

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating August 16, 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 Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Sic Transit Gloria*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem is my review of *Sacred Liberty. America's Long, Bloody, and Ongoing Struggle for Religious Freedom*, by Steven Waldman.

Calendar

Online

Wednesday August 12, 7:00pm-8:15pm, „The Catholic Church and the struggle against white Nationalism: Missing in Action?“ Fr. Bryan Massingale. Register at: bit.ly/atc-massingale

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

Thursday August 13, or Thursday August 27, 1:30pm-2:30pm, "The Protecting Places of Worship Forum," hosted by American Jewish Committee, Community of Conscience, Muslim-Jewish Advisory Council, and Rice University Boniuk Institute. Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/protecting-places-of-worship-virtual-forum-tickets-113054591326>

Thursday August 13, 6:00pm (7:00pm EDT) presentation, “Covid 19 and the Latest in U.S. Immigration Law,” Mikhail Izrailev (Fragomen, Del Rey, Bersen & Loewy, LLP), moderated by Despina Afentouli (journalist, sociologist). Sponsored by the National Writer’s Union. Register at:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScixr0WPvvpGPlzYanyY_L8ZDiUF8s0iOFMNRnpRdTKFBaZLg/viewform

Thursday September 10, 12:30pm-1:30pm, webinar “Social Responsibility of Religious Communities: Asian Traditions,” Robert Hunt (Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University) and friends. \$15; register at
https://secure.touchnet.net/C21403_ustores/web/product_detail.jsp?PRODUCTID=1930&SINGLESTORE=true

Friday September 11, 8:00am, online presentation “Black People in America’s Minority Religions,” Mansa Bilal King (Morehouse College). Information: Hayley Helmstreet, jhj2@rice.edu. Register at:
https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20200911/event_id/110233

Sunday September 27, 9:30am, “Darwin, Race, Slavery, and the Tree of Life,” Bruce Yeager. Online, TBA: contact mmcgm63@gmail.com. Posted by St. Philip Presbyterian Church, Houston.

In El Paso

Wednesday August 26 and **Friday August 28**, noon hour, death penalty vigils in front of the new federal courthouse at the corner of Magoffin and Campbell.

In San Antonio

Thursday September 10 is the date for The Big Give this year. See
<https://www.thebiggivesa.org/>

Saturdays September 12, October 17, and November 21, 10:30am-11:30am, SoL series, “Fath and Race—An Ongoing Conversation,” Bishop Trevor Alexander (Church of God in Christ, Univrsity of the Incarnate Word), Rev. Dries Coetzee (University Presbyterian Church), and Dr. Joshie Piper (University of the Incarnate Word). \$10 for all three sessions before September &, \$15 after. Register at:
<https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration/>

Notices

The Texas Coalition Against the Death Penalty has posted a webinar, *The Execution of People with Intellectual Disabilities in Texas*, with Prof. Ana M. Otero. Prof. Otero presents the case law on the subject. Recorded July 28, the recording is available until August 27 at: <https://zoom.us/rec/share/xv4saLju2EROT9bX4m-PQoEhRofjaaa8gXRNqfEOzBzSkrMOX6V2VY9H3ZASkckf>.

The access password needs to be manually typed, not pasted: +*fBS\$\$2

The Institute for Spirituality and Health has posted a video conference from August 6, „The Church Confesses: Reflections on Health Justice and the Christian Voice in Turbulent Times.“ Access at: <https://youtu.be/6xYABMiAA5Q>

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>

Second Reading (Romans 11:13-19, 29-32)

Paul speaks from the complicated situation of the foreign missionary: “Insofar, then, as I am the apostle of the gentiles, I glorify my service if I thus provoke my own to jealousy and save some of my own” (Rom 11:13b-14).

My pastor in another city, an old laborite whom Pope John XXIII ordained, received a \$17,000.00 donation for a worthy cause from a young member of the choir. The donor was an African immigrant who worked as a nurse in a hospital. The donation was undoubtedly some years' savings, accumulated during a non-consumerist, simple lifestyle. Should a charity, even a good one, accept that much

money from someone of modest means? The more the pastor expressed his reluctance to accept the donation, the more the young man insisted giving it was what he wanted to do.

