

# Testimony



## A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating September 24, 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](mailto: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 Doret 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](mailto:J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com).

### Editorial

After the calendar, the *Third Reading* commentary is based on the gospel reading for the twenty-fifth Sunday in ordinary time. Tom Keene's poem is *Every Once-in-a-While*. See <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php> for more of Tom's poems. Following the poem is my review of Antony Alumkal's new book, *Paranoid Science. The Christian Right's War on Reality*.

### Calendar

**Monday September 18**, 6:30pm-8:30pm, Community conversation: Fear & courage. Sponsored by the peaceCenter. Whitley Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Dr.

**Friday September 22**, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Poets for Peace: Words & Music—Rudi Harst, Trish Bigelow, Kyndall Rothaus, DaRell Pittman. Bring light snack or drink. RSVP: [dellisphelps@gmail.com](mailto:dellisphelps@gmail.com). 13633 Bluffcircle.

**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](http://www.upcsa.org/registration). Info at 210-732-9927.

**Sunday September 24**, "around 7:30pm. Feel free to come early at 7:00pm." **In Austin.** Film: *A Strike and an Uprising (in Texas)*, about the 1938 San Antonio pecan shellers' strike, the 1987 organizing campaign of Black workers at Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches, and the removal of the Jefferson Davis statue at UT Austin. Q & A with filmmaker Anne Lewis follows. \$7.00 donation suggested. Seating is limited—early arrival recommended. 2610 Manor Road, Austin, 78722.

**Tuesday September 26**, 11:00am-12:30pm, film: *Stolen Education*. In 1956 eight Mexican American elementary students and their families sued the Driscoll, Texas,

School District because of discrimination. Palo Alto College Student Center Annex, 1400 W. Villaret.

**Wednesday September 27**, 2:00pm-4:00pm, film: *Education, Inc.*, on the privatization of public education. Mabee Library, Room 221, University of the Incarnate Word, 6301 Broadway.

**Wednesday September 27**, 6:30pm-7:30pm, Reflection on the murder of Sr. Patricia Ann Kelley: Standing against the Death Penalty. Chapel of the Incarnate Word, 4503 Broadway. Contact: Sr. Martha Ann Kirk, [kirk@uiwtx.edu](mailto:kirk@uiwtx.edu).

**Wednesday September 27**, 6:30pm-8:30pm, Third Convening of In The City for Good. University of the Incarnate Word Osteopathic Campus, Brooks City Base, 7615 Kennedy Hill, Building 2, San Antonio 78235.

**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**, 7:00pm, 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.

**Saturday September 30**, 11:00am-6:00pm, A Thousand Poets for Change. El Centro de Artes, 115 Plaza de Armas, Suite 102.

**Monday October 2**, 3:30pm, film: *Thomas Berry: The Great Story*. "At the heart of the film is Berry's experience of the universe as a cosmic liturgy." Christus Heritage hall, The Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

**Thursday October 19**, 6:00pm-7:30pm: Cory Dolgon, Ph.D., "Kill It to Save It: An Autopsy of Capitalism's Triumph over Democracy" (Dr. Dolgon argues that the public accepts the destruction of the public sector and accepts arguments that "feel right" without regard for facts). University of Texas at San Antonio, downtown campus, Buena Vista Street Bulding, Aula Canaria (BV 1.328).

**Friday October 21**, 4:30pm-7:00pm; **Saturday October 22**, 9:00am-4:45pm, Iran in the World. Presentations by experts on the historic 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and the U.S., china, Russia, France, Germany, U.K., and European Union. Chapman Auditorium, Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Park at Alamo Stadium.

**Thursday October 26**, 5:00pm-6:00pm, **in Austin**, Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., "Pope Francis: reclaiming the vision of Vatican II." Jones Global Events Center, Ragsdale Center building, Saint Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress Ave., Austin, 78704.

