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UP IN THE BALCONY: WHITE RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND
SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN ARKANSAS, 1954-1960

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

David Andrew Lai

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Gerald L. Smith, Associate Professor of History

Lexington, Kentucky

2012

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

UP IN THE BALCONY: WHITE RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN ARKANSAS, 1954-1960

This paper examines the various responses of progressive white southern clergy to school desegregation events in Arkansas. I investigate why no major white clerical movement emerged to support civil rights, arguing that internal and external factors limited their genuinely motivated witness. National and local clergy endorsed *Brown* for both religious and practical reasons, arguing that segregation was counter to Christian brotherhood and hurt worldwide evangelism. However, like William Chafe's progressives in Greensboro, too many clergy worked for school desegregation but ignored African American voices, believing that their demands unnecessarily inflamed the local opposition and unfortunately urged patience and civility instead of justice. Furthermore, clerical intervention proved to be less effective than ministers expected. Sympathetic clergy experienced physical harassment and congregational opposition for speaking out, and local communities simply ignore their messages.

KEYWORDS: School integration--Arkansas--Little Rock--History--20th century, Central High School (Little Rock, Ark.)--History--20th century, Civil rights--United States--Religious aspects--Christianity, massive resistance movement, Arkansas clergy

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In her 1949 book *Killers of the Dream*, Lillian Smith described a play her students performed about a female Prince's coming of age journey. For the journey, the Prince picked up four traveling escorts: Conscience and Southern Tradition stayed close by, while Religion and Science were up in "the balcony." When the Prince saw nonwhite children and wanted to play with them, her escorts debated whether they should allow her to do so. Southern Tradition barred the way, with Conscience's active acquiescence. The Prince then reached out to Religion, which quoted Biblical passages such as John 3:16 emphasizing a united sisterhood. Conscience declared in response, "I never listen to Religion when segregation is involved. No one does, down here."

This exchange disturbed an observer, who asked: "Religion is no good as a traveling companion as long as it stays up in the balcony. Why doesn't Religion come down here and push Custom back where it belongs?"

A girl from the balcony answered the question: "But Religion doesn't do that in the South... Religion stays out of controversies. You know that. Our place is up here."¹

Although Southern Tradition ends up ahead here, Smith's thinly veiled parable about race relations is ultimately optimistic about the potential that a religiously-based moral argument had in breaking down Jim Crow segregation. In the parable, only Religion's preference to "stay out of controversies," rather than outside forces, is what kept it penned up in the balcony. When Smith's students got a second chance to perform the play how things could be instead of how they were, religion as love helped "push

¹ Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*, 2nd ed. (1961 repr., New York: Norton Library, 1978), 43-48.

Southern Tradition off the stage and teach it a few lessons about being nice to other people.” Other southern liberals expressed similar optimism regarding organized religion’s potential, as seen by Southern Regional Council (SRC) executive director George Mitchell’s claim soon after *Brown* that “we are all of us convinced that the churches will lead the South in all of these matters of race.”²

But by 1963, another writer had a very different impression of white southern religious leadership. In his famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Martin Luther King, Jr., lambasted southern clerical silence. While he initially expected that “the white ministers, priests, and rabbis in the South would be among our strongest allies,” King soon found out that too many “remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained glass windows,” and that some outright opposed the movement. While African Americans struggled against a tidal wave of local and state opposition, white ministers dismissed civil rights as “social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern.”³ According to King, southern white religious institutions had proven unwilling to descend down from the proverbial balcony and exert their moral influence.

The stark contrast between Smith’s parable and King’s letter is best explained by the fact that in the intervening fourteen years between *Killers of the Dream* and “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” especially after the 1954 *Brown* decision, civil rights campaigns sprouted up, gathered strength, encountered fierce opposition, and continued to grow—while nearly all local white churches failed to take positive action. Although only some

² Smith, *Killers of the Dream*, 49-50; Mitchell to Charles F. Golden, 20 June 1955, Southern Regional Council (SRC) Papers.

³ King, *Why We Can’t Wait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 89-90. S. Jonathan Bass’s *Blessed are the Peacemakers* looks at the eight white Birmingham ministers singled out by King’s famous “Letter From Birmingham Jail,” arguing that they occupied an invisible middle ground between segregationists and militant African American demands. See Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the “Letter From Birmingham Jail”* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 2001).

ministers went as far as giving segregation divine justification, most white ministers remained in their proverbial balcony, preaching united brotherhood but not practicing it courageously.

This contrast engenders yet more questions: Why? What was it that made southern white liberals believe that religion was a potential tool in dismantling Jim Crow segregation? Why did local churches remain silent? And most importantly, what does their silence tell us about the role of national religion during the civil rights movement? This paper examines progressive white southern religious leaders and their response to school desegregation campaigns in Arkansas from the *Brown* decision through the era of massive resistance. I contend that throughout this era white clerics genuinely believed that racial segregation was un-Christian and sinful, but they by and large failed to channel their prophetic urgings into productive activity.

Closely examining their motivations and inhibitions complicates the differing interpretations in the movement's religious subhistoriography regarding white southern clerical efforts in this time period. David L. Chappell's *A Stone of Hope* inspired much of this work with his claim that the white church's cautious support provided an unexpected boon for civil rights. According to Chappell, when "the white South's religious bodies lined up on one side and its politicians on the other," they denied segregationist thought its legitimacy. Whereas southern religion endorsed slavery during the Civil War, its neutrality here allowed the civil rights movement's superior ideology of nonviolence to prevail and win the grudging support of local whites. Although even Chappell concedes that racial liberals failed to take concrete action because they "felt the need for other

things, especially their own power, much more strongly than they felt the need for civil rights,” the larger church deserves praise and not censure for its tacit support.⁴

Chappell’s argument is frustrating because it corrects previous historiographical excesses by introducing new ones. His claim that neutral churches were indeed beneficial supports his overall assertion that religion was vital to the movement, allowing one to celebrate dedicated local clergy. Previously, religious historians blamed the limited clerical activism in the 1950s on ministerial apathy and cowardice. James Findlay states that the National Council of Churches (NCC) refused to take concrete action, contenting itself with issuing resolutions that were “little more than slight slaps on the wrist to those institutions [perpetuating segregation] and had little or no long-term practical effect.” These resolutions, according to Michael Friedland, represented a facile hope that segregation would simply fade away, and their limited nature showed that most white southern clergy refused to take the concrete steps needed to counter segregationist sentiment. Friedland argues that white southern churches in the 1950s stood silent during

⁴ Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: UNC, 2004), 1-8, 43, 106-108. According to Chappell, liberal churches ended up prioritizing order and moderation over integration, failing to draw strength from their religious tradition—in contrast to African Americans, who “got strength from old-time religion.” This work echoes Chappell’s thesis in *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1994), where he contends that it was not so much the “race dissenters” as the diversity of opinion amongst white moderates that explains civil rights successes. He echoes a similar conclusion in his article specifically focused on Arkansas, “Diversity within a Racial Group: White People in Little Rock, 1957-1959,” in *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 55 (Winter 1995), pp. 444-456. Other works not mentioned in this study that examine the role of national religion in the civil rights movement include Paul Harvey, *Freedom’s Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: UNC, 2005), Charles Marsh’s *God’s Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton, 1999) and Andrew Manis’s *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict: Civil Rights and the Culture Wars* (Macon: Mercer, 2002), which employs the concept of civil religion to detail the struggle between white segregationists and African American activists. Denominational histories also abound, such as Mark Newman’s *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: Alabama, 2001).

racial discrimination, before northern clergy came South and helped local African Americans overturn Jim Crow segregation.⁵

Findlay and Friedland underemphasize the amount of white clerical activism that existed, however. More recent works use Chappell's claims of theological diversity to justify the basic argument that southern ministers made honest efforts to bring about desegregation, whatever the result. Elaine Allen Lehtreck's dissertation on southern white ministers eschews an explicit argument for retelling considerable stories of ministerial courage and reprisal, showcasing clergy "being faithful" to their calling and arguing that "they deserve recognition and a place in the recorded history of the Civil Rights Movement," regardless of how effective they actually were. In their edited volume on movement religious rhetoric, editors Davis W. Houck and David E. Dixon comment that they privileged speeches from the normally invisible "brave white southern clergy" who experienced persecution for their attempts to lead their local communities "to a more enlightened understanding of race relations." James T. Clemons's history of Arkansas Methodists similarly asserts that local Methodists "were, as best they could, promoting

⁵ Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* (New York: Oxford, 1993), 11-38; Friedland, *Lift Up Your Voice Like a Trumpet: White Clergy and the Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements, 1954-1973* (Chapel Hill: UNC, 1998), 18-48. By starting in the 1950s, these works also ignore the considerable history linking southern religion and southern liberalism, leaving one to wonder what changed in the twenty intervening years. While regional historians conceded that southern liberals failed to achieve concrete results in the post-*Brown* era, they affirmed the genuine religious impulses behind southern liberalism and argued that they helped bring the South forward. Morton Sosna claimed that dedicated Southern liberals stood out because of their "emphasis on religion" and that their efforts "helped create a climate" conducive for civil rights activity, even though they themselves "possessed neither the power nor desire to force social change." John Egerton largely exonerates the ministers among "the thin scattering of Southern liberals and progressives and moderates who opposed" opportunistic politicians exploiting the race issue for their own benefit. While they lacked "the numbers, the discipline, the unity, or the fervor" to successfully steer the South toward desegregation, their courageous example showed "the capacity of white Southerners to change, to repudiate racism and rise up to the standard of justice and equality" (Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South* [New York: Columbia, 1977], 172-174, 206-207; Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* [Chapel Hill: UNC, 1995], 624-627).

harmony and equality, peace and justice among the races” during the civil rights era.⁶ The central assumption behind Clemons, Dixon, and Lechtreck’s works is that their heroic efforts must have done *something* positive, although what exactly is never specified.

That being said, Chappell’s particular argument also contains considerable weaknesses. Segregationist theology may not have had much clout on the national arena, but it retained considerable support in local pews.⁷ According to Pete Daniel, massive resistance occurred because “moderate whites haltingly called for acceptance of the Court’s decision, whereas segregationists minced no words in their strident opposition.” Daniel claims that churches “offered the best hope for easing the transition from segregation,” but that their views instead “reflected the community, with its aggregation of sins and shortcomings.” Even if their ministers supported desegregation, “the flocks of laypeople did not always follow,” creating a divide between pulpit and pew that silenced the minister. Jane Dailey explains that segregationist thought remained strong in local pews because congregants feared that interracial youth mixing would inevitably lead to miscegenation, which was abhorrent to their sensibilities.⁸

One explanation why Chappell deemphasized local segregationist sentiment is that his regional scope and top-down approach skewed his views. Chappell uses Billy Graham as one minister who effectively championed clerical neutrality, integrating his

⁶ Lechtreck, “Southern White Ministers and the Civil Rights Movement” (Ph.D dissertation, Union Institute, 2007), v-vii; Houck and Dixon, Introduction, in *Rhetoric, Religion, and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965* (Waco: Baylor, 2006), 10; Clemons, Introduction, in *Crisis of Conscience: Arkansas Methodists and the Civil Rights Struggle*, eds. Clemons and Kelly L. Farr (Little Rock: Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, 2007).

⁷ Chappell does a respectable job demonstrating how national segregationist clergy avoided using the Bible to positively justify segregation, instead defensively arguing that the Bible had little to say on the matter. According to Chappell, this demonstrates that they were “hedging segregationists’ bets, not exhorting them with a vigorous call to arms.” Although his argument shows why segregationist theology had little respect on the national level, he ignores the significance of such views amongst local congregants rather than local pastors (Chappell, *Stone of Hope*, 108-123).

⁸ Jane Dailey, “Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown,” in *Journal of American History* 91 (June 2004), 119-144; Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* [Chapel Hill: UNC, 2000], 180-185.

evangelical meetings despite local discontent. However, Billy Graham had the national clout to force his way even in hostile climates, whereas local pastors could not simply silence dissent without creating dangerous ill will.⁹ Dailey argues that “ministers often found themselves in the cross hairs on the segregation question, as congregants attempted to counteract the influence of clergymen in civic affairs and to capture the power of Christian righteousness for segregation.”¹⁰ Neutrality can not only explain why the civil rights movement succeeded, but it can also explain why the movement participants’ innumerable acts of heroism and sacrifice produced such limited results.

If not cowardice or apathy, why then were so many of these resolutions so ineffective? One major reason was that, in the words of the Smith parable, Religion’s descent from the proverbial balcony on “social matters” like civil rights was contested by Southern Tradition. Religious leaders who spoke out in favor of desegregation discovered considerable opposition both outside and inside their church walls. Many pro-segregationist citizens rejected their views as inaccurate theology and disastrous Communist-influenced policy, justifying not only disagreement but also active reprisal through physical harassment. Disagreement also created unwelcome drama within their churches, splitting congregations apart. While white southern ministers’ religious beliefs led them to oppose segregation, their moderate political outlooks and vulnerability to

⁹ Chappell conceded this point in his book, writing that “when Graham desegregated his audiences, for example, his vast popularity shielded him from scrutiny and retaliation” (Chappell, *Stone of Hope*, 139-144). While Chappell interprets Graham favorably, other recent studies on Graham have emphasized his disconnect with civil rights leaders. For example, see Michael G. Long, *Billy Graham and the Beloved Community* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

¹⁰ Dailey 134. While Chappell looks at pulpit-pew dissent as more evidence of a diversity of opinions between a polarized white church, he also only considers expulsion a success if the pastor ended up leaving (Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*, 134-135). As Chapter 4 demonstrates, even unsuccessful expulsions discouraged ministerial activism.

reprisals left them, for all intents and purposes, onlookers in the balcony rather than effective advocates.

Yet too many ministers were content to remain in the balcony because they believed they could do the most good there, and did not know how to translate their moral call into effective political action. Initially, most supportive clergy bought into the southern white liberal belief that, given sufficient time and patience, desegregation would occur naturally. Further militancy was not only unnecessary but could very well destabilize a peaceful resolution. When future events proved that line of reasoning to be a fallacy, many religious leaders clung to their role as impartial arbiters rather than engaged activists. They argued that while segregationist excesses were definitely unwelcome, much of the blame also lay with the African American militants who provoked violence in the first place with their insistent demands. Because these clergy refused to embrace civil rights causes, their efforts at mediation were weak appeals which political leaders safely dismissed.

In his 1980 study on Greensboro, William Chafe coined the term “progressive mystique” to describe the mixture of “implicit assumptions, nuances, and modes of relating” that informed local elites’ worldview. Committed to maintaining their city’s image of a “progressive” region that had respectable race relations, Greensboro’s political leaders prioritized avoiding conflict and extending only paternalistic support to “civil” African Americans. To protect their progressive reputation during the post-*Brown* era, white Greensboro leaders adopted a “politics of moderation” that marginalized both

militant African American demands and White Citizens Council members, accepting token desegregation while mitigating the possibility of radical change.¹¹

Whereas Chafe's Greensboro mitigated massive resistance, Arkansas segregationists presented a formidable challenge to local moderates. Arkansas governor Francis Cherry drew upon the state's progressive reputation when he vowed state compliance to *Brown*, claiming that "Arkansas will observe the law. It always has."¹² When massive resistance emerged, many clergy championed moderate solutions and civility, attempting to preserve whatever remnants of the state's respectable image remained. As such, many clergy not only spoke out against mob violence, but they also marginalized NAACP activists as unreasonable and not representative of the larger community. Their limited political vision hindered both their collaborative efforts and their ultimate vision, although it similarly motivated them to take decisive action against massive resistance's excesses. Rather than being complicit in a cynical ploy, these ministers were blinded by the "progressive mystique," which encouraged them to take unpopular stands on behalf of inconsequential gains.

Arkansas is an ideal state to study white religious activity because of the relative plethora of available sources. The state's initially progressive atmosphere meant that clerical activity received positive newspaper coverage and that ministers were more likely to express even unpopular views, whereas ministers and presses were more circumspect in their protests to segregation in a Deep South state like Mississippi.¹³

¹¹ William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 7-9, 67-70.

¹² "Cherry Says Arkansas To Obey Law," *Arkansas Gazette*, 19 May 1954.

¹³ In contrast to Arkansas, Mississippi did not desegregate any of its public schools for ten years after *Brown*, successfully squashing African American challenges through a state sovereignty commission, extralegal violence, and a failed attempt to equalize the schools and head off local protests. Charles C. Bolton's monograph on Mississippi school desegregation describes this period with a binary white-black

Furthermore, supportive clergy in Arkansas had much to protest against, as the state became a hotbed for massive resistance. Although my study goes beyond Little Rock, the 1957 Central High School crisis was a prominent news story that was replayed on the international scale, one that spurred ministers to respond both in the short run and in the long run. In Arkansas, ministers could speak out and had plenty of reasons to speak, thus providing ample primary source material.

This paper consists of four main chapters, following a roughly chronological order. Chapter 2 observes that national and local religious bodies applauded both *Brown I* and *II* for heralding a better era of race relations under a “prudent” timetable, which would ultimately prove costly. They declared themselves against segregation, arguing it violated God’s call for Christian brotherhood and that its existence hurt the church’s global prestige. However, Christian thinkers shied away from federal enforcement measures, believing that gentle encouragement and proper teaching was the only way to encourage Southerners to implement desegregation and that more militant means would only provoke unnecessary violence. National complacency toward the decision’s implementation bled into the local scene, as religious leaders focused on lending assistance to the few model districts willing to desegregate rather than emphasizing the moral call of the hour. Church leaders called *Brown II*’s “all deliberate speed” a wise and judicious decision, even as resisters used it as a rallying cry to completely halt desegregation efforts.

opposition, suggesting that if there were white racial liberals in the state, they largely kept silent. While some white public school teachers protested a school closure amendment, Mississippi governor Hugh White silenced the opposition by flattening the debate to a simple straw poll between supporting school closure of “backing ‘the Negroes.’” See Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980* (Jackson: Mississippi, 2005), 61-95.

Grassroots massive resistance across the state dashed clerical hopes for widespread voluntary compliance, as ministers discovered that local whites were not amenable to mediation and moral education. Chapter 3 explores the varying tactics ministers took to discourage increasingly popular segregationist sentiment preceding the Central High School crisis. Ministerial support for the embattled Hoxie school board failed to deter local protests, and politicians dismissed clerical opposition to the Southern Manifesto as well as four bills against school desegregation. While the many moderate ministers who acquiesced to massive resistance deserve some blame, their united but still unsuccessful push to fight the bills shows that ministers needed more than just courage to succeed. More accurately, clerical activism failed to oppose massive resistance because it was a hugely popular movement, and grassroots support for segregation dwarfed its opposition and steered political leaders dangerously rightward.

The Central High School crisis left both moderate and progressive clergy as the lone voices crying out in opposition to mob violence that kept African American students out of Little Rock's public high schools. Chapter 4 looks at the clergy's divergent tactics and the fierce resistance they encountered. It challenges *Christians in Racial Crisis*, Thomas Campbell and Ernest Pettigrew's 1959 study of Little Rock clergy which remains the standard work today. Like Campbell and Pettigrew, I contend that moderate ministers failed to present an effective witness, unwisely retreating to law and order stances and ignoring African American voices. However, Campbell and Pettigrew did not give sufficient consideration to the many limitations placed upon both moderate and progressive ministers, who did not merely have to contend with outside harassment but also dangerous discord within their churches. Caught between the contradictory duties of

condemning injustice and maintaining cordial relations with their congregants, even progressive clergy had to watch their words. Far from demonstrating cowardice or apathy, ministerial records of the time suggest that the repressive atmosphere constrained the ministers' available options.

Unable to influence events on their own, supportive clergy flocked to alliances with other racial moderates to bring any peaceful resolution, however limited. Chapter 5 highlights both the strengths and the limitations of this approach, as coalitions possessed sufficient power to quell massive resisters but also muted the progressive clergy's unique demand for true integration, rather than merely desegregated facilities. According to John Kirk, the Little Rock school board's use of pupil placement laws and other gradual solutions fit under a banner of "minimum compliance" that "far more effectively undermined the process of school desegregation... throughout the South."¹⁴ The progressive ministers who joined larger coalitions initially supported minimum compliance measures only because they needed allies to overcome the segregationists. Much as they had protested against segregated facilities, progressive clergy resorted to moral appeals for true integration in later protests against restrictive pupil-placement laws, demonstrating that not all white racial progressives supported minimum compliance. Despite their apparent successes, the clergy's limited role in the moderate coalition suggests their limited ability to encourage positive change.

Two quick notes: This study uses the words clergy and minister interchangeably throughout the text, and employs "religious leader" when referring to a prominent layperson like Congressman Brooks Hays, who was the president of the Southern Baptist

¹⁴ Kirk, "Maximum Resistance and Minimum Compliance: The Origins of the 1957 Little Rock School Crisis and the Failure of School Desegregation in the South," in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, ed. Clive Webb (New York: Oxford, 2005), 94.

Convention but was technically never called upon to preach. Much of the interchangeability reflects my sources, which draw entirely on Christian and predominantly Protestant voices—although Little Rock’s Jewish community joined in supporting civil rights efforts.¹⁵

Furthermore, while I take care to identify clergy’s denominational affiliation, I eschew larger denominational analysis for two reasons. First, my sample size of active ministerial voices is too small to draw anything more than baseless conjectures if I subdivided it further into individual denominations, as the considerable activity of a handful of Little Rock Presbyterians does not necessarily translate into widespread national support. Secondly, my analysis of my sources shows little apparent difference across denominations. In a 1961 speech at The College of the Bible, Will D. Campbell, then employed by the National Council of Churches (a symbol of ecumenicalism), said that his NCC job gave him the chance to take Communion in the Presbyterian manner alongside Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians and other denominations in a service led by a Congregationalist and a Baptist at a Methodist church. Campbell noted that if there was one positive from the contemporary racial crisis, it was “that Christians caught in a serious crisis will sometimes transcend ecclesiastical structures and barriers.”¹⁶

¹⁵ For more on Jewish activism in Little Rock, see Carolyn Gray LeMaster, *A Corner of the Tapestry: A History of the Jewish Experience in Arkansas, 1820s-1990s* (Fayetteville: Arkansas, 1994). Rabbi Ira Sanders was particularly active around this time.

¹⁶ Campbell, “The Sovereignty of God in Christian Race Relations,” in *Southern Churches and Race Relations: Report of the Third Interracial Consultation, July 17-21, 1961*, ed. Lewis S. C. Smythe (Lexington: College of the Bible, 1961), 89-90.

CHAPTER 2

“EFFECTING A TRANQUIL TRANSITION”

On 23 May 1954, Colbert S. Cartwright, pastor of Little Rock’s Pulaski Heights Christian Church, devoted his Sunday sermon to discussing the proper Christian response to *Brown*. He first briefly laid out an argument about why “segregation is totally un-Christian,” emphasizing that it “ran counter to Christian brotherhood” because it encouraged adherents to have “a prideful attitude contrary to Christ’s lowly spirit.” Cartwright cited as the “collective judgment of American churches on segregation” the National Council of Churches’s (NCC) 1952 resolution, which called for all adherents to take a stand against racial discrimination. According to the NCC, segregation was “a denial of the Christian faith” and “diametrically opposed to what Christians believe.” Furthermore, American race relations reflected poorly on Christianity worldwide. Cartwright claimed that, with the world wondering “if we truly walk as we talk,” how local churches responded to desegregation efforts “may determine the future peace of the world.” Dedicated Christians striving to live out their faith only had one correct option: to join with those “who work to implement the decision.”

Having established the clear moral call, Cartwright discussed how churches could assist in “effecting a tranquil transition” from segregation to desegregation “fully with the spirit” of *Brown*. He personally believed it would be a painless process, drawing upon previous examples of desegregation in the military and in interstate travel to predict “we shall adjust to the breaking down of segregation [in public schools] much more easily than we think.” Although he conceded that “undoubtedly voluntary segregation will continue for many years in some sections,” Cartwright assumed that the delay was

beneficial because it would provide time for local Christians to convince their communities to voluntarily comply with the decision and to “mitigate the fears” of local apocalyptic violence. Overall, Cartwright’s sermon was optimistic, expressing his expectation that moral education would be sufficient to eradicate segregation’s “spirit not only from the statute books but from the hearts of men.”¹

Encouraging such patience and delay would prove disastrous, however, especially after 31 May 1955, when the Court ruled in *Brown II* that public schools should desegregate at “all deliberate speed.” While churches applauded the decision as a wise step toward implementing desegregation, segregationists and local school boards used the language to legitimize delay. According to John Kirk, *Brown II*’s “overall message to the South seemed to be that it could take as long as it wanted to desegregate schools. To many, this meant never.” Failing to set a definite deadline resulted not in voluntary compliance, but rather in a widespread massive resistance movement that effectively stalled school desegregation for years.² Far from producing a “tranquil transition,” clerical support for *Brown II* would breed violence and defiance in local communities.

However, white ministers’ conviction that segregation was immoral suggests that their unintentional support for policies beneficial to massive resisters was misguided, not

¹ Cartwright’s sermon was reproduced as “A Challenge: Racial Segregation: Is It Un-Christian?” in the 30 May 1954 edition of the *Arkansas Gazette*.

² Kirk, “Maximum Resistance and Minimum Compliance,” 80-81. As much as scholars differ on *Brown*’s significance, most agree that the Supreme Court’s gradual delay and *Brown II*’s doctrine of “all deliberate speed” was, at the very least, unfortunate. Richard Kluger’s classic work *Simple Justice*, an overall paean to the monumental significance of *Brown*, wrote that “by almost any measure, [the delay] gave the South a great deal more of what it had asked at the final round of arguments than it gave to the Negro.” Michael Klarman, who argues that *Brown* precipitated massive resistance and overall proved more a rallying point for segregationists than civil rights activists, also contends that “the decision seems to have encouraged defiance and undermined those moderates who were already taking preliminary steps toward desegregation.” For more, see Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America’s Struggle for Equality* (New York: Random House, 1975), 745; and Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford, 2004), 319-320.

malicious. This chapter looks at the religious discourse on the national and state levels from 1954-1955, contending that religious bodies nationwide constructed a strong argument against segregation that drew from both Biblical and practical reasons. Not only did segregation's existence directly hurt world evangelism efforts, the same reactionary elements that vocally endorsed segregation also provided fodder for atheist Communists and opposed ecumenical church efforts. However ineffective their support, white ministers had ample genuine motivations to wish segregation gone.

