

Florida Baptist Historical Society
MONOGRAPH

November, 2023

**The Southern Baptist Convention's
Message after World War II**

By
Dr. David T. Crum
Assistant Professor of History,
Truett-McConnell University.



Published by the
Florida Baptist Historical Society
Graceville, Florida

Copyright 2023. All rights reserved.

About the Author/Dr. David T. Crum

Dr. David T. Crum is an on-line Assistant Professor of History at Truett-McConnell University. Additionally, Dr. Crum serves as the on-line Dissertation Chair and Adjunct History Professor for Liberty University. In addition to the B.S. degree, Dr. Crum holds two M.A. degrees (Theological Studies and History, respectively) and the earned Doctor of Philosophy degree in Historical Theology.

The Southern Baptist Convention's Message after World War II¹

Introduction

Destruction is inevitable in warfare, and World War II was no exception. No other conflict in world history caused so much damage throughout the entire globe. Some nations were destroyed by bombs, while others suffered economically. Entire people groups, such as the Jews, faced extermination. While Europe and Asia experienced the most damage, people mourned across the globe.

The United States was fortunate that the war did not make its way to North America. However, America was still affected by the conflict. One of the greatest changes was the development of new U.S. foreign policy that involved being active worldwide in promoting democracy as the only acceptable form of government. America determined to no longer be isolationists as they had been in the past. The U.S. government created policies to ensure that peace prevailed throughout the world. Many Americans believe that such peace could never co-exist with communism. Most Christians agreed, viewing communism as atheistic ideology.

In the late 1940s, rebuilding was a common theme across the country, including among Christians. The leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention knew rebuilding souls and lives for Christ was the ultimate goal and the only hope for their country. America's fear of communism is a major theme in this article. Many Christians rightly believed that communism was a direct threat to religious freedom. While this paper presents the fears and threats of communism, the main focus is on the importance of the Christian worldview from the lens of the Southern Baptist Convention, whose position was that Christianity was the only answer in a fallen world. Their mission never changed before, during, or after the war. A common message appeared across the denomination in pulpits around the country – choose Christ or chaos, and for the SBC, the latter was inevitable for anyone not made new in Jesus Christ.

Rebuilding America and America's Involvement in the World

Many European nations criticized the United States for its immediate departure from Europe after the First World War. By the beginning of World War II, it was evident that America continued to embrace “neutrality.”² Though one could argue that Franklin Roosevelt wanted to enter the war earlier, this was not possible due to politics.³ Roosevelt slowly “changed his policies with the Lend-Lease Act” and eventually assisted England.⁴ However, the U. S. did not officially enter the conflict until the senseless attack at Pearl Harbor, which forever changed America and its foreign policy.

Readers Digest journalist Charles Ferguson addressed “isolationism and foreign policy” in December of 1945.⁵ Ferguson let his “followers know their nation would never be the same

¹ This article is a continuation of the author's dissertation: *The Southern Baptist Convention during and after World War II (1939-1948): A theological-critical appraisal*. Bloemfontein, South Africa; University of the Free State (KovsieScholar), 2017.

² David M. Kennedy, *The American People in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵ *New Castle News*, December 06, 1945, 2.

following the war.”⁶ He specifically “emphasized a large army and navy was not the only solution in foreign affairs.”⁷ He felt his country’s foreign policy needed to center around peace and prosperity. In particular, Ferguson challenged his readers to open their hearts and minds to a suffering world.⁸ The only way peace could exist, according to Ferguson, was from within the hearts of Americans and their political leaders.⁹ Ferguson, “worried that Americans could end up worshipping their way of life and possessions and forget about the rest of the world.”¹⁰ He knew the United States needed to be a “true leader in the post-world war era, which included implementing a foreign policy that would benefit Americans and the entire world.”¹¹ Perhaps Ferguson was arguing for a “humanitarian mindset” for his nation. Whatever his motives, his logic was correct. The world needed a leader, and the United States appeared to be that nation that sought a “free world.” American leaders desired a new world focused on their democracy and involvement in global affairs.

