

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating December 27, 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 Feast of the Holy Family. Tom Keene's poem is *Potluck with Jesus*.

After the poem is an excerpt of an essay by Francis Paiva, and there is a story to this. Francis had been a member of a minority group on the island nation of Sri Lanka, south of India. An employee of the Sri Lankan government, he was promised a promotion upon returning from the U.S. where he was to earn a doctorate, but as soon as he and his family were out of the country his position was given to someone else. So after earning his Ph.D. he taught in American universities and for a time worked for the United Nations as a specialist in international development. I knew him as an older member of the Pax Christi chapter in Nashville, Tennessee, where he and his wife settled to live in retirement near their daughter. He never expressed any bitterness over the disruption that discrimination and broken promises brought to his life; indeed, he always exuded peace and gentleness. Francis died December 3rd of this year, on his hundredth birthday. His essay was a reflection on part of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, the latter a landmark Vatican document.

Calendar

Saturday January 2, 2:00pm, online Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. Details TBA.

Monday January 11-Thursday January 14, 6:30pm (7:30pm ET)-9:00pm (10:00pm ET), students only (undergraduate & graduate): online seminar: Creating a World Free of Nuclear Weapons: Developing the Next Generation of Specialists & Activists of the Catholic Community; Drew Christianson, S.J. (Georgetown University), George A. Lopez (University of Notre Dame), Maryann Cusimano Love

(Catholic University of America), Gerald Powers (University of Notre Dame), and others, hosted by the Kroc Institute, University of Notre Dame. To register, contact Hannah Heinzekehr (hheinzek@nd.edu), Lisa Gallagher (lgalleg3@nd.edu), or aortega@nd.edu.

Wednesday January 13, 11:00am-12:15pm (12:00pm-1:15pm ET), webinar “A Policy Playbook on Nonproliferation Sanctions,” Linda Gerber (Fourth Freedom Forum), Trita Parsi (Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft), Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins (Women of Color Advancing Peace, security and Conflict Transformation), and George A. Lopez (University of Notre Dame), moderated by Maura Policelli (University of Notre Dame). Register at:
https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/1116079731340/WN_xAiXJygRUqZ6lzbrrGnng?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Register%20Now&utm_campaign=Washington

Notices

Anti-Nuclear Weapons Banners: Please take a look at the picture of the banner in the attachment. It refers to an international treaty that the Holy See has ratified. Pax Christi Dallas is working with the Nuclear Free World committee for the Dallas Peace and Justice Center to find good places in Texas to put them for the month of January--high traffic areas near a traffic light or stop sign where cars have to stop so then the drivers will have a chance to read them. In the bottom corners you will see the website link to ICAN (www.icanw.org) so that folks can go there and find lots of information. ICAN is the International Coalition to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and won the Nobel Peace Prize about a year ago. For a banner, contact Joyce Hall: hallmj@sbcglobal.net



What really happens to the used clothing you donate? Read this revelatory article by Anna deSouza: <https://www.rd.com/article/what-happens-used-clothing-donations/>

Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act. First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio was the first local organization to endorse this bill, which has also been endorsed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. See <https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/1/messages/AL3K2mRHejHBX9ewnwO9CKEAaFY>

Texas Death Penalty Developments in 2020: The Year in Review, Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. Access the report at: <https://tcadp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Texas-Death-Penalty-Developments-in-2020-FINAL.pdf>

Watch Pax Christi USA's Michelle Sherman, interviewed in the "Young Peacebuilders" series of Pax Christi International: <https://paxchristiusa.org/2020/12/16/watch-pax-christi-usas-michelle-sherman-featured-on-young-peacebuilders-series/>

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

The Lectionary offers alternative readings: Colossians 3:12-17, Colossians 3:12-21, or Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19.

Colossians 3:12-17

Colossians appears to have been written by followers of Paul rather than Paul himself. While numerous minor linguistic clues suggest that the author was not Paul, the authors were for sure summarizing important parts of Paul's teachings. For example, Colossians 3:11, "In that image of the creator, there is no Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Messiah is all and in all," is reminiscent of Galatians 3:28, which also includes the pair "male and female." A little further on in the reading for today, "So, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness humility, considerateness, patience, bearing with one another..." the teaching is reminiscent of the list of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, honesty, kindness, faith, gentleness, self-control."

