

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating November 19, 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 thirty-third Sunday in ordinary time. Tom Keene's poem is *Strangers*. See <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php> for more of Tom's poems. A thought piece of mine on empathy and conflict follows.

The November 5 edition of the San Antonio *Express News* featured Pax Christi San Antonio member Sr. Martha Ann Kirk in a page A8 article. Among various revelations, it includes a circa 1963 photo of her in habit as a novice, typing, and a more recent photo of her on a bicycle at one of the San Antonio Spanish-era missions. "While Kirk has wide-ranging interests, her core philosophy is simple: move past the influences of sexism, racism and religious prejudice to do good in the world."

Opinion

They keep telling us to pray. Some unfortunate busts into a theater, school, night club, even a church, armed with automatic weapons and aims at real people as if they were impersonal targets in a video game. Mental illness is the explanation. "Pray...Our hearts go out to them"—this expression is quickly becoming political spin. "Maybe if more good people had guns..." Is that really it? Do too few people have guns? "Now is not the time to talk about gun control. Pray. Don't interrupt the grieving." And when will the time come that people will not be grieving?

Remember when Richard Nixon politicized the Supreme Court? I do. He said he would appoint "strict constructionists." That was a word taken from history but was being used for a different meaning—a code word for replacing retiring justices with ones that would not racially integrate schools. He instead appointed pro-abortion justices in the hope that legalized abortion would counter the movement for socialized medicine. After all, the biggest contributor to his presidential campaign was W. Clement Stone, an insurance magnate, and largely anti-abortion Catholic union voters were the ones who wanted socialized medicine but would be squeamish about it including abortion. Later presidents appointed justices who were more directly opposed to civil rights legislation, the Voting Rights Act in particular; by then the *Roe v. Wade* opinion was established law. So constitutional law became a partisan football for years to come.

What does the politicization of the U.S. Supreme Court have to do with the need for prayers and grieving now? The "strict constructionist" justices changed the meaning of the Second Amendment and thereby turned it into an individual right to own guns. The Amendment originally concerned states having the prerogative to organize militias in an era in which there was no national standing army; the amendment guaranteed that

the states or the people (not individual persons) could defend their territory from foreign invasion. The post 1969 justices, even while weakening the Fourteenth Amendment in matters of the civil rights of racial minorities, expanded it to create an individual right to possess and use guns.

“Pray,” they say. Aren’t these the same kind of church officials who urged us to vote for the “pro-life” presidents who appointed the pro-gun justices? Even amateurs at political tactics recognized the bait-and-switch. Unborn innocents were the bait; they still do not have the protection of law. They were “switched” for the primacy of profit, profits of gun and bullet manufacturers and distributors in particular. So every lunatic, as long as a diagnosis has yet to be recorded in an FBI list, can purchase a weapon of crowd destruction, and even after such a diagnosis such a one could purchase guns in a “private” or gun-show sale, as opposed to a sale in a retail outlet. And cities and counties—no matter how close to the people they may be—can do nothing about it. And the politically pro-life clergy tell us to pray. No doubt they are sincere, but what they have been counseling us about politics for decades does not seem very intelligent. And then there are the honorable people who work for the National Rifle Association and its allied politicians.

Calendar

Tuesday November 14, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Ecumenical Thanksgiving Prayer Service. Our Lady’s Chapel, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Tuesday November 14, 6:00pm, Dr. Beth Blue Swadener (justice studies, Arizona State U.), “Scholar Activism and Pedagogies of Place.” Aula Canaria (BVB 1.328), Buena Vista Street Building, UTSA Downtown, 501 W. Cesar E. Chavez Blvd.

Tuesday November 14, 6:30pm, Clair Hein Blanton (doctoral student, University of Aberdeen, religious ethics) Luther, Ant-Semitism, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Reflection on the Legacy of the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Holzman Auditorium, Jewish Community Campus, 12500 N.W. Military Highway. RSVP to events@hmmsa.org.

Friday November 17, 6:00pm to **Saturday November 18**, 2:30pm, Symposium on Immigration, sponsored by the *Texas Tribune*. Buena Vista Building Auditorium, UTSA Downtown, 501 W. Cesar E. Chavez Blvd. RSVP at <http://www.eventbrite.com/e/a-symposium-on-immigration-registration-38946217184>. Friday, doors open 6:00pm; 6:30 U.S. Representative Joaquin Castro, former ambassador to Mexico Antonio Garza. Saturday 8:30am light breakfast; 9:00am Immigration and the Legislature: Reps. Diego Bernal, Ina Minjarez, Jason Villalba; Moderator Evan Smith. Other panels: 10:15 Immigration and the Trump Administration; 11:30 The Human Cost of Immigration. 12:30 lunch. 1:00pm screening of “Beyond the Wall.”

Thursday November 23, 9:30am-10:30am, One Day. One Hour. One People. Gathered in Gratitude. House of Prayer Lutheran Church, 10236 Ironside. Sponsored by Compassionate San Antonio.

Tuesday November 28, 6:00pm-7:00pm, "It's Not on MY Map: A Panel Discussion on Equity Impacts in SA." Diego Bernal, Pattie Radle, Queta Rodriguez, Richard Montez, Matthew Martinez, covering ZIP codes 78207, 78237, 78202, 78203. YWCA, 503 Castroville Rd. Extra parking at dLas Palmas Library, next door.

