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Editorial

The Precarity of Normalcy in Interreligious and Higher Education

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The Precarity of Normalcy in Interreligious and Higher Education

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The time since the BJRT's publication of Volume 7 in December 2021 has seen the return of most in-person courses and programming to the GTU and UC Berkeley campuses. This has introduced a kind of return to a semblance of normalcy—though, a “normalcy” belied by a seemingly ever-present pandemic lurking under the surface that, while somewhat receded, continues to infect bodies and impact communities. With this physical return, however, came heightened attention on other too-often overlooked symptoms of the state of academia, in particular the treatment and exploitation of academic workers. Building on historic labor movements in service, retail, and other industries happening throughout the country, for over a month in November and December 2022 workers across the University of California system organized the largest ever labor strike in the history of U.S. higher education, led by postdoctoral researchers and other academic workers at UC Berkeley. The action resulted in the negotiation of new contracts for Cal workers, and ultimately sparked other waves of collective action in graduate programs across the country highlighting the need for more equitable treatment of non-tenured workers in academia.

As many in the GTU community take classes, participate in events, and regularly dialogue with fellow scholars at UC Berkeley, the

reverberations of such action have been felt across Holy Hill. These calls for justice have historical roots in religious movements—from the early-20th century Catholic Worker Movement to the Poor People’s Campaign, began by Martin Luther King, Jr. and more recently revived by Bishop William J. Barber II and Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis. This tradition of organizing for justice—inclusive of advocating for racial justice, LGBTQ justice, and climate justice, in addition to economic justice—is greatly aided by interreligious dialogue. However, the justice dialogue central to GTU classroom discussions and coursework must be matched by just policies proposed and enacted by the administration.

An exciting and momentous event that took place this year was the 60th Anniversary of the GTU’s founding, offering a time of reflection on the school’s important contributions to interreligious dialogue. And while looking back provides cause for celebrating achievements, it also offers the opportunity to look ahead. Building on the historic labor movement just across the way on Cal’s campus, one of the challenges for the GTU Board and Executive Leadership Team moving forward is to work toward better supporting students, graduate workers, and contract instructors who are all-too familiar with the precarious state of higher education—a cause instrumental in advancing the important role of interreligious education that the GTU has exemplified for more than half a century.

As the peer-reviewed Journal of the Graduate Theological Union, the BJRT is once again proud to publish work that reflects the consortium’s values of diversity, academic excellence, and interreligious scholarship. This begins with the 5th Borsch-Rast Lecture awarded in 2021 and given at the GTU in 2022 by Ashley Bacchi, Assistant Professor of Jewish History and Ancient Mediterranean Religions at Starr King School for the Ministry, whose talk covers material from her award-winning 2020 book, *Uncovering Jewish Creativity in Book III of the Sibylline Oracles: Gender, Intertextuality, and Politics* (Brill). Dr. Bacchi’s lecture format was intentionally conversational, making the publication of her remarks a dialogue with interlocutors—UC Berkeley’s Erich Gruen and Harvard Divinity School’s Annette Yoshiko Reed—rather than a more traditional lecture and response. This allowed for a dynamic discussion on important topics such

as gender roles and the voice of women in ancient texts, and we are honored to publish the remarks in the BJRT.

Following the lecture is a series of articles that highlight the interreligious spirit and interdisciplinary focus of the BJRT. Tamanna Ali also explores gender roles, but in the context of Muslim women in her contribution “Female *Marāji*: Rethinking the Concept of *Shīʿī* Religious Authority.” This is followed by a turn to neo-Hasidic Judaism with Jonah Mac Gelfand’s “Finding Egalitarianism in A Neo-Hasidic Reading of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov” that locates a mystical justification for egalitarianism and inclusivity in the teachings Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810). The final two articles explore more historical and ethical questions in Christianity, first with an analysis of the life and legacy of an Anglican Bishop in Pamela Stevens’s “Interfaith Engagement as a Threat to Colonialism: Recovered Narratives of the Last Days and Legacy of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther (ca. 1807–1891).” Finally, K. Lauriston Smith’s article “Towards Civility as a Virtue: James K. A. Smith’s Creational Hermeneutics and Roger Williams’s Civility,” provides a critical re-examination of the concepts of civility and alterity through a hermeneutical lens. The issue concludes with book reviews of Francis Clooney’s *Reading the Hindu and Christian Classics: Why and How Deep Learning Still Matters* (University of Virginia Press, 2019), Joseph Drexler-Dreis’s *Decolonial Love: Salvation in Colonial Modernity* (Fordham University Press, 2019), and Marcia Pally’s *Evangelicals and Right-Wing Populism: How Did We Get Here?* (Routledge, 2022).

We hope you enjoy these excellent and important contributions to the environment of scholarship and interdisciplinary dialogue cultivated at the Graduate Theological Union and furthered by the Berkeley Journal of Religion & Theology.