

  
**Testimony**  
**A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas**

Anticipating December 15, 2019

Communications with the editor may be sent to [j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com](mailto: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 Third Sunday of Advent. Tom Keene's poem is *Un-naming the Butterfly*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is an essay, "What Do Borders Really Do?" which first appeared in the autumn 2019 issue of the *University of Toronto Magazine*. The author, Sadiya Ansari, has generously granted us permission to republish it.

**Calendar**

**In Austin**

**Wednesday December 11**, 6:30pm, Third Annual Courageous Conversations Potluck Fellowship Dinner. Holy cross Catholic Church Family Life Center, 1110 Concho St., behind the main church building. Bring covered dish; avoid an over-supply of desserts.

**Sunday December 15 (3<sup>rd</sup> 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 9**, 7:00pm-8:30pm, continuation of the Faiths in Conversation series. Information, location, and tickets: [dallasinstitute.org/faith-in-conversation/](http://dallasinstitute.org/faith-in-conversation/)

### **In El Paso**

**Saturdays December 14 and 21**, 10:00am-4:00pm, Weaving for Justice will sell a variety of hand-woven and embroidered textiles by Maya women in cooperatives in Chiapas, Mexico. We are located upstairs at 525 E. Lohman on the north side of Lohman between Mesquite & Tornillo in Las Cruces. Just look for our sandwich board and balloons by the street. All proceeds go back to the weaving groups. Weavers in these groups have told us that their earnings are making a big difference in their ability to stay on their ancestral lands and avoid having to migrate. Information: [www.weaving-for-justice.org](http://www.weaving-for-justice.org).

**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).

**Friday December 13**, 6:00pm-8:00pm, Dinner and Play fundraiser for Los Americas immigrant advocacy center. \$20.00. Café Mayapan, 2000 Texas Avenue.

**Sunday December 15**, 1:30pm-4:00pm, Community First Coalition press conference (1:30 in front of the downtown E Paso Public Library), Community First Coalition meeting (2:00), and Social Justice Education Forum (2:30; Carmen Rodriguez, Kathy Staudt, Rosemary Neill, and Oscar Martínez—authors of *Who Rules El Paso?*). El Paso Public Library, 501 N. Oregon. The book is available now at [https://www.amazon.com/Who-Rules-El-Paso-community/dp/1710689048/ref=sr\\_1\\_fkmr0\\_1?keywords=who+rules+episo&qid=1575239832&s=books&sr=1-1-fkmr0](https://www.amazon.com/Who-Rules-El-Paso-community/dp/1710689048/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_1?keywords=who+rules+episo&qid=1575239832&s=books&sr=1-1-fkmr0).

## **In Houston**

**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. This is in observance of National Human Trafficking Awareness Day and commemoration of St. Josephine Bakhita, patroness of trafficking victims. Dominican Center for Spirituality, 6501 Almeda Rd. contact Ceil Roeger @713-440-3714 or [croeger@domhou.org](mailto:croeger@domhou.org)

**Monday January 20**, 10:00am, 26<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:croeger@domhou.org)

## **In San Antonio**

**Friday January 10**, 7:30am-9:00am, Dreamweek 2020 Opening Breakfast. Keynote speaker is Paul Rusesabagina, who hid refugees during the Rwanda genocide and founded the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation to fight for human rights. \$65.00. Briscoe Western Art Museum, Jack Guenther Pavillion. 200 W. Market. <https://dreamweek.org/events/>

**Sunday January 19**, 4:30pm-6:30pm, 33<sup>rd</sup> 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/](https://dreamweek.org/events/)

**Thursday January 23**, 6:00pm-7:30pm, Andrew Hill (St. Philip's College) "Our Shared Humanity: The Geneva Conventions in 2020. American Red Cross, 3642 E. Houston. <https://dreamweek.org/evt/our-shared-humanity-the-geneva-conventions-in-2020/> for RSVP.

### **Second Reading (James 5:7-10)**

“Have patience, then, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord.” As is usually the case with the *Letter of James*, the message is simple and direct. The James in question was not James the apostle or the early Christian leader in Jerusalem, James the Brother; *James* was a common name in ancient times as it is today. The principal topics addressed in the letter are the treatment of the poor and illness. This particular excerpt read at mass on the Third Sunday of Advent seems to divert into patience instead: “Have patience, then, brothers and sisters....” But notice “then.” What reason for patience comes before this excerpt? “Come now you rich, weep, wailing over troubles coming upon you. Your wealth has decayed and your garments become moth-eaten; your gold and silver has corroded....” Be patient despite the tenuous nature of wealth. “Look: the wage of the workers who mowed your fields, which were withheld by you, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts.”

