5-1-2022

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Honors Thesis submitted to Shackouls Honors College, Mississippi State University, Spring 2022

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An Honors Thesis Submitted to
the faculty of Mississippi State University
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements For the
Cursus Honorem

Shackouls Honor College

Mississippi State University

May 2022

Introduction

As I prepare to enter seminary at Duke Divinity School, I have reflected on my time growing up in Mississippi and the Methodist church. When I was a kid, I walked into the sanctuary of Starkville First United Methodist Church and looked out on a congregation that looked like me. The congregation was mostly white and middle class, but I also knew that Starkville's population was not solely white middle-class people. In fact, I did not have to look far to find United Methodist Churches whose make-up was wholly African Americans. I went to school with African American kids and interacted with African Americans throughout Starkville. What was special about Sunday? If we were all Christians and United Methodists, why did we worship at separate churches? The statement that "Sunday is the most segregated hour" was playing out as true. How did we get here though? Does not Christianity teach that all men are created equal and are part of one family? These questions bothered me throughout my elementary school and high school days. At the same time, I was part of efforts to attract more diversity into my own church, but the tradition of Sunday as the most segregated hour has proven hard to overcome.

Diversity and integration in the mainline Methodist Church have proven hard to achieve. African Americans occupy leadership positions throughout the episcopal structure of the church, but most local churches remain de fact white or African American. This thesis will explore how the Methodist Church in Mississippi responded to civil rights activism beginning with the initial segregation of the church and its effects on the church's episcopal structure, Methodist responses to the Church Property Bill, the Born of Conviction Statement in 1963, and the Jackson Church Visit Campaign in 1963 and 1964. This thesis argues that there were three distinct groups vying for control of the church: progressives, institutionalists, and segregationists. In the end, the white institutionalists maintained their control of the church through hiding behind structure and

tradition to maintain a façade of stability during the civil rights era. However, in white institutionalists attempts to protect the church as they knew, they never addressed the theological implications of segregation and acted as enablers for segregationists' elements in the church.

Segregation and the Structure of the Methodist Church

At the beginning of the 1956 General Conference of the Methodist Church, Bishop Fred Pierce Corsen stood and read a statement from the Council of Bishops. The bishop's address summarized the life and thought of the Methodist Church and its response to society in 1956. "Ours is a world church," Corsen told the assembled leaders. "As such its responsibility is to unite in one fellowship men and women of all races and nations, As Christians, we confess ourselves to be children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. This being true, there is no place in The Methodist Church for racial discrimination. 'To discriminate against a person solely upon the basis of his race is both unfair and unchristian.'"[1] It was nothing short of a sweeping new racial ethic. Indeed, Methodist publications that covered the conference noted that racial issues dominated the actions of the body. The delegates, consisting of Methodist clergy and lay people from across the United States and overseas churches, adopted three actions that defined a struggle for racial equality in the Methodist Church for the next decade. The delegates reiterated the words of the bishop's address declaring discrimination and forced segregation incompatible with the Methodist Church. Methodist delegates also created a seventy-member board to study the issue of segregation within the church and charged the board to deliver its findings to the 1960 General Conference. Despite the seeming uniformity of the body's deliberations, these motions were essentially aspirational. Southern Methodists had kept the church officially segregated since 1939 and—unofficially since the early nineteenth century—and had no

[1] "Excerpts From the Episcopal Address of the Bishops of the Methodist Church to the 1956 General Conference, Minneapolis," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate,* May 9, 1956.

intention of following Corsen's words or the actions of the conference. By the end of the meeting, the members settled on a half measure: Amendment IX to the constitution of the Methodist Church which allowed voluntary integration. For the white representatives from the South "voluntary" meant never.

By the mid-twentieth century, racial discrimination was built into southern society and had taken on a semi-religious aura. One Methodist minister declared that many in his congregation thought "to question it, to suggest that it was not essential to life, was to deny what was high and holy."[2] After the end of Reconstruction, white supremacists reasserted their control over politics in the South and established segregation and Jim Crow. By the beginning of the twentieth century segregation was firmly entrenched in the South. This was especially true in Mississippi. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, white supremacists solidified their power through Jim Crow laws and reversed any gains that African Americans had made after the Civil War.[3] This was true for the church as well.

During the 1950s and 1960s the Methodist Church in Mississippi was divided into four divisions, called "annual conferences." Two white annual conferences were part of the national church's Southeastern Jurisdiction, while the two African American annual conferences were part of the Central Jurisdiction.[4] From the inception of the Methodist movement in England, members had organized themselves into regional divisions. Indeed, the conference was the backbone of the church's institutional structure, and the quadrennial meeting, known as General Conference, was simply a gathering of delegates from each regional annual conference. However, the jurisdictional system—the level of organization between the national General

[2] Cunningham, *Agony*, 14
[3] Dittmer, *Local People,* 13.
[4] The Methodist Church, *Discipline of the Methodist Church 1964* (Nashville, TN: The Methodist Publishing House), 694-695.

Conference and the regional "annual conference"—was a legacy of the initial unification of the church after the Civil War. Early Methodism in Mississippi upheld John Wesley's ban on slave owning and drew support from African Americans and white society, but in the early nineteenth century as a powerful planter class that relied on slavery as its economic engine emerged, internal dissent grew. Many planters had already left the Methodist church for the Baptist church, which dominated the state by the beginning of the Civil War because of its permission of slavery. This system meant Baptists transitioned easily into segregation. However, some planters perceived a higher status in being Methodist and they battled the race issue at the 1844 General Conference and broke from the national to create the Methodist Episcopal Church South.[5] African Americans in the Methodist Church in Mississippi remained in the "Old Church" based in the North and this connection would keep African Americans in touch with nominally nonsegregated world of Methodism and part of a church that did not support Jim Crow.[6] However, in 1939 the two branches of the church reunited into the Methodist Church.[7] This reunification came with a price. As historian Carol V. George states, "Reunion would involve major structural changes in church government and policy, and all of it hinged on the segregation of black members."[8] The result was the jurisdictional system. The six white annual conferences organized themselves into jurisdictional conferences that were geographically defined: the Northeastern, the Southeastern, the North Central, the South Central, the Overseas, and the Western. All the African American annual conferences were organized into the Central Jurisdiction that had no regional identity but encompassed all the African American

[5] Carol V. R. George, *One Mississippi, Two Mississippi: Methodists, Murder, and the Struggle for Racial Justice in Neshoba County* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 15-16.
[6] Ibid 18
[7] Reiff, *Born of Conviction,* 5-6.
[8] George, *One Mississippi, Two Mississippi,* 71.

congregations across the nation.[9] Race defined the Central Jurisdiction. Both the Central Jurisdiction and the larger jurisdictional system itself represented a moral compromise in favor of the veneer of institutional unity, and only served to segregate the church. This new jurisdictional system decentralized the episcopacy of the Methodist church and power went from central control to regional control. George notes the arrangement was "a highly desirable outcome for the South," but she was referring only to the white South.[10] African Americans tried to oppose the reunification even asking the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to intervene, and of forty-eight delegates to the Uniting Conference thirty-six opposed the reunification of the Methodist church if the price was segregation and the Central Jurisdiction.[11] The Central Jurisdiction was a physical manifestation of segregation, and much like the segregated school systems, African American clergy in the Central Jurisdiction were paid lower salaries than their white counterparts.[12] The moderate white Methodists who forged this compromise enabled the segregationists in the southern branch to segregate themselves from their African American counterparts while outwardly celebrating "unity."

Racial discrimination both in southern society and the church remained the status quo throughout the first half of the twentieth century, but World War II would prove to be a watershed moment for the South and for Mississippi. People and money poured into state for the war effort. The rapid ramp up of industrialization caused worker shortages in the state's agricultural economy that relied on a system of sharecroppers and day laborers. These shortages along with a blurring of the color line in the military oversees, fostered white fears of newly

[9] George, *One Mississippi, Two Mississippi,* 71.
[10] ibid
[11] George, *One Mississippi, Two Mississippi*, 72.
[12]George, *One Mississippi, Two Mississippi,* 176.

empowered African Americans returning home to Mississippi.[13] In 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court struck a further blow to Jim Crow laws in the South when the court struck down the idea of "separate but equal" that underpinned segregation. The *Brown vs Board of Education* decision mandated the integration of public schools. For white Mississippians, *Brown* was a declaration of war against segregation and they began a fight that "assumed the trappings of a holy crusade" to preserve the racial status quo.[14] Less than two months after the decision, Robert Patterson organized a group of business and civic leaders in Indianola to form Mississippi's first White Citizens' Council (WCC), which was dedicated to preserving segregation without resorting to violence.[15] Instead, the WCC would use social and economic leverage to enforce compliance with segregation. The Mississippi government also created the State Sovereignty Commission (SCC), a secret police force that kept tabs on everything and everyone who preached integration in Mississippi and reported directly back to the WCC.[16] Mississippi was becoming its own "self-contained world" that was deeply repressive and riven with fear.[17] The church would not be immune to the effects of the WCC and the SSC.

James W. Silver, a history professor at the University of Mississippi during the 1960s, dubbed Mississippi a "Closed Society." He noted that, "The all-pervading doctrine, then and now, has been white supremacy."[18] Silver asserted that the church and religion served as a keystone in validating white supremacy and segregation. He claimed that the "segregation creed"

[13] Dittmer, *Local People*, 14; Jason Morgan Ward, *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Racial Politics, 1936-1965* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 51.
[14] Dittmer, *Local People*, 41.
[15] Dittmer, *Local people*, 45.
[16] Dittmer, *Local People*, 59.
[17] ibid
[18] James W. Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, INC., 1964), 6.

assumed the "sanction of the Bible and Christianity."[19] The white supremacists in control of WCC and SSC certainly expected and sought the sanction of Christianity to support segregation. However, despite Silver's claim the Methodist Church in Mississippi, though still officially segregated in the 1950s, fit uneasily within this segregationist framework, especially given the 1956 General Conferences pronouncements on race.

Mississippi Methodism was not as closed as Silver imagined. At the beginning of the Civil Rights era, the Methodist Church occupied a prominent part of Mississippi's religious landscape. It was the second largest protestant church in the state, and its membership rolls included leading political figures such as Senator James Eastland and the mayor of Jackson Allen C. Thomas.[20] However, the Methodist Church was also a self-defined "connectional" denomination that transcended the self-contained world of Mississippi. Debates were already roiling within Mississippi Methodism. The church's white members were tied to both a more progressive national church and to African American Methodists in the Central Jurisdiction who were actively trying to break down the church's segregated structure. The Church was a place that might provide a common space to discuss issues of race.

Not only did church structure give white Methodists connections to other people and ideas, within Mississippi many clergy and leadership held moderate views on race. The publishers of the *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, the Mississippi Annual Conference's newspaper, printed articles and editorials that both pushed against the dominant narrative of racial supremacy including an article after the *Brown* decision calling out America's caste system and others that upheld the white supremacist's viewpoints prevalent in the State's larger

[19] Silver, *Closed Society*, 22.
[20] Lyon, *Sanctuaries,* 28.

culture.[21] Millsaps College located in Jackson and founded by the Methodist Church was one of the state's best schools and one of its most liberal with ties to Tugaloo College an African American college nearby.[22] Millsaps was also the training ground for many young Methodist ministers who were increasingly going out of state to seminary and being exposed to different perspectives on race.[23] This was in direct contrast to many older minsters in the Mississippi annual conference who had done their ministry training through the Methodist Course of Study and were suspicious of seminaries liberalizing effect on ministerial candidates.[24]

For their part, civil rights leaders recognized the importance of the church to ending segregation. Despite the reticence of most of the white church, the debate within Mississippi Methodist opened the possibility of dialogue. Civil rights leaders saw that, perhaps in the common bond of Christianity there was more similarity than there seemed from afar and that African American religion and culture shared a common belief with white society in the South. Activists believed they could work on the consciousness of white churchgoers and that churches would play a pivotal role in redefining the nature of the Civil Rights struggle. Many on both sides believed that "when integration arrived it would go through the front doors of the white churches.[25]

Despite the prominence of moderate white leadership in the Methodist Church, the church in Mississippi never took a stand against segregation. On the surface, the era between the

[21] "Some Provocative Thoughts," *The Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, January 25, 1956.
[22] John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press 1994), 60.
[23] Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 120.
[24] Joseph T. Reiff, *Born of Conviction: White Methodists and Mississippi's Closed Society* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 9.
[25] Carter Dalton Lyon, *Sanctuaries of Segregation: The Story of the Jackson Church Visit Campaign* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), 25.

