

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating May 23, 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 Pentecost Sunday. Tom Keene's poem is *God's Glory*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is my take on recent reportage on the activity of "Catholic" lobbyists.

Calendar

(Times are given for the Central Time Zone)

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 Si'* 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/tZApdu2rpjwrGtZywnMI8Cr6U09rTNzP00kF>

Monday May 17, 12:00pm (1:00pm ET) online conversation "Communities Not Cages: A Just Transition from Immigration Detention Economies," translation available, English and Spanish. Register at: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_fUc0pmG7TRW3-Ap8RoJmug

Monday May 17, 12:00pm (7:00pm Rome) “Critical Opportunities in 2021 to Create Change: Call for an Integral Path,” Father Augusto Zampini (Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development), Gregorio Mirabel (Amazonia), and Dietebego Lebea (South African Institute of International Affairs), moderated by Christine Allen. Register at: <https://actionnetwork.org/events/laudato-si-dialogue-critical-opportunities-in-2021-to-create-change-call-for-an-integral-path/>

Tuesday May 18, 7:00am (2:00pm Rome) “Laudato Sí Dialogue on Education” (educating about Laudato Sí), Jacqui Remond (Listen Australia), Séverine Deneulin (Laudato Sí Research Institute, University of Oxford), Margaret Pfeil (University of Notre Dame), Alberto López Rosado (Universidad Francisco de Vitoria Madrid), Diego Solano (Argentina), and Adrian Beling (Argentina), moderated by Amy Echeverria (Columban Missionaries). Register at: <https://actionnetwork.org/events/laudato-si-dialogue-on-education/>

Tuesday May 18, 11d:00am (12:00 ET) “Women of faith and Belief in the Workplace,” Amrith Kaur Aakre (Sikh Coalition), Fatima Diop (Alliance Bernstein), Tina Forrister (GlaxoSmithKline), and Vanessa Sheridan (Vanessa Sheridan and Associates), moderated by Sandra Yamate (Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession). Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/tanenbaums-religious-diversity-leadership-summit-2021-tickets-148382292431>

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; Register at: https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_I1P4Kv22TnWulGx9C4mmWg

Wednesday May 19, 8:00am (3:00pm Rome), Laudato Sí Dialogue on Energy and Fossil Fuels: Global Catholic Divestment Drumbeat,” Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich (Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union), Bill McKribben (350.org), Reobetswae Tloubatla (Denis Hurley Peace Institute), Jeni Miller (global Health and Climate Action), Clare Fussell (Diocese of Bristol, England), and Bishop Brendan Leahy (Diocese of Limerick, Ireland), moderated by Lindlyn Moma (Advocacy for the Global Catholic Climate Movement). Register at:

<https://actionnetwork.org/events/laudato-si-dialogue-on-energy-and-fossil-fuels-global-catholic-divestment-drumbeat/>

Tuesday May 25, 11:00am (12:00pm ET) “Demographic Data & Trends on Religious Diversity,” Conrad Hackett and Samirah Majumdar (both of Pew Research Center). Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/tanenbaums-religious-diversity-leadership-summit-2021-tickets-148382292431>

Wednesday May 26, 9:00am, to **Saturday May 29**, 7:00pm, online national symposium “The Future of Tulsa’s Past: The Centennial of the Tulsa Race Massacre and Beyond,” John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation, \$99.00. Information and registration: <https://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/eventReg?oeidk=a07ehkbesxec eb7034b&oseq=&c=&ch=>

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, 49th 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

Transformed by Daniel Berrigan: Learning to Live in a Sacramental Nonviolent Ethic, by Bill Wylie-Kellerman, May 8, 2021. Access at: <https://paxchristiusa.org/2021/05/08/transformed-by-daniel-berrigan-learning-to-live-in-a-sacramental-nonviolent-ethic/>

Second Reading, Vigil (Romans 8:22-27)

"For we know that all creation groans and agonizes up to now; but not only it but we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit also groan, anticipating an adoption that is the redemption of our body" (Rom 8:22-23). There is much to unpack here.

First, we know that much we take to be real depends on perspective; what we see depends on where we stand. Some realities are subject-dependent; a rainbow, for example, is not "out there" in the sky but in impressions made in our central nervous system. Such social phenomena as power and prestige are similarly quite real, but they are not "out there" but in the sphere of impressions. In our human condition, we are part of a creation whose story is not yet over. We groan and agonize. But from our perspective as Christians, we anticipate an adoption into the life of the Messiah. We see our environing realities in a new way.

