The Protestant Churches and Lynching, 1919-1939

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THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES AND LYNCHING 1919-1939

> "If there were a drunken orgy somewhere, I would bet ten to one a church member was not in it. That is long odds, but on the whole I would assume a church member was not in it. But if there were a lynching I would bet ten to one a church member was in it. I don't find people belonging to churches giving a guarantee of emancipated race attitude or a high type of political morality. We can't assume that at all. We have it sometimes, but we can't assume it."
>
> REINHOLD NIEBUHR

It is fashionable among sophisticated Americans to belittle the power of the Devil, but a glance at the lynching record of the United States provides adequate proof of the Old Deluder's continued activity. Surely Satan exalted sat as mobs hung, shot, burned, gouged, flogged, drowned, impaled, dismembered, garroted, and blowtorched to death almost 550 individuals, including aged cripples, young boys, and pregnant mothers, in American lynchings, 1919-1939. Surely, also, the Protestant churches should not have remained silent in the face of this shameful record, for as Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian scholar, asked of American missionaries, "So long as this goes on in your land, do you think you have any Christainity to export?"[1]

Apparently some Americans answered this query in the affirmative. In any event, missionary work flourished while in darkest Georgia and other states, north and south, black deeds of mob violence were being perpetrated. And according to the closest students of lynching, devout Protestants were among the participants at these modern Golgothas. These authorities found an unhappy correlation between Protestantism and mob violence. They further disclosed that servants of the Lord frequently encouraged or silently acquiesced in lynchings. "It is no accident," believes a distinguished Negro leader, "that in these states with the greatest number of lynchings to their discredit . . . the great majority of the church members are Protestants and of the evangelical wing of Protestantism as well."[2]

[1] *Christian Century* (April 19, 1923), 502.

[2] Walter White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (N. Y., 1829), 41. Other authorities that concur in this judgment are Arthur Raper,, Frank Shay, Frank Tannenbaum, and Gunnar Myrdal.

Buttressing these conclusions are the findings of three students who investigated the social attitudes of Southern Baptists. They disclosed that although lynching was not often defended, on occasion it was accepted without serious question and even explained away.[3]

For instance, an examination of 1,003 Southern Baptist district association meetings revealed only nine references to lynching—a frequency of less than one per cent. Of greater significance is the record of 117 district association meetings *held within the boundaries of which a lynching took place.* These meetings all convened from one to four months after the lynching and in approximately 60 per cent of the cases, delegates, including the pastor, from the community where the lynching occurred were present at the meeting. In 116 of the 117 associations no reference was made to the local lynching and no resolution was passed on principle.[4]

Other examples of sunshine saints and summer parsons who remained silent when lynchings erupted in their communities could be cited. Apparently it was more discreet to preach on foreign missions and revival work than call the civic conscience to account.[5]

In Maryville, Missouri, a demented Negro rapist was chained to the roof of a schoolhouse. The gasoline-saturated building was then fired to the delight of the large audience of men, women, and children. According to an investigator for the Federal Council of Churches, the agreed policy of the town ministers, with one exception, was to say nothing about the tragedy. One parson preached the following Sunday on the necessity of Christians giving evidence of the grace of God in their daily living, illustrating the sermon with a story of a drunkard's conversion. Another minister appealed for funds so that the gospel might be brought to the heathen across the seas. It was not that Maryville lacked social consciousness,

[3] Foy Valentine, *A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations, 1917-1947* (unpublished D. Th. dissertation, Yale University, 1946), 221; George D. Kelsy, *The Social Thought of Contemporary Southern Baptists* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1946), 221; Hugh A. Brimm, *the Social Consciousness of Southern Baptists in Relation to Some Regional Problems* (unpublished D. Th. Dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1944), 45-47.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Presbyterian Magazine* (Jan., 1932), 31-32; *Christian Century* (Feb. 11, 1926), 175-176.

for a week following the lynching a petition to close the town pool halls was presented in some of the churches.[6]

In the same year, 1931, the Federal Council made a second investigation, this time of a lynching in Shafer, North Dakota. Again the churches were silent, the minister of the Presbyterian church explaining his refusal to cooperate in the investigation by the fact that he was too busy saving lost souls "in our gracious revival in Watford City."[7] The story was much the same after lynchings in Mississippi, Georgia, and Texas.[8]

The religious press occasionally justified lynching. So long as ignorant, vicious Negroes prowled the Southland, so long as the "unmentionable crime" was committed, so long as the courts were lax and punishment uncertain, just so long would Southern whites continue to take the law into their own hands. In any event, legislation, and particularly federal legislation, was not the solution to lynching. Only the healing balm of time and the Christian gospel provided the answer. Interventention by Northern liberals or congressional action was deemed insulting, unconstitutional, unfair, uncalled for, and irresponsible—a distinct aspersion upon the people of the South.[9] To paraphrase Damon Runyon, as much as these church press editors were opposed to lynching, they were not bigoted about it.

