

**White Mississippi Baptist Ministers Who Helped Crack the Walls of
The “Closed Society”: 1955 – 1968¹**

Charles M. Dollar
Hoschton, Georgia

In *These Few Also Paid A Price: Southern Whites Who Fought for Civil Rights* (2001) G. McLeod Bryan,² included fourteen clergymen, only three of whom were from Mississippi: Will D. Campbell, Director of Religious Affairs of the University of Mississippi, Ed King, Chaplain at Tougaloo College near Jackson, Mississippi, and Duncan Gray, Rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Oxford. Almost four decades earlier, Samuel Southard, Associate Professor of Psychology of Religion at Southern Baptist Seminary, had addressed the broader issue of Southern Baptist clergyman in Mississippi in an article in the *Christian Century* entitled "Are Southern Churches Silent?"³ Southard asserted that in the main Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches in the South were largely silent on race issues. With specific regard to Southern Baptist Churches he cited Baptist ministers in Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana who had taken strong public stands on racial relations. So far as Mississippi Baptists are concerned he mentioned only two instances. One was a reference to an editorial in the *Baptist Record* condemning rioting and violence in Oxford with the enrollment of James Meredith at the University of Mississippi.⁴ The second instance was a brief reference to four Oxford pastors, including the pastor of First Baptist Church, who condemned the riot and called for repentance "for having assented passively to conditions that spawned lawlessness."⁵

Southard suggested one significant reason⁶ for the silence of Southern Baptist ministers about race relations was that they preferred to work quietly to promote Christian values and activities of layman, "rather than to have attention called to some dramatic pronouncement by a clergyman."⁷ In addition, many Baptist ministers in Mississippi believed segregation and civil rights lay outside the moral and spiritual domain of the church and engagement in civil rights would detract from the church's primary mission of saving souls.⁸ Of course, there were Baptist ministers who supported segregation and they were not silent as Carolyn Rene Dupont has noted in her book, *Mississippi Praying*.

Nonetheless, not all white Mississippi Baptist ministers were silent. There were at least nine⁹ who publicly challenged the Mississippi "way of life" with regard to racial matters: Stanley J. Smith, Shady Grove Baptist Church (1955), Hazelhurst; Clyde Gordon, First Baptist Church, Poplarville, Mississippi (1955); Will D. Campbell, Director of Religious Affairs at the University of Mississippi (1956); Richard Butler Smith, Fairview Baptist Church, Indianola (1962); Bradley Pope, First Baptist Church, Shelby, Mississippi (1962); Chester Molpus, First Baptist Church, Belzoni, Mississippi (1964); John Daley, First Baptist Church, Marks, Mississippi (1965); William P. Davis, Mississippi Baptist Convention, Jackson, Mississippi (1965); and Harold O'Chester, Poplar Springs Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, Mississippi (1968). Of these nine, only William P. Davis and Bradley Pope remained in Mississippi until their retirement.¹⁰

This paper presents vignettes of these Mississippi Baptist ministers. The vignettes are organized into three categories: those whose sermons and actions precipitated no opposition; those whose sermons and actions resulted in harassment but no major opposition; and those whose sermons and actions resulted in their leaving the ministry and/or the state.

Ministers Who Encountered Little or No Opposition and Harassment

Clyde Gordon (1913 - 2000)

Clyde Gordon, a native Mississippian, was a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and pastor of several small churches in Pearl River County and pastor of New Palestine Baptist Church (1947 – 1952), the First Baptist Church of Poplarville (1952 – 1957), and the First Baptist Church of Raymond (1958 – 1962). He was pastor of several churches in Kentucky and also was a full-time evangelist (1968 – 1973).¹¹ Gordon was a powerful preacher and effective pastor and loved the members of every congregation he pastored and they in turn loved and respected him. In all the churches he served as pastor he had the reputation of “the preacher who helps people.”¹²

In 1955 he delivered a sermon to his congregation in which he presented his view of the race issue.¹³ He explained he had decided to speak on this topic because “It is a major issue and the church should face four square and sanely any issue that is of such vital importance to the spirit and attitude of its people. . . . as members of this church, you have a right to know what I, your pastor, think on this subject.”

With this as a backdrop, he proceeded to elaborate his view on race. The Negro, he said, is a member of the human race and therefore Adam and Eve are his first parents just as they are parents of mankind. God did not place a curse on Ham that made him black; he was black because climatic conditions affected two chemicals God placed in all human beings. Consequently, God is color blind.

Turning to more immediate issues, he declared the crimes of Negroes should be punished by law not mob violence. “If a Negro man is to be put to death for rape, then the white man must be given the same penalty for the same crime.” This part of his message must have fallen on deaf ears of the broader Poplarville community because in the aftermath of the Lynching of Mack Parker in April 1959 (the last lynching in Mississippi) no white person was ever indicted, much less prosecuted. Another immediate issue he addressed was integration. Gordon did not believe immediate integration would serve the best interests of whites or blacks because it would bankrupt the state and forced integration would precipitate violence and bloodshed. Instead, he advocated senior colleges and universities

admitting eligible Negroes to do graduate work. In succeeding years other Negroes could be admitted to senior, junior, sophomore, and freshmen classes.

He also believed much of the trouble in Mississippi at the time was driven by northern politicians who wanted "to put the South in a bad light so they can elect the next president." He objected strongly to those who wanted the Church to be the "quarterback" on the political football team, declaring that he would not have anything to do with it.

He concluded the sermon with an appeal for members "don't have anything to do with bloodshed. . . . Don't listen to radicals. Don't listen to people who run off at the mouth and talk about colored people as though there were worse than dogs."

Years later, Rev. Gordon noted that the congregation appreciated his stance. Several members were so impressed they volunteered to pay the cost of printing copies of the sermon to ensure it had a wide readership.¹⁴ Paul Gordon said his father preached the sermon one time but when people asked his views on race he would give them a copy of the sermon.¹⁵

In 1957 he became pastor of the First Baptist Church of Raymond, Mississippi (near Jackson and a Citizens Council stronghold). Apparently he did not address any civil rights issues in a sermon during the six years he was pastor there. Clay Lee was pastor of the First United Methodist Church and the two became good friends. On one occasion Louis Hollis, superintendent of the church school at the First Baptist Church in Jackson and a member of the Citizens Council moderated a television show on Sunday afternoon that featured a picture in the Methodist School (according to Lee, "it had been there for years and years") of Jesus with little children, one of whom was a black child. When the picture was shown Hollis asked, "Do you know what is going to happen to our society if you let that black child stay there?" Lee was out of town when this happened but Gordon wrote a strong letter to the Jackson *Clarion-Ledger* "abhorring this sort of thing on television." He added, "And my good friend Clay Lee agrees with me."¹⁶

In January 1963 Gordon became pastor of the First Baptist Church in Scottsville, Kentucky and served in this capacity until 1966 when he entered full-time evangelism. In 1973 he returned to the pastorate and served several Baptist churches in the Bowling Green, Kentucky area. He retired in 1992 and died on January 10, 2000.

John Daley (1927 – 2010)

John Daley was born on November 23, 1927 in Lexington, Kentucky where he grew up and was a member of Ashland Avenue Baptist Church. He graduated from the University of Kentucky in 1948 with a degree in Civil Engineering and worked for a year as a civil engineer until he felt a call to preach. In 1950 he enrolled in Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and graduated in 1954 with a B.D. degree. The first church he pastored was Sidon Baptist Church in the small town of Sidon, Mississippi (1954 – 1957). In 1957 he became pastor of the First Baptist Church in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky and served there until 1960 when he became pastor of the First Baptist Church in Marks, Mississippi.

