

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating November 11, 2018

Pax Christi San Antonio does not solicit donations. Thoughtful comments, however, may be sent to the editor at j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com, with the understanding that permission to publish them is implied. 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 Second and Third Readings commentaries are inspired by the Sunday readings for the 32nd Sunday in ordinary time. Tom Keene's poem is *The Little Soul*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. This is followed by my tentative meditation on the theme of human rights.

I have received the following request for volunteers through the University of Notre Dame alumni association: Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller MSpS, Archdiocese of San Antonio, and Bishop Mark Seitz, Diocese of El Paso, have partnered together to comfort and assist migrants released from the El Paso ICE Detention Center. Catholic Charities is requesting volunteers to travel to El Paso for at least one week to assist in providing humanitarian aid to the many migrants expected to be released from detention in the coming week. Volunteers requested must be bilingual and willing to serve in El Paso for a minimum of seven days. Transportation, shelter, and food will be provided to volunteers. For more information, call (210) 222-1294 or email Silvia Alvarez.

Calendar

In Austin

Wednesday November 7, 7:00pm, Dr. Emilia Justyna Powell, "International Law and the Islamic World." Carter Auditorium, Ragsdale Center, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

Thursday November 8, 5:00pm-6:00pm, Dr. Kristin Heyer (Theology, Boston College), "Subversive Hospitality: A Catholic Ethic of Immigration." Jones Global Event Center, Ragsdale Center Bldg., St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. Free parking permit: http://bit.ly/McCarthy_Heyer. Information: 512-448-8665.

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, Knapp Auditorium; registration required). Information: gaylen.mahoney@ssw.edu or 512-474-4133, ext. 333.

Friday November 16, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Discussion, “The Ethics of Peace—Remembering WWI.” Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward’s University, 3001 S. Congress.

In Dallas

Tuesday November 6, Robert Elkin, Voting Rights and Voting Suppression. Perkins School of Theology. Details: lfigura@smu.edu, or Laura Figura, 214-768-3371.

Friday November 9, 11:00am-1:00pm, Rev. Dr. Gina M. Stewart and Rev. Dr. Michael W. Waters (authors and community advocates for justice). Lecture and Lunch Series. Great Hall of Elizabeth Perkins Prothro Hall, 5901 Bishop Blvd.

In Houston

Thursday November 8, 8:00pm, film, *Citizen Blue*, on activist film maker James Blue (1930-1980). \$12.00; Rice Media Center, Cinema Auditorium, room 100, 2030 University Blvd.. Info: arts@rice.edu, Maria Martinez, 713-348-4882.

Saturday November 10, 8:00am-4:30pm, In God’s Image Disability Conference (English and Spanish). \$35.00; Jerabeck Activity Center, Scanlan Room, 4000 Mt. Vernon, St. Thomas University. Contact Brenda Banages, banegab@stthom.edu, 713-942-5070, for registration.

Saturday November 10, 3:15pm, film, *Owned: A Tale of Two Americas*, about U.S. housing policy. \$12.00; Rice Media Center, Cinema Auditorium, room 100, 2030 University Blvd.. Info: arts@rice.edu, Maria Martinez, 713-348-4882.

Sunday November 11, film, *The Invisible City: Houston’s Housing Crisis* (James Blue documentary, 1977). \$12.00; Rice Media Center, Cinema Auditorium, room 100, 2030 University Blvd.. Info: arts@rice.edu, Maria Martinez, 713-348-4882.

Sunday November 25, (9:30am-10:20am, Veterans for American Ideals, non-partisan group promoting belief that the U.S. is strongest when its policies and actions match its ideals. St. Philip Presbyterian Church, 4807 San Felipe.

In San Antonio

Monday November 5, 3:30pm-5:30pm, film: *John Muir in the New World*. Christus Heritage Hall, The Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

Wednesday November 7, 7:00pm, John F. Haight, 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.

Thursday November 15, 6:00pm-8:00pm, reception and 7:00pm screening, “Willie Velasquez: Your Vote Is Your Voice” (1st shown KLRN 10-3-2016). Santikos Mayan Palace, 1918 SW Military Dr.

