

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating December 19, 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 Fourth Sunday of Advent. Tom Keene's poem is *Mixed Feelings*.

For more of Tom's poems, see

<http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem is my review of a volume of materials from the April 2018 conference on peacemaking, which was edited by Marie Dennis. The conference marked a significant development on Catholic thinking on war and peace, making the publication of these materials also significant.

Calendar

Times are given for the Central Time Zone

Wednesday December 15, 5:00pm-6:30pm (6:00pm-7:30pm ET) online "2020 in Hindsight: The view from December 2021," on COVID-19, a nation rising against racial injustice, and the presidential election. Speakers: Scott Appleby (University of Notre Dame), Adelle M. Brooks (Religion News Service), Alan Cooperman (Pew Research Center), Russell P. Johnson (University of Chicago Divinity School), and Rev. Dr. Michael C.R. Nabors (Second Baptist Church, Evanston, Illinois). Register at:

https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/9116389080093/WN_rIRgBqehSmK5aJFsqvLO6g

Wednesday December 15, 10:00am (11:00am ET) online "Promoting Integral Human Development: Challenges and Opportunities for the Church and Catholic Organizations," Patrizio Piraino (Kellogg Institute, University of Notre Dame). Register at:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Wq79eiXDTDq3VyPzv2QDw?utm_source=sfmc&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Keough+Event+Digest+12.6.21&utm_term=https%3a%2f%2fus02web.zoom.us%2fwebinar%2fregister%2fWN_Wq79eiXDTDq3VyPzv2QDw&utm_id=611893&sfmc_id=16334564

Thursday December 16, 11:30am-12:30pm (12:30pm-1:30pm ET) online "Common Ground: Engaging Religious Dimensions in the Search for Peace," Sharon Rosen (Search) and Katherine Marshall (Berkley Center, Georgetown University). RSVP at: https://georgetown.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_maQZfwJkQmuwTMR9bnSTpQ

Thursday December 16, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET) online "The Catholic Church: Centering Nonviolence?" Marie Dennis (Pax Christi USA). Register at: <https://justfaith.org/december-16-webinar-with-marie-dennis/>
After this program, a discussion will follow, held by Pax Christi San Antonio; access at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84813955390?pwd=U1RnTTdvRERoK0tSaTQ0MHVmUXc4dz09>

Saturday December 18, 4:30pm-5:30pm, online "Hinduism and Justice," Rita D. Sherma (Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California), sponsored by the Interfaith Council of the Thanksgiving Foundation, Perkins School of Theology of Southern Methodist University, and the Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum. Register at: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_mTw1pFWkQa-iFu5c8YX4bg

Thursday January 13, 2:00pm, online interactive webinar "Shifts in Mission: Awareness of Systemic Racism," on changes in mission that come from an awareness of white privilege; Sister Marvelous (Marvie) Lomerio Misolas, M.M., representative of the Maryknoll Sisters to the United Nations. Register at: https://mission.maryknoll.us/resistingracism?utm_medium=email&_hsmi=183192499&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8lZXLdcHilbDiZzTlghKt6X3mXLdh_83uKeD3myALQKq0B0VXmCcNkxRhsfB7PTgq5xZj24QwmZM8Fm6LWweuDTdidpA&utm_content=183192499&utm_source=hs_email

Tuesday January 25, 9:00am-10:15am, online "Reading the Bible against the Bible: Reimagining the Marginalized" Anthony Pinn (Rice University). Register at: <https://hopin.com/events/midwinter-lectures-2022/registration>
Also in person in Austin; see below.

Tuesday January 25, 10:45am-12:00pm, online "Lessons on Courage: What the Church Can Learn from Young People," Evelyn Parker (Perkins school of Theology, Dallas). Register at: <https://hopin.com/events/midwinter-lectures-2022/registration>
Also in person in Austin; see below.

In Austin

Tuesday January 25, 9:00am-10:15am, "Reading the Bible against the Bible: Reimagining the Marginalized" Anthony Pinn (Rice University). Part of the Midwinter program at Austin Presbyterian Seminary. Register at: <https://hopin.com/events/midwinter-lectures-2022/registration>
Proof of Covid vaccination required. Austin Presbyterian Seminary, 100 E. 27th St.

Tuesday January 25, 10:45am-12:00pm, "Lessons on Courage: What the Church Can Learn from Young People," Evelyn Parker (Perkins school of Theology, Dallas). Part of the Midwinter program at Austin Presbyterian Seminary. Register at: <https://hopin.com/events/midwinter-lectures-2022/registration>
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First Reading (Micah 5:1-4a)

The reading from the rustic prophet Micah points to a future of hope. The kingdom of Judah had become a mere vassal of the Assyrian empire. Micah indicates that the historical memory of King David was still alive: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of all, from ancient days."

