

# Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating September 12, 2021

Communications with the editor should be sent to [j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com](mailto: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 the readings for the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Palestinians Israelis and Us*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is an articulate cry for justice emanating out of the Palestinian Christian community, written by Jean Zaru, first posted by the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center.

## Calendar

Times are given for the Central Time Zone.

**Tuesday September 7**, 7:00pm (6:00pm Mountain Time), online meeting, Pax Christi El Paso. The focus will be on the *Breaking the Idols* video from the recent Pax Christi USA Conference, View the video at:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJhefTVXtP0&list=PLnKdnZlt\\_EiurTkQuKk4zn1WqfM1-mrZ8&index=6&t=3302s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJhefTVXtP0&list=PLnKdnZlt_EiurTkQuKk4zn1WqfM1-mrZ8&index=6&t=3302s)

For the link to the meeting, send you email address to Pat Delgado at [phdelgado3583@gmail.com](mailto:phdelgado3583@gmail.com)

**Wednesday September 8**, 7:00pm (8:00pm ET) online panel "Planet in Crisis: What Are the Root Causes & Solutions?" Cynthia Gonzalez (Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach), John Din (Laudato Sí Movement—Philippines), and Marianne Comfort, RSM (Justice Coordinator for Earth, Activism, and Women, Sister of Mercy of the Americas). Register at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZlPfi-grDguHtPj8MD3VGIg9x1Y5zDmo0dL>

**Thursday September 9**, 9:00am-10:00am (10:00am-11:00sam ET) online  
"Secularism and Islam in Foreign Policy. A Conversation with Sarah Wolff," author of *Secular Power, Europe and Islam*, interviewed by Jocelyne Cesari. RSVP at:  
[https://georgetown.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_8CGATTZ2Qs-CezwUUuF2oA](https://georgetown.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_8CGATTZ2Qs-CezwUUuF2oA)

**Saturday September 11**, 10:00am (11:00am ET), online memorial on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2001 attack, hosted by Pax Christi Metro New York and Pax Christi New York State. To share a memory, poem, song, reflection, or prayer of up to 3 minutes, contact [nypaschristi@gmail.com](mailto:nypaschristi@gmail.com). To join or observe the proceeding, register at:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUkcuiuj0sH9yrhILOuc5XVyfz8XLC Oe6B>

**Thursday September 16**, 11:30am (12:30pm ET), online "Moral Principles, National Priorities, Budget Choices: The Human and Moral Dimensions of the Budget Reconciliation Debate," Ashley Kenneth (commonwealth Institute), Mary Novak (Network), Rev. Carlos Malavé (Christian Churches Together), Ramesh Ponnuru (American Enterprise Institute), and Elana Schor (*Politico*), moderated by John Carr (Georgetown University). RSVP at:  
<https://catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/events/moral-principles-national-priorities-budget-choices#rsvp>

**Tuesday September 21**, 3:00pm-4:30pm (4:00pm-5:30pm ET), online (or in person at the Hesburgh Center for International Studies, auditorium, U. of Notre Dame) International Day of Peace: Recovering Better for an Equitable and Sustainable World; Catherine Bolten (Anthropology and Peace Studies, U. of Notre Dame), Maira Hayat (Environment and Peace Studies, U. of Notre Dame), Hop Hopkins (Sierra Club), Emmanuel Katongole (Theology and Peace Studies, U. of Notre Dame), Luis Miranda (Sierra Club), and Roy Scranton (Krok Institute, U. of Notre Dame). Register at:  
[https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_fkOCYhYrQJqTbtX2Z2NVlg](https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_fkOCYhYrQJqTbtX2Z2NVlg)

**Wednesday September 22**, 8:00pm, online "Science and Religion: Why Hong Kong and Taiwan Are Different," Elaine Howard Ecklund, David R. Johnson, and Di Di (all

Rice University). Information: [Bethany.boucher@rice.edu](mailto:Bethany.boucher@rice.edu). Register at: <https://bit.ly/science-religion-hongkong-taiwan>.