Colossians 3:12-21

One can readily see why the editors of the Lectionary gave the option to use only verses 12-17 (see above); the remaining verses up to 21 comprise a "household code" which, on the face of it, is unacceptable to moderns: "Wives, be subordinate to your husbands..." "Children, obey the parents in everything..." One verse beyond the reading for today says, "Slaves, in everything obey the masters according to the flesh..."

The ancient Greco-Roman world was patriarchal. Patriarchal household codes such as that in Colossians were common. A similar one may be found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (8:10:5). What is notable about the one in *Colossians* is not the patriarchal clauses but what the followers of Paul add to

them: “Husbands, love the wives and do not be embittered against them” (verse 19). “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they lose heart” (verse 21). And with regard to slaves, it is even suggested that masters might not have justice on their side: “Masters, show justice and fairness to the slaves, knowing that you also have a lord in heaven” (4:1). Such advice was subversive in the context of the conventional wisdom of the age. Bibliolatry would have us be satisfied with matters as the *Letter to the Colossians* leaves them, but let us not be satisfied with bibliolatry. Rather, we should note the direction in which *Colossians* was moving.

Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

The Lectionary heavily abbreviates this passage from the ancient essay titled simply “To the Hebrews.” The passage cites examples of faith from the legends of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The larger passage begins with faith about the very creation of the world and leads up to the faith of Jesus himself at the point of crucifixion.

Third Reading (Luke 2:22-40)

Some parishes may choose to use a short form of the reading, Luke 2:22, 29-40.

The passage narrates Joseph and Mary bringing the newborn Jesus up to Jerusalem since he was a first-born. The narrative has them doing this when the days of their purification had been completed; “their” in this case would refer to Mary and Jesus. The Law specified a length of time of impurity for new mothers, and by tradition a new born infant was impure by association with his mother. A circumcision could occur after this period, eight days after birth. The narrative presents the family as ritually observant.

Luke’s narrative has the family meet Simeon, “a just and decent man,” in the Temple precincts. This seems to be a legendary reference to Simeon the son of Hillel. The point of the reference is that ritual observance was not an end in itself but an expression for a forward-looking hope, since Simeon was “awaiting the comfort of Israel,” and “it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the anointed one of the Lord.”

“And there was a prophetess, Anna, daughter of Phanuel, from the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with a husband seven years after her maidenhood, and she had been a widow for eighty-four years.” No doubt this

is another legend. She “thanked God and kept talking about him” (the infant) “to all who were expecting the redemption of Jerusalem.” Anna would have been about 105 years old, a parallel to Judith (see Judith 16:23), who in a popular work of fiction freed her people from an oppressor.

Unimportant families situate themselves in the matrices of history and the social world by preserving passing relationships with notables; the notables themselves may not recall the non-notables at all or only if reminded. My late “Uncle Tony” (first cousin once removed) earned a medical degree at his father’s alma mater in Rome, it being noted now and then that his father had been a classmate of Maria Montessori, the first woman to earn the M.D. degree in Italy as well as being a noted educator. The legend about Uncle Tony is that he earned money while a medical student as a chess hustler, playing chess with notables for large sums of money and letting the notables win now and then so that they would not give up. Years later back in the U.S. he was recruited by the OSS (predecessor to the CIA) to accompany Vice President Truman on a ship to Malta; from there Truman would go by air to Tehran on a diplomatic mission. In the course of the trip as far as Malta, Uncle Tony was to keep the Vice President from being photographed, at stops, with any Fascists or Communists—all of whom Uncle Tony knew. The legend is that the two got along very well, both tending to use rather earthy language. The fact may be, however, that we can blame Harry Truman for my cousin’s manner of speech.

So Jesus was blessed by Simeon the son of Hillel and the 105-year-old prophetess Anna. His own family was not notable; at the time he was otherwise not notable either. But now we try to set our calendars by years before and after his birth; it was not so in Luke’s day. And Jesus’ family behaved like a non-notable family, repeating legends about dealings with notables.

“And his parents went every year to Jerusalem for the Paschal Feast. And when he was twelve years old, they were going up at the feast as usual.... And after three days they found him in the Temple precincts sitting amidst the teachers listening to them, and questioning them....(A)nd his mother said to him, ‘Child, why did you do this to us?’ ...and he said to them, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I had to be in the house of my father?’”

