

# Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating May 16, 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 Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. Tom Keene's poem is *The Man Misunderstood*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is my review of a biography of Father Theodore Hesburgh, whose acquaintance I had made. Hesburgh was a major public intellectual for the Catholic Church in the last century. The review has also been posted on *Catholic Books Review* (see the Links section at the end of this newsletter).

## Calendar

(Times are given for the Central Time Zone)

**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>

**Wednesday May 12**, 7:00pm-8:00pm, online panel discussion on the documentary *The Years of Fierro*, about a Texas death row inmate for four decades who was released last year. First view the video at: <https://www.theyearsoffierro.com/>, free from May 7 to May 21. Once you sign up to watch it, you will receive the link for the panel discussion, which will include Santiago Esteinou (filmmaker), attorneys Sandra Babcock and Dick Burr, and César Fierro, moderated by Professor Ana Otero (Thurgood Marshall School of Law).

**Thursday May 13**, 11:30am-12:45pm (12:30pm-1:45pm ET) “A Conversation with José Casanova, interviewed by Thomas Banchoff (both of Georgetown University). Dr. Casanova is a world-renowned scholar of religions on the global scene, author of a modern classic, *Public Religions in the Modern World*. The focus will be on a series of lectures sponsored by the Berkley Center at Georgetown University on public religions in the COVID-19 world. Register at:  
[https://georgetown.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_SraPXvR9SJepHFea9zYCUw](https://georgetown.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_SraPXvR9SJepHFea9zYCUw)

**Saturday May 15**, 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>

**Saturday May 15**, 11:00am-3:00pm (12:00pm-4:00pm ET), online Care for Our Common Home Catholic Conference, Bishop John Stowe OFM Conv (Diocese of Lexington, Pax Christi USA Bishop President), Bishop Robert McElroy (Diocese of San Diego), José Aguta (Catholic Climate Covenant), and Francis Rooney (U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See 2005-08), Member of Congress 2017-21); with breakout sessions. Information and registration at:  
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ccl-2021-catholic-conference-call-to-action-to-care-for-our-common-home-tickets-149371232377?aff=efbeventtix>

**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>

**Monday May 17**, 9:00am, webinar “Nonviolence Is Key to a *Laudato Sí* Future,” Marie Dennis (Pax Christi USA), Ken Butigan (DePaul University), and Sr. Sheila Kinsey FCJM (International Union of Superiors General). Register at:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZApdu2rpjwrGtZywnMI8Cr6U09rTNzP0OkF>

**Wednesday May 19**, 8:00am, on Zoom, “What Scientists Think about religion and Why It Matters,” Elaine Howard Ecklund (Rice University), David R. Johnson (University of Nevada Reno), and Brandon Vaidyanathan (Catholic University of America). Information: [Bethany.boucher@rice.edu](mailto:Bethany.boucher@rice.edu); Register at:

[https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_I1P4Kv22TnWuIGx9C4mmWg](https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_I1P4Kv22TnWuIGx9C4mmWg)

**Saturday July 10**, 1:30pm (12:20pm MT), Pax Christi Texas state conference, part 2. Presentation by R. Khari Brown (Wayne State University): “Religion and Black Lives Matter,” followed by Q & A. Some members expressed the wish to visit and catch up after the program. Save the date; link information will be forthcoming.

**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**

### **Notice**

**Letter of Bishop Paul S. Coakley** (Archdiocese of Oklahoma City) **and Bishop David J. Malloy** (Diocese of Rockford), for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, to U.S. senators in support of the **Trillion Tree and Natural Carbon Storage Act**, April 12, 2021. Link:

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/letter-congress-support-trillion-tree-and-natural-carbon-storage-act-april-12-2021?eType>EmailBlastContent&eId=bb74a669-3c27-4782-b95c-d074fee612ac>

