

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating October 15, 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. Send comments on the newsletter to J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com.

Editorial

After the calendar, the *Third Reading* commentary is based on the gospel reading for the twenty-eighth Sunday in ordinary time. Tom Keene's poem, with an introductory preface, is *Cry of the Savior's Martyrs*. See <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php> for more of Tom's poems. A joint statement by the Black Catholic Theological Symposium and the Academy of Catholic Hispanic theologians in the U.S. on recent racist hate crimes follows. Finally, there is my reflection, *Half-Staff Flag, Bent Knee*.

Calendar

Sunday October 8, 5:00pm, Dignity San Antonio Interfaith Service, including a memorial to LGBT people who have died this past year. St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 1018 E. Grayson St.

Tuesday October 10, 6:00pm-8:00pm, Texas Climate Change: Panel with Councilwoman Anna Sandoval, Associate professor Hazem Rashed-Ali (UTSZA), Professor Kay Cook (UT Austin), Sister Martha Ann Kirk (UIW). Special Collections Room, Mabee Library, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway. RSVP at <http://bit.ly/TXclimateTourSA>.

Wednesday October 11, 5:00pm-8:00pm, film: *Stolen Education*, about the 1956 federal court case from South Texas that found illegal the tracking of Mexican American elementary school children into a three-year first grade to keep them separate. Film maker Enrique Aleman, Ph.D., whose mother was one of the students who testified in the case at age 9, follows up after sixty years. Vista Room, Central Academic Building, Texas A & M University at San Antonio, One University Way. Doors open, snacks, at 5:30pm.

Thursday October 12, 7:00pm-9:00pm, panel discussion hosted by Judith Norman and Habiba Noor, "The Rohingya Crisis." Fiesta Room (Coates University Center West 111), Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Park at Alamo Stadium.

Saturday October 14: Assemble 1:00pm-3:30pm, March 3:30pm, Program 5:30pm-7:00pm, Indigenous Dignity Day Human Rights march. Assemble at Columbus Park (W. Martin and San Saba). March to Main Plaza. Program is at Main Plaza. Themes: Human rights, deportations, immigration reform, private prisons. Sponsored by the Texas Indigenous Council: Antonio Diaz, 210-542-9271.

Sunday October 15, 2:00pm-4:00pm, Theater Performance: *To Be Honest*. Play based on research on San Antonio people's views of Islam. Stieren Theater, Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Park at Alamo Stadium.

Monday October 16, 5:00pm: Educators are invited to a house party in connection with COPS-Metro to develop issues for future action, including participation in a November 16 COPS-Metro Action Assembly. 1810 Oakline Drive, 78232 (US 281 or Henderson Pass to Brook Hollow, going southeast; right onto Oakline Drive going southwest). RSVP Bob Comeaux: bobtheunionguy@aol.com or 210-326-2655.

Tuesday October 17, 11:20am-12:35pm, Dr. Ashanté Reese, "Mapping Injustice: Race, Redlines, and Unequal Food Access." Stieren Theatre (in the Ruth Taylor Fine Arts Center), Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Park at Alamo Stadium.

Tuesday October 17, 7:00pm-9:00pm, St. Mary's University History Department, Latino Catholicism: San Antonio and the Transformation of the U.S. Church. Rev. David Garcia; Timothy Matovina. Conference Room A, University Center, St. Mary's University, One Camino Santa Maria.

Wednesday October 18, 6:30pm-8:00pm, panel discussion, "Climate Change in San Antonio." Bill Sinkin Eco Centro, 1802 N. Main.

Thursday October 19, 4:30pm-6:00pm, **in Austin**, Angela Stroud, "Gun Culture in America." Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3002 S. Congress Avenue, Austin.

