

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating June 6, 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 Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. Tom Keene's poem is *Eat Drink*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>.

As I write, the Israeli government and the Hamas authority in Gaza have agreed to a cease fire and appear to be abiding by it. One dare not call it good news, but less bad. Two sets of politicians, having lost their respective standings in the eyes of their respective constituents, decided it was convenient to have an outburst of violence. This was clearly a conflagration of the willing. The deadlock arising from the entrenched injustice of an internal colonialism remains in place, awaiting the next delimited time of violence that becomes mutually convenient. Following the poem is the moral outcry of Pax Christi International over what was happening in Israel/Palestine.

A reader has objected to my use of the term *excommunicate* in an editorial last week. Here is the context in which I used the term: "A church may want to excommunicate those who perform abortions or promote racial violence; I do not object to that. However, involving the state in the legislation of morality is quite another matter, and politicians can legitimately and morally differ on such matters, and should not be excommunicated when they do so. And I must ask, where does excommunicating stop? At the death penalty? At the sale of alcohol on Sundays? At segregation? At nuclear weapons?" The objection to my use of the term points out, "The writer talks about excommunication and this has never been discussed at all by the bishops. Please ask the writer to clarify this important issue." I was using the common English language meaning of the term, found in the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary, Tenth Edition, Revised* (Oxford University Press, 2002): "officially exclude from participation in the sacraments

and services of the Christian Church.” I understand this to include exclusion from any sacrament or service; evidently the objector would require an exclusion from all sacraments and services, as specified in the Code of Canon Law 1331 §1. The point is well taken; so let me rephrase: "...involving the state in the legislation of morality is quite another matter, and politicians can legitimately and morally differ on such matters, and should not be denied a sacrament when they do so."

The clarification in the previous paragraph dates from May 24, and I shared it with the person making the objection. The following day I received this reaction: "Your use of the word excommunication in the context of what you are writing is very confusing and needs much more explanation." Having conceded the linguistic point, I wonder in what confusion would reside. So allow me to point to the extra-linguistic context: Any action in settings in which humans gather has reciprocal consequences. A right of any one person corresponds to a duty or obligation on one or more other persons. A marginalization imposed on any one person facilitates a similar initiative by others and a distancing from the social gathering experienced by the targeted person. Still others who hold the targeted person as a significant presence in their own lives would experience a distancing from that part of the social grouping from which the original marginalizing action came. Such shunning behavior could be a complete shunning—as in an excommunication in the canonical sense—but it could also be a partial shunning, which I originally had in mind. And the denial of the reception of the Eucharist, a sacramental participation encouraged for all the faithful since the time of Pope Pius X, is a shunning. Make no mistake about it.

Christian tradition stands for life. That has been true from its beginning, when Christ followers in the early church refrained from infanticide and participation in the Roman military. In the context of limited government, the question arises whether limited government should criminalize the taking of pre-natal life prior to the point of viability. Legal experts differ on that matter. The person whom some Christian authorities would target for shunning, Joseph Biden, is trained in law, has played a role in drafting law, and has even chaired the Judiciary Committee of the United States Senate. His professional opinion on the limits on government is distinct from commitments he, as a Christian, should be expected to have on the sacredness of life. One may or may not agree with his professional opinion, but it is not proper to religiously shun him for whatever stand he takes. I myself may disagree with some aspects of his stand, but I endeavor to be a reasonable person, in the same way that he seems to be a

reasonable person. The texture of society depends on such reasonability, for that is what makes the reciprocity of social reality, which I described above, possible.

There is more: The Catholic Church is marked by the full Tridentine list of sacraments. One might notice about the sacraments that they build up the collective body of the faithful. How ironic it would be to weaponized a Catholic sacrament for furthering a partisan stand in a secular question, a sacrament commonly recognized as "communion" at that!

One would hardly find a role for shunning, even partial shunning, in a Christian church, if the person in question has not already pursued a course of action that has in effect created a separation from the wider body of the faithful in advance of a formal shunning.