Friday November 16, 8:00am-**Saturday November 17**, 12:00pm, Revisiting the '68 US Commission on Civil Rights: SA Conference. This is a major commemoration and update from the landmark hearings on the status and rights of Mexican Americans in the United States. Participants include Mayor Ron Nirenberg, Henry Cisneros, Julián Castro, Joaquin Castro, and numerous experts and activists. Registration and continental breakfast 8:00am-8:50am, Chapel Auditorium, Our Lady of the Lake University. A tentative draft of the full program can be accessed at www.50yearslater.org/conference-program/. Our Lady of the Lake University, 411 S.W. 24th street.

Tuesday November 27, 7:30pm-9:00pm, Mark Shields, “Politics and Policy: How Will History Judge Today’s Headlines?” Stieren Theatre, Trinity University, One Trinity Place.

Saturday December 1, 10:00am, **Pax Christi San Antonio meeting**. Residence of Maria Tobin, 8715 Starcrest Drive, #27.

Second Reading (Hebrews 9:26-28)

The author of *Hebrews* continues an extended contrast between the sacrifices that were offered in the Jerusalem Temple and the sacrifice of the Messiah. The former were copies, the latter the genuine deed. “For the Messiah did not enter hand-made sanctuaries, replicas of the genuine ones, but heaven itself, now to be made manifest before the face of God on our behalf....” Such a statement bore more weight when many Christians still looked to the ceremonials in the second Jerusalem Temple, which was still standing. The destruction of that Temple in the year 70 CE would change matters. The Christians’ habit of looking to ceremonials was broken, at least for a time. Judaism also was undergoing a significant change from ceremonial in a temple to a study of the Law, a study in how to live. However, as the author was writing, all this had not happened yet.

“And in the way it is destined for humans to die once, but after that judgment, so also the Messiah, offered up once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time without sin to those awaiting him for salvation.” The Messiah or Christ is not punished as some kind of stand-in for sinners. He “bears the sins of many.” Humans killed the Messiah, so contrary to their ways was his. He endured the sins of many. He will “...appear a second time without sin....” This is metaphorical language; there will be no physical eyes to see; the appearance will not be the exact same thing as the matter of ophthalmology, and “time” will not be what Big Ben and numerals on cell phones mark. But what the metaphor portends, the *coming*, not the departure, of the Messiah is salvation.

Third Reading (Mark 12.38-44)

The lectionary has the option of using only verses 41-44, which describe Jesus watching first the wealthy and then a poor widow bringing money to the Temple treasury. The teaching, that the small offering of the poor widow was actually greater than the nominally larger offerings of the rich, was not unique to Jesus or Christianity. What is unique to Christian tradition is the context in which Mark places it. Thus verses 38-40, which lead up to the narrative, are important and should not be left out. Jesus is criticizing the established religion: "Beware of the scribes, wishing to walk around in robes and wanting salutations in the market and the chief places in the synagogues and the first seats at banquets; swallowing up the houses of widows and on a pretext praying at length, these will receive the greater condemnation." There is a background assumption missing here; in Jesus' day everyone would know that the Temple and the entire religious establishment were supported by rents that the poor who worked the land had to pay. In antiquity, the rich made themselves famous by funding showy religious works, giving out of their abundance, but the poor paid rent out of their want.

One cannot help thinking of the religious establishment today. Megachurches located strategically nearby upscale residential areas and media networks that are linked to a variety of denominations provide feel-good religion to the comfortable and solicit donations. They often use wedge "social" issues to separate the uninformed as well as those unwilling to be informed, and they ignore, except to vilify, politicians who oppose moneyed interests. Many people of modest means are drawn into yea-saying in this context of Christian-colored paganism, simply because the mass of the many are under the illusion that by doing so they will be counted among the number of the few.

But there is more: "...on a pretext praying at length..." It is a pernicious superstition that God wants or needs lots of prayers. Prayer always, for sure, but not necessarily prayers out of verbosity.

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Poem

The Little Soul

*We are like lutes once held by God.
Being away from that warm body
fully explains this constant yearning.*
Hafiz

When I was a little soul,
born,
not out of the One
but into the One,
into sudden bliss,

utter completion,

some worm-word of wonder
nibbled at my innards:
More. I want more.

