

7INT 13

[begin interview with Duncan Gray]

"How long had you been president of the Mississippi Council....."

.....1962, I believe, to about .....1965.

"And you had been in the parish prior to that?"

I was in the parish then, understand that's not a paid position, the president.....shortly thereafter, I guess it was not long after King came during and after.....it's like, well, any other organization.....like the NAACP. You got a president, but he supports himself some other way, but the executive director is the paid.....I think I was president for about 5 or 6 years.....

"Who conceived of the Miss. Council?"

That's got a long history if you really go back, there was prior to World War II something known as the.....Council for Interracial Justice.....Bishop [Bratten], this would have been in Miss.....that was a regional organization. Out of that, after WWII, came the Southern Regional Council.....based in Atlanta and largely a research organization and so forth. In those days, it was a membership organ and you live in Jackson, Miss. you could be a member of the SRC. The reason I go into all of this is because there were 1 or 2 brief organized something locally in Miss. even back in.....after the war. With the formation of the SRC, again there were members, but along about the mid-50's.....state councils on human relations that would do the kind of work, hopefully, and maybe a forum for discussion for blacks and whites.....in Miss. that particularly.....was rather short-lived and I can speak to that because I was on the board then. I think we were organized along about '56, '57 '58, something like that; it wasn't very long. [ ] who is still living here.....a number of us were on the board. I suppose we had a few meetings and then the Clarion Ledger got a hold of a.....well, they had some hearings. The legislature in Louisiana had some hearings in which they connected, in those days of communist witch-hunting and so forth, the SRC with 'communist', and therefore Miss. Council for Human Relations, was unfamiliar with communists. I can see the headline now, "State Organization Declared Communist".....although it didn't bother particularly the people who's own names were listed, the board members.....council thought it was all downhill from that point on and it disbanded I guess '58, something like that. Now, it was revived in Oxford in '62 and then we began to get, particularly in the wake of the riots at Ole Miss.....because in a sense, it was kind of a turning point at least it.....some people to how awful the climate was and the situation was. So we started to get a little bit more response and I went on the board at the outset.....it was simply an organization that sponsored meetings, open forums to talk about issues. We would have speakers come in....we'd feel lucky if we had 100 people at a meeting. In those

days, there were days all of our meetings were out at Tupelo just about, except in those days again....jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church was at that time, had a conference center down on the coast, but most of the time we were meeting....in traditionally black environments. But I think a big day for the council was in the fall of '64 in the wake of the civil rights bill passage....well, of course from then on, we met in lots of places but in the early days we were closely associated with Tupelo. As a matter of fact, [Dan Biddle], who was president of Tupelo at the time, was our 1st president in the reorganization....and I guess the organization centered mostly in the Jackson area but later we had chapters on the coast and in Oxford.

"What was so significant about the King Edward meeting in the fall of '64?"

Well, that was the 1st, and I may be wrong about this, but I think it was the 1st integrated dinner meeting to be held in a hotel in Jackson. Remember, they didn't integrate or desegregate or whatever until the civil rights bill was passed in the summer. Again the NAACP, for example, was testing a lot of the motels and hotels and things, but those were mostly going in to register for the night, and a group would have lunch or something in the restaurant. But in terms of big formal meeting, a public meeting to which everybody was invited in a hotel, obviously there was a lot of opposition still to this.....a number of restaurants were becoming clubs and I'm sure they could exclude.....as a matter of fact, when we got this meeting set up, we got turned down by the [Heidelberg Hotel], they didn't want to mess with me here. Truth of the matter is, probably the King Edward was in financial trouble even at that time, they needed any business they could get and so they took us. But we tried 2 or 3 other hotels as I recall. "Did any newspapers give you coverage?" Yes, they did and.....not bad coverage. We were becoming more or less respectable at that point in the sense that another big thing that we were proud of at that time.....one of our real close colleagues in all this was [ ]. You know who I'm talking about, Cardinal Archbishop of Boston.....I have a feeling that it may be that the council on [ ] when there was a lot of meaningful contact or an attempt to produce meaningful contact, conversation, dialogue between white Mississippians on one hand, white and black Mississippians, but again the people that were coming in and doing the work....of course Aaron Henry, who was president of the NAACP at that point, and also president of [ ]. He was the particular head of the whole operation anyway. He was on the board of the Miss. Council on Human Relations so that worked out nicely, but while Moses and.....those were good, provided at least some sort of conversational link between....the leadership. Now, I was living in Oxford at the time and we had any number of people involved locally who'd come by the church and sing and speak....well, it was funded 1st by....fundraisers, things like that. We still would not have been able to function particularly with an executive director without the subsidies from the SRC.....But Ken was our 1st executive director, stayed exec. dir. until he

