


Testimony
A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating January 19, 2020

Communications with the editor may 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 Liturgical Reading reflections are based on readings for the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *No Mark for Cain*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is a press release from the Texas Coalition Against the Death Penalty, dated December 17, 2019, and summarizing events of the year.

Calendar

In Austin

Sunday January 19 (3rd Sunday of the month), 7:00pm, Pax Christi Austin meeting. Fr. Payne House, St. Ignatius Church, 126 Oltorf St.

Monday January 20, 9:00am, Martin Luther King March, Festival and Food Drive. Short program at the MLK statue on the UT campus, followed by march to Huston-Tillotson University, where further activities are planned.

Wednesday January 22, 6:30pm-8:30pm, Part 1, hour 2, PBS video *Reconstruction: America After the Civil War*, followed by discussion. Family Life Center, Holy Cross Catholic Church, 1110 Concho St.

Thursday January 30, 12:30pm-1:30pm, discussion on "Colleges Must Choose: Pursue truth or Harmony/Social Justice." Read for the discussion the article at <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Are-Colleges-Failing/244544>. Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

Monday February 3, 3:00pm, documentary *Emanuel*, on the aftermath of the shooting at the Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC. Sharon Risler, whose mother was one of the victims, will be present to sign copies of her book, *For Such a Time as This: Hope and Forgiveness after the Charleston Massacre*. Austin Presbyterian Seminary, 100 E. 27th St.

In Dallas

Saturday March 21, 7:00pm-9:00pm, “and You Welcomed Me: A Catholic Meditation on Immigration and Race for a Changing *Community*,” Hosffman Ospino (Boaton College). Church of the Incarnation, 1809 Maher Lane, Irving.

In El Paso

Fridays, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Pax Christi El Paso joins Border Peace Presence in front of the Federal Courthouse (corner of Campbell and San Antonio).

Tuesday January 14, 6:45pm, Pax Christi El Paso meeting rescheduled. 1101 Birch St. all are welcome.

Wednesday January 15, 12:00pm-1:00pm, execution vigil in front of the El Paso County Courthouse.

In Houston

Sunday January 19, 9:45am, “Voter Registration in the Civil Rights Movement and Today,” Cherry Steinwender (Center for the Healing of Racism). Room 201, St. Philip Presbyterian Church, 4807 San Felipe.

Monday January 20, 10:00am, 26th Annual MLK Grande Parade begins at San Jacinto & Elgin St. Information: <http://www.mlkgrandeparade.org> or call 713-953-1633.

Friday January 24, 8:00am-9:00am, “Evangelicalism and Whiteness in the Age of Trump,” Jessamin Birdsall (Ph.D. cand., Princeton U.), joining virtually. Lovett Hall, Suite 402 (accessible via building entrance C), Rice University. Information: Hayley Hemstreet, hjh2@rice.edu.

Saturday January 25, 6:00pm, film, *Father, Son and Holy War*, on the patriarchal culture of right-wing Hindu Nationalism. Rice Media Center, Cinema Auditorium #100. Information: cinema@rice.edu.

Monday January 27, 4:00pm, "The Hungarian Holocaust," Moshe Y. Vardi (Rice U.). Sewell Hall 301, Rice University.

Tuesday January 28, 12:15pm-1:30pm, "Death of the Black Church: How Religious Diversity Erodes Racial Solidarity among African Americans," Jason Shelton (U. of Texas, Arlington). Kyle Morrow Room, Fondren Library, Rice University. Information: Shirley Tapscott, sht1@rice.edu.

Tuesday January 28, 7:00pm-8:30pm, panel discussion "Race and Evangelical Politics," Richard Mouw (Fuller Theological Seminary), Jason Shelton (U. of Texas, Arlington), Janelle Wong (U. of Maryland). Sewell Hall 309, Rice University. Information: Hayley Hemstreet, jhj2@rice.edu.

Sunday February 2, 9:45am, "The Immigration Mess: One Presbyterian's Story," Nancy Kral, Ph.D. (Lone Star College, retired). Room 201, St. Philip Presbyterian Church, 4807 San Felipe.

