

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating September 26, 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 on the readings for the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Yes and No Together*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem is a theological statement on the priority of justice toward sexual minorities over matters of individual sexual morality: *A Home for All*. New Ways Ministry posted it last month, and it has received an extraordinary number of endorsements. To view the endorsements or to add your own, use this link: <https://www.newwaysministry.org/homeforall/>

Calendar

Times are given for the Central Time Zone.

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

Tuesday September 21, 5:30pm-7:00pm (6:30pm-8:00pm ET) online panel "Demystifying Critical Race Theory," Karolyn McGrorty Derstine (Gwynedd Mercy

Academy), Craig A. Ford, Jr. (St. Norbert College), Anita Roberson (Gwynedd Mercy Academy) and Toni Graves Williamson (Friends Select School), moderated by Palma J. Strand (Creighton School of Law). Register at:
https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_SMniz9oKQjifA0CXel9F8A

Tuesday September 21, 6:00pm Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter, online panel: "Highway Expansions: Why Are We *Still* Doing These Projects?" RSVP at:
https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?id=7013q000002FZxxAAG&formcampaignid=7013q000002FLBHAA4&data=0e422a072dac4fb936b45db82e74342f0c683121347cdbb0505a24f7c1928a5c74ab6317b0b2730cd4a9231222499ef8&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sierraclub&utm_campaign=outings

Wednesday September 22, 10:00am-11:00am (11:00am-12:00pm ET) online dialogue "Faith for Earth: A Call for Action," Iyad Abmoghli (United Nations), David Hales (Parliament of World Religions), Kusumita P. Pedersen (Parliament of World Religions), and Mary Evelyn Tucker (Yale Divinity School), moderated by Michael Lynch (Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers). Register at: https://creation.cadeio.org/events/faith-for-earth-dialogue/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ecumenical-and-interreligious-guidebook-announcement_6

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. 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

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

Wednesday September 29, 10:00am-11:00am (11:00am-12:00pm ET) online dialogue about *Healing Earth*, a publication of the International Jesuit Ecology Project: Michael J. Schuck (Loyola University, Chicago), hosted by Michael Terrien Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officer). Register at: https://creation.cadeio.org/events/healing-earth-dialogue/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ecumenical-and-interreligious-guidebook-announcement_6

Monday October 4, 10:00am-11:00am (11:00am-12:00pm ET) online webinar on the *Ecumenical and Interreligious Guidebook: Care for Our Common Home* (published by U.S. Conference of Catholic bishops, Catholic Assn. of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers, and Catholic Climate Covenant), Sister Pamela Smith, SS.C.M., hosted by Rev. Walter F. Kedjierski (USCCB). Register at: <https://creation.cadeio.org/events/care-for-our-common-home-an-overview/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=06358db3-6954-4ad5-bce9-ffe94950bfb#02232021anchor>

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 San Antonio

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/>

First Reading (Numbers 11:25-29)

The first reading presents a narrative in rather primitive terms. It depicts the authority of God, understood as an action of prophesying, as a substance that God first gives Moses and then Moses parcels out to seventy leaders. However, two more leaders, who happened not to be present, also began prophesying. Moses' assistant, Joshua, proposes stopping the two, but Moses says to allow them to prophesy. There is an interreligious aspect to this insofar as valid religion is not restricted to one religious organization, even one empowered by God Himself.

There is more to this than simply being open to other faiths. All persons experience the world as God created it, and through their powers of observation and reason, even under the inchoate form of a vague spirituality, all persons can intuit the divine reality that far transcends them. Not all do, but all have the potential. Consequently, too narrow a handed-down religion, one that pretends to encompass the fullness of greater truths, can become an obstacle to inspiration as it would otherwise be elicited by a creation that reflects the Creator.

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 prior, 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?

Poem

Yes and No Together

Caught up in our mind's dualities,
we feel captured by the either-or of choice:
 here and now or there and then,
 yesterday or tomorrow,
 yes or no.

Yet every no is a yes to something.
Such is the nature of choosing.

We discover over time,
that our world's separations
becomes a yes to the oneness we are:
 where choices between one or the other
 find each other in a yes
 that is us becoming.

Tom Keene and Muse
March 21, 2021

A Home for All
A Catholic Call for LGBTQ Non-Discrimination
New Ways Ministry
August 9, 2021

Introduction

The relationship between the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church and the community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) persons has long been fraught with tensions, negative emotions, and confusion. Harsh statements from high-ranking church leaders against LGBTQ equality initiatives in the civil arena have often succeeded in limiting the rights of LGBTQ people, causing great offense and allowing great social and personal harm to befall this marginalized community.

Equally alarming to us as Catholics is that a vocal section of our church leaders too often does not fully consider Catholicism's most fundamental teachings and values when taking positions on LGBTQ social policy initiatives. By supporting civic policies that promote discrimination and by opposing policies that would produce equality, these leaders bypass the Catholic Church's proud social justice tradition, the product of more than a century's development of social doctrine that increasingly supports the human rights of *all* people without exception.