became.....station WLBT and you know that story.

"You were in Oxford in '62. What sort of position did you take in the wake of the riots as a parish priest...How did you explain to your parishioners what was going on?"

I can submit some sermons to you if you want, I got copies.....I preached in the 1st sermon on that in February of '62.....[unclear for several minutes].....See, I was on the campus that night, and.....a number of reporters and so forth, lots of press and church.....well, I shouldn't say just that because I think reporters were all over town. I think they were going to church everywhere that Sunday.

[end of side A]

[side B--BLANK]

[BEGIN TAPE #6]

[begin side A]

.....in Oxford, we had met together, we issued statements.....pretty tame.....refrain from violence.....but at least we remained together and including black virtue, black and white, that was a good thing.....but that did provide, once again, a lot of communication between black and white communicants in the towns that didn't exist anywhere else during those troubled times.

".....participation from most of the white Protestant churches?"

No, well, let's put it like this; we had it from.....Wayne Coleman, you may know him, he was the pastor at the 1st Baptist Church, he'd been to Oxford, 1st Baptist Church is right down the street from the Episcopal church. The Presbyterian church is right there and the Methodist church is right behind it.....4 of them right there, you could see everyone of them from 1 spot. Well, Wayne Coleman did participate to a limited degree and he.....I think about our statement after the riot when we were proclaiming our responsibilities.....and he was a little uneasy with that but by and large, he stayed with us and he was there, now he wasn't one of the most active members at all, but the reason I'm saying all this, I think probably Wayne was in a more vulnerable position than any of us. And I mean we all had opposition and trouble, but Wayne ended up losing his job. "Over this?" More or less, now you know how those things go.....there were other reasons given but I think this was the reason Wayne ultimately came down to Jackson and was on the staff.....even though on one hand I'd say Wayne was a little more timid, a little more reluctant than the others, on

the other hand.....the policy of the Baptist churches is the big thing and the 2nd thing is just by and large, some of us had more support in our congregation and I don't mean necessarily, I'm not talking about the majority support, but some key support.....he questioned what I did on occasion and he always supported me; he trusted me to do what I felt was right. Wayne didn't have that kind of support.....I wasn't as vulnerable as Wayne, I knew that. Yes, we had Baptists, we had Methodists, Presbyterians, Catholics.....[several minutes unclear].....

"Why did you preach these sermons in the summer of '62?"

