James Fowler's Silence:

The White Moderate and the American Civil Rights Movement

Wes Crawford
Assistant Professor of Church History
Director, Center for Restoration Studies
Abilene Christian University
twc99a@acu.edu

James Fowler served as Preaching Minister for the Central Church of Christ in Birmingham, Alabama, during the pivotal years of the American Civil Rights Movement. Described as a champion of equality by some and as a white racist by others, Fowler's legacy remains ambiguous and complex. This study, which arises from a thorough investigation of Fowler's personal papers, offers a fresh look at one of the quintessential silent white leaders of mid-twentieth-century Churches of Christ.

Those standing at the polar ends of long continuums tend to grab the headlines, thereby etching their names in the recorded history of popular culture. Consider some of the most contentious issues of the current era. The phrase "gun control" brings to mind figures such as Ted Nugent, avid and controversial gun-rights activist. One also might think about young Emma Gonzalez, the high school student who burst on the scene as an outspoken activist for gun control in America. Abortion lays claim to the title of most polarizing issue of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The issue conjures images of Evangelical Christians holding picket signs declaring "Abortion is murder." Or, on the other end of the continuum, one might have seen the picture of an activist holding a sign that reads "Keep Your Rosaries Off My Ovaries." With each of these polarizing debates, the vocal and eccentric personalities grab the megaphones and dominate the headlines.

As one considers responses to "race" among twentieth-century white leaders within Churches of Christ, the names Foy Wallace, Jr. and Carl Spain quickly come to mind. One of the foremost leaders in twentieth-century Churches of Christ, Wallace also uttered some of the most racist things ever printed![1] On the other end of the continuum, Spain stood on the podium during the 1960 Abilene Christian

[1] Consider, for example, Wallace's exchange with Marshall Keeble in "Negro Meetings for White People," *Bible Banner* (March 1941) 7; and "From M. Keeble," *Bible Banner* (April 1941) 5.

College Lectureship and compared that school's administration to communists and Nazis for their official policy of racial segregation.

Historians remember those standing at the poles, but what about the majority of people who exist in the middle? Most people do not live at the poles; they live in the center—somewhere along that long continuum. This study centers upon one of those numerous figures, James Fowler, who lived between the two poles. Most will not recognize his name, because he intentionally avoided the light that illuminates either pole.

James Fowler stands in the mold of the southern white moderate, a figure often criticized by scholars of the American Civil Rights Movement for refusing to choose sides in the struggle for racial equality. The southern white moderate received praise from white leaders in the mid-twentieth century for providing a calming voice amidst the physical violence and politically charged speeches of the 1950s and 1960s. In his effort to keep the peace and avoid conflict, however, Fowler (along with other southern white moderates) perpetuated the racist status quo and hindered the progress of African American civil rights.

Fowler, a long-time preacher and teacher within Churches of Christ, spent much of adult life near the front lines of the American Civil Rights Movement. He occupied the pulpit of Central Church of Christ in Birmingham, Alabama, from 1961 until his death in 1979. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference visited Fowler's Birmingham in 1963 to instigate one of the most recognized protests against racial injustice in American history. During that campaign, Birmingham police deputies, led by Eugene "Bull" Connor, turned dogs and firehouses on peaceful protestors for civil rights. Birmingham also housed 16th Street Baptist Church, where members of the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan killed four young black girls by detonating a bomb in its basement in September 1963. King once called Birmingham "the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States."[2]

Fowler preached each Sunday from the pulpit located inside Central Church of Christ in Birmingham throughout the 1960s; yet he never joined the protests. But neither did he join the likes of Bull Connor or Governor George Wallace, who lobbied to keep Alabama segregated. Fowler did not support segregation, but he took the road traveled by countless other southern white moderates—the middle path. He not only took the middle path, he "baptized" the middle path. He described it as the most holy and NT-endorsed option between the two extremes: the violence perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan and the peaceful agitations by King and others. By examining the racial attitudes and behaviors of Fowler, one begins to understand better the mind of the typical, southern-white moderate.

---

[2] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964; Boston: Beacon Press, 1986) 87. Citations refer to the Beacon edition.

