

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating August 8 & 15, 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 first on readings for the Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, and a second set for the Feast of the Assumption, which occurs on the following Sunday. I will be on holiday, and to accommodate that I am sending two Sundays' materials in this issue. There are actually two sets of readings for the Assumption—one for the vigil and one for the mass during the day. Tom Keene's poems are *Jesus in Nazareth* for August 8 and *Flash of Destiny* for August 15. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem(s) is an op ed from the *New York Times* by Thomas B. Edsall, "The Resentment that Never Sleeps," which describes the fear of losing dominance that is so present in our times.

Calendar

[Times are given for the Central Time Zone]

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>

Wednesday August 18, 12:00pm-2:45pm (1:00pm-3:45pm ET) White Christian Nationalism in the United States. First panel: Anthea Butler (University of Pennsylvania), Caroline Mala Corbin (University of Miami), Kristin Kabes du Mez (Calvin University), Samuel Perry (University of Oklahoma), and Andrew

Whitehead (Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis). Second panel: Angela Denker (Lutheran pastor), Jack Jenkins (Religious News Service), Jemar Tisby (historian), Jonathan Wilson Hartgrove (author), and Amanda Tyler (University of California). Register at:
<https://raac.iupui.edu/programs/events/white-christian-nationalism-in-the-united-states-an-online-mini-conference/>

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/>

In El Paso

Tuesday August 3, 7:00pm Mountain Time, Pax Christi El Paso online meeting, discussing *Fratelli Tutti* Ch. 8, paragraphs 271-287. For the link, contact Patricia Delgado, phdelgado3583@gmail.com

In San Antonio

Saturday August 7, 10:00 am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. For information and link contact Arthur Dawes, arthurdawes@ATT.net.

Notices

"The Catholic Bishops' Brawl Over Denying Joe Biden Communion," by Paul Elie, June 22, 2021 *The New Yorker*. Good background article. Access at: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-catholic-bishops-brawl-over-denying-joe-biden-communion>

Video of the July 28 dialogue on "Communion, Catholics, and Public Life,"

sponsored by the Georgetown University Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life. Participants were Archbishop Christoph Pierre (papal nuncio to the United States), Bishop Kevin Rhoads (Fort Wayne/South Bend, proponent of a United States Conference of Catholic Bishops drafting a statement on the topic), Cardinal Joseph Tobin (Archdiocese of Newark, opponent of the drafting), Mollie Wilson O'Reilly (*Commonweal* magazine), Gretchen Crowe (*Our Sunday Visitor*), and John Carr and Kim Daniels (Georgetown University). Access at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9Kjz8JJyI8>

Decoloniality, Religion, and Peacebuilding, conversation between Alexander Hsu and Garrett R. Fitzgerald (both of the University of Notre Dame). Access at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Tbv5_HhQEY

August 8

First Reading (1 Kings 19:4-8)

The reading is another entry in the sequence of Elijah legends. Elijah had shown up 450 official prophets of the deity Ba'al in the northern kingdom of Israel, by working a miracle that they could not perform. Moreover, he encouraged a crowd to kill the 450—an extreme case of civil disobedience, to say the least. Queen Jez'ebel saw this as a threat to her influence in the court and threatened to have Elijah killed. So Elijah fled to the southern border and crossed into the kingdom of Judah.

The reading picks up the narrative, with Elijah depressed over being a failure. He leaves his servant behind and journeys into the wilderness, hoping to die under a broom tree. However, an angel brings him food. Elijah eats and hopes to die again, only to be brought food by an angel again. "And he arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God" (1 Kings 19:8). Horeb is another name for Sinai, and the

forty days alludes to Moses spending forty days and forty nights on the mountain (Exodus 24:18).

By the time of the composition of *First Kings*, the kingdom of Judah had experienced a disaster at the hands of a foreign power, similar to what Israel had experienced beforehand. Overcoming despair in the face of disaster appears to be what the author(s) of *First Kings* had in mind.

