

the Church in Mississippi was doing what it had always done (and what it did most other places in America); reflecting the status quo. When the status quo was total segregation the church closed the doors, the churchmen turned their heads as the police arrested those Negroes who dared knock on the holy doors. But, by ~~the~~^{the} fall of 1964, Mississippi should begin to show "tokenism" in ~~the~~ public school desegregation and "tokenism" everywhere else. Few Blacks could afford to eat in white restaurants or attend white movies; so there would be some occassional desegregation, but not much. The Church (especially the middle class churches where the moderates were concentrated) would not feel comfortable if the life within the church was too different from the world outside. Yes, we could expect ~~the~~ some opening of the church doors. In the meanwhile, I decided, the Methodist Church would probably be far enough removed (social class wise) that the smell of burning crosses would never disturb the fragrance of the altar flowers; that the Methodist Church, like all the white moderates, would never even notice the horror we in the Movement were sure could break out anywhere in Mississippi. But this time my judgment was wrong.

Early in June the cross burnings in Mississippi became

more frequent. By mid June the cross burnings had become church burnings. (Black churches would continue to burn for over a year at the rate of at least one church destroyed every week.) One of these first church burnings was in rural Neshoba County. The Mt. Zion Methodist Church, ~~had~~ a Black congregation with a small wood frame building, had offered their church building and grounds for use as a "Freedom School" in the COFO Summer Project. Here teen-agers would gather for academic tutoring. The church also opened its doors for week night voter-registration classes organized by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The one-room church was the only building for many miles that Blacks could use. As the congregation was leaving their mid-week Prayer meeting they realized that the church was surrounded by cars--klansmen. Most of the church members were allowed to leave but one of the church officers was held and badly beaten. His wife, held by the klan, ^{smen} watched and began screaming to Jesus for help when her husband fainted. He was still alive and she and friends were allowed to take him to their home on the next hill. When they arrived home they looked back at the red glow in the sky. Mt. Zion Methodist Church was burning.

Two days later the Movement workers for the area came to investigate. They were James Chaney, Black, ~~and~~ from Meridian

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 and his friend, Michael Schwerner, white, from New York. Both had been working for CORE in that area of Mississippi ~~for~~ since the winter. With them was another white man, Andrew Goodman, a student from New York who was one of the summer volunteers for the COFO project. Goodman had been in the state less than a few hours when he was assigned to accompany the other men to Neshoba to investigate the church burning and talk to the ~~city/~~ ^{community people.} ~~members/~~ Death threats (and escapes at high speeds) had already happened in this ~~county~~ so everyone who knew where the men were was concerned. The men were caught at the ~~the~~ ~~ruins~~ of Mt. Zion Methodist Church, ~~and~~ arrested by a Deputy Sheriff (who was ~~probably~~ ~~probably~~ a klan member), and ordered to drive into the county seat, Philadelphia, to pay some sort of ^{false} traffic fine. The three men did so, driving their own car. Inside the town a tire on their station wagon began to go flat. They pulled into the parking lot of the First Methodist Church (white only, of course). While changing the tire they ~~they~~ ~~were~~ ~~approached~~ by the deputy ~~and~~ who now had another officer with him. Now the men discovered it was not just a traffic fine facing them but they were going to jail. The two Mississippi veterans knew that might mean death. The last possible chance they had for escape was that very ~~very~~

church. But none of the prisoners thought of the church as any kind of sanctuary or even a temporary refuge. The new pastor of the Church had just come there from a church in Jackson. It was a promotion for him. He was the Chairman of the Board of Christian Social Concerns for the Mississippi Methodist Church, the same man who had told a group of us the previous Christmas that he did not think the church should get too involved in controversial things like the racial problems because that might jeopardize the work of the church in other important areas of social concern. (I often wondered that summer what this minister would have done if the three prisoners had run into his church that Sunday evening, or even shouted to him for help. The men knew they faced a possible death; the minister might have advised them to be less dramatic and emotional, and to respect law and order.) ~~The~~ Another Philadelphia Methodist churchman was the chairman of the recently formed "Fellowship of Loyal Churchmen"; the group of moderates who had finally tried to face some of the problems of the Church in Mississippi. Neither of these two Methodist churchmen had any idea of the reality of Mississippi. A few hours later the three men in the Movement were dead, buried in Neshoba County. The moderates, blind and deaf, gathered in their white

* This minister Clay had a year earlier had accepted post of assistant pastor of Gallows Methodist church in Jackson and the pastor (Dr. Solom) resigned position with Negroes from attending the church.

