

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating January 24, 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 readings for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Child of Empires*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is my review of Christopher Lamb, *The Outsider. Pope Francis and His Battle to Reform the Church*. The review first appeared on the website <http://catholicbooksreview.org>

Calendar

[Times given for the Central Time Zone]

Monday January 18, 11:00am-12:00pm (12:00pm-1:00pm ET), online "Conversation with Justice Alan Page (retired justice Minnesota Supreme Court, 1st African American on that court; former pro football hall of famer, 1967 graduate of Notre Dame). Access at: diversity.nd.edu/mlk at the time of the livestream.

Monday January 18, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET), online, "The Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.," Vicki Vernon Lott (Pax Christi USA Anti-Racism Team; Holy Cross Church, Austin), sponsored by the Greater Springfield Campaign Nonviolence and the Center for Social Justice at Western New England University Law School. Register at: https://wne-edu.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJwtfuippjMiG9ZJ_7p6rR6BUazd_rS3Mefh

Wednesday January 20, 6:00pm-7:30pm, online panel "Envisioning Liberation: Palestine and the Black Lives Matter movement. The Pursuit of Happiness in the

Struggle for Equality,” Maureen Kaki (San Antonio actiist), Penny King (San Antonio activist), and JeNae Taylor (Highlander Center), sponsored by Jewish Voice for Peace. Register at: <https://dreamweek.org/evt/envisioning-liberation-palestine-black-lives-matter/?fbclid=IwAR3n9hDjPJfGFCnZzVijywZiheLe20xuy4a-XU0PiMnsNoOXs3FIZaIN8>

Wednesday January 20, 7:00pm-9:00pm, online, Dream Week: “Listen for a Change,” on racial reconciliation; Jen Hatmaker (author, founder of Legacy Collective), Kimiya Denise (Black Freedom Factor), and Dorian Williams (physiologist, founder Reach SA, Texas Christian Fellowship, San Antonio Area Foundation). Access at: facebook.com/pubtheologysa/live

Thursday January 21, 1:00pm-2:00pm webinar “*A Laudato Sí* Focus on Environmental Justice,” Catherine Wright (Wingate University) and Veronica Coptis (Center for Coalfield Justice), sponsored by Catholic Climate Covenant. Register at: <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/3830455931346800912?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=62bf65b2-222f-48d3-b458-a0b7b2931e63>

Thursday January 21, 6:30pm-8:30pm, online Courageous Conversation on Racism, Holy Cross Church, Austin, discussion of recent incidents at the Capitol in Washington. Access: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87053993004?pwd=TmtQNk5YSUtXQUUzSFoycEZzOGxLZz09>

Thursday January 21, 7:00pm-9:00pm, and **Thursday January 28**, 7:00pm-9:00pm, online workshop, “Am I My Brothers’ Keeper: The Racialization of America,” Joyce Jones (Archdiocese of St. Louis), and Jeff Schulenburg (Sacred Heart Parish, valley Park, Missouri, Peace & Justice Commission). Sponsored by West County Collaborative and Justice 4 All Team. Information and links for the two dates at: <https://files.constantcontact.com/bbbab666001/9d56db3b-a392-4d63-bac3-99e4f4d42ac3.pdf>

Saturday January 23, 11:30am-1:00pm, webinar “Race and the Death Penalty,” Sr. Helen Prejean, Megan Rollag (Racial Justice Coalition), Rick Halprin (Southern Methodist University), and Rodrick Reed (brother of death row inmate), moderated by Mustafaa Carroll. Sponsored by many organizations including Pax

Christi Dallas. Register at: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_PRRnN1iYRza-bL4-nxiizQ

Sunday January 24, 9:30am, online “Immigration Update—It’s still a Mess...But Is There Hope?” Nancy Kral (prof. retired, Lone Star College). Access at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86564638381?pwd=MTBtSF16eVhoTUF3SXJ2VIBWd0N2QT09#success>

Wednesday January 27, 7:00pm, Maurice Chammah (Marshall Project) will discuss his book, *Let the Lord Sort Them: The Rise and Fall of the Death Penalty*, moderated by Pamela Colloff (ProPublica). Hosted by Austin’s independent bookstore, Book People. Register and/or order the book at: <https://www.bookpeople.com/event/virtual-event-maurice-chammah-let-lord-sort-them>

Mondays February 1 and February 8, 7:00pm-8:00pm, online “Getting into Good Trouble”: Hearing Voices in the Hebrew Bible on Civil Disobedience,” Francisco Garcia-Treto (emeritus, Trinity University) and Dawn Martin. \$10 before January 25, \$15 after. Register at: <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration/>

Saturday February 27, 9:00am-2:00pm, online state conference, Texas Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty. \$50.00; information and registration at tcadp.org.

In San Antonio

Thursday January 21, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Texas Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, vigil demonstration on the occasion of the scheduled execution of Blaine Milan, 300 Dolorosa (across the street from the Bexar County Courthouse).