Thursday February 6, 4:00pm, "Antisemitism, Pornography, and American Jews," Josh Lambert (University of Massachusetts). Information: jewishstudies@rice.edu. Registration: https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20200206/event_id/69900

Friday February 7, 8:00am-9:00am, "Making Monday Matter: American Evangelicalism and the Deprivatization of Economic Orientations in the 20th Century," Andrew Lynn (University of Virginia). Information: Hayley Hemstreet, RPLP Program Manager, [jhj2@rice.edu](mailto:hjh2@rice.edu), 713-348-3974. Register: https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20200207/event_id/69060

Thursday February 20, 10:00am-6:00pm, Workshop: The Medical Ethics of Consciousness, Sunil Kothari (Memorial Hermann Hospital), Christos Lazaridis (University of Chicago), Andrea Lavazza (CUI, Italy), and Lan Li (Rice University); discussant Tim Bayne (Monash University). Founders Room, Lovett Hall, Rice University. Information: Dr. Uriah Kriegel, uriah.kriegel@rice.edu.

Sunday February 23, 9:45am, “Physician-Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia after the Holocaust,” Sheldon Rubinfeld, M.D., FACP (Baylor College of Medicine). Room 201, St. Philip Presbyterian Church, 4807 San Felipe.

Saturday February 29, Racial Wealth and the Income Gap, presented by NETWORK. Dominican Center for Spirituality, 6501 Alameda Rd. Contact Ceil Roeger @713-440-3714 or croeger@domhou.org

In San Antonio

Monday January 13, 7:00pm-8:30pm, Vigil for Interfaith Justice: Somebody’s Hurting Our People and We Won’t Be Silent Anymore. Main Plaza. Organized by Poor People’s Campaign San Antonio.

Tuesday January 14, 6:00pm-7:30pm, “MLK: His Legacy of Resistance,” Jewish Voice for Peace. Travis Park Church, 230 E. Travis Street.

Wednesday January 15, 12:00pm-1:00pm, execution vigil in front of the Bexar County Courthouse, 300 Dolorosa.

Saturday January 18, 2:30pm-4:00pm, panel, “Health Care on Borders: How International Disputes Affect Health Care,” Rachel Pearson (UT Health San Antonio), Alfred Montoya (Trinity University), and Harry Gunkel. San Antonio Central Library, 600 Soledad.

Saturday January 18, 5:00pm mass, followed by dinner and social; 7:15 “Restorative Justice and Marianist Faith Communities,” Rosalyn Collier. Holy Rosary Parish, 159 Camino Santa Maria. To attend the dinner, RSVP to SARAH.MARIANIST@gmail.com.

Tuesday January 21, 6:00pm, agenda-setting meeting for 2020, Alamo Group of the Sierra Club. Eco Centro, 1802 N. Main.

Thursday January 23, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Martin Luther King Commemorative Lecture, Robert D. Bullard (Texas Southern University), scholar on the Environmental Justice Movement. Laurie Auditorium, Trinity University, One Trinity Place.

Saturday January 25, 1:30pm-3:30pm, “Phenology: The Living Calendar of nature,” Jon Zeitler (National Weather Service). Christus Heritage Hall, The Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

Sunday January 26, 3:00pm, Fourteenth Annual Blessing of the Peacemakers, honoring the 2020 San Antonio Peace Laureates: Lionel Sosa, Gurvinder Pal (G.P.) Singh, and Cappy Lawton. Whitley Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Dr.

Tuesday January 28, 7:00pm, Lecture by Eboo Patel (Interfaith Youth Core). Jackson Auditorium, Weston Center, Texas Lutheran University, 1000 W. Court Street, Seguin.

Monday February 3, 3:30pm, screening, *Super Hummingbirds*. Christus Heritage Hall, The Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

Monday February 10, 7:00pm-9:00pm, LGBTQ+ and the Spiritual Journey Series: “Interfaith Insights on Human Sexuality,” Father John Markey, op (Oblate School of Theology) and Rabbi Samuel M. Stahl (Temple Beth-El, emeritus). \$10 before Feb. 3, \$15 after. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). Registration: <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration>.

Wednesday February 12, March 25, and April 20, 7:00pm-9:00pm, “Living Together in Difference: Upending Violence through Alternative Community Building,” Derick Wilson. \$15.00 before Feb. 5, \$20 after. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). Registration: <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration>.

Monday February 17-Tuesday February 18, 8:00am-5:00pm both days, “Conference on Justice and Social Concerns. Schedule to be announced. Conference Room A, University Center, St. Mary’s University, One Camino Santa Maria.

