

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating August 12, 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 Doret 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

The Second Reading and Third Reading commentaries are based on readings for the Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Let Eucharist Happen*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. My essay, "The Moral Obligation to Know," follows.

Because of travel commitments, the newsletter anticipating August 19 will be sent out Wednesday August 15 rather than Sunday the 12th.

Calendar

In Austin

Tuesday September 11, 12:00pm-1:00pm, discussion: "Racism—The Sickness of the American Soul." Sorin Oak, immediately east of the Main Building, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. Sponsored by the SEU Center for Ethics and Leadership. Bring picnic.

Thursday September 20, 5:00pm-6:30pm, Margaret Groarke, Ph.D., on voter suppression. Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

Wednesday October 10, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Peniel E. Joseph, Ph.D. (Barbara Jones Chair in Ethics and Political Values, University of Texas, Austin). Heyer Lecture. McMillan 210, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 100 E. 27th St.

Thursday October 25, 5:00pm-6:30pm, Michael Lucas, "Low-income Legal Assistance." Fleck Hall, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

In Dallas

Wednesday August 29, 12:00pm-1:30pm, Maj. Gen. Robert Latiff (Ret.), "Future War: Preparing for the New Global Battlefield"—ethical implications of new technology for the

Dept. of Defense. Hmm. Free; information & reservations from Bora Laci, tower@smu.edu.

Wednesday September 5, 5:30pm-7:30pm, Lawrence Wright on his book, *God Save Texas: A Journey into the Soul of the Lone Star State*, an ethical-political commentary. McCord Auditorium, Southern Methodist University, 3225 University Blvd. Free, but reservation required: 214-768-3210 or CPHInfo@smu.edu

Thursday September 13, 10:00am-5:00pm, Global Refugee Policy Symposium: Susan Martin (Georgetown U.), Hardy Vieux (Human Rights First), Liz Cedillo-Pereira (City of Dallas), John Thon Majork (Woodrow Wilson International Center), Elizabeth Ferris (Georgetown U.), Elisa Massimino (Harvard Kennedy School), and Matt Reynolds (UN). Martha Proactor Mack Grand Ballroom Soutehrn Methodist University, 6425 Boaz Lane.

In Houston

Monday August 30, 7:00pm-8:30pm. Panel discussion: "Faith During and After Harvey: One Year Later." Alexander Johnson (Wheeler Ave. Baptist); Paula Pipes (Pipes Research); Jason Plotkin (Congregation Emanu El); Omar Samji (Aga Khan Council); moderated by Elaine Howard Ecklund (sociology, Rice University). Info for registration: Hayley Hemstreet, hjh2@rice.edu.

Tuesday September 18, 12:15pm-1:30pm, Simranjit Khalsa, "Practicing Minority Religion: A Study of Sikhs in England and the U.S." Kyle Morrow Room, Fondren Library, Rice University.

Sunday September 30, 2:30pm-6:00pm, film screening, "A Force More Powerful," on non-violent resistance, with panel discussion (Celebrating Gandhi's Legacy of Nonviolence). \$10.00. Asia Society Texas, 1370 Southmore Blvd.

In San Antonio

Wednesday August 8, 6:30pm, Texas Coalition against the Death Penalty, San Antonio chapter, meets at St. Mary's University Law School Alumni Room.

Saturday August 11, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Poets for Peace: Words and Music to Encourage, Uplift & Inspire. Kelly John Clark, Marisol Cortez, Chuck Gibbons, Pamela Ferguson. Hosted by Rosalyn and Jim Collier. Bring snack and drink to share. 2114 Letitia. RSVP dellisphelps@gmail.com

Friday August 17, 6:00pm-10:00pm, movie premiere: "Walk on the River—A Black History of the Alamo City." Carver Community Cultural Center, 226 N Hackberry. \$10.00; ticket in advance at www.eventbrite.com/e/black-history-of-san-antonio-movie-premiere-walk-on-the-river-tickets-45187484984?aff=efbevent

Wednesday September 12, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Anthony Graves, author of *Infinite Hope: How Wrongful Conviction, Solitary Confinement, and 12 Years on Death Row Failed to Kill My Soul*. Concert Hall, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Monday September 17, 1:00pm-Tuesday September 18, 5:00pm, “2018 Mayor’s Housing Summit.” For program, see <https://www.sanantonio.gov/Housing-Summit>. Henry B. Gonzales Convention Center, 900 E. Market. Tickets: \$30-\$55.