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.

August 15, Vigil Mass

First Reading (1 Chronicles 15:3-4, 15-16, 16:1-2)

The selected texts present an abbreviated account of King David having the Ark of God, which was a portable shrine, to a more permanent setting in Jerusalem. The selections leave out the various legends concerning the transit. This suggests an analogy between the transit of the Covenant to a newly established nation of the People of God and the transit of the mother of the Messiah to the newly established heavenly kingdom.

Second Reading (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)

The Feast of the Assumption of the mother of Jesus into heaven applies the Christian tradition of the resurrection of the faithful to a particular person, Mary. The very idea of resurrection challenges our thought categories. In the reading, Paul has already pointed to a realm beyond those thought categories: “But I say this, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does what decays inherit that which does not decay. Look, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed...” (1 Cor 15:50-51). The reading for today dwells on the paradox involved in a consciousness of what cannot be fathomed: “But what is decayed is clothed in imperishability and what is dead is clothed in immortality...” (1 Cor 54a).

Third Reading (Luke 11:27-28)

This brief passage presents a translation difficulty. As Jesus was speaking to some people, a woman approached him and said, “Blessed the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you.” The difficulty resides in the response from Jesus. The standard English translation, the Revised Standard Version, as well as the translation used at Mass from the New American Bible, render the response as follows: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

(11:28). An alternative version of the response, independent of the version Luke used, can be found in the Coptic Gospel of Thomas: “Blessed are those who have heard the word of the father (and) have kept it in truth” (Gospel of Thomas 79a). Luke chose to introduce the adversative term translated as “rather.”

An adversative term, such as the Greek *menoun* that Luke uses, can have a range of meanings: no not that but...; well, consider this also...; yes, but there is more. In my translation, published several years ago, I chose the last of these: “Yes, but rather....”

The traditional Catholic approach to the relationship between the nature and divine gifts is that grace builds on nature.

August 15, Mass during the Day

First Reading (Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab)

The reading is from the scripture commonly called the *Book of Revelation*, but the actual title in Greek reads *Revelation from Jesus, Messiah*. The selection begins with an appearance of God, reminiscent of the theophany before Moses on Mount Sinai: “And in heaven the sanctuary of God opened, and the ark of his covenant appeared in his sanctuary; and there was lightning, voices, thunder, an earthquake, and a great hail” (Rev 11:19). The Book of Revelation abounds with allusions to the Hebrew Bible, but inverts them. In this case, it is not Moses with commandments coming down from the Mountain but a woman who was about to give birth.

“And a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman robed in sun and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars, and she was having a child, and she cries out having birth-pains and in labor” (12:1-2). Moreover, a great fiery-red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns on its heads...” (12:3); the dragon, evidently an image of the Roman Empire, is thirsty for blood and ready to eat the newborn when it arrives, but the child is snatched up to God.

The author did not think too highly of the world’s powers.

Second Reading (First Corinthians 15:20-37)

In this reading, Paul makes it clear that speculation about the manner of resurrection is pointless; some things are simply unknowable in earthly terms. However, he is emphasizing the importance of resurrection; in our modern terms,

it is a gravitational center around which all else orbits. Its implications for how Christians live their lives is what matters.

Third Reading (Luke 1:39-56)

The *Gospel of Luke* narrates a visit by Mary to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. It is likely a literary device on Luke's part since none of the other gospels refer to such a visit. John the Baptizer in the womb jumps at the presence of Jesus in the womb, portending the relationship between their future prophetic careers.

The highlight of the reading is the *Magnificat*, a prayer that Luke has Mary exclaim in response to Elizabeth's greeting. It is a classic statement of the speaker's unworthiness, followed by a revolutionary anticipation of rulers being deposed and rich people being turned away. This is the implication of resurrection and divine judgment in the perspective of this gospel.