Because LGBTQ people suffer from unjust discrimination due to structural inequalities in law and social institutions, our Catholic faith compels us to speak out in support of the principle of non-discrimination. Non-discrimination would alleviate the personal suffering of LGBTQ people, provide them equal access to our society's opportunities, and, in many cases, save lives. Ending discrimination of this type would also benefit the common good of all people in our society. If

LGBTQ people were allowed to flourish as full human beings and as equal citizens, our communal, cultural, and social life would be greatly enhanced by their gifts.

As Catholic theologians, scholars, church leaders, writers, and ministers, we affirm that Catholic teaching presents a positive case for ending discrimination against LGBTQ people. We affirm the Second Vatican Council's demand that "any kind of social or cultural discrimination. . . must be curbed and eradicated" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 29). We affirm that Catholic teaching should not be used to further oppress LGBTQ people by denying rights rooted in their inherent human dignity and in the church's call for social equality.

We recognize that a great debate is currently underway in the Catholic Church about whether the current magisterial characterization of same-gender relationships and transgender identities is accurate or not. That is a vital discussion for the future of Catholicism, and one to which we are whole-heartedly committed. What we are saying in this statement, however, is relatively independent of that debate, and the endorsers of this statement may hold varied, and even opposing, opinions on sexual and gender matters. Whichever position you, the reader, may hold on sexual or gender ethics, we invite you to consider the following theological reflection on the topic of non-discrimination with an open mind and an open heart.

Signs of the Times: Discrimination

Heeding Vatican II's repeated calls to discern "the signs of the times," Catholics have been engaging questions of gender and sexuality with renewed energy.

Despite certain legal and social advances in recent years, LGBTQ people in the United States remain victims of significant discrimination. A recent report shows that more than one-third of LGBTQ people have faced some form of discrimination, and this rate is notably higher if one is transgender or a person of color. Discrimination manifests itself in healthcare, housing, employment, public accommodations, adoption and foster care, interactions with police, access to credit, and education. Such discrimination is often compounded by gender, race, religion, class, or other factors.

Moreover, many LGBTQ people are forced to remain closeted, thus compounding the emotional damage. We think, too, of LGBTQ people subject to so-called conversion therapies that, though causing great psychological damage, still remain legal in most states. LGBTQ people are also disproportionately subjected to policies of mass incarceration. And the all-too-common physical violence persists in many places. Especially tragic and scandalous is the fact that

LGBTQ youth are three times as likely to contemplate suicide than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts do — and five times as likely to have attempted suicide compared to those same counterparts.

Discrimination cuts across a wide segment of American life, from LGBTQ youth being prevented from forming support clubs in schools to LGBTQ elders being denied senior living opportunities. While the right to marry civilly has now been secured, a couple can still legally be refused services because of their marriage. In short, the failure of U.S. society to implement comprehensive non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people has severely curtailed their ability to flourish as human beings.

Scripture strongly affirms that God hears and responds to the cry of the poor and suffering. Society's failure to protect LGBTQ people has left them crying out for justice. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we too must hear and respond to this cry by pursuing policies and laws that remedy such grave injustices. To do any less would abdicate our responsibility as Christians to live the Gospel in public life by advancing the good of all people, especially those on the margins.

The time has come to remedy this grave injustice, and our Catholic tradition holds the tools to fix this problem.

Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching, the body of doctrine and knowledge developed in church documents from the late 19th century to the present day, provides a clear basis for Catholic leaders to support non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* demands. While Catholic Social Teaching acknowledges that resolving social issues is complex, certain primary principles guide its application. At its foundation, Catholic Social Teaching recognizes that *all* people are created in the image of God. This innate dimension is the source of our dignity as human beings —dignity that is respected through the protection of each person's human rights. These rights should be protected by law. They apply to all people. No exceptions are made. No person is excluded.

Catholic Social Teaching is based on decades of theological reflection and has developed with the following components at its core:

- Because all human beings are endowed with human dignity and equal to one another, no individuals or groups should be denied the civil rights enjoyed by others in society.
- All human beings have the right to participate as full citizens in their societies, and they should be afforded opportunities to advocate for themselves and for the common good.

- Because human beings are social, the structure of society and its laws has a direct impact on all individuals' abilities to grow and develop in society.
- Justice in society requires a preferential concern for any individuals or groups who are poor, vulnerable, or marginalized.
- As a human family, we are all responsible for one another's well-being, and we must stand in solidarity with our neighbors, especially if their human dignity is being violated.
- Society must always value the common good, which includes protecting each person's ability to reach their full human potential.

The Catholic virtue of hospitality also has a social dimension. Hospitality is at the very heart of the Gospel, evident in Jesus' table ministry and his frequent invitations to all people to participate in his way of life. This disposition to welcome has been realized by Christians in each age, most recently in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, in which Pope Francis regards hospitality as a "sacred duty." Non-discrimination protections are essential to living out hospitality in the way Jesus modeled.

Which Comes First: Justice or Sex?

From the 1970s onward, Catholic leaders, including members of the hierarchy, have applied Catholic Social Teaching concepts to promote the idea that LGBTQ people should not be subject to prejudice, discrimination, abuse, and harassment. Time and again they have affirmed the full and equal dignity of LGBTQ people.

