

# Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating October 3, 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 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Ancestors*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is *Reflection for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of September 11, 2001*, by Rosemarie Pace of Pax Christi New York. Of course many insightful reflections were published last month, but this one struck me as particularly relevant from the general perspective of the members of Pax Christi. Pax Christi USA posted it soon after Rosemarie sent it to me and others. She has generously given permission for its posting here.

## Calendar

Times are given for the Central Time Zone.

**Saturday September 25**, 12:00pm (1:00pm ET)-**Thursday September 30**, 3:50pm (4:50pm ET), Women's Earth & Climate Action Network, International's global women's assembly. Notice of this assembly came too late to be listed in last week's newsletter, but the later portions of the extensive list of presentations might be of interest. See the schedule at: <https://www.wecaninternational.org/womens-assembly-schedule>

**Monday September 27**, 11:00am-12:30pm (12:00pm-1:30pm ET) online panel "Pope Francis, Grand Imam Al-Tayyeb, and Ayatollah Al-Sistani: What Do Their Relationships Mean for Us?" Cardinal Blase J. Cupich (Archdiocese of Chicago), Imam Sayyid M.B. Kashmiri (U.S. representative of Ayatollah Al-Sistani), Chorbishop George Toma (Assyrian Church of the East, Eastern U.S. Diocese), and

Dr. Tamara Sonn (Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding). RSVP at:  
[https://georgetown.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_XXlhXp3-TZSiJq9HmZueVw](https://georgetown.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_XXlhXp3-TZSiJq9HmZueVw)

**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](https://creation.cadeio.org/events/healing-earth-dialogue/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ecumenical-and-interreligious-guidebook-announcement_6)

**Thursday September 30**, 10:00am-11:30am (11:00am-12:30pm ET) online panel "Christianity and Islamic Friendship and Contemporary Challenges," Gholamreza Aavani (Iranian Academy of Sciences), John Hare (Yale University), Fatima Tofighi (University of Religions, Pardisan, Qom), Daisy Khan (Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality), and Grand Ayatollah Ebrahim Jannaati (Iran), moderated by the Right Reverend John Bryson Chase (Episcopal Diocese of Washington, retired). Register at:  
[https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_mRvxpzQ5QBaA-Tcdv93Osw](https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_mRvxpzQ5QBaA-Tcdv93Osw)

**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-ef94950bfb#02232021anchor>

**Wednesday October 6**, 7:00pm-8:30pm (8:00pm-9:30pm ET) online workshop "Faith in Action: What is Catholic Social Teaching?" Cynthia Gonzalez (Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach), Marylu Vazquez (Just Catholics El Paso), Wesley Cocozallo (Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach), and Alexandra Carroll (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops). RSVP at:  
[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_crGC76PwSDa9\\_-l8RwcjIA](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_crGC76PwSDa9_-l8RwcjIA)

**Thursday October 7**, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET) online "Who Is My Neighbor? Washington, Afghanistan, Haiti," young Muslim and Christian people brought together for the discussion by the Archdiocese of Washington at the request of Pope Francis. Welcome by Cardinal Wilton Gregory; panelists include Muzhgan Azizy (refugee and former English professor from Afghanistan), Juan Aznaran (Catholic Archdiocese of Washington), Omayma El Ella (Democracy Fund), Reynald Hyppolite (Catholic Relief Services, Haiti), and Gerald Smith (St. Thomas More Catholic Academy, Washington), moderated by Anna Gordon (Georgetown University). RSVP at: <https://catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/events/who-is-my-neighbor#rsvp>

**Friday October 8**, 11:00am-12:30pm (12:00pm-1:30pm ET) online "Overcoming Intersections of Oppression: Immigrant and Racial Justice in the U.S.," Brittney Nystrom (American Civil Liberties Union, Utah), sponsored by the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies University of Notre Dame. Register at: [https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_ZXWJ0xg\\_QfqszwFzUkaK2g](https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ZXWJ0xg_QfqszwFzUkaK2g)

**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>

**Tuesday October 12**, 5:00pm, online "Latinos and the Re-creation of American Catholicism in the Twenty-first Century." Hosffman Ospino (Boston College). McCarthy Lecture, St. Edward's University. Register at: [https://stedwards.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_FqJn4VRQSPuYf6njk0\\_p7w](https://stedwards.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_FqJn4VRQSPuYf6njk0_p7w)

**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**

**Tuesday September 28**, 12:00pm-1:00pm, execution vigil across the street from the Bexar County Justice Center, 300 Dolorosa.

