

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating February 11, 2018

Pax Christi San Antonio does not solicit donations; however, anyone wishing to join should make a donation to Pax Christi U.S.A. and notify Maria Tobin, matob@aol.com, to receive email messages sent to members. 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. Send comments on the newsletter to J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com.

Editorial

After the calendar, the *Third Reading* commentary is based on the gospel reading for the Sixth Sunday in ordinary time. Tom Keene's poem is *We Farmworkers*. See <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php> for more of Tom's poems. My essay, *Social science and Well-formed Consciences*, follows.

Calendar

Tuesday February 6, 12:00pm-1:00pm, **in Austin**, discussion: "How to Build an Autocracy," concerning the current American presidency. Fleck Hall, Room 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress, Austin. Recommended reading: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/achive/2017/03/how-to-build-an-autocracy/513872/>. RSVP for a lunch: https://cal.stedwards.edu/department/center_for_leadership_and_ethics.

Wednesday February 7, 7:30pm-9:30pm, Shaka Senghor, on criminal justice reform. Jackson Auditorium, Weston Center, Texas Lutheran University, 1000 W. Court St., Seguin.

Thursday February 8, 9:00am-3:00pm, Civic Engagement Summit: "Exploring the civic Identity of San Antonio." UTSA Main Campus, HEB UC Ballroom. The San Antonio peaceCenter will facilitate one of the breakout sessions.

Thursday February 8, 5:30pm-8:00pm, rescheduled from January 16, Mayor Ron Nirenberg and State Senator Jose Menendez, Cultural Conversation: From Community Trauma and Division to Hope and Action. Whitley Theological Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Drive.

Thursday February 8, 6:30pm-8:30pm, **in Austin**, Red Bench Interfaith Dialogue, "Human Dignity." A guided dialogue process that welcomes voices from diverse religious, secular, and spiritual perspectives. Maloney Room, Main Building, St. Edward's University, 3001 S Congress, Austin.

Tuesday February 13, 4:30pm-6:30pm, “Working Together, Building Digitally Inclusive Communities.” Jordana Barton, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas; Clarissa Ramon, Google; Emily Royall, *Rivad Report*; William “Cruz” Shaw, City Council District 2. Wheatley Community School, 415 Gabriel.

Tuesday February 13, 4:30pm-6:00pm, **in Austin**, Bob Hilliard and Steve Showen, on the case they argued before the U.S. Supreme Court that set the precedent that Mexican nationals killed by U.S. agents in Mexico can obtain judicial review in U.S. courts. Jones Global Events Center, St. Edward’s University, 3001 S. Congress, Austin.

Tuesday February 17, 7:30pm, Diane Guerrero, on her memoir, *In the Country We Love: My Family Divided*. Award-winning actress recounts her experiences after her parents were deported. Jackson Auditorium, Weston Center, Texas Lutheran University, 1000 W. Court St., Seguin.

Thursday February 22, 6:00pm, **in Houston**, Elisa Massimino, president of Human Rights First, presents the Houston Trinity Distinguished Alumni Chapter lecture. United Way Community Resource Center, 50 Waugh Drive, Houston. Space limited; register online <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/trinity-university-houston-distinguished-alumni-lecture-by-human-rights-first-ceo-elisa-massimino-82-tickets-42124392191?aff=es2>.

Friday February 23, 8:30am-4:30pm, 2018 Immigration Symposium. National and regional legal experts, and Congressman Joaquin Castro. \$30 (student), \$70 (non-attorneys and government employees), \$110 (attorneys), free (St. Mary’s University law school faculty); breakfast and lunch included. Register at www.scholarlawreview.org/symposium. Norris Conference Center, 618 N.W. Loop 410 #207.

Monday February 26, 12:00pm-1:00pm, **in Austin**, “Failed Christianity,” on refusing shelter to refugees. Hosted by the Center for Ethics & Leadership. Fleck Hall, Room 305, St. Edward’s University, 3001 S. Congress, Austin.

Wednesday February 28, 1:00pm-2:45pm, David Swanson (RootsAction.org), “War is Never Just.” Mabee Library Auditorium, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Wednesday March 21, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Salman Hameed, Ph.D., “The Crescent in the Scientific Age: Muslim Perceptions of Science and Religion.” University Center, Conference Room A, St. Mary’s University, One Camino Santa Maria.

