

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating August 27, 2017

Pax Christi San Antonio does not solicit donations; however, anyone wishing to join should make a donation to Pax Christi U.S.A. and notify Maria Tobin, matob@aol.com, to receive email messages sent to members. Pax Christi International was founded in 1945 with the encouragement of Bishop Pierre Marie Théas of Montauban, France, by Marthe Dortel Claudot, as a Christian lay organization dedicated to preventing a repetition of the savagery of the twentieth century's world wars. Send comments on the newsletter to J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com.

Editorial

After the calendar, the *Third Reading* commentary is based on the gospel reading for the twenty-first Sunday in ordinary time. Tom Keene's poem is *What Is Meditation?* More of his poems can be found at www.tomkeenesmuse.com.

In 1919, the executive council of the National Catholic Welfare Council, as the conference of United States bishops was called back then, issued a highly influential statement on social reconstruction, drafted by Father John A. Ryan. I began to wonder some weeks ago what such a statement would look like today. Last week this newsletter presented Part 1 of a thrrr part draft twenty-first century statement on social reconstruction. Below, after the poem, is Part 2.

Rev. Robert Woody (Episcopal Church of the Reconciliation) and family have recently connected with a group of young adults from the Boston area who are part of an immigrant rights group, Cosecha. They have come to San Antonio to campaign against anti-immigrant legislation. They need financial assistance and other support. Contact Priscilla or Robert Woody: Priscilla@cor-satx.org, 210-655-2731; Robert@cor-satx.org, 210-771-4364.

Many public personages have been criticizing President Trump for failing to condemn racists and bigots unambiguously—i.e., without “balancing” a criticism of them with a critique of those opposed to racism and bigotry. Such personages formulate their commentaries with greater eloquence than any effort on my part would have. I was out of the country last week and could tune in to American media only occasionally to monitor what was going on in the wake of the Charlottesville murder. I was particularly struck by the eloquence of David Gergen and Don Lemon, two CNN commentators.

The issue that brought the Nazis, Kluxers, and other white supremacists out to protest and occasioned one of them driving a vehicle into a crowd of innocent counter-protesters is a significant one—the removal of a Confederate statue. Many such statues honor General Robert E. Lee, and there are a number of reasons why a statue of General Lee is objectionable. The obvious one is that, despite any wish on his part, he became an icon of the “myth of the lost cause.” The myth is that the Confederate cause was an honorable one, led by leaders who were really interested in a political philosophy of limited national government, not a defense of slavery. The claim is that the Confederate movement, represented today by the Confederate battle flag, was about liberty, not the oppression of Americans of African ancestry. The claim would

detach the tactic of limiting national government from the end for which the Confederates employed the tactic.

Let's place General Lee in his historical context. He was a talented military tactician from Virginia. He was not the only such person; his military mentor Winfield Scott and another tactical talent George H. Thomas were also from Virginia. However, those two opposed slavery and remained loyal to their nation. General Scott invited General Lee to lead the Union army in the Virginia theatre, but Lee, in an agonizing decision, was in the end moved more by a limited national government than by justice for the oppressed. General Thomas was never favored by the authorities in Washington; many were suspicious of him because he was a Southerner, and he led the Union army in the Battle of Nashville more or less by default, brilliantly finishing off the Confederate army in the western theatre as a force of any military consequence. Lee agonized over the prospect of doing right and ultimately failed to make the right decision. Scott did not hesitate to offer Lee the opportunity to decide differently; Thomas persevered without agonizing, in his decision, a right one, despite difficulties that stood in his way.

The moral problem today is not that many of us Americans are Nazis, Kluxers, or white supremacists. The moral problem is that of Robert E. Lee. Too many of us fail to see the full extent of evil in the oppression of minorities, a sin of a magnitude that should motivate us to do good and avoid evil.

Calendar

Sunday August 20, 3:30pm-5:00pm, ACLU People Power Planning/Implementation Meeting. Includes presentation by ACLU Austin on SB4 ("show me your papers bill"). One Riverwalk Place: 700 Saint Mary's Street, second floor, suite 200.

Friday August 25, 7:30pm-9:00pm, presentation of programs by San Antonio Water Service, followed by the documentary *Flow: For the Love of Water*. Eco Centro, 1802 N. Main Ave.

Tuesday August 29, 7:00pm, COPS meeting on immigration. Sacred Heart Church, 2114 W. Houston. <http://www.copsmetro.com/>

Saturday September 2, 10:00am-2:00pm, **in Austin**, Rally: Day of Resistance and Noncompliance with SB4, organized by Jolt Texas and Basta Texas. Texas State Capitol, 1100 Congress Ave., Austin. More information: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1308974945890276/>

Tuesday September 5, 3:00pm, film, *Seed*, depict the struggle to defend the future of food. Christus Heritage Hall, Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

Thursday September 7, 6:00pm-8:30pm. Performance: To Be Honest (Islam in American Politics). Dramatic readings from 2016 interviews with San Antonians about the perception of Islam in American politics. McNay Art Museum, 6000 N. New Braunfels.