### **Second Reading** (Ephesians 1:17-23, OR 4:1-13, OR 4:1-7, 11-13)

The New Testament passage that narrates the Ascension is in the first reading, from the *Acts of the Apostles*. The selections from the *Letter to the Ephesians* that are options for the second reading are from an essay that was written after Luke’s history of early Christianity, a history in which the *Acts of the Apostles* was the second part. The author of *Ephesians*, writing anonymously under the pseudonym of St. Paul, who had been executed in Rome some time beforehand, was situated much as we are: hearing the gospel and drawing lessons for life from it. He says that he is praying for the readers (Eph 1: 16) so that, in effect, they may draw such lessons: “...so that the God of our Reverend Jesus, Messiah, the Father of glory, may grant you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowledge of him....”

The alternative readings are from a later chapter in *Ephesians*. That chapter, numbered four, gives some exhortations for living morally and has some references to Jesus having ascended.

### **Third Reading (Mark 16:15-20)**

The original *Gospel of Mark* concluded with Easter: The tomb no longer contains the body of Jesus, and a young man in white clothing announces that Jesus the Nazorean who had been crucified has been raised. Appearance legends were added to the gospel early on, and the reading for today is taken from one of them. The eleven disciples did not believe Mary Magdalene about Jesus appearing, or the two walking into the countryside; so Jesus appears to them directly. He tells them to go preach the good news “to every creature.”

“One who believes and is baptized will be saved, but one who is not believing will be condemned.” Does salvation really depend on intellectual assent to a report? Faith in New Testament Greek is closer to “trust” in English than “belief,” and “salvation” refers to rescue from disaster. The saying is not about punishment for not assenting to a report; it is about people—evidently in the manner of the eleven—predisposed or not to mistrust good people. Living in such mistrust is a disaster from which one needs to be saved.

Jesus’ discourse goes on: “But these signs will accompany those believing: they will cast out demons in my name, speak new languages, lift up snakes by hand, and drinking something deadly it will not harm them; they will lay hands on the sick and they will be well.” This comes out of a world that was characterized by magical thought. It did not seem so extraordinary or magical to the ancients, but it does to us. Few people believe in spirit possession and exorcism today, and that has nothing to do with a mistrustful predisposition. Similarly few seem intent upon handling snakes today; the few who are so intent insist upon the King James Version translation, “serpent.” Such insistence upon going back to premodern, nonscientific worldviews has nothing to do with accepting the appearance of the risen Christ in the world.

## Poem

### *The Man Misunderstood*

“Don’t *cling* to me,”  
I am said to have said  
to Mary, my friend.  
I had to go.  
Unless I did,  
you wouldn’t get  
the spirit of it all.  
You wouldn’t get  
the whole point of my life,  
or of yours.

So surrender forever  
the notion you can own me.  
It is enough to remember me  
with wine and bread,  
where you can taste  
the blood-spurting, fleshy  
meanings of me.

And please don’t reduce me to doctrine  
or trivialize me with comfy feelings.  
If you want God’s kingdom,  
dump your images of kings.  
If you want God’s peace,  
let go the hope that war will bring it.

If mythologize me you must,  
let the myths *be* myths,  
doors to the Unknown.  
Don’t bury my meanings  
in tombs of words taken literally.  
If you would explain me with words,  
let them be lyrics to music.

So don't cling.  
If you want to meet me, feed the hungry,  
free the prisoners, touch your enemies with love.  
They are the Unique Particularities  
in which Universal Compassion abides,  
and where I wait for you.

Tom Keene    February 26, 2008

### **Book Review**

Todd C. REAM. *Hesburgh of Notre Dame. The Church's Public Intellectual*. New York: Paulist Press, 2021. Pp. Xxiv + 175. \$27.95 pb. ISBN 978-08091-5402-9.  
Reviewed by Anthony J. BLASI, 4531 Briargrove St., San Antonio, TX 78217  
(J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com)

Why another biography of Father Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C.? There are already good ones as well as his autobiography. The author, an Evangelical educator and editor, explains that none of the works about the famous president of the University of Notre Dame (1952-87) dwells on the theology that inspired his multi-faceted career.

