

PROTAGONIST CORNER

Erskine Clarke, Publisher of *Journal for Preachers*, Easter 2016, Montreat, NC

The statement—"An Appeal to Christians in the United States"—reflects a growing alarm that our country is entering a very dangerous period in which some political leaders and some media are directly challenging our most fundamental Christian convictions. The statement is consequently a theological affirmation. Clergy colleagues, from four different denominations, participated in its composition.

By the evening of December 26, 2015, more than 2,000 church leaders and members had signed the Appeal with the numbers growing by the hour. The signers represent many different backgrounds and denominations - small town pastors and pastors of large city churches; lay leaders; presidents of eight Presbyterian theological seminaries; a variety of other seminary presidents; Hispanic evangelical church leaders; Episcopal and Methodists bishops; Mennonite pastors and church members; Pentecostals and evangelical leaders; African American church leaders; Lutherans from Minnesota, Baptists from Georgia, and Calvinists from Michigan; Catholic friars and sisters, an abbot and a monsignor; activists for the homeless; distinguished theologians, biblical scholars, and historians.

If you wish to participate in this effort of Christians to ground their address to public issues in core theological understandings, you may sign the appeal by going to <http://action.groundswell-mvmt.org/petitions/an-appeal-to-christians-in-the-united-states>.

"An Appeal to Christians in the United States"

We the undersigned are deeply concerned that in the current political climate many politicians and many in the media are calling on Christian voters to abandon our commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to turn from His call to discipleship. We appeal to all of us who are seeking to be faithful followers of Jesus to reject such calls, to reaffirm our Christian commitments, and to seek to be agents of God's justice and reconciliation in the world.

A fundamental conviction of Christian faith is that God is sovereign over our lives, over all nations, and over the course of human history. When we abandon that faith we surrender to fear on the one hand and to pride on the other. Both pervasive fear and overweening pride violate our commitment to the lordship of Christ.

Because of fear we too easily caricature or condemn those who are different from us. Politicians and too many in the media stereotype African Americans, Asian Americans, people from Hispanic background and followers of Islam. If we follow their lead, we slander our neighbors and blaspheme against the one God of all peoples. We resist such stereotypes and pledge to work for laws and practices that honor the dignity of all people.

Because of fear we have armed ourselves beyond all reason and beyond reasonable restrictions. Politicians and too many in the media rush to stigmatize mentally disturbed people as if they were the source of all violence, promoting the illusion that more assault weapons in our homes

and in our public places will make us safe. If we follow their lead and believe their illusions, we will not only live in the midst of growing violence but will also abandon our commitment to the Prince of Peace. We resist such illusions and pledge that we will seek to limit the proliferation of guns in the U.S.

Because of fear our politicians and too many in the media try to win our votes for themselves or their candidates by demonizing the refugee and immigrant. If we follow them we will turn from following Jesus who was once a refugee in a foreign land, and we will ignore the rich biblical injunctions to welcome the stranger. We resist such enticements and pledge to be advocates for laws that regulate in a just and orderly manner the flow of refugees and immigrants.

Because of pride too many politicians tempt us to believe we can build a wall of cyber security, pretending that by technology we can be saved. Because of pride too many of our leaders are trying to lure us into believing we can build a wall of geographical security, pretending that we can engineer our way out of compassion. Because of pride, too many of our leaders call us to be like gods and to build our own twenty-first century towers of Babel. If we heed their calls and surrender to their enticements, we will turn from the God who has called us to be one and who in Jesus Christ breaks down every dividing wall of hostility. We resist such pride and the fears that drive it and pledge to work for systems of security that guard human dignity and protect the vulnerable as well as the strong.

As Christians we call ourselves and our Christian brothers and sisters in the U. S. to reject these temptations that are being promoted among us. There is too much at stake for easy blasphemy. Let us resist publically all politicians and leaders who exploit fear and pride. Let us help shape the character of our much loved land not by an abandonment of our most cherished Christian convictions but by following the counsel of the Prophet Micah--to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.