



The Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity

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Statement

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We have watched an almost-total conspiracy of the civil and religious leadership of Lowndes County to exonerate one of their own. As the Attorney General of Alabama has eloquently indicated, the entire proceedings here constitute a miscarriage of justice, irrespective of the nature of the verdict. Through its failure to call certain witnesses, and then in its failure to adequately interrogate those that did appear, the prosecution played its role in the conspiracy successfully. That the trial proceeded at all without Fr. Richard Morrisroe, both a victim and a key witness, is manifest proof of the shabby regard for due process and just procedures we have seen here. Serious charges were levelled against Fr. Morrisroe who is still living, by the grace of God, and who could have defended himself at a later time. Jonathan Daniels, who represented us in the Selma area, could not defend himself against the charges that he carried a weapon. The state made no effort to establish the fine character of this dedicated servant of Christ. Mr. Gamble was supplied a message of high tribute and praise for Jon Daniels, issued by the Dean and Faculty of Jon's seminary, but he saw fit not to introduce it in the face of this conspiracy to defame. Much talk was heard about visitors to the jail possibly smuggling weapons in, but no effort was made to secure testimony from any of these visitors - one, at least, being a priest of the Episcopal Church who was present for the trial.

That no Justice Department officials were on hand to observe the proceedings sorely taxes one's confidence in this agency's interest or ability to serve the cause of justice anywhere. While justice is winked at once more in Alabama, President Johnson announces plans for a Federally sponsored opera company. Such cultural advantages will have little future in a country where the law of the jungle appears increasingly to provide the only alternative for persons unable to expect justice from the courts. The White House must recognize that the mood of many people, generally patient and disposed to wait upon the gradual forces of change, cannot long endure the cumulative effect of a steady series of judicial miscarriages. We must have Federal initiative and involvement in the investigation and prosecution of murders connected with efforts to support and implement Federal laws in voting and other aspects of civil rights activity. That such Federal initiative is undertaken in pursuit of the illicit whisky industry, but not for citizens seeking to obtain a more just and democratic society, is an irony of tremendous proportions.

Above all else, the most depressing part of this charade was the manner by which the Church was trotted out in the person of local clergy, both on the stand and in the audience, to bless and pronounce absolution over the whole ritual of exoneration. By implication these deputies of Christ cast stones at a true disciple whose whole reason for being in the Selma area was one of Christian commitment and motivation. That Jonathan Daniels should be so mocked by other Christians would have been no surprise to him, for he suffered much abuse at the hands of fellow Episcopalians during the time he was in Alabama; never once, though, becoming embittered or unforgiving because of it. The Episcopal Bishop of Alabama had met and talked with Jon, but not once has there been any public expression of regret over his death from top Church sources. St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Selma endured his presence, at times either excluding him when in the company of Negro friends, or causing them to sit in the rear. The parade of preachers at the Hayneville Courthouse was a consistent portrayal of the role official Church spokesmen played in relationship to this now-deceased follower of Christ.

Jonathan Daniels was in Selma primarily to work for reconciliation and communication between the terribly divided communities called White and Black. This commitment rightly took him at times into a full identification with the Civil Rights Movement. At other times he withdrew from this level of ministry and sought to help bridge the awful gulf that tears at Selma and the nation. His disposition was gentle and loving above all else. He could not have carried a knife anymore than Fr. Morrisroe could have brandished a gun. Deep in the hearts of the townfolk of Hayneville this truth will restlessly remain to further remind them of a forsaken integrity.

Jonathan Daniels has not died in vain. Tomorrow there will be a service across from the White House at St. John's Church, Lafayette Square, or in the park itself, after which a delegation of Episcopalians will hope to see President Johnson to plead for Federal intervention to halt this escalating carnage. Tomorrow, also, will mark the inauguration of the as-yet unannounced Selma Interreligious Project, joined in by Catholic, Protestant and Jewish groups who feel that the work Jonathan Daniels began should be continued. It will be staffed by the Rev. Francis Walter, an Episcopal priest who is native to Alabama. The religious folk of America who came to Selma in such impressive strength in the spring, and who remained through faithful servants such as Jonathan Daniels, will not leave this area until justice and love are more regarded and some sanity is restored to a sick and divided people.