### **First Reading (Genesis 2:18-24)**

The origins narrative concerning man and woman in Genesis is exactly that, a narrative or story. It has a point to make: Women are of the same species as men and are not analogous to wild or domestic animals. The text thus accords women a dignity that may not have been obvious in an environment in which marriage was almost a form of servitude for women. Nevertheless, it cannot be forgotten that the Hebrew scriptures were the work of upper caste men, with all the blindnesses that such a circumscribed authorship implies. As the story goes, Adam is the special creation; Eve is derivative. The point of Eve even existing is that she keeps Adam satisfied.

It is not surprising that Hebrew case law would allow men to simply dismiss wives on a whim, requiring only that the dismissal be in written form. As will be seen below, such law was no longer accepted as adequate by the time of Jesus.

### **Second Reading (Hebrews 2:9-11)**

The author of *Hebrews* blends Hebrew traditions and riddle-like Greek prose that forces the reader to stop and ponder. In the excerpt for today, the author has Psalm 8 in mind, even quoting fragments of it:

When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,

The moon and the stars which thou hast established,

What is man that thou art mindful of him,

And the son of man that thou dost care for him? (Psalm 8:3-4 RSV)

Paralleling the psalm the author goes on to speak of all things being subjected to humanity. But now, says the text of *Hebrews*, we do not yet see all subjected, “but we see Jesus, who was made less than the messengers for a time, crowned with glory and honor through the agony of death....” “Messengers” could be either authors and interpreters of the Hebrew scriptures, or angels. The subjugation of all things to humanity is replaced by someone who was subjected

by human powers, only to be revealed to be not subject at all, in a great reversal. By torturing and executing the savior, human power revealed itself to be all the more in need of the very person it killed. "For it was fitting to Him, by Whom all things and through Whom all things are, while leading many sons to glory, to make the initiator of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

Speaking of the abused Jesus, the author says, "For both the one sanctifying and those sanctified are all from the same One; on that basis he is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters...." There is none too lowly to be sanctified, no out-group or "other."

### **Third Reading (Mark 10.2-16)**

"Then what God has joined together, let a human not separate." Law is too blunt an instrument for matters of intimacy. Consequently, Jesus was not satisfied with what the Law specified; it merely provided a procedure for divorce. Rather, he turned to the motive behind the divorce procedure: "...let a human not separate...." The third person imperative is rare in English; its use varies from stating wishes to giving orders, from "May the weather be good" to "The meeting will come to order." The ambiguity is true of the Greek as well as the English translation. Ironically, some in history have sought to turn the internal motive into an external law and have governments prohibit divorce and remarriage.

The elite families of Rome and its Empire, who comprised the establishment in Mark's day, made political alliances through marriage. As political alliances changed, divorces followed. Children were legally the property of their fathers; so when divorces occurred children were separated from their mothers and put into the care of their paternal aunts. The divorced woman returned to her father's family. Among the non-elite, women were simply turned out after a divorce, without the children; frequently, prostitution was the fate awaiting them. It is understandable that Jesus would draw a person's attention to the spouse rather than to the self: "Whoever puts his wife away and marries another, commits adultery against her, and if she putting away her husband should marry another, she commits adultery." The tense structure of the verbs here is interesting; it is not *Whoever has put a spouse away and later marries another*, but again a matter of motive. The motive for divorcing should not include both putting away and marrying another.

I once had a middle-aged woman in an upper division class. Let's call her Sylvia. After a divorce she was left with a truck but little else. She attended the

university on scholarship; during the regular semesters she lived in the women's dormitory, but in the summers she lived in the truck, parking it at public camp sites. Her disposition was remarkably pleasant and upbeat, especially when she talked about her son, who was also attending the university. She simply exuded happiness, irrespective of what befell her. One day a routine memo from the department head reached my mail box. It had a check-off with the department members' names; we were to read the memo and pass it on to the next named professor. It asked us to recommend someone for a paid internship with housing, in an archaeological project at a Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps site. I did not pass the memo on but took it the department head. He agreed, it would be perfect for Sylvia. She wouldn't have to live in the truck for most of the summer. Sylvia went to the CCC site with several students whom other departments recommended. She took over informal leadership of the students, and the work they all did was so impressive that the project director sent them to the Department of the Interior in Washington to give their report there. And, oh yes, she met a man at the CCC site. She said she was going to marry him. The last time I saw her, she was driving her truck, literally into the sunset.