Wednesday September 19, 7:00pm, Kenneth R. Miller, Ph.D. (Biology Dept., Brown University), “Darwin, God, and the Cosmos: Is faith still Relevant in a Scientific World?” University Center, Conference Room A, St. Mary’s University, One Camino Santa Maria.

Friday September 21, 6:00pm-**Saturday September 22**, 6:00pm. “Cesar Chavez: Faith Seeking Justice.” Oblate Spirituality and Social Justice Institute. \$60.00. Whitley Theological Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Dr. Information and registration: Noemy, (210) 341-1366, ext. 212.

Wednesday November 7, 7:00pm, John F. Haught, Ph.D. (Theology Dept., Georgetown University), “Evolution ad Faith: What Is at Stake?” University Center, Conference Room A, St. Mary’s University, One Camino Santa Maria.

Second Reading (Ephesians 4:30-5:2)

The author of Ephesians cites a series of moral maxims, often adding reasons for following them: “Let each speak the truth with one’s neighbor,’ because we are members of one another. ‘Be angry; do not also sin.’ Let the sun not set on your anger, lest you give the devil room. Let the thief steal no longer, but rather let him strive, doing good with his own hands, so that he will have something to share with whoever has need. Let no foul language leave your mouth, but whatever is good for meeting a need constructively.” It is after these maxims that today’s reading begins: “and do not grieve the holy spirit of God....” Then more moral maxims follow.

Notice that the basis of morality, according to the author of Ephesians, has little to do with oneself and a consciousness of one’s own salvation. It is a matter of compassion in community life: “...because we are members of one another.” Rather than thievery, do good with one’s own hands in order to have something to share with whoever has need.

Third Reading (John 6.41-51)

This passage resumes a narrative that the Evangelist used to lead up to some discourse material. That material does not appear to have begun as a unified essay but as a juxtaposition of sayings. Then a final editor inserted another saying, introduced by “Amen. Amen....” Commentators generally observe that the final editor preserved the Evangelist’s wording carefully, even when doing so broke the flow of the Gospel.

They were murmuring about this Jesus. How could he have been from heaven? They knew his family, and that family was nearby, down on earth, not in a distant heaven somewhere.

What a wonder of religious psychology! We cannot imprison God in a concept, but we can exclude God, keep God up in heaven and not down among people whose families we know. Commendably, we want to be honest in our philosophy and admit that we have hardly any insight into the divine, but we manage to be dishonest when it comes to our natural sociability and exclude the divine from our inconvenient neighbors. But “all shall be taught by God”; we can learn something of the divine from all. “Not that anyone has seen the Father; only the one who is from God has seen the Father.” So our inconvenient neighbors will not be telling us about God in so many words, try as they might; but belief in God does not pertain to what can be captured in words.

“I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert and died. This bread is what is coming down from heaven, so that anyone who would eat of it would not also die.” Jesus did not live to manufacture bread but promote life, even when we know the family.

Some who promote life seem satisfied to prevent murder, or more explicitly, abortion. But that is only a beginning, since life does not end at birth. Eternal life encompasses more than simply not being murdered. There is much to be included in what “shall be taught by God.” The challenge is to replicate God’s own affection, the affection on the part of the One who created all.

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Poem

Letting Eucharist Happen

Tonight, the weekly gathering
of agitator-activists
falls on Holy Thursday.

Apollo,
with no resort to apostolic consecration,
or communal approbation,
just instant inspiration,
breaks bread into pieces,
spreads them out on a plate,
pours into a goblet
blood-red wine,
passes them around.

In silent thanks some politely decline.
One says, “I don’t do

blood of Christ stuff."

Another dips bread into wine
saying, "Happy resurrection."

Tom Keene
March 25, 2005

The Moral Obligation to Know Better

Anthony J. Blasi

The political commentator Mark Shields quipped on national television that then-candidate Donald Trump was "criminally incurious." The suggestion was that the candidate for the U.S. presidency was saying ignorant things and that he should have known better. It is this "should" in the phrase "should have known better" that merits some consideration. It implies some obligation on the part of those who have the freedom and prerogative of consequential action.

