

**Confessions  
of a  
Hoosier Christian**

**Part II**

**The Georgia Years**

**William W. Rogers  
Hanover, Indiana**

1954

**The Supreme Court's Decision to End Racial Segregation in the Public Schools and Ours to Accept an Invitation to Move South**

"When you feel the pain you know that you're alive."

Big Daddy to his son, Brick, in Tennessee Williams', *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

**Part II**  
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## **Part II**

### **The Georgia Years**

#### **Chapter 1**

#### **From Kalamazoo to Athens, Georgia**

##### **A. Malcolm McIver's Visit**

It was in the Spring of 1955, less than a year after the momentous decision of the United States Supreme Court to end racial segregation in the public schools, that Malcolm McIver sat down with June and me in our apartment in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and asked us to consider taking the job as Presbyterian Campus Minister at the University of Georgia. Malcolm was the Secretary for Campus Christian Life in the Presbyterian Church, US (the Southern Presbyterian Church) and was in town for a meeting of the Campus Strategy Committee of the United Student Christian Council. I had known Malcolm, personally, since my days as Chairman of USCC some years earlier.

I mention Malcolm's visit, and the Supreme Court's decision, in the same breath because the years 1954 through 1960 were crisis years in the deep South - indeed in the entire United States - and were almost precisely the years Malcolm McIver, unbeknownst either to him or to us, was inviting us to live through. Malcolm's agenda was to build up the campus ministry at Georgia Tech and the University of Georgia. The Synod of Georgia, he told us, had plans to build two, brand new student centers - one at Georgia Tech and one at the University, in Athens. The first would be built in Athens. Would we be willing to do the job there? It would be to continue to build up the Westminster Student Fellowship at the University and to staff the Synod's Capital Funds Campaign Committee which had been set up to raise a quarter of a million dollars for the construction of the two centers - an ambitious project!

June and I had only been in Kalamazoo for two years and it seemed a bit premature to think of leaving, but we prided ourselves on being open to new challenges and were intrigued by Malcolm's invitation. We knew very little about the Deep South, and did not even know that the University of Georgia was racially segregated (ie. racially exclusive). But Malcolm patiently explained the situation and genuinely seemed to feel that a new day was coming. Would we be willing to help? The next step was to let him nominate us to the Joint Committee on Campus Christian Life in Athens. After some soul searching, we agreed and within the next two weeks were on our way to meet the Joint Committee. (The "Joint" Committee was made up of representatives of the First Presbyterian Church of Athens, and the more conservative Central Presbyterian Church.)

Here I must pause to marvel that Malcolm McIver, and the Joint Committee on Campus Christian Life in Athens, would ask "a Yankee Preacher," as I was sometimes referred to, to come and serve in such a sensitive position - nurturing the Presbyterian students at the

University of Georgia (the cream of the crop) and taking the lead in raising funds and interpreting campus ministry throughout the State. As I look back now on these years I can see that it was, from the beginning, an incredible act of trust. My new friends in Georgia were indeed looking forward to a new day. It would not be easy, for them or for us, but it would be an unusual exercise for all of us in learning to live the Christian faith.

## **B. Meeting the Joint Committee**

The meeting with the Joint Committee went well. I particularly remember one of the exchanges. An Elder from the Central Presbyterian Church asked me what I thought of the Vuhgin Buhth - at least that's what it sounded like to me. My questioner was patient and made clear that he was asking about the Virgin Birth of Jesus. I was still in my Neo-Orthodox mode (left over from McCormick in the 1950s) and shared with my questioner Emil Brunner's opinion that the Incarnation was a big enough miracle in itself not to have to depend on a virgin birth. Why did he ask? "Oh," he said, "I wouldn't be considered a good committeeman if I didn't." Then I said, "Let me ask the Committee a question. What do you think of racial segregation?"

I don't remember all that was said, except for one of the Elders from First Church who said he didn't think "they" wanted to be with us any more than we wanted to be with "them." Which was probably true, but beside the point - not to mention an offensive remark. But the meeting continued to be otherwise civil, and at the end another Elder, E.A. Lowe, took me aside and asked me to take a walk with him across the campus. He said the Committee expected this to be a concern of mine, which was alright. But he asked me, in a way that seemed reasonable, that I not try to "save" my new friends. I sensed a genuineness in the exchange which I could accept. Everyone wanted this to work. But it foreshadowed five years of the most intense learning in my life.

## **C. A Restatement of Purpose**

Let me state again that the purpose of this memoir is to share with my children, my extended family and my friends a reflection on how the piety of my childhood interacted with the realities of the world (the military occupation of Germany, racial segregation in the South and - in Part III [which is yet to come] - US imperialism in Latin America) to shape my theology and social ethic; and especially to share with my children an account of what was happening with their father as they were growing up in Athens, Georgia; Ithaca, New York; and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

It is also, for my family and friends, an attempt to say something about the inseparability of the Christian faith and social action.

I pause at this point in my memoir to say this because, after the military experience accounted for in Part I, Chapter 2 ("Out of the Manse and Into the World"), my five years in Georgia were the next big shock of my life. But I want to be careful how I say this.

First of all I want to make it very clear that June and I did not go to the South to join in the struggle to end racial segregation nor to get involved in the Civil Rights Movement, though I have profound respect for those who did. We went, first, because we were invited by a friend from the South who knew us and trusted us - and who commended us to his friends in Athens. And, second, we went because we were asked by the Joint Committee on Campus Christian Life and the Synod of Georgia to come and share in a ministry we could all affirm. As I will try to make clear, it made an incredible difference that we put our lives (and our livelihood) in their hands.

Second, I want to say that it was nonetheless the shock of my life to find myself living, for the first time in my life, not only in a legally segregated society, but also one which was in many ways living so close to the legacy of Negro slavery. This is not to exonerate the North. It is to say that it was a different culture and forced me to seek endlessly for an understanding of the new reality in which I was now living. June and I had many teachers, to whom I will shortly pay tribute.

But the third thing I want to say is that some of the greatest Christians I have ever known I came to know in Georgia. I will introduce these new friends as this story moves along. Some were women and men of national acclaim (like Lillian Smith who wrote a best-selling novel in the 1940s called *Strange Fruit* and Clarence Jordan, the founder of Koinonia Farm, perhaps best known as the community from which Millard Fuller launched his world-famous project, Habitat for Humanity). But most, including my colleague, Corky King, and the marvelous students with whom we worked in the Westminster Student Fellowship, were less well known. But I am indebted to them all for teaching me the ways of the world and for deepening - I am inclined to say, for "radicalizing" - my Christian faith.

Let me now return to the narrative and describe something of the pattern of our ministry in Georgia.

#### **D. The Pattern of Ministry**

Much like our work in Kalamazoo, the centerpiece of our campus ministry at the University of Georgia was a Sunday Evening Fellowship meeting, consisting of a supper, a worship service and a program - normally a speaker, a movie, a dramatic presentation of some kind or, perhaps, a panel discussion. These Sunday Evening meetings were held in the fellowship hall of the First Presbyterian Church in downtown Athens (a block from the campus) but were soon moved to an old house directly across from the campus on South Lumpkin Street which the Synod had just purchased as the site for the new campus ministry center.

Also, similar to the ministry in Kalamazoo, I was an Assistant Pastor in each of the sponsoring local churches, in this case the First Presbyterian Church and the Central Presbyterian Church of Athens. This consisted of assisting, on alternate Sundays, with the morning worship services and occasional preaching.

But the basic job was two-fold: First was to work with the leaders of the Westminster Fellowship on the planning and carrying out of their program, including their outreach to the

Presbyterian students on the campus (publicity, dormitory visits), their various stewardship, educational and service projects and their recruitment for conferences and summer service projects. These included things like an annual Spring vacation trip to visit the theaters and art museums of New York City (called "The Christian Faith and Contemporary Culture"); participation in a World Council of Churches Work Camp in Brownsville, Texas; and weekend retreats with the Wesley Foundation (with Bola Ige, President of the Nigerian SCM), or with Margaret Flory and Bruce Rigdon on international affairs with the University's Cosmopolitan Club - or planning retreats on what was then a wild and undeveloped Jekyll Island!

The second task was working with the Joint Committee on refurbishing the old house on South Lumpkin Street to make it useable as a temporary student center - and the much bigger task of getting the Joint Committee, the students and the Synod cranked up for developing the plans for the new center and the fund-raising to make it happen. E.A. Lowe (who wished not to be saved!) - and who was in charge of building the new Kellogg Center for Continuing Education, right across the street from us -- was my right-hand man in working with the architect, Wilmer Heery, in drawing up the plans for the new campus ministry center.

At the state level the Joint Committee and I worked with the Synod's Campus Christian life Committee and a professional team out of New York to organize an incredibly effective fundraising strategy. One thing I learned was that the professionals can be of inestimable help, but they don't raise the money. You still have to do that yourself. Much of my time was spent traveling and speaking in local churches and presbyteries all over Georgia - and especially to the Women of the Church, who made campus ministry their special thing.

A foot note here: One of the junior staff members from New York (not the Director who was quite good) came to one of our meetings with ideas for a fund-raising strategy which appealed to the presumed anti-communist anxieties of southern Christians! I was appalled and said, bluntly, that this simply would not do. We were not going "to scare up" this money. I was pleased that the committee agreed, believing with me, I think, that such a strategy - given the tensions we were going to have to deal with down the line - would be counter productive. That was the end of that.

Much effort and much love went into our campaign and our goals were met. But that's getting ahead of our story. In the meantime there was much to be learned about living in Georgia.

## **E. Learning the Folkways and Mores of the Deep South**

### **1. Andy McCullough Comes to Visit**

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines "mores" (pronounced: more rays, rhymes with "folkways") as "customs imbued with ethical significance which have the force of law."

One of the first things that happened after we arrived in Georgia was getting a call from A.T.K. (Andy) McCullough, the African-American student from Kalamazoo College who went with us on the work camp in Big Lick, Tennessee. Andy was in Officer Candidate



School (OCS) at Fort Benning, Georgia. Could he come and visit us in Athens? We were delighted and invited him to come right away. But we were beginning to get an idea of how things worked and asked the Joint Committee for advice. The Committee said it would be alright for Andy to visit me "in my study" (since I was a minister) but that he must come in through the back door - and he must not stay overnight. It was the last time I asked the Committee for advice.

For some reason I'm blocking and don't remember exactly what we did. (It was 48 years ago!) Except that Andy did come to see us and I think stayed with us overnight. In any case, Filson's course came back to me. We had to live by grace and not by the law. ("Love never wronged a neighbor, therefore, love fulfills all that the law demands." [Romans 13:10] -- Dynamite!)

