


Testimony
A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio
Anticipating January 13, 2019

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 Reading sections are inspired by the readings for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This week the poem, *Is God a She?*, was sent to us by its author, John Dauer. Last spring (June 4, 2018), the *New York Times* (May 26, 2018) and presumably other news sources, reported on "Project Blitz," an effort to induce state legislatures to undermine the non-establishment of religion in the name of religious freedom. In the section following the poem, I discuss this effort.

Calendar

In Austin

Thursday January 17, 5:00pm-6:30pm, Dr. Eric Winsberg on climate science chaos, and unpredictability. Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. For parking permit: <https://www.stedwards.edu/contact-us/main/main-campus-united-states>. Refreshments served. Register: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/cel-speaker-series-eric-wisberg-on-philosophy-and-climate-science-tickets-46804971931>.

Thursday February 7, 5:00pm-6:30pm, Rita Stephan, "Women in the Muslim World." Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress Register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/cel-speaker-series-rita-stephan-on-women-in-the-muslim-world-tickets-46805163504>. For parking permit: <https://www.stedwards.edu/contact-us/main/main-campus-united-states>.

Friday February 8 & Saturday February 9, 7:30 performance, "Sister Moses. The Story of Harriet Tubman." Desert Dance Theatre. Contact Huston-Tillotson University.

In Dallas

Friday February 8, 12:00pm-1:30pm, Bolin Family Public Life personal faith Scholarship Luncheon. Judy Woodruff, PBS Newshour, interviewed by Peggy Wehrmeyer. Information: John Martin, johnma@smu.edu, (214) 768-2026.

Friday February 8, 2:00pm, Jeffrey Kopstein, "Intimate Violence: anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust." Davidson Auditorium, University of Texas Dallas.

In El Paso

Tuesday January 8, 6:45pm, Pax Christi El a meeting. Centro Mujeres de la Esperanza, 1101 Birch St.

Sunday January 13, 2:30pm-4:00pm, panel, "Homelessness Crisis in El Paso is Deepening. What Comes Next?" Ray Tullius, Linda Velarde, John Fleek, Sr. Emile Morgan, Eva M. Moya. Maud Sullivan Gallery, El Paso Public Library, 501 N. Oregon

Sunday January 13, 3:00pm, film showing, *A Force More Powerful*. St. Joseph School auditorium; park across from church rectory, 1315 Travis St.

Tuesday January 15, 12:00pm, death penalty vigil, in front of El Paso County Courthouse, 500 E. San Antonio.

Wednesday January 30, 12:00pm, death penalty vigil, in front of El Paso County Courthouse, 500 E. San Antonio.

In Houston

Friday January 18, 8:00am-9:00am, Paul Froese (Baylor University), "Our Purpose: How We Create the Meaning of Life." Room 402, Lovett Hall, Rice University (use Entrance C). Information: Hayley Hemstreet, hjh2@rice.edu.

Sunday January 20, 9:30am, Cherry Steinwender (Center for the Healing of Racism), "White Allies and the White Church). St. Philip Presbyterian Church, Room 201, 4807 San Felipe.

Tuesday January 29, 7:00pm-8:30pm, panel discussion, "Religion and the University." Sewell hall, Room 309, Rice University. Information: Hayley Helmstreet, [jhj2@rice.edu](mailto:hjh2@rice.edu). Free, but register. See https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20190129/event_id/23533.

In San Antonio

Saturday January 12, 12:30pm-4:30pm, Ken Kramer (Sierra Club), "The Water Future of Texas: Seeking sustainability," followed by documentary film, *Saving Atlantis*. Christus Heritage Hall, The Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

Saturday January 12, 6:30pm-8:30pm, Colors of San Antonio Together Dinner. Raindrop Turkish House, 4337 Vance Jackson.

Wednesday January 16, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Brian Dillard and special guests, "Race and Spiritual Action" (Pub Theology discussion). The Friendly Spot Ice House, 943 S. Alamo.

Friday January 18, 6:30pm-9:00pm, "Otro Mundo Es Posible: Creating Positive Change under the Current Presidential Administration." Representatives from various community

groups discuss the past two years. Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, 922 San Pedro.

Sunday January 20, 4:00pm-6:30pm, Martin Luther King 32nd annual City-Wide Interfaith Worship Service. Second Baptist Church, 3310 E. Commerce.

Monday January 21, Annual Martin Luther King March. The march begins 10:00am, 3501 Martin Luther King Drive and ends at Pittman-Sullivan Park, 1101 Iowa.