A questionnaire of 1935, answered by some five thousand ministers, revealed only 3.3 per cent had worked against lynching by preachment and writing to their congressman in favor of a federal law. Further, 1.5 per cent said they would not do so and 1.7 per cent were in doubt.[10]

Happily, the official minutes of the major denominations at their national assemblies, conventions, and conferences re-

[6] *Information Service* (Feb. 7, 1931), 1-3.

[7] *Christian Century* (April 1, 1931), 429.

[8] Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill, 1933), 91, 245, 334-336.

[9] These and similar expressions, although not the same degree of frequency or intensity, appeared in the *Western Recorder, Alabama Baptist, Religious Herald, Presbyterian Advance, Southern Churchman, Arkansas Methodist, Baptist Record,* and *Biblical Recorder.*

[10] *Economic Justice* (Nov., 1935), 5.

veal a greater concern for lynching.[11] The Northern Presbyterians, somewhat more law abiding than their frontier Scotch-Irish forebears, took a dim view of lynching. In 1919 their General Assembly recorded itself against the "wicked and unlawful practice which is commonly called lynch-law." In 1922 and again in 1923 this group passed resolutions endorsing the Dyer bill making lynching a federal offense. On several instances the Board of National Missions in its report to the Assembly strongly condemned mob violence, and in 1934 an adopted resolution branded lynching as the logical result in every community that pursued a policy of humiliation and degradation toward the Negro. In *every* succeeding year of the decade Northern Presbyterians endorsed federal legislation, such as the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching bill, to end the "unspeakable evil."[12]

Although Southern Presbyterians spoke less frequently, lynching did not pass unnoticed. For instance, in 1921 the Committee on Home Missions vigorously condemned mob violence, as did another committee two years later. In 1936 a severe arraignment of lynching, complete with statistics, was presented, and the following year a superb report on race relations included an attack on the evil. In 1939 the Assembly called upon its members to lead the fight against lynching.[13]

Unlike Presbyterians, Northern Methodists met only once in every four years in General Conference. At each of these quadrennials, America's most shameful barbarism was denounced. Time and again, through resolutions and Episcopal admonishments, Wesley's followers characterized lynching as

[11] Frank S. Loescher, *The Protestant Church and the Negro* (N. Y., 1948), is frequently quoted as an authority on the official attitude of the churches on lynching. Unfortunately, Loescher did not examine the denominational minutes and consequently his conclusions are incomplete, unfair to the churches, and inaccurate.

[12] *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.* (1919), 170; (1922), 185; (1923), 205; (1931), 93; (1932), 101; (1934), 229; (1935), 103; (1936), 154-155; (1937), 223-224; (1938), 167-168; (1939), 195.

[13] *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.* (1921), 114-115; (1923), 82; (1936), 99; (1937), 105-107; Department of Research of the International Council of Religious Education, *Social Pronouncements by Religious Bodies . . . Research Bulletin No. 16* (Chicago, 1939), 16.

an "unpardonable blight," a "black spot on America's soul" which the federal government must act to stamp out.[14]

Southern Methodists in General Conference were not silent. For example, the Episcopal Address of 1922 vigorously condemned lynching, and the adopted report of the Committee on Temperance and Social Service urged "both preachers and laymen to make every effort to prevent outbreaks of mob violence and to endeavor to bring about the punishment in the courts of all who thus defy the law of both God and the land." The next quadrennial demanded equal justice for all persons regardless of race. In 1930 the Bishops called for justice to the Negro, while the entire Convention adopted a resolution expressing horror over a lynching in Texas. Four years later the Bishops again urged the formation of public opinion that would make lynching unthinkable, and the adopted report of the Committee on Temperance and Social Service condemned mob violence as subversive of all law and good government. "Lynching most frequently grows out of race prejudice," read the report, "often it relates itself to property values or personal piques and is even resorted to as a blind for a white man's guilt." Finally, in 1938 the Bishops of the Southern Methodist Church once again asked that the Negro be protected against extra-legal attacks upon his person and property.[15]

Baptists were not silent. In 1920 the Northern group pledged themselves to do their utmost to wipe out lynching, a "barbaric symptom of anarchy." Two years later the Northern Baptist Convention called for effective legislation to remedy the abuse. In 1926 the Committee on Interracial Relations rejoiced in the decline of mob violence, and the following year an adopted report demanded the punishment of officers who failed to protect their prisoners. In 1931 the Convention again expressed its detestation of lynching, and sub-

[14] *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (1920), 302, 583, 638-639; (1924), 188, 294-295; (1928), 622-623; (1932), 170, 657; (1936), 338.