It is particularly noteworthy that James does not call upon the poor and the working classes to await a reward at the end of time. It is the wealthy and those who accumulate wealth through deeds of injustice who need patience. They need to reform their ways before the coming of the Lord.

### **Third Reading (Matthew 11: 2-11)**

“Are you the one coming, or should we expect someone else?” John the Baptizer was in prison, not yet decapitated at the whim of someone in the Herodian household. Jesus had been a disciple of this prisoner, and John sent two other disciples to ask whether someone more impressive than John himself would be appearing. It must have been a depressing errand for the Baptizer’s two other disciples.

“Going, report to John what you hear and see: Blind people see again....” Do they? How much insight do people seem to have? Some weeks back a group was picketing a “Christian” church that was holding a celebration in honor of the Israeli state, a state known for the theft of people’s lands, analogous to the actions of such regimes as those of Hitler and Putin. Theft is still contrary to Christian teaching, isn’t it? Why does a Christian church need to be reminded of that?

The crippled walk and lepers are cleansed. Do they? Are they? It depends on their insurance, and that has become, gratuitously, a political football.

And deaf people hear. Maybe, but do they listen?

And “the dead are raised and the poor are given the good news.” The martyrs must be agitated indeed, at the idolatry of gold and authority that is disseminated in so many sermons and televised church services. Neither John the Baptizer nor Jesus had much patience with the religion of their day. Maybe it is too much to expect better in our own. The real problem in the days of John and Jesus was that there were blind people, incapacitated people, people considered impure, unheard and unhearing people. Go tell John that Jesus had to work miracles!

So, “Who did you go out into the wilderness to see?” What do you seek?

## Poem

### *Un-naming the Butterfly* (for Dillon Aguirre, age 2)

Remember that first sighting?  
How IT flit-danced in the air?  
Its colors waving zig-zag?  
Splendor, surprise,  
before its name nailed it down?

Remember the seizing wonder?  
Like, but not like,  
the feel-bad flood of hurt  
when tripping,  
how the ground falls up  
to hit head, belly,  
scrape knees, hands,  
extracting yowls, tears,  
only this felt good?

Is there a name for what we lose in the naming?

Did the losing begin  
before Adam grabbed the apple?  
When he dared to name  
his fellow creatures:  
a risk neither cunning fox,  
nor brave lion would take.

It is true,

as our ancestors knew,  
that to name a god is to get a handle,  
a way to control.

But there is danger, confusion too.  
For the ticket is not the show,  
the directions are not the destination,  
and your name is not your soul.

Names are frames,  
like for windows,  
and the window  
is more than the frame.  
Windows are for sticking out your head,  
to go through and out,  
to find the Un-named.

Tom Keene and the muse  
Nov. 5, 1997

What Do Borders Really Do?<sup>1</sup>

By Sadiya Ansari

Lines on a map confer advantages on some and exclude others. This serves political needs, but is it morally just?

The migrant crisis conjures an image of what people must leave – war, famine, gang violence. And yet, a crisis also often awaits them at their next destination. As liberal democracies face rising populism fueling anti-immigrant sentiment, there’s ratcheting pressure to tighten border control. The result of this in the U.S., for instance, has been a zero-tolerance policy for undocumented migrants, spurring a steady volume of headlines – family separations, squalid detention conditions, weekend raids in sanctuary cities.

The threats to migrants exist not only at the border, but on the journey there. Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez and his daughter are two of hundreds who died attempting to enter the U.S. this year. In June, a photo of the pair was published worldwide: the father and his toddler were found motionless, their

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published in the *University of Toronto Magazine*, Autumn 2019 issue. Used by permission of the author.

drowned bodies still partially in the Rio Grande river during the last leg of their journey from El Salvador to the U.S. The reaction was horror, sadness, an outpouring of sympathy. The photo raises the question: In democratic societies, what's our moral responsibility to those outside our borders?

### **The moral case for open borders**

Joseph Carens, a [University of Toronto] professor of political science, has explored the question of moral responsibility of liberal democratic states in relation to immigration for decades, including in his 2013 book *The Ethics of Immigration*. He makes the case that Western democracies have a clear responsibility to be open to immigrants and also inclusive of those who have already arrived. For Carens, that includes those who have come to a country undocumented, as he wrote in an essay for the *Boston Review*: "The moral right of states to apprehend and deport irregular migrants erodes with the passage of time." And while he recognizes that state sovereignty means countries are entitled to erect borders, he says it doesn't absolve them of their moral responsibility to migrants.

