

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating February 25, 2018

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.

Please do not respond to this newsletter's address; but 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 Second Sunday in Lent. Tom Keene's poem is *We See At Last*. See <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php> for more of Tom's poems. Following the poem is an essay presenting a perspective on the violence and famine in Yemen that one generally does not find in American media; it is taken from a post on the Pax Christi USA website. The author is Kathy Kelly, coordinator of Voices for Creative Non-violence.

Frank Skeith, coordinator of Pax Christi Texas, has brought to our attention a video of peace activist Edward O'Rourke, speaking on practical steps toward abolishing war. Mr. O'Rourke was speaking last November 15 at Keon House at the University of St. Thomas in Houston. The video can be accessed at <https://youtu.be/UArUtUoXkME>.

Calendar

In Austin

Monday February 26, 12:00pm-1:00pm. "Failed Christianity," on refusing shelter to refugees. Hosted by the Center for Ethics & Leadership. Fleck Hall, Room 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress, Austin.

Thursday March 1, 6:00pm-9:00pm, Annual Dialogue & Friendship Dinner 2018: "Racial Reconciliation—The Role of Faith Communities." Keynote speaker: Laila Muhammed. \$100: [Eventbrite.com/e/2018-annual-friendship-and-dialogue-dinner-tickets-40851416687](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2018-annual-friendship-and-dialogue-dinner-tickets-40851416687). Asian American Resource Center, 8401 Cameron Rd.

In Dallas

Tuesday February 27, 2:00pm-7:00pm, "Faithful Citizenship: Religious Perspectives on Voter Responsibility." Bruce Marshall, Steve Long, Robert Abzug, and Mohamed Lazzouni. Great Hall, Elizabeth Perkins Prothro Bldg., Southern Methodist University. Make reservation by Feb. 26 at whoozin.com/YRQ-FP6-JTG6/RSVP

Thursday March 1, 6:00pm, “Table of Abraham: Justice for Women. Perspectives from the Abrahamic Tradition on Harassment & Abuse.” Free for attendees; organizational sponsorship \$100. Christ Lutheran Church, 3001 Lovers Lane.

Wednesday March 7, 12:00pm-1:30pm, Paul B. Stares, “America’s Next War and How to Prevent It.” Tower Center Boardroom, Carr Collins Hall 227, Southern Methodist University.

In Houston

Thursday February 22, 6:00pm. Elisa Massimino, president of Human Rights First, presents the Houston Trinity Distinguished Alumni Chapter lecture. United Way Community Resource Center, 50 Waugh Drive, Houston. Space limited; register online <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/trinity-university-houston-distinguished-alumni-lecture-by-human-rights-first-ceo-elisa-massimino-82-tickets-42124392191?aff=es2>.

Tuesday March 20, 12:15pm, Mary Patillo, “Statutory Inequality: Monetary Sanctions in State Law.” Venue TBA—check with Dept. of Sociology, Rice University.

Saturday March 24, 8:45am-evening. **Pax Christi Texas State Conference: Paul K. Chappell of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, “Warrior Strategies for Waging Peace in a Time of Nuclear Weapons.” Dominican Center for Spirituality, 6501 Almeda, Houston, Texas 77021.** Doors open 8:00am. Program: 8:45am-3:45pm, closing liturgy 4:00pm. Suggested donation \$40 individual, \$50 couple/family. Mail registration check to Pax Christi Texas, 3901 Mattie St., Austin, TX 78723, by March 1. Some single rooms with shared bath available at the Center, \$40 per night; breakfast included. Contact Sr. Adrian Dover 713-440-3708.

In San Antonio

Tuesday February 20, 7:00pm-10:00pm, Rev. Charles Johnson, “Vouchers: Public Classrooms for Profit?” Temple Beth-El, 211Belknap Place.

Wednesday February 21, 8:30am-11:30am, City of San Antonio Faith-Based Initiative, interactive working session on geographical lines of division and intentional initiatives of common good. Christine Dawson and Moly Cox will moderate. Tri Point, 3233 N St. Mary’s. RSVP at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2018-winter-convening-tickets-42547063412>.

Friday February 23, 8:30am-4:30pm, 2018 Immigration Symposium. National and regional legal experts, and Congressman Joaquin Castro. \$30 (student), \$70 (non-attorneys and government employees), \$110 (attorneys), free (St. Mary’s University law school faculty); breakfast and lunch included. Register at www.scholarlawreview.org/symposium. Norris Conference Center, 618 N.W. Loop 410 #207.

Tuesday February 27, 7:00pm-8:00pm, Carmen M. Nanko-Fernandez, ¿Dio Bendiga America? Beisbol, Identity, and Competing Theologies of Patriotism.” Student Engagement Center, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Wednesday February 28, 1:00pm-2:45pm, David Swanson (RootsAction.org), “War is Never Just.” Mabee Library Auditorium, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Sunday March 4, 11:00am-12:00pm, 18th Annual Empty Bowls. Purchase a hand-crafted bowl for \$25 and enjoy soup and bread from local restaurants. Proceeds support San Antonio homeless families and ones on the brink of housing disaster. Southwest School of Art, 300 Augusta.

