

# Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating September 20, 2020

Communications with the editor should be sent to [j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com](mailto: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-fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *We Farmworkers*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem is an essay by a journalist, Benedict Rogers, on the silence of Hong Kong's Catholic Church hierarchy during a time of oppression.

## Calendar

**Tuesday September 15**, 11:30am (12:30pm ET), online panel discussion "What's Faith Got To Do With It? Reporters on Faith and the Faithful in the 2020 Presidential Election," Carl Cannon (Real/Clear Politics), Kelsey Dallas (Deseret News), Jack Jenkins (Religious News Service), Elizabeth Podrebarac Sciupac (Pew Research Center), and Eugene Scott (Washington Post). RSVP at: <https://catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/events/what-s-faith-got-to-do-with-it#rsvp>

**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

**Wednesday September 16**, 12:00pm (1:00pm ET), interactive Zoom event on the need to rethink the role of the president in US immigration policy, with Adam Coz

and Cristina M. Rodriguez, authors of *The President and Immigration Law*.

Register at:

[https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_KEcTGS0VTxCyTnWCRUdwow](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_KEcTGS0VTxCyTnWCRUdwow).

**Thursday September 17**, 6:30pm, Pax Christi Little Rock welcomes Dr. Anika Whitfield (Arkansas Poor People's Campaign), via Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83494408635?pwd=aVJaOFpBd3o2ZVZzTXBXdVQwOUVDZz09>

**Thursday September 17**, 7:00pm, No Nuclear Waste online writing party. This pertains to a proposal to transport radioactive nuclear waste through Texas metropolitan areas for "temporary" storage (i.e., with no designated permanent sites) in New Mexico and West Texas. Aquifer areas at the border between the two states have been re-mapped to make the "temporary" site legal. The online letter writing party is hosted by no less than 16 organizations, including Pax Christi San Antonio. Join on September 17 at

<https://tinyurl.com/NoNuclearWaste>

**Thursday 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](https://trinity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_FoYRDwbAS3q0wkTsx7V6Cw)

**Sunday September 20**, 1:30pm-3:30pm, Zoom discussion facilitated by Sr. Rose Marie Tresp, RSM, "Neither Right nor Left: How does Catholic Social Teaching help us live in the tension?" Register by noon Friday September 18 at:

<https://form.jotform.com/202454317901146>

**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\\_bhHslIcQF2rvqxlmaSCrw](https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_bhHslIcQF2rvqxlmaSCrw)

**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 Alive 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/>

**Tuesday September 22**, 6:30pm-8:00pm, virtual Courageous Conversation on Racism, hosted by the Holy Cross Catholic Church (Austin) Social Justice Ministry. For information, call Johnnie Dorsey 512-217-9616. The link for the meeting is: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84844915005?pwd=M1pDM2JDYjZyU2lydXY4Ly80Qy9FQT09#success>  
The meeting ID is 848 4491 5005; Passcode 026019

**Sunday September 27**, 9:30am, “Darwin, Race, Slavery, and the Tree of Life,” Bruce Yeager. Information: contact [mmcgm63@gmail.com](mailto:mmcgm63@gmail.com). Posted by St. Philip Presbyterian Church, Houston. Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86564638381?pwd=MTBtSF16eVhoTUF3SXJ2VlBWd0N2QT09#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>

**Monday October 5**, 3:30pm-4:30pm, webinar “Why Scientists Need to Talk about Religion to Address Race and Gender Disparities in Science” Elaine Howard Ecklund (Rice University) and Brandon Vaidyanathan (Catholic University of

America), moderated by David R. Johnson (University of Nevada, Reno). Register at: <http://bit.ly/science-religion-diversity>

**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 San Antonio**

**Saturdays October 17 and November 21**, 10:30am-11:30am, continued 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). \$15. Register at: <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration/>

### **Notices**

#### **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 (Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a)**

What the Lectionary presents is a contemplation on Paul’s part whether it would be better to die and join the Lord or stay alive and carry on his mission, though he leaves it to God to decide, not himself.

Why would such considerations even come to mind? The answer comes in previous verses: “Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the things that happened to me were more for the advancement of the good news, so that my imprisonment for Messiah has become visible among the whole Praetorium Guard and to all others, and most of the brothers and sisters in the Lord, encouraged by my imprisonment, have the boldness to speak the word fearlessly” (Philippians 1:12-14). Paul had been arrested in Ephesus, and he would possibly face the death penalty. Life and death for himself in this world would be a matter of relative indifference.

### **Third Reading (Matthew 20:1-16a)**

“You go into the vineyard, and I will give you whatever is just.” This, of course, comes from the parable of the vineyard owner who kept finding people unemployed and waiting to be hired; he hires them on the spot. He pays them all “whatever is just” for a day’s work, even though some of them worked only part of the day.

