

Christian Faith & Democracy

The United States confronts a crisis of democracy, and the American church confronts a test of faith. Democracy stands embattled, facing new threats within our nation and new challenges around the globe. The witness of “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) stands distorted and corrupted—especially to a new generation.

The Declaration of Independence testifies that democracy is not only a political system but also a moral affirmation. In this time of pernicious polarization, we are forced to grapple anew with fundamental questions about governance, civic life, shared values, and the role of faith in shaping our collective future. The rise of anti-democratic sentiment and nationalist ideologies imperils our common life and threatens the cultivation of communal and global peace. As followers of Christ, we strive to meet this moment with clarity and courage, charity and conviction, drawing on the depths of our moral imaginations and theological traditions to articulate afresh a theology of democracy fit for our times.

We are American Christians who deeply love our country. We affirm the right of Christians to bring our faith to bear on the public square for the common good and the flourishing of

all humanity. We also welcome and affirm the rights of people of all faiths and of no religious faith to speak to this crisis; this document offers a distinctly Christian perspective, but the principles affirmed here are shared broadly across many religious and ethical traditions and by people of good will.

We face this moment with great resolve and deep humility. Christianity has had an ambivalent and at times hostile relationship with democracy, as evidenced in colonial domination and the dispossession of indigenous peoples, the brutal enslavement of Africans, and the denial of women’s rights. We continue to reckon with the legacies of slavery and segregation, and with the enduring racism that limits achievement of a true multiracial democracy.

In recent years, in the United States and around the world, the Christian faith has been distorted and leveraged in defense of authoritarian leaders who seek to erode freedoms essential to a thriving democracy. Some Christians enthusiastically praise dictatorial leaders and regimes. Some have willingly accepted or even participated in political violence.

On January 6, 2021, the will of the American people and the peaceful transfer of power came under direct attack during a violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. In a profound distortion of the faith, some who rioted on the Capitol steps and stormed into the congressional chamber did so in the name of Jesus Christ.

We write in a moment of fierce urgency, as the people of God animated by faith, hope, and love. It is in this spirit that we reaffirm Christian support for democracy and invite all Christians and people of moral conscience to do the same.

In the face of these challenges, we ask our fellow Christians to join us in affirming and defending these truths.

On the Imago Dei and Human Dignity.

Core to Christianity is the belief that all people are made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27) and that our loving God is incarnate in the humanity of Jesus Christ. God's love, therefore, embraces all of humanity and calls us to respect every person. Democratic governance is an outgrowth of our divinely endowed dignity and corresponding obligation to protect the rights, freedom, and equality of all.

On Human Sin.

The scriptures attest that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Although humans bear the divine image, the capacity for sin runs through every human heart, and every nation. Christians are not immune from this reality. The mechanisms of democracy, the balances of power, and the protections of a Constitutional framework rein in human tendencies to dominate, demean, and exploit.

On Truth and Integrity.

We are called to speak truth, put away falsehood, and walk in integrity (Prov. 11:3; Eph. 4:25). Jesus said, "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32); therefore, the opposite of truth is captivity. A healthy democracy rests upon a foundation of truth. For that reason, we must work to foster trust among citizens, to elect leaders with demonstrated integrity, and, with gratitude for the tens of thousands of election workers who labor to ensure that all voices are heard, to keep our elections safe, secure, and fair.

On Loving the Stranger and the Enemy.

Jesus teaches us that loving God and loving neighbor are inseparable, and that loving our neighbors includes loving the stranger (Lk. 10:25-37) and our enemies (Mt. 5:44). We are obligated to reach out to those with whom we disagree, to empathize with those of different backgrounds and experiences, and to be hospitable to those who do not share our beliefs.

On Solidarity and the Common Good.

Love of neighbor calls for the inclusion of all our fellow neighbors in the political process. Democratic participation enables individuals to live in service to, and in solidarity with one another—especially the marginalized among us. As Christians, we are called not merely to pursue self-interest, but to prioritize the collective good.

On participation, wealth, and poverty.

In Matthew, Jesus calls Christians to demonstrate special care for the vulnerable, saying: “As you have done to the least of these, you have done to me.” Too often, American Christians have been guilty of idolatry, of worshiping money and power rather than the one true God. All citizens, regardless of wealth or income, should be able to participate fully in shaping our life together. Money should not buy greater influence, and Christians should work to overcome all unjust exclusion from civic participation as commanded in the Bible by the God of justice.

On Religious Pluralism.

The gospel of Jesus Christ advances through divine grace and human persuasion, not by government power and coercion (2 Cor. 5:11; Eph. 2:8). A democracy respects and protects the freedom of the human conscience to discern and decide on matters of religious faith. Christian communities and democratic societies alike must recognize religious pluralism and uphold religious freedom, respecting both minority and majority religious beliefs.

On Peacemaking and Bridge-Building.

Jesus called peacemakers “blessed” and declared them “children of God” (Matt. 5:9). Rather than stir conflict and seed mistrust, Christians are to “live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12:18). In this spirit, Christians should collaborate with individuals and institutions—religious or secular—to work for the common good and for the realization of a more just world at peace.

We now face specific threats to undermine and weaken our democratic system that are in direct opposition to these foundational Christian principles. Because we are committed to the core values above, we stand together against these threats.

Because every human being is of equal value and worth before God, we reject any attempt to limit, suppress, intimidate, or subvert equal participation in our democracy on account of a person’s skin color, economic status, or political opinions. We believe in transparently fair elections. We reject all efforts to inhibit voter participation, including curtailing opportunities for voter registration, obscuring information about how and when to cast ballots, removing eligible voters from voter registration lists, and reducing polling station hours in targeted areas. We firmly reject any intimidation or threats against election administrators and poll workers, or voters themselves, regardless of political persuasion.

Because democratic life requires pluralism, we repudiate political systems, parties, movements, laws, regulations, and policies that raise any group of people, including Christians, above others by granting them special rights and privileges. Specifically, we repudiate the tenets of Christian Nationalism and the idea that Christians or Christianity should hold a place of privilege and power in our nation's governance.

Because peace and stability are characteristics of a healthy democracy, we condemn the rising tide of violent language and behaviors, including violent threats and actions against public servants, election workers, and fellow citizens.

Because truth-telling is integral to the pursuit of solidarity and the common good, we denounce the sowing of falsehood about election outcomes, the use of lies and half-truths by officials and candidates to distort truth, and the weaponization of fear and despair as a strategy to acquire or maintain power.

As signers, we differ on many moral and social issues—on how to achieve a more equitable society, on war and foreign policy, on abortion and reproductive health, and on issues related to gender and sexuality—but we are committed to preserving a democratic space within which we can collectively discern the way forward with respect to these vital issues.

We realize that for some, signing this statement will put themselves and their livelihoods at risk, but we are convinced that the urgency of our moment requires such courage. We cannot remain neutral about the choices before us.

This is a *kairos* time, to use biblical language— a moment that can change time, altering events for decades, even generations to come. This electoral season, each one of us must stand for democracy's future. We must resist cynicism, apathy, and fear; withdrawing from the electoral process only risks consolidating power in the hands of those who would abuse it. We cannot transform democracy unless we save it.

As Christians, we are people of hope. The resurrection of Jesus Christ powerfully attests that life overcomes death, and that what is to come is far better than what is; "Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning." Pressing forward with confidence in God's sustaining care, we call on all Christians and people of good will to work together to reawaken democratic spirit and improve American democracy.

In keeping with these principles, we, the undersigned, commit to advancing a multi-racial, multi-faith, multi-generational democracy, where every voice is valued and every person afforded the opportunity to participate fully and freely in the life of the community.

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