


Testimony
A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating July 5, 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 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 Sunday Liturgical Reading reflections are based on readings for the Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's regular poem is *Authority of Women*. Tom also has a special poem for the holiday, *Litany for the Fourth of July*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. My reflection on the problem of structural immorality follows the poem.

Notices

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

"A Proactive Conversation with a Black Pastor on Race," video of Bishop Robert Schnase of the Rio Texas Conference, United Methodist Church, and Rev. James Amerson of St. Paul United Methodist Church.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gG6eCXkSvEY&feature=emb_rel_end&app=desktop

"Race, Church and Society—A Round table Discussion," video of Natalie Hardy (Research, City of San Antonio), Officer Doug Green, Pastor Bob Fuller, and Pastor Terrel Jackson (both of First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KS8tn97dOdc&app=desktop>

Calendar

(Unless otherwise indicated, times are those of the Central Zone)

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>

Monday June 29, 11:00am-12:00pm, online panel "Why Are We Dying? Race, Ethnicity and Health Justice in the COVID-19 Pandemic," Denna Wheeler (Oklahoma State University), Amelie Ramirez (University of Texas Health, San Antonio), Waridibo Allison (University of Texas Health San Antonio). Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/why-are-we-dying-race-ethnicity-health-justice-in-the-covid19-pandemic-tickets-110129805212>

Tuesday June 30, 2:30pm (3:00pm ET), "Creating Cultures of Belonging," (McGrath Institute for Church Life, Notre Dame), panel discussion led by Colleen Moore (Dir., Echo Program), with Jessica Brock (Loretto Online Community) and Madeline Infantine (Stories of Grace). Register at: https://notredame.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJwfk-ihRTgoHtSgNR37EEolGq4WYFcgNe0F?utm_campaign=CCR%20Summer%20Seminars&utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9GGqKfZJ7C2SLxy2WeY2Y6GvjTJkf5HTp7gOAwtaCCfGjX-YviNrxKwdijwREHlniHL4_QAdcyz36UPzAufFy4eIHyoQQ&_hsmi=90195836&utm_content=90195836&utm_source=hs_email&hsCtaTracking=16dd4824-77b6-4d39-b42a-7b898d05ce1e%7Ca3e32195-5025-438d-9e33-6204d84a040a

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

Wednesday July 8, 12:00pm-1:00pm, death penalty vigil across the street from the San Antonio Justice Center, 300 Dolorosa. (Hopefully, a stay of execution may make this unnecessary.)

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. Register at:

paceebene.org/hiroshimaday2020

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 Pelicaric, Dr. Ken Butigan, Rev. John Dear). \$50.00

Information and tickets for all three:

<https://paceebene.org/cnvconference2020?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=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 8:9, 11-13)

In this brief passage, Paul diminishes the importance of physical religious rituals and elevates the importance of inner dispositions. "But you are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if indeed the spirit of God dwells among you. But if someone does not have the spirit of Messiah, that one does not belong to him" (Rom 8:9). The lectionary skips the next sentence, seemingly for no good reason: "But if Messiah is among you, though the body be dead through sin, the spirit is alive through justice." Paul is not claiming that the physical world is evil; his point is that the Christian life is spiritual: "But if the spirit of Him Who raised Jesus from the dead dwells among you, He Who raised Messiah from the dead will enliven your mortal bodies too, through his spirit dwelling among you" (Rom 8:11).

Consequently, he goes on to point out, we do not owe anything to physical observances.

Third Reading (Matthew 11:25-30)

The sayings of Jesus textual material that Matthew uses in his gospel includes a section where Jesus pronounces woes on cities that witnessed his miracles but still did not believe in him. Then it adds the passage for this Sunday: “On that occasion Jesus said while answering someone, ‘I give praise to You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You hid such things from the wise and astute and revealed them to the childlike.’” Those who are not childlike have reasons not to see what is evident; those vested with “interests” are frequently in denial.