I have heard homilies interpret the parable as a lesson about the salvation of gentiles, relative latecomers to the worship of God, being a reward equal to that of the Jewish worshipers of God. That is a possible interpretation, but it does not make sense without a more straightforward reading: that an employer, and by extension a society, should pay workers what is just.

And what is just? We cannot read the text in a fundamentalist manner because the first century coin, the denarius, is no longer a currency. So a criterion of reasonability comes into play. If the pay does not sustain the worker and the worker’s dependents, the pay scale is not a reasonable one. There are actually two aspects to this—workers’ pay and prices. Legend had it at a small college where I once taught that the president and his family owned most of the housing in the small college town, and that every time the pay scale went up the rents rose by the same amount. The connection between pay and prices may not be so personal in the world at large today, but it is still a certain connection. In medieval thought, economic justice was articulated in terms of just prices. Bernardino of Siena, for example, railed against bakers who raised the price of bread when a large group of pilgrims came through town. In modern thought, economic justice is articulated in terms of the just wage—or more precisely, a living wage that includes both pay and benefits.

It is interesting in the parable that the laborers who worked a full day for a just wage resented the fact that those who worked only part of the day received the same pay: "...they grumbled against the master of the household...." There are two circumstances in which someone may not work "a full day"—being unable and being unemployed.

I recall being unable to work at my university—not the small college mentioned above—because of open heart surgery. On the first day of the semester I met a morning section, but that afternoon a stress test occasioned my being wheeled into a hospital for surgery, and I was unable to meet classes for the remainder of the semester. I remained on the payroll, however, because of the state university's benefits package. It is doubtful that anyone was envious of my situation.

How about unemployment? National governments have levers through which they can affect their national economies, and policies for promoting full employment comprise a requirement for economic justice. Companies can realize profit margins in two ways—creating scarcities while raising prices and raising production levels to ones needed in the market while receiving a lesser margin on each sale but with a greater number of sales. Promoting the latter condition is essential to a full employment policy. Economists generally define full employment as a statistical 4% unemployment rate.

We are entering an era of computerized automation where employment may not be the common source of income. What should be the guiding parable in such a future?

## Poem

### *We Farmworkers*

We are the ones who connect the seeds to you,  
attending them through to harvest:

Cane cutters,  
fruit pickers,  
planters,  
weed pullers,  
packers.

Picture us:

Over and over bending our backs,  
our gallons of sweat,  
our callusing of hands,  
our faces ridden with exhaustion,  
our eyes hungry for rest.

How without us cannot be:

Your cities,  
hospitals,  
schools,  
sewers,  
highways.

Imagine how, with every breakfast bite,  
you might grasp the worth of the work we do  
and resolve to pay us what our work is worth.

Tom Keene

December 12, 2017

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

### **A betrayal of Hong Kong's brave Catholics**

*Diocese's banning of a prayer is a significant setback for religious freedom in the  
Chinese territory*

Benedict Rogers

Updated: August 31, 2020

When I was exploring the Catholic faith eight or nine years ago, in preparation for being received into the Church in Myanmar, I read the entire Catechism of the Catholic Church.

My copy — given to me years before by my friend James Mawdsley, now a priest but at the time an activist released from jail in Myanmar for pro-democracy protests — tells me that prayer and action must be united, and that prayer is a form of activism. It also reminds me of the words of St. Augustine — whose feast

day we just celebrated — that “God wills that our desire should be exercised in prayer, that we may be able to receive what he is prepared to give.”

So when Myanmar’s Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, as president of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, issued a call to prayer for Hong Kong last month, I took it seriously. So too did many Catholics in Hong Kong, around the region and the world. We know that, as Catholics, we have a calling to work for justice, freedom and democracy — and that includes work and prayer. That was clear to me from my reading of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, which Cardinal Bo gave me when I was exploring the faith.

It is understandable if clergy choose — in certain situations — not to take to the streets.

It is understandable if bishops choose not to make statements.

It is understandable if religious opt not to write opinion articles.

But isn’t prayer what clergy, religious and laity do — always, daily, together — for justice and human dignity?

So it is perplexing to me as a relatively young Catholic that the Diocese of Hong Kong has reportedly banned a prayer for the city and its freedoms. They are concerned, it seems, that this particular prayer could be seen as a criticism of an “oppressive” government. But isn’t it the Church’s duty to speak out against oppression? A decision not to — and to actively discourage those who do — symbolizes an intense and sudden fear on the part of the Church as a result of the draconian new national security law, and it marks a significant setback for religious freedom in Hong Kong.