On June 6, 1965 Rev. Daley delivered a sermon to his congregation entitled “The Christian and the Racial Crisis.”¹⁷ In his introductory remarks he explained he had given considerable study and thought to Christians and race relations in Mississippi and believed it was time to engage in public discussion of this issue. Noting that nothing was to be gained through silence, he said it was his responsibility as their pastor and spiritual leader to provide leadership. At the same time he was concerned that:

If I spoke on the race issue from the pulpit I would be misunderstood; no one would hear me; I would lose any future effectiveness of my ministry; and may even be asked to leave the church, the community, the state. I no longer feel this to be true. . . .I know you are convinced of the sincerity and honesty of my ministry and out of your love for me know that this messages [sic] come out of my heart of love for you.

The first broad topic he addressed was “who the Negro is and is not.” The Negro is a man, not an animal, who is created in the image of God, and like all men he has a dignity that must be acknowledged. The Bible does not support white supremacy, and he advised each one to write an essay “If I were a Negro” to get a sense of what life was like for Negroes. To the extent that “the Negro is ignorant, immoral, and dirty this is as much of the fault of whites who have failed to help him advance.”

Turning attention to immediate issues and concerns, he declared it was folly to resist the Federal Government and Christians had the responsibility to obey and respect “the law of the land except where it would require disobedience to the revealed will of God.” Alluding to rumors that demonstrators would come to Marks, he said “We should not meet demonstrators with anger and brutality.” Christians in Marks have the responsibility to assume leadership in the community in order to maintain peace and avoid turmoil.

He concluded his sermon with the hope it would help open doors of communication for future discussion as to “find our way” in what is not a one-day crisis but rather “is something that will be with us for many years.”

This remarkable sermon caused no issues for Rev. Daley and the congregation of the First Baptist Church or even in the town.¹⁸ In 1968 he became pastor of Brook Hollow Baptist Church in Nashville, TN. He remained in this position until he joined the Southern Baptist Press in 1984. He retired in 1995.

MINISTERS WHO EXPERIENCED MODERATE OPPOSITION AND HARASSMENT

William David Campbell (1924 – 2013)

William David Campbell grew up on a farm community in Amite County, Mississippi called East Fork. The East Fork Baptist Church played a major role in the life of the family. After nearly dying at the age of five from a severe case of pneumonia, his parents promised God that he could have their son if he pulled through the pneumonia. From that point on Campbell grew up with the expectation that he would be a preacher.¹⁹ He was ordained as a Baptist preacher in 1941 and after completing two years at Louisiana College he enlisted in the army²⁰ where he spent more than two years in the South Pacific as a medical technician.

Like many white Mississippians in the 1920s and 1930s, he grew up in an environment in which racial bigotry and white supremacy were as natural as breathing. As he put it later in his memoir:

Race was not an issue when we were growing up. The prevailing system of racial relationships was never discussed. It was, I suppose, considered a permanent arrangement. There were in reality two parallel worlds, social, cultural, and political, existing in one geographical location. There were schools for white children and schools for black children. It never occurred to anyone, except an occasional black person who kept it to himself, that it would ever be any other way.²¹

His war time experiences challenged him to begin thinking about race relations.²²

After his discharge from the army he returned to Louisiana and married Brenda Fisher, who had just graduated from Louisiana College. Some of his army buddies told him Wake Forest University had a strong academic program so he decided to complete his college requirements there. In 1952 he graduated from Yale Divinity School with a B.D. degree.

Shortly thereafter, he became pastor of a Baptist church in Taylor, Louisiana, a conservative small timber town where it was not long before his social activism tendencies emerged. He and his wife

paid their maid the minimum wage and neighbors told him “this would ruin the help.” He learned about a paper mill strike in Elizabeth, Louisiana (some 200 miles from Taylor) and went there, joined the picket line and spoke in behalf of the strikers. One church member told him that all the ministers in the church had a ‘pet subject’ that they dwelt on, but she had noticed that Campbell had two: ‘McCarthyism and the Negro question.’ The conversation left the impression on Campbell that the community was at best amused and at worst, unaffected by his actions”²³ because they did not view him as a serious threat to the established order in Taylor.

By the summer of 1954 he realized he could not survive as pastor in Taylor or any other small town so he accepted a position as Director of Religious Affairs at the University of Mississippi. Over the next two years there were two major incidents that culminated in his resignation.

The first incident occurred when he and Dr. G. McLeod Bryan, a Baptist minister and Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University who was at Ole Miss to deliver a lecture, decided to visit Providence Farm, a cooperative established in the 1930s to promote the health and well-being of poor local blacks.²⁴ It now was under “siege” by the Citizens Council because of allegations of integration. They decided to visit the farm one Sunday afternoon. Someone copied the license tag of his car and reported it state officials. The next day a state legislator demanded that university officials explain why an Ole Miss employee was at the farm. Campbell explained that he was exercising his rights as an American citizen to travel and visit Christian missionaries without fear of intimidation and that he planned to go there the next Sunday. He was discouraged from making further visits because it could lead to the state legislature closing the university.²⁵

Campbell deliberately planned the next incident through his role as an advisor to a University committee that selected speakers for an annual Religious Affairs Week.²⁶ Ostensibly, the committee selected the speakers but in fact it endorsed speakers the Director nominated so he selected speakers who supported integration and thereby would turn Religious Emphasis Week into a symposium on race in Mississippi.

His plan went off the rails after one of the invited speakers, Alvin Kershaw, a jazz-playing Episcopal priest, won \$32,000 on the television show, “The \$64,000 Question,” and announced he would contribute his winnings to charities, one of which was the NAAC Legal Defense Fund. This infuriated the Governor, state legislators, and Citizens Council who demanded that the University withdraw the invitation. University officials pressed Campbell to withdraw the invitation but he disingenuously said that he could not do this because the committee had extended the invitation. In the

meantime, he contacted the other speakers and persuaded them to withdraw if the University withdrew Kershaw's invitation. In early February Chancellor J. D. Williams decided to withdraw the invitation to Kershaw.²⁷ Subsequently the remaining speakers declined to participate.

To mitigate the embarrassment, Chancellor Williams decided not to cancel Religious Emphasis Week but to invite local ministers to speak. Campbell had anticipated this possibility and had worked to ensure that they would not participate. To salvage what was left of Religious Emphasis Week, Campbell said that he would be in Fulton Chapel at 10:00 AM each day of for a period of mediation and invited others to join him. More than 200 students and faculty joined him

Believing his contract would not be renewed,²⁸ Campbell accepted an offer from the National Council of Churches in May 1956 to work as a "trouble shooter" for civil rights activists in the South and relocated to Nashville, Tennessee. After 1963 he became affiliated with the Committee of Southern Churchmen and over the years his work brought him frequently to Mississippi. The publication of his autobiography, *Brother to a Dragonfly*, in 1977 launched his career as a writer. Over the next 25 years he published 14 major books. He died in 2013.

