

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating February 21, 2021

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 First Sunday of Lent. Tom Keene's poem is *Ode to Resurrection*. For more of Tom's poems, see

<http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem are a few thoughts on activist ethics. After the poem is my reflection on activist ethics.

There is an extraordinary array of online events in the calendar section immediately below. This is due to the occurrence of several multi-day conferences. Be sure to save the date of the Pax Christi Texas state conference, scheduled for one afternoon, April 3 (Holy Saturday).

Calendar

Tuesday February 16, 12:00pm-1:00pm, webinar on lethal injection and the death penalty in Texas, with Maurie Levin (defense attorney) and Heidi Bragg (professor of pharmacy), sponsored by the Texas Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty. Register at:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfjLw6e9H5jL7VuxmjNMUo2SepVltyrSMLgmoaHMTO5I9TBvw/viewform>

Tuesday February 16, 7:00pm, online "Gospel Nonviolence: A Path to Peace and Reconciliation in Our Divided Nation and Church," Marie Denis (Pax Christi International), hosted by Pax Christi Memphis. Contact for link: paxchristimemphis.org

Thursday February 18, 10:00am (11:00am ET, 5:00pm Geneva), online "Decolonizing the Land. Christian Grassroots Approaches to Environmental

Peacebuilding,” Fr. Emmanuel Katongole (Bethany Land Institute), Daod Nassar (Tent of Nations), and Katie Chustak (Red Cloud Indian Institute), moderated by Elsa Barron (University of Notre Dame). Register at:
https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Wr_qczZfRQ6erIEp6mliSg

Thursday February 18, 11:30am (12:30pm ET)-12:45pm (1:45pm ET), online conversation, “Engaging with Difference, Religious Pluralism, and Building a Tolerant Civil Society,” with Adam Seligman (Boston University) and José Casanova (Georgetown University). RSVP at:
https://georgetown.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_IWHkTPS3QbSwGDwDCKYR2w

Thursday February 18, 2:00pm (3:00pm ET)-3:00pm (4:00pm ET), online “Religion & reimagining Black Futures,” Corey Miles (Morgan State University) and Melanie L. Harris (Texas Christian University) co-hosted by Sylvester Jonson (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University) and Joseph L. Tucker Edmonds (Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis). Register at:
https://iu.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_pJgMPSOgTEC3lgo4LitBZA

Thursday February 18, 6:00pm, online “New Realities at the US-Mexico Border,” Douglas Massey (Princeton University). Register at:
https://smu.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_kwLJfi96RNmJU6V4mySVOQ

Saturday February 20, 12:45pm to **Sunday February 21**, 4:00pm, virtual Citizens Climate Lobby, Third Coast Regional Conference. Information and registration:
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2021-ccl-3rd-coast-virtual-regional-conference-forward-together-tickets-135372900991>

Monday February 22 to Friday February 26, St. Mary’s University annual Conference on Justice and Social Concerns. Registration and access information:
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfjLw6e9H5jL7VuxmjNMUo2SepVltyrSMLgmoaHMT05I9TBvw/viewform>

Monday: Interview with Karla Scott Solomon, survivor and outreach specialist on sex trafficking. On international trafficking: Brenya Twumasi (UTSA & Alamo Colleges). Pane on prison outreach: Robert Leibrecht, Justin Miller, and Cody Brown (all Archdiocese of San Antonio). **Tuesday:** On Latino economic justice: Lindsay Passenger Wieck (St. Mary’s U.), Noel Andrés Poyo (U.S. Dept. of

Treasury), Monica Limón (National Assn. of Latino Community Asset Builders), and Victoria Villaseñor (St. Mary's U.). **Wednesday:** On hunger: Anthony Pogorelc (St. Mary's U.), Sue Nash (St. Mary's U.), Jeanne Holcomb (U. of Dayton), Diane Cuy Castellanos (U. of Dayton), Lorin Ramocki (Chaminade U.), Allison Jerome (Chaminade U.), and Brother Edward Brink (Chaminade U.). **Thursday:** On diversity of voices: Deborah Omowole Jarmon (San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum), Sarah Zenaida Gould (Mexican American Civil Rights Institute), Margaret Cantú-Sanchez (St. Mary's U.), Rick Sperling (St. Mary's U.), Gisela Reyes (Northwestern U.), José Medina (Northwestern U.), and Charles Miller (City University of New York). **Friday:** On social action: Him Vogt (Marianist Social Justice Collaborative), Kevin Matula (Zachry Group), Carla Ortiz (Catholic Relief Services), Jenee Gonzalez (Marianist Province, US), Daniel Vasquez (Holy Rosary Parish), Kiran Bains (SA 2020), and Brian Halderman (GivePlus).

