

SENATOR MARGARET CHASE SMITH AGAINST MCCARTHYISM: THE METHODIST INFLUENCE

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In mid-twentieth century America there was ample rhetoric portraying communism as an evil threat both externally and internally. McCarthyism was one extreme manifestation of anticommunism; its birth occurred on February 9, 1950 with Senator Joseph McCarthy's speech to the Women's Republican Club in Wheeling, West Virginia. The major controversy revolved around McCarthy's attack on alleged communists in the State Department and his usurping of executive and judicial authority. It was no easy task to counter the commanding and hard-hitting tactics of McCarthy, especially if mid-twentieth century intellectuals and pundits were correct about the emergence of an American culture of lifeless conformity, softness, and weakness. The first elected official to take any effective action against McCarthy was Republican Senator Margaret Chase Smith, the Senate's only woman member, who, on June 1, 1950, presented her "Declaration of Conscience" that identified the moral shortcomings of McCarthyism. Whereas many others avoided confrontation with the increasingly powerful McCarthy, Smith drew on her Methodist conscience to challenge and ultimately defeat him.

Smith was born in a working-class family in the small town of Skowhegan, Maine in 1897. Her grandfather was a Methodist Episcopal Church minister and throughout her adult life she proclaimed her Methodist faith. She entered political life in 1940 when she carried on the work of deceased husband Clyde Smith, who had entered Congress in 1937. After four terms as United States Representative for the Second Congressional District of Maine, Smith became a member of the Senate in January 1949, the first woman in American history elected to both the House of Representatives and the Senate. She was a determined and highly principled woman who exceeded contemporary expectations of what a female could achieve in political life. However, with political success came shocking criticism such as the case with one McCarthyite who, in a 1951 letter, wrote: "For a long time I have been intending to express my thanks and appreciation for your so fully substantiating a theory which I have long held and espoused, namely, that women do not belong in public life—that there are only two places for them, in the kitchen and in the bedroom—in your instance perhaps the latter

is out.”¹

In the face of sexist attitudes and daunting obstacles for a lone female senator, Smith’s Methodism provided her with a moral framework to tackle difficult issues. Her religious faith was mainly a private affair and there are no biographical records on how often she attended church services (perhaps very little), but her daily political life and demonstration of moral authority and integrity spoke well of her Methodist background. Her understanding of individual achievement had much in common with a Methodist conscience of working hard and exercising ethical and moral behaviour, and, as one biographer notes, her “Yankee Protestantism” directed her to identify right and wrong within herself and not be hostage to the passions of political banter.² As for the relationship of church and state, Smith believed in the separation “on which our country was founded.”³ But her notion of the separation of church and state requires clarification because she did not separate her religious belief and political practice. In her formulation, there was no problem with a politician being informed by a religious framework; indeed, she wrote that “we need more religion and less politics in our country.”⁴ On the issue of the separation of church and state, her concerns were specific. Speaking at the Centenary Methodist Church in Skowhegan, she identified two major problems: first, politicians often fanned “the fires of religious hatred” and, secondly, they “exploited the Church for their own selfish political desires.”⁵ This was especially worrisome in the cold war period because such mixing of church and politics could play into the hands of communists, who attempted to “confuse, divide, and conquer” Americans by creating “hatred between Protestants and Catholics and Jews.”⁶ Growing up in Maine where there were many people with Roman Catholic French-Canadian ancestry, Smith understood the divisive Catholic-Protestant barriers that existed before the election of Catholic President John F. Kennedy in 1960 and the ecumenical tone of Vatican II (1962-65) began to lower the distrust between many Protestants and Catholics.⁷ In her day, she was uneasy with the possibility

¹ C.A. to MCS, November 2, 1951, Trouble, Margaret Chase Smith Library (MCSL), Skowhegan, Maine.

