

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating August 19, 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 Dortel 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

After the calendar section, the commentaries are on the second and third readings for the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *The Man Misunderstood*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Finally, a translation follows of the address of Pope Francis at the conclusion of the dialogue among Middle Eastern Christian leaders in Bari, Italy, July 8, 2018.

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 Southern 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

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, anti-death penalty vigil across the street from county courthouse, 300 Dolorosa.

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 September 26, anti-death penalty vigil across the street from county courthouse, 300 Dolorosa.

Thursday September 27, anti-death penalty vigil across the street from county courthouse, 300 Dolorosa.

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

Second Reading

“Watch carefully, then, how you walk, not as the foolish but as the wise, seizing the opportunity because the days are evil.” Because the days are evil—how contemporary this old passage seems! The Christian cannot simply go along with everything and still be a genuine Christian. Rather, it is necessary to watch carefully and be wise. Yes, give voice to psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, but more importantly sing praise to the Lord in the heart.

Third Reading

John 6.51-58 (20th Sunday of Ordinary Time)

This passage largely repeats the reading for the 19th Sunday of Ordinary Time. The editor of the final version of the Johannine Gospel appears to have had two versions of the same discourse in hand and did not want to exclude either one of them. Both versions were composed by juxtaposing Jesus sayings that had been received in the tradition of the evangelist’s community.

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats from this bread, that one will live forever; but the bread that I will give is also my flesh for the life of the world.” The early Christians remembered Jesus daring people to understand him literally, cannibalistically. It is one of the ironies of history that there are Christian biblical literalists today—people who claim the Bible is true word for word, calling it “verbal inerrancy.” But the biblical literalists would adopt the mode of understanding that the Evangelist presents as a misunderstanding on the part of Jesus’ critics.

Yes, there is a sense in which Jesus is bread, but “living bread.” There is a literal sense in which bread dropped downward in the way manna dropped down at night in the Exodus legend, but we are not to understand Jesus as a skydiver. And we are not to understand that merely partaking of the Eucharist and the other sacraments brings eternal life; that too would be to misunderstand through “verbal inerrancy.”

To misconstrue what is supreme is to misconstrue supremely. To take Jesus in a cannibalistic sense is in fact to adopt the stance of his critics. Jesus was not taken up with the externalities of religion, and his discourses were not about externals. What Catholic tradition terms “real presence” has everything to do with things divine—imperative, providential, merciful, wise, just—wrapped up together in the here and now, and nothing to do with holding verbalization to be adequate for capturing the greatness of God.

The *Letter to the Colossians* (1.15) refers to Jesus as the image of the invisible God. It was the genius of the Jewish tradition to resist stopping at the image, since to do so would be idolatrous. By daring his critics to understand his real presence cannibalistically, Jesus was holding faithfully to that very Jewish genius. For those who would have Jesus be really present, it would be absurd to stop at the image. Rather, it is necessary to bring what is imperative, providential, merciful, wise, and just into the here and now.

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Poem

The Man Misunderstood

“Don’t *cling* to me,”
I am said to have said
to Mary, my friend.
I had to go.
Unless I did,
you wouldn’t get
the spirit of it all.
You wouldn’t get
the whole point of my life,
or of yours.

So surrender forever
the notion you can own me.
It is enough to remember me
with wine and bread,
where you can taste
the blood-spurting, fleshy
meanings of me.

And please don’t reduce me to doctrine
or trivialize me with comfy feelings.

If you want God's kingdom,
dump your images of kings.
If you want God's peace,
let go the hope that war will bring it.

If mythologize me you must,
let the myths *be* myths,
doors to the Unknown.
Don't bury my meanings
in tombs of words taken literally.
If you would explain me with words,
let them be lyrics to music.

So don't cling.
If you want to meet me, feed the hungry,
free the prisoners, touch your enemies with love.
Such are the real presences
where universal compassion abides,
and I wait for you.

Tom Keene February 26, 2008

Address of Pope Francis at the Conclusion of the Dialogue in Bari
July 8, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am most grateful for this graced moment of sharing. As brothers and sisters, we have helped one another to appreciate anew our presence as Christians in the Middle East. This presence will be all the more prophetic to the extent that it bears witness to Jesus, the Prince of Peace (cf. *Is* 9:5). Jesus does not draw a sword; instead, he asks his disciples to put it back in its sheath (cf. *Jn* 18:11). Our way of being Church is also tempted by worldly attitudes, by a concern for power and profit, for quick and convenient solutions. Then too, there is the reality of our sinfulness, the disconnect between faith and life that obscures our witness. We sense our need for renewed conversion to the Gospel, the guarantee of authentic freedom, and our need to do so urgently, as the Middle East endures a night of agony. As in the agony of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, it will not be *flight*(cf. *Mt* 26:56) or *the sword* (cf. *Mt* 26:52) that will lead to the radiant dawn of Easter. Instead, it will be our gift of self, in imitation of the Lord. The Good News of Jesus, crucified and risen out of love, came from the Middle East and has won over human hearts down the centuries because it is bound not to the powers of this world, but to the unarmed power of the cross. The Gospel invites us to daily conversion to God's plans; it invites us to find our safety and consolation in him

alone, and to make him known to everyone despite all obstacles. The faith of the lowly, so deeply rooted in the Middle East, is the wellspring from which we can draw water to drink and to be purified. This is always the case whenever we return to our origins and go as pilgrims to Jerusalem, the Holy Land or the shrines of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and the other holy places in the region.