Thursdays September 7, 14, 21, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Ron Rolheiser, O.M.I., "Simply Being Good-Hearted is Not Enough: A Spirituality of Charity, Justice, and Prophecy, parts 1, 2, &3." \$60.00; 20% group discount. Contact Brenda, 210-341-1366, ext. 212. Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Dr., Whitley Theological Center.

Saturday September 9, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. Residence of Maria Tobin, 8715 Starcrest Dr., Apt. 27. (Go north on Starcrest from I-410; Starcrest becomes a divided road. The apartment complex is located between Hidden Drive and Granby Court, on the south-bound side of Starcrest. It is possible to park on Hidden Drive.)

Monday September 11, 7:00pm-**Wednesday September 13**, 5:00pm, The Francis Effect: Living in Harmony with Creation. Whitley theological Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Dr. \$50.00 (\$25.00 student); an additional meal plan \$44.00. Information and registration (by Monday August 28) at franciseffect.ecociv.org.

Wednesday September 13, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Lecture by Devery S. Anderson, "The Murder of Emmett Till." University of the Incarnate Word Concert Hall, 4301 Broadway. The concert hall is next to the Administration Building, facing Broadway at the Hildebrand-Broadway intersection. Parking is in front. It has sign ("Concert Hall") in front.

Saturday September 23, 9:00am-4:00pm, Rosalyn Falcon Collier and Rev. Ann E. Helmke, "P.E.A.C.E. Is Our Birthright." Experiential learning session. \$60.00; bring a bag lunch. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell Avenue (park off Shook). Registration through www.upcsa.org/registration. Info at 210-732-9927.

Wednesday September 27, 7:00pm, Abdullah Ahmed An-Na'im, "Religious Freedom and the Universality of Human Rights: A Modernist Islamic Perspective." Saint Mary's University, One Camino Santa Maria, University Center, Conference Room A. Parking in Lots D and H.

Thursday September 28, Robert George, "Constitutional Structures, Civic Virtue, and Political v. Culture." Saint Mary's University, One Camino Santa Maria, University Center, Conference Room A. Parking in Lots D and H.

Third Reading (Matthew 16:13-20)

In this reading, Matthew develops his narrative once more by expanding what he had found in the earlier *Gospel of Mark*. Jesus is traveling with his disciples into the district of Caesarea Philippi and asks them who people were saying he was. The answers were John the Baptizer, Elijah, and one of the prophets. All of these were remarkable identities that involved a return from the dead. Mark had Peter answer, "You are the Messiah." Here Matthew adds much more: "And replying Simon Peter said, 'You are the Messiah, the son of the living God.'"

In a previous chapter, Matthew has Jesus walk on the Sea of Galilee, enabling Peter to join him on the water and calming the wind. At that point, the disciples say, "Truly you are a son of God" (Mt 14:33). The added words Matthew assigns to Peter's response, "the son of the living God," allude back to that previous narrative.

Matthew has Jesus reply, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah...." Matthew generally avoids Aramaic expressions and translates them into Greek, but here he makes a point of using the Aramaic form of the name of the disciple. This too is an allusion; in Matthew 16:4 he had the Pharisee and Sadducee authorities demand a sign from Jesus and Jesus reply, "An evil and adulterous generation demands a sign, and no sign will be given it but the sign of Jonah." The legend of Jonah had Jonah angering God by refusing to preach in the pagan city of Nineveh; when he fled by sea rather than do that God stirred up a violent storm that only calmed when the terrified sailors threw Jonah overboard: "And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (Jonah 1:17).

Peter, or Simon Bar Jonah, had fears and doubts about culturally different churches and culturally different people in general. At one point Saint Paul openly criticized him for that (see Galatians 2:11-13). In the *Acts of the Apostles* Luke describes Peter as gradually learning to accept culturally different people (Acts 10:34).

After Peter comes to really recognize the son of the living God, after he emerges from the fish-belly-like darkness of non-recognition, only then do we hear: "and I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock (*petra*) I will build my church...."

Which is it? Is it the Baptizer redivivus, Elijah redivivus, a prophet redivivus, or Nineveh all over again?

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Poem

What Is Meditation?

When asked, the teacher,
so quick with answers, hesitated in surprise.
"I don't know. I'll have to think about it."
Days later, his child toddled up,
stretched out her arms in expectation.
Taken up, she laid her head on his shoulder.
When satisfied, she wiggled to be let down.