Wednesday February 19, 7:00pm-9:00pm, “Activism through a Buddhist Lens,” Thomas Bruner. \$15 before Feb. 12, \$20 after. SoL Center, University Presbyterian

Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). Registration: <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration>.

Tuesday February 25, 7:00pm-9:00pm, “The Trouble with fracking,” Sr. Elizabeth Riebschlaeger, ccvi. Free; register by Feb. 18. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). Registration: <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration>.

Monday February 22, 1:30pm, screening, *Journey of the Whooping Crane*. Christus Heritage Hall, The Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

Saturday February 29, 8:30am-4:00pm, Texas Coalition Against the Death Penalty 2020 Annual Conference. Whitely Theological Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate. Pre-register, \$60.00, at <https://tcadp.org/tcadp-2020-annual-conference-registration/>

Second Reading (1 Corinthians: 1-3)

On the Sundays that are numbered with ordinal numbers (“Ordinary Time”), excerpts from the epistles of the New Testament appear in order, having nothing to do with a theme of the Sunday or the Gospel of the day. This Sunday we have the opening lines of *First Corinthians*, the address. So it names the senders of the letter and the recipients:

Paul, called to be an apostle of Messiah Jesus, by the will of God, and Brother Sosthenes, to the church of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Messiah Jesus, called to be holy, with all who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Messiah, in every place, theirs and ours....

It is not clear whether the letter means to say Paul was called to be an apostle by the will of God, or that Jesus was the Messiah (“Christ”) by the will of God. I suspect the latter meaning is what was intended.

The addressees, “the church of God which is in Corinth,” are called to be holy, along with all who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Messiah, in every place, theirs and ours. The letter was not addressed to the universal church, though it is now read in all churches; the latter are simply mentioned as those “along with” the Corinthian church who are called to be holy.

It is interesting that the simple act of sending a letter to a small assemblage of people will have consequences for a much larger number of people later in history. This could be true of many things that people, including ourselves, do.

Third Reading (John 1:29–34)

“Look! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” By the time of the Fourth Gospel, the phrase “lamb of God” referred in a general way to quite different images. In the strange apocalyptic visions of the end time, a Christian version of which is presented by the book of *Revelation*, the lamb is the conqueror who overcomes the evil of the world. In the liturgical imagery, the lamb’s blood recalls the sprinkled doors that the angel of death bypassed in Egypt. The first image represents an inversion, wherein a gentle and harmless creature overcomes the worldly forces. The second image reflects the favor of God in selecting those whom he will fashion into a refugee nation.

To “take away” sin in the Greek means literally to lift it up and carry it off. The implication is that sin is lifted off of us, and we are no longer to be burdened by it.

If the austere John the Baptizer of history said such a thing, he would have had the first image in mind. His insight into a world that deserved the wrath of God matured and deepened into a reversal wherein divinity would be lamb-like yet overcome all. The ancient writers, collectively called “John,” who gave us the Fourth Gospel reflected the second image, a household free of the distress and destruction that loomed in the darkness outside. These evangelists, however, take the image beyond that of a tribal household, with the blood of the lamb warding off not an attack of a national foe but the sin of the world.

Culturally distant as such images may be, they yet resonate with us if we dwell on them and yield them time.

Poem

No Mark for Cain

After we have

*stoned the adulterers,
beheaded the rebels,
burned the heretics,
drowned the witches,
hanged the horse thieves,
put the killers to the needle,
we take time to thank our god.*

We thank you, god
for being a god in our own image,
a god who is Number One,
a kick butt kind of god
of power and might.

We thank you for being not
some pitiful god of pity, absolution and peace.
Who could forgive a forgiving god?
Some bleeding-heart god,
creating out of love and loving creation?
Give us you: a destroyer god.

We hunger for a god like you,
a god who wants sacrifice, not mercy.
A god who *accepts* Abraham's offered son,
a Moloch who understands that we understand,
who knows we know what we are doing,
when we sacrifice the innocent and the guilty.

Make us, O god, instruments of your retribution.
Demand of us killing for killing,
murder for murder.
Give us a god we can fear,
that fear may secure us,
bind us together.