**Friday September 24**, 8:00am-Friday October 8, 11:30pm, online Environmental Film Fest, hosted by the San Antonio River Authority. To receive notices of the films, register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/8th-annual-environmental-film-fest-virtual-registration-165455151813>

**Saturday September 25**, 10:00am (11:00am ET), online interfaith prayer service on the occasion of the United National International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. Sponsored by a number of organizations, including Pax Christi New York State. Register at: [https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0qcemspzkiGd0cYXWKV62-XslreVIFxP\\_1](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0qcemspzkiGd0cYXWKV62-XslreVIFxP_1)

**Sunday September 26**, 9:45am, online "Rachel Carson and Glimpses of God," on the religious, spiritual, and literary influences on Rachel Carson's environmentalism. Presentation by Bruce Yeager. Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86564638381?#success> ; Zoom passcode: `pwd=MTBtSFI6eVhoTUF3SXJ2VIBWd0N2QT09`

**Friday October 8**, 5:00pm-7:00pm (6:00pm-8:00pm ET), online "Developing Catholic Moral Teaching: A 30,000-foot View," Dr. Helen Marie Burns, RSM. First in a series on moral theology as it pertains to sexual minorities. Register at: <https://fs18.formsite.com/jennhardin/1w3acsjqd3/index.html>

**Saturday November 13**, 11:00am-1:00pm (12:00pm-2:00pm ET), online "Catholic Moral Teaching: Centrality of Conscience," Dr. Linda Hogan (Trinity College, Dublin). Second in a series on moral theology as it pertains to sexual minorities. Register at: <https://fs18.formsite.com/jennhardin/1w3acsjqd3/index.html>

**Friday December 10**, 6:00pm-8:00pm (7:00pm-9:00pm ET) online "Catholic Moral Teaching: What It Is and Is Not," Dr. Jamie Manson (National Catholic Reporter). Third in a series on moral theology as it pertains to sexual minorities. Register at: <https://fs18.formsite.com/jennhardin/1w3acsjqd3/index.html>

## **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 San Antonio**

**Wednesday September 8**, 12:00pm anti-death penalty witness on the vigil of the execution of John Ramirez, across the street from the Bexar County Justice Center, 300 Dolorosa.

**Wednesdays September 22 and October 13**, 7:00pm-8:00pm, discussion class: "Dr. King's Beloved Community: Where Do We Go from Here—Chaos or Community?" with Bishop Trevor Alexander. \$15.00 registering before September 15, \$20.00 after. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell Ave.; park off Shook. Register at: <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration/>

## **Notice**

**Cardinal Jsoeph Tobin (Catholic Archdiocese of Newark) and John Rowe (former CEO Exelon Corporation): Immigration Reform is Morally Right and Poltiically Smart.** Access the oped at: <https://www.nj.com/opinion/2021/08/cardinal-tobin-ex-ceo-immigration-reform-is-morally-right-and-politically-smart-opinion.html>

### **First Reading (Isaiah 50:5-9a)**

Deutero (or Second) Isaiah, unlike the prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem, wrote after Judea proved to be no better off after its previously welcomed conquest by Persia. Isaiah of Jerusalem heralded the coming of Cyrus, and his hopeful rhetoric is used in Advent in anticipation of the coming of the Christ. But Deutero Isaiah (whose name we do not know, but his writings come after those of Isaiah in the biblical book of Isaiah) writes in a much more somber mood.

There are three "Suffering Servant" songs by Deutero Isaiah; the third, from which the reading of the day is taken, seems less hopeful than the other two, even resigned to the situation of the chosen people. The suffering servant faces

adversity, endures everything, but never deviates from a commitment to the ways of God.

### **Second Reading (James 2:14-18)**

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if some say they have faith, but have no works? Can faith save them?” So begins a famous passage in the *Letter of James*. In an equally famous homily, Saint John Chrysostom cited the presence of Jesus in the needy in the judgment scene of the *Gospel of Matthew* to make essentially the same point: “Do you want to honor Christ’s body? Then do not scorn him in his nakedness, nor honor him here in the church with silken garments while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked.” And again, “Of what use is it to weigh down Christ’s table with golden cups, when he himself is dying of hunger? First, fill him when he is hungry; then use the means you have left to adorn his table. Will you have a golden cup made but not give a cup of water? What is the use of providing the table with cloths woven of gold thread and not providing Christ himself with the clothes he needs?” Most relevant to our present era: “Apply this also to Christ when he comes along the roads as a pilgrim, looking for shelter. You do not take him in as your guest, but you decorate floor and walls and the capitals of the pillars.”

### **Third Reading (Mark 8.27-35)**

Jesus forbade the disciples from telling anyone that he was the Anointed One, the Messiah. But when he began to teach them that the human son had to suffer much and be rejected by the ethnic leaders, by the higher clergy, and by those who wrote out official documents (elders, high priests, and scribes), and be executed and rise after three days, Peter tried to forbid Jesus from teaching such things.

God talk! Jesus was forbidding his followers from provoking people with Christian God talk. He did not want it to be his followers’ religious talk that would provoke persecution. Biblical scholars refer to this feature of the *Gospel of Mark* as the “Messianic Secret.” No, the disciples were to provoke the ethnic leaders, the power-seeking clergy, and official functionaries more directly, and the reaction, occasionally even a judicial killing, would follow. But mysteriously, after they were oppressed they would rise on the third day—as Hosea put it centuries beforehand: “After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up,

that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord” (Hosea 6.2-3a).