302, 583, 638-639; (1924), 188, 294-295; (1928), 622-623; (1932), 170, 657; (1936), 338.

[15] *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (1922), 245, 356; (1930), 67, 377-378; (1934), 329-330, 369; (1938), 246; F. Ernest Johnson, *The Social Work of the Churches* (N. Y., 1930), 155.

sequently a resolution was adopted requesting effective preventive legislation.[16]

Although Southern Baptists in local meetings hesitated to speak on lynching, this was not true of the Southern Baptist Convention. At almost every meeting lynching was termed "brutal" and "shameful." Baptists were urged not to rest until every vestige of the barbarity had been eradicated, and law officers were called upon to forfeit their lives rather than surrender their prisoners to a mob.[17]

Congregationalists lived mostly in the North and perhaps their lack of direct involvement in the majority of lynchings led them to speak without restraint or reservation. In any event, the National Council of Congregational Churches and the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches (after 1931) invariably hit at the crime.

In 1919, for instance, a resolution was adopted asking Congress to pass a law making lynching a federal offense. The 1921 Council attacked the abuse and the following meeting adopted a resolution voicing approval of the Dyer anti-lynching bill. In 1925 Congregationalists called for the protection of the Negro, and two years later they resolved to support all public officials in their protection of prisoners. The members of the 1934 General Council pledged themselves to use all of their influence "to condemn and oppose the iniquitous and inexcusable crime of lynching until this disgraceful, inhuman and barbarous practice disappears from our land." Convinced that local and state authorities could not do the job, the delegates saw the "high necessity" of federal legislation.[18]

Other denominations, with faith in the right as God gave them to see the right, labored to heal the wounds of racial and

[16] *Annual of the Northern Baptist Convention* (1920), 269; (1922), 183; (1926, 168; (1927), 145; (1931), 463; (1935), 276-277.

[17] *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (1921), 83-84; (1925), 118; (1928), 83-84, 88; (1929), 93; (1930), 69-70; (1931), 122-123; (1932), 90-91; (1933), 105; (1934), 103; (1935), 63, 70; (1936), 26-27, 34; (1937), 70-71, 271-272; (1938), 101; (1939), 131. It will be noted that the Southern Baptist Concention did not endorse federal anti-lynching legislation.

[18] *Minutes of the National Council of Congregational Churches* (1919), 40; (1923), 236; (1925), 52; (1927), 221; *Minutes of the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches* (1934), 111; Carl Hermann Voss, *The Rise of Social Consciousness in the Congregational Churches* (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pittsburg, 1942), 146.

class hatred by condemning lynching. The Episcopalians, for example, voiced their disapproval of mob violence in 1919, and in 1934 the House of Bishops endorsed a federal anti-lynching measure. In that year the Board of Temperance and Social Welfare of the Disciples of Christ indicted lynching, and in 1934 the International Convention of the Disciples adopted a strong resolution against the evil. The following Convention officially endorsed the Wagner-Van Nuys Anti-Lynching bill.[19]

Additional evidence abounds. The Church of the Brethren, the United Brethren in Christ, the Reformed Church in America, and the Evangelical and Reformed Church all called for the elimination of brutish lynching, and, in some instances, supported federal action.[20]

The Federal Council of Churches, representing most of the major Protestant denominations, consistently and courageously concerned itself with lynching. At a special session in 1919 the Council voted to memorialize the Congress of the United States to enact a federal law for the suppression of lynching. The Council pledged to use its authority in every way to remove from America this disgraceful evil. Under authority granted by the quadrennial meeting of 1920, the president of the Federal Council called together leading white and Negro citizens at Washington, D. C., July 12, 1921, and there was formed the Commission on the Church and Race Relations, the youngest commission of the Council. Among the manifold activities of this commission was the distribution of thousands of pamphlets denouncing lynching. By 1928 the Administrative Committee adopted a strong resolution against lynching, and in that same year the Council's Commission on Race Relations issued a summons to church people to penitence and prayer to free the nation from the evils of mob violence. The day chosen for this observance was February 12, known as Race Relations Sunday.[21]

[19] *Journal of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (1919), 160-161; (1934), 317-318; *Disciples of Christ Year Book* (1934), 79; *Christian-Evangelist* (Oct. 29, 1936), 1416; (Nov. 11, 1937), 1443-1444.

