

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating March 6, 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 First Sunday of Lent, Year C. In many parishes, the readings for Year A might be used instead, to coordinate with the RCIA program. The late Tom Keene's poem is *Prayer*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem is the text of a letter from eighty-one Christian scholars to Congress, calling for reductions in military spending.

Finally, after this issue the newsletter is being discontinued because of a rapid deterioration of my eyesight. It has been a stimulating adventure. My thanks to Arthur Dawes for helping me assemble this issue.

AB

Calendar

Times are given for the Central Time Zone.

Tuesday March 1, 6:30pm, online "Vietnamese-American Catholics...or American-Vietnamese Catholics?" Peter Phan (Georgetown University). Register at: <http://PeterPhan.eventbrite.com>

Wednesday March 2, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET) online "Women's Ordination and the Synodal Church" KateMcElwee (Women's Ordination Conference) and Heidi Schlumpf (National Catholic Reporter). Information at: <https://www.sacredheart.edu/academics/colleges--schools/college-of-arts--sciences/departments/catholic-studies/center-for-catholic-studies-spring-speaker-series/>

Friday March 11, 8:00am-9:00am, "Sunday Morning Social Constructions of Racial Problems and Solutions from American Protestant Gigachurches," Melissa Denton (University of Texas San Antonio). Register at:
https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20220311/event_id/261774

Saturday March 12, 1:00pm (11:00am Pacific), online "The Nonviolence of St. Francis and St. Claire," Ken Butigan (DePaul University). Register by March 8 at:
<https://beatitudescenter.org/>

Saturday April 9, 11:30am-2:00pm (12:30pm-3:00pm ET) online "White Supremacy and American Christianity," Robert Jones (Public Religion Research Institute), Bryan Massingale (Fordham University), and Marcia Chatelain (Georgetown University). Register at:
<https://networklobby.org/uschristianityconvo/>

First Reading (Deuteronomy 26:4-10)

"My father was a wandering Aramean...." Even according to the legends narrated in the first books of the Hebrew bible, the father of Moses or those in his company was not a wandering Aramean. The wandering Aramaean was Abraham, the father of the nation. The sentence is the beginning of a traditional narrative recited on occasions and simply connected to the revised Mosaic Law in the book of the second law, or Deuteronomy. It is not without significance; the experience of the divine for any person is situated in a social or national narrative. We are unable to accept God as God in our consciousness because God is too great for that. Consequently we receive hints at the divine through our human traditions.

It is a worthwhile exercise to consider how much of our own personal grasp of the divine is a product of our circumstances.

Second Reading (Romans 10:8-13)

Anthropomorphism can be the ultimate form of idolatry if it involves our worshiping not God but our idea of God. This is what Paul was getting at in his *Letter to the Romans* immediately prior to this Sunday's reading: "But the justice that is from faith speaks thusly: 'Do not say in your heart, Who will go up to heaven?'—that is, to bring Messiah down. Or, 'Who will go down into the abyss?'"

That is to bring Messiah from the dead” (Romans 10:6-7). Paradoxically, the Messiah, the presence of God, is neither “up” nor “down,” but “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart.” “That,” says Paul, “is the word of trust that we preach.”

Similarly, justification or salvation is not “up there” or “down there” but here. It would be bizarre for God to command something different from a just or saved state as a precondition for justification or salvation. Heaven is not a cosmic reward for good behavior but rather good behavior as a cosmic reward.

Third Reading (Luke 4.1-14)

The Gospel of Mark had said that after John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan, Jesus went out alone into the desert for forty days. Luke inserts at that point a narrative that may have been a story about temptation that a source, which Matthew also used, had applied to Jesus.

“If you are the son of God,” says the devil, “tell this stone to become bread.” Jesus had been fasting, and there would be nothing particularly wrong in ending the fast with bread. Temptation may begin with innocuous things. Jesus does not condemn bread in rebuffing the devil, but he points to what is more than, and apart from, bread: “The human shall not live on bread alone.” That which is more than bread, and apart from it, would lead one to provide bread for others, not oneself.

Then the devil showed Jesus “...in an instant all the kingdoms of the inhabited world.” It was “in an instant,” not a survey of what was actually in the kingdoms. The people in the kingdoms didn’t count in the panorama that the devil presents. “I will give you,” says the devil, “all this authority and all their glory, because it has been given to me...” Unlike bread, which is innocuous in itself and can even be good, authority and glory are described as possessions of the evil one. They become intrinsically evil when the people in the kingdoms do not receive consideration. Jesus rebuffs him again: “You shall worship the Lord your God, and you shall worship him alone.” When it is a matter of God or Caesar, priority goes to God.

