

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating August 20, 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@aol.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 twentieth Sunday in ordinary time. Tom Keene's poem is *San Antonio Dreaming*.

In 1919, the executive council of the National Catholic Welfare Council, as the conference of United States bishops was called back then, issued a highly influential statement on social reconstruction, drafted by Father John A. Ryan. I began to wonder some weeks ago what such a statement would look like today. The result is presented in three parts, with the first part appearing below in this issue.

Finally, Dr. James Ball, who teaches theology at St. Mary's University, authored an essay that appeared in the July 28, 2017 San Antonio *Express-News*, under the title "No, Governor, the Common Good is not Socialism." He has kindly granted us permission to publish his essay as he originally drafted it.

Calendar

Tuesday August 15, 6:30pm-9:00pm, Sierra Club Meeting: Justice-focused Environmental Movement in Texas. Bill Sinkin Eco Centro, 1802 N. Main Ave.

Tuesday August 15, 7:00pm, meeting of the San Antonio Sanctuary Network. First Unitarian Universalist Church, 7150 I-10 frontage road.

Sunday August 20, 3:30pm-5:00pm, ACLU People Power Planning/Implementation Meeting. Includes presentation by ACLU Austin on SB\$ ("show me your papers bill"). One Riverwalk Place: 700 Saint Mary's Street, second floor, suite 200.

Saturday September 2, 10:00am-2:00pm, **in Austin**, Rally: Day of Resistance and Noncompliance with SB4, organized by Jolt Texas and Basta Texas. Texas State Capitol, 1100 Congress Ave., Austin. More information: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1308974945890276/>

Tuesday September 5, 3:00pm, film, *Seed*, depict the struggle to defend the future of food. Christus Heritage Hall, Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

Thursday September 7, 6:00pm-8:30pm. Performance: To Be Honest (Islam in American Politics). Dramatic readings from 2016 interviews with San Antonians about the perception of Islam in American politics. McNay Art Museum, 6000 N. New Braunfels.

Thursdays September 7, 14, 21, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Ron Rolheiser, O.M.I., "Simply Being Good-Hearted is Not Enough: A Spirituality of Charity, Justice, and Prophecy, parts 1, 2, &3." \$60.00; 20% group discount. Contact Brenda, 210-341-1366, ext. 212. Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Dr., Whitley Theological Center.

Saturday September 9, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. Residence of Maria Tobin, 8715 Starcrest Dr., Apt. 27. (Go north on Starcrest from I-410; Starcrest becomes a divided road. The apartment complex is located between Hidden Drive and Granby Court, on the south-bound side of Starcrest. It is possible to park on Hidden Drive.)

Wednesday September 13, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Lecture by Devery S. Anderson, "The Murder of Emmett Till." University of the Incarnate Word Concert Hall, 4301 Broadway. The concert hall is next to the Administration Building, facing Broadway at the Hildebrand-Broadway intersection. Parking is in front. It has sign ("Concert Hall") in front.

Saturday September 23, 9:00am-4:00pm, Rosalyn Falcon Collier and Rev. Ann E. Helmke, "P.E.A.C.E. Is Our Birthright." Experiential learning session. \$60.00; bring a bag lunch. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell Avenue (park off Shook). Registration through www.upcsa.org/registration. Info at 210-732-9927.

Wednesday September 27, 7:00pm, Abdullah Ahmed An-Na'im, "Religious Freedom and the Universality of Human Rights: A Modernist Islamic Perspective." Saint Mary's University, One Camino Santa Maria, University Center, Conference Room A. Parking in Lots D and H.

Thursday September 28, Robert George, "Constitutional Structures, Civic Virtue, and Political v. Culture." Saint Mary's University, One Camino Santa Maria, University Center, Conference Room A. Parking in Lots D and H.

Third Reading (Matthew 15:21-28)

The reading for today is another instance of Matthew reworking a narrative from the older *Gospel of Mark*. Mark had Jesus retreating "to the region of Tyre and Sidon," in what is now Lebanon, and trying to hide from the public: "And entering into a house, he did not want anyone to know and he was unable to escape notice" (Mark 7:24). Mark's recurring theme of secrecy, which made sense given his experience in Rome where there was persecution, had little meaning for Matthew and his community east of

the Jordan River. Matthew's narrative presents a quite different situation; he has a Canaanite woman coming for help and Jesus not responding for a time. While Mark's Jesus is disinclined to help her because he wants to escape notice, Matthew's Jesus remains silent, and the disciples ask him to dismiss her because she kept crying out to them. Jesus finally replies, repeating the policy of his disciples: 'I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Mt. 15:24).