² On historic Methodism, see Eric R. Crouse, “Methodist Encounters: Confronting the Western and Urban Frontiers of 19th Century America,” *Methodist History*, 40:3 (April 2002): 157-167. That a “decent” Christian could gain success by hard work and self-reliant individualism was an enduring notion. On Smith’s “Yankee Protestantism,” see Patricia L. Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith: Beyond Convention* (Orono, Maine: University of Maine Press 1996), xxi. Also, see Janann Sherman, *No Place for a Woman: A Life of Senator Margaret Chase Smith* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press 2001), 5. Sherman speaks of Smith’s “higher moral authority” and “the courage of her convictions.”

³ MCS to Page Carlin, August 6, 1964, MCSL.

⁴ General Speeches in Maine, October-November, 1951, 391, MCSL.

⁵ Speech at Centenary Methodist Church, Skowhegan, Maine, May 30, 1954, 163, MCSL.

⁶ Speech at Centenary Methodist Church, Skowhegan, Maine, May 30, 1954, 163, MCSL.

⁷ Smith understood this issue because her mother was raised a Roman Catholic.

that voters made their choice based on a politician's religion.⁸ Smith was too ecumenical in her thinking to allow religion to be a divisive force in the political arena; her mingling of personal faith and practice was inoffensive to those of other faiths.

When asked by the evangelical magazine *Guideposts* to comment on how religion helped her with political duties, Smith offered that religion made difficult political decisions easier to make and that "religion is aimed at making life good and right for the people."⁹ In one church address, she stated that the foundation for morality in the United States was the church and the Bible; the way to realize "national morality" was for more individuals to experience "a sense of moral rebirth." She explained that, "Our country and our people need a united endeavor to make religion the guiding factor in our daily decisions. Surely our first armament must be spiritual for victories are never won by people of little faith."¹⁰ Encouraged that an increasing number of Americans were turning to "divine guidance," Smith told audiences that the Golden Rule must win in "the struggle of good and evil—of moral force against physical force."¹¹ Concluding her "This I Believe" statement, she explained: "I believe that in our constant search for security we can never gain any peace of mind until we secure our own soul. And this I do believe above all . . . *that I must believe*—that I must believe in my fellow men—that I must believe in myself—that I must believe in God—if life is to have any meaning."¹² Similar to the dominant tone of mid-twentieth century Methodism, Smith presented her faith in a broad and ecumenical manner, thus offering a religious message that appealed to Americans of varied religious backgrounds.¹³

Polling and the work of scholars indicate that the 1950s, at least statistically, was the most religious decade of the twentieth century in the United States. Linked to this religiosity were the forces of anticommunism; among the more vigilant foes of communism were religious leaders who often ex-

⁸ A good example is her repudiation of a newspaper claim that Maine voting results of the 1960 presidential election represented "religious prejudice." See Religious Prejudice, Elections, 1960, Statements and Speeches, Vol. 22, 284, MCSL.

⁹ MCS to editor Len Lesourd, July 9, 1951, 469. Her favorite Bible verse was Psalm 23 "because of the peace of mind it gives." See MCS to Sam LaValley, February 5, 1968, Religion Correspondence, MCSL.

¹⁰ Speech at Old Alna Church, August 17, 1952, 40. Even in the late 1960s, she held that "the woes that plague the world today stem from Godlessness." For example, see MCS to Reverend Ralph E. Peterson, July 31, 1967, Religion Correspondence, MCSL.

¹¹ Smith also stated: "One of the most encouraging current developments in a national trend back to the Church is the emphasis that it is putting on the spiritual training of our children. If all the children of the world could have instilled in them full reverence for God and the Church, than surely we would end wars in the future." See General Speeches in Maine, October-November 1951, 390, MCSL.

¹² Presented to the Centenary Methodist Church, Skowhegan, May 30, 1954 and published in her book *Declaration of Conscience*, ed. William C. Lewis (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 446-48.

