

Conway, Ark.  
May 20, 1935

Permanent Judicial Commission,  
Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.,  
Cincinnati, O.

Gentlemen:

I understand you are to have before you  
Rev. Claude Williams. May I venture to say  
a word about him.

Last fall I attended a Conference on  
Religion and Labor held in his community,  
Paris, Ark. and saw something of him and his  
work. I was impressed by his Christ-like  
spirit and his courage in putting it into  
practice. His chief interest seemed to be the  
establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.  
I trust that you will find it possible to  
let him continue his helpful ministry.

yours very truly,

Ethel K. Millar



May 19, 1935  
Box 132 \* Hendrix College  
Conway, Arkansas

Permanent Judicial Committee  
Presbyterian Church, U. S. A.  
Cincinnati, Ohio

Sirs:

I am writing concerning the case of the Reverend Claud C. Williams of Paris, Arkansas, who was dismissed from his pulpit for "unorthodox" teachings and behavior "unbecoming" a minister.

What this "unbecoming" behavior was no one has ever learned. The only criticism I ever heard of Mr. Williams of this nature was directed at him because he allowed young people - old people, too, if they wanted to - to dance in his home. To dance in the home of a minister is considered immoral in the town of Paris by a few of the older people, but they make no effort to stop drunken brawls that are held in the Country Club and dance halls about town.

I was a member of Mr. Williams' Church while I lived in Paris and was closely associated with him for more than five years. At the time I met him I had just completed a very unsuccessful year at the State University and had dropped back to the gutter with the majority of the people of Paris. Williams became interested in me and after two years of hard work managed to show me that I needed to be in school. I expect to finish a four year course at Hendrix College next year and then enter some graduate school in preparation for some Christian-Social service.

You must pardon the above personal reference. It was necessary to make it because he has done as much for scores of others, both young and old.

"Preacher", as he is affectionately called by intimates, has championed the cause of the laborers, farmers, and young people in a way that is a credit to any Church. Aye, he has even given the Negro a place in his program and it is this that has caused a great deal of trouble for him.

*Arkansas*

Mr. Williams has been a leader of the miners and unemployed of Western and has welcomed them to his church regardless of their appearance and financial condition. And they came! On more than one occasion it is well known that the influence exerted by him was the only thing that averted violence in the settlement of labor disputes.



"Preacher" is the only person I have ever heard of that gave the Negroes of that section any attention except in the form of exploitation. They regard him as a person interested in their race, not because he thinks it is novel or because he is curious, but because he knows their condition and realizes that they are human (most of us is Arkansas don't) and wants to help them.

That he is a leader of young people is clearly demonstrated by the Church records that I am sure will be presented by some one else. Maybe by one of the officials that railroaded him out, who knows? To the young people of Paris he is a personal Savior. Through him we were able to see a Church that wasn't isolated by denominationalism. It was not a cold, stern institution of iron clad "Ten Commandments". He built a Church that held love for everyone, be he poor or rich or white or black. We grew to know some of our neighbors who live "South of the tracks" and learned to love them. He gave us recreational advantages that made it possible for us to spend our time in wholesome quarters instead of the pool halls and the "Bloody Bucket" (a popular name for a Paris dance hall). He furnished us books to read and we read them. He showed us Christ and we were no longer ashamed or afraid. We were glad to be members of a Church that helped us live and that provided social justice to all.

And then what happened? Four members of the Church caused his removal and caused discredit to come to our Church! Two of these members were alarmed because of his attitude toward the Negro. I shall not provide their names but can do so if necessary. Another was alarmed when Williams began to become a powerful figure in the community. Needless to say, this "objector" and "guardian of morals" for the community was a politician. The other person, who is at this time is allowing a daughter and several children starve and freeze because she married a man not of his choice, while he is comfortably fixed became alarmed when Williams advocated social justice.

These are the individuals who have killed the only Church program that young people and workers could subscribe to. Four near-sighted, dear old fools have robbed us of the only Preacher who ever brought us Christ. We were hard to convince that the Church had anything for us but Williams got busy and showed us. One by one we joined in his program and were given places in it. Here was a high school boy working with a grizzled miner - there was another boy interested in problems of race - another wanted to something about the sales tax - some one else was interested in the music of a certain composer - another would like a book of poems - another a book on Socialism - Whatever it was, "Preacher" supplied it for us. His home became headquarters for us and we began to spend our time profitably.

Four people whose lives of exploitation can't be many more years have managed to sever a leader from hundreds of young people and thousands of miners and workers. Most of them



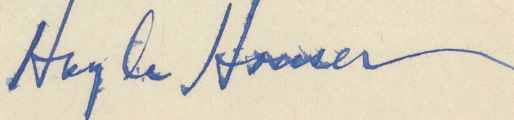
have said that they were disallusioned in the possibilities of living in the Church, anyway. Others who had planned entering the ministry or some other Christian service have turned thumbs down. It will be hard for many to ever again enter a Church program, they will long remember the sting received in this one.

