Methodist History, 26:1 (October 1987)

THE RACIAL CRISIS IN THE METHODIST CHURCH

PETER C. MURRAY

During the period of the Civil Rights Movement, the Methodist Church faced an acute crisis because of its own racial composition and church structure. The Methodist Church had the largest number of black members in a predominantly white Protestant church and also a considerable southern white membership. Moreover, in 1939 when the northern and southern Methodist churches reunited after a division of nearly a century, the church had created one of the most rigid racial structures among all American churches. This merger created six jurisdictional conferences for the election of bishops and representatives on church boards and agencies: five jurisdictions based on geography, but the sixth, the Central Jurisdiction, exclusively for the nineteen black annual conferences.

Black members were less than 5% of the Methodist Church, and consequently their opposition to creation of the Central Jurisdiction did not block merger of the northern and southern halves of the church. They remained within the church because they had invested a great deal in the church and because they believed that the mission of the church included being a witness against racism and injustice. But they anxiously awaited the day when Methodists would change their racial policies and practices and in the early 1950s became increasingly vocal about their opposition to segregation in the church. The Central Jurisdiction's annual conferences, and jurisdictional meetings, and its newspaper, *The Central Christian Advocate,* criticized the church and condemned segregation. Black Methodists spoke out despite knowing that many white Methodists perceived no racial problem and others did not fully understand what removing all racial barriers within the church truly meant.[1]

Methodists became a great deal more serious about race relations after the Supreme Court's *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision. *Brown* raised the possibility that civil authority might integrate secular society faster than churches desegregated their own institutions and structures. Thus, the decision challenged the Methodist and other churches to build inter-

---

[1]There are several general studies of Black Methodism and/or the origins of the Central Jurisdiction. Paul A. Carter, "The Negro and Methodist Union," *Church History* 21 (March 1952): 55-70; Dwight W. Culver, *Negro Segregation in the Methodist Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953) and J. Phillip Wagoman, *Methodism's Challenge in Race Relations* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1960). For more detailed information that can be covered in this short article, see the author's "Christ and Caste in Conflict: Creating a Racially Inclusive Methodist Church," Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1985.

racial congregations and to desegregate all institutional facilities. The extent of the challenge was clear at the November 1954 Council of Bishops meeting where the bishops endorsed the *Brown* decision over the objections of the Southeastern Jurisdiction's bishops who urged their colleagues to be silent and who afterward disassociated themselves from the Council's statement.[2]

Black Methodists were unanimous in interpreting *Brown* as a message to the church that it had to end all forms of segregation. Many Central Jurisdiction annual conferences praised the *Brown* decision in their 1954 and 1955 sessions such as the Central Alabama conference which said that the Court had cut out "a vicious cancer from our national life."[3] Both the North Carolina and Georgia annual conferences noted that the church needed to express itself more clearly in support of desegregation. Most Central Jurisdiction annual conferences memorialized the 1956 General Conference to draw up a plan of church integration or simply to abolish the Central Jurisdiction. Black Methodists had high hopes for church desegregation and looked forward to the eventual integration of local churches.[4]

Just as many black Methodists looked to the General Conference to begin desegregation, many southern white Methodists opposed any change in the jurisdictional system or the Central Jurisdiction. In December 1954, white Methodists from six southern states formed the Association of Methodist Ministers and Laymen opposed to the "break down [of] long established racial customs," and church literature that served, "as channels of propaganda looking toward integration."[5] They organized within their annual conferences to exert pressure on the 1956 General Conference to maintain segregation and in some cases harassed ministers who spoke out for an end of segregation.

The 1956 General Conference consideration of church racial policy first established the goal of ending segregation "with reasonable speed," a paraphrasing of the Supreme Court's order that school desegregation occur with "all deliberate speed."[6] Then the church adopted a policy of desegregation called voluntarism. At its heart was Amendment IX to the church constitution, which permitted black churches and annual conferences to transfer into white annual and jurisdictional conferences.

