

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating September 13, 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 Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Consider Bread*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Two items follow the poem. The first is a letter from Pax Christi San Antonio member Al Eisch, upon a receipt of a political mailer from a purportedly Catholic organization. Al investigated the organization and writes a warning about it in his letter. The second item is my reflection on "The Interrelatedness of Pro-Life Issues," by Bishop John Stowe, Chapter 1 of *Voting and Faithfulness* (ed. Nicholas P. Cafardi. New York: Paulist Press, pp. 13-11).

Calendar

(Times are given in Central Time Zone)

Online

Monday September 7, 1:00pm (2:00pm ET), First Annual Live-Streamed Labor Day Mass, Bishop John E. Stowe, ofm Conv. Celebrant. Register at: <https://paxchristiusa.org/2020/08/30/join-bishop-stowe-for-first-annual-labor-day-mass-with-the-catholic-labor-network/>

Tuesday September 8, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET), Election 2020: Left, Right, or Politically Homeless? Discussion aimed at Catholics under 40. Meghan Clark (St. John's University), Abigail Galvan (Crimsonbridge Foundation), Charlene Howard (Archbishop Carroll High School, Wahsington, DC), and Stephen White (Catholic University of America). RSVP:

<https://catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/events/election-2020-left-right-or-politically-homeless#rsvp>

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

Thursday September 10, 2:00pm (3:00ET), webinar, “Catholic Social Teaching, Politics, and the Fullness of Faith.” Bishop John E. Stowe, ofm Conv. (Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky), and Daniel R. DiLeo (Creighton University). Register at: <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/2596696129955988491?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=837bba68-eb84-4957-91a0-762ae093b419>

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

Saturdays September 12, October 17, and November 21, 10:30am-11:30am, SoL series, “Faith and Race—An Ongoing Conversation,” Bishop Trevor Alexander (Church of God in Christ, University 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/>

Tuesday September 15, 6:00pm, Sierra Club Alamo Group meeting, “An Evening with Gina Ortiz Jones, congressional candidate, district 23. Zoom information: Zoomlink: <https://sierraclub.zoom.us/j/93300351100?pwd=QjdRd0syQlZQdjVRdFdHaWVCbzluUT09>
Meeting ID: 933 0035 1100
Passcode: 875772

Friday September 17, 7:00pm, “Homemade Citizenship: All but Inviting Injury,” Koritha Mitchell (Ohio State University). Lecture on the African American experience hosted by Trinity University. Register at: https://trinity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_FoYRDwbAS3q0wkTsx7V6Cw

Monday September 21, 12:00pm-1:00pm, panel discussion “How Religious Organizations Can Respond to Educational Inequality in a Time of COVID,” Marilyn Lee (Loving Houston), Esmeralda Sanchez Salazar (Rice University Religion & Public Life Program), Brandon Walker (The Summer Institute), and moderator Elaine Howard Ecklund (Rice U. Religion & Public Life Program). Register at: https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_bhHsllcqQF2rvqxlmaSCrw

Tuesday September 22, 4:00pm-5:00pm, online presentation “A Knock at Midnight: A story of Hope, Justice, and Freedom,” Brittany K. Barnett (attorney, founder of Buried Alieve Project), relates taking on a pro bono case that changed her life. She asks, “What does freedom mean in a country that is home to the world’s largest incarcerated population?” Donation-based ticket; register at <https://www.dfwworld.org/registration/brittany-barnett>

Tuesday September 22, 6:00pm, conversation with Anthony Ray Hinton, who served 30 years on death row in Alabama though innocent, author of *The Sun Does Shine*. Register at: <https://junghouston.org/jung-centers-fall-benefit-2020/>

Sunday September 27, 9:30am, “Darwin, Race, Slavery, and the Tree of Life,” Bruce Yeager. Information: contact mmcgm63@gmail.com. Posted by St. Philip Presbyterian Church, Houston. Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86564638381?pwd=MTBtSF16eVhoTUF3SXJ2VIBWd0N2QT09#success>

Thursday September 29, 12:00pm-1:00pm, webinar “Overturning Wrongful Convictions in Texas,” Christopher Scott (House of Renewed Hope) and Mike Ware (Innocence Project of Texas). Register at: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfG9LHysup1Fv1RPTewUben6UpvMvMEPwWXUxB5F87qxnbanw/viewform>

Wednesday September 30, 8:00pm, *Blood on the Wall - Humanizing the Immigration Debate*, on the National Geographic Channel.

Saturday October 3, Voice of the faithful is holding its 2020 Conference online, with Phyllis Zagano and Fr. Richard Lennan as keynote speakers. \$50. Register at <https://interland3.donorperfect.net/weblink/weblink.aspx?name=votf&id=9>

Tuesday October 6, 12:00pm-1:00pm (1:00pm-2:00pm ET), Ta-Nehisi Coates (New York University), “Racial Equity and Housing Justice during and after COVID-19.” Register at: <https://bit.ly/32yRqi6>.

