

Baptist groups lament and decry racial injustice

June 4, 2020

Leaders of the North American Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist World Alliance, as well as leaders of Texas Baptist Women in Ministry, issued statements lamenting and decrying racial injustice in the United States.

“We affirm that all deserve a chance for justice in the courts, not a lynching in the streets,” the [joint statement](#) from the presidents and general secretaries of the NABF and BWA reads.

The [Texas BWIM](#) statement acknowledges “the deep pain and anger within the Black community.”

“Those of us who are not Black cannot possibly know the depths of your sorrow and rage at these continued acts of injustice; we can only stand with you and listen as you pour out your hearts,” reads the statement from the Texas BWIM board of directors and coordinator.

Both the NABF/BWA statement and the Texas BWIM statement point to the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd as examples of racial injustice.

“We lament and decry that unarmed Blacks are three times more likely to be killed by police than unarmed whites. We affirm that Black lives matter to God and should also matter to us,” reads the statement jointly issued by NABF and BWA leaders.

The NABF, a fellowship of 19 million Baptists in 55,000 churches and 22 conventions and unions in the United States and Canada, is the one of six regional groups in the BWA, a network of Baptist groups in 125 countries

and territories representing 47 million Baptists.

Unequal justice

“We lament and decry a society where Blacks are twice as likely as whites to be pulled over by police and four times more likely than whites to be searched once pulled over. We affirm that justice must be fair for all or it is not justice at all,” the NABF/BWA statement continues.

“We lament and decry a justice system where Blacks are more likely to receive a harsher sentence for the same crime, where a capital punishment verdict is most likely in cases with a Black defendant and a white victim. We affirm the call for just mercy given by our Lord, who was executed by a corrupt system.

“We lament and decry the militarization of police, which are particularly deployed to treat minority communities as an enemy. We affirm the teaching of the Prince of Peace that ‘blessed are the peacemakers.’”

On June 1, law enforcement in Washington, D.C., broke up a protest at Lafayette Square north of the White House shortly before President Trump crossed the street and posed with a Bible in front of St. John’s Episcopal Church without the permission of church officials.

While the White House objected to news accounts that referred to police using “[tear gas](#),” the U.S. Park Service said law enforcement used smoke cannisters and pepper balls as control agents—chemicals that cause irritation to the eyes and make breathing difficult.

While the NABF/BWA statement does not make specific reference to the incident in Washington, D.C., it reads: “We lament and decry the use of tear gas and pepper spray—both of which are banned for use in warfare, on demonstrators. We affirm the constitutional right to peaceably assemble

should be respected. ...

“We lament and decry the exploitation of Christian texts and sacred spaces to lend support to abuses of power. We affirm the witness of our Lord, who was born amid government persecution that stomped the breath out of the innocent.”

Both the NABF/BWA statement and the Texas BWIM statement also refer to the riots and vandalism that has occurred in some cities across the United States.

“We lament and decry violence, including deliberate destruction or defacing of businesses, homes and houses of worship. We affirm the biblical call to ‘love thy neighbor as thyself,’ and we give thanks for public servants dedicated to protecting others,” the NABF/BWA statement reads.

The Texas BWIM statement urges its readers “to stay focused not on the violence of a few protesters, but on the reason for the pain—embedded institutional and structural racism that threatens Black Americans every day of their lives, no matter where they live or work.”

Calls for self-examination

Both statements include calls for self-examination and calls to action.

“As Christians we are called in the prayer Jesus taught us to pray to seek for God’s kingdom to come and God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Surely this means that we must speak out against every sort of prejudice and discrimination that would dare to suggest that a person’s skin color defines them as less than someone else and thus subject to inhumane treatment,” the Texas BWIM statement reads.

“This horrible situation, which Black Americans have been pointing us to over and over again for decades, is not a problem for them to solve. It is a

problem that we must all take responsibility for ending. We must vote at every level for leadership who understand the depth of this problem and demonstrate a commitment to solving it.

“We must listen to the experience of Black Americans and do them the justice of believing them when they tell us about the treatment they receive. We must investigate more closely to understand how racism is at work in subtle and blatant ways. We must be willing to speak out when we encounter racism. We must examine ourselves and ask forgiveness when we are complicit with racism.”

The NABF/BWA statement points to the “continuing consequences of slavery, Jim Crow, urban planning, redlining and discrimination by financial institutions,” as well as “the racial gaps in wealth, as well as education, healthcare, internet, etc., that have become even more obvious during the coronavirus pandemic as Black Americans die at a rate of three times that of white Americans.”

“We affirm that our nation must address structural inequalities, including the need to begin serious negotiations that will lead to addressing the ills of the past through acts of repentance and prayer,” the NABF/BWA statement continues.

“We lament and decry the times when our own Baptist communities have failed to act as the light of the world, instead joining the flames of hatred—and we humbly seek forgiveness from God and our neighbors when we have failed. We affirm our commitment through word and deed to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly.”

The statement is signed by Samuel Tolbert, president of the NABF and president of the National Baptist Convention of America; Jeremy Bell, general secretary of the NABF; Paul Msiza, president of the BWA; and Elijah Brown, general secretary and CEO of the BWA.