Luke leaves us clues that he was drawing a parallel with the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus. It was the Paschal time. At age twelve, Jesus was ready for a transition of some kind. He was away three days.

Luke’s passage is occasioning in our thinking feelings and attitudes about Jesus. The *mind* about Jesus, how we are to regard him, is that we miss him, that

we hope to find him, and that we cannot understand why he is absent, or seems absent, even when he is God with us. The fact that he became very much with us and then leaves, leaves us precisely how we ourselves are supposed to be for the time being. Our religion, the way that we are with him and he with us, is but a prelude. In order for him to *seem* as he really *is*, as an absence because of his dwelling in a house not of our making and beyond our understanding, is not only disquieting but humbling. And if it is too much for us, he will go down to Nazareth with us—for a time.

Poem

Potluck with Jesus

When he came into our village contentions,
he asked the women to get up a potluck.

Bakers brought breads,
gardeners their goods,
householders their steaming stews.
We toasted and tasted ourselves
with homemade wines.

In his reach,
we felt in one another
his lighter than gravity,
electromagnetic touch,
finding us, binding us,
freeing us.

When he left,
he stayed in our memories
of how we beheld one another then
and how he continues with us now
in our Sabbath potlucks.

Tom Keene
March 1, 2016

Toward a Caring International Community Reflections on *Compendium* chapter 9¹

By J.F.X. Paiva

A. Reaching out to Believers and Non-believers

The effort to reach to the entirety of humanity is in keeping with the concept of integral salvation. It is a challenge to bring together the various groups that constitute our churches in the various parishes. It is even a greater challenge to try and reach those who are not in these churches. The message needs to be communicated to all, that we need to come together because we are blessed with a common heritage. For those who believe, this may be acceptable. But for others the appeal may have to be made via the common goal of happiness and self-fulfillment. When Cain was asked: Where is your brother? Cain's answer was: Am I my brother's keeper? That perhaps was an instinctive admission that he indeed was Abel's keeper. The *Compendium* makes it clear that in fact all have this responsibility and duty.

When disasters strike, people do come together and try to help one another. But even here, there could be variations. Once when a relief wagon of one particular ethnic group went to the help of another in the wake of an earthquake, the relief was refused and rejected, and it was asked that it be taken back. The two groups were in enmity for a long time. Even a tragedy of this nature could not bring them together. When the tsunami struck,² though the victims in one of the islands helped one another initially, soon they were resuming their old hostility. It is true that the *Compendium* says that there is a natural desire for kinship at the simple family or community level, and that this same unity could be extended to higher levels of international cooperation as well (432). While most desire to unite—a natural family instinct—others however want to be different and make the task of bringing all together a difficult one. Such situations call for a studied response taking into account the characteristics of the situation.

¹ Pp. 119-26 in D. Paul Sullins and Anthony J. Blasi (eds.) *Catholic Social Thought. American Reflections on the Compendium* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

² On December 26, 2004, a huge tsunami struck a number of countries, including Sri Lanka. Francis Paiva raised a large relief fund, with the help of Father Joseph Patrick Breen of St. Edward's Parish in Nashville, Tennessee, and personally brought the proceeds to Sri Lanka to disperse it personally and make sure it did not disappear in government corruption--AB.

The United Nations was brought together by the desire not to perpetrate tragedy of war again. The leadership of some, a few, played a great part in the achievement of bringing all together. The same few could exercise their powers of veto to make the nations not at all together.

To give another example of the difficulty of bringing people together: After Vatican II ecumenism was accepted as a very much desired objective, and many wished to go even beyond ecumenism. In fact its chief exponent, Yves Congar, who had once been “banished,” presumably for his views, was brought back again by Pope John XXIII to be the leading light on ecumenism. Now, after so many years the ecumenical movement waxes and wanes according to the convictions and conveniences of bishops and priests. So, even among the believers of the gospel message there is inconsistency in coming together. It appears that the light of ecumenism burns more brightly in the older churches of the Reformation than elsewhere.

