

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating September 9, 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, The commentaries on the Second and Third Readings are based on the liturgy for the Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem, *She Dances*, follows. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem two book reflections follow, one by Tom Keene on the poet Christian Wiman's *My Bright Abyss*, and mine on Paul S. Vickery's biography of Bartolomé de las Casas.

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 Jordan 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 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 Proctor Mack Grand Ballroom Southern Methodist University, 6425 Boaz Lane.

Thursday October 4, 5:30pm-7:30pm, Douglas Holtz-Eakin, Tax Cuts and Jobs Act: Growth Policy or Giveaway?" Miller Events Center, Southern Methodist University. Free, but reservations required: tower@smu.edu or Bora Laci 214-768-4716.

Monday October 15, 12:00pm-1:30pm, Susan Hayward (U.S. Institute for Peace), "Women, Religion and Peacebuilding: Illuminating the Unseen." Venue TBA at Southern Methodist University. Free, but reservations required: tower@smu.edu or Bora Laci 214-768-4716.

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.

Sunday September 9, 2:00pm-5:00pm, film: "In the Name of Peace: John Hume in America." Documentary on Jon Hume, who, inspired by Martin Luther King, helped bring peace to Northern Ireland. Jones Hall, St. Thomas University, 3910 Yoakum Blvd. Information: irishstudies@stthom.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.

Friday September 28, 4:00pm, Steven DeLay (Wake Forest University), "Making Peace." Humanities Bldg. 117, Rice University, 6100 Main St.

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.

Wednesday October 3, 7:00pm-8:30pm, panel discussion, "From Discrimination to Hate Crimes: A Conversation on What Americans of Minority Religions Are Facing Today." Rabbi Steven Morgen, Congregation Beth Yeshurun; Christopher P. Scheitle, West Virginia University; Manpreet K. Singh, The Sikh Coalition. Rice University; for information contact Hayley Hemstreet, RPLP Program Manager, hjh2@rice.edu, 713-348-3974

In San Antonio

Friday September 7, 7:00pm-9:00pm, film: "A Strike and an Uprising! (in Texas)." San Antonio pecan shellers' strike of 1938, Jobs for Justice March in Nacogdoches in 1987. \$10 in advance at <http://www.urban15.org/>, \$15 at the door. Urban 15, 2500 S. Presa.

Saturday September 8, 9:30 registration; 10:00am-2:00pm, Day of Action 2018: Seeking Sensible Gun Legislation. Information on sensible gun legislation, skills development, contacting legislators. Mabee Library Auditorium. Registration for the Day of Action: <https://south-moms.ngpvanhost.com/ngpvanforms/27534>

Saturday September 8, 11:00am-2:00pm, demonstration: Rise for Climate to Build a Fossil Free World. Milan Park, 500 W. Commerce.

Wednesday September 12, 12:00pm-1:00pm, 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.

Wednesday September 12, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Pub theology with Carry Clark. The Friendly Spot, 943 S. Alamo St.

Wednesday September 12, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Joseph L. Cook, "Climate Change and Ecological Spirituality." SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). Free, but register by September 5: 210-732-9927, or see <http://www.upcsa.org/classes/>

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.

Wednesday September 19, 7:00pm-8:30pm, Roger Barnes Ph.D., "Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Path to Nonviolence." Mabee Library Auditorium, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway. For information, contact Sr. Martha Ann Kirk: kirk@uiwtx.edu

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, 12:00pm-1:00pm, anti-death penalty vigil across the street from county courthouse, 300 Dolorosa.

Thursday September 27, 12:00pm-1:00pm, anti-death penalty vigil across the street from county courthouse, 300 Dolorosa.

Friday September 28, 2:00pm, “Project Lifeline,” Children in Crisis—Dehumanization and Immigration Detention, A Conversation between Physicians and Faith Leaders. Ballroom, student Engagement Center, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Tuesday October 2, 9:00am-3:00pm, “From Circular Economy to Circular Society in San Antonio.” Sustainability workshop, with European experts in conversation with San Antonians. Rooms 2030-2032, Student Engagement Center, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway. <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/from-circular-economy-to-circular-society-in-san-antonio-tickets-49512237435>

Thursday October 4, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Edward B. Westermann, Ph.D. (Texas A & M San Antonio), “Propaganda: The Dangers of Dehumanization.” SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). \$15; register by September 27 (\$20 after): 210-732-9927, or see <http://www.upcsa.org/classes/>

Saturday October 6, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. Residence of Maria Tobin, 8715 Starcrest, #27. Contact matob@aol.com

Tuesday October 9, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Lisa Epstein (Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America), Gun Myths Busted. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). \$15, register before October 2, \$20 after: 210-732-9927, or see <http://www.upcsa.org/classes/>

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 (James 2:1-5)

The author of the *Letter of James* contrasts faith in human honorifics and Jesus’ faith: “My brothers and sisters, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus, Messiah, as a faith in reputation, by showing partiality.” The passage goes on to contrast the treatment that might be accorded a man wearing a gold ring and radiant clothing, and that accorded a poor man in filthy clothes.