---

[2]Council of Bishops, Minutes, (Chicago, IL, November 1954 meeting), pp. 390-91, Council of Bishops Papers, United Methodist Archives Center (UMAC), Madison, New Jersey; Edward L. Brock, "Methodism's Growing Cleavage," *Christian Century* 72 (Aug. 24, 1955): 971-972.

[3]1954 Central Alabama Annual Conference *Journal,* 47.

[4]1954 Georgia Annual Conference *Journal,* pp. 39-40; 1954 North Carolina Annual Conference *Journal,* 61-62.

[5]Brock, "Methodism's Growing Cleavage," 972.

[6]1956 General Conference *Journal,* 1693.

Transfers required, however, a two-thirds majority approval by both black and white Methodists at the appropriate conference and church levels. Despite this arduous process, white exponents of voluntarism were enthusiastic because to them it used love rather than force to change society. Voluntarists labeled forced change unChristian and assumed that any desegregation plan adopted by the General Conference that aroused local opposition was coercive. Voluntarists did not ask themselves whether segregation was immoral because it was forced.

Black Methodists were not fooled by the arguments justifying voluntarism, but neither were their objections loud and strong. Thurman Dodson, a past president of the National Bar Association, told the General Conference that black Methodists were keenly aware of the faults of voluntarism and Amendment IX. Yet he supported Amendment IX because, "it is imperative in these times that this great Church should take some move in a direction toward integration."[7]

The constitutional amendment itself did not entirely satisfy the General Conference, so it also established a commission to "study and recommend action concerning the jurisdictional system."[8] The seventy-member commission became a commission to evaluate the entire jurisdictional system as well as to improve racial brotherhood within the church. Some white Methodists, such as Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, wanted to scrap the entire jurisdictional system or modify it to increase the national character of the church, but southern white Methodists led by Bishop Arthur J. Moore and layman Edwin Jones opposed any modification of the Central Jurisdiction or the jurisdictional system.

The church commission, called the Commission of Seventy, had a difficult time balancing its mandate to review the jurisdictional system and to promote racial brotherhood. In hearings held by the Commission throughout the country, Central Jurisdiction members urged church integration down to and including local congregations so that Methodists would have an impact on grassroots America. Yet southern white Methodists insisted that union had been a covenant between the northern and southern churches and that any change in the jurisdictional system was a violation of that covenant. Moreover, the Commission worked in the period after both the *Brown* decision and the Montgomery Bus Boycott when civil rights had become a divisive national issue. Despite President Eisenhower's sending federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas to enforce court ordered desegregation, the actual pace of school desegregation declined from 1957 to 1960 compared with the period from 1954 to 1957.

---

[7]1956 General Conference *Journal,* 471; on the origins of voluntarism see 1956 General Conference *Journal,* 459-66.

[8]1956 General Conference *Journal,* 1406-08.

The Commission arrived at a report that delighted southern whites, satisfied most white jurisdictional critics, but disappointed black Methodists. The report recommended that the church retain the jurisdictional system, but also proposed several constitutional amendments that would reduce jurisdictional autonomy and promote a more national church. The Commission of Seventy also recommended continued reliance on voluntarism on the grounds that Amendment IX had not had enough time since ratification by annual conferences for a fair testing of its effectiveness.[9]

Almost as soon as the 1960 General Conference began consideration of the Commission's work, Harold C. Case, president of Boston University, proposed making 1968 a target date for ending the Central Jurisdiction. Case's amendment to the commission's report aroused spirited southern white opposition, including the comment the Jesus had not established a target date for coming of God's Kingdom. Edwin Jones attempted to deflect the desire for a target date by proposing the immediate abolition of the Central Jurisdiction and its merger with the Northeastern, North Central, and Western jurisdictions. This the conference rejected. Charles Parlin, a Wall Street lawyer and one of the best known lay leaders within the church, joined the southern opposition to the Case amendment arguing that setting a target date had been an emotional issue throughout most of the Commission of Seventy's deliberations and that it would actually only divide the church rather than assist in reaching the goal of abolishing the Central Jurisdiction.

