

## The Southern Baptist Convention and World War II

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### Introduction

On December 7, 1941, the world changed when the United States was attacked at Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces.<sup>1</sup> The following day, the United States officially declared war on Japan. On December 11, Germany and Italy reacted to this declaration by entering the fight against the United States, the United States also declared war on these two countries.<sup>2</sup> People across the United States grew angry over the attack at Pearl Harbor. How would religious leaders react from the pulpit? Denominations worldwide were faced with a challenging task, ultimately finding themselves having to discuss the problem and reality of evil. One denomination that voiced its opinion was the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

### The Southern Baptist Convention's Reaction to Pearl Harbor and the United States' Entrance into World War II

With a membership of over five million in 1940, the SBC was one of the largest Protestant denominations in the world and the largest in the United States.<sup>3</sup> One prominent figure who addressed the attack on Pearl Harbor was George Truett, who then served as the pastor for the First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. On December 14, 1941, Truett addressed his congregation in a sermon titled, "The Lord Reigneth." He immediately opened up his sermon preaching: "Our situation undoubtedly calls for a fresh re-

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<sup>1</sup> This article was drawn from the author's 2018 PhD dissertation completed at University of the Free State, South Africa, and he extends special thanks to his doctoral supervisor, Dr. Dolf Britz.

<sup>2</sup> David Kennedy, *The American People in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 98–99.

<sup>3</sup> Social Service Commission, "Embezzlement of Power," Annual SBC 1941, May 14–18, 1941, 448, available at [http://media2.sbhl.org/s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC\\_Annual\\_1941.pdf](http://media2.sbhl.org/s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1941.pdf).

examination by us all, of all our standards and ways of life. Especially do our hearts need to be searched to the depths as to the motivations that actuate us in our response to and participation in the world situation, as we have it on us now.”<sup>4</sup>

Truett recognized that feelings of anger and revenge were prevalent in his church. He understood patriotism was going to grow, and he even encouraged it. He stated, “A man who doesn’t love his country is in a bad fix, and his country’s in a bad fix to have such a man around.” For Truett, patriotism was what made Americans so special, and he felt that patriotism was connected to religious freedom and democracy. The opposing forces of the Axis powers were anything but lovers of liberty. Freedom was at war with tyranny. Truett stated, “The domineering, tyrannical reign of a few over the vast masses, the destruction of freedoms more precious than life are involved in this great conflict: freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of religion. Freedom, freedom in its noblest sense.” Truett believed Nazism and the Japanese led by their emperor were a direct threat to America and all of its ideals. He argued that his church needed to find refuge in God. He felt his church could find peace in God and his sovereignty on the earth. He preached, “We are under God, we’re under His authority, we’re under His dominion, we’re under His guidance and government, and He governs by great principles and righteousness.”<sup>5</sup> While the future was unknown in 1941, Truett felt confident that God would overcome the darkness.

Truett was not the only member with strong opinions on entering the conflict. At the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1942, Chas A. Jones called the Convention to urgent prayer. Jones served the denomination as the general secretary and released the following statement:

The seriousness of the world situation has not abated but has grown worse. Our own nation has been forced into active participation in this terrible war by the sinister attack of the Japanese upon Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. And

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<sup>4</sup> George Truett, “The Lord Reigneth” (sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, TX, December 14, 1941), available at <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/search/collection/fa-gwt>.

<sup>5</sup> Truett, “The Lord Reigneth.”

today the United States is engaged in an all out war to protect its own people and its democratic principles.<sup>6</sup>

Jones appeared optimistic and assured the people that God's "blessing" could fall upon the United States if the country was willing to embrace him as the ultimate Creator and King. Comparing ancient Israel to the United States, Jones explained the nation could be under "judgment for their overall lack of faith."<sup>7</sup> Jones portrayed the consensus as individuals and the country, in general, should be repentant and seek to honor and worship God.

