



“These colored people
are not abused in any way,
but the way they’re abusing us
is just shameful.”

--Owner, Daybreak Plantation,
quoted in New York Times

Official Christian Leadership Not Doing Job in Mississippi

By
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★ The official Christian leadership in the State of Mississippi, Roman Catholic and Protestant, white and colored, is failing to provide sufficiently effective guidance, support and initiative to the civil rights movement.

After an investigation of all phases of the problem, during which we drove more than 1100 miles in the State of Mississippi and talked with leaders, victims of anti-civil rights activities and anyone who had anything to say on the general subject, we have concluded that Christian leadership is the only real hope for ending the injustices and atrocities which are so common there. Leaders are not doing enough.

Who are we? Malcolm Boyd, an Episcopal priest, is national field director of the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity and member of an inter-racial team ministry at the Church of the Atonement, Washington, D. C., William J. Jacobs is a Roman Catholic layman, managing editor of *Ave Maria*, a widely published author and frequent lecturer, with a background of almost 21 years of interest in inter-racial work and investigative reporting.

We use witness in this article in two senses. First, as Christians, we were witnesses to events and statements in Mississippi. On the basis of our observations, we feel we must bear witness to our belief as Christians that the awful conditions in Mississippi cannot be remedied by the milder-than-moderate, these - things - take-

time attitude expressed by so many in authority.

The tendency among church leaders we talked to is to seek solutions through the existing power structure. We contend that the power structure is mainly responsible for conditions in Mississippi and cannot be changed fast enough to stop the unbelievably horrible things we saw and heard about during our trip.

The leaders we interviewed are good men, men of considerable ability in many cases, men we would like to have as personal friends. But every one of them advocated policies and points of view such as we will enumerate below. We believe these to be wholly inadequate in a place where people are being terrorized by segregationists, where they have been murdered, cut in half, whipped with chains, where women have been outrageously abused, stripped and beaten, where children are paralyzed by fear and injured for life, where churches and houses have been bombed . . . recently . . . all of this recently!

Usual Views

The general attitudes voiced by the leaders are as follows:

- That integration must be a very long-term process and that rapid action and results are not to be expected in any area.

- That the white power structure in Mississippi is the only logical source to deal with the problems and that all actions must be directed through it.

- That only white natives of Mississippi can understand Mis-

issippi's problems and that outsiders, regardless of their training, abilities and intentions will only harm things by stirring up resentment among the whites.

- That the National Council of Churches' Delta Ministry which has sent teams of workers into Mississippi has done great harm by increasing resentment among whites.

- That COFO — a rather militant group of young civil rights workers — is made up of beatniks and agitators, untrained and unskilled in dealing with the problems of Mississippi.

- That COFO has been infiltrated by Marxists and others with extreme leftist tendencies. A figure often quoted is that two out of seven members are in this class.

- That the COFO workers engage in gross immorality.

- That the NAACP is too aggressive. In other places and in some quarters within the civil rights movement in Mississippi, it is accused of being too slow and hesitant.

As you talk to the bishops, priests, ministers and others who have thrown in their lot with the power structure, you learn that there are several "dirty words." These include "outsider," "agitator," "activist" and "journalist." In less polite circles, the word "Jew" is included. At the same time, they will tell you that what they need most is leadership in politics and journalism. You get the impression that they are prepared to sit there and wait for it.

As for the charges listed here, let us answer them one by one.

● Regarding speed of integration, we feel it must be increased and that it won't be unless the Christian leadership of Mississippi takes the leading role in bringing about the increase. There are hundreds of segregated churches in Mississippi for every one that is integrated. Schools — including parochial schools — have integrated only one grade, and there is no evidence of a desire to move any faster than one grade a year. In many cases, terrorists prevent Negro children from attending integrated schools. If a Negro child does register in an integrated school, it is virtually certain that the child's father will lose his job immediately.

The Power Structure

● Everyone in the power structure assumes that only he and his peers in Mississippi know the answers to racial problems. We contend that what we saw and heard from local people about the problems refutes this assumption because it is so plain that Mississippi is a terrorist police state so far as Negroes are concerned. The same problems observed almost anywhere else would result in screams for immediate justice. The power structure, on the other hand, cries principally for time to work things out . . . the white man's way.

It should be noted that there are Negro church leaders who throw their lots in with the power structure, failing to allow their churches to be used for civil rights meetings, failing to take any real action to stop the terror and bring justice, charity and peace.

● It is entirely possible that native Mississippians are the very people who cannot possibly understand the whole situation. They are not necessarily to be

blamed for this, but it is virtually certain if outsiders left the natives alone, racial justice would never come to Mississippi.

● We found the Delta Ministry to be made up of highly trained, completely dedicated men and women, both white and Negro. Their "sin" apparently is that they are doing something. That will naturally cause resentment in Mississippi.

● We feel that the very presence of COFO workers in Mississippi is a positive good . . . a presence in the best religious sense. We feel this way because they are an abrasive group who will not let the problems be swept away. They are unkempt and unpleasant in many cases, but they are doing something, they are being effective, despite power structure claims to the contrary.

They are running freedom schools. They are helping with voter registration and with the Freedom Democratic Party. They are demonstrating and integrating. They are witnesses. They are risking their lives. They are going hungry in many cases. There has to be a great deal of good in their motives.

Ironically, we also found that much of the COFO leadership is by Mississippians. The only trouble is that the leaders involved are Negro.

