

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating September 10, 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. Comments may be sent to J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com.

Editorial

After the calendar, the *Third Reading* commentary is based on the gospel reading for the twenty-third Sunday in ordinary time. Tom Keene's poem is *Crocus*. See <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php> for more of Tom's poems.

Last July 18, an article by Antonio Spadaro and Marcelo Figueroa in the semi-official Vatican periodical, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, drew considerable international comment. It criticized themes of thought often found among conservative Catholics. Antonio Spadaro is the editor of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, and Marcelo Figueroa is a Presbyterian pastor and Editor-in-chief of the Argentine edition of *L'Osservatore Romano*, another semi-official Vatican periodical. Their article, "Evangelical Fundamentalism and Catholic Integralism in the USA," follows the poem.

Calendar

Sunday September 3, 7:30pm, Laborers for Love Silent Stand-In. Main Plaza in front of San Fernando Cathedral. 9:00pm, 20 minute lightshow on the Cathedral façade.

Tuesday September 5, 3:00pm, film, *Seed*, depicting 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.)

Monday September 11, 7:00pm-Wednesday September 13, 5:00pm, The Francis Effect: Living in Harmony with Creation. Whitley theological Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Dr. \$50.00 (\$25.00 student); an additional meal plan \$44.00. Information and registration (by Monday August 28) at franciseffect.ecociv.org.

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 a 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.

Friday October 21, 4:30pm-7:00pm; Saturday October 22, 9:00am-4:45pm, Iran in the World. Presentations by experts on the historic 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and the U.S., china, Russia, France, Germany, U.K., and European Union. Chapman Auditorium, Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Park at Alamo Stadium.

Thursday October 26, 5:00pm-6:00pm, in Austin, Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., "Pope Francis: reclaiming the vision of Vatican II." Jones Global Events Center, Ragsdale Center building, Saint Edward's University, 3001 S. congress Ave., Austin, 78704.

Third Reading (Matthew 18:15-20)

Buford Boone was the retired publisher of the newspaper in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. A young interim, or "visiting," assistant professor at the University of Alabama,

I had made an appointment to meet with him in his garage—for tax purposes he was relegating everything related to his former career to his garage. It was a mere 45 minute interview late on a hot afternoon, during which I asked only a few questions and he, sitting in a swivel chair with his feet on a desk, chatted continuously about events twenty years before in 1956. Once the interview was over, I drove to my office and typed from memory for two hours what he had been telling me.

The South was a new and strange world for me. Some of the old white men I interviewed referred to me as a “Yankee,” indicating they would talk to me anyway. Mr. Boone never put me into any regional category; I was just a young writer and he had spent much of his life helping young writers get the facts.

Why did I seek out Buford Boone? I had come to Tuscaloosa and found that people were still talking about the governor “standing in the school house door” at the old university auditorium to block racial integration a dozen years beforehand, and even more about efforts to assassinate Autherine Lucy, a courageous young lady who tried to integrate the university in 1956 but, after a white non-student mob threatened violence and even trapped her for a time in a classroom building, the university expelled her for reasons of public safety. Mr. Boone editorialized against the university’s action the next day, himself running the risk of attempts on his own life (which were rumored) and boycotts against his newspaper (which were in fact attempted).

Buford Boone’s editorial did not focus on race relations but on the rule of law. The target of the mob was Autherine Lucy: “Her ‘crimes’? she was born black, and she was moving against Southern custom and tradition—but with the law, right on up to the United States Supreme Court, on her side.” He continued, “What does it mean today at the University of Alabama, and here in Tuscaloosa, to have the law on your side?” The question haunts us all, not simply people living in a small city in Alabama in 1956.

The rule of law eventually prevailed, though not for Autherine Lucy personally. Governor Wallace stepped aside before a token show of force by a campus ROTC unit and allowed the registration of two African American students in 1963. The governor later repented standing in the way in the first place, admitting that he had been wrong. It is my impression that many repented along with him.

The *Gospel of Matthew* endorses the rule of law and respects what we would call due process. “But if your brother sins against you, go reprove him between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you gained your brother; but if he does not listen, bring one or two with you besides, so that every word may be confirmed by the mouth of two or three witnesses. But if he ignores them, tell the assembly.” If the offender ignores the assembly, “let him be for you like the gentiles and tax farmers”—i.e., as someone who is morally ignorant. Matthew follows this up with a saying addressed to a plural “you”: “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Poem

Crocus

Petals, each white as sun-bathed cloud,
together make one six-pointed star,
centered around a gold colored stamen,
tipping a flagpole stem,
unbending in still of morning.

A clear, soundless declaration
for itself and us, observed and observers:

I am. We are.