It was not unusual in antiquity for rich and poor to dress differently. The poor often had no clothes but their work clothes. Today in our democratic society we deny class differences in our attire. The practice of 1960s college students “dressing down” in protest against class inequality has persisted to this day, but as a disguise rather than a

protest. It has extended into the general society, even church. People are more likely to express their claims to upper class status with their automobiles and residences. It should be asked whether the claims to superiority that one dare not make in church should be made elsewhere.

Third Reading (Mark 7.31-37)

When does child-like simplicity of heart verge upon the childish and infantile? It is child-like to be open to rich and poor alike; making distinctions is something learned on the way to adulthood. To be childish is to be self-centered, not allowing others to matter.

I used to walk to work in a small Ohio town, and a little girl of four or five would wait for me in the morning on the porch of a frame house, and run out and excitedly squeal my name and embrace me at the knees until her mother called her back. The child was child-like in being so welcoming to a "man in the street," but childish in allowing her every impulse to overrule the requirement of someone having to go to work. There was enough of the former to make one smile.

At the frontier of pagan territory, with its "I do for you and you do for me" religion, they brought Jesus a deaf and speech-impaired man, "and they demanded of him that he lay his hands on him." There was no sympathy for the deaf and speech-impaired man; he was not given a chance to speak in his impaired way. They just wanted a good magic show. Jesus was willing to do an act of mercy, but he took the man away from the crowd so as to avoid making a spectacle. He looked to heaven and sighed; there was too little child-likeness to lead him to smile, and too much childishness. He ordered that no one be told of the cure, but the show had to go on: "as much as he ordered them, the more excessively they proclaimed it."

The deaf man began to hear, but the crowd did not begin to listen. The speechless man began to speak, but the chatter of the crowd was superficial. "He makes the deaf hear," but do the hearing listen? He makes "the speechless speak," but do those who chatter inspire meaning?

How much prayer is childish rather than child-like? How much of it is intended to bring God around to satisfying our own impulses rather than embracing the Divine where Divinity is to be found? And oh, the show that must go on.... Sigh! So much of the religious programming in the electronic media is infantile! It is about "me" and "my salvation."

Poem

She Dances

At the PTA carnival,
near the deejay's amplifiers,
on elementary school blacktop,
she dances.

Eyes closed,

her hands
slide in sync
with legs and torso;
lips make silent words;
hair does counter point with hips.
All partners in a poem.

She draws a crowd.
We know we watch a private thing.
Like a prayer, a kiss.

The music ends,
she stops.
We applaud. She opens her eyes.
Surprised.

But the music begins again.
She is gone into sacred space.

What demons wait to corrupt this innocence?
What angels plot celebration?

Tom Keene
July 13, 1999

MY BRIGHT ABYSS: Meditation of a Modern Believer

(New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2013)

Review by Tom Keene

Nothing clears the mind so much as knowing tomorrow you will die. Christian Winan, diagnosed with a rare and incurable cancer, shares that clarity and tests it in “My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer.”

Born in West Texas, and until recently, editor of *Poetry Magazine*, Winan describes his wrestling with belief and doubt. His book takes readers on a meditative journey into flashes of faith within a secular culture that holds in abeyance any notions of transcendence. As company for the journey, Winan brings along dozens of poets and writers: poets such as Gerard Manley Hopkins, Rainer Maria Rilke and Patrick Kavanaugh; writers like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thomas Merton and Simone Weil. With the help of such company Winan relates his crisis of impending death, a prospect made more poignant and revealing in the flood of life and love from his wife, Daniele and daughters that enfolds him.

With his gifts of lucid prose and his own evocative poetry, Winan explores the presence of God in God’s absence and finds moments of “clear-spirited existence....”

Along the way, Winan posts cautionary signs for two attitudinal pitfalls endangering any who quest for ultimate meanings: The secular skepticism that is too smug or too afraid to face ultimate issues and the religious literalism that strangles the life out of metaphor.

On the uses and necessities of metaphor, Winan notes that they “can flash us past our plodding resistance and habits into strange new truths. Thus the very practical effects of music, myth and image, which tease us not out of reality, but deeper and more completely into it.”