Was the young man a convert? The son of converts? I do not know, but it was likely. When someone makes a decision to live the Christian gospel, as opposed, for example, to the prosperity gospel, the decision becomes a serious commitment. We who have a faith by heritage rather than by decision might be provoked in the way Paul speaks of “his own” being provoked.

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.

Poem

Sic Transit Gloria (Thus, passes glory)

According to ancient custom,
A slave rode in the chariot
with the victorious general in parade
followed by troops and spoils of war
amid the adulation of cheering crowds.

The slave held a brazier of hot coals
and a fistful of straw stems.
His task: to remind the general of what is real
by dropping, one by one, a single straw into the coals.
As the straw burst into flame the slave told the general,
“Sic transit gloria.

Today, as we behold our glories take flame
in the coals of all-present plague,
we turn to find glories that do not burn.

Tom Keene and Muse
June 27, 2020

Sacred Liberty. America's Long, Bloody, and Ongoing Struggle for Religious Freedom, by Steven Waldman. New York: Harper, 2020. Reviewed by Anthony J. Blasi.

As the title indicates, this is a history of the freedom of religion in America, and as the title implies, it is written by an author who values that freedom. A journalist, Steven Waldman previously authored the 2008 bestseller *Founding Faith: How Our Founding Fathers Forged a Radical New Approach to Religious*

Liberty. His new book, *Sacred Liberty*, is not a work of original historical research but a well-crafted narrative that is based on the work of numerous historians.

Prior to the American Revolution, we learn, most of the colonies established one or another version of Christian tradition and persecuted others. "The Reverend John Waller was preaching in Carolina County, Virginia, in 1771 when an Anglican minister strode up to the pulpit and jammed the butt end of a horse whip into his mouth." Waller was dragged outside and beaten bloody by the local sheriff, and subsequently spent 113 days in jail for the crime of being a Baptist preacher. So begins the narrative.

In the seventeenth century, Massachusetts hanged people for being Quakers. In 1776, nine of the thirteen colonies barred Catholics and Jews from holding office. Well after independence, in 1838, the governor of Missouri issued an executive order calling for the extermination of Mormons. Protestant mobs burned convents, sacked churches, and collected the teeth of deceased nuns as souvenirs in the 1830s. Hundreds of thousands of Africans were not only enslaved but stripped of their religions. After the Civil War, the U.S. government banned many Native American spiritual practices and forced indigenous children to convert to Christianity. Before and during World War II, Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned, beaten, and, we are told, even castrated for refusing to salute the American flag. Such is the dark side of the story. The other side features individuals who championed religious liberty. In a recent example, thousands of grassroots demonstrators flooded airports in 2017 to protest President Donald Trump's plan to ban Muslim immigrants.

Waldman highlights the thought of James Madison and its influence during the early years of the American republic. Madison supported the separation of church and state not because he wanted to secularize society but because he reasoned that it was the only way to ensure religion would flourish. His observation of the persecution of Baptists in Virginia led him to believe that religion would thrive when there were many kinds of religion and when governments left them alone. The idea was, and still is, counter intuitive, but history has proven it insightful.

There had been experiments in the colonies before the Revolution and the First Amendment. New York, Pennsylvania, and especially Rhode Island provided models of freedom. Roger Williams famously founded Rhode Island as a free colony, free not only religiously but also with a prohibition of slavery; Williams even paid for the land that had formerly been owned by Native Americans. In what would become New York, the Anabaptist Lady Deborah Moody, who had

left Massachusetts, founded the community of Gravesend in present-day Brooklyn, with the patent providing for freedom of religion. Her followers later engaged in civil disobedience against the Dutch governor, Peter Stuyvesant. Pennsylvania featured tolerance, but imposed pacifism during war between the colonists and Native Americans, occasioning a change in the colonial laws.

Waldman devotes a chapter to the persecution of Roman Catholicism. Divines such as Lyman Beecher preached against the Catholic threat; Catholics were a "dark-minded, vicious populace—a poor, uneducated mass of infuriated animalism." A drunken mob buned down the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts, in 1832. Two years later the hoax memoir of Maria Monk about depravities of priests and nuns became a literary sensation. Inventor of the telegraph Samuel Morse published books about overseas Catholic conspiracies to send dangerous and criminal Catholic migrants to the U.S. In the 1840s, violence between Protestants and Catholics broke out in Philadelphia when the Pennsylvania legislature mandated the teaching of the King James Bible in the public schools.

