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Bevel

By PAT LEISNER

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PHILADELPHIA AP - A Southern Christian Leadership Conference official said Tuesday he does not think James Earl Ray had either the mental or physical ability to assassinate the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

And the Rev. James L. Bevel also said in a news conference he is willing to take his fight to defend Ray to the courts.

Ray would not be able to plot the murder of the civil rights leader, or direct the bullet more than 100 yards, Bevel said in a news conference.

Bevel would not say, however, whether his planned defense is to try to prove Ray physically innocent or morally and socially without guilt.

The offer from the 32-year-old Baptist minister from Philadelphia to represent Ray in the Memphis murder trial has been blocked by a Tennessee statute.

According to Tennessee, a non-resident acting as counsel must have a license from the Bar Association. Bevel is not a lawyer, although he said he has represented defendants in criminal cases locally.

"I will seek to obtain a lawyer's license," said Bevel.

HE SAID, TOO, THAT HE INTENDS TO TRY TO ENJOIN THE COURTS FROM "illegal activity by appealing to a higher court." Bevel said under the Constitution, an accused has right to counsel of his choice.

Should these efforts fail, Bevel said, "I will seek justice in the streets by organizing a movement to that end." He would not elaborate.

It has been Bevel's contention that "conspirators" are responsible for the death of the civil rights leader at a Memphis motel last April 4.

"Upon apprehension of Ray, then Atty. Gen. Ramsey Clark said there was no conspiracy," Bevel said. "At this point he could not have had substantial evidence to come to this conclusion.

"I'm not bent on getting the killer. I'm not even interested.

"Men are not criminals," he said. He went on, explaining that accused are insane or sick.

Bevel, who offered his services to Ray in a telegram Jan. 18, visited him in a Memphis cell last week.

"Ray said he didn't murder King," Bevel said.

"We've allowed King to be killed under the guise of law and order and now we're going to allow Ray to be lynched under the guise of justice," he said.

Bevel said, "Within the context of non-violence, I think (The Rev. Ralph) Abernathy would back me" in legal proceedings to represent Ray. The Rev. Mr. Abernathy is head of SCLC.

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