

# Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating May 2, 2021

Communications with the editor should be sent to [j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com](mailto: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 Easter. Tom Keene's poem is *The Rabbi Said*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is my review of the autobiography of a fascinating person, the Czech Catholic public intellectual Tomáš Halík.

This past week the Texas Department of Criminal Justice issued a revised policy allowing death row inmates to designate a TDCJ chaplain or other spiritual adviser of their choosing to be present inside the death chamber after they receive notification of their execution date. This is a reversal of a previous decision the Department made after the U.S. Supreme Court stayed an execution on the grounds that the Department disallowed a Buddhist chaplain who was not on an approved list. The Rev. Rick McClatchy, field coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Texas, said he welcomed the TDCJ's protocol change. He was among nearly 200 Texas faith leaders who wrote to the state asking to keep spiritual advisers in the death chamber.

"I am glad the Correctional Institutions Division has restored the sacred tradition of allowing clergy to be present in the execution room to minister to the condemned and will also now allow the presence of a spiritual advisor of that person's religious choice," he said in a statement to UPI. "I belong to a faith tradition which values the practice of ministering to the executed. It was Jesus who modeled this type of ministry to the men being executed with him. My American civic values also lead me to believe that even those condemned to death and the faith leaders who advise them are guaranteed the right to the free exercise of religion."

## Calendar

[Times given for the Central Time Zone]

**Monday April 26**, 11:30am-12:30pm (12:30pm-1:30pm ET) online panel discussion "Justice for George Floyd? Unpacking the Verdict," Emmanuel Cannady (doctoral candidate, sociology), Jennifer Mason McAward (Klau Center for Human Rights), and Richard Pierce (history and Africana studies), moderated by Silas Altheimer (Klau Center for Human Rights), all at the University of Notre Dame. Register at: [https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_hlsg3mBMSi-YF71RXeVAFQ](https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_hlsg3mBMSi-YF71RXeVAFQ)

**Monday April 26**, 11:30am-12:30pm (12:30pm-1:30pm ET) webinar "River Missionaries: The Catholic Counteroffensive in the Amazon," on the problem of deforestation and Evangelical prosperity gospels; Rodrigo Pedroso (Brazilian Journalist) and Niyanta Spelman (Rainforest Partnership), moderated by Rev. Fletcher Harper (Greenfaith). RSVP at: [https://georgetown.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_kY\\_8mGHbTz6K3KNAEX3kYQ](https://georgetown.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_kY_8mGHbTz6K3KNAEX3kYQ)

**Monday April 26**, 6:30pm-7:30pm online "Becoming an Ally against racism," Lisa Stone (anti-Defamation League). Register by April 19 at: <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration/>

**Tuesday April 27**, 12:00pm, webinar "HIV Risk, Social Conditions, and Theological Ethics in Africa," Fr. Jacquineau Azetsóp, SJ (Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome). Register at: <http://HIVinAfrica.eventbrite.com>

**Wednesday April 28**, 7:00pm, Zoom meeting of Pax Christi Dallas. Discussion will center on a video about Ukraine; watch the video in advance at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaGvFHBcGqY>. For the link to the meeting itself, contact Joyce Hall at [hallmj@sbcglobal.net](mailto:hallmj@sbcglobal.net).

**Thursday April 29**, 11:30am (12:30pm ET), online dialogue "Owning Slavery, Pursuing Justice, Seeking Reconciliation: Lessons from Georgetown and the U.S. Jesuits," Joseph Ferrara (Georgetown University), Rev. Timothy P. Kesicki, SJ (Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States), Kimberly Mazyck (Catholic Charities USA), and Joseph M. Stewart (Descendants Truth & Reconciliation)

Foundation), moderated by John Carr (Georgetown University). Register at: <https://catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/events/owning-slavery-pursuing-justice-seeking-reconciliation#rsvp>

**Thursday April 29**, 4:30pm-6:00pm (5:30pm-6:30pm ET), webinar “History of Anti-Asian Violence in the US: Politics, Gender, and Resistance,” Melissa Borja (University of Michigan), Pam Butler (University of Notre Dame, Jennifer Huynh (University of Notre Dame), and Rebecca Tinio McKenna (University of Notre Dame), moderated by James Breen (University of Notre Dame). Register at: [https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_SH6OLsGMSPSoeUbQ8xLzgw/](https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_SH6OLsGMSPSoeUbQ8xLzgw/)

