

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating October 31, 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 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is my review of Gale Yee's book, *Towards an Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics. An Intersectional Anthology*.

Calendar

Times are given for the Central Time Zone.

Tuesday October 26, 12:30pm, online or in person "Planet Now!" Series: A conversation with Matthew Tejada, Director of Environmental Justice, EPA. For online, register at:
https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_VoJbgmnZR8e67LQ6dQqOT
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For in-person attendance, see **In Houston**, below.

Tuesday October 26, 6:00pm-7:30pm, online "Unequal Impact: Climate and Environmental Racism in a Warming World," Gerald Durley (Interfaith Power and Light) and Jehann El-Bisi (documentary film maker). Register at:
https://www.eventbrite.com/e/unequal-impact-climate-and-environmental-racism-in-a-warming-world-tickets-168881648557?keep_tld=1

Tuesday October 26, 7:00pm-8:30pm, in-person or Zoom, "Public Virtues: Rediscovering Civic Engagement," Brandon Metroka and Judith Norman. \$7.00 before Oct. 19, \$10.00 after Oct. 19. University Presbyterian Church, Information:
<https://sourceoflightsa.org/classes-and-events>

Friday October 29, 8:00am-9:00am, "Islam in America: Debunking Myths and Valuing Diversity," see **In Houston**, below.

Monday November 1, 11:30am (12:30pm ET), online "Catholic Faith, Communion, and Public Life: Voices from the United States and a Report from the Vatican," Sr. Mary Bader, DC (St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth, and Families, Washington, D.C.), Carmen Nanko-Fernández (Catholic Theological Union, Chicago), Gloria Purvis (Consultor, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Religious Liberty), and Christopher White (*National Catholic Reporter*), moderated by John Carr (Georgetown University). RSVP at: <https://catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/events/catholic-faith-communion-and-public-life#rsvp>

Thursday November 4, 9:00am-12:30pm online "the Way Forward: Immigration Reform for the 21st Century." For the full program, see: https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20211104/event_id/242253
To register, contact bipprsvp@rice.edu, or 713-348-2183.

Friday November 5, 8:00am-9:00am, online or in person "Religion and Aging," Andrea Henderson-Platt (University of South Carolina). Register at: https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20211105/event_id/230042
To attend in person, see **In Houston**, below.

Sunday November 7, 3:30pm, online or in-person, 2021 National Peacemakers Honorees; the George Floyd family will be honored. See **In Houston**.

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 Houston

Tuesday October 26, 12:30pm, online or in person "Planet Now!" Series: A conversation with Matthew Tejada, Director of Environmental Justice, EPA. To attend in person, contact humanities@rice.edu to request a seat in the Rice Welcome Center.

Friday October 29, 8:00am-9:00am, "Islam in America: Debunking Myths and Valuing Diversity," Craig Considine (Rice University). Information: Hayley Helmstreet jhj2@rice.edu. Register at: https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20211029/event_id/219472

Friday November 5, 8:00am-9:00am, online or in person "Religion and Aging," Andrea Henderson-Platt (University of South Carolina). Kraft Hall 339, Rice University. Register at: https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20211105/event_id/230042

Sunday November 7, 3:30pm, 2021 National Peacemakers Honorees, sponsored by the Houston Peace and Justice Center and by My Brother's Keeper. The George Floyd family will be honored. Third Ward Multi-service Center, 3611 Ennis St., Houston, or online via Zoom. Information and registration, or to take out an ad in the program: HPJC.org.

In San Antonio

Thursday November 18, 7:00pm-8:30pm, "U.S. Immigration and Biblical Interpretation: The Politics of Belonging," Francisco Lozada (Bright Divinity School, Fort Worth). Assumption Chapel, St. Mary's University, One Camino Santa Maria.

First Reading (Deuteronomy 6:2-6)

There are many versions of the basic religious law of the Hebrews; the reading is a section of one of them. This version became popular and was known as the Great Jewish Prayer. In the gospel reading, according to Mark, Jesus cites this version when asked about the first of the commandments.

Second Reading (Hebrews 7:23-28)

The reading from the *Letter to the Hebrews* continues a comparison made in the previous week's reading (30th Sunday in Ordinary Time) between the earthly priesthood in the Temple in Jerusalem and the eternal priesthood of the Messiah: "And on the one hand those becoming priests were many because they were hindered by death from remaining; but on the other hand one has forever an unchangeable priesthood." Today's passage leads up to the point that the Messiah "has no need to offer sacrifices daily, as the priests..., for he did it once and for all, offering himself."

