

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating August 2, 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 Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Consider Bread*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem is an essay, "The Church of QAnon: Will Conspiracy Theories Form the Basis of a New Religious Movement?" by Marc-Andr   Argentino, a Ph.D. candidate at Concordia University in Montreal. We wish to express our gratitude to Dr. Argentino for granting permission to use his essay. While few people, in San Antonio and elsewhere, belong to such a strange church as that described in the essay, many avowedly religious people accept its underlying tenet in unspoken form. Our purpose is to kill it with daylight.

Calendar

Tuesday July 28, 12:00-m-1:00pm, webinar, "The Execution of People with Intellectual Disabilities in Texas," Anna Otero (Thurgood Marshall School of Law). Registration, information, and Zoom invitation: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdDyIX-zok222bXffJKLI75wH15aH75zOH0yb4WihEL47-Vig/viewform>

Tuesday July 28, 6:00pm, webinar "How to Address Environmental Racism in Your Community: The Role of Young People in Shaping Our Future." Register at: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAsf-GrrT0jH92XzE8M-m_eLt3ee79t4pod

Wednesday July 29, 12:00pm-1:30pm, panel discussion “Systematic Barriers to Social Change and Civic Participation,” Candice Bledsoe (SMU), Anna Offit (SMU), Grant Hayden (SMU), Danielle Casarez Lenni (SMU), Arthur Anthony (Locke & Lord LLP), Jeffrey Kahn, moderator (SMU). Register, beginning at:
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/doing-the-work-series-registration-111569573598>

Thursday July 30, 1:00pm-2:00pm, webinar “Faithful Recovery in a Time of Climate Change,” Kim Burgo (Catholic Charities USA), Marilyn Shapely (Catholic Relief Services), Ricardo Simmonds (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops). Register at
<https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/945581507697019403?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=69f649f5-33f8-4133-8542-5f36a2ef4f72>

Saturday August 1, 2:00pm, online meeting, Pax Christi San Antonio. For a Zoom invitation, contact Yvonne Dilling at yvonedilling@gmail.com

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>

Thursday August 6, 12:00pm-1:30pm, Zoom panel, “The Church Confesses: Reflections on Health Justice and the Christian Voice in Turbulent Times,” Clare Hein Blanton (theology graduate student, U. of Aberdeen), Matthew Russell (Chapelwood United Methodist Church, Houston), Fred Smith (Center for Leadership in Public Theology), and John Swinton (U. of Aberdeen). Register at:
<https://spiritualityandhealth.networkforgood.com/givecart>

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&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

Notices

Interfaith Radio livestream: *Trans in the Eyes of God*

Part 1, Includes an interview with Toni Newman, author of *I Rise*.

https://interfaithradio.org/Archive/2018-September/Trans_in_the_Eyes_of_God__Part_1

Part 2, Features the Anglican Church

https://interfaithradio.org/ShowAudio/Trans_in_the_Eyes_of_God__Part_2

Part 3, Features the Jewish context

https://interfaithradio.org/ShowAudio/Trans_in_the_Eyes_of_God__Part_3

The Marianist Social Justice Collaborative has posted a video on welcoming sexual minorities. The link is

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=_ItQVlyXjd4&feature=emb_logo

Online Resource for families or small groups:

If you're needing

some social interaction with depth,

more than just listening to zoom webinars,

longing for the social time that used to happen before and after Mass,

consider using the *Maryknoll Weekly Reflection Guides*. Gather as family or small group and use these guides in Facetime, Skype, Zoom etc. This an easy online structure with prayer, an introductory theme, a link to the Sunday Readings and some reflection questions to guide group conversation. Using the SeeJudgeAct methodology, you will be led as a group to consider where, in light of the shared reflection, the Spirit is calling you this week. The Global Solidarity charism of the Maryknoll family will feed you spiritually for these challenging times. Find the Guides in both Spanish and English at:

<https://www.maryknoll.us/home/resources/mission-spirituality/ordinary-time-2020>

Online video on the Cristian Nationalist Movement, by Andrew Whitehead (Clemson University), 5 minutes:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xbLKa40T1I>

Second Reading (Romans 8:35, 37-39)

“What will separate us from the Messiah’s love? Affliction, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, hazard, or the curved sword?” So much appears to have gone “off course,” as it were. There is a pandemic, and what should be responsible government has been irresponsibly denying reality and encouraging people to act selfishly. Following natural tendencies to be sociable is something to be resisted at the present hour, and for many people working to provide for others as well as oneself is not possible, or not advisable. The interiority that enables us to arise above all such has become a necessity.