However, another line of discussion in Catholic discourse about LGBTQ issues emphasizes the magisterium's condemnations of sexual activity between people of the same gender and, more recently a disapproval of transgender people. That line of discussion is often proclaimed more frequently, more loudly, and more absolutely than the Catholic Church's social justice teaching as it applies to LGBTQ people. This emphasis on the sexual teaching and opposition to trans identities is often used as a trump card to oppose any non-discrimination initiatives for LGBTQ people.

Catholics are thus faced with an important question: Should the church's sexual ethics tradition or its social justice tradition be the primary lens with which to examine LGBTQ equality initiatives? We believe it is imperative for Catholics and their leaders to rely on the social justice tradition.

As early as 1983, the Washington State Catholic Conference declared that "...prejudice against homosexuals is a greater infringement of the norm of Christian morality than is homosexual...activity." This excerpt neatly distills the

idea that opposition to discrimination is an ethical claim prior and superior to that of any sexual or gender ethic. This concept is strongly supported by Catholic reasoning:

➤ When considering equality measures for LGBTQ people, we must remember that we are first and foremost talking about *people*. An individual's personhood is the most important feature of their identity, and it is what qualifies them to be protected by civil law.

➤ Both social ethics and sexual ethics are fundamentally concerned with how to love well and pursue Christian perfection. Social justice, however, is necessarily prior to creating the appropriate conditions whereby people can choose the good when it comes to sexual ethics.

➤ No evidence exists in Scripture for LGBTQ people not to be considered full human beings deserving of social inclusion and protection. No quotes about sexual orientation or gender identity are attributed to Jesus in any of the four gospel accounts. However, those same gospels *are* filled with directions and demands that Jesus' followers love one another, welcome the outcast, foreigner, and oppressed, and reach out to all, even those outside of one's own religious traditions. The message of Scripture shows that Jesus was much more concerned with social arrangements than with sexuality.

➤ In Catholic thinking, public law is not an enforcement mechanism for the totality of personal morality. Not all that is considered immoral is unlawful, nor should it be. The church does not seek to criminalize every action which the magisterium prohibits on ethical grounds. Civil law serves to preserve the public order, creating conditions conducive to the flourishing of all. Discrimination against LGBTQ people violates this mandate for justice, and civil law must strive to end these practices.

➤ The Catholic ethical tradition rejects the idea that a just end can be obtained through unjust means. Discrimination against LGBTQ people cannot be used as a means to oppose ideas or behavior to which a religious body may object. And while church leaders can oppose ideas or behaviors that undermine the common good, non-discrimination for LGBTQ people is not in these categories. Religious beliefs that disapprove of same-gender sexual relationships or of contemporary understandings of gender cannot be used to support discrimination that leads to a diminished role in society for LGBTQ people.

Signs of the Times: The Right Moment

Now is the time to act for non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people. We have already described the urgency of preventing human suffering and

violations of civil rights, but we must also observe that both the church's and society's understandings of LGBTQ people have changed in the following important ways.

First, scientific evidence continues to prove that sexual orientation and gender identity are fundamental characteristics of an individual. Research shows that diverse sexual and gender identities are normal in the human experience, not deviations from it.

Second, as more LGBTQ people are open about their orientation and/or identity, we witness more and more the healthy, holy, and wholesome ways that God's revelation is manifest in *all people*, including LGBTQ people.

Third, among the U.S. laity in our Catholic Church, more welcoming and affirming attitudes toward LGBTQ people continue to expand. Over the past 10 years, surveys and opinion polls keep showing a growing acceptance of LGBTQ people and relationships among U.S. Catholics in the pews. This growth is evident in the large number of Catholic parishes, schools, and college campuses that have already developed projects, policies, and programs to support LGBTQ people. More and more Catholic scholars, writers, and conferences are examining the place of LGBTQ people in church and in society and are advocating for equal treatment.

Moreover, our church has placed a renewed emphasis on its social teaching as a constitutive aspect of its evangelical mission. The Catholic Church today, enlivened by the dangerous memories of those on the underside of history, proclaims the Reign of God especially when it proclaims social justice. This reorientation, begun at Vatican II and developed in theology and the magisterium over the past six decades, calls Catholics and all people of good will to be seekers of peace and doers of justice wherever inequities and suffering exist. If LGBTQ people, who still face myriad forms of discrimination, are not included in our church's call for justice, its other entreaties for justice will be perceived as untenable.

Conclusion

As Catholic theologians, scholars, church leaders, writers, and ministers, we care deeply about our church and our society. Our strong endorsement of non-discrimination towards LGBTQ people comes from careful reflection on scripture, our church's tradition and teachings, our academic studies, and our experience of the lives of LGBTQ people. In these sources, we witness the Holy Spirit speaking through them to guide us to live more faithfully the Gospel mandate to pursue justice by hearing and responding to the cry of the poor and marginalized.

We invite all Catholics and people of good will to join us by standing up and speaking out for non-discrimination in your communities. We hope you will join in the mission to make both our church and our world a home for all.

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>

Beloved Community Project
<http://belovedcommunityproject.org/>