

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating July 25, 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 Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Gods and Goddesses*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem is an essay by Sherry Simon of Pax Christi Little Rock, "Sophia Wisdom: Rediscovering the Divine Feminine in the Institutional Church." The essay first appeared in the Pax Christi Little Rock newsletter; we are grateful to Dr. Simon for her permission to republish it here.

From Pax Christi International



Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, former archbishop of Kinshasa and co-president of Pax Christi International (2007 to 2011), has died following a period of illness. He was a force for peace and tireless advocate for democracy in his beloved homeland, DR Congo. He will be sorrowfully missed by the entire Pax Christi movement and his legacy lives on in the important grassroots, nonviolence work we continue to carry out in the Great Lakes region of Africa today.

Calendar

Times are for the Central Time Zone

Tuesday July 20, 6:30pm (7:30pm ET) online For the People Act Teach-In, concerning voting rights, sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy Justice Team and the Franciscan Action Network. Register at:
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdMNM3FcWS9NmbNj2gxgdGN5sAuL8PoZMFpkRPBxMKO3bwBYA/viewform>

Wednesday July 21, 6:30pm, online Courageous Conversations on Racism, sponsored by the Holy Cross Church, Austin, Social Justice Ministry. Zoom link:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83705545449?pwd=YjISb1NlaG1kckFRWXJjN3Aza0tkZz09>

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>

Wednesday July 28, 11:30am (12:30pm ET), online dialogue "Communion, Catholics, and Public Life: Where Do We Go from Here?" Archbishop Christophe Pierre (apostolic nuncio to the United States), John Carr (Georgetown University), Gretchen Crowe (*Our Sunday Visitor*), Mollie Wilson O'Reilly (*Commonweal* magazine), bishop Kevin Rhodes (Diocese of Fort Wayne-South end), and Cardinal Joseph Tobin (Archdiocese of Newark), moderated by Kim Daniels (Vatican

Dicastery for Communication). RSVP at:

<https://catholicalthought.georgetown.edu/events/communion-catholics-and-public-life-where-do-we-go-from-here#rsvp>

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/>

Wednesday August 4 to Friday August 6, institute "Stories of Truth and Transformation: Compassion, Solidarity in Civic Engagement, Teaching Social Justice." Save the date. Information, including participation opportunity:

<https://sites.google.com/view/stories-truth-transformation/home>

Thursday August 19, 12:00pm, online panel discussion "Understanding Systematic Racism in Education," Roby Chatterji (American Progress), Cherry Steinwender (Center for the Healing of Racism), and Jordan Starck (Stanford University), moderated by Jillian Bontka (Anti-Defamation League). Register at:

https://adl.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_MN2p0o8ET56AlqEsHucP8A

Wednesday August 25, 6:30pm, online "Sensory Pollution in the Anthropocene: Effect of Light and Noise Pollution on Birds in the 'Age of Humans,'" Jennifer N. Phillips (Texas A & M, San Antonio). Access at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86042962207?pwd=VnJ5cDY1SDhzMVhkZlFXNysxcDY4dz09#success>

Notices

Why Daniel Hale Deserves Gratitude, Not Prison, by Kathy Kelly, concerning the prosecution and sentencing of a former United States Air Force analyst who blew the whistle on the use of drones as weapons. Access at:

<https://paxchristiusa.org/2021/07/13/why-daniel-hale-deserves-gratitude-not-prison/>

Contact: Quarterly Journal of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, OFM, July 2021 issue. Access at http://www.ofmjpgic.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/EN_202106_m.pdf?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_contact_from_the_jpic_office&utm_term=2021-07-15

First Reading (2 Kings 4:42-44)

This narrative comes in a sequence of food-related miracles performed by the prophet Elisha during a famine. The book of *Second Kings* relates it without further explanation or interpretation. It has for us an obvious parallel in the narrative of Jesus multiplying loaves of bread. The Jesus parallel adds fish to the bread; the symbol based on the word "Christ" in Greek, the *ichthus* or in English "fish" symbol, makes the implication of adding the fish to the bread obvious.