There is a tendency among some Christians to be overly pessimistic and over-estimate "original sin." A strong faith in a Creator God involves faith in the goodness of creation too. We have sufficient goodness in us to groan and agonize over what populates our experience, our impressions of reality. And that pinch of goodness is enough to lead us to a hopeful perspective. "For we were saved in this hope..." (Rom 8:24).

Second Reading, Mass during the Day, 1st alternate reading

(1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13)

Pentecost Sunday clearly calls attention to the Holy Spirit. The very idea of a holy spirit would have what is non-spirit being animated by what is spirit. What is non-spirit comes in many forms, but there is an underlying oneness in the animation that takes place. This passage from Paul's letter to the Corinthian Christians uses this conception to help the Corinthians understand how it is that Christians could be so different from one another: "Now there are different assignments of gifts, but the same spirit; and there are different assignments of ministries, and the same Lord; and there are different assignments of works, but the same God, Who activates all things among all people" (1 Cor 12:6).

Understanding the differences comes readily. What requires more insight is understanding the oneness brought about by the Spirit.

Second reading, Mass during the Day, 2nd alternate reading
(Galatians 5:16-25)

There are people who use religion to divide the world into insiders and outsiders. Religion becomes more about despising the outsiders than anything else. Paul perceived in his day that enthusiasts for religious rules, "the law," were busy turning others into outsiders. This is the context for the entire *Letter to the Galatians*. The kind of religious law he had in mind was all about religious physical paraphernalia: what people wore, what they ate, when they performed certain rituals. "But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under a law" (1 Cor 5:18).

Surprisingly, Paul associates legalistic religion with "prostitution, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, factions, dissension, sects, grudges, drunkenness, carousal, and the like" (5:19-20). In contrast to all that, he speaks of the fruit of the spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, honesty, kindness, faith, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (5:22-23).

Third Reading, Vigil (John 7:37-39)

On Pentecost, the major reading comes from the first reading, from the *Acts of the Apostles*. The gospel reading is a brief excerpt from the *Johannine Gospel* that refers to the Holy Spirit. It narrates Jesus saying, "'If anyone thirst, come to me, and let anyone who believes in me drink. As the scripture said, Rivers of living water will flow out from within him.' Now he said this about the spirit that those who believed in him were going to receive. For there was not yet a spirit since Jesus was not yet glorified."

The writer is explaining from the perspective of the disciples, "those who believed in him," there was not yet a Holy Spirit. The understanding on the part of "those who believed" would evolve; new understandings would emerge. It is said now that Jesus was the fullness of revelation, but nothing is really revealed in one sense until it is understood. The demand that understanding cease evolving at some point in time is one kind of fundamentalism.

The understanding of revelation unfolds historically in the development of doctrine and personally in the growth in faith.

Sunday Mass during the Day, 1st alternate gospel reading (John 20:19-23)

There are two alternate readings for the masses during the day on Pentecost; this is the first one. It is one of a number of post-Easter appearance narratives. What distinguishes it from others are the two sayings, "As the Father sent me, I also am sending you," and, "Receive the Holy spirit: Whatever sins you might forgive are forgiven them, whatever you might hold has been held." The Messiah came, with offenses against God already forgiven; and those who follow him go out, with the forgiven state of those to whom they go already established. Note the tenses of the verbs in the second sentence. Christians do not create forgiveness but discover it. They do not arrogate to themselves the prerogative of forgiving or not forgiving.

Some sins remain unforgiven because their perpetrators have not recognized what forgiveness has been offered. The perpetrators remain in denial and defense.

It is strange that the saying about forgiveness has often been read to mean the opposite of what the words actually say.

**Sunday Mass during the Day, 2nd alternate gospel reading (John 15:26-27,
16:12-15)**

This reading is a composite of two brief passages from the *Johannine Gospel*. The first part juxtaposes the testimony of the Holy Spirit about Jesus and that of the disciples about him. This appears to be a way of affirming two aspects of the Christ or Messiah—an origin that is divine and a historical human experience of the human Jesus.

