The Department of Special Collections & Archives, J. Edgar & Louise S. Monroe Library
Presents:

Fr. Louis J. Twomey, S.J.
Loyola’s Voice for Labor

A companion exhibit to the First Year Experience program, 2005-2006

Located in the Library Living Room through December, 2005
“To create a Society in which the dignity of the human person, in whomsoever found, shall be acknowledged, respected and protected.”

–Fr. Twomey

Timeline:

1905  Born on October 5th in Tampa, Florida

1923  Graduates as valedictorian from Jesuit High School

1926  Declines a baseball contract with the Washington Senators; enters Jesuit novitiate at Grand Coteau, Louisiana

1931  Receives B.A. degree, Loyola University New Orleans

1933  Receives M.A. degree, St. Louis University

1939  Ordained on June 21st

1947  Receives M.B.A. degree, St. Louis University; Joins faculty at Loyola University New Orleans; Founds the Institute of Industrial Relations (it later becomes the Institute of Human Relations, then the Twomey Center for Peace through Justice)

1948  Begins publishing “Christ’s Blueprint for the South,” an aid to the social formation of members of the Society of Jesus, which focuses on the application of Catholic social doctrine to contemporary social needs. By the time of his death in 1969, circulation is over 3,000 copies per month.
Timeline continued:

1953  Supports the National Agricultural Workers Union in an attempt to unionize for fair wages and working conditions

1954  Represents New Orleans Archbishop Joseph Francis Rummel in an unsuccessful lobby against the “Right to Work” bill before the Louisiana state legislature

1963  Founds the Inter-American Center at Loyola University to train young leadership groups of Latin America in ideas, ideals, tactics and techniques of building democratic social institutions

1969  Fr. Twomey dies on October 8th in New Orleans
Fr. Twomey opened the Institute for Industrial Relations at Loyola University New Orleans in 1947 in a small, 300 square foot office and with a budget of $20 per month. The mission of the Institute was to facilitate dialogue and understanding between management and labor personnel. To achieve this means, non-credit courses were offered to interested parties. Fr. Twomey directed the institute until his death in 1969 and used it as a resource center for teaching, writing and circulating information on labor problems, the challenges of communism and racial injustice.

Through the years, the institute grew into 3 separate divisions:

- **The Labor-Management Center**, which offered free courses and conducted programs in collective bargaining, economics and industrial ethics

- **The Social Order Center**, which provided programs in community development and race relations and trained the unemployed at vocational centers in New Orleans and the surrounding areas

- **The Inter-American Center**, which operated under funding from the US Office of International Development and offered 6-week courses in community and national development to Latin American citizens
Highlights of the Institute’s Programs:

Agricultural training, 1966

Clerical training, 1966

Vocational training, 1966

Training program graduation ceremony in the Danna Center, 1966
“The more I know of the philosophy and theology of man, the less I understand how people can promote institutions in society which undercut the human person.”

In the years after World War II, members of the Catholic Rural Life Movement encouraged Polish refugees to move to south Louisiana to become sugar cane farmers. The vast majority of these refugees were black, and were paid between $700 and $1200 per year. Under these conditions, many refugees left Louisiana.

For those who stayed, Fr. Vincent O’Connell organized the Agricultural Workers Union (AWU), to use collective bargaining strategies to improve pay and working conditions for the group.

The AWU soon became affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), with whom Fr. Twomey had already been working for some time. Fr. Twomey wrote to the director of the Southern Conference of Teamsters: “There are thousands of workers on the plantations who live in a state of almost semi-feudalism... Of themselves they are powerless to make any effective efforts to right their pitiable condition. Strong union organization is really their only hope.”

On October 12, 1953, the union went on strike. The plantation operators, working with the American Sugar Cane League, managed to quell the strike after only 28 days. During that time, many workers lost utilities or were forced out of their homes.