Being in denial, straining to maintain the plausibility of ideologies that are self-serving but cannot be acknowledged as such, brings with it a psychological burden. It takes great effort to maintain the lies that are enticing because they justify ethnic, racial, and class prejudice and support related senses of self-superiority. The unproductive and undeserving privileged in particular have much to work at. In contrast, the Jesus sayings lead one to an untroubled recognition of the truths of the environing social world: “Come to me all who toil and are burdened, and I will refresh you.”

That to which Jesus calls his hearers has its own, rather different trouble, but it does not take the form of a psychological burden from within that would blind as well as bedevil: “Take up my yoke on yourself and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls; for my yoke is easy to wear and my burden is light.”

There are two stages to the freedom from burden that this passage describes. One is a freedom from—freedom from the psychological burdens of blinding ideology. A second is a freedom to—freedom to criticize openly what needs criticism and to seize opportunities to act against the injustices that ideologies inspire.

Poems

Authority of Women

Breasts: a badge, of sorts,
signaling girls reaching womanhood,
coming into an authority whose essence
grounds itself on nourishment,
recalling how, from birth,
we are welcomed with mothers' milk,
and recall seeing, as we age,
how beauty gives tribute to Beauty:
a proclamation of life.

Tom Keene and Muse
May 11, 2020

Litany for the Fourth of July

(Adapted from *The Powers that Be* by Walter Wink. July 4, 1994)

Oh America, happy birthday. Happy remembering how we declared our independence from the world's most powerful rule.

Happy remembering how we proclaimed our freedom from the very idea of empire, when we declared, "all humans are equal," when we pronounced that governments get their powers from the consent of the governed, when we deemed it our right and duty to overthrow any rulers who impose on us empire and the ideas of empire.

Today, on this your birthday, we declare **again** our independence from empire and from the notions of empire;

from the idea that the need to control requires that some dominate others,
we declare our independence,
from the belief that the rulers may use us to achieve *their* goals,
we declare our independence,
from the prejudice that nature equips men better than women to dominate, and some races and classes to dominate,

we declare our independence,

from the dogma that violence is redemptive, that violence is the only language enemies understand,

we declare our independence,

from the idolatry that money is the most important value,

we declare our independence,

from the opinion that institutions are more important than people,

we declare our independence,

from the pomposity that there is no higher value or being or power than the state, that if there is a God, God is the protector and patron of the state,

we declare our independence,

Happy birthday America

and here is to the day when we will enjoy
independence from our own empire.

The Problem of Structural Immorality

Anthony J. Blasi

In recent months we have been witnessing mass demonstrations against violence perpetrated by some police officers against African Americans and other minorities. This has gone beyond minority communities acting on behalf of their own defense; in fact, most of us are happy to see the multi-racial and multi-ethnic nature of the protests. One might attempt to explain this as a response elicited by videos of murders. However, I think there is, here, something more than a crowd reaction to a depiction. Those in the demonstrations as well as others are experiencing a moral imperative. The videos spark a factual awareness, a state of knowledge; they bring an issue to the forefront. The moral imperative arises out of each person's interiority and cries out for action, correction, setting things right.

There is a tendency to individualize morality, to focus our personal moral resources exclusively on our own actions. Thus an examination of conscience would consist of a review of our own sins of commission and omission. But what about an evil event in our social world? One might say, "I did not commit the

murder. I was not there to prevent it. Yet I am moved to protest, and I think it is a morally positive deed to do so. It is right and proper for me to do something, but how is that so? Well, I am part of the society in which murders like this occur." Structurally, it is like failing to remove something from a stair step that somebody is likely to trip over. It is in this sense that one can speak of "structural sin." It is not about oneself and one's guilt, but about a circumstance and a moral imperative associated with it.