Thursday October 19, 6:00pm-7:30pm: Cory Dolgon, Ph.D., "Kill It to Save It: An Autopsy of Capitalism's Triumph over Democracy" (Dr. Dolgon argues that the public accepts the destruction of the public sector and accepts arguments that "feel right" without regard for facts). University of Texas at San Antonio, downtown campus, Buena Vista Street Building, Aula Canaria (BV 1.328). 501 W. Cesar Chavez Blvd.

Friday October 20, 4:30pm-7:00pm; **Saturday October 21**, 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.

Saturday October 21, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. Residence of Maria Tobin, 8715 Starcrest Dr., #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 October 23, 6:00pm-9:00pm, Catholic Relief Services Solidarity Event: Global Migration seminar. 6:00 rosary; 6:30-7:30 Nahren Anweya presentation on the Syrian refugee crisis; 7:30-7:45 Q & A. Our Lady's Chapel, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Wednesday October 25, 4:30pm-6:00pm, Dr. Neomi DeAula, "Immigrants and Social Justice: A Theological Response." Mabee Library Auditorium, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

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.

Tuesday November 7, 6:00pm-8:30pm, Community Conversation with San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg. Foyer and Conference Room A, University Center, Saint Mary's University, One Camino Santa Maria.

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 22:1-14)

The reading is Matthew's version of the parable of a man who invites purported friends to a dinner, and the intended guests turn him down, preferring to spend the time pursuing their business interests. The man then opens the feast to whomever his slaves could find. Matthew rewrites the narrative, making the host a king who was inviting people to a wedding feast for his son. Matthew also adds a reference to some of the invited guests killing the slaves who were delivering the invitation; the king sends an army to kill the murderers and burn their city—perhaps a reference to the Romans suppressing the rebels in the Judean War and burning down Jerusalem in the year 70. Matthew also adds the curious narrative of an unworthy guest at the banquet who came without a proper wedding garment; the king has him bound hand and foot and thrown out into the darkness.

In Matthew's hands the parable is made to refer to more than social graces. The king is obviously a figure for God and the wedding a figure for the assembling of the church for Jesus, the human Son of God and messiah. In antiquity an important personage would make a point of inviting high society to banquets and seating them in rank on floor-level couches, with the most important people next to himself. This king,

however, learns that socialites are unworthy; so he invites in common folk, from whom he expects proper conduct.

I suspect Matthew added the curious narrative about the guest coming in improperly attired because of a temptation on the part of Christians to be smug about not being counted among the invitees who did not come. The following of Jesus is not limited to not being a Judean authority in Jerusalem. Too much can be made of belonging to the “correct” religion or “chosen” denomination.

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Poem

It was the 1980s. U.S. tax payers and the Reagan administration were funding El Salvador’s military to make war on its own citizens. Between army massacres, air force bombings and death squads, 80,000 Salvadorans were killed. Mostly, as usual, women and kids. To this day, El Salvador remains the most bombed out nation in the Western Hemisphere.

Many U.S. citizens worked to raise awareness of what our government was doing. After college, Jennifer Cassolo, served as an American volunteer helping escort North American visitors to El Salvador to see their tax dollars at work. Jennifer was arrested and taken to prison for questioning at the time a Salvadoran army unit murdered six Jesuit priests and their housekeepers. She was interrogated amid the screams of other prisoners being tortured, then released and forcibly returned to the U.S. She told her story on a nation-wide speaking tour.

Her story included the heart to heart conversation she had with her interrogator, a young lieutenant who joined the military to help feed his family. Jennifer refused the lieutenant’s demand that she confess and name names. He asked her, “Why do you want to suffer?” A woman’s interrupting scream pierced their ears. Jennifer, in her solidarity with the suffering, pointed in the direction of the scream and said, “How can I not?” As they continued to talk, Jennifer’s candor and courage won the lieutenant’s respect, which hopefully led to a questioning of his life.

It is this hope of someone breaking through into the hearts of the torturers, and we taxpayers who fund them, that cries out in the voices of those tortured and killed. So, this poem is called...