A Canaanite woman! There was no place called Canaan in Jesus' day. Matthew is making no pretense of his narrative being a historical report; rather he was using a deliberate archaism to raise the issue of relations with historical ethnic enemies. He has the "Canaanite" woman embarrass Jesus and his disciples by calling upon their compassion: "...even the puppies eat from the bits that fall from the table of their master." After that, Jesus relents and tells the woman that he has healed her daughter who, we are informed, was evilly possessed.

The lesson to be drawn about ethnic and other inter-group relations is obvious and need not be dwelt upon. So also is the lesson about circumscribing Jesus' ministry. It is worth considering, however, what was the guiding principle, the North Star as it were, that made Jesus finally relent in the narrative—compassion.

© 2017 Anthony J. Blasi

Poem

San Antonio Dreaming

Hey, San Antonio, I got a dream.

In San Anto everyone wants to work got a job.
And it pays good, man.
You can feed the kids and even take them to Disneyland
with the uncles, aunts and cousins,
even put something aside in case the kids go to college.

The jobs ain't no hamburger flippin crap either.
These jobs mean something,
like helping people out in close by hospitals,
helping kids in schools and on playgrounds,
teaching how to do hula hoops and free throws,
and how to make tortillas like Nani used to make,
soft and smooth, made with love.

In San Anto, all the barrios got their own parks,
and they always clean.
Gang kids keep'em that way.
That's how they show off their pride,
how they get respect.

And every park has a boxing ring
and a wrestling mat on a stage.
That's where the gangs duke it out,
under the Marquis of Queensbury rules,
with all the people from the 'hood there
watching to make sure its a fair fight.

Any man or boy hit any woman or girl,
he got to fight all her brothers, uncles and cousins,
there in the park one by one
in front of the whole neighborhood.
In San Anto, we don't put up with that shit,
a man hitting a woman.
What kind of a man is that?

In San Anto, don't nobody get sick,
'cause everybody got their shots and they eat good.
None of that junk food.
And if they do get sick,
they get the best hospital care money can buy,
but its free for everybody
'cause you ain't got health, you ain't got nothing.
In San Anto, we ain't got time to be sick.
We get our people back to work,
back to school, back home,
where they can do some good.

In San Anto, our TV don't do none of that Hollywood crap.

All the barrios got their own production studios,
and we put on our own sit-coms,
written by our own people.
Who'd have guessed we had that kind of talent,
until we tried it?
And guess what.
No commercials.
We know what we need.
Don't need no uptown lady in a fancy dress
telling us what we want.
Who needs that crap anyway?

Once a year San Antonio does its own Emmy awards,
all the barrios putting up their best against all the others.
Seems every neighborhood gets a San Antonio Emmy for something.
And everybody feels good.

'Cause we did it,
not some cat in Hollywood.

In San Anto, we got clean water and clean government.
'Cause we keep the fat cats with money
from building their shit over our aquifer.
And we keep their money out of city and county elections.
Anybody want to run for office,
he, she don't need money.
Just get on the neighborhood TV and say your piece.
Don't cost nothing.
Same with radio.
Hey, who owns the air waves anyway?

In San Anto every barrio got its own poets,
painters, dancers, music makers.
The barrio poets write poems
for baptisms and funerals,
weddings, even divorces.
And they get paid good:
hundred bucks a shot.

And paintings.
We got murals up and down every block.
Can't go nowhere without neighborhood pride
hitting you in the eye
with Virgins of Guadalupe and neighborhood folks,
all heroes with their own immortality.

Every barrio got ten, twenty bands,
rock, conjunto, country western,
old folks dance bands, young folks rappers.
Street dances every Friday and Saturday
somewhere in the 'hood.
Free. Except to chip in for the bands.

We want them paid good.
'Cause they do our souls good.

In San Anto, ain't got none of that violence crap,
drive-bys and all that shit.
People got a gripe with anybody else,
we got mediators, negotiators, trouble shooters, peacemakers everywhere.
No need to go to guns
when you got all that help to make things come out fair for everyone.

And schools. San Antonio got the best schools anywhere.
We put our best people teaching first, second, third grades.
Get those kids excited about learning.
Once we get them turned on,
ain't no one can stop them thinking and learning.

