

November 12, 1964

I took the opportunity to speak to Mark Weaver while he was in our orientation school. He comes from Macon, Mississippi and is assigned as an MCC PAX worker to the Congo. Before going South I wanted to get his impression of the tentative plans. After speaking to him it was very obvious that he represented the southern viewpoint.

I will attempt to summarize our discussion by making a few observations.

1. Mark believes the Mennonite church in Mississippi has a tremendous mission and future. He said this would only be possible if outsiders do not give them a bad name and if the church does not get involved in politics. By politics he meant that we should never get involved in civil rights. When I asked him what the church in Mississippi would look like in 5, 10 or 15 years he stated that it probably would not be integrated until the southern way of life changes. He says the church should not push integration but should accept it after the Federal Government has educated and conditioned society as a whole to accept integrated churches.
2. Mark emphasized that segregation was a way of life for the southerner. We should not try to change this way of life but rather consider ourselves as a foreigner and try and understand them. In other words get the southern way of life, orientation, and adjust to it which means adjusting to segregation.
3. When asked if our idea of taking material and spending some time in a Negro community was a good idea he responded by saying that we should take the materials to them but then leave the community. The only condition under which we should stay in a colored community would be if the Mennonite is a Negro.
4. He also gave some suggestions and stated we should follow them to avoid difficulty. We should never shake hands with a Negro or call them "Sir" in the presence of a white person. He also had one category for all Negroes stating that all of them will cry for help but do not really need it. They simply try to get as much from the white person as possible.

I thought this discussion with him was very helpful although he is inconsistent in saying we should definitely take material aid to the people and then turns around by saying they really don't need material but are trying to get as much from us as possible. In a way he is saying they need help but doesn't really know how to speak to this need since he wants to uphold the southern way of life. Secondly he has a different view of the church than we have. He thinks the church should simply follow the state or federal government rather than go ahead and try to change the way of life. If Christianity does not change our way of life of what value is it? He said a change is coming due to the civil

rights bill and pressure by the federal government. The people will slowly adjust to this and then the church can follow. In a way he really is saying we need more civil rights workers to force the government to change the southern way of life so that the church can follow.

This conversation with one of our Mennonites who lives in Mississippi is recorded because I believe it is a common view held by the southern Christian. Added to this is the fact that both of us are in MCC and therefore he shared very freely and frankly. The way to understand such a person probably is to simply listen to him and asking questions rather than trying to make him defensive which could very easily have been done in this case because of the numerous inconsistencies. After a better relationship is established one can ask questions which might be more probing.

Jake Friesen