Monday February 22, 3:00pm, panel on race: "‘Make America Great Again,’ Racial Pathology, White Consolidation, and Melancholia in Trump’s America," Stephen Finley (Louisiana State U.); "Now It Is Always Now; blackness, Time, and State-Sanctioned Violence," Biko Gray (Syracuse U.); "The Devil’s Work: Race, Witchcraft, and the Demonization of the Black Lives Matter Movement," Margarita Guillory (Boston U.). RSVP at:
https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_y79cT2gtSy62qoBpbSH9Sw

Tuesday February 23, 7:00am (3:00pm Kiev) **to Friday February 26**, 3:00pm (10:00pm Kiev), conference on Integral Human Development in the Digital Age: Poverties, Migrants, Pandemics, and the Idea of a New Social Ethics, sponsored by the Ukrainian Catholic University, Georgetown University, the University of Notre Dame, the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Rome), and the Lviv Lab for the Activation of Democracy. Information and registration at:
<https://ihd.ucu.edu.ua/ihdda2021#rec268998987>

Tuesday February 23, 6:30pm-8:30pm, online Courageous Conversations, Holy Cross Church, Austin. Criminal defense attorney Walter Long will discuss eliminating the death penalty. Link:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87228586124?pwd=RzRrazRSWFRtQXNlcytjMDEya2Y0Zz09#success>

Wednesday February 24, 7:00pm-8:00pm livestream panel on overcoming racism, Jonathan Butler (City of San Antonio), Christopher Whitt (Creighton University), and Tiffany Galvin Green (John Carroll University). Access at: <http://www.stmarytx.edu/conference>

Thursday February 25, 7:00pm-8:00pm, online “Meet the Author of *Baby in the Bag*, Featuring Hafza Girdap, Ph.D.Cand.,” on human rights violations in Turkey. Sponsored by the Raindrop Foundation San Antonio. Register at: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/meet-the-author-of-baby-in-the-bag-featuring-hafza-girdap-tickets-138717889943?utm_term=attend&invite=MjAyMjc4NDUvZjZhb3RvbnRob255Ymxhc2lAeWFob28uY29tLzA%3D%0A&utm_campaign=inviteformalv2&utm_source=eb_email&utm_medium=email&ref=enivtefor001

Wednesday February 24, 7:00pm-8:30pm, online panel “A Conversation on Race, Equality, and Equity,” with Jonathan Butler, Esq. (City of San Antonio), Christopher Whitt (Creighton University), and Tiffany Galvin Green (John Carroll University). For information about registering, contact Susan Elias selias@stmarytx.edu.

Friday February 26, 10:30am (11:30am ET)-11:30am (12:30pm ET), “Sixty Minutes with Europe’s Top Climate Action Official, Mauro Petriccione.” Register at: <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/9095590506583880971>

Saturday February 27, 9:00am-2:00pm, online state conference, Texas Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty. \$50.00; information and registration at tcadp.org. scholarships are available for people who can’t afford the \$50 fee. People should contact Kristin Houle at khoule@tcadp.org if they are interested in the scholarship.

Wednesday March 10, 6:30pm (7:30pm ET), webinar “Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church,” Olga Segura (*National Catholic Reporter*). Register at Fairfield.edu/cs

Tuesday March 16, 6:30pm (7:30pm ET) webinar “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing: Jewish and Christian Women as Allies in Anti-Racism,” Ann Millin (former historian, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum). Register at Fairfield.edu/cs

Saturday April 3, 1:45pm-4:15pm, Pax Christi Texas State Conference. Keynote speakers: Daniel Castillo (Loyola University, Maryland) “Ecological Theology of Liberation”; and Jere Locke (Texas Drought Project) “Urgency of Climate Change and Consequences If Our Response Is Inadequate.” Online, link information coming soon.