Central Jurisdication representatives such as Charles F. Golden, Noah Moore, and Ira Loud supported a target date, even though it left several important questions unanswered. The Case amendment only applied to abolition of the Central Jurisdiction with no mention of the continued existence of segregated annual conferences. Because the amendment did not establish any means of desegregation beyond Amendment IX, black Methodists were gambling that by 1968 the church would devise an equitable means of desegregation that was more than token integration. In supporting the Case Amendment, Central Jurisdiction leaders Golden and Moore (both subsequently elected bishops) argued that black Methodists were ready to bear the uncertainty for the promise of assured desegregation. The General Conference, however, voted down by a narrow margin the target date and instead decided to maintain voluntarism while creating a new, smaller commission to speed desegregation using Amendment IX.[10]

---

[9]Commission to Study and Recommend Action Concerning the Jurisdictional System [Commission of Seventy] "Report of the 1960 General Conference" Jan. 6, 1960, n.p., 3-12, 20-24, Papers of Charles C. Parlin, UMAC; Stephen L. Wasby, Anthony D'Amato, and Rosemary Metrailer, *Desegregation from Brown to Alexander* (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1977), 192-98.

The new commission went right to work in the fall of 1960 on devising a concrete plan of desegregation that could be completed before the end of the new quadrennium. Led by Parlin, the Commission of Thirty-Six (six members from each jurisdiction) produced a plan of desegregation in April 1961 that was simple and far broader than any previous discussion of integration. The plan maintained voluntarism and had no timetable for completion.

According to the plan, each of the five Central Jurisdiction's episcopal areas (annual conferences presided over by one bishop) would transfer into one of four regional jurisdictions. The Central Jurisdiction would end when its annual conferences had transferred into regional jurisdictions, but merger of overlapping black and white annual conferences in those regional jurisdictions would only occur when "all Conferences affected are ready."[11] The plan did urge integration of all church-related institutions and did endorse the eventual integration of black and white congregations at some point in the future.

The initial reaction of some black Methodists to the plan was positive, but the Central Jurisdiction's advisory body on desegregation, the Committee of Five, saw problems with the plan. Led by Dr. James S. Thomas (elected bishop in 1964) and composed of W. Astor Kirk, John H. Graham, Richard Erwin, and John J. Hicks, the Committee of Five was younger and had in many ways more experience in dealing with desegregation than previous jurisdictional leaders. The Committee of Five requested that the Central Jurisdiction's bishops call a special meeting of a cross-section of jurisdictional leaders for intensive discussion regarding church desegregation. This conference took place in Cincinnati, Ohio, in March 1962.

The Cincinnati conference was devoted to discussion and consultation between jurisdictional leaders with key individuals such as Joseph E. Lowery, Major J. Jones, Ernest T. Dixon, and W. Astor Kirk providing papers for consideration of the delegates. Dr. James P. Brawley, a key lay leader and President of Clark College, gave the keynote address. Through the conference's deliberations, black Methodists rejected the Commission of Thirty-Six's plan and outlined what they expected racial brotherhood in the church to be like. Black Methodists objected to the Commission's plan because it essentially carved up the jurisdiction and distributed portions of it to each regional jurisdiction except for the Western Jurisdiction, which had only three Central Jurisdiction churches within its bounds. This would have produced new racial anomalies such as the Central Jurisdiction's North Carolina conference being part of the Northeastern Jurisdiction even though it geographically overlapped the

---

[10]1960 General Conference *Journal,* 322-33.

[11]Commission on Inter-jurisdictional Relations [Commission of Thirty-Six] "First Report" Washington, D.C., April 28-29, 1961, 2, Parlin Papers, UMAC.

Southeastern Jurisdiction. The conference instead decided that desegregation should end the Central Jurisdiction by putting all black and white Methodists in the same geographic area into the same jurisdiction.

