

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating October 11, 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-eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *We Riffraff*. For more of Tom's poems, see

<http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>.

After the poem is my review and reflection on an essay by Doctoral Candidate Robert G. Christian of Catholic University of America, "The Roots of Catholic Polarization in the United States."

Calendar

Online. Times given in Central Daylight Time.

Monday October 5, 2:30pm, demonstration in favor of a pandemic relief, economic stimulus package. Office of Senator Cruz, 9901 W. Interstate 10, Collonade Shopping Center. Contact Karen Ball: bluebonnetkaren@gmail.com, or text 210-788-1123.

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>

Monday October 5, 4:00pm-5:30pm, Faiths in Conversation: Islam Religion in Society," Iman Dr. Khalil Abdur-Rashid (Harvard University), response from Hussain Rashid. Register at:

<https://35468.blackbaudhosting.com/35468/packagetickets?tab=3&txobjid=44b9c877-6897-4881-9fd8-760c4f9507f0>

Monday October 5, 6:30pm (7:30 ET), “are Nuclear Weapons an Absolute Evil?” Archbishop Joseph Mitsuki Takimi (Nagasaki), Drew Christiansen, sj (Georgetown University), Maryann Cusimano Love (Catholic University of America) Hirokazu Miyazaki (Northwestern University), and Gerard Powers (University of Notre Dame). Register at: <https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/events/2020/10/05/are-nuclear-weapons-an-absolute-evil/>

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>.

Tuesday October 6, 6:00pm-7:00pm, video *Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Working for Social Justice*, followed by discussion, with Brandon Matroka (University of the Incarnate Word), Casey Ogechi Iwoagwu (UIW), Alexandria Salas (UIW), and Cynthia Shepperd (South Texas attorney); moderator LuElla D’Amico (UIW). Access Zoom at: <https://uiw.zoom.us/j/98308219946#success>

Wednesday October 7, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Sister Helen Prejean will speak about her memoir, *Rivers of Fire*, in the Cal Turner Program in Moral Leadership at Vanderbilt University. Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/sister-helen-prejean-speaks-about-her-memoir-river-of-fire-tickets-120420457831>

Wednesday October 7, 4:00pm (5:00pm ET) "Showing Up: The Radical Work of Commitment in Uncertain Times," Sr. Colleen Gibson, SSJ. 20th Annual Anne Drummey O’Callaghan Lecture on Women in the Church, at Fairfield University. Register at fairfield.edu/cs

Friday October 9, 7:00pm-8:30pm, San Antonio religious sisters, including Pax Christi member Sr. Martha Ann Kirk, and Nuns on the Bus, on the topic, “Who We Elect Matters.” RSVP at: <https://nunsonthebus2020.org/view/events/san-antonio-austin-town-hall-for-spirit-filled-voters>

Tuesday October 13, 7:00pm-8:00pm, “The Innocence project: Finally running Free,” with Huwe Burton (an exonerated former inmate). RSVP at:

https://identity.stedwards.edu/app/stedwardsuniversity_singlesignon_1/exk84w4vbqoYsowzl2p7/sso/saml

Tuesday October 13, 7:00pm-9:30pm, documentary film *13th*, on the Thirteenth Amendment ending slavery; followed by discussion, with Felix Ortiz, Brandon Coleman, and Sr. Martha Ann Kirk (all University of the Incarnate Word). Register at: <https://uiw.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJUvf-usqTMpHtJCb3xSZnnc45LeWK5mUSIN>

Thursday October 15, 5:00pm-6:00pm (6:00pm-7:00pm ET), “Do Black Lives Matter to God?” Amey Victoria Adkins-Jones (Boston College). Register at: https://bccte.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_rhWFKojlSzOGaM0po2gXzw?utm_source=Do+Black+Lives+Matter+to+God+Webinar++15+October+2020+first&utm_campaign=Do+Black+Live+Matter+to+God+webinar++first&utm_medium=email