Saturday March 24, 8:45am, **Pax Christi Texas State Conference: Paul K. Chappell of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, “Warrior Strategies for Waging Peace in a Time of Nuclear Weapons.” Dominican Center for Spirituality, 6501 Almeda, Houston, Texas 77021.** Doors open 8:00am. Program: 8:45am-3:45pm, closing liturgy 4:00pm. Suggested donation \$40 individual, \$50 couple/family. Mail registration check

to Pax Chisti Texas, 3901 Mattie St., Austin, TX 78723, by March 1. Some single rooms with shared bath available at the Center, \$40 per night; breakfast included. Contact Sr. Adrian Dover 713-440-3708.

Tuesday April 10, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Lauren Turek, "Religion, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement." SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook).

Saturday April 14, 9:00am-12:00pm, Rev. Dr. Mitzi J. Smith, "Womanism, Biblical Interpretation, and Social (In)Justice." Whitley Center, Oblate School of theology, 285 Oblate Drive, \$40. For information: Thelma at 210-341-1366, ext. 230.

Third Reading (Mark 1:40-45)

"And a leper comes to him asking for help, kneeling, and saying to him, 'If you would wish, you will be able to make me clean!'" This is a difficult passage because of varying readings in the next sentence in the ancient manuscripts. But when we carefully read the very first sentence, a difficulty already appears: "If you wish...." The leper is doubting Jesus' intentions from the outset. In fact, the leper himself appears to be a difficult person, perhaps made that way by the social isolation resulting from leprosy in ancient times.

The *New American Bible*, which the U.S. Catholic Church uses in the liturgy, reads the next sentence as follows: "Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, 'I do will it. Be made clean.'" Most published Bibles translate similarly. But then the next verse doesn't make sense if one stays with that translation; Jesus is said to "warn sternly," but the Greek has him expressing displeasure, not simply being stern.

The alternate ancient reading does not have a showing of compassion but anger. It is a principle of text criticism that an ancient copyist would change a text to remove a difficulty but not to introduce one. Choosing the variant that described Jesus as having compassion violates that principle, and the editorial committee responsible for the critical Greek edition of the New Testament that stands behind modern Bibles expressed their qualms about the matter in their textual commentary.

The early 20th century scholar Kirsopp Lake solved the problem by noting the ambiguous nature of the pronouns in the passage. Following Lake's reading, one would translate the passage this way: "'If you would wish you will be able to make me clean.' And being angry and stretching forth his hand he grasped Jesus, and Jesus says to him, 'I wish it, be made clean'; and straightway the leprosy left him and he was made clean. And troubled by him, Jesus straightway sent him away...."

The easier text that was selected for the published Bibles provides good homiletical material about reaching out to stigmatized people. The more difficult text selected by Lake not only has Jesus willingly engaging with a stigmatized person but doing so even when the individual proves to be difficult and troublesome. And troublesome he proved to be. After Jesus had cured him and told him to follow the standard procedure for being declared "clean" (showing oneself to the priests as

prescribed in the Law) and not to tell anyone, the cured man “began to proclaim it a great deal and publicize the report, so that Jesus was no longer able to enter a city openly....” Jesus might have been unable to enter cities openly because crowds of people wanted additional cures—a pattern found elsewhere in the *Gospel of Mark*—but it might also have been because he himself had become unclean by having made contact with a stigmatized leper.

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Poem

We Farmworkers

We are the ones who connect the seeds to you,
attending them through to harvest:

Cane cutters,
fruit pickers,
planters,
weed pullers,
packers.

Picture us:

Over and over bending of backs,
our gallons of sweat,
our callusing of hands,
our faces ridden with exhaustion,
our eyes hungry for rest.

How without us cannot be:

Your cities,
hospitals,
schools,
sewers,
highways.

Imagine how, with every breakfast bite,
you might grasp the worth of the work we do
and resolve to pay us what our work is worth.

Tom Keene

December 12, 2017

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Social Science and Well-formed Consciences

Anthony J. Blasi

Those of us who lived in the last century know that racism was the fundamental social and moral issue of the era. People argued about it under the heading *Colonialism* in much of the world, but the United States had its own vocabulary of *civil rights* and *equality*. A world war was premised on the issue of racism, and in our own nation we witnessed the halting and contested implementation of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which mandated the equal protection of the law at all levels. Today we still encounter racism among gangs inside prisons, among demagogue politicians, and, strangely, among police officers, who target minorities for nuisance traffic stops and occasionally for brutalization, and additionally among Border Patrol agents who destroy water rations in desert locations near the southwestern border. Most of the public, especially among the younger age groups, reject such racism. Even the followers of racist demagogues in our politics include among their number people who inhabit a sub-world of denial and media-promoted delusion that knows of no racism this side of the struggle in the 1960s to end the legislated segregation of schools, theaters, cafes, and water.

