

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating November 15, 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 Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Here and Now*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem is my review of *An Ecological Theology of Liberation. Salvation and Political Ecology*, by Daniel P. Castillo.

Calendar

Times are given in the Central Time Zone

Monday, November 9, 7 pm , Zoom meeting of Pax Christi El Paso (note change of date). Conclusion of discussion of *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle*, by Angela Davis, pp. 129-45. For the Zoom invitation, contact Patricia Delgado, phdelgado3583@gmail.com.

Monday November 9 to Wednesday November 11, conference "Four Years of Peace Accord Implementation: International Comparative Experience and the Colombian Case" (Kroc Institute at the University of Notre Dame). Information and registration: <https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/events/2020/11/09/four-years-of-peace-accord-implementation-international-comparative-experiences-and-the-colombian-case/>

Tuesday November 10, 12:00pm (1:00pm ET), online dialogue "Faith and the Faithful in the 2020 Election: What Happened? Why? What now?" with Yamiche Alcindor (Public Broadcasting System), Elizabeth Dias (*New York Times*), Elana Schor (Associated Press), Mark Shi9elds (Public Broadcasting System), and

Christopher White (National Catholic Reporter). RSVP at:
<https://catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/events/faith-and-the-faithful-in-the-2020-election-what-happened-why-what-now#rsvp>

Tuesday November 10, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET), Pax Christi USA “Grassroots Leadership Call,” primarily for Pax Christi members. Link:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86492056719>

Tuesday November 10, 7:00pm (6:00pm MT), bilingual online discussion “Pope Francis and the Current Economy of Exclusion,” Fr. Fabian Marques (El Buen Pastor Church, Sparks) and Carlos Marentes (Centro Sin Fronteras). Link:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85608443210?pwd=QIN2WGZHS0laeEhmU1hoMEJOUFLZz09>
Meeting ID: 856 0844 3210; Passcode: ecofran

Wednesday November 11, 12:00pm (1:00pm ET), “Drawdown for Congregations,” online presentation about congregations using less carbon in their buildings. Elizabeth Bagley (Project Drawdown). Registration information TBA.

Wednesday November 11, 7:00pm (6:00pm MT), bilingual online discussion “The economy of inclusion,” Fr. Mario Serrano, ofm.conv (chaplain, University of Texas El Paso). Link:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82373438626?pwd=d3pWQTVvWklKRUZ0TE9BanhJdHRwQT09>
Meeting ID: 823 7343 8626; Passcode: ecofran

Wednesday November 11, 7:00pm-8:30pm, online lecture “The Life & Witness of Ben Salmon: On the Front Line of the ‘Army of Peace,’” Michael Baxter (Regis University, Denver). Ben Salmon was an American World War I war resister. Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-life-witness-of-ben-salmon-on-the-front-lines-of-the-army-of-peace-tickets-125403490215>.

Thursday November 12, 6:00pm, online colloquium “What Scientists Around the World Think about Religion and Why It Matters,” Elaine Howard Ecklund (Rice University) and David R. Johnson (University of Nevada Reno). Register at: <http://bit.ly/scientists-around-the-world>.

Monday November 14, 12:00pm (1:00pm ET), webinar “Drawdown for Congregations,” on congregations reducing carbon emissions, with Elizabeth Bagley (Project Drawdown). Register at: <http://bit.ly/IPLDrawdown>

Sunday November 15, 10:00am, online presentation “Carbon Offsets and How to Purchase Them,” Jim Blackburn (Coastal Exchange). Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86564638381?pwd=MTBtSF16eVhoTUF3SXJ2VIBWd0N2QT09#success>

Monday November 16, 6:30pm-8:30pm, second part of online conference “Faith in Humanity: A Pre- and Post-Election community Conversation,” hosted by Compassionate San Antonio, Interfaith San Antonio Alliance, and the San Antonio Compassionate Institute 2020, organized by Ann Helmke (City of San Antonio). Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/faith-in-humanity-a-pre-and-post-election-community-conversation-tickets-125265347025>

Tuesday November 17, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Texas Coalition Against the Death Penalty webinar, “Seeking Justice in Texas,” an election debriefing. Register at: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScXS5BJYtI3ThcN_NoCRJY0pmTfxJliQetWLMlDf2laKXC0zA/viewform

Tuesdays November 17, 24, December 1, 8, 3:00pm (4:00pm ET) or 6:00pm (7:00pm ET), online discussion of the new encyclical by Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*. A discussion guide will be sent upon registration at: <https://fs18.formsite.com/rtresp/idycfr1slp/index.html>
Electronic access to the encyclical: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

Tuesday November 17, 7:00pm (6:00pm MT), bilingual online conversation “How to Build an Economy Centered on Inclusion,” Sebastian Chacon (Just Catholics young adult group). Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84451678674?pwd=YjJPcDVLdUZwd042cG9uWTUreHZ0UT09>
Meeting ID: 844 5167 8674; Passcode: ecofran