## **2. Lillian Smith Speaks to the Westminster Fellowship**

Funny how the work camp at Big Lick keeps connecting here. When June and I left Big Lick after the summer work camp in 1954 the pastor of the church, Gene Smathers, gave us a gift. It was a copy of Lillian Smith's autobiographical book, *Killers of the Dream* (Cresset Press, London, 1950.) Lillian Smith was an aristocratic Georgian, the Director of an exclusive summer camp for girls in the mountains of Northeast Georgia and, as mentioned above, the author of a best-selling novel called, *Strange Fruit* - a book which dealt, in a positive way, with an interracial love affair. After the publication of her novel, Lillian Smith was cut off by her wealthy clients and lived alone on a mountain top near Clayton, Georgia. There she wrote *Killers of the Dream*, a book about the ideology of "racism" (though she never calls it that) and about how the South - and indeed, the whole country - would never live up to its Christian and democratic values unless it put an end to racial segregation and the ideology of white supremacy on which it was based.

### **The Importance of a Book**

Since this book was such an important part of my education, and similarly so important in the opening up of the Westminster Student Fellowship to the challenge of social justice in the South - and in the whole country - let me share with you something of the gentle (and unsettling) way in which Lillian Smith draws us into her argument.

She begins with a poignant anecdote about how some of the good Christian ladies of her childhood discovered a little white child living with a colored family over in the colored part of town. Assuming that the child had been kidnaped they got the sheriff to remove the child and placed it - a little girl of Lillian's age - with Lillian's mother. Lillian and the "rescued" child shared a room and grew to be quite close. But then, suddenly, it was discovered that the child was "really black" and was returned to her black family. All of which made no sense to Lillian and which her mother could not explain. The incident was not to be discussed and Lillian was forced to accept the whole matter without question. It was not until Lillian Smith left home and served as a mission volunteer in China that she began to understand her own culture, especially as she saw how the Chinese workers on shipboard were treated on her trip to China.

In later years, as Director of the summer camp near Clayton, Lillian tried to help the young girls in her care understand the realities of Southern culture through the use of drama. Over several summers the girls, under Lillian's direction, produced a play based on Antoine de Saint Exupei's fantasy *The Little Prince*. In the original story the Little Prince comes from another planet to visit the children of Earth. In Lillian's version the Prince comes to Georgia. But he wants to play with all the children; not just the white children. The girls in the camp realize, of course, that this will be difficult to arrange, so, with Lillian's coaching they decide to help the Prince by giving him some advisors.

They begin with a group called Southern Tradition, played by eight dancers who surround the Prince, blocking his way or opening it as he traveled. The next advisor they chose was Religion. "I know we should take religion along," one child said, "but it just doesn't seem to belong on the stage with the others - after all, it's near us only on Sundays." "Then put it in the balcony," another called out. And they did, asking five girls to take their Bibles with them to the far balcony and sit there. (p 30)

The next advisor the children chose was Science. As one of the girls said, "We live in an age of science and we shouldn't make a journey through the universe with only ... Southern Tradition and Religion. It's too dangerous. There are times when the Prince had better know some facts."

Says Lillian, "Science was reluctantly chosen and put on the other balcony opposite religion." (p 31)

## **The Unfolding of a Play**

Now the stage is set and the children create their play as they go along. The Prince represents their longing for decency and wholeness (precocious kids!) while Southern Tradition frustrates his every move. The battle is on. The girls who represent Religion weigh in with their Bibles and their well-selected passages of Scripture. Says Lillian Smith, "They read in chorus a part of the Sermon on the Mount."

"And then one girl said clearly and with such deep simplicity that it was truly moving,"

"Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." (p 34)

"Conscience, did you hear?" (Conscience was another advisor.)

"Conscience turned away arrogantly, 'I never listen to Religion where segregation is involved. No one does down here.'"

The battle continues. Science and the Prince drive Southern Tradition into the wings and then turn against "Conscience."

"They told her she was a coward always to be listening to Southern Tradition - Why couldn't she grow up and learn things from Religion and Science!

"And then as quickly, the campers watching this, decided that they could impersonate earth children, they could be Chinese and Japanese and Germans and Russians and Negroes, they could come from the ends of the earth and play with the little Prince. And they did this.

"Then a counselor put Beethoven's Seventh Symphony on the gramophone and the old gymnasium where we had played and worked for twenty-five summers filled with sounds of triumph as we made a great circle and danced together in earth-unison."

Then Lillian admits, "It was make-believe and we knew it. But we could not let our play die as so much that is young has died on that old wall, segregation. But at supper, the children looked tired and preoccupied and I knew we had failed to answer the question twisting in their minds." (p 36)

Then Lillian Smith tells of the late night visit of one of the older girls who is angry. "Why do you teach us to love these dreams when you know we can't live them!" Lillian listens and then, as the book unfolds, patiently tells the whole story of slavery, the civil war and reconstruction - of the near starvation of the post-war South, the origins of the share-cropping system and the rapacious greed of both Southern and Northern business people as they fed on the misery of the South.

The book was full of insights into the reality and structure of segregated life. I read it shortly after moving to Athens and gave it to several of the students to read and tell me what they thought. For some, it was the beginning of their "coming of age." It was their story, too, they said. I said, look, Clayton is only 50 miles from here. Why don't we invite Lillian Smith to come and spend a weekend with us? The students thought that was a great idea and the invitation was sent. That seemed simple enough. But it turned out not to be so simple. We found out that, since the publication of her novel, Lillian Smith was *persona non grata* at the University and I found myself being coached by some of my more sophisticated friends on the faculty about how to handle a presumably touchy situation.

We had an overflow crowd at the Presbyterian Student Center that Sunday night. The students hung on every word. The Chairman of the Joint Committee was there at my special invitation. I thought he would enjoy being with such a brilliant woman, but he seemed to be afraid that something bad would happen. This was long before the University was under a specific court order to desegregate. It was assumed then that desegregation would first occur in one of the grade schools, or a high school, somewhere in the state but, as it happened, the line of Georgia's "massive resistance" was broken, not in the lower schools but at the University -- with the forced admission of Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes. The first desegregated dormitory in the state, Center Myers, was the women's dorm across the street from our Center. Lillian asked the students, "Where does a riot begin?" The question was prescient. (Stay tuned.)

After her weekend with the Westminster Fellowship Lillian reciprocated and invited June and me, and our children, to spend a weekend with her and her companion, Paula Snelling, in her home atop "Old Screamer Mountain." Even there she was under pressure. Vandals had burned the cabin where she wrote and destroyed her most recent manuscript. Lillian Smith was one of my most cherished teachers.

### **3. Mr. Marable**

June and I had not been in Athens long before we met an African-American preacher by the name of Hobart Marable. We were living in our first home in Athens, a one-story ranch-style house on Greenwood Drive. Mr. Marable was in the neighborhood soliciting funds for his church. He came to the front door (which I now realize was unusual), introduced himself, said he was a preacher and explained the reason for his visit. I said I was a preacher, too, and invited him to come in and sit down. Mr. Marable was distinctly uncomfortable and I realized that I had just broken another of the "laws" (mores) of the Deep South. He showed me a list of my neighbors with a record of how much each had given. Most had given 25 cents. I gave him a dollar. I remember trying to have a conversation with Mr. Marable, but he was much too uncomfortable to converse with me, sitting on the edge of his chair and clutching his hat. It seemed like he couldn't wait to get out.

As it turned out, that was the beginning of a long relationship with Mr. Marable. He kept coming back, even after June and I moved to another house in a different part of town. But it wasn't to ask for money for his church. It was to ask for work or for help with some problem or project. It was later explained to me that this was quite common. Hobart (I was the only one who called him Mr. Marable) was asking June and me to be "his white folks."

Once Mr. Marable came to me with an official-looking paper from the State of Alabama. His son was a patient in a mental hospital there and the State was asking for permission to perform a frontal lobotomy on him. I took the document to a friend, a Psychiatric Social Worker named Sarah Otto, of whom you will hear more as this story unfolds. Sarah explained that this was a way mental hospitals had of controlling unruly patients (by turning them into vegetables) and advised Mr. Marable not to sign. On another occasion Mr. Marable said that his bishop had asked him to give a talk at the Annual Convention of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church. The topic was "Children and Youth in the Church of Today." Would I write the speech for him? I said I couldn't write the speech, but let's talk about it. How was it for children and youth in the church of today? I had been in Mr. Marable's home, a miserable shack over in East Athens - one of many shacks which often burned to the ground because of unprotected fireplaces. I had been there to deliver a Christmas ham, and was shocked to find a baby, Mr. Marable's grandchild, crawling in front of a fireplace with no screen. I thought Mr. Marable would tell me how bad things were for children and youth in the church of today.

But I was wrong. Mr. Marable thought that things were much better.

What startled me was Mr. Marable's concept of history. Time was divided between "slave days" and "nowadays." What he was telling me was that children and youth were better off

nowadays than they had been in slave days. The other thing that startled me was how thin the line seemed to be between these two periods of time. He told me how his grandfather had been a slave on a plantation near Athens and how he had run away, only to be chased up a tree by the dogs. Mr. Marable was not only humiliated by what had happened to his grandfather but seemed to think that he, too, had been a slave on that plantation. He told me about how he had been beaten by two of the white boys on the plantation and locked in a shed. And then, with his voice breaking, he said,

"And do you know what? Their mama didn't even scold them for that."

Talk about "living close to the legacy of Negro slavery." Hobart Marable was also one of my cherished teachers.

## **F. Navigating the Waters of Change**

June and I were living in a world we had not known before but we had some remarkable teachers. I'll share my memories of several more of them in a few minutes, but first an observation. The campus ministry at the University of Georgia -- in fact the whole Church -- was sailing through uncharted waters. We needed a theological and moral compass to help us chart our course. It came in an unusual way.

One of the members of the Joint Committee on Campus Christian Life was a member of First Church and a Professor of Art History at the University, named Irv Breithaupt. One day early on, Irv asked me, "When are you going to teach us what you learned in seminary?" What a marvelous question! What minister wouldn't be delighted to have such an opening?

With the pressures on Georgia to desegregate, with the State Government vowing never to give in; and with urgent moral issues at stake I often thought of those courses at McCormick Seminary where we talked about prophetic justice, the life of grace and honesty in the use of language. Now here was a member of my board asking me to share these gifts. It led to my setting up a course at the student center which I called, "An Introduction to Biblical Theology." It was based on George Ernest Wright's course on the Old Testament and stressed the writings of the biblical prophets. (cf. Part 1, Chapter 4, "The Seminary Years," pages 49-52 and 55)

### **1. A Study of Biblical Theology**

The first class, which was small but included townspeople as well as faculty and students, was conducted in seminar fashion where we read sections of the biblical texts aloud to each other and discussed them - relating the texts as best we could to the political and social situation through which we were moving. As the class developed from year to year it turned out to be a course in liberation theology before there was any liberation theology, stressing the "Exodus/Wilderness/ Promised Land" paradigm and the prophetic call to:

Let justice roll down as waters,  
And righteousness as a mighty stream. (Amos 5:24)

Early on I discovered a book by Bernard Anderson called *Rediscovering the Bible* (Association Press, 1951) with a companion study guide, *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible* (1953), which fit the needs of our class remarkably well and which I used throughout the rest of my professional ministry.