We want a god who underwrites

the righteous good in ourselves,
expels the expendables.
We long to serve a god of vengeance,
who puts no mark of forbearance on Cain
and the murdering sons of Cain.

Death to Cain.
Long live vengeance.
Long live our god.

Tom Keene and Muse

**Report finds Texas death sentences remain at historic lows in 2019 as jurors
reject the death penalty in 50% of cases**

*Cases scheduled for execution in 2019 rife with errors, discrimination, and
compelling innocence claims*

(Austin, Texas) -- The number of new death sentences and executions declined in 2019, according to a [new report](#) from the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (TCADP). Texas juries rejected the death penalty in 50% of the cases presented to them this year. Four capital murder trials in which prosecutors sought the death penalty resulted in sentences of life in prison without the possibility of parole, while four other capital trials ended with new death sentences.

“It is clear that prosecutors and jurors are turning away from the death penalty,” said Kristin Houlié, TCADP Executive Director and author of [Texas Death Penalty Developments in 2019: The Year in Review](#). “Over the past five years, 40% of trials involving death-qualified juries have resulted in sentences other than the death penalty. This year, the rejection rate was 50%. This raises serious questions about the cost and efficacy of pursuing capital punishment when an alternative exists.”

As use of the death penalty declines, its application remains geographically isolated. More than one-third of all death sentences imposed by juries in Texas in

the last five years came from just four counties. No Texas county has sentenced more than two people to death in that timeframe, however.

The State of Texas put 9 people to death this year, compared with 13 executions in 2018. Nine other individuals scheduled to be executed this year received reprieves from state or federal courts; in three cases (Dexter Johnson, Ruben Gutierrez, and Patrick Murphy), the inmates received multiple reprieves.

Despite declining use, the cases that were scheduled for execution this year underscored persistent concerns about the fairness and accuracy of Texas's death penalty system. Attorneys for the inmates facing execution challenged their convictions and/or death sentences on such issues as the use of false testimony, discriminatory legal proceedings, evidence of intellectual disability, and actual innocence claims, among others. Some of these claims were successful and resulted in stays, while other similar challenges failed to receive consideration by the courts.

Former Texas Court of Criminal Appeals Judge Elsa Alcalá argues, "The fact that some death penalty cases were stayed and others proceeded to execution despite similar errors and concerns demonstrates an uneven and arbitrary application of justice."

On November 15, 2019 – five days before he was scheduled to be put to death – the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals stayed the execution of Rodney Reed and ordered the case back to the trial court to consider his actual innocence claim, among other issues. Millions of people worldwide spoke against Reed's execution. The case also drew bipartisan concern from dozens of elected officials who publicly asked Texas Governor Greg Abbott to grant a reprieve.

In contrast, Larry Swearingen was executed on August 21, 2019, despite a compelling innocence claim and substantial doubts about the circumstantial and faulty scientific evidence used to convict him. He had faced five previous serious execution dates.

Three individuals – Billie Wayne Coble, Robert Sparks, and Travis Runnels – were executed despite the fact that a state's witness, A.P. Merillat, provided false testimony related to the issue of future dangerousness in all three cases. Over the years, Merillat offered similar testimony in at least fifteen other death penalty

trials. In two of those cases, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals ordered new punishment hearings; both of those individuals eventually were removed from death row.

Two longstanding cases from Harris County were resolved with sentences other than the death penalty this year. Marlin Nelson and Bobby Moore received reduced sentences and were removed from death row. After two trips to the U.S. Supreme Court in the past two years, Moore's sentence was commuted to life in prison due to his intellectual disability. Nelson's death sentence was overturned due to faulty jury instructions. A third individual, Ignacio Gomez, died in custody this year. Collectively, the three men spent nearly 90 years on death row.

Since 2015, a total of 25 individuals have been removed from death row in Texas for reasons other than execution, including sentence reductions (17), deaths in custody (7), or exonerations (1). More than half of these cases originated in Harris County. During this same timeframe, the State executed 49 people.

"The death penalty landscape in Texas has changed significantly over the past 20 years, but it is still rife with error, arbitrariness, and bias," said Houlé. "At this critical moment in our state's experience with the death penalty, it is imperative for concerned citizens and elected officials to examine the realities of this irreversible and costly punishment and embrace alternative means of achieving justice."

TCADP is a statewide grassroots advocacy organization based in Austin.

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/