The SBC made plans to establish "Christian leaders" in schools and churches throughout the world once the war was over to teach the principles of Christianity. The convention was adamant that these moral principles tied to Christianity could drastically change one's "ideals and influence one's overall character."<sup>8</sup>

While looking toward the future was admirable, the fact remained that the war was far from over. The SBC found itself suffering, especially in foreign missions. Overseas missions were severely impacted in 1942 when the Japanese placed several SBC missionaries in "prison or internment" camps throughout China and the Philippines.<sup>9</sup>

With their nation at war and some of their fellow church members imprisoned, tensions grew both in the church and across the nation as many Americans became extremely hostile towards the Japanese due to Pearl Harbor. According to the Home Mission Board of the SBC, Jesus Christ was the answer to all of the world's problems. In the 1942 annual meeting, the Home Mission Board declared, "If there ever was a period in world history when we needed light—divine light—it is today. The world is in spiritual darkness. Christianity is face to face with two inexorable facts—force and suffering."<sup>10</sup> As a Christian body, the denomination felt

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<sup>6</sup> Chas A. Jones, "Call to Prayer for a Just and Righteous Peace," Annual SBC 1942, May 16–20, 1942, 45, available at [http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC\\_Annual\\_1942.pdf](http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1942.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Jones, "Call to Prayer for a Just and Righteous Peace," 45.

<sup>8</sup> Jones, "Call to Prayer for a Just and Righteous Peace," 45.

<sup>9</sup> Foreign Mission Board, "Missionaries in Prison and Internment in China and Manila," Annual SBC 1942, May 16–20, 1942, 170, available at [http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC\\_Annual\\_1942.pdf](http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1942.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Home Mission Board, "Christ is the Answer," Annual SBC 1942, May 16–20, 1942, 252, available at [http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC\\_Annual\\_1942.pdf](http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1942.pdf).

its obligation was to honor God in all aspects of life. Likewise, the SBC realized it must pray earnestly for peace.

### **Prayer for Just and Righteous Peace**

With war a reality, humanity needed to rely on faith. Faith connected to peace and peace connected to God's standard of living. In 1942, the SBC released six focal points for a *Just and Righteous Peace*:

1. The hour calls for deep searching of heart on the part of individuals and nations that we may discover wherein we have departed from God's way.
2. The hour calls for deep penitence and prayer for divine forgiveness for our sins both individual and corporate. When will nations come to know that "Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin a reproach to any people." (Proverbs 14:34)
3. The hour calls for unwavering faith in the power of God to change the hearts of men and to guide in the affairs of nations. The hope of a new world order, more in keeping with God's plan, is to be found in individual regeneration by the Holy Spirit through faith in the atoning death of Christ. Only redeemed men can build a Christian social order. As God's people we need to give more earnest heed to Christ's command: "Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness." He promises the necessary material blessings to those who make it their supreme life purpose to establish his kingdom and righteousness upon the earth.
4. A just and righteous peace must provide for spiritual, intellectual, political and economic freedom. And we reaffirm our age-long contention that the complete separation of Church and State is absolutely necessary to spiritual liberty. These freedoms are not favors to be granted but are God-given and inalienable. And we plead that the liberties shall be guaranteed to all peoples.
5. As a great Christian body we must prepare our people to play their part intelligently in the new order which must follow this war. Our churches and our Christian schools must give the world a better leadership for the new day ahead.

The world sorely needs leaders of Christlike character, with Christian ideals and motivated by Christian principles.

6. We would call upon our own people and upon all true Christians everywhere to join us in prayer and most earnest endeavor to bring these things to pass, so far as they are consistent with the will and purpose of our God.<sup>11</sup>

Righteous peace could only come from God. Southern Baptists knew individuals and entire nations needed to surrender their lives to Jesus Christ. A common theme appeared, which was “Christ or Chaos.” Peace was only in Jesus Christ. The Axis forces symbolized chaos and darkness. While acknowledging the darkness prevalent in the world, the SBC sought to confront the Axis forces. Part of engaging the Axis forces meant facing them on the battlefield, though the question remained: Could a great Christian body justify war?

### **An Argument for War**

While the SBC accepted the fact that their nation was at war, could the denomination condone military force against the Axis powers? By 1942, the SBC taught that their God must confront the darkness. The SBC presented three main arguments to defend the use of military force. First, it was widely believed God’s will would be carried out on earth regardless of the situation. Second, the SBC felt religious freedom and democracy were worth fighting for. In fact, the SBC felt religious freedom must be defended, or their religion could cease to exist. Third, the SBC and many of its members felt their nation had an obligation to assist governments that could not protect themselves.