Monday March 5, 3:30pm, film: “Winds of Heaven: Emily Carr, Carvers and the Spirits of the Forest.” Christus Heritage Hall, the Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

Tuesday March 6, 6:00pm-9:00pm, 13th Annual Dialogue and Friendship Dinner: “Teaching Compassion and Making a Difference.” Keynote speaker: Sonya Romero, teacher hero. Proceeds support a variety of charities: \$45. Register at https://www.eventbrite.com/e/13th-annual-dialogue-and-friendship-dinner-tickets-39734988420. Rosenberg Sky Room, University of the Incarnate Word, 847 E. Hildebrand Ave.

Wednesday March 21, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Salman Hameed, Ph.D., “The Crescent in the Scientific Age: Muslim Perceptions of Science and Religion.” University Center, Conference Room A, St. Mary’s University, One Camino Santa Maria.

Wednesday April 4, 11:00am-12:15pm, Multi-faith Dialogue Panel: “Beyond the Gender Divide,” on gender inequality and religious traditions. Huisache Hall, Northwest Vista College, 3535 N. Ellison Dr.

Tuesday April 10, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Lauren Turek, Ph.D., “Religion, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement.” SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook): \$20. Register at <http://www.upsa.org/sol-calendar/2018/4/10/religion-race-and-the-civil-rights-movement-with-lauren-turek>.

Saturday April 14, 9:00am-12:00pm, Rev. Dr. Mitzi J. Smith, “Womanism, Biblical Interpretation, and Social (In)Justice.” Whitley Center, Oblate School of theology, 285 Oblate Drive, \$40. For information: Thelma at 210-341-1366, ext. 230.

Third Reading (Mark 9:2-10)

This is the earliest version of the Transfiguration narrative; Matthew and Luke based their versions on this one. It is often said that Mark took some post-Easter tradition and placed it before the narrative of the passion and crucifixion in order to introduce some hope, in order to prepare the reader for the awful realities that were to follow. His readers—in Rome after the traumatic experience of the macabre persecution of Christians by Emperor Nero—were indeed in need of hope in the face of trauma.

The Transfiguration narrative has Jesus and four chosen disciples going up a mountain; Jesus is transformed into a glorious image, in which he converses with Moses and Elijah. Peter, who plays the part of the well-meaning but un-insightful student in Mark's gospel, says how wonderful it all is. Then God the Father speaks from a dark cloud, and Jesus is seen as an ordinary earthling.

The point of this strange scene is the need for disciples of Jesus to have a double vision. What disciples see in this world is traumatizing, but what they see in the tradition of law (Moses), prophecy (Elijah), and enlightened engagement with these (Jesus conversing) is exhilarating.

But why not talk about that? The narrative has Jesus instructing the four disciples to keep quiet about it until after the Resurrection. Scholars have referred to this as the "messianic secret." It is true enough that the early Christians had an in-group secret, but there may be more to it. An adage has it that someone who has insight does not speak, and that someone who speaks does not have insight. The wisdom of communicative silence derives from experience, not formulae. One needs recognize the limits of verbal teaching, god-talk, formulaic orthodoxy, and similarly the limits of unexamined trauma.

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Poem

Note: Matthew and Luke connect their Transfiguration account to the story of Jesus healing a possessed boy after his disciples failed to do so. This poem considers the contrast between the two stories.

We see at last

(Peter muses: Matthew 17:14-21 and Luke: 9:28-43)

On ascending,
we sit in a circle.
We see ourselves brilliant,
a gazing into sun without going blind.

Elijah, Moses, Jesus, John, James, me.
Hard to tell us apart,
blurring bleeding into one corona,

where notions of each other
make sense no more.

On descending,
we find the boy,
screaming blather,
flailing futility,
begging to burst his prison.

Our common gut
seized by a loathing,
a panic to flee, to cast out.
Then, as in a sudden dawn,
he's struck with calm.

We see at last,
from heady highs
to feet-in-the-dirt hurt,
the Healing Wholeness.

Tom Keene

**Conflict in Yemen Causes Migrants to Flee; Their Boat Capsizes Resulting
in Many Deaths**
by Kathy Kelly

On January 23rd an overcrowded smuggling boat capsized off the coast of Aden in Southern Yemen. Smugglers packed 152 passengers from Somalia and Ethiopia in the boat and then, while at sea, reportedly pulled guns on the migrants to extort additional money from them. The boat capsized, according to The Guardian, after the shooting prompted panic. The death toll, currently 30, is expected to rise. Dozens of children were on board.

The passengers had already risked the perilous journey from African shores to Yemen, a dangerous crossing that leaves people vulnerable to false promises, predatory captors, arbitrary detention and tortuous human rights violations. Sheer desperation for basic needs has driven hundreds of thousands of African migrants to Yemen. Many hope, upon arrival, they can eventually travel to prosperous Gulf countries further north where they might find work and some measure of security. But the desperation and fighting in southern Yemen were horrible enough to convince most migrants that boarded the smuggling boat on January 23rd to try and return to Africa.