Nevertheless, ministers backed disastrous policy because they complacently assumed that desegregation was inevitable, having excessive faith in their local congregations' willingness to let their faith rather than their politics guide their actions. Their complacency was also tinged with the realization that while Southerners would not protest delay, they would certainly contest "forced integration" or militant enforcement. National complacency trickled down into local churches, which by and large praised the decision but failed to apply pressure for enforcement. Expecting that future desegregation would speed up rather than slow down, local churches assumed that the initial limited successes were the first signs of an avalanche rather than a grueling and slow trickle.

In the months following *Brown*, each major denomination released its own resolution praising the decision. The SRC recapped these denominational resolutions in its publication *New South*, citing church leaders and organizations who called the decision in line with "the broad Christian principle of the dignity and worth of human personality" (United Church Women), a "recognition of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God" (Methodist Bishop William C. Martin), and, more simply, "just

and right” (Protestant Episcopal Church, Southeastern Province).³ Surveying the number of resolutions praising the decision, the *Christian Century* concluded that denominational “unanimity proves that the source of their conviction is found in the Christian faith itself.... One can no longer claim that there is a substantial difference on this matter.”⁴

The spurt of resolutions praising *Brown* was the latest round in a series of postwardenominational statements declaring that segregation was against the will of God. The *Christian Evangelist*, the denominational magazine of the Disciples of Christ, reported that the southern Presbyterians’ Committee on Christian Relations had claimed in May 1949 that “since Jesus placed love at the center of the ideal of the Kingdom there can be no escaping responsibility by the church to seek actively for a solution of the problem of race and human rights upon a Christian basis and as an integral part of a God-given task.”⁵ The NCC’s 1952 resolution that Cartwright cited also appeared in the *Church Woman*, the United Church Women (UCW)’s periodical.⁶ Broadly summarized, these resolutions declared racial segregation “as un-Christian, unjust and unbrotherly.”⁷

While the context of the debate over segregation drastically changed over the years, the Bible verses used to justify racial desegregation stayed remarkably consistent from this era on through the 1960s. Dorothy Tilly, one of the two southern members on President Truman’s Committee on Civil Rights, backed her assertion that “there is not room in any heart for both God and prejudice” with Biblical evidence. Specifically, Tilly wrote:

³ SRC, *Answers for Action: Schools in the South*, 6-7.

⁴ Editorial, “Resist Racist Appeals!,” *Christian Century*, 27 October 1954, 1295.

⁵ “A Southern Church Studies the Race Question,” *Christian Evangelist*, 2 November 1949.

⁶ “The Churches Have a Platform—On Segregation,” *Church Woman*, October 1952.

⁷ Resist Racist Appeals!,” *Christian Century*, 1295.

God the Father of all the races of men—all men brothers. Then, remember the love teachings of Jesus—His example of crossing all lines and making a woman of Samaria the first city missionary; Peter’s house-top experience and the Gentiles having the Gospel; Paul preaching to Jew and Greek, proclaiming “He hath made of one blood all nations of men,” declaring “there is neither Greek nor Jew. . . but Christ is all, in all.”⁸

“Peter’s house-top experience and the Gentiles having the Gospel” referred to Acts 10, a particularly popular passage for desegregationists because it featured the Apostle Peter’s purposeful evangelism to non-Jewish people, demonstrating God’s universality. In a 13 February 1952 editorial, the *Evangelist* declared that segregation had little support in the New Testament and that, if anything, “there seems to be definite teaching against it, as may be gained from the experience of Peter in his vision on the housetop at Joppa.” In a 9 August 1954 *Christianity and Crisis* article, Morehouse College president Benjamin Mays explained how Acts 10 applied to desegregation by quoting a later section of the chapter, where the Apostle Peter “was quick to apprehend ‘that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable by him.’” In a later pamphlet published during the Little Rock crisis, First Lutheran Church pastor Richard C. Jahn also quoted from the story “‘God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.’ (Acts 10:28) I must not think with contempt of anyone.”⁹

Tilly’s quotation of the Apostle Paul invoked Acts 17:26 (“He hath made of one blood”) and Galatians 3:28 (“there is neither Greek nor Jew), both central proof texts in desegregation theology. Mays claimed that the Galatians verse “sounded the universal

⁸ M. E. Tilly, “Overcoming Prejudice,” *Church Woman*, January 1953. The “woman of Samaria” reference likely refers to the story of John 4, where Jesus had an extensive discussion with a Samaritan woman despite the historically rooted antipathy between their ethnic origins.

⁹ “Disciples and Segregation,” *Christian Evangelist*, 13 February 1952; Benjamin E. Mays, “The Church Will Be Challenged in Evanston,” *Christianity and Crisis* 14 (9 August 1954), 107; Jahn, “What Saith the Scripture,” 21 October 1957, Arkansas Council of Human Relations (ACHR) Papers, Box 29.

character of the Gospel,” while Jahn cited Acts 17:26 as proof that “physically there is a common brotherhood between all human beings.” Martin Luther King, Jr. also frequently quoted these verses as Biblical proof texts, especially in his sermon “Paul’s Letter to American Christians.”¹⁰

Not only did these religious leaders argue that segregation was against the will of God, they also contended it marred Christianity’s international image. Specifically, domestic racial difficulties hurt international evangelism efforts and provided fodder for Communists abroad, which championed an atheistic agenda that was anathema to world Christianity. In her seminal work *Cold War Civil Rights*, Mary Dudziak contends that the federal government intervened in civil rights affairs because it sought to mollify international criticism that domestic racial discrimination threatened its international image. According to Dudziak, U.S. political leaders had to at least appear to champion civil rights reform, trying to “tell a particular story about race and American democracy” that accented progress and “triumph of good over evil.”¹¹

¹⁰ Mays, “The Church Will Be Challenged in Evanston;” Jahn, “What Saith the Scripture”; King, *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 130. When asked to provide an explicitly Biblical defense for integration, King cited both verses: “Paul’s declaration on Mars Hill in which he states God has mad [sic] out of one blood all nations of men to live on the face of the earth. Again Paul states there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (King to Wilbert J. Johnson, 24 September 1956, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume III: Birth of a New Age, December 1955-December 1956*, eds. Clayborne Carson et al. [Berkeley: University of California, 1997], 378-379). The theological argument persisted throughout the era, with some changes. *Christian Century* editor Kyle Haselden, in his widely-cited *The Racial Problem in Christian Perspective*, argued that the proper Christian outlook not only accepted Acts 17:26 as true, but also provided the “spirit which transcends ethnic differences, which is beyond likes and dislikes, and which resolves the conflicts of racial interest,” allowing a secular society to desegregate. Haselden also cited Galatians 3:28 as the “Magna Charta of Christian human relations,” where “that spirit which makes all one” obliterates all human differences (Haselden, *The Racial Problem in Christian Perspective* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959], 155-166, 189-190).

¹¹ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton, 2000), 13. Dudziak details how the Supreme Court took international criticism as a factor in *Brown* and how American diplomats seized upon it as a public relations coup. She argues that “*Brown* was an essential and long-overdue affirmation of the story of race and American democracy that the government had already promoted abroad” (107).

While Dudziak focuses on federal policy makers, American Christian leaders also had a vested interest in championing racial progress and opposing world communism. In March 1950, World Council of Churches staff member Paul Abrecht condemned segregation as “the greatest obstacle to European-American understanding and the most powerful weapon in the hands of opponents of American policy.” Segregation, according to Abrecht, was “the one thing that makes even many well-disposed Europeans feel that Americans preaching about democracy is hypocritical.” Otherwise sympathetic Europeans liberals’ objections to American race relations made them vulnerable to atheistic communist appeals, weakening Christianity’s potential international appeal.¹²

Adopting an anticommunist approach also defended the mainline church against reactionary forces that opposed its social agenda. Dudziak observed that domestic fears of communism “left a very narrow space for criticism of the status quo,” making criticism of the class dimensions behind racial exploitation heresy.¹³ The polarized atmosphere made national church bodies very sensitive to charges like J. B. Matthews’s July 1953 article “Reds in Our Churches,” which claimed that at least seven thousand clergy were communist agents. Christian publications took these charges seriously and emphasized the various differences between Christianity and communism. *Christianity and Crisis* co-founder John C. Bennett called such red-baiting accusations cynical attacks from social conservatives looking to “discredit the heritage of the Social Gospel as a whole and with it the contemporary social teachings of the Churches.” The *Evangelist*

¹² Paul Abrecht, “As Others See Us,” *Christianity and Crisis* 10 (20 March 1950), 26-27.

¹³ One unfortunate side effect of progressive clerics’ anticommunism was that it pushed away radical Christians who endorsed communist thinking as a radical solution to racial and economic inequality. The debate over communism created a sharp divide between the leaders of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, as labor organizer and former minister Claude Williams became persona non grata to Christian Socialists like Howard Kester. For more, see Anthony P. Dunbar, *Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929-1959* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia, 1981).

also protested, calling Matthews's accusations irresponsible and defending the church as "a leading bulwark against communism in the nation today."¹⁴ Such a reply linked American mainstream churches to national efforts to contain communism abroad.

International scorn for American racism also directly marred Christian witness. Reflecting on a recent Asia tour, African American pastor James Robinson wrote that Americans who blamed Communists for publicizing domestic racial tensions were missing the point. After all, "Communists merely exploit what many of the people we respect most are greatly disturbed about when they see the great difference between our ideals and actions." Asian curiosity about American race relations from both Christians and non-Christians left Robinson uncomfortably on the defensive. Robinson recalled one discomfiting incident, when a Muslim "put me to shame in Pakistan when he asked me if the Christians in America could measure up to the brotherhood which has been achieved within the body of Islam." He stated that, expecting the church to do more, "our friends around the world state categorically that they cannot have confidence in us as long as they see such a large disparity between our professed ideals and our concrete acts." According to Robinson, the short term solution to losing out potential converts to other religions was to send more African Americans on world missions, because they were generally better received. The longer term solution, of course, was to "demonstrate the practicality of the message of Jesus as a solution to group and color antagonisms" through racial reform.¹⁵

¹⁴ "The Protestant Clergy and Communism," *Christianity and Crisis* 13 (3 August 1953), 107-110; "Attack Upon Protestant Ministers," *Christian Evangelist*, 29 July 1953, 713.

¹⁵ James H. Robinson, "Race Relations and International Problems," *Christian Evangelist*, 11 February 1953, 134-135, 140.

Christian writings praising *Brown* made sure to discuss its international ramifications. According to the *Christian Century*, the decision “will do more to clean the hands of the United States as it comes into the court of world public opinion than any other single act by any agency of our government since the return of the Boxer indemnity.” The *Christian Evangelist* echoed this observation, arguing that the decision might be “the turning point in the struggle of Western democracy for its survival,” threatened by negative propaganda about its sordid race relations.¹⁶

As partners in the larger American church, southern religious leaders had plenty of incentive to maintain their own formal opposition to segregation. The Southern Baptist Convention Christian Life Commission’s 1956 working paper “Integration” observed that American international prestige had been a considerable factor motivating the Court’s decision to eliminate legal segregation. Still, the paper approvingly credited the Christian message that condemned racial discrimination, arguing that its tension “between the Christian ideal on one hand and the very imperfect embodiment of that ideal in the world and even within the Christian fellowship is necessary if real progress is to be made.” While Southern Baptists had their own prejudices to conquer, they recognized that “we cannot escape the plain teachings of the Bible that every basic principle revealed in it knows no limitation,” especially racial ones.¹⁷

As David Chappell contends, the force of the pro-desegregation argument left segregationists on the defensive. E. Earle Ellis, Aurora College in Illinois professor and Florida native, contended that the mainline periodicals’ tendency “to identify integration

¹⁶ “A Momentous Court Decision,” *Christian Evangelist*, 2 June 1954, 515; “The School Decision,” *Christian Century*, 2 June 1954, 660.

¹⁷ T. B. Matson, “Integration,” Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Commission, 1956, in ACHR Papers, Box 29.

with Christianity and segregation with the forces of iniquity” was “a basic distortion of the issues.” Still, the most Ellis could say in rebuttal was that the desegregationists’ argument that “integration was concordant with Christian race relations” did not mean that it was “*necessary*,” and that segregation was allowable even if it was not ideal. Ellis had to concede that “few Christians” could “defend *in toto* segregation-in-practice in the South,” instead resting his argument on two contentions that race relations in the North were far from ideal and that a gentler segregation could produce better results.¹⁸ Even the seminarians opposing desegregation admitted that it was in the proper Christian spirit, hardly a rallying cry for local segregationists.

The religious and practical argument that the national church constructed in support of *Brown* denied white southern clergy the ability to comfortably embrace the fiction that disfranchisement-era race relations were ideal. It also gave the minister a clear directive to encourage progress and to work with local allies to build a more Christian and less violently racist order, proving national Christianity’s ability to redeem society before a skeptical worldwide audience. Numerous unsung clerics throughout the region cited such reasoning to justify their bold stands in direct opposition to their communities for desegregation.

The American church failed to channel their moral imperative into an effective national movement that championed racial desegregation, however. While they knew which way to go, their end destination and plans how to get there remained all too vague.

¹⁸ E. Earle Ellis, “Segregation and the Kingdom of God,” *Christianity Today* 1, no. 12 (18 March 1957), 6-8. Although *Christianity Today*, the evangelical counterpart to the *Christian Century*, published Ellis’s article, its own editorial stance veered toward the Billy Graham argument that segregation was un-Christian but that Christians must be careful not to speak “in the spirit of secular and socializing views” (“Review of Current Religious Thought,” *Christianity Today* 1, no. 2 [29 October 1956], 38). For more on the theological debate surrounding desegregation, see Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*, 105-130.

In regards to the *Brown* decision, Christians nationally and locally assumed that it would be a “tranquil transition” and that, given enough time and space, religion’s gentle and moderate encouragement would lead white Southerners to voluntarily abandon racial segregation.

Their naïveté led them to almost uniformly embrace delay. Nearly all of the sampled publications singled out *Brown’s* unspecified timeline as a wise and prudent decision, expecting that time would solve local obstacles toward enforcement. According to the *Christian Evangelist*, the Court’s decision gave sufficient time for localities to “thresh out” the method on account for the “many perplexing problems yet unsolved,” and the *Century* claimed that the ruling’s effectiveness “almost certainly will be enhanced by the wise decision of the court to postpone for months” the decision’s implementation. Reinhold Niebuhr’s editorial in *Christianity and Crisis* called the delay “additional proof” of the Court’s wisdom, claiming that it “did much to deflect any incipient revolt against the decision.”¹⁹ In contrast, the *Church Woman* reported that the southern state affiliates who met on 21-22 June “recognized the time factor in adjustment and also the immediacy of their efforts.”²⁰ Unlike other organizations, the UCW also emphasized the urgency to act in the contemporary moment so that desegregation would actually occur.

The “perplexing problems” which the *Evangelist* editorial referred to specifically meant discontented local reactions to the decision, which Christian leaders assumed that delay would quiet. The *Century* predicted in its initial editorial that “during the next few weeks there will probably be a good deal of noisy protest against this decision” as “race-

¹⁹ “A Momentous Court Decision,” *Christian Evangelist*, 2 June 1954, 515; “The School Decision,” *Christian Century*, 2 June 1954, 660-661; Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Supreme Court on Segregation in the Schools,” *Christianity and Crisis* 14 (14 June 1954), 76.

²⁰ “Southern Leaders Confer,” *Church Woman* 20 (August-September 1954), 30.

baiters in politics, in newspaper offices or hanging around court-house squares may vie with one another in the ferocity of their threats.” In its official statement on *Brown*, the NCC admitted that “to put the decision into effect will test the goodwill and discipline in many communities.” Meanwhile, the *Christian Evangelist* quoted a *New York Times* editorial claiming that the decision would “touch, and undoubtedly irritate, highly sensitive sociological, ideological and political areas of the national life.” In particular, the *Evangelist* feared states would abandon their public school systems, forcing churches to choose between allowing public education to wither or taking over a segregated system.²¹ While these editors recognized that desegregated public schools were not popular among local whites, they vastly underestimated just how unpopular they would remain.

Because they underestimated the problem, church leaders believed that moral suasion and religious appeals could win over recalcitrant white southerners, providing the smoothest possible solution to the situation. The *Century* claimed that delay would “particularly give Christian forces in the south their opportunity to calm any storm which may blow” and the needed time “to reassure the frightened, to draw up the constructive proposals which the court has asked for, and to put the race-baiters in their place.” Meanwhile, the *Evangelist* claimed that because segregation had “moral and religious implications of great significance, the churches can and must play an important part in interpreting and cushioning the impact of the decision upon public opinion.”²² Recent

²¹ “No School Segregation, Says Supreme Court,” *Christian Century* 71 (26 May 1954), 627; Statement Adopted by NCC General Board Re: Decision of the U.S. Supreme Court on Segregation in the Public Schools, Chicago, Ill., 19 May 1954, SRC Papers, Reel 44; “The Churches and the Court Decision,” *Christian Evangelist*, 31 March 1954.

²² “No School Segregation, Says Supreme Court,” *Christian Century*, 26 May 1954; “The School Decision,” *Christian Century*, 2 June 1954, 661; “A Momentous Court Decision,” *Christian Evangelist*, 2 June 1954.

history also provided hopeful signs. A later *Evangelist* editorial cited with approval *Arkansas Gazette* editor Harry Ashmore's claim that desegregated school communities soon realized "it wasn't as bad as we thought it would be" and that integration could happen peacefully.²³

Christian leaders expected that churches could dismantle local opposition through interracial committees and by maintaining empathy for recalcitrant whites. The 21-22 June meeting of various UCW leaders passed a resolution declaring that "the best solutions to our many problems can be reached when people of all races work together toward a common end, and we urge women to make every effort to bring together individuals in free discussion." Edwin L. Brock also recommended that local Christians oppose "dishonest" ways to "circumvent the law," such as abolishing public school education or redistricting school zones to maintain virtual segregation, maintaining a "sensibly restrained and unimpassioned" approach and fighting "the demonstrations of littleness and ill will."²⁴ Brock encouraged Christians to operate as the community's moral arbiters and discourage extremist actions, allowing the mass of white southerners to freely choose voluntary desegregation. Such a strategy, however, could all too easily justify moderation and neglect the just demands of local African Americans in favor of an ostensibly compliant plan that perpetuated inequality along racial lines.

National church structures' appeals for delay dovetailed with southern liberals' hope that religion's presence on the stage could overcome Jim Crow customs. Two weeks after the decision, SRC executive director George Mitchell described his "right method:" "why should not citizens of both races who are seriously interested in education

²³ "Light on Segregation Issue," *Christian Evangelist*, 14 July 1954, 659.

²⁴ "Southern Leaders Confer," *Church Woman*, August-September 1954; Brock, "Christians and the Court Decision," *Christian Century*, 18 August 1954, 975-976.

voluntarily set up a committee in each school unit to discuss this problem and attempt a settlement that will be fair?" Churches, in Mitchell's mind, would provide the needed encouragement to organize such groups. He expressed his confidence that "the churches are going to rally to their jobs and play a major part in the work that confronts the South in the next few years."²⁵

Clerical confidence thus led clergy to choose gradualism over other possible solutions. As churches would eventually do in the 1960s, they could have lobbied for federal intervention, put political pressure on state and national leaders, and marshal national pressure against southern racism. Even without knowing future events, several contemporaries questioned the clergy's confidence in their moral suasion capabilities. For example, in March 1951, South Carolina governor James Byrnes threatened to close down the public school system should the Court rule segregated facilities unconstitutional, leaving it for churches to decide between supporting segregation or deny needed education. According to Stiles B. Lines, state church leaders chose not to respond because they knew that "such a large proportion of churchmen share the conservative view on segregation" and they feared "that they cannot count on the support of the laity in this case." Had churches recognized their approach's inherent difficulties at the outset, they might have adopted more militant, and possibly more successful, strategies to enforce desegregation.

Gradualism also relied heavily upon local clergy to spearhead the actual work of pointing their communities in the Christian direction. This, of course, begs the question: how did local ministers respond to *Brown* and its immediate aftermath? This study now turns to examine local pastors in Arkansas and their reactions to *Brown*. Like their

²⁵ Mitchell to James Sells, 14 June 1954; Mitchell to Lauris Whitman, 31 May 1954, SRC Papers, Reel 44.

national counterparts, the state's religious organizations applauded the decision, but remained content with resolutions and pronouncements, believing that gradualism would bring about the most positive change. While they made clear their preference for school boards to desegregate and played a supportive role in the handful of local communities that did so, they did not emphasize the urgency of the hour. Furthermore, even at this early stage, clerical activists remained sensitive to community criticism.

As seen in the beginning of this chapter, Colbert S. Cartwright echoed the national church's views, supporting *Brown* from a moral perspective but avoiding more militant alternatives. Cartwright's father was none other than the then-editor of the *Christian Evangelist*, whose ideas we have also explored above. While worldviews are not transmitted genetically, Cartwright's biography contains traces of exceptional liberalism and a border South upbringing. His exposure to pacifists like Harold Fey (who later became editor of the *Century*) led him to successfully apply for conscientious objector status during World War II. After attending Yale Seminary, Cartwright became pastor of a church in Lynchburg, Virginia, where he joined with interracial committees to address local tensions. After falling in love with and marrying one of the members in his congregation, Cartwright and his new wife moved to Little Rock in January 1954, to "start life together on equal footing in a new church setting." In his autobiography, Cartwright recalled that before he moved he had inquired about the city's race relations, explaining that he "had some problems in Virginia over those issues and did not look forward to more of the same. I was assured that the city had no racial problems and that I need not worry on that account."²⁶

²⁶ Cartwright, *Walking My Lonesome Valley* (Self-published manuscript, 1993), 69-73, 80.

However, dismissing Cartwright as an outlier because of his religious liberalism is a mistake. Cartwright established his impeccable bona fides before moving to Little Rock, meaning that interviewing churches had to have known about them. Furthermore, Cartwright's new pastorate, the three-hundred member Pulaski Heights Christian Church, welcomed Cartwright's political views. During Cartwright's interview process, the local deacons glowingly described the church's "liberal heritage" and mentioned that its previous pastors were "all courageously socially radical in terms of Arkansas culture." The church's previous history gives credence to the deacons' assertion. It claims to be the first church in the South to freely accept members of other denominations, and its previous pastors were involved with the incipient labor movement and served at local relocation camps for interned Japanese Americans.²⁷ Pulaski Heights Christian Church is also likely exceptional, but its existence challenges flat assumptions of conservatism in southern churches.

Many local church bodies echoed at least elements of Cartwright's message. On the more conservative side, Paul Hayes, pastor of a church in Hot Springs, expressed his faith that "the new generation in the South will obey the Supreme Court's decision with a minimum of friction." Hayes's statement fails to capture the theological imperative, but even a blunt call for law and order was a vote for desegregation.²⁸ Meanwhile, O. L. Bayless, Arkansas representative to the Southern Baptist Convention's Home Mission Board, believed that broad Christian leadership and interracial cooperation would do

²⁷ Ibid., 76-79; Pulaski Heights Christian Church, "Church History," www.phcc.lr.org (2 March 2012).

²⁸ "Pastor Sees Compliance," *Arkansas Gazette*, 18 May 1954.

more for African American Baptists, hoping for a not unsympathetic but still heavily paternalistic relationship.²⁹

Even explicit racists could uphold the idea that the Supreme Court decision was good. In his appeal for Supreme Court compliance, Rev. G. A. McKelvey wrote, “we are pretty well aware of the limitations of the Southern Negro,” namely his lack of morals, ambition, and initiative, and that “in many instances great hearts beat in humble homes and beneath blue denum [sic] overalls and starched cotton dresses.” Yet McKelvey also equated white supremacy in the South with the “ugliness and repulsiveness of the goose-stepping Nazis,” and unequivocally stated that “race superiority, founded on color lines alone, is bigotry and egotism at its ugly worst” and was contrary to Biblical teachings.³⁰

McKelvey’s paternalistic support paled in comparison to his Methodist denomination’s enthusiastic support of *Brown* as in line with “the spirit and teaching of Jesus Christ.” The resolution hewed closely to the national line, also praising the “wise decision” to postpone implementation, which they felt would give its churches time to partner with local communities to desegregate with “clear, calm judgment and Christian good-will.”³¹ Meanwhile, Catholic bishop Albert L. Fletcher reminded state Catholics that “the Church considers all men to be equally the children of God” and that *Brown* cleared the legal path for Catholics “to act more freely in giving to all races the same benefits she is able to provide for the practice of their holy religion.”³² Much like their national superiors, local clergy applauded *Brown* but did not press for immediate change.

²⁹ Bayless, “Arkansas Baptists Will Meet The Need,” *Arkansas Baptist*, 24 June 1954.

³⁰ G. A. McKelvey, “Race Relations: A Timely Discussion of a Pressing Problem,” *Arkansas Methodist*, 24 February 1955, 3.

³¹ “Text of Methodist Report,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 13 June 1954.

³² “Official Announcement,” *The Guardian*, Diocese of Little Rock, 13 August 1954. In his unpublished memoirs, Arkansas Council of Human Relations executive director Nat Griswold observed that while the letter in style appeared to firmly support desegregation, its actual effect “was to establish local option in

Clerical support for voluntary compliance passed its first test with flying colors, although it was hardly representative of the difficulties ahead. A few days after the Court's announcement, the school boards in Charleston and Fayetteville—both in the mountainous northwest part of the state—announced their decision to desegregate their school districts for the upcoming school year. Their approaches toward implementation varied. Charleston kept its plans secret, only reporting that that it had desegregated after the fact to avoid unwelcome publicity on what it insisted was a local problem.³³ On the other hand, Fayetteville publically announced its efforts to desegregate its high schools, and, according to Andrew Brill, successfully accomplished a peaceful desegregation campaign with “quiet dignity.” The resulting publicity provides a unique window into how local clergy envisioned voluntary compliance, supporting other interested forces.³⁴

According to observer Stephen Stephan, a sociology professor at the nearby University of Arkansas, local ministerial support was a notable reason for Fayetteville's unique desegregation campaign. Specifically, local churches adhered to the national strategy of promoting interracial contact—especially among youth—and lending moral support to the overall plan. As the local high school student leaders also were involved in local youth groups, church activity “helped to destroy the feeling that Negroes would not be welcome in the high school.” He noted that while a handful of the out of state letters

each parish. Consequently, generally nothing was changed” (Griswold, *The Second Reconstruction in Little Rock*, 21, Sara Alderman Murphy Papers, UA Fayetteville). Its limited impact suggests further the futility of the voluntary approach.