¹³ On the ecumenism of mid-century United Methodism, see *The History of American Methodism*, Vol III (New York: Abingdale Press, 1964), 259.

pressed their concerns from the pulpit and the press box.¹⁴ Smith herself embraced the notion that the United States and Christianity were under constant threat of attack by the Soviets “because the one thing the Communists fear the most is the Church.”¹⁵ As was the case with many Americans, she believed that religion was “the most formidable barrier to their [communists] goal of world domination.”¹⁶

The Soviet’s acquisition of the atomic bomb, the spread of communism in Europe, the communist control of China, and the charge that government official Alger Hiss shared military secrets with the Soviets were bothersome news that had a profound impact on many Americans.¹⁷ For example, when commercial pilot and sky writer Jack Tatum tested his equipment in the moonlight above Chicago’s North Side in May 1950, hundreds of concerned citizens telephoned the Civil Aeronautic Administration’s midway office. Responding to Tatum’s solo flight in the *Chicago Tribune*, one man declared: “We heard the roaring and we woke up. We got frightened because we saw the smoke making sickles in the sky. How were we to know the communists weren’t coming?”¹⁸

Fear of the communist “other” had been part of the American experience years before the rise of McCarthy, but the Wisconsin senator represented a blazing light of anticommunism on the national scene that highlighted the path that politicians and the press had been travelling.¹⁹ Anticommunist sentiments thrived in church circles, schools, and popular culture. A common message in Hollywood films of the late 1940s and early 1950s, such as “The Red Menace,” “The Red Nightmare,” “I Was a Communist for the FBI,” was for Americans to do their patriotic duty and report those with communist

¹⁴ Eric R. Crouse, “Popular Cold Warriors: Conservative Protestants, Communism, and Culture in Early Cold War America,” *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, Vol. II (Fall 2002): 1-16.

¹⁵ Speech at Centenary Methodist Church, Skowhegan, Maine, May 30, 1954, 163, MCSL.

¹⁶ Scrapbook, Vol. 138, 69, MCSL.

¹⁷ On Hiss see G. Edward White, *Alger Hiss’s Looking-Glass Wars: The Covert Life of a Soviet Spy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). There were other important cases in the public eye: the pro-communist publication *Amerasia* having possession of classified government reports; Judith Coplon, a Justice Department employee supplying Soviets with confidential FBI reports, but set free as a result of a technicality; and the recent exposure, days before the “Declaration of Conscience,” of Harry Gold, the American communist who received secret atomic information from British Klaus Fuchs of the Manhattan Project. See Ted Morgan, *Reds: McCarthyism in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Random House 2003), 274-83; David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy so Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (New York: The Free Press 1983), 100.

¹⁸ Quoted in Anne Sheek, “Margaret Chase Smith’s ‘Declaration of Conscience,’” 4, Declaration of Conscience Speech, MCSL.

¹⁹ Studies that survey American anticommunism throughout the twentieth century include: Morgan, *Reds: McCarthyism in Twentieth-Century America*; Joel Kovel, *Red Hunting in the Promised Land: Anticommunism and the Making of America* (London: Cassell 1997); Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New York: The Free Press 1995); and M.J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (1990).

sympathies.²⁰ McCarthy's methods were ruthless, but his crusade against communism in America reflected popular culture.

The early relations between McCarthy and Smith were good, despite their many differences. He had a college degree; she had no college education. He was loud and flamboyant; she was quiet and restrained. He was a heavy drinker and smoker; she neither drank nor smoked. He enjoyed women of the night life; she was a lady who avoided the party scene. He had support from the conservative Republican hierarchy; she was a liberal New Deal Republican in the eyes of conservative Republican leaders.²¹ Initially impressed by McCarthy and his "photostatic copies" of evidence, Smith supported his campaign to expose card-carrying communists in the State Department. However, during her search to understand this "disturbing and frightening" information, she began to doubt that her Republican colleague could substantiate his serious charges against people; not a lawyer and unsure of herself, she told McCarthy: "Perhaps I'm stupid, Joe. But they [photostatic copies] don't prove a thing to me that backs up your charges."²²

