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THE REV. JOHN B. MORRIS

## ESCRU: An Ecclesiastical Watchdog

BY CHRIS BCKL

"Free-wheeling watchdog" is a label frequently used to describe the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity (ESCRU), but its self-appointed director says its activities are strictly "responsible militancy."

"We try to make sure the Church practices what it preaches," said the Rev. John B. Morris, director, "and sometimes toes are stepped on."

ESCRU covers the country. It complains when a church hospital in New York uses discriminatory practices. It complains when a bishop in Flori-

da plans to build a separate Negro church. It complains when an Episcopal school is segregated.

Though he speaks softly, Morris is a writer of burning convictions. In a recent letter reflecting on "Black power," he wrote, "It isn't sufficient to come charging out as the Bishop of North Carolina did recently when he said there... 'there is no place in the Church for the thinking of the Klan or the philosophy of Black Power.' The fact of the matter is that there are white churchmen in his diocese who espouse the thinking of the Klan—white supremacy when he has not previously sought to accomma-

date. It's as if a little white rector is alright, but we sure aren't going to tolerate any Negro anger."

Father Morris has been director of the Atlanta-based organization since it was formed in 1960. His associate director is Father Kim Dreinbach, an intense former Marine Corps officer. Others are Father Dreinbach and Father Robert Hunter, a Negro priest, listed for five days at the Cathedral of St. Philip to protest the holding of Lovett School's bicentennial service in the Church. The school has announced since then that it is changing its policy of segregation.

How did ESCRU begin?

"ESCRU was first discussed at the end of 1959 by concerned Episcopal laymen and clergy. We now have 52 bishops who are members, and some bishops that don't speak to us," the director said.

Father Morris said one of the strengths of ESCRU is that it is not dependent on any particular bishop or groups of bishops for its funds. The organization was funded by a grant for three years and managed to survive on contributions from members.

Asked what was the reaction of clergy and laymen to

ESCRU's activities, the director replied: "We have caused them to think. They know what we do. Our bishops react with the younger bishops—pardon my pun—today's bishops have obtained authority and have not compromised themselves."

Father Morris said an Episcopal church in the Diocese of Atlanta has turned away Negroes who came to services. Most churches are integrated, but there are some churches where a Negro would not feel a sense of welcome.

Discussing the "white backlash," Father Morris said, "We are feeling it right now. There are some who think the

Negro is making too much noise and they have canceled their membership." But he is not discouraged, saying "Race relations has brought on a happy ecumenical spirit."

Father Morris, a native of Brunswick, finished his seminary training in 1954 and was assigned as pastor of a church in Dillon, S.C. He and others published a book to cry and have an open discussion and "combat the idea that all whites were with Jimmy Byrnes."

Since becoming director he and other members have worked to carry out the organization's motto: "Behold how good and joyful a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." The goal has not been accomplished, but ESCRU will continue its work as an ecclesiastical watchdog.



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