

Testimony 
A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating March 22, 2020

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 Fourth Sunday of the Lenten Season. Tom Keene's poem is *Let's Ceebrate*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem there is my own meditation on capital punishment.

Calendar

Double check to see whether an event has been canceled because of the current pandemic.

In Austin

Saturday March 28, 9:00am-12:00pm, "5 Myths on Immigration." McCord Community Center 201, Austin Presbyterian Seminary, 100 E. 27th St.

(Tuesday April 2, 5:00pm-6:30pm, Mark Graves (Fuller Theological Seminary), "AI, Ethics, and Human Flourishing." Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.) Canceled.

In Dallas

(Saturday March 21, 7:00pm-9:00pm, "and You Welcomed Me: A Catholic Meditation on Immigration and Race for a Changing *Community*," Hosffman Ospino (Boston College). Church of the Incarnation, 1809 Maher Lane, Irving.) Postponed.

Tuesday April 7, 7:00pm, "Ending War." David Swanson. Peace Chapel at Cathedral of Hope, 5910 Cedar Springs Road.

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).

Wednesday March 18, 12:00pm-1:00pm, execution vigil in front of the El Paso County Courthouse. (execution scheduled)

Wednesday March 25, 12:00pm-1:00pm, execution vigil in front of the El Paso County Courthouse. (execution scheduled)

Saturday April 4, 8:30am, The Migrant Way of the Cross, with Bishop Seitz. Mount Cristo Rey. Information: Diocesan Peace and Justice Center, 872-8422.

In Houston

Wednesday March 18, 11:45am-1:25pm, lunch and learn dialogue: Racism in K-12 Education. Center for the Healing of Racism, 3412 Crawford St.

Saturday March 21, 6:30am-6:30pm, Dialogue on the Plantation; includes tours of three plantations. Center for the Healing of Racism, 3412 Crawford St.

(Sunday March 22, 9:45am, "Church & Society Series: The 2020 Census." St. Philip Presbyterian Church 201, 4807 San Felipe.) **Canceled.**

(Tuesday March 24, 5:30pm, reception, 6:30pm-8:00pm lecture, Joan Roughgarden (Stanford University), "The Gender Binary in Nature, Across Human Cultures, and in the bible." Kyle Morrow Room, 3rd floor, Fondren Library, Rice University.) **Canceled.**

(Thursday March 26, 6:00pm-7:30pm, "Strangers at the Gates: Women, Religion, and Immigration at the Border," Miguel de la Torre (Ilf School of Theology), Sr. Norma Pimentel (Catholic Charities South Texas), Anne Snyder (*Comment Magazine*). Hudspeth Auditorium, Anderson-Clarke Center, Rice University.) **Canceled.**

Friday March 27, 11:30am-7:30pm, Impact Investing conference: climate change track and faith-based investing track. Keynote speaker: Beth Collins (Catholic Relief Services). University of St. Thomas, 3800 Montrose Blvd. \$49.59 includes lunch; use promo code TIA2020. Tickets: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/annual-impact-investing-conference-tickets-92260717289>

In San Antonio

Monday March 16, 6:00pm-8:00pm, Derek Wilson (St. Philip's College), "There are few, if any, non-neighbors left,' An Invitation to Communities of Faith." Campus of the San Antonio Jewish Community, 12500 NW Military.

(Tuesday March 17, 6:30, "Towards a Texas Nantahala: A Proposal for the Guadalupe River, from New Braunfels to Gonzales," Gib Hafernack, sponsored by the Sierra Club. Eco Centro, 1802 N. Main.) Canceled.

Wednesday March 18, 12:00pm-1:00pm, execution vigil, across the street from the Bexar County Courthouse.

Saturday March 21 (3rd Saturday of the month), 11:00am, Lazarus ministry: reflection and prayer service at the paupers' cemetery in southwest Bexar County. Contact Arthur Dawes, 210-213-5919, arthurdawes@att.net.

Tuesday March 24, 7:00pm-9:00pm, "Creating an Ally," Miriam Sobre and Jake Erney. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook), \$15. Register at <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration/>

Wednesday March 25, 12:00pm-1:00pm, execution vigil, across the street from the Bexar County Courthouse.

(Thursday March 26, 7:30pm-9:30pm, "My Evolution as an Economist," Richard Thaler. Stieren Theatre, Trinity University, One Trinity Place.) Canceled

(Saturday March 28, 10:00am-12:30pm, 24th Annual Cesar E. Chavez March for Justice. Assemble at intersection of S. Brazos & Guadalupe. Bus service from end to beginning of the route.) Canceled.

(Saturday March 28, 1:30pm, film *Beatrix Farrand's American Landscape*. Christus Heritage Hall, The Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.) Postponed.

Second Reading (Ephesians 5:8-14)

This excerpt from the deuteropauline *Letter to the Ephesians* contrasts darkness and light, corresponding to the cure of the blind man narrative in the gospel. The context in *Ephesians* is a discourse on proper speech: “but let immorality and every impurity or greediness not be mentioned among you, as is fitting for saints, even unseemliness silly talk, or buffoonery, which does not belong, but rather thanksgiving” (Eph 5:3-4). The problem is not with speech itself, but its connection to action: “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience through such. So do not become consumers of them” (8:6-7). At verse 8, *Ephesians* takes up the metaphor of darkness and light. Again, the letter makes the connection with the results of darkness and light: “for the fruit of the light is in all uprightness, justice, and truth” (8:9). The fruit of light embraces one’s person (uprightness), the environing world to which one contributes (justice), and a sense of reality (truth).