1956 and 1964 General Conferences changed nothing to end the Methodist Church's segregated structure. Segregation and integration remained purely voluntary, however Carolyn Renee Dupont noted that the Methodist Church, "Passed the civil rights years in chronic, debilitating turmoil."[26] This turmoil stemmed from a power struggle between institutional moderate leadership, segregationists, and progressives who fought for control of the church. At the heart of this struggle was the effort to abolish the Central Jurisdiction and have General Conference enforce mandatory segregation. In this struggle, white supremacists used the formal church structure to keep it segregated, while progressive clergy in the African American church and Civil Rights movement drew attention to the dichotomy between the Methodist Church's stated policy and reality. In the face of this pressure the moderate leadership tried to maintain "respectability" and institutional unity in Mississippi. It was a fight the moderate institutionalists would win, but because of their loyalty to the unity of the Church they served as enablers for segregationists to exercise control. In the moderates' best attempt to save the church they loved, they failed to look past the interest of institutional church they knew and created a power vacuum that white supremacists exploited to keep the church segregated.

In the run up to the 1956 General Conference, Mississippi Methodists had been increasingly on edge. During the 1950s civil rights activists experienced moderate victories, but at the same time racial tensions and violence started to increase. African Americans in Natchez had voted in record numbers, African Americans served on juries in Natchez and Greenville, and the NAACP was quietly growing, but all these were allowed to happen because the white community "had become convinced that the racial status quo was no longer a threat."[27] African

[26] Carolyn Renee Dupont, *Mississippi Praying: Southern White Evangelicals and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1975* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013), 128.
[27] Dittmer, *Local People*, 34

American voter registration did not threaten the white community's hold on the state government and the national government had not moved forward with sweeping racial change. White political and societal supremacy seemed assured.[28] However, *Brown vs. Board of Education* reignited white fears overnight, and even within Methodism there were signs that members of the national Methodist church were challenging the racial status quo. On January 11, 1956, the *Mississippi Methodist Advocate* reprinted a nation-wide poll that reported half of Methodist supported the statement "all barriers should be removed and that all persons should be received into local churches who met the tests of character and take the membership vow regardless of economic status or race." In the same poll only seventeen percent of the other responders checked that they favored segregation.[29]

In the Mississippi Annual Conference there was also a new group of seminary-trained, young clergy who challenged the church's segregated structure. Roy Delamotte had attended Millsaps and completed a Ph.D. at Yale before returning to Mississippi to serve as a pastor. Despite his intention not to say anything on racial matters for a year after he returned, at the 1955 Annual Conference he protested a resolution to General Conference that "called for continuation of the present segregated jurisdictional system."[30] The next night, Delamotte's district superintendent told him that no church in the conference would accept his appointment as a pastor.[31] Delamotte had challenged the status quo within Methodism in Mississippi and in a sign of what was to come, the forces of segregation within Methodism drove him out. His ousting represented an increasing fear most Mississippians felt towards the progress drift of the nation and the church. The paternal toleration that had defined the early part of the 1950s had exploded

[28] ibid
[29] "Nation Wide Poll," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, January 11, 1956.
[30] Reiff, *Born of Conviction*, 21.
[31] Reiff, *Born of Conviction*, 22.

after the *Brown* decision. White supremacists and segregationists looked to fortify the racial hierarchy in the state and were prepared to fight for it.

To calm the fears of the members of the Mississippi Annual Conference, Bishop Marvin Franklin reminded Methodists there was a difference between enactments of General Conference, by which the whole church is governed, and a resolution that "is only the mind of a majority of the members present and voting."[32] White Mississippians' fears of the larger national church controlling the state echoed their fears of federal government overreach in the 1960s.[33] Despite Franklin's reassurance, conferencing was a key part to the Methodist structure in the United States that had tied the church together since the churches founding in 1784. Delegates to General Conference were made up of clergy and laity from the seven jurisdictions, and the Annual Conferences that were nested within each of the seven jurisdictions.[34] These delegates constituted the "the supreme law and policy-making body of The Methodist Church," and only they could "expresses the official views of the church on subjects related to Christian living…Only the General Conference can speak officially for The Methodist Church."[35] General Conference tied churches across the country together and it had the power to enforce its enactments on the entire denomination. The most relevant aspect of this organization for the southern delegations was General Conference's power to change the jurisdictional system in the Church. It had the power to abolish segregation and the Central jurisdiction in Methodism.

Fears about the future of the Central Jurisdiction and the continuation of segregation were well founded. The *Mississippi Methodist Advocate* noted that in 1956 "more than 100 memorials related to proposals to abolish, alter or continue the Central Jurisdiction, [which is] composed of

[32] Marvin Franklin, "The Bishops Column," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, April 11, 1956.
[33] Ward, *Defending White Democracy*, 102.
[34] Ward, *Defending White Democracy*, 102.
[35] "General Facts about Conference," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, April 25, 1956.

360,000 members."[36] Despite the clamor for change within the jurisdictional system Bishop Franklin assured those worried that, "The need for jurisdictions is apparent, and all members of the College of Bishops of the Southeastern Jurisdiction favor the retention of the Jurisdictions, including the Southeastern and Central Jurisdictions."[37] The "need" for the current Jurisdictions "was apparent" to all the white bishops intent on maintaining segregation. Segregationists had used the church's episcopal structure to their own benefit in creating and perpetuating segregation.

The southern delegates to the 1956 General Conference fought hard to keep the Central Jurisdiction in place, and even though the national church body recommended that segregation should be abolished with "reasonable speed," southern Methodists were satisfied that the call for integration was to be voluntary. [38] Bishop Franklin declared on Amendment IX, which allowed voluntary integration of annual conferences, that "all feel that the action on the amendment were such as should be pleasing to all in Mississippi who were apprehensive about possible General Conference actions." He was especially pleased because the proposed Amendment IX required the full ratification of all the annual conferences, and if two conferences decided to merge, Amendment IX required two thirds vote by each of the annual conferences joining together to proceed. He wrote in the *Mississippi Methodist Advocate* that, "The principle of local self-determination has been established and nothing is to be forced upon any church or Annual Conference."[39] Atlanta area Bishop Arthur J. Moore explained "This General Conference has stated the ideal position on many issues, but it should be clearly pointed out that it has also safeguarded the right of regional opinion," because it left the decisions to the autonomy of the

[36] ibid
[37] Marvin Franklin, "The Bishops Column," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, April 11, 1956.
[38] "Digest of General Conference Action," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, May 16, 1956.
[39] Marvin Franklin, "The Bishops Column," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, May 9, 1956.

Annual Conferences.[40] The more moderate delegates declared their convictions on racial issues while allowing southern members to keep segregation thus preserving institutional unity. Amendment IX was a compromise that had no real effect on racial relations in the church if it remained voluntary. This compromise rendered hollow the declaration that discrimination was unchristian. This hollowness was a natural outgrowth of the regionalism and decentralization of the Methodist Church that the Jurisdictional system engendered. It represented a major victory for southern segregationists, but African Americans and progressives in the Church would continue the fight and waited expectantly for the 1960 Annual Conference where a committee promised to release its findings on the viability of the Central Jurisdiction and recommendations for its future.

From 1956 to 1960, white supremacists continued to tighten their grip on Mississippi. The WCC and SSC kept a quiet control on the entire state. This control extended to both African Americans and the white church. The NAACP recognized the African American church as a natural ally, but pastors of churches and their congregations, especially the influential and affluent members of the congregation had the most to lose to the from the WCC's economic warfare. Thus, most kept their distance from political activism.[41] The WCC also monitored the white Methodist Church. One of the State Sovereignty commissions agents Zack Van Landingham informed Governor J.P. Coleman of Mississippi that the Methodist Church was holding a summit on race in 1960, and that O.B. J Triplett Jr. of Forrest was on a panel that would debate segregation. Van Landingham provided Triplett with "official" information on the

[40] Arthur J. Moore, "Constitutional Amendment," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, May 16, 1956.
[41] Dittmer, *Local People*, 76-77

schools in Mississippi and kept tabs on news reports on the debate.[42] Also on the panel were NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall and Oliver Emmerich, who was the editor of the *Jackson Times*. A report said that they "exchanged heated viewpoints on segregation and treatments of negroes in Mississippi."[43] Emmerich and Triplett said that the majority of both races didn't favor integration, and that Mississippi provided opportunities for African Americans to study out of state if courses weren't offered in Mississippi.[44] The same year Clyde Kennard, an African American who had been attending the University of Chicago but was forced to return to Mississippi to take care of his father, tried to apply to Mississippi Southern University and was arrested and sent to Parchman Farm State Penitentiary. Van Landingham and SSC were also heavily involved as opponents in the Kennard case making a mockery of the pronouncements at the Methodist debate.[45]

General Conference 1960 was another major win for the southern segregationists. The seventy-member board that studied segregation in the church recommended keeping the Central Jurisdiction. White commentators noted that the segregated system gave African Americans a voice on the Council of Bishops, but Dr. Stockton, the pastor of New York's Christ Church, noted one of the primary reasons for the decision was, "It was almost a choice of that [continuing segregation] or splitting the church again north and south which would be a calamity." Institutionalists in both the North and the South were committed to preserving denominational stability. Bishop Love, one of the Central Jurisdiction bishops tempered the rosy prognostications of his white counterparts. He said that the decision seemed the only practical

[42] Zach J. Van Landingham to Governor J.P. Coleman, August 18, 1959, "Segregation Problems of Schools of South," Sovereignty Commission Online, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as Sovereignty Commission, MDAH).
[43] "Whites Hail Thurgood," *Gulf Creek World*, September 11, 1959, Sovereignty Commission, MDAH.
[44] ibid
[45] Dittmer, *Local People*, 81-82.

course, but it didn't make it right. The Central Jurisdiction represented segregation to many African American members.[46] Once again a compromise had been decided on to keep the unity of the church together. The 1960 General Conference proved the limitation of white moderates in the church of the 1950s. They believed segregation was immoral but they were not willing to help African Americans with the struggle for Civil Rights partly because they couldn't accept African American leadership, but also because they realized that the price they would pay for their support was a diminishment of their own position or the church's authority.[47] The bishops of the church realized that the church was not living up to its pronouncements on segregation, but they were not willing to face a split in the South to pursue them. Northern delegations were also not fully on board with integration either and joined with the southern delegates they would have been able to block any further amendment at General Conference 1960.[48]

The Church Property Bill

Extreme segregationists made no attempt to understand the nuances or effects of the national church's statement on integration. Even the consideration of voluntary segregation and the prospect of integrated churches began to draw unwanted attention toward the church and marked the Methodist Church as a target. At the same time racial tensions were growing in the 1960s as the newly elected Governor Ross Barnett started utilizing more police-state tactics.[49] In 1960 the State legislature proposed bill No. 1517 or the Church Property Bill. An editorial from the *Mississippi Methodist Advocate* entitled "Why the Methodist Church" from April 22, 1964 described the bill like this:

[46] "Negro Has Big Voice in Church," *Times Picayune*, February 1, 1960, Sovereignty Commission, MDAH.
[47] Dittmer, *Local People*, 68.
[48] "Methodist to Talk Segregation Today," *Clarion Ledger*, April 28, 1960, Sovereignty Commission, MDAH.
[49] Dittmer, *Local People*, 82.