What would directly provoke oppression from ethnic leaders, from power-seeking clergy, and official functionaries? There always seems to be an out group. Demagogues warn us about political correctness; they say we must have out groups! When one rationale for rejecting a class of people loses its force, another one replaces it. Bible-believing Christians, we are told, reject transgendered people. “Why? Where in the Bible is that mentioned?” Why ask? The point of demagoguery is to pull oneself up by tearing others down. But Jesus would have us associate ourselves with whomever the demagogues would stigmatize. “Seal that border! Build that wall!” The demagogues would make people illegal. “Where in the Bible does it say we should seal borders rather than welcome sojourners?” Why ask? The point is to make people illegal so that state functionaries can document their illegality.

Catholic tradition does not limit itself to the Bible. It notes that we humans have a native, God-given power to see much of the will of the Creator in the ways creation flourishes. Peter knew what Jesus was teaching was true enough; otherwise he would have left when Jesus told the crowd to take up the cross. Peter had more insight than one would think; he knew how awful the truth was, and his emotions led him to protest it. Don’t we all have the temptation to avoid displeasing the ethnic leaders, power-seeking clergy, and the state functionaries who would have us stigmatize, and are we not all tempted to hide behind God talk?

## Poem

### *Palestinians, Israelis and Us*

For every suicide bomber, a hundred doctors.  
For every sniper, a worker for peace.  
For every teacher of hate, a dozen speakers of truth.

For every tank commander, a kindergarten teacher.  
For every torturer, a tortured one who forgives.  
For every settlement, a hundred refusniks.

When will we see who we really are?

How will the One convince us we are One?

Tom Keene

May 8, 2002

## **BEING FAITHFUL WITNESSES: SERVING GOD IN A CHANGING WORLD<sup>1</sup>**

Jean Zaru

From the heart of Palestine, a land besieged and violated by Israeli military occupation, I have come to join you today. From the midst of Palestine, a tortured nation held in captivity, I stand with you today.

Both my life experience in Palestine and my ecumenical work in many corners of the world requires that I share with you the story of my people, a story of human hurt and hope. I represent a narrative of exclusion, the denial of basic human and community rights. But, I have a message of hope. A message of hope embodied in the spirit and will of all those who refuse to submit to the forces of oppression, violence and injustice, structures of domination, colonialism and foreign occupation.

The situation in Palestine calls on all of one's resources: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. And in the darkest nights of the soul, we seek your affirmation and actions, especially as governments and power systems have failed us because of their power politics, absence of will and shortsighted self-interest.

The current atmosphere in Jerusalem is highly charged, and the situation in the Holy Land is surely far more complex than that which we encounter in Luke's presentation of the first century. Even my identity as a Palestinian Christian is not easily explained to anyone living outside my immediate context. You see, I am Christian, and I am Palestinian. One part of my identity cannot be separated from the other. And as such, we, Palestinian Christians, are often referred to as the embroidery work of our people; that is, we are an interwoven and an integral part of the whole society.

Although we are the modern heirs of the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem and despite our rich contributions to the Middle East, we have become unknown,

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<sup>1</sup> First published in *Cornerstone: A Publication by Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center* 83 (Summer 2021):1-4.

unacknowledged and for-gotten by much of the world. We are a highly educated community with deep historical roots, a community that is, unfortunately, diminishing every day as a result of political and economic pressures. Our future is uncertain; the pressures are enormous.

And as we are part and parcel of our society, not outside of it, it is a daily challenge to remain faithful, to witness to our faith in these, the direst of circumstances, where today as Palestinians none of our rights are guaranteed. We stand with our Muslim sisters and brothers at the margins of life in Palestine, sharing a common reality of prolonged suffering and waiting, and acting together in hope for a brighter future.

Seventy years ago we were cast outside the course of history, our identity denied, and our very human, cultural and historical reality suppressed. We were victims of the cruel myth: 'a land without a people for a people without a land.' And we continue to be victims of an exclusive agenda—an agenda that has usurped our rights, our lands and confiscated, as well, our historical narrative.

Our country is becoming one gigantic prison and one vast cemetery. The people, land, houses and trees have been brutally treated. Fear and insecurity have replaced compassion and trust.

Relations have become hard and tense. When almost every aspect of life is framed in oppression and humiliation, moral space is diminished. Our own humanity is threatened and role models for our children become hard to find.

People are tired and depressed. They are traumatized by the violence that is perpetuated against them which affects both their physical and mental health. My people need time to mourn, to heal their wounds, to pacify their children and to find their daily bread.

