


Testimony
A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating December 8, 2019

Communications with the editor may be sent to j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com. 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.

Editorial

After the calendar, the Liturgical Reading reflections are based on readings for the Second Sunday of Advent. Tom Keene's poem is *Abraham's Song*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. My own essay on democracy as a Christian principle follows.

I have received a response to the American bishops' letter on race, which is a neglected document that I posted recently. The response reads: "It's all well and good what the Bishops say, but it's also just theoretical. Why don't they do something about the incarceration rates, the doctrine of Discovery for American natives, and the torture of refugees at the border. I never hear anything about such things in homilies or diocesan newspapers." Indeed.

Calendar

In Austin

Sunday December 15 (3rd Sunday of the month), 7:00pm, Pax Christi Austin meeting. Fr. Payne House, St. Ignatius Church, 126 Oltorf St.

Thursday January 30, 12:30pm-1:30pm, discussion on "Colleges Must Choose: Pursue truth or Harmony/Social Justice." Read for the discussion the article at <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Are-Colleges-Failing/244544>. Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

Monday January 20, 9:00am, Martin Luther King March, Festival and Food Drive. Short program at the MLK statue on the UT campus, followed by march to Huston-Tillotson University, where further activities are planned.

In Dallas

Monday December 2, 1:00pm-8:00pm, National Security Symposium: Arms Control and Nonproliferation. Two panels and dinner with keynote speaker, Rose Gottemoeller. Free, but RSVP:

<https://calendar.smu.edu/site/centersinstitutes/event/tc-national-security-symposium-arms-control-and-nonproliferation/>

Thursday December 5, 5:00pm reception, 7:00pm dinner and program; 2019 Dallas Peacemaker Awards Banquet. Double Tree Campbell Center, 8250 N. Central Expressway (Central Expressway & Caruth Haven). Information and tickets: <https://www.dpjc.org/2019-peacemaker-awards-banquet>

Thursday December 5, 7:00pm, Debate: U.S. Military Intervention I Foreign Conflicts. Room 241, Umphrey Lee Center, Southern Methodist University.

Monday December 9, 7:00pm-8:30pm, continuation of the Faiths in Conversation series. Information, location, and tickets: dallasinstitute.org/faith-in-conversation/

In El Paso

Fridays, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Pax Christi El Paso joins Border Peace Presence in front of the Federal Courthouse (corner of Campbell and San Antonio).

Tuesday December 3, 6:45pm, Pax Christi El Paso meeting. Centro Mujeres de la Esparza, 1101 Birch St.

Sunday December 8, 3:00pm, film, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. St. Joseph School Auditorium. Enter through the school parking lot across from the church rectory at 1315 Travis St.

In Houston

Wednesday December 4, 11:45am-1:15pm, Lunch and Learn Dialogues, "Shattering of Stereotypes." Center for the Healing of Racism, 3412 Crawford St. (at Holman). Park in HCC Lot 9. Free, donations appreciated; bring lunch. RSVP at efhr1@juno.com or 713-520-8226.

Friday December 13, 6:30pm-8:30pm, film, Ways of struggle, by documentary film maker Anand Patnardhan, on India's abandonment of non-violence. Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 1001 Bissonnet.

Saturday January 11, 9:00am-11:30am, Prayer and Labyrinth Walk to End Human Trafficking. Dominican Center for Spirituality, 6501 Almeda Rd. contact Ceil Roeger @713-440-3714 or croeger@domhou.org

Monday January 20, 10:00am, 26th Annual MLK Grande Parade begins at San Jacinto & Elgin St. Information: <http://www.mlkgrandeparade.org> or Call 713-953-1633

Saturday February 29, Racial Wealth and the Income Gap, presented by NETWORK. Dominican Center for Spirituality, 6501 Almeda Rd. Contact Ceil Roeger @713-440-3714 or croeger@domhou.org

In San Antonio

Monday December 2, film, *E.O. Wilson—Of Ants and Men*. Christus Heritage Hall, The Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

Wednesday December 4, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Pub theology/Members of Jewish Voice for peace will talk about the Jewish movement for peace and justice in Palestine. The Friendly Spot Ice House, 943 S. Alamo.

