

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating June 28, 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 Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Proclaim Resurrection*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is my review of *Why Science and Faith Need Each Other*, by Elaine Howard Ecklund.

Last Monday (June 15) I was able to participate in a discussion on racism via Zoom, hosted by Holy Cross Catholic Church in Austin. A number of the other participants commented on how inspiring it was to hear the clergy of their parishes preaching on the sin of racism and on social justice in general. A former Austin pastor, now Bishop Bill Wack, c.s.c., of Pensacola Tallahassee, zoomed in as well.

Here is a news item of interest:

A bishop in El Paso knelt in prayer for George Floyd. Two days later, Pope Francis called

By Alisha Ebrahimji, CNN

Updated 7:22 PM ET, Fri June 5, 2020



Bishop Mark Seitz's act of kneeling in prayer for 8 minutes and 46 seconds to remember George Floyd prompted a call from Pope Francis this week.

CNN)Catholic Bishop Mark Seitz had no idea that his act of solidarity in El Paso, Texas, would be met with a phone call of gratitude from his boss, Pope Francis.

With eyes closed, masks covering their faces, white roses in hand and handwritten signs that read "Black Lives Matter," Seitz and 12 other priests from the Diocese of El Paso knelt in silence for 8 minutes and 46 seconds on Monday. They were praying in silence for George Floyd, a black man who died in the custody of Minneapolis police after an officer knelt on his neck for that same amount of time.

"Frankly, what I did and what I have said is only a very small way to take part in what so many are doing in their peaceful protests," Seitz said. Two days after the clergy's prayer, Seitz had just finished celebrating Mass when he got a call on his cellphone from the pontiff himself. In Spanish, Francis told Seitz how grateful he was for Seitz's response to Floyd's death.

"Through me, he's expressing his unity with everyone who is willing to step out and say this needs to change," Seitz said. "This should never happen again.

Wherever there is a lack of respect for human beings, where there's a judgment based on the color of their skin, this has to be rooted out. Whether it's in law enforcement, in business, in government, in any aspect of our society, this has to change. And now we know very clearly that the Holy Father is making this his prayer."

Pax Christi San Antonio Letter

Tom Keene cited this news story in a letter he sent to the editor of the San Antonio *Express News* on behalf of Pax Christi San Antonio:

To the Express-News editor,

We are members of Pax Christi (Peace of Christ) San Antonio. Our national office, Pax Christi, USA, issued a statement regarding the killing of George Floyd. It concludes with these words:

"In the first reading of this past Sunday, Ascension Sunday, as Jesus is taken up into the sky, his disciples are asked: 'Why are you standing looking up at the sky?' For those of us who would follow Jesus, the implication is that our eyes should not be focused above on heaven, but our attention needs to be on this world, here and now. We are called to find the Jesus who is still here, crucified in our midst, to stand at the foot of that Cross, and to mourn. To mourn for George Floyd. And to turn that mourning into the action needed to heal our world and dismantle the racism that upholds a culture of death."

We also note that Catholic bishop, Mark Seitz, of El Paso, Texas, publicly knelt and prayed for eight minutes to remember Floyd. Bishop Seitz represents an institution and we recall how the racism that killed George Floyd does not reside only in one or more police officers. It pervades our police departments, police unions, our cities, counties and states. Bishop Seitz received a call of support from Pope Francis who heads the institution of the Catholic Church. The pope said, "...we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life."

We of Pax Christi, San Antonio stand with all such institutional leaders who confess to the racism that permeates our world and pledge to themselves, their institutions and us to profound and revolutionary change.

Tom Keene on behalf of Pax Christi, San Antonio

Notices

Video of the June 11 panel discussion, “Justice and Faith, Family and Community: Latino Leadership in a Time of Crisis,” in the Georgetown University *Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life* series. Participants include Bishop Mario Dorsonville (Washington, DC), Juan Belman Guerrero (Georgetown University), Michael Okińczyc-Cruz (Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership, Chicago), and Olga Segura (author). Access the video at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4lvtV3HpBk&feature=emb_title

Video of “Racism as a Public Health Crisis,” Michelle Williams (Harvard Chan School of Public Health) and Ana Sandoval (San Antonio City Council). Accessible at: https://nowcastsa.com/news/webcast-conversation-about-racism-public-health-crisis?utm_source=NOWCastSA&utm_campaign=c4f90a4baa-NEWSLETTER_2020_06_20_09_43&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_99706c05e2-c4f90a4baa-443848369&mc_cid=c4f90a4baa&mc_eid=574eebd535

Wednesday July 1-Friday July 31, website for plastic free eco challenge. Check out <https://plasticfree.ecochallenge.org/>