Confronting the increasingly powerful McCarthy was a formidable task, particularly in an age when commentators wrote of Americans lacking vitality; McCarthy's aggression and vigor contrasted sharply with the perceived softness and lifeless conformity of American life. Scholars argued that in bureaucratic and business circles the "organization man" and "other directed" white-collar males were deficient of leadership and creative qualities.²³ The dominating forces of consumerism also appeared to blunt American initiative and passion. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. lamented in *The Vital Center* (1949) that industrial wealth provided "comfort in undreamed-of abundance" but it also left anxiety and desperation: "We live on from day to day, persisting mechanically in the routine of a morality and social pattern which has been switched off but which continues to run from its earlier momentum. Our lives are empty of belief." On the issue of freedom, America lacked a "fighting faith."²⁴ It is difficult to know whether Smith read Schlesinger's work, David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1951), or even William W. Whyte's *Organization Man* (1956), but it is clear she had similar concerns about the general laxness of American society. In 1951, she stated that America suffered "two great losses": initiative and public morality. The outcome was that Americans were "too lazy to do [their] own thinking and too cowardly

²⁰ Margot A. Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 69-70.

²¹ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*; Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith*; Patricia Ward Wallace, *Politics of Conscience: A Biography of Margaret Chase Smith* (Praeger: Westport, Connecticut 1995); Arthur Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Man and Myth* (New York 1999); Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*; Thomas C. Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy* (1982).

²² Smith, *Declaration of Conscience*, 7.

²³ William W. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York, Doubleday, 1956); David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1953).

²⁴ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962), 243-45.

to speak [their] minds"; they had defaulted "their thinking to demagogues." In light of an increasingly stronger Russia, Americans had to stop "cry baby-ing" and recapture old glories that were a result of "individual initiative."²⁵ In recent scholarship, these troubling signs of American decline receive considerable treatment. One study refers to the self-absorbed America of the 1950s as a "feminized and infantilized culture." The materialism of post-WW II prosperity and the rise of bureaucratic life caused the softening of American society; Americans took security, liberty, and affluence for granted and there was a decline of the "earlier values of frugality, individualism, self-denial and struggle on behalf of society."²⁶

In this climate of passivity, McCarthy's power soared. Could any political leader confront him without committing political suicide? Senators on both sides of the floor disagreed with McCarthy's methods, but most feared the political consequences of challenging him, and, thus, they failed to exercise their freedom of speech. Of course, there were Republicans frustrated with the political longevity of the Democrats in the White House and they were content to see McCarthy at work weakening the Democratic Party. The only woman among 95 males in the Senate, Smith decided to act, but she had to be cautious and only a small number of people knew of her plans to confront McCarthyism since secrecy was necessary in order to prevent the Republican hierarchy from silencing her. Republican National Chairman Guy Gabrielson was clear on his support for McCarthy, believing that the "average person" was not "close enough to know or care about the methods" of attacking communism; such thinking implied that a passive America would accept a strong leader, even a demagogue.²⁷ C.J. Nolan of Seymour, Indiana was hopeful that McCarthy, the "good marine," would "bomb out these pussyfooters who have fooled the people." He believed that the government fell for the same trick that Delilah carried out on Samson, namely Russia acquiring Uncle Sam's secrets from the State Department without the government understanding the consequences.²⁸

Shortly before she gave her "Declaration of Conscience," Smith met McCarthy on the underground Senate subway tram where he stated, Margaret "you look very serious. Are you going to make a speech?" When she admitted that he would be displeased with her speech, he ended the brief verbal exchange with a threatening reminder of the political power he wielded.²⁹ On the Senate Floor, with McCarthy sitting two rows behind, Smith, speaking "as a woman," presented a fifteen-minute speech to the Senate and the

²⁵ Statements and Speeches, Monthly Report, 82nd Congress, 1951, Vol VIII, MCSL.

²⁶ Robert D. Dean, "Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Winter 1998), 35-36. Also see K.A. Cuordileone, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis of American Masculinity, 1949-1960," *The Journal of American History*, Vol 87, No 2 (September 2000): 515-545.