**Saturday May 1**, 10:00am-2:30pm (11:00am-3:30pm ET), virtual nonviolence training, a collaboration of Pax Christi USA and Meta Peace Team. \$35.00 suggested donation. Register at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEsduiqqjorEtBmxLEsTNND5cqEgco d9P5v>

**Saturday May 1**, 2:00pm, Pax Christi San Antonio chapter meeting. Agenda: “Reflection on the trial of the murder of George Floyd,” by Bishop Jon Stowe, FM Conv (Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky, and Bishop-President of Pax Christi USA), and expectations of Catholic leadership by members of Pax Christi San Antonio. Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83674213208?pwd=SG1QRkJiRmZpUzdpa1h5dmI3R3JHQT09> If asked for a passcode, it is 776978.

**Monday May 3**, 11:30am-12:30pm (12:30pm-1:30pm ET) webinar "The Frontlines of Peace: An Insider's Guide to Changing the World," discussion of the book by that title by Séverine Autesserre (Columbia University); discussants are Autesserre, Laurie Nathan (University of Notre Dame), and Rachel Sweet (University of Notre Dame). Register at: [https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/8016179754403/WN\\_8cKwP2eVRvmNdO1snRG\\_Gg?utm\\_source=sfmc&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=5.3.2021+Event+Severine+Autesserre+Invite+1&utm\\_term=https%3a%2f%2fnotredame.zoom.us%2fwebinar%2fregister%2f8016179754403%2fWN\\_8cKwP2eVRvmNdO1snRG\\_Gg&utm\\_id=482224&sfmc\\_id=16334564](https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/8016179754403/WN_8cKwP2eVRvmNdO1snRG_Gg?utm_source=sfmc&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=5.3.2021+Event+Severine+Autesserre+Invite+1&utm_term=https%3a%2f%2fnotredame.zoom.us%2fwebinar%2fregister%2f8016179754403%2fWN_8cKwP2eVRvmNdO1snRG_Gg&utm_id=482224&sfmc_id=16334564)

**Tuesday May 4**, 8:00pm-10:30pm, screening of *I Am Greta* (Thunberg), followed by a panel discussion: Tatiana Claire (Climate Action Santa Monica), Mica Williams (Climate Action Santa Monica), and Ngozi Chukwueke (City of Santa Monica). Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/i-am-greta-online-screening-and-panel-discussion-registration-148271677579?utm-medium=discovery&utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&utm-source=strongmail&utm-term=listing>

**Saturday May 8**, 11:30am-1:30pm, webinar “A Costly Failure: Why the Death Penalty Must be Abolished,” Robert C. Boruchowitz (Seattle University), Nicole C. Brambila (investigative journalist), Peter Collins (Seattle University), Edward Ray Keith, Jr. (public defender, Lubbock, Texas), and Diane Lozano (Wyoming capital/public defender’s office), moderated by Rick Halperin (Southern Methodist University). Register at: [https://amnestyusa-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_MeefAYniTEKGTQf6Sv7A0Q](https://amnestyusa-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_MeefAYniTEKGTQf6Sv7A0Q)

**Monday May 10**, 6:30pm-7:30pm, online “Jesus and Muhammad: On Peace, Forgiveness, and the Golden Rule,” Craig Considine (Rice University), \$10.00; register by May 3 at: <https://sourceoflightsa.org/classes-and-events>

**Saturday May 13**, 10:30am-11:30am, online “Dr. King’s beloved Community: Where Do We Go from Here—Chaos or Community?” Bishop Trevor Alexander, \$5.00; register by May 7 at: <https://sourceoflightsa.org/classes-and-events>

**Monday May 17**, 7:00pm-8:00pm, online “Public Virtues: Rediscovering Civic Engagement,” Brandon Metroka (University of the Incarnate Word) and Judith Norman (Trinity University), \$7.00; register by May 10 at: <https://sourceoflightsa.org/classes-and-events>

**Friday July 30-Saturday July 31**, 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary Pax Christi USA conference, online. Keynote Speaker: Olga Segura, author of *Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church*. Conference mass presider: Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv. SAVE THE DATE