James Fowler's Life: A Brief History

James F. Fowler was born on December 17, 1919, in Thorp Springs, Texas, to Thomas G. and Jessie F. Fowler. His parents and both sets of his grandparents were members of the Churches of Christ. Fowler's father, Thomas, served as a preacher, teacher, and businessman in Texas. Though Fowler grew up in multiple Texas locations, in 1937 he graduated high school in San Antonio, where he remained for two years to help his family financially. His father, suffering from depression, found it difficult to maintain a job there. After that he attended Abilene Christian College (ACC) and after just three years, he graduated in 1942 with a BS in Biblical Studies with honors. That same year, he married Lottie (formerly Netterville) of Nashville, Tennessee. Though she began her education at David Lipscomb College in Nashville, she completed her degree at ACC, where they met. The two had one son and three daughters.

Fowler spent his ministerial career in five different congregations. Following his graduation from ACC, he and Lottie moved to Temple, Texas, where he preached for the Central Church of Christ from 1942–1944. In 1944 Fowler moved to Dallas to work on his master's degree from Southern Methodist University and preached at the Shamrock Shores Church of Christ. Upon completing his master's degree, he moved his family to College Station, Texas, where he ministered from 1946–1956 and taught Bible courses at Texas A&M University. This passion for teaching carried throughout his ministerial career; he often taught classes on church education at various lectureships.

In 1956 the Fowlers moved to Irving, Texas, because his youngest daughter Judy needed special medical treatment for cerebral palsy. The hospitals in the Metroplex had more capacity to help her. While in Irving, Fowler preached for the South Delaware Church of Christ (a congregation that later merged with the East Side Church of Christ to become South McArthur Church of Christ). While preaching at South Delaware, Fowler began working with a television program, "The Way of Life," a ministry sponsored by the Skillman Avenue Church of Christ. This foray into broadcasting made a lasting impression upon Fowler, for he continued to broadcast his ministry through television and radio for the rest of his career. Finally, in 1961, Fowler accepted the Preaching Minister position at Central Church of Christ in Birmingham, Alabama, and occupied that position until his death in 1979 from a sudden heart attack.

When he arrived at Central, its 650 members made it the largest congregation of the Churches of Christ in town (and one of the largest congregations of any kind in downtown Birmingham). Fowler used his platform at Central to initiate a radio ministry, "Messages for the Master," broadcasting to thirty stations in eight states and one foreign country (Belize).

Thus, Fowler was well-positioned within Churches of Christ to catalyze denominational change when the dramatic clash of black and white southern culture landed on the doorstep of his prominent congregation.

Fowler And Race Relations

Four important episodes in Fowler's career exemplify his attitude on the topic of race relations.

Episode 1 (Pre-1954): Joint Worship Service in College Station

Sometime before 1954, when Fowler worked with the Church of Christ in College Station, a group of African American singers visited the congregation from Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas, at Fowler's invitation.[3] After receiving permission from College Station's elders, Fowler arranged for the group to bring with them a "preacher-student." Fowler also received the elders' permission to invite the "colored" church in Bryan to meet with them on that Sunday afternoon and remain for the Sunday night service. Everyone, black Christians and white Christians, shared a meal in the annex together before the evening service. The Southwestern students led the service, including the singing and the sermon.

The letter provides some interesting background about the days leading up to that event. During a congregational business meeting, someone raised a question concerning the seating arrangement of the event; certain elders of the congregation had grown anxious about the possibility of black and white Christians sitting together during the service and the meal. Fowler instructed those attending the business meeting to read James 2:1-4 with no comment. That text reads:

> My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?[4]

---

[3] In a 1967 letter to Walter Burch, Fowler dates this event "before the 1954 ruling" (indicating *Brown v. Board of Education*), but he does not report the exact year. See James F. Fowler, "Letter to Walter Burch," (unpublished correspondence, 1967), Fowler Family Papers, 1943–1992, Center for Restoration Studies MS #495, Abilene Christian University Special Collections and Archives, Brown Library, Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX.

[4] James 2:1-4 (King James Version, in deference to the period when this would have been read by the elders.)

Upon the prompt given by Fowler, most meeting attendees read the passage. After a few moments of silence, someone suggested that no distinction be made in the seating arrangements. All agreed.

This event highlights important aspects of Fowler's character. First, he was bold. He initiated an integrated worship service (and an integrated meal) in central Texas before 1954! As a young minister (no more than thirty-five years old), he took the risk of publicly challenging segregation, both in the service itself, the business meeting preceding it, and a joint meal. Thirteen years later, in describing this event to Burch, Fowler writes that he challenged the racial customs of his day "in a quiet and non-crusading way." By 1967, Fowler sought to distance himself from the "crusading ways" of the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement protestors of the 1960s. Though his actions in the early 1950s placed him within the small group of white instigators for African American civil rights, by the late 1960s Fowler revised his role in the telling of this event, thereby aligning himself with white moderates. Whether Fowler bowed to political and ecclesiastical pressure or whether he did indeed experience a change of heart, the evidence reveals his articulated position on civil rights changed dramatically between the early 1950s and the late 1960s.