Friday October 16, 9:00am-12:00pm, webinar “Displaced: Unhomeliness and Community During Times of Crisis,” a cross-cultural symposium sponsored by the University of the Incarnate Word and Atatürk University, Turkey. Register at: <https://uiw.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJEpf-yqqjwsGNYcOmP1irv5IOAKfYLi8hJU>

Saturdays October 17 and **November 21**, 10:30am-11:30am, “Faith and Race—An Ongoing Conversation,” Bishop Trevor Alexander (Protestant chaplain, University of the Incarnate Word), Rev. Andries Coetzee (University Presbyterian Church), and Dr. Doshie Piper (University of the Incarnate Word). \$7.50 for both discussions, before October 12; \$10.00 after. Register at: <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration/>

Tuesday October 20, 2:00pm, webinar “Immigration and Asylum: Mission and Solidarity at the El Paso-Juarez border,” Hedi Cernaka (attorney and Maryknoll missionary). Register at: https://mission.maryknoll.us/elpasajuarezborder?utm_campaign=2020%2010%20Webinars&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=95731585&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9OPwT20QEBVfhKli3Fc8g90QlqIFSoLjI-UIkk53I7-Zl4hZwjW_YQu5XJIMwQ8dl37zZ5cguv7MonU1dzQxy9wEAB6g&utm_content=95731585&utm_source=hs_email

Tuesday October 20, 1:00pm (Part I) and **Tuesday October 27**, 12:00pm (Part II), “Texas’s ‘Future Dangerousness’ Special Issue,” Gretchen Sween (Austin, Texas, attorney). Register at:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScTGdhjmus1Z8VVPE2EivDhFmmNERaWSZzeyuHs6XrJgXF_hw/viewform

Wednesday October 21, 7:30pm, Texas Coalition Against the Death Penalty book club online discussion of *A Lesson Before Dying*, by Ernest J. Gaines. Register at:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScWORN7DdsUiXJlgb_Eyq9G0JF8uMn5JVuS9ix3wV1ihtk1_w/viewform

Thursday October 29, 7:00pm-9:00pm, documentary film *Separated: Children at the Border*, followed by discussion with Maia Felix-Ortiz and Brando Metroka (both of University of the Incarnate Word). Register at:
https://uiw.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJEscemsrTMuGtZ6f0sT-Fc_J7Nxfuk-yYhp

Saturday November 7, 10:00am, live streamed border mass, accessible on the Catholic Diocese of El Paso web page. The dioceses of El Paso, Las Cruces, and Ciudad Juarez will join in the celebration of the mass, with bishop Peter Baldacchino of Las Cruces officiating.

Notices

Reimagining public safety through public health partnerships

Leana S. Wen in the June 12 *Washington Post*. Her essay describes actual changes she helped engineer in Baltimore:
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/06/12/instead-defund-police-imagine-broader-role-them-public-health/>

Racism and restorative justice

“This is the casual racism that I faced at my elite high school. Unexpectedly, the school did something about it.” Rainier Harris in the *New York Times*, Sept. 25:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/24/nyregion/regis-catholic-school-racism.html?fbclid=IwAR2suKN4elkLvPTamYVKOXMe73t2KIoCaDK5Sx3FD2FPV83WacpytcwIROM>

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://mission.maryknoll.us/reflection-guides-ordinary-time>

Sierra Club Letter Writing: Get Out the Vote

An effective way to "Get Out The Vote" is to join the Sierra Club in writing letters to voters for whom a nudge will make a difference. "Who votes" is public information, "how you vote" is private. The Sierra Club has identified voters inclined to vote environmental, but who would benefit from a nudge. Join the Serra Club to write a million letters, to be mailed on a specific day:
<https://www.sierraclubindependentaction.org/writing-climate-voters-letters>

Second Reading (Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20)