Our Catholic Christian priests celebrate the mass daily, even though the holy deed was done by an eternal priest once and for all. We should realize that the normal liturgical involvement, which is weekly, is made necessary by our nature, not that of the divine, and that the daily celebration of the sacrifice corresponds to the needs of the human priesthood—both those of the celebrants and of those celebrating with them.

Third Reading (Mark 12:28-35)

This is the famous passage where Jesus identifies the greatest commandment. The introduction, however, is often passed over. It reads: "And approaching, one of the scribes, hearing them in disputation and seeing that he (Jesus) answered them well, asked him...." Two groups, one consisting of Pharisees and Herodians and the other of Sadducees, had been trying to ambush Jesus with two lines of questions. This scribe, however, happened to come upon the scene and sought wisdom from someone who was answering well. Jesus later observed, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Mark as a writer liked to juxtapose narratives. Here he is juxtaposing one about those who want to win arguments and one about someone who seeks insight.

And then there is the insight itself. Jesus was asked about the most important commandment, and his answer indicates that for the most important imperative one had to go beyond any commandment. Commandments are obeyed, not loved the way God and neighbor are loved. "Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is one...." The core of the Law is God, not propensities toward authoritarianism or conventionality that may reside in the psyche of the individual. You "...shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and from your whole soul and from your whole intellect and from your whole strength."

God is centermost in what moves one, what one lives for, what one is attentive to, and what one strives for. This is a critique of allowing legal details move one, living for what is petty, making oneself religiously respectable while being intellectually numb, and trying to be holy internally without acting externally. "This is the second: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." While the first commandment would involve one's whole self, the second requires that it not be *for* oneself.

Jesus took his answer right out of Hebrew tradition. A genuine rather than superficial appreciation of tradition can be revolutionary. Tradition is rooted in the past, but it is not equivalent to the past. It is necessary to search for the essence of what engendered various traditions in the first place. What moved that which is good in history is what traditions are genuinely about. Thus the basic imperative is what is greatest, not the various commandments that both give form to but threaten to contain and restrain that basic imperative. As in the case of most first steps, reaching into the depths with tradition is necessary, but it is also necessary to grow out from such roots.

Poem

We Metaphors

The rabbi called himself a son of humanity
and gave out metaphors for himself and us:

A mother hen and her chicks
that we look out for the weak.

A gate that opens to all.

Bread that we nourish ourselves.

Wine that we in-spirit and inspire.

Shepherds who give their lives.

He showed us how heaven happens among us.

Tom Keene and Muse

August 26, 2019

Book Review

Gale A. YEE, *Towards an Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics. An Intersectional Anthology*. Eugene, Oregon: Casade Books (Wipf & Stock), 2021. Paperback, ISBN 978-1-7252-6340-6. Reviewed by Anthony J. Blasi

Gale Yee was studying for her doctorate in the biblical studies department in the early 1980s in the Toronto School of Theology. She registered through the University of St. Michael's College while I registered through another affiliate of the University of Toronto, Regis College. Most of my biblical course work centered on the New Testament, while she concentrated on the Hebrew Bible. So I knew her, but we were members of different academic tribes.

Gale had no traces of immigrant or Chinese patterns of behavior. That was not surprising to me, as someone who had grown up in mid-20th century California, where many Chinese-, Japanese-, and Korean-descended people lived and "migrants" tended to be people like myself who came from the northeastern quarter of the United States. However, she reports in her biographical statement that both in Canada and the United States she ran into marginalizing stereotypes: hard-working but self-repressed, nearby but foreign, entrepreneurial but unoriginal, scientific rather than humanistic, etc. Early in her career she suffered for it, passed over for appointments in Hebrew Bible and tracked into teaching "Asian American" topics. By the time she had written the essays collected into this book, events took a far different turn; she had served as president of the Society of Biblical Literature and for a long time as a professor of biblical studies at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Gale's biography actually contributes much to what she teaches us about reading the Hebrew Bible. She did not grow up in a Chinese ethnic enclave but in a working class Chicago neighborhood populated by African American and Puerto Rican-American people. Her second generation parents spoke only English in the home. She and they strongly identified with the Roman Catholic Church. Intellectually she was attracted to the humanities, majoring in English literature at Loyola University, Chicago, as well as earning a Master's there in New Testament.