William Penn Davis (1903 - 1989)

Rev. William P. Davis, a native born Mississippian and graduate of Mississippi College (1929) and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1939), had been a public school superintendent,²⁹ an army chaplain during World War II, and pastor of several churches in Mississippi, when he was named Secretary of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Department of Work with National Baptists (1957) and later President of the Mississippi Baptist Seminary (1959). He had a close connection, therefore, with the work of black Baptist churches and preachers in Mississippi. His most widely publicized contribution was his leadership of the inter-racial interdenominational of the Committee of Concern that in 1963 – 1964 raised thousands of dollars to help rebuild forty-six black churches Ku Klux Klan night riders had burned.

Davis grew up in a devout Baptist family where he learned all human beings are of value in the sight of God. In later years he recounted the experience when he was nine years old and a Negro man came to his Daddy's farm to pick up some logs. It was a cold, windy day about noon when the man and his son arrived. His Daddy invited the man and his son to join them for "dinner" (the noon meal). When it was time for the "blessing" he asked the man return thanks. After the man and his son left his Daddy told young Davis:

“It doesn’t make any difference what the color of a man’s skin is. The thing that matters is his heart. He’s a human being and he is to be treated as such. Don’t ever discriminate against a person because of the color of his skin.”³⁰

Davis also recounted another incident that had a profound influence on him. After he graduated from Mississippi College he was pastor of a small Baptist church in Hinds County and also superintendent of the local public schools. On one occasion he was squirrel hunting and heard a gunshot. When he investigated he found a white man with a gun who told him “I just shot a Nigger. . . . He sassed me and threatened me, and no Nigger is going to sass me and get by with it, so I just shot him.” Davis noted the black man was shot in the back. Davis visited the family of the dead man and after seeing their grief he resolved “I was going to try and do something to help the race situation in Mississippi.”³¹ He adopted the mantra, “I am my brothers’ brother . . . my brother is everyman.”³² During his years as a pastor and army chaplain he tried to apply this principle in his personal relations with blacks.

After his discharge from the army he became associate executive secretary of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. One day, Dr. Guy Bellamy director of work with National Baptists at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, was visiting the offices of the Mississippi Baptist Convention and asked for directions to the Mississippi Baptist Seminary. Davis volunteered to drive Bellamy to the office of the Mississippi Baptist Seminary, which was supported in part by the Mississippi Baptist Convention. As Davis left the seminary, Dr. Lang, president of the seminary, invited him to join the board of trustees of the Seminary. In 1957 he succeeded Dr. William Keele, as Secretary of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Department of Work with National Baptists in Mississippi, and two years later also became president of Mississippi Baptist Seminary. His work with both organizations gave him a venue for promoting harmonious race relations.

He faced a major crisis in 1961 when Dr. S. Leon Whitney, vice president of the Mississippi Baptist Seminary and pastor of Farish Street Baptist Church in Jackson, was bitten by a police dog when he attended the trial of students who had been arrested during a library sit-in demonstration in Jackson. He had attended the trial because several of the students were members of his church. After the Jackson *Clarion Ledger* published a story about his arrest with no explanation for his presence, there was a storm of criticism from whites who demanded his dismissal. Rev. Whitney immediately offered to resign but Davis asked him to delay resigning. He asked Douglas Hudgins, pastor of the First Baptist Church and no friend of civil rights and demonstrators, to convene a meeting with leaders of the church

so he could explain to them what was going on. Davis met with the leaders and after some discussion they accepted his explanation and demands for Dr. Whitney's resignation faded away.³³

Davis' work required him to travel regularly to each of Mississippi's 82 counties to visit with black preachers and community leaders. In the early 1960s a white man visiting in black communities aroused the suspicions of hostile whites and law enforcement officials. In one instance, a band of white men wearing masks forced his car off a road, pulled him from the car, beat him up, and urinated in his face "to teach a dam nigger-lover some sense."³⁴ Subsequently, Davis wrote to each county sheriff explaining his work with the Mississippi Baptist Seminary "was primarily to train Christian leaders in Negro churches." One sheriff contacted the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission requesting a clearance from the commission. The Sovereignty Commission endorsed Davis' work,³⁵ which enabled him to continue his mission of training black Baptist ministers in counties where white hostility to blacks was blatant.

In 1954 Mrs. Sophia Sutton Begley, who grew up in Mississippi and later was a public school teacher and librarian in Kentucky, donated 100 acres of land in Jefferson Davis County to Mississippi Baptist Seminary to be developed as a training facility for black young people. The deed of gift of the land to Mississippi Baptist Seminary included a provision that the Sophia Sutton Mission Assembly "would supplement the entire program of interracial Baptist work throughout the state."³⁶

After Davis became president of the seminary he ensured the assembly facility never operated as a segregated institution.³⁷ In addition, he led an effort to revamp the assembly into an interracial nonprofit religious corporation with its own board of trustees who would manage it in compliance with the seminary's charter. This was a remarkable development because it made the assembly independent of both the Mississippi Baptist Convention and Mississippi Baptist Seminary. As a nonprofit religious corporation it was able to solicit funds to build new facilities and initiate a major building program through a recreation loan from the Farmer's Loan Administration. In addition, the assembly received funding from the Office of Economic Opportunity to run a Head Start program.

As noted earlier, Davis' most publicized work in the state for interracial cooperation came in 1963 - 1964 when Ku Klux Klan nightriders burned 42 black churches in the state. The sight of the burned ruins of the churches staggered him. He could not understand how any individual could be so depraved as to burn down Houses of Worship. He recounted his experience when he visited the smoldering ashes of black church near Jackson and saw the smoke of' burning Bible, hymn books, the toys of little children, pulpit and communion furniture, all evidences of the sacrifice of poor people,

whose desire had been to worship God.³⁸ He opened his Bible to Isaiah 61: 1-4 and read the words “The Lord hath anointed me . . . to bind up the broken hearted . . . and to give unto them beauty for ashes.” He vowed:

I must, and I will, challenge the religious community of my state, my nation, and the world, to help rebuild these burned churches, and to bind up the brokenhearted by building bridges for better human relations.³⁹

He took his concerns to Chester L. Quarles, Executive Secretary of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, and Joe T. Odle, Editor of *The Baptist Record*, the Baptist weekly newspaper. They gave full support to his proposal to form a committee to organize fund raising and distribution of funds to the churches. Odle wrote an editorial “Smoke Over Mississippi” deploring the burning of the churches and other acts of violence and declaring Mississippi’s problems “will be solved by Christian people acting in the spirit of Christ, and under the principles of God.”⁴⁰

For several years Davis had been a member of an informal group of ministers that met periodically, usually at Farish Street Baptist Church, for fellowship and to exchange views about race relations in Mississippi. Davis met with this group and obtained their enthusiastic support to establish the Committee of Concern, an interracial and interdenominational (Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish) group, to raise funds to rebuild the churches⁴¹ For the first time the group was publicly aligned with an initiative to address race relations. Over the next 24 months or so the Committee of Concern was enormously successful in collecting more than \$242,000 in cash and donated labor and building supplies and rebuilding 42 black churches.⁴²

On February 20, 1965 he was a witness at a meeting of the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights in Jackson and described the work of the committee and how it was funded. He closed his remarks with this powerful declaration:

Now, I would like to say as a final word, let it be clearly added that anarchy, bigotry, and demagoguery, and violence shall not be allowed to prevail in Mississippi . . . A power structure designed to deprive citizens of their voting rights and to discriminate in the administration of justice because of racial creed is tyranny. It is not treason to challenge tyranny. It is the highest act of patriotism and obedience to the eternal command of Almighty God. Let My People Go.⁴³⁴⁴

Owen Renick, author of “The Great Adventure,” who spent many hours with Davis, noted that on occasion he could get carried away with his rhetoric.⁴⁵ Two months earlier Davis used similar language at the dedication of the Christian Negro Baptist Church on January 24, 1964,⁴⁶ which suggests his

testimony was not a matter of getting carried away with rhetoric but rather it sprang from a long felt deep conviction about racial injustice toward blacks in Mississippi.