Second Kings, composed during the exile of the Jerusalemites in Babylon, collected pre-exilic legends and often used them to explain the sad situation of the nation in its defeat. In general the narratives are accepted as legends, i.e. received stories without any concern for chronology or historical accuracy. There is a nostalgic "This is our story" aspect to them.

Second Reading (Ephesians 4:1-6)

The reading, a brief excerpt from an essay by followers of Paul, presents the figure of Paul the prisoner: "So I appeal to you, I a prisoner in the Lord...." It speaks clearly from outside the circle of established and approved-of power. It would have the bond—or more graphically, the cuffs—of the prisoner be a bond uniting together those who are called out to be Christians: "...walk in a manner worthy of the call..., being eager to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace...."

The unity in question goes beyond that of an organized religion; it is cosmic in its dimensions. *Ephesians* speaks of "one body, one spirit, one hope," "one God and father of all who is over all, through all, and in all." Using the feature of grammatical gender in the Greek original, it emphasizes inclusiveness by employing the different genders: "one Lord" (masculine), "one faith" (feminine), "one baptism" (neuter).

Third Reading (John 6:1-15)

The reading is the traditional narrative of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, as given in the Johannine gospel. The narrative has obvious Eucharistic symbolic weight, but the evangelist wanted to connect it with the symbolic weight of the Exodus as well, noting, "Now it was near the Passover, the feast of the Jews." Jesus' disciples point out how difficult feeding the crowd would be. Jesus' response in the Johannine version hints at the imagery of shepherds leading sheep to pasture: "Now there was much grass in the place." When the crowd had eaten, it wanted to establish a kingdom; so Jesus "withdrew again to the mountain...."

...Withdrew to the mountain: Moses did that too. When the crowd set up a golden calf, he broke up the terms of the Covenant written in stone, destroyed the golden idol, and withdrew to the mountain. And what is the new idol, the new gold calf re-incarnate that sent Jesus back up the mountain? The crowd wanted to seize him and make a kingdom.

It was not too far back in history that the Catholic Church was a kingdom, with the pope a monarch over Papal States. Norms about marriage, for example, were a matter of legal decree. Providence has changed matters; the idol has been destroyed and replaced by conscience.

That leaves us with the responsibility of cultivating a well-formed conscience rather than relying on laws. No longer are virtues to be denatured by replacing them with acts of legal observance. It seems that also in antiquity, Jesus wanted faith, hope, and charity to increase rather than himself compelling conformance.

This is a greater civilizational challenge than may first appear. Training for obedience, analogous to military regimen, is simply not up to that challenge. The cultivation of conscience requires a clear-headed and questioning populous, an unsilent majority whose strength lies in being unmanageable. Moreover, organized civilization, always spiritually agitated, needs make itself more so.

Poem

Gods and Goddesses

Manly gods of identity/separation
as for lungs to breathe,
hearts to pump,
kidneys to filter.

Womanly goddesses of connection/unity
as when life overflows itself,
into eagles and orchids,
earth and sun made for each other.

In one body they make the love
that births the what, the who
we are and become:
Goddesses and gods in concert.

Tom Keene and Muse
September 13, 2020

Sophia Wisdom: Rediscovering the Divine Feminine in the Institutional Church By Sherry Simon

I pray and talk to Sophia every day in the same breath that I speak to God, intertwined. I started to do this several years ago after I had a dream about a baby named Sophia that I found hidden in a closet. She was not crying. Just very quiet and somber. But, she loved being found. She smiled and was playful when I would hold her. And she would talk to me without words. She provided me with so much food for thought. But somehow in my dream, she kept being put back in the closet. And I would have to go back there to find her, over and over again. It was then I realized that in my Catholic faith, I was actively putting the feminine aspect of God (Wisdom) in the closet even though I had directly experienced Sophia and her positive effect on my life. Instead of trusting in this feminine aspect of God, I continued to return to the patriarchy of the institutional Church

to guide me on my path. But the answers, although often containing wisdom, were not complete for me as a woman. And so I continued to search for Sophia.

