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Holding Them in Line

The Methodist Church, the largest (9,815,459 members) Protestant denomination in the U.S., is opposed to segregation, yet it operates on a segregated basis. Some 9.4 million of its members belong to five geographical jurisdictions. But almost 367,000 Negro Methodists (92 per cent of the colored members) are affiliated with the non-geographical sixth group, the Central Jurisdiction.

In Denver's City Auditorium last week, 788 delegates to the church's quadrennial General Conference argued bitterly over this system which 21 years ago helped to bring the Northern and Southern sections of this large group of Methodists together.

Moderates, backing a four-year church study which recommended that "no basic changes" be made in the jurisdictional setup, pointed to the fact that it gives Negroes especially good representation in national church offices (i.e., about one-sixth). Moreover, they argued, it already contains an operating system for gradual absorption of Negro churches by "white" jurisdictions.

Proponents of speed, paced by the Rev. Dr. Harold Case, president of Boston University, moved for abolition of the Central Jurisdiction by 1968 as an "express goal." This enraged many Southern delegates, who took a stand of "complete opposition to any form of integration being forced on the church."

The argument went deep into the night. "Segregation is a cancer that will destroy not only the Methodist Church, but the American way of life!" shouted an Iowa clergyman. An African delegate pleaded that a definite schedule for abolishing the Central Jurisdiction would save Methodism from world dishonor.

After two days of lively debate, the moderates won out, and the gradual integration offered by the present system was generally accepted. "We tried to hold in line the Northern brothers," said Charles C. Parlin, New York lawyer and head of the study group. "Now we're trying to hold in line the Southern brothers. I think we're over the rough spots."

►In Jacksonville, Fla., delegates to the annual assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (Southern) heard a "Message to the Nation" issued by a joint committee of their own denomination and of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The general statement reiterated forthright positions on current problems. Among them: (1) "The sexual relation [in marriage] . . . is to be regarded not merely as a means of bringing children into the world, but also as a divine provision for the mutual fulfillment of husband and wife." (2) "No human differences such as the color of men's skins can annul the fact of their essen-

tial equality or justify any discrimination based on denial of it." (3) "We call upon [our nation's leaders] and all her children to seek with other peoples every possible means of halting the production of instruments of destruction that threaten the survival of the human race on this planet."