By way of illustration, the legal analysis of racism in American history can be quite revealing. The text of the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution, speak of the rights of people. For example, in the First Amendment there is a reference to "the right of the people peaceably to assemble"; and in the Second Amendment it is "the right of the people to keep and bear arms." The Fourth Amendment refers to right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures. The Fifth Amendment speaks of "no person" being held to answer for a serious crime without an indictment of a Grand Jury. The Ninth Amendment says the enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people." Note that these references to persons or the people do not limit the rights in question to free people but to people in general, all people. Prior to the Civil War, abolitionists argued in court that the Bill of Rights accorded the listed rights to slaves as well as free persons. The courts during that epoch were blinded to the obvious meaning of the words of the Amendments. An abolitionist who argued for the constitutional rights of all persons, John Bingham, was a principal drafter of the Fourteenth Amendment, which is worded in such a way that constitutional rights would be extended to all: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States" are citizens who are to be accorded "the equal protection of the laws." It was not until 1954 that U.S. Supreme Court justices would make the obvious meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment operative in the application of laws in the U.S. courts.

The example of the judicial reading of legal texts shows how prevailing practices and customs can create blind spots and cognitive distortions. Structural immorality, as described above, is subject to that kind of cognitive distortion; people often cannot see instances of structural immorality for what they are. The same cognitive distortion applies to the readings people make of the Bible. I would go so far as to point out that a similar process of cognitive distortion affects the very translation of scriptures into English. This is not the place for linguistic analyses—I have done some elsewhere. I would point out that misreadings and

mistranslations have affected the understanding of women in the Church and consensual adult homosexuality.

Since Pax Christi is a culturally Catholic organization, I will point to the Catholic tradition of moral thought: The books of the Bible were not dictated by God to such authors as Jeremiah, St. Paul, and Mark the evangelist. God and the human Son of God, Jesus, inspired the authors, and these authors wrote as humans, producing human texts. The message of any given scriptural text carries a human apparatus with it, a culturally limited embodiment. The twenty-first century Christian reading a book of scripture needs to contend with whatever cognitive distortion the author may have suffered from, that of the translators, those of countless homilists and commentators, as well as that one may have on one's own. There is likely to be as much distortion as message! What corrective would be available to the modern reader?

The medieval scholars, whose wisdom was summarized by St. Thomas Aquinas, were aware of the problem. Having a strong doctrine of creation, they argued that creation reflected the mind of the Creator. God did not fumble about in the process of creating the cosmos and the world. The medievals did not think in terms of processes, such as evolution; rather they thought in terms of perfect being, which the everyday entities that are available to us can approximate as potentialities. Thus humans as observant and rational beings can approximate the mind of the Creator by observing and thinking about creation. Perfect understanding may not prevail, but reasoning, *ratio* as the medieval thinkers termed it, would in general be a valid guide. One would take tradition seriously because tradition is the outcome of thousands of rational people reasoning over time about an issue and arriving at a consensus about it.

The result, in the case of moral cognition, depended on a dialectic between reason and revelation. If one goes astray in one's reasoning, a reflection on scripture could be a corrective. If one reads scripture in a cognitively distorted way, science or reasoning could be a corrective. Church teaching usually reflects a moment in this dialectic, this corrective process. When it is such, it is surely open to question, and as such it is often a good point at which to begin a consideration. In this sense it is a source of questions, not answers.

There are a number of human foibles that can come into play. Humans are reluctant to be corrected. Consider how long it took for Christians to accept the fact of evolution; some still do not accept it. Some do not want to hear about racism and economic injustice from the pulpit. Some clergy do not want to talk about racism and economic injustice from the pulpit! Some Christians cannot

bring themselves to accept the teaching of St. Paul in Galatians: "Neither Jew nor Greek is possible, neither slave or free is possible, male and female not possible; for you are all one in Messiah Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Others continue to misconstrue Paul's *Letter to the Romans* as a condemnation of homosexuality. The contemporary issue appears to be less revelation correcting science, or *ratio*, and more a matter of science correcting distorted revelation.

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>