

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating July 2, 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@al.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 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 *Third Reading* commentary is based on the gospel reading for the thirteenth Sunday in ordinary time. Tom Keene's poem is *Eye of the Fly*. An essay by Joseph Cook of the San Antonio Mennonite Church, *The Killing of Environmental Activists*, follows; the links to videos are worth following up.

Calendar

Monday June 26, rally against the "show me your papers law." 8:30am rally begins; 9:00am teach-in & rally; 11:00am-1:00pm, major rally & press conference: "No Hate in Our State," anti SB4 Rally. RSVP at <http://bit.ly/NoSB4>. 655 E Cesar E. Chavez Blvd. (federal courthouse)

Tuesday June 27, 5:30pm-7:00pm, Human Tragedies of Turkey's Purge—Special Fundraising Dinner. Raindrop Turkish House, 4337 Vance Jackson, behind the large "Car Wash" sign just north of I-410. RSVP and ticket at <https://specialfundraising.eventbrite.com>. Info at sanantonioturkishhouse.org.

Sundays, July 2, 9, 16, 23, & 30, 1:30pm-3:00pm. Dr. Fatma Arslan, Golsum Arslan, Dr. Dhawn Martin, and Sumetra Tek lead discussions of *Crafting a Life That Matters*, by Emily Esfahani Smith. Raindrop Turkish House, 4337 Vance Jackson Road (just north of I-410, behind the big car wash sign). \$15 for 5 sessions. Register by June 23. For details, see www.upcsa.org/classes.

Wednesday July 5, 3:30pm, film viewing: "Watershed—Exploring a New Water Ethic for the New West." The film concerns the Colorado River. Christus Heritage Hall, the Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

Saturday July 22, environmental film extravaganza. 1:00pm, *Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for Our Time*. 2:15pm, *Love Thy Nature*. 3:45pm, *Before the Flood*. Mabee Library Auditorium, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Sunday July 23, 4:00pm-6:00pm, Michal Lemberger, Finding the Voice of the Voiceless in the Hebrew Bible. \$17. Register by July 14. For details see www.upcsa.org/classes. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook).

Tuesday July 25-Thursday July 27, 10:30-12:00 noon, Rev. Traci Smith, "Cloud of Witnesses: The Community of Christian Hebrews." \$35 for 3 sessions. Register by July 17. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook).

Saturday July 29, environmental film extravaganza. 1:00pm, *Written on Water: A Modern Tale of a Dry West*. 2:15pm, *Watershed: Exploring a New Water Ethic for the West*. 3:45pm, *Revolution*. Mabee Library Auditorium, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Third Reading (Matthew 10: 37-42)

"One who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and one loving son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." So begins the gospel for the thirteenth Sunday in ordinal time. (For some reason the ecclesiastical translators insist upon using the wrong adjective, *ordinary*, for the counted Sundays in the liturgical calendar. I will return to this below.) Historically, homilists have associated this passage with the sacrifices related to clerical and religious celibacy.

The passage, taken in isolation, prioritizes matters of faith over family. Placed into context, however, it addresses conflict within families, not merely a setting of priorities. Immediately before the first verse of the reading comes, "Do not suppose that I came to bring peace upon the earth. I came not to bring peace but the sword. For I came to turn a man 'against his father, and a daughter against her mother,'" and so forth, citing the prophet Micah 7:6.

During the heated 2016 American political season, statements of prejudice and discrimination against, and exclusion of Latino economic migrants, Latinos in general, and Muslims divided families. Family celebrations of the Thanksgiving holiday that year were particularly delicate or disastrous depending on how matters went. Pastors encouraged people to maintain domestic peace; their advice do doubt reflected wisdom and legitimate concern. But is there a limit to what one should tolerate from loved ones?

The passage from the *Gospel of Matthew* goes on to say, "One who accepts a prophet as a prophet will receive the reward of a prophet, and one who accepts a just person as a just person will receive the reward of a just person." One would not demand that prophets be just and just people inactive because of family.

Wisdom counsels us to know the difference between issues that should be tolerated, such as the ecclesiastical practice of using the wrong adjective (*ordinary*, as opposed to *ordinal*) and ones that should not be. And while not everyone needs to be the prophet in every instance, one needs accept and even defend prophets in every

instance: “And whoever would give merely a cup of cold water to one of these little ones as disciples, amen I say to you, will by no means lose his or her reward.”

© 2017 Anthony J. Blasi

Poem

Eye of the fly

He traveled the country,
jacking up awareness:
 solar power,
 cleaning up,
 animal rights.

I asked, “What got you started?”

“I was a bio-physicist,
studying fruit flies –
university research.

“Peering into a microscope
at the eye of a fly,
I saw what
I’d never seen before.

“That year,
I quit my job.
I went out
to change the world.”

“What did you see?”

“The eye of God.”