Referring to those who drowned when the boat capsized, Amnesty International's Lynn Maalouf said: "This heart-breaking tragedy underscores, yet again, just how devastating Yemen's conflict continues to be for civilians. Amid ongoing

hostilities and crushing restrictions imposed by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, many people who came to Yemen to flee conflict and repression elsewhere are now being forced yet again to flee in search of safety. Some are dying in the process.”

In 2017, more than 55,000 African migrants arrived in Yemen, many of them teenagers from Somalia and Ethiopia where there are few jobs and severe drought is pushing people to the verge of famine. It's difficult to arrange or afford transit beyond Yemen. Migrants become trapped in the poorest country in the Arab peninsula, which now, along with several drought-stricken North African countries, faces the worst humanitarian disaster since World War II. In Yemen, eight million people are on the brink of starvation as conflict-driven near-famine conditions leave millions without food and safe drinking water. Over one million people have suffered from cholera over the past year and more recent reports add a diphtheria outbreak to the horror. Civil war has exacerbated and prolonged the misery while, since March of 2015, a Saudi-led coalition, joined and supported by the U.S., has regularly bombed civilians and infrastructure in Yemen while also maintaining a blockade that prevented transport of desperately needed food, fuel and medicines.

Maalouf called on the international community to “halt arms transfers that could be used in the conflict.” To heed Maalouf's call, the international community must finally thwart the greed of transnational military contractors that profit from selling billions of dollars of weapons to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and other countries in the Saudi-led coalition. For instance, a November, 2017 Reuters report said that Saudi Arabia has agreed to buy about \$7 billion worth of precision guided munitions from U.S. defense contractors. The UAE also has purchased billions in American armaments.

Raytheon and Boeing are the companies that will primarily benefit from a deal that was part of a \$110 billion weapons agreement coinciding with President Donald Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in May.

Another dangerous crossing happened in the region last week. U.S. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI) arrived in Saudi Arabia, along with a congressional delegation, to meet with the monarchy's King Salman and subsequently with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman who has orchestrated the Saudi-led coalition's war in Yemen. Following that visit, Ryan and the delegation met with royals from the UAE.

“So rest assured”, said Ryan, speaking to a gathering of young diplomats in the UAE, “we will not stop until ISIS, al-Qaeda, and their affiliates are defeated and no longer a threat to the United States and our allies.

“Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, we are focused on the Iranian threat to regional stability.”

Beyond the simple well-recorded fact of lavish Saudi financial support for Islamist terrorism, Ryan's remarks overlook the Saudi-led coalition military assaults and “special operations” in Yemen, which the U.S. supports and joins. The war there is arguably undermining effort to combat jihadist groups, which have flourished in the chaos of the war, particularly in the south which is nominally under the control of the government allied to Saudi Arabia.

The Iranian government Ryan denounced does have allies in Yemen and may be smuggling weapons into Iran, but no one has accused them of supplying the Houthi

rebels with cluster bombs, laser-guided missiles and littoral (near-coastal) combat ships to blockade ports vital to famine relief. Iran does not provide in-air refueling for warplanes used in daily bombing runs over Yemen. The U.S. has sold all of these to countries in the Saudi-led coalition which have, in turn, used these weapons to destroy Yemen's infrastructure as well as create chaos and exacerbate suffering among civilians in Yemen.

Ryan omitted any mention of the starvation, disease, and displacement afflicting people in Yemen. He neglected to mention documented human rights abuses in a network of clandestine prisons operated by the UAE in Yemen's south. Ryan and the delegation essentially created a smokescreen of concern for human life that conceals the very real terror into which U.S. policies have thrust the people of Yemen and the surrounding region.

Potential starvation of their children terrifies people who can't acquire food for their families. Those who can't obtain safe drinking water face nightmarish prospects of dehydration or disease. Persons fleeing bombers, snipers, and armed militias who might arbitrarily detain them shudder in fear as they try to devise escape routes.

Paul Ryan, and the congressional delegation traveling with him, had an extraordinary opportunity to support humanitarian appeals made by UN officials and human rights organizers.

Instead, Ryan implied the only security concerns worth mentioning are those that threaten people in the U.S. He pledged cooperation with brutally repressive dictators known for egregious human rights violations in their own countries, and in beleaguered Yemen. He blamed the government of Iran for meddling in the affairs of other countries and supplying militias with funds and weapons. U.S. foreign policy is foolishly reduced to "the good guys," the U.S. and its allies, versus "the bad guy," – Iran.

The "good guys" shaping and selling U.S. foreign policy and weapon sales exemplify the heartless indifference of the smugglers who gamble human life in exceedingly dangerous crossings.

Kathy Kelly (kathy@vcnv.org) co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence (www.vcnv.org)

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.sanantonioplace.center>

Interfaith Radio, (*Interfaith Voices*)
<http://www.interfaithradio.org/>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty
www.txccedp.org