In American politics, “bipartisan support was necessary for the United States to be a global power.”¹² This was apparently the case by the end of the war as both Democrats and Republicans “supported the move for Americans to establish military satellite bases in both Germany and Japan.”¹³ The U.S. political leaders felt it was crucial to remain in the very nations they had just defeated. *The Long Islander* reported, “Both political parties viewed their presence to be necessary to maintain world peace.”¹⁴ By 1947, the Americans did not fear “an uprising or a future conflict with Germany or Japan.” The greatest threat to American foreign policy and democracy came directly from the Russians.

U.S. Secretary of State Jimmy Byrnes viewed communism “as the most serious threat to the American people and the world alike.”¹⁵ By the end of the war, two main ideologies were influential globally: democracy and communism. For many, this was freedom against tyranny. Secretary Byrnes told the following story of the two worldviews:

An American soldier was talking to a Russian soldier in Berlin. The American said that in his country he could go to Washington without a permit, go to the White House, wait his turn, get in to see the President and tell him that he doesn’t like the American foreign policy. The Russian soldier says, “In my country I can go to Moscow, knock on the door of the Kremlin walk in, wait my turn, see Stalin, bang on the desk and say, ‘Mr. Stalin, I don’t like Truman’s foreign policy either.’ And nothing would happen to me; that’s my foreign policy.”¹⁶

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *New Castle News*, December 06, 1945, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *The Long-Islander*, June 05, 1947, 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Mexico Independent*, December 05, 1946, 3.

¹⁶ *Mexico Independent*, December 05, 1946, 3.

Secretary Byrnes shared this story with many people over the years. This parable explained how much freedom the American people possessed. One could not oppose communism or Stalin in Russia, as this was a death sentence. For Americans like Byrnes, the choice was clear; communism was evil and the enemy of freedom. These two opposing worldviews had little in common, and both the Russians and Americans sought to pass on their influence and ideologies to nations across the world.

It was official; the Americans were no longer isolationists minding their own business. World War II created an American government that supported the existence of democracy in all nations. Christian leaders had their opinions about democracy, just like all Americans. The Southern Baptist Convention knew their denomination was fortunate to exist within the democratic nation of America. According to the SBC, not every Christian was as fortunate.

The Fear of Communism

Like most Christians in the 1940s, Billy Graham felt communism was evil as “he described communism as the worldview of the devil.”¹⁷ Though some disagreed with Graham’s feelings about communism, one could not argue that religious freedom was nonexistent in communist-run nations. From Russia to Romania, where communism was alive, Christians were suffering.

Richard Wurmbrand was tortured and beaten by both Nazis and Russians. He explained that “living through Nazi occupation made him tough and prepared him for the future beatings he would endure under Russian communism.”¹⁸ Wurmbrand, a Romanian Christian leader, “was an important figure in the underground Church,”¹⁹ which was made up of Christians who met secretly to worship Jesus Christ.²⁰ The Russian government strictly forbade this practice, and Wurmbrand was arrested and imprisoned in 1948.

Sadly, such occurrences were common in the Russian system. Those who believed in Christ had few liberties and lacked simple religious freedom. Wurmbrand wrote, “Thousands of believers from churches of all denominations were sent to prison at that time.”²¹ Stalin feared uprisings, especially by Christians. Nazi Germany greatly impacted Stalin’s willingness to allow freedom within his nation.

In prison, Christians suffered severe beatings, and many died. Wurmbrand shared one story about a Christian pastor’s fourteen-year-old son being brought into the prison and beaten in front of his father as the man’s captors demanded that he denounce Christianity.²² The man’s son insisted his father stay strong and live his life for Jesus Christ.²³ This infuriated the Russian

¹⁷ Alan Scot Willis, *All According to God’s Plan: Southern Baptist Missions and Race 1945-1970* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 58.

¹⁸ Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (Bartlesville: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 1967), 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

²² *Ibid.*, 34.

²³ *Ibid.*

guards so much that they beat the young man to death.²⁴ For Christians during the 1940s, communism “stood for atheism and totalitarianism.”²⁵ Being killed for Christ was not only a reality but also a regular occurrence.

