

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating September 3, 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-second Sunday in ordinary time. Tom Keene's poem is *Let There Be Land*. More poems by Tom 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 and the week before, this newsletter presented the first two parts of a draft twenty-first century statement on social reconstruction. Below, after the poem, is Part 3, the concluding section, followed by a litany pertaining to white supremacy which I found on the webpage of the Episcopal Church of the Reconciliation.

Calendar

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

Wednesday August 30, 5:00pm, "San Antonio Stands Against White Supremacy." People are signing up to speak to the city council. City Council Chambers, 114 West Commerce Street.

Friday September 1, 11:30am, March in protest against SB4, the Texas "show me your papers" law. Milam Park, 500 W. Commerce.

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*, depicting 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 a 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 16:21-27)

“Get behind me, Satan; you are my stumbling stone, for you do not think the things of God but human things.” This is Jesus’ well-known rebuke when Peter protested against Jesus going to Jerusalem to “suffer many things from the elders, high priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised on the third day.” Peter had not really said anything evil; he simply had not recognized what Jesus saw was inevitable. The absence of evil, however, was insufficient. Jesus was insistent that he was to follow his calling rather than expend his energies avoiding what could not be avoided.

And “be raised on the third day”: Mark had written “after three days,” and Matthew changes the text to “on the third day.” What was at issue was Matthew’s preference for highlighting an allusion to Exodus 19:18: “for on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.” Being raised on the third day was to parallel being in the sight of all the people.

An old saying has it that there is no Resurrection without a Crucifixion. There must be a rising from the wrath of officials and other people—all of them all too human. “If anyone wishes to come after me, deny the self and take up one’s cross and follow me.” It is not possible to square such language with proper and respectable churches that are staffed by safe professionals who maintain chaplaincies for worldly forces.

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Poem

Let There Be Land

You called the land
to rise from roiling seas,
lined the river basins
with fertile loam.

You steeped in greens
the forest-jungles,
rolled out the plains,
beige and flat as corn tortillas,
raised the mountains to make
fuchsia shadows with the sun.

You made the land
a place to plant and build,
free as the air,
open as the oceans,
vital as rivers and rain,
ours as much as the stars.

Now tell us, God,
when did you sell
the land to the rich?

Tom Keene
May 1, 1990

Social Reconstruction for the Twenty-First Century

Part 3

Anthony J. Blasi

There are thirteen sections to this statement, the final five of which comprise the third 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.

Law Enforcement

The purpose of criminal statutes and their enforcement is the protection of persons and property from theft, destruction, and violence. The possession and use of such mild drugs as alcohol and marijuana should not be a criminal matter for adults, though operating boats, vehicles, and dangerous machinery and using guns and other weapons “under the influence” should be. Addictive “hard drugs” should be treated as a medical problem for the user, though a criminal matter for the manufacturers and distributors.

The purpose of the penal system is to isolate people prone to dangerous behavior from the general population, to deter violations of criminal law, to make a public statement about unacceptable conduct, and to rehabilitate the convicted. Making it impossible for a convicted person to even be considered for most employment opportunities does not further any of these purposes; that is why people speak of “banning the box,” referring to a check-box about prior convictions that appears on many job application forms. Similarly, the death penalty does not further any of these purposes beyond what life-time incarceration can achieve. The death penalty does render the reversal of wrongful convictions impossible, costs the public vast sums of money that can be put to better public purposes, and lessens the value placed on life.

Prosecutor offices need to be sufficiently staffed to make “speedy trials” a reality. Prison after a conviction, not detention prior to trial, should be the actual punishment.

Health and Medicine

There are several different models for the provision of health care. The private practice model emerged in an era in which practitioners often did not complete medical school training and rarely specialized; they carried no great student loan debt such as that which now deters people from entering medical school. Physicians also responded to accidents and bouts of sickness rather than conduct checkups and provide advice for preventing illness. Advances in medicine, especially preventative vaccination regimes, have resulted in longer average life spans and, significantly, longer health spans so that the time spent in bad health at the end of the health span and before death has been shortened; consequently nursing home stays are shortening. The result is that far more medical care is now needed in old age, typically at an age most people did not even reach a century ago. Consequently, the contemporary form of the private medical practice model takes the form of insurance coverage associated with the workplace and for senior citizens socialized insurance (Medicare).