The Cincinnati conference also declared that the church must become racially inclusive. By this term, black Methodists meant that the church must open itself fully to its black members and respond to the needs of black Americans. Integration alone would not necessarily change the church for tokenism might replace segregation. A racially inclusive church would have to open itself to the talents of black Methodists and actively remove all vestiges of racism. Inclusiveness meant as much a change in attitude and a new sense of brotherhood as a change in church structure.[12]

The Cincinnati conference was a tremendous success for black Methodists because it unified them and announced a common standard for church desegregation. To emphasize that black Methodists throughout the Central Jurisdiction endorsed this standard the annual conferences of the Central Jurisdiction meeting later that year passed resolutions of support for the guidelines reached at the Cincinnati conference with remarkable unanimity. The Commission of Thirty-Six's plan saw no further action by black Methodists beyond the Committee of Five drafting a plan to redraw annual conference boundaries. This did not satisfy the Commission of Thirty-Six which wanted to have a revised plan to abolish the Central Jurisdiction ready for the 1964 General Conference.[13]

While the Commission of Thirty-Six and the leaders of the Central Jurisdiction were in conflict over the next step in desegregation, another more graphic battle was taking place in Methodist churches in Jackson, Mississippi. For some time interracial teams had attempted to worship at two Methodist congregations. Ushers at these churches, referred to as the "color guard," blocked entrance to these visitors who were usually college students or Methodist ministers from New York, Chicago and Detroit.[14] Often the ushers had the visitors arrested. the Methodist Council

---

[12]Central Jurisdiction Study Committee [Committee of Five] "Central Jurisdiction Speaks," pamphlet published by the Committee, 4-10; Unpublished papers distributed or presented at the Cincinnati conference included James P. Brawley, "The Problem of the Central Jurisdiction and the Methodist Church"; Ernest T. Dixon, "A Proposed Solution to the Central Jurisdiction Problem"; Bishop Charles F. Golden, "Statement of Purpose"; Major J. Jones, "Pre-Conference Reflections of the Jurisdictional Problem of the Methodist Church"; Joseph E. Lowery [untitled paper dated March 1962]. Xeroxed copies of all are available in material donated by the author to the UMAC.

[13]Committee of Five, "Central Jurisdiction Speaks," 11-14; Central Jurisdiction annual conferences that expressed support of the Cincinnati conference recommendations during their 1963 session included Central Alabama, Central West, Delaware, Florida, East Tennessee, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Upper Mississippi. For Commission of Thirty-Six's request, see Commission of Thirty-Six, Minutes, May 4, 1962, Chicago, IL meeting, 2-6, Parlin Papers, UMAC.

[14]W. J. Cunningham, *Agony at Galloway* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1980), 13.

of Bishops condemned the barring of churches to those trying to worship and branded arrests "an outrage."[15]

The most widely publicized confrontation in Jackson came on Easter Sunday 1964 shortly before the 1964 General Conference met when bishops Charles F. Golden and James K. Mathews attempted to enter Galloway Methodist Church. They were barred from the church by the chair of the official board and their request to speak to the minister was denied. While some conservatives charged that Golden, Mathews and the others were engaged in agitation, many Methodists were shocked by the scene of two bishops being turned away from a church on Easter Sunday.[16]

Blocking the church doors in Jackson caused distress, but the 1964 General Conference faced its own dramatic showdown over voluntarism. The Commission of Thirty-Six had finally recommended that the church continue with voluntarism and that the Central Jurisdiction's annual conference transfers into regional jurisdictions and that still later annual conferences merge on a voluntary basis. Transfer and merger would be two separate steps. Allen M. Mayes, representing the Central Jurisdiction's leaders, proposed to the General Conference that the transfers into regional jurisdictions and mergers of black and white annual conferences take place simultaneously, otherwise black annual conferences would become trapped in white jurisdictions with no guarantee that segregated conferences would end nor any commitment to inclusiveness would occur.

The critics of the one-step transfer and merger procedure were white Methodist leaders from outside the South. George Atkinson (Western Jurisdiction) argued that the one-step transfer and merger process contradicted the policy of voluntarism. Leonard Slutz (North Central Jurisdiction) objected on the grounds that it would delay transfers from the Central Jurisdiction into the Southeastern Jurisdiction, and Parlin (Northeastern Jurisdiction) concluded that the one-step procedure violated the church's constitution. Again, the General Conference accepted voluntarism and agreed that first each Central Jurisdiction annual conference transfer into the overlapping regional jurisdiction and then that each jurisdiction merge segregated annual conferences when it decided the time was right.