Notices

Pax Christi USA Post by Pax Christi Texas member David Atwood, on the siege of the Capitol building: <https://paxchristiusa.org/2021/01/12/trump-was-the-match-but-other-factors-also-contributed-to-the-events-at-the-u-s-capitol/>

From Crisis to Opportunity: A Policy Playbook on Nonproliferation Sanctions. This policy report, from the Keough school of Global Affairs, University of Notre

Dame, traces the negative consequences of Washington's misuse of sanctions under the Trump administration, argues for a recalibration of US nonproliferation policy, and articulates specific recommendations for the incoming Biden administration. Access the full report at:
<https://curate.nd.edu/downloads/fx719k4567v>

Second Reading (1 Cor 7:29-31)

St. Paul's correspondence with the Corinthian church was evidently salvaged from an archive and published with other genuine Pauline letters when Paul had become a historical personage in early Christianity. It was probably Luke's *Acts of the Apostles* that was responsible for Paul's fame. Sections of the Corinthian correspondence were out of order, as published, and even included some passages incorrectly attributed to Paul. While the material under the title *Second Corinthians* is an obvious mixture, with abrupt breaks between topics, the order of passages in *First Corinthians* appears to have largely been preserved. This helps in understanding excerpts from *First Corinthians* because we can place passages in their authorial contexts.

Paul was writing *First Corinthians* in response to both reports from Corinth brought to him by Chloe's people (1 Cor 1:11) and to a letter, also from Corinth, that asked him questions about a number of topics. Paul addresses the topics one by one, beginning at Chapter 7, verse 1: "Now concerning the things you wrote about..." The context for today's reading is a discussion of virgins, i.e. unmarried as well as betrothed but not yet married women. "Now about virgins, I do not have a precept of the Lord, but I give a maxim as a person of faith shown mercy by the Lord" (1 Cor 7:25). This is an instance where day-to-day life goes beyond legalism and one is left to one's own best judgment.

Paul concedes that there may be some point to not marrying, but rather than an absolute command the point applies to married people as well: "the season is shortened; in the time left, even those having wives should be as those not having wives...." (1 Cor 7:29).

When reading through the broader passage, Paul is seen to be avoiding legal strictures and allowing for flexibility. This might be kept in mind today when some people vilify Pope Francis for his pastoral flexibility in matrimonial matters.

Third Reading (Mark 1:14-20)

“The kingdom of God has drawn near; convert and trust in the good news.” Here we go again! John the Baptizer had preached out in the wilderness, and the Herodian tetrarch, Antipas, put an end to that by having the Baptizer arrested. Now Jesus comes onto the scene stirring things up again. Mark calls Antipas a “king” in order to highlight what the problem was with Jesus’ teaching: “The kingdom of God has drawn near.” Moreover, the new prophet began to recruit operatives—Simon and Andrew, and Zebedee’s sons James and John.

Today we think of monarchs as historical heads of nation states. They stood at the head of governments, and those governments were responsible for the common interests of the people and had fiscal regimes that were separate from the personal wealth of the monarchs. This was not the case before the early modern period; ancient and medieval kings were simply strongmen who captured a population, or they were half-willing underlings of stronger men who were also called “kings” in antiquity but also labeled “emperors,” especially by modern historians. The people were not citizens in the sense of modern citizenship but subjected people; they paid tribute rather than today’s kind of tax.

Domination by self-serving strongmen who usurp power and garner wealth for their own purposes rather than for the common good is inherently unjust. That they crack down on those who agitate for other interests is a natural and essential aspect of their rule. Agitation for other interests, even spiritual interests, is a natural response that is inherent in the condition of subjugation. The Jesus movement was such a response. Is today’s Christianity? Do churches agitate against self-serving seizures of power and national wealth?

Poem

Child of Empires

She knew and felt herself a child of empire:

Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, Greece,
China, Rome, Aztecs, Incas, Spain,
France, Britain, Russia and now us,

all with armies and navies, soldiers and sailors,
herded by kings and queens, Caesars and Czars,

corporate powers, frantic for land to own,
control of women and men,
the ones who work land and factories,
for from them we squeeze power and wealth for we rulers
and servitude for the rest:
 empire's quintessence.

She knew and felt herself a child of hope:

in her clarity that, as with all parasites, empires die,
she sensed her inner spark ready to flame,
how the dignity of all will make us a working kindred,
knowing power, not over, but with others
to make ourselves, our world, worthy of trust.
 God's evolving reign of justice.

Tom Keene

October 5, 2017

Book Review

Christopher Lamb, *The Outsider. Pope Francis and His Battle to Reform the Church*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2020. Pp. 188 + xvi. \$24 pb. ISBN 978-1-62698-361-8. Reviewed by Anthony J. Blasi.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected pope on March 13, 2013. Within hours, the traditionalist blog *Rorate Caeli* posted, "Horror!" Of "all the unthinkable candidates, Jorge Mario Bergoglio is perhaps the worst." Thus began a continuous campaign to subvert a papacy. Journalist Christopher Lamb, of *The Tablet*, recounts the intrigues of conservative hierarchs, media personages, secular political operatives, and high-roller business moguls, and the silent non-responding response of the popular Pope Francis.