Tom Keene
August 12, 2017

Evangelical Fundamentalism and Catholic Integralism: A Surprising Ecumenism

Antonio Spadaro and Marcelo Figueroa

In God We Trust. This phrase is printed on the banknotes of the United States of America and is the current national motto. It appeared for the first time on a coin in 1864 but did not become official until Congress passed a motion in 1956. A motto is important for a nation whose foundation was rooted in religious motivations. For many it is a simple declaration of faith. For others, it is the synthesis of a problematic fusion between religion and state, faith and politics, religious values and economy.

Religion, political Manichaeism and a cult of the apocalypse

Religion has had a more incisive role in electoral processes and government decisions over recent decades, especially in some US governments. It offers a moral role for identifying what is good and what is bad.

At times this mingling of politics, morals and religion has taken on a Manichaean language that divides reality between absolute Good and absolute Evil. In fact, after President George W. Bush spoke in his day about challenging the “axis of evil” and stated it was the USA’s duty to “free the world from evil” following the events of September 11, 2001. Today President Trump steers the fight against a wider, generic collective entity of the “bad” or even the “very bad.” Sometimes the tones used by his supporters in some campaigns take on meanings that we could define as “epic.”

These stances are based on Christian-Evangelical fundamentalist principles dating from the beginning of the 20th Century that have been gradually radicalized. These have moved on from a rejection of all that is mundane – as politics was

considered – to bringing a strong and determined religious-moral influence to bear on democratic processes and their results.

The term “evangelical fundamentalist” can today be assimilated to the “evangelical right” or “theoconservatism” and has its origins in the years 1910-1915. In that period a South Californian millionaire, Lyman Stewart, published the 12-volume work *The Fundamentals*. The author wanted to respond to the threat of modernist ideas of the time. He summarized the thought of authors whose doctrinal support he appreciated. He exemplified the moral, social, collective and individual aspects of the evangelical faith. His admirers include many politicians and even two recent presidents: Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush.

The social-religious groups inspired by authors such as Stewart consider the United States to be a nation blessed by God. And they do not hesitate to base the economic growth of the country on a literal adherence to the Bible. Over more recent years this current of thought has been fed by the stigmatization of enemies who are often “demonized.”

The panorama of threats to their understanding of the American way of life have included modernist spirits, the black civil rights movement, the hippy movement, communism, feminist movements and so on. And now in our day there are the migrants and the Muslims. To maintain conflict levels, their biblical exegeses have evolved toward a decontextualized reading of the Old Testament texts about the conquering and defense of the “promised land,” rather than be guided by the incisive look, full of love, of Jesus in the Gospels.

Within this narrative, whatever pushes toward conflict is not off limits. It does not take into account the bond between capital and profits and arms sales. Quite the opposite, often war itself is assimilated to the heroic conquests of the “Lord of Hosts” of Gideon and David. In this Manichaean vision, belligerence can acquire a theological justification and there are pastors who seek a biblical foundation for it, using the scriptural texts out of context.

Another interesting aspect is the relationship with *creation* of these religious groups that are composed mainly of whites from the deep American South. There is a sort of “anesthetic” with regard to ecological disasters and problems generated by climate change. They profess “dominionism” and consider ecologists as people who are against the Christian faith. They place their own roots in a literalist understanding of the creation narratives of the book of Genesis that put humanity in a position of “dominion” over creation, while creation remains subject to human will in biblical submission.

In this theological vision, natural disasters, dramatic climate change and the global ecological crisis are not only not perceived as an alarm that should lead them to reconsider their dogmas, but they are seen as the complete opposite: signs that confirm their non-allegorical understanding of the final figures of the Book of Revelation and their apocalyptic hope in a “new heaven and a new earth.”

Theirs is a prophetic formula: fight the threats to American Christian values and prepare for the imminent justice of an Armageddon, a final showdown between Good and Evil, between God and Satan. In this sense, every process (be it of peace, dialogue, etc.) collapses before the needs of the end, the final battle against the enemy. And the community of believers (faith) becomes a community of combatants (fight). Such a unidirectional reading of the biblical texts can anesthetize consciences or

actively support the most atrocious and dramatic portrayals of a world that is living beyond the frontiers of its own “promised land.”

Pastor Rousas John Rushdoony (1916-2001) is the father of so-called “Christian reconstructionism” (or “dominionist theology”) that had a great influence on the theopolitical vision of Christian fundamentalism. This is the doctrine that feeds political organizations and networks such as the Council for National Policy and the thoughts of their exponents such as Steve Bannon, currently chief strategist at the White House and supporter of an apocalyptic geopolitics.^[1]

“The first thing we have to do is give a voice to our Churches,” some say. The real meaning of this type of expression is the desire for some influence in the political and parliamentary sphere and in the juridical and educational areas so that public norms can be subjected to religious morals.