Even though the General Conference continued support for voluntarism, it also began to respond to the call for racial inclusiveness in four ways. First, the conference added to the *Discipline* an unequivocal statement regarding the openness of all Methodist congregations to all members regardless of race. Second, the church established a temporary special fund to aid merged conferences with both pensions and minimum salaries so that merger of annual conferences would not destroy the pension and

---

[15]Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church, Statement Adopted Nov. 13, 1963, Detroit, Michigan meeting, 1013, Council of Bishops Papers, UMAC.

[16]*New York Times,* March 30, 1964, 20.

minimum salary levels already in existence. This was the first time that the church had addressed the large disparity between Black and white and ministerial pensions and salaries. Third, the conference authorized yet another church commission to work on desegregation. Finally, and most importantly, it adopted James Thomas' proposal to create annual and jurisdictional conference advisory councils to begin face-to-face negotiations on transfers and mergers.[17]

Even though the 1964 General Conference did not fully adopt a policy of racial inclusiveness, the Central Jurisdiction approved new annual conference bounds and began the transfer and merger of its annual conferences with two regional jurisdictions. The Lexington Conference became part of the North Central Jurisdiction and merged with its annual conferences in 1964. Bishop James Thomas (elected shortly after the General Conference) transferred with the Lexington Conference and began presiding over the Iowa Annual Conference. Also, the Washington and Delaware annual conferences transferred into the Northeastern Jurisdiction along with Bishop Prince A. Taylor with annual conference mergers completed the following year. In a year's time the Central Jurisdiction had a third less members, and two of the four overlapping regional jurisdictions had initiated building racial inclusiveness.

In the southwest, negotiations toward a tranfer and merger plan between black annual conferences and the South Central Jurisdiction also proceeded rapidly, but black and white Methodists in the southeast were at a complete standoff over whether transfer and merger should be two distinct steps or whether there should be a deadline for completion of the second step. The two sides even failed to negotiate because the Southeastern Jurisdiction had appealed to the church's Judicial Council for a ruling on whether the jurisdiction could require separate steps of transfer and merger. This was a direct challenge to the Central Jurisdiction's which urged its annual conferences to approve one-step transfers and mergers, even though it actually approved the two-step transfer and merger with the Northeastern Jurisdiction because merger of annual conferences was assured.

There was so little sign of progress that when the five Central Jurisdiction annual conferences overlapping the South Central Jurisdiction voted to transfer into that jurisdiction, the eight black annual conferences overlapping the Southeastern Jurisdiction voted against transfer so that they would not be left alone to face the Southeastern Jurisdiction. In a sense, the eastern portion of the Central Jurisdiction was willing to hold the western annual conferences hostage so they would not be left alone. Their fear was apparently rooted in the idea that such a small jurisdiction might be abolished by the 1966 General Conference without any provi-

---

[17]1964 General Conference *Journal,* 309-26, 1471-72.

sion for merger of black and white annual conferences which would mean victory for segregationists within the Southeastern Jurisdiction. The message to church leaders, however, was the desegregation would stop unless some suitable arrangement was made in the southeast.[18]

This impasse concerned church leaders for two reasons. Passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act meant that the national government had set new standards of openness in American society. The Commission did not want the church to become one of the last vestiges of segregation. Moreover, the 1964 General Conference had given tentative approval to union with the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) Church. Quite like Methodists in theology and polity, the EUB's would increase church membership by 750,000, but failure to end the Central Jurisdiction would imperil EUB approval of merger. Both the Commission of Twenty-Four (four members from each jurisdiction) and the Council of Bishops decided to work toward bringing the two sides in the southeast to some agreement.

Voluntarism was at the root of the problem between black and white Methodists in the southeast. Within the Southeastern Jurisdiction there was strong resistance to any plan that had either a deadline or a target date for the merger of black and white annual conferences. Black annual conferences would be received into the Southeastern Jurisdiction, but nothing more could be guaranteed. To black Methodists this was unacceptable. This was not racial inclusiveness which was their standard for desegregation and which had been agreed upon in every other transfer and merger agreement.