Calendar

[Times are for the Central Time Zone]

Wednesday June 2, 12:00pm (1:00pm ET) webinar *Understanding Systemic Racism in the Banking and Housing Industries*, Jonathan Wilson (Liberty Bank and Trust Company) and Luis Guajardo (Kinder Institute for Urban Research), moderated by Mark Toubin (Anti-Defamation League Southwest). Register at: https://adl.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_UbA3dMK4R-aKEu-EVnJAYQ

Wednesday June 2, 3:00pm (4:00pm ET) Network online webinar *Faithful Recovery: The American Jobs Plan and the American Families Plan*, Laura Peralta-Schulte, Jarrett Smith, and Gina Kelley (all from Network). Register at: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_cO876VEWSdWt-J4EhRoSJw

Saturday June 5, 2:00 pm Pax Christi San Antonio online meeting. The theme will be sexual minorities' issues; the agenda includes a memorial of Nicki Valdez by Deb Myers and information presented by Pastor Joseph Garrett of Woodlawn Point Church. The Zoom link is: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83427586495?pwd=WUFhK2tBYIRRRFVks2VMZHcxOU44Zz09>

Wednesday June 9, Saturday June 12, Sunday June 13, OR Wednesday June 16, each 1:00pm (11:00am Pacific Time; 2:00pm ET), virtual delegations to Silwan, the Jerusalem neighborhood resisting expulsion and home demolitions. The context is 70% of Palestinian residents having received eviction or demolition notices. Eyewitness Palestine is leading the virtual delegations in order to counter the Israeli tourist and archeology industries' effort to link the Bible stories of King David to the modern Israeli state. Each session is limited to 45 participants. Register at: <https://secure.everyaction.com/PJNPkea3GEeB7sS4O0QF6A2>

Thursday June 17, 6:30pm, "Seeds of Peace: The Case for Nuclear Disarmament," Ira Helfand (Physicians for Social Responsibility). Contact Pax Christi Little Rock for the Zoom link: paxchristilr@gmail.com.

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.

Tuesday July 13, 6:30pm-Thursday July 15, 8:00pm, *Laudato Sí and the U.S. Catholic Church. A Conference Series on Our Common Home*, sponsored by Catholic Climate Conference and Creighton University. Addresses by Blasé Cardinal Cupich (Archdiocese of Chicago), Maureen Day (Franciscan School of Theology), Bishop Joseph Tyson (Diocese of Yakima, Washington), and Sister Ilia Delio, OSF (Villanova University).

Complete schedule: <https://www.creighton.edu/catholicclimate/schedule/>

Register at:

https://reg.abcsignup.com/s_reg/reg_registration_maintenance.aspx?ek=0036-0013-440150ea4e6b4155aae2e37436d164b1

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

Notices

Racism and the Catholic Church one year after George Floyd's Murder (video) from *America Magazine*. Access at: <https://paxchristiusa.org/2021/05/25/racism-and-the-catholic-church-one-year-after-george-floyds-murder/>

Defining Nonviolence (video, 7 minutes 28 seconds) interviews with Myla Leguro (Philippines), Archbishop Peter Chong (Fiji), Rania Murra (Palestine), Fr. Emmanuel Katongole (Uganda), Jasmin Nario Galace (Philippines), Fr. Dave Kelly (USA), Sarah Thompson (USA), Jean Baptiste Talla (Cameroon), Christina Leaño (USA), and Pietro Ameglio (Mexico). Access at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPt5mShNfPM>

Understanding Nonviolence (video, 4 minutes, 24 seconds) interviews with Christina Leaño (USA), Pietro Ameglio (Mexico), Jasmin Nario Galace (Philippines), and Jean Baptiste Talla (Cameroon). Access at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MQpKDNmxuk>

Planning for Nonviolence (video, 12 minutes, 38 seconds) interviews with Christina Leaño (USA), Fr. Emmanuel Katongole (Uganda), Myla Leguro (Philippines), Jean Baptiste Talla (Cameroon), and Rania Murra (Palestine). Access at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK5dOVJK-lk>

Nonviolence in Action (video, 14 minutes, 25 seconds) interviews with Fr. Dave Kelly (USA), Jasmin Nario Galace (Philippines), Archbishop Peter Chong (Fiji), Fr. Emmanuel Katongole (Uganda), Pietro Ameglio (Mexico), and Christina Leaño (USA). Access at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrdR-5k5fq0>

