

# Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating January 31, 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 readings for the Fourth 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 a thought or two of mine on Christianity and democracy.

## Calendar

[Times are given for the Central Time Zone.]

**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>

**Wednesday January 27**, 8:00pm-9:00pm (9:00pm-10:00pm ET) online "Learning to Earn Your Trust: A Virtual Discussion about Public Trust in Science," Adrienne Hollis (Union of Concerned Scientists) and David S. Meyer (University of California, Irving). Register at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83751905681?pwd=dFN1TW1oa3lzemV3djhTTVI0bVFjQT09>

**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/>

**Tuesday February 2**, 1:30-2:45pm, online presentation, "Central High in Little Rock," Roger Barnes (University of the Incarnate Word), on racial integration in 1957. Access at: <https://uiw.zoom.us/j/94347297846#success>

**Tuesday February 2**, 6:30pm-8:00pm, webinar "I Am Babylon: A Postcolonial Womanist Interpretation of the Woman Babylon in the Book of Revelation," Rev. Shanell T. Smith, Ph.D. Presented by St. Mary's University. Register at: [https://stmarytx.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_kygQv2SPSxGvm\\_\\_FdF43bg?\\_x\\_zm\\_rtaid=s11qopO\\_SZue5\\_T-VYhIbQ.1610377213564.ca386e78429267ce744b826430682071&\\_x\\_zm\\_rhtaid=31](https://stmarytx.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_kygQv2SPSxGvm__FdF43bg?_x_zm_rtaid=s11qopO_SZue5_T-VYhIbQ.1610377213564.ca386e78429267ce744b826430682071&_x_zm_rhtaid=31)

**Thursday February 4**, 12:30pm-1:30pm, webinar "A Conversation about the Black Lives Matter Movement in Light of the Insurrection at the US Capitol," Cleve Tinsley (Virginia Union University) and Brandon Mack and Kandice Webber (both of Black Lives Matter Houston). Sponsored by the Rice Center for Engaged Research and Collaborative Learning. Register at: [https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_oxnSg7\\_vRjq6hevCaw6lkw](https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_oxnSg7_vRjq6hevCaw6lkw)

**Friday February 5**, 8:00am-9:00am, online presentation "Holier than Thou: Religion, Race, and the Children of African Immigrants," Dialika Sall (postdoctoral fellow in sociology, Rice University). Register at: [https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20210205/event\\_id/147226](https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20210205/event_id/147226)

**February 24**, 7:00pm-8:30pm, online panel "A Conversation on Race, Equality, and Equity," with Jonathan Butler, Esq. (City of San Antonio), Christopher Whitt (Creighton University), and Tiffany Galvin Green (John Carroll University). For information about registering, contact Susan Elias [selias@stmarytx.edu](mailto:selias@stmarytx.edu).

**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](http://tcadp.org).

## Notices

**Called to be Peacemakers**, a January 14 statement on the incursion into the Capitol Building by 79 American faith leaders, including Catholic religious sisters and the executive director of Pax Christi USA. Access at: <https://sojo.net/about-us/news/called-be-peacemakers?fbclid=IwAR0IsEH6Zttfe13jdiKe4vSRw-OW5e7GKXa6AKnRWDToSvLUHRW4JtWQNnQ>

**Interview by National Catholic Reporter with Bishop John Stowe**, Bishop President of Pax Christi USA and Bishop of Lexington, Kentucky, on implications of Catholic social teachings for the new Joseph Biden administration. Access at: <https://paxchristiusa.org/2021/01/18/building-a-common-future-an-ncr-interview-with-pax-christi-usas-bishop-president-bishop-john-stowe-ofm-conv/> About 31 minutes.

### **Second Reading (1 Corinthians 7:32-35)**

“But I wish you to be free from concern. The unmarried person is concerned with the Lord, how one may please the Lord; but he marrying is concerned with the world, how to please the wife, and has become distracted” (1 Cor 7:32-34a). This continues a discussion from the passage read last Sunday; Paul is continuing his response to something raised in a letter from the Church at Corinth to him: “It is good for a husband not to exploit a wife.” Note that what he has to say is not something essential to the gospel message that he brought to the church in his mission but a response to a point someone had made.

Paul had already advised those who were married to remain married. So he directs his advice to someone not yet married but thinking of marrying: “...but he marrying...” He directs his advice not only to men but also to “the unmarried woman and the virgin”; the unmarried non-virgin would presumably be widows and women who had been divorced from unbelieving husbands or who had to divorce despite the Jesus saying discouraging divorce.

“But I say this for your own benefit, not to put a noose around you...” So Paul concedes the point made in the letter from the Corinthians, but extends it to women as well and makes it plain that celibacy is voluntary.

### **Third Reading (Mark 1:21-28)**

Jesus enters the synagogue in the modest town of Capernaum and starts teaching. "And they were astounded at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one having authority and not as the scribes had." Then someone with an "unclean spirit" interrupts: "What do you have to do with us, Nazarene Jesus? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are holy one of God." Then Jesus casts the unclean spirit out.

At one level, we can read this as Jesus starting out with questionable credibility, and seizing upon the ravings of the man possessed by an unclean spirit as an opportunity to demonstrate his authoritative power. He would show that his spiritual power was greater than that of the town demoniac.

Let's look at the legend more closely, as Mark wrote it. The people were "astounded" because he taught as someone "having authority." Does teaching need authorization? In our time, education is a formally organized endeavor; teachers need to be credentialed in the sense of having appropriate degrees and licenses. There are good reasons for such credentialing since modern life demands technical specializations in the classroom. However, nothing in Mark's narrative suggests Jesus went to the synagogue to impart specialized knowledge requiring the kind of expertise that the scribes had.

