DOROTHY TILLY, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND THE METHODIST CHURCH
by Arnold Shankman

At its 1965 meeting the Women’s Society of Christian Service of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of The Methodist Church named Dorothy Rogers Tilly the “outstanding woman” of the first quarter century of that organization’s existence.¹ Unquestionably the honor was deserved, for few women had done more for the church and more to promote good will amongst people of all backgrounds than the tiny eighty-one-year-old woman from Atlanta. Next to Jessie Daniel Ames, founder of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, Dorothy Tilly worked harder to eradicate this evil than any other white Southern woman. Devoutly religious, she lived with the conviction that it was possible to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to Earth. As she once told a reporter:

Our world is a battle between those who would exploit the hatred in it and those who would strengthen the fellowship within it. Violence may be infectious but liberty and courage are also infectious.²

Dorothy Tilly was born in Hampton, Georgia, on June 30, 1883, the fourth of eleven children, eight of whom survived infancy. Her father, an important influence on her life, was the Reverend Richard Wade Rogers (1850-1928). Son of a physician, he entered Washington College (now Washington and Lee) shortly after the end of the Civil War and graduated from that institution in 1869. Commended by Robert E. Lee, then president of the college, for “distinguished industry and success” in school,³ he was a solemn, scholarly man but one with great compassion for others. In 1873 he was licensed to preach and soon developed a reputation as a skilled revivalist and a competent Methodist preacher. From 1896 to 1901 he served as president of Reinhardt Junior College in Waleska, Georgia, where he not only inspired his students but also “left the college free of debt.”⁴ Frances (Fannie) Eubank Rogers (1860-1922), Dorothy’s mother, also greatly influenced her offspring. Daughter of a

¹Haygood Methodist Church Bulletin (Atlanta), VIII (February 28, 1965), 3.
³Lee to Dr. C. Rogers, June 26, 1869 (photostat), Dorothy Tilly Papers, Emory University (EU).
⁴Wesleyan Christian Advocate (Macon and Atlanta), July 27, 1928.
Georgia planter, she graduated from Wesleyan College in 1876. A patient woman, she never complained about frequent moves from parsonage to parsonage and she contented herself with housework, supervising the reading of her children, and conducting Sunday School classes. 5

Both parents sought to instill in each of their children a love of learning and a sense of justice and fair play. Dorothy Tilly remembered that during her childhood neighbors, both black and white, were always bringing their troubles to "the doorstep of the parsonage." Never did her parents turn away those with problems. This made a deep impression on Dorothy and awakened in her a lifelong interest in others. At age twelve she became president of the children’s missionary society of her father’s church. 6

The eight Rogers children who survived infancy all received college educations. Dorothy graduated with honors from Reinhardt (1899) and Wesleyan Colleges (1901). In 1903 she married Milton Eben Tilly, a graduate of the University of Georgia and an Atlanta chemical salesman. In 1904 the couple’s son, Eben, was born. Doctors, worried about Mrs. Tilly’s consistently frail health, advised the couple not to have any more children. 7

When Eben became a teenager Milton Tilly encouraged his wife to devote her spare time to church activities and to take summer school courses at Garrett Seminary, Scarritt College, the University of North Carolina and Emory University. Perhaps because she was unable to have a large family of her own, Dorothy Tilly became especially interested in the religious education of Methodist youth. Around 1915 she was put in charge of the education of juniors at Atlanta’s Martha Brown Memorial Church. An active member of the Woman’s Missionary Society (WMS) for the North Georgia Conference of the Methodist Church, she was elected to the children’s work committee of that group in 1916. Two years later she was put in charge of children’s work for the WMS of her conference, a post she held for thirteen years. 8

Election to a position of responsibility in the WMS meant much to Dorothy Tilly. Scarcely a month passed that did not find her traveling to