The Red Issue

● COFO is suffering more from lack of leadership than from anything else. If the Reds are present and want to take over, there is every opportunity for them to do so. They don't seem to be taking over. We met no Marxists among the COFO workers, although they admit themselves that some workers have had extreme leanings. However, these workers have often drifted in and out of the movement and seem to have no effect on such leadership as exists.

The whole Red issue is a vague one and as one Baptist minister put it, not really a relevant one in this place of terror. It does raise an em-

barrassing question. If so many with leftist tendencies have gravitated to Mississippi to work among the struggling Negroes . . . why have so few Christians done so? Why are we less involved than the leftists in a situation that cries to heaven for a humane solution . . . and fast?

● We found no evidence that there is any great immorality among COFO workers. Conditions are certainly not as bad among them as on many polite college campuses. Furthermore, they are usually pretty tired and pretty hungry and show little outward interest in orgies. Generally, their commitment would seem to make them more moral than most of us.

● Our own experience with the NAACP included accompanying a group of its workers and helping them to integrate three motels and a dining room in Natchez. We found them to be sensible, dedicated and fearless under the worse imaginable conditions.

The Bombed Churches

One reason we went to Mississippi was to look over possibilities for getting more Americans directly involved in the struggle for freedom by urging them to give financial support to some project in the state. Our number-one consideration was the Committee of Concern, which seeks to raise \$300,000 to rebuild 36 Negro churches which have been bombed recently.

After careful study and considerable reflection, we came to the conclusion that we should not lend our direct support to the committee, even though we would urge that it be supported. The committee represents considerable progress. It is interdenominational and bi-racial . . .

something its leaders say would have been impossible a couple of years ago. This is the kind of progress they mean when they refer to working entirely within the existing power structure.

It is precisely this reason that weakens the committee in our eyes. Absolutely no mention is made of integration at any stage of the proceedings. The committee would rebuild Negro churches for Negroes. Not one member mentioned any hope of integration or of having Negroes use nearby white church facilities even until their own are rebuilt. The thought of integrated worship at white churches during the interim was never born.

We were told by any number of local people in Mississippi that the power structure often uses the Negro church to continue the beloved status quo. A Negro preacher who gets a fairly comfortable income from his church along with a little prestige is often the last man who wants to make waves. He can do a lot to calm his people down, to keep them from the very action which would help to set them free. To repeat, this is no theory of our own. It was explained to us by Negro churchgoers in Mississippi.

Admitting, then, that there are good intentions and good goals involved in the planning of the Committee of Concern, we nevertheless concluded that we could not raise money for it ourselves in good conscience.

It may strike you that we have said a lot of far-reaching things so far without offering much documentation. We'll provide some now and a great deal more in another report.

The Great Gap

As our time in Mississippi grew longer we felt hurt more and more as we witnessed the gap between the leaders and the people. The leaders said to us: "Just leave us alone. We are

the only ones who can handle things here. Everything will be fine. We are making unprecedented progress."

The people said to us: "We have never talked to those men (the leaders). You don't think they'd come into a house like this do you?" This was in a farmhouse only 50 miles from Jackson.

An intelligent young Negro man said: "I expect to die before this is over. I expect to be beaten and cut in half or something. I expect it. My only prayer is that I don't beg for mercy . . . that I don't lose the one thing I've got, my own dignity."

We talked to a family, father, mother and seven children. The father is a tractor driver. He can work four months each year. During that time, he works 12-hour days for \$36 a week. This is the family's only income. Medical care is a sometimes thing. The house consists of two rooms. The walls are cracked. It is a lonely place, miles back from any community, off a dirt road. Asked what they do about food when money runs out the man answered: "I shoot 'coons."

A teen-ager sat on the edge of a trunk in a bedroom late at night. Her mother was at work in a nearby box factory. The girl clutched a bathrobe about her because it was cold. She told what happened to her 39-year-old mother, the mother of 10, when the terrorists decided to drive six families out of Liberty in Amite County to keep "the niggers in line." This was at a time when there was almost no civil rights activity in the area.

The girl said in a flat, unemotional voice: "They called and threatened her a lot of times. Then one night they said they were coming for her and they did . . . on a Friday about 9:45.

"They took her down to the woods and put a rope around her neck. A man had a sawed-

off shotgun. They told her they were going to kill her. The men took a knife and cut off the pedal pushers she was wearing. Then they took a whip and beat on her naked skin. They left her there. She had to crawl back to the house herself. She went back to work on Monday."

This woman was only one of several victims. Some were beaten with chains. At least one was raped.

The woman and her family moved. They picked a poor location . . . right next to the Society Hill Baptist Church in McComb. The church was bombed not long after their arrival. It stands as one of the ugliest, most depressing sights we have ever seen, a reminder of what men can and will do in a place where Southern "justice" prevails and segregation is a cherished way of life to be fostered and preserved at all cost.

Economic Oppression

Along with the threats, the beatings, the killings, the insults . . . there is terrible economic oppression. The white plantation-style farmers "need niggers" to keep their system going, but there are more niggers than they need. The policy is to keep them poor, hungry and in terror so they will leave. One state official said openly that welfare is administered in Mississippi to get rid of the surplus Negroes. But the Negroes hold on. For one thing, it's home, as bad as it is. For another, most have no education or skills with which to make a decent living if they did leave. So they live on, obedient to and in terror of The Man.