Episode 2 (1963): Birmingham "Kneel-in"

The second episode took place about a decade later in 1963, a landmark year in Birmingham's history. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference led a campaign in downtown Birmingham, in the shadow of Central Church of Christ. Members of the Ku Klux Klan had bombed the 16th Street Church, killing four young African American girls. This event prompted King to release his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

Finally, in 1963, civil rights activists initiated a "kneel-in" movement among Birmingham churches. Their strategy required black and white protestors to visit white Christian congregations throughout the city on Sunday morning to worship. Obviously, they hoped to challenge the segregation laws (and customs) of Birmingham. News reporters with television cameras often accompanied the kneel-in activists, ready to share their images live with the American public. By being turned away, the protesters hoped to shine a light on unjust segregation in the American South.

Most white congregations in Birmingham, including Central, knew in advance about the planned kneel-in event. In preparation, the elders of Central wrote a policy instructing the congregation how to respond.[5] They advised ushers to allow black worshippers to enter the building, attend the service, and sit in a

[5] Central Church of Christ Elders, "Policy of the Elders Regarding 'Kneel-in' Demonstrators," Folder I/1 Race Relations, Central Church of Christ (Birmingham, AL) Records, 1961–1969, Center for Restoration Studies MS #508, Abilene Christian University Special Collections and Archives, Brown Library, Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX.

segregated area of the sanctuary. By implementing this strategy they hoped to avoid a public spectacle!

Unfortunately for them, two black worshippers arrived unexpectedly on Easter Sunday, one week before they had planned to announce the policy to the congregation.[6] The two black women were Birmingham residents, and at least one of them considered herself a member of the Titusville Church of Christ, a local African American congregation. Caught off-guard and unsure how to handle the situation, the ushers at the door escorted the two women to a room full of elders, who happened to be gathered for a regularly-scheduled meeting that morning before services. According to a letter written by the Central elders, they met with the two women for some time.[7] Upon learning one of the women attended the Titusville Church of Christ, the elders "counselled with her regarding her Christian responsibilities for peace and harmony." The elders indicated the two women decided to leave "of their own choice," even though they offered to seat them "if they still thought it was best under the present circumstances."[8]

If the leaders of Central Church of Christ hoped to avoid a public spectacle, they failed miserably. The two women told local media that they were turned away from worshipping at Central, and the story caught fire. Newspapers from as far away as Chicago printed the story of white Birmingham Christian congregations, including Central Church of Christ, refusing to admit black worshippers.[9] The Central Church of Christ office began receiving letters from around the country, mostly from members of Churches of Christ, sharing their disgust. One person wrote, "At least the Presbyterians admitted them."[10] Another wrote, "The church in Birmingham is not the TRUE church."[11] Drawing upon the reverence for the words of Paul in Churches of Christ, one disgruntled Christian wrote, "Do you suppose Paul would have refused to preach to someone just because his skin was black?"[12] Still, another person wrote, "I would hate to be at the Gate when you knock and see what St. Peter has to say. Shame on you."[13] In all, the congregation received dozens of such letters,

---

[6] Central Church of Christ Elders, "Unpublished Letter Dated 16 April 1963." Folder I/1 Race Relations, Central Church of Christ (Birmingham, AL) Records, 1961-1969, Center for Restoration Studies MS #508.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] "Negroes Attend White Churches," *Chicago Tribune*, 15 April 1963; "2 Churches Admit Negroes, 3 Say No at Birmingham," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, 14 April 1963.

[10] "Criticism Received as a Result of the News Item Re: 'Kneel ins,'" Folder I/1 Race Relations, Central Church of Christ (Birmingham, AL) Records, 1961–1969, Center for Restoration Studies MS #508.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

most expressing harsh words of condemnation to the Central elders for their refusal to allow black worshippers to attend their services.

