

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating March 14, 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 Fourth Sunday of Lent. Tom Keene's poem is *Burn*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem I comment on the recent Texas decision to cancel the mandates to maintain social distancing and wear masks; I use the principle of the right to life.

Calendar

[Times given for the Central Time Zone]

Monday March 8, 12:30pm (10:30am Pacific Time), "Womxn Act for Climate Justice—International Women's Day Online Event." Webinar registration at: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/9216136055559/WN_JWtw3YUOQci66IFWAghLZA

Monday March 8, 6:00pm, online video "Women's Voices from Central America—Impacts of U.S. Policies on Migration," Yolanda Áreas Blas (Nicaragua), Carla García (Honduras), Sonia Umanzor (El Salvador), and music by Lilo Gonzalez (El Salvador). Register at: <http://bit.ly/WomensVoicesMigration>

Tuesday March 9, 3:15pm (4:15pm ET), "Online Ecumenical and Interreligious Guidebook, Dialogue 3," Bishop Joseph Tyson (Catholic Diocese of Yakima, Washington), Bishop Marc Handley Andrus (Episcopal, representative to the UN Conference of Parties on Climate Change), Bishop Sally Dyck (United Methodist, President of the general Board of Church and Society), Bishop Elizabeth Eaton (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, presiding bishop), and Rev. Walter F.

Kedjiersky (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops). Register at:
https://creation.cadeio.org/events/online-ecumenical-and-interreligious-guidebook-dialogue-3/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ecumenical-and-interreligious-guidebook-announcement_6

Wednesday March 10, 12:00pm-1:30pm (1:00pm-2:30pm ET) “Fratelli Tutti: Social Solidarity from Several Points of View,” Michael J. Sandel (philosopher), Marilynne Robinson (novelist and essayist), and Pankaj Mishra (novelist and essayist); introduced by President John J. DeGioia of Georgetown University, moderated by Paul Elie (Georgetown University). RSVP at:
https://georgetown.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_fHzd3mJnQYWMISSGBXT1Sw

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](https://fairfield.edu/cs)

Thursday March 11, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET), “This Is Our Story...This Is Our Song: Black Catholic Women Religious Standing in the Breach,” Sr. Anita Baird, D.H.M. (founding director, Archdiocese of Chicago Office for Racial Justice). Register at:
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_rCSgoXP_Qee7Z87QDjhWNw

Thursday March 11, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET), online dialogue “Young Catholics and the Biden Administration: Moral Principles and Policy Priorities,” Serena Alvarez (League of United Latin American Citizens), Milton Javier Bravo (*Commonweal* magazine), Michael Wear (Public Square Strategies), and Joanna Williams (Kino Border Initiative); moderated by Kim Daniels (Georgetown University). RSVP at:
<https://catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/events/young-catholics-and-the-biden-administration-moral-principles-and-policy-priorities#rsvp>

Friday March 12, 3:00pm-5:00pm (4:00pm-6:00pm ET), online “Winter Soldiers for Peace and Social Justice: Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Today.” A commemoration of the Winter Soldier Investigation organized by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War in February 1971 and a similar event by the Iraq Veterans Against the War in March 2008. Register at:
https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_fXEWO-TLR_y7ukMg4HpeOA

Tuesday March 16, 12:00pm (1:00pm ET), online panel “Understanding Systematic Racism in the Healthcare Industry,” Jamila Taylor (Century Foundation), Laura Garcia (San Antonio *Express-News*), and Alicia Monroe (Baylor College of Medicine); presented by the Anti-Defamation League Southwest. Register at: <https://adl.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJEkf-6trjsvHd3L0WAlS0Rxm5oKZIsYuKIQ>

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

Friday March 19, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET) to **Sunday March 21**, 11:00am (12:00pm ET), “Lenten Virtual Retreat Sponsored by Mary’s House, Birmingham, Alabama,” Edgar Heyes (Freedom Farm), Brenna Cussen-Anglada (Saint Isidore Farm), Frida Berrigan, Jim Robinson, and Suzanne & Brayton Shanley (Agape Community). Register at [peace@agapecommunity](mailto:peace@agapecommunity.org) soon enough to receive materials by mail. Send \$30 to Mary’s House, 2107 Ave. G, Birmingham, AL 35218. More information: peace@agapecommunity.org or agapecommunity.org.