Duke McCall was one Southern Baptist who viewed communism as a direct threat to Christianity. He wrote: “Under communism, the individual has no basic rights which may not be usurped by the state.”²⁶ McCall taught that “communism did not value individual human liberty and welfare.”²⁷ According to him, communism was the complete opposite of Christianity, which focused on man made in God’s image.²⁸ Communistic thinking had little room in this form of religious thought. McCall pointed to “Karl Marx as the founder of Russian communism” and emphasized that Marx “taught religion could not co-exist with communism.”²⁹ According to McCall, communism was a system of slavery that provided no hope to its adherents.

Southern Baptist Professor H.C. Goerner believed his fellow church members could gain faith by looking toward certain American role models and their views on life. In particular, Goerner felt several American leaders valued the importance of Christ. Goerner believed General Douglas MacArthur gave a good speech about all Americans needing to analyze the significance of Christianity. MacArthur declared the following once the Japanese officially surrendered:

Military alliance, balance of power, league of nations all in turn fail. We have had our last chance. If we do not now devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door. The problem basically is theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence and improvement of human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advance in science, art, literature, and all material and cultural developments of the past two thousand years. It must be of the Spirit if we are to save the flesh.³⁰

MacArthur’s speech summed up his opinion on humanity: the only hope a government or person had was to follow Jesus Christ. He believed only “God Himself” could transform lives and entire nations into followers of Christ³¹ and that failing to follow Jesus led to ultimate destruction.

In 1946, R.C. Campbell, an SBC pastor of the First Baptist Church in Columbia, South Carolina, released a book titled *Keeping the Foundations*. Toward the end of the book, Campbell addressed the importance of religious liberty. According to Campbell, the U.S. needed to continue its foundation and remain based on religious freedom. He wrote, “Freedom of choice frees men from the corruption of state churches, the hands of which are stained by blood of saints

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 239.

²⁶ Duke K. McCall, *God’s Hurry* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1949), 32.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

³¹ McCall, *God’s Hurry*, 28.

and martyrs. Where religious liberty is not found, spiritual thralldom is the rule.”³² Campbell taught religious liberty needed to emphasize a complete separation of church and state.³³ On the importance of religious liberty, he argued:

Religious liberty is based upon the principle of direct approach to God without the interference of men. God gives one and all the free right to come directly to him without the encumbrances of deputies, proxies, priests, or popes. Baptists are inevitably and unalterably opposed to every form of sponsorial religion. Everyone must repent himself, believe for himself, be baptized for himself, and account to God for himself. What institution, however venerable, what individual, however powerful or wise, what tradition, however hoary with the age, has any right to come between the individual soul and God?³⁴

Whether it was communism or any form of dictatorship, McCall, Goerner, and Campbell recognized a nation’s only hope lay within the teachings of Jesus Christ. Campbell emphasized that a government could never force a doctrine on humanity. He knew man must choose to follow Jesus Christ for true conversion to occur. He taught that good follows for any nation that embraces Christianity, and any country that operates contrary to the teachings of Jesus needs to prepare for God’s righteous judgment. He also espoused the idea that individuals from all parts of the country must be converted in order for a nation to be Christian.

God’s Judgment

According to Goerner, any nation could claim Christianity, but few countries resembled followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.³⁵ For this Baptist, “a true Christian nation proved its worthiness in morality and dealing with other nations.”³⁶ Goerner felt “sin was rampant and destroying the United States.”³⁷ From “drunkenness to rising crime rates,” he felt confident his country was heading down a dark path.³⁸ He wrote the following: “When one considers soberly the sinful, selfish and materialistic nature of so much of popular American life, the prospects for the future are not promising.”³⁹ He felt sin and hypocrisy were destroying the U.S., and according to him, God would not allow such actions to continue without judgment.⁴⁰ Comparing the U.S. to ancient Israel, he suggested that all Christians needed to do was examine the Bible to see accounts of God’s judgment upon nations who did the opposite of His will. The only hope a country could have lay in the hands of Christ. America needed to be rebuilt in Jesus Christ. Goerner was not alone in his concerns for his nation. The Social Service Commission of the SBC remained quite disheartened with the immorality found in America. In fact, this organization of the SBC “mentioned there was one state within the Baptist Convention” that did

³² R.C. Campbell, *Keeping the Foundations* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1946), 179.

