

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating September 17, 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-fourth Sunday in ordinary time. Tom Keene's poem is *River of Blood*. See <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php> for more of Tom's poems. Tom has also contributed an essay: *Reflections on a Massacre*.

And just in: Tom Heger sent this link to a riff on Martin Niemöller and Matthew 25: <https://sojo.net/media/riff-martin-neimoller-and-matthew-25>.

Calendar

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.

Monday September 18, 6:30pm-8:30pm, Community conversation: Fear & courage. Sponsored by the peaceCenter. Whitley Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Dr.

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.

Saturday September 30, 11:00am-6:00pm, A Thousand Poets for Change. E Centro de Artes, 115 Plaza de Armas, Suite 102.

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.

Friday November 10, 7:30pm-9:30pm, **in Seguin**, film, *(Re)Formation*. A group of artists renovate a transition home for discarded youth and explore the meaning of church, holy ground, and Jesus' mission. Studio Theatre at Weston Center, Texas Lutheran University, 1000 West Court St., Seguin.

Third Reading (Matthew 18:21-35)

The reading presents the familiar parable of two officials (called "slaves," in an ancient usage) in a king's court. One official owed the king a huge sum of money. After beginning to sell the official and his family into slavery and readying the official's property for auction, the king had compassion and forgave the debt. That official, in turn, was owed a much smaller amount by a fellow official and threw him into debtor's prison. The people in the court were shocked and reported the matter to the king, who proceeded to treat the first official as the latter was treating the second official. The meaning and implications of the parable are obvious. Its lesson should come to mind every time we recite the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses...."

My late friend Jim Stone used to talk about what happened a few years after his father had been murdered. His father had retired and, to have something to keep himself busy, worked part time at the cash register in a liquor store. A robber shot him, killing him, in the course of robbing the store. Jim said the murder disturbed him, kept bothering him. He went into a period of depression because of it. It seemed to sour every aspect of his daily life. One evening he received a phone call; it was from a

chaplain at a prison. The young man who had shot his father wanted to know if Jim would forgive him. Jim didn't know what to say, but in the end said he forgave his father's murderer. As Jim explained his experience, he did not know whether forgiveness did any good for the young man in prison, but it did a great deal for Jim himself. The whole weight of the tragedy was lifted from his consciousness.

Jim's story, and much else about his life, gave me much to pack into the eulogy I gave at his funeral.

Poem

River of Blood

It was the 1980s.
With neither approval nor permission
from We the People,
our nation's CIA hired mercenaries.
Calling themselves Contras,
they raided Nicaragua's isolated villages,
killed the workers for health, literacy
and terrorized the rest.

One of them tells his story:

*We found the teacher,
laid him in a newly dug ditch.
Following orders,
I plunged my trench knife into him,
till his screams and breathing stopped.*

*Later, I went to the river
to wash my hands and face.
In a flash, the river turned to blood.*

*That night, I slipped away,
never to return.*

Imagine us taxpayers walking away
from our Afghanistans, Iraqs, Vietnams
and their rivers of blood.

Tom Keene
August 26, 2017

Reflections on a Massacre

by Tom Keene

Pax Christi, San Antonio

I am watching my infant grandchild playing in her sandbox. Between putting handfuls of sand to her mouth she looks for bright toys to chew. I keep recalling the priest from Chiapas, Mexico, who told of the massacre of 45 people at the village of Acteal on December 22, 1997. I recall that one of the 45 was an infant. I wonder about the one who killed the baby. I let my imagination flow.

He is a young man. Late teens. He sits beside his uncle on the bed of the truck as it maneuvers the curving dusty road following other trucks to the village. He grips the automatic rifle cradled between his knees, muzzle up. It is loaded with the safety on. Sticking out from his belt are four full magazines of ammunition. He has fired the rifle at trees and targets but never at a person. Today will be different. He can feel his heart beat, his blood race. His head feels light.

He has never been to the village, though he has seen some of the villagers at markets in the larger towns. They seemed hard working and confident, but others, his uncles and their friends, made fun of them. Slurs and ridicule ran through their talk. He remembered the phrase, "enemies of the government." Such gossip does not interest him. What matters is being a man and proving it so others know.

At the village, the men in his truck jump out and run to join the men from the other trucks as they surround the village meeting place. Before he can get there he hears the staccato of automatic rifle fire. Chips of wood and paint fly from the meeting house walls. Screams and shouts. Villagers pour out of the building. Some fall. Others continue to run. Confusion everywhere. His belly tightens into a knot. He follows after his uncle who is chasing someone, a girl. She clutches an infant and runs toward the river. An image of his sister and her child flashes across his vision and is gone. He catches up with his uncle who stands on the river's bank, aims and fires a burst at the girl. She drops the baby and falls. She lies face down, silent. The baby screams. With his uncle, he walks to the girl's body. With the toe of his boot, his uncle turns the girl's body over. She is dead. His uncle motions to the baby. "Kill it." The young man steps to the screaming baby. He points the rifle at the child and wonders at this tool in his hands, its heft and newness. His head feels lighter than ever. "Kill it," his uncle says again. The burst startles him. The spray of bullets rips across the baby, peppers the grave strewn turf. "Come on," says his uncle. After that the surge of noise and confusion settles into a pattern of chase down and shoot, chase down and kill. It becomes a matter of doing what everyone else is doing.

The trucks return the men to their own villages. The young man finds himself with his uncle and other men from the raid. The men pass around bottles of tequila. The young man has never before seen at one time that many opened bottles. He does not follow the talk of the men. He hears someone say that the shooting business took four hours. He cannot remember it, nor imagine how that time could be so short or so long. He still feels light in the head. The tequila does not help. He wants to sleep, but cannot.

Later, after enough liquor, he passes out. When he wakes, he looks into the eyes of his sister and her baby staring at him. They both seem different. He knows they will never look the same to him again.

I am back in the sandbox. I wonder at how this grandchild, that dead child, that young man, the villagers and their killers and those inner forces that urged the killers on, can ever be one, loved by the one God.

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