Wednesday April 7, 6:30pm (7:30pm ET), “Walking with the Saints: My Writing Life,” Robert Ellsberg (Orbis Press, formerly with the *Catholic Worker*). Register at Fairfield.edu/cs

Notices

Catholicism, Joe Biden, and U.S. Politics: A Conversation with Massimo Faggioli, video recorded February 3, 2021. Access at: <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/events/catholicism-joe-biden-and-u-s-politics>

Faith and the American Insurrection, a series of editorial responses to the January 6 insurrection, authored by Judith Weisenfeld (Princeton University), Tobia Cremer (University of Oxford), Ruth Braunstein (University of Connecticut), Ruth Gopin (Georgetown University), Paul Harvey (University of Colorado), Lauren R. Kerby (Harvard Divinity School), Philip Gorski (Yale University), and Amelia Uelmen (Georgetown University). Access at: <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/faith-and-the-american-insurrection>

Lenten resources with a Social Justice Focus, from Maryknoll. Designed to be used virtually in a small group you can form with friends or family, or your parish small group (or your Pax Christi friends), or easy to use at home with those in your pod. Each week applies the Sunday scriptures, to an issue of global solidarity. <https://www.maryknoll.us/resources/mission-spirituality/lent-2021>

Maryknoll's Lenten resources with a call to global solidarity

Second Reading (1 Peter 3:18-22)

For a variety of good reasons, scripture scholars agree that *First Peter* was not written by Simon Peter but by someone in the Roman church well after Peter's time. Being a follower of the Messiah, Jesus, could still be dangerous; so a resort to pseudonyms in avowedly Christian literature was common. The context of occasional persecution is germane to the content of the letter. "... (I)n case you are defamed those who revile your good conduct in Messiah will be embarrassed. For if it is the will of God, it is better to suffer doing good than doing evil" (3:16b-17).

The reference to enduring humiliation and mistreatment leads directly to today's reading, which turns out to summarize salvation: "For Messiah also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, so that he might bring God to you, put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit..." (3:18). Note that salvation is not a matter of mollifying an angry God with a ransom of sorts, but a matter of bringing God to humans, both God and humans able to be united in spiritual form., specifically the spirit of the Messiah.

The conclusion of the reading, after a reference to the waters in the time of Noah, is also interesting: "And this is a symbol that Baptism is now saving you, not a removal of grime from the flesh but a pledge to God of a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus, Messiah..." (3:21).

Third Reading (Mark 1:12-15)

"And straightway the spirit casts him out into the wilderness. And he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan, and he was with wild beasts, and messengers cared for him." It is tempting to take this as a historical account; however, even the text has no witness for what it narrates. And if there had been a witness, one would be hard put to it to say what the spirit casting Jesus out into the wilderness looked like. An ancient writer such as Mark did not have an elaborate conceptual or verbal apparatus for describing subjective or interior processes; he told stories instead.

The spirit casts Jesus out: Today, we would say Jesus felt alienated from his world. It all seemed wrong to him.

Into the wilderness: Mark is describing Jesus as getting away from everything that is taken for granted. Jesus was enabling himself to rethink everything.

He was in the desert forty days: This is an allusion to the Hebrews wandering in the Sinai Desert for forty years. It was a liminal state between slavery in the realm of the Pharaoh and a new society yet to be established, implying that the society Jesus knew was also a form of slavery and that he was about to commit himself to a new set of rights and wrongs.

He was tempted by Satan: No one is emotionally free of the world one has lived in; there is always the temptation to go back to accepting that world.

And he was with wild beasts, and messengers cared for him: This is an allusion, that the later evangelist Matthew would note—“For he will give his angels (messengers) charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the adder...” (Psalm 91:11-13). Jesus was in the process of finding the courage in prayer to confront and challenge the world to which he would return.