William Penn Davis was a very complex individual who pushed for racial justice and equality within the Mississippi Baptist Convention, which both insulated him from the pressures of local churches to adhere to a racial perspective and constrained what he could do in promoting justice and equality.⁴⁷ After Davis became Secretary of Work with National Baptists, Chester Quarles, Executive Secretary of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, cautioned him, "The people are not ready, don't push us." Doubtless, Davis understood the limits on initiatives he could undertake. For example, in March 1966 Ft. Lawrence Watts (with the endorsement of Ft. Bernard Law) proposed to Davis that the Committee of Concern expand its program to include a program for training blacks as carpenters, masons, electricians, and plumbers to build affordable housing for blacks. Initially, the program would be funded by contributions and the revenue from sales of the houses would be placed in a construction building fund.⁴⁸ This went far beyond what Davis apparently believed the Mississippi Baptist Convention would support so the proposal never received serious consideration. At the same time Davis was actively leading the Sophie Sutton Assembly in becoming one of the most integrated religious organizations in the state. As noted previously, this was largely the result of the assembly's charter as a nonprofit religious organization with its own board of trustees and was not under the control of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

When Davis was ten years old his father took him to Shiloh Civil War battlefield where his two grandfathers had fought on opposite sides. He told young Davis, "When you're sixty years old, the 'struggle fought here will be in progress again; and you'll be in one phase of it. I hope you'll be in the right."⁴⁹ Davis spent his adult life demonstrating "he was in the right."

Davis retired from the Mississippi Baptist Seminary and Secretary of the Department of Work with Negroes in 1971. He died at the age of 83 in 1989. Interestingly, he is the only one of the nine ministers who remained in the ministry in Mississippi until his death and he is the only one with a file in the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission records.

Harold E. O'Chester (b. 1927)

Harold E. O'Chester, a graduate of Mississippi College (1954) and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (1958), became pastor of Poplar Springs Baptist Church in Lauderdale County near

Meridian, Mississippi in 1964. Early on Easter morning 1968 Ku Klux Klan nightriders set fire to Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, the fourth black Baptist church in Lauderdale County to be burned in two months.⁵⁰ On the following Monday at a meeting of the Baptist Pastors Association of Lauderdale County, O'Chester expressed concern about the burnings and introduced a resolution to create a county-wide Committee of Conscience to raise funds to rebuild the churches. The committee was organized and O'Chester named the director. He wrote in his church's weekly newspaper "if you hear that your preacher is trying to do something about this burned out church, YOU HEARD IT RIGHT."⁵¹ A week later the church unanimously adopted a resolution endorsing the work of the Committee of Conscience and fully supporting his participation.⁵²

Shortly after his selection as the head of the Committee of Conscience, the FBI told him a credible informant reported he was on the Klan hit list. The FBI advised him not to do or say anything that might compromise the informant but to move his family to the back of the house where they would be safer. For eighty-one nights two FBI agents watched his house.⁵³

The Committee of Conscience raised more than \$20,000 in materials and services to help rebuild the burned churches. The first church rebuilt was Mount Pleasant Baptist Church. A groundbreaking service for the church was held on July 22, 1968 and Rev. O'Chester was the principal speaker. In his remarks,⁵⁴ he declared we come to say no to anymore violence in our community. The spirit of Christianity is the antithesis of racism so it is a shame that leadership in improved human relations has not come from churches but from labor unions and government institutions. The failure of churches to apply Christian principles to human relations had brought the community to this point. The Committee of Conscience was trying to undo something that should not have happened in the first place.

O'Chester usually was pastor of a church for four or five years before moving to a smaller church with new challenges and opportunities, so it was not a surprise to his friends that in February 1969 he accepted a call to become pastor of Allendale Baptist Church in Austin, Texas. Under his leadership the church grew enormously and eventually became Great Hills Baptist Church. O'Chester remained as pastor of Great Hills Baptist Church until his retirement in 2003.

MIINISTERS Who Experienced Strong Opposition and Harassment

Stanley James Smith (1925 – 2013)

Stanley James Smith was born in Jefferson County in 1925 and graduated from Monticello High School in 1942. Subsequently, he graduated from Mississippi College and received the ThM degree from

New Orleans Baptist Seminary (1954). While completing the degree programs at Mississippi College and the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, he was pastor of several small Baptist churches in Mississippi. In 1954 he became pastor of Shady Grove Baptist Church near Hazlehurst, Mississippi.

At its annual meeting in May 1954, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution endorsing the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in public education and advocating following the “spirit of Christ” in the period of adjustment to the ruling. Mr. E. Ray Izard, Superintendent of Copiah County Schools and Chairman of the Board of Deacons of the First Baptist Church of Hazlehurst, with the full support of his pastor, Rev. Rev. Rowe Holcomb, opposed this action. Under Izard’s leadership in June 1955 the First Baptist Church adopted a resolution condemning the endorsement.⁵⁵ On October 21 the Copiah County Baptist Association approved a similar resolution. Smith voted against the association’s resolution.

On November 3, 1955, Smith wrote to Dr. A. C. Miller, Executive Director of the Christian Life Commission, saying, “I voted against the adoption of the resolution feeling that such an adoption was unnecessary and unprofitable. I refuse to adopt any resolution which will make for confusion and further racial antagonism.” He added:

My own church people, and in particular, the deacons, are clamouring [sic] for my resignation as pastor of this church as a result of my stand at the Association. . . . It is most difficult to minister to a people of such deep-rooted racial prejudice. . . . Reports are circulating in the community that I voted to let ‘niggers’ into the church.⁵⁶

Smith thought his resignation was inevitable but he would not do this “until I have given my testimony in behalf of racial understanding and in opposition to racial discrimination.” A few days later he resigned.⁵⁷

In late January 1956 he wrote to Dr. Miller, saying he and his family were living with his father-in-law and he “had gone before two churches in view of a call but nothing has developed.” He added that he thought it unlikely any church in Mississippi would be interested in him so his current obligations required him to seek outside employment.⁵⁸

He left the ministry and eventually became a successful insurance adjustor, first in Little Rock, Arkansas and later in Jackson, Tennessee.⁵⁹ However, he did not leave the church; he was active in Southern Baptist churches wherever he lived. In 1984 he returned to the active ministry on a part-time

basis as pastor of Falcon Baptist Church near Selmer, Tennessee, where he remained until 1995. He spent his retirement years in Henderson, Tennessee where he died in 2013.

Richard Butler (R. B.) Smith (1923 – 1987)

A native-born Mississippian, Richard Butler Smith was nineteen when he graduated from Clark College, a Baptist junior college in Newton, Mississippi, was ordained as a Baptist preacher, and married Nina Livingston, a member of the Sallis Baptist Church, where his father was pastor. After spending several years in Memphis, Tennessee, he enrolled in Mississippi College and graduated in 1947.