5Ibid., August 11, 1922.
a conference or a church to assist with young people's work. Writing and directing plays, awarding prizes to worthy juniors, promoting the development of church "baby divisions," and raising funds for motherless children both in Georgia and in foreign lands were among her myriad activities. Dorothy Tilly's obvious sincerity, her natural talent for working with youngsters, and her willingness to visit every church in her district won friends for her throughout the conference. In 1926 the editor of the Wesleyan Christian Advocate marveled that she had attended 111 meetings in the district and had missed only one conference in nine years. Several years later the same editor expressed amazement that she could attend four different meetings in two districts in a single weekend yet be "punctually in her place [at the Wesley Memorial Church Building on Monday,] when the office hours arrive." So great was her reputation for excellence that her work was viewed as a model for leaders in other conferences to emulate. Moreover, in 1924 she was one of the first three women to be named trustees of Wesleyan College.

Mrs. Tilly did more than travel from conference to conference. Increasingly her interest grew in the substance of church teachings for youth. Under her direction expanded attention was given to improving relations between the races. She formed reading groups of white youths who visited black children, established a program under which white youngsters donated flower seeds to the poor of both races, and collected pennies to buy an "ant proof" piano for African children whose instrument had been destroyed by insects. Her hope was "that when our children are grown a better understanding will exist between the two races that live side by side in our state."

Mr. Tilly approved of his wife's activities; in fact, he urged her to do even more to improve the lot of Afro-Americans. During the late 1920s he would insist that, before breakfast, they take automobile tours of Atlanta's Negro slums. Once he drove his wife to the service entrance of a fashionable hotel, where both observed famished Negro youths raiding garbage cans for vegetable peelings and other food discarded by the hotel restaurant. When Dorothy Tilly protested that she did not wish to witness such horrible things, he chided her, "If seeing [this] ... hurt you enough, you will tell other people and they will do something." Tilly, a retiring man, who shunned the limelight, promised to give his wife whatever monetary assistance she needed to "get involved." This he did, and no

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9Wesleyan Christian Advocate, May 11, August 3, 1923, March 28, September 26, 1924, June 26, 1925; WMS...North Georgia...1923 Report, p. 34.
10Wesleyan Christian Advocate, August 27, 1926, September 23, 1932; see also ibid., March 23, 1923.
11Ibid., June 20, 1924, February 13, 1931.
12Ibid., June 27, 1930; WMS...North Georgia...1921 Report, p. 29; WMS...North Georgia...1923 Report, p. 34; WMS...North Georgia...1925 Report, p. 40.
one was prouder than he of her efforts to combat racial prejudice.¹³

The dramatic episode at the Piedmont Hotel was profoundly to influence the rest of Dorothy Tilly's life. No longer did she assume that good thoughts were enough; rather she recognized that action also was necessary to improve the world. She asked Atlanta juvenile court officials to send her the names of needy black children and often she provided food and clothing — sometimes even temporary shelter — to those referred to her. In 1932 she led a campaign of church women that successfully persuaded the financially-pressed Atlanta school board not to terminate its night school program for Negroes. As a member of the rural development committee of the Woman's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, she worked to improve the quality of educational facilities available to the children of black sharecroppers; she also called for studies on the ways that rural cooperatives could help the poor of both races.¹⁴

Mrs. Tilly had extensive experience teaching at religious seminars at Emory University, Lake Junaluska, the Blue Ridge (N.C.) Interdenominational Conferences on Missionary Education, and at the Episcopal Leadership Training School of Virginia.¹⁵ Frequently she spoke about racial themes at these gatherings. Around 1929 she began to interest herself in the summer leadership conferences held at Paine College, a black Methodist school in Augusta with an interracial board of trustees and an interracial faculty. These summer conferences were designed to help prepare Afro-American women for positions of responsibility in their churches and in their communities. By 1933 Dorothy Tilly had been named director and dean of women for the summer conferences. Each spring she made sure that as many communities in Georgia as possible located capable black women interested in the program and that each white Methodist church paid for one woman's summer tuition to Paine College.¹⁶ In 1937 she described the work going on at the school as

a story that cannot be written or told, because words cannot paint varying shades of emotion... [a] story of the growing mutual understanding and respect between the white and black people here in Georgia.¹⁷

