

Minister renounces ordination with Southern Baptists, seeing racism in denomination

## **Lawrence Ware's tipping point was a recent debate over a resolution to disavow white supremacy.**

by [Holly Meyer](#) in the [August 16, 2017](#) issue

Lawrence Ware, a pastor and scholar in Oklahoma City, publicly renounced his ordination in the Southern Baptist Convention because of the racism he sees within the country's largest Protestant denomination.

He announced his decision in [a July 17 op-ed piece in the \*New York Times\*](#), giving as his reasoning that he could “no longer be part of an organization that is complicit in the disturbing rise of the so-called alt-right, whose members support the abhorrent policies of Donald Trump, and whose troubling racial history and current actions reveal a deep commitment to white supremacy.”

Ware will continue to be a minister at Prospect Church in Oklahoma City, which is connected to the Progressive National Baptist Convention as well as to the Nashville, Tennessee-based SBC. Ware will continue to associate with the PNBC but will no longer be involved with the church's Southern Baptist Convention-related work. (In the Southern Baptist Convention, ordination is a local church matter.

The denomination doesn't ordain or license ministers.)

Unlike others he knows who have quietly left the denomination over the past year, Ware made his departure public as a way to push the Southern Baptist Convention to confront the situation.

“Me doing that quietly will not force them to come to terms with the lived experience of people of color in that denomination,” Ware said. “More needs to be done to substantively change the culture of SBC.”

Ware, who also holds several positions at Oklahoma State University, including codirector of the Center for Africana Studies, pointed to a series of recent incidents

that led to his departure, including white professors at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary dressing up as rappers.

Ware's tipping point came during the SBC's annual meeting in Phoenix in June. [The resolutions committee initially rejected a resolution opposing the alt-right movement](#), a term often applied to those whose political views embrace white nationalism, racism, and anti-Semitism. Committee members raised concerns about the resolution's language, and the full convention voted not to overrule the committee. Leaders crafted a new resolution that they would "decry every form of racism, including alt-right white supremacy, as antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ" and it passed.

Ware, who did not attend the meeting of SBC leaders, wrote in the *NYT* that "while they hesitated to adopt a resolution that condemned white supremacy, they did not hesitate to throw out activists who tried to raise awareness about the ways in which the convention fails its LGBTQ members."

Dwight McKissic, the Texas pastor who wrote the original resolution, wants more black Southern Baptists in denominational leadership roles and for the convention to denounce the "curse of Ham," a religious theory that justified the basis for slavery and segregation. It was in his resolution, but not the one the convention passed.

McKissic said he respects Ware's decision to go, but he stays because he thinks it is still "worth trying to bring healing and hope" to the SBC. "The majority of the people's hearts are in the right place, but there is still some work to be done."

Byron Day, president of the National African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention, said he "believes that it's better not to leave, but rather to stay and help educate other brothers and sisters."

Ware said he understands "the logic behind wanting to stay inside an institution and make changes from the inside. ... That motivation is noble in some instances, but it's also enabling in others."

Ware said of the SBC, "I just came to a place where I couldn't stay in." —USA Today Network

*A version of this article, which was edited on July 31, appears in the August 16 print edition under the title "People: Lawrence Ware."*