In 1947 he became pastor of Hardy Baptist Church outside of Grenada, Mississippi. For the first couple of years he was also principal of the Wolf-Hardy Elementary School (near the church) and school bus driver.⁶⁰ In the mid-1950s, he enrolled in New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1960.⁶¹

Shortly before graduation from the seminary, he became pastor of Fairview Baptist Church, outside of Indianola, Mississippi. Indianola was the birthplace of the Citizens Council, and several deacons of the church were sympathetic to its cause. Almost from the beginning of his ministry he encountered opposition because of his refusal to endorse the Citizens Council and his comments to church members and others about Christians and race relations. He noted in a letter to Dr. Frank Stagg, Professor of New Testament at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, he did not “hedge when pressed for a biblical answer to the most crucial question of our generation: can a white Christian exclude a black Christian from fellowship and still remain in fellowship with God? Can the fatherhood of God be established apart from the brotherhood of man?”⁶²

Matters came to a head in July 1961 during a Vacation Bible School class when a young boy asked him, “What about the nigger business?” Smith turned the question around, asking the boy, “If a white man and a black man were both in the field picking cotton and both picked the same amount in one day, which one should have the most money?” The boy went home and related this to his daddy, who was also a deacon at Fairview Baptist Church. Turning the boy’s question back to him without unequivocal support for white supremacy was unacceptable to the father. A few days later in a secret meeting the deacons recommended the church request Smith’s resignation effective September 1 because it would “best serve the interests of our church.”⁶³

Without income or a place for his family to live, Smith decided to return to Hardy. He had a small house trailer his mother had once lived in, so he moved it to Hardy for him and his wife and tried to rebuild his life. After taking into account the storage of clothing and household goods, the actual livable spaced was about 28 square feet (7 X 4).⁶⁴ Thus, they farmed out their children to family and friends. He worked as an automobile mechanic from seven in the morning to six in the evening six days a week for forty dollars a week.⁶⁵ He wrote to Dr. Frank Stagg, about his predicament, asking for assistance in finding another church, including one in the American Baptist Convention.⁶⁶ Stagg encouraged him not to give up, supported his admission to the seminary graduate program, and arranged for rental of a house trailer near the campus and a job on the seminary grounds crew.⁶⁷

He began attending graduate classes and preached occasionally. In December 1964 Smith accepted a call to become pastor of the First Baptist Church in Winslow, Arizona. After four years he completed his dissertation, "The Concept of Church in the Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," and received the ThD degree. In the spring of 1972, Bernard Loposer, a classmate at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and president of Oakland City College in Oakland City, Indiana, visited him in Winslow and discussed the possibility of his joining the faculty of the college. His strong academic credentials would be essential to fulfilling the North Central Association of Colleges and Universities accreditation academic requirement for the Religious Studies Department.

In August 1972 he became Professor of Religious Studies at Oakland City, a General Baptist Convention college. He was a very popular professor who did not fit the expected stereotype of a minister and professor of theology. He could make almost anything mechanical work, including cars, and played several musical instruments. On one occasion he showed up for an interview with a prospective faculty member riding a motorcycle, dressed in a jump suit and helmet, and wearing turquoise jewelry.⁶⁸ He had a sharp wit and smoked Winston cigarettes.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, he was serious when it came to theology and matters of faith. Until he suffered a fatal stroke in 1987, he spoke or conducted seminars in more than seventy churches in the Mid-West.

James Bradley Pope (b. 1932)

James Bradley Pope is a native Mississippian (born and raised in Brookhaven), a graduate of Mississippi College (1954) and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1958). Initially, he planned to be a religious counselor, but this changed when his former college roommate resigned as pastor of First Baptist Church in Shelby, Mississippi⁷⁰ and recommended the church call Pope as pastor. He accepted the call and had a fairly good relationship with most of his church members until 1962. Beginning then,

the mood of the church changed as members became upset about the riot at Ole Miss, Freedom Riders, sit-ins, the Council of Federated Organizations, and the NAACP. They became suspicious when he preached sermons about loving your neighbor rather than attacking integration. The sermon he preached on Sunday morning June 30, 1963, entitled "I Am An American,"⁷¹ exacerbated this suspicion. He began by reviewing Stephen Vincent Benet's essay "A Creed for Americans,"⁷² in which Benet described a democratic government as one where every person enjoys a free and equal chance to develop his own best abilities. The cornerstones of our democracy, he wrote, are free speech, free assembly, free elections and class, race, and religious hatred has no place in America. Pope followed up with his own comments that Christians should obey the laws of our land, render to the government what is due the government, (including obedience unless its action contravene God's will), and participate in the political life of the country. Christians, he added, as citizens of a democracy are obligated to work through political channels to bring about needed changes.

Pope recognized this sermon would reinforce those church leaders who were contemplating asking for his resignation. Unbeknownst to them, however, he had begun discussions with Mississippi College about becoming Campus Minister, so he announced his resignation and took the college job. He spent the next twenty years in this role, and in 1983 he became a marriage and family counselor at Shepherds Counseling Service in Jackson, Mississippi. He retired in 2003 and resides in Clinton, Mississippi.

Chester A. Molpus (1912 - 1999)

Chester A. Molpus was born March 12, 1912 in Meridian, Mississippi. His parents were staunch Baptists who attended Fifteenth Avenue Baptist Church in Meridian. In his senior year in high school he began thinking about becoming a Baptist minister. He decided to enroll in Mississippi College but his parents could not afford to send him to college so he paid his way through college. He worked as a clerk in a drug store and as a bookkeeper in a concrete company. It took six years to complete college during which time he was president of the student ministerial association and a member of the student honor council. In his senior year he was voted selected "most promising senior" and named to Who's Who in American Colleges, 1936-37.⁷³

His home church, Fifteenth Avenue Baptist Church in Meridian, ordained him "to the full work of the gospel ministry" in September 1937 just before he married his childhood sweet heart and they moved to Louisville, KY, where he enrolled in Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.⁷⁴ One of his fellow students was Duke K. McCall, who later would become president of Southern Baptist Seminary and be of

enormous assistance to him. Three years later Molpus graduated from the seminary with a Bachelor of Divinity degree and became pastor of Taylorsville Baptist Church near Louisville, Kentucky. In 1942 he moved on to the First Baptist Church of Belzoni, Mississippi.⁷⁵

In May 1954 Molpus attended the Southern Baptist Convention where he supported a resolution that endorsed the Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in public schools. Then on July 4, 1954, he preached a sermon on “Christians and Politics”⁷⁶ that set him on a collision course with members of his church. In the sermon he described the political responsibilities of Christians. He began the sermon with this reminder:

because our forefathers carried their religious faith into the arena of politics we have this 4th of July to Celebrate . . . To those who would maintain a complete aloofness from all political activity & say: ‘we cannot have anything to do with politics’ – Let me remind you: POLITICS HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH YOU! It regulates our lives – tells us what to do & what not to do & if you abdicate here, you abdicate where millions are vitally affected.

The “we cannot have anything to do with politics” reference was directed to the editor of *The Baptist Record*, the Mississippi Baptist weekly newspaper, who opposed the resolution endorsing the decision of the Supreme Court, arguing this was purely a political issue and had no bearing on moral and spiritual values. Molpus told his congregation he had written a letter to the editor rejecting this contention, explaining his support for the resolution was intended to advance the Kingdom of Heaven.⁷⁷ Molpus elaborated on this theme of the engagement of Christians in politics by reminding the congregation a Christian must be a partisan for Christ, not a Democrat – Southerner – with Confederate soldier ancestry. “A partisan for Christ,” he said, “is one who sides with Him on every issue.” Concerning the ruling of the Supreme Court on segregation this meant Molpus would “seek the MIND of Christ on the matter. I know the attitude of approach will be Love-- the love of all men which God has for us.”