**Friday November 10**, 7:30pm-9:30pm, **in Seguin**, film, *(Re)Formation*. A group of artists renovate a transition home for discarded youth and explore the meaning of church, holy ground, and Jesus' mission. Studio Theatre at Weston Center, Texas Lutheran University, 1000 West Court St., Seguin.

### **Third Reading** (Matthew 20:1-16a)

"You go into the vineyard, and I will give you whatever is just." This, of course, comes from the parable of the vineyard owner who kept finding people unemployed and waiting to be hired; he hires them on the spot. He pays them all "whatever is just" for a day's work, even though some of them worked only part of the day.

I have heard homilies interpret the parable as a lesson about the salvation of gentiles, relative latecomers to the worship of God, being a reward equal to that of the Jewish worshipers of God. That is a possible interpretation, but it does not make sense without a more straightforward reading: that an employer, and by extension a society, should pay workers what is just.

And what is just? We cannot read the text in a fundamentalist manner because the first century coin, the denarius, is no longer a currency. So a criterion of reasonability comes into play. If the pay does not sustain the worker and the worker's dependents, the pay scale is not a reasonable one. There are actually two aspects to this—workers' pay and prices. Legend had it at a small college where I once taught that the president and his family owned most of the housing in the small college town, and that every time the pay scale went up the rents rose by the same mount. The connection between pay and prices may not be so personal in the world at large today, but it is still a certain connection. In medieval thought, economic justice was articulated in terms of just prices. Bernardino of Siena, for example, railed against bakers who raised the price of bread when a large group of pilgrims came through town. In modern thought, economic justice is articulated in terms of the just wage—or more precisely, a living wage that includes both pay and benefits.

It is interesting in the parable that the laborers who worked a full day for a just wage resented the fact that those who worked only part of the day received the same pay: "...they grumbled against the master of the household...." There are two circumstances in which someone may not work "a full day"—being unable and being unemployed.

I recall being unable to work at my university—not the small college mentioned above—because of open heart surgery. On the first day of the semester I met a morning section, but that afternoon a stress test occasioned my being wheeled into a hospital for surgery, and I was unable to meet classes for the remainder of the semester. I remained on the payroll, however, because of the state university's benefits package. It is doubtful that anyone was envious of my situation.

How about unemployment? National governments have levers through which they can affect their national economies, and policies for promoting full employment comprise a requirement for economic justice. Companies can realize profit margins in two ways—creating scarcities while raising prices and raising production levels to ones

needed in the market while receiving a lesser margin on each sale but with a greater number of sales. Promoting the latter condition is essential to a full employment policy. Economists generally define full employment as a statistical 4% unemployment rate.

We are entering an era of computerized automation where employment may not be the common source of income. What should be the guiding parable in such a future?

### Poem

#### *Every once-in-a-while*

Through our classroom windows  
blared sirens of ambulance;  
fire truck; squad car;  
halting the hum  
of student work.

Out of the silence  
that held our  
unsaid dread  
of unknown perils,  
a nun's voice came:  
    Someone's in trouble.  
    Stop and say a Hail Mary  
    for them.

We did  
and went back to work,  
knowing a power  
that couldn't be said.

Tom Keene  
May 18, 2009

### Book Review

*Paranoid Science. The Christian Right's War on Reality*, by Antony Alumkal. New York: New York University Press, 2017. Reviewed by Anthony J. Blasi

Some years ago I read a fine scholarly work, *Asian American Evangelical Churches: Race, Ethnicity, and Assimilation in the Second Generation*, by Antony Alumkal. I included the book in the online searchable bibliographic database that I maintain for the Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR) and the Association of

Religion Data Archives (ARDA), the latter hosting the database. This past August I met Dr. Alumkal at the annual meeting of the ASR and discovered his new book, *Paranoid Science*, in the book display. Both books are well-researched and merit careful reading, though they are quite different in tone. *Asian American Evangelical Churches* is written in order to bring readers to an understanding of the life situation of a group of people; *Paranoid Science*, as the title suggests, is an exposé. Both works are balanced in the sense of being well grounded in data and observant of such methodological principles as adequacy, accuracy, and replicability. The second work, however, calls the reader's attention to the well-justified conclusion that purportedly scientific claims championed by the Christian Right are not themselves adequate, accurate, or replicable.