Rushdoony’s doctrine maintains a theocratic necessity: submit the state to the Bible with a logic that is no different from the one that inspires Islamic fundamentalism. At heart, the narrative of terror shapes the world-views of jihadists and the new crusaders and is imbibed from wells that are not too far apart. We must not forget that the theopolitics spread by Isis is based on the same cult of an apocalypse that needs to be brought about as soon as possible. So, it is not just accidental that George W. Bush was seen as a “great crusader” by Osama bin Laden.

Theology of prosperity and the rhetoric of religious liberty

Together with political Manichaeism, another relevant phenomenon is the passage from original puritan pietism, as expressed in Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, to the “Theology of Prosperity” that is mainly proposed in the media and by millionaire pastors and missionary organizations with strong religious, social and political influence. They proclaim a “Prosperity Gospel” for they believe God desires his followers to be physically healthy, materially rich and personally happy.

It is easy to note how some messages of the electoral campaign and their semiotics are full of references to evangelical fundamentalism. For example, we see political leaders appearing triumphant with a Bible in their hands.

Pastor Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993) is an important figure who inspired US Presidents such as Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump. He officiated at the first wedding of the current president. He was a successful preacher. He sold millions of copies of his book *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952) that is full of phrases such as “If you believe in something, you get it”, “Nothing will stop you if you keep repeating: God is with me, who is against me” or “Keep in mind your vision of success and success will come” and so on. Many prosperity prosperous televangelists mix marketing, strategic direction and preaching, concentrating more on personal success than on salvation or eternal life.

A third element, together with Manichaeism and the prosperity gospel, is a particular form of proclamation of the defense of “religious liberty.” The erosion of religious liberty is clearly a grave threat within a spreading secularism. But we must avoid its defense coming in the fundamentalist terms of a “religion in total freedom,” perceived as a direct virtual challenge to the secularity of the state.

Fundamentalist ecumenism

Appealing to the values of fundamentalism, a strange form of surprising ecumenism is developing between Evangelical fundamentalists and Catholic Integralists brought together by the same desire for religious influence in the political sphere.

Some who profess themselves to be Catholic express themselves in ways that until recently were unknown in their tradition and using tones much closer to Evangelicals. They are defined as *value voters* as far as attracting electoral mass support is concerned. There is a well-defined world of ecumenical convergence between sectors that are paradoxically competitors when it comes to confessional belonging. This meeting over shared objectives happens around such themes as abortion, same-sex marriage, religious education in schools and other matters generally considered moral or tied to values. Both Evangelical and Catholic Integralists condemn traditional ecumenism and yet promote an ecumenism of conflict that unites them in the nostalgic dream of a theocratic type of state.

However, the most dangerous prospect for this strange ecumenism is attributable to its xenophobic and Islamophobic vision that wants walls and purifying deportations. The word “ecumenism” transforms into a paradox, into an “ecumenism of hate.” Intolerance is a celestial mark of purism. Reductionism is the exegetical methodology. Ultra-literalism is its hermeneutical key.

Clearly there is an enormous difference between these concepts and the ecumenism employed by Pope Francis with various Christian bodies and other religious confessions. His is an ecumenism that moves under the urge of inclusion, peace, encounter and bridges. This presence of opposing ecumenisms – and their contrasting perceptions of the faith and visions of the world where religions have irreconcilable roles – is perhaps the least known and most dramatic aspect of the spread of Integralist fundamentalism. Here we can understand why the pontiff is so committed to working against “walls” and any kind of “war of religion.”

The temptation of “spiritual war”

The religious element should never be confused with the political one. Confusing spiritual power with temporal power means subjecting one to the other. An evident aspect of Pope Francis’ geopolitics rests in not giving theological room to the power to impose oneself or to find an internal or external enemy to fight. There is a need to flee the temptation to project divinity on political power that then uses it for its own ends. Francis empties from within the narrative of sectarian millenarianism and dominionism that is preparing the apocalypse and the “final clash.”^[2] Underlining mercy as a fundamental attribute of God expresses this radically Christian need.

Francis wants to break the organic link between culture, politics, institution and Church. Spirituality cannot tie itself to governments or military pacts for it is at the service of all men and women. Religions cannot consider some people as sworn enemies nor others as eternal friends. Religion should not become the guarantor of the dominant classes. Yet it is this very dynamic with a spurious theological flavor that tries to impose its own law and logic in the political sphere.

There is a shocking rhetoric used, for example, by the writers of *Church Militant*, a successful US-based digital platform that is openly in favor of a political ultraconservatism and uses Christian symbols to impose itself. This abuse is called

“authentic Christianity.” And to show its own preferences, it has created a close analogy between Donald Trump and Emperor Constantine, and between Hillary Clinton and Diocletian. The American elections in this perspective were seen as a “spiritual war.”^[3]

This warlike and militant approach seems most attractive and evocative to a certain public, especially given that the victory of Constantine – it was presumed impossible for him to beat Maxentius and the Roman establishment – had to be attributed to a divine intervention: *in hoc signo vinces*.

