

Southern Baptists decry white supremacy, call for 'moral character' in public officials  
by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [July 19, 2017](#) issue

Southern Baptists have adopted a statement denouncing “alt-right white supremacy” as antithetical to the gospel.

The move on June 14 at the denomination’s annual meeting came after the Southern Baptist Convention’s Resolutions Committee declined to bring to a vote the previous day a Texas pastor’s proposed resolution condemning the alt-right movement, whose members include white supremacists.

The nearly 5,000 SBC delegates gathered at the Phoenix Convention Center agreed to “denounce and repudiate white supremacy and every form of racial and ethnic hatred as a scheme of the devil,” reads the one-page statement distributed just before the last session of the two-day meeting.

Passage of the resolution was met with thunderous applause.

Resolutions Committee chairman Barrett Duke had said the original proposal was “too open-ended” and could be misinterpreted. A day later, he apologized.

“We regret and apologize for the pain and the confusion that we created for you and the watching world when we decided not to report out a resolution on alt-right racism,” he told messengers, or delegates, adding that he shares their abhorrence of the “particularly vicious form of racism that has manifested itself in the alt-right movement.”

He said the new version of the resolution speaks with “conviction but also with compassion” and repudiates racism “in a tone that honors all people, even those with whom we disagree.”

Dwight McKissic, who authored a resolution about the Confederate flag at last year’s convention that was rewritten and passed, didn’t understand why the resolution wasn’t dealt with in a less confusing way. He was receiving calls from black Southern Baptists threatening to leave the convention.

“I’m very heartened by the statement,” he said. At the same time, “there’s obviously a discomfort with this subject matter.”

The SBC is overwhelmingly white and has made pointed efforts to apologize for its history—founded in 1845 in defense of missionaries who owned slaves—and to attract African Americans. The SBC, the nation’s largest Protestant denomination with 15.2 million members, has lost members for ten years in a row and has baptized fewer people nine out of the last ten years.

In recent decades, leaders of the denomination’s public policy wing, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, have pushed for stronger statements condemning that past. Richard Land, the former commission head, was instrumental in the passage of a 1995 resolution in which Southern Baptists lamented slavery and apologized to African Americans for condoning racism. Two decades later, current commission president Russell Moore called for the repudiation of the Confederate flag.

“When we stand together as a convention and speak clearly, we are saying that white supremacy and racist ideologies are dangerous because they oppress our brothers and sisters in Christ,” Moore said from a microphone before the resolution was adopted.

Paige Patterson, president of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, called the new resolution “tremendous” but said action is needed more than words.

“You can talk about problems all you want to,” said Patterson, who offered ten new scholarships for black students after a photo of white faculty members at his seminary posing as rappers caused a stir earlier this year. “They don’t get solved by talking about them. They get solved by doing something about them.”

At the same meeting, Southern Baptists adopted a statement on the importance of public officials who display “consistent moral character.” The resolution, “On the Importance of Moral Leadership,” was proposed by Tennessee pastor Micah Fries with the exact language of a 1998 resolution adopted while President Clinton was being questioned about an affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

“This resolution was originally approved by the SBC during a Democratic presidency and now we have an opportunity to remain clear and consistent in our convictions during a Republican presidency,” Fries said.

But the committee added language commending “those leaders who choose not to meet privately with members of the opposite sex who are not their spouse.”

Just as the committee two decades ago opted not to include Clinton’s name in the statement, the 2017 committee did not include the names of either President Trump or Vice President Mike Pence, who has said he never eats alone with a woman other than his wife.

Other items, all of which passed with no discussion, were:

- A resolution calling for Congress to defund Planned Parenthood.
- A resolution to mark the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation by promoting its emphasis on “the sufficiency of scripture.”
- A resolution that reaffirmed the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement, the idea that Jesus took the place of sinners on the cross.

—Religion News Service

**FOLLOWING UP (Updated July 3, 2018):** Just prior to the Southern Baptist Convention’s annual meeting in 2018, its executive committee voted to expel Raleigh White Baptist Church because of “clear evidence of the church’s intentional discriminatory acts” against a growing black congregation sharing its church building, *USA Today* reported. Members and leaders of the congregation in Albany, Georgia, were thus not allowed to participate in convention business until showing repentance.

*A version of this article, which was edited, appears in the July 19, 2017, print edition under the title “Southern Baptists condemn white supremacy, call for ‘moral character’ in officials.”*