Poems

August 8

Jesus in Nazareth

He came back to our village,
this bastard son of Mary,
this carpenter, now notorious
for healings and teachings.

He came with his rabble of
women and men hanging on
to his doings and words.
Who does he think he is?

Some of us went to him for healings.
We listened to his ramblings
about this Kingdom of God,
coming soon, already growing among us.

We elders hung back.
We knew this guy as a kid
coming to synagogue,
raising befuddling questions.

Some of his healings took
but a lot more didn't.
Most of us knew him too well.
Off he went with his groupies.

Word came back about his troubles
with the Romans and temple chiefs.
The Romans dispatched him
in their Roman way.

Now, his minions disrupt our synagogues
with claims he is our urgently needed messiah,
imagine that: a crucified savior
and still making trouble.

August 15

Flash of Destiny

When we fall into love,
when, in a sudden, some other
becomes our seeming center,

in that flash we get a taste,
a touch, a piquant tang that
soaks into our roots, our guts,
impels us to soar.

A hint of our immutable destiny:
To love and be loved.

Tom Keene and Muse
November 18, 2019

The Resentment that Never Sleeps

Thomas B. Edsall¹

More and more, politics determine which groups are favored and which are denigrated.

Roughly speaking, Trump and the Republican Party have fought to enhance the status of white Christians and white people without college degrees: the white working and middle class. Biden and the Democrats have fought to elevate the standing of previously marginalized groups: women, minorities, the L.G.B.T.Q. community and others.

The ferocity of this politicized status competition can be seen in the anger of white non-college voters over their disparagement by liberal elites, the attempt to flip traditional hierarchies and the emergence of identity politics on both sides of the chasm.

Just over a decade ago, in their paper "Hypotheses on Status Competition," William C. Wohlforth and David C. Kang, professors of government at Dartmouth and the University of Southern California, wrote that "social status is one of the most important motivators of human behavior" and yet "over the past 35 years, no more than half dozen articles have appeared in top U.S. political science journals building on the proposition that the quest for status will affect patterns of interstate behavior."

Scholars are now rectifying that omission, with the recognition that in politics, status competition has become increasingly salient, prompting a collection of emotions including envy, jealousy and resentment that have spurred ever more intractable conflicts between left and right, Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives.

Hierarchal ranking, the status classification of different groups — the well-educated and the less-well educated, white people and Black people, the straight and L.G.B.T.Q. communities — has the effect of consolidating and seeming to legitimize existing inequalities in resources and power. Diminished status has

¹ New York *Times* op ed, December 9, 2020.

become a source of rage on both the left and right, sharpened by divisions over economic security and insecurity, geography and, ultimately, values.

The stakes of status competition are real. Cecilia L. Ridgeway, a professor at Stanford, described the costs and benefits in her 2013 presidential address at the American Sociological Association.

Understanding “the effects of status-inequality based on differences in esteem and respect” is crucial for those seeking to comprehend “the mechanisms behind obdurate, durable patterns of inequality in society,” Ridgeway argued:

Failing to understand the independent force of status processes has limited our ability to explain the persistence of such patterns of inequality in the face of remarkable socioeconomic change.

“As a basis for social inequality, status is a bit different from resources and power. It is based on cultural beliefs rather than directly on material arrangements,” Ridgeway said:

We need to appreciate that status, like resources and power, is a basic source of human motivation that powerfully shapes the struggle for precedence out of which inequality emerges.

Ridgeway elaborated on this argument in an essay, “Why Status Matters for Inequality”:

Status is as significant as money and power. At a macro level, status stabilizes resource and power inequality by transforming it into cultural status beliefs about group differences regarding who is “better” (esteemed and competent).

In an email, Ridgeway made the case that “status is definitely important in contemporary political dynamics here and in Europe,” adding that

Status has always been part of American politics, but right now a variety of social changes have threatened the status of working class and rural whites who used to feel they had a secure, middle status position in American society — not the glitzy top, but respectable, ‘Main Street’ core of America. The reduction of working-class wages and job security, growing demographic diversity, and increasing urbanization of the population have greatly undercut that sense and fueled political reaction.