Saturday December 7, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting at the residence of Tom Wakely, 16406 Ledge Point Street.

Sunday January 19, 4:30pm-6:30pm, 33rd Annual MLK Interfaith Worship Service. Laurel Heights United Methodist Church, 277 W. Woodlawn.

Monday January 20, 10:00am, annual Martin Luther King March begins at 3501 MLK Drive and ends at Pittman-Sullivan Park, 1101 Iowa. Check out related events at dreamweek.org/events/

Second Reading (Romans 15: 4-9)

Some of the first Christians observed the Jewish purity laws and some did not, and the two camps were put off by each other's practices. Paul had urged the Roman Christian churches to respect one another and not upset those who had more sensitivity. He adds, "For the Messiah himself did not please himself; but, as it is written, 'The reproaches of those reproaching you fell on me.'" The scriptural citation from the Hebrew Bible comes from Psalm 69:

For it is for thy sake that I have borne reproach,
That shame has covered my face.
I have become a stranger to my brethren,
An alien to my mother's sons.
For zeal for thy house has consumed me,
And the insults of those who insult thee have fallen on me.
(Ps.69-7-9)

So he commends taking hope from the scriptures and from endurance.

Implicit in all this is the pluralism of early Christianity. Rome in particular did not have one Christian assembly held in uniformity by a hierarchy, but multiple assemblies that Paul would have united in respect for their different practices.

Third Reading (Matthew 3:1-12)

Legend tells us that Jesus was from Nazareth, a town in Galilee, and that he followed John the Baptizer, whom Matthew tells us was in Judea. Far as we are from the Middle East and from the era of the Roman Empire, the difference between Galilee and Judea might be lost on us. But Judeans were not quite sure Galilean religious tradition was a true one, and Galileans were suspicious of the "official" interpretations of the Law that issued from Judean elites in Jerusalem. Jesus was born in Judea, came of age in Galilee, and came to be fascinated with the Judean prophet John the Baptizer. He would himself have two distinct followings—Galilean and Judean. The difference would be an explanation of two (of the four) canonical gospels—that of Matthew and the fourth or Johannine gospel.

Even in the Galilean gospel, the Judean prophet John the Baptizer is a captivating figure. He lived in the wilderness and condemned the clergy as a brood of poisonous snakes. He was even irresponsible, refusing to be a leader himself but insisted instead that someone else would come, worthier than he.

The Baptizer was not the only prophet in history. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a theologian who condemned the religion of his day, which accommodated the Nazi regime. Mario Savio was a student leader who condemned the University of California administration for blocking students from collecting donations for the civil rights organization SNCC. The Baptizer and Bonhoeffer were decapitated; Savio was smeared, surveilled, and reported on in hundreds of pages of FBI surveillance notes. The Baptizer made it into the Bible; Bonhoeffer, albeit posthumously, into the lists of best-selling authors, Savio into the official enemies files. The Baptizer is safely contained now in Advent readings. Bonhoeffer is held a bay as a troublesome read. And Savio—like most Catholics he did not engage in sufficient God-talk to be either contained safely or listed in theology syllabi.

Poem

Abraham's song

Did that schlepping Aramean
trumpet in lavish excess
when he sowed his seed
between the thighs of Sarah,
her servants' and his?

Did the death camp smokestacks
sigh in frustration,
knowing they worked in vain,
that around the same earth
that received
their fulsome spewing of bone ash,
under the same sky
that inhaled the stench of burning bodies,
everywhere Abraham's offspring
begot and delivered,
fresh from amniotic flush,
new beings,
so, nations yet to be known
would bless themselves by his name?