For Winan, faith is not so much acceptance of a system of coherent beliefs. Rather, “Faith is nothing more—but how much more this is—than a motion of the soul toward God.... Faith is faith in the soul. Faith is the word ‘faith’ decaying into pure meaning.”

Winan highlights the importance of personal, internal experience. He points to “any moment in our lives when we were rendered mute with awe, fear, wonder. Absent this there is no sense in arguing for God in order to convince others, for we ourselves are not convinced.”

As readers of Winan’s *Bright Abyss*, we will find ourselves navigating mazes of insights grounded in life experiences, their depths and shallows, enabling a wiser and braver engagement of our own quest for meaning.

That Winan uses Christian imagery to convey the one crisis that all humans will face need not put off readers with other religious or even secular traditions. Among all traditions, forms of expression will differ, but they share common concerns for the heart of the matter which is a quest for authenticity and integrity, healing and wholeness.

**Reflection on Paul S. Vickery, *Bartolomé de las Casas. Great Prophet of the Americas* (Mahwah, NJ : Paulist Press)
Anthony J. Blasi**

If one sacrifices from what has been wrongfully obtained, the offering is blemished; the gifts of the lawless are not acceptable.

The Most High is not pleased with the offerings of the ungodly; and he is not propitiated for sins by a multitude of sacrifices.

Like one who kills a son before his father’s eyes is the man who offers a sacrifice from the property of the poor.

The bread of the needy is the life of the poor; whoever deprives them of it is a man of blood.

To take a neighbor’s living is to murder him; to deprive an employee of his wages is to shed blood.

(Sirach 34: 18-22)

A priest from Seville contemplated this passage for a Pentecost Sunday homily in 1514. Opposed impulses were at work in his soul. His father Pedro de las Casas had accompanied Christopher Columbus on the latter’s second voyage to the New World. When he returned, he gave his son, the future priest Bartolomé, a young Taino Indian slave named Juanico. Bartolomé found Juanico a compatible companion who served him well when he left home for the seminary, but Queen Isabella had been greatly

disturbed that Admiral Columbus would give three hundred of her subjects, including Juanico, away as slaves. She sent all the slaves back to the New World. Bartolomé had come to appreciate someone whom others dismissed as an inferior savage, and had known him as a human and valuable companion.

Bartolomé participated in the colonization of the new “Indies,” returned to Europe, and was ordained in Rome on a trip with Diego Columbus. Back in the “Indies” he was rewarded for his service in the brutal colonization process with property and slaves in Cuba. Preparing his homily, he faced a dilemma: How could he preach what had to be a self-condemnation?

Bartolomé de las Casas would become the best known advocate for the indigenous people of the New World and for the moral and practical superiority of peaceful and reasoned proselytizing among them, as opposed to conquest. He was not the only or first such advocate; several years earlier, on the fourth Sunday of Advent, 1511, he witnessed a courageous and controversial sermon by a Dominican, Antón Montesino, delivered after a consensus and decision of the local Dominican community on Hispanola: “You are all in mortal sin! You live in it and you die in it! Why? Because of the cruelty and tyranny you use with these innocent people. Tell me, with what right, with what justice, do you hold these Indians in such cruel and horrible servitude?”

Las Casas disposed of his business interest on Cuba and returned the slaves to the governor who had awarded him with them. He began to remonstrate with the court back in Spain, became a Dominican himself, and eventually a bishop in Central America (Chiapa). He would gain more insight over time, eventually rejecting the slave trade and enslavement of Africans as well as of Amerindians.

Spain had received jurisdiction over the religious conversion of the peoples of the greater part of South and Central America and the new “Indies” from Pope Alexander VI, and the Spanish crown “entrusted” the indigenous people to the colonists. The newly dominated people were legally free, but in practice were enslaved in order to create the colonists’ wealth that would be taxed by the Spanish crown. The colonists—mostly convicts who were pardoned on condition that they go to the new world—conquered brutally and worked the technically free slaves, literally to death. Queen Isabella had some interest in the success of the missionary project that accompanied all this, but by the time Las Casas was making his case she had died, and King Ferdinand did not show much interest. Years later, Las Casas would make some progress with King Charles (Emperor Charles V), but the remedies legislated by Charles’ decrees could not be enforced over the objections of the colonial authorities. Charles had accumulated huge debts in amassing his Empire, and his successor Philip, an admirer of Las Casas as Charles had been, proved to be the unwilling servant of the colonial authorities and the tax revenues they provided.

Facing hostility even in his diocese of Chiapa, the aging Bishop Las Casas resigned and returned to Spain, publishing a remarkable collection of works that recounted the sad history of the colonial atrocities and arguing theologically and legally against colonialism’s ideological defenders.

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