So when Jesus re-entered that world, he repeated the message for which John the Baptizer was arrested: “The age has been fulfilled.” “The kingdom of God has drawn near; convert and trust in the good news.” There is some other kingdom, and that is the good news.

Poem

On 1 Peter 3: 18

Ode to Resurrection

You body:
you extension of the eternal in me
into finite time, limited space
immersed in the ocean
of living, dying and rising anew,

you spiral strands of DNA,
in genes and cells
of organs humming in concert:
 blood and breath,
 skin and skeleton,
 muscles and nerves,
each and all

knowing what to do,

coming alive, passing away,
birthing again,
day by day, year by year,
ever-old-ever-new.

Tom Keene and Muse
November 2, 2018

Activist Ethics

Anthony J. Blasi

Ethics in general have constraining and active aspects, proscriptions and prescriptions, "Thou shalt not" lists and "Thou shalt" lists. Catholic moral thought has tended to feature the constraining aspect. The simple historical reason is that it was developed in seminary training manuals that were meant to prepare clergy to hear confessions. Social ethics for the masses presupposes some level of democratic governance, which appeared late in history. In democracies, citizens do not simply avoid engaging in indictable offenses but are to promote collective actions that they are convinced should be undertaken. Social morality calls upon individuals to form groups that are to be activated so that they may democratically advance the common good. For example, individual morality may lead one not to serve in the military in an unjust war or during a war at all in an age of total war. Social morality, by way of contrast, calls upon individuals to organize in efforts to both prevent war and advance peace.

I am going to propose that there is a grand theological narrative that leads up to and corresponds to this emergence of democratic responsibility and social morality.

Let me begin with conscience and consciousness. The two terms are almost homonyms in English. Conceptually they are related because consciousness is the beginning of conscience. Conscience cannot be genuine in a condition of numbness; it cannot deliberate on that of which it is unaware. So the underlying dynamic in the grand theological narrative is the development of consciousness. Not surprisingly, consciousness lends acts a directive impetus, a momentum.

To be conscious is to have a focus on an object. By implication, if there is an object, there is also a subject. An "I" leaves tracks in the world, so to speak, and when it notices those tracks as "my" tracks it becomes aware that it is an agent, an "I." With children, this begins to occur with imitation; in order to imitate one needs to be aware of an "Other" and compare one's own activity with that of the other, and then adjust one's own activity to approximate that of the other. But others do not always repeat themselves; they change their courses of action. The "I" imitates that too, becoming unpredictable and undertaking initiatives. It is in this context that one imagines oneself more or less like the other and imagines the other as more or less like oneself.

This ability to imagine an Other as being more or less like oneself, taken for granted among humans, would comprise a highly sophisticated psychological capacity if it were to occur, say, in a centipede. It is this ability that humans exercised when generating their primitive conceptualizations of deities. Underlying wind, thunder, lightning, rain, and so forth, there must be beings something like ourselves behind it all. They do favorable and unfavorable things to me and to others like myself. I, we, disturb them or mollify them; or we may even make bargains with them: "Do et des." There is no morality in this, only manipulation.

But it comes to pass that my tribe of others comes upon another tribe of others, and they have different deities from our deities. Disturbing, mollifying, and bargaining with competing deities can become complicated. One deity becomes the greatest of them, at least for my tribe. My tribal morality becomes a nationalism, and my theology henotheist—i.e. the cultivation of a deity who is greater than other deities.

Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good;
Sing to his name for he is gracious!
For the Lord has chosen Jacob for himself,
Israel as his own possession.
For I know that the Lord is great,
and that our Lord is above all gods.
Whatever the Lord pleases he does, in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and all deeps.
He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth,
who makes lightnings for the rain
and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.
He it was who smote the first-born of Egypt,

both of man and of beast.... (Psalm 135:3-8)

What characterize such a religion are nationalism and law. Nationalism at least has the merit of transcending egoism; and law, expressing the will, even a capricious will, of the deity, brings about a degree of social order. There is a morality resident in such a theology, but it is a morality with which one is simply confronted. There may be a few "Thou shalt" statements that call for mollifying that deity that is greater than all other deities, but the broader morality consists largely of what one should not do to the other members of one's tribe who mollify that same deity.