## Notices

**Pax Christi Texas State Conference**, Part 1, video of the April 3 session. Link: <https://youtu.be/d-6QxV9FOYQ>

### Second Reading (1 John 3:18-24)

As often occurs, the paragraphing of modern biblical translations, and consequently Lectionary selections, violates the flow of a Greek-language text. In the present case, the author, Presbyter John, speaks of practical magnanimity: "Now those who have the goods of the world and see a brother or sister in need and shut off their compassion, how does the love of God remain in them? Children, let us not love in word or speech but deed and truth as well..." (1 Jn 3:17-19a). Apart from putting the first sentence in the plural to avoid the English pronoun gender problem, I follow the Greek closely. The lectionary reading begins with "Children, let us not...." Clearly, Presbyter John has practical action in mind, not some mere inner disposition. And when he wrote a few lines later of God's commandments, he did not have the Decalogue in mind but the two greatest commandments from the Jesus tradition: "And this is His commandment, that we trust the name of His son Jesus, Messiah, and love one another, as Jesus gave the commandment to us" (1 John 3:23). [In English, a mechanical translation would say "as he gave the commandment to us"; that would make the antecedent of "he" ambiguous while in the Greek it clearly refers to Jesus.]

Translations are rarely neutral. They come from the context of the presuppositions of the translator. As such presuppositions change over the course of history, the translations too should change. For that reason it is important to "read slowly," whether one has the specialized training to refer to the ancient languages or not.

### Third Reading (John 15:1-8)

The *Johannine Gospel* presents more than one version of a farewell discourse by Jesus. The reading for this Sunday is the beginning of one of the versions. It consists of the familiar similitude of the vine and the branches. It should be noted that while there is only one vine, there are nevertheless multiple branches. It is not only unity that is important, but plurality as well. "Unity without uniformity" as a phrase captures part of the message, but a plurality of "branches" depicts separateness as well, separateness without separation or

distantiation. The “trunk” that keeps the separate branches from being separated off is Jesus himself, not some doctrine or organizational structure.

The very idea of a human son of the transcendent God implies that no human connection can exhaust the possible avenues toward divinity. There are always more ways than one’s own way. This implication highlights the value of faithfulness and loyalty to the way by which one has come to trust in God (adherence to the true vine), but also of interest in, appreciation of, even fascination with the ways through which others come to such a trust. Exploration of the separate others stimulates and enriches an exploration and understanding of one’s own faith experience and the ways in which it can grow.

## Poem

### *The Rabbi Said*

The rabbi said:

Do this to remember me.  
By this bread, this wine,  
I become you as you become me.

By this, we model for all  
how illusions of separation  
dissolve in the Oneness of life,  
drenching this unique Universe,  
yet transcending even that  
into the utterness of  
Being, Being, Being.

Tom Keene and Muse  
April 8, 2021

## Book Review

Tomáš HALÍK. *From the Underground Church to Freedom*, translated by Gerald Turner. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019. Pp. 325. ISBN 978-0-268-10677-5. Reviewed by Anthony J. Blasi

This is an autobiography of a Christian who once experienced persecution in an officially atheist society but who also experienced liberation. The author is remarkable both for an intense interiority and an absence of an interiorized persecuted condition that marked many others who shared similar experiences.

Tomáš Halík was born in 1948, at the beginning of the era of Communist domination in his native Czechoslovakia. He was baptized a Catholic as an infant, but more as an afterthought since religion was neither taken seriously nor practiced in his family. His family did take human consciousness seriously. In Czechoslovakia social freedom and public life emerged historically in opposition to official Roman Catholicism, which was linked to the dominant Austrian empire. This was quite in contrast to Poland, where Catholicism served as a cultural bulwark against foreign domination. The cultural resistance of Halík's family against the Communists featured the secular democratic ethos of two sociologists, President Tomáš Masaryk (in office 1918-1935), for whom Halík was named, and President *Edvard Beneš* (in office 1935-1938, 1945-1948). *Halík's father worked as a librarian, but privately maintained and edited the works of a humanist Czech cultural icon, Karel Čapek, whom the Communists ignored. The younger Halík listened to broadcasts of the BBC with a maternal uncle in the 1950s—a dangerous activity at that time.*

*The Czechoslovak government was a more severe police state than the other Soviet-dominated nations behind the "iron curtain"; it was also more thoroughgoing in its suppression of religion than the others. A few churches were left open in Prague, maintained for propaganda purposes for the eyes of foreign visitors; clergy were allowed to grow old and stick to sacramental services. Some clergy collaborated with the secret police. Cardinal Tomášek had been forced to accept some of these collaborators on his staff; when he met with more trustworthy people, he turned a transistor radio on in his office to interfere with electronic listening devices. Nothing modern in the Church, such as the theology behind the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, could be openly communicated to either clergy or what remained of a laity.*