²⁷ "Who Cares?" Scrapbook, Vol. 88, 21, MCSL.

²⁸ "Believes McCarthy Slurred," Scrapbook, Vol. 88, 65, MCSL.

²⁹ Smith, *Declaration of Conscience*, 12.

packed galleries; her main criticism was the detestable manner of politicians playing politics with the issue of national security at the expense of individual freedom: "The United States Senate has long enjoyed worldwide respect as the greatest deliberative body in the world. But recently that deliberate character has too often been debased to the level of a forum of hate and character assassination sheltered by the shield of congressional immunity."³⁰ Sparing neither the Democratic Party nor the Republican Party Smith spoke of the Democratic Administration's ineffectiveness in confronting the threat of communism and the disgrace of Republican leaders who lacked political integrity and intellectual honesty and who were willing to "ride to political victory on the Four Horsemen of Calumny—Fear, Ignorance, Bigotry, and Smear."³¹ Adhering to Senate protocol, Smith's message provided no names, but there was no mistaking the barbs directed toward McCarthy. Signed by six other Republican senators, the "Declaration of Conscience" laid the foundation for an official and public reassessment of McCarthyism.

The Smith story was good copy that sold newspapers and, consequently, "The Declaration of Conscience" speech received widespread national coverage in the popular press, with many newspapers printing the entire text.³² An Alabama editorial echoed the common theme in many newspapers that desired to see the removal of an un-American atmosphere: "The whole document provides a draft of clean, wholesome air, turned upon the national capital, as well as the entire country, when they are stumbling in confusion, divided in leadership, and playing into the hands of the enemies that beset us here and abroad."³³ Other positive appraisals had a religious tone. One newspaper editor wrote that, "This cool breeze of honesty from Maine can blow the whole miasma out of the Nation's soul."³⁴ The *Washington Post* claimed that Smith's speech provided desperately needed words for "the salvation of the country," the *Chicago Sun-Times* stated that "it has in it the ring of Lexington and Valley Forge, of the Gettysburg address, of the American classroom, of the American home, the American Sunday school and the American church," and the *Syracuse Herald-American* argued that "it should be studied in every school and commented on from every pulpit."³⁵ One clergyman who preached on Smith's speech was the Rev. Robert W. Olewiler of Grace Reformed Church in Washington, DC. Olewiler broadcasted a sermon on radio that praised Smith and the Christian nature of her position: "When conscience speaks, in a very real sense it is God speaking. And in this sense we can rejoice that Senator Smith called her declaration

³⁰ Smith, *Declaration of Conscience*, 13. She declared: "I speak as a Republican. I speak as a woman. I speak as a United States Senator. I speak as an American."

³¹ Smith, *Declaration of Conscience*, 15-16.

³² Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 112.

³³ Scrapbook, Vol. 88, 8, MCSL.

³⁴ Scrapbook, Vol. 88, 16, MCSL.

³⁵ Declaration of Conscience, Out of State Reaction, 1-8, MCSL.

one of conscience, for it represents the whisper of God in the soul of man.”³⁶ Many ordinary Americans wrote supportive letters to Smith.³⁷

Others condemned Smith’s attack on McCarthy, including a critic who referred to her as “a Moses in nylons.”³⁸ One of the more conservative newspapers and major supporter of McCarthy was Colonel Robert McCormick’s *Chicago Tribune* that downplayed her speech while highlighting feminine (weakness) references to the “woman from Maine” with “pink cheeks and silver hair.”³⁹ Viewing communist conspiracy as “a clear and present danger to the security of The United States,” *The Tablet*, a Catholic weekly newspaper, wrote that Smith and others who opposed McCarthy should “put up or shut up.” The view of these Catholics was that there was nothing wrong with a political party or a politician gaining political capital from the successful prosecution of communist activity within the government: “Such political capital is earned by genuine patriotic service in defense of the security of the United States. Why should it not be eagerly sought rather than scorned?”⁴⁰ In early 1952, the Rev. James Finucan of the Cathedral Rectory, LaCrosse, Wisconsin wrote two letters to Smith that questioned her inadequate evidence for opposing the activities of McCarthy. Reversing the charge from McCarthy to Smith, Finucan wrote: “It is certainly unfortunate that a United States Senator should be ‘taken in’ by such sketchy documentation and malicious distortion of truth.”⁴¹

