

Students and alumni take seminary presidents to task

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When Southern Baptist seminary presidents pronounced critical race theory incompatible with the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message, they left Christians who are working toward racial harmony vulnerable to charges of unfaithfulness, a group of Southern Baptist students and seminary alumni have asserted.

More than 50 graduates and students of Southern Baptist seminaries and their related undergraduate colleges were among the initial signatories to a [statement](#) issued Jan. 19.

The students and alumni drafted the statement as “a response to the current conversations surrounding race in the Southern Baptist Convention,” as well as the Council of Seminary Presidents’ Nov. 30 [statement](#) reaffirming the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message and declaring critical race theory, intersectionality and critical theory incompatible with it.

“As students of Southern Baptist seminaries and colleges, we are concerned that by declaring these concepts incompatible with BFM 2000 without clearly defining specific points of incompatibility with regard to the usefulness of these tools for analysis, but not overarching worldviews, the statement leaves faithful Christians who are engaged in the work of racial reconciliation and justice vulnerable to charges of unfaithfulness that are misleading about their convictions and ministry practice,” the statement reads.

“We deny that these charges have brought light to the conversation around racial reconciliation and confess great concern for how such labels have

been used to stifle the discussion and threaten those who do not agree with the select applications of a certain tribe in our convention.”

While not mentioned by name, “a certain tribe” appears to refer to the [Conservative Baptist Network](#), a group formed in February 2020. The network states it “rejects worldly ideologies infiltrating the Southern Baptist Convention, including critical race theory, intersectionality and other unbiblical agendas deceptively labeled as ‘Social Justice.’”

Bearing ‘false witness’

The statement by seminary alumni and students asserts the conversations in the SBC about critical race theory and related matters “have regularly misrepresented the teachings of our seminaries, colleges and professors.”

“These misrepresentations are contrary to the biblical command not to bear false witness against our neighbor,” the statement reads.

Critical race theory, intersectionality, critical theory and “wokeness” have been used “in broad, ambiguous and pejorative ways to villainize those who are engaged in such conversations” about race, the statement asserts.

Seminary alumni who signed the Jan. 19 statement included Mason Ballard, lead pastor of Resurrection Church in Charleston, W. Va., and president of the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists, and Dwight McKissic, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington.

The students and alumni joined the seminary presidents in reaffirming the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message as a “treasured statement of biblical truth” and expressed gratitude for a convention and institutions “that hold to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.”

“We affirm that our professors have consistently encouraged us to hold the Bible as the highest authority of truth and the only authoritative rule for

faith and practice, sufficient to direct us in life, ministry, ethics and all other matters,” the statement from students and alumni reads.

“Without exception, our professors have thoroughly strived to equip us to interpret the Scripture as the inerrant and sufficient Word of God, and have equipped us to live according to it. We deny that any professor has ever encouraged us to reject scriptural authority, subordinate Scripture to worldly ideology, or interpret the Bible through any philosophical system as if it were authoritative over the Scripture itself. Therefore, we reject any notions that professors have done anything other than teach the full authority, truthfulness and sufficiency of Scripture.”

Nonetheless, “misleading accusations of heterodoxy” have been made against professors who have engaged in conversations about race, the statement asserts. The students and alumni deny that critical race theory and intersectionality “have been used as authoritative sources, comprehensive worldviews or essential tools for the work of racial reconciliation.”

Critical race theory ‘helpful from time to time’

“Critical race theory and intersectionality alone are insufficient to diagnose and redress the root causes of the social ills that they identify, though they have proven helpful from time to time to identify key areas of concern, historical failings on racial issues, and challenges that have gone unanswered or unsatisfactorily answered by our tradition,” the statement reads. “We reject any notion that there is a source other than divine revelation to ultimately and foundationally remedy injustice.”

The students and alumni assert the statement from the seminary professors not only is insufficient to address the issue of racial justice, but also their

declaration of what is and is not in alignment with the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message is beyond their authority because the SBC is a “convention of churches, not a denomination under the authority of entities.”

The statement by students and alumni also calls for representatives of the National African American Fellowship, the Hispanic Leaders Council, the Asian American Collective and others be included in drafting any future pronouncements on race.

“We hope that future means of addressing these issues will encourage conversations about race within the convention to be guided by a yearning for biblical justice, clarity of terms, and a rejection of fearmongering and confusion,” the statement reads.

“It is our hope that the seminary presidents affirm that their faculty members are within the bounds of each institution’s confessional statements. Likewise, we pray that they will work as active peacemakers on this issue between now and the 2021 Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, Tenn.”