In 1955 a Bible study class he taught for local black ministers met each Monday night in his study at the church became an issue because one of the black ministers was Rev. George W. Lee,⁷⁸ a resident of Belzoni, a NAACP activist, and a vocal advocate of black voter registration. Lee’s presence in the Bible study group exposed Molpus and the church to charges he supported the NAACP and black voter registration. However, Lee’s murder in May 1955 made this a moot issue.

Despite objections from his congregation, he continued to include references to racial relations in his sermons through the 1950s and early 1960s. In May 1962 several deacons told him he should resign because his “continued preaching on controversial issues and mainly the racial issue had alienated a large segment of the congregation.” Molpus knew some church members stopped coming to

church because, as one member told him, “they can’t go there and listen to you preach all that Nigger stuff.”⁷⁹ Nonetheless, he continued to preach on the subject of race because “people could not practice a religion of love with hatred in their heart.”⁸⁰

A lull in the tension between him and the deacons lasted for a year until during a series of sermons on the Seven Deadly Sins he addressed the “Sin of Pride” and more specifically the “sin of racial pride.” He delivered the sermon on June 14, 1963, the Sunday after the murder of Medgar Evers. One deacon walked out during the sermon, and a number of church members interpreted this sermon as a continuation of his “riding the hobby horse of race.” In addition, during the summer of 1963 at evening worship services he preached a series of sermons from the Epistle of St. Peter, and in one he explained the meaning of the exhortation to slaves to obey their masters rather than overthrow slavery. Christianity, he said was the “leaven” of society that over time would eradicate evils of society. Some members believed he was making a connection with segregation and he heard repercussions from the sermon.⁸¹

Four months later in October the congregation pushed back against his leadership by adopting an exclusionary, white-only racial policy for worship services. Prior to the vote Molpus wrote in the “Weekly Reminder,” the church newsletter:

I cannot, for the life of me, imagine Jesus standing on the steps of the Church and turning a man away because of the color of his skin. I believe that this proposed statement of policy contradicts the mind of Christ as revealed in the New Testament. I am opposed to its adoption solely because I believe Jesus would have me do so.⁸²

It was only a matter of time before his service as pastor would end. In August of 1964 the Chairman of the Board of Deacons informed him he should seek another church and if he did not do so the Deacons would recommend the church dismiss him.

Molpus was prepared to fight this action but upon further consideration⁸³ he decided this would cause irreparable harm to the church and resigned on October 26, 1964.⁸⁴ Marge Baroni, a Roman Catholic civil rights advocate in Natchez wrote to Molpus after his resignation, expressing her joy on learning of a “man of God sacrificing so much an extent for his faith.”⁸⁵ Molpus thanked her for her letter and noted:

It is very difficult in these days in Mississippi for anyone to contend for justice for all people --- and continue to be accepted in a community. I find that there are many Mississippians who are uneasy in their souls about the way we have been treating the Negroes, but they are afraid to register openly they disagree with the majority view-point. When there are more Christians who

really begin to care about “justice for all” then they will have the courage to take a stand, for it is caring that makes people courageous.⁸⁶

In the November 5, 1965 issue of the *Arkansas Baptist News Magazine*, the editor reported Molpus’ resignation under the heading, “What Would Jesus Do?” C. R. Daley, Editor of the *Kentucky Recorder*, called Molpus a “modern martyr” and wrote “He has lost his salary and popular approval but has saved his integrity and Christian Conscience. This is a good swap, and may God increase his tribe.”⁸⁷ The *Baptist Record* reported the facts of his resignation without any editorial comment.

Molpus recognized his “reputation” in Mississippi meant it was unlikely any church in Mississippi would consider calling him as pastor so he kept his friends, including Duke K. McCall, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, advised about his situation. After several months, no invitation from a church was forthcoming so President McCall offered him a newly created job at the seminary as Director of the Alumni Fund at a salary of \$200 per month. McCall also made arrangements for Molpus and his wife to have a temporary apartment on campus. In mid-February he and his wife moved to Louisville, Kentucky facing a very uncertain future.⁸⁸ Their youngest son, David Molpus, was a junior in high school, so he elected to remain in Belzoni to complete the school year. No church family asked him to live with them so he stayed with the school band director.

In May, Molpus moved into a permanent position as Director of Administrative Services at an annual salary of \$8,300. In conjunction with his seminary duties, he preached at various churches on Sundays and conducted several revivals. Eager to return to the pastorate, in September 1968 he accepted the call of the First Baptist Church of Chesterfield, SC where he served until his retirement in 1979. In his retirement years he served as pastor of several small country churches in South Carolina. He died on January 2, 1999.

Conclusion

What can we conclude about these nine Baptist ministers? All but one of them (Harold E. O’Chester) were native-born Mississippians, which mitigated the argument they were outsiders who did not understand the complexities of the Mississippi way of life. All but one of the nine (Will D. Campbell) received a theological education at either Southern Baptist Theological Seminary or New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminar where they were exposed to Professors J. B. Weatherspoon and Edward A. McDowall at Southern Seminary and Frank B. Stagg at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. These professors were outspoken advocates of a “social ethic,”⁸⁹ which included the ills of society in the spiritual values churches should address. Although there is no evidence any of the nine ministers knew

each other or communicated, they believed race relations involved spiritual values and theology must be made relevant for ameliorating social problems, including race relations. All nine ministers were unbelievably courageous in laying out their views on Christianity and race in a hostile environment. Verbal harassment by members of the community, the threat of friends and members of the church ostracizing them, or at worst outright dismissal were constant threats, as several of them could attest. They marched to a different drummer than some fifteen hundred other Baptist ministers. They had everything to lose and a willingness to risk it all that enabled them to rise above a racist culture supported by a racist theology and helped crack the wall of the “Closed Society” and thereby help pave the way for a new and brighter day for Baptists in Mississippi. Considered by some as traitors and pariahs in their churches and communities at the time, we now acknowledge they were on the right side of history.

¹ This is an expanded version of “White Mississippi Baptist Ministers Who Helped Crack the Walls of the ‘Closed Society’: 1955 – 1968” published in *Baptist History & Heritage*, Vol. L (Summer 2015), Number 2, 52 – 67. Used by permission.

² Bryan was a Baptist minister and Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University.

³ *The Christian Century* (November 29, 1962), 1429 – 1432.

⁴ Southard notes that several months later the Mississippi Baptist Convention rejected a resolution condemning the riot at Ole Miss.

⁵ *The Christian Century*, 1430.

⁶ In an earlier article on “Segregation and Southern Churches” in *The Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol.1, No. 3 (April 1962), 214, Southard wrote that another reason for silence was “the huge debt incurred in church building. Neither pastor nor layman want anything to upset the mortgage payment.”

⁷ *The Christian Century*, 1431.