Actually, I think the class, on which I spent a great deal of time, had more of an effect on me than it did on the students or my friends in the local churches or on the university faculty, and did more than anything else - except for the sheer scandal of racial segregation -- to lock me into a social justice mode of campus ministry.

## **2. The Growing Importance of Bonhoeffer, Tillich and Niebuhr**

It didn't take long for my theological interests to begin shifting away from the Neo-orthodoxy of my Student Christian Movement and Seminary years to the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. It was a matter of context and history. The challenge in Georgia in the 1950s was to help students move beyond the limits of 19th Century piety and its close correlation with racial segregation and the ideology of white supremacy, and into the struggle for a just society. The Neo-orthodoxy of post-war Europe - as vital as it may have been - simply sounded too much like the fundamentalism of the Old South. As Tillich used to say, we had to learn to express our faith "in other words." If we couldn't do that we probably didn't understand it. Furthermore, as the students soon learned - and as June and I were also learning - there was a price to pay for going against the folkways and mores of the Old South. We needed a theology which could help us both to understand and embrace the struggles we were facing. Notable books were:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*

Paul Tillich's *The Courage to Be; Love, Power and Justice;* and *Dynamics of Faith*

Reinhold Niebuhr's *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* and *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*

I was not a scholar, but I have spent my life trying to understand what it means to be a Christian and these books have been close companions.

Now, back to learning the folkways and mores of the Deep South and to the introduction of several more of my teachers:

## **G. Three More Teachers**

### **4. Hattie Jennings**

Hattie Jennings was another of our African-American teachers. Hattie worked for June and me as a maid. Why don't I call her Mrs. Jennings? Because she was always "Hattie" to us. I think it was a case of our all-too-easily conforming to custom - though I do remember referring to Hattie once in a conversation with a woman at the First Presbyterian Church as "Mrs. Jennings" and getting a puzzled response. "Well, I guess she *is* Mrs. Jennings. After all, she *is* married."

Hattie had grown up in the cotton fields. She referred to her work there as "choppin" and "pickin" cotton. One of the expressions used by one of my white friends was: "Keep yo' cottonpickin' hands off my gin." He thought it was funny. I doubt that it would have sounded that way to Hattie.

Two occasions highlight my learnings from Hattie Jennings:

### **Visiting Hattie's Church**

Hattie, of course, knew that I was a minister and thought I would like to visit her church. The church was out in the country and, although Hattie had given me careful directions, I arrived late and slipped in the back. The service had already started and I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible. But I had never experienced anything quite like what was about to happen. First of all, there was a spirit in the congregation that I find hard to describe. It was informal, spontaneous and participatory - and made me think of the words of Krister Stendahl (the Harvard professor) who said at our study retreat at Gun Lake (remember?) that worship in the Swedish Lutheran Church was "like standing in the vestibule of Heaven" - and that the only time he felt like that in America was in a black church in the South.

In any case, there was a rhythm to the service which I can only call "antiphonal." The preacher would make a statement and the people would respond - "That's right" or "Amen." Then he surprised me by saying - in the middle of his sermon! - "I see that one of our white brothers is here this morning." He did not get an exactly enthusiastic response. It was more like a subdued moan. "That's the way it's gonna be in heaven," he said. (Subdued moan) "Ain't gonna be no black heaven." (That's right) "Ain't gonna be no white heaven." (Amen) "Just gonna be God's heaven!" (Enthusiastic Amen!)

Actually, I had heard from a member of the Central Presbyterian Church that there was going to be a black heaven and a white heaven. Didn't the Bible say "heavens!" I think my friend was joking. But it made me wonder.

But I didn't have much time to think. The next thing I knew, the preacher was asking Hattie to introduce me and then inviting me to come up and sit on a sofa behind the pulpit. All of this within the rhythm of the service. The preacher kept on preaching and then said, "Now it's time for our white brother to preach!" I was startled, but stood up and thanked the people for their hospitality and shared a few thoughts about the message of the biblical prophets. The response was warm and I can understand how one could easily get carried away with all the "Amens" and "That's right, brother!"

The taking up of the offering was a special time - or, rather, several times - as the deacons would count the money after each collection, announce the total and then tell the congregation how much more was needed to reach their goal. In his prayer of dedication the preacher asked God to bless all those who had given and "those who wanted to but didn't have nothin'!"

It was an unforgettable morning and on the way home I wondered how Hattie's preacher would have fared if he had dropped in on the service at the First Presbyterian Church in Athens.

## **Taking Hattie to See the New Presbyterian Student Center**

Once when I was taking Hattie home after work I stopped to show her the new Presbyterian Student Center (Westminster House) which had just been built. We had taken great pains to make the building attractive and had hired an Interior Designer who had been trained by Frank Lloyd Wright to do the interior decorating. When Hattie entered the building she gasped and said, "This is what it's going to be like in heaven." Then she noticed a picture of an African on our bulletin board and asked who he was. I said he was Bola Ige, a graduate of the London School of Economics and President of the Nigerian Student Christian Movement, who was going to be the speaker at a conference we were having that weekend. Hattie gasped again and said, "And they always told us we was just dumb savages." It was enough to make you cry.

I leave it to my readers to fit the pieces of this story together and say what it tells us about our life as Christians in America.

## **5. Eleanor Jordan**

Eleanor Jordan was a student at the University of Georgia and a member of our Westminster Fellowship. She was from Americus, Georgia, and was born and raised at Koinonia Farm, an interracial community which was founded by her father Clarence Jordan. Things were heating up in Georgia; pressure from the Supreme Court and the Federal Government to desegregate its schools was mounting and resistance was growing intense. The Governor of the State, Marvin Griffin, was threatening to make "race mixing" a capital crime and Koinonia Farm had become a high-profile symbol of everything the segregationists hated. Its life was under siege. Its roadside stand (where it sold sugar-cured hams and other farm produce) was dynamited and blown off the face of the earth, a barn was hit by a fire bomb and shots were fired into some of the farm houses.

After a weekend at home, Eleanor returned to the University carrying the remains of a .45 caliber bullet which had been fired through her bedroom window and which had lodged in her mirror. She invited some of us to go with her to Koinonia to meet her parents. Four of us went, including a dark-skinned student from India. It was a wonderful visit and was the beginning of an important relationship with Clarence. I count him as one of the most important teachers in my life. More on this as we go along.



It was getting dark as the four of us said our goodbyes and headed back to Athens. Not far from the farm, traffic was held up by what looked by a night ball game. As we approached the turnoff we could see a raised platform and, under the floodlights, the Ku Klux Klan in full regalia. Our Indian student was terrified, lay down on the floor and covered herself with a blanket. We got safely past the Klan and back to Athens. But such was the ambience of Georgia in the late 1950s.

## **6. Betty Ann Conger**

Betty Ann was something of a rebel and outspoken in her defense of the Southern Cause. Until, that is, she got to know Eleanor Jordan, after which she became properly outraged at what the segregationists were doing to Koinonia Farm. Also, somewhat out of character for Betty Ann, she signed up for a National YWCA Summer Project at Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts. There she told the Koinonia Story to students from all over the country and organized a protest to the Attorney General of the United States. To which the Attorney General replied that his office was looking into this matter and that if he founds grounds to prosecute he would "prosecute with vigor!"

Somehow Betty Ann's father got wind of all this and confronted Betty Ann when she returned home. Her home was in Athens. It was Sunday afternoon. June and the children and I had just gathered for dinner when the phone rang. It was Betty Ann. "Come quick, Bill. Daddy's getting his guns!" When I arrived at the house there was a shotgun and a couple of other weapons lying on the front porch and Betty Ann was running down the street. I don't remember exactly what happened next, but I remember Betty Ann's account of it. This exchange occurred:

Daddy: "Daughter, where'd you get those ideas?"

Betty Ann: "Daddy, I got them from you. You're the one who taught me about democracy and about being fair!"

## **H. Reflections on the Georgia Reality**

It's hard to say what these six vignettes taught me about the reality in which I was now living. Each of my new "teachers" showed me, either inadvertently (Andy McCullough) or intentionally (Lillian Smith), a different aspect - or many different aspects -- of life in the Deep South. Each led me through experiences which were startling and unforgettable (like my morning in the black church, or Mr. Marable's "memory" of slavery, our encounter with the Klan in South Georgia or sharing Betty Ann's experience with her father.) Each was a piece of the puzzle and they fit together with many other pieces which were coming to us almost daily. Living in Georgia (like anywhere else) was an experience of total immersion.

But the pieces don't automatically make sense. They tend to fit patterns and these come from a "culture of meaning" - ideas you grew up with - or in a more disciplined way from books and long talks with trusted friends. I'm thinking of John Dollard's *Caste and Class in a*

*Southern Town*, C. Van Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* and a book given me by a doctor friend (the one who delivered my son David) *An Epitaph for Dixie*.

## **Chapter 2**

### **What Did We Learn and What Did We Do About It?**

#### **A. Translating Evangelical Concepts into “Engaged Christianity”**

It wasn't long after June and I arrived on the scene in 1955 that we began to see that the most important part of our work at the University of Georgia was not raising money and building a new student center but the building up of the Westminster Student Fellowship. The challenge to all of us was to grow in our understanding and practice of the Christian Faith. That meant "growing where we were planted" and it meant, especially, to grow in the context of the history through which we were passing. It meant to become engaged with the moral and ethical issues of our time.

I'll say more in a minute about what that meant in terms of the many things we did as a Westminster Fellowship - and that June and I got involved in as citizens of Athens - but first I want to share some memories about how, over time, and particularly after the arrival of our Student Intern, Corky King, we began to translate some of the central ideas of Southern, evangelical Christianity into justice-oriented concepts. It began with the students.

#### **1. Ye Must Be Born Again**

One could read these words on signs all over rural Georgia. They were a little embarrassing to a "northern liberal" like me, but I can remember the students saying, "Yes, Bill, that's right. You must be born again!" They explained that being a "fundamentalist" and a "segregationist" for a white Southerner was like living in the warmth and darkness of the womb. But to become a grown-up person you have to leave the womb, cut the cord and learn to breathe on your own. But it's a shock. Suddenly you are thrust out into the cold air, you're blinded by the light and then someone starts to spank you. It can be both exhilarating and painful

I suspect Betty Ann could relate to that last point. How many of our students had the experience of getting into trouble for transgressing "the folkways and mores" of Southern Tradition! Lillian Smith would have been pleased with their insights.

#### **2. The Decision for Christ**

There were two Southern Baptist ministers who had an impact on me in Georgia. One was Billy Graham - who dominated the airwaves -- the other was Clarence Jordan, the founder of Koinonia Farm, as we have noted. For Graham the "decision for Christ" took place in a revival meeting at the feet of an evangelist. It meant giving intellectual assent ("confessing

with your tongue and believing in your heart") that Jesus was your personal Savior. There was no moral content to the decision. The orientation was to the afterlife. But for many others, in the painful context of segregated Georgia, the decision for Christ was made every time they were confronted with the challenge of deciding for justice on behalf of the oppressed. "Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you have done it unto me." This seemed to be supremely illustrated in the life of Clarence Jordan and his courageous friends at Koinonia Farm.

