

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating January 9, 2022

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 Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Tom Keene's poem is *Breakthrough*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem is an essay by Jonathan Kuttab, a Palestinian Christian and prominent human rights attorney, on pressing for justice in Palestine.

Calendar

Times are given for the Central Time Zone.

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_83uKeD3myALQKq0B0VXmCcNkxRhsfB7PTgq5xZj24QwmZM8Fm6LWeeuDTdidpA&utm_content=183192499&utm_source=hs_email

Wednesday January 19, 6:30pm-8:00pm, online, Freedom is the Future: Challenging Common Discourse Frameworks for Palestinian Liberation. For information: <https://dreamweek.org/evt/freedom-is-the-future-challenging-common-discourse-frameworks-for-palestinian->

liberation/?fbclid=IwAR0jfWgNWiu1_WE6Ak11ROMLW-
btFCX_zgqUZgrV8cTx0Qh1oHc4ZT5_W0c

To register: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScdCUpPalq5TTjk9AHv-MDq2VseAbrk-agrVc6xY_6CtfGIEw/viewform

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.

Tuesday February 15, 5:30pm-7:30pm (6:30pm-8:30pm ET) online, Network's 50th Anniversary Intergenerational Dialogue, between the sister founders of Network and younger social justice advocates. Individuals in the latter group (ages 18-30) are invited to apply to join the panel: <https://networklobby.org/intergendialogue/>. All applicants will receive a recording of the event. Special guest speaker will be Olga Segura, author of *Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church*.

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>
Proof of Covid vaccination required. Austin Presbyterian Seminary, 100 E. 27th St.

Thursday February 24, 6:00pm-8:30pm, Community Engagement Meeting Hosted by the Austin Police Department. Holy Cross Church Family Life Center, 1110 Concho St., Austin.

In San Antonio

Tuesday January 11, 8:30am-3:30pm, "@ The Intersection Multi-Faith Symposium," briefings every half hour by San Antonio leaders: Mayor Nirenberg, Ann Helmke, etc. Topics include Compassionate Community, housing, houselessness, domestic violence, food security, mental health, immigration, refugees, resourcing, and public safety. Register at:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/theintersection-multi-faith-symposium-tickets-220039382717>

Tuesday January 18, 5:15pm-7:30pm, San Antonio Is a "Compassionate City"? What Does This Mean? Presentations by six local activists and artist Lionel Sosa. Sponsored by Compassionate San Antonio. Refreshments, as COVID norms permit. Cody Library, 1141 Vance Jackson Road. Register at:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/san-antonio-is-a-compassionate-city-what-does-this-mean-tickets-192765275127>

Sunday January 23, 2:30pm-4:00pm, symposium "The future of Faith and Faith in the Future...Exploring Intersections of Religious practice and 21st Century Life." Ron Nirenberg (mayor, san Antonio), Adam Russell Taylor (*Sojourners*), and a yet-to-be-named representative from the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Discussion of faith and the city and politics, activism and social justice, faith-based perspectives of young adults, and multi-religious collaboration. The SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell Ave. (enter off Shook). Free. Register at:

<https://sourceoflightsa.org/classes-and-events>

Wednesday January 26, 2:00pm-3:30pm, conversation about peace studies courses in San Antonio, led by Andrew J. Hill (St. Philip's College). Northwest Vista College, 3535 N. Ellison Dr. Free. Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-future-of-peace-conflict-studies-in-san-antonio-tickets-192635727647>

First Reading

The lectionary offers a choice of two alternative readings—Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7 and Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11.

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

The passage is from one of the Suffering Servant songs of the second of the authors of the materials in the prophetic *Book of Isaiah*. The lectionary leaves out verse 5, which is an elaborate "thus says the Lord" reiteration. The servant will bring forth justice, but unlike the earthly king, Cyrus, it will not be by force of arms. It will not even be by agitation in the streets. It will be opening minds ("eyes") and freeing those who feel they are prisoners of darkness. With the downfall of the northern and then the southern kingdoms and the experience of exile, the history of the Covenant people had taught a better way of life, replacing the ways of the early warrior kings Saul and David.

