

# British Baptists: ‘Sorry about slavery’

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SWANWICK, England—Baptists in Britain have apologized for their role in the slave trade.

The Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, at its recent meeting in Swanwick, England, passed a resolution of apology.

“We offer our apology to God and to our brothers and sisters for all that have created and still perpetuate the hurt which originated from the horror of slavery,” the resolution said.

The council, which made the transatlantic slave trade the main focus of its meetings, further repented “of the hurt we have caused, the divisions we have created, our reluctance to face up to the sin of the past, our unwillingness to listen to the pain of our black sisters and brothers, and our silence in the face of racism and injustice today.”

British Baptists acknowledged “our share in and benefit from our nation’s participation in the transatlantic slave trade” and “that we speak as those who have shared in and suffered from the legacy of slavery, and its appalling consequences for God’s world.”

The apology was a response to the “the pain of hurting sisters and brothers,” and to “God speaking to us,” and stated an intention to “turn the words and feelings we have expressed today into concrete actions.”

The 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade is being observed this year. The trade brought millions of kidnapped and captured Africans as slaves mainly to the Americas in exchange for money, guns, and other goods, and was officially abolished by the British in 1807. Slavery in the British colonies was itself abolished in 1838.

Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam said the apology brought him a “deep feeling of relief.”

Callam, a Jamaican descendant of African slaves, was elected BWA general secretary in Accra, Ghana, in July.

“By this single action, the (Baptist Union of Great Britain) has taken a giant step in restoring the special place it once enjoyed in the affection of many Baptists around the world.”

Noting his disappointment that the British had not made an apology at the BWA service of memory and reconciliation held at the Cape Coast Slave Castle in Ghana in July, the BWA leader hoped that “now that this has happened, some of us can bring closure to the experience of the service at the slave castle” and “are now better able to partner with our fellow Baptist Christians in the BUGB to deal with the issues of prejudice and racism which are our collective charge today.”

Baptist Union of Great Britain General Secretary Jonathan Edwards said, “God led us not to a simple conclusion about an agonizing part of our history, but to a new way of relating to one another as a gospel people within which we take full account of the people that we are today and the histories that have shaped us.”

*Based on reporting by the Baptist World Alliance*

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