Cry of the Savior’s martyrs
(for Jennifer Cassolo)

Who will be our voice
and speak to our killers' consciences,
remind them that someone,
Someone/All is watching?

Who will be our hands
to touch the hands of our torturers,
naming their work the cruelty it is,
deeming it more hurt to themselves than hurt to us?

Who will ask our interrogators
the questions that turn their hearts,
hearing their confessions,
opening them to forgiveness?

Who will cleanse with pain-hardened truths
the eyes and ears of blind and deaf,
the nameless who pay our assassins' wages,
pay for the bullets that pierce our bodies?

Who will nourish initial doubts and whispered thoughts
into growing convictions and stubborn resistance,
broadcast the seeds of critical mass
till stilled hearts rise and cry as One?

Who will hail us from our graves
to hear our cries transfigured
into choruses of justice, symphonies of grace
when we come, bright and sure as morning suns?

Tom Keene February 5, 1990

**ACHTUS/BCTS Statement Regarding the Most Recent Surge in Racist Hate
Crimes in the United States**

4 September 2017

In the wake of the horrific events of Charlottesville Va. On August 11-12, 2017,
and the deeply troubling displays of hate speech, neo-Nazi and white supremacist
ideologies, the recent pardoning of former Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio, and the battle

over the “sanctuary cities” law in Texas, the leadership of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS) and the Black Catholic Theological Symposium (BCTS) stand in solidarity as one body, with one voice to condemn the systemic violence, racism and legitimized hatred that diminish the integrity of the United States of America. We call for a united front of human dignity and civil rights for all who call these United States home.

As sorrow fills our hearts for our brothers and sisters who have senselessly lost their lives to cowards who instill fear and provoke violence with impunity, our spirits are filled with hope as we vow to live in Love and advocate for Justice.

As Christians, we stand with the families and communities of our lost beloved. We are both comforted and led by the certain knowledge that in Christ we are all one body, in one Spirit: “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; 26).

As global citizens we commit to “recognizing the inherent dignity and the equal inalienable rights of all members of the human family [as these are] foundations of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (Preamble, UN Declaration of Human Rights).

We proclaim and teach anew the preamble of the US Constitution, establishing a more perfect Union built on Justice and the promotion of the common good.

Together as Catholic scholars and disciples, we recognize that much work, dialogue and healing lie ahead. As such, we commit to being prophetic voices for justice and peace by condemning violence, denouncing the sins of hatred and retrieving the redemptive nature of the cross as a way toward a common good.

We recognize the historical legacy of hate and oppression against black and brown folk in this nation. White supremacist attitudes, volatile and explosive words, and death-producing actions related to fascist movements, are not new phenomena in these United States of America. These stem from an enduring history and cycle of institutionalized racial prejudice and oppression. While this nation’s declaration of independence proposes “that all men [sic] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights...,” still whiteness dominates in all sectors of society and remains the norm in the worldview of this country underscored initially by Christian principles. Normative whiteness and white privilege perpetuate and sustain racism, which does not lead to a so-called post-racial society. Instead racism grows on fertile ground where white supremacist racists feel emboldened to chant “blood and soil” in their quest to “Make America Great Again.”

A history of violence, racial oppression, and hatred runs counter to our longstanding biblical history and primary teachings in the Christian tradition. These sources promote the dignity and incomparable worth of all human beings who are social in nature. It is because of this that we are called to be in right relationships of justice and love with God, self, and others.

The membership of ACHTUS and BCTS, representing a wide array of academic and pastoral vocations, consistently dedicate our lives to the struggles for justice for black and brown peoples, and all the human family. Many of us pay a heavy price in our professional lives because the work of organizing, community action, and public theology are not viewed as worthy of the academic endeavor. In addition, racist and bigoted rhetoric, violence against black and brown bodies, and practices and politics

that oppress black and brown folk significantly impact our membership in ways that go unacknowledged by the institutions in which we work.