What we read in the *Compendium* about the international community is no doubt the ideal. However, to achieve that ideal there has to be a better understanding of society and its problems. For this, resources of time and talent are needed to bring believers and nonbelievers together for ushering in a better international order. We need new leaders to do that. The *Compendium* seems to limit itself to some well-known resources. While the world is grateful for Popes John XXIII and John Paul II, there are other thinkers as well: Karl Rahner, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Leonardo Boff.³ Much wisdom is to be found in groups like the World Council of Churches, the Christian churches especially in Africa and Asia, as well as numerous other groups in the Church itself. The United Nations helps. But it is the common people who will have to “till the soil and prepare the ground” for the seeds of hope with faith in the vision of a better world.

B. *Peace and Conflict*

The issue of war is very easily understood as the devastations that come with it for women, children, and the whole family and community. But equally devastating are ethnic conflicts which are no longer confined to internal areas of a country. As the wounded and vulnerable flee to safer shores there are problems of migration that affect both neighboring as well as more distant countries in the region. The problems are even more complex when the affected country is contiguous with the mainland.

³ As with most Vatican documents, the *Compendium* almost exclusively cited prior Vatican documents, especially those of popes—AB.

The *Compendium* is most eloquent in describing the necessity for peace and justice. There is a very inspiring paean of hope throughout the book. To keep such hope alive, there is faith: faith in the essential goodness in all beings made in the likeness of God or in other cases, an independent faith in the essential human nature of wanting to help one another when challenged by need or disaster. However, the fiercest of battles have taken place in defense of ethnicity and culture. While the fight over territory is related to the basis of economic productivity, territory is also regarded as an important means of cultural expression and identity. The bond between land and the people results in a cultural trait that distinguishes one group of people from another. Language and religion are also expressions of cultural features that people are ready to defend with their own lives. Often there is also hatred of the other.

To promote peace and justice between such conflicting groups is most often a thankless and fruitless task. In these situations, where humans are inhuman to one another, the involved parties are incapable of initiating efforts for peace. Very often a third party becomes the intermediary. Normative institutions or persons with the charisma of inviting trust are usually the actors who try to bring about peace. Often churches are the only hope, but not all churches seem to accept this vocation readily. For example, in some developing countries of Africa or Asia, unlike in Latin America, there is little outstanding leadership by religious groups or leaders ready to seek the understanding of issues and to initiate the paths to peace. Bishop Desmond Tutu has been an outstanding exception. Many cultural factions in third world nations have continued to fight one another till death while the churches have looked on or sometimes taken sides or refused to cooperate with other churches to initiate peace and reconciliation. Wars of all kinds, national and international, are inherently evil and destroy faith in humanity and sometimes hope in God. One basic fact seems to emerge—cultural groups often seem unable to be reconciled for negotiating peace. It does not come unless there is peace and forgiveness, as demonstrated by the South African experience. If the churches cannot offer leadership in this area, who can?

Visions for a renewed international order and the means to realize them are still possible where political or economic institutions are not able to bring them together. In this complex age of conflicts, if it is to be admitted that the churches have a special role in bringing about peace, then what are the implications for the curriculum content in the training of priests and in the adult faith formation of lay persons? Changes in human attitudes and acquisition of

skills in situational analysis, in negotiating peace, and in the transformation of conflicts—all these and more should be an important requirement for persons interested in the future of communities.

C. Community and Solidarity

Today, community may appear elusive when, in whole or in part, social, economic, and industrial peace is in disarray, not to mention war and its consequences. But without the goal of solidarity, community and human relations, the international community cannot come into being. There is always a constant threat to commitment and a challenge to reassemble as community—without this process the United Nations may not be achievable.

The world continues to be as complex as ever and made even more complex by the issues that keep coming back. The defense of minorities in building community is challenging enough. But then there are also groups who are being driven to the bottom through discriminatory structures of poverty and personal failure, as well as discrimination against homosexual groups, same sex partners claiming the benefits of marriage, and minorities that pursue advocating technologies to respond to the horror of HIV and AIDS. How is it possible to make community as the *Compendium* generally advocates, and to establish a basis for international cooperation, while the church—the ecclesiastical segments at least—has yet to make efforts to accommodate groups of diverse beliefs and practices? No approach has been made as a universal church corresponding to the gesture the founder of the church made when he was with prostitutes or with many other public and private sinners. The quality of mercy and the embrace of the prodigal have yet to be heard or experienced in all sectors of the church. The *Compendium* does not take these situations into account.