### **3. The Way of the Cross**

Again, Graham and Jordan show the contrasts. For Graham the cross was the occasion of Jesus' sacrificial death -- the so-called "substitutionary atonement." Graham is right, of course, that this has been a central theme of conventional Christianity through the ages. But it is not the only one and maybe not the most meaningful one - or even the most authentically biblical -- for those who feel called to follow Jesus. Said Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "When Christ calls a person, he bids that person come and die." Jesus calls us to "take up" the cross and follow. "No one has greater love than this, than that that person will lay down his or her life for her friends."

Once when I was visiting Clarence at Koinonia Farm -- or maybe it was when Clarence was our guest at the University -- he told me about a conversation he had had with his brother who was in the State Legislature. The discussion was about following Jesus. Clarence's brother said that that was what he was trying to do. "But how far are you willing to go in following Jesus?" "All the way," replied his brother. "All the way to the cross?" asked Clarence. "Yes, to the very foot of the cross." "But are you willing to be nailed up on that cross with him?"

"No, Clarence, I'm not willing to go that far."

Who is? Not even Clarence Jordan who withstood the fury of segregationist Georgia, and whose life was in constant danger, actually was nailed up on a cross. But the symbolism is real. My mind goes back to that lecture by Tom McDill at McCormick Seminary, that what killed Jesus was not the physical trauma of being nailed on the cross. There were no mortal wounds. But the sense that he had been forsaken. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" Said McDill, "Jesus died of a broken heart."

But it didn't just happen on the cross. It happened step by step as Jesus was abandoned by his people, deserted by his friends, betrayed by one of his disciples and denied by his beloved Peter. McDill spoke of how in some societies the curse of the witch doctor, and the driving of a villager alone into the desert, could actually cause the victim's death - such was the solidarity within the village and the unbearable burden of rejection.

Let us never underestimate the reality of the cross as the threat of rejection. No one should court this, but no one should be afraid of it, either. A meaningful Christian life - or any meaningful life - may entail occasional pain but may sometimes be exhilarating. It is not boring.

## 4. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

This Is My Body Which Is Broken for You.

After the new Center was built (which we called "Westminster House") our governing board agreed to sponsor a Westminster Fellowship Leadership School for the Southeastern region of the Presbyterian Church, US (the Southern Presbyterian Church.) Students and staff from Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina came for a week. Harry Smith, the Presbyterian Campus Minister from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was our speaker. One of the things that was special about the School was that students from one of the predominantly black Presbyterian Colleges in Alabama came for the week. That made our school "interracial" in segregated Athens! We were going against the folkways and mores of the Deep South, wholesale! But the students handled it well and the Catholic Student Center down the street helped us with housing.

Harry did a splendid job and we pushed out the frontiers of theology and liturgy each day, taking many of our cues from the Christian Faith and Life Community at the University of Texas. (More on that later.) At the end of the week we celebrated our life together with a communion service. We wanted to get back to the practice of the Early Church which celebrated the sacrament in the catacombs of the Empire by gathering around a table, or perhaps a tomb, sharing a single, uncut loaf of bread and a single goblet of wine. We felt a bit like one of those "illicit" Christian communities of the First Century, as we broke the implicit laws of the State.

We were also attempting to take Martin Luther's idea of the priesthood of all believers seriously, which he said meant that each Christian is a Christ to his or her neighbor. When we passed the bread each would say to his or her neighbor, "The Lord Jesus said, 'This is my body which is broken for you.'" The same with the wine. "The Lord Jesus said, 'This is my blood which is shed for you.'" Each would share the priestly function.

But a strange thing happened. I was presiding and served the person on my right, an African-American student from Alabama, quoting the Words of Institution: "The Lord Jesus said, 'This is my body which is broken for you.'" But when he turned and served the person on his right, a white co-ed from the University of Georgia, he said, "This is my body broken for you!" That had particular significance, which was picked up immediately because we knew that he had been injured in a civil rights demonstration in Alabama. His body had been broken in the struggle for a more just society for all of us. Could this be what it means to be a Christ for one's neighbor - to risk the breaking of one's body or the spilling of one's blood for one's neighbor?

I won't say that everyone left that School with the same perceptions of what was going on, but such was the way many of our understandings of the traditional themes of the church were transformed in the struggle.

The Pledge of Allegiance

Another way of understanding the sacrament of Holy Communion came from an appreciation of the original meaning of the Latin word, *sacramentum* - the pledge of allegiance which a company of soldiers made to their captain before going into battle. The pledge was to follow "even unto death" and was made by the whole company by "lifting the cup" and drinking from a single goblet of wine.

## **B. Putting Faith into Action**

### **1. Taking a Stand for Desegregation**

Clearly all the signs were pointing to the importance, indeed the Christian necessity, of taking action for change - i.e.; for change in the direction of social justice. And, we believed, that that meant taking action for desegregation - whether that was going to come first in the public schools or at the University. But we had had no experience with this and had to find our way. As it turned out the State Legislature gave us our first opportunity. It decided to hold hearings on the issue of desegregation in each of the ten Congressional Districts in the State. One would be in ours!

An Atlanta banker by the name of John Sibley was appointed to preside over these hearings. Ours was the 10th Congressional District and our hearing was to be held in the Court House in Washington, Georgia, some 10 to 15 miles from Athens. Westminster Fellowship went into action. One of our graduate students, Bill Angemier, asked the students in each of his psychology classes whether or not they would favor the admission of black students to the University - and invited those who would to sign petitions to that effect. Other Westminster Fellowship students simply collected signatures, wherever they could find them, stating that the signers were in favor of desegregation. These were not scientific surveys. But in a political climate where it was assumed (at least by State and University officials) that everyone was opposed to desegregation, the ability of the Westminster Fellowship to show that there were at least some university students - and maybe a lot - who would actually welcome black students to the campus would be a telling point to make.

But it wasn't easy to go into that Hearing and take the stand. Could there be retaliation? Was it even safe to be there? I remember driving up to that Court House. It was surrounded by State Police Cars. The Court House was packed. The mood was tense. As the hearings got under way a District Superintendent from one of the school systems in the area was testifying and telling Mr. Sibley how much everybody liked the system just like it was. He even called on the black principal of one of the black schools in his district to testify. The black principal was sitting in the balcony. (Naturally, the hearing was segregated.) The white District Superintendent looked up and called to his black principal. "Henry, come down here and tell Mr. Sibley what you think of our system." The black principal came down, took the stand, looked Mr. Sibley in the eye and quoted a line from the Book of Job:

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust him!"

The black principal did not tell Mr. Sibley "how much he liked the system" - he took his life in his hands (or clearly felt that he was doing so) and testified against the system -- and for its desegregation!

When it came Westminster Fellowship's turn to testify one of our members, I think it was Winston Stephens - the daughter of our representative in the State Legislature - presented Mr. Sibley with the list of names of the University of Georgia students who said they favored the admission of black students to the University and would welcome them to the campus. John Sibley was impressed and may have begun to see a way through the impasse which the Governor and the State Legislature had created.

In any case, the next student to testify was from one of the pro-segregation fraternities at the University. (They were *all* pro-segregation.) He said he was speaking for the whole fraternity. Mr. Sibley asked him if he had any lists. He didn't and John Sibley politely dismissed him.

## 2. SOS

There were many ways that the Presbyterian Student Center (Westminster House) was involved theologically and politically with "the history through which we were passing" and I will tell you about a number of them. But first I want to tell you about an action for desegregation that June and I were involved in that applied to the public schools of Athens (and by implication to the public schools of whole state.) It was the founding of a community organization for political action called SOS (Save Our Schools) - also referred to as HOPE (Help Our Public Education.)

This was not a university-based initiative but one that came from the progressive leadership of the City of Athens. One of the organizers was the City Attorney, though he as others was acting as a private citizen. I'm not sure how June and I happened to get involved. Perhaps it was through June's connection with the League of Women Voters, She and Sarah Otto were Co-Presidents and attended the League's national convention together in Atlantic City. Or maybe it was through our friendship with Paul and Louise Pfuetze (Paul was a philosophy professor at the University and an outspoken advocate of social justice, and Louise was a powerhouse for social change in her own right.) I remember that Herb and Sarah Otto were involved from the beginning with SOS. Herb was a psychology professor and Sarah, as noted earlier, was a psychiatric social worker. (Sarah Otto was one of the most important counselors and interpreters of the psychological dimensions of race relations that we and our students had. She even participated in one of our Westminster Fellowship leadership retreats on Jekyll Island.)

In any case, those who were involved in SOS were a remarkable group of people and we all bonded as we met and planned our various strategies for action. This may be hard to understand from this time and distance but for those involved at the time it was a risk-taking venture. One of our group remarked that it must have felt like this to have been involved in the underground in France during the German Occupation. One of our discussions was of the roles of the transplanted Yankees (like June and me and the Pfuetzes) and that of the native

Southerners. It was agreed that the up front *persona* of the organization must be Southern, though the transplanted Yankees were equally-valued members of the group. All of us were taking personal risks (with our standing in the community, even with our jobs and our livelihood). But it was especially risky for the Southerners. As E.A. Lowe said to me in that memorable walk across the campus, it was expected that Northerners would be in favor of desegregation. But for Southerners it was betrayal. "We are all traitors," one of them said.

One of the first acts of our new organization was to print up a leaflet featuring a Pulitzer Prize winning cartoon from one of the Atlanta newspapers, and an editorial by one of its editors, Ralph McGill, alerting the public to the crisis we were facing in our schools. The Governor and the State Legislature were threatening to close down the whole system rather than comply with the Supreme Court's orders to desegregate. What I remember most clearly about this action of our committee was that our son John, who could not have been more than seven or eight years old, enlisted one of his friends in the neighborhood and went up and down our street putting SOS leaflets in our neighbor's mailboxes. It was John's first taste of political action!

Our next act was to send an SOS to our representative in the State Legislature, Bob Stephens (Winston's Dad.) It was in the form of a telegram signed by more than 100 voters in his district opposing the position of the Governor and the Legislature - which was (as a last resort) to close down the schools. From this vantage point in time the policy seems bizarre, but many people in the state were willing to do it. Sarah Otto, for example, told us that her father, a native of Savannah, Georgia, said, "Don't worry, Daughter. We got along without public schools before. We can get along without them again!"

Our telegram was the longest ever received by the State Legislature (each of us paid ten cents to add our names.) We made the front pages of the Atlanta papers and got instant visibility.

But the *coup de grace* was an even more outlandish stunt. Working quietly behind the scenes, we reserved the Athens Country Club, set up a dinner, and arranged for a blue ribbon committee to send engraved invitations to the commercial elites of Athens to come to a banquet featuring representatives from the Little Rock, Arkansas, Chamber of Commerce. For those who may be too young to remember, the first crisis in the desegregation struggle in the United States was in Little Rock where the 101st Airborne Division was called in to enforce the orders of the Supreme Court. On the surface the Country Club Banquet, with its leaders from Little Rock, sounded like a cheer leading occasion for the resistance. But our tacit understanding with our guests from Little Rock was that they would counsel us not to resist. It was too costly.