Nevertheless, we persist in our efforts to organically make our intellectual pursuits relevant to the plight of black and brown folk, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, LGBTQ, and any other group persecuted and regarded as “less than” by the myth of white supremacy in all its expressions. *In seeking to do more than simply react to this newest spate of hate through a letter or statement, we commit to the hard work of creating a joint document that will focus on race and racism in the theological academy and the nation.* We commit to this joint project aware that this kind of hard work is often unrewarded by our institutions, and may even be detrimental to our professional lives. But we are convinced that there is no way forward other than to join our intellects and our souls to provide some guidance to the academy and the Church – both institutions that we love – in the effort to disrupt white supremacy and racism.

Lastly, as leaders of ACHTUS and BCTS, we commit to supporting our constituents in the ongoing work of:

- Constructing theology that’s transformative, challenging, and hopeful, deeply grounded on the Incarnate love of God as it bears the marks of the experiences of our peoples;
- Denouncing the ways that the myth of white supremacy in its current expressions do violence to the bodies, souls, and minds of our communities and this nation;
- Shaping and leading communities of wholeness, hope, resilience, and radical welcome to the most vulnerable in our institutions, neighborhoods, nationally, and across borders;
- Sustaining ourselves and each other through practices of self-care of mind, body, and soul that acknowledge our response to the command to love self as we love neighbor;
- Joining others in actions of resistance and solidarity in our campuses, parishes, and communities.

Therefore, as we journey together in spirit and in truth may our combined voices give testament to the ongoing struggle for justice and be hope to our constituencies and communities that continue to work for a time when we truly will love one another.

Half-Staff Flag, Bent Knee

Anthony J. Blasi

The flag at half-staff: Is it not a symbol of a union hurt but not divided? We lose one of our own but not the oneness of our own. Someone who had become a figure in our collective lives dies, either naturally or at the hand of an assassin. We are united in mourning the loss together. True, the flag flies lower than it usually does, but it is not as if someone lacked the will to have it unfurled for all to see. It is not stopped half way up out of shame or weakness. It is meant to call to mind the breadth of the connection among the living, with the fallen one.

The sound of the break, the imperfection, at the crescendo of *Taps* is not an assault on the marking of an internment but an expression of sadness over who is no longer vibrant and what is no longer pulsing, a sadness on the part of precisely those who are still vibrant and whose blood still pulses. The paradox of death and life takes the form of a note broken but held.

We lower the flag at dawn and allow a bugle to haunt us at dusk when we lose one of us but continue to feel that it is still a we that we still, in fact, are. We affirm, in more than a verbal formula, that we are indeed one nation in God's regard, indivisible, with liberty for all and with social justice.

The days will come—whether during my own life or not, I do not know—when the flag will be lowered for Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. It would be outrageous to lower it for Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, but not for George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush, as it would be outrageous to lower it for the two President Bush and not for Presidents Carter and Clinton. The We who will mourn is not a partisan issue, albeit comprised of partisan groups and individuals. A great people does not diminish itself when it raises its symbol either at full or half height. So it must be when the time comes, as it surely will, for the flag to be lowered for Barak Obama, and I dare say for Donald Trump. But the point is made by the case of Barak Obama. President Obama, whom some dismissed as a minority and “not really an American,” is ever as much a part of the American story and the American We as any other president.

Those who are choosing to fall to one knee during the national anthem are performing a gesture that parallels flying the flag at half-staff. That was in fact the explicit original intent of the gesture when it was first performed in 2016. It says that those who die because of the malfeasance exercise of the police power are part of the American We ever as much as presidents and Americans killed by attacks from abroad. The victims of the malfeasance exercise of police power are to be mourned. The We is hurt but not dissolved when we acknowledge them, mourn them, and rise again to embrace one another. It is telling that an equivalent to falling to one knee during our anthem has emerged—black, brown, and white players, coaches, and team owners locking arms as the *Star Spangled Banner* leads us all into the experience of its tempo together.

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