³³ “Sheridan Rescinds Integration Order, Fayetteville to Mix,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 23 May 1954; “Classes Mixed Since August At Charleston,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 14 September 1954; *Southern School News*, October 1954, 3.

³⁴ Brill, “*Brown* in Fayetteville: Peaceful Southern School Desegregation in 1954,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 65 (Winter 2006), 338. Brill argues that Fayetteville's success serves as evidence that there were multiple Souths that reacted differently to the process.

called the desegregation process against God's will, most letters "endorsed the board's stand as consistent with democratic and Christian principles."³⁵

Oral histories mostly confirm Stephan's initial observations. John Lewis, who attended Fayetteville High in 1954, confirmed that many of the high school's student leaders "came out of the Methodist and Episcopal and Presbyterian and Christian churches" and that desegregation was discussed in church meetings. Meanwhile, Thelma Engler, president of the UCW state chapter, recalled that fundamentalist churches refused to allow ministerial associations to endorse integration efforts, but that allied organizations "kept the idea of accepting everybody as the ideal." Engler's mention of fundamentalist churches serves as a reminder that progressive voices were by no means unanimous. Still, these testimonies suggest that local churches in Fayetteville helped rather than harmed the desegregation process.³⁶

However, Fayetteville's situation was quite different than that of Little Rock or other school districts that had more difficulty obeying the Supreme Court. Fayetteville had pragmatic reasons to desegregate its schools. In his study on early school desegregation, Stephan found that desegregation was far more likely to occur in districts that were smaller and predominantly white, for economic reasons. As an example, Stephan cited Fayetteville—which only had 400 African Americans amongst a town of 18,000, and only six African American high school students enrolled in its district. Lacking a local school for so few students, the school district had previously paid around \$5000 a year to have them to attend schools at Fort Smith or Hot Springs, sixty to 180 miles away. William Gatewood points out that Fayetteville's progressive reputation made

³⁵ Stephan, "Integration in Arkansas," *Christian Century*, 24 November 1954, 1426-1427.

³⁶ "John Lewis" and "Thelma R. Engler," in *Civil Obedience: An Oral History of School Desegregation in Fayetteville, Arkansas, 1954-1965*, ed. William Gatewood (Fayetteville: Arkansas, 1994), 125, 144.

it more amenable to compliance, as it was a college town and Senator William Fulbright's home. Finally, Andrew Brill argues that Fayetteville's location in Northwest Arkansas, one of the bastions of pro-Union sentiment back during the Civil War, meant that Jim Crow sentiment was never as strong as it was in other locations. Desegregation occurred in Fayetteville because it was also far more convenient and cheaper for these districts to desegregate their schools than to maintain segregation.³⁷

Although the state initially appeared to move toward compliance, clergy encountered occasional local resistance. Once the *Gazette* republished parts of his sermon, Cartwright received some mail from eight states disagreeing with his antisegregationist stance. Mostly, letter writers objecting to his sermon raised both "a fear of mongrelization" and Biblical arguments proving African inferiority. One such example came from a Mrs. Robinson, who wrote that "there isn't a Negroe [sic] in the world that God bids me degenerate to their low principles." Some letters also contained veiled threats, such as Earl C. Swider's: "I understand it you are new in these parts and some of us Boys around here play for keeps." Swider was likely a local, as he mentioned the class differences between the well-to-do Pulaski Heights area and the rest of the city.³⁸

Swider also accused Cartwright of being a Communist dupe and that the "only reason this is happening now is Russia," daring Cartwright to prove that African Americans "are not Hypocrites and Not give Russia a tool to hold over their heads." The broad association made between civil rights reform and communist sympathy might have

³⁷ A. Stephen Stephan, "Population Ratios, Racial Attitudes, and Desegregation," *Journal of Negro Education* 26 (Winter 1957), 22-29; Stephan, "Integration in Arkansas," 1427; "Classes Mixed Since August At Charleston," *Arkansas Gazette*, 14 September 1954, Gatewood, Introduction, *Civil Disobedience*, 6; Brill, "Brown in Fayetteville," 340-341. For similar reasons, Charleston's school board also claimed that desegregation would save the school about \$4000 in transportation costs.

³⁸ Cartwright, *Lonesome Valley*, 82-83; Mrs. Robinson to Cartwright, 24 May 1954; Swider to Cartwright, 24 May 1954, Colbert S. Cartwright Papers.

been what motivated Arkansas Methodists to devote a large section of their 12 June resolution to it. According to the resolution, “we resent unproved assertions that the Protestant ministry is honeycombed with disloyalty. We are unalterably opposed to communism, but we know that the alternative to communism is not an American brand of facism.”³⁹ Despite these resolutions broadcasting their counter argument that civil rights reform actually hurt worldwide communism, supportive ministers remained susceptible to red-baiting.

Such letters reveal that the spirit of massive resistance was present long before it materialized into full form. Sheridan, in between Pine Bluff and Little Rock, also encountered local resistance in its own unsuccessful attempt to comply with *Brown*. On 21 May, the day before Fayetteville announced its own decision, they were the first city in the state to announce compliance. However, local opposition forced them to reverse their plans the next day, and even after they did still threatened to replace them entirely. On a 1 June mass meeting, state representative candidate J. H. Duncan criticized the clerical support behind Sheridan’s desegregation, especially the pastor of Sheridan’s First Methodist Church, Bryan Stephens. Stephens had opposed the mass meeting, warning that “men are liable to resort to violence and bloodshed” in such situations. Highlighting Stephens’s mediating role might well have made him a target for segregationist reprisals as well. Sheridan’s defiance also inspired hope that the Court’s decision could be resisted. According to a local citizen, Sheridan “had given the people of Pine Bluff more

³⁹ Swider to Cartwright, 24 May 1954, Cartwright Papers; “Text of Methodist Report,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 13 June 1954.

hope and inspiration than anything that had happened since the unprecedented Supreme Court decision.”⁴⁰

Still, such opposition pales in comparison to what similar actions would spark in the future. Had state church bodies united in decrying Sheridan’s resistance and reminded the school board of its legal duty, they might have overcome local opposition. As other districts like Hot Springs and Little Rock discussed possible desegregation methods, a hard push from church bodies might have encouraged desegregation to occur before fatal national events like the Southern Manifesto stiffened resistance.

Arkansas churches failed to take advantage of this window because of their faith in moral suasion. They could point to its remarkable success in Fayetteville and Charleston, ignoring the regional differences that made them exceptional outliers rather than representative communities like Sheridan, and dismissing oppositional mail as the unfortunate product of a lunatic fringe. In April 1955, assessing the situation, newly hired Arkansas Council of Human Relations (ACHR) executive director Nat Griswold claimed that “Arkansas has an excellent leadership in the matter of inter-group relations and is more ready to do that which is right than any other southern state.”⁴¹

Therefore, when the Supreme Court announced on 31 May 1955 that school desegregation should occur “with all deliberate speed,” local clerics praised the decision as wise. According to the *Arkansas Methodist*, the decision “makes possible a more sane and deliberate approach to the whole problem involved than would have been possible” had it set a fixed date. Griswold also praised the decision’s timetable, claiming that it

⁴⁰ “Sheridan Set to Mix Pupils In High School,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 22 May 1954; “Sheridan Rescinds Integration Order, Fayetteville to Mix,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 23 May 1954; “Sheridan Session Demands School Segregation Continue,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 2 June 1954; *Southern School News*, 3 September 1954, 2.

⁴¹ *Southern School News*, 4 May 1955, 2.

allowed local concerned citizens to focus on “joint planning to meet properly these requirements which recognizably are in accord with our religious teachings and with our democratic principles.”⁴²

National organizations were also optimistic regarding future implementation. In its 1954 end of year issue, the *Evangelist* maintained that “many of the fears [of segregationists] have not been realized,” even as it admitted that whole states had ignored the decision.⁴³ The *Century* praised *Brown II* for its moderation, contending that it gives churches “an unparalleled opportunity to raise their voices” for action. In contrast, had the Court issued a deadline, “the stage would have been set for an explosion of demagoguery which in turn would have been met by a demand for punitive legislation.” The *Century* editorial recognized that state resistance encouraged by southern political leaders like James Eastland presented a potential obstacle, but dismissed it as “more than a little silly” in light of the moderate tone of the decision.⁴⁴ Despite the mounting evidence that the South would not simply accept *Brown*, church leaders maintained hope that current progress judged future trends.

Clerical perspectives dovetailed with those of southern liberals, who remained optimistic in May 1955. Days before the Court’s ruling on implementation, *Christianity and Crisis* ran a reprint of Frank Porter Graham’s article “The Need For Wisdom,” which urged for a moderate process. Graham wrote that “both those who would require immediately complete integration in all communities with the resulting bitter resistance in many communities, and those who would use time as a tactic of deliberate

⁴² “Supreme Court Turns Over Task Of Integration to Local Officials; Arkansas’s Proposal Is Followed,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 1 June 1955; “The Court Announces Method For Desegregation,” *Arkansas Methodist*, 9 June 1955.

⁴³ “Where Integration is Succeeding,” *Christian Evangelist*, 29 December 1954.

⁴⁴ “The Desegregation Ruling,” *Christian Century*, 15 June 1955.

noncompliance in those communities” would be responsible for the resulting damage locally, nationally, and internationally. According to Graham, time properly used would remove the emotional appeals to either nullify the law or to demand for federal intervention “resulting in contagious fear and further resistance in the Deep South.” Voluntary desegregated communities, according to Graham, would “by their example show the way” for others, a domino theory where even recalcitrant districts would eventually be forced to desegregate. Like earlier authors, Graham also cast his argument in an international scope:

Standing on the brink of the disaster of a divided world with the hydrogen bomb in its bosom, the nations cannot lag in the control of its power, loaded with either the doom of our civilization or the hopes of co-operation in its creative uses for all people through the United Nations. Let us not lag in our own democracy but rather may we in this hour become the fresh source of equal freedom and the dynamic center of a spiritual chain reaction for the mobilization of all the races, regions, humane cultures, and spiritual hopes of the people so that the universal yearning of the people for peace shall in time transform the high potentials of the world for war into the co-operation of peoples toward equal freedom, justice, and peace under God who “made of one blood all the nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth.”⁴⁵

In Graham’s vision, the promise for America, if it would abolish Jim Crow and grant full democracy to all its citizens regardless of race, was nothing less than the mythic goal of world peace.

While clerical hopes for voluntary desegregation ultimately proved facile, looking at the white church solely based on its results clouds our own understanding of the 1950s. If one accepts that both national and local church bodies desired to eradicate segregation, especially because local racial prejudice threatened missionary activity and national prestige, then one cannot resort to the typical reasons of cowardice or apathy. Rather,

⁴⁵ Graham, “The Need For Wisdom: Two Suggestions for Carrying Out the Supreme Court’s Decision Against Segregation,” *Christianity and Crisis* 15 (30 May 1955), 66-72.

churches failed to initially mobilize because they believed that the considerable negative reaction to *Brown* would diminish rather than erupt into full defiance. Their initial optimism led them to hope that interracial committees and public pronouncements would lead local Southerners to voluntarily desegregate in proper time, and more importantly, tranquilly. Such a vision led them to downplay the budding signs of local resistance that would soon flower and prevent them from raising the more militant tone that civil rights clerical campaigns would gain in later years. Unfortunately, local citizens' growing determination to defy *Brown*, especially in unruly ways, would illustrate just how impossible voluntary compliance was as a solution. Massive resistance blindsided the clergy's plans for productive delay, leaving them scrambling for other potential ways to mobilize support for desegregated public schools.

CHAPTER 3

“MIRRORS OF PREJUDICE OR COLONIES OF HEAVEN”

The Court’s policy of delay that southern liberals and church bodies supported did not lead to compliance. Instead, it led to the emergence of local Citizens Councils and southern reactionary politicians. In his classic work *Rise of Massive Resistance*, Numen V. Bartley wrote, “the southern mood leaned toward social reaction, however, and during the year following the second *Brown* decision of May, 1955, massive resistance grew to maturity.” According to Bartley, neobourbon political elites swung opinion rightward, using redbaiting tactics to hijack the South and gain prominence and power. Although Bartley predominantly focused on political actors, he observed that their rise to power and the silencing of viable liberal alternatives “was the symptom of a none too healthy society.”¹

The state’s open defiance of *Brown* left local churches in the small minority that protested the reactionary turn. While David Chappell’s claim that “the white South’s religious bodies lined up on one side and its politicians on the other” over desegregation is true, far more people joined the politicians than the churches.² This chapter examines Arkansas clergy’s split responses to massive resistance, observing that they failed to influence state affairs. Segregationist virulence shocked many local ministers into silence rather than action, pleading for moderation over justice. Still, even the more conservative ministers remained necessary allies for the civil rights advocates, and they at least lined up alongside the desegregationists ideologically in opposition to local resistance. Even when united, however, supportive clergy discovered their opposition alone could not

¹ Numen V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950’s* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1969), 340-345.

² Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*, 108.

derail a growing segregationist tide that had considerable political sway. By September 1957, they had discovered just how much courage it took to champion Christian behavior.

This chapter also introduces a new actor onto the scene, the Arkansas Council of Human Relations (ACHR), an interracial statewide organization affiliated with the SRC that was formed soon after the initial *Brown* decision. Although not an explicitly religious organization, the ACHR's leadership and rank and file contained many sympathetic clergy, including Cartwright—who was a founding member, its vice-chairman, and even its president for a while. Sociologist and ACHR member Elaine Ogden McNeil's study on the organization discovered that its members were mostly “personnel in welfare or religious organizations, academicians, or wives of such men.” Her 1960 sample of members' professions showed that 17.8 percent of the organization had a background in religious organizations or welfare, as opposed to 1.3 percent of the overall state population. The percentage was likely even higher in 1955, as many ministers and welfare workers were transferred out of the state, “presumably because of the unpopularity of their pro-civil rights stand.”³

The first state signs of emerging massive resistance appeared after Hoxie successfully integrated its entire school system in Summer 1955. A small farming town of less than two thousand in northeast Arkansas, Hoxie shared many similarities with its counterparts in the northwest part of the state. It also had only a few African American

³ McNeil, “White Members of a Biracial Voluntary Association in Arkansas” (Ph.D dissertation, University of Kansas, 1967), 48, 73, 165. According to John Kirk, the ACHR's prominent role in statewide activism “suggests that the role of white activists in the civil rights struggle may be more important than their understated presence in the literature currently indicates,” especially with a local studies approach (Kirk, “The Southern Regional Council and the Arkansas Council on Human Relations 1954-1974,” in *Beyond Little Rock: The Origins and Legacies of the Central High Crisis* [Fayetteville: Arkansas, 2007], 137-138). Also see Chappell, “Diversity Within a Racial Group.”

high school students (eight, to be exact) who had to be bused for their education (twenty-three miles to Jonesboro). Although the town had a primary school for its fifteen African American students of primary school age, the building was falling apart and placed in an undesirable location, and even the school board recognized that its condition signified unequal education. The *Southern School News* summarized Hoxie school superintendent K. E. (Howard) Vance's three reasons why Hoxie chose to desegregate as follows:

- 1) "Integration is "right in the eyes of God."
- 2) Obedience to the Supreme Court ruling that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional.
- 3) It's cheaper.⁴

Much like Fayetteville and Charleston, Hoxie fit the profile for school districts that would voluntarily desegregate.

The initial integration proceeded smoothly, much like in Fayetteville. The only sign of local discontent was a rumor that someone had put up a \$100 reward to fight Vance, which went unclaimed—possibly because Vance was six foot three and weighed 245 pounds. Jerry Vervack argues that Hoxie's initial compliance was evidence "that peaceful integration was possible in the upper South," and that the resulting segregationist protests was, ironically, the influence of outside agitators and not local citizens. According to local sources, trouble only began after *Life* published a two-page photographic essay on the town's integration process, including a picture of two schoolgirls, one white and the other African American, walking arm in arm.⁵

⁴ *Southern School News*, August 1955, p. 15; "Hoxie Decides To Integrate All Its Schools," *Arkansas Gazette*, 26 June 1955.

⁵ Jerry Vervack, "Road to Armageddon: Arkansas and *Brown v. Board of Education, May 17, 1954 to September 2, 1957*," M.A. thesis (University of Arkansas, 1978), 57-60; Cabell Phillips, "Integration: Battle of Hoxie, Arkansas," *New York Times*, 25 September 1955; *Hoxie: The First Stand*, DVD, produced by David Appleby (New York: Cinema Guild, 2003).

Perhaps not entirely coincidentally, the following week white supremacist organizations from outside the town carpet-bombed Hoxie's streets with handbills, and segregationist organizers found enough local citizens to form a grassroots movement determined to reverse the school board's decision. On 3 August, more than 350 residents met to organize a boycott of the schools, and on 13 August, Amis Guthridge, the legal counsel for Little Rock's chapter of White America, Inc., spoke at a local rally. The rallies even gained the blessing of several segregationist pastors. Local Missionary Baptist pastor Robert Watkins delivered the invocation for the segregationists' 10 August meeting, and Wesley Pruden of Little Rock's Broadmoor Baptist Church, a "friend" of White America, Inc., delivered the closing prayer at a later rally.⁶ Significantly, Governor Orval Faubus was not one of the local supporters, choosing to instead remain neutral. According to biographer Roy Reed, Faubus declared Hoxie "a local matter and he would not intervene."⁷

The resulting pressure forced the school district to close its summer session two weeks early, although it reiterated its determination to remain integrated.⁸ The dispute eventually landed in court, as White America, Inc., sued the Hoxie school board for breaking minor laws, and the school board countersued the segregationists for impeding the federal court order to desegregate. Over a year later, the Eighth Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the school board, ordering segregationist organizations to desist in their efforts to hinder desegregation.⁹

⁶ Phillips, "Integration: Battle at Hoxie"; "White America Speaker Vows Continuation of Effort at Hoxie," *Arkansas Gazette*, 7 September 1955.

⁷ Reed, *Faubus: The Life and Times of an American Prodigal* (Fayetteville: Arkansas, 1997), 173.

⁸ Bill Butler, "Hoxie: A City Divided," *Arkansas Democrat*, 7 August 1955; *Southern School News*, September 1955, 10.

⁹ Vervack, "Road to Armageddon," 76-83.

Although the segregationist campaign to reverse integration ultimately failed, its prominence alarmed progressive clergy. Hoxie Methodist Church pastor Rev. H. L. “Pop” Robison had followed the Fayetteville script on the eve of school integration, encouraging his church’s youth to observe the Golden Rule in their interactions with the African American students. He maintained his support for the school board even after protests emerged. Robison explained his support in an Associated Press interview, saying, “I told my people that the Negroes were brought over in chains and worked under the lash and we have to correct that wrong.”¹⁰ Robison’s public support made him a target for reprisal, as his church went through a schism over the matter and he experienced personal harassment when people hammered below his floor and honked their car horns outside his house at night to disturb his sleep.¹¹

The presence of an organized segregationist movement also galvanized state liberals, after the ACHR initially ignored integration at Hoxie because “there was no need for help, no ‘outside influence.’” When the crisis emerged, ACHR chairman Fred Darragh, *Arkansas Gazette* editor Harry Ashmore, Reverend E. B. Williams, Urban League representative Perry Taylor, and ACHR executive director Nat Griswold, a former Methodist minister, met to discuss the situation. They eventually decided to send Griswold and Williams, who knew members of the school board, to Hoxie “to help stabilize the situation.” Arriving on 17 August, Griswold and Williams met with board

¹⁰ Bem Price, “The South’s Schools Look At Integration,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 28 August 1955.

¹¹ Ken Parker, “Integration at Hoxie, Arkansas,” in *Crisis of Conscience: Arkansas Methodists and the Civil Rights Struggle*, 175-179; “Rally at Hoxie Cheers Foes of Integration,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 18 September 1955; Cabell Phillips, “Integration: Battle at Hoxie.” Pete Daniel’s examination of the North Carolina Patriots, a similar segregationist organization, shows their deep antipathy for sympathetic clergy. According to executive committee member Paul D. Hastings, “the best way to quiet these preachers down is by getting the lay members of our church informed as to what is involved in the issue.” The NCP boasted that its efforts led to forced removals of fifteen ministers from their churches (Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 203-206).

members, Vance, and a “Methodist minister” (likely Robison) for several hours “to bolster their courage and resolution.” In his report to the SRC, Griswold described the situation as “bad, very bad.” Specifically, “around the clock calls, anonymous abusive language to members of their families, distrust of neighbors” wore down the school board, and they were “ready to resign.”¹²

Griswold returned to Hoxie on 19-21 and 25-27 August to organize local ministers and to find local legal counsel for the board. The heightened tension made it difficult for Griswold to rally local pastors to reinforce Robison, despite being armed with the national church resolutions promoting desegregation. He met with Hoxie’s First Baptist Church pastor J. B. Chandler, encouraging him to call a meeting of local ministers to discuss how to publicly support Hoxie desegregationists. Although Chandler agreed to call the meeting on 29 August, he later developed second thoughts. In a 26 August letter, Chandler explained that he had canceled the meeting because “I am of the opinion, we are not ready.” He gave three reasons: he had not talked about the meeting with the board or the superintendent, the recent refusal of Walnut Ridge’s school board to not pursue desegregation, and his belief that the best thing to do at the moment was “to spend our time in ‘Watchful Waiting.’”¹³

While Chandler’s willingness to give Griswold a fair hearing suggested his interest in desegregation, the potential costs of opposing massive resistance were apparently too much. It is hard not to imagine that witnessing Robison’s persecution firsthand gave Chandler cold feet, and that “Watchful Waiting” was really an excuse to

¹² Griswold, “A Director Gets Involved,” 23 August 1955, ACHR Papers, Box 16; “Log for August,” [c. September 1955], ACHR Papers, Box 16.

¹³ Griswold to Chandler, 22 August 1955, ACHR Papers, Box 16; Chandler to Griswold, 26 August 1955, ACHR Papers, Box 16.

not invite strife and harassment. Griswold recalled his own disappointment after meeting with Chandler on the 29th: “fell flat on my face to find that the minister had not called the meeting: ‘Decided it would do no good now!’”¹⁴

The ACHR succeeded in locating a friendly lawyer thanks to ministerial networking. While legal counsel did not fit his job description, Cartwright provided surprising assistance. He had made regional headlines in June 1954, when he told University of Arkansas medical and pharmacy students in a baccalaureate address that they “have an inescapable obligation to lead others to judge the worth of persons not on the basis of race but of intrinsic human worth.”¹⁵ The resulting news coverage caught the eye of a Mrs. Bill Penix living in nearby Jonesboro, who wrote a letter praising Cartwright’s courage and that she had alerted her husband to the speech. Not only did her husband teach local Wesley Foundation students about how the church had not taken “a responsible stand in support of the Supreme Court on desegregation,” he was also a lawyer.¹⁶ Thus, when the Hoxie school board listed legal counsel as one of its needs, Bill Penix fit the bill of the “enthusiastic lawyer with moral convictions” the ACHR sought. According to David Appleby, Penix provided invaluable assistance to the school board, especially with his connections to Arthur Caldwell, a high ranking member of the Civil Rights division in the Justice Department.¹⁷

¹⁴ Griswold, “Log for August.” Apparently, Griswold missed Chandler’s 26 August letter three days prior.

¹⁵ Cartwright, “‘What Doth the Lord Require of Thee,’ Baccalaureate Address to the University of Arkansas Schools of Medicine and Pharmacy,” 12 June 1955, Cartwright Papers.

¹⁶ Penix to Cartwright, 13 June 1955, Cartwright Papers.

¹⁷ Cartwright, “What Can Southern Ministers Do,” *Christian Century*, 26 December 1956; Griswold, “Log for August”; *Hoxie: The First Stand*. In the *Century* article, Cartwright claimed that Griswold remembered that a “Little Rock minister” (very likely Cartwright) told him about Penix. In Appleby’s documentary, Vance ignores the Griswold/Cartwright connection, saying that after three days in his search for legal counsel in the local area, he found Bill and his father Roy Penix to represent the school board.

Hoxie was the first place in Arkansas where voluntary desegregation efforts met massive resistance, providing a test case for the clergy's ability to calm inflamed passions. According to the national script, ministers appealing to shared Christian values could counter the inflammatory rhetoric of reactionary racists and convince communities to peacefully accept the end of Jim Crow. Judging the clergy by that script, they failed. Robison's initial efforts to smooth desegregation and his later heroism likely had a positive impact on the situation, but the segregationists continued their rallies with the blessings of their own pastors. Chandler's diffidence and eventual refusal to call a meeting together, furthermore, show that the courage required to actually implement moral suasion was far higher than theorized. Ministers found out not only that their pleas were not decisive, but also that their official titles provided little protection from either expected or actual harassment. Silent moderates like Chandler ended up providing little effective support, weakening the potential reach clergy had.

However, Hoxie also showed that ministers could do more than simply speak out. While Griswold's attempt to rally local clergy failed, he succeeded in his other two goals of boosting the school board's morale and finding legal counsel. It is significant that, according to ACHR sources, Griswold recruited Penix not because of his legal skills but because Penix's wife vouched for his Christian motivation and distaste for segregation. Penix's recruitment served as a promise that there were also committed laypeople with valued skill sets who believed that segregation was un-Christian. Mobilizing them could provide just as valuable a service to beleaguered school officials as their publicized pulpit messages.

However, partnering with officials would only work if the officials were firmly on the side of compliance. Both Jerry Vervack and David Appleby give deserved credit to Superintendent Vance and the local school board for standing firm despite experiencing similar harassment, while Elizabeth Jacoway castigates Little Rock superintendent Virgil Blossom for his efforts to forestall and minimize similar attempts. Later events would prove that Hoxie was the exception for school desegregation campaigns. The ACHR soon discovered that few people were as willing as Vance to stand up to reactionary forces. Far more often, local officials buckled under local pressure to affirm Jim Crow. Although itself a success, the Hoxie campaign foreshadowed many of the difficulties that white southern progressive ministers would experience in later years.