Many racists-in-denial are highly churched people. They often belong to the big non-denominational churches where clerical propagandists promote pseudo-biblical campaigns against sexual minorities and for the verbalization of a great number of prayers and god-talk. Many others belong to liturgical churches, including the Catholic Church, where salvation is secured by avoiding or repenting of sexual sin, and where one will find a great number of prayers if not god-talk. The moral scope is narrow; it fails to be proactive or sensitive to large issues. Somehow racism does not really count in the conscience, nor do war, the treatment of migrants, the state's use of the death penalty, or the ruination of the supportive natural environment that God gave us.

The problem, in traditional terms, is that of an unformed conscience. People's operative awareness has notable gaps and obscured sectors; it lacks compass. They were taught by their parents to seek truth in the natural sciences and not to lie in interpersonal relations, but their parents were not too keen on history, economics, anthropology, and sociology. They learn not to murder, maim, steal, and rape from the criminal law, as mediated by the entertainment industry; however, they remain morally immune to matters of war, to shortcomings in medical insurance, economic injustice, and human trafficking. Moreover, they hear little if anything about the larger issues in church because their clergy have consciences that differ little from their own.

How is this so? There are surely church teachings about war and peace, about just economic conditions and the rights of migrants and workers. Are the clergy not versed in moral theology? They are, but moral theology without social science in the modern world is a one-ended bridge. The bishops at the Second Vatican Council knew this and called for a new formulation of moral theology, but Catholic Church officials hesitated at the first dilemma where demography and conventional teachings about birth control led in different directions. The scientific conclusion of demography pointed to the impoverishment of individual families, something Christian values would lead one to avoid; the conventional teachings forbade contraception, the most practical form of

birth control. The new formulations of moral theology ceased, apart from efforts to repeat old teachings with less unpersuasive arguments. Demography and the other social sciences mentioned so often in the Council documents became taboo. The only genuinely innovative moral theology—liberation theology—was treated like a heresy.

One of the early sociologists, Frederic Le Play (1806-1882), collected a vast amount of empirical data on the working class in Europe; he found that the stability of the family as an institution was vital to the well-being of the people he studied. He also observed that religion was highly important, and toward the end of his life he converted to Catholicism. He had an enormous impact on Catholic intellectual life, but Church interest has not led beyond the conclusion that the family is important. Yes, the family is still important; it is easy to demonstrate that with statistics on economic well-being and educational outcomes, but what about dysfunctional or abusive family situations? What are the effects of second marriage families, blended families, same-sex marriage families? Are religious policies concerning divorce and remarriage supportive of children's well-being or destructive? There are research reports on such matters, but one will not see them cited in contemporary church documents.

There are areas of inquiry beyond family studies. What are the real effects of minimum wage increases? Do people who can work continue to do so if there is a guaranteed annual income? Are there thresholds of public transit access at which people choose to use public transit rather than private cars? Does single-payer medical insurance work? Is there anything to racialist theories? What impact does the experience of prejudice and discrimination have on subsequent chronic disease? Is religiosity related to positive health outcomes because of stress-buffering? Does the death penalty deter? Church officials and their people have teachings about minimum wages, environmental pollutant reduction, medical insurance, race, prejudice, discrimination, the care for the elderly, and the death penalty, but they seem to be impressively incurious about the relevant social scientific research. Why is this so?

When the American political conservative movement disapproved of the findings of the social sciences, it pressured major universities to eliminate programs in sociology and funded the creation of "entrepreneurship" programs. Most of the major universities declined to bow to the pressure. Something similar happened in Catholic education when bishops no longer wanted to hear about the demographic pressure on the well-being of families and wanted no longer to read about the rejection of their pet theologies by priests and people. Priests were no longer being sent to study sociology and establish pastoral planning offices. Some Catholic colleges eliminated sociology and anthropology and promoted criminal justice departments in their place. At the present, Catholic University of America does not have a credible sociology department, despite the impressive heritage of such figures as William Kerby, Paul Hanly Furfey, Hart Nelson, and Dean Hoge. Most significantly, theology schools, in most cases, lack any courses in "Religion and Society."

It is standard procedure in moral theology to assemble the facts of a case before applying any value analyses. Knowing the facts cannot be left to happenstance but needs to be pursued in as adequate a manner as possible. It is not simply a procedural nicety of moral theology; it is a moral imperative to be informed factually in matters of moral significance. Moral stands absent a grasp of relevant realities lack moral weight; one should pay no attention to them. So one must ask, how credible can the moral

teachings of our clergy be if they have little or no background in the study of the larger questions of our world?

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 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>

Interfaith Radio, (*Interfaith Voices*)
<http://www.interfaithradio.org/>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty
www.txccedp.org