³³ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

³⁵ Goerner, 31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

not have a committee formed to address moral issues and sin.⁴¹ Southern Baptists “stated their country needed to embrace morality, as sin led to death and the ultimate destruction of their country.”⁴² The Social Service Commission was quite specific in its desire to “see morality return in the educational system.”⁴³ Like so many others before them, this committee knew the youth of America would dictate the future of their country. They felt confident that “sin destroyed any chance for the U.S. to prosper in peace and freedom.”⁴⁴

The *Biblical Recorder* published a column by William Visser Hooft, who served as the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. Hooft “taught the recent world war and the use of the atomic weapon” was part of God’s judgment on Earth.⁴⁵ Hooft believed spiritual darkness fell over specific nations due to sin and evil desires.⁴⁶

He felt all Christians needed to fear “the possibility of judgment due to immorality.”⁴⁷ According to him, World War II was judgment carried out by God.⁴⁸ He taught that the key to gaining God’s blessings was “Christians” living in the Spirit of God and by the guidance of the Lord Himself.⁴⁹ Hooft and other Christians taught the Holy Spirit would assist all believers in righteous living.⁵⁰ They felt believers were required to follow the ways of Jesus Christ to live a righteous life and be willing to surrender their lives to Him, as taught in Luke 9:23 – 24.

The Lordship of Christ

Within Christianity, it was a common belief that Jesus was the Savior of the world. However, for many Christians, Jesus was not only the Savior but also the Lord of their lives, which was known as “the Lordship of Christ.”⁵¹ This “meant Jesus had the authority and ruled over the individual believer’s life.”⁵² Like a king who oversaw his kingdom, Jesus was viewed by Christians who embraced the Lordship of Christ as their Lord or King in life.

This worldview went even deeper for many Christians as several embraced “Lordship Theology.”⁵³ Lordship theology emphasized repentance of sin and obedience to Christ as proof of regeneration and ultimate salvation.⁵⁴ Believers who embraced these teachings believed salvation was possible only for those who held Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

⁴¹ *Annual*, Southern Baptist Convention [SBC], 1946, 121.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Biblical Recorder*, Wednesday, July 23, 1947, 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 117.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

One Southern Baptist who valued the Lordship of Christ was Robbie Trent. Trent served on the staff of the Baptist Sunday School Board within the denomination. He “referred to His Savior as Lord Jesus and emphasized Jesus must be the center of every believer’s life.”⁵⁵ He explained, “The Lordship of Jesus was proven with his heavenly resurrection that highlighted His Majesty.”⁵⁶ Trent stated the following: “Because our Lord has conquered death, all those who are his shall have part in the fruits of his resurrection.”⁵⁷ He argued that “the importance must be placed on those who were in Jesus Christ,”⁵⁸ which meant “those who followed Him and obeyed His commandments in Scripture.”⁵⁹ If people claimed Jesus as their Lord, they were required to prove their allegiance to Him by following His commandments.

The Lordship concept of Jesus Christ was quite simple: Christians who embraced this idea needed to resemble Jesus and follow Him in all aspects of life. J.M. Price, a professor at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, “taught if one was in Christ, they needed to curb their sinful tendencies and transform their lives into the likeness of Christ.”⁶⁰ He said believers “could not force conversion or moral living on anyone.”⁶¹ According to Price, this must come from the Holy Spirit, who convicted the souls and consciences of His followers.⁶² Hence, one could not “embrace the Lordship of Christ without being born again in Spirit and mind.” He posited that a sinner could not live a righteous life outside of Christ.

The SBC Committee on Race Relations felt it was “the Lordship of Christ that allowed white Christians to serve and work alongside their African-American brothers and sisters in Christ.”⁶³ This committee taught “if one were a Christian, they would obey their Lord as such and treat all of His creation in the manner commanded in the Bible.”⁶⁴ The Lordship of Christ took precedence in all believers’ lives. If one claimed the Lordship of Christ yet embraced blatant hatred or racism, they were denounced as not truly following the Lord Jesus Christ.