Abilene Christian University's Center for Restoration Studies has obtained papers which provide a detailed account of the events related to this episode (as recorded by the Central elders).[14] These records include a series of loose-leaf papers containing a list of names and addresses of those who sent letters to them.[15] Scrupulous in keeping every single correspondence sent to them, the elders sent a reply to each individual, and they also sent a letter to each member of their own congregation, explaining what had happened from their point of view.[16]

This event dramatically shaped Fowler. He commented on it during a lectureship speech in 1964 at Pepperdine and also mentioned it in his letter to Walter Burch in 1967. In both cases, he condemned the intolerance of those who wrote letters to the church, labeling them "outsiders" unqualified to comment upon the situation in Birmingham. More pointedly, he wrote, "they don't know what living in the Deep South is really like."[17] In this episode, from his leadership position within Central's power structure, Fowler struggled with the politics of negotiating between various points of view. He sought to pacify the members of Central, justify the congregation's actions to the outside world, and ultimately, avoid conflict at all costs.

Episode 3 (1964): Pepperdine Lecture—"From the Midst of the Crisis"

The third episode illuminating Fowler's position on race relations comes from the speech he delivered during the 1964 Pepperdine Bible Lectures, titled "From the Midst of the Crisis."[18] This speech represents the most public articulation of Fowler's position on race relations. In this address, Fowler stakes his position (as expected) along the middle path, between the road traveled by violent white supremacists and the one traveled by organized movements which, according to Fowler, instigate violence. He critiques the "injustices that have prevailed in the past and still prevail" against African Americans. He also criticizes outside organizers who traveled to Birmingham with the express purpose of creating discord and chaos. He says, "a

---

[14] This donation came from the elders of the Palisades Church of Christ, a Birmingham congregation which arose in 1990 from a merger between the Central Church of Christ and the West End Church of Christ. They donated the material on July 1, 2019.

[15] "Letters (Integration) Mail," Folder I/2 Desegregation, Central Church of Christ (Birmingham, AL) Records, 1961–1969, Center for Restoration Studies MS #508.

[16] Central Church of Christ Elders, "Letter to Central Church of Christ Membership," Folder I/2 Desegregation, Central Church of Christ (Birmingham, AL) Records, 1961–1969, Center for Restoration Studies MS #508.

[17] Fowler, "Letter to Walter Burch."

[18] Reuel Lemmons published a copy of that address in *Firm Foundatio*n later that year. See James Fowler, "From the Midst of the Crisis," *Firm Foundation* 81 (March 1964) 199, 205.

black man entering a congregation of whites can create an atmosphere as 'politically packed' as a white robed Klansman walking into a negro church."[19]

How could Fowler, and other white moderates, criticize violence perpetrated by white terrorists but refuse to engage in activism against it? Like most other white Americans of his time (and perhaps the present time), he viewed racial conflict as a political issue, not a moral issue. He refers to the Civil Rights Movement as a "social revolution." Toward the conclusion of his address, attempting to contrast the present conflict with weightier matters of the gospel, he says, "Let us not compromise the truth on any *moral* issue, but let us not by our lack of patience and understanding become more a part of the problem than the answer."[20] According to Fowler, one may compromise on issues related to race without making a moral compromise.

Most tellingly, Fowler justifies his position by appealing to NT passages instructing slaves to obey their masters (1 Pet 2:18; 1 Cor 7:21; Col 3:22-23, 4:1; 1 Tim 6:1-2; Eph 6:9). Fowler's unusual exegetical decisions in these passages, leads him to a conclusion that endorses his stance on southern racial divisions and the civil rights movement. He concluded that Paul and other first-century Christian leaders restrained themselves from publicly condemning or acting against a system they believed unjust, praising the first-century leaders for their patience and moderating voices. Finally, Fowler echoed the sentiment of so many other white southerners: "It is my sincere faith that this matter can be and will be worked out by congregations of the south and other sections if they are left to work out the problems in the way that seems best for their local situation."[21]

Episode 4 (1976): ACC Bible Lectureship, "Threats to our Freedom"

One final episode from Fowler's ministerial career deserves attention: his 1976 Abilene Christian College Bible Lectureship address, "Threats to Our Freedom." The importance of this moment arises not from what Fowler said but from what he refrained from saying. In the printed manuscript of his address, Fowler records examples of threats to Christian freedom modern Christians faced. He mentions alcohol, drugs, tobacco, and sex. He discusses materialism and money. In a section detailing how prejudice can rob Christians of their freedom, he offers a lengthy illustration of how Christians discriminate against men with long hair. In a section of his manuscript examining how "brotherhood pressures and politics can enslave us," he uses an example of a church in Alabama.[22] Fowler relayed the true story of a white congregation, fearing the angry (and possibly violent) reaction of their fel-

---

[19] Ibid., 199.

[20] Ibid., 205.

