

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating March 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 Fifth Sunday of Lent. Tom Keene's poem is *Children in the Storm*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem a personal statement, "My Life during COVIC (With Love, from Gaza)" by Mona El-Farra, M.D. follows. It is used with permission of the Middle East Children's Alliance; for information on the charitable works conducted by the Alliance for Palestinian children, see: <https://www.mecaforpeace.org/>

In the calendar section, there are two online events scheduled at overlapping times for Wednesday March 18. The one on the Francis Factor after Eight Years clearly has the star power, with two cardinals and moderated by the gifted John Carr of Georgetown University's Initiative on Catholic Social Thought. The other one, also scheduled by the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought, may well turn out to be the more interesting: José Casanova interviewing Fr. Tomáš Halík, a well-known Christian spokesperson in the Czech Republic. Perhaps I lack objectivity since both Casanova, with whom I am acquainted, and Halík are sociologists like myself, but Halík's biography is particularly interesting.

Calendar

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, 6:00pm, Sierra Club Alamo Group meeting, with presentation "Green Infrastructure and Low Impact Development: Recasting for Multiple Roles," Karen Bishop and Michelle Garza (both of San Antonio River Authority). RSVP at: Epinput@gmail.com . The meeting ID is 933 0035 1100, pass code: 875772, and Zoom

link: <https://sierraclub.zoom.us/j/93300351100?pwd=QjdRd0syQlZQdjVRdFdHaWVCbzluUT09>

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

Wednesday March 17, 11:00am (12:00pm ET) "Immigration Policy Update: Where We Are and Where We Are Going," Ronnate Asirwatham (Network). Register at: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_j_r6o4b5SY-OS4qHS5X2Jw

Thursday March 18, 11:00am (12:00pm ET); "Reflections on Faith and Secularity: Conversation with Fr. Tomáš Halík," moderated by José Casanova (Georgetown University). Fr. Halík found a path to faith under Communist rule in the former Czechoslovakia and was ordained secretly in the former East Germany. He is now a public intellectual in the Czech Republic, a professor of sociology at the Charles University in Prague, and president of the Czech Christian Academy. Register at: https://georgetown.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_K8g0IVCMTraWz89B4rry0g

Thursday March 18, 11:30am-12:30pm (12:30pm-1:30pm ET) panel discussion "The Francis Factor at Eight Years: Global Impacts, U.S. Challenges," Michelle Gonzalez Maldonado (University of Scranton); Cardinal Sean O'Malley, OFM Cap (Archdiocese of Boston); Cardinal Peter Turkson (Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human development); and Cindy Wooden (Catholic News Service), moderated by John Carr (Georgetown University). Register at: <https://catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/events/the-francis-factor-at-eight-years-global-impacts-u-s-challenges#rsvp>

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.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/>

Thursday March 25, 11:00am (9:00 PT, 12:00pm ET, 6:00pm Palestine) “Witness Silwan: Christian Zionism and Dispossession in East Jerusalem,” Friends of Sabeel North America. Register at: <https://form.123formbuilder.com/5845126/>

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.” For reservation information, contact Anthony Blasi (J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com).

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

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 (Hebrews 5: 7-9)

This brief passage can be translated in various ways. I take it to mean that Jesus prayed to be spared the passion of the cross, was heard by the Father, but nevertheless yielded to the will of the Father:

In the days of his flesh, he had been offering entreaties and supplications to the One able to save him from death, with a great cry and tears, and was being heeded because of this piety. Although being a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered, and being perfected he became the cause of eternal salvation for all those obeying him.... (Heb 5:7-9)

The *Letter to the Hebrews* is a very early work of Christian literature; it may well have inspired the famous passage in the *Gospel of Luke*, a later work, that depicts Jesus in the garden on the Mount of Olives: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; nevertheless, not my will but yours come to be" (Luke 22:40).