### **Man’s Freedom & God’s Will**

C. P. Herring, a North Carolina SBC pastor, taught that God’s will was connected to the current conflict. In an article titled “Why God Does Not Stop the War,” Herring wrote, “It is not difficult to see that war is out of harmony with all that we know about God and his will for mankind.” Herring explained his God

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<sup>11</sup> Chas A. Jones, “Call to Prayer for a Just and Righteous Peace,” Annual SBC 1942, May 16–20, 1942, 45–46, available at [http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC\\_Annual\\_1942.pdf](http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1942.pdf).

“was good, merciful, filled with righteousness and loving.”<sup>12</sup> He said God was not a dictator and allowed his creation to act according to free will. He wrote:

Men are not machines, but moral beings. They are free to choose their own war, and accountable for their choices. This freedom makes it possible for them to be patriots or traitors, heroes or cowards, according to the right or wrong use of their freedom. Furthermore, the power to choose good or evil is an essential factor in man's capacity for fellowship with God; even as his choice of good is an essential factor in qualifying him for such fellowship.<sup>13</sup>

War taught many valuable lessons. Most importantly, destruction was possible if humanity ignored God and his ways. Mankind was dead in their sin (Rom 3:10–11) and needed God for anything good or righteous to occur. Instead of blaming the war on “politics, or economics,” Herring explained the world needed to take accountability. He wrote, “The trouble, therefore, is not with systems, but with man who in their selfishness, greed, and godlessness make and sustain them (political, economic disasters).”<sup>14</sup> Herring’s view argued mankind’s free will and lack of obedience to God and his ways caused destruction and war. Instead of blaming God for not stopping the war, this pastor asserted humanity was to obey God to avoid conflict. While the Christian God was loving and filled with righteousness, a lack of faith and obedience would result in judgment from their holy Creator.

George Truett believed firmly that God’s will was carried out during this Great War. In his sermon titled “What We Do and Do Not Know About This Earthly Life,” he preached, “What need we have now of patient submission to God and for the constant appeal of our deepest hearts to Him, for His light and His leading.” Truett emphasized that one needed to surrender all aspects of their life to God. World War II indeed challenged everyone, yet this was no excuse to ignore God, his ways, and his will. He stated, “We are not to quarrel with God. We are not to contend with

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<sup>12</sup> C. P. Herring, “Why God Does Not Stop War,” *Biblical Recorder*, July 8, 1942, available at <http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/APA/Wakeforest/default.aspx#panel=search&search=11>.

<sup>13</sup> Herring, “Why God Does Not Stop War.”

<sup>14</sup> Herring, “Why God Does Not Stop War.”

God.” Truett argued one must constantly pray and rely on God in times of uncertainty. Complete submission to God’s will was the only hope one had. If one trusted God in all aspects of life, a sense of peace would overcome them; fear could cease to exist. He preached,

We are to seek above all to find out His will and our prayer day and night is, must be, Let God defend the right. And we can pray that prayer with all conscientiousness. And we can commit to ourselves, submit ourselves, yield ourselves with unresisting and unreserved commitment to Him, unafraid because His will is always right, and better still, His will is always safe and always best for us, whatever it may be.<sup>15</sup>

For Truett, God was sovereign and would carry out his will against sin. He urged his congregation to “pray for what was right” in the sight of God, not man. For many, what was right, was what the Americans stood for, freedom of religion and democracy.

### **Religious Freedom and Democracy**

At the 1942 annual convention, the Home Mission Board felt America and its ideals were at war with the Axis powers and their ways. It was stated, “If the Axis powers win, then totalitarianism will dominate the world. This ideology defies the state and enslaves the individual. In such a world Christianity would have no place, and the missionary who carries to the world Christianity would have no place, and the missionary who carries the Gospel of redeeming grace to lost men would find every door in the world closed.”<sup>16</sup> The Home Mission Board felt the civilized world was at stake. According to them, the United States and its allies were the only hope the world had if peace prevailed. On this, they emphasized, “We fight for the rights of mankind. For all that has been secured for us in the struggle of the past two thousand years.”<sup>17</sup> It was apparent; this war was not just American democra-

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<sup>15</sup> George Truett, “What We Do And Do Not Know About This Earthly Life” (sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, TX, July 12, 1942), available at <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/search/collection/fa-gwt>.