Wednesday November 18, 7:00pm (6:00pm MT), online bilingual conversation “From Reflection to Action,” Marco Rapozo (Catholic Diocese of El Paso). Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84873915944?pwd=SSSt4UEFuenJHNjQ3STlacU90a2ZDQT09> Meeting ID: 848 7391 5944; Passcode: ecofran

Thursday November 19, 2:00pm-3:00pm (3:00pm-4:00pm ET), online conversation “Religion & the 2020 Election,” Amanda Friesen and Andrew Whitehead (both of Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis). Register at: https://iu.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_J8h_mPr9QVKBjsT6wbS2Dg

Saturday December 5, 2:00pm, Pax Christi San Antonio online meeting. Gretchen Haynes of the local Quaker community, “Quakers Reflect on the Peace Process.” Information: Arthur Dawes, arthurdawes@att.net, 210-213-5919. For the Zoom invitation, send request to J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com.

Notices

Enduring Injustice: the Persistence of Racial Discrimination in the U.S. Death Penalty

In September, the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC) released *Enduring Injustice: The Persistence of Racial Discrimination in the U.S. Death Penalty*, an important report that places the death penalty in historical context. It documents the pervasiveness of racial discrimination in capital cases and explains why ending the death penalty is an important element in reforming the criminal legal system. It can be accessed at: <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/facts-and-research/dpic-reports/in-depth/enduring-injustice-the-persistence-of-racial-discrimination-in-the-u-s-death-penalty>

New Book: Pax Christi International and its Catholic Nonviolence Initiative are pleased to announce the publication of *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World*, the culmination of a three-year global conversation among church leaders, community organizers, activists, social scientists and theologians about how the Catholic Church might return to its Gospel nonviolence roots and transform the world. The book shares the experiences of on-the-ground nonviolent interventions, explores the scriptural, theological and historical foundations of nonviolence, reviews the most current social science on how nonviolence has been effectively employed, and outlines a

vision for how the Church might embrace active nonviolence into every aspect of its life. Order at: <https://www.fast-print.net/bookshop/2299/advancing-nonviolence-and-just-peace>

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>

Second Reading (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6)

"Peace and security!" That was the slogan of the Roman Empire in Paul's time. The implication was that people throughout the known world did not need to know about what was going on or to understand anything outside of their own personal affairs; the authorities would take care of all problems. People could remain in the dark and be satisfied. "When they say, 'Peace and security,' then sudden is the ruin that is impending on them..." (1 Thess 5:3). Paul recommends living as if wide awake in the day rather than asleep at night. "But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark that the day should come upon you like a thief, for you are all children of light and children of the day" (5:4-5).

We have official assurances directed at us by high-level administrators, corporate heads, governmental officials, and the like. "Peace and security!" It is an old trick. If there is genuine peace and genuine security, one need not be told about it if one were looking about in the daylight. To live in faith, which is ultimate trust, is hardly the same thing as hiding in the shadows.

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.

Poem

Here and Now

Each breath, heartbeat we have,
horizon, rainbow we see,
sound and silence we hear,
every step we walk.

Each Here: a touch of infinity,
each Now: a taste of eternity,
here and now for us
to treasure and transcend.

Tom Keene and Muse
October 11, 2020

Book Review

Daniel P. CASTILLO. *An Ecological Theology of Liberation. Salvation and Political Ecology*. Foreword by Gustavo Gutiérrez. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2019, 227 + xxviii pp. ISBN 978-1-62698-321-2, soft cover. Reviewed by Anthony J. Blasi.

We usually approach that aspect of nature that we call *ecology* with poetry and music. However, as threats to the physical environment and sustainable life arise, we may resort to the less inspirational discourses of physics and biology. The liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez draws from both kinds of discourse—cold sober description of the environmental crisis and its social causes, and the poetry and analogical imagination of biblical lessons. In this book by theologian Daniel P. Castillo of Loyola University Maryland, the reader is challenged to be both cold sober and an aficionado of poetry and myth. Almost every page is generously footnoted with references to political, economic, biblical studies, and theological literatures, often with follow-up discussions.

In a world of profit-driven instrumental rationality, one would dump toxic waste in poor and underpopulated nations, and pay them for the service. One would exploit mineral and agricultural resources in those same nations as hinterlands to core nations, much in the manner of the colonialism of old. Humanity is reaching the limit that such practices can go without producing planetary devastation that would impoverish and decimate center and periphery peoples alike, and elicit resistance from non-elite people and those elite who have scientifically-informed minds and sufficiently-informed consciences. While fragmentary efforts to avert or control ecological disasters are good, the author calls for a fundamental alteration in thinking. He would have a reversal of the underlying problem of profit-driven instrumental rationality, replacing it with a consciousness of the *common* human situation.

The first chapter, "Toward an Ecological Theology of Liberation," takes such themes as cosmic evolution, the connectedness of all things, and creation as sacrament from such authors of Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Berry, Leonardo Boff, and Ivone Gebara. It notes that these themes and authors had been ignored in recent years, as has social ethics. The result has been a failure to ask who suffers when corporate actors exploit and pollute the environment. Now there is a need for an anthropocentrism, not one that emphasizes human domination over nature but one that gives form to an ethic of responsibility.