The efforts of the church leaders in 1965 and most of 1966 to resolve the differences between the Southeastern and Central jurisdictions failed. The Judicial Council ruled that both the two-step and the one-step transfer and merger were permitted by the church's constitution. A special seven-member committee of the Council of Bishops held several meetings, but could not find an acceptable compromise.[19]

As the special session of the General Conference meeting in November 1966 approached to vote with the EUB's on church merger, the anxiety on both sides came through. Bishop Golden sent a letter to all bishops urging them to do all possible to move the church toward inclusiveness. He said, "The position of the Church on race is theological and moral. It cannot continue to be determined by geography and sectional traditions

---

[18]1964 Southeastern Jurisdiction *Journal,* 134-35; 1964 General Conference *Journal* [volume III covers the 1966 special session], 3066-69.

[19]*Decisions of the Judicial Council of the Methodist Church, 1940-1968,* (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, n.d.), 588-618; Council of Bishops, Minutes of April 1965, Houston, TX meeting, 112-13, 121 and Minutes of Nov. 1965, Seattle, WA meeting, 284, 290, Council of Bishops Papers, UMAC.

of an age that has run its course. To ignore [sic] or under-estimate the urgency for immediate positive action guaranteeing equality . . . is to hopelessly misread the signs of our time . . ."[20] Bishop Roy Short, a leader in the Southeastern Jurisdiction, lamented that parts of the church's bureaucracy seemed to vilify the Southeastern Jurisdiction. Even more poignantly, as the General Conference drew near he confessed to Harry Denman of the Board of Evangelism, "I dread the next two weeks as I never dreaded anything in my life."[21]

The Comission of Twenty-Four decided to draft its own desegregation plan to break the impasse. Its plan involved a ten-point "omnibus" resolution that required action by the 1966 General Conference, all jurisdictional conferences, all annual conferences, the Council of Bishops and each jurisdictional college of bishops. By engaging the entire church in the resolution, the Commission hoped that all the church would acknowledge that racism was not a sectional problem and that church acceptance would put pressure on those who were still opposed to desegregation. Yet at the same time the plan did not completely abandon voluntarism.

The omnibus resolution provided for the transfer and merger of the five black annual conferences within the bounds of the South Central Jurisdiction to be completed by 1968; it transferred and merged in one step several annual conferences within the Southeastern Jurisdiction; and it established a mid-1972 nonbinding target date for the merger of all black and white annual conferences within the Southeastern Jurisdiction. The 1966 General Conference adopted the omnibus resolution despite the opposition of black Methodist leaders such as Dennis R. Fletcher and John T. King both of whom had served on the Commission of Thirty-six and Twenty-Four. Both felt that black Methodists needed a guarantee that annual conference mergers would be completed by 1972 rather than just a target date.[22]

At the same time, the conference also rejected the objections of Judge John Satterfield and Edwin Jones, two of the most intransigent southern leaders, who argued that the omnibus resolution violated voluntarism. More liberal southern whites told the conference that the church had to act and that they were ready to move forward in the process of building inter-racial annual conferences. In the evening after the General Conference accepted the omnibus resolution, six Southeastern Jurisdiction bishops met with several Central Jurisdiction leaders in a hotel room to pledge that the Southeastern Jurisdiction would meet the target date.[23]

---

[20]Charles Golden's letter to The Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church, August 31, 1966, UMAC 76-11 2052-4-7:7.

[21]Bishop Roy H. Short's letter to Harry Denman, Oct. 26, 1966, UMAC 76-11 2052-4-7:7.

[22]1964 General Conference *Journal,* 2595-2602.

[23]1964 General Conference *Journal,* 2600-01, 2613-2626; *New York Times,* Nov. 12, 1966, 18.