Saturdays March 20, April 17, and TBD, 10:30am-11:30am, online “Faith and Race—An Ongoing Conversation,” Bishop Trevor Alexander (Protestant chaplain, University of the Incarnate Word), Rev. Andries Coetze (University Presbyterian Church), and Dr. Doshie Piper (University of the Incarnate Word). Register by February 13 at: <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration/>

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

In El Paso

Monday April 5-Saturday April 10, 7:00am-3:00pm, redeem tickets for 3 red cheese enchiladas, beans, rice, and salad, at Martita's Lunch Box, 3623 Buckner (new location), in the annual Isaiah House fundraiser. \$10.00 per order. Call Ana Ramirez 915-494-4180 or Pat Delgado 915-740-3962 to arrange ticket purchases.

Notices

Pax Christi International Statement on Pope Francis' Visit to Iraq: access at <https://paxchristi.net/2021/03/03/pax-christis-statement-on-pope-francis-visit-to-iraq/>

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>

Second Reading (Ephesians 5:8-14)

The theme of this entire reading is given in the exhortation, "...Walk as children of light..." The contrast between light and darkness, with the expectation that the Christian should walk in the light rather than in darkness, is a common theme in the New Testament; it especially appears quite often in the Johannine literature. It has several layers of meaning: Do not sneak around, but be open. Do not reject knowledge since the reality God created is good. Examine your own soul, lest unworthy motives lead you to do what you do not really want to do.

There are those who would make anti-intellectualism, blind faith, and "telling it like it (superficially) is" virtues. Ignorance, religiously pretentious ignorance, and ignorance made manifest by facile speech are not virtues. Rather, it is virtuous to be oriented toward truth, and such does not come easily.

Third Reading (John 3:14-21)

[At some masses, the readings from year A might be used instead, as part of an RCIA program.]

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, in this way must the son of humanity be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him would have eternal life.” This allusion to a narrative about Moses and the Israelites in the desert (Numbers 21:9) appears in the *Johannine Gospel* in the discourse between Jesus and Nicodemus. It is not clear whether it actually was a part of the discourse as passed down through tradition to the time of the composition of the gospel, or a theological comment in a side bar responding to the inability of Nicodemus to understand Jesus when Jesus said one must be born again. Either way, the allusion is meant to address the problem of people not seeing and not understanding.

In the Moses narrative, the people had become impatient: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?” Soon some of them die from snake bite: “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.” The Lord tells Moses to make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, “and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.”

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, in this way must the son of humanity be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him....” The symbolism refers obviously to the crucifixion. The point, however, is to see and understand. Jesus refers to himself as the son of humanity. However “high” a Christology the *Johannine Gospel* may have, it is necessary to see the son of humanity, not the eternal Word, when the crucifixion is perpetrated.

When innocent children and educators are murdered after gun manufacturers have used their political influence to keep the gun market open and uncontrolled, one must see and realize that children of humanity have been torn away from everyday life. When erstwhile travelers seeking peaceful work are captured at a border and sent back to a “homeland” so hostile to them that they had been moved to leave it in the first place, it is the children of humanity who have been repelled as unwanted at a border; that is the time when those who would repel them need to understand that it is the son of humanity whom they are turning away. When a condemned person on death row pleads for mercy, in order to understand one must see the son of humanity lifted up. The sacrifice at

Calvary was not about appeasing an angry deity but bringing an angry humanity to the point of seeing, understanding, and being converted.

Poem

Burn

"I want burning, burning...lovers who burn..."

Rumi from *Moses and the Shepherd*

When Moses wondered at the burning bush
might he have asked:

What is it that burns without consuming?

It is love, of course:

A secret fire hiding in every soul,
waiting, building for the moment
it may burst and spread without consuming,
declaring to all our pharaohs:

Let my people go.

Tom Keene

July 4, 2013

The Right to Life: For Real?