<sup>16</sup> Home Mission Board, “Christ is the Answer,” Annual SBC 1942, May 16–20, 1942, 252, available at [http://media2.sbhl.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC\\_Annual\\_1942.pdf](http://media2.sbhl.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1942.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Home Mission Board, “Christ is the Answer,” 252.

cy against Nazism. For the SBC, this war was necessary for the mere existence of Christianity.

Like the Home Mission Board, the Social Service Commission (SSC) of the denomination had strong opinions on the war. The SSC was confident in the future, releasing the following statement: “No Red Cross ambulance, no hospital, no church building is free from the attacks of dropping bombs and rolling tanks. We did not start this war but now it is ours. We will end it.”<sup>18</sup> Feeling forced into the conflict, the SSC felt there was no other way to end the war except to fight it until the end.

This group felt Christianity was at stake and required a defender. Communism, Nazism, and the dictatorship of the Axis forces could very well destroy the Christian religion. The SSC declared,

Truths to be potent and powerful must have leaders who are willing to fight, and, if need be, die in their defense. Let us, therefore, as a great religious organization not sit idly by and expect God to win this war or rebuild our civilization at its triumphant end. God left the cause of Christianity in the hands of men; and God expects to this day that men and women, upright, fearless, brave and strong, will carry on the cause of Christianity in the perpetuity of our civilization.<sup>19</sup>

The SSC justified war. A conflict of good versus evil was underway. However, God’s will and the fight for religious freedom were not the only justifications for war. Many leaders felt foreign policy, or a lack of American involvement had led to the ongoing conflict.

### **Helping Defenseless Nations**

Another just cause for war was assisting those who could not help themselves. George Truett and John Sampey both held to this position. Both leaders criticized their nation’s involvement in Europe following the First World War. Both figures felt their country left Europe too early and left the continent vulnerable to another Great War. The SBC also remained critical of US trade

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<sup>18</sup> Social Service Commission, “A Democratic War,” Annual SBC 1942, May 16–20, 1942, 91, available at [http://media2.sbhl.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC\\_Annual\\_1942.pdf](http://media2.sbhl.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1942.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Social Service Commission, “Truth Must Have Defenders,” 91.



relations with Japan. Truett challenged his congregation with the following scenario:

If you and I were out here in the street and saw some bullying, braggart, boastful man trampling a helpless little woman, or a helpless little child and you and I should fold our hands and say, "I don't believe in war, I don't believe in interfering in other people's business," and let the child be slaughtered and the woman destroyed, manhood has left us, that's all. We have to have regard.<sup>20</sup>

Truett felt the United States could have prevented World War II by not leaving Europe. He was not alone in his thinking; Sampey maintained, "The United States was unprepared for the attack by Japan."<sup>21</sup> Allowing the Japanese to control much of East Asia and allowing them to bully the Chinese and other defenseless nations caused a conflict that would occur no matter what.<sup>22</sup> At the 1940 annual convention, the SBC taught blood was on America's hands for supplying the Japanese with oil and weapons. It was stated, "One of the things most distressing to all Christians and all other peace-minded citizens in America, is that most of the munitions and munition materials used in Japan in her ruthless invasion and butchery of China have gone to Japan from America."<sup>23</sup> The SSC remained concerned,

Since that time the shipment of arms, munitions and munition material to Japan could have been controlled, could have been stopped, and our government can give no excuse for the continuation of a policy that allows this traffic to continue whereby America remains the source of death-dealing missiles and materials to be used by an imperialistic and ruthless nation against a peace-loving nation of democratic ideals. Such a policy ought to cease without delay.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Social Service Commission, "Truth Must Have Defenders," 91.

<sup>21</sup> A. Ronald Tonks, *Duke McCall: An Oral History* (Nashville: Field, 2001), 46.

<sup>22</sup> Tonks, *Duke McCall*, 46.

