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Editorial

A Declaration from Holy Hill:

A Christian Call for Compassion and Justice

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A Declaration from Holy Hill: *A Christian Call for Compassion and Justice*

The Editorial Staff of the
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PREFACE: This statement reflects only the views of the BJRT’s editorial staff. It is written from an explicitly Christian perspective for two reasons. First, many of those who are executing relevant government policy identify themselves as Christians, and our editorial staff – comprised of Christians from different traditions – feels compelled to issue a statement responding to the injustices being done in the name of Jesus Christ. Second, as the GTU is a consortium of eight theological institutions and ten academic institutes and centers representing a wide variety of religious traditions and confessions, our editorial staff does not wish to speak on behalf of the entire consortium, although our general sentiments, in whole or in part, may be shared by many in the broader community.

The Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology (BJRT) was founded in 2015 with the intention of hosting a variety of conversations in philosophical, religious, and theological studies. In the multi-traditioned and multi-religious milieu that comprises the Graduate Theological Union, people from radically diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious perspectives and practices come together in mutual understanding, challenging conversation, and rigorous scholarship. In the theologically rich environment of Holy Hill, we strive to celebrate our differences, stand in solidarity with the marginalized, and – most importantly – advance a universal love for all peoples, which typifies the best of our various religious traditions. The essential humanity which we share is grounded in

mutual respect and compassion, which is the bedrock of the interdisciplinary and interreligious work being done on Holy Hill.

The BJRT's editorial board is comprised of people from different Christian traditions. As people of ecumenical faith, our Christian traditions affirm a Creator who has made humanity in God's own image. Thus all peoples have a common and Divine origin. This theological reality sustains the fundamental dignity and value of each human individual, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, nationality, or any other categories we might create for ourselves.

Our universal point of origin in God unites us as a human species. Therefore, when powerful persons and systems of government dehumanize the vulnerable and the poor among us, our collective humanity and the integrity of the human individual is diminished. In the person of Jesus, Christianity celebrates a God who has come to live among even the marginalized and oppressed, but this long-standing Christian doctrine becomes meaningless and empty of hope if we do not also follow the way of Jesus and stand in solidarity with those who continue to be unjustly scapegoated and victimized.

Thus, it is with great horror and sorrow that – in the space of just a few months – we have witnessed a cascading series of unjust actions directed against the poor and marginalized from the highest levels of our federal government. Recently, elected officials, federal and state law enforcement officers, and members of the United States military have acted directly and inhumanely against migrants and refugees fleeing unspeakable violence, poverty, and other dangers of incomprehensible magnitude.

Our hearts were collectively shattered when we heard and saw that children – even babies and toddlers – have been separated from their parents at the border, with no clear plan for reunification. This separation was and is cruel, and strategically so, intended to deter those seeking refuge and might otherwise hope for safety in the United States. Our country has inflicted irreparable harm and trauma upon innocent children. In so doing, we have diminished our own humanity, corroded our democracy, and have cheapened the freedom we espouse as a national value.

In ancient Rome, Christian martyrs were caged in holding pens and prisons as they awaited trial and condemnation in a society that regarded them as inferior, undesirable, and unpatriotic. In their times of persecution, early Christians experienced God's solidarity with themselves, just as they also experienced the indifference and the depravity of their oppressors.

Likewise, those children – who are even now imprisoned and caged in concentration camps at our national border – are witnesses to God's solidarity with those who suffer. They are also witnesses to the depravity of a country that frequently celebrates its national exceptionalism and imagines itself to be somehow "Christian." In the orchestration of this separation, we ourselves have witnessed a cruel and even depraved indifference among those with political power, and among those with entrenched social privileges. The intentional targeting of vulnerable children has revealed a startling and deep hypocrisy among political and social operatives who posture as Bible-believing culture guardians while quoting Scripture against the weak, the suffering, and disempowered.

