



Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating May 17, 2020

Communications with the editor should be sent to j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com. Pax Christi International was founded in 1945 with the encouragement of Bishop Pierre Marie Th  as 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 Sunday Liturgical Reading reflections are based on readings for the Sixth Sunday of Easter. Tom Keene's poem is *Half of Me*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>.

Following the poem is my review of *Loving Life on the Margins*, a memoir by Suzanne Belote Shanley and Brayton Shanley, war tax resisters who co-founded the Agape community of Massachusetts.

Calendar

El Paso

Sunday April 26-Monday May 11, Mondays-Sundays, 7:00am-3:00pm, Isaiah House annual fundraiser. Order a red cheese enchilada plate take-out (915) 593-8490, pickup Lunch Box, 667 N. Carolina Dr. Tickets previously purchased can be redeemed. Isaiah House offers men leaving prison a temporary place to reside.

On the Net

Any time: Conversation, "Re-Opening the Nation: What Values Should Guide Us?" Danielle Allen (Ethics, Harvard University), Zeke Emanuel (Medical Ethics & Health Policy, University of Pennsylvania), moderator Mildred Z. Solomon (Hastings Center & Global Health, Harvard University).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahjo9oQ4lk8&feature=emb_title

Any time: Webinar replay (from Nov. 14, 2018), Vicki Lott, "Economic & Interracial Justice." <https://paxchristiusa.org/2018/11/14/webinar-replay-economic-interracial-justice/>

Any time: Webinar replay, Sr. Patricia Chappell, ssnd, former director of Pax Christi USA, “How to BE Peace.” <https://paxchristiusa.org/programs/webinar-how-to-be-peace/>

Any time: Webinar replay (from April 30, 2019), Catholic Climate Covenant, “Catholic Social Teaching and the Green New Deal,” Evan Weber (Sunrise Movement), Erin Lothes Biviano (College of St. Elizabeth), Marianne Comfort (Sisters of Mercy). <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/tags/webinar>

Friday June 5, 9:30am-3:00pm, online conference: “How Science Can Strengthen the Faith of Your Church.” 9:30 Elaine Howard Ecklund (Rice U.); 10:25, Mark Labbarton (Fuller Seminary); 11:15 Praven Sethopathy (Cornell U.), 12:30 Greg Cootsona (Cal. State, Chico) & Gus Reyes (Texas Baptists) on engaging youth and emerging adults in science; 1:20 Nichole Phillips (Emory U) & Harvey Clemons (Pleasant Hill Bapt. Church) on race, social justice, science; 2:10 Jonathan Hill (Calvin U) & Lee Hsia (First Bapt. Church, Houston) on human origins; 2:50 Closing remarks. The conference will be preceded by the release of Elaine Howard Ecklund’s book, *Why Science and Faith Need Each Other*. The first 250 people to register will receive a free copy; include your mailing address when registering. Register here: https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_w1ouOgz2R0etvzPbnHD4Zg Instructions to join the webinar will be sent to you after registering.

Second Reading (First Peter 3:15-18)

The passage by an anonymous author (using the name “Peter” because of persecution) shows that the ethic of the Beatitudes is very much in mind. It had already paraphrased part of the Beatitudes in verses 8-9: “And finally, let all be like-minded, sympathetic, familiarly loving, compassionate, unassuming, not returning evil for evil or verbal abuse for verbal abuse, but on the contrary giving blessing....” After quoting Psalm 34:12-16, it goes back to one of the Beatitudes: “And what person will harm you if you become zealots for the good? But if indeed you suffer for justice’s sake, blessed are you.” Then comes the passage for the day: “...but sanctify the Lord, the Messiah, in your hearts, ready always for a defense before anyone who asks you for a statement about the hope that is in you, but with gentleness and respect....”

The author evidently did not see the ethic of the Beatitudes as being a mere non-response to aggression. The Christian is setting about as zealots for the good. Retaliation comes upon one who promoted justice. One is not to respond to ill-treatment in kind but have good reasons to be given straightforwardly in a respectful manner.

Third Reading (John 14:15-21)

“If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Paraclete to be with you forever.” This passage from the Last Supper discourse in the *Johannine Gospel* is featured late in the Easter season because of the promise of “another Paraclete.” Jesus was leaving, but God will still be with his followers because of the sending of that Paraclete. Pentecost is soon to come.

However, when the passage elaborates on the promised presence of God, the language becomes quite mysterious—at least as translated. “A little while and the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live. On that day you will understand that I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you.” *In* translates the Greek ἐν, en. In English the primary meaning of *in* is to be inside a container, though we also speak of having faith *in* someone or investing *in* a venture. Greek is less precise than English; ἐν can equally mean *by* as well as *in*. So try an experiment:

I am, by my Father.