H.C. Goerner “believed many nominal Christians were in his country.”⁶⁵ A nominal Christian was one “who was a follower by name only.” Others felt cultural Christianity was prominent, where one claimed the faith due to ancestral roots. This Lordship of Christ position demanded obedience in Christ. These Christians were not only hearers of the Word, but also doers (James 1:22). Embracing the Lordship of Christ was a personal decision affecting only each individual believer. However, Christians who practiced this concept realized that with many believers viewing Christ as their Lord, an entire family, church, and nation would transform for the greater

⁵⁵ Robbie Trent, *The Faith We Share* (Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the SBC, 1947), 19.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁹ Trent, *The Faith We Share*, 31.

⁶⁰ J.M. Price, *Jesus the Teacher* (Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the SBC, 1946), 22.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Annual*, Southern Baptist Convention [SBC], 1947, 341.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Goerner, 55.

good of humanity. Choosing to deny Christ and His reign was a risk many believers were not willing to take.

The Importance of Salvation

The generation that lived through the Second World War in the 1940s was quite familiar with death. The Southern Baptist Convention and evangelical Christianity took the position of a soul having only two options after death. Man would go either to hell or Heaven. Christians taught that Jesus died for all humanity, and mankind was accountable to place their faith in Him if they wanted to go to Heaven after their earthly life ended.

Christian leaders understood the importance of challenging their congregations and churches about the concept of Heaven. The Bible taught Earth was a temporary home, and Heaven was the ultimate destination for believers and where the believer grew closer to God, as Heaven was God's permanent home.

W.A. Criswell, pastor, First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, from 1944 to 1991, taught Jesus and His angels were in Heaven waiting for believers.⁶⁶ Criswell mentioned Heaven as a place where Christians will “unite and live as one,”⁶⁷ a place where there is “no more death, sorrow or crying.”⁶⁸ This pastor explained that getting to Heaven occurred only through Jesus Christ.⁶⁹ This meant “salvation or the deliverance from sin” could occur only by people placing their faith in Christ.⁷⁰

During the 1948 North Carolina Baptist Pastors Conference, the *Biblical Recorder* “shared a message with their readers”⁷¹ that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand.⁷² This challenge was to ensure all pastors were ready to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁷³ This Baptist publication taught, “two-thirds of the world’s population” were not Christian believers and were “headed for hell.”⁷⁴

SBC Evangelist Hyman Appelman taught that “the wages of sin is death.”⁷⁵ According to Appelman, the “punishment for sin is hell,”⁷⁶ the ultimate destination for “all unbelievers”⁷⁷ and “the ultimate torment”⁷⁸—a place where no soul would want to spend eternity.

⁶⁶ W.A. Criswell, *Our All-Sufficient Savior* (Sermon) May 7, 1947.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Biblical Recorder*, Wednesday, April 14, 1948, 16.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Hyman Appelman, *Come Unto Me* (Sermon) June 1, 1945.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Appelman preached that “a sinner goes to hell because he pushed God out of the way and trusted himself more than the Savior, Jesus Christ.”⁷⁹ He stated the following about hell: “The most terrible thing about the penitentiary of the damned is that it entails perpetual banishment, perpetual separation, perpetual distancing from God and glory.”⁸⁰ Christians taught everything good about Earth was from God, and Heaven was even greater than Earth since sin was not present.

Appelman knew it was his duty to preach honestly. This meant speaking about people being judged and condemned to hell, separated from God for eternity. Appelman “felt the very second a human being sinned, God had the right to send them to hell.”⁸¹ Yet he also believed that, in His grace, Jesus Christ was the Redeemer who saved His own creation.⁸² Appelman and other Baptist leaders knew the years of World War II proved darkness and sin were present on Earth. Challenging souls about hell was an intentional effort to awaken souls to the reality of death and eternal salvation.

During the 1947 annual convention, Courts Redford, pastor and seminary professor, explained “Jesus was the only hope” for salvation.⁸³ Redford taught Jesus Christ was the only One who could confront sin and provide forgiveness,⁸⁴ turning darkness into light⁸⁵ and overcoming death by His power.⁸⁶ For the SBC and their leaders, the salvation of souls across the world mattered. They knew they must honestly share the gospel of Christ, emphasizing that those who embraced the world and sin, refusing to put their faith in Jesus, needed to prepare for the reality of hell.