We are familiar with the steam-roller that was used in Van Buren last year when Williams' case was presented. We see the same methods used in our Southern politics and then hear the ministers who employed the use of a "steam-roller" exhort loud and long about the dirty political work of our "two-bit" politicians.

A man named Willard E. Uphaus came down from the East and collected a vast amount of data on the Williams case. I read his report. It seemed to be fair and presented the case in an impartial manner. Mr. Uphaus spent several weeks in gathering information for this report and has compiled the data received in an interesting form. As far as I know, he has covered the case from every angle. His report was rejected by the Van Buren Presbytery. Many of us would like to know why.

"Preacher" Williams is not on trial. For most of us the Church as an institution is standing trial. If it fails to stand by Claud C. Williams we will simply live without it. Gentlemen, at least ten thousand people in Arkansas know that four cranks have robbed them of the services of their champion in his proper field. We are watchfully waiting and we want our Preacher back!

Sincerely Yours,



Hoyle Houser  
Box 132 - Hendrix College  
Conway, Arkansas



Received  
May 21, 1935

3504 High Street  
Little Rock, Arkansas

The Permanent Judicial Committee  
Presbyterian Church, U. S. A.  
Central Parkway Branch of the Y. M. C. A.  
Cincinnati, Ohio.

Dear Sirs:

I am writing in the interests of Claud C. Williams and the Presbyterian Church in Arkansas. Mr. Williams was dismissed from his pulpit in Paris, Arkansas, because he sponsored a program in the interests of the laborers, young people and Negroes of that section. The group which caused his removal camouflaged their actions by declaring that Williams was being removed because of personal misconduct. In reality they were concerned with his broad, constructive program and it had no place in their hearts.

I was an Elder in Mr. Williams' church until I moved from Paris in June, 1933. I was never able to find anything to criticize in his personal conduct. I watched him with interest as he drew young people and underprivileged workers into his very constructive church program. It was my first opportunity to witness a church movement that knew no social stratifications. In the program sponsored by Mr. Williams I found a place to work and was frequently in his home. My two grown sons were there almost daily and were inspired by the spiritual guidance and counsel of this noble man and his loyal wife to the extent that they are now back in school and bid fair to rise above the common run of Arkansas citizens.

The committee which caused the declaration of the vacancy of his pulpit has stolen from a group of people who need him very much the only able scholar-teacher they have ever known. Mr. Williams lived for these boys, girls and laborers. He studied, toiled, prayed, and played with them every day to better guide them in clean, wholesome, Christian living and thinking. Their response was marked and they have been deprived of his leadership by a few men and women with antiquated ideas who had rather die than submit to change.

I believe Claud C. Williams to be a true Christian whose character and conduct are certainly above reproach. I trust that you will find no fault with him and feel that he deserves every consideration and credit that you may find it possible to extend him.

Sincerely yours,  
*Mrs. Myrtle Dean Houser*  
Mrs. Myrtle Dean Houser



Received  
May 21, 1935

Arkansas State Teachers' College  
Conway, Arkansas

The Permanent Judicial Committee  
Presbyterian Church, U. S. A.  
Cincinnati, Ohio

Gentlemen:

I am interested in the case of the Reverend Claud C. Williams that comes before you for disposal this week.

It was my pleasure and great fortune to know and work with Mr. Williams for three years in his program in Paris. He was doing a noble piece of work there when he was interrupted by the action of a minority group belonging to his church. As I remember it, he was dismissed from his obligations as Pastor on the grounds of "personal misconduct" and "unorthodox teachings".

It was a great surprise to me to learn that Mr. Williams had committed any misconduct of any nature. I tried hard and long to find out what this great breach of conduct could be - but to no avail. That was one bit of information that couldn't be had. Knowing Williams as I did, I was not surprised when I was unable to find him guilty of anything not in keeping with a strict moral code.

As for the "unorthodox" teachings with which he was charged I am ready to say that anything Christian was absolutely foreign and positively unorthodox to a group of the members of his church. His comprehensive Christian program included the out-cast coal miner, the much "cussed" young man and woman, and even the Negroes of this area. I suppose that was a bit too inclusive for four or five of the good brothers of the church who had established themselves in the community by exploiting the first and last groups named above.

The destiny of the Christian church as an institution, as far as a group of us are concerned, is in your hands in the disposal of the Williams' case. We can not and will not have any part in an institution which calls itself Christian and then legally boots a man from its midst because he is Christian! That's a paradox of religion that even young people can't swallow.

Yours very sincerely,

Bill Dean Houser  
Bill Dean Houser