You are, by me.

I am, by you.

The Messiah is with us, by an act of God the Father. We exist, in a new way, by the activity of the Messiah. But the Messiah is with us by our activity. Because of its broader meaning, the Greek is not as cryptic as the translation, but it still needs some dwelling upon, especially the clause, “I am, by you.”

Poem

Half of Me

It was a civil war:

Salvadorans were killing their own.

We sided with the rich.

Our army's School of the Americas
trained the death squads who
left headless bodies in the streets.

So many, that kids
had to go around them
on their morning walks to school.

Decades later, one of those girls told us:
*I still wake from dreams where
half of me is killing the other half.*

Tom Keene and Muse
November 16, 2019

Book Review

Suzanne Belote Shanley and Brayton Shanley, *Loving Life on the Margins. The Story of the Agape Community*. Athol, Massachusetts: Haley's (haley.antique@verizon.net), 2019, xx + 315 pp. Reviewed by Anthony J. Blasi.

This is the family story of a couple, dedicated to peace, who separately gave up on their Church for a time but kept their implicit faith during wartime and amidst at least superficial social change. They created a communal Christian alternative life, and in the process faced ethical dilemmas. They eventually returned to the land, so to speak, in rural central Massachusetts.

The book came to my attention when a Pax Christi USA newsletter arrived in the mail. The newsletter mentioned in passing a few details that suggested I should have crossed paths with Suzanne and Brayton Shanley, and I surely shared some of their sentiments. I was intrigued.

The book roughly follows a chronological order, alternating between Suzanne's and Brayton's voices, though breaking with the chronology to complete the discussions of various issues and subnarratives.

Brayton was an "ordinary" suburban New York middle class boy until an injury destroyed his hopes of becoming a football hero. His father was a

functional alcoholic who would die when Brayton was 21. His mother, who favored the Civil Rights Movement of the early 1960s, died when Brayton was only eighteen. His family Catholicism never really addressed what he was to do with his life, and his father was not really successful in his claim to middle class status when funds for college ran out in the first year. "Out of luck, out of school, and out of money on the streets in Boston, I was eighteen and looking for work." He assumed a hippie appearance and ran from the draft for the morally questionable Vietnam War, but eventually had to be subject to the physical; the result was a medical deferment because of his old injury.

Brayton entered St. Anselm College, where his sister had been a student and where his uncle, Joe McDonald, taught philosophy. I knew Joe McDonald when I taught at St. Anselm, three years after Brayton Shanley graduated. Joe was a personable elder professor, respected as a Thomist. I did not know, but Brayton did, that in his twenties Joe had befriended Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, and that he had frequently invited Dorothy Day to St. Anselm as a guest speaker. St. Anselm was a politically conservative Catholic imitation of a Yankee college, but it retained a dissident conscience that preserved hints of the social encyclicals and the Catholic Worker counterculture. By the time I showed up, some students in their late teens were rebelling against middle class existence and romanticizing poverty, and those returning from the War were conscience-stricken over what they had done to innocent peasants in southeast Asia, having to talk it through with such young professors as myself. Most students, however, were simply on the white-collar job track.

Suzanne Belote grew up ethnically Polish (despite her father's French surname) and poor in Cheektowaga, near Buffalo. Her father, an alcoholic, was abusive toward her mother. Somehow her mother managed to become a nurse. Religion meant required Sunday attendance and ill-taught Wednesday afternoon catechism classes. Suzanne saw study as a way out of Cheektowaga; she eventually earned a Master's in English and became an English teacher. She resented the all-male priesthood of the Church that she and her siblings abandoned as soon as they were out of the household.

Both Suzanne and Brayton had given up on the Christianity they knew, as embodied in a Catholic Church that would not condemn the unjustifiable killing perpetrated by their government in Vietnam and that would rest contented with an unjust church culture of sexism and patriarchy. Yet when they met, they created an awareness that they both had lacked in their lives: "For the first time, I read books that portrayed Jesus as an outlaw, a renegade, an outsider who

preached solidarity with the oppressed, the poor, and the victimized" (Suzanne, p. 22).

Suzanne and Brayton had teaching jobs in the Boston area, Suzanne's the more notable at Simmons College. They affiliated with peace and anti-nuclear power groups and met Phil and Daniel Berrigan. Suzanne helped organize an anti-war teach-in at Simmons College, featuring Phil Berrigan and others; the teach-in led to a network, Ailanthus, which included Buddhists, Catholics, and Quakers. For ten years they held a weekly vigil at Draper Labs in Cambridge, Massachusetts; Draper developed missile guidance systems. Suzanne's arrest for trespassing at Draper and fourteen-day sentence led to Simmons firing her. Her brief stay in prison resulted in a cell-mate's children and the cell-mate herself becoming part of the extended Shanley family.