Third Reading (John 9:1-41)

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” The temptation is always to blame the victim. Jesus would have none of that: “Neither did he nor his parents sin, but it was to make the works of God be manifest in him.”

In the symbolism of the Johannine Gospel, blindness is not simply physical visual impairment but an inability or, more tellingly, an unwillingness to share in the Christian community’s spiritual insights. Thus often when Jesus speaks, his disciples understand him but his critics do not. Those who come around to understanding him are, in a sense, created anew:

But “a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground—then the Lord God formed a man of dust from the ground...”

Jesus “...spat on the ground, made clay from the spittle, smeared his clay onto the eyes...”

“Smearred” could also be translated as “anointed,” and thus calls to mind conversion and baptism.

A series of denials follows the resultant cure. First the formerly blind man’s neighbors deny that it is the same old beggar who was made to see. Today the phrase “fake news” would be heard. Then the Pharisees deny that a prophet of God had done the deed, since he made clay and spread it on the man’s eyes on the Sabbath. The Pharisees let their religiosity get in the way. Then the Judean authorities denied that the man had been blind to begin with, but when presented with evidence they resorted to dismissing him as someone born in sin; nothing good could come from unapproved of folk!

After interviewing the formerly blind man, Jesus, referring to himself as the one whom the man was seeing, quips, “I came in judgment against this world, so that those not seeing may believe and those seeing may become blind.” Huh? Those not seeing in the in-group Christian way may believe nevertheless—one thinks of Jews and Muslims, who believe in the same God as the Christians do, but not seeing in the in-group Christian way. And those who are so sure they see are blinded by their certitude.

Poem

Let’s Celebrate

Let’s celebrate
the absence of some facts.

We are not imprisoned and tortured,
nor sleep deprived desperate for rest.

We are not refugees begging for safety,
nor cold, hungry and left alone.

We are not homeless wondering
where we’ll sleep tonight,
nor how to keep ourselves warm.

We are not children stuck in cages

and lost to our parents.

Yet, some of our human family are.
What the hell are we doing about it?

Tom Keene and Muse
June 24, 2019

To Kill to Punish Anthony J. Blasi

Most people oppose capital punishment. In the past, one would say that only some people, who contemplated killing as a form of punishment, had come to oppose it, but today a sufficient number of the public have been brought to the point of actually thinking about it that a majority now opposes it. At the same time, newspapers report "homicide/suicide" cases, cases in which disturbed or distraught individuals kill others, usually family members, and then turn on themselves and commit suicide. Why is this so common? I would suggest that somehow killing in the name of the people and the association between killing oneself and killing those close to oneself share a common root. They are both instances of a similar act, albeit in different circumstances. And the propensity toward one kind of killing is easily converted into a propensity toward the other.

There is a mental exercise called *reduction* whereby one can get to the essence of something by eliminating extraneous considerations. Take the case of *number*. We count things more or less naturally, and in a sense anyone who has not counted is not likely to know what a number is. But unless one knows intuitively what a number is, one cannot really count. What is known intuitively is not the objects counted (marbles, coins, spoons) nor this or that number (one thousand six hundred three, eleven, seventy-four). Rather, it is simply number as number that we intuit.

Similarly, values are sometimes identified as intuitively known matters of thought, but unlike a simple number they have an imperative about them: truth, fairness, life, and the like. Many ethicists seek to settle moral dilemmas by identifying one or more intuitible values at stake in a decision rather than engage in a philosophical discourse at the level of argument and rationalization.

In contrast to values there are disvalues: falsity, unfairness, deadness, and the like. These also have an imperative or "valence" inherent within them, though it is a negative rather than a positive valence.

In the present context, we can contemplate killing. It is not a matter of this killing or a rationale for killing, but killing as killing. One feature of killing is the co-presence of the one killing and some other. Killing is not simply about oneself but also about the presence in mind of a victim. For the act itself, who or what kind of person the victim may be is not of the essence of killing, simply that there would be some co-present other person. With suicide too there is a co-present other; one makes oneself a victim because some other has angered or disappointed the one taking one's own life, or perhaps one has become an embarrassment to others. In getting to the essence of killing, these various details are extraneous; what is essential is that someone makes cease a living co-presence of other persons.

There are heroic instances in which one loses one's own life for the sake of others, but to *lose* a life is essentially different from killing. One may step into danger in order to push another to safety, but it is something or someone other than oneself that is the danger to someone whom one saves. In killing, one makes oneself the danger.

In human co-presence, one actually "goes through time together" with someone or one can imagine doing so. "Going through time" involves envisioning a future in light of the immediate past, or even in light of a distant past that is relevant to the present. Sometimes we speak of sensing the inner music of someone else; music involves a live tension of protentions and retentions. The music of this co-presence involves the wide-awakeness of the other living in the present of oneself and, possibly, the wide-awakeness of oneself living in the present of the other. In essence, this has the character of act, not the character of a thing.

It is sometimes said that there is a spark of the divine in each person, sparks having the quality of event rather than a thing. Philosophers sometimes refer to the divine, God, as "pure act." When we refer to God as the Creator, we are suggesting that the divine make people and things actual, lending the divine quality of act to them. This is what we who are created are unable to do; we are not Pure Act and hence cannot lend pure act. Consequently we cannot take away what we cannot give. Any killing would be a literal reversal of the creative act, of a divine initiative.

There are many arguments against capital punishment. It is irreversible while the criminal justice process is fallible, open to error. It is unduly expensive. It is unnecessary. These are reasons. But essentially, it is killing, sundering a co-presence that God has set in motion.

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>

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/