A component of an anthropocentrism that is up to the challenge of the times involves a re-examination of what comes through revelation. On the one hand there are scriptures plus the process of tradition interpreting them over time, and then there is the book of nature, creation as an opening to the mind of the Creator. Recently theology has emphasized the former, often failing to get beyond matters of individual sin and salvation. The social, economic, and political sciences have left social ethical concerns to non-scientific practitioners, often agents of multinational corporations and the politicians whom those agents influence. Gustavo Gutiérrez has a different idea: a community of faith as a servant of the world, a salvation expressing God's love in and for the world. He, as well as recently Pope Francis, refer to the parable of the good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke in connection with this kind of salvation. Castillo speaks of a new discourse in this connection, not that of developmentalism and modernization, which perpetrate an underlying plundering of the former colonies, but liberation.

The second chapter speaks of "integral liberation," a term taken from Gutiérrez. It involves social structural-level liberation, cultural/psychological – level liberation, and a theological-level integration. The last of these is a liberation from sin and a communion with God and neighbor realized through the other two levels. Contrary to Marxism, the structural and cultural/psychological levels are united; it is not a matter of the former driving the latter. Moreover, the cultural/psychological and theological levels are also united in the ecclesial community; they feature a theme of spiritual poverty that makes freedom a freedom for God and neighbor, especially the poor. Castillo notes that this parallels the unitary crisis of the social and the natural in Pope Francis' *Laudato Sí*.

The author turns to the content of this kind of salvation with a reading of the creation narratives in Genesis. That content takes the form of the mythic or poetic meaning of the narratives. While other neareastern creation accounts tell of struggle and violence, Genesis describes a peaceful creating of a world that is good. The terms in Genesis 2:15 translated as *dominion* and *subdue* come from the Hebrew for a shepherd's care for a flock and taking possession. It is not a matter of ruthless exploitation. The second creation account describes a gardener-like God who would have humans be gardener-like also. And there are two unique trees, a tree of life and a tree of knowledge that is both good and evil. Eating of the fruit of evil knowledge, of self-serving guile, results in a series of catastrophies. One can readily see where this is going, with reference to ecology.

Chapter 4 dwells upon the liberation of the Hebrew people from the pharaoh who did not know Joseph, the Joseph who secured Egypt from famine. That pharaoh is punished with the seven plagues. It is not the soil of Egypt that is ultimately saved, however, but the chosen people. Castillo admits that the narrative of exterminating and supplanting the Canaanites poses a theological problem. Nevertheless he goes on to describe the Jubilee Years that were to preserve the land and reinstate ancestral lands and thereby restore communal relationships. Castillo cites passages in the Second Testament that speak of all things coming together in the Christ (Colossians), the restoration of the divine order in a New Jerusalem that has two trees of life (Revelation). All this is underdetermined with reference to an ethic insofar as it remains a matter of poetry and mythic imagery.

Chapter 5 takes the reader to a contemporary ethic for the "anthropocene age" with its heightened human impact on the earth. Castillo taps into Pope Francis' critique of the technocratic paradigm that would see the world and even its people as an *it*, desiccated of any sense of the human subject. The market society that arises from such a paradigm makes society an adjunct of the market, rather than vice-versa. The *it*-things in the world become commodities within the systems of colonialism, slavery, extractive industries, etc. Such destroy the land, pollute, create monocrop economies, and justify it all with racist ideology. The underlying problem of the technocratic paradigm persists despite the remediative efforts of developmentalism. At the global level, the *it* mentality is driving an unsustainable project. Because of an inherent increasing inequality within and between peoples, it may be driving the world to violent revolutions as well.

Chapter 6 calls for conversion to a utopian vision that undermines the everyday world. Rather than seeing capitalism as a monolith and maintaining a false dichotomy between revolution and reform, Castillo advocates "revolutionary reforms," directed by the perspective of the poor. What the author describes reminds one of the *praxis* of neo-marxian thought, blended with some grateful joy from Christian celebration. The vision from below will include restorative rest, mercy, protest, solidarity, discernment, communal convocation, and celebration.

Daniel Pastillo intended to go beyond the liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez, and he has done so in admirable fashion. However, there remains much work to be done. Scripture includes many narratives that are difficult to reconcile with a liberative perspective; should one pick and choose among scriptural passages? The place of *Laudato Sí* in the development of the argument needs to be explained; is the argument a development of official magisterium, or

are the pope's arguments simply some among the many other works cited? Shouldn't Dr. Marx be credited with the concept of *praxis*, and shouldn't that concept be subjected to an examination and critique? And what about the exercise of power? Should Christianity mix explicitly with politics or stay sidelined out of a fear of Savonarola-like pesonages?

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

Migrant Center for Human Rights
<https://Migrantcenter.org>

Catholic Books Review
<http://catholicbooksreview.org>