As she ambled off he had his answer:

*Meditation is being quiet
with someone you love
and who loves you.*

Tom Keene
November 5, 2011

May the Voice of the Muse
be heard in our land
www.tomkeenesmuse.com

Social Reconstruction for the Twenty-First Century Part 2

Anthony J. Blasi

There are thirteen sections to this statement, the second four of which comprise the second part which is published here. The Table of Contents for the entire statement is as follows:

Part 1

*Income Fairness
Labor Rights
Automation
Federal Taxation*

Part 2

*Property Taxes
Power
Subsidiarity
Education*

Part 3

*Law enforcement
Health and Medicine
Higher Education
Pluralism
Environment*

I am indebted to numerous people with whom I have consulted for this statement.

Property Taxes

The operation of property tax schemes can be complicated, with multiple ways that injustices can enter in. First, properties need to be classified in such categories as agricultural, residential, commercial, and industrial. It is well known that some residential properties are disguised as agricultural and thus enjoy lower acreage tax rates.

Properties need to be large and genuinely operating as agricultural enterprises before being categorized as agricultural. Second, properties need to be assigned values. For the typical residential lot, reasonably accurate market values can be determined by the purchase prices of nearby “comparables.” However, large unique mansions may have no genuine comparables nearby; whatever value is assigned can be contested in the civil legal system by wealthy owners, whose legal teams can be budgeted to outlast the financial resources of evaluation boards, resulting in out-of-court settlements favorable to the owners. A similar problem occurs with large-scale retail properties—malls and big box stores. Moreover, the market value of properties in neighborhoods deemed increasingly desirable increase, rendering the tax assessments a problem for long-term residents. Where local governments impose real estate property taxes, they should do so with a graduated scale by size, not value, so that the rate for a large property would be higher than for a small property; this would have the effect of encouraging small holdings. Moreover, the same rate scale should be applied to all non-agricultural properties in the local governmental jurisdiction.

Power

The democratic exercise of power through the franchise within limits delimited by rights is a form of power that respects the dignity of humans. That exercise takes the form not only of casting votes in openly contested elections but of participation through spoken discourse, writing, broadcasting, demonstrating, and campaigning. Because the foundation of a democratic society is the God-given (or an equivalent thereof, for non-believers) dignity of individual human persons, it is the individual citizen who has the right to make financial contributions to political candidates. That is to say, the eligibility for voting and holding office is the same as the eligibility for making financial contributions to candidates. Court precedents to the contrary need to be either re-litigated or reversed through the constitutional amendment process. Moreover, individual campaign contributions below some threshold amount comprise a public good and therefore should be encouraged by restoring their status as income tax deductions.

Some exercises of power pertain not to the state but to crafts and professions. Those who would enter into some lines of work should meet specified criteria as a matter of justice to consumers and others who depend on the craftsmanship and professionalism of those providing services. The standards necessary in a line of work should be set and enforced by those skilled and knowledgeable in the craft or profession in question. The college form of specialists is consequently an important contributor to the quality of life in a society. It needs to be employed in the awarding of research grants, the staffing of educational and medical entities, and the retention of workers in a wide variety of craft occupations.

In many matters, the prerogative of decision-making rightly pertains to the family. Whom to marry, the socialization of the young, the care of the infirm, where to seek employment, and what kind of employment to seek are family or individual family member matters. Ordinarily, neither the state nor employers should be determining who may marry whom, how children are to be reared, what options among medical procedures should be selected, where people live, or what crafts or professions people pursue. No one of these prerogatives is an absolute, however. Laws may prohibit polygamy, require general education, step in where an infirm person is neglected,

empower craft and profession colleges to set standards, and prohibit habitation in flood zones and other unsafe places. Respect for the family as a traditional institution should, however, discourage efforts to render same-sex and inter-racial marriages illegal, deny access to quality education to those seeking it, deny medical care to those who need it, set up arbitrary barriers to various kinds of employment, or restrict immigration or emigration.

Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity holds that a higher or larger organizational entity should not interfere in the internal life of a lower or smaller organization, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to co-ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good. There is some similarity between subsidiarity and federalism, but federalism does not hold that the higher entity should help lower ones and in general does not extend to occupational groups or to families, and it makes no reference to the common good.