Because of her work at Paine and elsewhere, the Federated Council of the Churches of Christ appointed her in 1938 to serve on its race relations

¹³Thelma Stevens to writer, January 14, 1978; Smith, "Mrs. Tilly's Crusade," pp. 29, 66.
¹⁴Annual Report of the Woman's Missionary Council, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for 1932-33 (Nashville: Parthenon, 1933), p. 130; Ibid., p. 167; WMS... North Georgia...1933 Report, p. 34.
¹⁶Ibid., June 3, 1932, July 3, 1936, May 14, 1937, July 1, 1938, May 15, 1942; WMS... North Georgia...1934 Report, p. 35.
¹⁷Wesleyan Christian Advocate, May 14, 1937.
department.¹⁸

As might be expected Dorothy Tilly was, in 1931, one of the first Georgians to join the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL), founded by Jessie Daniel Ames, herself a Methodist. Methodist women had long made known their opposition to lynching. As early as 1913 and 1921, for example, they had publicly condemned the practice as barbaric.¹⁹ Mrs. Luke Johnson, a prominent Methodist, served as the first head of the woman’s division of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), a non-sectarian civil rights group headquartered in Atlanta.²⁰ Mrs. Ames, her successor, was determined to refute the argument that Southern white women viewed lynching as necessary to protect them from assault. Among other activities the ASWPL conducted campaigns to educate the public about the real causes for lynchings, which only in a minority of cases came about because of the alleged attacks on white women, and reminded sheriffs of their oaths to protect prisoners from vigilantes. Dorothy Tilly traveled from county to county in north Georgia securing pledges from law officials that they would not tolerate lynchings in their communities. So skilled was she at doing this and so passionately opposed was she to lynching that she virtually became Mrs. Ames’s second-in-command. Despite different personalities the two worked well together. Mrs. Tilly, as secretary of the Georgia chapter of ASWPL, occasionally represented Mrs. Ames at meetings concerned with racial matters. Tilly was also prominent in the Fulton-DeKalb (Ga.) Interracial Committee of the CIC.²¹

Perhaps Mrs. Tilly’s most celebrated campaign in this period of her life was the one she waged to have Georgia establish a school for delinquent Negro girls. In the 1920s the Georgia Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs (GFCWC) raised money for such an institution. Despite the lack of interest on the part of the state legislature, the GFCWC

¹⁸ Atlanta Constitution, January 16, 1938.
purchased a tract of land in Bibb County, near Macon. This lot was offered as a gift to Georgia as a site for the school. The CIC lobbied to convince the solons to accept the donation and to agree to a plan under which each county would pay a per diem rate for every girl it sent to the school. In 1937, hoping to spur the legislature to action, the GFCWC deeded the land to the state. By this time, thanks to federal grants, a barn and a dormitory for thirty girls had been constructed on the tract.22

Belatedly, in 1941, the legislature appropriated $10,000 for equipment and other expenses to be used at the school. The bill did not become law, however, because Governor Eugene Talmadge vetoed it on the specious grounds that Negroes did not want such an institution in Georgia. Mrs. Tilly, who served on the sponsoring committee for the training school, was furious, and in 1942, when the governor sought reelection, she resolved to ensure that he would be defeated in the Democratic primary.23

Dorothy Tilly met with Ellis Arnall, Talmadge's rival, and got him to pledge support for better race relations and for helping the school get funding so that it could open its doors. Then she encouraged her friends in the Methodist Church24 and in the CIC to support Arnall, who won the primary election and the governorship. In October 1942 Mrs. Tilly visited the governor-elect to remind him of her help in the campaign and of his promise to favor a legislative appropriation for the school. Arnall renewed his pledge of support, and Dorothy Tilly began an intensive lobbying campaign to get church women to write their legislators and make known their interest in having the school open.25