[20] *Social Pronouncements*, 15-16; *Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church* (1936), 253.

[21] *Report of Special Meeting of the Federal Council* (1919), 24; *Quadrennial Report of the Federal Council* (1920-1924), 125ff; (1924-1928), 201; *Federal Council Bulletin* (Jan., 1928), 5. The New York office of the present National

The Council acted in other ways. Scarcely an issue of the *Federal Council Bulletin* or *Information Service,* a second organ of the Council, failed to carry an editorial or article on the subject. An honor role was kept listing the states free from the blot and this information was given widespread distribution in both the secular and religious press.[22] The Council commended such organizations as the Association of Southern Women Opposed to Lynching, itself a group with a strong religious orientation. Special investigators were sent to towns where lynchings took place and letters of protest were mailed to state and local officials shamed by mob violence. In 1934 Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert, general secretary of the Council, testified at a Senate committee hearing on the Costigan-Wagner bill for federal curbs on lynching. Armed with quotations damning lynching from many church groups, Dr. Cavert made a powerful plea for congressional action. Two months later the executive committee of the Council officially adopted a resolution calling for federal legislation to cope with the problem.[23]

The interest of the churches in lynching mounted. The Women's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the National Board of the Y.W.C.A., the Women's American Baptist Home Mission Society, the Society of Friends, the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Commission on Missions of the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches all endorsed the Costigan-Wagner bill. Such groups as the Southern Church Leaders Conference, the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church's Commission on Co-operation with the Colored Methodist Church, the Church Women's Committee of the Federal Council's Department of Race Relations, and the Board of Education of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, all denounced lynching.[24]

Council of Churches has in its files several pamphlets on lynching. For example, *Mob Murder in America* (1923) and *The Law vs. the Mob* (1925).

[22] See, for example, *New York Times,* Feb. 6, 1933, 16.

[23] *Social Pronouncements,* 16; *Christian Century* (Nov. 14, 1934), 1461; *New York Times,* April 3, 1934, 3; Anson Phelps Stokes, *Church and State in the United States* (3 vols., N. Y., 1950), 11, 375- 377; Trevor Bowen, *Divine White Right* (N. Y., 1934), 135-138.

[24] *Social Pronouncements,* 16; Stokes, *Church and State,* II, 376, 778; Bowen, *Divine White Right,* 139; *Christian Century* (Jan. 3, 1934), 36.

Still other individuals and official as well as unofficial church groups spoke out. For instance, in 1919 the Freedmen's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church called for a federal law to suppress lynching, the memorial to the proper authorities in Washington recalled the great contributions made by the Negro race to American history and demanded that Negroes be accorded all the rights of other citizens. That year also, Wilbur P. Thirkield, resident Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church at New Orleans, issued a strong appeal to the people of Louisiana after the brutal lynching of a Negro. Early in the 'twenties the *Churchman* conducted a symposium on the subject of lynching among Southern religious leaders, and the contributors wondered how there could be any disagreement on the matter.[25]

In 1923 the Georgia Baptist Convention termed lynching "barbarous, heathenish and unchristian." The ministers of Waco, Texas, united in protesting a lynching in their city, and in 1924 Nashville clergymen and Southern Methodist officials requested that the members of a lynch mob be brought to justice. In the mid-twenties the Mississippi Annual Conference of Southern Methodist called upon law officers to give their lives in defense of their prisoners. Other spokesmen for this denomination urged the clergy to "cry aloud against this crime of crimes."[26]

In Georgia, in 1931, a Baptist minister, the Reverend Henry Brookshire, dissuaded a snarling mob from storming a jail and hanging a confessed Negro criminal. After the infamous Maryville lynching of that year, a protest statement was signed by ministers of practically every denomination in St. Louis. Similar protests were made by a Presbyterian synod in Tennessee and by the Nashville Pastors' Association when the orderly processes of law broke down.[27]

In 1933 fury struck the town of St. Joseph, Missouri. Forty-five clergymen united in petitioning for an investiga-

[25] *Northwestern Christian Advocate* (Jan. 22, 1919), 101; *New York Christian Advocate* (June 12, 1919), 753; *Churchman* (April 30, 1921), 14.