[21] Ibid., 199.

[22] James Fowler, "Threats to Our Freedom," *Abilene Christian College Annual Bible Lectures 1976* (Abilene: Abilene Christian College Book Store, 1976) 39-40.

low white Christian neighbors, that refused to allow their black brethren access to their baptistry. Fowler ends that example with this statement:

> There are times for both blacks and whites to act with restraint and patience—for expediency's sake; but there are also times when the only right thing to do is to act with boldness and courage even though we may suffer for it. We have come a long, long way in our race relations in the majority of churches, including the one mentioned above, but prejudice still enslaves many on both sides of the color line.[23]

Fowler writes a bold and strong illustration here! But, alas, Fowler never uttered these words when he delivered his public lecture, although it plainly was part of his originally intended Abilene lecture. This illustration exists in his printed manuscript, but he for an unknown reason chose not to actually speak these words from the podium in Abilene.[24] Perhaps he ran out of time and cut his remarks short. Perhaps he mistakenly overlooked this example in his manuscript. Or, perhaps here we have a hallmark of white moderates: they know what needs to be said, but they cannot bring themselves to say it.

Conclusion

Taken together, what do these four episodes from Fowler's life teach us about his views on race? In a letter dated March 3, 1967, Fowler wrote a letter to Mrs. Sara Ginn which answers this question:

> A person can be very sincere in heart and godly in life, and still be enslaved to prevailing cultural traditions and prejudices. Also, there are many 'practical' problems faced by southern communities (and other parts of the nation) that the 'crusader' never sees or seems to understand.[25]

Fowler fits well the definition of the white moderate offered by Carolyn Dupont. She writes of white moderate Evangelicals:

> They could wax eloquent about racial equality, but failed to frame the elimination of racial barriers with an urgency or to endorse the measures employed by civil rights activists—marches, direct action, and civil disobedience. . . . Moderates often presented themselves as the reasonable middle ground in a struggle waged by extremists on both ends.[26]

---

[23] Ibid.

[24] James Fowler, "Threats to Our Freedom," 23 February 1976, Lectureship and Summit Audio Collection, Center for Restoration Studies, Abilene Christian University, audio, https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/sumlec_audio/5018/.

[25] James Fowler, "Letter to Mrs. Sara Gunn" (unpublished correspondence, 3 March 1967), Fowler Family Papers, 1943–1992, Center for Restoration Studies MS #495.

[26] Carolyn Dupont, "White Protestants and the Civil Rights Movement," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Race in American History* (ed. Kathryn Gin Lum and Paul Harvey; New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) 499, 501.

Recall Fowler's assessment of Birmingham's situation in 1963. On the one hand, he criticized the radical and violent white supremacists; on the other hand, he also criticized the civil rights workers, whom he characterized as lawbreakers and instigators of violence. Fowler wore the label "moderate" as a badge of honor and thought his position most in line with NT principles of peace and harmony.

Among American religious historians, Billy Graham represents the quintessential example of the white moderate Evangelical. Not unlike Fowler, Graham resisted the extreme poles on the long continuum. Some characterize Graham as a champion in race relations, pointing to a few instances where he removed the ropes separating African American and white attendees at his revivals.[27] But others point out that Graham more often allowed the segregated seating to remain. Additionally, even though he and King often spoke well of each other, Graham criticized King and other civil rights activists for their aggressive strategies.[28] When invited to attend the March on Washington event in 1963, Graham declined for fear of being associated with any protestors who might endorse or tolerate violence.[29]

In addition to standing in the middle, white moderate Evangelicals of the time centered their strategy on gradualism. In his letter to Walter Burch, referred to earlier, Fowler writes, "One thing of which I am convinced is that 'gradualism' is our only approach."[30] In his address at the 1964 Pepperdine lectures, he said, "It is my sincere faith that this matter can be and will be worked out by congregations of the south and other sections if they are left to work out their problems in the way that seems best for their local situation."[31]

Finally, Graham and other white moderates like Fowler believed the only reasonable cure for racism lay in personal conversion. Graham commented more than once: "It has to come from the hearts of people. That's the answer to the race problem."[32] Though white moderates may have agreed on the unjust nature of segregation, they disagreed with those who asserted public pressure on politicians, congregations, and businesses to change laws and customs immediately. Instead, they sought to change the hearts of America's racists by converting them to Christ. An expanding church would conceivably reduce the number of racists in America. Responding to the view that southern white Christians would eventually persuade all racists to turn from their evil ways, DuPont writes:

---

[27] Ibid., 500.