Hoxie's slow and conflicted move toward integration might have scared off other school districts in the state, as none of them desegregated their public schools for the 1956-1957 school year. Instead, over a hundred senators and congressmen signed the Southern Manifesto on 12 March 1956 pledging "all lawful means" to resist implementing *Brown*. Furthermore, several historians contend that, at least in Arkansas, massive resistance forced the political leadership to follow, not the other way around. Elizabeth Jacoway and Roy Reed argue that electoral pressures pushed Governor Orval Faubus, who initially had a moderate reputation, rightward during and after his 1956 reelection campaign. Jacoway focuses on how challenger Jim Johnson, an Arkansas Delta native who helped rally Hoxie segregationists, ran a successful race-baiting campaign that "shut off Faubus's wiggle room" and forced him to take a stance supporting segregation to stay in power. Reed argues that Faubus was legitimately worried about Johnson's candidacy, while his political instincts told him that he could safely "ignore the

left, the NAACP, and the noisy but small band of white liberals.” Both arguments help explain why he endorsed implementing a pupil placement plan in his reelection campaign to make sure that “no school board would be forced to mix the races while I am governor.” Appearing restrained in comparison to Johnson’s encouragement of outright defiance, Faubus’s plan allowed him to label Johnson a “‘purveyor of hate’ who was profiting from stirring racial tensions” while maintaining an overall segregationist stance.¹⁸

As resistance became a reality, differences emerged within the supportive clerical ranks. While not fully representative of the continuum of views, one can broadly group them into moderates and progressives. Both sides agreed with the national vision that churches encourage local communities to voluntarily comply with the Court’s decision, but differed on tactics and emphasis. Moderates emphasized the *voluntary* aspect, urging that desegregation occur tranquilly and orderly, and that ministers should mediate between extremists on both sides. While their success was inevitable, in the meantime African Americans should simply be patient until the day when local white officials could hand them their well-deserved rights.

Progressive clergy differed in emphasizing the ultimate need for *compliance*. They saw *Brown* as a positive step reflecting democratic and Christian principles, not an inconvenient order crammed down the South’s throat, which only deserved obedience because it was the law of the land. They usually participated in interracial committees

¹⁸ Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, The Crisis that Shocked the Nation* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 40-45; Reed, *Faubus*, 175-179; *Southern School News*, April 1956, 2, 8; May 1956, 10; July 1956, 9; September 1956, 15. While the Little Rock school board had a desegregation plan in place, its continual pleas for delay left local NAACP leaders discontent.

with African American elites, which disabused them of the notion that the NAACP was the pro-integration version of local Citizens Councils.

One must remember that these are merely labels, and that people's attitudes toward desegregation fluctuated throughout this period. Jason Sokol argues that understanding individual white southerners is "even more complex because they were not fixed, but precarious and mutable. Few forces shook them so thoroughly as the struggles of the civil rights movement."¹⁹ While even Cartwright initially emphasized voluntarism following the *Brown* decision, he later endorsed coercive means as he recognized that voluntarism was causing more harm than good. Many formerly moderate pastors evolved into progressives, and not a few progressives urged caution when circumstances dictated. While the broad groupings help make general claims, it remains an imprecise measurement regarding individual views.

However, significant differences emerged between moderate and progressive clergy regarding Arkansas congressman Brooks Hays's decision to sign the Southern Manifesto. A self-proclaimed New Dealer, Hays was also a respected Southern Baptist layman who would become president of the convention in 1957. He supported the ACHR, praising its clerical activism in encouraging voluntary compliance. He even applauded Cartwright for his 23 May 1954 sermon praising *Brown*, writing, "I am glad

¹⁹ Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 15. Sokol's work, which primarily focuses on the '60s, has several anecdotes about how people initially sympathetic to segregationist organizations felt distaste as they became more extreme. One particularly representative one details the story of Margaret and Jim Conner of New Orleans, who refused to boycott the desegregated public schools—initially because she did not want to watch over her four schoolchildren during the day, and later because she despised group coercion. According to Sokol, her initial moderation "wilted when she confronted a highly charged situation" (135-139).

that you recognize the appropriateness of Christian ministers speaking out with reference to problems of this character.”²⁰

One compelling vignette illustrates Hays’s desire to improve African American welfare, albeit through paternalistic means. In January 1957, Hays wrote a letter to George Mitchell asking for a interest-free student loan for Terry York, who was the first African American student to attend Arkansas Polytechnic College. According to Hays, York, who was also working a full-time job as a fry cook, had talked with him about maybe getting one day off, but “he can’t afford to lose the money and his employer is non-cooperative.” As a result of Hays’s intervention, Mitchell contacted Griswold on behalf of “a friend of mine in Washington, D.C.” in order to arrange the loan.²¹

Hays was also a self-proclaimed moderate, whose stated motivations for signing the Manifesto reveal his distaste for both the declaration’s bombastic claims and the specter of federal intervention. In his 1958 book *A Southern Moderate Speaks*, Hays wrote: “while [the Manifesto] contained items which to me would have better been omitted, I believed the declaration was an honest reaction to the injury the South believed had been done to its way of life.” While Hays was no fan of *Plessy*, he had misgivings about the ways that African American activists could use *Brown* to force compliance on unwilling citizens. Specifically, Hays contended that both the Citizens Councils and the NAACP were responsible for sabotaging previously peaceful race relations, as both sides clashed in ugly and costly snafus like Autherine Lucy’s failed attempt to desegregate the University of Alabama. Even as incidents like Hoxie challenged the myth that the South would voluntarily and smoothly comply, Hays stubbornly clung to the notion that

²⁰ Hays to Cartwright, 31 May 1954, Cartwright Papers.

²¹ Hays to George S. Mitchell, 2 January 1957, SRC Papers; George S. Mitchell to Nat Griswold, 14 January 1957, SRC Papers.

“‘permissive integration,’ in communities where social opinion has become amenable to this development,” was the ideal strategy. The Manifesto, which specifically focused on “forced” integration but ignored voluntary cases, was acceptable, if not ideal, to the self-proclaimed “states rights liberal.”

Hays also claimed that his participation allowed him to drastically mitigate the Manifesto’s language, but his reasoning is less plausible. Hays stated that he and a handful of other Southern moderate legislators had “refused to sign the document unless it removed all mention of the doctrines of nullification and interposition.” However, Hays ignored that the more extreme legislators would continue to make plenty such statements after the Manifesto’s signature and that the Manifesto, by only removing mentions of legal chicanery rather than explicitly condemning these tactics as illegal, failed to resemble anything close to a moderating statement.²² Much like J. V. Chandler, Hays’s reasons for signing the address fail to address core issues of morality—a particularly odd stance when these leaders, at least publically, echoed the need for southern Christians to courageously advocate love, a united brotherhood undivided by race, and resolution to the long-standing racial discrimination afflicting the land.

Ironically, the Southern Baptist Convention’s Christian Life Commission, which Hays chaired, explicitly stated in its resolution the next month: “There is no reason for us to avoid these issues or couch them in evasive language or sentimental speech.”²³ Likely,

²² Hays, *A Southern Moderate Speaks*, 88-96. Immediately before discussing *Brown*, Hays mentioned his support for eliminating segregation in interstate travel, contending that was an area that the federal government could exercise its jurisdiction.

²³ Quoted in Hays, *A Southern Moderate Speaks*, 203-204. On 6 March, only a few days before Hays signed the Manifesto, the Christian Life Commission issued a statement blaming “violent and radical” reactions to the Court decision. Instead of rejecting it, however, the commission recommended that Southern Baptists “accept the Supreme Court decision as the law of the land,” as it “is in harmony with our democratic concepts and with the principles of the Christian religion.” As a convention, Southern Baptists

Hays was keeping one eye on his reelection campaign, knowing that he would face segregationist Amis Guthridge, who would undoubtedly use any refusal to sign the Manifesto as political leverage. Seeing that Hays would lose his seat two years later for his efforts to mediate the Central High crisis, such fears had merit. Still, as the ACHR put it, political “expediency hardly seems to call for joining the unreconstructed dixiecrats in deceiving responsible citizens into believing that there is a perfectly legal way of circumventing the Court’s decision.”²⁴

Progressive clergy saw Hays’s stand as a betrayal. When he met with African American Little Rock ministers while running for reelection, one of the pastors criticized him for signing the Manifesto, saying: “I simply cannot understand how a man with your background in good race relations could fail to maintain a high moral position.” Hays’s memoir emphasized the happy ending, where he expressed his belief that their “criticizing a white man to his face and doing it forcibly” was itself evident of the new times. While the pastor “might be right” that Hays should have not signed, all who attended agreed that “our honest disagreements could be reconciled on the basis of social, religious, and political actions of an educational nature” rather than government mandate.²⁵ While true, it ignored the fact that the Manifesto encouraged local citizens to resolve these disagreements not with communication but with force, repression, and the phantom threat that Communists and left-wingers were upsetting the South’s customs.

Hays’s sympathy toward the ACHR likely protected him from its public criticism, but leaders privately encouraged him to at least modify his statement. They sent a protest

knew that “we may need to go slowly and carefully, but we do need to recognize that our practice is far below the Christian ideal” (T. B. Matson, “Integration,” 1956).

²⁴ “Manifesto of Legislators,” *ACHR Newsletter* 2 (March 1956), in ACHR Papers, Box 25.

²⁵ Hays, *A Southern Moderate Speaks*, 86-96, 207-210; *This World: A Christian Workshop* (Nashville: Broadman, 1958), 95.

telegram off on 12 March, to which Hays responded the next day reiterating his belief that federal intervention was damaging and unnecessary. Still, Hays reiterated that he was “EAGER FOR CHURCH LEADERS TO KNOW THAT I HAVE NOT ABANDONED MY EFFORTS TO SECURE JUSTICE FOR MINORITY GROUPS AND END TO THE HARSH AND CRUEL ASPECTS OF SEGREGATION.” He also wrote Griswold specifically to promise a longer statement, mentioning that he was “glad your organization is available to help toward solution.”²⁶ Griswold and Darragh privately met with Hays on 29 March, where Hays was “very apologetic” and promised a speech “clearly voicing the view that the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine was long overdue for an over-hauling.”²⁷ Hays failed to actually produce such a statement, blaming the problem on insufficient time. No matter his claims of sympathy, he refused to publicly recant.

Similar letter writing campaigns to Governor Faubus, Senator Fulbright, and other legislators produced even less success. Donald K. Campbell, pastor of The Presbyterian Church in Crossett (Jim Johnson’s hometown), reported to the ACHR the results of his own letter writing campaign. According to Campbell, Faubus and Fulbright “walked all around Robin Hood’s barn without saying anything,” Congressman William F. Norrell was also evasive, and Senator John McClellan “wrote a letter that practically burned up the paper it was written on; at least I gather he was honest when he signed the thing.”²⁸ While behind the scenes support could pay off, it required that local leadership ignore the expedient solutions and political realities.

²⁶ Hays to J. Kenneth Shamlin, 13 March 1956, ACHR Papers, Box 25; Memo from Hays to Griswold, 13 March 1956, ACHR Papers, Box 25; Hays to Cartwright, 20 March 1956; Cartwright Papers.

²⁷ Griswold, “Log for March,” March 1956, ACHR Papers, Box 27.

²⁸ Campbell to Griswold, 28 March 1956, ACHR Papers, Box 5.

If Hoxie was the first sign of grassroots resistance, the Manifesto signaled the hour's desperate need for positive clerical action. The ACHR not only pressured Hays, but also attempted to rally statewide clergy. In its pamphlet "Simple Steps," printed soon after the Manifesto, it gave a blueprint on how school boards and community organizations could build general community support to support potential desegregation campaigns. The pamphlet's purpose, according to the ACHR, was to put into action "good faith compliance" and reiterate that compliance with *Brown* was actually possible, and that only the "intent to obey the law, its letter and spirit, is needed." The pamphlet recommended interracial committees, close communication between involved parties, and publicity efforts to inform the local public.²⁹

More directly, the council organized an interracial group of seventy ministers on 15 March to draft a potential counterstatement to the Manifesto. On 6 April, the group met again to discuss a draft of "A Declaration of Christian Principles," directly in opposition to the Manifesto's official name, the "Declaration of Constitutional Principles." The Declaration, meant "to reiterate some relevant Christian principles that seem to be forgotten," drew authority from "our several church fellowships" who pronounced *Brown* "in harmony with Christian theology and ethics." It started by reiterating the theological argument, observing that "holy writ counsels that we should not call any man common (Acts 10:28) for whom Christ died," therefore making racial distinctions irrelevant.

The Declaration urged politicians to not resist desegregation and focus on other issues. They condemned state legislative counter action, which "succeed only in

²⁹ ACHR, "Simple Steps In Compliance With Court's Decisions on Segregation," [c. April 1956], ACHR Papers, Box 10.

generating groundless fears and spreading of hatred.” In terms of action points, they and reaffirmed their support for public education and urged that state candidates running for office refrain from discussing race,. Finally, they expressed their “deepest concern over the present widespread inflammatory campaign” preying on latent racial prejudices concerning “social relations and intermingling of the races.” In response to the segregationists’ constant playing of the miscegenation card, the ministers urged that state citizens remember that “the selection of one’s friends and companions is still a matter of personal taste and choice” (emphasis original). They concluded with the well-worn plea that all citizens address desegregation with “Christian spirit and testimony,. . . without rancor and bitterness.”³⁰ Several boards echoed the Declaration with their own resolutions. On 19 April, the Disciples of Christ’s state board reaffirmed *Brown* and requested that politicians running for reelection avoid race, and on 7 June Little Rock Methodists reiterated their support for “Christian goodwill.”³¹

While the Declaration’s explicitly Christian argument echoes pre-*Brown II* resolutions and moderate clerics’ claims, juxtaposing them reveals considerable differences. The ministers devoted considerable time condemning reactionary behavior in the state legislature, but, unlike Hays, it exempted the NAACP from blame. The declaration also lacked the national resolutions’ initial optimism for a tranquil transition. Drawing different lessons from the post-*Brown* era, progressive clergy believed that the present time demanded more vigorous action on behalf of compliance, even if it meant

³⁰ Cartwright, Draft of “A Declaration of Christian Principles,” 6 April 1956, ACHR Papers, Box 21. Hays claimed that an interracial delegation presented the Declaration , confirming that it moved beyond the draft form (Hays, *A Southern Moderate Speaks*, 206-208).

³¹ *Southern School News*, May 1956, 10; July 1956, 9.

some force. The handful of progressive clergy continued to press for forthright action where moderates equivocated because they feared the consequences.

However, progressive clergy initially saw their moderate brethren as potential allies still committed to desegregation, who needed encouragement rather than condemnation. One can read Cartwright's two articles written for a national audience written after the Manifesto as an attempt to sway uncommitted clergy and laypeople toward supporting compliance.³² His first article "The Church, The World, and Race," published in the July-August 1956 issue of the Disciples' missionary organization *World Call*, reemphasized the moral scope of school desegregation in stark contrasts. Cartwright emphasized the New Testament church's call to be a "colony of heaven" set apart from worldly customs and that the Apostle Paul "in letter after letter... reminds his churches that within the church the big distinctions of which the world makes much and deems important has no place." For proof, Cartwright cited Colossians 3:11 as proof, which echoed the Galatians 3:28 claim by saying "here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all." In an era where prejudice ran unfettered and "the issues in regard to racial desegregation of the public schools are so complex and so filled with satanic emotions," Cartwright challenged southern churches to determine "whether we shall simply be mirrors of our communities' prejudices or whether we shall regard ourselves as colonies of heaven expressing in our fellowship something of that brotherhood which is like to that above." Cartwright's rhetoric reduced moderate clergy's various excuses into a simple dichotomy between being faithful to God's will by supporting *Brown*, or aiding

³² Cartwright himself never makes this claim. In his autobiography, Cartwright claimed that his 1956 articles "set out to cast the racial issue in terms of theological discussion" (Cartwright, *Lonesome Valley*, 93).

Satan's work by reflecting community prejudices. Emphasizing the religious dimension could help sway uncommitted pastors and laypeople toward the cause and was an example of the bold moral suasion that the Declaration encouraged.

Still, Cartwright might have had more room to criticize segregation because his church was uniquely tolerant. One admirer, A. H. Norcom of Sulphur, Louisiana, had once praised Cartwright as one of the very few ministers "willing to make their professed beliefs [with] the force it should be in resolving this question."³³ Cartwright's reply to Norcom deflected the praise, crediting his boldness to the fact that his church, "although it often does not agree with me, guards very diligently the freedom of the pulpit." Cartwright was not alone in thinking such statements. Barbara Clayton of nearby Texarkana also congratulated Cartwright on the article, but admitted her first thought was "how could a minister in Little Rock make such statements and keep his church?" While she thought her pastor was sympathetic to desegregation and wanted to express similar sentiments, "if he did he would not last out the week." Even though failing to speak could be construed as abetting "satanic emotions," many pastors had a lot to lose for going that route.³⁴ Much like how Hoxie represented a particular situation, Cartwright was placed in a uniquely suited position.

Secondly, Cartwright's article failed to spell out the persistent question: just how does one accomplish the Lord's work and implement *Brown*? In the *World Call* article, Cartwright left the answer vague: "there are many ways a church can set itself apart from

³³ Cartwright, "The Church, The World, and Race," *World Call*, July-August 1956, 17-18; Norcom to Cartwright, 21 July 1956, Cartwright Papers.

³⁴ Cartwright to Norcom, 24 July 1956, Cartwright Papers; Clayton to Cartwright, 8 September 1956, Cartwright Papers.

its community's prejudices and racial animosity."³⁵ Vague answers make potential solutions easy—after all, even moderates like Hays readily agreed with the fact that the Citizens Councils were negative influences and that Christian brotherhood should be extended to African Americans.

Cartwright addressed these possible objections in his next article, a December 1956 article for the *Christian Century* titled “What Can Southern Ministers Do?” If “The Church, The World, and Race” made the call to act clear, “What Can Southern Ministers Do?” pleaded for any positive action. In Cartwright's words, “what is of prime importance is that southern white ministers *do* act, carrying out their actions not only with enlightened consciences but with intelligence and imagination.” For pastors who feared congregational dissent, Cartwright noted that cooperative action in ministerial associations often protected individual pastors from full-on revolt.

While Cartwright conceded that clerical activism “must be done with a view to its possible results; otherwise it becomes irresponsible brashness,” he observed that not a few pastors used the fear of congregational dissent as an excuse. Rather than encourage martyrdom, Cartwright recalled Louisville superintendent Omar Carmichael's observation that ministers there had employed several tactics in support of school desegregation. Cartwright paraphrased Carmichael's observation that some ministers made bold calls for desegregation, while others made general comments, and others had taken an individualistic approach. Significantly, “all these approaches were helpful.”

In his autobiography, Cartwright claimed that he submitted the article because, “upon analyzing the usual approach of ministers either to speak out in protest or seek to

³⁵ Cartwright, “The Church, The World, and Race,” 18.

be mediators, I found them generally ineffective.”³⁶ In the article, Cartwright wrote that “ministers must be mindful that the power of public speaking is limited,” and that often there was a “time for him to accomplish his purposes by other means.” As an explanation, Cartwright explained that Griswold had not openly confronted the crowd but instead provided necessary moral support for Robison and the board—which even a moderate like Hays often did. Cartwright also mentioned his connection to Bill Penix, implying that pastors could use their networks to find committed laypeople similarly dedicated to urging compliance.³⁷

In many ways, the *Century* article, when paired with his *World Call* one, seems directed to win back moderate support and serve as a call to arms against regional massive resistance. “The Church, The World, and Race” reminded readers of the theological dimensions behind the struggle, adding a pointed jab that inaction suggested a lack of spiritual fervor. Meanwhile, “What Can Southern Ministers Do?” eschewed championing any singular strategy for the claim that any minister or layperson genuinely desiring desegregation can pitch in and do his or her part to the best of his or her ability. Such a message sought to unite moderates and progressives together to do the Lord’s work and root out the “satanic emotions” that had taken root in their home communities. Cartwright expressed optimism in his earlier letter to Norcom, writing that “at least in Arkansas, I am finding that ministers are increasingly growing in the conviction that the gospel of brotherhood must be demonstrated both in word and deed. There is a leaven at work which God will prosper.”³⁸

³⁶ Cartwright, *Lonesome Valley*, 92.

³⁷ Cartwright, “What Can Southern Ministers Do?,” *Christian Century*, 26 December 1956, 1505-1506.

³⁸ Cartwright to Norcom, 24 July 1956, Cartwright Papers.

Cartwright's work dovetailed with the ACHR's larger efforts to mobilize clerical activism. In honor of the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ)'s Brotherhood Week and "disturbed by the general climate in Arkansas," the ACHR invited ministers from all over the state to participate in interracial partnerships to discuss and clarify potential responses. Of the some 300 invited, fifty ministers showed up, including Little Rock pastors Dunbar Ogden, Dale Cowling, and Cartwright. Among the notable people who declined was Hoxie Methodist pastor H. L. Robison, who expressed his regrets for being unable to show up, but that "we are getting the Segregationists back into the life of our local Church and some of my personal friends in the congregation feel that accepting your invitation might hamper our local approach." Specifically, the family of one of his youth group's student leaders "was ready to commit mayhem at one time," meaning that his attendance at a suspiciously integrationist event could re-spark the schism.³⁹

Robison's absence aside, the commitments of fifty ministers demonstrated continued interest. In their 28 January 1957 report, Griswold and Chris Mercer expressed their confidence that "the churches are still our strongest ally and direct approach to local situations," and that local churches were using ACHR services.⁴⁰ While the moderate clergy's reluctance to fully embrace true integration would have future consequences, progressive clergy welcomed their assistance in opposing massive resistance.

Both moderate and progressive clergy found the state legislature's attempt to expand state executive power to defy *Brown* deeply disturbing. On 11 February 1957, the

³⁹ Griswold to James Dough, 17 December 1956; Griswold to Friend, 25 January 1957; Team Assignment Sheet, [c. February 1957]; Robison to Griswold, 17 January 1957, ACHR Papers, Box 5.

⁴⁰ Mercer and Griswold, Quarterly Report of the Executive Directors to the Board of Directors, 28 January 1957, ACHR Papers, Box 27.

Arkansas House of Representatives introduced four bills, No. 322-325, designed to enforce segregation in the state schools. Eventually passed just sixteen days later as Acts 83-86, the four bills officially declared an act of emergency in response to federal court decisions on desegregation, primary school students' "peace, health, safety, and general welfare," and various groups "engaged in certain unregulated activities which are designed to hinder, harass, and interfere" with Arkansas's domestic health. Put together, the four bills proposed a state sovereignty commission that would collect required financial records from local institutions and gave school boards greater leeway to defy federal court orders. According to Harry Ashmore, they were not only unconstitutional, but they signaled an unwelcome new era where state force would be used to preserve segregation.⁴¹

Both moderate and progressive church leaders united to protest the bills, raising objections to their intended impact to halt desegregation as well as their potential threat to pulpit freedom. The Arkansas Christian Missionary Society (ACMS) criticized both the purpose and scope of the bills, predicting that their passage would result "in racist acts of terror which Arkansas has thus far been able to escape" and that requiring churches to surrender their financial information interfered with the separation of church and state.

Other religious organizations echoed the ACMS, as the Greater Little Rock Ministerial

⁴¹ Arkansas Congress, House, Acts No. 83-86, 26 February 1957, Orval Eugene Faubus Papers; "Behind the Bills on Race Segregation," *Arkansas Gazette*, 12 February 1957. Acts 83 and 85 revolved around controlling dissent within the state, especially the NAACP. Act 83 proposed a state sovereignty commission entrusted with the duty to protect Arkansas "from encroachment thereon by the Federal Government or any branch, department, or agency thereof" by any means necessary, and given power to "require all persons, firms and corporations" to surrender records and books to the commission, investigate suspected threats, and subpoena witnesses. Act 85 required that organizations periodically report their donations and expenses to the state sovereignty commission, giving the commission access to organizations' financial records. Meanwhile, Act 84 abolished compulsory attendance in integrated school districts, and Act 86 authorized school boards to seek legal counsel in defending segregation, even supplying refunds from state funds.

Association reiterated that *Brown* “is in accord with Christian principles and democratic principles.” Meanwhile, local Quakers contested Senate Bill 28, a fifth bill requiring a loyalty oath, for suggesting that “truthfulness is not ordinarily to be expected in everyday affairs.”⁴²

Both progressive and moderate pastors raised their own individual objections to the bills the following Sunday. Cartwright accused the bills of pandering to the segregationists, warning that their passage meant that “the flames of prejudice and hatred will spread to deny many persons regardless of color their inalienable rights of freedom of speech and assembly” through “violence and bloodshed,” and that their goal was to “silence the prophetic voice of the pulpit.” In contrast, St. Luke’s Methodist Church pastor Elbert Jean said that the bills “would destroy the right of public hearing and the right of appeal,” and that if the legislature wanted to enforce segregation, it should do it “constitutionally.” First Methodist Church pastor Aubrey G. Walton also read an editorial critical of the legislation and then asked his congregants to make up their own minds, further suggesting a moderate approach. While Jean and Walton’s stands were less radical than Cartwright, they still indicated their clear opposition to the bills.⁴³

Organizational and individual criticism, combined with the efforts of state senator and Disciples layman C. E. Yingling, helped slow the process down. Governor Faubus, who had initially declared his opposition to “forcible integration,” responded to the protests by recommending that the legislature hold a public hearing rather than

⁴² Arkansas Christian Missionary Society, Press release, 12 February 1957; Greater Little Rock Ministerial Association Executive Committee, Press release, 12 February 1957; Testimony by Robert L Nixom on Behalf of the Little Rock Meeting for Worship of the Religious Society of Friends Before the House Committee on Public Health and Practices of Medicine, 11 February 1957, ACHR Papers, Box 5; “Two Groups Open Fire on Segregation Program,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 13 February 1957.

