

The White Ministers' Law and Order Statement

January 16, 1963

In these times of tremendous tensions, and change in cherished patterns of life in our beloved Southland, it is essential that men who occupy places of responsibility and leadership shall speak concerning their honest convictions.

We the undersigned clergymen have been chosen to carry heavy responsibility in our religious groups. We speak in a spirit of humility, and only for ourselves. We do not pretend to know all the answers, for the issues are not simple. Nevertheless, we believe our people expect and deserve leadership from us, and we speak with firm conviction for we do know the ultimate spirit in which all problems of human relations must be solved.

It is clear that a series of court decisions will soon bring about desegregation of certain schools and colleges in Alabama. Many sincere people oppose this change and are deeply troubled by it. As southerners, we understand this. We nevertheless feel that defiance is neither the right answer nor the solution. And we feel that inflammatory and rebellious statements can lead only to violence, discord, confusion, and disgrace for our beloved state.

We therefore affirm, and commend to our people:

1. That hatred and violence have no sanction in our religious and political traditions.
2. That there may be disagreement concerning laws and social change without advocating defiance, anarchy, and subversion.
3. That laws may be tested in courts or changed by legislatures, but not ignored by whims of individuals.
4. That constitutions may be amended or judges impeached by proper action, but our American way of life depends upon obedience to the decisions of courts of competent jurisdiction in the meantime.
5. That no person's freedom is safe unless every person's freedom is equally protected.
6. That freedom of speech must at all costs be preserved and exercised without fear of recrimination or harassment.
7. That every human being is created in the image of God and is entitled to respect as a fellow human being with all basic rights, privileges, and responsibilities which belong to humanity.

We respectfully urge those who strongly oppose desegregation to pursue their convictions in the courts, and in the meantime peacefully to abide by the decisions of those same courts.

We recognize that our problems cannot be solved in our strength or on the basis of human wisdom alone. The situation that confronts us calls for earnest prayer, for clear thought, for understanding love, and for courageous action. Thus we call on all people of goodwill to join us in seeking divine guidance as we make our appeal for law and order and common sense.

Signed by:

Bishop Nolan B. Harmon
Bishop Paul Hardin
Bishop C. C. J. Carpenter
Bishop Joseph A. Durick
Rev. Earl Stallings
Rev. George M. Murray

Rabbi Milton L. Grafman
Rev. Edward V. Ramage
Rev. Soterios D. Gouvellis
Rabbi Eugene Blackschleger
J. T. Beale

The White Ministers' Good Friday Statement

April 12, 1963

We the undersigned clergymen are among those who, in January, issued "an appeal for law and order and common sense," in dealing with racial problems in Alabama. We expressed understanding that honest convictions in racial matters could properly be pursued in the courts, but urged decisions of those courts should in the meantime be peacefully obeyed.

Since that time there had been some evidence of increased forbearance and a willingness to face facts. Responsible citizens have undertaken to work on various problems that cause racial friction and unrest. In Birmingham, recent public events have given indication that we all have opportunity for a new constructive and realistic approach to racial problems.

However, we are now confronted by a series of demonstrations by some of our Negro citizens, directed and led in part by outsiders. We recognize the natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized. But we are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely.

We agree rather with certain local Negro leadership that has called for honest and open negotiations of racial issues in our area. And we believe this kind of facing of issues can best be accomplished by citizens of our own metropolitan area, white and Negro, meeting with their knowledge and experience of the local situation. All of us need to face that responsibility and find proper channels for its accomplishment.

Just as we formerly pointed out that "hatred and violence have no sanction in our religious and political traditions," we also point out that such actions as incite to hatred and violence, however, technically peaceful those actions may be, have not contributed the resolution of our local problems. We do not believe that these days of new hope are days when extreme measures are justified in Birmingham.

We commend the community as a whole, and the local news media and law enforcement officials in particular, on the calm manner in which these demonstrations have been handled.

We urge the public to continue to show restraint should the demonstrations continue, and the law enforcement officials to remain calm and continue to protect our city from violence.

We further strongly urge our own Negro community to withdraw support from these demonstrations, and to unite locally in working peacefully for a better Birmingham. When rights are consistently denied, a cause should be pressed in the courts and in negotiations among local leaders, and not in the streets. We appeal to both our white and Negro citizenry to observe the principles of law and order and common sense.

Signed by:

Bishop C. C. J. Carpenter
Bishop Joseph A. Durick
Rabbi Milton L. Grafman
Bishop Paul Hardin

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Rev. George M. Murray
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