Encouraged by one another, we have engaged in fraternal dialogue. It has been a sign of our need to pursue encounter and unity without being afraid of our differences. So it is with peace: it too must be cultivated in the parched soil of conflict and discord, because today, in spite of everything, there is no real alternative to peacemaking.

Truces maintained by walls and displays of power will not lead to peace, but only the concrete desire to listen and to engage in dialogue. We commit ourselves to walking, praying and working together, in the hope that the art of encounter will prevail over strategies of conflict. In the hope that the display of threatening *signs of power* will yield to *the power of signs*: men and women of good will of different beliefs, unafraid of dialogue, open to the ideas of others and concerned for their good. Only in this way, by ensuring that no one lacks bread and work, dignity and hope, will the cries of war turn into songs of peace.

If this is to happen, it is essential that those in power choose finally and decisively to work for true peace and not for their own interests. Let there be an end to the few profiting from the sufferings of many! No more occupying territories and thus tearing people apart! No more letting half-truths continue to frustrate people's aspirations! Let there be an end to using the Middle East for gains that have nothing to do with the Middle East!

War is the scourge that tragically assails this beloved region. The poor are its principal victims. Let us think only of war-torn Syria, especially the Daraa region, where bitter conflicts have started again, displacing a large number of people who are now subjected to terrible suffering. War is the daughter of power and poverty. It is defeated by renouncing the thirst for supremacy and by eradicating poverty. So many conflicts have been stoked too by forms of fundamentalism and fanaticism that, under the guise of religion, have profaned God's name – which is peace – and persecuted age-old neighbours. Violence is always fueled by weapons. You cannot speak of peace while you are secretly racing to stockpile new arms. This is a most serious responsibility weighing on the conscience of nations, especially the most powerful. Let us not forget the last century. Let us not forget the lessons of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Let us not turn the Middle East, where the Word of peace sprang up, into dark stretches of silence. Let us have enough of stubborn opposition! Enough of the thirst for profit that surreptitiously exploits oil and gas fields without regard for our common home, with no scruples about the fact that energy market now dictates the law of coexistence among peoples!

To blaze paths of peace, let us turn our gaze instead to those who beg to live with others as brothers and sisters. May every community be protected, not simply the majority. Let the way to the right of common citizenship be opened in the Middle East, as the path to a renewed future. Christians too are, and ought to be, full citizens enjoying equal rights.

With deep anguish, but with constant hope, we turn our gaze to Jerusalem, a city for all peoples, a unique and sacred city for Christians, Jews and Muslims the world over. A

city whose identity and vocation must be safeguarded apart from various disputes and tensions, and whose *status quo* demands to be respected, as decided by the international community and repeatedly requested by the Christian communities of the Holy Land. Only a negotiated solution between Israelis and Palestinians, firmly willed and promoted by the international community, will be able to lead to a stable and lasting peace, and guarantee the coexistence of two states for two peoples.

Hope has the face of children. In the Middle East, for years, an appalling number of young people mourn violent deaths in their families and see their native land threatened, often with their only prospect being that of flight. This is the death of hope. All too many children have spent most of their lives looking at rubble instead of schools, hearing the deafening explosion of bombs rather than the happy din of playgrounds. May humanity listen – this is my plea – to the cry of children, whose mouths proclaim the glory of God (cf. *Ps* 8:3). Only by wiping away their tears will the world recover its dignity.

With this concern for the children – let us not forget the children! – we will shortly let our desire for peace take wing by releasing some doves. May the longing for peace rise higher than any dark cloud. May our hearts remain united and turned to heaven, as in the days of the Flood (cf. *Gen* 8:11), in expectation of a fresh twig of hope. And may the Middle East no longer be an *ark of war* lying between continents, but an *ark of peace* that welcomes peoples of different backgrounds and beliefs. Beloved Middle East, may you see dispelled the darkness of war, power, violence, fanaticism, unfair gains, exploitation, poverty, inequality and lack of respect for rights. “May peace be upon you” (*Ps* 122:8) – all together: “May peace be upon you” – may justice dwell within your borders, and may God’s blessing come to rest upon you. Amen!

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