> For a number of years Mississippi Methodism has been the target of extreme pressures. In 1960, the Senate Judiciary Committee of the State Legislature came up with the Church Property Bill. This bill No. 1517 was so obviously aimed at The Methodist Church that a more general bill was substituted in both houses of the legislature… Proponents of the bills stated that the bills were not aimed at any religious body; but, with one accord, they proceeded to attack The Methodist Church, her leaders, institutions and agencies. In March of that year both the Senate and the House voted favoring the bill. One representative even suggested an amendment to abolish The Methodist Church in Mississippi…

The defenders of Mississippi's Closed Society had not overlooked the role of the Methodist Church in the Civil Rights era because of the Methodist Church's prominence as the second largest protestant denomination.[50] Even the possibility of integration within the church and the increasing push to amongst some to abolish the Central Jurisdiction broke lock step with the segregationists agenda and philosophy. This grated at the Closed Society's foundational assumption of the "sanction of the Bible and Christianity."[51] Thus the state had retaliated, and in such a way that directly affected the Methodist Church. The Church Property Bill directly attacked Methodism's trust clause that stated if a congregation chose to leave the denomination, its property reverted to the annual conference."[52] The bill's sponsors expected white Methodists to support the state and its efforts to maintain segregation over their allegiance to the Methodist church, and that they would "support creation of a legal weapon to trump the trust clause, and

[50] Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 18-21.
[51] Silver, *The Closed Society*, 6.
[52] Reiff, *Born of Conviction,* 25.

thus resist the liberalizing, integrating tendencies of the General Church."[53] State leaders had a major advocate within Methodism on this account: the Mississippi Association of Methodist Ministers and Laymen [MAMML].

On the application card mailed to prospective MAMML members, the first purpose of the Association listed is, "to maintain racial segregation in all of our Methodist organizations and activities."[54] MAMML was an organization with the express purpose of keeping the Methodist Church segregated and was widely considered the mirror of the WCC in the Methodist Church. If the WCC was another Ku Klux Klan, at least it was, in the words of Hodding Carter Senior, an "uptown Klan," that traded in respectability, including in the church.[55] Methodist laity and leadership were under no illusion as to who backed MAMML. A 1964 editorial in the *Lexington Advertiser* stated, "A reading of the names of the leaders of this so called association is like reading who's who in the White Citizen's Council of Jackson and Mississippi. Since its organization in fact, we have privately regarded it as the Citizen's Council of the Methodist Church."[56] MAMML wielded considerable influence in the church.[57] They had an extensive mailing list, and counted amongst its supporters powerful figures in Methodism like John Satterfield, the former president of the Mississippi bar and an active laymen.[58] MAMML was actively engaged in trying to either drag the church back in line with the Closed Society's

[53] Reiff, *Born of Conviction,* 25.
[54] MAMML Application, Allen Eugen Cox Collection, Box 1, Folder 49, Manuscript Division, Special Collections, Mississippi State University Libraries.
[55] Silver, *The Closed Society,* 36.
[56] "Lowman and the Methodists," *Lexington Advertiser*, editorial, June 25, 1964, Allen Eugene Cox Collection, Box 1, Folder 47, Manuscript Division, Special Collections, Mississippi State University Libraries.
[57] George, *One Mississippi, Two Mississippi*, 115.
[58] Ralph Hutto, "200 Methodist Vowing to Keep Segregation In Churches Form 'Unofficial Association," Allen Eugene Cox Collection, Box 2, Folder 2/9, Manuscripts Division, Special Collections, Mississippi State University Libraries.

orthodoxy or create an alternate expression of Methodism in Mississippi.[59] When the Association circulated resolutions censuring the *Mississippi Methodist Advocate* and urging a boycott the paper lost so many subscriptions that it suffered serious financial loss.[60] Both the Church Property Bill and MAMML showed a radicalizing trend that was occurring in the state and the church in reaction to rising racial tensions, but in doing so segregationists challenged the leadership of the moderate leaders in the church.

Both the members of the state legislature and MAMML underestimated the influence of institutional moderates within the Methodist Church. Powerful leaders in the Church did not hesitate to condemn the bill. Bishop Franklin declared that it was a "dangerous proposal and will promote disunity and dissension," and he urged that all Methodists in Mississippi "do everything they can to prevent what could be the first step towards state control of our church."[61] The Board of Social and Economic Relations of the North Mississippi Conference declared that, "the bill is clearly aimed at our own church and violates Methodist tradition and polity," and that the bill threatened to destroy the "traditional framework of connectional churches."[62] The *Advocate* also listed thirty four other groups ranging from official church boards to Sunday school classes that had made motions to oppose the property bill, most of them unanimously, while only six groups had shown support for the bill.[63]

The controversy surrounding the Church Property Bill demonstrated the dissonance that white institutionalists within the church faced on issues relating to segregation. Most supported

[59] MAMML Information Bulletin, June 1965, Allen Eugene Cox Collection, Box 1, Folder 48, Manuscript Division, Special Collections, Mississippi State University Libraries.
[60] Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 136.
[61] Marvin Franklin, "Separation of the Church and State," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, Feb. 3, 1960.
[62] Board of Social and Economic Relations of the North Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Church, "Legislative Bill Designed to Impair Property Rights of Church," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, Jan. 27, 1960.
[63] "Opposition to Church Property Bill," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, Feb. 17, 1960; Feb. 24, 1960.

segregation because it had wide support from the laity in the church, but they also would not passively accept segregationist's interference or threats. In a reversal of policy, the bishop directly confronted segregationists over the Church Property Bill. The Methodist historian Reiff notes that speaking out against the Church Property Bill was "one of those rare occasions in his sixteen years as bishop in Mississippi that Marvin Franklin responded directly, publicly, and with all the force of his appropriate authority to a controversial issue, because of the threat to the institutional church."[64] MAMML also came under fire from institutionalists despite its widespread support. The Mendenhall Methodist Church noted its opposition to the bill declaring it was a "bonafide local congregation" and thus was more legitimate than any action from MAMML, "a self styled 'association of ministers and laymen,' such associations have no official connection with the Methodist Church."[65] Gerald Trigg, a pastor in Pascagoula, charged MAMML with making "consistently and cowardly attacks on almost everything Methodist."[66] While support for segregation remained strong in the church so did institutional loyalty. A letter from the Reverend Johnny A. Dinas expressed the frustration institutionalists felt with attacks on the church by ardent white supremacists and segregationists. He declared that the bill was borne purely out of the fear of integration. The Methodist law on the matter was clear, and that the Jurisdictional system, which the delegates to the 1956 General Conference had preserved, shielded churches from enforced integration from the national church. Even under Amendment IX, integration could only happen if the majority of both parties consented. He closes his letter with this statement: "A drastic change in population and sentiment would have to take place in order to integrate a Methodist Church in Mississippi. The law of Methodism gives such a

[64] Reiff, *Born of Conviction,* 25.
[65] "Opposition to Church Property Bill," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, Feb. 17, 1960
[66] Cliff Sessions, "Minister Charges Group 'With Cowardly Attacks" March, 17, 1961, Allen Eugene Cox Collection, Box 1, Folder 48, Manuscript Division, Special Collections, Mississippi State University Libraries.

guarantee to the present status in our church."[67] Dinas along with other institutionalists walked a fine line. They chose to ignore the decision of the delegates of the 1956 General Conference on race that called discrimination "unfair" and "unchristian," instead focusing on the voluntary aspect. However, they also did not support segregationists' policies when they affected the church. They were caught somewhere in between. Moderates primarily understood and evaluated issues regarding race not as a moral or theological question of right or wrong, but rather on how it affected the wellbeing of the institutional church. As racial tensions continued to grow so did tension between ardent segregationists such as MAMML, the state government, and integrationist at the national and local. It would not take long for these tensions to come into conflict.

Born of Conviction and the Appointment System

At the same time as the debate on the Church Property Bill, racial tensions were reaching a fever pitch. Emmit Till's murder in 1955 had served as a catalyst for a new generation of young African American activists who favored more direct action in challenging segregation.[68] One of the places that would become central to the story of Civil Rights in Mississippi and the struggle within the Methodist church was Tougaloo College where young African American's engaged in direct confrontation with Jim Crow laws and the color bar. On the morning of March 27, 1961, nine students from Tougaloo quietly sat in the Jackson Public Library and refused to move to the segregated section. These nine began to change the tide and encouraged older African Americans to become involved in Civil Rights.[69] The "Tougaloo Nine," foreshadowed

[67] "Much Opposition to Church Property Bill," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, Feb. 10, 1960.
[68] Dittmer, *Local People*, 58.
[69] Dittmer, *Local People*, 89.

the student activism that would define the school through the rest of the decade including the Jackson Church Visit Campaigns orchestrated by Methodist minister Ed King.

King was both a native white Mississippian and a Methodist. King had gone out of state for seminary but took leave from his studies to volunteer in Montgomery, Alabama setting up interracial associations to bring whites and African Americans together through prayer and conversation. During his time in Montgomery, his two arrests served to broaden his theological views of what constituted the church and stoked his zeal to return to Mississippi to challenge the issues. He said, "If I want to be minister of a Christian church and if I really believe the Christian Church offers the only possibilities of an real solutions to any problems, then I must broaden my conception of the Christian Church -and even the Methodist Church."[70] Ed King returned to Mississippi and serve on the vanguard as one of the young ministers who challenged the racial status quo in the Methodist Church and the moderate "respectability" of the church.

While King was continuing his theological education in seminary and prison cells, one of the most powerful men in Mississippi Methodism visited his parents to console them over their son. Vicksburg society had begun to shun King's parents and there were whispers that the family were secretly communists. J.W. Legget, a district superintendent who wielded enormous power in the Mississippi Annual Conference, comforted King's parents by telling them that he did not for one minute believe the people who told him that they were communist, but he was very afraid that their son was.[71]

J.W. Legget represented the established hierarchy in Mississippi that resented "troublemakers" like King. Legget also showed how the outsized influence of one individual

[70] Marsh, *Long Summer*, 124.
[71] Marsh, *Long Summer*, 125.

could impose his own views on the church. Roy Delamotte, in his fictional work entitled the *Stained Glass Jungle,* has one of his characters say, "Our little corner of Methodism has been run by a machine for almost thirty years now. Year after year the men with real courage and integrity have all transferred to other conferences."[72] The book goes on to describe how one district superintendent, Dr. Worthington, amassed power in the annual conference and essentially ran the annual conference through using the appointment system to make pastors conform to his political machine.[73] The *Stained Glass Jungle* was Delamotte's commentary and criticism of the Mississippi Annual Conference and J.W. Legget. Delamotte was intimately familiar with the Mississippi church and politics because he was the one who opposed the continuation of segregation in 1955 and was driven from the church.[74] The members in the Mississippi Annual Conference recognized the pseudonym of Dr. Worthington in the *Stained Glass Jungle* as either directly representing or having drawn inspiration from Williard Legget Jr.[75] Legget's intimidation would continue to influence the church throughout the 1960s, but a new wave of outside activism threatened the placid exterior that Legget successfully established.