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Here the second of the authors of the materials in the prophetic *Book of Isaiah* calls for a second Exodus, not a geographical trek through the Sinai wilderness but a spiritual one to a Jerusalem-like experience. "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (v. 3). In this kind of Exodus, it is not the people who traverse the desert but the Lord; the highway is for God. The prophetic author says nothing of rites and shrines; rather, the point has to do with spiritual obstacles, mountain-like and valley-like obstacles.

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.

Poem

Breakthrough

We grasp the tangibles,
reading maps, working computers,
numbers and algebra.

What's beyond we have to feel,

the startling beauty of desert sunsets,
the good of a friendly face,
the weighty impact of sudden truth.

Tom Keene and Muse
March 5, 2021

Peace & Apartheid

by Jonathan Kuttab¹

“This week, some of our friends in Sweden have asked the Church of Sweden at their general meeting to pass a resolution to investigate if an Apartheid System exists in Israel. Twelve bishops from the church of Sweden have attacked the proposition saying it is not helpful for peace between both Palestinians and Israelis.”

It is natural to think that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and by extension his modern followers should champion peace and promote it as a value that transcends all others. Yet, there are situations when "peace" itself becomes the enemy and it becomes the proper position of the church to take a prophetic, albeit unpopular, stance. Whether the evil being addressed is slavery, racism, tyranny, women's oppression, or apartheid, it is totally unacceptable to take a mild, compromising stance that avoids confrontation with the oppressive authorities. The classic "it is not helpful for peace" line has been used too often by the powerful and those who support them to prevent an honest, if potentially disturbing, discourse regarding the many sins of an oppressive regime. Often what is required therefore is not "peace," but a forthright prophetic and disruptive stand against injustice.

A prophet is rarely concerned with "peace and quiet," since it is usually just a formula for the acceptance of an unjust situation. For this reason, prophets are rarely popular, and always face the possibility of persecution. Even Jesus, the Prince of Peace, found himself often in conflict with the religious and political authorities of his day. He often spoke out against their hypocrisy, overturning the tables of the money changers in the Temple while declaring: "The zeal of [God's] house has consumed me!!" In the end, his prophetic message led to his being crucified.

In the case of Israel, a sober investigation of its apartheid policies is an essential first step towards the establishment of a just peace. This is particularly true because Israel pretends to be a democracy and claims much of its support in the West and among western Christians on the basis of such alleged "common values" as democracy, freedom, and the rule of law.

¹ Jonathan Kuttab is a Palestinian Christian and leading human rights attorney. For more information: <https://www.mei.edu/profile/jonathan-kuttab>. This essay was distributed during Advent by FOSNA, Friends of Sabeel North America.

A proper investigation into the practice of apartheid may even be useful in bringing to light practices that Israelis themselves would find difficult to justify on moral grounds. It would be like lifting a mirror to their faces and challenging them to be true to the higher values they claim for themselves. This cannot be done, of course, as long as they insist on maintaining supremacist ideologies, laws, and practices that favor Jews over non-Jewish Palestinians. Such discrimination is integral to the very idea of a Jewish state, and unless challenged it will continue to favor Jews and preserve the oppression of Palestinians.

The Church may not be able, at this time, to bring an end to the oppression of the Palestinians and compel the establishment of a more equal and democratic reality, but that is not the function of the Church. The Church is called to be a prophetic witness, calling out unjust and evil practices, institutions, and ideologies—trusting God with the ultimate outcome. It is precisely this ultimate outcome towards which we look during the season of Advent, for it is this vision of ultimate justice that inspires our resistance and strengthens our resolve in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

In the end, those who claim that Israel does not in fact practice anything akin to apartheid (and there are some who believe that) should welcome a proper investigation as to whether Israel indeed practices apartheid. The criteria are clear under international law and should be meticulously and fairly applied to Israel or any other state. Those who reject even such scrutiny are not advocating for peace but for the uncritical acceptance of an evil and oppressive status quo. They do no favors to Palestinians, Israelis, or the cause of peace, and they certainly do not honor the teachings of Christ in this contentious region.

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>

Beloved Community Project

<http://belovedcommunityproject.org/>