At the doctoral level in Toronto she pursued a humanities approach to the Hebrew biblical literature. Despite never gaining acceptance as "really" American, she was certainly not Chinese, as she discovered in the course of a year teaching in Hong Kong. As someone of Chinese descent, she was certainly not "Asian" if by that term one meant to include Japanese (in conflict with the Chinese of her parents' generation), Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, etc. She was not granted equal footing as a scholar at first, since the scholarly image was male and of European descent if not actually European. And she was no immigrant Evangelical, since as an educated Catholic she did not read biblical literature as a fundamentalist would.

The intersections of all these identities—which though not really hers but by necessity ones to which she had to be sensitized—led her to be aware of unequal gender relations in the various biblical stories, to notice biblical personages of ambiguous ethnic or national backgrounds, to gendered relationships in societies modern and ancient, and to doubt the claims to narrative neutrality. She came to note that discourses were contested, that even in the Bible the male/female binary was supplanted by gender ambiguity, and that multiple oppressions were in play—institutional, disciplinary, ideological hegemonies, and interpersonal. Through her own broad reading program, she became aware of previous female exegetes: Hildegard of Bingen (12th century), Christine de Pizan (15th century), Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Sojourner Truth (19th century), as well Gale's contemporaries. And Gale's gender consciousness could not be simply subsumed into the white educated class feminism of the twentieth century; she noted, for instance, the use of the term "womanist" rather than "feminist" by African American scholars. She had also to distance herself from the missionary colonialism with its inherited sexism, in turn reinforced by the sexism of the Taoist and Confucian traditions.

Gale's perspective led to highlighting Jael, the female and evidently foreign warrior (her husband was a Kenite) in Judges 4 and 5. For Jael to be a warrior violated the traditional gender roles of her time. And she was at best a hyphenated Hebrew. Gale likens Jael to the Mulan character of modern narratives, who disguises herself as a man and succeeds as a warrior, only to flee

back to the female role at the end of the story. Jael similarly shifts back and forth between gendered roles, using her female domesticity to trick Sisera and then assassinating him. Both Jael and Mulan are left ethnically ambiguous in the narratives.

And then there is Ruth, a Moabite foreigner and model convert, used by the author of the Book of Ruth for propagandistic purposes. Implicit in the narrative is a critique of the Ezra/Nehemiah policies against intermarriage. Nevertheless the author treats Ruth as the perpetual foreigner, always calling her "Ruth the Moabite." Once Ruth gives birth to a son, she ends up not being given the role of mother, is economically exploited, and is presented as a sexualized exotic foreign woman.

While conscious of her own Chinese family's hostility toward Japanese Americans, Gale nevertheless is "Asian" enough to have in mind the seizure of Japanese Americans' property during World War II when reading the depiction of Jezebel, the unscrupulous ("dragon lady" like) queen. There is some role reversal when Jezebel engineers an unjust seizure of property, as well as gender role reversal when the king bemoans his inability to act as ruthlessly.

Isaiah 56:1-8 features "eunuchs" that parallel sexual minorities of modern societies. In the passage, Third Isaiah argues for the reverse policy of Ezra and Nehemiah's exclusion of both foreigners and eunuchs from the re-established Israel.

Ezekiel 16:44-63 reflects a post-582 BCE landscape of Jews who lived beyond the usual reading where it is simply a matter of returnees vs. people of the land. The author uses three cities—Jerusalem, Samaria, and Sodom—to represent alternative Jewish voices. There were Jews who worked in mono-ethnic canal construction sites in Babylonia (Jerusalem), Jews who intermarried with others in Palestine (Samaria), and Jews who went to Egypt as refugees and intermarried (Sodom). The chapter characterizes the historical Covenant with a violent sexualized and racialized metaphor of a marriage gone wrong.

Gale Yee, Ph.D., writes from her inique personal standpoint, but so did the biblical authors. So do commentators and such readers as ourselves. She challenges us to be critical of our own personal standpoints, but also to recognize those of the biblical authors and subsequent commentators. Our personal standpoints are hinderances in one sense, but they are also resources at our disposal.

Links

Pax Christi International

<http://www.paxchristi.net/>

Pax Christi U.S.A.

<http://www.paxchristiusa.org>

Pax Christi Texas

<http://www.paxchristitexas.org>

Pax Christi Dallas

<http://www.Paxchristidallastx.org>

Pax Christi San Antonio

<http://www.paxchristisa.org>

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative

www.msjc.net

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, International JPIC Committee

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

San Antonio Peace Center

<http://www.sanantoniopeace.center>

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/>