Lamb clearly admires Francis, even as he sticks to the facts and points to mistakes the pope has made. He strategically inserts biblical quotations that parallel the pope's utterances. Because he is upfront with his perspective, the reader can see the book's reportage rather than editorializing. And he clearly has a mastery of the facts, telling the reader how he came to know what he reports and clearly pointing to lacunae in his knowledge.

Among the opponents of Pope Francis is now-retired Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganó, a figure in the 2011-12 episode in which Pope Benedict XVI's butler pilfered letters and leaked them to the press. Viganó, from a wealthy family, is himself accused in court of trying to take over his family's \$22 million fortune. Benedict demoted him, making him nuncio to Washington. When Pope Francis visited the United States in 2015, it was Viganó who arranged a meeting, without advising Francis beforehand, between the pope and a Kentucky county clerk who refused to process same-sex marriage licenses. In 2018, with the help of a right-wing reporter, Marco Tosatti, Viganó drafted a dossier falsely accusing Pope Francis of protecting the sexual abuser Theodore McCarrick (now a former cardinal). The dossier was published in the *National Catholic Register*, owned by the right-wing publishing conglomerate EWTN.

Francis wanted to simplify the Church's marriage annulment procedure, but Cardinal Raymond Burke, head of the Apostolic Signatura (highest court) stood in the way. The pope removed Burke from the court and appointed him to the presumably innocuous post of patron of the Order of Malta. Burke and the Grand Master of the order, Matthew Festing, championed pomp, ceremony, and elaborate vestments. Burke encouraged Festing to sack the no-nonsense grand chancellor (administrator) of the Order's charities, Albrecht von Boeschlager, claiming Francis wanted the firing. Francis had to reinstate von Boeschlager and install a special delegate to take over Burke's duties. An inquiry found mismanagement on the part of Festing, who had to be removed from office. Incidentally, in the past the Order of Malta had been involved in an attempt to remove Cardinal Bergoglio from the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires.

Meanwhile, Pope Francis was trying to revivify a synodal mode of governance, holding a synod on the family. Discussions at the synod about allowing divorced and remarried people to receive the sacraments angered traditionalists. Burke and three other cardinals published *dubia* (corrections) to the pope's exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, which Francis had issued in response to the synod; the *dubia* were published in the *National Catholic Register*. Australian Cardinal George Pell, later convicted of sexual abuse but ultimately exonerated, also expressed reservations publically.

Cardinal Gerhard Müller had led the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, but was replaced when his term was completed. He openly complained of being replaced and would accuse Pope Francis of lacking doctrinal rigor; he criticized the Amazon regional synod that Francis conducted.

Cardinal Robert Sarah from Guinea, as head of liturgical affairs, tried to reverse Vatican Council II and have priests face away from the congregations when celebrating mass; Francis had to block that. Then Sarah delayed Francis' decision to include women in the Holy Week Washing-of-Feet service. Sarah became a principal figure in the campaign against Francis.

All this seems to be inside ecclesiastical politics until populist politicians, media magnates, and business interests involved themselves. The right-wing Italian politician Matteo Salvini frequently attacked Francis because of the latter's environmentalist stance and defense of migrants' rights; unsurprisingly Cardinal Burke publically praises Salvini. Salvini is an ally of Steve Bannon, multi-millionaire from Goldman Sachs and one-time White House strategist for Donald Trump. Tom Monaghan, founder of Domino's Pizza, and others discontinued an annual donation to Vatican charities that had been made by the Legatus group. And the Papal Foundation, originally established under the guidance of former Cardinal McCarrick, also ceased its annual contribution. This group includes Frank Hanna III (with his brother David, operator of a credit card company that had been fined for not disclosing fees), a Trump donor. Tim Busch (Republican Party donor), Wayne Murdy (Trump donor), and James Longon (Eagle Forum, Trump endorser) also belonged to the Papal Foundation. All these people once had access to Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, but did not have access to Pope Francis. Archbishop Georg Gänswein, secretary to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and prefect of the papal household that Francis declines to live in, maintains a court of conservatives in parallel to the much less pretentious group of visitors to Pope Francis. A notable visitor to the Gänswein court is U.S. Ambassador Callsita Gingrich and her husband Newt, Cardinal Robert Sarah, and Msgr. Livio Melina (let go as a professor in the John Paul II Institute).

The Sophia Institute Press (Hanna) publishes anti-Francis conspiracy theories. Right wing critics of the pope regularly appear on Raymond Arroyo's *The World Over* program on EWTN, including Steve Bannon. Arroyo himself occasionally hosts programs also on Fox News. The Knights of Columbus organization has supported Cardinal Sarah by purchasing copies of his book, *God or Nothing*, for distribution in Africa. News stories with an anti-Francis slant often appear from the Catholic News Service, also owned by EWTN.

Then there are conservative and hence anti-Francis groups such as the Napa Institute (Tim Busch), the Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira Institute, the Societies for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property, and the Panamazonsynodwatch website.

Mr. Lamb has clearly made his point about an organized opposition to Pope Francis, linking it to big money and the defense of unfettered capitalism as well as to elements in the Catholic Church tied to doctrinal formulae from the past.

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>