[26] *Century* (April, 1923), 882; *Christian Century* (Oct. 22, 1930), 1268; *Information Service* (Jan. 20, 1923), 5; (Dec. 27, 1924), 2-3; (Dec. 26, 1925), 4.

[27] *Baptist* (June 6, 1931), 712; *Christian Century* (March 4, 1931), 321; (Nov. 23, 1932), 1454; *Nashville Christian Advocate* (Dec. 29, 1933), 1636.

tion. At this time Methodist conferences in Georgia and North Carolina lashed out at lynchers.[28]

The year 1934 saw many protests against lynching at the national and local levels. For instance, the Kansas City Council of Churches expressed approval of a federal anti-lynching law, and one pastor of that city devoted a sermon to "the Cry of the Mob." Further south, the Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, and North Alabama annual conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, all adopted resolutions against lynching. Nashville pastors once again issued a protest, and the mob murder of a Negro in Florida brought heated statements from many religious groups. The Reverend E. Stanley Jones and Edward A. McDowell protested lynchings in Florida and South Carolina.[29]

In 1934 and again in 1935 the National Council of Methodist Youth adopted resolutions endorsing the Costigan-Wagner bill. Further support for the measure came from the White Plains, New York, Ministers' Association which drafted a petition and secured one thousand names endorsing the bill. On January 6, 1935, an inter-faith mass meeting to mobilize support for the bill was held in New York, Dr. Allan Knight Chalmers presiding. Among the fifteen participating organizations were the Federal Council, the Greater New York Federation of Churches, the World Alliance for International Friendship Through the Churches, and the National Conference of Jews and Christians. A thousand miles away the ministers of Jacksonville, Florida, went on record favoring the measure.[30]

Agitation for federal action continued. In 1937 the New York East Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the United Christian Youth Conference gave their approval. In New Orleans the ministerial association petitioned the two senators from Louisiana to support congressional action, and termed lynching a "brutal and barbaric disregard for the

[28] *Christian Century* (Dec. 20, 1933), 1622; (Dec. 6, 1933), 1550.

[29] *Ibid.* (May 16, 1934), 676; (Jan 24, 1934), 132; (Jan. 3, 1934), 34, 38; (Dec. 5, 1934), 1566-1567; (Feb. 14, 1934), 235.

[30] Miron A. Morrill, ed., *Methodist Youth Council* (Chicago, 1934), 175; *The National Council Meets Again* (Chicago, 1936), 47; *Social Action* (June 15, 1935), 28; *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1935, 18; *Christian Century* (Jan. 16, 1935), 86; (April 10, 1935), 488.

value and worth of human life." In North Carolina, both the Disciples and the state Council of Churches endorsed federal action.[31]

Endorsement was also forthcoming from other church groups: the Congregational Department of Social Relations and the Congregational Council for Social Action, the Presbyterian Department of Social Education, and the Disciples' Department of Social Education and Social Action.[32] It scarcely need be added that unofficial liberal religious groups such as the Methodist Federation for Social Service, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Religion and Labor Foundation, the Fellowship of Socialist Christians, the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, and many others gave their support.

While some ministers were resolving, others, such as the Reverend Charles G. Marmion, Jr., of Eagle Lake, Texas, were resolutely risking their lives to hold back mobs. Further, the pastors of Huntsville, Alabama, and Dalton, Georgia, have been credited with preventing lynchings.[33]

When these examples are combined with many others—for instance, Unitarian and Universalist expressions—it becomes as plain as a pikestaff that Protestant protests against lynching were almost as thick as bald headed sinners at an Amy Semple McPherson revival.

The religious press also had a great deal to say about lynching, and, for the most part, said it in terms reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets. Here and there, particularly in the Southern press, as has been noted, an occasional veiled defense of lynching appeared. But these were exceptions. Usually lynchers were very severely handled.

One editor averred that the horrors of the American mob were unequaled even by the atrocities of Bolshevik Russia. Another suggested that somebody in the Turkish government

[31] *New York American*, May 18, 1937, clipping in files of the American Civil Liberties Union (Vol. 1009) in New York Public Library; *New York Times*, April 26, 1937, 3; *Christian Century* (Aug. 11, 1937), 1003; (Jan. 26, 1938), 126; (March 16, 1938), 341.

[32] *Social Action* (March, 1935), 12-13; *Social Progress* (Oct., 1937), 18-19; *Disciples of Christ Year Book* (1938), 55.