Thursday January 24, performance, “¡No Es Justo! Emma Tenayula’s Struggle for Justice.” McNay Art Museum, Chiego Lecture Hall, 6000 N. New Braunfels Ave.

Tuesday February 26, 7:00pm, Marie Dennis, “Active Nonviolence: A Paradigm Shift to a More Peaceful World.” Student Engagement Center Ballroom, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway. Marie Dennis was a primary organizer of the 2016 Conference on Nonviolence and Just Peace co-sponsored by the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and Pax Christi International.

Second Reading

The lectionary offers a choice of two alternative readings—Acts 10:34-38 and Titus 2:11-14, 3:4-7.

Acts 10:34-38

The passage from *The Acts of the Apostles* is situated in the house of Cornelius, who was not Jewish. Peter comes to realize that he should not stand apart from any class of people and, contrary to convention, responds favorably to an invitation to visit Cornelius and his household. He says on the occasion of his visit, “I truly comprehend that God is not one to have favorites, but one fearing Him in all nations and creating justice is acceptable to Him.” How we need to realize what Peter realized! There are people who will not visit east San Antonio or west San Antonio. Others are proud of never having set foot north of Interstate 410. Then there are those who would build a wall along the Rio Grande and west to the Pacific Ocean, serving as a symbol of social distance rather than any practical purpose.

Pseudepigraphic Letter of Paul to Titus

The letter to Titus is one of three parts of a work known as the Pastoral Epistles. The excerpt from the part that bears the title “Letter to Titus” quotes an early Christian saying: “But when the goodness and benevolence of God our savior appeared, he saved us not through works of justice that we did but according to His mercy....” Are salvation and works of justice mutually irrelevant or in some sense incompatible? Hardly! The “Letter to Titus” also says, just before in chapter 2, “For the grace of the saving God appeared to all people, instructing us so that, rejecting the impiety and worldly passions of humanity, we may also live in the present age with justice and piety...” (Titus 2:11-12). The point is not to engage in just and pious lives as a tactic to

get an eternal reward; rather being attuned to justice and piety *is* the result of God's mercy, and living in the present age with justice and mercy come from that.

Third Reading (Luke 3.15-16, 21-22)

In collecting the traditions about John the Baptizer, Luke interrupts the narrative of John baptizing in the Jordan and baptizing Jesus, with a reference to Herod the tyrannical tetrarch imprisoning John. The lectionary deletes this in order to maintain the continuity of the baptism narrative.

John the Baptist had an impact on people, as we all do. He was keenly aware of it, however, and made that impact his life mission. "(B)ut one stronger than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to loosen...." If John is given pause by the thought of his own limitations and unworthiness, how could it be different for us? That is the personal side of baptism, of membership among those called out to assemble (*ekklesia*). But there is another side to it; Luke later speaks of that other side as a second baptism, one in the spirit. "... (H)e will baptize you with holy spirit and fire..."—wording that anticipates the Pentecost narrative in Luke's *Acts of the Apostles*.

Jesus saw what John and we do not see: "the holy spirit coming down in a body, like a dove upon him...." But we and the Baptizer can hear the Father speak, if we would listen: "...there was a voice from heaven: I delighted in you."

With baptism, that is, with membership in Jesus' following, comes hearing, and perhaps an erstwhile quest for understanding. But there would be for us a second baptism-like experience of seeing, a recognition of things to do, imperatives that do not derive from the personal side of baptism but rather inhabit an arena to which we are called outside ourselves—notwithstanding how we feel about ourselves. We affect others, whether we will it or not. We have an impact, whether we like it or not. What is important is whether the voice in heaven can say, "I delighted in you," not whether we say we delighted in hearing it.

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Poem

Is God a She?

The day has been long,
The sun blinds one.
The road is long and bumpy.
I just want to get there.

Five hundred miles into the interior of México.
You get at the heart of the country.
You feel the spirit of the country.

It is time to stop quickly.
My turn to drive down the endless highway.

We both notice a woman,
Sitting off to the side,
Among the dust.
She sits on the ground, next to an abandoned gas pump.
Look at her. What do you imagine?

She is looking for anyone, even me, to buy one of her dried rattlesnake skins.

She has a big bag of them.
The skins are stiff, all sticking out of the bag.
See the rattles.

Did anyone buy one today?

“Buy one. They are good for cancer, arthritis, for what ails you.”
She names a whole list of illnesses it will cure.
“You grind it up.”

