

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating March 18, 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 Fourth Sunday in Lent. Tom Keene's poem is *Eons*. See <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php> for more of Tom's poems.

Fourteen US Churches and Church bodies joined together on February 6, 2018, to send a letter to President Donald Trump calling on him to reverse the recent U.S. decision to cut funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. UNRWA provides vital funding to millions of Palestinian refugees throughout the Middle East; funding cuts will have a devastating impact on already vulnerable communities. The full text of the letter is included below.

Joseph Cooke, who has written a few articles for us, has set up a website where he updates information on climate change. The Website is worth exploring. I am adding a link for it to the links listed at the end of the newsletter.

This past week an informal group of San Antonio residents, including a number of religious leaders, sent a letter to Mayor Ron Nirenberg, asking him to refrain from issuing the routine proclamation in honor of the National Day of Prayer event in May on the steps of City Hall. The problem is not the National Day of Prayer itself, initially intended in 1952 by President Harry Truman to embrace all religious Americans. The problem is that in the 1980s a fringe group of people who call themselves Christians hijacked the local event in San Antonio and exclude everyone else. The fringe group, an outgrowth of the 1970s counterculture, engaged in "flirty fishing" (using sexual attraction to draw unwitting adolescents into their group). In its current incarnation, the group presents its sect-like expression as the only valid form of Christianity or religion in general. It is unfortunate enough in our times that divisive political groups use the face of prayer and religion to promote hate and intolerance; that our well-meaning city officials should be tricked into giving official recognition of such a sectarian group is even more unfortunate. Several members of Pax Christi San Antonio added their names to the letter asking the mayor not to lend credibility to the annual sectarian event.

Calendar

In Austin

Tuesday March 20, 6:00pm, film screening and panel discussion, “Dolores,” about Dolores Huerta. Jones Global Events Center, St. Edward’s University, 3001 S. Congress.

Thursday March 22, 5:00pm, Natali Imperatori-Lee, “The Future of the Catholic Church Rooted in the Experiences and Lives of Latina/o Catholics in the United States.” Jones Global Events Center, St. Edward’s University, 3001 S. Congress.

Wednesday April 4, 12:00pm-1:00pm, “The Church and Transgender Identity.” Discussion based on article: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/church-transgender-identity>. Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward’s University, 3001 S. Congress.

Thursday April 5, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Susannah E. Prucka, former Maryland appellate prosecutor, “Is the Criminal Justice System Really Broken?” Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward’s University, 3001 S. Congress.

Friday April 15, 12:00pm-1:00pm, discussion; The Gamer’s Dilemma-Are we comfortable with children killing an average of 100,000 people in video games by the age of 18?” Recommended reading: https://iainews.iai.tv/articles/the-gamers-dilemma-is-virtual-murder-morally-wrong-aid-827?utm_content=buffer890be&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer
Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward’s University, 3001 S. Congress.

Tuesday April 24, 6:30pm-8:30pm, film by Martin Doblmeier, “An American Conscience: The Reinhold Niebuhr Story.” Prothro Theatre, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas Austin.

In Houston

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

Thursday March 22, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Susann C. Bon, Ph.D., J.D., “The Ethics of Special Education Leadership: Doing What Is Right for the Student.” Jones Hall, University of St. Thomas, 3910 Yoakim Blvd. Fee; register at stthom.edu/SEHSLectureSeries. Park at Moran Parking Center, \$5.00.

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

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.

Saturday March 24, 10:00am-5:00pm, Cesar E. Chavez 22nd Annual March for Justice. Begins at 1301 Guadalupe. Participants are encouraged to bring a can of food for the San Antonio Food Bank truck.

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>.

Friday April 13, 1:30pm-**Saturday April 14**, 5:00pm, interfaith conference "Religion and Climate Change: Taking Our Planet Back." Featured speakers are Sr. Linda Gibler, Oblate School of Theology; Douglas Melnick, City of San Antonio; Rear Admiral "Len" Hering, Center for Climate and Security (Washington, DC); and Gerald Durley, Providence Missionary Baptist Church (Atlanta). Chapman Center, Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Details at https://events-trinity.edu/events/religion_and_climate_change_conference. Free; required registration from the website.

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.

Tuesday April 17, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Ed Westermann, "Genocide." SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). \$20; register before April 10 at www.upcsa.org/registration.

Tuesday April 24, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Sarwat Hussain, "Causes and Implications of Rohingya Genocide." SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). \$20; register before April 17 at www.upcsa.org/registration.

