

Tolerance—Or Else



ARCHBISHOP RITTER. Discrimination forced an iron hand.

Very seldom do Americans hear talk of excommunication in their own country. Cutting worshippers off from any participation in church-life has seemed a penalty almost exclusively European.

But this month a short mention of the extreme action was enough to settle a touchy problem for the Roman Catholic archdiocese of St. Louis.

The situation developed as the school term opened. Archdiocesan authorities discovered that the lone Catholic high school for Negroes was overcrowded by about 100 pupils (normal enrollment: 300). Easy solution, they thought, would be to place the extra pupils throughout the four other church high schools in the city.

Catholic Color Line. For 700 parents of white students at those schools, however, it was far from a solution; it was "completely objectionable." To avert it they held meetings, decided to take the matter into court and get an injunction against the mixing of students.

Last week the objections had subsided to a few fire-side grumbles. St. Louis' Archbishop Joseph Ritter had written his flock a simple little letter explaining that automatic excommunication follows interference with the administrative office of the bishop by appeal to authority outside the church.

A plan to appeal to authority within the church, the Pope's personal delegate in Washington,* also dwindled. The Vatican attitude was too well known—no distinction between Catholics for any reasons of race or color.

*If the appeal-planners had studied their church law more thoroughly they might have saved themselves some effort—the only person to whom an archbishop is accountable is the Pope himself.