Friends of Mrs. Tilly later boasted that she was personally responsible for having 28,000 women sign petitions in favor of the training school and claimed that this convinced the reluctant legislature to pass the much desired bill. This seems to be an exaggeration of what happened. Dorothy Tilly did in fact coordinate a highly successful


23In Georgia then winning the Democratic primary was about the same thing as winning the final election. Minutes of the Fulton-DeKalb Interracial Committee, October 14, 1938, June 3, 1941, CIC Papers, AU; Dorothy Tilly to Dear Friend, August 11, 19, 1942, Glenn Rainey Papers, EU.

24In 1939 Mrs. Tilly was named a life patron of the Woman's Missionary Council of the Methodist Church. One year later she was elected secretary of Christian Social Relations for the Woman's Society of Christian Service for the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the Methodist Church. This allowed her to meet most of the important Methodist women in the South.

25Ellis Arnall to Mrs. Tilly, October 20, 1942 and attached memorandum on the meeting, CIC Papers, AU; Mrs. Tilly to Mrs. H.A. Hunt, and to Mrs. A.S. Clark, October 29, 1942, ibid.; Mrs. Tilly to Arnall, October 30, 1942, ibid.; Ellis, "Commission on Interracial Cooperation," pp. 86-87.
lobbying effort and she did encourage several thousand women to petition their representatives to favor the appropriation. But she did not, as is sometimes alleged, collect nearly 30,000 signatures and march thousands of women to the state capitol. Nonetheless what she did was rather impressive, and when the bill was finally passed in 1943 she refused to abandon her campaign in its behalf until a competent superintendent for the school was hired and the first girls were sent to Macon.27

The training school was not established until the midst of World War II. Dorothy Tilly had been among those women who had hoped that there would be no war. To her it was incomprehensible that Christian nations would have to resort to conflict to resolve their differences. In the 1920s as a part of her work with Methodist youth groups she tried to get children to choose “peacetime heroes” as role models.28 In 1935 Mrs. Tilly was named president of the Georgia chapter of the Committee on the Cause and Cure of War (CCCW).

The CCCW believed that if the United States observed strict neutrality and avoided the loaning of money or the sale of munitions to belligerents, it could avoid being drawn into the problems of Europe and Asia. Dorothy Tilly, disillusioned that World War I had not promoted democracy, believed that it was the duty of church women to lobby for congressional passage of neutrality legislation. This is not to suggest that Mrs. Tilly was an irrational isolationist, for she strongly advocated American participation in the League of Nations and the World Court. Like many others she overestimated the capability — or desirability — of America’s staying out of the world conflict.29

When war did come in December 1941, Mrs. Tilly gave her wholehearted support to the efforts to defeat the Axis Powers. After the opening of the delinquent girls’ school in Macon she busied herself with the Emergency Committee for Food Production (ECFP), a lobbying group seeking to save the Farm Security Administration, one of the most progressive of the New Deal agencies. On September 13, 1943, Courtenay Dinwiddie, head of ECFP, died while playing tennis. Mrs. Tilly succeeded him and for several months in 1944 lived in Washington, D.C. “An ardent dry, Mrs. Tilly,” author Helena Huntingdon Smith noted, “is probably the only successful lobbyist in recent history to entertain

26Box 35 of the CIC Papers at AU has information on the extent of Mrs. Tilly’s petition campaign.
27Georgia Voter (Atlanta), XV (April 1943), 7; Ellis, “Commission on Interracial Cooperation,” p. 189.
28Wesleyan Christian Advocate, March 28, 1924.
29Ibid., January 25, November 8, 29, December 13, 1935, November 6, 1936; Atlanta Journal, January 5, 1936.
congressmen without a drop of liquor.’’