The political consequences cut across classes.

Peter Hall, a professor of government at Harvard, wrote by email that he and a colleague, Noam Gidron, a professor of political science at Hebrew

University in Jerusalem, have found that across the developed democracies, the lower people feel their social status is, the more inclined they are to vote for anti-establishment parties or candidates on the radical right or radical left.

Those drawn to the left, Hall wrote in an email, come from the top and bottom of the social order:

People who start out near the bottom of the social ladder seem to gravitate toward the radical left, perhaps because its program offers them the most obvious economic redress; and people near the top of the social ladder often also embrace the radical left, perhaps because they share its values.

In contrast, Hall continued,

The people most often drawn to the appeals of right-wing populist politicians, such as Trump, tend to be those who sit several rungs up the socioeconomic ladder in terms of their income or occupation. My conjecture is that it is people in this kind of social position who are most susceptible to what Barbara Ehrenreich called a “fear of falling” — namely, anxiety, in the face of an economic or cultural shock, that they might fall further down the social ladder,” a phenomenon often described as “last place aversion.

Gidron and Hall argue in their 2019 paper “Populism as a Problem of Social Integration” that

Much of the discontent fueling support for radical parties is rooted in feelings of social marginalization — namely, in the sense some people have that they have been pushed to the fringes of their national community and deprived of the roles and respect normally accorded full members of it.

In this context, what Gidron and Hall call “the subjective social status of citizens — defined as their beliefs about where they stand relative to others in society” serves as a tool to measure both levels of anomie in a given country, and the potential of radical politicians to find receptive publics because “the more marginal people feel they are to society, the more likely they are to feel alienated from its political system — providing a reservoir of support for radical parties.”

Gidron and Hall continue:

The populist rhetoric of politicians on both the radical right and left is often aimed directly at status concerns. They frequently adopt the plain-spoken language of the common man, self-consciously repudiating the politically correct or technocratic language of the political elites. Radical politicians on the left evoke the virtues of

working people, whereas those on the right emphasize themes of national greatness, which have special appeal for people who rely on claims to national membership for a social status they otherwise lack. The “take back control” and “make America great again” slogans of the Brexit and Trump campaigns were perfectly pitched for such purposes.

Robert Ford, a professor of political science at the University of Manchester in the U.K., argued in an email that three factors have heightened the salience of status concerns.

The first, he wrote, is the vacuum created by “the relative decline of class politics.” The second is the influx of immigrants, “not only because different ‘ways of life’ are perceived as threatening to ‘organically grown’ communities, but also because this threat is associated with the notion that elites are complicit in the dilution of such traditional identities.”

The third factor Ford describes as “an asymmetrical increase in the salience of status concerns due to the political repercussions of educational expansion and generational value change,” especially “because of the progressive monopolization of politics by high-status professionals,” creating a constituency of “cultural losers of modernization” who “found themselves without any mainstream political actors willing to represent and defend their ‘ways of life’ ” — a role Trump sought to fill.

In their book, *Cultural Backlash*, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, political scientists at Harvard and the University of Michigan, describe the constituencies in play here — the “oldest (interwar) generation, non-college graduates, the working class, white Europeans, the more religious, men, and residents of rural communities” that have moved to the right in part in response to threats to their status:

These groups are most likely to feel that they have become estranged from the silent revolution in social and moral values, left behind by cultural changes that they deeply reject. The interwar generation of non-college educated white men — until recently the politically and socially dominant group in Western cultures — has passed a tipping point at which their hegemonic status, power, and privilege are fading.

The emergence of what political scientists call “affective polarization,” in which partisans incorporate their values, their race, their religion — their belief system — into their identity as a Democrat or Republican, together with more

traditional “ideological polarization” based on partisan differences in policy stands, has produced heightened levels of partisan animosity and hatred.