The lectionary skips a verse that consists of a few lines from Psalm 44: “We are dying for your sake the whole day/We are regarded as sheep for the slaughter.” The Psalm that Paul cites expresses a feeling of being abandoned and forgotten by God. That Paul cites such a passage suggests that feeling that way is not evil or an insurmountable evil, that it can coexist in us with the inner strength to overcome it.

Third Reading (Matthew 14:13-21)

The reading is Matthew’s version of the narrative about the multiplication of the five loaves and two fish. The crowds follow him into a desolate place,

where he had hoped to be alone. He felt compassion for the people and healed the ill among them. And when his disciples suggested he dismiss the crowds so that they could go to some villages to purchase food, he invites the crowds to sit and then fed them all with the mere five loaves and two fish—just as Matthew found the narrative in Mark’s gospel.

The narrative is obviously filled with symbolism and can be read at several levels. The place is described as desert-like, thereby calling to mind the biblical account of the Hebrews’ forty-year trek in the desert. The loaves and fishes narrative as found in *Matthew* comes after the account of Herod Antipas holding a big birthday party and having the head of John the Baptist given to the daughter of Herodias—a quite different kind of meal. One meal is offered out of compassion, the other singularly lacking compassion. And “taking the five loaves and two fish, having looked up into heaven he blessed them, and after breaking them....” This is obviously reminiscent of the Eucharistic celebration. And after breaking the bread, “he gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the crowds.” This obviously refers to ministry and to participation in the Eucharistic meal.

After this passage comes the narrative of Jesus making the disciples set out on the Sea of Galilee by boat. The theme of mission thus accompanies those of compassion, Eucharist, and ministry. All these form a unit. Consequently something is missing that should be there if there is compassion without Eucharist, or Eucharist without compassion; compassion without ministry or ministry without compassion; compassion without mission or mission without compassion.

Poem

Consider Bread

Consider how we provide Coca Cola worldwide
for any who can pay just a little bit of cash.

Consider how we let 24,000 people, mostly kids,
die every hour for lack of daily bread.

Consider how a grain of wheat must fall

from its life-giving stem, bury itself and die
in order to rise and yield a hundred-fold.

Consider how our dreamy prayer
of daily bread for all may require
us also to die and rise.

Consider us trading Coca Cola
for just plain bread for all to eat
if only we all rise-up and,
if necessary, die for it.

Tom Keene and Muse
January 12, 2019

The Church of QAnon: Will Conspiracy Theories Form the Basis of a New Religious Movement?

By

Marc-André Argentino

(This essay was originally posted in *Canada Conversation*.)

Followers of the QAnon movement believe in wild and dangerous conspiracy theories about U.S. President Donald Trump. Now a faction within the movement has been interpreting the Bible through QAnon conspiracies.

I have been studying the growth of the QAnon movement as part of my research into how extremist religious and political organizations create propaganda and recruit new members to ideological causes.

On Feb. 23, I logged onto Zoom to observe the first public service of what is essentially a QAnon church operating out of the Omega Kingdom Ministry (OKM). I've spent 12 weeks attending this two-hour Sunday morning service.

What I've witnessed is an existing model of neo-charismatic home churches — the neo-charismatic movement is an offshoot of evangelical Protestant Christianity and is made up of thousands of independent organizations — where

QAnon conspiracy theories are reinterpreted through the Bible. In turn, QAnon conspiracy theories serve as a lens to interpret the Bible itself.

Trump vs. the 'deep state'

The QAnon movement began in 2017 after someone known only as Q posted a series of conspiracy theories about Trump on the internet forum 4chan. QAnon followers believe global elites are seeking to bring down Trump, whom they see as the world's only hope to defeat the "deep state."