A system where birthright rules the chances you have in life, in this case the borders in which you were born, is no better than a feudal system, according to Carens. In a feudal system, the vast majority of people exist as peasants. "To be born into a rich state like Canada, the U.S. or the European states is like being born into the nobility," he says. "The point of the open borders argument is to get people to see that we have organized the world in a way that can't possibly be justified if you take seriously the idea that every human being ought to count."

Carens' argument for open borders is a radical departure from immigration policies seen around the world today, which are overwhelmingly motivated by economics rather than ethics. But he isn't naive; this is his stance as a political philosopher, not as a policy wonk. He recognizes all immigration policy requires careful political calculation.

In recent history, the political will of one leader to address the refugee crisis stands out. Under Chancellor Angela Merkel, Germany opened its borders to nearly one million migrants in 2015. But that move fueled the rise of a far-right party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD). The AfD was launched as an anti-European Union party in 2013 but shifted strategy after 2015, moving further right and campaigning on an explicitly anti-immigrant, anti-Islam agenda in the federal elections in 2017. It managed to garner mainstream support, becoming the third-largest party in Germany's Bundestag.

Carens casts this reaction as an example of opening the door too wide, too suddenly. “If you try to do too much, the result can be counterproductive,” he says, adding that this type of reaction will likely negatively affect existing and future immigrants. “Political actors always have a responsibility to assess consequences.”

### **Criminalizing migrants**

On the other end of opening the door too widely is the trend toward criminalizing irregular migration. In May, Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the U.S. had 52,000 people in detention, reported as an all-time high. Toward the end of the President Barack Obama era, that number was more than 34,000. That growth is related to the insistence of President Donald Trump’s administration that entering the U.S. undocumented is a crime. In reality, while it may be against the law to enter a country without formal permission, Carens says that doesn’t have to be a crime – it could just be seen as a civil violation.

This increased propensity toward criminalization leading to detention represents a shift in view, says Carens, from seeing undocumented migration as a civil offense, such as a traffic violation, to a criminal offense. Detaining migrants conflates the offense they’re committing – being in a country without permission – with a far more dangerous one. “You shouldn’t lock people up unless they pose a threat to society,” he says. “Just because they’re there without permission, doesn’t make them a threat.”

This criminalization is the result of migrants being perceived as a threat. Trump, for instance, campaigned on the myth of migrants as criminals. While this is a claim that has been debunked repeatedly, it’s certainly not new. A large-scale study looking at data over 40 years in the U.S., for instance, showed that increased immigration levels were consistently negatively correlated with violent crime, such as murder, and property crime. U of T Scarborough professor Donna Gabaccia – an historian of international migration – traces the belief that foreigners are potential criminals back to the 19th century in Canada, the U.S. and Australia. It’s a powerful narrative, she says. What she finds particularly disturbing is how asylum-seekers are being criminalized in these countries: “Under international law and under American practice, they have the right to seek asylum and yet, increasingly, they are being discussed as illegals who have committed a crime by crossing the border.”

## **Is it fair to let people “jump the queue”?**

Another common argument against undocumented migrants is that they have not followed the rules like everyone else. That leads to two criticisms: that they are jumping the queue, and that rewarding them will incentivize more people to do the same.

Carens returns to a tenet of his original argument: that migrants should respect laws of a state related to migration presupposes that the way the international order is set up is just. But setting that aside to deal with the legal and political realities of the day, Carens says the first criticism about rule-breaking comes down to a moral judgment on the character of an individual. And that most people, when faced with an actual undocumented person with deep ties to their community, can see that breaking a rule doesn't make that person morally defective.

The second criticism, that it incentivizes more people to cross borders undocumented, is trickier to untangle because while it's clear that it does encourage others to do the same, it's hard to parse out the exact impact of undocumented migrants. “Part of the problem here is that those who are already sympathetic to immigrants are going to say there are no consequences and those who are hostile to them are going to say there are devastating consequences,” says Carens. “It's very hard to get actual empirical information that isn't tainted by these [perspectives].”

But what Carens encourages people to consider are the negative consequences of deportation for those in the community where an undocumented person has deep ties. Deporting people has “devastating consequences” for those who care for them.

The reality is, some migrants simply don't have a legitimate path to citizenship in many countries. Emily Gilbert, a U of T professor of geography, says while there's an assumption that borders are more open than ever before, the reality is that while most tourists and those travelling for business move freely, there are many others who have difficulty crossing borders. This is the case even in Canada, which is perceived to be much more open than many other countries that have no path to naturalization. The Canadian system favours high-skilled workers, offering few opportunities for so-called low-skilled workers to become citizens. In her view, the people who the rules are built to advantage are the ones who get to jump ahead in line.