Lilliana Mason, a political scientist at the University of Maryland, describes it this way:

The alignment between partisan and other social identities has generated a rift between Democrats and Republicans that is deeper than any seen in recent American history. Without the crosscutting identities that have traditionally stabilized the American two-party system, partisans in the American electorate are now seeing each other through prejudiced and intolerant eyes.

If polarization has evolved into partisan hatred, status competition serves to calcify the animosity between Democrats and Republicans.

In their July 2020 paper, “Beyond Populism: The Psychology of Status-Seeking and Extreme Political Discontent,” Michael Bang Petersen, Mathias Osmundsen and Alexander Bor, political scientists at Aarhus University in Denmark, contend there are two basic methods of achieving status: the “prestige” approach requiring notable achievement in a field and “dominance” capitalizing on threats and bullying. “Modern democracies,” they write, are currently experiencing destabilizing events including the emergence of demagogic leaders, the onset of street riots, circulation of misinformation and extremely hostile political engagements on social media.

They go on:

Building on psychological research on status-seeking, we argue that at the core of extreme political discontent are motivations to achieve status via dominance, i.e., through the use of fear and intimidation. Essentially, extreme political behavior reflects discontent with one’s own personal standing and a desire to actively rectify this through aggression.

This extreme political behavior often coincides with the rise of populism, especially right-wing populism, but Petersen, Osmundsen and Bor contend that the behavior is distinct from populism:

The psychology of dominance is likely to underlie current-day forms of extreme political discontent — and associated activism — for two reasons: First, radical discontent is characterized by verbal or physical aggression, thus directly capitalizing on the competences of people pursuing dominance-based strategies. Second, current-day radical

activism seems linked to desires for recognition and feelings of 'losing out' in a world marked by, on the one hand, traditional gender and race-based hierarchies, which limit the mobility of minority groups and, on the other hand, globalized competition, which puts a premium on human capital.

Extreme discontent, they continue,

is a phenomenon among individuals for whom prestige-based pathways to status are, at least in their own perception, unlikely to be successful. Despite their political differences, this perception may be the psychological commonality of, on the one hand, race- or gender-based grievance movements and, on the other hand, white lower-middle class right-wing voters.

The authors emphasize that the distinction between populism and status-driven dominance is based on populism's "orientation toward group conformity and equality," which stands "in stark contrast to dominance motivations. In contrast to conformity, dominance leads to self-promotion. In contrast to equality, dominance leads to support for steep hierarchies."

Thomas Kurer, a political scientist at the University of Zurich, contends that status competition is a political tool deployed overwhelmingly by the right. By email, Kurer wrote:

It is almost exclusively political actors from the right and the radical right that actively campaign on the status issue. They emphasize implications of changing status hierarchies that might negatively affect the societal standing of their core constituencies and thereby aim to mobilize voters who fear, but have not yet experienced, societal regression. The observation that campaigning on potential status loss is much more widespread and, apparently, more politically worthwhile than campaigning on status gains and makes a lot of sense in light of the long-established finding in social psychology that citizens care much more about a relative loss compared to same-sized gains.

Kurer argued that it is the threat of lost prestige, rather than the actual loss, that is a key factor in status-based political mobilization:

Looking at the basic socio-demographic profile of a Brexiter or a typical supporter of a right-wing populist party in many advanced democracies suggests that we need to be careful with a simplified narrative of a 'revolt of the left behind'. A good share of these voters can be found in what we might call the

lower middle class, which means they might well have decent jobs and decent salaries — but they fear, often for good reasons, that they are not on the winning side of economic modernization.

Kurer noted that in his own April 2020 study, “The Declining Middle: Occupational Change, Social Status, and the Populist Right,” he found that it is voters who are and remain in jobs susceptible to automation and digitalization, so called routine jobs, who vote for the radical right and not those who actually lose their routine jobs. The latter are much more likely to abstain from politics altogether.