Rebuilding the Soul

These men believed that the Bible taught “one must be born again to enter Heaven” (John 3:3). Jesus taught about the spiritual rebirth connected to regeneration. Jesus explained that the “Helper” would assist Christians once Jesus left Earth (John 14:15 – 17). Christians viewed the Helper as the Holy Spirit and connected the spiritual rebirth to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Robbie Trent believed the Holy Spirit was the main part of spiritual regeneration. Trent taught, “Jesus gave Christians the Spirit to show the world His salvation.”⁸⁷ Trent emphasized that “the spirit indwelt in believers of Jesus.”⁸⁸ Citing 1 John 3:24, he explained, “The indwelling of the Spirit correlated to placing one’s faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.”⁸⁹ He wrote the following: “The Holy Spirit directs our actions. Sometimes this direction results in new insights as an everyday, humdrum task is done.”⁹⁰ More specifically, Trent felt “the Spirit could even

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Hyman Appelman, *Come Unto Me* (Sermon) June 1, 1945.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Annual*, Southern Baptist Convention [SBC], 1947, 56.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Trent, 41.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Trent, 41.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

wrestle with believers,” guiding them in a direction that was foreign or new.⁹¹ This, according to Trent, was God’s will challenging the human will, making it imperative that the Christian live obediently in the will of God.

Most importantly, Trent taught the Holy Spirit “challenged earthly problems in righteousness.”⁹² Trent continued, “The Holy Spirit uses our conscience as he guides us.”⁹³ He said the believer in Christ was made new due to the regeneration of the human soul, and the process of “sanctification” or “living a life of righteousness” was possible only due to the indwelling of the Spirit. Trent explained, “The Holy Spirit enabled spiritual growth within believers.”⁹⁴ If people were unsure about whether they possessed the Spirit and walked with God, Trent “ordered them to test themselves in faith.”⁹⁵ According to Trent, genuine believers would exhibit the “fruits of the spirit,”⁹⁶ “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance.”⁹⁷

The Spirit was to be the spiritual guide of the believer made new in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). If one was not born again in Christ, they not only lacked the Spirit, but also lacked salvation. Christianity espouses the foundation of the faith is Jesus Christ as Lord, Savior, and Helper. In a time when such destruction had just taken place, the Southern Baptist Convention and its leaders knew many souls longed for hope. From the SBC’s perspective, the answer to life’s problems was Jesus Christ.

The Importance of Faith

Before, during, and after World War II, the Southern Baptist Convention remained an active denomination. While the SBC recognized other Christian denominations, they remained confident their message was unique and focused upon the Bible. In 1939, former SBC President George W. Truett proclaimed the following of the Baptist message:

The Baptist message is non-sacerdotal, non-sacramentarian and non-ecclesiastical. Its teaching is that the one High Priest for sinful humanity has entered into the holy place for all, that the veil is forever rent in twain, that the mercy seat is uncovered and open to all, and that the humblest soul in all the world, if he be truly penitent, may enter with all boldness and cast himself upon Christ.⁹⁸

By 1948, not much had changed. The SBC urged the practice of the Great Commission throughout the world. They felt every soul must be “made new” in Christ if they were to inherit the Kingdom of God. Serving as Vice President of Blue Mountain College in Blue Mountain, Mississippi, Sadie Tiller Crawley agreed with Truett. In her book *A Faith to Live By*, Crawley

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Time Magazine*, July 31, 1939, 33.

wrote, “We who are called Baptists accept without question the Bible as the inspired Word of God, our only rule of faith and practice.”⁹⁹ Crawley taught that everyone believed in “something and followed a worldview.” She wrote of Hitler’s influence on Germany:

A world war called millions of German men and women to death. They went forth under the banner of the swastika, with “Heil Hitler” on their lips and a dream of world conquest in their hearts. The source of their dream and their faith was born in the heart of their leader, Adolph Hitler, and written in the book *Mein Kampf*.¹⁰⁰

Crawley shared that what one believed set that person apart from the world. And for her, Christianity and the Baptist message provided the only hope around the globe. This academic leader mentioned that her denomination had made a declaration in 1925 that placed the Bible as their official guidance in all of life.¹⁰¹ This 1925 statement (still used in 1948) read:

We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it is God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.¹⁰²

The Southern Baptist Convention took the position that one’s worldview determined if they were in Christ or not. More specifically, those who believed in Jesus Christ were in faith and destined to enter eternal life with God. However, those who did not know Jesus suffered eternal damnation. The SBC believed the Bible held ultimate authority over every denomination member. Likewise, one could seek God’s guidance and learn to follow the Creator.