Paul's letter was occasioned by a donation sent to him by the Christians of Philippi. It was good form in antiquity, even in the secular culture, not to be controlled by material considerations. One would not frantically pursue wealth nor grumble about living under modest circumstances. Paul presents himself as living by that good form, even as he thanked the Philippians for doing a good deed. "I both know being lowly and know having more than enough..." (Phil. 4:12). This same stance regarding wealth can be found elsewhere in Christian as well as non-Christian tradition: neither obsession with possession nor neglect of it. He concludes with a statement of confidence in divine providence, stated as a prayer: "But my God will meet every need of yours according to His riches in glory in the Messiah, Jesus. And glory be to God and our Father forever and ever. Amen" (Phil 4:19-20).

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.

Poem

We riff raff

We tax extorters and sex workers,
we wage slaves and migrant strangers,
we drunkards and beggars,

we zealous fanatics and searchers,
we puzzled and confused.

He gathered us at his table
to eat, drink, laugh, listen
and confide together,
close enough to behold,
smell, feel one another
and find in the roots of our being
a contagious Oneness.

Tom Keene
February 12, 2016

Review

“The Roots of Catholic Polarization in the United States,” by Robert G. Christian, III. In Nicholas P. Cafardi (ed.) *Voting and Faithfulness. Catholic Perspectives on Politics*. New York: Paulist Press, 2020, pp. 35-54. Reviewed by Anthony J. Blasi

Robert Christian, a Ph.D. candidate at the Catholic University of America and a fellow of the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies, has written this essay for a volume published in lieu of a voter guide by the American Catholic bishops. The bishops could not agree on a text to update their quadrennial guide. So it is interesting that Christian has formulated a commentary on polarization in the U.S. Catholic Church.

The author offers the preliminary consideration that most American Catholics know little if anything about Catholic Social teachings; they are therefore vulnerable to divisions along the lines of other Americans, Catholic or not. They lack a world view to either unite themselves or resist divisions from elsewhere.

Polarizations could occur among church elites only, between two extremes within the Church, between two sides of a centrist majority, or in asymmetry, with one extreme greatly outsizing the other. Whatever the form it takes, a polarization is not the same thing as partisanship. Polarization, the author says, is a matter of divergent cultures, whereas partisanship is a rivalry among parties,

groups of people. (As a sociologist, I would add furthermore that the more two parties share the same views and programs, the more hostile they tend to be toward one another, the more they perceive one another as traitors, as threats.)

Polarization is also not enmity. There can be civil polarization, and there can be uncivil divisions based on party, as opposed to worldviews. Moreover, polarization is not inherently bad, though in certain circumstances it can paralyze such an entity as the Church. A polarization that occurs among elites can be particularly pernicious; in the way that Congress is polarized and partisan to the point that it cannot act, the Church hierarchy, editors, intellectuals, and influential can also be too polarized and partisan to act.

The author sees American Church polarization based on an individualist ethic that is inconsistent with Catholic social teaching. He sees liberal individualism as underlying the pro-choice side of the abortion controversy, and conservative individualism underlying the social Darwinist views of many conservatives.

Politically, gerrymandering increases partisanship in the United States, driving polarization on just about anything into a strident partisanship. There is also the problem of the power of wealth, in both the Church and politics. Wealthy people who may have only a superficial view of issues nevertheless empower extremists on those issues. In the church, wealthy influentials often have views that are completely uninformed by Catholic tradition, let alone Catholic social teaching. Our vibrant media exacerbate the situation, not to mention the politicization of the federal Supreme Court.

Christian warns of a false balance of right-wing ideologues falsely claiming to be orthodox Catholics and left-wing ideologues. Neither side may be versed in Catholic social teaching. He sees the nationalist populism of Donald Trump as adding to the problem. Christian speaks of “alt-Catholics” with their alternative magisterium: anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, hostile to refugees and migrants in general, racist, sexist, admiring foreign strongmen, isolationist, and sectarian. Somehow they see the death penalty and anti-gay prejudice as Christian. Often they openly reject Catholic social teaching when they learn of it and oppose Pope Francis explicitly.