In a rigidly stratified society many people may not have that freedom or prerogative. Monarchs and nobles could engage in activity that has consequences, but commoners could not. Modern dictators may prevent the masses from engaging in meaningful action by blocking the dissemination of factual information, by imposing limitations on what people can do, or by disempowering the masses by discouraging the development of personal self-discipline in the educational system.

Democracy as a form of governance involves more than the procedures of casting and counting votes. It is a cultural value as well, eliciting from the citizens a moral sense that they must face facts rather than run from them, be wise with respect to the probable consequences of an action or lack of action, including what one votes for or fails to vote at all. This is the value that is at stake when voter fraud or bribery to vote one way rather than another would occur—whether in an election or in a decision by a city council or legislature. The result is that an outcome does not reflect what the person casting the vote knows or should know. Seen this way, an ignorant vote (or failure to vote because of a failure to be informed) is as serious a moral wrong as fraudulent voting and taking a bribe.

Knowledge, which is so critical to ethical action, is more than a recognition of evidence. For example, to speak of "a non-volitional cessation of biological processes as an outcome of another's volitional initiative" may be an accurate statement, so far as it goes, but it hardly qualifies as the "whole truth" or an adequate account of murder or war. A knowledge of sorts that would strip value-laden actions of their value dimensions is hardly genuine knowledge. The obligation to know refers to the fuller form of knowledge. The sensing of the values included within the parameters of that fuller knowledge is a sensitivity rather than a numbness, in the first instance. Any desensitization would be a form of vincible ignorance and not in the least defensible. In the second instance, that one would be numb to values implies a turning away from values per se, and values are an array of resources for correctly guiding action.

Instances of *vincible ignorance* include failures to know about knowable political processes. There is, for example, the failure to know basic civics. It is remarkable that the Texas public educational curriculum does not require courses in basic civics. Political processes, however, go beyond civics. Basic political economy is essential to understanding the modern world and the exercise of power within it. Those who promote tax cuts and expansions of government spending during the “up side” of the business cycle should know better; some of them even passed courses in Economics 101. The same could be said of advocates of tariffs.

Consumer behavior is another matter where *vincible ignorance* can be a problem. As I write, I am in an environment—not my home—in which the only drinking container available for my coffee is a styrofoam cup. There are many kinds of motorized vehicle on the market, and some people choose to purchase “Humvees.” Here in San Antonio, it is said that the wealthy owner of a major car dealership circumvented the water company’s effort to conserve water in our semi-arid region; he has his own well and uses it to soak his expansive lawn. There is also the matter of patronizing businesses that are unjust to their employees or that in turn advertise on television and radio outlets that regularly engage in disinformation. It is easy to be thoughtless about such matters.

The problem of *vincible ignorance* pertains to religion as well. I have in mind warped readings of scripture. Literalists, for example, read biblical poetry and legend as science and history, and proceed in a *vincibly ignorant* campaign against biological science and evolution. They ignore geological evidence about the age of the earth and even hatch theories about Noah stacking dinosaur eggs in the Ark! Beyond that, they read into the Bible condemnations of trans children’s use of bathrooms in the schools. Similarly, much is made about homosexuality on the basis of the ancient Hebrew ceremonial code and the mocking of Roman religious ritual by Paul of Tarsus. Careful reading of scripture, as opposed to a careless misreading, is a moral obligation, since misreadings have adverse consequences for people.

Also ignorant in its own way is a too strictly circumscribed sense of religious charitableness. One would satisfy one’s own sense of being a generous person rather than address community needs. One would engage in a measure of charity rather than demand a correction of the conditions that require charities. There is also the problem of a religious fixation on personal salvation rather than preaching the kingdom of heaven as the King of heaven and earth would have it. This is hardly to mention the practice of multiplying prayers in the name of religion.

There is more—the uncritical acceptance of the media’s offerings, the distorted history presented in in the schools, the general militarization of our culture. But the point, I think, has been made. The absence of knowledge, full knowledge, is no virtue; it is in fact a vice. Anti-intellectualism, which is sometimes called “populism,” is irresponsible, and irresponsibility is accurately and adequately appreciated as immoral.

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