Second Reading (Hebrews 9:11-15)

An eminent rabbinic scholar once spoke to me, with some humor, about the prospect of Christian fundamentalists accumulating the political and financial clout to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and resume the practice of burning goats and oxen. Of course, contemporary mainstream Judaism is as far removed from the ancient rituals of the Second Temple (let alone the First Temple) as is contemporary mainstream Christianity. Even back in the first century CE Jews,

Jewish Christ followers, and gentile Christ followers in the Mediterranean areas distant from Jerusalem did not know what to do with the elaborate ritual prescriptions about sacrificial ritual in the scriptures.

The author of the Christian *Letter to the Hebrews* dealt with the Temple rituals allegorically. The intent was to lead Jewish Christ followers away from the largely ethnic Jewish identity even while rooted in the Jewish religious heritage. This involved an argument that external observances, even in the architectural center of religion, in the Temple, were national or ethnic rather than spiritual or religious in a strict sense. Thus the *Letter* picks up on a scriptural reference to a new Covenant: "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord,/And I will conclude with the house of Israel/And with the house of Judah a new covenant" (Jeremiah 3:31). The author of the *Letter* likens the separation of the outer sanctuary and the Holy of Holies to a progression from an Old Covenant to a New Covenant. Rather than the shed blood of goats and calves, the Messiah (or Christ) enters a new space with his own blood (i.e., by death of a body) fulfilling the Old Covenant once and for all, "gaining an eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12, from today's reading).

Today, one might distinguish between the externals of religion and its spiritual point.

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.

Poem

Eat Drink

Some two hundred decades ago
a rabbi-healer gathered
his friends for a meal.

Eat this bread, he said, this is my body.
Drink this cup of wine, he said, this is my blood.

Both are given to all for all of us
that we be as One self:
body-blood-soul-spirit,
living out the One we already are.

The story goes on to tell how
three days later the rabbi's
tortured to death body set itself forth
for us to eat, drink and become.

Tom Keene and Muse
March 17, 2021



**Embolden peacebuilders, demand justice:
Message on the situation in Jerusalem**

Pax Christi International

Pax Christi International denounces all forms of violence. Yet, it is imperative to recognise that violence and terror can take many forms and can be executed under labels which belie its true intent. Violence never happens in a vacuum.

Today, the world is watching Jerusalem—the city of peace—devolve into utter chaos with contradictory narratives vying for the headlines. Soundbites do not lend themselves to truth nor context. Indiscriminate rockets retaliate . . . bombs fill the night sky over an imprisoned people. Rocks and bottles meet stun grenades, “skunk” spray, and rubber bullets. One man loses his eyesight to an explosion thrown in his face . . . a soldier is hit in the head. Some children are terrorised by midnight raids and arrests while others recoil in fear in a bomb shelter. The cycle continues.

Yet, beneath this explosion of violence is a long history of simmering anger, resentment, and loss of hope. One people’s terror from centuries of discrimination and unthinkable atrocities results in another people’s brutal subjugation under military occupation, and the incremental efforts to erase their presence in their homeland.

We cry for the pain of families who have lived with expulsion from their homes and threats of reliving the ongoing nightmare of displacement. We mourn with families who have lost loved ones to terror. We tremble in horror as young children witness destruction, death, and the degrading humiliation of being powerless. We pray that hardened hearts, instead of heads and bodies, be cracked open and willing to see the other as a beloved child of God.

Sadly, this is far from the first explosion of violence to rack this Holy Land. Every individual act of provocation and retaliation is met with another round of the same . . . often escalating to a moment of crisis as we see today.

Pax Christi International stands with the people who brazenly demand justice, all the more if they are caught up in an asymmetric conflict in so many ways. We recommit ourselves to supporting all forms of nonviolent resistance and plead that the international community, instead of blaming, recognise and lift-up the truth of each side’s transgressions and longings.

We embolden the peacebuilders to never allow the provocateurs of distrust and hatred nor the perpetrators of violence to chip away at their holy and rightful mission. Peace may be elusive; it might hide from view, yet we hold on to a solitary truth that if truly desired it is not impossible.

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>