This shift away from permanent immigrants toward temporary migrants in jobs such as agriculture creates exactly the situation the U.S. is facing now, adds

Gabaccia, in which a subsection of the population is politically alienated without access to the full rights of citizenship. As a temporary foreign worker in the U.S., for instance, there is no maximum time you can have authorization to work in a country. That means a migrant can be working, paying taxes and deepening ties in a community without access to certain benefits or the right to vote. “Countries [without] the opportunities for permanent residency and naturalization cannot call themselves democracies because they have privileged some people by reason of birth and citizenship and excluded everyone else,” says Gabaccia.

### **Earning citizenship**

While the question of who deserves citizenship is a complicated one, Carens has a guiding principle that makes it quite simple: the passage of time earns people a right to stay. If someone has been in a community for 10 or 15 years, they have put down roots whether or not they have official status, argues Carens. And if someone came to a country as a child, there’s an even more compelling argument that they should be able to stay.

Carens uses the example of Marguerite Grimmond, an 80-year-old woman who was told she had to leave the U.K. after living there the majority of her life. She came to Scotland as a child from the U.S., and when coming back from her first trip abroad to Australia (she was using an American passport), immigration officials told her she would have to leave within four weeks. “The moral absurdity of forcing her to leave a place where she had lived so long was evident, whatever the legal technicalities,” wrote Carens in the *Boston Review*. After the media picked up her story, Grimmond was permitted to stay.

And there’s another reason this story in particular is powerful for many readers, says Carens: Grimmond is an elderly white woman who wasn’t seen as a threat. For him, it strips the migration debate of the racial and cultural biases that affect public opinion and policy, although they are rarely officially acknowledged.

The recent Windrush scandal in the U.K. revealed different attitudes driving policy, where longtime legal residents from Caribbean colonies were threatened with deportation decades after their arrival. People from Caribbean colonies were invited to Britain to help rebuild after the Second World War, and, being part of the colonies, they had a legal right to citizenship. But under the government’s “hostile environment” policy introduced in 2012, those legal residents were being threatened with deportation. In a parliamentary committee addressing the scandal, Anthony Bryan, who was detained and threatened with deportation, said: “I don’t think I’d have this problem [if] I had come from Canada instead of

coming from Jamaica.” His wife put it more bluntly: “[It was] because of the colour of your skin.”

For Carens, that’s why the passage of time is the best way to determine right to stay, rather than measuring integration in some way, which he says “is inevitably tied up with notions of race, religion, ethnicity, culture that are deeply, deeply problematic.”

The narrative of a threatened culture is certainly not new, says Gabaccia, and is particularly concerning her right now as she sees parallels to the rise of fascism. “It’s very demoralizing for someone of my age who’d never expected to see this, but it tells us just how ubiquitous this fear of the stranger is,” says Gabaccia. “It rises and falls, but it never disappears.”

### **The Political Realities of Open Borders**

While the liberal perspective that there is a moral responsibility to those outside a nation’s borders may be admirable, what’s missing is the reality that the primary responsibility of elected political leaders is to voters inside their borders, says U of T prof. Phil Triadafilopoulos.

“The limits to open borders are partly a function of democracy,” says Triadafilopoulos, an associate professor of political science.

In a democracy, political leaders are accountable to those who elected them, he says, limiting their discretion over border policy to the confines of the mandate they were elected on. And an open borders policy is not exactly a formula for political success. The opposition to taking in more immigrants is often framed as a capacity issue – that countries can’t absorb every potential immigrant who may want to settle there. And even though evidence suggests otherwise – Triadafilopoulos uses the example of Turkey, which has absorbed more than two million migrants from the Syrian conflict – that doesn’t give license for democratic leaders to overrule the will of the people who elect them.

“If you believe in democracy and that the people should have some say in fundamental decisions, which might include who constitutes the polity, then it’s not enough to argue, ‘Well, the people are misinformed or the people don’t know what they’re talking about,’” says Triadafilopoulos.

The democratic imperative leads to immigration policy being framed in the self-interest of a nation, such as inviting immigrants to fill labour-market gaps and combat declining birthrates, rather than fulfilling a moral responsibility. “When managed migration schemes can be seen to deliver, then democratic publics aren’t necessarily totally averse to immigration,” he says.



## 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](http://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](http://www.txccedp.org)

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio  
[www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/](http://www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/)

Climate Change  
[www.creation-care.com](http://www.creation-care.com)

NowCastSA  
[www.nowcastsa.com/](http://www.nowcastsa.com/)