*Paranoid Science* does not maintain that proponents of intelligent design in the study of the origin of species, sexual orientation reversal, Christian Right bioethics, and climate change denial suffer from clinical paranoia. Rather, Dr. Alumkal uses the famous essay by the historian Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," as a device for subcultural characterization. The paranoid style commonly arises in political and other social movements in America and is shaped by the exigencies of such movements, not by the canons of science. The style affirms an existence of a vast sinister and influential conspiracy that, if left unchecked, would undermine and destroy a valued way of life. It has a Manichean mentality, forcing a good and evil divide upon reality and allowing for no shades of gray between black and white, rejecting all moderation or compromise. When the purportedly scientific claims advanced by the Christian Right conform to the paranoid style closely and stand opposed to careful and studied conclusions of genuine science, they obviously deserve to be rejected themselves.

The chapter on intelligent design examines the writings of Phillip E. Johnson, a professor of law, as well as those of his intellectual allies. After creationism had been excluded by the courts from the public schools as a religious doctrine rather than a scientific finding, Johnson et al. promoted intelligent design as an alternative to evolution. Intelligent design historically had been a philosophical argument for the existence of a creator, but the contemporary Intelligent Design Movement has sought to promote it as a scientific discovery that merits recognition in courses on biological and cosmological science. Alumkal traces the development of Phillip Johnson's version of intelligent design from a thesis of a conspiracy of "naturalists," and into a worldview of a social movement, abetted by the cryptically religious Discovery Institute Center for Science and Culture. In the course of this development, Johnson and his followers scorned liberal Christians (individuals such as Jim Wallis) who had no problem with evolutionary science, but embraced the new atheists as friends and scientific opponents, who also maintained that there can be no compatibility between contemporary science and genuine Christianity. Alumkal also notes an inconsistency in the Intelligent Design Movement's discourse—on the one hand affirming a theistic positivism in reading the Bible as a report of scientific facts and on the other hand resorting to the post-modernist relativizing of scientific affirmations. Johnson et al. would have the Bible read as scientific fact and scientific reports read mytho-poetically.

The chapter on the Ex-gay Movement follows the pattern of that on the Intelligent Design Movement, noting differences between the two movements where they occur. A minority of psychiatrists, who adhered to the belief of Sigmund Freud (ironically, an

atheist critic of religion) that homosexuality was an illness, attributed its removal from the official list of illnesses to politics, not science. While still claiming to be motivated by scientific stands, they found allies in centrist and conservative Evangelicals and took up the latter's cause as their own. The Evangelicals similarly attributed the greater acceptance of homosexuality to the political activism of the Gay Movement. If the psychiatric minority and its Evangelical allies were correct that homosexuality is an illness rather than a natural or God-given condition, then cure would be possible. An Ex-gay Movement became a ministry that sought support from its psychiatric allies. However, the ministry failed to convert homosexually oriented people into heterosexually oriented ones; the movement's leaders eventually renounced their beliefs about sexuality, closed down their ministry, and apologized to their clients. Alumkal devotes considerable space to describing flaws in purportedly scientific studies that found homosexuals to be unstable and the religionists' studies that claimed conformity to God's laws lead to health. I would like to have seen a greater exposé of Evangelicals' claim of a rampant and powerful homosexual agenda and stubborn denial of the naturally in-between population of not completely male and not completely female individuals among humans and throughout nature. Alumkal does say that psychiatric health is in part a political rather than natural scientific category to begin with, with purely central nervous system disability being the most if not completely natural scientific such category. Recognizing the socially-constructed nature of "health" would make the efforts of Evangelicals to justify their non-acceptance of homosexuality on psychiatric grounds pointless.