We got libraries everywhere.
Can't keep the kids out of them.
They lined up five, six deep waiting to get at the computers.
We getting more computers soon
so the lines be down to one or two.

In San Anto, we take care of kids and old folks.
Kids are our future and old folks our past.
We don't want nothing bad to happen to them.
They're what makes our hanging in worth it all.

San Antonio is good living, man.
Know how we did it?
We stopped asking the big dudes.
They never listened anyway.
We just went out and did it.
Yeah. It wasn't that hard
once we made up our minds,
once we stopped following and swallowing
what the fat cats said.
They wanted to jump in and help us with all their expertise.
We didn't need their shit.
We just went ahead and did it.
And we ain't going back.

That's my dream.
Anyway.

Tom Keene

Social Reconstruction for the Twenty-First Century

Part 1

Anthony J. Blasi

There are thirteen sections to this statement, the first four of which comprise the first part which is published here. The Table of Contents for the entire statement is as follows:

Part 1

Income Fairness

Labor Rights

Automation

Federal Taxation

Part 2

Property Taxes

Power

Subsidiarity

Education

Part 3

Law enforcement

Health and Medicine

Higher Education

Pluralism

Environment

I am indebted to numerous people with whom I have consulted for this statement.

In 1919, following what was called "The Great War," the executive committee of the National Catholic Welfare Council (predecessor of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) issued a *Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction*, which had been drafted by Father John A. Ryan. While some in the hierarchy and elsewhere considered it too socialist and radical, it became a highly influential statement that inspired much of the New Deal legislation a quarter of a century later. The statement began:

The ending of the Great War has brought peace. But the only safeguard of peace is social justice and a contented people. The deep unrest so emphatically and so widely voiced throughout the world is the most serious menace to the future peace of every nation and of the entire world. Great problems face us. They cannot be put aside; they must be met and solved with justice to all.

While there is much to be said for the proposals found in the 1919 statement, it was subsequently recognized to comprise only a beginning. Today our emergencies are not attributable to a great war between nations or to a simple struggle between capital and labor, but to injustices within and between nations and threats to the environment, even

the global climate. So what would an updated contemporary statement on social reconstruction look like? Here a draft is essayed.

Income Fairness

In the post-World War II era, some three decades after the 1919 *Bishops' Program*, one working person's income could support a household adequately. Since the 1950s, it is not uncommon that two income streams provide barely enough for a family to get by without governmental assistance. It is not an unreasonable expectation that one person's full-time employment at useful work support a household adequately. Though we dare not dispense with government programs for the working poor under present circumstances, there should be no need for people working full-time to depend on food stamps, housing assistance, supplements for medical insurance premiums, and the like. Hence people speak of a "living wage." The term is short-hand not only for the amount of income paid workers but also such benefits as health insurance, retirement, and paid vacations.

One positive social change that has occurred since 1919 is the greater and more equitable access to employment by women. Consequently, a living wage should not be thought of exclusively in terms of one employed person in a household having a job; two people, for example, could each have half-time gainful work. Or one could have a three-quarters job and one a quarter one. For such flexible arrangements to nevertheless bring in a living wage, part-time jobs should be compensated at levels proportionate to the fraction of a full-time job that they represent. This means that a half-time job should be compensated with half the income that a full-time job brings in, with half as much in retirement, paid vacation, and other benefits. The principle calls for pro-rated compensation for pro-rated work.

The problem with the manner in which part-time work is compensated is dramatic in higher education. A clear injustice is perpetrated on part-time adjunct faculty, who conduct one or two courses without "fringe benefits" and at per course pay levels that would add up to far less than a living wage if an adjunct conducted four or five courses per term. Those who are administratively responsible for hiring part-time adjuncts are often embarrassed at what low pay levels the directives from higher administration allow. Of course, it serves the career purposes of higher administration to "reduce costs" and cover more and more courses with such adjuncts than with full-time professors. At the present time, there are more part-time adjuncts than there are full-time professors in American higher education. Not only have our higher administrators thereby succeeded in transforming a higher education system that was once the world's envy into merely token undergraduate education accompanied by research centers, they have also perpetrated a massive injustice on part-time instructors. This can only be rectified by making it illegal and therefore impossible to "save money" by paying adjuncts at a lower level of compensation per credit hour than full-time professors, where qualifications are roughly equivalent. In other lines of work, it is often young people, either as interns or as casual workers, who are paid at lower rates than full-time workers. Apart from allowances for qualifications and genuine experience, compensation should be pro-rated from that of permanent full-time personnel.

