

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating July 4, 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 Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem, reminding us of important people who are part of our lived nation, is *We Farmworkers*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem is a book review by John Krejci, my classmate from many years ago in the graduate sociology program at the University of Notre Dame. The review is of a biography of Malcolm X; John finds it particularly relevant for today.

Calendar

Tuesday June 29, 12:00pm-12:30pm, What Happens Next to Voting Rights in Texas? Representatives Nicole Collier (Fort Worth) and Jessica González (Dallas), moderated by Alexa Ura (*Texas Tribune*). Register at: https://watch-voting-rights.splashthat.com/june23?mc_cid=113c293efd&mc_eid=008697c335

Tuesday June 29, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET), online Community Conversation: Sisters on the Border, sponsored by Network. Guest panel of religious sisters experienced in volunteer work on the southern border, followed by suggested actions and breakout sessions. Register at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcvcOGprz4iE9VKk5HSJmHCfqCCR-XLLgz0>

Thursday July 1, 7:00pm, San Antonio Audubon Society meeting, online presentation "Protecting Texas through Responsible Stewardship: The Watershed Approach," Eugenia Spears (Texas A & M University). Access at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89065967722?pwd=UFIVZlZrOHNRdHFmeXVVVYVBycWliZz09#success>

Saturday July 10, 9:00am-10:00am (10:00am-11:00am ET), Zoom online "The Mysticism of Ordinary Life: Which Mysticism? Whose Ordinarity?" Andrew L. Prevot (Boston College), using Latinx and Black/Womanist sources. Register at: https://bccte.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_AKO8O0YURfCkc97QV4T7zA

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 Si* 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

Thursday July 22, 6:30pm-8:00pm (7:30pm-:00pm ET) OR Sunday August 8, 6:00pm-7:30pm (7:00pm-8:30pm ET) Trans 101 Workshop for understanding transgender members of families and communities, presented by the Marianist LGBT Trans Advocacy Committee. Register for July 22 at:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/trans-101-workshop-tickets-158674811633>

Register for August 8 at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/trans-101-workshop-tickets-158802686109>

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. For further information:
<https://paxchristiusa.org/2021/06/03/registration-opens-next-week-for-the-pax-christi-usa-national-conference-july-30-31-2021/>

Notices

Exploring Religious Freedom with Asma Uddin, a conversation between author Asma Uddin and political scientist Daniel Philpott (University of Notre Dame). Together they explore how religious freedom has become a partisan issue in the United States. Access at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dM3MWJIUjg8>

Should Catholic Schools Teach Critical Race theory? Christopher J. Devron, S.J., *America* June 3, 2021. Access at:
<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/06/03/critical-race-theory-catholic-high-schools-black-lives-matter-240792>

Second Reading (2 Corinthians 12: 7-10)

Paul had visited the Christ followers in Corinth amidst some controversies, but the visit did not go well. He wrote Second Corinthians, chapters 10-13, in the aftermath of that visit. He had been criticized as being unimpressive. His response, in more modern parlance, would go something like this: "What do you want me to do? Start bragging about my greatness?" The translation of the section begins, "If I need to boast, I will boast about the matters of my weakness" (2 Cor 11:30). Then he starts explaining how he was so weak that friends had to smuggle him out of Damascus when he was under threat of arrest there. The reading for the Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time is a later part of his response.

"So, lest I be too elated, a thorn in the flesh was given me, a messenger of Satan, to cuff me on the ear, lest I be too elated. I called out to the Lord about this three times to remove it from me; and he said to me, 'My grace is strong enough for you, for power is completed in weakness'" (2 Cor 12:7-9). It is useful not to take this as a mere episode in his argument but to place it in the broader context of Paul's spirituality. Jesus was something of a reverse Messiah for him, a savior not through the exercise of worldly power but in the midst of the humiliation of

crucifixion—a punishment reserved for uppity slaves. By an inattention to worldly success the spiritual Messiah disarmed worldly power. As Paul saw matters, the Christ follower is called upon to do likewise.

Third Reading (Mark 6.1-6)

“Is this not the builder, the son of Mary and brother of James, Joses, Jude, and Simon?” And, “Are not his sisters here among us?” The problem was not what Jesus was saying or how he was saying it, but that he was nobody important.

A county judge in Texas, open-minded and moderate, did not match the image of the typical Texas politician. Experts in economics had told him that pay levels in town were too low for people to have a decent standard of living. They even told him retail business could not grow unless the minimum wage became a living wage. Interest groups had their facts. Such claims were more such facts.

He stepped out his private door into the hall of the county executive building. The afternoon sun streaming through the window at the end of the hall made a silhouette of the janitor who was emptying waste baskets into a big barrel on a cart. “How ya doin’, Sam?”

“All right, your honor. Anything you need?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact. How much do you get paid?”

After an awkward pause, “Minimum wage.”

“Is it enough?”

“I get by, with my weekend job at the parking lot and the wife’s waitress work. This month is a little tight, adding my son to the car insurance.”

“Yes,” said the judge, “It adds up.”

Back in the office, the judge had no more facts than before, but he saw them differently. Arguments for and against a “living wage policy” for county employees became arguments for and against the living people who were working for those wages. He decided to persuade the county commissioners to adopt a living wage policy.

Faith is not a matter of facts and arguments, though it may well deal with such. We do not see first and then have faith but have faith first and then begin to see. Unfortunately, faith is optional. Sometimes evidence may even be unavoidable, but understanding the evidence is not. After all, Sam the janitor is busy in the hallway five afternoons a week.