⁸ Included in these ministers were Douglas Hudgins, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Jackson, Russell McIntire, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Clinton, and W. Levern Moore, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Pontotoc. Moore succinctly summarized this view that the call of southern ministers “is not to re-make an imperfect society but rather to serve as ambassadors of Christ in remaking a lost humanity. . . . the minister in the south is not insensitive to the meeting of human needs and the alleviation of social inequalities; but he sees them as secondary {to}. . . . redemption from sin through Jesus Christ.” “Why Don’t Southern Ministers Speak out?” Undated article in Series 3, Folder 3, Sub-Series 1, Series 2 Religious Leaders, Samuel Southard Papers, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

⁹ Doubtless there are other unknown Baptist preachers who chose to leave Mississippi because of the racial environment.

¹⁰ I am grateful to the following people for their assistance in obtaining documentation about these ministers. Mrs. John Daley, widow of Rev. John Daley, Dacula, GA; Dr. Paul Gordon, son of Rev. Clyde Gordon, Winter Gardens, FL; Dr. Taffey Hall, Archivist, Southern Baptist Convention Library and Archives, Nashville, TN; Judith Koucky, Alexandria, Virginia; David L. Molpus, son of Rev. Chester A. Molpus, Cleveland, OH; Heather Moore, Archivist, Mississippi Baptist College, Clinton, MS; Dr. Harold E. O’Chester, Pastor Emeritus, Great Hills Baptist Church, Austin, Texas; James Bradley Pope, Clinton, MS; Mrs. Stanley James Smith, widow of Rev. Stanley James Smith, Henderson, TN; and Adam Winters, Archivist, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.

¹¹ Paul Gordon, *The Borrowed Years: The Life Story of Clyde Gordon* (Private Printing, 1995). The title of the book is based on an episode when Clyde was three years old and deathly ill with pneumonia. A doctor thought he

had stopped breathing but after a few moments a nurse noticed he had started breathing again. For the remainder of his adult life he reminded people he was living on “borrowed years.”

¹² Gordon, *The Borrowed Years*, 99.

¹³ Clyde Gordon to Karl Wiesenburg, May 1, 1963, Wiesenburg Family Papers, Pascagoula, Mississippi. Gordon congratulated Wiesenburg on publication of the booklet *The Price of Defiance*, “I agree with you one hundred percent and my admiration for you is really great.” Gordon included a copy of the 1955 sermon with the letter.

¹⁴ Gordon to Wiesenburg, May 1, 1963.

¹⁵ Paul Gordon to Charles Dollar, Email exchange, February 21, 2015.

¹⁶ “Oral History with Reverend Clay F. Lee, minister of the Methodist Church,” University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage (1980), 14.

¹⁷ In possession of the author. A copy of the sermon is available in The James Silver Collection, University of Mississippi Special Collections and Archives.

¹⁸ Interview with Mrs. Shirley Daley, Dacula, Georgia, September 15, 2013 and a telephone interview with Lee Thompson, Marks, Mississippi, a member of the First Baptist Church, Marks, Mississippi on August 12, 2013. In addition, Billy Reed, a resident of Marks in the mid-1960s recalled Rev. Daley as a “passionate moderate” on the question of race and believed the sermon caused no issue in Marks. Email exchange between the author, Curtis Wilkie, and Billy Reed, January 20, 2015.

¹⁹ Transcript of An Oral History with Will D. Campbell, June 8, 1976, University of Southern Mississippi Oral History Program, 10.

²⁰ His status as a clergyman made him eligible for deferment. Apparently, he was motivated by the example of his brother Joe, who already been drafted. Merrill M. Hawkins, Jr., *Will Campbell: Radical Prophet of the South* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997), 14.

²¹ Will D. Campbell, *Brother to a Dragonfly* (Continuum International Publishing Group: New York, 1977), 108.

²² Stephen Crary, an army chaplain and graduate of Union Theological Seminary introduced him to *Freedom Road* by Howard Fast, a historical novel set in the Reconstruction Era about Gideon Jackson, a South Carolina ex-slave who played a major role in organizing poor whites and blacks into a short lived political party. In addition, the troop transport ships returning soldiers to the United States were segregated so Campbell shared a bunk with three black soldiers. On the troop train returning to Louisiana he shared a berth with a black soldier. He quickly learned the price for this: his fellow white soldiers accused him of being a “nigger lover.”

²³ Hawkins, 28.

²⁴ By the 1950s Providence Farm had a small clinic that provided free health care for blacks. Hawkins, 32.

²⁵ Oral History Interview, 33.

²⁶ The primary source for this discussion of the Religious Week Emphasis imbroglio is Charles W. Eagles, *The Price of Defiance, James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 117 - 138.

²⁷ The Chancellor’s telegram to Kershaw noted that in his public statements he had failed to convey to the University he was an active member of NAACP. In addition, the Chancellor noted Kershaw’s explanation that while he planned to speak on religion and modern drama “he could not conceive that ‘discussion and questions on segregation would not be a natural and inevitable part of student interest’” was inconsistent with the intent of Religious Emphasis Week. Quoted in Eagles, *The Price of Defiance*, 131.

²⁸ Two incidents that sometimes are conflated with his decision to leave Ole Miss occurred after his resignation. The first incident involved someone placing human feces coated with powdered sugar in a punch bowl for a reception for new students. The second incident, more widely known, involved a ping pong game he played with a black minister on campus. When a University administrator asked him about this Campbell quipped that it was played under Southern rules: “the paddles were separate but equal, the ball was white, and there was a net drawn tightly between us.” The next morning ping-pong balls painted black and white dotted the yard of the Campbell house. Eagles, *The Price of Defiance*, 136 – 137.

²⁹ Brownsville, Mississippi. Jackson *Clarion Ledger*, February 23, 1989.

³⁰ “Interview with Dr. William Penn Davis,” March 24, 1972 (The Mississippi Oral History Program, the University of Southern Mississippi), 10 -11.

³¹ “Interview with Dr. William Penn Davis,” 13, 15.