The ancient clan of Ephratha had settled in a village that would later be called Bethlehem, "house of bread." It was from that clan that David came. Micah has God saying that the future ruler, the messiah or anointed one, would similarly arise from obscurity. Micah probably did not have God talking about geography as

much as speaking symbolically about the re-emergence of His people. Nevertheless, Christians make a point of linking Jesus to Bethlehem.

Second Reading (Hebrews 16:5-11)

The second reading, from the *Letter to the Hebrews*, applies an excerpt from Psalm 40 to Jesus, depicting the second Person of the Trinity as reciting it. The *Letter to the Hebrews* is a very early Christian essay that stresses the insufficiency of the old Law, and it is unlikely that its author had a developed Trinitarian theology; rather the theology would develop from it and other early statements. Psalm 40 reads:

You did not desire a sacrifice and offering,
but a body that you furnished for me;
With burnt offerings and offerings for sin
You were not content.
Then I said, "Behold I am here,
In the chapter of the scroll it is written for me,
To do your will, O God." (Ps 40:6-8)

God in the world, not in the sky as an object of rituals, is the will of God.

Third Reading (Luke 1.39-45)

...Elizabeth was filled with the holy spirit, and she cried out loudly and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why does it happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold as the sound of your greeting occurred in my ears, the child in my womb leapt with joy."

In the same way that Mary Magdalene and other women were the first to say to the apostles at Easter that Jesus was risen, so Mary and Elizabeth were the first to say that Jesus, still hidden, was coming to life. And filled with the as yet unrecognized Holy Spirit, Elizabeth asks why the mother of the Lord should come to her, to the mother of the last prophet of the Old Covenant? Not yet carried to term, that prophet was already rejoicing.

Zechariah, an official priest of the Old Covenant, was not to sire the Lord incarnate nor even be able to speak in testimony at all. But the unofficial Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, could and did speak. And Mary was going to Elizabeth as Jesus would go to John at the Jordan.

The very structure of Luke's Gospel calls into question whether the ways under the law were the ways chosen by God for the future. Few followers of Jesus today maintain that the Hebrew ritual life need be observed, but what about the hereditary priesthood? That too has been dropped, following the theology of the *Letter to the Hebrews*. And what about the male priesthood? Indeed, even the Greek term for *priest* is never used in the New Testament for a Christian minister; some extra-scriptural translator decided to render the term for *elder* or *presbyter* with the word *priest* for everyday discourse. The problem is not a semantic one; we can adjust to that. The problem is the failure to follow Luke in breaking with all the ways of the Old Covenant.

Poem

Mixed Feelings

Over generations we puzzle:
If God is good, if creation is good,
why do we suffer?

*It's hard to explain, says God,
according to what the mystics tell.*

I wonder too and recall a story:
We talked as we sat
at the tavern's bar, a stranger and I.

He'd just gotten out of the army,
I was still in. How do you feel
about it, I asked.

*I would not trade it for a million dollars
but I wouldn't give two cents
to go through it again.*

Tom Keene and Muse
June 16, 2021

Book Review

Marie Dennis (ed.) *Choosing Peace. The Catholic Church Returns to Gospel Nonviolence*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2018. Vii + 256 pp, paperback. ISBN 978-1-62698-270-3. Reviewed by Anthony J. Blasi.

This volume collects working papers various authors prepared for the April, 2018, conference in Rome that was sponsored by Pax Christi International and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (now named the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development). Along with a message from Pope Francis, there are excerpts from responses of the conference delegates to the pre-conference working papers. One minor criticism one may make is that it is unclear at times who the actual author is when reading the various sections of the volume; presumably the unnamed author is usually the editor, Marie Dennis.

Of course, I had read the news reports about the conference back in 2018. They were not encouraging insofar as they made it seem that the participants were rejecting the traditional just war theory, even as they misunderstood it. Many of us in the anti-war debates had used the just war theory to argue against particular wars that were in progress. The theory held that participation in a war was not justified unless a series of conditions had been met. It turns out, however, that the participants were more sophisticated than the news reports and that they were not arguing against the just war theory, but that they found it problematic that the desire for war was frequently already in place and that often actual war was in progress. As a matter of strategy, the conference participants had arrived at a consensus that Christians should argue for and help establish just peace in the first instance rather than focus on why particular wars were not justified.