*Given such circumstances, how did Tomáš Halík become a religious personage?* First, the social morality of Catholicism persisted in non-religious forms in the secular democratic culture of his country. Precocious in his intellectuality and general consciousness, he sensed that something was missing. "When I say 'I,' am also saying God, *because the human being without God is not whole.*" He found faith at about age 18. He had been fascinated by Czech history, especially the religious figure Jan Hus (1372-1415), who proposed reforms that anticipated Protestantism. As a university student at the Charles University in Prague, Halík participated in a discussion group that centered on the writings of President Masaryk, thereby keeping alive his consciousness of human rights and progressive ideas in general; but he also began reading works by Christian authors. A friend told him about a church where a priest gave entertaining sermons with a slightly anti-regime flavor. Halík eventually visited that priest, Jiří Reinsberg, to talk about converting. And an old man in a pub recommended out of the blue that Halík should read the works of Max Scheler, a philosopher and sociologist of an earlier generation who had become a professed Christian before religious conservatives drove him out of organized religion. Halík became a sociology and philosophy major; he also took a course from Milan Machovec on the Christian-Marxist dialogue. He managed to obtain serious works by such authors as Jacques Maritain, Romano Guardini, Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Rahner, Hans Kung, and Thomas Merton.

Though accepted into the Catholic Church, Halík was far from being a typical Catholic; "I would feel out of place among people who take religion for granted" (p. 12). Then as an exchange student in The Netherlands, he was shocked by students' rejecting the writers he had been reading, along with any semblance of faith. This led him toward conservative Catholicism, but only briefly; he saw that as a childish defense against the culture shock he experienced. He proceeded to become imbued with a Catholicism that is more open to intellectual freedom, science, and other religions, largely by associating with priests who had recently been released from prison, sometimes after long sentences and even torture. He names Antonin Mandl, who had studied in a seminary in Rome and then studied the "new theology" that led up to Vatican II as he pursued a theology doctorate in France. He also names Bonaventura Brouše, o.f.m., a recovered conservative whom the Communists imprisoned for preaching justice. There was also Josef Zvěřina, a human rights advocate who served as a clandestine educator of the Czech Church, and Oto Mádr, an organizer and conspirator of the Church against the government. In 1968, until the hard-line



Communists returned to power, professors who had been removed from the Charles University returned briefly—most notably Jan Patočka, who had been a student of the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl. Patočka later died during interrogation by the secret police; his funeral was harassed by government helicopters and motor cycles. Halík was actually studying English at the University of Bangor in Great Britain when the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia with tanks to restore what they considered order. In England Halík learned of the usefulness of students raising questions and participating in discussions in the classroom. He returned to Prague for Christmas, 1968.

It was after 1968 that Halík began thinking of priesthood, but the only seminary in the country that the government allowed did not accept students who had any university education. Meanwhile he completed a Ph.D. at Charles University in 1972 and was elected by his classmates to give the commencement speech. The university administration selected someone else, who did not show up. So at the last minute Halík was given a text to read; rather than do that, he gave an impromptu address thanking the professors and his classmates, including professors whom the Communists had removed. Needless to say, he would not have an academic career in Communist Czechoslovakia. He was assigned as a human resources counselor in a factory, while also completing compulsory military service. From 1974 he counseled and gave lectures for the benefit of industrial officials, who it turned out were lonely and much in need of attention.

Halík learned about worker priests and even met one who, after being released from prison, worked in a book store. He entered into a clandestine priestly formation program and was ordained in 1978 in East Germany. He was one of a group of secret priests who celebrated masses only for close friends and whose principal objective was to develop a humanistic Catholic subculture for the Church. This group is not to be confused with the one organized by Bishop Felix Davídek, who mistakenly believed he had permission to ordain married men and a few women. The secret police never discovered that Halík had been ordained, but they interrogated him often because he was active in Catholic circles and in the dissident circles led by future president Václav Havel. He was forced out of his factory sociology job and worked in a new position as a therapist for alcoholics and drug addicts. Halík found his new work rewarding; he had become an anonymous pastor.

By the 1980s, , ostensibly as a layman, Halík was editing underground literature and even writing speeches for the aged Cardinal Tomášek. The cardinal would have him serve as a tour guide for visiting church officials; Halík thereby

became a communications channel between the Czech Church and the Vatican. He drafted a ten-year cultural program for the Church and managed to have a friend advise an approving Pope John Paul II of it.