OKM is part of a network of independent congregations (or ekklesia) called Home Congregations Worldwide (HCW). The organization's spiritual adviser is Mark Taylor, a self-proclaimed "Trump Prophet" and QAnon influencer with a large social media following on Twitter and YouTube.

The website of Omega Kingdom Ministries mixes QAnon theories and biblical references.

The resource page of the HCW website only links to QAnon propaganda — including the documentary *Fall Cabal* by Dutch conspiracy theorist Janet Ossebaard, which is used to formally indoctrinate e-congregants into QAnon. This 10-part YouTube series was the core material for the weekly Bible study during QAnon church sessions I observed.

The Sunday service is led by Russ Wagner, leader of the Indiana-based OKM, and Kevin Bushey, a retired colonel running for election to the Maine House of Representatives.

Bible and QAnon narratives

The service begins with an opening prayer from Wagner that he says will protect the Zoom room from Satan. This is followed by an hour-long Bible study where Wagner might explain the *Fall Cabal* video that attendees had just watched or offer his observations on socio-political events from the previous week.

Everything is explained though the lens of the Bible and QAnon narratives. Bushey then does 45 minutes of decoding items that have appeared recently on the app called QMap that is used to share conspiracy theories. The last 15 minutes are dedicated to communion and prayer.

At a service held on April 26, Wagner and Bushey spoke about a QAnon theory, called Project Looking Glass, that the U.S. military has secretly developed a form of time-travel technology. Wagner suggested to e-congregants that time travel can be explained by certain passages in the Bible.

On May 3, the theme of the QAnon portion of the service was about COVID-19. Bushey spoke about a popular QAnon theory that the pandemic was planned. (There is no evidence of this.) And when an anti-vax conspiracy theory documentary called “Plandemic” went viral , the video was shared on the HCW websites as a way for e-congregants to consume the latest in a series of false theories about the coronavirus.

Leveraging authority

What is clear is that Wagner and Bushey are leveraging religious beliefs and their “authority” as a pastor and ex-military officer to indoctrinate attendees into the QAnon church. Their objective is to train congregants to form their own home congregations in the future and grow the movement.



Followers of the QAnon movement regularly show their support for Donald Trump at his political rallies, including this one held in Pennsylvania in 2018. (Shutterstock)

OKM’s ministry is rooted in Taylor’s prophecies. Wagner regularly mentions that if it wasn’t for Taylor, he would have never started this ministry.

On its website, OKM references the Seven Mountains of Societal Influence. Seven Mountains utilizes the language of Dominionism — a theology that believes countries, including the United States, should be governed by Christian biblical law. Its goal is to attain sociopolitical and economic transformation through the gospel of Jesus in what it calls the seven mountains or spheres of society: religion, family, education, government, media, entertainment and business. This blends QAnon's apocalyptic desire to destroy society "controlled" by the deep state with the need for the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Wagner and Bushey have taught their congregation to stop listening to any media — even Fox News — because they're all "Luciferian." What they provide instead is a road map to QAnon radicalization comprised of QAnon YouTube channels for the congregation's daily media diet, the Qmap website that lists new QAnon conspiracy theories and Twitter influencers.

'Deep state church'

They further insist that as Trump continues to "drain the swamp" in Washington, it's "our" responsibility to drain the deep state church swamp. They believe the same deep state that controls the world has also infiltrated traditional churches. As Wagner stated in his April 12 service: "I am here to focus on the deep state church. This goes beyond our church and involves our culture and our politics. Kevin is here to talk about QAnon and the military operation to save the world."

Like any church, they also run outreach ministries. OKM is currently raising funds for something called Reclamation Ranch, which Wagner describes as a safe place for children rescued after being held underground by the deep state. Children at risk is an ongoing theme in many QAnon conspiracy theories, including the famous fake "Pizzagate" theory.

As of May, OKM moved from Zoom to YouTube to accommodate the growth in attendees. At last count, approximately 300 accounts participated in the recent services.

While that's not a lot of followers, we should be concerned about these latest developments. OKM provides formalized religious indoctrination into QAnon, a conspiracy movement that is both a public health threat by spreading false information about the coronavirus pandemic and a national security concern.

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.sanantoniopeace.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>