In the spring of 1961, a new wave of direct confrontation came from outside of the state in the form of Freedom Riders. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), including its director James Farmer, decided to test the Supreme Court's decision to outlaw segregated seating on interstate carriers by staging a Freedom Ride through the Deep South.[76] The Freedom Riders had hit on one of the things the segregationists feared the most: the power of the Supreme Court. Segregationists understood that the courts and the justice department were the more "sinister

[72] Gregory Wilson, *The Stained Glass Jungle* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1962), 3.
[73] Wilson, *Stained Glass Jungle*, 3.
[74] Reiff*, Born of Conviction*, 53.
[75] Reiff, *Born of conviction*, 14.
[76] Dittmer, *Local People*, 91.

threat" in breaking down the color barrier.[77] The Freedom Riders and CORE hoped to force the federal government to intervene. In Mississippi, segregationists began to prepare themselves for a new assault of direct action.

Although the Freedom Riders focused on bus stations, segregationists feared that tests of their all-white worship services could follow. Before the Freedom Riders ever arrived, Mayor Thompson of Jackson, a member of Galloway, informed the pastor of Galloway that he had received information that Freedom Riders intended to send activist to try to attend morning worship, and that he had ordered police to keep them out of the church. Galloway Memorial Methodist Church was the largest church in the Mississippi Annual Conference and served as symbol for political and religious establishment. It was known as the "Cathedral of Mississippi Methodism." [78] The church itself sits in the shadow of the state capitol, closer than even the governor's mansion, and could pass as a government building. Befitting Galloways stature within the state, Dr. W.B. Selah, one of the most respected ministers in Mississippi Methodism, occupied its pulpit. It was the spiritual home for many powerful Mississippi politicians and symbolic of the traditional relationship between the powers who controlled the state and religion. On June 12, 1961, the Official Board of Galloway passed a resolution ordering its ushers to turn away any person white or colored who "seek admission for the purpose of creating an incident resulting in a breach of the peace."[79] Selah immediately discussed this decision with the chair of the Official Board of Galloway and both agreed the city did not have the authority to decide who could enter the church.[80] Just like the Church Property Bill, church leaders sought to retain

[77] Ward, *Defending White Democracy*, 125.
[78] ibid
[79] W.J. Cunningham, *Agony at Galloway: One Church's Struggle With Social Change* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1980), 3.
[80] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 27.

independent control of their sanctuaries. Selah particularly hoped the church board would not bar African American worshippers from Galloway saying that they likely wanted to be turned away.[81] He also considered the theological implications of the action saying that to turn away people at the door was antithetical to the very nature of the church. In a speech to the board he declared, "Now, gentleman, let me reiterate this Christian principle—there can be no color bar before the cross of Christ."[82] Selah's vigorous opposition to closing the door had little effect, and the board voted to close Galloway's doors to African American visitors. W. J. Cunningham, interpreting the events later, declared that parishioners' resentment against activism elsewhere in public life included the church. For many, he wrote, "the churches were the last line of defense."[83]

Before 1961, Selah represented the ideal of a southern "moderate." His congregation at Galloway held a variety of views on race. His congregation included mayor Allen Thompson and key leaders of the WCC. However, Galloway's membership also included racial moderates and liberals including some who were on the faculty at Millsaps.[84] Up until the Freedom Rides, Selah had done little to challenge the status quo in the South. Indeed, he had given the invocation at a Jackson Citizen's Council meeting and in a sermon from 1958 declared that it would be tragic for both races to put white and African American children in the same school.[85] However, something changed after the church considered barring African Americans in 1961. Selah began to preach decisively against forced segregation. Later that year Selah preached a sermon on Christian brotherhood stating, "It is not sinful for white people to prefer to worship with white

[81] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 29.
[82] Cunningham, *Agony*, 4.
[83] Cunningham, *Agony*, 5.
[84] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 28.
[85] ibid

people or for colored people to prefer to worship with colored people. The sin comes when a church seeks to erect a color bar before the cross of Christ…To discriminate against a man because of color is contrary to the will of God. Forced segregation is wrong. We should treat men not on the basis of color but on the basis of conduct."[86] In Jackson in 1961 his position "constituted a fundamental rebuttal" to segregationists and his own church.[87] Selah recognized the religious connection that Civil Rights activist hoped would stir white moderate Christians into action and pave the way for racial redemption.

No Freedom Riders ever made it to the door of Galloway though to test the resolve of its segregation policy. The Kennedy administration, fearing a civil war in Mississippi, brokered a deal with Governor Barnett. If Mississippi protected the Freedom Riders the White House would allow local police to arrest them and send them to prison without interference.[88] Kennedy's actions may have prevented a full-scale race riot in Mississippi, but it also allowed segregationists to maintain "respectability" and use local laws to trump federal rulings. However, events in northern Mississippi would soon eclipse the Freedom Riders and bring about the violence that the Kennedy's hoped to avoid.

At the University of Mississippi versus Kentucky football game on September 29, 1962, the Old South lived on. The football team was led out onto the field under Confederate flags while the Ole Miss band played "Dixie" to the screaming crowd. At halftime Governor Ross Barnett stepped onto the field and whipped the crowd into a frenzy declaring, "I love Mississippi! I love her People! I love her customs!"[89] The euphoric crowd recognized in these

[86] Davis W. Houck and David E. Dixon, *Rhetoric, Religion, and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1956*, (Baylor University Press, Waco: TX. 2014), 237.
[87] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 30.
[88] Dittmer, *Local People*, 95.
[89] Dittmer, *Local People*, 140.

words Barnett's commitment to blocking James Meredith, an African American, from enrolling at Ole Miss. Meredith had become a powerful symbol for African Americans as he tried to integrate Ole Miss with the help of the NAACP.[90] Kennedy had no option but to support Meredith's enrollment and trusted that Barnett would keep his word to keep order on the campus. Their trust in Barnett was misplaced. The night of September 30, 1962, the Ole Miss campus erupted into a full-scale race riot that saw two men die and one hundred and sixty US Marshalls injured. The violence intensified overnight, and the riot only ended with the arrival of 23,000 soldiers into Oxford.[91]

Two weeks later, four young Methodist ministers met at a secluded fishing cabin in Perry County, Mississippi to draft a statement in response to the insurrection at University of Mississippi. These four ministers hoped that the institutional leadership within the Methodist Church would say something publicly in response to riots at Ole Miss, but they had not. In one historian's re-telling, the ministers felt it "was time for someone to say publicly that not all white Mississippi Conference Methodists wished to be included in what historian James Silver would soon call the Closed Society's 'united front' against any change in race relations."[92] They composed a theological proclamation to clarify the Methodist position on race from pastors inside the Mississippi Annual Conferences. Through the rest of the fall and winter they gathered signatures from other Methodist clergy in the state.[93] Eventually twenty-eight ministers, mostly young clergy who represented the next generation of white clergy in Mississippi, affixed their

[90] Dittmer, *Local People*, 138-139.
[91] Dittmer, *Local People*, 140-141.
[92] Reiff, *Born of Conviction,* 82-83
[93] Reiff, *Born of Conviction,* 87-92.

name to the statement. This manifesto dubbed "Born of Conviction" based on its opening line was published in the *Mississippi Methodist Advocate* on January 2, 1963.[94]

Sam Ashmore, the editor of the paper, penned a brief editorial introducing the statement saying the young men who wrote the statement were, "some of our best trained and most promising ministers," and, "We feel they express the conviction of the vast majority of the clerical members of the conference."[95] The ministers declared that they had drafted the letter because of the "racial discord within our state," and "Born of the deep conviction of our souls as to what is morally right, we have been driven to seek the foundations of such convictions in the expressed witness of our Church."[96] The statement affirmed four points. The first expressed the need for freedom of the pulpit to be faithful to God's purpose. The second reaffirmed the official position of the Methodist Church on race as found in the Methodist Discipline and Social Creed that declared, "Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches that all men are brothers. He permits no discrimination because of race, color, or creed…We believe that God is the Father of all people and races, that Jesus Christ is His Son, that all men are brothers, and that man is of infinite worth as a child of God." The third point voiced support of the public school system: "We are unalterably opposed to the closing of public schools on any level or to the diversion of tax funds to the support of private or sectarian schools." The fourth noted that the issues of race and communism were frequently confused and that the writers concurred with the Methodist Council of Bishops' statement that said, "The basic commitment of a Methodist minister is to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This sets him in permanent opposition to communism. He cannot be a

[94] "Born of Conviction," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, Jan. 2, 1963.
[95] ibid
[96] "Born of Conviction," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, Jan. 2, 1963.

Christian and a communist."[97] At a basic level, the statement was fairly innocuous as it was only a commitment to what the Methodist Church had affirmed since 1956. There was no oblique reference supporting the idea of integration in the statement. However, in the racially charged atmosphere of Mississippi in 1962 their declaration threatened to break the myth of white solidarity in support of segregation. The twenty-eight signers in affirming their support for the public school system declared their opposition to the often-used threat of governors throughout the South to abolish the public school system if the federal government forced it to integrate.[98] In affirming the Social Creed of the Methodist Church, the authors reminded members of the basic connection they had as Methodists and Christians to the African American members of their own church and in their own state. In the immediate wake of the Oxford violence, the Born of Conviction statement brought back to the church's doorstep the Civil Rights and integration issues that episcopal leadership in the South had tried to bury under the arcane rules of the jurisdictional system. They reminded Methodists that the state church was joined to a larger church that had already condemned racial discrimination. For a brief moment, progressive voices had cracked the Magnolia curtain of the white segregationist's rhetoric and could discuss race in the light of shared Christian beliefs.

At first the reaction to the Born of Conviction Statement seemed positive. The *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, under the decidedly moderate editor Sam Ashmore, offered a place for readers to share their thoughts in a controlled and anonymous way. Several editorials noted the need for freedom of the pulpit, and argued that what a pastor says "may not always please all who hear, but the congregation must insist that he is a prophet of God and not a

[97] "Born of Conviction," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, Jan. 2, 1963.
[98] Ward, *Defending White Democracy,* 138-139.

panderer of meaningless platitudes."[99] Other editorials voiced support saying, "I am proud to support and work with these dedicated Ministers."[100] An African American news agency also picked up on the statement and its widespread acceptance among certain groups in the white Mississippi annual conferences. The *Mississippi Free Pres*s noted that the Born of Conviction Statement, "Drew support from 23 ministers meeting the next day in Okolona and from the Mississippi Conference Lay Leader Dr. J.P. Stafford."[101] Significantly, Dr. W. B. Selah voiced support of the ministers and reiterated his stance for integration first made in 1961. He declared, "Forced Segregation is wrong. We should voluntarily desegregate all public facilities…there can be no color bar in a Christian Church."[102] It seemed for a moment that the Born of Conviction statement had broken through the rhetoric of segregation and the reticence of most white Methodist clergy in the state.

However, the statement also came under intense scrutiny from the secular press in Mississippi, and it created a veritable firestorm. Seemingly all the Mississippi daily newspapers carried a report on the minister's statement soon after it was published.[103] With the increased press coverage and despite a few positive reactions, backlash ensued quickly. One editorial in the *Mississippi Methodist Advocate* outlined the issues most white Mississippians had with the statement. The writer saw nothing wrong with freedom of the pulpit and hoped everyone was against communism, but on the second and third points he said,

[99] "The Freedom of the Pulpit," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate,* January 2, 1963.
[100] Francis B. Stevens, "Endorses Statement of Ministers," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate,* Jan 9, 1963.
[101] "Ministers Speak out on Discrimination Document 'Born of Conviction' Braves Blasts; Gains Support." *Mississippi Free Press*, January 12, 1963, African American Newspaper Database.
[102] "Ministers Speak out on Discrimination Document 'Born of Conviction' Braves Blasts; Gains Support." *Mississippi Free Press*, January 12, 1963, African American Newspaper Database.
[103] Reiff, *Born of Conviction*, 93.