Tilly, however, did not particularly care for life in the nation’s capital, for Atlanta was her home. When she returned to that city in 1944 she became a founding member of the Southern Regional Council (SRC), which replaced the increasingly-stodgy CIC. The war had made it obvious that Southern blacks would not wait indefinitely for their rights, and the SRC offered Afro-Americans positions of leadership which the CIC had denied Negroes. Mrs. Ames’s personality clashed with several SRC leaders, and so Mrs. Tilly was groomed to replace her. SRC officials first asked Dorothy Tilly to serve as field secretary but soon added taking charge of women’s work to her duties.

Dorothy Tilly was especially valuable to the SRC. She knew Methodists in virtually every Southern hamlet and kept a file box full of names of people to contact in times of racial crisis. Moreover, because she was a 100% Southerner she could travel to scenes of violence and casually talk with taxi drivers, gas station operators, newspaper vendors and others and obtain information that would never willingly be given to a civil rights investigator. In 1946, for example, she investigated the Columbia, Tennessee race riot that destroyed the black business district of that city and resulted in the trials of scores of blacks for murder. Later that year she went to Monroe, Georgia, where two Negro couples had been lynched by between twenty and thirty masked men. Of the latter incident Tilly recalled, years later, the “two Negro couples [were] all four fine people. Not any effort whatever was made by any law enforcement agency, local, state or federal to even express concern.”

This multiple lynching also profoundly upset J.O. Taylor of the Wesleyan Christian Advocate, who wrote, “Prior to the Monroe incident I was strongly opposed to Federal intervention in such cases; right now I would cast my vote for Federal jurisdiction in such cases.”

In 1946 Tilly interested Methodist women in doing more to ease the racial tensions of the South and planned to form a new group to replace the ASWPL, which had been dissolved in 1942. Before this new organization could be established, however, President Harry Truman named Dorothy Tilly to his Civil Rights Committee. The only white woman and one of only two Southerners on the commission, she took her

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31Jacquelyn Hall is publishing a biography of Jessie Daniel Ames that will probably deal with this in great detail.
33Taylor, quoted in Wesleyan Christian Advocate, August 9, 1946.
duties very seriously. The Committee gathered mountains of evidence on the evil fruit borne by racial and religious prejudice. Her service on the commission persuaded Mrs. Tilly that separate but truly equal treatment for blacks was not the answer to the South's racial problems; what was needed was full integration.\(^\text{34}\)

A new sense of urgency in establishing a woman's group to lobby for fair treatment of Negroes came in 1949. Early in that year Representative L.L. Keenan of the South Carolina Legislature invited Samuel Green of Georgia, the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, to address the legislators. Several members of the South Carolina General Assembly applauded Green's speech. Mrs. Tilly sent 1000 mimeographed letters to prominent Palmetto church women asking them to protest this visit to their legislature and to demand that South Carolina pass an effective law prohibiting the public wearing of masks or hoods. One year later, largely because of pressure from the women whom Dorothy Tilly had contacted, the Palmetto State passed an anti-mask law.\(^\text{35}\)

In the summer of 1949 the SRC and Mrs. Tilly made final plans for the establishment of the long-awaited successor to the ASWPL. Eleanor Roosevelt, who had met Mrs. Tilly at Lake Junaluska in 1944 and who had been much impressed with the indefatigable Georgian,\(^\text{36}\) agreed to speak on the Declaration of Human Rights and how it related to the community. Following Mrs. Roosevelt's well-received address, Dorothy Tilly asked those present to take the following oath:

I AM concerned that our constitutional freedoms are not shared by all our people; my religion convinces me that they must be and gives me courage to study, work, and lead others to the fulfillment of equal justice under the law. I will respond to calls from the Southern Regional Council to serve my faith and my community in the defense of justice.

