May 27, 1938, p. 17.

20. *Minneapolis Spokesman*, Oct. 20, 1939, p. 1.

21. On the northern civil rights movement as a "rights revolution," see Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008). For a Minnesota-based perspective, see Jennifer A. Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal: Civil Rights and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 40–78.

22. *Minneapolis Tribune*, Sept. 15, 1955, p. 17. Gilligan served under Republican governors Thye, Luther W. Youngdahl, and C. Elmer Anderson, and Democratic-Farmer-Laborite Orville L. Freeman.

23. *Minneapolis Star*, July 7, 1955, p. 20; Governor's Interracial Commission, collection inventory and agency history record, Dept. of Human Rights Records, State Archives, MHS. Rucker was appointed the commission's first executive director in 1947.

24. On the new era in anti-racism education, see Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal*, 41–55. In 1945 the board had 13 members, including five clergy and Ransom



Billboard, Minnesota State Fair, 1948. From left: probably Cecil Newman, editor of the Minneapolis Spokesman, unidentified man, and Governors Youngdahl and Thye.

and Owens of the Urban League.

25. Here and below, Governor's Interracial Commission, *The Negro Worker in Minnesota* (1945), 5–9, 12–14. Other reports included *The Negro and His Home in Minnesota* (1947); *The Indian in Minnesota* (1947); *Race Relations in Minnesota* (1948); *Negroes and Whites as Fellow Workers* (1948); *The Oriental in Minnesota* (1949); *The Negro Worker's Progress in Minnesota* (1949); *The Indian in Minnesota* (1952); and *The Mexican in Minnesota* (1953). A letter of transmittal accompanied early reports, noting that Gilligan was the author in consultation with an advisory committee.

26. *Negro Worker in Minnesota*, 17–20, 25.

27. *Negro Worker in Minnesota*, 27–31.

28. *Negro Worker in Minnesota*, 49–53.

29. *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 27, 1947, p. 1, 9.

30. Here and two paragraphs below, Governor's Interracial Commission, *The Negro and His Home in Minnesota*, 71–77 (quotes, 72–73). The report highlighted the role of banks, real estate boards, and real estate agents in perpetuating housing discrimination. A 1919 Minnesota statute prohibited restrictive covenants on the basis of religious faith or creed but not race; the commission proposed amending the law to include race.

31. *St. Paul Recorder*, Jan. 17, 1947, p. 1;

St. Paul Pioneer Press, Jan. 25, 1947, p. 9.

The Minnesota law declared policy “to foster the employment of all individuals . . . regardless of their race, color, creed, religious or national origin, and to safe guard their rights to obtain and hold employment without discrimination;” *Minnesota Session Laws 1955*, ch. 516.

32. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 92–121.

33. William J. Collins, “The Political Economy of Race, 1940–1964: The Adoption of State-Level Fair Employment Legislation,” *National Bureau of Economic Research Historical Working Paper 128* (June 2000): 34; *Minnesota Session Laws 1955*, ch. 516, sec. 8, 9, 10. The law provided for complaints, timelines, commission inquiries, mediation, review, notice, court review, and appeal.

34. *St. Paul Recorder*, Jan. 17, 1947, p. 1; McWatt, *Crusaders*, 136.

35. Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal*, 110–16; *Minneapolis Labor Review*, Sept. 22,

1955, p. 1; League of Women Voters, pro-FEPC lobbying material, 1949, Minnesota League of Women Voters Records, MHS; Otto F. Christianson, anti-FEPC memo, 1949, in Governor's Interracial Commission, Dept. of Human Rights Records, MHS. For a brief summary of Mullin's career, see his obituaries in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press and Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Apr. 29, 1982, and biographical information, Minnesota Legislative Reference Library, St. Paul. Labor school classes were held between September and June. At one, Gilligan taught “Socialism: What is it? What it is not?,” A. P. Eberl of the Coal, Ice and Building Materials Drivers Union handled “How to Negotiate a Labor Contract,” and Mullin lectured on “A Lawyer Looks at the Taft Hartley Act.”

36. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 18, 1955, p. 1. See also Governor's Commission on Human Rights Records, MHS.

37. *Catholic Spirit*, Apr. 17, 1997, p. 14. At age 92, Gilligan turned out to meet church and Minneapolis Building Trades members; *Minneapolis Labor Review*, Dec. 21, 1990, p. 12. Looking back on his life, Gilligan continued to speak with pride of his racial-justice work; see, for example, *St. Paul Dispatch*, July 25, 1974, p. 30. Ironically, Gilligan's success helping his parish avoid disruption from the construction of Interstate Highway 94 through St. Paul did not help the nearby black Rondo neighborhood, which was cut in half despite significant protest.

38. According to St. Paul civil rights activist Allie Mae Hampton, the struggle for the FEPC did result in some modest but important changes: “It used to be open discrimination here . . . but now it's more refined. I think that is all to the credit of the FEPC;” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Feb. 26, 1961, sec. 4, p. 8. Revs. Flahavan and Mertz both attested to the influence of Gilligan on their generation of priests; 2009 interviews. Directly or indirectly, Gilligan-inspired clergy participated in 1960s-era civil rights, the emerging community-organizing efforts of the 1970s and '80s, and a host of congregation-based social-justice efforts today.

39. Juanita and Clarence Mitchell to chairman, Gilligan retirement testimonial dinner, telegram, Sept. 14, 1955, Governor's Interracial Commission records. On the limits of Minnesota's approach to racial justice in the pre-Martin Luther King era, see Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal*, 160–69.

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