> "We can and should love and respect our brothers without regard to race and if this is what the ministers are saying, then I agree with them. If they are saying that they advocate the mixing of races in the local church, in the school room or socially, then I vehemently disagree with them… As stated in Paragraph III of the statement, I too, affirm my belief that our public school system is the most effective means of providing common education for all our children. But if the statement is meant to imply that there should be mixing of races in the schools, then we are miles apart in our belief."[104]

The debate was particularly important at Galloway, the state's largest and most influential congregation. After Selah and his associate pastor Rev. Furr both came out in support of the statement the Official Board again took it upon themselves to adopt a resolution stating that the opinions expressed by the ministers of their church did not reflect the views of all members. In a selective call back to Selah's sermon on Brotherhood, the Board chose to ignore the pastor's stance against segregation and focus on his quote that, "It is not un-Christian that we prefer to remain an all-white congregation," and they added that, "The practice of the separation of the races in Galloway Memorial Methodist Church is a time-honored tradition. We earnestly hope that the perpetuation of that tradition will never be impaired."[105] Significantly, Mississippi Annual Conference Bishop Marvin Franklin declined to comment at first.[106] When the official statement from the bishop and council did come, it only affirmed their support of the doctrines and historic position of the Methodist Church without supporting the twenty-eight ministers in

[104] Spencer Sissell, "Born of Conviction, but Let Cooler Heads Prevail," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate,* January 16, 1963.
[105] Ibid, 6.
[106] Reiff, *Born of Conviction*, 93.

any significant way. It only noted, "The Ninth Amendment to the Constitution of The Methodist Church places racial relationships on a voluntary basis. By the provisions of this amendment integration is not forced upon any part of our Church."[107] This bland pronouncement echoed the statements issued by institutional moderates after the 1956 and 1960 General Conference. Franklin recognized the harm the statement had done to the tenuous line the church was trying to walk. The signers of the Born of Conviction statement put segregationists on edge, and it ignited the tensions that had simmered since the Church Property Bill debate in the church between institutionalists, segregationists, and those who challenged the status quo within the church.

The pressure generated from the Born of Conviction Statement and the divergent reactions to it reminded ardent segregationists that the church was not as theologically unified behind segregation as it seemed. Many supporters of the church recognized that the ministers who spoke out against the dominant racial narrative posed an institutional threat and reframed the Born of Conviction Statement from a moral and theological statement to an existential challenge to Methodism as they knew it. Opponents tried to cast the twenty-eight ministers as radicals within the church. State Senator John McLaurin of Brandon, himself a Methodist, called on Mississippians "not to judge the membership of the Methodist Church by these spokesman," and said that the statements of Born of Conviction were "calculated to stir racial strife and to destroy the society in which we are accustomed to living."[108] Bert Jones, the Associate Conference Lay Leader, voiced the confusion of many institutionalists when he declared that he did not understand why any leader in the church would "commit himself to implications that might divide him from his people and bring bitterness to his church." He expressed the fear that

[107] The Statement from the Bishop and Cabinet of the Mississippi Methodist Church," *The Mississippi Methodist Advocate,* January 16, 1963.

[108] "Ministers' Statement Stirs Public Reaction," *Jackson Clarion Ledger*, Jan 8, 1963, Allen Eugene Cox Collection, Box 1, File 50, Manuscript Division, Special Collections, Mississippi State University Libraries.

if people lost faith in the leadership of the church, and the church splintered "Our people will no longer follow our leadership, and we will not merit the unbounded love and mercies of our Heavenly Father." [109] The critics within Methodism were less interested in the theological argument against segregation implicit within the statement and instead they focused on the potential harm the statement could do to the church and their tradition. The leadership in the Methodist church recognized the same limitations that southern white leadership had in the 1950s. The clergy and laity within the church recognized "the price to be paid" if they embraced the Born of Conviction statement and like Kennedy gave into the fear of massive reprisal or membership loss in the church.[110] Leaders in the Methodist Church like Franklin and Legget once again placed their primary concern in institutional unity. Franklin's opposition was to the disruption the statement had caused to the status quo, not upholding the right thing to do or the Christian thing to do. Franklin, along with other leadership changed the argument from what was right to what was disruptive. Without the support of the bishop, the twenty-eight signers were left at the mercies of their local congregations and district superintendents.[111]

Maxie Dunnam, one of the statement signers, wrote later that "My district superintendent couldn't understand why I had helped write the statement in the first place, making my signing it even worse. He and other supporters of the political controlling force of the conference were clear that I and the other signers had ruined our future in Mississippi."[112]

The events of Born of Conviction highlighted an internal struggle within Methodism that was occurring at the same time as racial tensions in Mississippi were building. Willard Legget Jr., the former district superintendent in Vicksburg who had consoled Ed Kings parents, had

[109] "I Do Not Understand," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, Jan 16, 1963.
[110] Dittmer, *Local People*, 68, 94.
[111] Maxie Dunnam, *God Outwitted Me: The Stories of My Life* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2018), 103.
[112] Ibid, 104

become district superintendent in Jackson by 1963 and built a political machine in the Mississippi Annual Conference through which he exerted disproportional influence on the Methodist Church in the state. Legget was able to amass this political power because, as one observer put it, he had "mastered the complex puzzle of Methodist appointment making."[113] Using his Machiavellian exploitation of the appointment system he was able to enlist the support of a large block of clergy and leadership in the Mississippi Annual conference. In the Methodist Church pastors are itinerant meaning that throughout their ministerial career they move from church to church.[114] The district superintendents advise the bishop, who is in charge of appointing pastors to local churches. The churches do have some say in who gets appointed, but the bishop's decision is final.[115] The appointment ladder in the Methodist Church in the 1960s lent itself to exploitation, jealousy, and competition while rewarding pastors who maintained the status quo. Delamotte illustrates this in *Stained Glass* when the main character, Jack, is appointed to a wealthy church in the suburbs as his first appointment out of seminary. The other clergy in the conference quickly point out that he received this appointment because he was dating district superintendent Worthington's daughter. Jack, a high minded and naïve young minister, didn't understand why he was such a prominent appointment until another minister asks him, 'Gosh, you're marrying the boss's daughter, aren't you."[116] Jack is quickly introduced to the jealousy he has engendered when the wife of another pastor who thought her husband was going to be appointed to Wentworth confronts Jack about it and his relationship with the district superintendents daughter and reminds him, "Whatever it is, Jaaack, it's *not* Methodism!" The

[113] Dunnam, *Outwitted*, 104.
[114] The Methodist Church, *Discipline*, 166.
[115] The Methodist Church, *Discipline,* 175-177.
[116] Wilson, *Jungle*, 93.

wife channeling her disappointment and resentment to her husband's treatment asks Jack to "remember us when you come into your father-in-law's kingdom."[117]

Along with the competition and jealousy that the appointment system engendered, powerful district superintendents like Legget could also use the appointment system to enforce compliance with their agenda through emotional manipulation. Delamotte explores this power dynamic with a story from the son of a Methodist minister who explained how his father was coerced into voting for Dr. Worthington's machine. The character explains that when his sister and he were in high school, they found out that their dad was slated to move to a different church. Both he and his sister begged their father not to leave. "We just knew there was something Dad could do to get sent back one more year…There was. He went to Beloved [Dr. Worthington] and offered to throw in with the machine if they could work it somehow for him to stay at Westboro till I graduated. He's been their man ever since, and afraid ever since…"[118] Delamotte hit on one of the key issues plaguing moderates and clergy within Methodism in Mississippi: fear. Moderates knew if they spoke out, they risked the respectability of their position and their careers.

The nature of the appointment system allowed for the accumulation of power in the hands of ambitious district superintendents like Legget. It incentivized clergy to maintain the status quo, and it provided the means to punish or silence clergy who challenged it. Willard Legget Jr.'s exploitation of the Mississippi Annual Conference created an atmosphere of fear and oppression that led to the silencing of many progressive ministers or their exit from the Mississippi Annual Conference.[119] A report from the 1964 Mississippi Annual Conference

[117] Wilson, *Jungle*, 95
[118] Wilson, *Jungle*, 99-100.
[119] "Report of Fellowship of Loyal Churchmen," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate,* March 5, 1964.

reported that seventeen ministers, including most of the signers of the Born of Conviction statement, officially transferred, but J.B. Cain lists fifty-one "men who were reared in this conference or who were educated here, or licensed to preach in this Conference without ever becoming a member of the Conference, are now in other Conferences throughout the country."[120] However, it was not universally true that moderate and progressive ministers were forced out. One district superintendent, Tom Prewitt, who was one of Legget's lieutenants, protected at least three of the signers of Born of Conviction from recrimination. Out of these three only one felt compelled to leave. However, in an example of the power a district superintendent held, Prewitt did not protect Gerald Trigg, also a Born of Conviction signer who ended up leaving the state, for the simple reason that "Trigg did not fit Prewitt's idea of a Mississippi Conference pastor."[121] This suggested that at least to some in the episcopal leadership of the church, the motivation for forcing out the Born of Conviction signers was less about preserving the ideology of segregation and more about protecting the church. The same can be surmised about Legget from Delamotte's depiction of him in the *Stained Glass Jungle*. Legget's pseudonym Dr. Worthington wasn't vindictive. Instead, Delamotte portrays Dr. Worthington as driven by a great love for the church. One of Dr. Worthington's advisories describes him like this, "He never gets mixed up in controversial issues; he's as safe and orthodox as the Four Gospels; and he loves the Methodist Church with his heart soul, mind, and strength."[122] The Born of Conviction signers were forced out because they threatened the stability and standing of the Methodist Church in Mississippi, and the church's leaders chose to preserve institutional unity and the "respectability" it had in the

[120] "Brief Report From Gulfport Conference," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate,* June 3, 1964; J. B. Cain, "Historical Retrospect," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, February 26, 1964.
[121] Reiff, *Born of Conviction*, 174.
[122] Wilson, *Stained Glass Jungle*, 142

state. There was nothing for most of the clergy to do but leave, though not everyone who left stayed away.

Ed King and the Jackson Church Visit Campaign

In January 1963, Ed King and his wife returned to Mississippi to become the chaplain at Tougaloo College.[123] His actions during his seminary years, including being arrested multiple times in Montgomery in connection with Civil Rights groups, had led white Methodist leaders in Mississippi to put off his ordination by designating King to "be on trial" meaning that Board of Ministerial Training and Qualifications was still examining his "acceptability as a minister."[124] King recognized that the nature of the struggle for Civil Rights had taken a new turn with a younger generation of African Americans challenging segregation through direct action like the Tougaloo Nine. King and students at Tougaloo discussed a new tactic. They hoped to attend Galloway for Easter to highlight the immorality of segregation and test southern Christians' commitment to the idea of the brotherhood of all believers.[125] King hoped to prick the conscious of southern white moderates and that if they began to support any kind of racial change then, "the door was open, not just the church door, but the door to the possibilities of moderate, gradual change in all Mississippi."[126]

The African American clergy and laity that had remained loyal to the Methodist Church were also becoming increasingly active in the Civil Rights movement throughout the state. In the spring of 1962 Reverend L.P. Ponder opened St. John's Methodist Church to organizers from the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). After a meeting in the church a half dozen people

[123] Marsh, *Long Summer*, 126.
[124] Lyon, *Sanctuaries,* 58: Marsh, *Long Summer*, 125.
[125] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 44.
[126] Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, 130

decided to attempt to register to vote in Hattiesburg.[127] In 1963, Mt. Zion Methodist Church opened its doors to CORE and COFO to host a freedom school in their church.[128] African American leadership in the segregated Central Jurisdiction began to encourage African American Methodist churches to take an active role in challenging segregation in Mississippi. Bishop Charles Golden of the Central Jurisdiction of the Methodist Church was active in encouraging churches to support voter registration drives and declared that no Christian minister could be on the fence when it came to Civil Rights.[129] African American clergy, especially circuit riding Methodist clergy, recognized the risk they ran, but by the early 1960s ministers were helping organized Civil Rights groups to win the support of the African American society they served. Unlike their white colleagues within the church African American leaders like Bishop Golden and the pastors of the Central Jurisdiction used their ecclesiastical offices and the church to try to break down segregation in Jim Crow. They were willing to run the risk that white Methodist leadership was not willing to.