Sophia has been described by Thomas Merton in his book, *Emblems of a Season of Fury*, as "the diffuse Shining of God. Sophia is Gift, is Spirit, Donum Dei. She is God-given and God Himself as Gift. Sophia in all things is the Divine Life reflected in them." My favorite passage describing Wisdom (Sophia) is in the book of Proverbs 8:24-30. "When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there was no fountains or springs of water; before the mountains were settled into place, before the hills, I was brought forth; while as yet the earth and fields were not made, nor the first clods of the world. When he established the heavens I was there, when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep; when he made firm the skies above, when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth; when he set for the sea its limit, so that the waters should not transgress his command; then I was beside him as his craftsman, and I was his delight day by day, playing before him all the while."

As a woman, I can relate to this feminine side of my God. Not gender feminine, (God is so much more than gender-specific) but spiritually, psychologically and philosophically feminine. The regenerative, receptive, creative, peaceful, nurturing, loving and giving aspect of God. God is All, so God is more than the masculine attributes we have historically and culturally assigned.

So, I have long wondered about what might happen in my beautiful yet scarred Church if the feminine were placed side by side with the masculine and both allowed to speak reciprocally with one another. It sounds like a good marriage, doesn't it? A conjunction of masculine and feminine energy that has the potential, through love, to heal our world. This would require women being given the same respect as men, their different thoughts and processes being considered on par with men. Unfortunately, our Church has some roads to travel before this can be a reality.

In my search for Sophia, I began to read Wisdom literature. Historically, authors began referring to Sophia between 33 B.C. and 4-5 A.D. It is interesting that there are only four other figures mentioned more than Sophia in the Old Testament: Yahweh, Moses, David, and Job. So why don't we hear much about Sophia (Wisdom)?

Sophia was not always obscure. In fact the early church knew Sophia quite well. However, many Greek and Egyptian goddess cults still existed during that time and there was some concern among Christians that worshipping Sophia

would be associated with these cults. This fear of the goddesses was one reason why the early Roman church gradually disconnected from Sophia.

During that time, Gnosticism was also growing. This early Christian sect had a special devotion to Sophia, crediting her with the creation of the universe. The Gnostics were eventually charged with heresy, not because of their devotion to Sophia, but because they rejected the material world. In their passion for the inner life, the Gnostics valued only the spiritual and intellectual realms. They taught that Jesus was never incarnated and that salvation was only to be attained through knowledge of the inner self. As the Church drew away from the Gnostics, it also turned away from devotion to Sophia for fear of appearing to approve gnostic beliefs.

I believe that Sophia is a lost treasure of our Christian faith that is in need of recovery. In biblical literature, Sophia is revealed as having great depth and being full of mystery. Although she is "readily seen by those who seek her" (Wis 6:12), she is in the same moment hidden in mystery and needs to be discovered. Sirach 15:20-22 notes: "Happy is the person who meditates on Sophia, who reflects in one's heart on Sophia's ways and ponders her secrets, pursuing her like a hunter, and lying in wait on her paths."

I have noticed when attending Eastern Churches (both Catholic and Orthodox) that there is much emphasis placed on being attentive and alert in order to understand the messages that God is delivering. These traits are also prerequisite for discovering Sophia (Wisdom). In our busy modern lives, it is so easy to lose sight of our path. We discover Divine Wisdom by paying attention in each moment, and she is always available to guide us in our lives if we are open to her presence.

So, in addition to paying attention, how can we find this lost treasure? We must look for her. By her very nature, she is relational, present in the world, interacting among us all in our very ordinary lives. By praying to her, reading about her in scripture, desiring to know her better, and opening our minds and hearts, her wisdom and radiance will shine through our lives. Sadly, we need Sophia now more than ever in our broken world. It is past time for Christians to recover the richness of this legacy of divine feminine that has been lost as we are in dire need of her compassionate presence, wisdom, and love.

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>