It's amazing that the ruse worked. But sometimes political dead-ends become so outrageous that otherwise more cautious and circumspect people will take unusual measures to unmask them. In any case the Athenians turned out in big numbers to hear their supposed heroes from Little Rock cheer them on, only to hear them say:

"We feel like we're seeing you lined up to see a bad movie. We've seen that movie and are here to tell you to turn in your tickets."

## **C. Crossing New Frontiers**

And now back to the Westminster Student Fellowship. There were many things going on with the students, though, as time moved on, our consciousness was more and more dominated by the issue of desegregation and the whole challenge of living as Christians in the modern world. Let me now tell you about some of these events.

### **1. The Interracial Conferences at Paine College**

Here my hat is off to Sam Laird, the United Methodist Campus Minister at Emory University in Atlanta. He was the organizer of the ecumenical interracial conferences at Paine College, a predominately African-American school in Augusta, Georgia. I can remember taking University of Georgia students to these conferences on two occasions. As I remember, Roger Shinn, the Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Christian Ethics at Union Seminary in New York was the featured speaker both years. It was the beginning of a life-long friendship with Roger.

### **2. The Christian Faith and Contemporary Culture**

#### The Church and Urban Life Project

Perhaps one of the most important things we did for students at the University of Georgia was to put them in touch with the wider world outside the state. Not that the University didn't do that as well. It did, and some of the best things we did at Westminster House were in cooperation with our friends in the university. One of those friends was Mimi Thurman, the Assistant Chaplain. It was Mimi Thurman, for example, who first brought Eleanor Jordan to Westminster House. And it was Mimi who recommended June and me to serve as Co-Directors of a summer work-study project in New York City called "The Church and Urban Life!" The Project was based at the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village. June and I applied and were accepted, took our three children (John, Margee and Carol), lived in a basement apartment and served as Co-Directors with Norman Keim and Howard Moody of the Church Staff

There were probably 15 students in the Project. The Project helped them find jobs in the City, took them to the Broadway and Off-Broadway theaters and to the art museums and night clubs of the City and conducted seminars with the Project participants and invited guests (theologians, business people and journalist) exploring the relevance of Christian faith and ethics to modern, urban life. It was an exciting project. Highlights were seeing Jason Robards play Hickey in Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, reading J. D. Salinger's famous novel *Catcher in the Rye* and then visiting Holden Caulfield's favorite night club, Ernie's, which was across the street from Judson Church; and reading Paul Tillich's article on "Christianity and the Existentialists" (in which he gave his reasons for calling Picasso's *Guernica* the greatest Protestant painting of the 20th Century) - and then standing in silence before that magnificent and horrifying picture at the Museum of Modern Art.



An added bonus for me was commuting by subway to Union Seminary on the upper West Side and taking a course in Christian Ethics with James Gustafson. My term paper was a comparison of Tillich's *Love, Power and Justice* with Niebuhr's *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*. This came along at an important time in my theological development.

#### Annual Westminster Fellowship Trips to New York City

But of greatest importance to the Westminster Student Fellowship was that the Church and Urban Life Project became a model for annual Spring Vacation trips to New York City. On the first day of every Spring Break a caravan of three or four cars pulled out of the driveway of the old Presbyterian Student Center (later "Westminster House") and headed for New York. It took us two days to drive the 800 miles, but the costs were minimal - we shared the cost of gas (three cents a mile each), accommodations in the City at a United Church of Christ dormitory (\$3.50 a night) and meals on our own. The most expensive part was the theater tickets but these, too, were cheap by today's standards.

What were these trips about? Opening our students up to a wider world and sharpening our theological reflection. Tillich called this "the method of correlation." By which he meant that theology must proceed by correlating questions and answers. The questions come from the world and from the existential situation in which all of us, either implicitly or explicitly, ask about the meaning of life. So the plays of Eugene O'Neill (*Iceman, Long Days Journey Into Night*), Arthur Miller (*The Death of a Salesman, The Crucible*) and Tennessee Williams (*A Streetcar Named Desire, Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*) were all important to us. And, it seemed, the more pessimistic these plays were (Sartre's *No Exit*, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*) the better we liked them. I can remember hearing a quote from Billy Sunday commenting on the shrill wind that threatened to blow a sparrow from its branch, "Blow wind blow," sang the sparrow. "I've got wings, I can fly." We may have been dilettantes, but we were looking into some real pits - and liking the challenge.

In any case we were trying to live with some sense of elan in the real world and this was leading into some exciting new relationship with the arts at the University of Georgia. When the new Center was finished the art students filled it with their paintings and sculptures. I can remember one worldly visitor comparing our center to Adolph Hitler's Museum of Decadent Art - the only place in Berlin, Tillich said, that modern art could be viewed with impunity - such was the hostility of the German fascists to abstract art.

We also found a new relationship with the drama department as we put on plays like *The Sign of Jonah* - an anti-fascist play which Tom Driver first produced at Union Seminary in New York to the critical acclaim of Brooks Atkinson in *The New York Times*..

Did this have anything to do with the struggle against segregation? Yes, I think so. There's a sense in which life is of one piece. The same self that struggles for justice also struggles against his or her own alienation, and hence with the meaning of his or her life. I can remember watching Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* on one of our trips to New York. But we weren't just watching -- we were (emotionally) *in* the play - struggling with our own integrity and the meaning of our own lives just as the characters on the stage were struggling with

theirs. The reader may remember that the setting of *The Crucible* was the Salem witchcraft trials, but was really about the threat of fascism in America.

There was also an element of "unmasking" in these paintings and plays. And that had direct implications for us in our struggle - as it does today with our national delusions about the war in Iraq.

### **3. Getting in Touch with the African-American Community in Atlanta**

Sometimes it takes a gentle nudge from the outside to move one into new realms of relationships and actions. Such was the case with two groups from "the North" who wanted to come south and learn about the Civil Rights Movement. Both were campus ministry groups, like ours; one from Ohio State University, the other from the University of Nebraska. The groups were quite different. The group from Ohio State, to its credit, was racially mixed but otherwise insensitive and not prepared for the disciplines that would be required of its members. They seemed to think they could do whatever they wanted to, whatever the consequences to themselves and others. The other group was much better prepared, probably because of their campus minister, Verlyn Barker, who came with them and who some years later served as Executive Director of the National Commission on United Ministries in Higher Education.

To make a long story short, the group from Ohio State stayed in our home. There was no other place in Athens a racially mixed group could stay. I explained the reality of segregated life in Athens and asked them to be discrete while I went out to buy groceries. When I returned they were all out in my front yard playing soft ball. My neighbors were scandalized. The mailman who was coming up the street was so shocked to see an interracial ball game in my front yard that he dropped his letters in the street. The woman across the street was simply nonplused. She was not angry, or hostile, but simply could not understand how a "nice" family like ours could let something like this happen. I mention all this, not to scold my guests from Ohio State, but, again, to indicate something of the ambience in which June and I were living. I'll return to this later.

What I remember best about Verlyn's group is that they seemed to have had all the right connections with the African-American community in Atlanta, especially with Morehouse College and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and that they invited me go with them. Of special interest to all of us was meeting the leaders of SNCC (pronounced "Snick") which had just moved to Atlanta and was spearheading the Civil Rights Movement in the Southeast. The Chairperson of SNCC/Atlanta was a student by the name of Lonnie King. One memorable event which occurred during our visit was a meeting between Lonnie King and Ruby Hurley, the Regional Secretary of the NAACP. The meeting was in Mrs. Hurley's office - a plain, unmarked office in the black section of Atlanta. I was surprised by its anonymity and modest size. You would have thought from the banner headlines in the Georgia newspapers that the NAACP had an army in Atlanta!

In any case, Lonnie King and Ruby Hurley seemed to be meeting for the first time. Lonnie was rhapsodizing over the promise of "Nonviolence," as he put it, (meaning nonviolent, direct action like sit-ins and freedom rides.) Ruby Hurley responded with some testiness that the NAACP had always been nonviolent!

Lonnie seemed pleased to have contact with the group from Nebraska and with Westminster House in Athens - as I was pleased to have contact with Morehouse College and SNCC. The highlight of the trip to Atlanta -- and maybe the spiritual high point of my whole five years in Georgia - was standing in a circle with the leaders of SNCC, with students and staff from Morehouse College and the group from Nebraska singing a song which I had never heard before. It was to become the theme song of the Civil Rights Movement: "We Shall Overcome."

Deep in my heart, I do believe,  
We shall overcome someday!

This may be hard to believe, but I was transported to another realm.

## **D. A Comment on Our Life in Georgia**

I must now bring this chapter to a close and I will do so with an account of one of the most difficult experiences in my life. But before doing that I want to make clear, that for all the intensity of June's and my life in Georgia, our life there was quite normal and, often, a delight.

Part of that delight was just living in the pleasant climate of the South, of being able to take walks in the evening beneath the scented pines of Highland Avenue or having breakfast in the morning on our screened porch. And part of it was having friends with whom we shared our children and our lives -- perhaps more deeply than we ever had before.



**Carol, Margee and John in Greenwich Village**

But the deepest delight was living those five years with our children. John was two when we arrived in Georgia - soon to be three. Margee was still a baby. I remember when we put John in the Cooperative Nursery School at the Methodist Church. Someone asked him where he and his sister came from. (He didn't have quite the right accent.) "Oh," said John, "Margee came from Mommy's tummy. But I came from Illinois."

Soon to follow were Carol and David. Mark came in the very last months of our time in Georgia and was still an infant when we arrived in Ithaca in August of 1960. Mark was special. It was said by the Catholic bishops at Medellin, in defense of their "preferential option for the poor," that a mother's favorite child is always the one farthest from home. Mark was special because we almost lost him. He was born with a blood incompatibility that almost took his life. In those days it took major surgery to save him. He will always be special.

In another sense, of course, all of our children were special. What I remember best about Carol was her pleasant disposition. As a baby she occupied the Kiddie Koop in the bedroom between the kitchen and the front bedrooms in our house on Greenwood Drive. It was a frequently traveled passageway and Carol always greeted us with a big smile. Other fleeting memories: Carol as a two year old drinking turpentine and having to be rushed to the hospital to have her stomach pumped. Carol on Highland Avenue getting up in the morning before June and I were awake and going down the street for breakfast with the Ottos.

And this wonderful story. Once when we were traveling we stopped at a drugstore. A car pulled up beside us with an African American family inside. Soon I noticed my darling little three year old was making faces at them. I was shocked. "Care-ole," I said in that tone of voice that all children recognize. "What are you doing?" "I don't like black people," she said, "because some people don't like me." I don't remember what I said to that, but whatever it was Carol knew she was in trouble." She jumped to her feet, threw her arms wide and said,

"Oh Daddy, I love God and Jesus and everybody!"