In Jackson, Ed King, wanting to capitalize on the momentum that the Born of Conviction statement and African American activism had provided, contacted Selah at Galloway to inform him that students wanted to try to integrate Galloway. Selah said he and his associate minister didn't support the Church Board's decision to close the doors of the church and he very much wanted an integrated church, but he feared the students might face violence and encouraged them to wait until after the Mississippi Annual Conference meetings in May which Selah hoped would be a bellwether of change.[130] King agreed to hold off the first round of church visits until then.

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[127] Dittmer, *Local People*, 180.
[128] George, *One Mississippi, Two Mississippi*, 126.
[129] "Greenwood Citizens Attempt to Register; More Gunfire Aimed at Youth; Bishop Golden Speaks," *Mississippi Free Press*, March 16, 1963, *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[130] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 44.

However, the direct-action phase of the Jackson movement would not wait. On May 28, King was arrested with other Tougaloo faculty who were demonstrating in downtown Jackson while African American students tried to integrate a Woolworth's lunch counter. King was arrested again on March 30 for joining over a dozen African American ministers, students, and faculty from Tougaloo who were conducting a kneel-in at the steps of the federal building.[131]

King's actions and the rise of direct confrontation was not lost on the white clergy in Mississippi. At the Mississippi Annual Conferences meetings during the last week of May 1963 attendees were voting on the on a slate of delegates to the 1964 General Conference. In a strong win for segregationists in the church, Dr. J.P. Stafford who had vigorously defended the Born of Conviction signers was voted out as Conference Lay Leader. Members of the Conference also voted eighty-nine to eighty-five to discontinue King's status as a provisional minister on trial and demoted him to a local elder meaning that he was effectively expelled from the Mississippi Annual Conference as a minister.[132] The meetings were a great success for white supremacists, but the close vote on King showed that there was still tension between moderate leadership and arch segregationists among the clergy. After the Mississippi Annual Conference rejected King, Bishop Matthew Golden offered King a position in the Central Jurisdiction, which he accepted to become the first white minister in the African American conference.[133]

King kept his promise to Selah to wait to send a group to integrate Galloway until after the May meetings of the conference. On Sunday, June 9, 1963, four African American students from Tougaloo ascended the steps of Galloway Memorial Methodist Church. Galloway ushers met them and denied them entry to the church. After the service, Rev. Furr told Dr. W.B. Selah

[131] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 53-55.
[132] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 57.
[133] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 58.

that the church had turned away the students.[134] A report from the *Press Dispatch* said, "In a statement after the service Dr. Selah said, 'I understand the ushers turned several negroes away…I have said, as you well know, there can be no color bar in a Christian church… I cannot judge the motives of people who come to worship in this church…only God can do that… So I will ask the Bishop for another appointment."[135] Rev. Furr also submitted his resignation saying he, "could not willingly serve a church that turns people away."[136] This was just the beginning for Galloway. Throughout 1963 and 1964, King organized integrated student groups from Tougaloo and hosted clergy from out of state that attempted to integrate worship at white protestant churches in Jackson. The state's two largest Methodist congregations, Galloway and Capitol Street, were put under some of the most intense pressure from the integrated groups. The Tougaloo activists recognized the strategic importance of targeting Methodist churches because the church perceived itself as a "connectional denomination."[137]

In the meantime, Galloway was left without a senior pastor. Selah and Furr's resignations were hailed in the African American *Mississippi Free Press*, but at the same time it deprived Galloway from having a respected voice in a position of leadership that could have helped to open the church's doors.[138] While his decision to step down was a major action of protest, it was also a capitulation to the segregationists' strength. Instead of fighting from his leadership position, Selah chose to retire as one of the most respected pastors in the conference and was still beloved by many members at Galloway.[139] Selah's retirement enabled the members of the Church Board of Galloway who were heavily influenced by MAMML and the WCC to wield

[134] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 61.
[135] "Pastors Ask New Pulpits As Church Bars Negroes," June 10, 1963. Allen Eugene Cox Collection, Box 1, File 47, Manuscript Division, Special Collections, Mississippi State University Libraries.
[136] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 61.
[137] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 210.
[138] "Rev. Selah Resigns in Protest Against the Church Color Bar," *Mississippi Free Press*, June 15, 1963.
[139] "Galloway Memorial During Selah's Ministry," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, September, 1963.

more power in the church. The next pastor appointed to Galloway, the Rev. W.J. Cunningham did not have the time to build respect or rapport with the congregation at Galloway that Selah had enjoyed.

Cunningham was decidedly against the decision of the Church Board to close the doors and keep them closed calling the two resolutions "anti-Methodist" because, "as well as violating the nature of the church, this resolution disregarded the written law of the church."[140] He noted that the Methodist Book of Discipline for 1960-1964 stated unequivocally that all person were proper candidates for membership in the Methodist Church. In Cunningham's view "all persons" cut across racial lines.[141]

Methodist pastors had a limited amount of power to enforce this discipline though. The church visit campaigns demonstrated how the laity could hold sway over the church. Indeed, Cunningham noted that feelings ran high amongst the laity of Galloway, and while there were some who supported opening the doors, the segregationist faction was powerful and motivated. He said, "Resentment felt strongly elsewhere in the state against outside intervention in established Southern mores, was felt just as strongly in the Churches. Barring Negroes from worship in white congregations was another way of fighting back. The churches were the last line of defense."[142] Cunningham felt that the WCC and the SSC actively undermined his pastoral authority through his church board. Cunningham said, "Without a doubt a prime factor in creating the closed-door policy in Galloway was the powerful Citizen's Council backed by the awesome might of the State Sovereignty Commission."[143] Even if there were members sympathetic towards integration on the church board, Cunningham felt that the fear of reprisal

[140] "Galloway Memorial During Selah's Ministry," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, September, 1963.
[141] Cunningham, *Agony*, 6.
[142] Cunningham, *Agony*, 5.
[143] Cunningham, *Agony*, 15-19.

from the WCC prevented them from acting. In the face of these powers Cunningham said, "The only weapon I had to affect the open door were love and persuasion. If these weapons failed, my arsenal was exhausted."[144]

The JCVC continued throughout the remainder of the summer of 1963 after Cunningham was installed as the senior pastor at Galloway, and Tougaloo students continued to show up at the doors every Sunday to be turned away. As the visits continued, Cunningham declared, "as in the Middle Ages a cathedral could be turned into a fortress, so 'the Cathedral of Mississippi Methodism [Galloway]' became a bastion of White supremacy."[145] Rev. King and the students who participated saw the church visits as a way of exposing the immorality of racial segregation. The historian Lyon noted, "As Rev. King later summarized, that church visits would be a way to remind white Christians that they 'cannot escape thinking about the problems of segregation even on Sunday morning…that every single aspect of your Southern Way of Life is under attack."[146] The JCVC represented an invasion of segregationist sanctuaries literally and figuratively. Selah had directly declared that segregation was antithetical to Christianity, and Rev. Ed. King with students from Tougaloo ensured that segregation of Christian churches could not be hidden as they arrived every Sunday to be turned away at the Church steps. As summer faded into fall in 1963, the Citizen's Council announced a new initiative "to save Jackson Churches from integration."[147]

On October 6, 1963, three Tugaloo students, Julie Zaugg, Ida Hannah, and Bette Anne Poole arrived at Capitol Street Methodist Church on World Communion Sunday. In an ominous sign a police car had followed them from the gates of the college ten miles to the church. When

[144] Cunningham, *Agony*, 25.
[145] Cunningham, *Agony,* 13.
[146] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 78
[147] Lyon, *Sanctuaries,* 96.

they tried to enter the church the ushers barred their entrance as usual, but as they turned to leave, for the first time, Jackson Police intervened and arrested the group.[148] The *Mississippi Methodist Advocate* reported the incident as a "tragedy of errors," and was clear that "The Church did not call the police and the Church did not place a complaint of trespassing or disturbing public worship."[149] The arrests were a turning point in the movement because Methodist leadership throughout the country started to show a sense of collective guilt. The Advocate reported that "since the unwarranted arrests were made in front of a Methodist Church, many Methodist leaders were concerned and felt obligated to assume responsibility for release of the students, pending an appeal."[150]

One such leader was Anne C. Brown the general secretary of the Women's Division of Christian Service of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church. She contacted Bess Arrington, a friend and member of Galloway, and then King. After learning the details of the arrest, she began to coordinate the fundraising effort to release the students. The Woman's Christian Service raised the money and bailed out the students, but the arrests had brought the attention of the rest of the world to Jackson.[151] Methodist leaders from across the country started calling Rev. King to offer support and inquire about visiting Jackson churches.[152]

Sunday October 13 brought another round of church visits, but this time there would be more than just Tougaloo students. Rev. Hallett, a white Methodist minister from Chicago joined the students. With the arrests at Capitol Street a week earlier, Methodists from across the country started flying into Jackson to join with the Tougaloo students to attempt to open the churches.

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[148] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 115
[149] "A Tragedy of Errors," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, October 16, 1963.
[150] ibid
[151] Lyon, *Sanctuaries,* 118
[152] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 125

These ministers did not consider themselves outsiders to the church because "they were Methodist Ministers merely hoping to attend a Methodist Church."[153] While the Jackson police initially tolerated these new visitors, eventually they started arresting the ministers from out of state as well. On October 20, a group including four ministers from Chicago was arrested in front of Capitol Street. Deputy Police Chief J. L. Ray testified that no one in the church called him to make the arrests, but "When the situation became argumentative and the group refused to leave, he stepped in, arrested them and made the charges."[154]

Ed King along with Tougaloo students and outside ministers kept up a constant witness to the Methodist Churches in Jackson. Cunningham noted that the "paddy wagon across the street and the police officer with his billy club on instant duty became a familiar sight."[155] The ministers often met with Cunningham the Saturday before and then were arrested and jailed the next Sunday morning. Four ministers from New York, Reverends Skeete, VerNooy, Collins, and Williams, who were arrested in front of Galloway in November 1963 wrote about their experiences in a report to the Board of Christian Social Concerns. They said that Methodist leaders in Mississippi pleaded with the out of state visitors not to tamper with the jurisdictional system of the church lest people secede from Church. When they tried to attend church Jackson police arrested Skeete and VerNooy at Capitol Street for disturbing divine worship and the police at Galloway arrested Collins and Williams for trespassing. These ministers described their arrest as an outrage saying, "how could we as Methodist ministers be guilty of trespassing on Methodist Church property at a Sunday morning worship hour…There is here a violation of the

[153] Lyon, *Sanctuaries,* 126.
[154] "Deputy Police Chief Sought to Keep Peace," Jackson Clarion Ledger, October 26, 1963.
[155] Cunningham, Agony, 24.