There is something of value to be gained from a consideration of Douglass C. North's *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*.⁴ North maintains that the community and institutions must always be in a dynamic interrelationship of continuous growth in the achievement of desirable goals. Leadership and initiative must come from both ends of the interrelationship, whether the subject pertains to values, concerns, or issues in finding solutions to a problem. Though North is thinking in an industrial context he also states that the concept is applicable to other situations as well. Communities and institutions nourish each other to achieve community and larger societal goals.

⁴ Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

However, the process of building community needs understanding and skills. Each community at the parish level needs to provide methodologies for bringing together institutions and communities for building the blocks for an international community. This is one strategy for dealing with problems of community formation and protection of human rights and needs.

D. The Challenge of Poverty Underdevelopment, and Development

Development implementation and the response to underdevelopment and poverty raise more complex issues. The people themselves, the “haves” and the “have-nots,” try to overcome what has become a parallel concern for the international community in addition to dealing with the issues of war and peace.

The United Nations has successively tried various strategies for development to aid the poorer countries. They first emphasized the economic, then the social, and later they tried an integrated approach. But progress needs to be made on many other fronts as well: the political, financial, institutional and so on. Participants affected by the program became an important issue. Technocrats tended to ignore these poor and marginal people, very likely because they did not know how to reach out to them, think with them, and work alongside them. The following example may be considered typical. It is the case of an international agency that came to a third world country to find out why young farmers were abandoning their rice fields for the city in the middle of the cultivation season. In spite of many resources being poured into the program, the young farmers kept abandoning their fields. The international agency interviewed politicians, economists, and technocrats. Last of all, as an afterthought, the young farmers themselves were interviewed. Apparently participation in the agricultural system alone was not enough; they needed to be involved in other relevant system too. Too often the recipients of programs or services are the last persons from who information is sought.⁵ There is much to be learned from the people themselves who, as consumers and participants, are the first experts, not the last. Often non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have experimented with more successful programs because they had less bureaucracy to haggle with and fewer subsystems to work with. The challenge still remains to learn techniques gained at a comparatively micro level for application at the macro level.

It may also be helpful to note that

...sustainable development is a long-awaited call for political recognition of environmental decay, for economic justice, and for

⁵ Jean-Marc Ela, “Les voies de l’Afro-rennaissance,” *Studia missionalia* 49 (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2000), 337-44.

limits to material growth. It therefore represents an opportunity for humanity to correct a historical error and begin a more benign, balance, and stable relationship with the natural world. This view of sustainable development also raises moral considerations such as the need in a finite world for an equitable sharing and conservation of its natural bounty.⁶

Rees also presents in his principles of sustainable development facts about the disproportionate consumption of the majority of the world's nonrenewable resources by the wealthiest 26 percent of the world's population.

In a finite world, reducing the gap in living standards between the rich and the poor requires that any capacity for future material economic growth be redirected to the third world. Forgiving international debt, aid to rehabilitate tropical ecosystems, the programs to develop ecologically appropriate technology for the developing countries are examples of strategies the developed nations might implement to help redistribute global wealth.⁷

If such principles are implemented it will be a significant contribution to dealing with the challenges of development.

In the case of underdevelopment and poverty, the challenge is to penetrate a situation where there have been many years of exploitation, ignorance and neglect by a government. Indebtedness at the local level is as serious as at the international level. When bad nutrition and vulnerability to disease caused by an unhealthy environment are added to the already existing structure of poverty, underdevelopment presents itself in all its many different layers, each one of which is a challenge to meaningful penetration. A multi-system approach to remedy the situation is both expensive and difficult. More success is gained with intervening at a critical point in the system, with the potential to yield favorable responses from many subsystems. This strategy involves good leadership, cooperation, and selective holistic methodologies.

⁶ William Rees, "The New Natural Selection," in *Teilhard in the 21st Century: The Emerging Spirit of Earth*, ed. Arthur Fabel and Donald St. John (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), p. 103.

⁷ Rees, "New Natural Selection," p. 120.

Links

Pax Christi International
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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
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