Well, let me say 1st of all, that this was not the 1st time the issue of race.....In 1956, I was talking on the campus of Miss/State Univ. during a religious emphasis week.....essentially because I said segregation is incompatible with Christian gospel.....Will Campbell figures into this. Well, you know his story and he was at Ole Miss and the episcopal priest from Ohio contributed winnings from the \$64,000 and they ended up cancelling religious emphasis week at Ole Miss. that year, and Will had his private meditation, quiet hours in the [Fulton Chapel] and so forth. The religious emphasis week at Miss. State was scheduled for just a couple of weeks after that.....I was one of the participants there who had been asked to go there. Obviously, the question was raised in my mind, should I go under the circumstances, what is happening at Ole Miss., I ought to pull out. And I went to [Hyding Carter], who was a good friend of mine, and I was living in Cleveland, Miss. at the time and I called him and he had opted out of the state. I think he was supposed to have been at Ole Miss. He had opted out of 1 of them.....He had been scheduled to make a speech at one of the state schools and they'd cancelled out on him.....I talked to him on the telephone and I said, 'What do you think? You think I ought to go?' and he said, 'You ought to pull out.' I said, 'Wait a minute, they've asked me to talk.' He said no. I said, 'Well my opening speech is to be 'The Social Implications of the Christian Gospel.' I had to lead a seminar one afternoon during the week, I had a lot of other assignments, too,..... a seminar during one afternoon on the "changing sides.".....So I did, I went. And the 1st night there, I made my speech.....The only thing that got anybody's attention was segregation and integration. I was in the newspapers.....that was back when speakers had to be screened and campus had to do a background check to find out if he'd said anything or she'd said anything.....that's what had gotten Hyding Carter an invitation to speak. Long and short of it was, the legislature was in session, this was in February and there was all kinds of pressure on the college president, although this particular college president was very sympathetic to the legislature's position.....when it came out in the morning.....he came back and gave me three options. He said I could retract the statement, basically that segregation is un-Christian.....or I could say I was misquoted or I would have to leave. Well, I went back to him again, trying hard, in the meantime religious issues week was going on, I did get to do a few things, but I didn't get to do everything because it finally boiled

down to, he said okay, you can stay if your promise not to mention the race issue again as long as you live, as long as you're here.... But I said, Dr. Hillman, Ben Hillman.....you'll find a way to do it if you want to stay.....Will was involved.....he came over and was with me during the time we were negotiating and trying.....I'd meet with the president, I'd meet with the committee of 100 or whatever it was.....all of this.....I mentioned that to say that.....our department of Christian social relations here in the diocese.....1954.....that created quite a response so we'd been dealing with things like that.....I guess I was ordained with a deep concern about this that came out of my seminary experience. Again, I hadn't thought about this before seminary. But in the seminary.....after my 2nd year in seminary, there was a petition from the.....which is the S.E.Episcopal Church.....to open up the doors, to integrate the seminary. The trustees met in June of that year, in June of '52. Their statement was something like this, 'Although there is nothing in the laws, the ordinances in the university that would prevent negroes, we don't think it is a good idea to encourage that at this time.' That raised all kinds of ruckus. The most powerful and most significant of which was the seminary faculty, raising strong objections and ultimately submitting their resignations in mid-year. That was my senior year in seminary. I was president of the student body at the time, I was in it up to my ears...all of the arguments for and against, mostly against integration.....or heard anything later that I didn't hear in that year from.....students, from alumni.....[several minutes unclear].....

But I guess with that kind of consciousness, part of the Miss. Delta in 1953.....I went up to a meeting.....while I was there, I saw 3 other white people and they were reporters.....they said there was 10,000 people there.....a huge crowd. Thurgood Marshall was the principal speaker.....I got invited to come up to be on the panel for somebody. Well, that made me some important contacts in the delta among the black community.....

".....you would have been in some ways sympathetic to the black situation before divinity school, before you began the seminary."

But I must, I have to confess it wasn't a crusading issue with me, anything like that. I've often tried to reflect on that a little bit, I think surely growing up in a clergy home.....it was still pretty much in the context of segregation.....In those days, the white liberal was the one who was deeply concerned about making sure blacks got a good education and that schools were up to standard.....he was deeply committed to.....separate but equal school accommodations. He was as much a segregationist as anyone in the world, but because he was always in there plugging for upgrading the black schools, he got the same tag, a liberal and all, because he was concerned about the separate but equal doctrine applying. So it's a different ballgame, a different world, but by and large, I do remember, I was an engineer at Westinghouse and I worked in Pittsburgh for a year.....you went up and worked in different locations; you worked on this end of the line before you