Labor Rights

Collective bargaining is an example of engaging in business. Labor as a commodity (i.e., a saleable property) is organized by a collective, much as corporations organize their capital for purposes of engaging in business. It is a fine legal point whether “right to work” laws preventing labor unions from collecting dues from all workers covered by a negotiated contract (in essence, a form of exclusive contract) are constitutional (see Article I Section 10, which says no state shall pass any law impairing the obligation of contracts). Nevertheless, “right to work” laws are infringements on the scope of employees’ prerogative to engage in commerce and are therefore inherently unjust. All such laws should be repealed.

Automation

The mechanization of productive work has been responsible for the elimination of many employment opportunities. This has been progressing for quite some time, since the era in which tractors and motor-driven harvesters began to replace animal and human labor in agriculture. Late in the last century robots replaced humans in many of the manufacturing centers. Demagogues in both right-wing and left-wing politics, taking advantage of a general xenophobia, have blamed the loss of jobs on international trade. The fact is that corporations are unwilling to hire teams of human workers to do what a machine can do in a more cost-effective manner.

First, it is reasonable to demand that mechanized manufacturing actually be more efficient than comparable work done by humans. This means that corporations should not be accorded tax breaks for mechanized equipment; whenever the machines are actually more efficient they do not need to be subsidized by tax breaks. Furthermore, the full social costs of mechanized equipment need to be quantified and included in the operating costs of mechanized equipment. Something like that would occur with the “carbon tax” proposal: The cost of taking carbon pollution out of the atmosphere should be assessed from persons or corporations that put the carbon pollution into the atmosphere. A similar approach should be taken toward other kinds of pollution and contamination, such as those produced by “fracking” in the natural gas industry and by cement factories.

Federal Taxation

We have at present a federal tax system that taxes income more heavily when people work for it than it does when people do not work for it. The former, technically termed *earned income*, is what is reported as “wages, salaries, tips, etc.” and “business income” on the 1040 form. Business income is net income that someone earns by running a business, usually a small one. Unearned income comes usually in the form of dividends and capital gains. Earned income is taxed on a sliding “graduated” scale. Phony proposals for tax reform frequently call for reducing the number of gradations and lowering the rates on the higher incomes so that the result is less graduated than before. Actually, the complications in the tax code people complain about do not come from the number of gradations in the rate tables but in the special forms used for unearned income. These special forms set tax rates for dividends and capital gains that are lower than the ones applied to middle class people’s earned income (wages, salaries, tips, etc. and business income). A disingenuous argument for the lower tax rate for unearned income is that it spurs business; on the contrary, it would be lower

rates on *earned* income that would spur business by expanding the consumer market. Similarly lowering the rates for business income (not to be confused with dividends and capital gains) would allow small businesses to plow more funds back into their enterprises.

One way of enhancing tax fairness is to redirect taxation from corporations to their investors, while forcing corporations to distribute their wealth to taxed investors and not concentrate corporate wealth in the corporations themselves. This necessitates either a regulatory framework that requires corporate funds that are not plowed back into the enterprise to be distributed to stock holders or a heavy tax on funds not plowed back into the enterprise. "Plowing back" must involve some productive use, not, for example, holding stores of valuable metals, art works, or real estate.

Tax fairness would include an estate tax of 100% for estates above some threshold figure (e.g., one million dollars). It is often argued that families would lose businesses under such a regime, thereby contributing to the concentration of business into large corporations. If it were made easy to convert inherited businesses into publically traded corporations, the proceeds could be readily auctioned off as shares, with a limitation on the percentage purchased by any one entity. While we are skittish in the United States about governmental power being inherited, and while our Constitution prohibits the conferral of noble titles, we nevertheless allow for the inheritance of wealth. Wealth is clearly one resource for the exercise of power. In classical economics, profit is justified as an incentive for people to invest their energies and wealth into productive activity, creating goods needed by people and sold in a competitive market. Creating huge accumulations of wealth for purposes of leaving a large estate for descendants who did nothing to earn it provides for no such incentive. While the vast majority of people learn to earn their way in the world and are deemed solid members of society when they do so, there is no reason for the descendants of the wealthy not to follow that same path.