Still, there were Catholics who questioned McCarthy’s methods. For example, Sister Rachel of the Convent of St. Helena in Versailles, Kentucky viewed Smith’s courageous stand as “something that so desperately needed doing” although “it is a frightening thing that such an act should need courage, but undoubtedly it did.”⁴² Catholic labor groups and the liberal

³⁶ Declaration of Conscience Speech, Out of State Reaction, “The Religious Undertow in Senator’s Smith’s Declaration of Conscience.” Smith responded to Olewiler stating. “Your sermon on my “Declaration of Conscience” was one of the finest things that has ever happened to me. I am truly grateful. I like to think that my speech was in essence an elaboration and application of the Golden Rule to the behaviour of the United States Senate” [MCS to Robert W. Olewiler, July 12, 1950, Declaration of Conscience Speech, Out of State Reaction, MCSL].

³⁷ By mid-June, Smith reported correspondence sent was approximately 8 to 1 in favor of her position. See MCS to Raymond S. Oakes, June 15, 1950, Declaration of Conscience Speech, Maine Reactions, MCSL.

³⁸ “Senator Smith! How Could You?” Scrapbook, Vol. 88, 41, MCSL.

³⁹ Sheck, “Margaret Chase Smith’s ‘Declaration of Conscience,’” Declaration of Conscience Speech, 6, MCSL.

⁴⁰ Scrapbook, Vol. 88, 73, MCSL.

⁴¹ James Finucan to MCS, January 17, 1952 and February 27, 1952, McCarthy, Joseph Raymond, MCSL. In the 1950s, journalist Richard Rovere suggested that Irish Roman Catholics saw McCarthy as “the flaming avenger of their own humiliations of the past and who could not believe that the criticism he provoked was based on anything but hatred of his Church and his name.” See Richard H. Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), 21.

⁴² Sister Rachel to MCS, June 10, 1950, Declaration of Conscience Speech, Out of State Reaction, MCSL

Catholic press were also critical of McCarthy.⁴³ Even Prime Minister of Canada, Louis St. Laurent, a French-Canadian Catholic, offered his criticism of McCarthyism when he received an honorary degree from St. Louis University, a Catholic institution.⁴⁴

Some scholars see much of the support for McCarthyism based less on Catholic or Protestant identifications and more on liberal or conservative affinities; in other words, "McCarthy appealed to conservatives, whether Catholic or Protestant." There were fundamentalists who ignored his Catholicism and openly supported his efforts, mainly because they shared a common distaste for the United Nations, the New Deal, and the State Department; fundamentalists "who believed in separation from people having the 'wrong theology,' were willing to overlook a politician's 'wrong theology' in deference to his 'right politics.'"⁴⁵ Other religious leaders did not support his brand of anti-communism. Characterized by the *Chicago Daily News* as "Communism's Public Enemy Number One," evangelist Billy Graham admired those who hounded alleged communist subversives in government, but he could not publicly endorse McCarthy: "I have never met McCarthy, corresponded with him, exchanged telegrams or telephoned him. I have no comments to make on the Senator."⁴⁶ A recent study on McCarthyism and Presbyterians demonstrates that while there was support for McCarthy, far more Presbyterians found his investigative tactics inappropriate.⁴⁷ This appears to be the case for Methodists. Representing the Maine Methodist Conference Board of Education and Missions, the Rev. G. Duncan Moores expressed relief that a senator with courage finally took a stand against McCarthyism.⁴⁸ In 1953, the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church was one of a number of religious bodies that sharply criticized the bullying actions of McCarthy and his leadership of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.⁴⁹ In the same year, the Methodist publication *Christian Advocate* voiced its disapproval of McCarthy's hiring and defense of his executor director Joseph B. Matthews, a former lay Methodist missionary and one-time socialist who converted to the right and claimed that at least 7,000 Protestant clergy were assisting the

⁴³ See Donald F. Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the Catholic Church, 1950-1957* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1978).