Our oppression and the Israeli occupation could not have lasted so long without outside assistance. Proportionate to its population, the state of Israel is the recipient of more U.S. aid than any foreign state in history. This aid, combined with political support from the U.S., enables Israel to tighten its grip of occupation and make our lives more difficult, more unlivable. The truth has been so twisted that anybody who dares to speak out for justice is now associated with terrorism or anti-Semitism or, according to the theology of some, against God as they understand God's purpose in this world.

This is all done in the name of the so-called Christian Zionists, and as indigenous Palestinian Christians we have no choice but to answer to that claim and to the many religious leaders who exploit the Bible to endorse the legitimacy, policies and conduct of Israel. These Christians have established a linkage

between biblical Israel and the modern nation state of Israel. Evils of discrimination, oppression and dispossession are justified by reference to biblical texts. David Ben-Gurion called the Bible the Sacrosanct title deed to Palestine for the Jewish people.

As Palestinian Christians we must liberate our theology from such an understanding. God for us is a God of justice and compassion, not a God of vengeance and exclusivity. As Palestinian Christians, we have long been forgotten, even unknown, and certainly unacknowledged. We have suffered, as have all our people from dispossession, displacement and oppression. And we are then blamed for the history, politics and theology of others.

In spite of our different life experiences, we are very much influenced by each other's contexts. Where Islam is demonized, we are asked to love our neighbors and not to bear false witness against them. Western missionary movements, past and present, in spite of their good works have sometimes been a source of embarrassment and division, especially in Palestine.

The International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem is another story. Politically, it is pro-Israel in its expansionist policy with regard to settlements and is against any peace process that will end occupation. I find their theology violent and exclusive. It is pro-Israel but anti-Jewish. Fortunately, there are many faithful witnesses in Israel/Palestine. The Christian Peacemaker Teams, the members of the accompaniment programme of the World Council of Churches, the International Solidarity Movement joined by local Palestinians and Israelis, all bear witness to peace and justice. We have many others who join us in our non-violent struggle on many fronts and do support in any way possible.

Both my context in Palestine and my travels throughout the world have brought me into relation with many religious traditions. Many thinkers struggle with religious diversity. Others, as activists, are concerned with militarism, the degradation of the environment, racism and sexism. Many are working from a faith based on peace and justice issues. Often times, I have found that dialogue within the Christian tradition and among these various groups is not easy.

Some of these difficulties concern our understanding of witness, mission and the Bible. Let me begin by stating that I personally cannot take the Bible literally.

The stories in the Bible reveal people's perceptions of God but not the full reality of God. The view that the Bible is to be understood in a literalist way must be surrendered. There are many narratives that are problematic, containing texts of unsurpassed violence, which are an affront to moral sensitivities. Every effort

should be made to rescue the Bible from serving as a blunt instrument in the oppression of one people by another. In Palestine, the Americas and South Africa the Bible has been used as a tool of oppression rather than liberation.

If we want to know what God has been up to in the world, the Spirit bids us to keep our eyes and ears open to the witnesses of others. After all, the Spirit is about movement, and the presence of God. The Spirit fills, inspires, teaches, reminds and comforts. The Spirit both nurtures contemplation and empowers action.

Many Christians differ in their understanding of witness and mission. In many of the places I have visited, the churches' concerns about evangelism relate to its growing influence in their context as well as mine, of sects and new religious movements. The stories are very similar from Russia to the Pacific, from the Middle East to South Africa. The churches are disturbed by a massive influx of Christian charismatic and fundamentalist groups and by the aggressive methods of recruitment they use. I am disturbed by their theology where they generally advocate nationalist or religious exclusiveness and the subordination of women. They reject many of the political and ethical values of modern democracy, basic human rights, pluralism, freedom of speech, sharing of power and responsibility. Their literal understanding of the Bible is frightening and violent and, more often than not, justifies my oppression and dispossession as mandated by God. This is serious, even dangerous.

Must we not re-focus our efforts towards articulating a religious vision that can contribute to a global outlook and a discourse of radical, democratic human community and well being for all?

So, too, are we not challenged to articulate and then realize a liberating spiritual vision of justice? Biblical studies must be re-thought in such a way that they can contribute to the articulation of spiritual understandings that envision human dignity, justice, inclusivity and diversity in new ways.

On many occasions the witness of action has cast doubt on the witness of the Word. To witness to Christ is to follow Jesus' way and mission as expressed in Luke 4:18-19:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.*

## 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](http://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](http://www.txccedp.org)

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio  
[www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/](http://www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/)

Climate Change

[www.creation-care.com](http://www.creation-care.com)

Catholic Books Review

<http://catholicbooksreview.org>