Calendar

Tuesday June 23, 9:30am-11:00am, Webinar, “2020 State of Housing in Houston and Harris County,” Allison Hay (Houston Habitat for Humanity), Chris Herbert (Harvard University), and Mary Cunningham (Urban Institute). Free, register at: https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_w4KOmcWpTM22MRSH_HN4aQ

Thursday June 25, 1:00pm-2:00pm (2:00pm-3:00pm ET), webcast “Doing Justice: The Role of Faith in Building Climate Equity,” Rev. Michael Malcom (People’s Justice Council), Lindsay Harper (Arm in Arm), and Anita Fête Crews (Blessed Tomorrow). Register at: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_2giOoodleTF6UnuusCLLqug

Sunday June 28, 5:00pm-7:30pm, film *The Condor and the Eagle*, followed by a webinar. The focus is on four indigenous and Latino environmental leaders. Suggested donation: \$10.00. Information, registration, and link for donation at: <https://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/2020/06/the-condor-the-eagle/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=bb53c622-fab4-466b-b636-39bbcc2fa5d4>

Saturday July 4, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio holiday online meeting. Contact Yvonne Dilling at yvonedilling@gmail.com for the Zoom invitation.

Thursday August 6, 12:30pm-1:30pm, webinar: “The History, Present and Possible Future of Gandhian Nonviolence and the Nonviolent Way of Jesus in Methodism,” Natalya Cherry. \$15.00, Register at: https://secure.touchnet.net/C21403_ustores/web/product_detail.jsp?PRODUCTID=1929&SINGLESTORE=true
This registration site is actually quite cryptic; check out the information at: <https://www.smu.edu/Perkins/PublicPrograms/Webinars/United-Methodist-Studies-Webinar-Series>

Three events commemorating the 75th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki:

Thursday August 6, online commemoration of the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with Ira Helfand. Free.

Friday August 7, online nonviolence training by Pace e Bene. \$20.00

Saturday August 8, online conference, “Educating and Advancing a Nonviolent World (Rev. Richard Rohr, Dr. Erica Chenoweth, Rev. Lennox Yearwood, Jr., Dr. Ira Helfand, Kazu Haga, George Martin, Dr. Kit Evans-Ford, Veronica Pelicarić, Dr. Ken Butigan, Rev. John Dear). \$50.00

Information and tickets for all three:

<https://paceebene.org/cnvconference2020?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=7c490eaa-7087-4e9f-b3ab-6e0553d76d0a>

Thursday August 13, 12:30pm-1:30pm, webinar : „Social Responsibility of Religious Communities: New Traditions,“ George Mason (Wilshire Baptist Church, Dallas). \$15.00. Register at: https://secure.touchnet.net/C21403_ustores/web/product_detail.jsp?PRODUCTID=1930&SINGLESTORE=true

Second Reading (Romans 6:3-4, 8-11)

Paul's *Letter to the Romans* is a treatise that requires slow and careful reading. Immediately prior to the reading for today, Paul elicits a response from the reader: "So what shall we say? Should we continue in sin so that the grace may increase? Certainly not. How are we, who died to sin, to live in it?" Being dead to sin is the context for the image Paul uses of baptism being a death and burial. Having died in this sense, we can rise with Jesus.

The Lectionary skips a few verses where Paul uses a second metaphor: "growing together" the way a grafted fruit tree twig grows together with the trunk into it has been grafted: "For if we have in this way grown together with his death, so we shall also do with his resurrection." Then comes an obscure reference to the old self being crucified so that the dying self has been made guiltless of sin; this confusing reference is probably the reason the Lectionary skips a few sentences. Paul is probably likening crucifixion to the grafting of a twig into a trunk. The tree from which the twig was taken may die, but the twig itself enters into a new life. That would be the sense in which the dying self of the baptized has been made guiltless.

The grafting metaphor makes sense of what follows in the Lectionary: "But if we died with Messiah, we trust that we will also live with him, knowing that Messiah, raised from the dead, will not die again...."

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.

Ever since 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 gatherings and celebrations became particularly delicate or disastrous depending on how matters went. Pastors encourage people to maintain domestic peace; their advice no doubt reflects 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 not 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."

Poem

Proclaim Resurrection

We do it each flowering of spring.
We christen it Easter,
recalling the Goddess of Dawn
ancestors honored.

It's when we lift-up living's prolific
ever-coming-going-coming:
rabbit-fertility.
real as eggs-in-action,

When we bless our bodies
in how every seven years
our trillions of cells are born,
live, work, die and rise again.

With every circling of our life-giving Sun,
we declare: "Christ is risen,"
sure as spring-winter-spring,
certain as sun's rising-setting-rising.

We soar from our illusions
of death's separations
to realities of life's on-going
and declare to all: Happy Resurrection.