Tom Keene and Muse
1985

Democracy

Anthony J. Blasi

As I write, I have just witnessed the sometimes bitter discourse of the impeachment hearings sparked by the record of the July 25th phone exchange between President Donald Trump of the United States and President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine. This is not the place to review the evidence and arguments presented by the two sides in the U.S. House Intelligence Committee hearings. I want to call attention, however, to the fact that both sides appealed to the principle of democracy. One side argues that removing an elected official who was democratically elected is undemocratic, and the other side argues that abusing official power is undemocratic. The first argument points to the outcome of a democratic election, the second to laws and policies set in place through an equally democratic process.

We can take a look at democracy from the perspective of the history of at least one strand of Christian thought. Of course, most Christian denominations were associated more with monarchies in the early modern period, and democratic procedures inched their way into some of them gradually in the nineteenth century. The polity of the Roman Catholic Church is still monarchical. Nevertheless, there is a long-standing history of democratic principles in Catholic Christian thought.

The biblical book of Genesis presents God as a creator. God fashions humans “in the image and likeness” of God, i.e. as creators too, as well as creatures. The medieval scholastics, especially Thomas Aquinas, made the doctrine of creation central in their conceptual system. Because creation is a product of God, creation and its developments are good. In a more modern perspective, one would say creation and how it evolved are both good.

Humans, reflecting the nature of God insofar as they are created in the “image and likeness” of God, can recognize the goodness in creation and appreciate its ways. The medieval scholars called the goodness in creation and its ways *ratio*, reason. Because goodness comes from God’s act of creation and enters into human consciousness through reason, an imperative from some other

source, such as government, that is unreasonable is not an imperative at all. An irrational law is no law at all. Aquinas spoke of the superiority of reason over legislation as *natural law*.

In later centuries, the tendency in moral thought was to focus on law more than reason. The practice was to organize moral thought around the Ten Commandments rather than to follow the practice of Aquinas, who organized moral thought around virtues. A pivotal point in the history of Roman Catholic Christian thought came with the pontificate of Pope Leo XIII, who applied reason to social matters and biblical studies, and who urged a renewal of Catholic thought by means of the theology and philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. In the subsequent reign of terror over Catholic intellectuals during the Modernist Crisis, it became common for thinkers to clothe their writings in Thomist language, even if they were not genuinely Thomist. This was particularly true of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century manuals of moral theology, which emphasized law, rules, in a “*natural law*” rather than the *natural law* of Aquinas. And paradoxically, Vatican statements began to impose particular reasonings with bureaucratic force in the name of natural law, somehow ignoring the meaning of *natural*.

One of the examples of natural law used over the centuries was the case of an unreasonable law. An unreasonable law could be overturned in two ways: 1) If it is a matter of a criminal statute, an authority could simply not prosecute it under the principle of *epikeia* (Greek) or *aequitas* (Latin). If enforcing a law would bring about an injustice or an undue burden, the law would be set aside. This is the rationale behind prosecutorial discretion. 2) If people violate a law routinely over a long period of time and authorities take no step to make them cease, reason as recognized by a large number of people in effect repeals the law as unreasonable.

Positively, tradition should be respected unless one has a very good reason to ignore it, for tradition is the outcome of thousands of people over time exercising their powers of reason.

I would maintain that democracy is essentially parallel to prosecutorial discretion, *epikeia*, and tradition. It is a case of thousands or even millions of people exercising their powers of reason. Of course, democracy can result in bad choices, bad decisions, and bad laws, as can tradition. The capacity for error is not unique to democracy, however; monarchies and oligarchies can err also. The process of democracy, however, the process of exercising reason, is worth safeguarding because the exercise of reason within it is valuable. The fact is that

small groups of people, sometimes organized as committees, and also individual persons make decisions every day, and the quality of their decisions depends upon their developing the skills of reasoning as developed in the general society. If one cannot decide in collective matters, how can they do so in individual or small group matters?

Ultimately, we find ourselves confronted with a moral imperative to engage the issues with which our democracy is confronted.

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 Dallas
<http://www.Paxchristidallastx.org>

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

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.sanantoniopace.center>

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

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

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio
www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/

Climate Change
www.creation-care.com

NowCastSA
www.nowcastsa.com/