<sup>23</sup> Social Service Commission, "War and Peace," Annual SBC 1940, June 12–16, 1940, 87, available at [http://media2.sbhl.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC\\_Annual\\_1940.pdf](http://media2.sbhl.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1940.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Social Service Commission, "War and Peace," 87.

Studying such positions was alarming for Americans, as the writing was on the wall that a great conflict would likely occur. In Europe, the continent was vulnerable to a massive conflict, as was Asia. The United States failed in their foreign policy after World War I, and this continued into the 1930s, when the United States continued supplying the Japanese with items to further their destructive military campaign. Valuable lessons were learned. Democracy was at odds with totalitarianism. Small defenseless nations needed strong powers to defend them as they could not defend themselves. Ignoring foreign affairs made the world a ticking time bomb. If the SBC could learn one lesson from World War II, it would be choosing either *Christ or Chaos*.

### Follow Christ

Following the death of Truett, the new leader at the pulpit for the First Baptist Church in Dallas was W. A. Criswell. Criswell became the ideal replacement for Truett in the First Baptist Church. Like Truett, Criswell held strong opinions regarding the war overseas.

Preaching in December 1944, Criswell urged his people to “repent of their sin” and find their “way back to God.”<sup>25</sup> The preacher insisted humility was the key, as there was a need for hope and peace in the world. Criswell insisted that the “President, military leaders, legislators, senators, and all leaders must humbly seek God’s will if they wanted to have everlasting peace and victory in the war overseas.”<sup>26</sup> Referencing how widespread war propaganda was at the time, Criswell stated the following regarding his favorite cartoon:

I have seen many cartoons in this war, but the most impressive cartoon I have seen in this war was one of Uncle Sam down on his knees at the mourners bench, with his hands clasped and his head bowed, and underneath my text: “If My people, who are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their

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<sup>25</sup> W. A. Criswell, “The Way Back to God,” (sermon, First Baptist Church Dallas, December 31, 1944), available at <https://www.wacriswell.com/sermons/1944/the-way-back-to-god/?keywords=way+back+to+god+1944>.

<sup>26</sup> Criswell, “The Way Back to God.”

wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”<sup>27</sup>

Criswell challenged his congregation to examine their hearts; he “challenged his church and informed them that their nation was affected by sin like any other country on earth.” His solution was simple, return to God, repent and “seek Him,” and the nation could “survive the evil it faced.” Comparing the United States to Sodom and Gomorrah, Criswell warned his people that they must “walk side by side with Jesus Christ and humble themselves to have any hope in the ‘war-torn’ world.”<sup>28</sup>

In 1945, with the war slowly coming to an end, Criswell stated, “We are paying in blood, in toil, in tears, and in death. But, young people, there is another and a new day coming. We have learned at so great a price a lesson we shall never forget.”<sup>29</sup> Criswell informed his congregation that without Christ, disasters would continuously happen in their own country. The message was clear: God would not forget their sins, and America was just as guilty as other nations.

### **Moral Evil & the Post War-World**

In August 1945, the United States dropped two atomic bombs on the nation of Japan. Combined with the mass casualties carried out by the US Army in constant air raids, hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians lost their lives.<sup>30</sup> One thing was evident: the atomic bomb and the devastation that it caused forever changed the world. Warfare changed with this new weapon of mass destruction. Humankind was confused when faced with the reality of war and evil. Not only did the atomic bomb shock the world, but the fact that millions of Jews were also exterminated simply because of their race was a challenge every soul was faced with considering. Racism was prominent across the globe, even in the United States.

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<sup>27</sup> Criswell, “The Way Back to God.”

<sup>28</sup> Criswell, “The Way Back to God.”

<sup>29</sup> W. A. Criswell, “Victorious Surrender,” (sermon, First Baptist Church Dallas, January 21, 1945), available at <https://www.wacriswell.com/sermons/1945/victorious-surrender/?keywords=vctorious+surrender+1945>.

<sup>30</sup> Kennedy, *The American People in World War II*, 424.