This pledge was taken by the more than 160 delegates who were present and who represented virtually all Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic and Jewish faiths.\(^\text{37}\)

The organization Dorothy Tilly formed soon took on the name of the

\(^{34}\) Mrs. Tilly to Mrs. L.M. Spivey, August 15, 1946, Tilly Papers, SRC; "Mrs. Tilly Reports Action on SRC Separation Study," \textit{New South}, I (December 1946), 15; New York \textit{Times}, December 6, 1946; Mrs. J.D. Bragg to Mrs. Tilly, December 26, 1946, Tilly Papers, EU. Minutes of meetings of the President's Committee are in the Tilly Papers at Emory University.

\(^{35}\) Tilly to Dear Friends [in South Carolina,] February 25, 1949; Smith, "Mrs. Tilly's Crusade," p. 29; Cunningham, "Woman," p. 11.

\(^{36}\) \textit{Wesleyan Christian Advocate}, August 4, 1944; Eleanor Roosevelt, "This I Remember," \textit{McCall's}, LXXVIII (December 1949), 82; see also John Thomas to editor, Atlanta \textit{Journal}, December 1, 1949.

Fellowship of the Concerned (F of C). It charged no dues and had no officers save Mrs. Tilly, whose salary was paid by the SRC. Foundations and religious organizations supplemented the budget provided for F of C activity by the SRC. The Methodist Church was particularly generous in its grants for the F of C’s work. In 1963, for example, the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church sent $1000 to help underwrite F of C meetings. Although precise figures for contributions from Methodists have not been ascertained, they certainly totaled several hundred dollars per year. Congregationalist, Episcopal, and Jewish organizations also subsidized F of C activities.

Like the ASWPL the F of C personally visited sheriffs and police chiefs to get their pledges that they would tolerate no lynchings in their communities. The lawmen were given pamphlets on how to prevent trivial incidents from flaring into race riots. Unlike the ASWPL, F of C members were urged to sit in courtrooms as observers and personally inform themselves about the status of law enforcement in their home towns. Dorothy Tilly was especially anxious that prominent white women sit as spectators at trials involving black defendants accused of serious crimes. As Mrs. Tilly once said, “Justice would not only have to be blind, she would have to have a clothespin on her nose to stand what goes on in some of our courts all over the nation.”

Court room visits by white-gloved F of C members did change things. Judges, lawyers, jurors, spectators, prosecutors, and bailiffs—all were intimidated by well-dressed women attentively watching the proceedings and occasionally even taking notes on what they were witnessing. Negro defendants at such trials were less likely to be treated as second-class citizens, and there is reason to believe that interest in the courts on the part of Southern white women of middle and upper class backgrounds promoted respect for impartial justice.

By the mid 1950s Dorothy Tilly realized that the big issue was no longer prevention of lynchings, for by then this form of barbarism was all but extinct, but rather promotion of integration. Over the years Dorothy Tilly’s ideas on racial matters had matured, and her work for President Truman’s Committee had shown her that segregation was immoral. In her role as head of the F of C and as a member of the SRC executive board and in her capacity as a leading Methodist church woman, she knew she could do much to promote integration and to encourage other women to be “shock absorbers of social change.” In the spring of 1954 the

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38SRC Auditor’s Report for December 31, 1968, SRC; Tilly to Ruth Morton, November 14, 1949, Tilly Papers, SRC; Thelma Stevens to Tilly, October 1, 1963, ibid.
40Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, December 1, 1966; Thelma Stevens, “A Place of Their Own,” Southern Exposure, IV (Fall 1976), 57.
U.S. Supreme Court ruled that schools would have to be integrated. Tilly was pleased. She urged church women to accept the high court's verdict as final and desirable. Moreover, she wrote a pamphlet, "Christian Conscience and the Supreme Court Decision on Segregated Schools," which quoted liberally from the Bible to show that racial prejudices were harmful to youngsters. "The Christian's major concern in these days of change," she insisted, "must be the children." God was reconstructing His world, she added, "and all sincere Christians would, in time, realize that May 17, 1954, "[w] as a day on which another milestone was reached in the liberation of man." 41