The second member of the composite saying points to more that will be revealed to the disciples and, presumably, to the readers. "I still have much to say to you; however, you cannot bear it now." Revelation will go into new aspects and depths of the larger truth over time. As with the gospel reading for the Vigil Mass (John 7:37-39; see above), here the *Johannine Gospel* presents a different model of Revelation than a fundamentalist one, an understanding that is more practical and human, one open to adjustment and updating with the times, to "aggiornamento" (to use the expression of St. John XXIII).

Poem

God's Glory

We pray: Glory be to God.
What is God's glory, I asked.
God said:

*My glory is your healing,
your justice, your peace,
that we partake
in doing together.*

Tom Keene and Muse
April 18, 2021

Politicking in Our Name

Anthony J. Blasi

I sometimes feel queasy when asked for a donation by an umbrella group. There may be some worthy endeavors that such a group funds, but there may also be some programs that give me pause. A late friend of mine served as the principal of a Catholic school in a diocese that faced major law suits that stemmed from abuse allegations; Catholics donated funds directly to the school in record amounts rather than to the diocese in question because they trusted him more than they did "the Church."

Not too long ago the Catholic bishops of the United States lobbied against the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare"), unsuccessfully, even as the religious orders, mostly female ones, lobbied for it, successfully. Most Catholics seemed to be on the side of the sisters. One may want to give donations to such lobbying entities as Network rather than to dioceses. Or one may want to contribute to the campaigns of politicians who want the Affordable Care Act to work rather than to bishops who seem to be allied with politicians who want it to fail.

I mention this because of a news story like this one: "When the U.S. Congress passed the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act last fall to establish

a toll-free number with assistance for those with mental health crises, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops quietly lobbied behind the scenes against the legislation.¹ Why did they oppose the bill? "The legislation contained special funding for LGBTQ support."² The bishops for some years now similarly opposed the Violence Against Women Act because the text of the bill referenced sexual orientation and gender identity. And for decades they have opposed the Employment Non-Discrimination Act; they objected that the bill did not distinguish between inclination and act—a faulty anthropology, they say. "Such reasoning is, in part why the U.S. bishops have opposed the recently passed House legislation known as the Equality Act, which would expand federal civil rights protection" for LGBTQ persons, "while eliminating religious freedom protections."³ In practice, it seems that the collective stance of the U.S. Bishops is that they want to be able to discriminate against sexual minorities under color of religious freedom in employment policies in church-sponsored schools, hospitals, and the like.

The "anthropology" in question is not the science of physical anthropology but the bishops' favored view of human culpability. For non-heterosexual persons, this anthropology would hold that a sexual orientation is a condition over which the individual has no control; hence it involves no culpability. This view, granted, is better than the quack programs that promised to reverse people's sexual orientations. But the bishops' anthropology goes on to hold individuals culpable for acting on their proclivities. Hence, the lobbying position stands opposed to any kind of recognition of same-sex marriage. The category, *transgendered*, involves a slightly different stance; those experiencing gender dysphoria are said to, in effect, be faking, that there is no such thing. As I noted in a previous essay, this is contrary to scientific findings.

Irrespective of the scientific validity or invalidity of the bishops' favored "anthropology," there is no particular reason why legislation should reflect it. If having a hot line available for people having suicidal thoughts because of gender dysphoria works administratively, there is no moral rationale for opposing it. The bishops have no business lobbying, in our name, for legislative texts paralleling the language found in, for example, pre-scientific moral theology manuals.⁴

¹ Christopher White "For US bishops, LGBTQ 'anthropology' rules out Equality Act compromises," *National Catholic Reporter* 57:14 (April 16-29, 2021): 1.

² White, "For US bishops," p. 1.

³ White, "For US bishops," p. 5.

⁴ I highly recommend that scholars read what is called *manualist moral theology*, since these old textbooks often raise important questions, but following them mechanically is hardly competent moral theology. In fact, it strikes me as religious malpractice.

Let's focus on non-discrimination legislation. In general, discrimination is immoral; it perpetrates an injustice on the person(s) against whom there is a temptation to discriminate. The legislation would put legal force behind the moral imperative not to discriminate. I would not maintain that every moral imperative should be seconded by legal force, but some such imperatives should be. Laws that proscribe theft, for example, put the force of the state behind the moral imperative not to steal. People who are discriminated against are often vulnerable. On the face of it, legislation against vulnerable people having injustices worked against them is good legislation. The value that is the rationale for the legislation, justice, does not derive from the qualities of the would-be victims but from the disvalue of acting unjustly. One does not make theft of a homosexual's property an exception to laws against theft. It would bring about a disvalue to work an injustice on someone simply because that person is vulnerable or a sexual minority. Allowing for such disvalue because a law against acting on the disvalue might imply an allegedly incorrect "anthropology" does not make sense, morally speaking. It would be like allowing people to burn otherwise innocent people for witchcraft because a law against that might give people the wrong idea that some people are witches.