By the end of World War II, no one on Earth denied that evil existed. The generation of the war years experienced many things most will never see. The SBC believed they had an answer to all of life’s questions, and the only way to understand the secrets of the world was to surrender one’s life to Jesus Christ and be prepared to follow Him in all aspects of life.

Conclusion

While the United States was rebuilding its government and foreign policy, the Southern Baptist Convention sought to rebuild its churches, denomination, and country for Christ. The denomination was aware the post-war world gave them unique opportunities to speak of the Bible and the theological implications of life and living for Christ.

The SBC believed its members and all of humanity needed to be aware of God’s judgment. According to the denomination, it was simple: sin created death on Earth, and death on Earth would result in ultimate hell if one did not repent of their sin and place their trust in Jesus Christ. The SBC knew Jesus Christ needed to be the foundation of every soul on Earth.

⁹⁹ Sadie Tiller Crawley, *A Faith to Live By* (Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the SBC, 1948), 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰¹ Crawley, 5.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 6.

For many, Jesus was not only Savior, but also Lord. Christians who embraced Lordship salvation knew it was important to follow Jesus in everything they did in life, with strict obedience being necessary in their daily affairs. Neglecting to follow Jesus resulted in ultimate damnation, which Christians believed was hell, a place where all humanity would spend eternity unless they placed their trust and faith in Christ.

The SBC knew their members, their nation, and the entire world needed Christ, the hope of the world. World War II emphasized the darkness and sin of humanity. Jesus Christ was the only answer. If people were willing to lay down their lives and worldly desires to follow Christ, the SBC maintained the world could be different. Yet many Christians knew perfection was not possible in a fallen world. These believers longed for the return of their Lord and Savior and realized their ultimate mission was to share the gospel of Christ and bring glory to God.

Repentance or turning away from sin is necessary for salvation. Christianity was to be taught and encouraged; believers could never force salvation on the lost. World War II proved dictatorship was dangerous for individuals, nations, and the entire world. The SBC maintained that religious freedom was necessary and demanded within their country and worldwide. They felt if the Great Commission was to be carried out, the Southern Baptist Convention needed nations to be free of communism and tyranny and open to the message of Jesus Christ.

Bibliography

- Appelman, Hyman. *Come Unto Me* (Sermon). June 1, 1945.
Biblical Recorder. "Baptist Press Coverage." Biblical Recorder. <https://brnow.org/> (accessed 2022).
- Campbell, R.C. *Keeping the Foundations*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1946.
- Crawley, Sadie T. *A Faith to Live By*. Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the SBC, 1948.
- Criswell, W.A., *Our All-Sufficient Savior* (Sermon). May 7, 1947.
- Erickson, Millard. *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2001.
- Kennedy, David M. *The American People in World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism, and American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- McCall, Duke K. *God's Hurry*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1949.
- Mexico Independent (Mexico, NY) 1946.
- New Castle News (New Castle, NY) 1945.
- Price, J.M. *Jesus the Teacher*. Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the SBC, 1946.
- Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives. "Digital Resources." Southern Baptist Convention. http://www.sbhla.org/digital_resources.asp (accessed 2022).
- The Long-Islander (Huntington, NY) 1947.
- Time Magazine (New York City, NY) July 31, 1939.
- Trent, Robbie. *The Faith We Share*. Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the SBC, 1947.
- Willis, Alan Scot. *All According to God's Plan: Southern Baptist Missions and Race 1945-1970*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005.
- Wurmbrand, Richard. *Tortured for Christ*. Bartlesville: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 1967.