⁴⁴ "Unity and Strength," Scrapbook, Vol. 88, 9, MCSL.

⁴⁵ Robert P. Erickson, "The Role of American Churches in the McCarthy Era," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (1990), 47. Warren L. Vinz, "Protestant Fundamentalism and McCarthy," *Continuum*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Autumn 1968), 319. Also see Warren L. Vinz, *Pulpit Politics: Faces of American Protestant Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 116.

⁴⁶ Quoted in William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 166-167.

⁴⁷ Rik Nutt, "For Truth and Liberty: Presbyterians and McCarthyism." *Journal of Presbyterian History* 78:1 (Spring 2000), 51-66.

⁴⁸ G. Duncan Moore to MCS, June 2, 1950, Declaration of Conscience Speech, Maine Reaction, MCSL. Moores concluded his letter, "More power to you."

⁴⁹ Will Maslow, "Fair Procedure in Congressional Investigations: A Proposed Code," *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 54, No. 6 (June 1954), 840-41, 858.

Communist Party.⁵⁰

All in all, Smith had widespread support from Americans of varied religious backgrounds with only the more conservative element offering sustained criticism. But Smith did pay a price. In the period immediately after her Senate speech, McCarthy scorned “Snow White and her Six Dwarfs,” and, sadly, five of the six Republicans who had signed the “Declaration of Conscience” quickly recanted in the face of powerful McCarthy forces.⁵¹ Still, she held her ground and often went on the offensive with biting criticism of McCarthyism. For example, in one 1951 speech she stated: “Some of the demagogues who shout the loudest about communism and who smear anyone who disagrees with them by calling them Communists are the foremost disciples of the top technique of communism—Big Lie.” She warned that the repetition of false and unproven statements, unfortunately, to the detriment of the nation, acquired the status of fact.⁵² Political consequences of Smith’s opposition to McCarthyism included, in January 1951, her removal by McCarthy from the Senate Investigations Subcommittee replaced by junior Senator Richard Nixon, an act in violation of Senate tradition. Another consequence was her alienation from other Republicans who distanced themselves from a position that they viewed as political suicide. In 1952, she admitted that the “Declaration of Conscience” hurt her relationship with “professional politicians,” but the support from the people was overwhelmingly positive; those who condemned her were people who were already against her.⁵³

There were additional confrontations with McCarthy who had gained greater power with his stunning reelection victory in 1952, but Smith refused to be passive.⁵⁴ Methodist Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam (1891-1963) was one of a number of clergy leaders who experienced McCarthyite slander. In July 1953, a Maine constituent wrote to Smith stating: “Make no mistake about this; he [McCarthy] has gone just a bit too far on the Bishop Oxnam case.”⁵⁵ Oxnam was also a prime target of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and, on July 21, 1953, he endured a ten-hour hearing to clear his name of any communist affiliation.⁵⁶ Smith revealed no names, but it was clear where she stood on this issue of clergy criticized by McCarthyites: “And those who so irresponsibly smear the clergy with the malicious accusation of having thousands of Communists within their ranks, do our country a disservice besides the unpardonable sin they commit against ministers

⁵⁰ McCarthy, Joseph Raymond, General Material, *The Progressive*, 18, 4 (April 1954): 47-9, MCSL.

⁵¹ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 112.

⁵² General Speeches in Maine, October and November 1951, 398-99, MCSL.

⁵³ Declaration of Conscience Speech, Senator Smith’s Reaction, MCSL.

⁵⁴ Smith, *Declaration of Conscience*, 26-50.

⁵⁵ Brian M. Jewett to MCS, July 23, 1953, McCarthy, Joseph Raymond, Correspondence, MCSL.