Anthony J. Blasi

The expression "right to life" has taken on a narrow political relevance and has even become a lever to manipulate Christians into predetermined political positions. However, the genuine meaning of the term derives from the insight into reality behind the belief that God created the whole of being through remarkable processes that science is gradually discovering. The totality of creation is sacred because of its origin, but humanity, created within it, is particularly sacred because humanity itself has a special relationship with the

Creator. Consequently "God alone is the Lord of life...."¹ This insight resides behind the prohibition of murder in the Biblical narrative of Cain and Abel and the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," in the Decalog.

Moral reasoning has led to related corollaries about self-defense, suicide, health, and responsibilities of the state. I wish to point out that the State of Texas has neglected the right to life in its abandonment of preventive measures in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, even as it postures in the courts, at great expense, in defense of its anti-abortion laws. I use the term *posture* advisedly: We have a limited government under our federal Constitution. There are aspects of life over which government has no control; that is a matter of settled law in the judicial interpretation of the Constitution. In the same manner that even God permits evil in the world, so does government.

Rather than focus on what government cannot do, it is worth while focusing on what government can do.

Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good.

Concern for the health of its citizens requires that society help in the attainment of living-conditions that allow them to grow and reach maturity: food and clothing, housing, health care, basic education, employment, and social assistance.²

One cannot object to murder and abortion but at the same time refuse to take reasonable care of life and physical health; the value at stake is one and the same: life itself.

A first case at hand is the expansion of Medicaid. Texas has a high proportion of its citizenry lacking medical insurance coverage. Under the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") the federal government will provide the funds to extend medical insurance coverage for those who cannot otherwise afford it, if only the State of Texas would, as most other states, agree to participate in the program with a modest match of its own funds. When the federal law was first enacted, all manner of reasons were conjured up for not participating, chief of which was a claim that the law would set up so-called death panels that would decide who would receive care and live and who would not receive care and die. That was utter nonsense; no such panels were created, even to this day. Some also demanded, astonishingly, that the federal government not "touch" Medicare,

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), #2258.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2288.

the *government* medical insurance program for senior citizens. We all know the real reason the State of Texas has not participated in the Medicaid expansion; the governing party of the state will not accept a program enacted by the other major political party. It is an example of the worst kind of partisanship. It is also inconsistent with the right to life: "Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good."

A second case at hand is the cancelation of mandates to maintain social distance and wear masks in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. One cannot hide behind ignorance of the science in this matter; if there really were such ignorance, it would be vincible, not invincible (to use a traditional theological distinction). It is a matter of what one can reasonable know and understand. Prior to a high enough proportion of a population being effectively vaccinated against an epidemic so that a not-vaccinated person is unlikely to be infected through social contact, social contact should be minimized and alternative preventive measures should be taken. This is the principle popularly called *herd immunity*. At the present time, and for months to come, an insufficient proportion of the Texas population (and other populations for that matter) has been and will be vaccinated. Consequently, under present circumstances the lifting of the social distancing mandate (in particular limitations on the percentages of occupancy totals in restaurants and other businesses) and the lifting of the masking mandate are inconsistent with the right to life.

There is more: Not only is the State of Texas negligent with respect to the right to life, it is standing in the way of local governmental entities taking reasonable measures of prevention. The state is forbidding the cities and counties from imposing any sanctions that might enforce social distancing and mask wearing. This leaves local people unfree to exercise measures of reasonable care through their own local governmental agencies. It is also a violation of the principle of subsidiarity; a higher authority should, under that traditional Catholic principle, allow lower authorities to handle their own business and only intervene if and when those lower authorities cannot manage. The state is not coming to the aid of the cities and counties but preventing them from effecting reasonable measures for the care of life and health.

If all this is not bad enough, "personal responsibility" is being offered as a substitute for good governance. We do not leave driving under the influence of alcohol up to personal responsibility and refrain from passing laws against that. We do not leave burning refuse during fire alert days up to personal responsibility

and refrain from passing laws against that. There are just enough selfish and impulsive people around to make safety laws necessary.

Right to life? Let's get serious.

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>