The news reports go on to recount how the bishops' lobby has made recourse to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in their argument against various versions of non-discrimination legislation. When tested in the courts, this act has not fared well because the courts have ruled that they, interpreting the Constitution, determine what the people have by way of rights; it is not Congress that can do that. It comes down to the Free Exercise of Religion clause in the First Amendment. So if a religion holds that a sexual minority working in a church-sponsored school or hospital violates the religion, then the officials of the religion have the prerogative to discriminate in hiring and retention policies against the sexual minority. Note that this is a legal technicality, not a moral principle. *Free exercise* is a legal term of art derived from the British royal court when a queen was a Catholic. The queen was granted the free exercise of her religion—i.e., to attend a Catholic mass. This found its way into the American colonies when the prerogative was extended to the founders of the Maryland colony. It is a considerable stretch to claim it grants religions the prerogative to perpetrate injustices.

Any act having an ethical quality—be it moral or immoral—has several aspects. There is the end for which the act is performed. There is the immediate object of the act. There are the circumstances under which the act is performed.

Thus a hiker caught in a snow storm on a mountain may want shelter and food; those are the end or rationale for breaking into a vacant cabin, using its fire place, and consuming some canned food found in the cabin. The snow storm and impossibility of hiking back to a point of origin are conditions. Breaking in and consuming someone else's food taken alone has an immorality attached to it, but the conditions and end cancel the immorality. Discrimination has an immoral end; the rationale is to perpetrate an injustice on a vulnerable victim. The act itself—for example, not hiring or retaining—is neutral; sometimes one does not hire or retain for good reasons. The conditions do not justify the deed; otherwise it would not be a matter of discrimination. One would be hard put to it to make such an unjust act into a just one by claiming that not doing it burdens the free exercise of religion. In fact, the claim of a burden itself, needed under the terms of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, is scandalous; it creates a much greater burden by giving religion a bad name. How many people are religious officials driving out of the churches with their hateful political interventions?

What the official lobbyists for the Church do behind the scenes has a parallel in the doings of wealthy Catholics who oppose the Church's social teachings. Recent reporting names Sean Fieler, Frank Hanna, Tim Busch, and Leonard Leo. "Fieler is a hedge fund executive described by *Inside Philanthropy* as an 'ideologically motivated funder.' Hanna, CEO of the Atlanta-based Hanna Capital and a member of Regnum Christi, the lay arm of the scandal-riddled Legionaries of Christ, made a fortune marketing subprime credit cards."⁵ "Busch's law firm helps the ultra-wealthy to protect their wealth so it can be handed on to heirs. And while those clients are still alive, his luxury resorts provide places for them to play. He also is the principal funder of the Catholic University of America business school that bears his name."⁶ "Leo, for years the executive vice president of the Federalist Society, has been the principal architect of the conservative makeup of the Supreme Court and the supply line for conservative judges appointed by the Trump administration."⁷ None of these people produces goods that ordinary people can purchase and use; among the products are credit instruments that trap the poor!

And what are such influentials up to? They formed a front group, the Election Transparency Initiative, a \$5 million campaign targeting states with close

⁵ Tom Roberts, "The new magisterium: wealthy Catholics." *National Catholic Reporter*, April 30-May 13, 2021, p. 20.

⁶ Roberts, "The new magisterium," p. 20.

⁷ Roberts, "The new magisterium," p. 20.

election margins in 2020 and Republican-controlled legislatures. Under the color of pro-life and pro-family politics, the campaign is promoting the Big Lie that Donald Trump won the 2020 presidential election but was cheated out of it, and under the color of voter integrity promoting voter suppression laws in various states to make it more difficult for racial and ethnic minorities to vote. How are the Big Lie and voter suppression Catholic causes?

Does it not seem to be the case that the American Catholic bishops are prejudiced against sexual minorities and not actually obsessed with "anthropology," and that the wealthy Catholics, captains of everything but industry, are prejudiced against racial and ethnic minorities and not actually obsessed with life and voter integrity?

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.sanantoniopeace.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>