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- ³² William Penn Davis, *The Long Step* (unpublished memoir, Mississippi Baptist Convention Historical Commission, Mississippi Baptist College Archives), 105.
- ³³ Davis, *The Long Step*, 116 – 118.
- ³⁴ “Interview with Dr. William Penn Davis,” 56.
- ³⁵ William P. Davis to R. T. Pritchard, (Sheriff, Jefferson County, May 9, 1960, SCRI ID #9-25-0-1-1-1, Mississippi St Zack J. Van Landingham to R. T. Pritchard, May 11, 1960, SCR ID # 6-45-6-19-1-1-1, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. In a Memo to File dated the May 11, 1960. SCRI#9-25-0-3-1-1-1. Van Landingham noted that on the basis of the comments Davis made to him “I feel that he will be an excellent source of information and assistance to the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission.” This last comment implies Davis was willing to be an informant for the Sovereignty Commission. Scholars have long recognized that in many instances Sovereignty Commission records are not trustworthy because they promoted the success and importance of Sovereignty Commission investigators. Kenneth Dean, Edwin King, and Cecil Oreck, who knew Davis well in the 1960s, categorically rejected Van Landingham’s suggestion because Davis simply was not capable of such duplicity.
- ³⁶ Cecil Owen Renick, “The Great Adventure: A Comprehensive Study of Mississippi Baptist Work with The Negro through the Committee of Concern and the Department of Work with Negroes” (M. A. Thesis, Department of History, Mississippi College (1968), Mississippi Baptist Convention Historical Commission, Mississippi), 70.
- ³⁷ “Interview with Dr. William Penn Davis,” 27 – 28.
- ³⁸ Anne Washburn McWilliams, “Out of the Mississippi Ashes,” *Baptist Program* (March 1965), 4.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ *The Baptist Record* (August 6, 1964), 2.
- ⁴¹ Cecil Oreck, “The Great Adventure.” 96 – 109. Also see “An Interview with Dr. William Penn Davis,” 74 – 76.
- ⁴² Anne Washburn McWilliams, “Out of Mississippi Ashes,” *Baptist Program* (Nov. 1965), 4.
- ⁴³ Testimony of Rev. William P. Davis Before the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, February 20, 1965, Jackson, Mississippi, Justice in Jackson, Mississippi Hearings Held in Jackson, Miss. February 16 – 20, 1965. Volume II, 400.
- ⁴⁴ Testimony of Rev. William P. Davis Before the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, February 20, 1965, Jackson, Mississippi, Justice in Jackson, Mississippi Hearings Held in Jackson, Miss. February 16 – 20, 1965. Volume II, 400.
- ⁴⁵ Telephone interview with Cecil Owen Renick, March 21, 2015.
- ⁴⁶ *The New York Times Herald Tribune* (European Edition) February 23, 1965, Paris, France. Quoted in Oreck, “The Great Adventure,” 120.
- ⁴⁷ Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 124 – 126.
- ⁴⁸ Lawrence Watts to William P. Davis, “Project Housing,” March 24, 1966, File 15B, Committee of Concern, File 15B, Archive of the Catholic Diocese of Jackson, Jackson, Mississippi.
- ⁴⁹ Owen Renick, “Smoke Over Mississippi,” *Search* (Winter 1993), 11.
- ⁵⁰ Harold E. O’Chester, “A Stand against Violence,” *Texas Baptist Standard*, August 14, 1968.
- ⁵¹ Harold E. O’Chester, “Memoir,” 47. Unpublished Memoir of Harold E. O’Chester, courtesy of Harold E. O’Chester.
- ⁵² “The Bulletin,” April 28, 1968 (Poplar Springs Baptist Church, Meridian, MS). Copy in possession of author, courtesy of Dr. Harold E. O’Chester.
- ⁵³ Telephone interview with Dr. O’Chester, February 11, 2015.
- ⁵⁴ *Meridian Star*, July 22, 1968.
- ⁵⁵ He sent a copy of the resolution to Dr. A. C. Miller, Executive Director of the Christian Life Commission, which is in the same folder as that of Miller’s response. Dr. A. C. Miller to Mr. E. Ray Izard, June 7, 1955, Box 8, Folder 20, Christian Life Commission Administration Files, Southern Baptist Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee
- ⁵⁶ Stanley J. Smith to Dr. A. C. Miller, November 3, 1955, Box 14, Folder 1, Christian Life Commission Administration Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- ⁵⁷ Stanley J. Smith to Dr. A. C. Miller, November 14, 1955, Christian Life Commission, Box 14, Folder 1. The church agreed to pay him one month salary (\$260) and allow him to remain in the parsonage for thirty days.
- ⁵⁸ Stanley J. Smith to Dr. A. C. Miller, January 26, 1956, Christian Life Commission, Box 14, Folder 1.
- ⁵⁹ Telephone Interview with Mrs. Stanley J. Smith, February 13, 2015.
- ⁶⁰ Interview with Mrs. Jean Moss, Hardy, Mississippi, March 26, 2015.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*

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- ⁶² Smith to Stagg, December 7, 1961, Box 5, Folder 10, Frank B. Stagg Papers, Samford University Library and Special Collections, Samford University (Birmingham, Alabama).
- ⁶³ Letter from Board of Deacons to R. B. Smith, July 8, 1961 Copy in possession of the author, courtesy of Peggy Smith Conway. The letter makes no explicit reference to the grounds for dismissal.
- ⁶⁴ Smith to Stagg, December 7, 1961, Box 5, Folder 10, Frank B. Stagg Papers.
- ⁶⁵ Telephone interview with Mrs. Peggy Smith Collins, March 31, 2015 and April 4, 2015. Smith to Stagg, December 7, 1961, Box 5, Folder 10, Frank B. Staggs Papers.
- ⁶⁶ Stagg referenced this letter in the sermon he preached at Smith's funeral. Transcript of the sermon in possession of the author, courtesy of Peggy Smith Collins.
- ⁶⁷ Telephone interview with Mrs. Peggy Smith Collins, March 28, 2015. Dr. Walter "Buddy" Shurden was a member of a car pool in the spring of 1960 that included Smith.
- ⁶⁸ James W. Murray, President of Oakland City College, "A Eulogy for Richard B. Smith," Oakland City First General Baptist Church. Copy In possession of the author, courtesy of Peggy Smith Collins.
- ⁶⁹ Interview with Walter Buddy Shurden, May 22, 2015.
- ⁷⁰ Much of the information in this sketch is based on a telephone interview with Bradley Pope, February 3, 2015.
- ⁷¹ Copy of the sermon in possession of the author, courtesy of Bradley Pope.
- ⁷² It is unlikely that church members knew Benet had received the Pulitzer Prize in 1928 for his monumental epoch poem, *John Brown's Body*, which praised abolitionists and President Abraham Lincoln for redeeming the nation from slavery.
- ⁷³ Remarks of David Molpus at his father's funeral, copy in possession of the author.
- ⁷⁴ *The Baptist Record*, September 1937 (Vol. 39).
- ⁷⁵ Belzoni was in Humphreys County in the heart of the Delta. The economy was primarily agricultural and blacks comprised almost two-thirds of the total population.
- ⁷⁶ Copy of this sermon is in possession of the author, courtesy of David Molpus.
- ⁷⁷ *The Baptist Record*, July 22, 1954.
- ⁷⁸ John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urban, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 53.
- ⁷⁹ Molpus to Southard, June 15, 1963, Series 1, Sub-Series 2: 1963-1964, Folder 2, Item 10, Samuel Southard Papers, 1950 – 1966, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Archives, Louisville, Kentucky.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁸¹ Molpus to Southard, June 25, 1963, Series 3, Miscellaneous, Sub-Series 2, Folder 3, Item 15, Samuel Southard Papers, 1950 – 1966.
- ⁸² Molpus to Southard, June 25, 1963, Series 3, Miscellaneous, Sub-Series 2, Folder 3, Item 14, Samuel Southard Papers, 1950 – 1966.
- ⁸³ He received several letters from church members tearfully requesting him to resign to avoid irreparable harm to the church. Private Family Papers, courtesy of David Molpus, Cleveland, Ohio.
- ⁸⁴ The church voted to continue his monthly salary and allow him and his family to remain in the church parsonage until the end of March.
- ⁸⁵ Marge Baroni to Rev. Chester A. Molpus, October 29, 1964, Baroni Papers, 2bf16 (University of Mississippi Special Collections and Archives).
- ⁸⁶ Rev. Chester A. Molpus to Marge Baroni, November 14, 1964, Baroni Papers, 2bf17 (University of Mississippi Special Collections and Archives).
- ⁸⁷ *Western Recorder*, November 19, 19654.
- ⁸⁸ Payroll Authorization Forms in the Papers of Duke K. McCall, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Archives, Louisville, KY.
- ⁸⁹ As used here, "social ethic" conveys the sense that Samuel Hill used the term in *Southern Churches in Crisis* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1967) and Donald Shriver used it in *The Unsilent South; Prophetic Preaching in Racial Crisis* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965) and in "Southern Churches in Transition," *New South* (Winter 1970), 40 – 47.