“Is this not the builder, the son of Mary and brother of James, Joses, Jude, and Simon?” And, “Are not his sisters here among us?” So we know, factually, who he is, where he is from, how he is doing.

Poem

We Farmworkers

We are the ones who connect you to the seeds,
attending them through to harvest:

Cane cutters,
fruit pickers,
planters,
weed pullers,
packers.

Picture us:

Over and over bending of backs,
our gallons of sweat,
our callusing of hands,
our faces ridden with exhaustion,
our eyes hungry for rest.

How without us cannot be:

Your cities,
hospitals,
schools,
sewers,
highways.

Imagine how, with every breakfast bite,
you might grasp the worth of the work we do
and resolve to pay us what our work is worth.

Tom Keene

December 12, 2017

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Book Review

The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X, Les Payne and Tamera Payne. New York: Liveright Publishing, 2020, 612pp. Reviewed by John Krejci.¹

The mantra “Black Lives Matter” is new; it grew out of the killing of George Floyd and struck a chord with African-American as well as white youth. Perhaps it helped lead to the trial and conviction of the abusive police officer. However, Malcolm X (born Malcolm Little in Omaha in 1925) preached Black pride for decades before his assassination in 1965. His father, Earl, had spent his own life promoting Marcus Garvey’s Black solidarity and “back-to-Africa” movement fifty years prior to that. It is no wonder that even today Black Lives Matter instills fear in many white and white supremacy groups. And the name Malcolm X still engenders discomfort, fear and sometimes hatred to the present day. The five-part 1959 documentary *The Hate That Hate Produced*, hosted by Mike Wallace, is still cited to highlight the impact of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam.

In addition to Malcolm’s biography, this book gives the historical context to Malcolm’s, Martin Luther King’s, and white racists’ actions in 20th century America. The somewhat baffling title, *The Dead are Arising*, refers to the fact that many Black people are “dead” to pride and awareness of their worth and are hindered by the self-hatred that white society has instilled in them. Author Les Payne is a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, who carried out research for 30 years until his death in 2018. His daughter and chief researcher published the work in 2020.

I taught *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* to Nebraska college students in the 1970’s. That work, told by Alex Haley, was both insightful and inspiring. *The Dead are Arising* chronicles not only the life of Malcolm but relates the broad context of the civil rights movement. It describes in detail the 1919 insurrection in Omaha, the riot and lynching of an innocent Black man. It included the threat to hang the mayor, who tried to protect him, and the burning of the court house. (It is hard not to see parallels with the recent insurrection on our national Capitol 100 years later!) This work describes the involvement of J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI, the KKK, Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam, and police informants, as well as living friends and members of Malcolm’s family.

¹ First published in *Nebraska Report*, the newsletter of Nebraskans for Peace.

Malcolm's charismatic gifts of oratory, his ability to spellbind audiences and recruit new members to the Nation of Islam were so successful that Elijah Muhammad, the supreme leader of the Nation of Islam, became insanely jealous. It was no secret that the philandering and hypocritical head of the Nation of Islam wanted to eliminate Malcolm despite Malcolm's success and unquestioning loyalty to this so-called "Messenger of Allah." Even after Malcolm learned of the seven illegitimate children Elijah had fathered with his secretaries, he remained loyal. This is one part of Malcolm's belief that is difficult to understand.

Two laudable traits of Malcolm do stand out. He was fearless in the face of death. His house was firebombed at night. He survived numerous death threats and plots hatched by the Nation of Islam. These became more intense after Malcolm eventually revealed the sexual infidelities and lavish life-style of Elijah. Malcolm, by his own admission, could hardly believe that he had blinded himself to these transgressions for so long. Beside the Nation of Islam, Malcolm was spied upon and plotted against by J. Edgar Hoover, the CIA, and local law enforcement.

A second admirable trait of character was Malcolm's several conversions. Payne follows Malcolm as a petty criminal in Boston and Harlem in the 1930s and 1940s to his religious awakening and first conversion to the Nation of Islam in a Massachusetts prison.

The second conversion came after he traveled to Africa and the Mideast for the Hajj (the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca). He encountered Orthodox Islam, which professed the brotherhood of all humankind, non-violence, the proud history of the African people, the evils of colonialism, and a deeper resentment for U.S. racism.

However, the fruits of this conversion and the break with Elijah Muhammad was cut short by his assassination at age 39 by agents of the Nation of Islam, with the cooperation of the FBI, CIA, and other law enforcement agencies.

The lessons of this biography are not only a broader understanding of Malcolm X, but insights into the civil rights struggle and the complex interactions among actors: factions within the Nation of Islam, Martin Luther King, Orthodox Muslims, the FBI, the U.S. government, and the media.

Fifty years after Malcolm's death, we are still trying to overcome the racism generated by white supremacy. The murder of George Floyd has begun to make us more aware that it is white supremacy that has fueled racism and the oppression of minorities in the United States. We may have come a long way since 1965, but we have many miles to travel before we rest.

The book concludes with an Appendix in which Malcolm responded to the Islamic Centre in Geneva shortly before his death.

“ The beauty of the document is that it clearly shows where Malcolm’s mind was at the end of his life with regard to Islam and Muslims, the role of women in society and the importance of the black liberation struggle in America” (p. 525).

The Dead are Arising is well worth reading.

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.sanantoniopace.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>