Just war theory, as summarized in manuals used in the training of clergy, was directed at counseling subjects as to whether they could participate in military operations without committing the sin of murder. By the time that question arises, a war has not been prevented, nor have the conditions been established for justice and the peace that follows naturally from justice. The conference, in contrast, featured peace making and nonviolent resistance—the former as a prior broader concern than that taken up by the just war approach, and the latter to be used in opposing war once it has broken out. With this

approach, the conference participants had gone beyond the stale debate between just war and pacifism.

The first chapter bears the title "An Appeal to the Catholic Church." It notes that the just war theory, which goes back to St. Augustine, had been misused, and in response Christians should read the text of Jesus' life instead. It presents non-violence as a way of life, not a tactic. "The time has come for our Church to be a living witness and to invest far greater human and financial resources in promoting a spirituality and practice of active nonviolence and in forming and training our Catholic communities in effective nonviolent practices. In all this Jesus is our inspiration and model" (p. 23). Responding to this theme after the conference, participant Bishop Kevin Dowling, c.s.s.r. (from South Africa) reflects on the recent history of successful active nonviolence in his own experience. This illustrates the origin of the conference perspective not in the abstract theology of the manualist style but in the actual experiences of people, especially marginalized people.

As with the first chapter, the second provides no author; its title is "A Broken World." Direct or indirect violence is noted in the Philippines, South Sudan, Mexico, Croatia, Sri Lanka, South Korea, the United States and Peru, Uganda, and Afghanistan. The instance in South Korea was the construction of a U.S. naval base on a once-designated ecological preserve. The double case of the U.S.A. and Peru is a parallel between the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the Peruvian treatment of indigenous people. Chapter three, also anonymous, responds to the brokenness of the contemporary world under the title "Nonviolence in a Violent World." It describes communities opting out of on-going wars, encouraging peace conferences among belligerents, people-to-people contacts when national leaders have vested interests in war-making, standing physically in the way of military base construction, and engaging publically in such peace rituals as pilgrimages and observing memorials. Activities also aim at creating trust and educating religious elites.

In Chapter five, ethicist Lisa Sowle Cahill of Boston College reviews traditional Catholic thought on nonviolence. She notes that just war theory was intended to limit wars once Christians held power, and she reviews such peace activists as Francis of Assisi and Desiderius Erasmus. The official Church also exhorted nations to peace (Pius IX, Leo XIII, Pius X, Benedict XV, Pius XII), while conceding a necessity of defense (Pius XII, Vatican II). Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis have gone beyond that, rejecting violence in so many words. Episcopal conferences and Catholic NGOs have also called for

the rejection of violence. Cahill notes the acceptance of conscientious objection as an option by Vatican II. She also notes the humanitarian interventions in the former Yugoslavia.

Chapter six by Ken Butigan (DePaul University) and John Dear, "Catholic Practice of Nonviolence," recounts Christians who were peace activists through the centuries. Chapter Seven, by Maria J. Stephan (U.S. Institute of Peace), cites instances where mass nonviolent resistance brought down regimes: Chile, Tunisia, Guatemala, etc. It also acknowledges cases where regimes brutally suppressed such movements, as in Syria. (Now one could also mention Belarus.) Stephan offers empirical evidence that nonviolence is more effective than violent resistance. Here one sees peace making as conflict by other means.

Chapter eight, "Just Peace Practice," by Rose Marie Beyer, notes that peace is more than the mere absence of violence; she speaks of the presence of social, economic, and political conditions that sustain peace and human flourishing, having both physical and spiritual dimensions. She lists seven principles, previously articulated by Maryanne Cusimano Love of the Catholic University of America, for a just peace, principles that parallel the seven principles of just war theory: just cause for making peace, right intention, etc. She goes on to describe ten practical stratagems, each with a biblical basis in the Gospel of Matthew. The focus turns to human virtues that tend to result in peace. She mentions the use of armed forces for just policing, an idea admittedly requiring caution.

Chapter nine, with no author named, is "The Church and the Just War Tradition." Its thesis is that the historical focus on just war theory has prevented the emergence and prevalence of a more adequate perspective, that of just peace.

Chapter 10 is the World Day of Peace Message of Pope Francis, January 1, 2017, which was evidently influenced by the pre-conference papers. Terrence J. Rynne (Marquette University) comments insightfully on the message.

It should be noted that each of these chapters is followed by excerpted responses by conference participants from various parts of the world.

The April, 2018, conference was clearly an important event, and this volume makes a consensus emerging from it available to the reader.

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/>