In El Paso

Tuesday September 8, 7:00pm, Pax Christi El Paso meeting on Zoom; discussion of Angela Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, ch. 8, pp. 91-110. To receive the link, contact Patricia Delgado at: phdelgado3583@gmail.com

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, “Faith and Race—An Ongoing Conversation,” Bishop Trevor Alexander (Church of God in Christ, University 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

Hate Monger. Terry Gross, of the radio program *Fresh Air*, broadcast on National Public Radio, interviewed Jean Guerrero, author of *Hate Monger*. Guerrero describes Stephen Miller, the architect of the Trump administration’s immigration and border policy, and traces the development of Miller’s virulent anti-immigration stance. You can access the interview at: <https://www.npr.org/2020/08/24/905403716/hatemonger-paints-trump-advisor-stephen-miller-as-a-case-study-in-radicalization>

Program materials for hosting a Feast of St. Francis educational celebration, designed for use on October 4, from Catholic Climate Covenant. Sign up for the materials at: <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/program/feast-st-francis?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=0968c0cd-827b-4e11-af8e-fb5bf7b9b770>

Online course, *Laudato Sí* and *Integral Ecology*, beginning September, 12 sessions, presented by the Ordo Fratrum Minores (Franciscans), headquartered in Rome. Information and registration: <https://laudatosi-school-77aa.thinkific.com/>

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 14:7-9)

This brief excerpt from Paul's *Letter to the Romans* can be hard to understand taken in isolation: "For none of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself; for if we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord." The context is a difference of opinion in the early Christian church about what Christians could eat. The Jewish community, among which many were Christians, did not eat pork. Even other meats were dedicated to pagan deities by the meat cutters. Some Christians had no qualms about eating meat because they held that the dietary laws in the Hebrew scriptures no longer held, and that the pagan deities did not even exist. Other Christians felt bound by the dietary laws found in the Hebrew Bible and objected to having anything to do with meat that had been dedicated to idols.

Paul held that his fellow Christians were God's servants, and that no one had the right to make prescriptions for someone else's servants, let alone God's servants. "None of us lives for oneself..."; we are all servants of the Lord Jesus. We have no business judging fellow servants.

Today's issues differ from those of the first century. Some take the prohibition of homosexual relations, a ritual proscription in the Book of *Leviticus*, as something that must be observed. Paul would have those who do not see that as binding, refrain from judging them. The reverse would also be the case. And of course, his principle would hold the other way around.

There are other matters over which Christians have divergent views. Of course, there are limits. Even as one may not judge the person who refuses to wear a mask in a pandemic, one obviously has the right to insist or, if responsible for a setting, mandate that masks be worn. Here reason, "natural law," acts in a dialectic with received textual tradition.

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

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

Letter on a Purportedly Catholic Political Organization

Dear Catholics,

You might have received three mailings from CATHOLICVOTE. It is not Catholic. It is the typical political propaganda.

Brian Burch, president of CatholicVote, a political action group with no ties to the Catholic Church, has written repeatedly about how his organization has used “the latest technology to find Catholics, connect with them, register them to vote and then get them to the polls.”

The technology Burch is utilizing involves a digital marketing practice known as geofencing.

Mr. Burch receives an income from CatholicVote of over \$300,000 from your donations. Mr. Burch is Catholic but wishes to manipulate Catholics.

Like Cambridge Analytica 2016 –Using smartphone apps to identify where people are or the places they frequent, geofencing allows marketers to use that information to send messages advertising goods or services in a particular locale in the hope of turning smartphone users into customers.

You will not hear any guidance nor warning from the pulpit nor from the archdiocese for whatever reason due to separation from church and state.

I was sent an offensive 17x14 envelope three times from CatholicVote with my name in large print on the outside. I contacted the Nuncio whose office simply said: “It is not Catholic”. This past Monday I brought this up to my pastor who simply said: “It is not my job.”

Although every other church groups are militant in advocating one political party or another, I understand. Nevertheless, I do expect some guidance, on-going formation in social justice and warnings that Catholics are being targeted. So. I wonder if our youth leave the church because of the void and vacuum created by silence and lack of social interest. There still are sins of omission.

I am sure there are many other political organizations trying to capture my & your vote or misguide you. I just don't like being targeted and used. If you sense hatred, vindictiveness, nastiness or out-right exaggerated labeling, you can compare that with the gospel message and the gospel messenger and make your own conclusion.

Regarding politics, Pope Benedict XV stated in 1915...