## World War II and Its Influence on Civil Rights

Aware of the blatant racism occurring globally towards Jews, in 1945, the Southern Baptist Convention addressed the issue of racial equality. At the time, approximately nine million Baptists resided in the southern portion of the country. The SBC noted that out of these nine million Baptists, over three million were African American.<sup>31</sup> Under the name of Jesus Christ, the SBC sought to establish a relationship with their fellow Christian brethren. The denomination knew this was no easy task as segregation was prevalent and a way of life.

In the annual meeting of 1945, the SBC addressed racial discrimination towards African Americans. For instance, the Convention declared education should be “equal” for African Americans compared to white children. Additionally, the Home Mission Board said political freedom and “fairness” should be established within the African American community. Likewise, the Board declared that African Americans should have the right and opportunity to serve in all military branches. The Convention set additional goals for African Americans in “employment services, civil justice, and housing.”<sup>32</sup>

The conclusion was that if the Convention was to bear the fruit of Jesus Christ, then the SBC needed to address inequalities. While such ideas were admirable, not everyone shared the same sentiment. The Civil Rights era would not come to fruition for several more years. Nevertheless, the convention knew racism was at odds with their Christian Bible, including the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Due to the racism in the United States as well as the intentional extermination of Jews and other groups by Nazi Germany, the SBC could no longer ignore racial inequality. On issues such as race, the *Statement of Principles of Peace* played an integral part in the denomination.

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<sup>31</sup> Home Mission Board, “Epochs of Home Mission,” Special Meeting 1945, 247, available at [http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC\\_Annual\\_1945.pdf](http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1945.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Home Mission Board, “Epochs of Home Mission,” Special Meeting 1945, 247, available at [http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC\\_Annual\\_1945.pdf](http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1945.pdf).

### Statement of Principles

Presented in the annual Convention of 1944, the *Statement of Principles of Peace* sought to define the SBC's overall mission.<sup>33</sup> It served as a foundation for the beliefs and principles the denomination tried to teach across the world. In 1944, the tenets were:

1. We believe that the command of Jesus, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” is a condemnation of the policy of isolation on the part of any nation. No nation is justified in seeking to separate itself from the rest of the world—its needs, its problems or its life. We are inevitably members one of another.
2. Believing that God has created all men free and equal and has given to them certain inalienable rights which must ever be respected, we assert the right of all nations, both great and small, to self-government, and the obligation of the strong to protect the weak, whether small nations, racial minorities, or underprivileged peoples, in the exercise of their God-given freedom.
3. In order to guarantee security for all nations against aggression, invasion or attempted domination by any other nation, we believe an international organization should be set up which by economic sanctions, or if necessary, by police force, shall restrain any such attempt.
4. Believing in the worth of every individual, we deplore race prejudices and hatreds as undermining the respect to which every individual is entitled and as destroying the spirit of good will, which must be the foundation of enduring peace. This is true whether we consider racial tensions in our nation or in international relationships.
5. Many nations are retarded in their development because of poverty and lack of economic opportunity. The erection of tariff barriers for the protection and enrichment of stronger nations may be a serious hurt to weaker nations as military invasion.

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<sup>33</sup> Executive Committee, “Southern Baptists and World Peace,” Annual SBC 1944, May 16–18, 1944, 149, available at [http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC\\_Annual\\_1944.pdf](http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1944.pdf).

6. Every principle of Christianity and democracy demands the right of every individual to freedom of worship and the right to follow the dictates of his own conscience in respect to religion. The historic position of Baptists requires that we shall in all ways and at all times be apostles of absolute religious liberty for all mankind. This includes both the right to worship and also the right to evangelize and teach. Religious liberty is an inherent right and is not a privilege granted by governments. We must continue to insist that either toleration or restricted freedom of worship is a denial of this right. We earnestly contend that no peace terms will be adequate which either deny or obscure the principle of true religious liberty.<sup>34</sup>

By declaring the Statement of Principles, the SBC showed its desire to grow into a religious body that exemplified peace and love. Statement four demonstrated this attitude towards race relations. Releasing a formal statement condemning racism and bigotry was a big step for a nation covered in a history of slavery and current racial segregation. True peace came from Christianity. For Christianity to thrive, a great revival needed to occur.