⁴³ “Segregation Bills to Receive Airing Tonight,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 18 February 1957; ACHR Report, [c. 17 February 1957], ACHR Papers, Box 5.

immediately approve the bills, which the state senate did by a 16-15 vote.⁴⁴ The Women's Society of Christian Service (Methodist Church), Quakers, Disciples of Christ Arkansas Convention, and individual ministerial delegations attended the 18 February meeting to testify against the bills. Among the more moderate arguments, Mrs. M. E. Scott of the Methodist Women's society argued that the bills "would be an abridgement" of Arkansas citizens, while Mrs. Frances S. Eliot reiterated the previous Quaker complain that subpoenas and secret questioning violated their "right to seek truth." Both Immanuel Baptist Church pastor W. O. Vaught and St. John's Seminary rector James F. O'Connell employed Nazi imagery in their objections. Vaught compared the sovereignty commission with the Gestapo, while O'Connell observed that the bills bore uncomfortable parallels to Nazism, which was also based on segregation and master race theory.

On the more progressive side, Second Presbyterian Church pastor Marion A. Boggs reiterated the argument that segregation was un-Christian. African Methodist Episcopal state bishop Sherman L. Greene pushed even further, arguing that "even more basically, [the bills] are offensive to the very essence of Christianity and destructive of the Bill of Rights to which all citizens look, regardless of race."⁴⁵ Ministerial appeals again ran the gamut of moderate and progressive opinion, raising different objections, but

⁴⁴ William W. Hughes and Ray Moseley, "Backers Maneuver 4 Segregation Bills Toward Vote Today," *Arkansas Gazette*, 15 February 1957; Moseley, "State Senate Balks at Segregation Talks, Sets Public Hearing," 16 February 1957; Lester M. Bickford, "Disciples Assail Segregation Bills," *Christian Evangelist*, 6 March 1957, 309. The state senate approved the hearing by a 16-15 vote.

⁴⁵ Frances S. Eliot, Statement of the Little Rock Meeting for Worship, 18 February 1957; Mrs. M. E. Scott, To the Members of the Senate Committee on Constitution, [18 February 1957]; Sherman L. Greene, Statement to the Constitution Committee of the Arkansas State Senate, 18 February 1957, ACHR Papers, Box 5; Charles Allbright and Moseley, "Bills on Segregation Defended as Legal, Deplored as Unjust," *Arkansas Gazette*, 19 February 1957.

each requested that the state legislatures revise, if not defeat entirely, bills granting excessive executive power to halt *Brown*.

In terms of results, the groundswell of protest had little effect. Despite the hearings, the legislature passed the four bills the next day, and Governor Faubus signed them into law just nine days later. The protests had created some amendments along the way, but none of them addressed protecting civil rights or religious freedom.⁴⁶

One is hard-pressed to find major fault among the clergy themselves for their failure to defeat the segregation bills, however. While Chandler and Hays bowed to massive resistance in both the Hoxie crisis and the Southern Manifesto, the widespread outcry surrounding the segregation bills also failed to make a dent casts into doubt whether disunited and disengaged moderates were really the singular reason that clerical opposition failed. After all, if the Findlay and Friedland thesis is true that clerical disunity and moderate inaction prevented the southern churches from making an impact, then one would expect the united clerical protest around the bills to have a larger impact than it did.

Furthermore, Cartwright's post-Manifesto appeals for united clerical action, regardless of its source, as well as wider clerical opposition to the bills, make one wonder just how disunited clergy really were. In a 23 May 1957 letter to Wilma Dykeman, Cartwright commented that "it is hard for me to even think back to my thoughts at the time of the first Supreme Court decision," indicating the continuing evolution of his political views to match his moral conviction. If there was one good side effect from the protests, it was that the hearing committed "a good number of ministers in the state to

⁴⁶ Moseley, "Arkansas Senate Approves Bills to Resist Integration," *Arkansas Gazette*, 20 February 1957; "Faubus Signs Segregation Bills Into Law," *Arkansas Gazette*, 27 February 1957.

taking a public stand for the Supreme Court decision.”⁴⁷ As the next chapters show, some people introduced here would take larger roles opposing segregation in Little Rock. Cartwright’s own evolution shows that, at least for clergy, political identification could make revolutionary shifts fairly quickly.

This is not to completely absolve moderation. Both Chandler and Hays present unfortunate examples of how moderation could cloak expediency in times of crisis, and both definitely underprioritized African American demands. Moderate clergy too many times endorsed minimum compliance solutions, setting their sights on token desegregation rather than fundamental justice. Although purportedly in the middle, moderates like Chandler, Hays, and Jean seemed more concerned with addressing segregationist concerns, ignoring African American voices and often times losing their support.

However, it is to suggest that the main difficulty was, to flip Dr. King’s words around, “the hateful words and actions of the bad people” more than the “appalling silence of the good people.”⁴⁸ Here I disagree with Tony Badger, who argues that massive resistance’s emergence “owed as much, I would argue, to moderate failings as it did to the misconceived logic [of delay] of *Brown*.”⁴⁹ While the united clergy made their own fair share of errors and moderate religious leaders especially deserve some blame, it seems a stretch to credit massive resistance’s rise to their failures alone—especially when one takes into account the dedicated positive actions of local organizations like the ACHR. Rather than a top-down political takeover, the true reason massive resistance

⁴⁷ Cartwright to Wilma Dykeman Stokely, 23 May 1957, Cartwright Papers.

⁴⁸ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 86.

⁴⁹ Badger, “Brown and Backlash,” in *Massive Resistance*, 46.

emerged was that local citizens wanted to contest school desegregation, not cynical politicians using grandiose language to inflame a neutral populace.

Much of it is that the region's religiosity does not necessarily lead to greater ministerial influence in social affairs. The Griswolds and Cartwrights were less effective than the Jim Johnsons and Amis Guthridges in mobilizing support because segregationists told local citizens what they wanted to hear, while clergy told them what they did not want to hear. To quote Conscience in the Lillian Smith play, "I never listen to religion when segregation is involved," or, presumably, when it spoke up on matters outside of its approved domain. As Hoxie Methodist pastor H. L. Robison's experience shows and as the next chapter explores, local communities were willing to use quite drastic means to silence the critical voices from the balcony.

CHAPTER 4

PERILS OF PROPHECY

The Little Rock school board, under the pressure of a federal court order, finally prepared to desegregate Central High School at the beginning of the 1957-1958 school year. Hoping to mollify local citizens, it went against local black demands and selected only nine African American high school students. However, on 3 September, both the state National Guard and a local mob turned away the Little Rock Nine, starting a three-week long process that eventually resulted in federal paratroopers providing the necessary protection to enforce the court order and admit the Little Rock Nine.

Needless to say, there is little in such a process that suggests “voluntary.” Still, most local churches pushed for compliance even as the local community seethed at “forced integration.” Much like their February 1957 fight against the segregation bills, churches’ rhetorical strategies and tactics varied. Several ministers reiterated the clear theological basis for desegregation, made symbolic stands of brotherhood, and criticized the school board for its begrudging and token approach to the situation. Many others retreated to appeals for law and order, urging simple compliance with the law of the land. Both camps’ appeals were largely ignored and they both became targets for irate local citizens and not a few of their own congregation members.

This chapter and the next examine religiously-motivated activism and repression from the 1957 Little Rock crisis through the 1958-1959 “Lost Year” when the city shut down its public high schools rather than desegregate. This chapter specifically focuses on the ministers’ ineffective attempts to discourage resistance and the local repression they faced on behalf of their public stands. It is in dialogue with Ernest Q. Campbell and

William T. Pettigrew's 1959 book *Christians in Racial Crisis*, which gave a contemporary analysis on how Little Rock ministers responded to local events. The product of first-hand observations and interviews of forty-two local ministers conducted from October 1957-December 1958, *Christians in Racial Crisis* investigated why ministers failed to provide "the united and forceful leadership many expected." One important factor they spotlighted, which deserves more extensive treatment than it has received in the historiography or will receive in this paper, was the influence of the several "small sect, fundamentalistic" pastors that embraced segregation, such as Broadmoor Baptist Church's Wesley Pruden.¹ Campbell and Pettigrew's insightful work shines most when describing the competing interests that restricted sympathetic clerical activism, detailing the institutional pressures that enshrined the minister's "responsibility to preserve the church as a church, that is, to maintain church unity and with it an institutional program."²

However, Campbell and Pettigrew overemphasized local clerical agency, blaming clerical ineffectiveness on cowardice and apathy. Specifically, they divided their sample of twenty-nine antisegregationist ministers into three categories: fourteen "inactives" (those from moderate-sized churches who failed to act), seven "influentials" (those from big churches who gave little support) and eight "innovators (those whom they saw as "responsible for most of the religious support publicly given"). The innovators

¹ Both Elizabeth Jacoway and Karen Anderson give considerable credit to Pete Daniel's contention that segregationists "inherited a flawed history that conflated segregation, the Lost Cause, religion, and sex" (Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 1). Much like Jane Dailey, Anderson argues that high school desegregation hearkened southern white parents' fears for "their daughters' budding cultural and sexual autonomy," and that miscegenation was a powerful organizing tool for segregationist organizations like the Mothers' League (Anderson, *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High School* (Princeton: Princeton, 2010), 71-77. Meanwhile, Jacoway calls fears of miscegenation the "bedrock" that motivated local massive resistance to desegregated schools (Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, xiii). How these themes particularly play out in segregationist clerical rhetoric remains an interesting and underexplored question.

² *Christians in Racial Crisis*, viii, 108.

condemned segregationist obstacles in their pulpits, pushed for African American brotherhood, and took courageous stands; the other two groups were content to push for “compromise and neutrality,” and after some pro-forma protests, disengaged from the process—although the influentials privately believed that desegregation was right.³ However, one must take by faith whether their subjective classifications of which pastors belonged where was accurate, as they neglected to reveal names.

Campbell and Pettigrew contended that the main limitations mitigating clerical protest in Little Rock were “not intrinsic but are imposed by the institution itself”—emphasizing internal dissension over external considerations. They may have overemphasized clerical agency in *Christians in Racial Crisis* because it was written to convince churches to take action. Like Lillian Smith, Campbell and Pettigrew believed that the church was “potentially the most effective agent of social change in the South in the decade ahead,” and that it could realize its potential if more clergy followed their prophetic impulses and publicly condemn segregation, swaying moderates to their side.⁴ However, future events would show that white clerics played at most a supporting role for dedicated African Americans creatively agitating for rights in their local communities.

While Cartwright largely appreciated the book, he also questioned their emphasis on the minister’s public role. As mentioned in the last chapter, Cartwright by 1957 believed that sermons and pronouncements only had a limited effect and that other types of clerical activism could also influence local events. He observed that Campbell and Pettigrew were “able only to study Little Rock ‘after the fact’ of chaos” and thus did not incorporate Hoxie or the February 1957 protest in their analysis. That blind spot might

³ Ibid., 63-84.

⁴ Ibid., 135.

explain why they, “strangely enough, had little if any conception of the responsibility of Christians to work through secular organizations to achieve their ends,” ignoring that “changes do not usually come about except through some kind of organized approach.” After the book’s release, Cartwright pointed out that Pettigrew “assumed there was silence just because you did not happen to know of anything that was said or done,” although he conceded that “your conclusions from inadequate evidence were probably correct.”⁵ Informed by the clerical struggles to assert their voice in the past two years, Cartwright emphasized the necessity of working with other sympathetic voices in coalitions against massive resistance.

While cognizant of the hostile atmosphere that clergy worked in, Campbell and Pettigrew underestimated just how susceptible clergy were to community pressure. Supportive ministers had to balance between their prophetic impulses and their congregation’s wellbeing, knowing that supporting racial reform would stir up dissension, discord and other deleterious effects amongst the very same people who paid them to guide their spiritual lives. Furthermore, speaking out drew the larger community’s ire, harassment, and threats of physical violence. In the polarized times of massive resistance, even many ministers’ support of moderate policies was highly unpopular. While it is likely that a more united and forthright stand from clergy would have helped the situation, the vehement resistance that effectively restrained their activity made such a stand unlikely.

⁵ Cartwright to Liston Pope, 7 December 1957, SRC Papers, Reel 141; Cartwright to Oliver R. Whitley, 19 March 1959, Cartwright Papers; Cartwright to Pettigrew, 20 July 1959, Cartwright Papers. Cartwright’s objections aside, he largely appreciated Campbell and Pettigrew’s work. In his letter to Pope, Cartwright wrote that he “was impressed with their competence” and had “every confidence in their ability.”

As mentioned in the last chapter, another complication was that individual ministers' views could and often did change in response to local events. Events like the Central High School crisis completely dismantled assumptions about the South's fundamental decency and challenged previously complacent ministers to participate in improving local race relations. Dunbar Ogden was one such minister. Born and raised in the Deep South, Ogden held pastorates in North Carolina and Virginia until clinical depression forced him to temporarily retire in 1951. After a three year break from the ministry, he became pastor of Little Rock's Central Presbyterian Church in 1954. Prior to the school crisis, Ogden's most public action was participating in the ACHR's Brotherhood Week interracial discussions in February 1957.

In June he became president of the local interracial ministerial alliance, which was why Daisy Bates called him in early September when she sought white support for the Nine's initial attempt to desegregate Central High. Ogden later recalled that he had initially questioned whether ministerial support was wise, asking her if "it's part of the work of religion to participate in a movement that might be thought of as more political and social than of a churchly nature?" According to Bates, Ogden was initially hesitant to march not only due to "simple fear" but also because he "was still thinking in terms of 'separate but equal,'" not recognizing just how unjust Jim Crow was. He urged his fellow ministers to use their pulpits on 1 September to urge "goodwill and understanding" regarding desegregation and to pray that it would commence smoothly, neglecting to mention its theological necessity.⁶

⁶ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* (1962 repr., Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 1986), 189-191; "Little Rock Quiet on Eve of Opening Integrated Schools," *Arkansas Gazette*, 2 September 1957; Dunbar H. Ogden, *My Father Said Yes: A White Pastor in Little Rock School Integration* (Nashville: Vanderbilt,

However, marching with the Nine on 3 September gave Ogden the personal experience to affirm Cartwright's claim that segregation stirred up "satanic emotions." Not only did he watch a segregationist mob threaten to lynch high school student Elizabeth Eckford, but he also saw the National Guard refuse to act on the Nine's behalf and instead order them away from the school. Ogden later told Bates that when he "saw the stored-up hate in the mob and their contorted faces, when he heard them screaming not only for the blood of the nine Negro children but for him and all connected with him," he realized just how vicious the emotions that fueled Jim Crow were. Ogden later described to his son that while he had a "prophetic experience" that made him fearless, he had plenty of reasons to be afraid. Specifically, Ogden recognized the clear danger confronting a violent mob capable of "lethal retaliation" and responsible for "the acid-throwing and drive-by shootings that he knew could maim and destroy children." This experience, according to Bates, changed Ogden from a moderate to the "lone voice crying to the conscience of the people" when other ministerial voices failed.⁷

Cartwright's experience provides an illustrative example of the sharp opposition speaking out publicly could cause. Cartwright was also emotionally affected over witnessing Eckford's terrible experience, but was unsure how to properly respond. In a letter to graduate student Eleanor Haney, he recalled feeling "emotionally involved, torn up inside over the thing and recognized there would be some disturbance if I did speak,

2009), 22-23. According to his son, Ogden's sermon notes on 1 September contained a reminder to "ask for God's guidance in the matter of *INTEGRATION* in our public schools."

⁷ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 191-192; Ogden, *My Father Said Yes*, 27-29. Although she was once part of the ACHR board, Bates excoriated other ministers for failing to take as bold a stance as Ogden in support for desegregation, instead choosing to retreat behind silence, reconciliation, and appeals for law and order. Bates specifically singled out Cartwright and NCC troubleshooter Will Campbell, who also attended the 3 September march, as pastors who offered private prayer but neglected public mention (Bates, *Long Shadow*, 87). Painting Ogden as the lone martyr, however, diminishes the clear risks that other ministers took in their own disapproval of mob action and even cautious support for desegregation in the midst of vehemently opposed citizens and congregants.

felt extreme frustration at trying to say anything relevant.” Cartwright recognized that there was no guarantee that public speaking would actually produce positive results, and it could quite possibly alienate uncommitted segregationists away from his influence and put his own livelihood and his church’s institutional health at risk. Such factors, however, failed to counteract that “he was appalled at the vicious white reaction and ashamed of being a white person,” and conscience demanded he do something to condemn local violence and support the Nine.⁸

Cartwright ended up devoting his sermon the following Sunday on his eyewitness account of Eckford’s solitary walk through the mob. Haney noted, significantly, that it “does not, in other words, attempt to remind the congregation of its responsibility or argue the case for desegregated schools,” even as Cartwright had previously made such sentiments clear to his congregation. Rather, Cartwright’s sermon focused purely on Eckford’s Christian character. Having interviewed her the previous Wednesday, Cartwright claimed she drew courage from Psalm 27 when confronted by “the war-like mob vomiting the filth of a lifetime’s accumulation upon her,” equating them to the “wicked, even mine enemies and my foes” in the Biblical verse. Cartwright pointed to the moral issue at stake behind desegregated schools: “we shall be in danger of losing our own souls if in the midst of great impersonal issues, we lose sight of some very bright children of high moral character who want an education—an education not available to them in formerly Negro schools.”⁹

Other ministerial voices joined Cartwright and Ogden in condemning the mob violence opposing school desegregation. While Ogden avoided specifically mentioning

⁸ Eleanor Humes Haney, “A Study of Conscience As It Is Expressed in Race Relations,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale, 1965), 125.

⁹ Cartwright, *Lonesome Valley*, 245-253; Haney, “Study of Conscience,” 127.

desegregation the following Sunday, his sermon drew from Luke 4 and reminded his congregation of Jesus' mission to "set at liberty those who are oppressed."¹⁰ Both pastors were among the sixteen ministers who issued a statement on 4 September criticizing Governor Faubus for calling out the National Guard and also among the twelve who confessed their community's "corporate sin and guilt" for neglecting a Christian response that reflected God's love toward all His children. Ten Northwest Arkansas Presbyterian ministers issued their own resolution "as Christians and citizens" urging Faubus to withdraw the Guard and instead allow for desegregation to occur. University Baptist Church of Fayetteville pastor Walter Johnson brought up the international dimension, imagining that "the devil must laugh... in glee" when events like Little Rock hindered missionary efforts abroad.¹¹

Cartwright ultimately obeyed his conscience, but his fears over speaking out proved to be unfortunately prescient. Even though Pulaski Heights was a remarkably progressive church that had supported pastors criticizing internment and respected the freedom of the pulpit, the 8 September sermon triggered a minor schism that ultimately resulted in thirty members, about a tenth of his congregation, leaving Pulaski Heights. As evidence of the deep antipathy they held toward Cartwright, they refused to attend

¹⁰ Ogden, *My Father Said Yes*, 41-42.

¹¹ "Faubus Action Is 'Deplored' By 10 Pastors," *Arkansas Gazette*, 7 September 1957; "A Pastor Speaks: More Notes on the Little Rock Story," 11 September 1957; "Constant Prayer Seen By Ministers as Only Hope in Racial Crisis," 13 September 1957. Elizabeth Jacoway argues that the school board's incompetency forced Governor Faubus to call out the Guard and that Faubus legitimately feared violence. She cites a hearsay conversation where Faubus said, "if I don't call out the Guard, people will say that I knew there was going to be a race riot and I didn't have courage enough to stop it before it occurred" (Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 115). Cartwright also contextualized the decision as not Faubus's personal fault. In one of his nationally published articles on the crisis, he wrote that Faubus's decision "was the natural outcome of every step the Little Rock school board had taken" in its reluctance to comply and its refusal to seek community help (Cartwright, "A Lesson From Little Rock," [c. 21 September 1957], Cartwright Papers).

worship the following Sunday, requesting that the deacons administer Communion rites to them separately.

Cartwright initially attempted to downplay the impact, but the congregational revolt definitely weighed on his mind. On 23 September 1957, known as “Black Monday,” the National Guard was withdrawn and the Little Rock Nine were pulled out of Central High after mob violence turned on African American reporters and threatened to invade the school. That same day, Cartwright wrote a fellow pastor describing how local tensions had “torn up everyone emotionally,” reflected in his own congregation’s “flare-up which I think we will weather.” Optimistic note aside, the dissent continued to annoy him. In a 30 October letter to his father, Cartwright confessed frustration at the dissenters’ constant sniping at “every additional thing I say,” and that “I would be just as happy if the thing came to a head, and those who are leaving would depart. It is quite a strain.” Although it may disrupt donation, their departure would “result in a more harmonious group, and we may pull together and accomplish more.”¹²

While Cartwright’s willingness to let the dissenters walk suggests that Pulaski Heights would survive the schism, his later recollections reflect the discord and disharmony it created. E. B. Whitaker, one of his congregation members, wrote him a confidential letter on 22 October criticizing his cavalier attitude toward the segregationists. Whitaker gave Cartwright a pass for his political views, assuring him that “no one wants to dictate to you, what to think or preach.” The problem, however, was that Cartwright forgot that the pastor’s “first duty is to all members of your congregation,” and reaching out to the disenchanting was “more urgent than to some

¹² Cartwright to Robert D. Chambless, 23 September 1957, Cartwright Papers; Cartwright to Dad, 30 October 1957, Cartwright Papers.

social reform regardless of how compelling right you think such reform to be.” Rather than believe that it was “okay to run members off because others will come in to take their place.... You cannot criticize people and hold up to ridicule and scorn their prejudices and at the same time lead them into adopting a christian [sic] attitude.” Whitaker interpreted Cartwright’s refusal to concede to the segregationist minority as an abuse of power and an abandonment of his pastoral duty to care for the spiritual health of every one of his members, especially those that disagree. Whitaker’s concluded with a veiled threat: “If I ever leave Pulaski Heights Christian Church, it will not be because I disagree with the minister, which I rarely do, but because I am tired of strife and turmoil and intolerance of intolerance.”¹³ Schism and church drama affected not only the out-and-out segregationists but many others who blamed the pastor for disrupting organizational unity by taking an unnecessary stand on a controversial social issue. In his autobiography, Cartwright wrote that while the church had survived, “its minister was left drained empty. The congregation was weary. Community morale was at low ebb.”¹⁴

Whitaker’s intense discomfort with Cartwright’s running battle revealed the white supportive clergy’s precarious balancing act between taking prophetic action and maintaining a healthy church. According to Campbell and Pettigrew, the minister is taught to “rest the case for his personal competence on the responses people make to his ministry,” and that opposition and failure in this goal “is a shattering personal experience.”¹⁵ Even if members like Whitaker stayed, their grumbling was something that a pastor could not simply ignore, especially as he had his own duty to shepherd his congregation’s wellbeing. Role conflict helps explain why Cartwright, in his

¹³ Whitaker to Cartwright, 22 October 1957, Cartwright Papers.

¹⁴ Cartwright, *Lonesome Valley*, 117-118.

¹⁵ Campbell and Pettigrew, *Christians in Racial Crisis*, 119-120.

autobiography, wrote that Whitaker's letter left him feeling "myself to be a failure as a pastor." Even though he never recanted his clearly just motivations for speaking out, his sense of failure highlights the tension that supportive clergy faced, being the spiritual mentor to the very same people whose behavior they believed were perpetuating injustice.¹⁶ That this happened at Pulaski Heights, which had previously supported Cartwright's freedom to criticize Jim Crow segregation, suggests that other churches likely had even less room to maneuver without sparking congregational opposition.

Role conflict also provides a gentler explanation why clerical protest diminished rather than grew after the explosive events of September 1957. According to Bates, most clergy feared upsetting outspoken segregationists and "began tempering their public remarks or became silent in full retreat," suggesting Findlay and Friedland's cowardice and apathy theory. However much the church's overall ineffectiveness makes the theory plausible, the national church's benefits from seeing Jim Crow disappear and many of the local clergy's consistent support for *Brown* in the years preceding Little Rock challenges the easy assumption. While altruism and Christian brotherhood can prove to be thin reeds of support, healthy self-interest can help even the cowardly find courage; H. L. Robison and Cartwright's actions suggest that pastors did concern themselves with local affairs. Rather than simple cowardice and fear for their own personal safety, ministers feared what such discord could do to their measures of success and their jobs.¹⁷

¹⁶ Cartwright, *Lonesome Valley*, 162-166.

¹⁷ Bates, *Long Shadow*, 92. Most scholars ignore the psychological part of role conflict, assuming that white sympathetic clergy were more interested in status than civil rights. For example, Karen Anderson claims that church leaders' ideological need for consensus and "commitment to the construction of harmony" meant they "ceded power to conservative and moderate members of their churches, who could use threats to leave the church or withdraw financial support to great effect" (Anderson, *Little Rock*, 85-86). For Cartwright, however, it was not just the schism but the ripple effects that truly affected him.

The moderate clergy's signature event to address the crisis also demonstrates theologically based support for civil rights, even as its limited goals made it practically irrelevant. On 12 October 1957, around six thousand Little Rock citizens gathered in eighty-five places of worship to pray for peace to return to their cities. Their platform specifically avoided endorsing integration, and instead encouraged prayer for law and order to return, for replacing prejudice with compassion, and for "resistance against unthinking agitators." The *Christian Century* applauded the call to prayer, assuming that such an event must have boosted the spirits of those committed to "their unpopular, perilous job of restoring sanity to a shaken community."¹⁸ Hindsight, however, shows that the call to prayer had seemingly little effect, likely because of its ill-guided emphasis on reconciliation over reiterating the clerical argument for desegregation. The Day of Prayer is a prime example of how the politics of moderation hurt desegregation efforts, claiming to be supportive while lacking substance.

Campbell and Pettigrew scathingly criticized the prayer meetings in *Christians in Racial Crisis*. In their eyes, the day of prayer was a minimum-level protest that fulfilled the clergy's "own needs to act" and comply with "the national demand for ministerial action," and they "symbolically washed their hands of the conflict" soon afterward.¹⁹ It was weak enough that President Eisenhower, school superintendent Virgil Blossom, and Governor Faubus all endorsed the event, despite their competing interests in the larger crisis. The first two urged the clergy to pray for peace to return, while Faubus's letter

¹⁸ Homer Bigart, "6,000 in Prayer in Little Rock," *New York Times*, 13 October 1957; Brown, *Bigger than Little Rock* (Greenwich: Seabury, 1958), 97-98; "Prayers for Little Rock Prayers," *Christian Century*, 23 October 1957, 1251. In his memoir, Blossom singled out the call to prayer as an example of local citizens "who continued efforts to solve the integration problem peacefully" (Blossom, *It Has Happened Here* [New York: Harper, 1959], 138).

