BOOK REVIEWS


The author of this book served as pastor of Galloway Memorial Methodist Church, Jackson, Mississippi, September 1963 to June 1966. With a membership of some 4,000, Galloway was the ranking church in Mississippi Methodism.

In the 1960's, legal segregation was on the way out in the South, but Galloway's official board, by an overwhelming vote of 184 to 13 on January 14, 1963, declared, "It is not unchristian that we prefer to remain an all-white congregation."

When the laymen set about enforcing segregation in the church by stationing guards at the doors on Sunday, W. B. Selah, the popular pastor for the previous eighteen years, immediately resigned.

With the presiding bishop's approval, the Galloway pastoral relations committee then approached Cunningham who at the time was pastor of a strong church in Memphis. Cunningham frankly told the laymen that he was opposed to segregation, but apparently they concluded that he would be discreet and judicious enough to serve as their pastor, and in due time he was transferred from Memphis to Jackson.

In his mid-fifties, and having already served several strong churches very acceptably, Cunningham seemed to hope and believe that as pastor of Galloway Church he would be able to lead in a ministry of reconciliation without, so to speak, disturbing the ark of the covenant.

Soon after arriving in Jackson, Cunningham discovered that he was mistaken. He had underestimated the determination of the laymen to maintain a segregated church, and he had overestimated his own ability to promote brotherhood, peace, and good will in such a milieu. While some members supported him as pastor, many others did not. During his tenure many members left the church.

As the guards at the church doors turned away blacks (and whites also if accompanied by blacks), the attention of the nation, and to some extent of the world, was turned toward Galloway Church.

During the period of tension, Cunningham hoped in vain that his presiding bishop would make a public statement or take some action which would help Galloway Church to accept the integration which was
sure to come anyway.

In November 1965, the pastoral relations committee asked Cunningham to submit a letter of resignation, effective in June 1966, so as to give the committee ample time to search for a new minister. Knowing that the bishop concurred with the committee, Cunningham drafted a courteous letter of resignation, and in June 1966 he was duly transferred to Decatur, Alabama.

Then *mirabile dictu!* The Galloway Church laymen who had in effect insisted on segregation forever, suddenly did an about face. On January 10, 1966, the official board voted 65 to 40 to open the doors of the church to all people without regard to race.

Cunningham correctly observes that in so voting the laymen were not leading in a righteous cause; they were tardily accepting the inevitable. The church did not change the culture; the culture had changed and carried the church along with it.

The author of this book, a sensitive, capable minister who had been warmly esteemed in previous pastorates, faced intransigence at Galloway Church, was unable to win the good will of the people, had little support from ecclesiastical superiors, and was finally asked to submit his resignation. The total experience was traumatic if not devastating for him, and after fourteen years he has not fully recovered from what to him was both a professional and a personal disaster.

However, through it all Cunningham has been and still is a Christian gentleman. The volume contains no rancor or hatred, only regret that he was unable to do more than he did to help the church which finally rejected him.

Ministers who read this poignant volume may be thankful that in their careers few of them will ever be called upon to pass through an ordeal comparable to the one which beset W. J. Cunningham at Galloway Church.

Albea Godbold
Lake Junaluska, N.C.