“There is a way,”
said the One that I was,
“become with me a co-creator.”

“From this Oneness
plunge into otherness,
into illusions of duality:
self and other
male and female,
hurts and healings,
ecstasy and despair,
wins and losses.

“Make of your separate self
a life of gifts to others in their separations,
that out of seeming otherness,
out of seeming chaos
we celebrate our inner secret:
That All Is One.”

Yet to know what my choice would bring,
I dared to answer, “Yes!”

Tom Keene

Human Rights Discourse

Anthony J. Blasi

Beginning in the eighteenth century politicians and philosophers have been speaking of human rights. The most famous example of such discourse in American culture is the striking statement a young Thomas Jefferson wrote in the *Declaration of Independence*: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” The argument is that life comes from the Creator and that it is not up to human purpose to take life; that freedom comes from the Creator and that it is not up to human purpose to oppress; and that happiness, defined by Aristotle as the realization of complete goodness in action while adequately

furnished with external goods (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.x.15), too, comes from the Creator and that it is not up to human purpose to suppress.

The expression *human rights* serves as a shorthand term for asserting an action priority over institutional opposition. It refers to the priority of life, liberty, and happiness (happiness in the philosophical sense given above) in settings where individuals are forced to respond to deprivation, oppression, and suppression at the hands of institutions. Thus human rights are not God-given principles but rather human assertions in settings where institutions threaten God-given gifts. The gifts are created from eternity, the rights are asserted historically. One will not find rights asserted in the Bible, but one will find the gifts from God.

The very historically recent nature of the assertion of human rights suggests that they are occasioned by the human world in which we now live. People began to recognize this in the nineteenth century; commentators began to contrast the small intimate communities of the rural world with the giant anonymous societies of the urban world. Globally, the rural world has been depopulating, its peoples “voting with their feet” and migrating to the urban world. And in that urban world people experienced both the intimacy of family and of their small social circles, and the anonymity and even depersonalization of their larger society-wide circles.¹ When the small social circles exert too much coercion, people assert their individuality, turn away from the small worlds, and engage the wider society. When the institutions that exert power in the wider society threaten life, liberty, and what the philosophers refer to as “happiness,” people assert their human rights. Human rights discourse is characteristic of mass societies, in which people can orient themselves to wide social circles.

In the course of asserting human rights, individuals intuit their consciences or their senses of responsibility. These are two different but related kinds of priority. Conscience and sense of responsibility come at first by way of intuition rather than discursive reasoning because the intellectuals who are attached to threatening institutions are in a position to dominate culture and use its discursive forms. The self-righteousness of the institutional managerial stratum holds sway over the language, convention, and tradition of the wider society. The threats against the life, liberty, and happiness of the individuals who live in large social worlds are clothed with legitimacy by the hegemonic cultures of those large social worlds. Intuitions are case-specific insights that are isolated from and independent of hegemonic cultures. If they have any shared cultural background, it comes from the verbal and artistic expressions that emerge in such family-borne small social circles as religions and specialized trades. The power of intuition rarely develops spontaneously; it is often cultivated in religious spirituality.

Once it has emerged from individuals' intuitions, a discourse of human rights is perfectly able to become institutionalized itself and imbue the culture of the wider society with its characteristic ethic. It can sustain such ideas as a pluralistic societal unity, tolerance, and processes of adjudicating contraries and conflicts that emerge in the wider society. The rights discourse will come to be found in individuals' demands

¹ Those familiar with the intriguing writings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century writer Georg Simmel will recognize this insight as his; see “The Expansion of the Group and the Development of Individuality,” in Simmel, *Sociology. Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms*, vol. 2. Leiden: Brill, 2009 (first published as *Sociologie* in 1908), pp. 621-41, 651-65, 669-75.

that the rights be recognized, in judicial proceedings, in legislation, and in treaties. Those who are motivated to threaten those rights are likely to become impatient with rights discourse itself, with judicial proceedings in general, and international law (which is embodied in treaties).

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>

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