## Poem

### *Ancestors*

We consider our ancestors and their legacies.  
How we take them in as air to breathe  
with nary study or thought.

Centuries of weapons: battleaxes and battleships  
catapults and cannons, rockets and nukes.  
And wars among tribes and empires to bloodshed worldwide.

So masculine, virile, forceful.  
Determined to dominate all,  
even nature's Mother.

Starting with women, each, every and all.  
Stealing their self-sustaining powers,

making them property, chattel, cattle.

Some came up with the story of Adam's rib  
giving birth to women and  
a Father-god cursing our birthing with pain.

We consider, also, heritage of even earlier ancestors.  
A sapiens-time when we survived not with weapons  
yet to become but by banding and bonding,

expressing ourselves in crafting handheld statues  
of Earth Mothers birthing, nursing, planting, herding,  
holding families together, enabling peace.

Thus, our showdown of clashing legacies:  
Death dealing warriors, life giving mothers.

Tom Keene and Muse  
August 22, 2020

**Reflection for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001**  
by Rosemarie Pace

*Love your enemies; do good to those who persecute you.  
Forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven times.  
You who live by the sword will die by the sword.*

Many Americans refer to the United States of America as a Christian nation, but what does that mean? The Gospel verses above are all teachings of Jesus the Christ for whom the term "Christian nation" is named. It's easy to say Jesus didn't really mean what he said, at least not for all people in all circumstances, but let's take a moment to look a little more deeply at his life.

Scripture tells us Jesus was born in a place for animals because his parents were far from home and had nowhere else to stay. Shortly after his birth, this little

family became refugees because his life was under threat. When they returned home it was to an occupied land. When he became a man he knew the pain and suffering of outcasts: widows and orphans, the sick and disabled, the impoverished and oppressed. He dedicated himself to helping these people, teaching very unpopular lessons like the ones above, which made him an enemy of the most powerful people in his faith and state. Some opposed him so strongly that they unjustly arrested him, tortured him, and chose him for crucifixion over a known criminal. Still, while hanging on a cross, he prayed that God forgive his executioners.

Jesus was not naïve. He was not unfamiliar with affliction. He did not deny the reality of cruelty and evil, of enemies and violence. He even warned that these would be part of the lives of anyone who followed him; yet, he still said, “Follow me.”

In that light, just how well does the U.S.A. measure up as a “Christian nation”? Twenty years ago, on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, terrorists brutally attacked the U.S.A., killing nearly 3000 people. Far more were left in shock and mourning. Since then even more have died from illnesses attributed to their work in the toxic environment of the fallen buildings and polluted air. Much of the world rallied round the U.S.A. in sympathy and support. Millions of voices, anticipating vengeance, cried out, “Not in our names.” Official statements were written calling for a nonviolent response. Prayers were offered. Some even dared to recognize that our suffering was not unique, that other countries and other peoples had already experienced similar assaults on their lands.

But how did the U.S.A., as a nation, respond? Within a month, we were at war in Afghanistan, a country from which not one of the terrorists came. In time, U.S. troops were waging a “War on Terror” not only in Afghanistan, but also in Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, and elsewhere. Torture became an everyday practice. The U.S. opened a prison in Guantanamo and filled it with men without charge, many of whom were guilty of nothing, suspects based on false and unverified information. At home, the new Department of Homeland Security was created, breeding fear to muster support for military actions abroad and stoking hostility toward all Muslims and anyone mistaken for Muslim. There were and still are restrictions placed not only on foreigners, but U.S. citizens as well.

What started with approximately 3000 dead has now claimed nearly a million lives across nations and continents, including civilians, members of national military and police forces, opposition fighters killed by U.S.-led coalition troops and their allies, U.S. military service members and contractors, as well as allied Western troops, journalists, and humanitarian aid workers. (It is important to note here that despite being described as unwilling to fight for their country, 32 times more Afghan soldiers died than U.S. military in 20 years of war there.)