Doctoral candidate Christian offers some remedies for American Catholic polarization. But there are obstacles to be overcome: “When the church is not a poor church for the poor but filled with people who justify the abandonment of the weak and vulnerable, few will find this witness compelling” (p. 43). So Catholics need first to be converted to Catholic Social Teaching. This cannot

happen in part because traditionalists, economic conservatives, and alt-Catholics have attempted to capitalize on the sexual abuse crisis, and liberals attempt to use the same crisis for their reforms. The church's social teachings need to be recognized first. Christian sees this to be so fundamental that he says resolving church polarization, while an important goal, should not be sacrificed while giving in to either the conservatives or the liberals.

So while emphasizing Catholic Social Teaching internally in the Church, it is necessary to take on some external difficulties in American society as a whole. Fix America first, and the Church may take care of itself. So he calls for campaign finance reform, reform of how legislative districts are drawn, encouraging independents to join political parties to counterbalance extremists, counter the voter suppression that is characteristic of our electoral laws, stand up for Catholic Social Teachings in the political corridors so that there would be more equality and justice, and seat fewer ideologues on the Supreme Court.

Our author also calls for a unified vision for the Church. He would have the Church united against bigots and alt-Catholics. He would have it promote Catholic Social Teaching. He would somehow have these teachings not come from the top only, in the form of bishops' council statements that few read, but appear within interactions of priests, educators, and lay people. He would have Catholics avoid being independents: "Being an Independent may give one a sense of purity, separated from the messiness of party politics, but too often it means inactivity until one is deciding which flawed candidate they will support in the general election" (p. 47). This, of course, involves being well informed, not retweeting groundless claims. One would check sources. Even within the Catholic world, not every publication that claims to uphold Catholic traditions really does so.

The author would want partisan and ideological animosity avoided. Catholics should cease trying to drive people with different views out of the Church. The sacraments should not be weaponized. Those who dissent from a Church teaching should be honest about doing so. All should work at being well-informed citizens.

There is much with which one could agree in principle with Robert Christian's views. But let me return to his first point—the distinction between polarization and partisanship. Experientially, is it a distinction without a difference? Decades ago, after Pope Paul VI, whose credibility up to August 1968 was considerable, decided that contraception was gravely sinful unless "natural" means were used, a large number of Catholic moral theologians honestly

dissented, and lost their academic positions for it. The most notable was Charles Curran. When he was eventually fired from the Catholic University of America, he obtained employment at Auburn University, a venue having nothing to do with the Church. The bishop of the area lobbied the Auburn Board until it canceled the contract with Father Curran. Eventually Southern Methodist University found an academic place for him. The point is, the Catholic hierarchy pursued him as a person, attempting to leave him unemployed, simply because he was open and honest about his dissent.

I once belonged to a network of Catholics in Nashville that invited a prominent Catholic moral theologian to present a lecture on justice in international relations. A week before the lecture, the bishop ordered the parish, in whose hall the lecture was to be given, to cancel it. The moral theologian honestly differed on the Vatican on some matter—I think it was abortion to save the life of the mother. A member of the network owned an entertainment space and made it available for the lecture. The hierarchy pursued a person, not his ideas on international relations.

I can point to other instances. If the hierarchy, and those of a similar mind, would become more interested in the pursuit of truth, using the natural law method recommended by St. Thomas Aquinas (wherein free discussion based on the logic observed in nature, which reflects the mind of the Creator) one could honestly dissent from one or more official teachings of the Catholic Church without facing personal retaliation. But experientially hierarchical partisanship overlaps too much with polarized worldviews, and vice-versa. Doctoral candidate Christian's approach can only come about with considerable buy-in on the part of hierarchs (and parish priests who want to be hierarchs). Such may be the program of Pope Francis; the question is, How widely is it shared?

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.sanantoniopace.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>