Third Reading (John 12:20-33)

[At some masses the readings from year A might be used instead, to accommodate RCIA programs.]

When read from beginning to end, this passage lacks continuity and can seem to be quite difficult to understand. In the context of the *Johannine Gospel*, it follows the scene in which Jesus makes a triumphal entry into Jerusalem seated on the colt of a donkey. People are excited by his raising Lazarus from the dead, so that his entry draws a considerable crowd. There are Greeks in the crowd; the writer probably had Greek-speaking proselytes in mind. They approach Phillip, one of the disciples, who has a Greek name and who is from Galilee, a territory that has a mixed population. Phillip talks to Andrew, and the two approach Jesus.

Jesus, however, has something else on his mind; he does not seem to be taken up in the enthusiasm of the moment. "The hour has come for the son of humanity to be glorified." At this point the narrative is broken off with a double "Amen" statement. This can be set aside, literally, as a side bar; we would put it into a footnote in our modern practice. With it put aside, what Jesus says fits the scene: "The hour has come for the son of humanity to be glorified. Now is my soul troubled. And what should I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Jesus sees as his life purpose not to lead a parade but to act in a way that would occasion the potentates of his world putting him to shame and death. The very course of action that leads people to strike up a parade leads others to target him.

The double Amen saying, about a grain of wheat falling to the earth and in a sense having to die, can be understood as a mediation on the scene.

The narrative continues with a voice from heaven that some in the crowd mistake for thunder. Jesus clarifies for the crowd, "This voice did not come for me but for you. Now is the judgment of the world, now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to myself." Jesus was bent upon drawing people into a condemnation by the rulers of this world.

Poem

Eons

It hides among high cliffs
over the Rio Grande,
along a thin trail,
a cave-turned-grotto.

In red ochre paint,
rock walls
manifest figures
of antelope, bison, deer,
of bows and spears,
of the shaman,

arms stretched out
radiating earth's dark-light powers.

Nourished by seeping rain,
green vines,
bearing blossoms,
the grotto draws flights of bees
to suck nectar,
proliferate pollen.

The work of ancients and earth,
it is enough to bring
a born Catholic to kneel,
to reflect,
in the bee-hum silence,
on doors to mysteries,
links to eons past,
connections that bleed
into memory
for eons ahead.

Tom Keene
March 25, 2009

**Letter of 14 religious organizations to President Trump on his decision to
discontinue contributions to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency**

February 6, 2018
President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

As Christian denominations and organizations concerned about and working in the Middle East, we are writing to express our dismay at the recent decision to withhold \$65 million in U.S. funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The humanitarian impact of these cuts will be devastating. Many of our agencies and local partners know firsthand the important role that UNRWA plays in providing assistance to Palestine refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. More than half a million Palestinian children are educated in UNRWA schools. Half of

Gaza's population receive food assistance from UNRWA. Hundreds of thousands of people each year rely on health services provided by UNRWA clinics. These already-vulnerable communities will be forced to suffer even more if these unconscionable cuts are not restored.

Secondly, we are deeply concerned by the politicization of humanitarian aid that is evident in this decision. The U.S. government has long maintained that "a hungry child knows no politics" and while this has not always been carried out perfectly, it has remained as an important guideline for U.S. policymakers. Humanitarian aid must be provided to civilians on the basis of need alone, not used as a way to attempt to extract concessions from political leaders. We are also concerned that this action could lead to a trend toward politicizing humanitarian aid to other vulnerable communities around the world and would erode U.S. reliability and credibility internationally.

Thirdly, the effort to withhold funds from UNRWA appears to be part of a series of actions to deny basic rights to Palestinians—in this case, their fundamental rights as refugees under international law. We yearn deeply for the day when UNRWA will no longer need to exist, but this must be the result of a negotiated resolution of the conflict, based on international law, that is fair and just for both Palestinians and Israelis. It cannot come through unilateral decisions by the United States to deny the rights of Palestinians.

We stand ready to work with you and all who seek a more just and peaceful future for all peoples in the region. In the meantime, we urge you to restore immediately full U.S. funding to UNRWA.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Baptists
American Friends Service Committee
Church of the Brethren, Office of Public Witness
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
Office of Social Justice; Christian Reformed Church
Pax Christi International
Pax Christi USA
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Reformed Church in America
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

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.sanantoniopeace.center>

Interfaith Radio, (*Interfaith Voices*)

<http://www.interfaithradio.org/>

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