An advance in moral consciousness occurs when the deity behind natural manifestations is unitary and a creator. In being thought of as unitary, the God is beyond the control of our passing observations. The consciousness of a lack of control on our part marks a step beyond magic, a step that occurs despite a continuation of petitionary prayer. Petition is not "Do et des"; it recognizes that good, the common good in particular, can be something other than what we happen to want. Unlike "Do et des" we do not take command of God when we petition. In a quest for recognizing the seat where control resides, we recognize a Creator deity. This deity is not arbitrary, willing at random, but a deity responsible for a natural order of things. A life well lived would entail wisdom, a recognition of both the natural order and its Source.

All wisdom comes from the Lord
And is with him for ever.

The sand of the sea, the drop of rain,
and the days of eternity—who can count them?
The height of heaven, the breadth of the earth,
the abyss, and wisdom—who can search them out?

Wisdom was created before all things,
and prudent understanding from eternity.

The root of wisdom—to whom has it been revealed?
Her clever devices—who knows them? There is One who is
wise, greatly to be feared,
sitting upon his throne.

The Lord himself created wisdom; he saw her and apportioned her,
he poured her out upon all his works.

She dwells with all flesh according to his gift,
and he supplied her to those who love him. (Sirach 1:1-10)

At some point in history, there is a consciousness, a recognition, of a paradoxical Messiah. The paradox comes from the language of nationalistic and legalistic religion; the term *messiah* or, in Greek, *Christos*, refers to the anointings employed ritualistically in the making of national and religious rulers. But, paradoxically, the Messiah violates and is violated by the old principles. The law no longer counts for much; not violating it is a course of action followed only to keep peace. The forgiveness of violations comes readily! Government too, as it would be known prior to a time of social morality, is of practical rather than moral significance:

Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's (Mark 12:17).

The paradoxical Messiah is the one accorded a criminal slave's execution at the request of priests.

There were prior indicators of the religious consciousness of the messianic paradox. The fifty-third chapter of the Prophet Isaiah describes an anti-hero despised and rejected by humans, despised and not esteemed. And according to the prophet Zechariah, a king will come to Jerusalem, triumphant and victorious in an unusual way, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass (Zechariah 9:9). But such indicators were but a minor voice amid a general expectation of a nationalist hero and ruler.

What is the character of a consciousness that emerges from the Great Paradox? The "I" becomes more proactive in establishing a consciousness of matters to be corrected in the life-world (or environment) and even by expanding the life-world. Appreciating this requires understanding the full meaning of *environment*. It is not a matter of simply what is nearby the conscious individual but what the individual brings to the foreground in consciousness. An astronomer will see more in a telescopic image than would a non-astronomer, even as both look through the same telescope; an electrical engineer will see more in a circuit board than would one who is not an electrical engineer, even as both look upon the same circuit board. A visitor will see much less in a neighborhood than would a long-time resident even as they walk together through it. In each of these cases, two persons share the same setting but have different environments. Environments emerge in consciousness, and when they do so the experiences, knowledge-bases, perspectives, and personal histories condition and even create the environmental objects of the individuals who are aware of those objects. So the individual who has experienced war, injustice, discrimination, or

powerlessness will hear something in a political speech, for example, that someone who has experienced no such thing will hear.

A social ethic entails in the first instance, a bringing to bear of biographical experience. Unreflectiveness needs be held suspect. Moreover, every "I" participates in a "we" and needs explore the multiple environments resident in the life-worlds of the "we." An individual would hardly be genuinely proactive in developing a consciousness if failing to explore multiple life-worlds, both separately and shared. Incidentally, it is this shared aspect that makes church important in the development and workings of the social ethic. This ecclesial aspect cannot be a mere handing down of prefabricated formulae without disabling the very proactive character of consciousness. Inherited formulae are significant precisely as elements in a shared life-world, not as moral conclusions at which the "I" or the "we" must force a deliberation to arrive. In the way that ethics in general need to assume the nature of an active voice, so also must social ethics.

When social ethics, with an active voice, not only incorporate an ecclesial dimension but add to it, we may speak of an activist ethic. That is to say, one's own reflective process enters into those of one's consociates.

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

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