As it happens, I don’t much like some of the wording of the prayer that was proposed for an advertising campaign. According to reports, the proposed prayer was: “Lord, you reward your faithful servants with prosperity, but for servants not of your mind, your justice will come and you will deliver your people from oppression and slavery. As the city of Hong Kong is under threats of abusive control, we pray for your mercy. Amongst adversaries and oppression, we believe your Word and Grace shall bring back the confidence and hope of your people.”

I join with this prayer for mercy against abuse, for justice against repression, and for action against oppression and slavery, but I object to the link to prosperity. Ours is a justice Gospel, a freedom Gospel, a Gospel of human dignity, love and life, but not necessarily a “prosperity Gospel.” Indeed, throughout its history the Church has preached a Gospel of hope and care for the poor, the marginalized and the imprisoned, not an embarrassment of riches.



Nonetheless, I care passionately about the freedom to pray and freedom of expression. And it would appear that, despite Cardinal Bo's appeal, Hong Kong's senior clergy feel pressure to silence dissent.

### **Efforts to silence conscience**

Many of us can empathize with fear. None of us who live in the free world with no direct experience of repression can step into the shoes of decision-makers under pressure from authoritarian regimes. But all of us who value such freedoms can stand opposed to efforts to silence conscience.

And that's why I can't stay silent in the face of this ban on the proposed prayer for Hong Kong.

The diocese could have negotiated over the wording of the prayer with the groups proposing it. They could have let it go but expressed some slight reservations. They did not need to do the Chinese Communist Party regime's work for them by forcing the organizers to withdraw it.

To do so is a betrayal of the many brave Catholics in Hong Kong who hold the flag for freedom and human dignity and who face imminent danger. People like the father of the democracy movement Martin Lee, entrepreneur Jimmy Lai, former chief secretary Anson Chan, activist Agnes Chow, retired Cardinal Joseph Zen — all inspiring, courageous, devout Catholics. And their diocese tells them not to pray? Come on.

Can you imagine Pope St. John Paul II taking such a position? Of course not. His spiritual inspiration breathed life into the Solidarity Movement in Poland, which may be why the Chinese Communist Party is scared of prayer.

Can you imagine East Timor's courageous Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, a Nobel laureate, telling his people not to pray for their future? Inconceivable.

Can you imagine the Philippines' Cardinal Jaime Sin or South Korea's Cardinal Stephen Kim banning their people from saying a prayer? No.

The Catholic Church is already facing an image problem over its handling of China. The Holy See's silence in the face of the regime's atrocities is noted. Pope Francis' failure to speak out speaks volumes. Its dubious deal with Beijing undermines its moral authority. But banning a prayer for Hong Kong is — by all stretches of the imagination — a step too far.

In the months of intensified repression in Hong Kong, I have turned to some prayers, particularly *Holy Mother* by Eric Clapton and Luciano Pavarotti.<sup>1</sup> Under

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiGfuTdel2M>

Hong Kong's draconian and absurd new security law, it's probably illegal. "Holy Mother, where are you?" might be misinterpreted by Beijing's puppet chief executive Carrie Lam, who has regularly asserted her "motherhood" of Hong Kong status, as a question about her whereabouts or as a threat to Xi Jinping's self-appointed near-divinity.

For me, as a Catholic of only seven years, prayer fuels my activism. The great poet Alfred Lord Tennyson was right when he said: "More things are wrought by prayer than this world ever dreams of."

Cardinal Bo, who received me into the Church in Yangon seven years ago, was right to call for prayer for Hong Kong. People in Hong Kong and their friends around the world are right to follow that call. The Diocese of Hong Kong is wrong to silence their prayers. But the one thing we all know is this: God hears our prayers, whether we articulate them through public campaigns or express them in the silence of our hearts. And either way, sooner or later, they will overturn tables in Beijing and Rome.

As Leonard Cohen sang in *Anthem*: "Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." If the bells of Catholic churches in Hong Kong are no longer willing to ring for freedom, let those bells ring in our hearts in prayer.

*Benedict Rogers is a writer and human rights activist, co-founder and chair of Hong Kong Watch and a member of the advisory group of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC). He is the author of 'From Burma to Rome: A Journey into the Catholic Church'. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official editorial position of UCA News.*

## 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](http://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>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty

[www.txccedp.org](http://www.txccedp.org)

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio

[www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/](http://www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/)

Climate Change

[www.creation-care.com](http://www.creation-care.com)

NowCastSA

[www.nowcastsa.com/](http://www.nowcastsa.com/)

Migrant Center for Human Rights

<https://Migrantcenter.org>