This is not an isolated incident. This is but the latest in a string of policy decisions that have steadily eroded our national psyche and the social safety-nets which protect impoverished families, the elderly, the differently-abled, and other marginalized groups. These calculated, dehumanizing actions and policies should alarm all Americans, regardless of religious or political affiliation. These actions and policies jeopardize the inalienable rights of every American in every state, and stand as a challenge to the basic human rights of people around the world. These actions and policies undermine the fundamental source of our enduring belief in liberty and justice – *for all*.

Though individually we identify with different Christian traditions, together we are united in declaring that now is the time for Americans to reject the abuse of the Christian gospel to inflict trauma and suffering upon the poor and vulnerable among us. We are united in declaring that now is the time for Americans to transcend religious particularism and party affiliation, to acknowledge the basic human worth of all peoples, and to stand united behind the core teachings of our shared Christian principles;

faith, hope, and love are not abstract notions affirmed by our good intentions – we are obligated to act upon them.

In light of these events we, the staff of the BJRT, confess the following:

1. We believe in a God who created humanity in God’s own image.

Thus, we affirm that all people share a common human bond, and must therefore be afforded the inalienable rights of personal dignity and familial integrity.

Thus, we reject and condemn any pogroms and policies that dehumanize the weak and vulnerable among us while enshrining the privileges of the wealthy and the powerful.

2. We believe in a Christ who reconciled all people to himself, and who weeps in solidarity with all those children and adults who suffer under the weight of oppression and state-sponsored violence.

Thus, we affirm that the Church is called to follow Jesus, to be in solidarity with those who suffer and seek safety. Inasmuch as Jesus has said, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matt. 25:40), we affirm that authentic Christian discipleship welcomes “the least of these,” and shelters them in safety and dignity.

Thus, we reject and condemn any action that validates or seeks to validate the oppression of disempowered individuals and groups as an expression of Bible-based faith. We further reject and condemn actions that stop short of embracing those peoples on the basis of not having the right papers or the “right” citizenship.

3. We believe in a Holy Spirit who gives and affirms life in our world.

Thus, we affirm that the church is called to work in making our community and the wider world more humane and life-affirming.

We are called to ensure that our social, cultural, political, and religious structures enable all creation to flourish.

Thus, we reject and condemn churches whose actions either destroy or endorse the destruction of the familial or bodily integrity of those without power or recourse. We further reject and condemn actions or speech that abuse scripture in an attempt to victimize peoples or rationalize such destructive actions.

4. We believe in a God who demonstrates the perfect embrace of diversity in one indissoluble unity.

Thus, we affirm that the church, as an image of the triune unity, is called to embody this diversity in unity as best as we are able. *We further affirm* that this obligates the church to work in ways that repair and reconciles peoples, communities, and the world, just as the church is called towards its own repentance and redemption.

Thus, we reject and condemn those who seek to marginalize peoples, divide communities, or encourage hatred towards particular peoples, classes, races, or nations. *We further reject and condemn* those who remain silent in the face of evil, inasmuch as silence in the presence of evil constitutes consent.

We, the editorial board of the BJRT, confess and affirm these basic Christian truths and commitments. In so confessing, we recall the earlier witness of our theological ancestors, who encountered injustice in their own contexts and faithfully resisted. Facing arrest and imprisonment, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflected on the “very real danger of our drifting into an attitude of contempt for humanity.”¹ In this time of great turmoil, as basic human rights are disregarded for political expediency, let us also recall the warning of Martin Luther King, Jr., penned in a letter written from a Birmingham jail: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”²

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone Books, 1997), 9.

² Martin Luther King, Jr. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches*, ed. James Washington (New York: HarperOne, 2003), 290. The text is available online at

In remembering these saints, we confess these truths and commit ourselves to exercising compassion, love, and peace; we commit ourselves to remaining vigilant against evil, hatred, complacency, and indifference in the face of human suffering; we commit ourselves to finding concrete ways to resist injustice in our time.

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