

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating August 1, 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 Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Chlorophyll*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is my review of Michel Evdokimov's book, *Two Martyrs in a Godless World. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Alexander Men*. The review appeared first online in Catholic Books Review.

Calendar

[Times are given for the Central Time Zone.]

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

Thursday July 29, 10:00am-11:00am (11:00am-12:00pm ET) online dialogue on the interreligious guidebook *Care for Our Common Home* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers, and Catholic Climae Covenant), Jessical Moerman

Evangelical Environmental Network), Michael Terrion (Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers Care for Creation Committee) and Dennis Testerman (Presbyterians for Earth Care), moderated by Walter F. Kedjierski (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops). Registration and webinar link: https://creation.cadeio.org/events/care-for-our-common-home-ecumenical-dialogue/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ecumenical-and-interreligious-guidebook-announcement_6

Thursday July 29, 1:00pm-2:30pm (2:00pm-3:30pm ET) panel discussion "Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders: Systematic Racial Challenges," moderated by Audrey Kitagawa (G20 Interfaith Forum Anti-Racism Initiative), co-sponsored by Georgetown University. RSVP at: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_upfrrDBTSYegcfrHXdDpLg

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, online institute "Stories of Truth and Transformation: Compassion, Solidarity in Civic Engagement, Teaching Social Justice." Organized by University of the Incarnate Word. Information and schedule: <https://sites.google.com/view/stories-truth-transformation/schedule?authuser=0>

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>

In Dallas

Thursday September 16, 8:15am-3:30pm, Jno Owens Conference: Impact of Migration on Economic and Human Development, at Federal Reserve Bank, Dallas. Information and registration:
<https://calendar.smu.edu/site/centersinstitutes/event/owens-conference-2020/>

First Reading (Exodus 16: 2-4, 12-15)

The reading presents a narrative of the Israelites whom Moses led out of Egypt complaining that they were about to starve. Moses and Aaron bring the complaint to God, and God provides manna in the mornings and quail in the evenings. The chapter in Exodus contains some duplication, and in some respects contradicts a parallel version in chapter eleven of the book of Numbers. Clearly this is legend material that evolved into versions that differed from one another even in the relative antiquity of the era in which the Hebrew scriptures were set into written form.

The lesson to be drawn is about the providential, not the miraculous. Manna exists even today; it is produced by insects that infest some plants on the Sinai Peninsula. It drops to the ground in the cool of the night; Bedouin collect it in the early morning before it melts and consider it a sweet delicacy. Quail migrate between Scandinavia and southern Africa, stopping in the peninsular area in the course of their migrations, either north or south.

Christian tradition has made symbolic use of manna as a food that portended Eucharistic bread. Quail have not been accorded any symbolic existence. Of course, in our culture we do not know of manna except from biblical references, though we do make meals of quail.

There would have been no point in collecting more manna than needed in the moment; it would simply melt away in the warmth of the day. One could only speculate about keeping quail for the morrow, perhaps kept alive in a cage. In both cases, the instructions were to only take as needed. The question arises today: What providential gifts should we refrain from seizing upon, leaving them

for others? This would apply more to such intangibles as power and publicity, perhaps in contrast to edibles.

Second Reading (Ephesians 4: 17, 20-24)

Curiously, the lectionary skips verses 4:18 & 19 from *Ephesians*. Presumably, the editors wanted to retain the main clause of the extended sentence as a lead-in to verse 20, which they believed presented the main point of the passage. The deleted verses are participial constructions, which tend to be cumbersome in English. So the edited reading begins, "So I say and testify to this in the Lord, that you walk no longer as the gentiles walk in the transitoriness of their knowledge..." The author is speaking of converts to Christianity. The text goes on to describe the non-Christians' lives as "darkened in consciousness, estranged from the life of God on account of the ignorance that was among them, because of the obstinacy of the heart of those who, having become callous, gave themselves in sensuality to works of every uncleanness in avarice."

We moderns read in a hurry. We want what we read to get to the point, assuming there is only one point. So modern editors of ancient texts accommodate us; even when they do not, we scan ahead anyway. Let's look at what the ancient writer wanted to say: The Christian life is not "darkened in consciousness." Packaged in conventionality, church Christianity does not jar the consciousness; would-be Christians go about unperturbed by the barbarity and injustices of the world. What knowledge there might be does not connect to anything; it is transitory. The author asks the reader to consider what Christianity is all about. One should not be "estranged from the life of God on account of the ignorance" that is to be found about. The ignorance in question is not an invincible condition; rather it is a studied avoidance of what gets in the way of every kind of indecency that is based on avarice.

Here is where the lectionary resumes: "But you did not learn from the Messiah thusly, if you heard him indeed and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus..." The author calls to mind the figure of Jesus, with his disturbing parables. The truth is so disturbing that one must cast off an old self and become quite a different person. The new person is taught by Jesus' teaching "to put off the old person, corrupted by the passions of deceit, with respect to the former way of life, and to be renewed in the spirit" of consciousness. One is to "put on the new person which was created by God in the justice and holiness of the truth."

Third Reading (John 6.24-35)

“Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness....” The crowd wanted Jesus to make bread in a miraculous way once more. The last time he had done that, they wanted to set him up as a king.

“Would you like some bread, sir?” The young waiter threw the question out as an afterthought.

“Sure.” I was between meetings and had stopped at a large sandwich shop in a mall for a quick lunch. The waiter brought a round wooden platter with warm bread and a small bowl of olive oil in the center to keep me occupied before the kitchen delivered my order.