¹⁹ Campbell and Pettigrew, *Christians in Racial Crisis*, 68.

praised its focus on “reconciliation” and reducing tension over assigning “blame” to individuals. The fact that each different side could openly support the event is ample evidence of its blandness.²⁰

While Campbell and Pettigrew’s assessment of its results rings true, the motivations behind the Day of Prayer services were more than simple ritual. During the February protests, many ministers avoided criticizing segregation itself but instead focused on its potential threat to religious freedom. The Day of Prayer also placed the clergy as a major public voice in the city against segregation, even as it sidestepped the initial issue. Local segregationists certainly did not welcome their efforts to mediate. The League of Central High Mothers, which supported segregation, lambasted the Saturday event as a coded call for “race-mixing,” and a small group of fundamentalist pastors scheduled their own prayers dedicated to preserving segregation the night before.²¹

Looking at organizer Robert R. Brown’s own background and reaction to the Central High School crisis also challenges the idea that the Day of Prayer was simply meant to appease outraged national opinion. Brown was born in Kansas, raised in Texas, received his B.D. from Virginia Theological Seminary, and served as a priest and rector in various cities in Texas and Virginia before being called to serve as Arkansas coadjutor in 1955 in response to the previous bishop R. Bland Mitchell’s declining health. Mitchell’s political views can best be described as conservative—while he initially supported *Brown* solely because it echoed Christian principles, he also observed that such

²⁰ “Text of 3 Letters to Little Rock Bishop,” *New York Times*, 4 October 1957.

²¹ Campbell and Pettigrew, *Christians in Racial Crisis*, pp. 27-29. Little Rock historians generally echo Campbell and Pettigrew’s negative assessment. Friedland echoes Campbell and Pettigrew’s criticism that the prayers of guidance “left something to be desired,” while Anderson cited Nat Griswold’s criticism that it “was reconciliation without ethical discrimination.” Jacoway’s own assessment was also negative, observing that over half of the participants were Catholics, who maintained a separate set of parochial schools that were nominally desegregated but had only sparse African American attendance. See Friedland, *Lift Up Your Voice*, 35; Anderson, *Race and Resistance*, 85; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 203-204.

passages did not mean “that racial or biological differences were obliterated, but that they were secondary.” Mitchell had also endorsed the Southern Manifesto as “the right note of sanity and moderation, it seems to me, as against the unbridled passions of the agitators.”²² Christian principles aside, Mitchell’s public statements emphasize the first aspect of voluntary compliance far more than the second.

Juxtaposed with Mitchell’s conservatism, Brown’s social views appear quite progressive. Brown’s response to “Black Monday” was to use his authority as state Episcopal bishop to issue a pastoral letter decrying the violence. Confessing that his previous silence “failed dismally” to produce a peaceful agreement, Brown wrote that the day’s events “urges us to our knees in shame over our inability to exert an adequate Christian leadership in this hour.” Brown repeated the national consensus that segregation was heretical and that Episcopalian doctrine declared that “Christ’s teaching is incompatible with every form of discrimination based on color or race, both domestic and international.... We consistently oppose and combat discrimination based on color or race of every form, both within the Church and without, in this country and internationally.”²³ Brown contended that the segregationist protests contained “some embryonic characteristics of Hitler’s Nazism” and that “intelligent Christian people... acknowledge that Christ died for *all* men, regardless of race; they agree that integration must come and that it ought to come.”²⁴

His pastoral letter provoked a hostile reaction, and several bystanders charged that he was bringing disgrace upon the local churches through his “attempt to destroy the

²² “Supreme Court Decision,” *Arkansas Churchman*, February 1955, 6; “Troubled Times,” *Arkansas Churchman*, April 1956, 2.

²³ Brown, “To the Churches of Little Rock,” 23 September 1957, Cartwright Papers.

²⁴ Brown, *Bigger Than Little Rock*, 20, 131.

handiwork of God by advocating the mixing of members of the white and colored races.”²⁵ More alarmingly, hundreds of “self-styled authorities on Biblical exegesis” simply dismissed his argument and “reserved the right, suddenly, to interpret Christianity according to their prejudices and began to present proof-texts for their own entrenched position rather than for the truth of the Word of God.”²⁶ Brown’s attempt to interject into the crisis larger church moral support for desegregation provides less evidence for moderation’s weakness than for the local community’s willingness to ignore clerical condemnation on racial matters.

According to Brown, the Day of Prayer was just one part of a larger “Ministry of Reconciliation” to restore peace to the city. In his 1958 book on the crisis, he cited 2 Corinthians 5:18 as scriptural justification: “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” In Brown’s mind, Christian reconciliation was not mere “conciliation” emphasizing unity over justice, but desired “the spiritual restoration of man from enmity and estrangement with his brother” and sought to “open their minds, calm their passions, and restore the lines of communications with each other.” Against Campbell and Pettigrew’s criticism that ministerial action ended soon after 12 October, Brown protested that the call to prayer was supposed to be only an initial step toward finding a satisfactory solution to the crisis, and it was supposed to be followed by interracial discussions and

²⁵ Ibid., p. 80. Jacoway claims that Brown’s letter revealed his ignorance that local citizens “responded to racial issues with more deeply rooted beliefs than his newfound understanding of the demands of the ‘brotherhood of man,’” and that it reflected his elite assumption of leadership (Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 196). I would argue, however, that Brown was reflecting the broad national consensus discussed in Chapter 3, and that he was far from alone in reflecting the attitudes of local clergy regarding the Central High crisis.

²⁶ Brown, “Little Rock and the Churches,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 13 (January 1958), 21-22.

clerical intervention. As the city's moral compass, religious leaders had a duty to model Christ's loving sacrifice to redeem their world around them.²⁷

That being said, Brown's explanations on theological reconciliation leave a lot for the twenty-first century onlooker to desire. I contend that while Brown's sympathy toward desegregation was genuine, his endorsement of gradual and moderate techniques like the Day of Prayer reveal a condescension and paternalistic attitude toward African Americans, unfairly equating them with local segregationist violence. According to Brown, reconciliation was the only process that could bring ideal moral change without excessive provocation. He said that when desegregationists raised the issue of moral injustice, they were "holding a mirror up to a small boy to show him that his face is dirty, without providing soap, water, and a washcloth." Though necessary to reveal the problem, the response of church people should not only risk whatever "persecution, rejection, and indifference" to condemn injustice, but also champion healing through united and concerted action.²⁸ Such explanations helped justify away militancy as needless provocation, holding out for the impossibly perfect resolution rather than addressing what he saw as the central problem at hand: the local tensions that made any type of progress impossible.

Brown also saw spiritual reconciliation linked to political moderation. In contrast to the individualists who neglected the Biblical mandate to take action and the integrationists who "could see no possibility of compromise on such virtues as brotherhood, personal dignity, the rights of free man, or on such vices as discrimination," Brown praised a middle group of clergy. According to Brown, this group recognized the

²⁷ Brown, *Bigger than Little Rock*, 99-101; Campbell and Pettigrew, *Christians in Racial Crisis*, 37.

²⁸ Brown, *Bigger than Little Rock*, 88-91.

“rightness of the perfectionist position,” but thought “that it was better to compromise on perfection in order to establish a *present* condition which might more nearly approximate it” [emphasis original]. They believed that “the desegregation issue called for the wisdom of the serpent and the gentleness of the dove,” quoting Jesus’ advice in Matthew 10:16. By only quoting Scripture while describing the moderates, Brown hinted that they were the ones adopting Christian means toward Christian ends.²⁹

One major weakness in Brown’s platform of reconciliation was that while it certainly considered the viewpoint of local whites, it neglected local African Americans and refused to explicitly endorse the protests’ morality. In his 1959 book *Bigger Than Little Rock*, Brown stated without source that one fourth of Little Rock’s African Americans disapproved of integration and that the NAACP was “not our kind of people” and that the NAACP was “quite intolerant and suspicious of their less aggressive people.” To Brown, this was just one sign of the intra- and interracial “communication breakdown” occurring all over Little Rock due to the actions of “aggressive organizations” of both races.³⁰ Such declarations marginalized the African American activists whose voices one would need most in order to actually accomplish significant reconciliation and justice.

Brown’s condemnation of the NAACP gives one pause when one considers just how he translated theological reconciliation into daily life. While Brown criticized extremists like the Citizens Councils, he also commented that the white Southerner’s attitudes toward race had “been ingrained for generations and requires understanding” and “time to adjust themselves and time for the southern Negro to grow in the

²⁹ Ibid., 67-69.

³⁰ Brown, *Bigger Than Little Rock*, 28-34.

responsibilities of citizenship.” He also claimed that mandated school desegregation had its flaws, raising questions about the *Brown* decision’s legality in regard to states’ rights and rejecting federal intervention as unnecessarily polarizing. By prioritizing reducing violence over addressing injustice, Brown was championing a peace that, in the words of Dr. King, was “purchased at the price of capitulating to the forces of darkness... [and] that stinks in the nostrils of the almighty God.”³¹

Brown and other moderate clergy who supported desegregation could have done far more to push for justice, and they remained unfortunately susceptible to a “progressive mystique” that effectively neutralized their protest. However, the evidence suggests that they genuinely believed that moderation would lead the way toward true integration smoothly, rather than a premediated attempt to erect what John Kirk describes as “minimum compliance” with school desegregation. In both the Day of Prayer and the segregation bills protest, they demonstrated unusual amounts of courage, sacrifice, and conviction to freely express their views, which were far from popular to the people whose support they needed. Their principled stands in the face of not insignificant opposition make it hard to label their actions as cowardly and expedient.

While moderate calls for law and order and reconciliation hardly seem courageous when juxtaposed with Eckford’s solitary march through a segregationist mob, such calls during massive resistance’s heyday evoked considerable opposition. Dunbar Ogden’s clear sympathy for desegregation made him an obvious target for a similar style of harassment that H. L. Robison experienced years ago, but the retaliation campaign also hit Congressman Brooks Hays, whose endorsement of reconciliation and general

³¹ Brown, *Bigger Than Little Rock*, 19; King, “When Peace Becomes Obnoxious,” 18 March 1956, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume VI: Advocate of the Social Gospel, September 1948-March 1963*, ed. Clayborne Carson et al (Berkeley: UC, 2007), 258.

sympathy for African American welfare made him vulnerable despite his signing the Southern Manifesto in 1956.

Ogden's public profile unfortunately made him a clear target for harassment, much like how white pastor Robert Graetz was treated during the Montgomery bus boycott. While Ogden's home was not bombed, he soon became "the favorite target for abuse in the white community," receiving an avalanche of hate mail and crank calls. Ogden received countless late night and early morning calls accusing him of "race-mixing," "mongrelization," and being a "nigger lover." According to Ogden's wife, the "hate calls and hate mail... could hurt him so deeply" that she volunteered to field most of them.³² Ogden's positive relationship with the African American community did give him one unexpected benefit: during the school year, black men patrolled his street and even hid in the nearby bushes to protect the family against possible violent reprisal. It is telling that they felt that Ogden needed their protection, however.³³

According to Campbell and Pettigrew's glowing profile of Ogden, his close ties to the South made these accusations even more painful, revealing that his "efforts in the cause of racial justice disassociate him from a tradition and a people he loves." They quoted the most vehement accusation thrown at him: "Judas betrayed a Man, Benedict Arnold betrayed a nation, and you, my friend, have betrayed a race!"³⁴ Local sentiment saw clerical activity for desegregation not as a courageous stand for the Lord, but a Yankee maneuver to further shame the South.

³² Ibid., 63, 69.

³³ Ogden, *My Father Said Yes*, pp 70-71. Graetz published a firsthand account on the boycott and his personal experience (*Montgomery: A White Preacher's Memoir* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991]).

³⁴ Campbell and Pettigrew, "Vignettes From Little Rock," *Christianity and Crisis* 18 (29 September 1957), 134-136.

The harassment continued to affect the family even after Ogden and his wife left in 1958. Segregationists switched their target to their son David, who was also accused of being a “nigger lover” and being in an illicit relationship with Bates. It soon escalated into physical abuse, causing him to leave the city. The family believes that the emotional scars from the abuse likely were what drove David into a deep depression, resulting in his committing suicide two years later. According to Dunbar III, his father took David’s death hard, occasionally saying to him that “I killed my own son. Sometimes I feel guilty as hell.”³⁵

What ultimately drove Ogden away from Little Rock was not harassment so much as the lack of congregational support he received at Central Presbyterian. Like Cartwright, Ogden experienced severe role conflict as his congregation split over his public support for civil rights. Ogden identified his congregation as “my people,” making the church’s 60% decline from two hundred attendees in Fall 1957 to eighty in Spring 1958 all the more painful. One possible reason for the decline was that several members attempted to organize an internal boycott, urging their fellow members to not tithe or attend church until Ogden left. Despite receiving support from crucial members such as elder Gardner Lile, declining contributions were his ultimate undoing. Fearing for their church’s future, the church’s elder board with a reason to cut his salary by 30%, driving Ogden to find another pastorate out of state. The acrimony between pastor and congregation was still present two years later, when the church declined his request to attend the church when he returned to Little Rock to attend his son Jonathan’s graduation.

One clear reason for the church’s turmoil was that it had lost many members who disagreed with their pastor’s stance on civil rights. However, their departure had a

³⁵ Ogden, *My Father Said Yes*, 68-70, 144-147; Bates, *Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 194-196.

boomerang effect on the rest of the congregation. Congregants blamed Ogden for the schism, as his constant speaking on social issues did not fit their understanding of a minister. Several Central Presbyterian members expressed their expectation for the pastor “to conduct services, to preach love and brotherhood, and do things according to procedure”—meaning that “this integration business is not exactly what his congregation pays him for.” Even those who personally agreed with their pastor ended up supporting his departure, prioritizing the church’s welfare above the pastor’s message. Lile gave voice to his allies’ thoughts, claiming that they “love and respect you. We feel that you are doing what you think is right. We here are with you.” Still, they eventually “have to save our little church” over allowing him to continue speaking.³⁶ Much like how Whitaker protested Cartwright’s sermon, many Central Presbyterian members sympathized with their pastor’s political views but disliked his use of the pulpit to support divisive issues.

While Campbell and Pettigrew blamed institutional church structures that supported church growth and stability over social activity, their blame gave insufficient credit to how much clerics cared about the strife affecting their pastorates. Brooks Hays captured such tension perfectly: as the clergy “listens sympathetically to the minority’s plea, he must have a keen sensitivity to the needs of his own congregation.”³⁷ Concerned clergy still had to balance the conflicting prophetic and priestly roles, proclaiming the Biblical mandate to act justly while shepherding their congregations’ spiritual wellbeing. These conflicting duties ended up circumscribing the options they had available.

³⁶ Ogden, *My Father Said Yes*, 59, 107-113. As a sign of his personal loyalty, Lile transferred membership to another church after Ogden left.

³⁷ Hays, *A Southern Moderate Speaks*, 227.

As Hays would discover, such advice did not apply only to clergy but also to dedicated Baptist laymen like himself holding public office. Hays had not only endorsed Brown's Day of Prayer, but had played his own key role in the initial days of the crisis working as a go-between between President Eisenhower and Governor Faubus, attempting to get both sides to reach a solution of voluntary compliance with the court mandate to desegregate the high school.³⁸ Such moderation made him politically vulnerable in the racially charged political arena of massive resistance. Although he fended off Capital Citizens Council president Amis Guthridge's challenge in the 1958 Democratic primary, he lost his congressional seat in the general election to segregationist school board member Dale Alford, who declared his candidacy eight days prior and won via a write-in campaign. Apparently Hays feared Alford's challenge, as he even ran an ad setting himself up as the stronger candidate for segregationists. The ad claimed, somewhat accurately, that while Alford signed off on Little Rock's initial desegregation plan and supported the federal court mandating desegregation two years later, Hays had signed the Southern Manifesto and continually opposed federal intervention.³⁹

While his ad emphasized his segregationist bona fides, Hays's interest in general African American welfare made him susceptible to public anger. In between Guthridge's challenge and Alford's write-in campaign, Hays had accepted an invitation to speak at the African American-dominated National Baptist Convention (NBC)'s annual conference.

³⁸ Jacoway describes Hays as a "naïve" patsy in between Faubus and President Eisenhower, whose moderate philosophy made him capitulate to Attorney General Brownell's refusal to grant an orderly delay, afraid to upset him for political reasons (Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 130-162).

³⁹ "Dale Alford Voted FOR L.R. School Board Plan of Integration," [c. 1958], Hays Papers, Box 47. The ad fits with Jacoway's description of Hays's overall strategy to emphasize his own consistency against Alford's opportunistic defense of segregated principles (Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 283-284).

Later explaining his actions to Eleanor Haney, Hays wrote that although he was cognizant that speaking there “would damage me politically... it was my duty to appear at this fellow convention of fellow Baptists.” Furthermore, withdrawal might have upset NBC president J. H. Jackson, and “the morally sensitive official must be alert on the matter of affronting Negro people.”⁴⁰ Hays’s son also declared his open opposition to the proposed plan to close the public schools, which brought public ire on the family.⁴¹

According to John Kyle Day, the tense atmosphere made it easy for opponents like Governor Faubus to exploit Hays’s moderation to oust him from office. Eugene Newsom, who ran opinion polls for the governor, noted a few days before the election that voters disliked how “Hays has never made himself clear on the Integration issue.”⁴² While Hays accepted his later defeat and refused to call for a recount to account for possible voter fraud, he still found the results disappointing. Sardonicly, he said that he felt like someone that a donkey kicked in the head, fighting to stay alive so to escape the epitaph “Kicked to Death by a Jackass.”⁴³

Christian observers nationwide saw Hays’s defeat as a testament to his courageous stand on behalf of moderate principles. A S. S. Moore from Louisiana congratulated him for staying the course, writing that “you have lost an election, but you have set an example and given a witness that will be a challenge to all Christians throughout our land.” The Baptist General Convention of Texas president E. Hermond

⁴⁰ Letter to Eleanor Humes Haney, 10 September 1963 and 9 December 1963, quoted in Haney, “Study of Conscience,” 218.

⁴¹ John Kyle Day, “The Fall of a Southern Moderate: Congressman Brooks Hays and the Election of 1958,” in *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 59 (Autumn 2000), 248-249.

⁴² Newsom to Faubus, 24 October 1958, Faubus Papers, Box 1000.

⁴³ Day, “The Fall of a Southern Moderate,” 241-264; Elizabeth Carpenter, “Hays Says Faubus Broke Promise, Damaged South By Sabotaging Moderates,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 8 November 1958, in Hays Papers, Box 47. Day’s article emphasizes the previous friendship that Hays had with Faubus and emphasizes that Hays also had little support in the African American community, which saw his voting record as disappointingly similar to Alford’s.

Westmoreland echoed Moore's sentiments, writing that "your gracious Christian stand on a vital moral and spiritual problem should be highly commended by all Christian people." Bill Penix, who represented the Hoxie board two years earlier, wrote that Hays's defeat "is another bit of weight to help speed our trip to the bottom." Even J. H. Jackson wrote a consolation note to Hays, observing that his defeat convinced African Americans that massive resisters "will without provocation attempt to destroy upright men irrespective of the color of their skin." Although local African Americans viewed Hays far more pessimistically, national Christian sentiment claimed that Hays's support for civil rights made him, much like Ogden, a victim of local hate.⁴⁴

Finally, local officials tarred the ACHR with a broad Communist brush for the organization's activities to organize local clergy. State attorney general Bruce Bennett held a three-day session from 16-18 December 1958, accusing progressive groups of Communist influence. According to Bennett, the ACHR was suspect because it held ties to the SRC, which had "been cited as subversive by the House Un-American Activities Committee, the Senate Internal Security Committee, and the Attorney General of the United States," and the NAACP, whose officials "have an almost incredible tie-in with communist and communist front organizations." As the child of the "pro-communist" SRC, the ACHR was also "organized for the purpose of instigating and pushing integration in Arkansas." Most dangerously, it received funds alongside the NAACP and SRC from the Ford Foundation's Fund for the Republic, which employed *Arkansas*

⁴⁴ Moore to Hays, 6 November 1958; Westmoreland to Hays, 10 November 1958; Penix to Hays, 6 November 1958; Jackson to Hays, 1 December 1958, Hays Papers, Box 47. In a later speech, Hays defended his embrace of moderation despite the "good deal of prejudice" that contemporaries placed on the term, declared the write-in campaign a "sneak attack" that prevented him from explaining his "risky position," and reiterated his expectations that somehow it would produce the ideal voluntary compliance needed to desegregate schools (Hays, "Can Moderation Succeed In the South?," Hays Papers, Box 48).

Gazette editor Harry Ashmore.⁴⁵ According to Bennett's conspiracy theory, the ACHR was part and parcel of a broader Communist attempt that involved Thurgood Marshall, Martin Luther King, Jr., Daisy Bates, Ashmore, and other prominent African American or white southern liberal activists.

The ACHR reply drew heavily on its ministerial population and national church support, also hewing closely to the national church's anticommunist defense. The ACHR proudly declared its affiliation with the Fund for the Republic, observing that other groups that the Fund supported included "religious groups associated with all major faiths" and "educational, professional, and patriotic organizations." While it conceded that Bennett accurately described its overall purpose to bring about desegregation, its emphasis on interracial cooperation and mutual respect placed it "in accord with the declared faith of every major body." Its religious impulses placed it in overall accord with the committee's purported goals to eliminate Communist influence as it would inevitably "result only in discord and destruction in the South."⁴⁶

However, its final parting shot subtly indicates its own opinion on just whom were truly advancing worldwide Communist interests. According to the ACHR, global communism's "spirit is that of arrogance and mistrust. It is dangerous because it divides men and ruthlessly crushes persons. Opposed to it is a Christian dynamics. It is more powerful. It is beneficial because it unites men and gently exalts persons." The ACHR claimed its devotion to the latter, working toward the goal of a unified and desegregated society. Although left unspoken, Bennett's heavy-handed attempt to silence the ACHR to

⁴⁵ Special Education Committee, Transcript of 16-18 December 1958 Session, ACHR Papers, Box 5; "Hearing Before the Special Education Committee of the Arkansas Legislative Council," 16-18 December 1958, SRC Papers, Reel 141.

⁴⁶ "Human Relations Council Strikes Back at Accuser," *Arkansas Gazette*, 21 December 1958, SRC Papers, Reel 141.

preserve a segregated and divided society made him, not Griswold, more Communist in spirit than the loyal ACHR.

The problem with red-baiting, however, was that one could not fully escape its grasp. Years later, a William Ruck took issue with a three-page statement from Griswold regarding public education. Rather than address Griswold's actual arguments, he argued that local citizens should "turn a deaf ear" to the ACHR because its ties to the SRC and its "questionable background" meant that it was another secretive organization that "strive for the suppression of the majority and create racial discord under the cloak of dogoodism." For proof, Ruck cited Bennett's testimony about the ACHR's devious connections.⁴⁷ However unfounded it was, state suspicion gave locals the license to freely marginalize progressive voices, regardless of how much their actual message might otherwise make sense.

If one looks purely at the results rather than the broader circumstances, Arkansas clergy are definitely found wanting. Stretching back to their failed attempt to overturn the segregation bills, clergy found their voices at best ignored, and at worst attracting the wrong type of attention. While David Chappell contends that even token resistance was better than segregationist encouragement, it is clear that their Christian witness failed to deter massive resistance. However, moving the question from whether the clergy effectively resisted to why they failed to sway public opinion raises puzzling contradictions. Regardless of whether people listened to them, vocal supportive clergy paid a steep price for saying that violent segregationist resistance to *Brown* was unacceptable. Rather than apathy or fear, three primary factors suffocated clerical opposition to massive resistance.

⁴⁷ Ruck, "In the Best Interests of Public Schools," [c. 1961], SRC Papers, Reel 141.

The first reason was that faith and willingness alone are insufficient conditions to jump-start a movement. While Robert Brown possessed a powerful theological tool for organizing Christians specifically with his concept of reconciliation, he never got a truly representative group of people together to work out a positive platform of change. In his unsuccessful attempt to appeal to segregationist voices, he shut out the NAACP, which represented a significant portion of the very same African American community whose education he was ostensibly attempting to improve. Furthermore, reconciliation is a two-way street, requiring the active participation of each party. Although Brown recognized that some coercion could be needed, he failed to provide a compelling vision that other religious leaders could get behind. While Cartwright initially endorsed even moderate solutions as some active form of opposition, the ineffectiveness behind the Day of Prayer protests suggests that the progressive mystique looked like a poor alternative to massive resistance.

Another reason was simply that speaking out invited retaliation. Much like African American activists—though to a much lesser degree—white liberal religious leaders received hate mail, were accused of harboring Communist sympathies, and had to fear for their lives.⁴⁸ Many saw each of these religious leaders as part of a larger conspiracy forcing unwelcome “race-mixing” and an assault on a traditional way of life, and sought either to harass or expel those who criticized their views. Hays’s political defeat and David Ogden’s suicide reveals that even moderate dissent could bring about serious consequences.

Finally, white supportive clerics had their own unique problem: many of the people who harbored segregationist sentiments attended their congregations and sat in

⁴⁸ Lehtreck, “Southern White Ministers,” vi-vii.

their pews. Cartwright especially struggled with this contradiction, confessing to Eleanor Haney that “I certainly don’t like conflict.... I don’t like to have people dislike me or have people antagonistic toward me.”⁴⁹ Ministers like Cartwright remained particularly sensitive to criticism that they were neglecting their pastorates to take up social action crusades that all too often produced little tangible results. These pastors’ responsibility to proclaim truth and reveal injustice conflicted with the also important call to nurture their congregation’s wellbeing. Role conflict made their decision to take public stances all the more costly, especially in undermining their personal conviction that they should pursue prophetic leadership. It also stood in contrast to the community support that many African American clergy enjoyed, for example Martin Luther King’s local leadership in the Montgomery bus boycott.⁵⁰

The extreme antagonism clergy experienced also suggests that average Arkansas citizens were complicit in their support for massive resistance. The strong divide between pulpit and pew shows that all too many white southerners were not simply waiting for progressive leadership to lead them away from segregation, but rather continued to fervently cling to Jim Crow despite available alternatives. Far more than a simple refusal to come down from the balcony, the Little Rock crisis shows the crucial fallacy behind the southern liberal supposition that segregation was simply an ancient relic that would easily disappear. Rather, when push came to shove, even sympathetic laymen like Whitaker preferred maintaining the stable past above working toward a better future. It

⁴⁹ Haney, “Study of Conscience,” 126.