In addition to these deaths, the whole Middle East has been destabilized. There are secondary conflicts erupting where none existed before. New terrorist groups, like ISIS, have emerged.

The “War on Terror” has also had a huge financial impact. The Cost of War project calculates over \$8 trillion. That is \$8 trillion not spent on health care even as the world faces a pandemic, a climate crisis that threatens the future of the entire planet, poverty relief around the world, affordable housing and living wages here at home, along with free education through college, and so much more.

And who have paid the highest of these costs, both human and monetary? First and foremost our own veterans who have been deployed repeatedly. Far too many who weren’t killed suffer from long-term if not permanent physical injuries and PTSD. The suicide rate among them is about four times the number killed in battle. Many are homeless. And a disproportionate number are people of color on both sides of the conflict. Interpreters and others who helped U.S. and allied troops have risked theirs and their families’ lives with no guarantee of refuge. And then there are the innocent civilians killed “by mistake” in drone attacks, one of the U.S.’s new favorite means of fighting. And not to be forgotten are those victims of the “War on Immigrants” into which the “War on Terror” has evolved.

The War on Terror began in this “Christian nation” because 19 men using U.S. jet liners attacked us. Their simple, low-tech strategy turned the world upside down, but did it have to? Could this “Christian nation” have responded differently? Could we have actually followed Jesus? Could we have set aside our rush to vengeance and humbly and honestly examined why this happened? What of our own policies and practices might have aroused such hatred? (And, if we are humble and honest, we will have to admit it wasn’t because of our freedom.) Could we have opened our hearts and minds to listen and learn about the

cultures of the peoples and nations we claimed to want to protect and defend without taking the time to understand what they needed and wanted? Could we have chosen the hard work of loving our enemies, of forgiving, of abandoning the sword and choosing diplomacy and international law instead? Could President Biden, the U.S.'s very Catholic Christian president, who proclaimed emphatically that "We will not forgive" when ISIS-K attacked the Kabul Airport during the long-overdue U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, have demonstrated instead that we are, indeed, a "Christian nation" by *not* retaliating and killing, among others, an innocent family of 10, including several young children? Sadly his words and his action demonstrate that we, as a nation, have learned nothing about the futility and destructiveness, imprecision and injustice of violent vengeance.

But neither President Biden nor any of his three predecessors will have the last word. Since 9/11/01, many people have chosen to love and forgive and to put away the sword. In particular, many people of different faiths have rallied together to learn about each other, to pray together, and to become community. What we learned was that at the heart of every religion undistorted and undefiled is LOVE. We also learned that many people who profess no religion also share this belief in LOVE.

It is now time for us all to unite in making the U.S.A. truly a "Christian nation," but only by accepting the fact that that means a nation in which Christ-like behavior for those who are Christian is also the behavior of all people who know that love is paramount. Rather than anyone calling the U.S.A. a "Christian nation," let us be a "Nation for All People," a nation willing to engage in the hard work of peacemaking. Let us never forget one more teaching of Jesus, perhaps the most important one of all, at least as we commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 attacks:

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.*

Special thanks to the following for critical facts and stats:

*Over Two Decades, U.S.'s Global War on Terror Has Taken Nearly 1 Million Lives and Cost \$8 Trillion: A new report from the Costs of War Project makes staggering estimates for the human and financial costs of the global forever wars by Murtaza Hussain,*  
<https://theintercept.com/2021/09/01/war-on-terror-deaths-cost/>

*High Suicide Rates among United States Service Members and Veterans of the Post-9/11 Wars*  
by Thomas Howard Suitt, III, Boston University,

[https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2021/Suitt\\_Suicides\\_Costs%20of%20War\\_June%2021%202021.pdf](https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2021/Suitt_Suicides_Costs%20of%20War_June%2021%202021.pdf)

and

*STATE OF INSECURITY: The Cost of Militarization Since 9/11* by Lindsay Koshgarian, Ashik Siddique, and Lorah Steichen, <https://ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/State-of-Insecurity-The-Cost-of-Militarization-Since-911.pdf>

## **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>

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