[33] *Living Church* (Nov. 23, 1935), 548; *Presbyterian Tribune* (Sept. 17, 1936), 27; *Fellowship* (Oct., 1936), 14; *Christian Century* (Jan. 13, 1937), 69; *Social Progress* (March, 1937), 16-17.

ought to have enough sense of humor to make representations to the government of the United States in protest of lynchings. Opponents of federal anti-lynching legislation were termed "time-servers" and "racial sadists," while lynchers themselves were described as "vile dregs of society," "filthy hoodlums," and "depraved devils." The specious plea that lynching was necessary to protect white Southern womanhood made one editor "sick." It was suggested that missionaries be sent to the location of a lynching to Christianize the natives, and that the missionaries would be "safer among the cannibals of New Guinea." The only way to civilize a lynch mob was with a gun. Lynchers were compared to communists and, perhaps even worse in the eyes of some churchmen, to bootleggers. In brief, religious editors held lynching to be a violation of Christianity and democracy—and they said as much on countless occasions.[34]

It is fitting to conclude this inquiry with a brief reference to a lynching that brought especial shame to the land of the free and the home of the brave. On Sunday night, November 26, 1933, a drunken mob overpowered the sheriff of San José, California, and proceeded to wreak sadistic vengeance on a kidnapper and murderer. Governor Rolf of California deliberately refrained from sending state forces to aid the beleaguered sheriff, and in a carefully prepared public statement referred to the lynchers as "good citizens," believing the lynching a "fine lesson to the whole nation." This far western, hardly divine event moved American Protestantism deeply.

Eighteen members of the local ministerial association signed a public statement condemning the mob spirit which prompted the brutal act. Both the Presbytery of Los Angeles and the Presbytery of San Francisco passed resolutions recording their sense of shame and condemning Rolf's defense of the mob. The Los Angeles Ministerial Association also adopted a strongly worded resolution denouncing the gover-

[34] The present writer has in his files hundreds of editorials on lynching from three score different church journals. General speaking, Northern papers were more outspoken than Southern, but this was by no means always true. A majority of these journals favored federal anti-lynching legislation.

nor, and the chaplain of the California legislature, the Reverend Lawrence Wilson, made clear his disgust.[35]

Halfway across the continent, Detroit's famous preacher, William L. Stidger, termed Rolf's attitude "impossible," while in New York many pulpits rang with damnations of the California official. Bishop Francis J. McConnell spoke his mind, Bishop William Manning demanded the governor's impeachment, and a great mass meeting of protest was held at the instigation of leading Protestants, Catholics, and Jews.

Dr. Henry Darlington of the Church of the Heavenly Rest, however, defended the governor (although Dr. Darlington later repented), and for this his church was picketed by Union Theological students. Whereupon a solumn deputation of ruffled vestrymen presented a demand to Henry Sloane Coffin of Union that he expel the students. Said Dr. Coffin: "How old is your rector?" "Forty-eight," said the vestrymen. "Do you intend to ask him to resign?" "We do not," they answered. "Well," said President Coffin, "if at forty-eight he can be excused for the stupidity he exhibited, my students in their twenties might well be treated in the same way."[37]

A score of religious journals lashed the governor. "In our opinion," said the editors of a Disciples paper, expressing a common attitude, "Governor Rolf has proved himself unfitted to carry out faithfully his oath of law-enforcement or to hold public office."[38]

What conclusions can be drawn from this evidence? The record of the Protestant churches was spotted, but on the whole their concern with lynching was both deeper and more widespread than commonly believed. Surely it would not be

[35] *Christian Century* (Dec. 20, 1933), 1611-1612; *Presbyterian Advance* (Dec. 14, 1933), 22-23; (Jan. 4, 1934), 23; *New York Times,* Nov. 28, 1933, clipping in files of the American Civil Liberties Union (Vol. 636) in New York Public Library; *Northern Christian Advocate* (Jan. 18, 1933), 50.

[36] *Christian Century* (Dec. 20, 1933), 1621; *New York Times,* Dec. 4, 1933, 1 and Nov. 28, 1933; *San Francisco News,* Nov. 28, 1933, Last two items from clippings in the files of the American Civil Liberties Union (Vol. 636) in New York Public Library.

[37] Walter Russell Bowie, "Preacher," *This Ministry. The Contributions of Henry Sloane Coffin* (Reinhold Niebuhr, ed., N. Y., 1945), 65.

[38] *Christian-Evangelist* (Dec. 7, 1933), 1557.

unfair to say that the Protestant churches deserve some share of the credit for helping to expel this evil from the land.

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