In a separate study of British voters who supported the leave side of Brexit, “The malaise of the squeezed middle: Challenging the narrative of the ‘left behind’ Brexiter,” by Lorenza Antonucci of the University of Birmingham, Laszlo Horvath of the University of Exeter, Yordan Kutiyski of VU University Amsterdam and André Krouwel of the Vrije University of Amsterdam, found that this segment of the electorate

is associated more with intermediate levels of education than with low or absent education, in particular in the presence of a perceived declining economic position. Secondly, we find that Brexiters hold distinct psychosocial features of malaise due to declining economic conditions, rather than anxiety or anger. Thirdly, our exploratory model finds voting Leave associated with self-identification as middle class, rather than with working class. We also find that intermediate levels of income were not more likely to vote for remain than low-income groups.

In an intriguing analysis of the changing role of status in politics, Herbert Kitschelt, a political scientist at Duke, emailed the following argument. In the recent past, he wrote:

One unique thing about working class movements — particularly when infused with Marxism — is that they could dissociate class from social status by constructing an alternative status hierarchy and social theory: Workers may be poor and deprived of skill, but in world-historic perspective they are designated to be the victorious agents of overcoming capitalism in favor of a more humane social order.

Since then, Kitschelt continued, “the downfall of the working class over the last thirty years is not just a question of its numerical shrinkage, its political disorganization and stagnating wages. It also signifies a loss of status.” The

political consequences are evident and can be seen in the aftermath of the defeat of President Trump:

Those who cannot adopt or compete in the dominant status order — closely associated with the acquisition of knowledge and the mastery of complex cultural performances — make opposition to this order a badge of pride and recognition. The proliferation of conspiracy theories is an indicator of this process. People make themselves believe in them, because it induces them into an alternative world of status and rank.

On the left, Kitschelt wrote, the high value accorded to individuality, difference and autonomy creates

a fundamental tension between the demand for egalitarian economic redistribution — and the associated hope for status leveling — and the prerogative awarded to individualist or voluntary group distinction. This is the locus, where identity politics — and the specific form of intersectionality as a mode of signaling multiple facets of distinctiveness — comes in.

In the contest of contemporary politics, status competition serves to exacerbate some of the worst aspects of polarization, Kitschelt wrote:

If polarization is understood as the progressive division of society into clusters of people with political preferences and ways of life that set them further and further apart from each other, status politics is clearly a reinforcement of polarization. This augmentation of social division becomes particularly virulent when it features no longer just a clash between high and low status groups in what is still commonly understood as a unified status order, but if each side produces its own status hierarchies with their own values.

These trends will only worsen as claims of separate “status hierarchies” are buttressed by declining economic opportunities and widespread alienation from the mainstream liberal culture.

Millions of voters, including the core group of Trump supporters — whites without college degrees — face bleak futures, pushed further down the ladder by meritocratic competition that rewards what they don't have: higher education and high scores on standardized tests. Jockeying for place in a merciless meritocracy feeds into the status wars that are presently poisoning the country, even as exacerbated levels of competition are, theoretically, an indispensable component of contemporary geopolitical and economic reality.

Voters in the bottom half of the income distribution face a level of hypercompetition that has, in turn, served to elevate politicized status anxiety in a world where social and economic mobility has, for many, ground to a halt: 90 percent of the age cohort born in the 1940s looked forward to a better standard of living than their parents', compared with 50 percent for those born since 1980. Even worse, those in the lower status ranks suffer the most lethal consequences of the current pandemic.

These forces in their totality suggest that Joe Biden faces the toughest challenge of his career in attempting to fulfill his pledge to the electorate: "We can restore the defining American promise, that no matter where you start in life, there's nothing you can't achieve. And, in doing so, we can restore the soul of our nation."

Trump has capitalized on the failures of this American promise. Now we have to hope that Biden can deliver.

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>