Carol is now a professor of Early Childhood Education and teaches teachers about raising children to be tolerant and just. In asking her permission to tell this story I said I thought it was a remarkable bit of self-analysis for a three year old. (The theology wasn't too bad either.) Carol said, "Dad, you haven't been listening. Lots of three year olds think like that."

Oh.

Glimpses of Margee include listening to her sing a little made-up song about the roses growing just outside our screened-in porch. We had just been through a summer rain shower and the song went like this:

"If there wouldn't be any rain there wouldn't be any flowers."

There were frequent repetitions and variations on the theme. I thought it was beautiful. Another fond memory is of taking Margee to lunch at the brand-new Georgia Center for Continuing Education - in the most elegant dining room in the City of Athens. But I was

rushing things a bit and Margee wasn't tall enough to sit up at the table. So she sat in a highchair on our first date!

My first memory of David was the night he was born. It was Thanksgiving Eve in 1958. June was having contractions and we met the doctor at the hospital. We knew John Elder as a colleague in the struggle to save the schools. Those were not yet the days of fathers in the delivery room so while June was being prepped Dr. Elder and I talked politics. Then he delivered David and brought him out in a little blanket to let me greet him. It was a wonderful day.

How was June bearing up under all of this? As she says, having five children in seven years was not easy. She thought she would never have them all out of diapers. But the hardest part was having her life so heavily impacted by events over which she had no control. For all of our idealism about being a team, it was my job but when I got into trouble she had to live with the consequences. One thing I noticed about June (keen observer that I am) was how eager she was for summer to come and a chance to get out of Georgia. I was always ready for a break when summer came but June was ready to pack up the kids and go direct a work/study project on the Mexican border or in the slums of New York! There we were really a team and we lived as a family.

## **E. The US/USSR Student Exchange**

### **1. Bill Angemeier and Ted Alexander Represent Georgia in the Soviet Union**

In the late 1950s Dwight Eisenhower and Nikita Krushchev took an initiative for peace by authorizing the first US/USSR Student Exchange. Several US based student groups were asked to nominate potential participants, including both students and faculty advisors. The United Student Christian Council (USCC) was one of these groups. As a former chairman, I was invited -- along with others - to make nominations. I made two: one was Bill Angemeier, a graduate student in psychology and an active member of Westminster Fellowship; the other (for faculty advisor) was Bob Bowers, my former history professor at Hanover College, a man with a longstanding interest in peacemaking. Both were selected for the program.

But, in addition to Bill Angemeier of the University of Georgia, a student from Morehouse College in Atlanta by the name of Ted Alexander, was also selected to represent the State of Georgia. We had met Ted Alexander on our visit to Atlanta with Verlyn Barker.

The trip to the Soviet Union, from Moscow in Central Russia to Tashkent in the Far East was a fantastic experience for all involved, but was especially so for Bill and Ted who found that their Soviet counterparts were keenly interested in race relations in the United States. They were impressed by how much the Soviets knew about the United States, including the exact locations of Atlanta and Athens. "How were things going with the desegregation of the public schools?" their hosts and hostesses wanted to know. Bill and Ted assured them that very real

progress was being made and could tell them, from personal experience, exactly what was happening.

Not surprisingly, members of the Westminster Fellowship back at the University of Georgia were also keenly interested in the dialogue taking place in the Soviet Union and, accordingly, invited Bill and Ted to be the speakers at Westminster's "kick off" event for the fall term. That event would take place in the First Presbyterian Church since the new Presbyterian Student Center (Westminster House) was under construction.

## **2. The Session Refuses to Let Ted Alexander Speak in Our Church**

But not all was going well. Harmon Ramsey, the saintly Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church was worried that there might be some objection to having this meeting at First Church because Ted Alexander was black. Harmon thought it would be the better part of valor to get the Session's approval in advance and so took the matter to its next meeting. The Session turned him down! Harmon was undone. He could hardly bring himself to tell me.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing! I said, "Harmon, look! Ted Alexander has been in the Soviet Union telling people about the progress we're making in race relations and the first thing that happens to him when he gets back is that we tell him he can't speak in our church because he's black!"

I said, "Harmon, I want you to reconvene the Session and let me speak to it."

Harmon Ramsey: "I can't."

I: "If you don't I will go to each member of the Session, individually, and tell them what they've done."

Harmon Ramsey: "I wish you wouldn't do that."

My first call was on Uly Gunn. I'm not sure why I went first to Uly. He may have been Clerk of Session. The visit was in the office of his men's store on Main Street. I think Uly knew why I was there. A plain spoken man, he said, "Now don't quote the Bible to me. I've got more Bibles than anyone in that church. But I don't read them." I told Uly what I told Harmon Ramsey and said I thought we ought to reconvene the Session and ask it to change its action.

Things were getting tense. Uly wasn't saying anything. Then he said he had to "work up some spit." Not that he wanted to spit. It was just that his mouth was dry. So was mine.

Uly: "Bill, if we did what you want there'd be blood running in the streets."

I had no rejoinder, and began to feel terribly alone.

Uly: "I kind of think of our church as a private club. And it shouldn't have

any niggers in it."

I know that this is going to sound paranoid, but my hands were sweating and I could begin to feel nail prints in the palms of my hands.

I think Uly at least would have understood the intensity of that meeting – I have never experienced anything else like it, before or since.

So what happened next? The students were moving ahead with alternative plans for their meeting with Bill Angemeier and Ted Alexander. The Episcopal Church had offered the use of its parish house, which the students had accepted. I was too exhausted to make the rounds of the whole Session but I did make one more call. I don't remember the Elder's name, but he was a transplanted Yankee and Dean of the Ag School. He was disappointed that the students' fall "kick-off" with Bill and Ted was going to be held in the Episcopal Parish House and not in our church.

The big event went well, though it almost didn't come off. Ted's mother almost didn't let him come. She was afraid he might be lynched.

## **F. Five Remarkable Years Come to an End**

I hope my readers will begin to see that June's and my life in Georgia during the late fifties, while in many respects quite normal for a typical, white middle class family, was in other respects intense. Two of our five children were born in Georgia, school began there for the older ones as they came of age - birthdays were celebrated, grandparents came to visit. But we were living with the legacy of slavery in the Deep South; a legacy of what was probably the most virulent form of slavery in the history of humankind. We saw only bits and pieces of that legacy, but they all pointed to an institution which was based on an ideology of white supremacy and the nearly absolute exploitation of an entire "caste and class" of people (to use John Dollard's terminology) by another race.

It was African and African-American slavery that made the production of plantation crops so profitable, and that made the slave owning aristocracy of the South -- and the textile mills of England (and New England) - so rich. But as Robin Blackburn shows in his monumental work, *The Making of New World Slavery* (Verso, 1997), it was the ruthless organization of Africans, and in North America, African-Americans into slave gangs and drivers that made the system work.

One of the most sobering things to read in Dollard's *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, is a concluding chapter on what he antiseptically calls "accommodation," and what one of my African American friends (who was born and raised in Macon, Georgia) calls "totalitarianism." Totalitarian is a strong word but I am inclined to agree with its use. Dollard makes it clear that in the southern town he studied in 1937 no dissent was brooked with the reigning ideology. If you were a politician your career went nowhere if you weren't a segregationist, if you were a preacher you would lose your congregation, if you were black

you ran the risk of being lynched. Lillian Smith tells us that 3,148 Negroes were lynched in the South between 1882 and 1946. (1950 p 189)

Athens of course was not Dollard's Southern Town. In the first place, it was the site of the State University - and though imperfectly practiced still had a decent respect for academic freedom. And these were the 1950s and not the 30s. Things were changing and there was much more tolerance for change. Still, it was a mix. The "land mines" of southern tradition (the folkways and mores "which have the force of law") were still there to be tripped over -- and I tripped over most of them. But the struggle seemed clear and the comraderie was real. No day was without its joy and none, it seemed, was without its pain

I was lucky. I still had friends in high places and they knew that the tensions were mounting. The Secretary for Student Work in the United Presbyterian Church USA, Hal Viehman, asked me to consider two openings in campus ministry in the national church: One was at the University of Pittsburgh; the other at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

I quietly visited both places. What stands out most vividly in my memory of the visit to Pittsburgh was staying with Dan and Joan Little in the House Church which Dan was pastoring. The House Church Movement was on the cutting edge of urban ministry and Dan's ministry had been featured on the cover of *Presbyterian Life*. I was impressed but wasn't interested in moving to Pittsburgh.

The same with Cornell. I knew that Hal was taking care of me, but for all the pain of living in Georgia, I still thought of it as a "challenge" and, besides, Corky and I had big dreams for the future. We had completed, successfully, our first "Five Year Plan" - the Center had been built and we had the nucleus of a strong and committed student fellowship. There were several versions of our dream for Stage Two. One was to buy the two houses on either side of the new center and turn them into self-financing dormitories. One for men, the other for women. These, together with the facilities of Westminster House, would be the base for a "resident community" of lay scholars similar to the Christian Faith and Life Community at the University of Texas.

I had been a Religion in Life Week speaker at the University of Texas some years earlier and got to see the life and work of the Faith and Life Community up close. With its students living together in disciplined study and worship, and then dispersed throughout the social and academic life of the University, it seemed to be doing the most effective job I knew of anywhere in the country of raising the level of theological sophistication and action for justice in the university. We had had Jack Lewis, the Founder/Director of the Christian Faith and Life Community as a consultant at the time of the Dedication of Westminster House.

#### My Meeting with Jon Westfall

The phone rang. It was Jon Westfall, the Chairman of the Joint Committee which employed Corky and me. Would I drop by his Office? Jon was a transplanted Yankee and one of the more progressive members of the university faculty. His daughter, Peggy, was active in the Westminster Student Fellowship and Jon was very supportive. This afternoon he looked tired.



Jon: "I hear you've been to Cornell"

I: "Yes."

Jon: "Did you like it?"

I: "Yes"

Jon; "Did they ask you to come?"

I: "Yes"

Jon: "Are you going to go?"

I: "I don't know. Actually, I don't think so. There is too much I'd still like to do here."

Jon: "I suggest you go."

I was stunned! I felt like I had just been fired.

Jon: "We've had more tension than we can take."

It was like a ton of bricks had fallen on me. Actually, there was plenty of pressure to go around. By now the University was under Court orders to desegregate. Walter Danner, an Elder at First Church and Registrar of the University was on the front line of resistance. So was Bob Stephens, another Elder and our Representative in the State Legislature. He surely knew of Westminster's involvement with the Sibley Hearings in his district. Who knows what pressures were on Jon Westfall? It had been more than a year now since my blow up with Harmon Ramsey and the Session over Ted Alexander's exclusion from our church.

As I look back on it now I can see that Jon Westfall probably thought he was doing me a favor. But to me, then, it felt like I had lost everything.

At the next meeting of the Joint Committee on Campus Christian Life I tendered my resignation. Irv Breithaupt voted against the motion. That felt good.