[28] Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009) 25.

[29] Dupont, 500-501.

[30] Fowler, "Letter to Walter Burch."

[31] Fowler, "From the Midst of the Crisis," 199.

[32] Randall J. Stephens, "'It Has to Come from the Hearts of People': Evangelicals, Fundamentalists, Race, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act," *Journal of American Studie*s 50 (2016) 559-585.

> In fact, in the very region of the country where the vast majority of the populace claimed to have experienced personal salvation, racial oppression flourished most overtly and resisted destruction most fiercely.[33]

Fowler's story offers more than a picture of one, isolated, southern, Christian minister making his way in the turbulent years of the American Civil Rights Movement. His story illumines the path taken by many (if not most) white moderate church leaders in the 1950s and 1960s. Ideologically they appeared more progressive than many of their white peers, but methodologically or strategically they acted as impotent as the common white southerner. In his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail," King wrote:

> I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens' Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action'; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mystical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a 'more convenient season.' Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.[34]

One wonders what might have happened if Fowler had taken a different path? What would have happened if Fowler had allowed his bold actions in 1954 as a thirty-five-year-old minister in College Station to set the trajectory of his life? Perhaps he would have been fired and oppressed like other courageous southern white Churches of Christ ministers who dared to speak out against racism and segregation, such as Carl Spain, Walter Burch, John Allen Chalk, Bud Stumbaugh, or George William Floyd, the pulpit minister who dared to praise Martin Luther King, Jr. from the pulpit of his Sylacauga, Alabama, congregation and was immediately fired for his conduct. Perhaps he would have never again spoken at a Church of Christ lectureship. Perhaps he would have never delivered his 1964 speech "From the Midst of the Crisis." Alternatively, maybe he would have helped steer a congregation in the heart of the storm by being a harbinger of hope and racial reconciliation, rather than one doomed to engage in damage control after a quiet but failed attempt to avoid a public spectacle during the 1963 Birmingham kneel-in campaign.

---

[33] Dupont, 501.

[34] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the "Letter from Birmingham Jail"* (ed. S. Jonathan Bass; Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2001) 246.

This close examination of James Fowler's life and legacy cries out as an example for American church leaders seeking to address the social changes instigated by the many faces of racial unrest in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. Can white moderate Christians afford to once again sit on the sidelines championing the causes of peace, tranquility, and the path of least resistance at historical moments like when our world desperately needs action, confrontation, and prophetic leadership?[35] SCJ

[35] For recent studies centering upon race, racism, and racial unrest within Churches of Christ, see: Tanya Brice, ed., *Reconciliation Reconsidered* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2016); Wes Crawford, *Shattering the Illusion: How African American Churches of Christ Moved from Segregation to Independence* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2013); Wes Crawford, "Churches of Christ and Lost Cause Religion: One Southern Denomination's Attempt to Find Identity in Post-Civil War America," *Restoration Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2022) 1-12; Wes Crawford, "An Apple That Fell Far from Its Tree: The Protest Legacy of Floyd Rose," *Restoration Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2021) 11-18; Douglas A. Foster, "The Effect of the Civil War on the Stone-Campbell Movement," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 20, no. 1 (2017) 5-16; James L. Gorman, Jeff W. Childers, and Mark W. Hamilton, eds., *Slavery's Long Shadow: Race and Reconciliation in American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019); Gary Holloway and John York, eds. *Unfinished Reconciliation: Justice, Racism, and Churches of Christ*, rev. and expanded ed. (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2013); Barclay Key, *Race and Restoration: Churches of Christ and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2020); Edward J. Robinson, *Hard-Fighting Soldiers: A History of African American Churches of Christ* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2019); Edward J. Robinson, *Show Us How You Do It: Marshall Keeble and the Rise of Black Churches of Christ in the United States, 1914–1968* (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2008); Marshall Keeble, *A Godsend to His People: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Marshall Keeble* (ed. by Edward J. Robinson; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008); Edward J. Robinson, *The Fight Is On in Texas: A History of African American Churches of Christ in the Lone Star State, 1865–2000* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2008); Edward J. Robinson, *To Save My Race from Abuse: The Life of Samuel Robert Cassius* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007); Samuel Robert Cassius, *To Lift Up My Race: The Essential Writings of Samuel Robert Cassius* (ed. by Edward J. Robinson; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008); Edward J. Robinson, *I Was under a Heavy Burden: The Life of Annie C. Tuggle* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2011).