

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating June 3, 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 Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ. Tom Keene poem is *Body of Christ*. See <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php> for more of Tom's poems. A May 1 article from the *Guardian* about hostility and threats to Christians in Jerusalem follows.

Calendar

In Austin

Friday June 1, 6:00pm-**Sunday June 3**, 6:00pm, ATX Hack for Change 2018. ATX Hack for Change brings together members of the Austin community to tackle unique issues "facing our weird city" and to use technology to create a lasting impact. It reflects a commitment to social justice in the community and beyond. See <http://atxhackforchange.org>. St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

Saturday June 9, 9:00am-5:00pm, The Nation at a Crossroads: A National Latino Policy Conference. Texas Capitol, Auditorium E1.004, 1100 Congress Ave. Free, RSVP at <https://eventbrite.com/e/the-nation-at-a-crossroads-a-national-latino-policy-conference-tickets-45084367557>.

Saturday June 23, 9:00am-5:00pm, Junteenth Health Festival. 2018 theme: Reproductive Justice. The event is an annual celebration of Black Health and Weallness in the context of liberation. See <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/junteenth-health-fest-2018-tickets-45395760943?aff=efbeventtix>. Tickets (free) by May 30. Huston-Tillotson University, 900 Chacon St.

In Houston

Wednesday June 6, 8:00am-9:00am, Greg Cootsona (California State University at Chico), *Science at a Particular Crossroads: Bringing the Religious Implications of Mainstream Science to Evangelical Christians*. Rice University, Humanities Bldg. 117. Register at <http://events.rice.edu/#!view/event/date/20180606/event-id/6295>.

In San Antonio

Saturday June 9, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting, home of Al Eisch, 3130 Clearfield (off Vance Jackson, north of I-410).

Monday June 18, 4:30pm to **Wednesday June 20**, 8:30pm, Summer Institute: Downward Mobility. Presentations by Shane Claiborne, Robert Elsberg, David Haas, and Sue Mosteller. Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate dr. \$85 registration; meal plan and lodging available. For information: <https://ost.edu/continuing-education/>, or (210) 341-1366 X 406.

Third Reading (Mark 14:12-16, 22-26)

The gospel reading includes the Eucharistic Institution narrative from the *Gospel of Mark*—hardly a surprising choice for a celebration of the Body and Blood of Christ. But do not let that absence of surprise obscure the unordinary aspect of it all.

First, Jesus has secret followers in Jerusalem, and he needs to tell his Galilean disciples how to make contact with them through a secret sign. Secrecy implies danger. Mark's Christian community in Rome knew of such danger; they had gone through a period of persecution and were still officially illegal. They continued to maintain a communal secrecy. It was a survival stratagem for members of one part of the Christian network not to know the members of another part, except through a few select leaders. The Jesus movement had known a similar situation in Palestine, and the tradition about that resonated with Mark's associates in Rome.

Second, the secret sign involved crossing gender expectations. The famous Dominican biblical scholar Marie-Joseph Lagrange (1855-1938) observed long ago that women carried earthen water jugs while male water carriers used large leather bottles. Evidently the early followers of Jesus made light of violating gender expectations. The disciples followed the man carrying the water jug to a house, where the household head had a large upper room ready where the disciples could prepare the Passover meal.

Third, Jesus adds the famous statement of his real presence in the bread and wine blessings, which Mark does not even try to explain.

Fourth, "...after singing the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives," rather than continue the celebration as would be expected. Knowing of the plot of Judas and the Jerusalem authorities, Jesus did not want his secret Jerusalem followers to be further endangered by his presence. So he and his disciples leave the house.

The hymn traditional for the Passover consisted of Psalms 115-118, found in modern bibles. Psalm 116 includes this passage:

I kept my faith, even when I said,

“I am greatly afflicted”;
I said in my consternation,
“Humans are all a vain hope.”
What shall I render to the Lord
for all His bounty to me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation
And call on the name of the Lord,
I will pay my vows to the Lord
In the presence of all His people.
Precious in the sight of the Lord
Is the death of his saints.

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Poem

Body of Christ
(At breakfast with fellow activists)

We dare to embody you in our communion
over tacos and coffee, amid laughter at ourselves,
our talk about matters that matter.

Embody you in our recall:

of your presence then,
your healing touches,
your startling stories,
your embracing glances
that seized us to the core.

of your presence now,
in our hungers for justice,
in our grief over cruelty,
in our pleasure at each of our
faltering forward steps,

of your lasting presence
as the arc of our becoming
bends toward the all we can together be.

Tom Keene
August 12, 2016

Christians in Jerusalem's Old City 'under threat' from settlers

Church leaders claim priests are being verbally abused and spat at while property is being vandalised in ancient walled city

Harriet Sherwood in Jerusalem
The *Guardian* May 1, 2018

Christians in Jerusalem's Old City say their presence at the geographical heart of their faith is under threat from intimidation and aggressive property acquisition by hardline Jewish settlers.

According to church leaders, priests are being verbally abused and spat at, and property vandalised.