Tuesday November 28, 6:30pm-9:00pm, Robert Rico, MPA and Sofia Bahena, Ed.D., Restorative Justice: An Alternative to disciplinary Policies in Our Schools. Martinez Street Women's Center, 801 Olive St.

Wednesday November 29, 2:00pm-4:00pm, video, *Written on Water*, on the tension between property rights and state-mandated pumping limits in west Texas. Mabee Library Room 221, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Third Reading (Matthew 25:14-30)

The reading is the parable about a man who places slaves in charge of talents while he was away for an extended time--five, two, and one talent respectively. The parable is sometimes used for homilies on the theme of using one's abilities; that pertains to the performance of the slaves in what they do with the treasures placed in their hands. The talent, however, was a measure of weight, in this case indicating quantities of silver. The treasures come from the master, i.e. from a stand-in for God. So it is worthwhile inquiring about what the treasures are that come from God, as opposed to human abilities that we may develop in the course of life.

An important treasure given us by God takes the form of both a natural sense of fairness and justice and the biblical concern for justice. Both forms have issued in the traditional social justice teachings of the Church. One cannot help lamenting the homiletical neglect of these teachings, and their displacement by sentimentality, psychology, and charities. The mandate implicit in the parable's imperative is to make such treasures productive. Burying them for safe-keeping hardly satisfies the gospel mandate.

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Poem

Strangers

They approached,
along the sidewalk
in surroundings strange to both,

each a stranger to the other.

One said,

*Can you help me?
I need a bus ticket to Dallas.
I have the cash but the bus company
only takes credit cards online.*

Together, they went to a public library
and to a stranger working a computer.

*Can you help us?
Can you go to this web site
where we can use a credit card?*

He did. When done, the two thanked him. He said,
De nada..

Tom Keene
October 10, 2017

Meditation on Empathy and Conflict

Anthony J. Blasi

We reasonably consider empathy a good and conflict an evil, but conflict does not develop in the absence of empathy. Consequently empathy is not always an indicator of a salutary circumstance. People who have no empathy for one another do not go to war against one another; they are hardly aware of one another. If they are greatly distant from one another and consequently cannot begin to understand one another they have no rationale for endangering themselves by engaging in war against one another.

The focus here is not on the continuation of hostilities, which is a dynamic that has a force of its own and is unlikely to be stopped by empathy. Rather the focus is the decision to begin hostilities, the going to war. When it comes to making such a decision, it is not a question of mercenaries who simply hire on as warriors, nor of professional military personnel, who have taken on the morally questionable obligation of following orders or “just doing a job” when hostilities break out. Rather it is the leaders and publics who hire the mercenaries or commit the professional militaries to engage in conflict with an “enemy.” These—leaders and publics—not mercenaries and military professionals, have enough understanding of some other to perceive the other as an “enemy.” There is sufficient interpenetration of consciousness on the part of the self-group (a “we”) and some other group (a “they”) to provoke anger and hostility. Where such is lacking, there is neither empathy nor conflict.

Conflict should not be confounded with competition. Conflict is a form of interchange that goes well beyond competition. Competition occurs within the limits of

rules and custom. Athletes who compete with one another have more in common with one another than they do with their fans. Similarly business entrepreneurs who compete in a market have much in common with one another and may even be members of the same trade organization; they have much less in common with their employees and customers. Well beyond any goals of a competition, combatants in conflict seek to disable or terminate one another.

Where there is too much empathy for conflict to occur, the Golden Rule comes to be as much a description as a mandate. Disabling or terminating the other would be to almost blank out one's self, since one would be treating the other as one treats oneself. Where there is that high a degree of empathy, each perceives interests that are held in common. Competition could occur under such a circumstance since competitors have much in common. As noted, one thinks of the fellowship of competing athletes and entrepreneurs.

However, where there is only a moderate level of empathy, conflict could occur. The parties know enough to be angry at one another. The other is known to want what is one's own or "ours," and I or we similarly want what is the other's. Lest too much commonality occur, the parties de-humanize one another. It is only then that genocide and euthanasia could occur. One can more readily empathize at so limited a level with a dog than with another who is known to be fully human. For that reason de-humanizing racist discourse occurs in conflict-related propaganda.

There are two alternative conditions in the situation of moderate empathy. First there can be unshared means and shared goals. Rich and poor, for example, may coexist in the competitive market; they do not have the same access to means of obtaining their objectives, but they may well have the same objectives. Second, there can be unshared goals but shared means. One thinks of uncivil politics and war.

One way to prevent conflict is to promote competition. Competition involves people in a common set of rules and customs. It is important, however, that the competitors share the same goals and equivalent means for obtaining those goals. One kind of justice has such a sharing of goals and equivalent means as its theme. A second stratagem for preventing conflict is to promote appreciation. A problem to be overcome is the limitedness of people's perspectives. It is in this light that interfaith events take on significance. Similarly, rational debate, as a form of competition, promotes a sharing in rationales so that people have more in common than would be the case in too limited a degree of empathy.

It has often been noted that peace is not the mere absence of war. Where there is a maximization of empathy, peace is not in danger. However, where there is a mere modicum of empathy, the danger of conflict is present and peace-making stratagems are needed.

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>

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.sanantoniopeace.center>

Interfaith Radio, (*Interfaith Voices*)

<http://www.interfaithradio.org/>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty

www.txccedp.org