Teaching is the reciprocal of learning as left is to right and up to down. The learning experience involves an appreciation of the fact that there is something of value that one does not already know, and that furthermore one knows enough to recognize it when a teacher reveals it. The teacher astonishes the one who would learn by revealing the fact that one who would learn had the ability to know something all along but had been misled by the trappings of inessentials that disguised what was essential. Thus teachers do not throw out factual particles that serve as dust in the eye but rather array facts in a way to reveal questions. One who would learn needs first to grasp the structure of a problem or question, and then generate answers on the basis of cognitive powers already in place. Such does not require authorization. And when learning erupts, it occasions a certain wonder; it astounds.

Then comes the interruption by the "unclean spirit": "What do you have to do with us, Nazarene Jesus? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, holy one of God." The native of Capernaum was not disposed to accept teaching from someone from elsewhere, in this case Nazareth. Notice that consciousness

of self, in this case a member of the community of Capernaum, stands in the way of learning. "Have you come to destroy us?" Yes, a teacher comes to dissolve the "us" as a solidary unity more interested in preserving its own solidarity than recognize the good that can be found in the world of foreigners. A teacher needs to induce people to think for themselves; otherwise recognition of what one does not know may never come about. "I know who you are...." That is the problem—what "I" already think is "knowledge."

So much that passes for religion has the form of some in-group fixation that forestalls the formation of any questioning spirit. Finding a "holy one of God" threatens the group-think that accommodates authorized inessential knowledge.

## 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

## **Christianity and Democracy**

Anthony J. Blasi

There is more than one reason why a person might follow rather than not follow a legitimate law. One reason might be an unreflective propensity to follow laws in general. This reason leads to trouble when the law is a bad one that results in the perpetration of injustices. Racial laws that mandated discrimination come to mind, and laws in support of unjust wars. A propensity to follow laws in general entails an insensitivity to the values at issue in the actions that the laws require. Even obeying a good law out of obedience alone deprives an otherwise good act of its meritorious quality. Wearing a mask as required by a law during a pandemic only because the law says to do it is not much different from a gang member robbing a bank wearing a mask because the gang leader says to; both are instances of obedience, but they differ greatly in their worthy and unworthy characters. A psychological propensity to be obedient in itself is neither moral nor immoral.

Early in the last century moral theologians who wrote in favor of workers' rights were quick to cite such papal encyclicals as *Rerum novarum* (Pope Leo XIII) and *Quadragesimo anno* (Pius XI) to justify their stands. Given the alliance of many ecclesiastical authorities with political and financial elites, such citations are understandable as defensive measures. However, one would wish stands for labor rights and, for that matter, all rights, to be based on more than obedience. One suspects that those "Social Catholic" theologians of the last century were motivated by more than obedience.

One may take any statement of ethics formulated in an official source of some kind as something merely to obey, and that would certainly be to miss the point of the statement. "You heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall not murder;' whoever murders will be subject to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who grows angry at a brother or sister will be subject to judgment" (Matthew 5:21-22). Out of mere obedience, the moral imperative at issue could be satisfied with a tranquilizer! Both the imperative not to murder and that not to

be angry would be equally arbitrary if they were not based on something at issue that is other than and greater than obedience.

It took centuries for the official Church to put the rationale of its social ethic into words. A milestone was the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*) of the Second Vatican Council, which presents a theology for a social ethic. It spoke of a growing conviction of the need to establish a political, social, and economic order at the service of humanity in order to assert and develop the dignity proper to individuals and to societies (see #9). A more systematic statement appears in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*:

Men and women, in the concrete circumstances of history, represent the heart and soul of Catholic social thought. The whole of the Church's social doctrine, in fact, develops from the principle that affirms the inviolable dignity of the human person. (#107)

The dignity of individuals and their collective entities is foundational. The official Church was drawn to that insight by the experience of authoritarian governance in Europe in the last century—Fascist, Nazi, and Communist.

The only form of governance that respects the just-mentioned principle would be limited and democratic. Government needs to be limited; otherwise it would diminish the inherent dignity of individuals. One thinks of limits against capital punishment and, as the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution phrases it, against "cruel and unusual punishments." For the same reason, governments would not privilege one religion over another or prohibit the free exercise of religion, for even to impose an excellent religion or suppress a lesser one would be to deny individual persons of something essential to their humanity (First Amendment). Similarly, human dignity entails rights to speech, press, assembly, and petition.

Government needs to be democratic. Precisely what form democracy takes will obviously vary, but respecting the dignity of individuals and collective entities requires that they be involved in the creation of legislation and the supervision of its implementation. By its very nature, this entails a balance of majority rule and minority rights. Neither are majorities always right nor minorities always wise, but the balance of the prerogatives of both is always right and wise. The alternatives are not tolerable—majoritarian dictatorships, political violence, and the like.

Why review this now? I write in the wake of an attempt by an unelected mob to storm the U.S. Capitol to prevent the duly elected Congress from counting the official Electoral College presidential and vice-presidential votes. Had the

mob, stirred up by, among others, a son of the incumbent president, the personal attorney of the incumbent president, the attorney general of the State of Texas, and the incumbent president—had the mob succeeded, a coup will have been begun to be attempted. In a democratic form of government, the people select their chief of state, not the relatives and hirelings of the incumbent chief of state, not the attorney general of Texas, and not a mob.

The problem of the Capitol incursion was not merely political, just as anger to the point of a desire to murder is not merely psychological. Essentially at issue is human dignity.

### **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.sanantonioplace.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>