⁵⁶ D.F. Fleming, “Are We Moving Towards Fascism?” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol.16, No.1 (February 1954), 54-55.

generally.”⁵⁷

McCarthy sought to remove her from the Senate with a concerted effort to destroy her reelection bid in 1954. He had played a major role in the 1950 electoral defeat of Senator Millard E. Tydings (Maryland), one of his foes, and he was ready to organize financial support and campaign for anyone who challenged Smith. The McCarthy candidate Robert L. Jones, however, was no match for Smith who won the primary easily with a five-to-one margin. Given that the press viewed Jones as a McCarthy clone, the results were a clear victory for Smith over McCarthyism. The *Christian Century* wrote that “Smith’s overwhelming victory [should] put courage into her timorous senatorial colleagues.”⁵⁸ At the end of the year, the Senate voted 67 to 22 on a censure resolution that “condemned” McCarthy for his obstructing and dishonoring of the Senate; McCarthy fell from power.

Smith experienced success against McCarthyism for a number of reasons. First, she recognized and responded to “the sin of cynical, sophisticated indifference” of too few Americans demonstrating their “wrath and indignation” over the decline of public morality. Like Schlesinger and others, she identified a weakening of American culture. Unlike many other political leaders, however, she acted with authority and her bold actions against McCarthyism received much greater support than criticism from Americans across the nation. Second, change came slowly, but there were encouraging signs for women to pursue politics and opportunities outside the domestic sphere; recent scholarship shows that the ideology of domesticity was not as dominant, in postwar mass culture, as Betty Friedan has argued.⁵⁹ When the press attempted to connect her to the domestic sphere, her character usually represented leadership rather than submissiveness and vulnerability. Soon after her “Declaration of Conscience,” cartoonist Herbert L. Block of the *Washington Post* has a stern-looking Smith standing in the kitchen ordering a naughty G.O.P., who is filthy from McCarthyism, upstairs to his bedroom for punishment.⁶⁰ Third, one of McCarthy’s tactics was to question the masculinity of an opponent. A woman and a hard worker with modest economic origins and no college education, Smith did not fit McCarthy’s category of a “sissified” eastern establishment figure that allowed communist infiltration. He was unsure how to control the forceful Smith—a highly principled, no nonsense woman—who had proven herself as a strong personality capable of holding her own in the Senate. Out of character for McCarthy, he sat white-faced during Smith’s speech, offered no rebuttal, and gave no official comment to the press. He allegedly revealed to his friends that he would

⁵⁷ Centenary Methodist Church, Skowhegan, Maine, May 30, 1954, 163, MCSL.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 136.

⁵⁹ Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (March 1993): 1455-1482.

⁶⁰ *Never Underestimate. . . The Life and Career of Margaret Chase Smith Through the Eyes of the Political Cartoonist* (Northwood University Margaret Chase Smith Library 1993), 26.

not respond to “the spanking” Smith gave him.⁶¹ Fourth, because she was a Republican it was more difficult for McCarthy to convince many Americans that she was soft on communism as supposedly would have been the case for a Democrat. He would find ways to oppose the formidable Smith, but overall his efforts to defeat her failed. Most importantly, Smith’s Methodist conscience gave her the necessary strength and moral authority to handle the intensity of McCarthy opposition; her clean living and public religious statements also assured the majority of her constituents that she was no “godless” politician who allowed the employment of communists in government.

After Senator Margaret Chase Smith delivered her “Declaration of Conscience” many Americans responded positively, delighted that someone finally had the moral courage to voice strong opposition against the shameful methods of Joe McCarthy. Given the timidity of Congress to speak out, it is striking that the first to take any significant action was the sole female senator. A principal component of her strength was her Methodism. Certainly, Smith’s Methodist faith was a private affair, but if one is to take her religious statements seriously it is reasonable to argue that her faith and conscience are essential in any understanding of how she managed the pressures of political life in an age identified for its lifeless conformity and passivity.

⁶¹ Sherman, *No Place for a Woman*, 111.