Church Militant asks if Trump’s victory can be attributed to the prayers of Americans. The response suggested is affirmative. The indirect missioning for President Trump is clear: he has to follow through on the consequences. This is a very direct message that then wants to condition the presidency by framing it as a divine election. *In hoc signo vinces*. Indeed.

Today, more than ever, power needs to be removed from its faded confessional dress, from its armor, its rusty breastplate. The fundamentalist theopolitical plan is to set up a kingdom of the divinity here and now. And that divinity is obviously the projection of the power that has been built. This vision generates the ideology of conquest.

The theopolitical plan that is truly Christian would be eschatological, that is it applies to the future and orients current history toward the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice and peace. This vision generates a process of integration that unfolds with a diplomacy that crowns no one as a “man of Providence.”

And this is why the diplomacy of the Holy See wants to establish direct and fluid relations with the superpowers, without entering into pre-constituted networks of alliances and influence. In this sphere, the pope does not want to say who is right or who is wrong for he knows that at the root of conflicts there is always a fight for power. So, there is no need to imagine a taking of sides for moral reasons, much worse for spiritual ones.

Francis radically rejects the idea of activating a Kingdom of God on earth as was at the basis of the Holy Roman Empire and similar political and institutional forms, including at the level of a “party.” Understood this way, the “elected people” would enter a complicated political and religious web that would make them forget they are at the service of the world, placing them in opposition to those who are different, those who do not belong, that is the “enemy.”

So, then the Christian roots of a people are never to be understood in an ethnic way. The notions of roots and identity do not have the same content for a Catholic as for a neo-Pagan. Triumphant, arrogant and vindictive ethnicism is actually the opposite of Christianity. The pope on May 9 in an interview with the French daily *La Croix*, said: “Yes Europe has Christian roots. Christianity has the duty of watering them, but in a spirit of service as in the washing of feet. The duty of Christianity for Europe is that of service.” And again: “The contribution of Christianity to a culture is that of Christ washing the feet, or the service and the gift of life. There is no room for colonialism.”

Against fear

Which feeling underlies the persuasive temptation for a spurious alliance between politics and religious fundamentalism? It is fear of the breakup of a constructed order and the fear of chaos. Indeed, it functions that way thanks to the chaos perceived. The political strategy for success becomes that of raising the tones of the conflictual,

exaggerating disorder, agitating the souls of the people by painting worrying scenarios beyond any realism.

Religion at this point becomes a guarantor of order and a political part would incarnate its needs. The appeal to the apocalypse justifies the power desired by a god or colluded in with a god. And fundamentalism thereby shows itself not to be the product of a religious experience but a poor and abusive perversion of it.

This is why Francis is carrying forward a systematic counter-narration with respect to the narrative of fear. There is a need to fight against the manipulation of this season of anxiety and insecurity. Again, Francis is courageous here and gives no theological-political legitimacy to terrorists, avoiding any reduction of Islam to Islamic terrorism. Nor does he give it to those who postulate and want a “holy war” or to build barrier-fences crowned with barbed wire. The only crown that counts for the Christian is the one with thorns that Christ wore on high.^[4]

^[1] Bannon believes in the apocalyptic vision that William Strauss and Neil Howe theorized in their book *The Fourth Turning: What Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny*. See also N. Howe, “Where did Steve Bannon get his worldview? From my book”, in *The Washington Post*, February 24, 2017.

^[2] See A. Aresu, “Pope Francis against the Apocalypse,” in *Macrogeo* (www.macrogeo.global/analysis/pope-francis-against-the-apocalypse), June 9, 2017.

^[3] See “Donald ‘Constantine’ Trump? Could Heaven be intervening directly in the election?”, in Church Militant (www.churchmilitant.com/video/episode/vortex-donald-constantine-trump).

^[4] For further reflection see D. J. Fares, “L’antropologia politica di Papa Francesco», in *Civ. Catt.* 2014 I 345-360; A. Spadaro, “La diplomazia di Francesco. La misericordia come processo politico”, ib 2016 I 209-226; D. J. Fares, “Papa Francesco e la politica”, ib 2016 I 373-385; J. L. Narvaja, “La crisi di ogni politica cristiana. Erich Przywara e l’idea di Europa”, ib 2016 I 437-448; Id., “Il significato della politica internazionale di Francesco”, ib 2017 III 8-15.

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.sanantoniopace.center>

Interfaith Radio, (*Interfaith Voices*)
<http://www.interfaithradio.org/>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty
www.txccedp.org