In conjunction with the Commission on Human Rights, and with a considerable amount of money from Archbishop Rummel of New Orleans, Fr. Twomey organized caravans of relief with clothing and food for the strikers and their families. Despite the strike’s failure, Fr. Twomey continued to carry the message of the farmers around the country and became a commanding voice as a spokesman for labor and justice.
The “Right-to-Work” Bill - 1954

“There is no such thing as limited freedom... The requirements of justice demand that the wage and other conditions of work be such as to accord with the intrinsic dignity of the human personality.”

The Right to Work Bill contended that no worker should be required to be a member of the organized labor movement in order to obtain or retain employment. Thus, the bill was viewed by many as “anti-labor,” or more clearly, a bill that would serve the interests of management over those of the workforce. If passed, the bill would have effectively allowed management to operate and make decisions without pressure from unions, possibly leading to the exploitation of workers.

In a telegram to the Louisiana State Legislature dated June 1, 1954, New Orleans Archbishop Joseph Francis Rummel declared the bill “insincere because, while it pretends to guarantee the right to work, it actually frustrates that right, in effect exposing labor to lose security, a decent standard of living and humane working conditions.”

Father Twomey’s remarks to the LA State legislature, June 2, 1954: “Now is the time to rise above the din and roar of class-conscious argumentation. Now is the time to take on the moral grandeur of men who will have no part with special interests at the expense of the general welfare. Now is the time to assume the role of genuine statement and make yourselves superior to the pull of personal interests and to the lure of political expediency. This is the price you must pay now for greatness in the eyes of God as well as in the eyes of your fellow men. If you are willing to pay this price, you will kill the ‘Right to Work’ bill in your committee.”

Soon after his appearances in Baton Rouge, the bill was made into law.

Nonetheless, Father Twomey noted two positive outcomes resulting from the unsuccessful fight against the Right to Work bill, namely that the church won support from the working class and that church leaders found a forum for discussing social doctrine.
The Blueprint

“Before anything, I am a priest.”

First published as “Christ’s Blueprint for the South,” Fr. Twomey began editing this monthly newsletter in 1948. It later became “Blueprint for the Christian Reshaping of Society” and finally, the “Blueprint for Social Justice.” Its mission is simple: to apply Catholic social doctrine to contemporary social needs.

Circulation began as a world-wide newsletter for members of the Society of Jesus, which it served to aid in the social formation of its members. Very shortly after it appeared, laypeople began requesting subscriptions, and today, the circulation has grown to beyond 3,000 in 51 countries.

During Fr. Twomey’s life, two main themes often discussed in The Blueprint were racism and the rights of the worker to organize into unions. Today, the publication stays true to its roots, reporting on one issue related to social justice each month.

To request a subscription, please contact the Twomey Center via phone 504-861-5736 or via e-mail: bluprint@loyno.edu

From a Blueprint cover story, circa 1990s
“We must establish our identity in togetherness toward the dignity of the human person.”

“He was a good man to have around and there were too few like him. As much as anyone he pricked and wakened the conscience of the South. And if the South’s conscience is now more responsive than the rest of the nation’s, he surely had something to do with it.” – Walker Percy

Father Twomey died three days after his 64th birthday in 1969. In the end, 4 major obstacles hindered his journey - The anti-communist hysteria of the McCarthy era, racism, southern culture, and finally, his personal health.

His premature death from emphysema was the result of years of heavy smoking. With that in mind, it is important to note that he was forced into inactivity during the last 5 years of his life because of his health, and that he was largely unable to participate in the reforms enacted by Vatican II, as well as “The New Frontier” and “Great Society” social movements of the 1960s against poverty and injustice.

In the eulogy delivered by the president of Loyola University New Orleans, Fr. Thomas Clancy, S.J., he was remembered as “a great man, a great priest, a great Jesuit, a great American.”

Fr. Clancy went on to say: “Let us pray for the soul of this courageous crusader. Let us pray for this city and this Southland that he loved so well and that he worried about and argued with so constantly, and let us pray for this nation and for all the people with whom he felt an instinctive bond, the poor, the downtrodden, the same people in whose company our Divine Savior was found throughout his life. Amen.”
For More Information:


The Twomey Center for Peace through Justice: http://www.loyno.edu/twomey/
Fr. Louis J. Twomey, S.J
1905-1969