### Revival

Following World War II, the United States entered the Cold War and feared a nuclear attack. The legendary Billy Graham, a Baptist, became one of the world's most influential preachers. Graham found much success preaching at crusade meetings in cities such as Los Angeles, Boston, and New York City. Graham regularly referenced war and nuclear attacks and urged the American people to repent of their "sin and trust in Jesus Christ."<sup>35</sup> Referencing the fall of France to the Germans, Graham informed the people of Los Angeles in 1949 that this could happen to them if they neglected God and his ways.<sup>36</sup>

His message was simple: "We need a revival." Graham found success in his message and gained many followers, eventually

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<sup>34</sup> Executive Committee, "Southern Baptists and World Peace," Annual SBC 1944, May 16–18, 1944, 149, available at [http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC\\_Annual\\_1944.pdf](http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1944.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> Billy Graham, *Revival in our Time: The Story of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Campaigns including Six of his Sermons* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1951), 70.

<sup>36</sup> Graham, *Revival in our Time*, 73.

packing entire baseball and football stadiums.<sup>37</sup> The post-war world appeared to long for hope, love, and identity. Preachers such as Graham capitalized on these opportunities to share the message of Jesus Christ. Like Graham, the SBC Foreign Mission Board realized the need for spiritual rebirth in its own country and sought to establish home missions in places such as “Arizona and California.”<sup>38</sup>

Not only was the United States changing, but the whole world was also. The once “Christian friendly China” was transforming. Communism became the enemy of Christianity, and missionaries and pastors were forced out of the country and often arrested.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the Soviet Union continued to show that it was unwilling to embrace any ideas conflicting with their dictating government. Hence, Christians would suffer at the hands of Soviet soldiers, often being killed or imprisoned for their faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup> In a sense, communism would be the direct enemy of Christianity as nations such as China and Russia viewed religion as an immediate threat to their governments.

### The Fear of Communism

For many Christians, communism was evil. Billy Graham felt this way in the 1940s as “he described communism as the worldview of the devil.”<sup>41</sup> While perhaps many disagreed with Graham and his feelings towards communism, one could not argue that religious freedom was in danger in communist-run nations. From Russia to Romania, communism was alive, and Christians were suffering.

Richard Wurmbrand was a man who was tortured and beaten by both the Nazis and the Russians. Wurmbrand “explained living through Nazi occupation made him tough and prepared him for the future beatings he would endure under Russian communism.” Wurmbrand, a Romanian Christian leader, “was an important figure in the underground Church.” The underground church was an

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<sup>37</sup> Graham, *Revival in our Time*, 70–72.

<sup>38</sup> Robert A. Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People 1607–1972* (Nashville: Broadman, 1974), 347.

<sup>39</sup> David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing* (Lanham, MD: Regnery, 2003), 59.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice, 1998), 55.

<sup>41</sup> Alan Scot Willis, *All According to God's Plan: Southern Baptist Missions and Race 1945–1970* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 58.

establishment of Christians that met secretly to worship Jesus Christ. The Russian government strictly forbade this practice, and Wurmbrand was arrested in 1948 and imprisoned.<sup>42</sup>

Sadly, this was a common theme under Russian rule. Believers of Christ had few liberties and lacked simple religious freedom. Wurmbrand wrote, “Thousands of believers from churches of all denominations were sent to prison at that time.”<sup>43</sup> Nazi Germany had left an enormous impact on Stalin and led to his unwillingness to allow religious freedom in his country. He feared any uprisings would include threats from Christians.

Duke McCall was a Southern Baptist who viewed communism as a direct threat to Christianity. He wrote, “Under communism, the individual has no basic rights which may not be usurped by the state.” McCall argued that “communism did not value individual human liberty and welfare.” According to him, communism was the complete opposite of Christianity. Christianity focused on humanity made in God’s image, but communism had little room for this form of thinking. McCall pointed to “Karl Marx as the founder of Russian communism” and emphasized that Marx “taught religion could not co-exist with communism.”<sup>44</sup> According to McCall, communism was a system of slavery providing no hope to its adherents.

Southern Baptist Professor H. C. Goerner looked towards Christian role models. Goerner felt several American leaders, in particular, valued the importance of Christ. One of these was General Douglas MacArthur, who made a heartfelt speech that all Americans needed to analyze. Once the Japanese officially surrendered, General MacArthur declared:

Military alliance, balance of power, League of Nations all in turn fail. We have had our last chance. If we do not now devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door. The problem basically is theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence and improvement of human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advance in science, art, literature, and all material

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<sup>42</sup> Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 33.

