



### Open Letter from ATS Latinx Presidents and Deans

We live in unprecedented times. There are over 3 million dead worldwide from novel coronavirus, and over a half a million of those in the United States alone. We read daily in the newspapers of new hotspots in India, Brazil and within the US. Merging with this wave of death has been a wave of gun violence that has affected communities of color in a disproportionate manner. The shooting or otherwise violent confrontation of law enforcement officers with African American and Latinx peoples over what are often minor infractions—a broken taillight, a speeding ticket, a shoplifting accusation—or over spurious accusations with no basis has left too many mothers, fathers, siblings, and extended families mourning and raging over the injustices leveled. More recently, following the irresponsible and heated rhetoric of politicians, Asian Americans too have been the victims of violence and unjust rage, unfairly scapegoated by a population unwilling to admit to its historical anti-Asian hate and racist diatribes. It is no wonder that between March of 2020 and March of 2021, the CDC reported more than a half million “excess deaths” in the United States. The country is awash in death.

Given this reality, it is easy to succumb to “compassion fatigue,” and to wonder if it is worth it to raise our voices once again in the light of the unjust death earlier this year of another child, 13-year-old Adam Toledo. After all, we could say that he “deserved to die” for carrying a handgun and for running away from police when commanded to stop. We could ignore that he had stopped, that his hands were raised, that he was only 13 years old. We could ignore the deaths of Antonio Valenzuela, Andrés Guardado, and most recently, Mario Gonzalez. Their deaths have been mostly unacknowledged, except for brief moments in the news. The Church has been largely absent and silent. In a country traumatized by the loss of hundreds of thousands, why should we care to make another statement?

We who are ATS Latinx Presidents and Deans have dedicated our professions to speak “from the margins” and to do theology from the perspective of the “least of these.” We have often claimed that we are shaped and formed as biblical scholars, ethicists, and theologians by the voices of the forgotten, the marginalized, the poor, and those whose lives are considered to be worthless by the powerful of society. To not speak out on behalf of Adam Toledo and Mario Gonzalez, of Antonio Valenzuela and Andrés Guardado, and the many others in our communities who have died needlessly and violently is to violate the mission and purpose of our calling in theological education. We name them and protest their deaths, because no one should be invisible, or nameless, or forgotten. We name them from the wells of grief because they are not a statistic but

rather children of God, God's creation, and therefore precious. We name them because in their loss, we have all lost some of our future. We name them because injustice is never an acceptable option for a just society. We name them and condemn a system that sees itself at war with its citizenry, rather than seeing itself as peacekeepers and aides to communities. We name them in utter condemnation of racist structures that would consider them less than human beings. We name them recognizing the connection between their death and the dehumanization of the casual violence directed against members of our communities who come seeking refuge at the border and our young people in our streets. We name them because the silence concerning their deaths and the deaths of countless other Latinx people is deafening. Elie Wiesel reminds us that the opposite of history is not myth but rather forgetfulness, and so we must name them: Adam Toledo, Mario Gonzalez, Antonio Valenzuela, Andrés Guardado, Sean Monterrosa, Antonio Báez... and say to their families and communities, "¡Presente!"

Sincerely,

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