The omnibus resolution sailed through all but two portions of the church. In the Southeastern Jurisdiction the margin of approval for the resolution was only slightly above the two-thirds majority required. Within the Central Jurisdiction, three annual conferences, each presided over by Bishop Golden, failed to give the two-thirds approval. Golden was the key black leader opposed to any compromise with voluntarism and committed to making the church racially inclusiveness. Golden did have some ministerial support for continued opposition to voluntarism, but in other areas of the Central Jurisdiction support for the omnibus resolution was strong. In these annual conferences, the appeal of church desegregation and the end to the Central Jurisdiction led black Methodists to accept the omnibus resolution. Rather than wait for the church truly to become an agent of change in society, they wanted simply to have the church change itself. Voting against the omnibus resolution was a moot issue, however, since the annual conferences of the church ratified merger with the EUB. In the new United Methodist Church created via the Methodist-EUB merger there were only five regional jurisdictions. There would be no Central Jurisdiction of whatever size.[24]

The last meeting of the Central Jurisdiction occurred in Nashville, Tennessee in August 1967 to select a replacement for Bishop M. L. Harris who had died of a heart attack the previous fall. Although some black Methodists were already members of desegregated conferences, black Methodists from across the country attended because they knew that this would be the last meeting the Central Jurisdiction, the segregated structure that they despised but where mutual affection was strong. They celebrated the change that was beginning to take place within the church, although Bishop Glen Golden speaking for the jurisdictional college of bishops warned that the struggle for a fully inclusive church was far from over.[25]

The abolition of the Central Jurisdiction was not the end of the church's racial problem. The new United Methodist Church formed in April 1968 still had twelve black annual conferences anxiously awaiting merger with their overlapping white annual conferences. Moreover, to become fully inclusive the church had more to do than just eliminate racial structures. The church needed to see that its agencies practiced inclusiveness in their employment policies, an area where black Methodists charged that the Methodist Publishing House blantantly discriminated. Another area of concern was the survival of black institutions because the funding for black colleges and homes would be decided by annual conferences where black members were a minority and where comparable white institutions already existed. Finally, black Methodists wondered whether the church

---

[24]1968 General Conference *Journal,* 1760-62.
[25]1967 Central Jurisdiction *Journal,* 76, 88-9.

would really open itself to the talents and spiritual direction of black members. For the church to be inclusive, it could not be a white church with black members. Rather it had to be a church without color that opened itself to all members as they responded to God's love in their own lives. If the church was to be inclusive, the response could not be channeled into a white Methodist agenda.

The Central Jurisdiction was the most enduring problem facing the Methodist Church from 1939 to 1968. Created late in the Jim Crow era as a compromise between the northern and southern church, it was a time bomb slowly ticking down that for black Methodists could not detonate too soon. The Central Jurisdiction was a constant test of how well the church could interpret Christian teachings independently of the social mores of American culture. The church did change, but like American society the change was neither quick nor easy. Although exact measurement and comparison of social change is impossible, in many ways the church moved no faster than American society in general.

In retrospect it is apparent that the hope of many voluntarists that the church would show American society how racial policies and practices could change without generating hatred and anger failed. Voluntarism failed for several reasons. First, it ignored that segregation was fundamentally based on racial antipathy and that there could not be Christian segregation any more than there could be Christian slavery. Voluntarism treated desegregation as a problem in Church structure and waited for people to grow in acceptance of a new desegregated structure. Yet the structural problem was minor compared to the moral problem raised by a segregated church. Voluntarism did not lead the church to acknowledge the sinfulness of segregation which many critics of voluntarism thought was necessary for moving toward a racially inclusive church.

Voluntarism, like the jurisdictional system created in 1939, also split the church into regions rather than uniting it. Voluntarism was a form of freedom of choice that permitted the church to desegregate at different times, but this diluted any church stand on race. Proponents of voluntarism assumed that stronger church action would either violate the church constitution or would cause a massive revolt in the Deep South. Certainly, opposition to desegregation was strong in parts of the south, although there were elements of moderation as well. Ironically, in several instances black Methodists used the voting procedures created in Amendment IX to prevent the transfer of annual conferences out of the Central Jurisdiction in order to force the church to provide a more inclusive structure. Only when inclusiveness would become the mission of the entire church would Methodists have a truly united racial policy.