The author cites Hesburgh's early theological book, *God and the World of Man*, and uses it as a key for understanding the multitudinous addresses, public statements, and articles archived in the Hesburgh Papers at Notre Dame. Hesburgh took the priesthood of the faithful seriously, and he understood his personal role as an ordained priest as an aspect of that broader calling. Priesthood served not only to bring the grace and inspiration of God to humanity but also to bring the conduct of human social life into the ways of God. In contemporary parlance, one would say that his view of priesthood featured an engagement in human affairs; it anticipated the teachings of the Second Vatican Council by about fifteen years.

The author points out that Father Hesburgh was called upon by U.S. Presidents, beginning with Dwight Eisenhower, to bring a religious perspective to science, civil rights, the potential benefits and dangers of atomic energy, and international development. His role as president of what was becoming the most important Catholic university in the world also led him to conceptualize the role of Catholic institutions of higher education, the place of academic freedom in them, the compatibility of science and religion, the rights of women, and ecumenism. Because he was leading Catholics out of the defensive posture characteristic of an earlier era in which Catholics were the object of scorn and discrimination, and into a new era in which Catholics were to be citizens collaborating with other citizens, he drew the ire of Catholics who were more stationary in the ways of the early twentieth century.

This account is good, as far as it goes. However, it reads as if Father Hesburgh had developed his strongly incarnational theology based largely on his readings of Thomas Aquinas, Jacques Maritain, John Henry Newman, and Barbara Ward and proceeded to use it to guide his responses to the many requests made of him by presidents and popes. One should ask, Why did he read and dwell on these authors and not some others? Why did he read these authors selectively, allowing himself to be drawn into progressive public causes?

Ted Hesburgh was not ambitious. He had to be persuaded to undertake the ventures that he ended up leading. Those who made his acquaintance knew him as someone completely comfortable with himself and others, and who made others comfortable with him. There was nothing pretentious about him. He dined and chatted with unimportant people readily. Students dropped in to talk to him late at night at his office—no appointments needed. He was comfortably grounded in the world immediately around him and open to it.

And what was that world? Notre Dame had a tradition of being open to the sciences. Father John Zahm of Notre Dame traveled about the United States giving lectures promoting the theory of evolution in the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century the Holy Cross priests studied at Catholic University of America, as did Hesburgh himself, and at that time Catholic University was known

for its progressive social ethics. Such a scientist as Father Julius Aloysius Nieuland, C.S.C., earned his doctorate in botany and chemistry at Catholic University and had a distinguished scientific career at Notre Dame. One would be hard put to it to credit Catholic University for such things today, but the excellence of its early history was part of the Notre Dame story in Hesburgh's day. One priest who identified with the Zahm heritage and who earned a Ph.D. in sociology at Catholic University was Father Raymond Murray, C.S.C.; Murry wrote a dissertation on what was a novel institution at the time, the juvenile court. As a social scientist at Notre Dame, he participated in anthropological studies in the Arctic and wrote favorably about human evolution—in the 1940s. Murray's sociology text condemns racial prejudice, and Murray himself did so in his classes. Murray, it turns out, was Father Hesburgh's spiritual director. It is this kind of contextual information that can help one understand the genesis and development of Father Hesburgh's practical theology.

While these favorable features of Father Hesburgh's involvement in public affairs make sense given his context, there are less favorable features as well. On the Notre Dame campus is a Stonehenge-inspired monument to the war dead of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnamese War. The largest monument on the campus, it does not simply remember the deceased but glorifies war. Hesburgh's generation was that of World War II, and Hesburgh himself accepted militarism without any evident qualms. He also never appeared to be open-minded about sexual minorities—again, something typical of his generation.

## 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.sanantoniopeace.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>