The F of C held annual meetings and regional meetings in most Southern states in the 1950s and 1960s to consider such questions as the integration of public facilities, the promotion of justice in the courts, and the role of the United Nations in furthering the spread of basic human rights. Without exception these meetings were integrated, for Mrs. Tilly wanted whites and blacks to get to know each other as equals. A major concern of hers was that "white Southerners ... be continually made aware of, and confronted with, the injustices, discriminations and hurts of the past so that our present and future may be better." 42 Delegates to these meetings were selected by various church and synagogue groups. Whenever possible Dorothy Tilly raised funds to pay for some of the expenses of those attending the sessions lest financial reasons prevent those most in need of being present from accepting her invitations. Money from foundations and church groups, including Methodist groups, was sometimes used in this way. 43

In many ways the 1950s and 1960s were trying times for Dorothy Tilly. She had anticipated that many Southerners would oppose her activities in behalf of integration, but she expected Dixie's church leaders to be among her defenders. This was not always the case. For example, in 1963, when she visited Selma, Alabama, to observe the status of race relations in that city, the local Methodist clergy refused to meet with her. 44 In another Southern city a few years later a minister argued that her activities promoted only friction and controversy. "We must save the church," he sharply admonished her. To this comment Mrs. Tilly tartly replied, "If the church needs saving...it is not worth saving." 45

42Mrs. Tilly to Ella Mae Brayboy, March 11, 1964, Tilly Papers, SRC.
43Mrs. Tilly to Mrs. E.P. Cudd, March 13, 1956, ibid.; Mrs. Tilly to Dorothy Thompson, July 24, 1959, ibid.; George Mitchell to Robert Weaver, September 23, 1955, George Mitchell Papers, SRC.
44Dorothy Tilly, "[First] Visit to Selma, October 7, 1963," in Tilly Papers, SRC.
Generally speaking Mrs. Tilly seldom resorted to sarcasm, but, her friends recollected, she "often emerged entertainingly in her beratings of bishops, pussy-footed...churchmen and congregations." Her joking, however, could not disguise her dismay that many of her fellow Methodists were failing to practice the teachings of their faith. It puzzled her that so many in the church failed to recognize that their great mission was to promote "harmony, understanding and peaceful integration in community life." With bitter irony she once noted "that as soon as Negroes move into a white neighborhood, the church people become frightened and seek a new location for the church."46

One Methodist leader sought no new location for his church; rather what he wanted was a new location for Mrs. Tilly. L. Blake Craft, an elder of the North Georgia Conference, was outraged that SRC leaders were able to rent rooms at the Wesley Memorial Church. Craft, who alleged that the civil rights movement was led by communists and other radicals, had no use for Dorothy Tilly. He insisted that her work for abolition of the poll tax and in favor of civil liberties and integration were nothing more than "communist front activities."47 Others also thought that Mrs. Tilly was pro-communist, and one man, M.G. Lowman, proposed that the House Un-American Activities Committee investigate her.48

Accusations that she was un-American were not the only problems Dorothy Tilly faced. Former friends sometimes shunned her in church. "I realized," she wrote, "it was affecting my worship and most certainly others. To help I made the blocks from my house to the church 'The path to my Father's house' and I soon never noticed the slights." Even more disturbing were frequent "ugly anonymous telephone calls." About these she wrote:

I have found several ways to handle the telephone calls. I have a small record player on the telephone table, with the needle set to begin playing the Lord's Prayer. It always helps me and it silences the one at the other end of the phone. Repeating the 23rd Psalm is a great message to myself and, I hope, to the listener. "The Lord is my Shepers" [sic] has new meaning to me every time.

Another way is to keep asking over and over "who is speaking," giving him no time to talk. If he gets in a word, you will find he is utterly without imagination. [If the caller gives me a name as his, I respond,] "wait and I'll look you up in the city

46Dorothy Tilly to Celia Sheppard, September 28, 1962, Tilly Papers, SRC; Mrs. Tilly to Louise Killingsworth, June 7, 1963, ibid.


