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Achtus/BCTS Joint Statement: Racist Hate Crimes in the United States

Black Catholic Theological Symposium

Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States

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In his Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis asserts that the “Church, in her commitment to evangelization, appreciates and encourages the charism of theologians and their scholarly efforts to advance dialogue with the world of cultures and sciences (133)”. Speaking mainly from the margins of society, the academy and the Church, and from our particular and diverse social locations, the Black Catholic Theological Symposium (BCTS) and Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the U.S. (AHTUS) have collaborated to proclaim the good news, the joy of the Gospel, to a nation sorely in need.

AHTUS/BCTS Statement Regarding the Most Recent Surge in Racist Hate Crimes in the United States
(September 4, 2017)

In the wake of the horrific events of Charlottesville Va. on August 11-12, 2017, and the deeply troubling displays of hate speech, neo-Nazi and white supremacist ideologies, the recent pardoning of former Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio, and the battle over the “sanctuary cities” law in Texas, the leadership of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (AHTUS) and the Black Catholic Theological Symposium (BCTS) stand in solidarity as one body, with one voice to condemn the systemic violence, racism and legitimized hatred that diminish the integrity of the United States of America. We call for a united front of human dignity and civil rights for all who call these United States home.

As sorrow fills our hearts for our brothers and sisters who have senselessly lost their lives to cowards who instill fear and provoke violence with impunity, our spirits are filled with hope as we vow to live in Love and advocate for Justice.

As Christians, we stand with the families and communities of our lost beloved. We are both comforted and led by the certain knowledge that in Christ we are all one body, in one Spirit: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; 26).

As global citizens we commit to "recognizing the inherent dignity and the equal inalienable rights of all members of the human family [as these are] foundations of freedom, justice and peace in the world" (Preamble, UN Declaration of Human Rights).

We proclaim and teach anew the preamble of the US Constitution, establishing a more perfect Union built on Justice and the promotion of the common good.

Together as Catholic scholars and disciples, we recognize that much work, dialogue and healing lie ahead. As such, we commit to being prophetic voices for justice and peace by condemning violence, denouncing the sins of hatred and retrieving the redemptive nature of the cross as a way toward a common good.

We recognize the historical legacy of hate and oppression against black and brown folk in this nation. White supremacist attitudes, volatile and explosive words, and death-producing actions related to fascist movements, are not new phenomena in these United States of America. These stem from an enduring history and cycle of institutionalized racial prejudice and oppression. While this nation's declaration of independence proposes "that all men [sic] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights...", still whiteness dominates in all sectors of society and remains the norm in the worldview of this country underscored initially by Christian principles. Normative whiteness and white privilege perpetuate and sustain racism, which does not lead to a so-called post-racial society. Instead racism grows on fertile ground where white supremacist racists feel emboldened to chant "blood and soil" in their quest to "Make America Great Again."

A history of violence, racial oppression, and hatred runs counter to our longstanding biblical history and primary teachings in the Christian tradition. These sources promote the dignity and incomparable worth of

all human beings who are social in nature. It is because of this that we are called to be in right relationships of justice and love with God, self, and others.

The membership of ACHTUS and BCTS, representing a wide array of academic and pastoral vocations, consistently dedicate our lives to the struggles for justice for black and brown peoples, and all the human family. Many of us pay a heavy price in our professional lives because the work of organizing, community action, and public theology are not viewed as worthy of the academic endeavor. In addition, racist and bigoted rhetoric, violence against black and brown bodies, and practices and politics that oppress black and brown folk significantly impact our membership in ways that go unacknowledged by the institutions in which we work.

Nevertheless, we persist in our efforts to organically make our intellectual pursuits relevant to the plight of black and brown folk, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, LGBTQ, and any other group persecuted and regarded as "less than" by the myth of white supremacy in all its expressions. *In seeking to do more than simply react to this newest spate of hate through a letter or statement, we commit to the hard work of creating a joint document that will focus on race and racism in the theological academy and the nation.* We commit to this joint project aware that this kind of hard work is often unrewarded by our institutions, and may even be detrimental to our professional lives. But we are convinced that there is no way forward other than to join our intellects and our souls to provide some guidance to the academy and the Church - both institutions that we love - in the effort to disrupt white supremacy and racism.

Lastly, as leaders of ACHTUS and BCTS, we commit to supporting our constituents in the ongoing work of:

- Constructing theology that's transformative, challenging, and hopeful, deeply grounded on the Incarnate love of God as it bears the marks of the experiences of our peoples;
- Denouncing the ways that the myth of white supremacy in its current expressions do violence to the bodies, souls, and minds of our communities and this nation;

- Shaping and leading communities of wholeness, hope, resilience, and radical welcome to the most vulnerable in our institutions, neighborhoods, nationally, and across borders;
- Sustaining ourselves and each other through practices of self-care of mind, body, and soul that acknowledge our response to the command to love self as we love neighbor;
- Joining others in actions of resistance and solidarity in our campuses, parishes, and communities.

Therefore, as we journey together in spirit and in truth may our combined voices give testament to the ongoing struggle for justice and be hope to our constituencies and communities that continue to work for a time when we truly will love one another.