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 meditation 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

Children in the Storm

Side by side, we scooch our bodies down,
huddle along the wall furthest from the porch’s edge,
and face the caterwauling coming down,
bare knees hugged, drawn to chins,
in ear-filled awe, wide-eyed watching:
 sky-shot water-sheet slapping tin roofs,
 gushing down rain spouts,
 making new rivers of gravel walks.

We marvel at the angry sky-man who makes all this,
of whom we sing, I think, in brave derision:
 It's raining, it's pouring, the Old Man is snoring,
 he jumped in bed, and bumped his head,

and couldn't get up in the morning.

Is it in wrathful punctuation or promise of punishment
that he pronounces his opinion in hurled thunderclap
and with cussing concussion rattles our bodies,
quivers the linings of the void in our bellies?

Warned,
we sit in silent wonder
at a world alive.

Tom Keene and Muse

My Life during COVID (With Love, from Gaza)

Mona El-Farra, M.D.

Director of Gaza Projects, Middle East Children's Alliance¹

The result of the test was positive, which meant that unfortunately I had contracted COVID. At first, I was panicked: Covid! But then I pulled myself together for a special kind of war—a war I decided I had to win, despite the fact I had already been suffering from asthma, hypertension and other health problems.

My treatment stage was divided into two stages; first, protecting others from contracting the disease, and second, doing what I needed to do to get over it. The quarantine phase began with all its complications, yet colleagues and loved ones made my life much easier. Friends from the Health Relief Foundation contacted me now and then; doctors from European Hospital reached out to check up on me; and Nuseirat municipality staff showed enormous care and endless love. Not letting all these wonderful people down became a must for me. I'm in my 60s, so I knew that resisting this virus would be tough. Indeed, my symptoms were extremely acute. I coughed my heart out, struggled with high fevers, and battled insomnia. But my will to win was strong, so I stuck to my treatment and kept myself busy by reading. I'm passionate about books, which

¹ Dr. El-Farra tells of her own experience with COVID—as a sufferer herself, a healthcare provider, and a community leader. She has now fully recovered and is working again to bring relief to people in Gaza.

provided me with the strength I needed to persist. I also didn't stop working. Work was actually part of the treatment, because keeping up the work I do is a type of resistance. I followed up with MECA health, psycho-social, educational, and relief projects that are implemented by our local partners. We are now done with the file of scholarships, and our partners distributed food baskets and hygiene kits to families. They also began implementing a project called "A Warm Winter," which provided more than 500 clothing packages to the needy in the first phase as well as assistance to a number of families quarantined in their homes.

I'm proud of the work but thinking about the people who are struggling was a constant source of pain. The poor people who live in the streets, in camps, or in overcrowded, dilapidated houses. How could they afford their basic needs? How would they get food on a daily basis? How could they socially distance and cope with Gaza's cold winter? Gaza already suffers from high rates of unemployment and poverty, and the health system is on the brink of a huge collapse. Ordinary people with chronic diseases, and even many cancer patients, have had their care postponed since hospitals must devote all their time and attention to the 700-1,000 people who contract COVID every day.

It's worth mentioning that every single person in Gaza, in whatever organizational structure, works under unbearably complicated conditions. The same is true of the medical workers in a pandemic that's crippled the healthcare systems of countries with way more resources than ours. Heroes in white, as I call them, are exerting indefatigable efforts to cope despite cuts in pay; shortages of medicine, equipment, and money; and the regular daily assault of electricity shut offs. So, I appeal to all friends and solidarity activists around the world to continue supporting and fundraising for Gaza. Your support and solidarity will get us through this crisis.

Finally, I send my warm greetings to all of my friends here, and I sincerely miss you all. Communication via tech-tools is not leaving me satisfied! And even though I hate this social-distancing thing, I encourage you to stick with it to fight COVID. I also send my love to everyone that blessed me with love and care: my love and my warm hugs for my children, Mohammad, Basma, and Sondos. My love for my brothers Manar and Musheir, for my sisters, Dr. Maha and Dr. May, and for all of their children.

I assure everyone that we will meet soon, and that this virtual hug will turn into a real, warm hug. Together we will celebrate the victory over COVID.



Mona El-Farra, M.D.

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>