⁵⁰ For evidence of this support, see the extended transcript of the Montgomery Improvement Association Mass Meeting in Holt Street Baptist Church, 5 December 1955, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume III: Birth of a New Age, December 1955-December 1956*, ed. Clayborne Carson et al (Berkeley: UC, 1997). Still, many African American ministers who declined to participate in civil rights protests may have felt a similar squeeze in raising “social issues” specifically, or taking actions that threatened their institutional safety.

would take broad vocal leadership from many concerned people to overturn massive resistance, relying on a broad politics of moderation platform that muted clerical activism. Such a coalition could achieve concrete, albeit limited, results. Unfortunately, it also muted the clergy's unique moral conviction that "neither Jew nor Greek," nor any other racial distinction, should exist in both sacred and secular spaces.

CHAPTER 5

SIMPLE JUSTICE AND HUMAN DECENCY

Even though Arkansas ministers discovered the ramifications for publicly criticizing massive resistance during the Central High School crisis, they could still influence local affairs as part of a larger coalition. Applying the lessons of Hoxie, Cartwright especially emerged as an advocate for practical solutions to implement school desegregation, featuring both progressives and moderates alike. As local resistance embraced increasingly extreme alternatives such as closing the high schools, other vocal dissenters joined the clergy in protest, successfully scaling back the most extreme segregationist policies like shutting down public education. This chapter focuses on how ministers supported larger moderate/progressive alternatives, arguing that while larger coalitions provided limited results, they also lacked the moral clarity that religious conviction provided.

Clerical marginalization left progressive voices powerless against what John Kirk has called “minimum compliance,” the plan that moderates employed in Arkansas. Kirk contends that, by sidestepping ethical obligations and requesting that only a handful of students attend desegregated schools, minimum compliance not only allowed massive resistance to flourish for a time but also reasserted itself as the only logical alternative after the crisis. In Kirk’s words, “when massive resistance failed, self-styled moderates used the furore it created to justify their already established policy of minimum compliance with the law.” He agrees with Numen V. Bartley’s claim that the shift from massive resistance to minimum compliance was relatively smooth and represented “no real break from the past,” because massive resistance had changed the landscape where

“token efforts to comply nominally with the letter of the law of the land, while often evading its spirit, came to be hailed as “progress.” However, Kirk disputes Bartley’s claim that it was the accidental results by “well-meaning leaders,” insisting that it was instead a “much more calculating and premediated attempt to circumvent the *Brown* decision.”¹

In contrast, Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis contend that this argument “misses much of the political conflict and historical contingency which marked that moment in time.” Claiming that the Kirk/Bartley argument focuses too much on “political elites,” Lassiter and Lewis instead claim that examining local responses to extreme segregation “demonstrates the ways in which shifting attitudes among whites undermined massive resistance and formed a popular consensus for accepting limited desegregation before most political leaders were willing to take such a stand.” While popular resistance to massive resistance policies did not bring about full integration of public schools, it “heralded substantial political and educational changes in Virginia,” providing the groundswell to overturn the old political oligarchy in the upcoming decade.²

¹ Kirk, “Massive Resistance and Minimum Compliance,” 76-98; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 342-343. R. Scott Baker’s monograph on school desegregation in Charleston, South Carolina concurs with the Kirk/Bartley thesis, writing that “the most durable resistance to African American demands for desegregation came from moderates not extremists.” Baker describes how the Charleston school board used test scores and other means to restrict the number of African American students (Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation: African American Struggles for Educational Equity in Charleston, South Carolina, 1926-1972* [Columbia: South Carolina, 2006], 127).

² Lassiter and Lewis, “Massive Resistance Revisited: Virginia’s White Moderates and the Byrd Organization,” in *The Moderates’ Dilemma: Massive Resistance to School Segregation in Virginia*, eds. Lassiter and Lewis (Charlottesville: Virginia, 1998), 1-21. In his study on SRC leader Benjamin Muse, Lassiter concedes that minimum compliance had its own limits. He writes: “as massive resistance receded, the initial desegregation achieved through the rhetoric of open public schools and economic progress all too often represented compliance with the minimum requirements of the law followed by conservative retrenchment, not the beginning of more fundamental racial change” (Lassiter, “A ‘Fighting Moderate’: Benjamin Muse’s Search for the Submerged South,” in *The Moderates’ Dilemma*, 201).

Looking at Arkansas ministers provides further evidence for Lassiter and Lewis's claim that the switch from massive resistance to minimum compliance was far from smooth. Furthermore, each of the above authors fails to convey that local progressives supported minimum compliance only as a way station to full integration. Progressive clergy's religious justification that segregation was immoral and that God demanded truly integrated facilities left them especially uneasy with pupil placement, which hardly reflected true Christian brotherhood. As massive resistance faded, the more radical clergy spoke out against minimum compliance, ultimately to little avail. Still, clerical dissent in the transition period is worth analyzing to discover potential alternatives and shed light on the contested nature between massive resistance and minimum compliance.

The first antisegregationist alternative that enjoyed broader support was businessman Herbert Thomas's proposed plan in Spring 1948 to resolve the crisis through compromise. Thomas, who helped oversee the University of Arkansas's desegregation process in 1948, proposed establishing an interracial committee which would set local guidelines to desegregate in return for withdrawing the remaining Little Rock Nine after the end of the 1957-1958 school year. Although the proposed committee would not have legal force behind its recommendations, Thomas contended that "because of its very nature it would operate with tremendous moral persuasion toward improved race relationships."³ Elizabeth Jacoway wrote that the Thomas Plan had "Brooks Hays's fingerprints" all over it, and the plan echoed many preceding proposals from moderate clerics.⁴ What made the Thomas Plan different from earlier efforts like the Day of Prayer was that it bypassed the clergy and emerged from other local leaders.

³ Thomas, "The Arkansas Plan," 7 April 1958, in Herbert L. Thomas Papers, Box 4.

⁴ Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 247.

Local white ministerial reaction ranged from eagerness to ambivalence, although few dismissed it outright. First Christian Church of Fayetteville pastor James Spainhower, who had supported local desegregation four years prior, stated that the plan “would encourage the masses as well as our leaders to practice such patience” that was “very much needed” in contemporary affairs. Fort Smith Methodist pastor Fred Roebuck echoed the moderation line, endorsing the “most excellent” plan as one that local citizens, except the “extremists and agitationists on each side,” would willingly support, and Bishop Robert Brown also endorsed the plan. J. Hodge Alves, rector of Little Rock’s Christ Episcopal Church, explained why many ministers found themselves in natural support of the plan: “Christian understanding and cooperation and regard for one another, patience and tolerance must all have a part in any permanent solution.” These pastors embraced the ever-present ideal of the decent and Christian South marshalling its voice to resolve an increasingly embarrassing situation, responding more to the Plan’s reasonable rhetoric than its proposed implementation.⁵

While more progressive pastors took heart at the emergence of other antisegregationist voices, they opposed the Plan’s proposed implementation. In their official report to the Little Rock school board, the ACHR declared that “the sincere and devoted work of Mr. Herbert Thomas and his associates... is cause for renewed hope” and supported its voluntary commission as an issue “of primary importance” to allow dedicated local leaders to assert control. However, it rejected the Thomas Plan’s efforts to halt current desegregation efforts, stating that the plan called for “the ending of one plan, however inadequate, without another or a promise of another.” Instead, it echoed local

⁵ Spainhower to Joshua K. Shephard, 8 April 1958; Roebuck to Shephard, 19 April 1958, Alves to Thomas, 22 April 1958; Brown to Thomas, 24 April 1958, Thomas Papers, Box 4.

African American criticism that withdrawing the remaining students was too large a price to pay.⁶

Donald K. Campbell of Crossett helped explain why progressive pastors found the proposed methods intriguing but the overall plan unworkable in a 10 April letter to Arkansas Plan proponents. Campbell wrote that while the voluntary committee could not hurt, it had to make sure to include NAACP leaders and those who “have a zeal for pursuing the rights of their own people even when the dominant majority find this unpleasant.” Campbell neglected to specifically mention Thomas’s name, but he wrote that those who railed against extremism on both sides and equated the NAACP with local Citizens Councils neglected the difference between “those who are bold to seek the rights granted them by the law, and who use legal means” with those who “are set up to block and hinder the law of the land.” Interracial committees held considerable promise, but they had to include the entire community rather than only those voices elites deemed acceptable to be effective.

Campbell’s also expressed his religiously based discomfort with the moderate endorsement of minimum compliance. Specifically, Campbell wrote:

This document seems to reflect a point of view that segregation is wrong but also a desire to have no more integration than absolutely necessary. Though I might work with the Arkansas Plan, I can never be satisfied with this attitude. I grew up with deep prejudices, and was brought to favor integration because as a Christian I became convinced that it is the will of God as taught us in Christ Jesus. I do not believe that it is enough for me to merely accept something God wills in a passive way, but I feel that I must go out and actively seek to bring it about. Therefore I not only will agree to, but want, integration. I can give only qualified support to any plan that falls short of this.⁷

⁶ ACHR Suggestions to the Arkansas State Board of Education, [c. May 1958], Box 25; ACHR Minutes, 17 April 1958, Box 34, ACHR Papers.

⁷ Campbell to Thomas, 10 April 1958, Thomas Papers, Box 4.

Campbell's reply reiterated that integration was not only inevitable but desirable, revealing the discomfort progressives had with the idea that eight students had to be ejected from integrated schools just for an advisory commission.

Of course, progressive ambivalence paled in comparison to segregationist rejection. The Mothers League of Little Rock sent a telegram accusing the Plan as yet another unconstitutional attempt to override local option and that "WE CHRISTIANS OPPOSE THE ALIEN PLAN OF MONGRELIZATION." Missionary Baptist elder R. A. Raney of nearby Carthage defended segregation as completely in line with the Bible, and that separation of church and state made it crystal clear that local areas had a distinctive duty to defend their way of life. He failed to distinguish exactly how Thomas's plan would bring about desegregation, but asserted that it "is a simple plan of weak man, versus God's plan."⁸ Both of these answers illustrate a hard-line approach that rejected even moderate overtures as de facto capitulation to unwanted intrusion into local affairs.

Outright segregationist opposition allowed Thomas to present an overture to progressive voices that his plan was the best compromise to rally moderate support. Thomas assured ACHR members Adolphine Terry, Marion Boggs, and Cartwright that he only suggested withdrawal because the Nine's presence was the sticking point behind moderates becoming "vocal and active participants" for an actual solution. However, he also added that he did not include Daisy Bates because she was an "extremely well-paid, well-trained, guided, and disciplined worker for the National Association," and one who would never compromise. Thomas used a traffic metaphor to explain his views: while one definitely has a legal right to cross the intersection when one has a green light, it is

⁸ Mothers of North Little Rock and Mothers League of America to Thomas, 11 April 1958; Raney to Thomas, 9 April 1958, Thomas Papers, Box 4.

still prudent to wait for speeding oncoming traffic to cross rather than sue the offenders later on for damages.⁹ The NAACP, by supporting local court cases rather than waiting for the glacial pace of local opinion to change, was risking an unwelcome collision.

Therein lay the dilemma for progressives post-September 1957: while Thomas's plan sacrificed the moral justice behind true racial integration, standing firm in one's convictions was apparently not going to quell local resistance. Speaking at a church conference, Thomas hammered this point home when he indirectly responded to Campbell as an anonymous "extreme white integrationist, who has formed his conviction through honest reasoning and sincerity of purpose gas approached closely...the Christian philosophy of brotherhood." Although laudable, such a stance assumed perfection was "a state of being" rather than "the longed-for goal" and felt comfortable risking "the tragedy, the horror, the sorrow of another 'Little Rock' incident." This argument mirrored Bishop Brown's concerns about "integrationists," versus the "prudent" moderate approach.¹⁰

While the Thomas Plan was ultimately unsuccessful in winning over Governor Faubus's support, the contentious discourse such a plan generated in religious circles reveals that behind-the-scenes coalition work was far from easy. Rather than leading similarly motivated Christians like Jonesboro lawyer Bill Penix who believed segregation was a heresy, progressive leaders too often found out that the larger coalition was all too willing to emphasize expedience and practicality over final solutions aimed also at addressing structural injustice. While the ACHR remained sensitive to African American

⁹ Thomas to Terry, 15 April 1958, Thomas Papers, Box 4. In a speech to African American leaders, Thomas commented that if they disagreed with "voluntary cooperation, in the spirit of mutual trust and good will, then I am persuaded to believe that they have been influenced by a rigid, uncompromising element within their own race rather than by their own independent judgment and sense of perspective" (Thomas, Speech to Negro Leaders, 16 April 1958, in Faubus Papers, Box 599).

¹⁰ Thomas, A Statement Prepared For a Conference of Protestant Church Leaders At New Orleans, 13-14 May 1958, Thomas Papers, Box 5.

leadership and its categorical rejection of withdrawal, it could not convince moderates like Thomas to display similar sensitivity.

The desire to portray a positive Christian response also prevented local progressives from taking advantage of the international interest in Little Rock. According to Mary Dudziak, Little Rock “was a crisis of such magnitude for worldwide perceptions of race and American democracy that it would become the reference point for the future.” Fearing that unwelcome publicity would hurt diplomacy abroad, the State Department prepared a list of talking points claiming that Little Rock was an anomaly and that “marked progress toward integration” was occurring nationwide.¹¹

Interestingly, even the ACHR supported the national narrative of progressive integration, entertaining international dignitaries who wanted a firsthand look at the city because of the crisis. The Little Rock crisis had sparked international interest in the city’s race relations, which visiting dignitaries freely admitted. A Japanese economist was “even more interested in the matter of race relations” than the local economy, while a Pakistani political leader wanted “an objective view of intergroup relations and political affairs in the Little Rock area.” Local progressives could have used this global interest to put pressure on the federal government to take more vigorous action to enforce its own laws and court decisions. By all appearances, however, the ACHR instead promoted the federal government’s narrative of local racial progress. Specifically, Nat Griswold reported that a Mr. Garba “seemed to be pleased with his experiences here” and received word that a Nigerian official thanked him for the chance to meet a charming and “diverse

¹¹ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 118, 142-145. Dudziak also quotes a United States Information Agency (USIA) memo outlining an overall strategy “to minimize the damage by summarizing anti-integration events on a factual basis, supplying facts whenever possible to balance adverse sensational items, quoting editorials and official statements which indicate steady determined progress toward integration, and informally suggesting to friendly editors possible constructive treatment.”

section of the community.” While polite, this is hardly the response one would get when detailing a bleak racial situation.¹² Although I was not able to find any sources to explain Griswold’s motivation, national church prestige also dictated downplaying racism at home in order to support missions worldwide, which could serve as a possible motivation for his willingness to play along with the diplomatic script.

Little Rock would again appear in the international spotlight when Governor Faubus closed the public high schools in September 1958 rather than obey the federal court order to have them desegregated, and local citizens voted on a 3:1 ratio to keep them closed in a popular referendum. They would reopen the following year, but only after a recall vote ejected the three segregationist members of the school board. According to Sondra Gordy, historians have unfortunately neglected the “complicated, confusing, frustrating” events of the 1958-1959 school year, otherwise known as the Lost Year. She makes a somewhat persuasive case that the Lost Year galvanized local citizens to speak out against massive resistance and to build a grassroots campaign aimed against political manipulation. In regards to the potential counterargument that the initial vote to close the public schools demonstrated widespread support for resistance, Gordy argues that the vote is an inaccurate barometer for local attitudes. She observes that local citizens believed the governor’s false promise of segregated private schools and the ballot was worded such that a vote for public schools was also an endorsement of full integration, flattening the continuum of views citizens had into a polarizing dichotomy. In contrast,

¹² Jerome F. Margolius to Griswold, 29 May 1958; Wilfred R. Brunner to Griswold, 29 September 1958; Griswold to F. Lamar King, 3 April 1959; Seidu A. Carba to Griswold, 11 April 1959; ACHR Papers, Box 14. For one particular visit, American Council of Education staffer Jerome F. Margolius alerted Griswold that a Mr. Tamai was going to go to Little Rock regardless of sponsorship, and “it is, of course, much better that he will have a sponsor there” (Margolius to Griswold, 16 October 1958, ACHR Papers, Box 14). Having a sponsor could make him more comfortable but also could help discourage him from drawing negative conclusions while the city was up in turmoil.

the recall vote showed that the community was done with massive resistance and searching for less extreme alternatives to desegregation that preserved public education.

Gordy gives considerable credit to the moderate businessmen and to the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Schools (WEC), a local organization of female racial liberals who used the school closing to mobilize discontent toward segregationists. In contrast, Gordy's only mentions of clerical involvement were the Protestant churches that tacitly supported school closure by opening schools for their high school students. One minister Gordy spotlights is Second Baptist Church pastor Dale Cowling, who helped open the Baptist High School, which was the second largest private school during the Lost Year with about 400 students enrolled, all white. It required its students to pay tuition, rejecting public support as violating "Baptist principles of separation of church and state," although Raney offered free tuition.¹³ Such a portrayal paints clergy as indifferent toward the larger question of public education at best, and worse, willing allies to keep segregated schools.

WEC leader Vivion Lenon Brewer also found the clergy silent on this issue. Her firsthand account on the Lost Year recounted the struggle to mobilize local ministers behind a drafted public statement claiming that they supported open schools "as citizens and as religious leaders." Despite constantly receiving "replies such as: 'If you get so many signatures, then I will sign'; and out and out refusals," the WEC persisted through several months of dealing with semantic issues over the statement's wording to placate individual objections. Still, out of the four hundred churches in the city, only twenty-five ministers—and two rabbis—promised to sign the statement, which Brewer deemed too

¹³ Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year: What Happened When Little Rock Closed its Public Schools* (Fayetteville: Arkansas, 2009), 64-71.

few to release. The sparse support was, to Brewer, “one of our disheartening failures.” The best exemplars of Christian perseverance and commitment, according to WEC sources, were not religious leaders like Robert Brown, but the WEC rank and file, who were mostly “church members” in their own right.¹⁴

Focusing exclusively on the admittedly limited ministerial efforts during the Lost Year, however, complicates the Gordy/Brewer narrative. After all, twenty-seven signatures were more than the number who signed the two resolutions opposing Governor Faubus and the local community’s dismal handling of the Central High crisis the year prior. And although numerically small, supportive clergy established what “the church” had to say in the local discourse regarding public education and race. Rather, the overwhelmingly negative or indifferent response to even their most vigorous clerical arguments suggests that the blame also lies among the many local citizens who dismissed their moral arguments as wrong, offensive, and/or irrelevant.

Clergy tried to build up public support for open schools even before the WEC’s creation. As the federal court case to order desegregation loomed, Brown asserted that the Arkansas Episcopalian Church “will want to play its part” to encourage peaceful resolution and that reconciliation “does not mean conciliation, or peace at any price.” Despite his pending reelection campaign, Hays also criticized shutdown, saying “it’s terrible to contemplate closing any school,” and Donald Campbell joined other South

¹⁴ Vivion Lenon Brewer, *The Embattled Ladies of Little Rock: The Struggle to Save Public Education at Central High, 1958-1963* (Fort Bragg: Lost Coast, 1999), 108-111, 283. Sara Murphy’s *Breaking the Silence* contains numerous accounts about how religious faith motivated many participants. WEC member Margaret Kolb recalled that many women were recruited “by word of mouth through the church women,” and PTA president Billie Wilson remembered receiving encouragement and public speaking tips from “two good Presbyterian ministers” and how her church’s pastor had publicly opposed the school closings despite congregational opposition (Sara Alderman Murphy, *Breaking the Silence: Little Rock’s Women’s Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools, 1958-1963*, ed. Patrick C. Murphy II [Fayetteville: Arkansas, 1997], 98, 135-144).

Arkansas Presbyterians in criticizing the “sinister” Johnson Amendment authorizing Governor Faubus the power to close integrated high schools.¹⁵ On the eve of the Supreme Court decision, the ACHR organized an eighteen hour prayer vigil “in hopes that God’s Will will prevail at this time, and to purify and strength each Christian Witness in word and deed.” Ogden, Griswold, and Pulaski Heights Presbyterian Church pastor T. B. Hay were among those who prayed that God would, in the words of Social Gospel theologian Walter Rauschenbusch, “help us now to master the social relations of mankind that we may gain justice and a world of brothers.”¹⁶

Clerical criticism escalated after Faubus closed the four public high schools in the city pending a 27 September local referendum. Methodist bishop Paul Martin retreated to the moderate line of prayer and law-abidance, also adding that “as Christians, we must remind ourselves that it is our solemn obligation to avoid the world’s evil tempers, its hatreds, its prejudices and its pride.... We must recognize and appreciate the dignity and integrity of all the children of God.”¹⁷ Dunbar Ogden’s local denominational peers in the Washburn Presbytery—about fifty members, evenly split between laymen and clergy, including T. B. Hay—went further, issuing a resolution on 16 September deploring the school closings and urging Governor Faubus to rescind his actions.

¹⁵ “Bishop Brown Silent on Visit,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 6 September 1958; Jack Blalock, “Hays Decries Amendment As ‘Dangerous’ Rights Curb,” 8 September 1958, “Presbytery Slaps State Amendment,” 11 September 1958. Jim Johnson, Faubus’s opponent in the 1956 election, was now a state legislator.

¹⁶ William J. Massie, “Keep the Vigil”; Prayer Vigil Signup Sheet, 11 September 1958; Order of Service for Keeping the Vigil, 11 September 1958, ACHR Papers, Box 18.

¹⁷ “Prayer, Obedience to Law Stressed by Bishop Martin,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 15 September 1958. While the Washburn Presbytery grabbed headlines, many other ministers also urged local citizens to vote against closing the public schools. 65 Hall High School students gathered at Hay’s church to open schools, even though organizer David Johnson claimed the church “had no connection to the meeting.” The *Gazette* also reported on two sermons by Kenneth Shamblin and Dale Cowling supporting public education. According to Shamblin, the governor “rigged” the upcoming referendum by focusing on integration itself rather than the lack of desirable alternatives, while Cowling pointed out that such a measure would undoubtedly hurt local high schoolers. See “Hall Students Ask Immediate School Opening,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 20 September 1958; “Two Ministers, Boards Of Churches Urge Vote For Reopening Schools,” 22 September 1958.

Governor Faubus's reply that the Washburn Presbytery members were "very effectively brainwashed" by "the leftwingers and the Communists" illustrates the ministers' overall lack of influence. After all, most politicians cannot directly slander a major denomination's local leadership because offending particular religious constituencies could mean a considerable loss of public support. And as one might expect, the Presbytery howled foul, immediately issuing another resolution expressing its "regret that in the hour of crisis, with the educational welfare of thousands of children at stake, the Governor of Arkansas has resorted to name-calling and slander.... Our great church is due an apology." Five Little Rock Methodists the following day supported their Presbyterian brethren, writing an open letter to Faubus contending that "the only basis you had for such an accusation of these men was that they disagreed with you."¹⁸ If local congregations shared their ministers' views, then Faubus's intemperate statement could have crippled his political influence.

That local opinion sided with the governor instead indicates the marginal status local clergy had at that time. Faubus received a considerable amount of local and national support, much of it repeating common segregationist arguments against the church. Many locals advanced the segregationist argument that if the ministers were so concerned, they should "open their churches + invite the negro, before trying to tell the schools what to do." This argument ignores local African American voices, which displayed far less interest in church desegregation than in abolishing the widely unequal financial

¹⁸ Resolutions Adopted by the 154th Meeting of Washburn Presbytery held at Central Presbyterian Church, Little Rock, Arkansas, 16 September 1958, Faubus Papers, Box 568, "Faubus Resets Election For September 27, Rips School Board, Clergymen," *Arkansas Gazette*, 17 September 1958; "Presbyterians Deny Charge, Demand Apology of Governor," 17 September 1958; "Methodists Urge Governor to Apologize to Ministers," 18 September 1958. Both Ogden's son and the *Arkansas Gazette* suggested that Ogden had a hand in convincing his fellow Presbyterians to directly oppose the school closings (Ogden, *My Father Said Yes*, 120-121).

distribution between their schools and local white schools. Many of the outside letters agreed with Faubus's claim of brainwashed clergy, citing literature from popular segregationists like J. B. Matthews and Carl McIntire that accused the national church for taking strong progressive stances because they were infiltrated by Communists.¹⁹

Other letters expressed discomfort with clerical activism in social affairs. One local citizen wrote, "I for one, wish the Church would first become a Saint before trying to run the State of Arkansas" and another explained that he left Hay's church when "I could no longer stomach the parroting of the theories of Socialism from the pulpit instead of the teachings of Jesus Christ." They would likely be in accord with Memphis resident F. A. Brewer, who wrote Hay that "preachers don't know the facts of life.... Preachers know all about the bible and things related but all of you are weak on ethics, logic, philosophy, the humanities and sociology, in fact everything that is part of how people live and react to one another."²⁰ Like Robert Brown's self-styled theologians, these letters suggest that white Southerners were willing to disregard, if not entirely oppose, their pastor's political views. As both Cartwright and Ogden discovered, many of these socially apathetic congregation members may not have had a strong opinion on their pastor's political views per se but resented how they interfered with the real business at hand—the institutional health of local churches. Faubus likely recognized local discontent with clerical activism when he red baited local Presbyterian leadership, and his refusal to apologize made him more, not less, popular.

¹⁹ J. D. McDonald to Faubus, 17 September 1958; John W. Glover to Faubus, [c. September 1958]; Joe K. Rowan to Faubus, 18 September 1958; Frank J. Maston to Faubus, 23 September 1958, Faubus Papers, Box 530.

²⁰ F. A. Brewer to T. A. Hay, 16 September 1958; Cass Gentry to Faubus, 18 September 1958; J. C. Overstreet to Faubus, 19 September 1958, Faubus Papers, Box 530.

