

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating September 30, 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-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *A Tale of Two Planets*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Earlier this month Tom sent me a photocopy of an April 1985 article he wrote for the *San Antonio College Ranger*. Titled "El Corralon: From Cow Pen to Detention Center," it could have written yesterday, though now we have ICE rather than INS. So little have some things changed! The article follows the poem.

Once again, this time in Dallas, a police officer is too ready to shoot, and the resultant death is that of an African American. This time the name of the deceased is Botham Jean. I hear so little from the pulpit about our culture of violence and targeting. But this time, at least one white clergyman has spoken out. The Rev. George Mason, senior pastor of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas. I highly recommend his brief sermon, available on youtube: <https://youtu.be/pwMEdlwRsY4>.

Calendar

In Austin

Thursday September 27, 3:30pm-5:00pm, "Understanding Exploitation of the Internet and Social Media in Promoting Violent Extremism and Terrorism." Maura Conway, Ph.D. (Dublin City University). Carter Auditorium, John Brooks Williams Natural Science Center, 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.

Thursday November 8—Saturday November 10, Blandy Lectures: Journalist Ray Suarez on the U.S. majority minority future, and faculty lectures on “Gender and Sexual Orientation in the 21st Century.” Episcopal seminary of the Southwest, 501 E. 32nd St.: \$125 for the full program, free for the Ray Suarez lecture only (7:30pm Nov. 8). Information: gaylen.mahoney@ssw.edu or 512-474-4133, ext. 333.

In Dallas

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

Tuesday September 25, 7:00pm-9:0pm, The Gospel—Borders: A Public Forum on Immigration, co-sponsored by Catholic Cahrities and Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops. Panelists are Elise Griesmyer, JD; Jennifer Carr-Allmon, Aisha Koroma, and Maria Treviño-Rodriguez. Jones Hall, University of St. Thomas, 3800 Montrose Blvd.

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

Wednesday September 26, 12:00pm-1:00pm, anti-death penalty vigil across the street from county courthouse, 300 Dolorosa.

Wednesday September 26, 7:00pm, public meeting on proposal to transport used nuclear fuel rods to West Texas and Eastern New Mexico and store them there on an interim basis. Eco Centro, 1802 N. Main.

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.

Friday September 28, 6:00pm-8:00pm, Digital Inclusion Forum—Engaging the Tech Community, facilitated by Matt Ready (USAA). Panel: Jo Ann Alvaredo (SAHA), Jordana Barton (Federal Bank, Dallas), Craig Hopkins (City of San Antonio), and Steven Husain (Goodwill); sponsored by Digital Alliance of San Antonio. UTSA Downtown, La Villita Room, Durango Bldg., 501 W. Cesar E. Chavez Blvd. Park in Lot D-3 under the IH-35 bridge, corner of W. Chavez and S. Pecos.

Saturday September 29, 8:30am-3:30pm, Peter Paris, “From Vision to Action: The Social Teaching of the Black Churches.” After lunch, panel discussion. \$25, discount for students. Whitley Theological Center, Oblate School of Theology 285 Oblate Dr. Information, registration, discounts: Noemy at 210-341-1366, ext. 212.

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>

Wednesday October 3, 1:30-3:00pm, Adam Farrell, Ireland Consul general, “20 Years of Peace in Northern Ireland.” Northrup Hall 040, Trinity University, One Trinity Place.

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/>

Sunday October 14, 3:00pm-6:00pm, Celebration and thanksgiving of the Canonization of Oscar Romero of El Salvador. Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller and Rev. Juan Carlos. Christ the King Catholic Church, 2610 Perez (outdoors, bring lawn chairs and if needed umbrella).

Wednesday October 24, 7:00pm, play, "The Line in the Sand: Stories from the US/Mexico Border about Immigration," followed by panel discussion. Concert Hall, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Thursday October 25, 7:30pm-9:00pm, Gretchen Daily, "A New Business Model for People and Nature" (Trinity University Distinguished Scientists Lecture). Laurie Auditorium, Trinity University, 1 Trinity Place.

Monday October 29, 6:30pm-8:30pm, Civility: A Community Conversation, sponsored by Compassion SA, Office of the Mayor, and SoL Center. Oblate Renewal Center, 5700 Blanco Rd. (Do not try to enter from Oblate Dr.)