A chapter on Christian Right bioethics focuses on the treatment of embryos (including abortion), modifications of the human body, and euthanasia. The paranoid style in debates on these issues involves a dualistic contrast of certain truth with errors and foolishness, another contrast of Evangelical good with evil intentions, a stress on high stakes involved in the struggle over these issues, and resort to the slippery slope fallacy. Except for abortion, the Christian right activists have failed to market their stands successfully or institutionalize their campaigns well. From a scientific perspective, there is no one point when life begins since fertilization is a process rather than an instant event and because definitive individuation occurs well after fertilization. The paranoid style, however, cannot tolerate such ambiguity. In the 1980s, after ignoring for some time the largely Catholic opposition to abortion, Evangelical leaders, activated by the denial of tax-exempt status to Bob Jones University because of its racially discriminatory policies, selected abortion as an issue with which they could build an alliance with non-Evangelicals. Not being a genuinely biblical issue, abortion rhetoric followed the political pattern of the paranoid style. The assertion that a human life is created at a moment of conception was lifted from the abortion debate and applied to debates over stem-cell research and even gene therapy—the latter involving a substitute for God's way of creating life.

The rhetoric of the Evangelical anti-environmentalism movement, as often quoted in the chapter treating it, is the most frantic. Particular venom is directed against Evangelicals who want to care for the environment. The issue pits centrist and left-of-center Evangelicals against the Evangelical right wing, unlike the other issues, where the centrists allied themselves with the right wing. The right wing in turn was so allied with the free market absolutists by the time environmentalism arose as a point of

controversy that it took over its allies' denial that human activity abets climate change. The theological basis of Evangelical anti-environmentalism is the view that God created humanity as the steward of the earth and that it would be against God's will for humans to withdraw and allow environmental systems to balance themselves naturally. God, it is argued, designed a durable earth and promised to provide protection against any wholesale catastrophe. The failed attempt to win over the Evangelical centrist leaders to the anti-environmentalism movement was followed by a media campaign to win over the Evangelical rank and file, featuring a DVD series on resisting the "green dragon." The typical paranoid style appears in the DVDs: Suddenly environmentalism was an alien religion competing with Christianity and hating rather than cherishing humans. This new religion seeks to establish a totalitarian government, according to the argument.

An issue that the book does not verbalize but nevertheless brings to mind is whether patently wrong claims deserve equal time in the media and in educational settings along with those consistent with evidence. Television and radio public affairs broadcasts, for example, give equal time to opposed views of political issues out of a sense of fairness—which, of course, does not protect them from accusations of bias from such political figures as Spiro Agnew and Donald Trump. Where settled science is concerned, I would argue that patently wrong claims often do not deserve equal time. Geography and astronomy courses should not give equal time to flat earth theory. Creation science, as it was called, does not belong in the scientific classroom, even in Christian schools, because it is not science. The depiction of gamete fertilization as an event rather than a process and as definitive of individuality similarly does not belong in the science classroom. Clear evidence, even if disputed fallaciously, needs to be respected.

There is another aspect of intellection which is not factual in nature but inherent in intellectual operations themselves—critical thinking. As a professor of theory, I used to assign manifestly flawed readings because they were important in raising important issues in how one thinks scientifically. The educational objective in such cases is the ability to recognize flaws in inference and analysis. Those who are not familiar with the history of important errors are destined to imitate them if not repeat them. With reference to making inferences, one should note that it is a skill upon which the making of ethical decisions depends. As Dr. Alumkal notes, the conservative Evangelical moralists read commands into the origins myths of Genesis; for example, one cannot really infer a prohibition of transsexualism from "male and female he created them." That would be eisegesis rather than exegesis. Reading inferences into scriptural passages and presenting them as presentations of "facts" is a flawed modality, and carelessness in the matter is a form of negligence. I am not comfortable with Dr. Alumkal's and, for that matter, Dr. Hofstadter's, use of the term *paranoid* to describe what amounts to a form of dishonesty because true paranoia is excusable and treatable.

## 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/](http://www.copsmetro.com/)

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative  
[www.msjc.net](http://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](http://www.txccedp.org)