In general, consumption taxes should be minimal; they tax lower and middle income people more heavily than higher income recipients because the former need to spend a larger proportion of their earnings on necessities while the latter can save and accumulate funds. The present federal tax on gasoline is not only such an unjust consumption tax, but it is also failing to finance sufficiently the transportation infrastructure needed by trucks and automobiles. It is therefore failing to serve as a users' tax. It should be replaced by a mileage fee collected for the support of vehicle-related infrastructure. Moreover, tariffs on imports should be avoided; they comprise a sales tax—albeit at the wholesale rather than retail level—paid for the most part, ultimately, by people in the lower and middle income brackets.

To be continued next week.

Governor Abbott and the Common Good

James Ball,

Associate Professor of Theology, Saint Mary's University, San Antonio TX

Governor Greg Abbott's recent claim that tree ordinances of municipalities amount to socialism understandably made headlines in San Antonio and across Texas. But even more curious than the claim itself – and revealing of the Governor's political ideology – is the *reason* he gave for this claim. The reason bears repeating, so far afield it is from mainstream notions of American civic responsibility and traditional religion, not the least of which is Abbott's own Catholicism.

As reported in the *Express – News*, the Governor characterized in the following way the statements of cities in defense of their ordinances and his own justification for opposing them: “Trees add to the greater good of the city. They also improve the environment.... Municipalities are saying they have a right to impose a fee on you for removing a tree because if you remove a tree, you're diminishing the greater good of the city, and the greater good of the environment.... They have articulated the per se definition of collectivism, socialism.”

Abbott's political philosophy is that in reality there is no such thing as “the greater good.” All we have is the individual pursuing his or her private aims and rights that protect this freedom, chief among them being the right to private property. Anything else is collectivism, which he equates with socialism.

A quick look at the U.S. Constitution belies this view of society. In the Preamble, “We the People” declare that “establish(ing) justice” and “promot(ing) the general Welfare” are, along with Liberty, constitutive of our national purpose. In other words, the social good or the public good was never reducible to what private individuals or property owners chose to do or not do. The course of American history and many Supreme Court decisions testify to the role of the government as an instrument of the people in pursuing this justice and this public welfare. That's not “collectivism.” That's America!

Abbott's abhorrence for “the greater good” is also coming from a place outside of the way mainstream religions – for example, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – have long conceived of society and social responsibility. For instance, in Catholic political thought, the “common good” is the good or well-being of the community in which one participates, to which one contributes, from which one benefits, and through which one becomes more human. Saint John Paul II called this “the good of all, and of each person.” The common good includes an ensemble of public goods such as decent education, affordable housing, clean air, and now, says Pope Francis, the climate itself. We all have a stake in these.

The common good is not an odious threat to personal autonomy as Abbott would have it, but it does mean that the needs of the community – reaping the multiple benefits of decent tree coverage, it would seem – can sometimes take precedence over the interests of the individual or corporation, and that the role of law is to promote the common good. Unlike communist totalitarianism, in Catholic social teaching, property rights are real, but they are not absolute or unrestricted.

Pope Francis writes, “The principle of the subordination of private property to the universal destination of goods, and thus the right of everyone to their use, is a golden rule of social conduct and the first principle of the whole ethical and social order.” That’s not collectivism. That’s Catholicism, with parallels in other religions.

Gov. Abbott might be ill-informed about Catholic social and political theory, or he might be consciously rejecting it. Either way, his virtue is that he is honest. His justification for his crusade against tree ordinances in Texas is rooted not simply in idolizing free market economics – about which Catholicism has its own reservations – but in an often unacknowledged Libertarianism that has overtaken the leadership of much of the Republican Party in Texas and therefore our state government.

Residents of Texas can now judge what to make of that. We can and should disagree in good faith on particular issues of public policy, but we are in real trouble if we throw out the venerable idea of the common good, even as we invoke another venerable idea, freedom, in doing so. Justice William O. Douglas once wrote, “The right to be left alone is the beginning of all freedom.” If that is true, it is equally true that the *fruition* of freedom is the capacity to contribute to and defend the common good.

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://saccvi.blogspot.com/>

San Antonio Peace Center
<http://www.sanantoniopeace.center>

Interfaith Radio, (*Interfaith Voices*)

<http://www.interfaithradio.org/>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty

www.txccedp.org