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As Bonhoeffer scholars, religious leaders, and confessing Christians, we have a special 
responsibility to name crises and discern responsible actions of resistance and healing. We 
confess our own complicity in the social order that has produced Donald Trump’s presidency, for 
many of the social and economic injustices we confront predate it. As we take responsibility for 
these injustices, we resist the policy goals of this administration that have contributed to ever-
deepening divisions and growing vulnerability among the marginalized sectors of our population, 
including the dehumanizing treatment of migrants, systematic attempts to strip rights from 
LGBTQ persons, the increased rapacious destruction of the environment, the marginalization and 
assault on communities of color especially through voter suppression, and the economic policies 
that have contributed to the largest disparity of wealth in the nation’s history. We believe that an 
honest reckoning with these realities must lead to dismantling the dehumanizing ideologies and 
 systemic inequities in which they are rooted.

We believe that one crucial step in this reckoning is ending Donald Trump’s presidency. We do 
not make this statement lightly. Bonhoeffer’s writings have been influential for Christians from a 
wide range of churches and political views, but we feel called to address the grave moral 
concerns we have outlined here that call every one of us to account. During this new year, 
debates and discussion will continue to be held concerning the best way for America to move 
forward. We believe that the United States has the human resources to provide capable and 
will ing leaders, and that together a more just and respectful future can be forged. Acknowledging 
that all human community and leadership is a mixture of blessing and brokenness, health and 
dysfunction, we stand with all those who believe this country deserves and needs a constitutional 
and peaceful change in leadership. And we commit ourselves to listen to the call and obey the 
commands of Jesus as we enter the year 2020.

We make this statement, in part, because we know that Dietrich Bonhoeffer - a theologian and 
martyr - is often cited in times of political contention. We offer the following theological lessons 
from Bonhoeffer’s work as a glimpse into the ways he understood his faith and his 
responsibilities as a citizen in his own times, and to encourage discernment about how these 
words might resonate for us today:

- He spoke of God’s freedom and human freedom as “freedom from others” not “freedom 
from others.” (1932)
- He preached that the gospel is “the good news of the dawning of the new world, the new 
or der … God’s order,” and therefore it is good news for the poor. (1932)
- He warned that leaders become “misleaders” when they are interested only in their own 
power and neglect their responsibilities to serve those whom they govern. (1933)
- He warned that when a government persecutes its minorities, it has ceased to govern 
legitimately. (1933)
- He reminded Christians that the church has an “unconditional obligation toward the 
victims of any societal order, even if they do not belong to the Christian community.” 
(1933)
- He wrote, “For peace must be dared. It is the great venture … The hour is late. The 
world is choking with weapons. … The trumpets of war may blow tomorrow. For what 
are we waiting?” (1934)
- He believed that Jesus’s commands in the Gospels - like love your neighbor as you love 
yourself, welcome the stranger, and love your enemies - are to be obeyed in the social 
and political realm. He wrote: “From the human point of view there are countless 
possibilities of understanding and interpreting the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus knows 
only one possibility: simply go and obey.” (1936)
He wrote, “Behold God become human … God loves human beings, … Not an ideal human, but human beings as they are, … What we find repulsive … namely, real human beings … this is for God the ground of unfathomable love.” (1941)

He wrote from prison, “… one only learns to have faith by living in the full this-worldliness of life. … then one takes seriously no longer one’s own sufferings but rather the suffering of God in the world. Then one stays awake with Christ in Gethsemane. And I think this is faith; this is metanoia/repentance. And this is how one becomes a human being, a Christian. … How should one become arrogant over successes or shaken by one’s failures when one shares in God’s suffering in the life of this world?” (1944)

He wrote from prison, “How do we go about being ‘religionless-worldly’ Christians, how can we be [eclesia/church], those who are called out, without understanding ourselves religiously as privileged, but instead seeing ourselves as belonging wholly to the world?” (1944)

Signed by the Board of Directors, International Bonhoeffer Society – English Language Section,

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About the International Bonhoeffer Society – English Language Section

Since its founding in 1972, the Society has pioneered research and scholarship on the life, historical context, and writings of Bonhoeffer. Working in close collaboration with Bonhoeffer’s best friend, theologian and pastor Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer’s niece Renate Bethge, and scholars in Germany, the Society laid the foundation for the historical and textual study of Bonhoeffer’s life and work in the English-speaking world, culminating in the recently completed sixteen-volume translation of the German critical edition, the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*, published by Fortress Press. The Society is now developing a centralized, public, virtual community, as a more accessible resource for undergraduate students, scholars, pastors, activists, and communities of faith to engage Bonhoeffer’s legacy in concrete ways: www.thebonhoeffercenter.org. For more information, please contact the president of IBS-ELS, Dr. Jennifer M. McBride, at jmcbride@mccormick.edu.