In the American framework, most criminal law, intra-state transportation, and education pertain to the states rather than the federal government. There is no well-worked out framework, however, for identifying what pertains to counties and municipalities. It remains to be established, for example, what falls within the purview of local governments and what pertains to the state. Threats to health and safety that arise from activities at the local level obviously should fall within the purview of local governments. This includes such things as ordinances designed to preserve trees, control emissions of air pollutants, restrict single-use plastic bags, set speed limits on local streets, establish and determine the location of elementary and secondary schools as well as hospitals, and provide for local policing agents and courts. States should be able to do some of these things, but in doing so should not force local standards to be less than state-wide standards. For example, states should be able to set state-wide maximum speed limits, but not thereby prevent municipalities from setting lower city-wide speed limits. States should be able to set automobile efficiency standards, but not thereby prevent counties from setting more stringent ones.

A framework for the respective roles of states, local governments, professions, and families in the education of the young also needs to be worked out. States should provide for the establishment and financing of elementary and secondary schools and require that children be educated. It is not the case, however, that states should make personnel decisions for the schools, assign students to particular classes, or interfere with parents' efforts to match their children's needs with appropriate schools.

One source of income for county and municipal governments should be a tax on income earned within the boundaries of a jurisdiction. People who reside outside a city or county but use the city or county roads to reach their workplace and who benefit from police protection within the city or county should pay some tax on the basis of where they work rather than on where they live.

Education

Education is a good that both benefits individuals and contributes to the common good. The contemporary world is one in which knowledge and, especially, skills of inquiry and analysis are a valuable form of cultural capital. There is technical knowledge

which is task-specific and can serve, usually on a short-term basis, in an employment setting, and there is a general competence that is useful for advancement into decision-making and policy-setting positions. The common good depends on general competence as much as upon task-specific technical knowledge. People suffer when bad decisions are made in either the private or the public sector. Democracy as a form of governance depends on a competent public.

States should fund elementary and secondary education, preferably with an income tax. The traditional reliance on property taxes for education is a vestige of a frontier settlement era in which land was the only significant capital at hand to be taxed for education. There is no rational reason to continue to rely on property taxes in that way. In fact, the concentration of people having similar income levels in the same areas results in the emergence of rich and poor school districts, and this circumstance undermines the very democratizing purpose of public education. Moreover, as property values increase in strategically located neighborhoods in municipalities, the property taxes become insupportable in “gentrifying” areas. That forces often long-term residents to sell their properties and move away, thereby undermining social relationships at the neighborhood level. When states fund education, they can do so by apportioning funds among counties on the basis of the population sizes of school-age children.

Children with special needs and special potential require more funding than most children. Counties are generally sufficiently large to budget for the needs of all categories of student and sufficiently small to make special provisions. Under present practice, geographically-defined school districts—either within counties or corresponding to whole counties—have school boards elected to govern schools. A century ago such geographically-defined districts made sense because children walked to school. Since that is no longer the case, any group of people in a county who wish to organize an elected school board, wherever in a county they live, should be able to hold an election and govern one or more schools. How large such a group needs to be is a practical matter that can be set by a county government. It should not matter whether the school district’s group of citizens agreeing to vote for the board of that district defines itself by residential location, educational philosophy, culture, or religion; so long as it meets state and county standards it should be entitled to receive the state funding through the county, based on the number of students who will be attending the district’s school(s). This would differ from “voucher” schemes insofar as all the schools would be public schools.

To receive public funds, a school must conform to the general state curriculum as set forth on entirely secular grounds. Consultations with professional groups of educators and researchers must be involved in the establishment of state curriculum standards. Moreover, teachers who conduct courses within the framework of the general state curriculum should be paid directly by the county according to a common county-wide compensation framework; no district receiving public money would pay according to a less-generous framework than any other district. The state should license teachers, but counties should be able to add additional local licensing requirements according to local needs. The county should nominate teachers for positions within the districts, and the districts select (or veto) applicants from among the nominees. The selection or non-selection of teachers of subjects within the general state curriculum should not discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, religion, gender, sexual

orientation, age, or veteran status. If a district wishes to add a distinctive curriculum to its offerings, it should be able to do so, but not using public funds. A citizen may cast a vote in the school district board election of his or her choice. A parent should expect to be charged additional fees for any added courses in the ethnic or religious school. Parents who do not want their children to attend public schools are responsible for homeschooling or funding private school educations.

Links

Pax Christi International
<http://www.paxchristi.net/>

Pax Christi U.S.A.
<http://www.paxchristiusa.org>

Pax Christi Texas
<http://www.paxchristitexas.org>

Pax Christi San Antonio
<http://www.paxchristisa.org>

COPS / Metro Alliance
www.copsmetro.com/

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative
www.msjc.net

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, International JPIC Committee
<http://saccvi.blogspot.com/>

San Antonio Peace Center
<http://www.sanantoniopeace.center>

Interfaith Radio, (*Interfaith Voices*)
<http://www.interfaithradio.org/>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty
www.txccedp.org