went out into more or less your permanent assignment, and I guess I really got my eyes opened one way at that point, and I'm not saying most people would, You'd think a Mississippi southern boy.....I found out in one of these.....manufacturing plants, where you bought.....This was right after WWII, '48, and I was working with a guy in there who's steam cleaning a motor chassis, before[ ] and all, and got to talking with him, found out....just as bright as he could be.....teach a kind of responsibilities in the military. He came out in Pittsburgh and just was about as menial and low category job as you could get. I really got to talking to him at [Summer Lake].....Actually, his experiences being stationed in the south had not been all that unpleasant and that he felt, in one sense, more discriminated against.....Well, that kind of got me fascinated. I mean, I didn't expect to find that in Pittsburgh. This serious, more serious than I thought. I'm not even beginning to say that they were the main reason, but let me say this: I was wrestling with the call of the priesthood.....

"Where did you go to college?"

Tulane. I got started there during the war, in the Navy. They told me I was an engineer. I took all the tests and so forth and so on. When the war was over, I was discharged in '46.....it was really kind of well, what direction do I go, and they had said.....don't go into the priesthood if you can stay out of it. He didn't mean that in a derogatory sense, he meant obviously, that it's not something you just.....weigh this and weigh that and say, well I think I'll go this way.....inner compulsion, inner calm. The reason I want to suggest all this is going on in my mind.....but living in [Shreveport] when I finally decided.....things happened that again, struck me.....I remember one thing. There was an automobile accident right in front of our house and I went out there and saw our police retrieving, there was a black motorist and a white motorist. The black man had a couple of little kids with him.....well, there wasn't any question about who was at fault. I mean, as best I could see it was at least debatable, arguable, but I mean everything was putting the black down and taking care of the white.....so there were assumptions.

"How was the black person responding to this?"

Groveling and you know, sorry boss, ad that type, sort of stuff.....not resisting any of this, not protesting.....but then we had a maid working for us, a black woman.....screams and stuff like that going on. I don't know anybody can scream but it got my attention, I went back and asked her, what's your son anyway.....I don't think, he says, he swears he didn't do it. So forth and so on, but they've got him in jail.....that got to me and I said, well, I'm going to have to do something. I went down to the office the next morning (Westinghouse office) and was talking to the boss and trying to feel him out gradually.....but I was trying to get some sort of delusions of grandeur, maybe community action, some kind of thing.....but I'll string him up, get it over with right now.....well, that really shook me. I didn't feel up to the

challenging my boss at that point and again, I'm telling these stories because you said what kinds of things made impressions on me before seminary. I'm not going to say I went right down and said I'm going to seminary, but the point is, when I got to seminary, I had these concerns.....

"You were talking specifically about the race issue in seminary with your professors and other classmates; what sort of literature were you reading in seminary that helped crystallize some of these things?"

Well, of course in terms of sociology and Christian ethics, I had one professor.....he was an ordained priest but he had a ph.d in anthropology.....[several minutes unclear].....There was one wonderful black theologian writing in the 40's and 50's who I think is one of the sociologists. I can't believe I've forgotten his name. He was the chaplain at Marsh Chapel at Boston Univ. and was professor of theology at Boston Univ., and then went out to San Francisco and started the People's Church actually in Oakland.....wrote a book called Jesus and the Dispossessed, Deep River. Howard Thurman. In fact, a Quaker printer out of Louisiana has just printed 16 of Howard Thurman's books.....the name rings a bell but I don't think I read anything of his. Like I say, we weren't concentrating on that. I guess that one professor's class.....

"Had you done some traveling with your parents outside of the south as a child?"

Yes, as far as I understand.....my Navy days were very limited. I got as far as Newfoundland at one point and mostly fogged in.....

"Did you feel support from your parents in '62?"