Tom Keene
February 1, 2009

The Killing of Environmental Activists.ⁱ

Joseph L. Cook
San Antonio Mennonite Church

This article for *Creation Care News* is much shorter than previous articles I have written. That is because I am using videos that are in this article that go into a depth that my words cannot express. It is people like the murdered activists who bring to the rest of us an expression of faith in action in the face of danger and oppression. A faith that risks and encounters death to oppose environmental destruction and speak for the poor and the helpless in the face of the powerful and the rich. It is a story that continues every day as new activists step into the footsteps of those who are murdered for standing for justice.

Being an Environmental Activist in many parts of the world brings with it the risk of death at the hands of those opposing the actions that environmental activists are taking in regards principally to land issues and violations against indigenous populations. These activists, who some would call social justice activists, are trying often to prevent the illegal grabbing of land where the rightful owners of the land are ejected often by use of force and use of killings. Land appropriation is done for large agricultural interests, mining operations, illegal logging operations, and many other reasons such as building of dams where land is appropriated often without adequate payments to the rightful owners of the land. Often these actions cause pollution of water, land and air and threaten the local population's health and local biodiversity, creating a painful injury against humanity and creation. The powerful line their pockets with profits at the expense of the poor and the powerless.

In 2015, there were 185 documented killings of environmental activists – “Mining, agribusiness, logging, and water rights were the four industrial sectors mostly explicitly implicated in this wave of violence. Mining — for tin, coal, copper, silver, and gold — was linked to 42 murders. Agribusiness was linked to 20 known murders. Expanded logging activity was linked to 15 killings. And hydroelectric dam initiatives in Central America were linked to another 15 — not including the high-profile assassination of indigenous Honduran activist Berta Cáceres, a Goldman Environmental Prize winner and dam opponent who was shot in her home in March 2016.”ⁱⁱ The killing of environmental activists continues unabated with at least two people being killed each week.ⁱⁱⁱ The Non-Governmental Organization Global Witness reported that between 2002 and 2013 a total of 908 environmental activists were killed in 35 countries with only 10 convictions for these killings.^{iv} The deadliest nation was Brazil with 448 deaths between 2002 and 2013; Honduras--109 deaths; Peru--58 deaths; Philippines--67 deaths; and Thailand--16 deaths during this time frame. Of those who are killed about 40 percent are indigenous people trying to protect their land^v

Among the most notorious murders was that of Berta Caceres, who was murdered on March 3, 2016 in Honduras. Berta was a member of the indigenous Lenca people, who opposed the building of the Agua Zarca Dam on their lands. Her murder came after threats to her life and members of her family. Another person murdered while trying to protect the land rights of poor farmers was a Catholic nun, Sister Dorothy

Stang, who was killed on February 12, 2005. Sister Dorothy, from Dayton, Ohio, was shot six times and left to die on a muddy road in the Brazilian Amazon. Please look at the following videos that go into greater depth on the murder of Berta and Sister Dorothy:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVagqPURp1U>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHpQ8IONGtY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AR1kwx8b0ms>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQWYwN6553Y>

The brutal killing of those trying to protect the rainforests that Sister Dorothy tried to protect continues to this day (see: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/why-do-environmentalists-keep-getting-killed-around-world-180949446/>)

I have struggled with my perception that although scientifically rational efforts to address environmental and ecological problems has made some progress, there is a lack of concern or even indifference to taking action on these problems. Some folks go about earning their daily bread even if the way their bread is earned and the way they live their lives is a major reason for increasingly severe environmental and ecological problems and even as we have seen the killing of those trying to protect creation. When we place an emphasis on the created and not on creation as a whole we are diminishing our true humanity. Pope Francis's Encyclical Letter *On Care for Our Common Home--Laudato Sí* is an important revelation that I fully welcomed as necessary to make the world realize modern folks are creating a garbage heap of our world.

I feel that humanity is embedded in all creation, and we do not have a dominion or lordship over that creation given to us by the creator but we are co-authors with God to ensure that we are stewards of that creation. As a Native American Proverb says "Tread the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents--it was loaned to you by your children"

How much do we participate in being stewards of creation? Some like Sister Dorothy Stang and Berta Caceres were murdered for speaking for the poor and the powerless trying to prevent degradation of creation. Both lived in poor communities and spoke about the injustice and despite threats to their lives were willing to take up the cross for all creation and for the folks they lived with.

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/

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative
www.msjc.net

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, International JPIC Committee
<http://sacsvi.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

ⁱ Originally published in *Creation Care Corner*, June 5, 2017.

ⁱⁱ Alexander Sammon, "At Least 185 Environmental Activists Killed in 2016." *Mother Jones*, 16 June 2016.

ⁱⁱⁱ Reece Walters, "Eco crime and green activism." In Tiffany Bergin and Emmanuela Orlando (eds.), *Forging a Socio-Legal Approach to Environmental Harms*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2016, pp. 73-100.

^{iv} Nina Lakani, "Surge in Deaths of Environmental Activists over Past Decade, Report Finds." *The Guardian*, April 15, 2014.

^v Rachel Nuwer, "The Rising Murder Count of Environmental Activists." *New York Times*, June 20, 2016.