

denominational level] of the Church.” Blacks from the Central Jurisdiction Organization were representatives on these “governing bodies of the Church.” They ensured the “degree of racial integration” that the Commission proudly referred to.

2. *What are the limits of “voluntary” action within a fellowship of believers in Christ?* In all of the debates on “the Central Jurisdiction problem” at the 1960 meeting of the Church’s legislative body, the principle of *voluntarism* was strongly advocated and defended. The point was emphasized again and again that in The Methodist Church the existent patterns of relations between Blacks and Whites were the result of voluntary mutual agreement.

Unfortunately, the critical issue of the limits of voluntary behavior within the parameters of a *fellowship* of “believers in Christ” was not prominently highlighted and given the examination that its importance deserved.

What kinds of voluntary action are inherently incompatible with the fundamental nature of any fellowship of “believers in Christ?”

My understanding of the New Testament standards affirmed by major denominations is that these standards proscribe all *voluntary* interactions among communicants that are based on considerations of “race” and color. In 1960, many Methodists, including both Blacks and Whites, shared this understanding of New Testament standards.

Surprisingly, debates and discussions at the 1960 meeting of the Church’s legislative body did reveal a promising sign. An increasing number of people throughout “the connection” were becoming aware for the first time that “the Central Jurisdiction problem” involved a great deal more than simply abolishing a large—and constitutionally prescribed—“racially” defined organizational *structure*.

Eliminating the Central Jurisdiction Organization posed another critical issue for the legislative body. It was fundamentally a moral question: Should the legislative body amend the existing body of Church law to include *ecclesiastical rules stating that for Methodist communicants, acting within the bounds of The Methodist Church fellowship, voluntary behavior of any kind based on “race” or color was totally unacceptable?*

In 1960, if the legislative body had answered that question affirmatively, then The Methodist Church would have crossed the Rubicon. Failure to do so meant waiting four years for another opportunity to ensure that the law of The Methodist Church governing relations between Blacks and Whites paralleled the emerging new norms of public policy in the United States of America.

CONCLUDING SUMMARY

The fact that the 1960 session of The Methodist Church’s legislative body did not act boldly and decisively, with respect to amending the body of

church law so as to *prohibit* involuntary “racial” segregation, put Central Jurisdiction Organization leaders under enormous pressure. That pressure is evident in the following statement by Dr. James P. Brawley, then president of Clark College:

The climate, the temper, and the revolutionary character of the current general struggle for human dignity, and removal of every vestige of segregation and discrimination from our American life demand that the same reform be effected within the Church. The members of the Central Jurisdiction are not only in accord with this demand, but are a part of the struggle that undergirds this demand. *The Negro in The Methodist Church could not with prudence be a part of such a struggle for desegregation in the community life outside of the Church, and at the same time not favor or urge the same reform within the Church.* (Emphasis added.)

Failure of The Methodist Church to cross the Rubicon at its 1960 quadrennial legislative meeting precipitated an unprecedented, organized and well-directed *civil rights* movement within the denomination. A “new breed” of Blacks in The Methodist Church provided leadership for this movement. Like the civil rights movement in the broader society, this newly energized denominational *anti-segregationist* movement had an immediate paramount goal: **To rid The Methodist Church of involuntary “racial” segregation.**

The Central Jurisdiction Organization’s own leaders of this movement were able to creatively and skillfully exploit changes in inter-ethnic relations that had occurred in the secular society since the creation of The Methodist Church in 1939.

Their strategy involved methodically creating a set of circumstances in which the *disvalue* of the Central Jurisdiction Organization to The Methodist Church as a whole would far exceed the *value* of that “racially” segregated organization to denominational special interest groups.

The walls of The Methodist Church’s Jericho (i.e., its constitutionally mandated “Jim Crow” or apartheid system) could not withstand our well organized and carefully directed assaults against them; they had to come “tumbling down.”

The delegates to the 1960 quadrennial meeting of the Central Jurisdiction Organization established a special committee—the **Committee of Five**—to plan a denomination *civil rights* strategy and to lead a broad-scale, coordinated and sustained assault on the bastions of involuntary “racial” segregation in The Methodist Church. Chapter 6 discusses in detail the *foundational* work of that group.