* And further faithful performance of duty led by 1976 to promotion to pastor of largest Meth. Church in Miss. Gallows -

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white churches that Sabbath evening in Philadelphia to praise God as usual. The white Methodists probably did not know that a Black Methodist church in their county had been burned; the white Methodists probably did not even know the church existed.

The three ~~men~~ Movement men had one more representative of the white Christian religion of Mississippi to face. But this final meeting was not in the ruins of a Black Methodist Church or in front of the beautiful ^{red} brick white Methodist Church. One of the men in the klan mob who beat them and killed them was a white minister, a fundamentalist Baptist preacher, the Rev. Mr. Killen. Although he may not have been involved in such ~~exte/ exte~~ extermination business in the past, this man was known in the community as "Preacher Killen." The three ~~men~~ ^{men} were shot, one by one, then dumped in a pile together. As the dirt~~ly~~ was being thrown over their bodies Preacher Killen led a bizarre kind of funeral service that was possible only in Mississippi. The preacher committed the souls of the departed unto God and prayed that God would forgive them ^{the victims,} all their sins.

(I knew that these men were missing in Neshoba County. I knew this several hours before they were killed. I talked with several other Movement leaders that evening; we decided that to go to Neshoba to try to help our friends would only mean

our own reasons--and we had important tasks to do. We were not motivated by fear--or so we thought-- for we fully expected to soon be killed ourselves. We just rationally decided not to go and attempt to help our friends, ^{not} to go and die with them. We did seek help from the U.S. government, ~~the Justice Dept and the State Dept~~ ^{directly from the Justice Dept} from the FBI, which knew of the trouble in time to stop the killings but refused to help us. None of us were surprised that the FBI allowed these three men to be murdered. The FBI was not on the side of the Freedom Movement. The FBI was not on the side of Freedom. So we knew that the ^{American} government would not help our friends; we knew that we ~~th~~ were the only ones who could go to Neshoba. ~~They did not go.~~ We did not go. I did not go.)

The next day was one of the most terrible I ever lived in Mississippi. Although I had said I would expect nothing from the white liberals and moderates in the churches I could not stop trying. I thought that the horror of the Neshoba murders might still shock the white church leaders into some kind of action, some kind of support for an end to the violence, if nothing else. And if the white moderates would move against violence, the Movement would be helped. So I tried again. Again I failed--but was hurt deeply in the process.

I called Buford Posey, a white friend who lived in Neshoba County. He was no moderate but a supporter of the Movement who had visited Tougaloo ^{College} frequently. He was a white native of Mississippi who knew that change and freedom would make a better Mississippi for everyone. X He agreed to find out everything he could about the missing men and to keep me and the COFO office informed. *His first assumption was the same as mine - they were dead,*

Then I contacted Fr. Bernard Law, ^X the liberal editor of the ~~Journal~~/newspaper for the Roman Catholic Church in Mississippi. I knew that Fr. Law supported desegregation--and that Fr. Law did not think the confrontation tactics of the Movement (such as the church visits) were a good thing. ~~He had been~~ His school background included Harvard and he certainly was not a typical Mississippian. But X he did have great influence within the Catholic Church in the state and the help of every one would be needed if white moderates were to move against the ~~state of~~/violence. But Fr. Law refused to express much concern about the missing men in Neshoba and certainly was not ready for his church to become involved in a moderate effort to stop violence. ^J ~~Violence~~ ^{ence} that he refused to admit existed.

X Now a Bishop in Missouri -

I could get nowhere^s with this man who was sure that he had a perfect understanding of everything about Mississippi and what the Church or moderates should do in the state. I asked to see Bishop Gerow. The Bishop put aside whatever work he was doing and welcomed me. He let me say ~~anything~~ anything I wanted. The Bishop was an old man, almost eighty, but a man of great compassion. He was greatly upset by my descriptions of what was now happening in Neshoba and what would continue to happen unless the white church led the white moderates in some effort to reduce the violence. The Bishop invited me to stay for lunch with him. His questions about the Movement, about Neshoba, about the missing men, were all serious and perceptive. Then Fr. Law came in and proceeded to convince the Bishop that I was not speaking the truth, that I was too emotionally upset (if not cynically^{ic} trying to use a minor incident in Neshoba to deceive the Bishop, a matter that Fr. Law strongly hinted at in my presence-- I can imagine what he said when I left). Law had two major points to prove that I was exaggerating everything I said. The first was that no black church had been burned in Neshoba County. Law claimed to have checked with a white priest in that part of Mississippi who assured him that this was just