Private insurance for those below age 65 came to be associated with employment entirely by happenstance as a result of wage controls put in place during World War II. The war occasioned a labor shortage, but employers were not allowed to compete for workers by raising wages. So the employers began to offer medical insurance as an inducement for workers to work for them. As the costs of medical treatment and medical insurance increased, employers began to drop or minimize the medical insurance they offered at the workplace. The Affordable Care Act (“Obamacare”) attempted solve a problem of uninsured people obtaining hospital emergency room service, which raised the cost of medical care in general, by mandating health insurance. It also addressed the problem of the high cost of medical insurance by subsidizing it for lower income people through the income tax code. It set up online exchanges so that an actual competitive marketplace for private insurance would operate. As originally conceived, it called for a “public option” insurance plan for people to choose; this would have been to offer public insurance in markets where the private sector did not make insurance available. The program is working in most places, but because Congress deleted the public option provision the program is not working in some markets. Moreover, because of the increasing income gap between the wealthy and a large portion of the public, the plan will require an ever-increasing subsidy through the tax code.

Socialized insurance, with a public single payer, is similar to Medicare, Medicaid for the poor, and the Canadian model for medical insurance. While it takes the profit motive out of insurance, it is subject to negotiations between the public insurance sector and the private medical practice sector. When the prices paid providers by the insurance agency do not satisfy the providers, they might drop out of the plan (as many do under Medicare) or even go on strike (as has occurred in Canadian provinces). Some favor a single-payer system for the United States, though they seldom go into detail whether it would be operated by the states that opt into it or by a federal agency.

Socialized medicine, where the government funds medical care and staffs clinics and hospitals, is the British system. The British public appears to be quite satisfied with government medicine. The United States provides socialized medicine for veterans, but it has had mixed results with VA medicine. One might question whether American culture would fit the British model as well as British culture seems to.

It seems most reasonable for the United States to add a “public option” to its present Affordable Care Act, but also to allow states to establish a single payer system for their citizens. But it should not be left at that. There is a shortage of medical personnel, especially physicians. State university medical schools need to be greatly expanded and made more accessible. The entry requirements need to be reviewed to determine whether they actually contribute to the quality of medicine practiced by graduating physicians. At present, the nation is too dependent on immigrant physicians in the sense that other nations are being deprived of their medical doctors and potential U.S. students are being artificially denied access to U.S. medical schools.

Higher Education

College and university education furthers the common good by inducing the young to develop a general competence. Anyone who has worked in higher education can notice the difference in competence between the typical first year student and the typical fourth-year student. Such competence develops best when the curriculum is challenging, where reasonability is a virtue, the company is diverse, and administrative control is minimal. Some students begin to thrive by gaining confidence in a non-competitive setting such as the typical community college. Some thrive where there is interaction with professors and among students in the small college setting. Still others respond favorably when they find themselves “at sea” in a large university and begin constructing a coherent intellectual response on their own. None of these kinds of response correspond to income brackets or even intellectual potential.

In general, higher education should be tuition-free. States need to be serious about higher education as a public good to be provided for from public funds. People used to complain about the cost of college-level texts, but technology has greatly changed that. Appropriate materials can be posted online under passwords by libraries now, and texts in the traditional sense can be made available at much lower cost than in hard copy form. This leaves living expenses; it makes sense to direct grant and loan programs to living expenses.

Pluralism

Diversity is a demographic juxtaposition of a variety of races, cultures, linguistic groups, religions, and nationalities. A minimal condition for peace and justice in a

diverse society is tolerance of difference. However, peace and justice are more likely to prevail where there are not only diversity and tolerance but pluralism, a prevalent attitudinal stance of favoring, relishing, and rejoicing in diversity.

The Fourteenth Amendment to the *Constitution of the United States* marks not only an outcome of the American Civil War but a civilizational achievement. "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside." The Amendment sets forth a unitary citizenship, not one with more or fewer rights, not one with gradations or legal classes. "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." While the Amendment set forth a framework for life in a diverse society, it took almost a century for the courts, Congress, and legislatures to apply that framework consistently to interstate commerce and transportation, education, public employment, finance, and the conduct of elections. Resistance to diversity still exists, which is to say that we as a nation have achieved a level of multiculturalism and diversity, but not yet full pluralism. Resistance against diversity is most evident in education and the drawing of the boundaries of legislature and congressional districts. The proposal outlined above to equalize per-student appropriations by states for elementary and secondary education is a step to address this problem. A policy of drawing legislature and congressional district lines so as to maximize an equivalence of population totals represented, contiguity, nearness of fit to equilateral rectangles and to minimize the mix of urban and rural counties would be another way to undermine efforts to dilute the power of minority groups.