“Let each one freely defend his own opinion, but let it be done with due moderation, so that no one should consider himself entitled to affix on those who merely do not agree with his ideas the stigma of disloyalty to faith or to

discipline," he wrote. (That was a hundred years ago, mind you, in the pre-Twitter era. One wonders what Benedict XV would make of Catholic conversation today.)

Let's mend this nation with forgiveness, compassion and working for the common good.

In Christ,
AL EISCH

Reflection on Bishop John Stowe's "The Interrelatedness of Pro-Life Issues." ¹

Anthony J. Blasi

In preparation for recent presidential elections, the Catholic bishops of the United States published updated versions of a guide, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. Not this year! Despite the fact that the Trump presidency raised issues concerning honesty, creation care, capital punishment, medical care, and racism, the bishops have nothing to say. Or at least, they cannot agree on anything new to say. So a new volume, published by Paulist Press, a collection of essays, is offered instead. Most of the essays are authored by moral theologians in various Catholic universities. What follows below is my reading of the first of the essays in the volume.

That first essay is by Bishop John Stowe of Lexington, Kentucky, a conventual Franciscan. He is also the Bishop President of Pax Christi U.S.A. He begins by recalling the 2019 March for Life in Washington, D.C., where some young march participants, wearing MAGA caps, appeared to be in a confrontation with an elderly Native American rights drummer. Bishop Stowe enumerates the ways the Trump presidency is anti-life, implying that the Native American drummer was closer to a genuine life ethic than the teenage MAGA cap wearers. "The president who is celebrated by some as a champion of the pro-life movement because he appointed staunchly antiabortion judges to the Supreme Court is the same president whose administration created and enforced policies that kept little children penned up in chain-link cages at the U.S.-Mexico border

¹ Pp. 3-11 in *Voting and Faithfulness. Catholic Perspectives on Politics*, ed. Nicholas P. Cafardi. New York: Paulist Press, 2020.

and who presided over the separation of young immigrant children from their parents in custody" (pp. 4-5). He sees an irony in this, noting that the pro-life movement was first organized by Juli Loesch, who had trained with César Chávez. Loesch "joined forces with Benedictine Sister Mary Lou Kownacki during the formative period of what is today Pax Christi USA..." (p. 5). Being anti-abortion, he says quite correctly, makes no sense detached from a concern for the dignity of all humans and an equal concern about war.

Bishop Stowe reviews the involvement of Catholic sisters and clergy in the Civil Rights Movement, the consistent advocacy by bishops for the rights of refugees and immigrants, and the teachings of Pope Francis about the value of the marginalized and vulnerable. He calls attention to the 2018 pastoral letter of the American Catholic bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, which was the first since 1979 to condemn racism; it did so as a life issue, centering on human dignity. He also calls attention to the climate crisis, which young people and all scientists recognize but the U.S. president does not. Indeed, the president's administration has withdrawn the nation from the Paris Accord on Climate and has been industriously eliminating environmental protections. The last of these actions, of course, contrasts with the encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Sí*.

The point, according to Bishop Stowe, is not to make abortion illegal but to make it unthinkable. The point is to convert people, especially the young, to the ethic of life, grounded in a recognition of human dignity, the preciousness of every and all life.

As a guide, Bishop Stowe's chapter is a good one, so far as it goes. The agenda for voting that he presents is a sound one, but despite the connections with life it is a list of things to do, not an ethic. He sensed a need to connect items on the agenda, but does not appear to have succeeded in connecting them in more than a superficial way. The very fact that intelligent high school students in 2019 needed to be taught that what MAGA caps stand for is anti-life suggests that the connecting links from one agenda item to another are not obvious. Thus just as someone could oppose elective abortion without welcoming immigrants or respecting Muslims and Jews, so could one favor environmental protection and simultaneously favor abortion and capital punishment.

I think it would be more than a biblicism to begin instead with *agape*, not in the abstract but face-to-face with another. Would it not be extremely difficult if not impossible for an attorney general to leave Washington and sit down with an erstwhile refugee child for an hour or two and still hate? Could an E.P.A. official live in a coastal lowland and talk with locals without thinking twice about eliminating

environmental protections? Could not even a racist be converted by an hour's Bible study if first actually coming to know and love the other people in the study group? It would be a fundamental ethic to seek out one with whom one would connect as the focus of every morally-weighted social issue.

This is a political season. Every such season I listen with some dismay as people evaluate candidates in terms of minute points of policy to be agreed with or not. Most of the time this is done with presidential candidates, though it is legislators, not presidents, who are responsible for policies. Yes, it is good to think about policies as well as presidents, but in a chief executive it is more important to know about characters. Does the candidate seek out and look for someone behind an "issue" with whom to connect, to get to know and appreciate as a person?

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.sanantonioplace.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>