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 (Letter of James 5:1-6)

"Come now you rich, weep, wailing over troubles coming upon you. Your wealth has decayed and your garments become moth eaten...." This is a typical biblical condemnation of materialism and misplaced priorities. But then the author turns to his point: "Look: the wage of the workers who mowed your fields, which were withheld by you, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts." The Lord is to be found among the victims of injustice: "You condemned, you murdered the just one." It is not possible to cheat the worker without condemning Jesus, any more than one could execute Jesus without condemning God.

A member of the city council spoke to a homeowners' association about his lonely vote against an ordinance that would require paid sick leave for employees in the city. (This was the same council member who voted against the removal of a Confederate statue from a city park, saying he had to consult with his constituents first.) In the question and comment period following his presentation, I related my experience eight years ago of undergoing major heart surgery, and how I benefited from a contract provision under which I continued to receive an income, and how I was able to pay bills during my recovery. "Paid sick leave is a wonder program," he said, "but we need to do it the right way." He didn't want it to be an imposition on employers; he saw it as a state rather than city matter. Hmm.

Third Reading (Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48)

The passage follows the narrative of Jesus responding to the disciples' discussion of who was the greatest; he had put a slave boy before them and said, "If anyone wishes to be first, that one will be the last of all and servant of all." The passage read for the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time continues the discussion of being a servant of all. John says, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name...." "Do not forbid him...." What comes next is often obscured by translations. The liturgical

editors leave out verses 44 and 46—correctly since the two verses do not appear in the earliest manuscripts. A close reading of the Greek of verse 42 reads, “And whoever would cause difficulties for one of the least of those who believe in me, it is rather better if a large millstone were put around his neck and cast into the sea.” It goes on to speak of one’s hand, foot, and eye causing one to “stumble,” the same verb stem translated as “cause difficulties for.” That stem is the noun, skandalon, stumbling block. Someone placing a small stumbling block deserves a large mill block around the neck.

I drove out to a picnic held in a public park as a going-away party for my friend and department chair, David. I barely knew some of the people there, and most I did not know at all. A young lady was telling me about her forthcoming trip to Egypt to convert the unsaved. Her parents were visibly uncomfortable with the zealotry of their daughter, but they were not going to stand in her way. One could almost hear the gospel injunction, “Do not forbid...” “Who are these unsaved people in Egypt,” I asked, assuming I would hear some stereotypical prejudices about Muslims. “They think they are Christians, but they are virtually pagans called *Copts*,” she replied. I asked with some astonishment, “Haven’t they been followers of Jesus since time of the apostles?” Her answer was well-practiced: “They have to be born again like ordinary American Christians.”

I could not help but think of Saad, a gentleman whose acquaintance I had made decades beforehand, more a revolutionary than a religious person. He bore scars on his body from his participation in the Algerian Revolution against France. At the time of the picnic, he was actually in Egypt, in prison for exposing electoral fraud that kept the strongman president, Hosni Mubarak, in power. He would be exonerated of any crime twice by the highest Egyptian court before being released to leave the country, but that had not happened yet. At the university where I worked a Muslim colleague knew him and spoke highly of him, and a Coptic man who worshiped in the same Roman Catholic parish as I, along with his wife and young son, also knew him and spoke of him as the only high-profile person in Egypt who spoke out in favor of the rights of the Coptic Christians.

When is religion an occasion of sin and irreligion an occasion of virtue?

© 2015 Anthony J. Blasi

Poem

A Tale of Two Planets

One has Coca Cola up for grabs
everywhere to any who can pay
and lets twenty-one thousand
hungry children die every day.

The other does just the reverse.
Which to bless, which to curse?

Tom Keene
November 4, 2016

El Corralon: From Cow Pen to Detention Center

By Tom Keene

For the approximately 500 Central Americans detained at the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service Processing Center in Harlingen, this is not their most uncomfortable experience.

The site of a huge cow pen, a corral, during the 1950s, it is commonly referred to as El Corralon. Here there is food, a bed with clean sheets, shared company and time.

They wait for letters from relatives or contacts in this country or in the countries they left, hoping for a promise of help or money to gain temporary release from the detention center while seeking legal status to remain in the United States.

Two of El Corralon's men agree to discuss why they came to the United States, requesting their real names not be used because they fear retaliation against relatives living in their native countries.

Nestor, 25, lived only two kilometers from the capital city of San Salvador, where he worked in a shoe factory.

He belonged to the workers' union. It went on strike. On April 7, 1979, the National Guard came to the plant.

"They machine gunned us," Nestor said.

To ensure understanding, Nestor pointed his forefingers and imitated the rat-tat-tat of automatic rifles.

