

Bigotry Recrucifies Christ, Selah Says

By SALLY RUGARER

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MACON, June 5—A short, compact, white-haired man with a dead-pan delivery and a Missouri twang is preaching every night to Methodists at the South Georgia Conference here. He is Dr. William B. Selah of Galloway Memorial Methodist Church in Jackson, Miss.

He told Methodists here Tuesday night that, "When we subvert or deny justice to any human being, we crucify the Son of God afresh."

Jesus was crucified not only by the Roman soldiers and Pontius Pilate, Dr. Selah said, but by the bigotry of the "respectable citizens, the religious people of Jerusalem who had forgotten the major element in their faith—love."

"Almost the most dangerous thing is religion without love. That is bigotry," Dr. Selah said. "The spirit of bigotry crucified Jesus then and now. Bigotry weakens the nation by dividing it. It sets race against race, church against church, section against section."

DR. SELAH'S humor is underplayed and dry. On his first night here Monday, he asked the traditional question to those in the back: "Can you hear?"

Back came some scattered "no's." "Well," Dr. Selah replied calmly, "If you can't hear, you can sleep."

In an interview Tuesday, he spoke of racial matters and some of the things he has said about them at home in Jackson.

Back in 1961, Dr. Selah preached a sermon in which he said that to discriminate against any man because of color or creed is wrong. "Christian love means seeking for everyone the same justice, the same rights, the same opportunities we seek for ourselves," he said.

LAST JANUARY he was widely quoted when he said that there should be "no color bar in the Christian church" and that all public facilities should be desegregated, with each community working out its own plan of desegregation.

He's gotten a lot of reaction to this, both good and bad, Dr. Selah said. But he has just been at his church in Jackson for the 19th year.

"I guess 90 per cent of the people in his church probably disagree with me on this," he said. "But they are sweet-spirited. Most of my men want me to state my conviction. I don't rub it in on 'em every week. They want a free pulpit. They are tolerant."

"I recognize the freedom of the pew to disagree. That's the theory of the Protestant church and the Methodist church."

"I'd been preaching that all my life," he said. "My people don't expect me to keep quiet. I've been preaching the Christian principle of brotherhood ever since I've been there. Most agree with the principles. How to apply them — that's not so easy."

After some of his public statements this year, Dr. Selah said some folks quit coming to his church. But others who didn't belong started attending. And even those who disagreed with him began to increase their contributions enough so that at his annual conference last week, Galloway Church paid all its quotas.

IN JACKSON, Dr. Selah has urged Mayor Allen Thompson to appoint a biracial committee to begin some talks there, where there were demonstrations and arrests last week. He doesn't know the outcome of his suggestion, he said, but he is sure the city wants to settle issues peacefully. "There's enough good will in Jackson that we can sit down and work out our problems peacefully," he said. "I love my people" at Galloway, he said. "That's one thing that makes it hard. You have to stand up at times and say, by implication at least: You're wrong. That's the tragedy of it."

from R - respectful Selah

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