<sup>43</sup> Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 33.

<sup>44</sup> Duke K. McCall, *God’s Hurry* (Nashville: Broadman, 1949), 32, 34, 35, 37.



and cultural developments of the past two thousand years. It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh.<sup>45</sup>

For Goerner, MacArthur's speech summed up his opinion on humanity. The only hope a government or person had was to follow Jesus Christ. He believed "God Himself" could transform lives and entire nations into followers of Christ.<sup>46</sup> For this Baptist, failing to follow Jesus would lead to ultimate destruction.

In 1946, R. C. Campbell, SBC pastor of the First Baptist Church in Columbia, South Carolina, released a book titled *Keeping the Foundations*. Campbell addressed the importance of religious liberty. According to Campbell, the United States needed to continue its foundation and embrace religious liberty. He wrote, "Freedom of choice frees men from the corruption of state churches, the hands of which are stained by blood of saints and martyrs. Where religious liberty is not found, spiritual thralldom is the rule."<sup>47</sup> Campbell argued religious liberty needed to emphasize a complete separation of church and state.<sup>48</sup> On the importance of religious liberty, he wrote,

Religious liberty is based upon the principle of direct approach to God without the interference of men. God gives one and all the free right to come directly to him without the encumbrances of deputies, proxies, priests, or popes. Baptists are inevitably and unalterably opposed to every form of sponsorial religion. Everyone must repent himself, believe for himself, be baptized for himself, and account to God for himself. What institution, however venerable, what individual, however powerful or wise, what tradition, however hoary with the age, has any right to come between the individual soul and God?<sup>49</sup>

Whether it was communism, or any form of dictatorship, McCall, Goerner, and Campbell recognized the only hope a nation had was within the teachings of Jesus Christ. Campbell emphasized a government could never force a doctrine on humanity. It needed to be people themselves who elected to follow Jesus Christ for a true conversion to occur. If a nation embraced Chris-

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<sup>45</sup> McCall, *God's Hurry*, 28.

<sup>46</sup> McCall, *God's Hurry*, 28.

<sup>47</sup> R. C. Campbell, *Keeping the Foundations* (Nashville: Broadman, 1946), 179.

<sup>48</sup> Campbell, *Keeping the Foundations*, 180.

<sup>49</sup> Campbell, *Keeping the Foundations*, 181.

tianity, good things could follow; if a country lived contrary to the teachings of Jesus, that nation needed to prepare for God's righteous judgment. For a nation to become Christian, individual conversions had to occur from all parts of the country.

### Conclusion

The Southern Baptist Convention has long been considered a great Christian denomination. Studying this organization during World War II, it is evident that Jesus Christ remained its members' focal point. The denomination believed God was active, as evidenced by his judgment, will, and sovereignty during the war years. Part of his judgment was to face darkness head-on and fight for the existence of Christianity. Many died, and others were imprisoned for their faith. However, one thing remained strong was faith and trust in Jesus Christ. The Southern Baptist Convention was required to discuss evil and proclaim Jesus Christ as the only way out of evil. They did this as preachers such as Truett urged people to repent and seek forgiveness and guidance from God.

Like the whole country, the SBC also was forced to address the topics correlated to civil rights. The denomination could not preach against evil yet find itself hypocritical in its own racial relations. World War II impacted the denomination and the future of the denomination regarding racial equality. The convention released strong statements during and after the war years found in the *Prayer for Just and Righteous Peace* and the *Statement of Principles for Peace*.

Likewise, the SBC realized a conflict like World War II was possible in the growing tension with Russia. For this reason, pastors preached earnestly, begging their people to have a saving relationship with their Lord and Savior. Communism was at odds with democracy. For most Christians, communism was the definition of evil, providing no religious freedom.

Overall, World War II allowed the denomination to discuss the problem of evil. The SBC did so, and they had the proper explanation. For them, evil existed and would remain until Jesus Christ returned. For the SBC, the only way to defeat evil was to trust in God.