While the First Amendment prevented the federal government from establishing a religion or promoting religion in general, and from inhibiting the free exercise of religion, the states were free to do both. The post-Civil War Fourteenth Amendment was intended to change that, though the courts were slow to apply it. The principal author of the Fourteenth Amendment was Congressman John Bingham, and Waldman credits Bingham's religion for moving him. I appreciate the attention given to Bingham, but I must point out that Bingham befriended an African American classmate when a student at Franklin College, and that friendship affected his world view. Bingham also read "people" in the Bill of Rights to include slaves, which view was long argued but did not prevail in the Dread Scott decision in 1858.

In the chapter on the persecution of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Waldman points to events in Navoo, Illinois, and in Missouri. Much of the criticism of the Mormons focused on polygyny, but it was also the case that what aggravated the Church's critics was that overseas converts to the Church were encouraged to migrate to the United States. In 1857, President James Buchanan, famous in history for failing to take action against the secessionists of the South, saw fit to take action against the Mormons, who had migrated to Utah in 1848; it had been a part of Mexico when they began the migration but had become American territory by the time they arrived. Under Buchanan there was a military standoff, but eventually cooler heads prevailed. The Mormons later gave up on

polygyny so that Utah could become a state without controversy, but this did not occur until after Congress had disincorporated the LDS Church and had prosecuted polygamists.

The twentieth century saw the Ku Klux Klan movement, which was directed against Catholics, Jews, and especially Catholic schools in the 1920s, prior to the renewed Klan becoming primarily an anti-African American movement. The Catholics were not helped by the nineteenth century popes having declared the separation of church and state erroneous, as well as rejecting religious pluralism. What the popes had in mind, of course, was the anti-religious stance of "enlightened" Europeans and the Italian national unification movement determined and destined to remove the pope as a monarch of the central portion of the Italian peninsula. Waldman does not place the papal policy into its historical context. American Catholics never applied the papal policy to their own country, and their best-known intellectual of the mid-20th century, John A. Ryan, argued that American Catholics accepted freedom of religion. That did not prevent the anti-Catholic and anti-Irish cartoons of Thomas Nast and the virulent anti-Catholic campaign against the presidential candidacy of Al Smith. Smith and later, with more success, John F. Kennedy, clearly favored freedom of religion and abandoned any effort to publically fund Catholic schools.

The successful use of the Fourteenth Amendment for assuring religious liberty came in court cases in which the Jehovah's Witnesses were defending their right to distribute literature and verbally proselytize, and to not participate in saluting the flag. During the 20th century, when these cases were being litigated, something of a consensus had developed around a "Judeo-Christian" American identity, generally associated with President Dwight Eisenhower. Waldman fails to note that Eisenhower had served for a time as the military attaché in the embassy in Manila and used his position to facilitate the settlement of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany in the Philippines.

Ultimately, the U.S. Supreme Court took the First and Fourteenth Amendments to their logical conclusion and, in controversial decisions, banned prayer in the public schools and began to adjudicate what symbols could be displayed on public property. This takes the author up to the point of extending the legal principles to religions more or less new to the country, particularly the Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim religions.

The era of the culture wars has stretched into the twenty-first century. Because Conservative Protestants and the Catholic bishops want the state to prohibit abortion, these groups have formed an alliance with the American

political right wing. Waldman does not stress the uneasy nature of this alliance: Neither the Evangelicals nor the Catholic bishops want the exclusion of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus from the nation, which the political right wing wants, even as they agree on abortion. Nor will Catholic bishops support the teaching of creationism in the public schools. Waldman does describe the interesting issue of government medical insurance covering contraception, but this seems to be a matter of a political opposition to government medical insurance, not a genuine concern about the free exercise of religion. The Evangelical churches had not made cotrnception an issue, and Catholics overwhelmingly reject its hierarchy's opposition to it (The hierarchy has not been able to show its teaching on contraception is derived from Christian tradition).

This book is a good read. While I would slant the presentation differently here and there, the presentation is a useful one as it stands. I am particularly impressed that the author appears to be a moderate on the issue of public funding of denominational schools, at least on their teaching of secular subjects according to state curricular standards.

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>