48Dow Kirkpatrick to Lowman, January 19, 1959, copy in Tilly Papers, SRC. Perhaps the worst attack on Mrs. Tilly came in 1947, when Franklin Acker called her "a parasite who while living upon funds furnished by the Methodist Church has rendered much of her service to the cause of socialism and communism." Acker, "The New Attack," Anderson (S.C.) Independent, November 17, 1947.
directory. "This gives me a chance to leave the phone and not come back."49

Once, in the 1950s, the Ku Klux Klan let it be known that they intended to bomb Mrs. Tilly's house. Fortunately word of this was leaked to Atlanta's mayor, William Hartsfield. The mayor had a street light placed directly in front of the Tilly residence, ordered police cars to patrol her street at night, and insisted that a detective follow Dorothy Tilly for several weeks to protect her from potential assailants. Apparently these tactics were successful, for the Ku Klux Klan soon turned its attention to other matters.50

Dorothy Tilly knew that if the KKK considered her a threat, she must be doing something right. Others agreed, and scores of organizations bestowed their highest honors on her. Methodist, Jewish, and United Church of Christ groups were among those presenting her with scrolls, citations, trophies and medals.51 An Atlanta civic group awarded her a chest of silver, and several honorary fraternities and a variety of other prestigious organizations elected her to membership. Mrs. Tilly was active in the Americans for Democratic Action and the American Civil Liberties Union. Honors came frequently, and Dorothy Tilly accepted these with humility and never failed to remind her audience that it was not any sacrifice to fight for justice. "I have had," she once declared, "the most satisfactory, thrilling and stirring life possible."52

Fortunately for Dorothy Tilly she lived long enough to see the passage of the civil rights legislation of the 1960s. "We in Georgia are changing," she exulted in 1965. Even arch-segregationists with an interest in politics realized that the Negro vote could represent the balance of power in close elections. Southern schools were integrating with less violence than had characterized similar efforts in the 1950s. Bigots might condemn integration, but it was plain to all that segregation was on the way out.53

In 1970 Dorothy Tilly died. For years she had been ill, but until a few months before her death she continued to travel all over the South--by

50Chester Davis, "Capturing the Strategic Foothills," Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel, February 22, 1953; Mrs. Tilly to Mrs. Page Wilson, April 10, 1964, Tilly Papers, ED.
51Shortly after Dorothy Tilly's death President Richard Nixon post-humorously awarded her a citation of merit for her "dedicated service in behalf of justice and equality for all citizens." This citation is in the Special Collections of Emory University.
53Tilly to Thelma Stevens, February 23, 1965, Tilly Papers, SRC; see also Dorothy Tilly to Mrs. Stuart Sinclair, October 30, 1964, Ibid.
train when confined to a wheel chair, by plane when on crutches.\textsuperscript{54} To the very end she remained optimistic about man’s potential to make the world a better place. When news of her death was made public tributes poured in, but none would have meant more to her than the one from the Atlanta \textit{Daily World}, an Afro-American newspaper. The \textit{Daily World} considered Dorothy Tilly “one of the Southland’s most militant fighters for decent treatment of Negroes....Mrs. Tilly is mourned by tens of thousands of Negroes in the deep South who knew her well, a tribute...well deserved.”\textsuperscript{55}

Curiously less than a decade after her death Dorothy Tilly’s work has been all but forgotten. That is a grievous mistake, for too many people believe that the civil rights movement was brought about by Northern white liberals and Southern blacks. Scholars need to study the role of Southern liberal religious leaders in the integration movement. Dorothy Tilly’s life proved one of her favorite beliefs: “There have always been Southerners who put humanity above color.”\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55}Atlanta \textit{Daily World}, March 29, 1970.
\textsuperscript{56}Smith, “Mrs. Tilly’s Crusade,” pp. 29, 66-67.