Suzanne and Brayton married in 1980; the ceremony took place in a Quaker meetinghouse, with a Roman Catholic priest who worked with poor people officiating. For a time they had a modest house in Brocton. With Suzanne's post-Simmons part-time teaching and a job Brayton secured with Pax Christi Boston under Gordon Zahn, they managed to earn too little to be subject to federal tax. They received donations for their new community, the "Agape Community," and gave retreats and presentations on pacifism at parishes, colleges, and high schools. They were joined by, among others, Charlie McCarthy, a former theology professor at Notre Dame who quit because Notre Dame President Theodore Hesburgh expelled some draft card-burning students. McCarthy was a married Melkite Roman Catholic priest who made his house in Brocton a small church. A Notre Dame graduate student in the early 1970s involved in anti-war demonstrations, how did I miss knowing Charlie McCarthy? I did, eventually, make the acquaintance of my fellow sociologist Gordon Zahn. Another member of Agape was Father George Zabelka, who was a military chaplain who had blessed the *Enola Gay* and the *Bockscar* and their crews, the planes that dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945; McCarthy gradually converted Zabelka to pacifism. Zabelka was the subject of the documentary film, *The Reluctant Prophet* (1988).

Agape received invitations and gifts from many teaching sisters, Bishop Daniel Patrick Reilly of Norwich and later Worcester, and a few lay people, but generally met with damning faint praise from Catholic clergy. Suzanne sent out a newsletter with a mailing list of 800. Gordon Zahn of Pax Christi Boston wanted to focus exclusively on conscientious objection; so Brayton and Suzanne, who both

worked for Zahn for a time, set out on their own under the Agape label, teaching a broader philosophy of non-violence.

Agape engaged in many multiple faith-tradition events, but essentially they modeled a new kind of Catholicism. They approximated a new kind of monasticism, even as they objected to the all-male priesthood and the hierarchy's opposition to contraception. They took inspiration from the pacifist Jesuit Richard McSorley and from Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit. Ever realists, they did not require members of Agape to be war tax resisters. People who turned up in the Shanley's network included numerous figures in the peace movements, some more familiar than others.

The Shanley's discuss dilemmas that arise in their work. What about self-defense? Does opposing war and violence involve allowing victimization? What about abortion? One runs against the popular opinion when opposing self-defense and abortion. Is voluntary poverty a proper ideal for inner city folk trying to escape involuntary poverty? Or is it simply an idealistic stance for relatively privileged white people? The Shanley's do not claim to have all the answers. There is enough to do in the task of peace-making not to worry about self-defense. There is enough to do to provide enlightened approaches to adoption; the Shanley's themselves adopted a child. They did not set about attacking women caught up in the traps that lead to abortions. They spoke of simple living rather than voluntary poverty.

In 1987, the Shanley's left Brocton and moved Agape to a rural central Massachusetts location. They set about growing their own food, using their own waste, living off the grid, burning no fossil fuel, and accepting young adult interns. College student retreatants absorbed as much back-to-the-land lifestyle as peace-making. Much of the narrative turns to this back-to-the-land development in their lifestyle. Yet the peace work continued because of the Gulf Wars. In 2002, Massachusetts witnessed the strange juncture of Cardinal Law leading support for President George W. Bush's wars even as Pope John Paul II condemned those same wars; the pope, joined by the Shanley's and many others, participated in an interfaith prayer for peace at Assisi. Agape initiated a petition calling for an end to the Second Gulf War; after minor revisions to the text of the petition, Pax Christi New England and many others signed on to it. Only a few clergy signed on, including Bishop Gumbleton, Charles McCarthy, and the latter's former student Melkite Bishop John Botean. The Shanley's themselves had a polite confrontation with Cardinal Law.

The Shanley's again showed up for protests. They were arrested in Natick, Massachusetts, at the Biological and Chemical Command Center, but judges began to decline to sentence them once juries found them guilty of trespassing. Long opposed to the death penalty, they succeeded in helping William More, a saintly prisoner on Georgia's death row, get his death sentence changed to life, but not so with Dzhokhar Tsarnaev in 2015, who had planted a bomb at the Boston Marathon. Needless to say, the Shanley's received widespread criticism and even death threats in their activism.

Suzanne and Brayton made choices in their lives that occasion pause and reflection. Their lives are prophetic, and so is their book.

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/

Migrant Center for Human Rights

<https://Migrantcenter.org>