Tom Keene and Muse
August 13, 2019

Book Review

Why Science and Faith Need Each Other. Eight Shared Values That Move Us Beyond Fear, by Elaine Howard Ecklund. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2020. 196pp., ISBN 978-1-58743-488-4. Reviewed by Anthony J. Blasi

Elaine Howard Ecklund, professor of sociology at Rice University, is well known for insightful studies about the relationship in society between science and religion. She has led teams that interviewed natural scientists around the world to see what they really think about religion, as well as what religious people, primarily in the United States, really think about science. She has found that despite a small minority of scientists who are hostile toward religion, there is widespread respect in the scientific community for religion, even on the part of atheist and agnostic scientists. Moreover, a substantial majority of religious people accept and value science. Nevertheless, sufficient percentages of scientists hostile toward religion and believers suspicious of science exist for the myth of a general conflict to persist.

Why Science and Faith Need Each Other is a popular-level book based on Ecklund's prior research. She is engaging in an outreach to the general public to assuage the fear of science that many religious people, especially many

Evangelical Christians, have. In fact, I received the book from her when I registered for the conference she organized, "How Science Can Strengthen the Faith of Your Church." Her new book reveals the depth of scientists' appreciation of religion and the value believers place on science not only with quotations from her interviewees but with her own personal testimony as someone born with serious and painful disabilities that science and medicine helped overcome and whose scientific curiosity was stifled in one church and encouraged in another church to which she converted.

Why is this of interest to me, son of a religious scientist, someone who benefited from enlightened and educated religious educators who never made science an object of suspicion and fear? For a time as a child, my family attended a parish church pastored by someone my father regarded as incompetent and bigotted; we moved into another parish. Years later, fresh out of college, I taught in a Catholic high school coincidentally located in that same parish, with the same pastor. At the commencement ceremony at the end of the academic year, the valedictorian, a brilliant youngster whom I did my best to teach, made a passing reference to evolution, and to the dismay of the well-educated parents who comprised the audience, the pastor criticized the notion of evolution before pronouncing his closing prayer! The fear of science was still with us, and judging from the contemporary cult of "creationism," racial theories of intelligence, climate change denial, claims that vaccinations cause autism, and further claims that the COVID pandemic is a hoax, it is still with us now. Meanwhile, I myself have been the recipient of a few anti-religious barbs from social scientific colleagues who regarded me as something of an aberration—a few, not many—and an ally in my endeavors in the American Association of University Professors, an organization that keeps the flame alive for academic freedom, sometimes introduced me to others, his voice squeaking with incredulity, as someone who writes in a strange specialty called the *sociology of religion*. Then there was a curriculum committee member, a philosopher, who blocked a course I proposed teaching on the scientific study of religion; science in the same course as religion? There could be no such thing!

Ecklund spends no time on arguments why science is no genuine threat to faith and vice-versa. Such turn up now and then in the quotations from her interviewees, but that is not on her agenda. Rather she proceeds as a social scientist, showing both with survey statistics and her interviews that there are indeed religious scientists as well as a-religious ones and scientific religious people as well as those who fear science. The result is a conversation among

three collective parties: Christians who do not appreciate science, Christian scientists, and atheist scientists. Generally, *Christian* is exemplified by Protestants, especially Evangelicals.

The conversation proceeds not with propositional theses but virtues that are or at least should be common to both science and faith. Her survey work that employed a highly nuanced questionnaire about evolution shows that she has no lack of sophistication with propositional theses, but the book is about virtues. One virtue is curiosity, usually seen as a characteristic of scientists. She calls for churches to be safe places for curiosity. Another virtue is doubt; the best scientists doubt received views, and Christians who examine their faith realize that faith consists more of doubt than certitude. Humility is a third virtue, experienced by scientists before evidence and by Christians before the Almighty. Another virtue is creativity; religious scientists speak of God having a sense of humor, of divine creativity. Unfortunately, churches tend in many cases to discourage women from engaging in science and other creative activities. Then there are the moral controversies about in-vitro fertilization and gene-editing; there are both good reasons for these and potential abuses of them, but concern should not be a fear of "playing God." Then there is healing, more in a physical sense among the scientists but more expansive than that among Christians. Both science and religion know awe, an experience that Ecklund depicts as a virtue. The virtue of *Shalom*, a pervasive satisfaction that, despite hassles, what one is doing is a contribution, is worthwhile. Some scientists describe their work as a form of prayer, a calling. Finally, there is gratitude, the basis for religion that science recognizes as having physical and psychological benefits.

So why do science and faith need one another? They are characterized by mutually reinforcing virtues. Without such virtues, they become needlessly competing dogmas.

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>