Of course, what made the September 1958 protests different from years prior was that other major voices finally emerged to support the clergy in their efforts to save public education. The WEC wrote letters of support commending fourteen of the pastors who spoke out in September 1958, recognizing their shared mission.²¹ It also attempted to work with Robert Brown to organize a 26 September television program encouraging local citizens to vote against shutting down the high schools. According to Brewer, Brown only agreed to participate if the other members of the panel were also ministers, forcing a complete re-write of a script and leading to a program that “was poorly timed, blurred in expression, and was a great disappointment.” She also had a difficult time rounding up the three other religious leaders, exhausting her list of ministerial contacts only to find Paul Martin and T. B. Hay. She then turned to Cowling, who had participated in an earlier pro-WEC television program, to be the fourth member. Cowling replied that he would do it, “but it makes me very sad that you have found so few.”²²

Taken together, the four religious leaders crafted a specific appeal aimed at extolling the Christian character of public education, carefully omitting any mention of how segregation fit into their scheme. The ultimately moderate message avoided prophetic theological pronouncement on desegregation for protecting public education. Brown reiterated his message of reconciliation and urged citizens to let Christian faith guide their vote, while Martin stated the social benefits of public education. After meeting privately with Brown, Adolphine Terry and Dottie Morris concluded that he was trying to protect his relationship with Governor Faubus and “is not willing to lose any

²¹ WEC Memorandum On 7 October Meeting. [c. 12-18 October 1958], Murphy Papers, Box 15.

²² Brewer, *Embattled Ladies of Little Rock*, 27-29; Murphy, *Breaking the Silence*, 89-90. According to a WEC eyewitness account, Brown feared the program would be “too controversial,” and “we were like ten minutes from going on the air, and he was trying to talk us out” of doing it.

little influence he may have by taking too strong a stand on TV” against him. In contrast, the two pastors in the panel made more direct links between Christian faith and keeping public schools open. Cowling claimed that “God has given us our American system of free public school education” and that “we simply must not allow the heat of our passions in this hour to cause us to throw overboard such a priceless heritage.” Meanwhile, Hay focused specifically on the high schoolers, observing that the acerbic debate over closing the public schools “is like a father and mother who are fighting over their child. When it’s all over, perhaps no great harm shall be done to the father or the mother, but the child will be terribly wounded.”²³

Cowling’s role in the program is especially interesting given his later role in sponsoring Baptist High. Much like other strongly moderate leaders, Cowling’s endorsement for public school education triggered local ire. He soon received a unique form of harassment, as a small handful of African Americans attempted to desegregate his church in protest for his support for public school desegregation. The protesters’ arguments were especially odd, giving credence to Cowling’s theory that their views were not representative of the larger community and that it was a setup from a “pressure group.” African American protester Albert Hudson claimed that he chose Second Baptist to show that “integration was impossible at the churches and thus impossible in the schools,” and added that Daisy Bates attempted to intimidate him by her suggestion that white church leaders “who objected to his effort might beat him up.” Local African American leaders supported Cowling over Hudson, as Bates’s husband L. C. denied NAACP involvement and that “all we want is integrated public institutions. I don’t care

²³ WEC Television Program Prior to the Little Rock School Election, 26 September 1958, Murphy Papers, Box 15; Murphy. *Breaking the Silence*, 89.

whether they ever integrate the churches.” Roland Smith, African American pastor of the First Missionary Baptist Church, also discouraged the protests and that African Americans should resist being “pawns and tools” for segregationists.²⁴

If not a sign of genuine African American discontent, such a protest illustrates the ministers’ dilemma. Cowling could have simply welcomed the protesters in to worship with the church, as many contemporary observers noted. However, role conflict likely discouraged Cowling from taking any action that could trigger explosive discontent in his congregation and, in a way, give in to arch-segregationist wishes. The actual embarrassment Cowling experienced and the potentially explosive discord suggests that Hudson’s attempt was not a mere prank but a serious effort to undermine Cowling’s career.

Given segregationist opposition to Cowling, how should one view his efforts to both support public education and later construct an alternate school system? Gordy’s basic contention that these pastors abetted local governmental efforts to evade the federal court order remains true, as separate private schools had little impact for the African Americans thrown out of education and denied access to schools like Raney High. However, Cowling’s spirited defense for public education complicates the picture. After all, Brewer portrayed Cowling as the rare minister who vigorously supported the WEC, in comparison to Brown’s diffidence. Instead of a dream come true, Baptist High was more likely the last-ditch remedy for a bad situation, making sure to protect church adolescents from the political power plays that would otherwise deny them needed education. Cowling and other moderate pastors were not willing segregationist allies but

²⁴ “Court Resume School Debates,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 6 October 1958; “Two Churches Open Classes For About 60,” 13 October 1958; “Three Private Schools Enroll More Students,” 27 October 1958, “Negro Plans Another Try At Attending White Church,” 15 October 1958.

pawns trapped between the distasteful choices of tacitly supporting segregation or letting local youth suffer from a situation not of their own choosing.

Interestingly, the clerics who attempted to rally support for public education in the September 1958 vote were more moderate than those who supported the Little Rock Nine, suggesting that these ministers believed more in public education generally than desegregation specifically. Cowling, Brown, and Martin all fall under Campbell and Pettigrew's definition of "influential" ministers, established ministers who refused to endorse desegregation in the Central High crisis. Even as the moderates' reasoning avoided racial reasons, their public support placed them against Faubus and local segregationist sentiment. One reason for their greater activism might have been wounded pride. After Pettigrew gave an advance paper of his findings criticizing the majority of Little Rock's ministers for failing "to show ministerial courage" during the Central High School crisis, Cowling and Brown both gave spirited replies defending their record. Cowling complained that Pettigrew subjectively determined "which ministers [are] helping and which hindering," while Brown believed that local ministers showed "a great deal of courage and perseverance in seeking a solution to this dilemma."²⁵ Such vehement replies suggest that local clergy were emotionally invested in desegregation, as apathetic clergy could have simply dismissed Pettigrew as another clueless academic whose focus on "social matters" was irrelevant to the church's true mission.

In contrast, progressives mostly kept a low profile during the Lost Year, which coincided with Central Presbyterian Church turning away Dunbar Ogden and Brooks

²⁵ "Courage Poke Draws Replies From Pastors," *Arkansas Gazette*, 1 September 1958. The *Gazette* article also quoted Dunbar Ogden's positive reply, saying that "most of our ministers did very well considering that a great many church members exerted a severe pressure to keep them from using their influence opening to allow a beginning of gradual integration."

Hays's election defeat. If progressives led the Fall 1957 efforts and vocally contested the Thomas Plan, by Fall 1958 they contented themselves with less public roles. In a 30 September letter to his family, Cartwright wrote that "I have stayed out of the headlines, and have not been subjected to much harassment," but instead "have been free to work behind the scenes in some possibly significant ways, unmolested." His efforts to secure federal intervention by ghost-writing a report for the Civil Rights Commission and requesting assistance from Attorney General Rogers proved to be of little avail, but did not subject him to Whitaker-level criticism. When Brewer was mobilizing support for her petition, Cartwright expressed his own private support but "was not encouraging" regarding its chances of success.²⁶

One possible reason why Cartwright shied away from the public eye was that the unfruitful efforts of the past several years left him drained. Cartwright's letters from September-October 1958 reveal considerable mental fatigue, as he flirted with the temptation to move elsewhere. Disciples of Christ officer Ralph E. Valentine, hearing that Cartwright "might be interested in a pastorate in a University center," wrote to him about an available pastorate in West Virginia. Cartwright observed that the church was "pretty good," but declined because "I don't see quite how I could leave right now," especially with his church's building fund campaign. Still, the offer suggests that the thought of leaving Little Rock was not a foreign one.²⁷

Cartwright also declined a proposed educational visit from Lincoln, Nebraska Baptist and Disciples youth groups to study the situation in Little Rock, writing that "it is difficult to explain to one who is not in the present situation the 'battle fatigue' which

²⁶ Cartwright to Folks, 30 September 1958; Brewer, *Embattled Ladies of Little Rock*, 110.

²⁷ Valentine to Cartwright, 12 September 1958; Cartwright to Valentine, 15 September 1958; Cartwright to Folks, 30 September 1958, all in Cartwright Papers.

develops in this kind of circumstance.” Specifically, Cartwright noted that the trip would not be for Little Rock but for the students’ benefits, and “our immediate task is not to educate the world but try to do something here.” Excusing his poor behavior, Cartwright wrote that “today I have been harassed on radio and television and in person. It is all wearing, and limits what one can do.”²⁸ Much like how later SNCC activists recorded burnout for their heroic and lonely stances, Cartwright’s own four-year exposure to public scrutiny left him considerably less optimistic, likely contributing to his silence during the Lost Year crisis.

Eventually, massive resistance met its match in May 1959, when the segregationist members of the school board refused to renew the contracts of forty-four Central High School teachers and staff. The firings gave a race-neutral cause to oppose the board, and the WEC combined with business leaders to form the Committee to Stop This Outrageous Purge (STOP) in opposition. With the WEC’s mobilization and the business community’s funds, STOP took advantage of local outrage to launch a successful recall of the three segregationist school board members with moderates.²⁹

Much like previous efforts to overturn massive resistance, the WEC marginalized its progressive voices to maintain a broader consensus. According to Vivion Brewer, WEC leaders recognized that “we could afford no hint of being in favor of integration if we were to win any election,” and that political viability meant they had to distance themselves even from the interracial and red-baited ACHR. However, the WEC continued to revisit how to handle practical racial issues like endorsing desegregation in the public schools or allowing African American membership in its executive board

²⁸ Keith D. Stephenson to Cartwright, 9 October 1958; Cartwright to Stephenson, 14 October 1958, Cartwright Papers.

²⁹ Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 310-327.

meetings. Brewer said that “over and over, depressed but realistic, we decided against inviting Negro members, against attending inter-racial groups.” While it made practical political sense, Karen Anderson claims that its “deference to male civic leaders...ultimately limited not only its progressive political vision” but also its interracial appeal.³⁰ Much like the Thomas Plan, the WEC failed to make clear that desegregation itself was as Donald Campbell claimed, “the will of God.”

That being said, progressive clergy initially took heart in STOP’s success. Cartwright recognized that the successful recall vote had little to do with the clergy, who mostly “remained silent on the school issue. When upon occasion they did speak, they were not heeded.” Rather, it was the result of a local community “finally learning for themselves from the bitter experiences of life what righteousness demands,” and evidence that Little Rock had “a new spirit for righteousness.” His initial optimism faded as truly minimal compliance reemerged, however. The school board assigned only eight African American students to white public schools for Fall 1959, making the number even lower than in 1957, and twelve for Fall 1960. Such low enrollment, according to Elizabeth Jacoway, was because local “social and business leadership” still viewed “integration as

³⁰ Brewer, *Embattled Ladies of Little Rock*, 11-12, 70-72; Anderson, *Little Rock*, 13. Brewer claimed that Bates once wrote a critical article that the WEC worked “for the Negroes, not with them,” but decided not to publish it out of deference to her friendship with Adolphine Terry. The WEC’s decision to ignore race has drawn significant scholarly debate. Laura Miller concedes that the WEC “did not set out to redefine gender or race relations,” but their campaign to save public education proved an invaluable training ground for developing their political skills and raise a voice “supporting social change, educating the public, and mobilizing large numbers of women to work for social justice.” In contrast, Lorraine Gates argues that the WEC adopted moderate policies because it was a moderate organization and that its members “opposed the segregationists because of what their actions were doing to the community’s economy and reputation, not because of any commitment to racial equality.” While disagreeing with Gates that the WEC did not care about racial injustice, Anderson agrees that their actions “reinforced the view that race relations were a dispute among whites over what to do about blacks,” marginalizing their voices. See Miller, “Challenging the Segregationist Power Structure in Little Rock,” in *Throwing Off The Cloak of Privilege: White Southern Women Activists in the Civil Rights Era*, ed. Gail S. Murray (Gainesville: Florida, 2004), 154-156; Gates, “Power From the Pedestal: The Women’s Emergency Committee and the Little Rock School Crisis,” in *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 55 (Spring 1996), 40; Anderson, *Little Rock*, 180-181.

distasteful as their less sophisticated neighbors” and purposefully hindered desegregation.³¹

While an accurate description of the moderate majority, Jacoway’s assertion does not cover the progressive clergy and sympathetic women who found the glacial pace of desegregation unsettling. The ACHR, in its July-September 1959 confidential quarterly report, accused the school board of legal chicanery, claiming that it hoped “to restore the ‘good faith’ of Little Rock without practicing fair play toward the Negro students” and that African Americans and a good percentage of WEC citizens were opposed to the board’s policies.³² In efforts to build up more local activism regarding racial issues, the American Friends Service Committee sent Thelma Babbitt to organize four interracial conferences.

The four Conferences on Community Unity, as they would be called, provided an opportunity for white racial liberals and African Americans to discuss a variety of topics, from the semantics between desegregation and integration to use of titles for African Americans to structural issues like housing inequality. While these meetings bore considerable similarity to previous interracial efforts, Babbitt’s successful efforts to find both African American ministers and students gave the white liberals broader exposure to larger grievances, and to think about possible action steps. Cartwright recalled that the conferences exposed him to “the intolerable ways black students in the high schools were

³¹ Cartwright, “Lessons From Little Rock,” Address Delivered at the International Convention of Christian Churches, Denver, Colorado, 30 August 1959, Cartwright Papers; Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son*, 328.

³² ACHR Quarterly Report, July-September 1959, ACHR Papers, Box 27. According to Anderson, the moderate school board, “whose commitment to tokenism was intense, confronted an African American community equally resolute in its desire to contest tokenism with whatever tools it had available” (Anderson, *Little Rock*, 208). African American students applied to transfer in considerable numbers, but the school board held firm in allowing only a trickle to attend desegregated schools.

being discriminated against” without any response from school officials, further pointing to the lie of minimum compliance.³³

The Conference of Community Unity provided Cartwright the ideal progressive platform to announce his break with the politics of moderation. Cartwright’s concluding speech for the final conference on 22 November 1960 started with a call to action, observing that his audience had the people and the ideas needed to overcome racial discrimination, but that it needed “the guts to act the way we believe.” Much like how he had earlier called segregation the root of satanic emotions, he again expressed his religious conviction that it was wrong. Cartwright said:

In the sight of God everything that thwarts the development of a wholesome personality in another person is evil and sinful. Yet it is just the nature of racial discrimination to din constantly into the ears of the Negro that he is inferior and that he is of little worth compared to his white neighbors.³⁴

Like Donald Campbell’s criticism of the Thomas Plan, Cartwright claimed that the dedicated Christian would not merely be content with official and legal compliance, but that moral compliance would mean completely dismantling even unofficial barriers and, by implication, bringing about significant integration into the public school system.

The need for action was especially acute because community leaders were hardly meeting “the ordinary demands of simple justice and human decency.” Cartwright singled out the “legalistic Pharisees” of the school board for special criticism, claiming that “they have not acted in good faith either with the patrons against whom they plot or with the God who is ever watching and testing the sincerity of each man’s actions.” By

³³ Report, Conference on Community Unity, Aldersgate Camp, 20 February 1960; Second Conference on Community Unity for Adults and Youth, 29 April 1960, Murphy Papers, Box 9; Cartwright, *Lonesome Valley*, 141-142. For example, the second conference focused on African American college student voices, significantly in the wake of the sit-ins in Greensboro and in Nashville.

³⁴ Cartwright, “‘Band Together For Genuine Unity,’ Presented to the Fourth Conference of Community Unity,” *New South* 16 (January 1961), 8.

limiting the number of African American students and allowing white students to harass them in the schools, the moderate school board created “a policy of equivocation and duplicity which can erupt at any time into greater tragedy than our city has yet known.” As a call to action, Cartwright urged the participants to join him in pushing for a group of religious leaders that stands against “all demagoguery and duplicity—against racists and moderates alike—and seeks a just and equitable solution to our racial problems.”³⁵

The speech’s timing puzzled the *New York Times*, which called it an ill-timed attempt to get local residents “to re-examine the collective attitude that their ‘problem’ really had been solved” and also remarked that it was the first time desegregationists had criticized the already embattled school board. In response, Cartwright sent off a heated letter to the *Times* editor, charging that the article was “the most irresponsible piece of journalism yet to come out of Little Rock.” In particular, Cartwright found fault with the article’s portrait that “all is well with ‘token integration,’” ignoring the ways that officials openly “discriminate within the law.” Furthermore, the article failed to lay out the “religious and moral” dimensions of the issue, which differentiated Cartwright’s argument from the segregationists.³⁶

In a private letter to *Progressive* editor Morris Rubin, Cartwright further explained his break with moderation. While he previously had encouraged moderate clerical activism, he now blamed moderates for “stymying [sic] real progress with a holy

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

³⁶ “Schools in Little Rock Accused of ‘Cold War’ Against Negroes,” *New York Times*, 27 November 1960; Cartwright, Letter to the Editor of the *New York Times*, 29 November 1960, SRC Papers. The *Times* responded by giving Cartwright an interview allowing him to explain his opposition to the school board, which resulted in the later article “Minister Asserts Little Rock Fails,” *New York Times*, 4 December 1960. Everett Tucker, the school board’s president, also took a swipe at Cartwright, stating that “closed schools were a fairly effective bar to racial discrimination per se” and that the criticism was a “harsh disservice” for individuals who received their own fair share of opposition from segregationists (*Southern School News*, January 1961, found in Cartwright Papers).

righteousness born of a legalistic approach to the whole problem.” The main problem was that the moderates’ attitudes basically hoped “that if you just don’t talk about these things, they will go away,” as succinct a statement about the “progressive mystique” as any. While moderation prevented true change, Cartwright held out hope that a truly progressive ministerial push armed with religious truth against racial discrimination could bear fruit. Cartwright admitted that he ultimately changed his strategy because his previous approach had not produced results. In his words, previous efforts “proved to be a dead-end, and so this week I changed my strategy by coming out on a moral basis, in the public eye.”³⁷

Cartwright’s turn from political organizing to moral condemnation triggered a new wave of segregationist opposition. Like Ogden, he received a wave of threatening phone calls and hate mail, one which stated that “God will burn you in HELL for you [sic] attempt to Destroy mankind and making yellow niggers.” His stance also caused minor ripples in his church, as moderate voices who believed that Cartwright’s views were similar “felt greatly wounded because they were put in the category [by their minister] with the racists.” His later recollections paint a more severe situation, where even his wife was “considerably disturbed” by his actions and that while his congregation did not publicly oppose him, they could not “understand my depth of moral indignation” and had “no heart for battle.”³⁸

While Cartwright was able to accurately dissect the weaknesses in the moderate approach, his own prophetic stance produced few results. In a 9 February 1961 letter to Thelma Babbitt, Cartwright observed that the Conference on Community Unity had not

³⁷ Cartwright to Rubin, 6 December 1960; Cartwright to Folks, 25 November 1960, Cartwright Papers.

³⁸ Cartwright, *Lonesome Valley*, 147-148; Haney, “Study of Conscience,” 129-130; Cartwright to Thelma Babbitt, 9 February 1961, Cartwright Papers.

gotten together and “would take a great deal to get us going again.” Lacking mobilization, “the community grows more complacent by the day” yet another ineffective vehicle for change. In a June 1963 interview with Eleanor Haney, he admitted that the last several years had left him “tend[ing] toward despair of the church, despair of white persons generally having any effect in the area of radical change.”³⁹

³⁹ Haney, “Study of Conscience,” 125, 136. According to Irving J. Spitzburg, Jr., Cartwright and his fellow progressives actually hurt themselves by declaring a clean break with fellow moderates because they “limited their effectiveness by not restraining themselves at the right time and very often offending instead of persuading the influential men in the community. On many occasions, the liberals talked themselves into most of the trouble they had” (Spitzburg, *Racial Politics in Little Rock, 1954-1964* [New York: Garland, 1987], 175-176).

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In his autobiography, Colbert S. Cartwright succinctly summarized his efforts as follows:

I determined to work within the church and culture to transform it in companionship with Christ who had not given up on either. At some points I turned to the secular political expediencies of the moment, counseling a school board how to survive by a minimal compliance with the Supreme Court school decision. Disillusioned with this approach, I turned prophet, attacking those who had generally followed my counsel. In the end I tended to conclude that attempts to work with Christ to transform the church and society were not adequate.¹

Cartwright and his fellow clergy had ample reasons to reach such pessimistic conclusions. Their repeated attempts to positively transform their culture resulted in consistent failure. Their pleas for Christian brotherhood fell on deaf ears, as the state plunged first into massive resistance and then engaged in a winking noncompliance with federal laws. The few successes toward building desegregated schools also had little to do with clerical involvement. As the drama over school desegregation unfolded on the stage, the clergy found out they were not the stars of the show but a peanut gallery ensconced in a faraway balcony, whose words did not change the unfolding play.

That being said, Cartwright's transparent sincerity and apparent desire to bring about truly integrated education illustrates clerical activism's unrealized potential. Religious motivation was what motivated the ministers and dedicated laymen like Bill Penix to take courageous stands not just for legal desegregation but for a truly communal society. Someone like Cartwright could have seen minimum compliance as significant progress except for the spiritual discomfort progressives felt, which Donald Campbell described in his statement that he would "give only qualified support to any plan that falls

¹ Cartwright, *Lonesome Valley*, 239.

short of” truly Christian integration, like the Thomas Plan. Although certainly more preferable than legally segregated or shut down schools, token desegregation was hardly a snapshot of true Christian society.

While possessing genuine conviction, local ministers lacked the practical understanding needed to constructively challenge racial injustice in their communities. Like other clergy locally and nationally, Cartwright initially endorsed voluntary desegregation, confident that the fears of resistance were overblown. His journey from spectator to advisor to prophet reflects an evolving understanding of the demands of social change, learned on the job. The same minister who eagerly endorsed “many different types of action” in 1956 stated in 1960 that he was against “all demagoguery and duplicity—against racists and moderates alike.” Furthermore, as Cartwright explained, his views mostly shifted because previous efforts had ended in failure. The events at Hoxie proved that voluntary compliance was more fantasy than reality, while the constant struggles that the few token African American high school students endured attending desegregated schools after 1959 showed that the moderates’ demand for civility trumped their longing for brotherhood. Resorting to prophetic action, however, ended up further underscoring his December 1956 observation “that the power of public speaking is limited.”² His final pessimistic comments stand as proof that he, and by extension other local clergy, were trying to figure out just how exactly to channel their religious sentiment into constructive efforts.

Much of it was that the people on stage were not used to receiving social advice from the balcony. According to Robert Brown, local resistance was evidence of “the staggering fact that the Church is largely without influence in the day of society’s

² Cartwright, “What Can Southern Ministers Do,” 1505-1506; “Band Together For Genuine Unity,” 10.

trouble,” and that “what it insists upon as truth, not a few are disavowing as moralism and mere sentimentality.” Campbell and Pettigrew quoted a contemporary Atlanta Baptist theologian, “I often think, ‘Am I the shepherd of my flock or its pet lamb?’”³ While Campbell and Pettigrew suggested that the pastor had the ability to decide which role he wanted to be, local apathy to ministerial objection proved otherwise. Even as pastors tried to shepherd their flock, too many locals remained faithful to theological heresies that condemned miscegenation, dismissing the clergy’s views as unwanted meddling.

The experiences of Arkansas clergy during massive resistance not only inform the local arena, but also share similarities with many other stories outside its exact place and time. Cartwright was not the only minister in America who tried to “work within the church and culture to transform it in companionship with Christ,” nor was Arkansas the only state that struggled with massive resistance, yet alone racial prejudice. Three observations stand out from this study.

First, studying how churches conduct social change requires not only investigating their theological world views but also their political beliefs. Both moderate and progressive clergy affirmed that desegregation was morally right, and took risky actions in light of their personal convictions. However, too many clergy did not escape their local culture and its impact on their overall worldviews, clinging to their own biases and paternalistic attitudes toward African Americans. Bishop Robert Brown echoed Biblical truth when he spoke of the urgent need to build true reconciliation and unity within communities, but his actual approach neglected including the inconvenient but crucial voices needed for the process to succeed. Furthermore, the moderates’ acceptance of minimum compliance stems not from Biblical wisdom but rather from a conservative

³ Brown, “Little Rock and the Churches,” 21; Campbell and Pettigrew, *Christians in Racial Crisis*, 131.

outlook that prioritized patience over justice. On the other hand, Cartwright's early exposure to radical pacifist circles likely informed his own lifelong resistance to legal segregation. While nationally accepted theology spurred local clergy to act, their own differing worldviews affected the implementation.

Second, a religious institution can look drastically different from the national to the state to the local level, creating the potential for vigorous internal conflict. Martin Luther King, Jr., observed the gap between the national and the local in his December 1957 speech to the National Council of Churches, saying that "the sublime statements of the major denominations on the questions of human relations move all too slowly to the local churches and actual practice," despite the "dauntless courage" of individual ministers pleading for desegregation.⁴ Part of the reason that national resolutions did not translate into action is that local people also dismissed national religious opinion as irrelevant, assuming that communists or atheists had tainted the larger society. In Arkansas, it was a segregationist grassroots movement that united discontented people with explosive myths that rejected institutional wisdom for their own narrative of racial superiority. Local church and community resistance to clerical leadership, at least in Arkansas, also suggests that massive resistance could be just as much a bottom-up approach as a top down one. The vigorous contrasts between governing board, pulpit and pew highlights the present need for more professional historians interested in religion and the movement to adopt a local studies approach.

Finally, looking at the white southern ministers' failure lies in the same vein as other recent scholarship criticizing the teleological outlook present in textbook accounts

⁴ King, "The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations, Address Delivered at the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches," 4 December 1957, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume VI*, 326-327.

of the civil rights movement. This paper echoes Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's call to make the movement "harder to celebrate as a natural progression of American values," focusing not just on its partial gains but on the considerable effort it took from countless unsung activists to overturn their contemporary society.⁵ While the clergy are far from faultless, their failure to persuade locals to accept the Court decision also points to the depths of local resistance beyond the lunatic fringe. Their mission, to transform local hearts and minds to live up to the religious standard of an all-encompassing community that neglects race, class, gender, and language barriers for sacrificial love, remains a pressing one for communities all over the country. After all, truly integrated and equal public schools, and a society that recognizes the dignity of every person as God's creation, remains an elusive goal for Fayetteville, for Hoxie, for Little Rock, and for towns and cities all over the state and the nation.

⁵ Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," in *Journal of American History* 91 (Mar. 2005), 1235.

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