Tensions have risen this year in the Christian and Armenian quarters of the 1 sq km ancient walled city, which includes the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the holiest place in Christianity where Jesus was believed to be crucified and resurrected. The Old City is also home to places of critical religious importance to Jews and Muslims.

The churches say they are facing onslaught on three fronts: a war of attrition waged by hardline settlers; unprecedented tax demands by Jerusalem city council; and a proposal to allow the expropriation of church land sold to private developers.

Theophilos III, the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem and the most senior Christian leader in the Holy Land, told the *Guardian*: "Today the church faces a most severe threat at the hands of certain settler groups. The settlers are persistent in their attempts to erode the presence of the Christian community in Jerusalem.

"These radical settler groups are highly organised. Over the last years we have witnessed the desecration and vandalism of an unprecedented number of churches and holy sites and receive growing numbers of reports from priests and local worshippers who have been assaulted and attacked.

"Where the authorities are concerned, this behaviour goes largely unchecked and unpunished."

At Mount Zion, just outside the Old City walls, undeveloped land owned by the church and often referred to as the "Greek garden" is regularly vandalised, according to Moni Shama, a church caretaker.

Trees have been uprooted, garbage left, graffiti scrawled on stones and paint thrown inside the ancient Chapel of Pentecost, he said. Three years ago, a Greek Orthodox seminary at the site was set alight.

The Greek Orthodox church, the oldest Christian presence in the Old City, is also deeply concerned about attempts to gain control of properties it owns close to Jaffa Gate, the main entrance to the Christian and Armenian quarters.

A court ruling is expected later this year on a disputed sale of the historic Imperial and Petra hotels. The church has challenged a deal made by an official under the previous patriarch, which it claims involved bribery and conspiracy and was therefore invalid. The church has already lost one case on the sale, but it is appealing.

It says the settler organisation Ateret Cohanim is behind the purchase of the strategically significant properties as part of its drive to increase the Jewish presence in the Old City. The organisation, dedicated to the “physical and spiritual redemption” of the Old City, has been frequently accused of using third parties to buy properties.

Abu Walid Dajani, whose family has managed the 45-room Imperial Hotel for almost 70 years, said the prospect of ownership changing hands from the Greek Orthodox church to Ateret Cohanim was a “nightmare”.

“If I used to wake up twice a night, now I wake up four times, thinking what if the decision goes in favour of Ateret Cohanim,” said Dajani, 74. “I will try my best to keep this hotel, but I know they want us out.”

Gabi Hani, whose restaurant Versavee is next to the hotel, said: “They [Ateret Cohanim] want to drive Christians out, for sure.

“If you have a hostile organisation sitting in your home, it is no longer your home.”

Daniel Luria of Ateret Cohanim said: “Claims or accusations by the Greek Patriarchate regarding ‘radical settlers’ targeting their priests with verbal abuse etc are absurd, unacceptable and disgraceful.”

He denied that the organisation wanted Christians to leave the Old City, and declined to comment on the issue of the Jaffa Gate sales. “Ateret Cohanim believes in coexistence with Christians and Muslims alike, living side by side without fences or borders, living in any neighbourhood of Jerusalem,” he said.

“The concept of disallowing Jews to live in certain areas is foreign and unacceptable. Christian and Muslim Arabs buy and live quietly side by side with Jews in predominantly Jewish neighbourhoods, so why couldn’t or shouldn’t Jews purchase and live in predominantly Arab neighbourhoods?”

In a separate development – but one that church leaders say is part of a pattern of targeting Christians – Jerusalem city council issued churches with a demand in February for nearly \$200m (£143m) in back taxes. In protest, the church denominations closed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for an unprecedented three days, during which thousands of pilgrims were locked out.

The tax bill followed a decision that a tax exemption for places of worship had been wrongly applied to church-owned commercial properties. The churches say they pay taxes on purely commercial properties, such as restaurants and hotels, but many of those that the council says are liable provide educational, medical and welfare facilities for Christians and others.

The closure was lifted only after the intervention of Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, who set up a committee to look at the issue of church taxes. He also temporarily halted the progress of a proposed law to expropriate church lands sold to private developers.

The bill has the support of 40 members of the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, who say the Greek Orthodox church is selling off land at discount prices to private developers, which puts leaseholders at risk. The Greek Orthodox church owns about a third of land in the Old City and key sites around Jerusalem, including the land on which the Knesset, government offices and the Israel Museum are built.

Theophilos has in the past few months travelled to the UK, the Vatican, the US and elsewhere to seek support for Christian institutions in the heart of the Holy Land. In

the UK, he met Prince Charles, government ministers and Christian leaders, including the archbishops of Canterbury and Westminster and the Coptic archbishop of London.

The patriarch wants a commitment to the continuation of the status quo, an agreement which provides protection of, and access to, holy sites in Jerusalem and elsewhere, allowing Christians to live and worship in peace despite the conflicts and divisions in the area.

Pope Francis and other Christian leaders have called for the status quo to be respected.

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>

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