"They killed 12 of us. They wounded 47. They broke the strike.

"We were detained and beaten. The soldiers formed a gauntlet line. We had to run past them as they hit us with the backs of their machetes. They broke my jaw and smashed my face."

On being released, Nestor went to the countryside to live with relatives. His union activities made him suspect to the plantation managers where his family lived and worked. Mere suspicion was cause of becoming a name on a death list. He decided to leave El Salvador.

Nestor took a bus to Mexico where he could find no work. He came to the U.S. border and crossed the Rio Grande at Brownsville. A few days later, he was arrested and sent to El Corralon.

He is applying for political asylum in the United States. He knows the chances are slim, but his application gives him time. He does not want to be sent back to El Salvador.

If the civil war at home were ended, would he return? It depends on who wins, he says.

"I would not return to a government controlled by the right. It would be the same conditions as now."

Nestor pauses.

“You might ask why I do not fight with the guerrillas against the right.

“It is for personal and spiritual reasons. I sued to want to collaborate with the left. But I have come to realize that my way of seeing the world is much different from theirs. I joined with people who follow Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence.”

Nestor says he would return to el Salvador if the left wins.

“I would try to cooperate with the new government. It would probably be Marxist. That has good and bad points. There would be much government control.

“I could collaborate with the left. Although our ideas are not completely in accord, we can agree on some things. There might even be some repression from the left. All governments have laws with which one does not agree. But it would not be like it is now—torture, killing, disappearances.”

The leftists also have a record of violence, he admits.

“When the leftist guerrillas kill, it is a lean kill—a bullet through the heart or brain. The people call it ‘clean guerrilla justice.’ But the right-wing death squads will slowly torture one to death. They will tear out fingernails, cut off the fingers, then chop off the hand at the wrist, then the elbow, and the shoulder.”

Nestor demonstrates with chopping motions to his fingers, wrist, and elbow. He then explains what he believes the people of El Salvador want in their country.

“Many are very conscious, very aware politically. They recognize injustice and the problems of dictatorship. They see the need for change and that change is imminent.

“Many, though, are reticent. They see what happens to those who speak out. Slashed throats, decapitations, arrests and torture, the death squads.”

“Many others simply want to avoid decisions and problems. They keep their mouths shut and pretend not to see.”

Jacinto, 20, left Guatemala and its civil war three months ago. He left his family of mother, five brothers and niece in Guatemala City, where he worked as a photographer for a book printer.

“I was forced into the government’s army. They tried to turn me into a brute.”

Jacinto says he was forced to serve in the Guatemalan army after he was stopped in the street without any identification papers.

“They took me to a training camp. Once there, we were beaten by older trainees. We were told we must accept the beating. If we resisted, we would be beaten worse. After our third week, we were forced to beat up new recruits. If I refused, I would be beaten too.”

After one failed attempt, Jacinto escaped to Guatemala City, where he hid until he was able to gather enough money to begin his trip northward.

“I had 4,000 pesos to use to get me to the U.S. border. I walked through the mountains and took short trips on third class buses through towns and cities I will never remember. After crossing the river into the United States, I was arrested by immigration.”

Jacinto says he will be killed if he is deported to Guatemala.

“If not right away, then later the army would come to kill me. They put you in jail until it is time to be shot.

“If I had the means, though, I would have stayed in Guatemala to help my people.”

He says he would like to see a peaceful end to the civil war in his country.

“This is a dream. War is good business for governments that sell arms. I see the United States and Russia promoting wars as a way to sell arms.”

Speaking with a heightened enthusiasm, he leans forward.

“My people cannot eat bullets from the United States. In El Salvador children die of hunger. Hunger is the gun powder of the region. I do not want support from the United States that furthers violence in my country.

“We want peace and liberty. Let the arms be thrown in the trash. Violence is only bringing destruction to the world. Armies do not fight for people only for their own benefit.

“All that is necessary for us is to have peace and land to cultivate.”

A guard interrupts, telling Jacinto his time is up.

Rising to leave, he considers a final question:

“It is the position of the U.S. government that the troubles in Central America are due to communism. Is this not true?”

As Jacinto considers his answer, the expression on his face changes from enthusiastic hope to that of a 20-year-old cynic.

The United States government will say whatever it wants to help itself.

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.msic.net

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, International JPIC Committee

<http://saccvi.blogspot.com/>

San Antonio Peace Center

<http://www.sanantonioplace.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