How many thousands of years of accumulated experience brought me some bread and oil? And how many hands worked on this loaf, this platter, this bowl, this oil, these spices in the oil? Who planted the wheat and harvested it? Who pressed the olives? Who worked the lathe to shape the bowl? What were the aspirations of the “geek” who worked out the credit card system I would use to pay the tab? And what contributions to everyday life have the fellow diners at their tables, a sundry lot indeed, made—the young ladies across from me in their light blue team T-shirts? The silent old man with his cane and the three talkative ladies with him? The young couple in their stylishly torn Saturday array?

The background music suddenly blares out of control. The chatter stops. Then everyone laughs in amusement, knowing that somewhere some unseen clerk bumped against an overly-elaborate sound system and was frantically turning one or more knobs counter-clockwise.

Somebody in a gated community is making a great deal of money from all this, proud of an accomplished business career. That sense of accomplishment fences off people who work fields, operate olive presses, bake bread, take orders for turkey breast sandwiches.

“Amen. Amen I say to you, Moses did not give you bread from heaven....” No human alone gave me the platter of warm bread with the little bowl of oil. Without the thousands of years’ experience, the farmer, and even the diners who comprised a market for the unknown entrepreneur to exploit, I would have never had it to enjoy. This is all a prefiguring: “... but my Father will give you genuine bread from heaven. Indeed, the bread of God is that coming down from heaven and giving life to the world.”

Poem

Chlorophyll

This green stuff that lets
sunlight and leaves nourish all
so, life may feed on life,

empowering Mother Earth
and Father Sun to make love
amid light and earth's dark dirt,

that we can happen.

Tom Keene and Muse
March 20, 2021

Book Review

Michel EVDOKIMOV. *Two Martyrs in a Godless World. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Alexander Men*. Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2021. Pp. 162. \$24.95 pb. ISBN 978-1-56548-384-2. Reviewed by Anthony J. Blasi, San Antonio, TX (J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com)

Despite the title, this little book is not a double biography but a presentation of a religious stance. Published originally in French, the translation by Jeremy N. Ingpen reads smoothly. The author, Michel Evdokimov, is an Orthodox priest and theologian. For many years he was Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Poitiers. He is the author of a short biography of Father Alexander Men and many books on Orthodox spirituality.

The book has four parts: an introduction, a section on Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), a section on Alexander Men (1935-1990), and an afterword consisting of an essay by Olivier Clément (1921-2009), an Orthodox theologian and ecumenist.

The introduction dwells on the paradox of Christianity: To be true to itself it needs to work against itself as a worldly power. God, to be genuinely embraced, needs to cease being God as people imagine God to be; and humans, to be genuinely embraced, need to cease being human as they imagine humans to be. For there is a necessary tension in the unity of genuine divinity and genuine humanity, a unity that is at the core of Christianity. So as Christianity once needed that Christendom be warded off—and the forces of secularization made that possible—so now secular humanity needs spiritual and religious indifference to be warded off. The force of resistant theism makes the latter possible. The author reasons that God without an uncoerced humanity is but a sterile idea, and humanity without a voluntary theism is but animal. The dialectical nature of this stance pervades the remainder of the book.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, of course, was a theologian and pastor of the anti-Nazi Confessing Church in Germany in the 1930s. He worked in the short-lived Finkenwalde seminary, where he prepared pastors for an underground church. His ministry featured a common life and, simultaneously, a retreat from and engagement in the world. Bonhoeffer became the counselor in the plot to assassinate Hitler, resolving the rule-based inhibitions that would lead the would-be assassins away from tyrannicide. Engaged to Maria von Wedemeyer, he was imprisoned, and he was executed just prior to the German surrender. In his famous prison letters, Bonhoeffer wrote of dispensing with the God of the gaps who would make the practice of the faith easy. He made it clear that God provided the social world providentially, a world that included non-Christians.

While Bonhoeffer was killed in an official procedure by the Nazis, an unknown assailant, presumably a Communist in the Stalinist mode, killed Alexander Men with an ax apart from any official formality. The Soviets under Stalin has long persecuted religion. In 1937, 24,000 people, including almost all of

the Moscow clergy, had been executed and buried in a mass grave outside Moscow. From that time, Men's family affiliated with an underground "Catacomb Church." Trained as a biologist, Men was not allowed to graduate because of his church-going. He was self-taught in philosophy and completed a correspondence course in theology and was ordained a priest in 1960. As a pastor, he attracted an educated following; so under government pressure he was transferred to a rural parish, where he remained for the rest of his life. Intellectuals, often "atheists" in search of a spirituality, went out to him in the countryside. When Russian society opened up in 1988, Men was speaking in schools and in the media about a Christianity that was open to society and science. He became a noted advocate of Christian unity. He noted that under the tsars, the Church had become nothing but a compulsory formality that persecuted monks and Old Believers. Official Soviet atheism, he observed, freed Christians from that compulsory formalism. He focused on knowing the Creator through creation, including history. "The idea of the afterlife should be considered, not as a consoling anxiety-relieving invention, but as an invitation to fulfill one's vocation here on earth" (p. 112).

A brief postscript draws parallels between Bonhoeffer and Men. Then the afterword by Olivier Clément restates the basic thesis that secularity represents a freeing of faith from the dishonest control over the spirit by worldly powers, worldly sciences, and worldly art. Clément rejects fundamentalism, which he deems a quest for a restored Christendom, and rejects as well pseudo-sciences of the spirit, which he deems a technology for flight from the world.

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>