Yes, I always did. You know, my dad wasn't, I mean, I think he was pretty nervous about what I was doing and probably would have been just as happy if I hadn't done it but he certainly was never.....he always turned over any sort of remarks about the Oxford situation which was in everybody's mind. Let me put it like this, I put him on the spot a lot.....a lot of them wrote letters to the editor and stuff like that.....By the way, this is something that part of it is speculative.....[Beckler], he's a former associate of mine, too. Born in Canton, grew up in Columbus.....letters to the editor blasting me and southern Bishop Allan and all.....in those turbulent 60's. Even before that, because he got on board, he started writing me letters after the incident at Ole Miss.....I'd get letters every day from him.....not every day but very often, like, you know, every week or so there would be a letter.

"Threatening letters?" Well, you could take them that way.....you know, I'm going to be looking for those. I've got a lot planned for retirement next year and I'm taking a lot of files out. I'm afraid I don't remember saving any of those.....he was writing all

these letters to me, I was living in Cleveland at the time, dedicating a new rectory in Greenwood and saw [Delea] across the way in the crowd. I didn't want to see him and he didn't want to see me, I know. So we were sort of avoiding one another, but lo and behold, inadvertently, we came face to face and he started apologizing.....I was as mean as I could be, I just didn't say anything, I just listened to him. He kept on and on, but I had been back in Cleveland two days. What I'm trying to say is the Delea I knew.....was not mentally right.....this is what I remember of Delea, because Delea was kind of a laughingstock in high school. He was a little older than we were, but I can remember we'd go to a dance and everybody else would be wearing sportcoats, maybe a tie or something like that. Delea would come out in white tie and tails with a red ribbon across his....."Sounds similar in part to [Sam Bowers], who also has a very strong presence.....I talked to a black man who lives across the street from the [ Amusement Company] which is the amusement company Bowers runs. He has sworn to me he has seen Bowers walking around in a dress."

When I told you about the Miss. Council on Human Relations.....after that story appeared in the Jackson paper about state organizations linked to communists and so forth, and all the names of the board of directors.....it couldn't have been more than two night later that a shot was fired into their home and U was living in Cleveland, Cleveland is close to Greenwood. I heard about it through the priest in Greenwood, so I got in my car and drove right down there to see the.....and they were in good spirits and they were not worried and they said it was pretty obvious.....

[end of side A]

[begin side B]

.....they were trying to put the best face on it, said this is going to get publicity because everyone knows now that it was done because we were listed as directors of Miss. Council, maybe this.....will drum us up some members or something. But I asked them, I'll never forget this, I said 'You got any idea who might have done this?' He said Delea. See, they were Episcopalians, too, members of the congregation there in Greenwood. We don't have any proof of that but I tell that story to say that's the way people sort of regarded Delea in his, our, town. They assumed, I assumed that was Delea that had....."Well, the trial's going to be reconvened isn't it?" Well, supposedly, I don't know it but they keep postponing it.....he's back in [ ], Tennessee now.

"Have you seen Jack Nelson's book, Terror in the Night?.....what is your impression of his book?"

Oh, I thought it was good overall and I appreciated it.....[few minutes unclear].....I think it's true. I think Jack got that from [ ] but I think it's true that I found it a little hard to believe that this was being done but I can remember...[ ] calling [ ] in New Orleans from my house that night and I



didn't eavesdrop on the conversation, but when he came back he said, 'Well, they postponed it.' So see again, we knew before [ ] left that night, or I think they spent the night with us, it wa still on the playing board.....

"You of course befriended [Tom Terrance] when he was in parchment. Did you ever meet Tom when...." I never knew Tom.....

[discuss childhood in Laurel, recollections of father and activism in civil rights, informal dialogue, unclear, irrelevant. rest of tape blank.]

[end of side B]

[END OF TAPE #6]

#### Explanatory Notes:

..... denotes irrelevant or unclear dialogue

" " denotes interviewers comments and questions

[ ] denotes proper names that may or may not be correctly understood or spelled (note - names will appear only once within brackets. where no name appears, name was not heard.)

transcribed by: Katie Kirkpatrick 823-2774

completed: 12/13/93

total hours:30