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There had been great conflict about segregation in the white Methodist Church of Mississippi for a full year preceding the first church arrests of October, 1963. Since the crisis at Ole Miss involving the admission of James Meredith the matter of race relations had been a source of anguish and anger, of division and turmoil for the white Methodists. In the ten years before the riots at Ole Miss there had always been a small but significant minority of Methodists talking about improved race relations and the need for eventual desegregation. The White Citizens' Councils had never succeeded in totally silencing all of their opponents, although many ministers of the Methodist Church and other denominations were driven out of the state. Almost all possibilities were ended of even discussing any change in race relations, even by the all white, all native Mississippians at a church yough meeting or some women's conference. From 1952 to 1962 the Methodist Church had more division and problems over segregation than any other church in the state. So it was natural that there should be further division and trouble in the Methodist church growing out of the Ole Miss crisis.

Most white church leaders, of all denominations, had done very little to help their people think about the racial crisis in new ways, to examine segregation in the light of their church teachings. Thus the few men who did speak out were usually quickly isolated, seen to be atypical, and driven from the state without too much upset to the routines of life. There had been many opportunities (in the crises in other states) for the white church leaders to take a moderate stand for gradual desegregation. Every "distant" opportunity was wasted. Finally, in the summer of 1961, the Movement came to Mississippi with the mass arrests of the Freedom Riders. Again there was silence from the church leadership. Many of these leaders were following what they said was a wise strategy, they were saving their influence to use in a time of true crisis, they would not jeopardize the potential good of this future crisis by acting too soon in a present crisis. For over ten years this reasoning allowed such men to remain quiet and uninvolved. The white church leadership in September of 1962 did not see the weeks of fury that culminated in the murders and rioting at Ole Miss as that major crisis. By this time that precious influence they had been hoarding had probably drained away without their notice. But still they waited. If they had finally spoken or acted it was probably so late that they would have been ignored--or martyred; but certainly

it was too late for them to give leadership to the moderates.

Some individual ministers were able to speak before the final disaster for white Mississippi at Ole Miss. But even these men doubted that their words could help much--but still something had to be said. One such man was Dr. W.B. Selah, pastor of Galloway Memorial Methodist Church in Jackson. This was the major pulpit of the church in the state and, for many years, had been one of the major Protestant churches in the entire South. Dr. Selah had preached some moderate sermons over the years about race and some changes in patterns of segregation. During the tense days of September, 1962, almost all religious men in Mississippi joined in prayers for peace, and for God to guide their Governor (Ross Barnett) and their President (John Kennedy.) Many ministers in the more evangelical, more fundamentalist, churches were probably clear that the Governor (a popular Baptist Sunday School teacher)was the chosen instrument of God. In most middle class churches, such as the Methodist congregations, the ministers did not choose sides (thus letting the congregations assume they supported the Governor) but sincerely prayed that "Thy Will Be

Done." At Galloway Methodist Church, on the Sunday a week before the riot, the pastor talked of mob violence as well as education:

> I should like to say here with all possible emphasis that regardless of what happens at Oxford or elsewhere our public schools must be kept open. We are in a struggle for freedom against the Communist world. In the long run the nation that produces the best brains and finest character will win. We would better see to it that every citizen is offered the finest education that the state affords. Otherwise we can lose the struggle for freedom and for our very existence.
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> The major problems that confront mankind today are either helped or hindered in their solution by what goes on in the home. Take the problem of law and order. We are perhaps the most lawless nation in the world. Many of us have lost respect for constituted authority....[2]

The minister discussed an instance of people in another Southern state many years in the past forming a lynch mob.

> ... But a mob is a monster with no brains or sense of justice... When law goes, everything valuable is lost. Without law there can be no liberty and no safety....[2b]

Any stronger statement than this, with any clearer references to the possibilites of what Mississippi was doing, would not have been tolerated. By this time very few ministers in the

state could have said as much without part of their congregation walking out of the church service--and a majority demanding the minister's immediate resignation. Dr. Selah's references to Communism were carefully selected--both to protect himself from the certain accusation of being a Communist and to reach his people who were convinced that the desegregation of the state university was a Communist conspiracy and that Ross Barnett was leading the "struggle for freedom and for our very existence." Such were the thoughtful words of one of the finest preachers in the land. But it was far too late for thoughtful words and reason and even oblique references in favor of desegregation such as offering the finest education to all citizens. If there had been many more men like Dr. Selah then this approach might have been more relevant in the state. This was a fine sermon but hardly "radical" enough for the time, the final week before the outbreak of violence. In the eight months that followed this sermon Dr. Selah was to be far more "direct" in his words and even "radical". He had done the best he could the way he knew best; when that was not enough he moved to a stronger style; eventually (because chances for moderation had almost all been lost in the prior decade) all he could offer was personal witness--and the dramatic resignation of his pulpit.

The Sunday following the Ole Miss riots Dr. Selah had strong words about the need for his people, as with all the white people, of Mississippi to pray for repentance. His condemnation of the mob action and the murders in Oxford shocked many of his people. One lady commented to another, "Dr. Selah is so upset about all this, but you know he really just does not understand. ~~He/Is/~~ He's from Missouri and he has only been our minister here in Jackson for eighteen years. He just doesn't understand Mississippi at all." The dear lady was quite willing to forgive her beloved pastor-- and to ignore his words.

The Southern Baptist churches, the Governor's own denomination and the largest church in the state, had the possibility of even greater influence on white Mississippi during the Meredith crisis. Dr. Samuel Southard of the faculty of the Southern Baptist Theoligical Seminary in Kentucky studied the response of Baptist churches to racial crises. About Mississippi churches he wrote:

> There was silence in Mississippi as events built toward violent climax in the fall of 1962, silence that was broken only after the white mobs had been quieted. In September, with tension mounting, the editor of the

> (Mississippi) Baptist Record* acknowledged that "serious problems" were rising in the state; he urged that prayer be offered on behalf of the authorities responsible for solving the problems and warned private citizens against taking the law into their own hands. He did not, however, mention race relations in so many words until October 4, when word of the exploding situation had been spread on the front pages of newspapers the world over. In the issue of that date he condemnded rioting and violance. Several weeks later he was among those who felt that a resolution concerning human relations and modern tensions should be passed by the Baptist state convention when it was offered to that body. But when pastors objected, the measure was tabled.[3]

The clergymen of the little university town of Oxford in north Mississippi had to face directly the consequences of the years of silence by the moderates as the students at Ole Miss, joined by gangs of older men from several Southern states, took their guns and rocks and fought the U.S.Marshalls and the U.S. Army. During the night of rioting at least two white ministers tried to calm the students and went out among the rioters urging them to go home. These men were the Episcopalian College Chaplain, the Rev. Wofford Smith, and the pastor of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, the Rev. Duncan Gray. Their sane words and witness were of little influence with the rioters compared to the battle cry of an Episcopal laymen, retired General Edwin Walker, newly arrived from Texas.