

Bishop James E. McManus Papers

**Baltimore Province of the Redemptorists Archives
7509 Shore Road
Brooklyn, New York 11209-2807**

The scope of the papers of Bishop James E. McManus, C.Ss.R., a member of the Baltimore Province of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, encompasses letters, manuscripts (including memoirs), notebooks, articles, news clippings, photographs, and sound recordings dating from the early 1900s to as late as 1983, seven years after his death. The collection is especially important—however partial—for research on the history of the Catholic Church in Puerto Rico. The Province Archives is also in possession of Bishop McManus' dissertation, a thesis completed in the School of Canon Law at the Catholic University of America, entitled "The Administration of Temporal Goods in Religious Institutes" (1937). The entirety of the collection is open to qualified researchers, with one exception related to an annulment case. Consultation of these materials will be at the discretion of the Province Archivist.

Biography:

James Edward McManus was born October 10, 1900, in Brooklyn, New York, to William and Elizabeth (née O'Loughlin) McManus. Baptized in St. Thomas Aquinas Parish at 9th Street and 4th Avenue, his first communion and confirmation were made at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, whose parochial school he attended from 1906-1914, taught by Sisters of St. Joseph. In the fall of 1914, he attended Manual Training High School on 3rd Street and 7th Avenue in Brooklyn, but by Christmas his life took a different course. In January, he entered the Redemptorist high school at North East (1915-1921), did his novitiate at Ilchester, Maryland, and completed the theological course at Mt. St. Alphonsus in Esopus, New York, in 1928. He was invested with the Redemptorist habit August 1, 1921, made his first profession as a Redemptorist on August 2, 1922 and made his perpetual profession on August 2, 1925. Ordained at Esopus by Patrick Cardinal Hayes, June 19, 1927, he was immediately sent to do parish work at Annapolis, Maryland, at St. Mary's Church. Beginning in May 1929, he did parish work in the mission territory of Puerto Rico, where Redemptorists had been present since the turn of the century. There he served at Caguas and Puerta de Tierra and their outlying barrios. Upon arrival in Puerto Rico, his most immediate task was to rebuild chapels decimated by the San Felipe hurricane. In 1932 he tended to the Leper Colony in Trujillo Alto and the sanatorium for tuberculosis patients in Rio Piedras. In 1933 he was made a member of the regular mission band of preachers, which covered the entirety of the island of Puerto Rico. In 1934, he was recalled to the United States at the request of his superiors to pursue canon law studies. In 1937, he obtained the JCD from the Catholic University of America and appointed to return to Esopus to teach canon law. He did this, under obedience, for three years, but felt that the work was neither to his liking nor suited to his interests. He asked for permission to return to Puerto Rico and remained there, serving in pastoral assignments at Aguadilla at the newly erected Church of St. Charles Borromeo until 1945, when he was named pastor of the larger parish of the Candelaria in Mayaguez. He remained there only a short while, however, because on May 10, 1947, at the direction of Pope Pius XII, he was made Bishop of Ponce, succeeding his Redemptorist confrere, Bishop Aloysius Willinger, C.Ss.R. Bishop McManus was consecrated by Bishop William T. McCarty, C.Ss.R., in the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Brooklyn on July 1, 1947, and remained a member of the episcopate in good standing for the remainder of his life.

The Diocese of Ponce, which claimed some 800,000 Catholics distributed over 1,800 square miles, had thirty-five parishes at the time of McManus' ascendancy to that See. It had been established as a

separate diocese from the much older Archdiocese of San Juan (1513) in 1924. Of the hundred or so priests then working for Ponce, about a third were Redemptorists, most of whom were American by birth. Among the notable accomplishments of his tenure as Bishop of Ponce was the beginnings of three important apostolates—the launching of three communications endeavors, two diocesan periodicals (*Luz y Verdad* and *El Debate*) and a radio station (WEUC), the establishment of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico in 1948, and the encouragement of a new Catholic political party in Puerto Rico, the PAC. The latter's emergence would raise the hackles of many on the island and although it never amounted to any serious threat to the political establishment, it was a source of controversy that drew out important issues for the people, especially over the question of nationhood and self-determination, as well as moral issues of government policies on divorce and family planning. McManus himself often felt as though it was incumbent upon him to take up adversarial positions against the actions of political leaders, but this was always, in his view, to safeguard the best interests of religion over against total state control.

In 1960, an attack of angina pectoris forced McManus to suggest the appointment of an auxiliary bishop. At McManus' request, his secretary Monsignor Luis Aponte Martinez was named that July and consecrated a bishop in October. Aponte, who McManus ordained in 1950, began in earnest and served the Bishop well, becoming the diocesan chancellor and director of development both to the University and to the new major seminary, Regina Cleri, another of McManus' projects. Aponte was named coadjutor in April 1963, with the right of succession. But by that August, the relationship he had with McManus became impaired. On August 7, Aponte informed McManus that he had been to see the nuncio, Archbishop Emanuele Clarizio, and had resigned. Stunned, McManus wrote to both men for a resolution but within a week's time it was McManus who was offering to resign—an offer he repeated several times. Clarizio acquiesced, and this opened the way for Aponte to succeed McManus, which he did on November 18, 1963. He barely lasted a year in the job. Aponte would go on to become the Archbishop of San Juan at age 43, being made a Cardinal of the Church in 1973. McManus later characterized the methods of Clarizio as "brutal." As for McManus, after some speculation that he would be made an archbishop for a six-month assignment to the See of San Juan, on November 27, 1963, he was instead appointed to become an auxiliary bishop to Francis Cardinal Spellman, serving on "the back porch" as Vicar for Sullivan and Ulster Counties within the Archdiocese of New York. Upon assuming this role he was given the titular See of Benda.

While serving the New York Archdiocese, McManus was stationed as pastor at Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish, in Port Ewan. His attendance at the Second Vatican Council was minimal and he avoided the third and fourth sessions, though he kept up with the proceedings intently. He was not disposed to embrace certain theological trends then coming into vogue and often wrote to Council Fathers with his views, notably John Cardinal Wright, though it is interesting that he did not supply these same opinions to Cardinal Spellman. The habit of making careful theological and canonical analyses of the propositions being entertained at the Council carried over to the post-conciliar period when so many of the directives issued by the Fathers were to be implemented. He often supplied the American Bishops' Conference with his expertise on liturgical law and catechetics, though he maintained a decidedly conservative point of view throughout. He grew ardently more pro-life in his final years, especially after the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*, going so far as to propose a special meeting of the entire American episcopate to mobilize on this issue. Beyond this work, he was content to preside at confirmations and meetings of clergy in the vicariate. The late 1960s proved to be somewhat tumultuous, owing partially to the uproar over hundreds of thousands of hippies coming to the Bethel/Woodstock music festival—a cultural event that catalyzed a split between younger and older clergy.

On June 26, 1970, Bishop McManus submitted his resignation for reasons of health at age 70 and retired to Opa Locka, Florida, to a Redemptorist parish and to be near his remaining family. Despite his health issues, he remained active up until his death, which in that year saw him covering no less than 57 confirmation assignments for the Archdioceses of Miami and New York. While visiting at West End, NJ, he suffered a massive stroke and died a few days later, July 1, 1976, in the hospital at Long Branch. The obsequies were given at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, Brooklyn, on July 5. He was buried from St. Patrick's Cathedral the next day, with Terrence Cardinal Cooke as principal celebrant of the funeral Mass. He was interred at the Redemptorist cemetery in Esopus. He was survived by his sister, Mary O'Leary, of Florida.