Environment

Human action on the environment embraces science, conservation, non-pollution, and clean-up. There was a consensus favorable to science for generations; however, when technology has enabled specialists to discover the bad effects of burning coal and petroleum, a well-funded political movement to discredit, ignore, and stifle scientific inquiry has been set in motion. Past efforts to oppose science were funded by the tobacco industry, and the gun lobby promoted federal legislation that is still in effect forbidding researchers from publishing federally-funded data that reveal the dangers associated with the ownership of firearms. The current attacks on science argue that specialists have a nefarious agenda of some kind and that they are perpetrating some kind of hoax about the dangers of coal and petroleum. They would have us take the word of high profile politicians who have only a legal training and who receive campaign contributions from coal and petroleum interests, and they would have us not take the word of scientists who dedicate themselves to research, submit their findings to anonymous peer review, and have actual data at hand. There is even an effort to decommission satellites that collect data on the climate. Meanwhile, ice shelves near the North Pole melt and temperature-sensitive coral reefs in the South Pacific die.

Conservation includes both preserving natural habitat and using fewer resources. Natural habitats work as ecological systems wherein different species depend on one another. Disrupting ecological systems frequently has untoward, sometimes unanticipated consequences, including the endangerment of species that might become

extinct. A frequent stratagem for preserving natural habitats is setting geographical areas aside and excluding them from industrial exploitation. The use of fewer resources includes such stratagems as zero- or near-zero-scapes and using more efficient electrical devices. It also involves recycling.

Generating electricity from sunlight or wind rather than from burning fossil fuels and replacing automobile use with mass transit are examples of non-pollution. Chemicals in such varied products as fertilizers, cooling devices, spray cans, and fuels need to be replaced by less harmful substances. Because no satisfactory solution has been found for the problem of radio-active waste having long half-lives, there is a need to phase out nuclear energy. All this has required governmental regulations that vested interests have lobbied against.

Environmental cleanup has tended to focus on dramatic cases of concentrated poisons. There is a "superfund" mechanism for cleaning up industrial sites contaminated with poisons, and much has been done to restore Lake Erie; the Cuyahoga River, which feeds into Lake Erie, occasionally caught on fire. There is yet a need to address the problem of clouds of smoke emanating from clearing land by means of fire in "third world" settings and removing plastic deposits from the oceans, a problem to which the "first world" contributes.

* * *

Surely there are many other aspects of a social reconstruction that could be considered. Those identified above should be seen as a point of departure for further discussion. In general, the endeavor is to maximize individual goods and the common good.

A litany for predominantly white spaces, against white supremacy Litany against white supremacy

By Revs. Elizabeth Rawlings and Jennifer Chrien, Lutheran Pastors

In the beginning, you created humanity and declared us very good.
We were made in Africa, came out of Egypt.
Our beginnings, all of our beginnings, are rooted in dark skin.
We are all siblings. We are all related.
We are all your children.
We are all siblings, we are all related, we are all your children.

Violence entered creation through Cain and Abel.
Born of jealousy, rooted in fear of scarcity,
Brother turned against brother
The soil soaked with blood, Cain asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?"
We are all siblings, we are all related, we are our brother's keeper.

When your people cried out in slavery,
You heard them. You did not ignore their suffering.
You raised up leaders who would speak truth to power
And would lead your people into freedom.
Let us hear your voice; grant us the courage to answer your call.
Guide us towards justice and freedom for all people.
We are all siblings, we are all related, we all deserve to be free.

Through the prophets you told us the worship you want is for us
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke;
Yet we continue to serve our own interest,
To oppress our workers, to crush our siblings by the neck because we are afraid.
Because they don't look like us, act like us, talk like us.
Yet, they are us. And we are them.
We are all siblings, we are all related, we are not free unless all are free.

In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son,
Born in poverty, living under the rule of a foreign empire,
Brown-skinned, dark-haired, middle-Eastern.
They called him Yeshua, your Son,
Who welcomed the unwelcome, accepted the unacceptable
—The foreigners, the radicals, the illiterate, the poor,
The agents of empire and the ones who sought to overthrow it,
The men and women who were deemed unclean because of their maladies.
We are all siblings, we are all related, we are all disciples.

The faith of Christ spread from region to region, culture to culture.
You delight in the many voices, many languages, raised to you.
You teach us that in Christ, "There is no Jew or Greek, there is no slave or free, there is
no male and female."
In Christ, we are all one.
Not in spite of our differences, but in them.
Black, brown, and white; female, non-binary, and male; citizen and immigrant,
In Christ we are all one.
We are all siblings, we are all related, we are all one in Christ.

Each week, we confess our sin to you and to one another.
We know that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.
We are captive to the sin of white supremacy,
Which values some lives more than others,
Which believes some skin tones are more perfect than others,
Which commits violence against those who are different.
We confess our complicity in this sin.

We humbly repent.

We ask for the strength to face our sin, to dismantle it, and to be made anew

We trust in your compassion and rely on your mercy

Praying that you will give us your wisdom and guide us in your way of peace,

That you will renew us as you renew all of creation

In accordance with your will.

We ask this, we pray this, as your children, all siblings, all related, all beloved children of God.

Amen.

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