Discipline, disregard of the statement of the Council of Bishops, as well as a violation of the spirit of Christ."[156]

While the JCVC started as an ecumenical campaign, after the arrests of the ministers it became a Methodist fight. Any observer could see plainly what Methodists across the country had known since the mid-1950s: the church was at war with itself. After the first arrests in October 1963, thirty of thirty-nine arrests took place at Methodist Churches. The students and ministers who participated in the JCVC exposed Methodists so called "connection" with the larger church. The Methodist Church had become the very public symbol of white Christian resistance in Jackson. King and the students who initiated the JCVC exposed the hypocrisy of the church in Mississippi in a way that forced the national church to act. The students witness encourage ministers and laymen from outside of Mississippi who objected to the segregated policies of the church came to witness to the need for an end of volunteerism and gradualism in desegregating the denomination.[157]

The constant pressure the JCVC caused throughout 1963 created a crisis in the Methodist world of Mississippi. Editorials flooded the *Advocate* criticizing the "archaic moral leadership" of the church, while many moderates believed that the church was under siege from an "unholy alliance" of agitators on the left and the right who sowed hatred and repression.[158] J.P. Stafford the outgoing Conference Lay Leader, used his weekly column to urge leadership to move past the forces of the "old guard" and decried the church's front doors being guarded by the "rear guard of yesterday."[159] However, at the same time MAMML and the WCC turned their attention

[156] Cunningham, *Agony*, 31-33
[157] Lyon, *Sanctuaries,* 210
[158] "Archaic Moral leadership Insufficient for Space Age," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, October 9, 1963; "An Unholy alliance," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, November 13, 1963.
[159] J.P. Stafford, "Thoughts From a Quite Corner," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, October 16, 1963.

towards the paper as readership steadily dropped throughout 1963 prompting editor Sam Ashmore to plead with his readers to support the Advocate that "represents freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of the press," and, "tries to keep awake the smoldering fires of understanding and love."[160] Ashmore's dedication to equal reporting in the paper had consequences that were recognizable to Mississippians who took a stand on Civil Rights. He referenced the "brutal elements of tales which pass for truth against the church paper," and the character assassinations and burning crosses that happen when "myth is substituted for reality."[161]

On Easter Day 1964 Galloway boasted a full sanctuary. Two Methodist bishops arrived to join the congregation that morning. Bishop Mathews of the Boston area and Bishop Golden of the Los Angeles area. The ushers standing guard at the door, including the official chair of the board Nat Rogers, barred their entrance into Galloway because Bishop Golden was an African American. The bishops asked if they could speak to Cunningham. Nat Rogers located Cunningham in the hallway as he prepared to enter the service. When asked what to do Cunningham said, "Let them in on my responsibility." Cunningham recalls, "there came over Mr. Rogers face an expression of almost complete horror. I might as well have made such a horrendous statement as, "Let's burn the house down!" Cunningham never went to the door to speak to them, and Nat Rogers acting on his own authority and the authority of the Church Board barred their entry. [162]

Cunningham reached his breaking point after expulsion of the bishops from the church. That afternoon, the minister went to the home of a church officer house and broke down

[160] Sam Ashmore, "Your Church Paper," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, November, 27 1963.
[161] Sam Ashmore, "Editing Your Church Paper," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, April 29, 1964.
[162] Cunningham, *Agony*, 55.

emotionally from the stress. At that point he considered quitting his ministry at Galloway.[163] The next day Bishop Franklin came to Cunningham and told him if his fellow bishops had been admitted he would have stood by Cunningham. This was the first promise of support that bishop Franklin had given Cunningham or any supporter of opening the churches in Mississippi, but only behind closed doors.[164] Cunningham never tested that promise though, and his anguish and pastoral leadership remained behind the closed doors of Galloway as well.

The publicity of Galloway and the JCVC reverberated across the country inducing more ministers to come to Mississippi to witness to their convictions. In the words of Cunningham Galloway became a "cause celebre across America and lands beyond the seas."[165] The *Los Angeles Times* ran an editorial cartoon depicting the outdoor church bulletin board at Galloway as reading in bold, "Every One Welcome," and underneath this in small text, "except negroes."[166] This publicity fueled the fight within Methodism.

In Mississippi, leaders within the church scrambled to react to what many saw as an invasion of outside pastors and press. The delegates to the North Mississippi Annual Conference adopted a resolution asking out-of-state clergy to refrain from participating in demonstrations in Mississippi.[167] The Chairman of the Official Board of Galloway, Nat Rogers, defended his church implying it was not the Methodist problem child, but its whipping boy.[168]

Moderate institutionalists were stuck somewhere in between, and as with the Born of Conviction statement they would choose to do what they felt was best to save the church at any

[163] Cunningham, Agony, 56
[164] ibid
[165] Cunningham, *Agony*, 11.
[166] Cunningham, *Agony*, 96.
[167] "Resolution," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, June 24, 1964.
[168] Nat S. Rogers, "Galloway Memorial Methodist Church Methodist Problem Child or Whipping Boy?" Allen Eugene Cox Collection, Box 2, File 219, Manuscripts Division, Special Collections, Mississippi State University Libraries.

cost. “Episcopal leadership would be nil during my tenure,” Cunningham wrote later.[169] A certain Rev. Harvey meeting with Bishop Franklin after Selah’s resignation, “came away with the impression that Bishop Franklin was torn internally, that he knew the right thing to do and even wanted to do the right thing, but did not feel strong enough to withstand the pressures against him”[170] Part of the pressure Franklin felt was the realization that taking a strong stand on behalf of opening the doors of the church would cause members to leave. MAMML had become increasingly pugnacious throughout the JCVC. In 1964 they invited Myers Lowman the executive secretary of Circuit Riders, Inc., and a frequent guest on the White Citizens Council’s radio show, to do a speaking tour through Mississippi where he inveighed against Franklin saying, “I hope you don’t think I’m kicking an old man, but if I’ve ever heard a flannel-mouthed, double-talking bishop, it’s your own Marvin Franklin.”[171] The pragmatic Legget was quoted as saying that he personally favored segregated churches in Mississippi because “the great majority of Mississippi Methodists do not believe in integration,” and if the churches were forced to be integrated it “would destroy the churches over which I preside.”[172] Legget didn’t frame his support for segregation on theological or racial issues, instead he understood it in light of protecting the church as he knew it. More than anything, moderate institutionalists’ love for the church and fear that integration would fracture the church drove decision making. Cunningham recalled a congregational meeting he had with the bishop Edward J. Pendergrass, who replaced Marvin Franklin in 1965, in which Cunningham’s associate minister Dr. John Sutphin made the dire prediction that if they opened the doors of Galloway, they would lose two hundred more members. Cunningham noted, “It was one of those insubstantial rumors that kept intimidating

[169] Cunningham, *Agony,* 11.
[170] Lyon, *Sanctuaries,* 87.
[171] “Lowman and the Methodists,” *Lexington Advertiser*, June 25, 1964.
[172] Lyon, *Sanctuaries,* 139.

officers and stifling faith…The evening's meeting with the bishop closed in the gloomy pessimism that if we did what was right and opened the doors to all as was becoming to Methodist Christians, we'd lose two hundred members. Placating two hundred dissident members was more desirable than doing what was right."[173] To the ecclesiastical leaders in the church institutional concerns trumped any personal convictions.

More moderate voices such as Ashmore of the *Mississippi Methodist Advocate* and Stafford, both of whom had previously supported the Born of Conviction signers, expressed sorrow over the condition of the church and questioned closed-door policies. Ashmore wrote, "Our people deeply resent the fact that our church has been made the battle ground of outside forces and conflicting ideologies and our reaction to such pressure is heard around the world." He also acknowledged that the arrest of clergy and the barring of the two bishops was incomprehensible and "makes us wonder if the policy is consistent with Christ's teaching that 'whosoever will may come."[174] Stafford took a harder stance saying the "old attitude got a jolt in 1963, but it remains to be seen whether we have basic intestinal fortitude to do better in 1964." He argued the Methodist church had become comfortably middle-class bent on preserving face and, "The trouble in the days ahead will come from our narrowness. Those members who cannot think beyond their limited comer or their favorite attitude, whether they are looking at the more or less fortunate."[175] However, neither one of them ever actually called for an end to segregation or acknowledged racism. Instead, Ashmore referenced the "hate propaganda" that had access to

[173] Cunningham, *Agony*, 90-91.
[174] "The Travail of Mississippi Methodism," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, April 8, 1964.
[175] Dr. J.P. Stafford, "Thoughts from a Quite Corner," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, Jan. 8, 1964.

the minds of Mississippians, and Stafford cited nebulous groups such as "pockets of extreme conservatism" or the "Old Guard," that held the church back.[176]

Ashmore, Stafford, Selah, and Cunningham served as moderate and, at times, progressive voices trying to lead the church into a new direction, but they also represented how moderates within the church leadership often acted as enablers for the worst actions of local congregations and laity. They called out the institutional failure while only hinting at the moral issue of segregation that lay underneath. Almost all the moderate leaders fell prey to this. Selah, in tendering his resignation at the beginning of JCVC, deprived Galloway of the leadership and good will he built during his long and celebrated ministry. All of them failed to address the effect of individual Methodists' actions. In his memoir, Cunningham defends his congregation. He claims that the members of Galloway were part of an "innately decent society clutched in the frozen grip of dead tradition," and that they were "compelled" to act as they did because of "forces stronger than themselves."[177] Cunningham's use of passive voice in describing his congregation strips them of individually agency and subtly absolves them of their actions. It also transforms the members who enforced the closed-door policy from active participants perpetuating segregation to victims. He believed, along with Stafford and Ashmore, in the "respectability" of white church members. Cunningham blamed the maligning influence of outside pressures. He said the church board was caught up in the power and fear that politicians and the White Citizens Council used against the church to keep it segregated, but he never willingly spoke against his board to condemn their action. At the same time, he provided multiple examples of how prominent members worked to keep the church segregated and he

[176] "The Travail of Mississippi Methodism," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, April 8, 1964; Dr. J.P. Stafford, "Thoughts from a Quite Corner," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, January 29, 1964; Dr. J.P. Stafford, "Thoughts From a Quite Corner," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, May 20, 1964.
[177] Cunningham, *Agony*, 59.

never confronted them. Even the clergy who had visited Jackson and written the report to the Board of Christian Social Concerns suggested one of the basic issues facing the church in Mississippi was its powerlessness, "in the face of state interference.[178] Some of the Methodist clergy who were arrested told Deputy Chief Ray "they understood the ministers of the two churches at which we were arrested did not desire our arrest." Ray responded with his own question, "Do you run the church?"[179] The policeman's response implied that the pastors did not run their church, the laity of the Official Church board did. The pastors commented in their report after Cunningham visited them in jail to express his sorrow, "This is the sad state of the church—that it is sorry about the arrests, but powerless to prevent them. Or is it?"[180] The leadership within the church in its effort to try to hold the church together, actually acted as enablers to those powerful figures who were trying to maintain segregation.

As winter faded into spring in 1964, and the JCVC continued the *Mississippi Methodist Advocate* proudly proclaimed that "Galloway Leads the Nation Again."[181] Galloway had led the nation in giving in a national tithe effort, but not all of Galloway's leadership was so benign. On the same page, the *Advocate* reported that Galloway's Official Church Board passed a proposal to the General Conference of the Methodist Church which was to be convened April 26, 1964. The request was the same as in 1956: to not change the jurisdictional system of the church or take away the voluntary nature of Amendment IX.[182] Despite the pressure the JCVC had put on Galloway with its negative publicity and the violence in Mississippi from 1960 to 1964, Galloway still fought to keep sanctuary segregated. Nevertheless, the JCVC had created an

[178] Cunnningham, *Agony*, 33
[179] Cunningham, *Agony*, 33.
[180] Cunningham, *Agony*, 34.
[181] J.W. Cunningham, "Galloway Leads Nation Again," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, March 18, 1964.
[182] "To the General Conference of the Methodist Church to be Convened April 26, 1964 in Pittsburgh, PA." *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, March 18, 1964.

increased sense of urgency among Methodist outside the state to call for a mandate to end segregation in the Methodist Church. Indeed, these aims had become a primary factor for out of state clergy visiting Mississippi. Lyon noted that Methodist ministers and laymen journeying to Jackson hoped to expose the contradiction between the stated ideals of the church and the reality that individual churches had barred their doors and even allowed police intervention into their affairs. "They hoped to draw more attention to this incongruity so that the Methodist hierarchy would intercede, or so that the upcoming general conference in Pittsburgh in April 1964 would mandate desegregation throughout the bodies of the Methodist Church, including those at the congregational level"[183] However, segregationists in Mississippi still held sway in the church.

