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Statement on Racism, Casteism, and Religious Chauvinism

Society of Hindu-Christian Studies

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Statement on Racism, Casteism, and Religious Chauvinism

“One should never do to another what one regards as injurious to oneself. This, in brief, is the law of dharma.”

~*Mahabharata* XVIII.113.8

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

~*Bible*, Luke 6:31

THE recent police murder of George Floyd has precipitated sweeping protests in the United States and, in fact, the world. Such activities against racism by Black Lives Matter and other organizations represent just responses to a fundamentally unjust and longstanding state of affairs. In this moment of crisis, the leadership of the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies could not remain silent. We wholeheartedly support our African-American brothers and sisters as they seek justice against the racist polices that continue to oppress them.

For a quarter of a century, the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies has dedicated itself to the fruitful examination of Hinduism and Christianity in a spirit of openness, respect, and honest inquiry. As our Statement of Purpose plainly states, “our membership includes Christians interested in the study of Hinduism, Hindus interested in the study of Christianity, and scholars—Hindu, Christian, and other—interested in the historical and contemporary interactions of Hinduism and Christianity.” At the same time, we acknowledge the power imbalances existing in the interactions between Hindus and Christians, in the past and present.

Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies 33 (2020): 4-5

Furthermore, injustice occurs not simply between traditions, but within them, and not only in North America, where racism and bigotry continue, but also in South Asia, where casteism and bigotry continue. Finally, and just as importantly, we must acknowledge that scholars, including those of our Society, are being harassed and silenced by powerful forces who believe that any academic study of religious traditions and communities constitutes an attack on their own. Such a stance is contrary to free inquiry and to the pursuit of truth in its many manifestations. This, too, our Society cannot abide. As an organization whose membership straddles continents, we must identify and seek to overcome racism, casteism, and religious chauvinism in ways appropriate to an academic society.

Thus, given the current context, we here commit to redouble our efforts against all forms of oppression. We shall do this by a critical and moral self-reflexive examination of our membership and our intellectual work, looking within and without. We shall challenge ourselves to involve greater participation and representation that is diverse in terms of religion, race, ethnicity, gender, caste, and creed. Programmatically we shall prioritize sponsoring panels (at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion) and essays (in the *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*) examining minority Hindu and Christian communities and the processes of oppression. We shall strive to examine religiously sanctioned violence, Dalit and SC/ST struggles of emancipation, and the

nefarious effects of systems that dominate and do violence to vulnerable persons and communities. We shall also continue to self-critically appraise the ongoing influence of racism, casteism, and religious chauvinism in Hindu-Christian studies. And we shall do all this while drawing on the guidance of the

accumulated wisdom and ethical resources of Hindu and Christian traditions. We call on all people of good will to join us in our efforts.

Society for Hindu-Christian Studies Officers and Board of Directors