## **G. A Talk at Kalamazoo College**

### **The Report of a Yankee Preacher**

I hadn't been at Cornell long before I received an invitation from Lloyd Averill, the Dean of the Chapel at Kalamazoo College' to speak at the Chapel. I had been the Campus Minister at Kalamazoo College and Western Michigan University before I went to Georgia. I chose as my topic "The Report of a Yankee Preacher" and talked about my sojourn in the South after leaving Kalamazoo in 1955. This was now the fall of 1960 or the Spring of 1961. The Civil

Rights Movement was just getting off the ground and I tried to give the students at K College some sense of the difficult yet hopeful changes that were coming about. But for all the hope, I must have been feeling the pain of those eventful years, which I also wanted to affirm. I tried to sum it up with the quotation with which this part of my memoir begins. Its from Tennessee Williams' play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in which Big Daddy, played by Burl Ives is dying of cancer. His son Brick wants to give him a shot of morphine to deaden the pain, which Big Daddy refuses, saying:

"When you feel the pain you know that you're alive!"

## H. The Sequel

### **The Disciplined Study Community and the Desegregation Crisis**

I write this now in January, 2005. I was fortunate to be able to get back in touch with Corky King after all these years. The Alumni Office of Davidson College helped me find him. He had stayed on at the University of Georgia until the fall of 1962 when the Joint Committee said they thought they needed someone with more "pastoral experience," after which Corky served as the Presbyterian Campus Minister at the University of West Virginia in Morgantown. This, too, was a stressful move. After several more years Corky decided he was too liberal to be a pastor in the Southern Presbyterian Church; moved to California where he earned a PhD in psychology and spent the rest of his professional career as a Psychotherapist. I found him in Mt. Angel, Oregon. We corresponded and Corky actually came to Hanover and spent two days with me in July, 2004.

Here's what happened in Georgia after June and I left in the summer of 1960:

Georgia's line of "massive resistance" to the Supreme Court's order to desegregate its schools was broken, as we have said, not in the lower schools, as in Arkansas and Alabama, but at the State University in Athens. Two well-qualified African-American students, Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes, had applied and the University's delaying tactics were running out of time. In January, 1961, to the accompaniment of banner headlines in newspapers across the country, Charlayne and Hamilton were actually admitted. In February Charlayne moved into the freshman girls' dormitory, Center Myers, across the street from Westminster House. For the first two or three nights there was rioting outside her room. Lillian Smith's question of four years earlier ("Where does a riot begin?") was even more relevant than she might have imagined. But the University and the City of Athens kept things under control and Charlayne and Hamilton began attending classes that week.

Again, the students associated with Westminster House went into action. But this time it was different. Corky and the students of the Westminster Fellowship had taken the lead in putting together an explicitly *ecumenical* group called "The Disciplined Study Community." The Community met every morning at Westminster House for breakfast, worship and study. This was not done, however, as a "tactic" for social action, but was done before the students even

knew that their university was going to be on the front line of a national struggle for racial justice. It was done because Corky and the students saw this as their vocation - their "calling" (a funny if not suspect term in today's political ambience) as Christian students.

I'm having to guess at what was in their minds (and their curriculum) but if the experience of the Christian Faith and Life Community at the University of Texas is any clue, there were important antecedents to this style of life in the Evangelical Academies in East and West Germany, and the Iona Community in Scotland after the Second World War --- which were among the first signs of spiritual renewal in Post War Europe.

So it was natural that Corky and the students would befriend Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes as these two African-Americans would have to brave the anxieties and sometimes the hostility of the University of Georgia students. Winston Stephens, a Westminster Fellowship and Disciplined Community member, accompanied Charlayne to each of her classes in those volatile days; Joan Zitzelman, also a member of Westminster Fellowship and the Disciplined Community, became Charlayne's best friend; and Corky King, his wife Mary Lisle and their young daughters, Mary Scott and Margaret, made it a point to have the more reclusive Hamilton Holmes in their home each week for dinner with the family and a much needed respite from the tensions of the campus. Hamilton's mother remarked later that she didn't think Hamilton would have made it without Corky's friendship. (Noted by Calvin Trillin in *An Education in Georgia*, Viking, 1964 p 26.) Hamilton also made Phi Beta Kappa! And Corky tells me that in later years Hamilton went on to become chair of the state body responsible for all of higher education in Georgia!

But, back to those first days of desegregation. Corky said that the Disciplined Community became the nucleus of a loosely knit network of some 300 students who helped to smooth the way for Charlayne and Hamilton -- by doing things like writing on blackboards:

"Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

And advocating in any ways they could on their behalf.

Elsewhere I have seen this group referred to as "Students for Constructive Action." Calvin Trillin, referring to the very first reaction of University of Georgia students to the appearance of Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes on the university campus, says:

The fraternities and sororities let it be known that anybody interested in his position on campus would be wise not to talk to the two Negroes.

However:

Another group of students, most of them associated with Westminster House, the campus Presbyterian organization, formed a group called Students for Constructive Action. They posted signs about the Golden Rule in the classroom buildings and arranged to take turns walking with Charlayne and Hamilton on their way to class. (p 60)

Which brings me to Trillin.

Today Calvin Trillin writes satirical verse for *The Nation* and has a regular column called "The Deadline Poet." In 1961 he covered the desegregation of the University of Georgia for *The New Yorker*. I read his reports at the time, but only learned from Corky, in making preparation for writing this memoir, that he had published a book on the subject. In the book Trillin frequently notes how often Westminster House and the Presbyterian student group came into play as the drama of desegregation unfolded. On his second visit to Athens, after Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes had been there for a year and a half, he went looking for Harold Black who had followed the initial break-through of African-Americans at the university. He noted, for example, that:

The First Presbyterian Church, on many Sundays during the school year, included in its distinguished and conservative congregation of university faculty and Athens business leaders Harold Back, a Negro Baptist from Atlanta.

Harold Black had originally gone to the First Presbyterian Church with some of his friends after a Sunday morning Bible class at Westminster House, where he was a regular participant in its Disciplined Study Community morning meetings, its Wednesday-night seminars, its Sunday-evening supper programs, and just about anything else that was going on. In the first months of the university's integration, Westminster House had been the headquarters for the Students for Constructive Action and the scene of a lot of discussion about race relations....

On my second visit, I found that the Westminster House seminars and study groups still provided about the only outlet for students who wanted to go deeper than fraternity-house conversations, and that Westminster was still the only place where a Negro was accept without question.

Intrigued by the existence of such a place, Trillin takes time to comment on Westminster House.

Westminster House is a big red-brick building not far up the street from Center Myers and the Continuing Education Center. The first time I went there looking for Harold Black - I failed to find him, either in any of the seminar rooms or in the bright, spacious living room - I had a talk with its minister, the Reverend Roland Perdue, in order to find out how a Presbyterian society had happened to become the center of dissent at Georgia.

(Perdue) said that Westminster had acquired its unusual role on campus mainly through his predecessors. The pastor who preceded Corky King was an outspoken liberal, and King was so active that in 1962, when he was encouraged to leave by the board that watches over Westminster House, he was considered to be the only casualty of Georgia's integration. (p 140)

I share these comments with you because I am proud to have been Corky Kings' "outspoken predecessor" and because I am enormously proud of the students with whom Corky and I had the privilege of sharing our lives.

Now let me share some of Calvin Trillin's comments on Harold Black's reception at the First Presbyterian Church which are both hopeful and sad.

It seemed obvious that if Corky King and his predecessor had not talked sympathetically about Negroes, none of the students frequenting Westminster House would have been likely to bring one along with him. But now, thanks to the two earlier pastors and Perdue, Westminster appeared to be the only place at Georgia that had gone from conscious acceptance to near normality - to the point where it seemed almost natural for Harold to go with the other students to the First Presbyterian Church one Sunday after Bible class.

It may have seemed almost natural to the students at Westminster House, that is. To the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church, the oldest church in Athens, it could not have seemed natural at all. At Perdue's suggestion I went to see the minister there, the Reverend William Adams, to find out how his congregation had reacted.

Unlike the action of the Session four years earlier when it refused to let Ted Alexander speak in its fellowship hall, the church now had a policy of open acceptance - all visitors would be seated "as space allowed." Knowing how active Harold Black was at Westminster House the Session specifically took the action to accommodate him if he should happen to come to church. Adams was justifiably proud and told Trillin:

We haven't checked on this, but I think we're the first church in the deep South to have a Negro worship with whites on a continuing basis. (p 142)

That was the hopeful part. The sad part was that things did not work out as well as Adams had hoped. Said Trillin:

It turned out that the Reverend William Adams ... had spoken too soon when he told me that Harold Black's integration into First Church might serve as a demonstration to others in the South that things can be worked out.

A few weeks after our conversation, Adams met with Harold Black and, explaining that First Church would continue to seat all visitors, outlined to Harold the possibility of violence and the damage to the church that might be caused by his continued attendance. Harold decided not to return." (p 178)

# **I. Reflections on the Anomalies of Life**

## **1. Christian Ethics Against the Enormities of Human History**

Now let us take a few steps back from what we have learned first hand from the legacy of African and African-American slavery in Georgia and reflect, as Christians, on what I shall call "the enormity" of slavery in America - and in the Western World. How should we translate the pre-critical piety, and the naive morality, of our childhood, into a mature Christian social ethic?

Let's begin with the sheer scale of this catastrophe. My Webster's Collegiate defines "enormity" as "exceeding wickedness" and "also, an outrageous act or offense." It also means "enormous," but not just something big. It means an enormous calamity. I can't think of a better word to describe the institution of Negro slavery. When I spoke of the legacy of slavery in the Deep South (p 88) and said it was a legacy of "what was probably the most virulent form of slavery in the history of humankind" I was saying that against the common knowledge that Negro slavery was:

1. Massive (There were literally millions of Africans shipped to, and bred and raised within, the Americas.)
2. Racially based (It was the white population of Europe and the Americas buying, selling and working - sometime working to death - black Africans.)
3. Economically motivated (Its development correlated with the burgeoning economies of Europe as its populations developed tastes for the plantation crops of the Americas - especially sugar and coffee from Brazil and the comfort of cotton fibers from North America.)
4. Cruel (To be sure there were acts of kindness and love between masters and slaves, but let us be honest, there were also acts of incredible brutality, which sometimes included beatings and lynching, the mutilation of black men, the sexual abuse of black women and the breaking up of families and the selling off of their members.)

Nothing as massive, racially based and economically motivated as this happened before in world history. There has always been slavery; the exploitation of the weak by the strong and the enslavement of prisoners of war; but nothing on the scale of what happened as Europe colonized the world and developed its slave-based plantation systems in the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. And nothing was quite as insidious as the role of color (whites enslaving blacks) as it played out in the development of the ideology of white supremacy.

The Holocaust in Europe, which killed six million Jews in four years, was an unspeakable act of wickedness. But Negro slavery was a Holocaust which lasted four *hundred* years.

The reader may quibble with my overly-neat formulations, but I think no one would quibble with my description of the institution of Negro slavery in the Americas - including the cotton-growing Deep South - as "an enormity of human history" - or at least as part of an enormity that was international in scope.

But is it just history? Is it all over and past?