a rumor spread by the civil rights workers. The second point was that there had been no murders, that Ed King was just making that up, that Ed King was, perhaps, just too tired because of all ^{he} had done the past year and now, understandably, Ed King just could not think straight. The man then assured me that I would see things differently in a few days and that I should really be concerned about becoming so emotional. (And I realized that this man that I had thought would one day be a great help with the problems of Mississippi did not understand those problems and could not face a world with such problems. BUT Fr. Law was a little frightening because he did have the intellect and the talents to be a great leader. In just a few moments he had totally destroyed my relations with the Bishop. There would be no effort to call other church leaders together to talk about the new crisis of murder and violence now. Even if I could reach someone like the Episcopal Bishop I knew he would contact the Roman Catholic Bishop, who would then suggest Fr. Law as the man who understood the problem. Because Fr. Law was so absolutely sure of his own interpretations I realized he was a dangerous man. There was no hope for Mississippi here. But I tried again. I suggested to Fr. Law that

* Law became a Bishop in 1972 and was assigned to a diocese in Missouri. Then Cardinal in Boston. Then Pope?

he must have heard about the attempted fire ^{bombing} ^{Black} ~~being~~ of a Catholic school building in Hattiesburg. (A Movement meeting had been held there; for the rest of the summer Catholic property ^{like black churches} ~~almost~~ everywhere in the state was closed to the Movement) ~~By~~ There was no question at all about the business. But, to my amazement, Fr. Law said that this most likely was an accident and not the work of the klan at all. I could not tell if he really believed that or was just trying to convince himself. (I believe that he was so concerned that the Catholic Church not become a target of the Klan--who were anti-Catholic as well as there other hates. So he wanted to keep down any possible publicity or public notice of the fire-bombing.) Since he denied this bombing my point about the Neshoba bombing being real was lost.

I left the Catholic Chancery building very sad. It was not just ^{my} ~~his~~ shock at the ^{response} ~~of~~ this liberal priest and the failure to enlist the Bishop in some moderate campaign against violence. I had found my time with the Bishop very meaningful. The old man did want to understand--even something as horrible as this. And for a moment I had almost wanted to turn to him as a spiritual father, to confess my own failure to go to Neshoba to be with my friends who I knew faced death, to receive his blessing. But if Fr. Law had heard my words that I too expected to be killed he would have been convinced I was insane. So I left, saddened.

* Roman Catholic parochial schools were segregated like the public schools -

That night Jeannette and I went ^{to} into Jackson to meet a group of white churchmen at Jane Schutt's home. Jane thought we were probably right in our insistence that the missing men had been murdered in Neshoba. But no other white moderate present did. And some of these people would call themselves liberals on the race issue. All of them were in favor of desegregated churches and all other forms of desegregation-- as long as the change came gradually and peacefully. My picture of a Mississippi where crosses burned nightly, where Black churches were being bombed, where people were being ~~shot~~ killed by police working with klansmen was just something they could not tolerate. If this picture of a bloody Mississippi ^{were} was true, then their patience and inaction was wrong.

One young Methodist ^{leader} minister began talking the same way Fr. Law had earlier. Ed King was too tired, too emotional, too involved to understand anything anymore. These remarks contained the same mixture of hostility and concern as when I heard them from Fr. Law. BUT this was even worse. I was emotional. My friends were dead; I told them, and many more of us might soon be dead. SUCH language is hard to take. The ^{man} minister, Bob Kocktitsky, then silenced me (and any worries the group had) by saying he knew white Mississippians would not

burn a Negro church. If Ed King ~~is~~ was exaggerating on that then surely Ed King was exaggerating in this talk about murder.

* Give more on dual role of Bob K.

(A few years after this Kochtit^zsky had changed his opinions about reality in Mississippi and was working in integrated poverty programs and interracial church meetings. His own home in Jackson was bombed by the klan/ in ~~1968~~ 1968) After convincing the other whites in the room that I was wrong this Mississippi churchmen then proceeded to attack COFO and repeat the insults that the Mississippi press and politicians were mouthing--that COFO probably knew where the three men were hiding, that COFO was staging the whole thing just to create bad publicity for Mississippi and to raise money for their Freedom Summer Project which (as all the white policial leaders had just announced) was a great failure. To hear the moderates and liberals speaking and believing the nonsense of the racists was too much. Jeannet^{ette} and I left and returned to Tougaloo.

As I walked to the door Jane Schutt came over and gave me a hug. She understood. I was crying as Jeannette and I got in the car. I cried for Mississippi, for the Movement, for the Moderates, for the Church, for my friends who were dead in Neshoba, for my friends who soon would die, for Jeannette, for myself.

But by the time we got home to Tougaloo my sadness was over. Now I was angry and ready for the work that waited.

This was, officially, the opening day of the 1964 COFO
FREEDOM SUMMER.