

A STATEMENT CONCERNING THE CRISIS IN OUR NATION

June 5, 1968

We recognize that no individual or organization can speak for all Baptists. The following represents the concern, confession, commitment, and appeal by the majority of the messengers meeting in Houston, Texas, June 5, 1968.

We Face a Crisis

Our nation is enveloped in a social and cultural revolution. We are shocked by the potential for anarchy in a land dedicated to democracy and freedom. There are ominous sounds of hate and violence among men and of unbelief and rebellion toward God. These compel Christians to face the social situation and to examine themselves under the judgment of God.

We are an affluent society, abounding in wealth and luxury. Yet far too many of our people suffer from poverty. Many are hurt by circumstance from which they find it most difficult to escape, injustice which they find most difficult to correct, or heartless exploitation which they find most difficult to resist. Many live in slum housing or ghettos of race or poverty or ignorance or bitterness that often generate both despair and defiance.

We are a nation that declares the sovereignty of law and the necessity of civil order. Yet we have had riots and have tolerated conditions that breed riots, spread violence, foster disrespect for the law, and undermine the democratic process.

We are a nation that declares the equality and rights of persons irrespective of race. Yet, as a nation, we have allowed cultural patterns to persist that have deprived millions of black Americans, and other racial groups as well, of equality of recognition and opportunity in the areas of education, employment, citizenship, housing, and worship. Worse still, as a nation, we have condoned prejudices that have damaged the personhood of blacks and whites alike. We have seen a climate of racism and reactionism develop resulting in hostility, injustice, suspicion, faction, strife, and alarming potential for bitterness, division, destruction, and death.

We Review Our Efforts

In the face of national shortcomings, we must nevertheless express appreciation for men of good will of all races and classes who have worked tirelessly and faithfully to create a Christian climate in our nation.

From the beginning of the Southern Baptist Convention, and indeed in organized Baptist life, we have affirmed God's love for all men of all continents and colors, of all regions and races. We have continued to proclaim that the death of Jesus on Calvary's cross is the instrument of God's miraculous redemption for every individual.

Inadequately but sincerely, we have sought in our nation and around the world both to proclaim the gospel to the lost and to minister to human need in Christ's name. Individually and collectively, we are trying to serve, but we have yet to use our full resources to proclaim the gospel whereby all things are made new in Christ.

We Voice Our Confession

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I heal' 'from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14).

The current crisis arouses the Christian conscience. Judgment begins at the house of God. Christians are inescapably involved in the life of the nation. Along with all other citizens we recognize our share of responsibility for creating in our land conditions in which justice, order, and righteousness can prevail. May God forgive us wherein we have failed him and our fellowman.

As Southern Baptists, representative of one of the largest bodies of Christians in our nation and claiming special ties of spiritual unity with the large conventions of Negro Baptists in our land, we have come far short of our privilege in Christian brotherhood.

Humbling ourselves before God, we implore him to create in us a right spirit of repentance and to make us instruments of his redemption, his righteousness his peace, and his love toward all men.

We Declare Our Commitment

The Christ we serve, the opportunity we face, and the crisis we confront, compel us to action. We therefore declare our commitment, believing this to be right in the sight of God and our duty under the lordship of Christ.

We will respect every individual as a person possessing inherent dignity and worth growing out of his creation In the image of God.

We will strive to obtain and secure for every person equality of human and legal rights. We will undertake to secure opportunities in matters of citizenship, public services, education, employment, and personal habitation that every man may achieve his highest potential as a person.

We will accept and exercise our civic responsibility as Christians to defend people against injustice. We will strive to insure for all persons the full opportunity for achievement according to the endowments given by God.

We will refuse to be a party to any movement that fosters racism or violence or mob action.

We will personally accept every Christian as a brother beloved in the Lord and welcome to the fellowship of faith and worship every person irrespective of race or class.

We will strive to become well informed about public issues, social ills, and divisive movements that are damaging to human relationships. We will strive to resist prejudice and to combat forces that breed distrust and hostility.

We will recognize our involvement with other Christians and with all others of goodwill in

the obligation to work for righteousness in public life and justice for all persons. We will strive to promote Christian brotherhood as a witness to the gospel of Christ.

We Make An Appeal

Our nation is at the crossroads. We must decide whether we shall be united in goodwill, freedom, and justice under God to serve mankind or be destroyed by covetousness, passion, hate, and strife.

We urge all leaders and supporters of minority groups to encourage their followers to exercise Christian concern and respect for the person and property of others and to manifest the responsible action commensurate with individual dignity and Christian citizenship.

We appeal to our fellow Southern Baptists to join us in self-examination under the Spirit of God and to accept the present crisis as a challenge from God to strive for reconciliation by love.

We appeal to our fellow Southern Baptists to engage in Christian ventures in human relationships, and to take courageous actions for justice and peace.

We believe that a vigorous Christian response to this national crisis is imperative for an effective witness on our part at home and abroad.

Words will not suffice. The time has come for action. Our hope for healing and renewal is in the redemption of the whole of life. Let us call men to faith in Christ. Let us dare to accept the full demands of the love and lordship of Christ in human relationships and urgent ministry. Let us be identified with Christ in the reproach and suffering of the cross.

We therefore recommend to the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention that:

1. We approve this statement on the national crisis.
2. We rededicate ourselves to the proclamation of the gospel, which includes redemption of the individual and his involvement in the social issues of our day.
3. We request the Home Mission Board to take the leadership in working with the Convention agencies concerned with the problems related to this crisis in the most effective manner possible and in keeping with their program assignments.
4. We call upon individuals, the churches, the associations, and the state conventions to join the Southern Baptist Convention in a renewal of Christian effort to meet the national crisis.