I think it is not over. For me the memories of living with the legacy of slavery/reconstruction and legal segregation in Georgia in the 1950s are too vivid and still seem much too close. I think you cannot treat a people as blacks were treated for 400 years in North America and Brazil and not expect that their mistreatment (the biblical prophets called it "oppression" and we should not be afraid to use that word) re-enforced from generation to generation will not have enormous consequences.

And again, let's be clear. The damage to white people - to the oppressing caste and class -- is also great. It's the damage of learning to live with a lie.

We have a lot of "unpacking" to do and I will not attempt to do it now. Except to say that I fear for my country as I see how caught up we are with illusions about ourselves and the rest of the world.

## **2. A Dialogue We Have Not Had**

For now, let me say something to my fellow Presbyterians, and especially to my Peers at McCormick Theological Seminary, to my friends in the former Presbyterian Church U.S., (the former Southern Presbyterian Church) and to my friends in the Ohio Valley Presbytery.

It has to do with the price we paid for reunion. It was the price both members of the Presbyterian Church U. S. (which was essentially a regional church) and the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (which was essentially a national church) paid by not having a serious dialogue about what each side was bringing into the reunited church with respect to the history of slavery.

I am not right now raising the question of whether there is more or less racial prejudice in one church or the other. I leave it to our African-American friends to tell us that. The question *I am* raising is what the effect has been on the Southern Church (which was also *my* church for several years of my life) -- of having been born in the defense of slavery at the time of the Civil War (and probably for 100 years before that) -- and then of having been solidly pro-slavery through the War -- "white supremacist" through Reconstruction and Redemption -- and pro-segregationist right up until the time I knew the Southern Church in the 1950s. It's not that the former Southern Church, or at least its pro-reunion leadership, hasn't put the vestiges of racism behind it, but that the Southern Church's history of defending, and indeed practicing, slavery and segregation prevented it from developing anything like a prophetic social ethic or a progressive understanding of mission -- as a denomination.

I am not saying that individuals within the Southern Church may not have developed a prophetic social ethic or a progressive view of mission but that the *institution* could not do so

and still be as thoroughly integrated with the "folkways and mores" of Southern culture as the Southern Church appears to have been.

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Let me interrupt the argument for a moment to say that I have not been successful in raising this point with friends from the former Southern Presbyterian Church. With each attempt the response has been "there is just as much prejudice in the Northern Church as there is in the South" – which may be true but which does not engage the issue. The issue is that churches, and especially the denominational structures which support them, are institutions and that these institutions are profoundly affected by the cultures in which they are embedded. Which is what institutions are for. They are to give order and predictability to our public and private lives. So, for starters, they must be in tune with their constituents and be what they want them to be. To this extent they must be "conservative" and hard to change.

It goes without saying, then, that a society whose economy is based on the unrequited labor of black slaves, and whose social system is undergirded by a culture which says that such a system is ordained by God and in the best interests of both masters and slaves, cannot embrace a religion which says:

Let justice roll down as waters  
And righteousness as a mighty stream

without sowing the seeds of its own destruction!

So, there are profound *structural* issues to be faced and it is about time we faced them.

And there are poignant personal and pastoral issues to be faced. I ask my readers to look again at Calvin Trillin's account of what happened to Harold Black when he started attending services at the First Presbyterian Church of Athens, Georgia, with his friends from the Westminster Student Fellowship. I cannot read these words without feelings of personal anguish which are literally too deep for words. So, please, as a personal favor to me, read again the account on pages 93 and 94. Thank you.

And, now, back to the original text.

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At the same time that the Southern Church was living with its "peculiar institution" of slavery and segregation, the Northern Church was living with the rapid industrialization of much of the rest of the country, with immigration and the labor movement and the challenge of the Social Gospel. Not that the Northern Church was all that progressive, but it was stirring and dealing with its own internal dialogue. There was no "solid North" as there can be said to have been a "solid South" - all be it a solid *white* South.

What really set us apart, however, were the stirrings of the 1960s with the explosion of the cities, the advent of the Civil Rights and the Peace Movements and the response which the



United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. made to these events through its Board of National Missions and its seminaries, especially with the development of the Confession of 1967. I can hardly stress enough the significance of C-67. Here for the first time in the history of Christendom a mission statement was lifted to the status of a creed. And, not only that, it was a justice-oriented mission statement dealing with world poverty, racial justice, peacemaking and gender equality.

My impression is that we never did deal with the fundamental differences between our two denominations; that the "progressives" in the national church (I was one of them) were so committed to "the ecumenical movement" and so eager for reunion that we "sold the store" (without realizing what we were doing) and our counterparts were only too happy to pick up the pieces.

But the dialogue is still needed. Without it we continue in the lie, and stumble on with a coalition of conservative/fundamentalist/right-wing elements whip lashing the church and virtually keeping us silent as the country moves dangerously on its rightward course.

### **3. A Tribute to the Students at the University of Georgia**

I am tempted to end these chapters on a note of pessimism. But how can I be pessimistic remembering the exciting role those evangelical students played at the University of Georgia as they re-wrote their theology, took their courage in their hands and helped to guide their University through one of the great moments in Georgia's history.

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## **Addendum: The Role of the International Students**

As I was writing *The Georgia Years* a letter arrived from out of the blue. It was from Frank Chou who had been an international student at the University of Georgia during the years June and I were in Athens and who was retiring, with honors, after 39 years of teaching at Augusta State University in south Georgia. He said he was writing to say thank you for all that the campus ministry had done for him during his student days. This essay is to say thank you to Frank, and all the other international students who so much enriched our lives and who contributed so much to getting us ready for the crisis through which we were living.

I'll say more about Frank in a moment but first I want to say something more general about the contribution the international students, and their sponsors at the University, made in preparing the Westminster Student Fellowship for the desegregation crisis to which it responded in such an exemplary way. It was hearing from Frank Chou that brought it all back.

As I have indicated, one of the challenges in working with the students at the University of Georgia in the 1950s was with their insularity. The great majority of them had grown up in Georgia and were thoroughly acculturated in the "folkways and mores" of the deep South. That was one of the reasons for our annual trips to the theaters and art museums of New York. The Georgia students needed to be opened up to the wider world. The international students, on the other hand, had other problems, not the least of which was learning how to live in the segregated South. They were hungry for relationships of depth with students who could help them understand where they were!

I remember, for example, making calls one evening in Reed Hall, the Freshmen men's dormitory, and coming across two international students who were watching the landing of the 101st Airborne Division in Little Rock, Arkansas, on television. President Eisenhower had just sent the troops in to enforce the desegregation of the public schools. The two international students who were watching this in Reed Hall were scared. What was going on in this country? We had a good visit and I invited them to come to our Westminster Fellowship meeting the next Sunday when we would be talking more about what was going on. Actually, we needed their inputs as much as they needed ours.

A somewhat more humorous example of the puzzlement of the international students with the culture of the south -- or the rest of the country for that matter -- was that of a Norwegian student who was invited to speak to a group of young Girl Scouts called "Brownies" and who thought she had been invited to speak to a group of young African Americans! Imagine her surprise and the sudden need to revise her talk.

In any case, the visit with the students in Reed Hall was the beginning of a relationship with an increasing number of international students, including the international student office on campus and with Mimi Thurman, the Assistant University Chaplain, and with the official international student organization, the Cosmopolitan Club. On at least two occasions the Westminster Fellowship organized weekend retreats or conferences, jointly sponsored by the Cosmopolitan

Club. One was at Rock Eagle with Margaret Flory and Bruce Rigdon; and one, additionally sponsored by the Wesley Foundation, was with Bola Ige, President of the Nigerian Student Christian Movement (mentioned earlier in this section.)

From these interactions our students learned that they could make friends with people who didn't sound like them. Some of these strangers (Frank Chou of Formosa – Bill Angemeier of West Germany – Roy Hinshalwood of Scotland -- and Daroush [“Dary”] Hakim of Iran) actually became members of Westminster Fellowship and helped lead the way through the desegregation crisis.

I don't want to detract one bit from the outstanding qualities of each of these “strangers” (Bill Angemeier, for example, was hand-picked by the University to be its first candidate for the PhD degree in Psychology and was a high profile leader in Students for Constructive Action.) But this essay is a salute to Frank Chou. Frank was the Resident Caretaker of Westminster House. He had a room in the old house on South Lumpkin Street and an apartment in the new Center – and was the one who locked up at night and made the coffee in the morning! But Frank was much more than our Resident Caretaker and Host. He was a cherished teacher and friend. And for the purpose of this memoir, which has to do primarily with my dawning awareness of the world we lived in, and the development of a relevant Christian social ethic, Frank helped me think more critically about what today we are calling “Christian Presence in a Post Colonial World.”

Frank came to us as a refugee from Chiang Kai-shek's invasion of Formosa, which, for Chiang, was Taiwan, a province of the China, but which, for Frank, was his homeland. For Chiang the native Formosans were “as nothing” and he ruled the island as an oriental despot. I don't know the whole story, but I learned as we went along that Frank had “escaped” from Chiang's tyranny and felt that if he ever went back he would be in danger of arrest and imprisonment,

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In checking this out with Frank (in January, 2006) I was sent the following paragraphs:

For almost 40 years (1949-1987) Chiang Kai-shek imposed martial law on the population of Formosa. The country became a police state. There was no freedom of speech or press. Anyone who criticized the government was quickly arrested and jailed by the secret police, often without a trial. This oppression was not known by many Westerners.

But that is why I had to leave the island in 1955. Even after completing my education in America it was still too dangerous for me to return to Taiwan. Thirteen years later, however (in 1968), with the help of a United States Congressman, I became a U.S. citizen and was able to go back for a visit with an American passport.

But we North American Christians were oblivious to all of this. For us Chiang and Madame Chiang Kai-shek were the great Christian heroes who stood up to the Communists and were the beneficiaries and patrons of the Christian Mission. Accordingly, we saw Frank Chou as both a product of the Christian Mission in China (his part of China) and as a future Christian teacher and leader in the Chinese Christian Church. We thought we were quite progressive in raising scholarship funds for Frank and for preparing a native Chinese to become a “missionary teacher” among his own people.

But Frank knew better and tried to help us understand. I have to admit that I was a slow learner. I thought it was a lack of commitment that allowed foreign nationals to be tempted by “the good life” in America rather than accept the challenge of a more rigorous life back on the “mission field.” But Frank was patient. I think now that perhaps the hardest thing for him was the loneliness he had to endure in living with our lack of understanding – indeed with our colonial mentality and our missionary imperialism.

I therefore salute you, Frank Chou, for your strength of character, your kindness and your patience as you lived among us and helped us to see the world, and all we were fighting for, in a new light.

Your lessons went beyond race relations. Or, perhaps we should say, they put race relations in a larger context. You patiently and winsomely took us to the basics of living together in the modern world. I remember the story you used to tell of a man who saw a wild beast on the distant horizon. As the beast drew closer he could see that it was a man. When it got closer still he could see that it was his brother!

Thank you, Frank, for a noble and courageous life.