In Mississippi, some congregations followed Galloway's example and asked General Conference not to abolish the Central Jurisdiction; MAMML continued to threaten to lead people out of the Methodist Church if they adopted an integrationist platform.[184] However, there was a new coalition arising to support to counter the influence of MAMML no matter what happened at General Conference. On February 5, 1964, an editorial in the *Mississippi Methodist Advocate* entitled "Abandon the Ship? Never!" declared that many were lost in the fog and threatened to withhold support from the church and abandon the ship. It promised "When the storm is over, however, and we see our great Methodist ship has maintained its perspective and balance, we thank God that we did not abandon the Church for a Birch canoe or some other flimsy substitute."[185] This centrist position was further solidified when on February 29, 1964, forty-one ministers and laymen founded a new organization to counter MAMML, The Fellowship of Loyal Churchmen (FLC). The resolutions stated that the Mississippi Conference was vital to the

[183] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 141.
[184] "Resolution," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, April 1, 1964.
[185] "Abandon the Ship? Never!" *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, February 5, 1964.

Church, that those in the membership would be loyal to the church no matter what was passed at General Conference, and they recognized that the loss of so many ministers from the Mississippi Annual Conference was a result of a lack of freedom of the pulpit. In a direct shot at the power of Legget, they stated that the low morale of ministers was, "partially due to the accumulation of political and appointive power fostered by the repeated service of ministers in the office of District Superintendent."[186] With these new movements within the church Rev. King and the Tougaloo activists hoped that the Methodist Church would adopt a measure to ensure compliance with the denominations racial policies or provide a way to punish wayward congregations who did not comply.[187]

Another issue at hand for the General Conference 1964 was the Central Jurisdiction and the planned merger with the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Many Evangelical United Brethren ministers did not want to be in union with the Methodist Church until it desegregated all its structures.[188] Discontentment with the Central Jurisdiction also continued to run high in the African American annual conferences. The Central Jurisdiction Conference in 1964 passed a resolution opposing "segregated annual conferences within regional jurisdictions as 'incompatible with a truly inclusive Methodist Church.' To implement this, the conference agreed on criteria for annual conference transfers, including agreement by the receiving jurisdiction that its conferences would not be continued on a segregated basis."[189] All the African American annual conferences in the Central Jurisdiction voted for the dismantling of the Central Jurisdiction and integrating into the regional jurisdictions in 1964.[190]

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[186] "Report of the Fellowship of Loyal Churchmen," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, March 5, 1964.
[187] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 243
[188] Lyon, *Sanctuaries*, 248.
[189] "At the Central Jurisdiction Conference," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate,* July 1, 1964.
[190] "Central Jurisdiction Meets June 16-21," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate,* June 17, 1964.

Recognizing these pressures, delegates to General Conference acted. In response to the JCVC, members to General Conference clarified the rules for membership within the Methodist church, and they amended the Discipline of the Methodist Church to say, "The Methodist Church is part of the Church Universal. Therefore all persons without regard to race, color, national origin, or economic conditions, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, to participate in its programs, and, when they take the appropriate vows to be admitted into its membership in any local church in the connection."[191] The discipline on church property was also amended to say that on all other matters the churches followed local law, "provided, further, that the services of worship of every local Methodist church shall be open to all persons without regard to race, color or national origin."[192] These amendments proved to be a pyrrhic victory. The General Conference overwhelmingly decided to maintain the gradualism found in Amendment IX over the next four years, and the jurisdictional system was maintained. Soon after delegates began debating what the word "eligible," meant.[193] The church, like it had in 1939 and 1956 had chosen institutional stability and the status quo over risking angering its southern members.

For all intents this marked the end of the JCVC as Rev. King and other activist turned their attention to the larger effort of Freedom Summer. The white southern delegations were satisfied with the result in the same way they were satisfied in 1956. General Conference had held to the status quo. John D. Humphrey the executive secretary of the Inter-Board Conference wrote in the *Advocate* hoping to remind Mississippians that although the question of race dominated the conference, it had not mandated integration. He summed up the events of General Conference like this, "Significant actions were taken and the guidelines for action for the 1964-

[191] The Methodist Church, *Discipline,* 49.
[192] Ibid, 78.
[193] Lyon, *Sanctuaries,* 249.

68 quadrennium have now been set forth. Some matters up for debate were highly controversial but the will of the majority was established and though it is doubtful if any Methodist is in agreement with every action."[194] The will of the majority was the retention of the Central Jurisdiction. He also stressed that Amendment IX remained on a voluntary basis, and that the new paragraph in the Methodist Discipline was "not a part of the law of the church but is a policy statement for the information and guidance of Methodists as they search for God's will in this matter."[195] General Conference 1964 was ultimately a failure for progressives. While the church gave lip service to the promise of integration, it continued to be an empty vessel of reform.

Even this was too much for MAMML. The July edition of MAMML's Information Bulletin contained a resolution denouncing the actions of General Conference of 1964 and resolved to work for the goals of withdrawal of the Mississippi and North Mississippi Annual Conferences from the Methodist Church and the formation of a church body in Mississippi.[196] Cunningham estimates that four hundred members left Galloway for MAMML's splinter denomination, and Dupont notes, "While only one small rural congregation withdrew from the conference intact, the new churches siphoned members from established congregations, and these immediately felt the departure in both money and morale."[197] In departure, MAMML admitted defeat. While they had successfully managed to keep the church segregated throughout the beginning of the 1960s they were unable to lead the Mississippi annual conferences out of the Methodist Church or stop the symbolic drift of the conference towards integration. With the loss

[194] John D. Humphrey, "General Conference," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, May 20, 1964.
[195] John D. Humphrey, "General Conference," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, May 20, 1964.
[196] "Resolution," Information Bulletin, Allen Eugen Cox Collection, Box 1, File 47, Manuscript Division, Special Collections, Mississippi State University Libraries.
[197] Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 222

of the hardline members Galloway and Capitol Street opened the doors of their churches to integrated groups in 1966 which served to send more members to disaffiliate.[198]

In the period between the 1956 and the 1964 General Conferences there was a power struggle between progressives, moderate institutionalists, and conservative segregationists. In this struggle the moderate institutionalists were the only group that consistently achieved their aims. The conservative segregationists came under increased fire as the moderate leadership of the church labelled them as a threat when they started attacking the church. On December 16, 1964 the members of the Interboard Council of the North Mississippi annual conference passed a resolution to condemn MAMML since it had "carried out a program of vilification of the Methodist Church and its lay and clerical leadership."[199] These conservative segregationists also felt forced out of the church they had tried to protect from integration and liberalizing influences after General Conference 1964. The progressives and institutionalists in the church also failed to bring about significant change. Most of the Born of Conviction signers left or felt themselves forced out from the church after they took their stand. King, Selah, Cunningham, and the Tougaloo activists did not change the collective hearts of white church goers, nor did they force systematic change at any General Conference. The moderate institutionalists maintained the control of the church, and despite its travails, managed to hold on to the status quo that existed in the church. Theology or "doing what was right" didn't drive institutionalists like Bishop Franklin or Williard Legget Jr. They desired to protect the church they loved at all costs and reacted to anything perceived as a threat to the church's institutional stability or status quo. They showed this desire for institutional vitality in their constant compromises. In 1956 and 1964, they favored

[198] Ibid, 223.

[199] Interboard Council Resolution, Allen Eugen Cox Collection, Box 1, Folder 48, Manuscript Division, Special Collections, Mississippi State University Libraries.

gradualism in integration when it best suited the church in Mississippi. Williard Legget Jr. and his machine drove off pastors like Delamotte and the Born of Conviction signers; Marvin Franklin offered no decisive leadership during the JCVC; and MAMML began to threaten the church, institutionalists ostracized them. They successfully fended off attacks from both sides. In the moderates' best attempt to save the church they interpreted and judged every issue in the light of institutional interest and the fear of reprisal from white supremacists. The fear of the loss of respectability and membership drove moderates' decision making on both the local Mississippi level and the national level, and this enabled segregationists to keep control of the church. The moderate leadership chose a form of "unity" in favor of true unity with the African American members of their church.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote in "Thoughts Upon Methodism." "I am not afraid that the people called Methodist should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America," he wrote, "But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast to both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out."[200] These words were on Maxie Dunnam's mind when he proclaimed in a sermon shortly before he transferred out of the Mississippi Annual Conference that religion in America had a major problem: "Religion has been established securely in a taken-for-granted manner as an important institution of American society."[201] He said the issue with this was "religion, or the religious establishment is having very little effect on the life of society." In embracing the institutionalism of religion, the church acted as a "Community of respectability" offering little difference from the morals of secular

[200] Herbert Welch, ed., *Selections From The Writings of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A. Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford* (New York, NY: Eaton and Mains, 1901), 127, https://divinityarchive.com/bitstream/handle/11258/4679/04416403.pdf?sequence=1.
[201] Maxie Dunnam, "Community of Responsibility," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, January 15, 1964.

institutions and sanctioning society in a strong religious vocabulary. "In America," he declared, "we have all the forms of religion without the power of it."[202] The church in Mississippi had chosen to sanctify the society it was in, including segregation.

The moderates' success at maintaining a veneer of institutional unity was a limited victory. They had done little to prepare the church for mandated integration when it came in 1972. Dupont stated that the question of integration did not accurately represent the war and turmoil among Methodists between 1965 and 1977. The white church lost 14,500 members. The church lost another 4,000 members between 1976 and 1977, and those numbers do not represent churchgoers who switched churches without officially taking their names from the rolls.[203] A longer challenge was overcoming the moral compromise of the Central Jurisdiction even after it was abolished. Moderates' institutional unity came at the price of the legacy of segregating the African American churches.

Despite this, the work of ministers such as Selah, the Born of Conviction signers, and the pastors who participated in the Jackson Church Visit Campaign was not in vain. Recently the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference of the United Methodist Church elected the Mississippi Annual Conference's first African American bishop, James Swanson, who began his tenure in 2012.[204] The United Methodist Church in Mississippi is officially an integrated denomination with minorities occupying all levels of the annual conference's bureaucratic structure. It should also be noted, however, that while the church ended official segregation in 1975, segregation was only ended at the administrative level.[205] In many ways the specter of segregation and the moral

[202] Maxie Dunnam, "Community of Responsibility," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, January 15, 1964.
[203] Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 227
[204] "Bishop James Edward Swanson Sr.," Our Bishop, The Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church, accessed October 28, 2021, https://www.mississippi-umc.org/ourbishop.
[205] Lechtrek, *Southern Ministers*, 204.

compromises that were required to maintain it hangs over the church in Mississippi. The long-term effects of the words of Galloway Memorial's Official Board's statement saying, "It is not un-Christian that we prefer to remain an all-white congregation…"[206] are still acted out every Sunday at United Methodist Churches across Mississippi. Sitting right next to each other in Starkville are two Methodist Churches: Starkville First United Methodist Church perched on a hill overlooking Main Street, and Griffin Chapel United Methodist Church at the bottom of the hill. Starkville First United Methodist Church's membership is almost wholly white. Griffin United Methodist Church's membership is African American. The United Methodist church and indeed Mississippi as a society has evolved, but it has evolved in Dittmer's word as a society "where the ugliest manifestations of racism would disappear" but also where the relationship of the existing classes and races "remained intact" from the segregationists era.[207]The form of unity that Methodist leadership chose during the Civil Rights era was just a veneer over a divided church and as the modern Methodist Church tries to live up to its ideals of "Open hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors," it still has to reckon with its own long history.

[206] Jan 23, 1963 "The Statement of the Official Board of Galloway Methodist Church," *Mississippi Methodist Advocate,* January 23, 1963.
[207] Dittmer, *Local People*, 68.

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