She adds, “or do you have any food?”

There she stands, pleading to live life. What a contrast between her and me.
Why is life like this?
So hard for some. She is poor.

We give her the two apples we have.
I don't want to buy a rattlesnake skin, or do I?

She says thank you, and wishes us God's blessing and a protected, safe journey. Why?

We drive away.
The question stands.

John Dauer
From *My Word*
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Project Blitz and Religious Freedom
Anthony J. Blasi

The *Guardian* (June 4, 2018), the *New York Times* (May 26, 2018) and presumably other news sources have reported on “Project Blitz,” an effort to induce state legislatures to undermine the non-establishment of religion in the name of religious freedom. The press reports appear to be based on a “Project Blitz Primer” distributed by Americans United, which in turn discusses a strategy document that was developed by the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, the National Legal Foundation, and the WallBuilders Pro Family Legislative Network. The three foundations present a strategy of beginning with innocuous resolutions or “proclamations” about such things as posting “In God We Trust” on public buildings. After this “first level” the legislatures would proceed to mandate the place and importance of religion in school curricula and the offering of electives on the Bible. After such “second level” measures, further measures described as “protective” would follow. The strategy document, “Report and Analysis on Religious freedom Measures Impacting Prayer and Faith in America (2017 version),” provides model proclamations, model legislation, talking points, and arguments for all three levels.

I have examined the strategy document online (Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation website). What the strategy leads up to is providing state assistance to professionals who might be sued for “in good faith” contravening the non-establishment of religion clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. In the case of educators, defendants—school board members, administrators, teachers—would be entitled to defense by a state attorney general, indemnified from court costs and damages, and entitled to formal or informal advice from a state attorney general. “In good faith” is defined as thinking one’s practice is legal. The legislation would authorize the exercise of religion, including but not limited to student and teacher expressions of religious views in class or classwork, student or teachers wearing religious apparel in school, or a religious activity or expression at a school-sponsored event.¹

Having spent over four decades in the classroom as an educator, my practice and schools’ policies were to refrain from stating religious convictions (with the exception of one semester when I was responsible for a ninth-grade religion course in a Catholic high school). Students sometimes wore religious apparel, which of course I never questioned. An educator’s role was not to be used to impose, subtly or unsubtly, a religious stance on students. Students, however, were free to have their religious beliefs and identity markers. Students never used the classroom to advocate their own religious stances; it never occurred to them to do so. If they tried to do such, I guess I would have encouraged them to have their views but advise them that the classroom was not to be used to promote or discourage any religious stance. In any case, student’s freedom to hold religious views would be respected and freedom from officially endorsed promotion of religion or irreligion would be avoided. As I understand the Project Blitz model legislation, an educator could “in good faith” advocate some religious or irreligious stance or mark student papers and tests on a religious basis. Only “proselytizing,” i.e. trying to recruit students for membership in a particular religious organization, could not be done “in good faith.”

¹ Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, National Legal Foundation, and WallBuilder Pro Family Legislative Network, *Report and Analysis on Religious freedom Measures Impacting Prayer and Faith in America (2017 version)*, pp. 106-07.

The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States differs in its treatment of religion from the principle of *laïcité* as found in many other democracies. *Laïcité* is freedom from religion; it corresponds to government not establishing religion: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion....” And by the Fourteenth Amendment, what Congress cannot do the state legislatures similarly cannot do. But then the First Amendment goes on to say Congress shall make no law...prohibiting the free exercise” (of religion). “Free exercise” of religion came into American law, and was argued for by Charles Carroll of Carrollton, in the first years of Independence. Free exercise does not imply that the freedom to engage in religious activity can prevail in every time and place, any more than freedom of speech can be exercised in every time and place. One cannot walk into a courtroom where a trial is in progress and simply begin preaching or making a speech. Any free exercise—speech, bearing firearms, religion—has practical limits. State legislatures have no business favoring an expansion of any free exercise over a limitation of that free exercise, simply on the basis of its being an expansion.

The official stand of the Roman Catholic Church on religious freedom is stated in the “Declaration on Religious Liberty” of the Second Vatican Council (Dec. 7, 1965). It merits a reading and is available on the Vatican’s website. Paragraph 2 begins, “The Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that all men should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power so that, within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in associations with others. The Council further declares that the right to religious freedom is based on the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom must be given such recognition in the constitutional order of society as will make it a civil right.”

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>

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

NowCastSA
www.nowcastsa.com/