When the demonstrations in Prague that would eventually topple the Communist government were taking place, Halík was actually out of the country, working his network. He went public as a priest in 1989 when he delivered a speech at a Catholic gathering, arguing that the Church should not be closed in on itself. The Communist government him to go to Rome to organize the radio coverage of the canonization of St. Agnes of Czechoslovakia—the government did not want it to be left to Czech exiles instead. He had dinner with the pope as demonstrations were leading to the fall of the Communist government of East Germany. Within weeks Havel would become the new, non-Communist president of Czechoslovakia.

Halík resigned from his clinic job and informed his clients that he was a priest. He declined to be part of the Havel government, but became instead rector of a church near the University. In speeches he gave at the time, he advocated not a return to the past but that the Church, while continuing the ministries in the parishes, also continue the works of those who had been forbidden to minister by the Communists and the ministries of those secretly ordained like himself. This implied a continuation of the worker priest model. He also stressed the need for theological education and the involvement of deacons and lay people.

The hierarchy acted with unusual haste to put him to work on something else--in Rome to prepare a papal visit to Czechoslovakia that would occur in April 1990. The pope wanted him to inform him about Czech history and culture. He was given a formal if safe position, consultor to the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers. He earned a Licentiate in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Lateran University at the pope's suggestion, albeit mostly by distance learning. He engaged in similar study with the Polish Pontifical Theology Faculty in Wroclaw so that he would be able to be appointed as a professor of theology.

Among the numerous positions Halík filled, one turned out to be particularly telling. He was appointed a professor of practical psychology and sociology in the theology faculty, which some described as a high school for altar boys; it was detached from the Charles University and located in the countryside. The position was to focus on Catholic social teaching, which the Communists had previously excluded from discussion. The academic standards were low; the students wanted lessons dictated slowly so that they could write them down.

Papers were never required! "Many Christians who had lived for years under siege were now incapable of living without an enemy" (p. 217). The "decadent West," about which the Communists used to speak, was now the enemy to replace the Communists as the new foe. The faculty refused to participate in the new European Society for Catholic Theology. They also found Halík threatening by his very presence; they tried to dismiss him, but the archbishop over-ruled them. Halík resigned volutnarily, finding the whole experience depressing. He titles the chapter on this episode "The Experience of Darkness." And indeed, it brought on a dark night of the soul for him.

He centered his subsequent work on the congregation of students near the university. The interest in religion has receded generally in Czechoslovakia (and soon in the half of the nation that became the Czech Republic), but students seemed to remain interested. The university appointed him a professor of religious studies, which he began to enjoy. In fact, he thrived as a public intellectual, engaging in international lecture tours and writing books. He turned down an invitation to run for the presidency of the Czech Republic: "What could politics provide me? Money, fame, power: such things truly meant little to me. What I really needed, I already had" (p. 255).

A reader might not suspect this, but I have left much out of the fascinating life of a fascinating person. He is a contemporary of mine, two-years younger. He pursued sociology, beginning with the sociology of knowledge; so did I, albeit through reading Karl Mannheim rather than Max Scheler. His account brings back many memories—the resistance by clergy to the Second Vatican Council and lack of understanding of its theology, the hostility of the Vatican toward the Dutch Catholic Church (which I did not understand at the time), the Prague crowds in 1968 embarrassing the Soviet tank drivers by asking why they made the people into an enemy.

Tomáš Halík was about to become a Catholic conservative in 1968, and he explains why he did not follow that route. In 1989 he was in discussions with the conservative Pope John Paul II, with people from Opus Dei, and with conservative Catholics from the United States; he does not say why but simply informs us diplomatically that he was not going down that road.

I think his story of the Czech Catholic Church confronts us with an irony. The Communists did their best to make religion something of interest only to closed-minded elders, to limit religion to sacramental services, to isolate Church officials and clergy from the intellectual world, and to banish any mention of social justice in Church circles. They succeeded in large part, except among such

troublesome people as Tomáš Halík. Now that Communism has disappeared as a cultural force, the Catholic Church in free societies has largely ceased being something of interest to the young, is largely contained within sacramental services, is busy populating imaginations with answers on matters on which intellects have no questions, and holding any mention of social justice and Catholic social doctrine suspect. Even the writings of the current pope, Francis, are mentioned selectively by many clergy. The fresh minds of youthful students, not in seminaries, led Tomáš Halík out of the dark night. And Christians today....

### 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](http://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](http://www.txccedp.org)

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio  
[www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/](http://www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/)

Climate Change  
[www.creation-care.com](http://www.creation-care.com)

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