Then the devil led Jesus to the Temple. That is a remarkable situation—the devil leading someone to the Temple. The devil leads Jesus to the very House of God. On its highest place, the devil says, “If you are the son of God, cast yourself down from here; for it is written: ‘He shall command his messengers concerning you, to protect you.’” In the manner of a hate-filled or self-serving clergy person,

the devil quotes scripture. The climax of temptation occurs in religion itself. The temptation itself consists of using religion magically—i.e., as an instrument for doing good for oneself.

The focal issue is whom one serves.

Poem

Prayer

Deliver us from illusions of separation.
May we wake to our Oneness in you.
All we ask is the clarity, the courage
to do, to co-create with you
what we already are.

Tom Keene and Muse
February 27, 2021

Eighty One Christian Scholars Call For Reduction in Arms Spending

Feb. 2, 2022

Dear Members of Congress,

The undersigned Christian scholars and leaders unite in our commitment to human flourishing and ecological care as well as the cultivation of a sustainable just peace. In turn, we express our strong opposition to the current sky-high Pentagon budget and recent National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) top-line of \$768 billion. We urge Congress to reduce Pentagon spending in the appropriations bills for FY 2022 and set a trajectory of practical reductions in this area, as well as reductions in nuclear weapons.

Pouring billions more into the military, \$25 billion beyond even the level requested by President Biden, sends exactly the wrong message at this moment in history. The bulk of this extra money is going to military contractors and the Pentagon is yet to pass an audit. We are struggling to end a deadly pandemic,

deal with the looming climate crisis, confront racial injustice, prevent violence in our own streets, secure badly-needed relief for working people all over the country, address mental health challenges, and care for those living in poverty. Yet we are consistently told that limited resources are available for these and asked how we will pay for such efforts even as there always appears to be plenty of money to buy new weapons, project military threat, maintain ongoing bombing campaigns, and prepare for the next potential major war. We already spend more on our military than the next 10 countries combined, and nearly three times as much as China. We have about 20 aircraft carriers while China has 3.

We urgently need to shift our security and foreign policy strategy to focus on a policy framework of 1) cultivating the habits and skills of constructive conflict, 2) breaking cycles of violence, and 3) building a more sustainable peace. These 3 strategic foci draw us to invest in peacebuilding, nonviolent resistance movements, diplomacy, and development programs. Some of the norms embedded in this framework to guide our actions and policies include education and training in key nonviolent skills, participatory processes, re-humanization in our language and narratives, conflict transformation such as trauma-healing, acknowledging responsibility for harm such as restorative justice, nonviolent direct action, reconciliation, robust civil society, human dignity and rights, ecological sustainability, economic and racial justice.

A first step would be to redirect the extra \$25 billion toward accounts like the Complex Crisis Fund, Prevention and Stabilization Fund, UN Peacebuilding Fund, as well as the U.S. Institute of Peace and Unarmed Civilian Protection programs. A second-step should be decreasing overall spending away from weapons development, including nuclear weapons, and toward initiatives to address climate change, which will be a major driver of potential violent conflict and refugee crises, and the ever-growing economic inequality in the United States.

“Let us unambiguously urge that arms be set aside and military spending reduced, in order to provide for humanitarian needs, and that instruments of death be turned into instruments of life.” (Pope Francis, International Meeting for Peace, Oct. 7, 2021).

"I am convinced that...we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values...A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death. America, the richest and most powerful nation in the world, can well lead the way in this revolution of values. There is nothing except a tragic death wish to prevent us

from reordering our priorities so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war." (Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," April 4, 1967).

"And there are many nay-sayers who worry about us shifting funds from the military to social programs. They claim that a strong military keeps us safe in a dangerous world...Our spending on war and violence is arresting our ability to provide true security and well-being at home...[we need to] transform society and enact a moral agenda that puts people first and challenges the intersecting injustices of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, militarism and the war economy..." (Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II and Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, Co-Chairs, Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, "Foreword," Executive Summary: Poor People's Moral Budget: Everybody Has The Right to Live, June 2019)..

"Everyone talks about peace"... "everyone claims to want it, but unfortunately the proliferation of weapons of every type leads in the opposite direction. The arms trade has the effect of complicating and distancing us from a solution to conflicts...Therefore I consider that...we can unite our voices in expressing hope that the international community may make new, concerted and courageous efforts against the proliferation of weapons and to promote their reduction." (Pope Francis, Address to 7 New Ambassadors, Mar. 1, 2014)

"It is high time, then, that governments develop economic policies aimed at inverting the proportion of public funds spent on education and on weaponry." (Pope Francis, Dialogue Between Generations, Jan. 1, 2022).

"In the light of Christ's peace, we see one another as brothers and sisters. God did not create us to be enemies of each other, but rather as members of one human family, all God's children, sharing this beautiful common home. We need not threaten anyone, anywhere, any longer with nuclear warfare. We must take concrete steps to begin the process of nuclear disarmament: to dismantle our weapons, to clean up our land, and to spend those enormous resources on structures of international nonviolent conflict resolution." (U.S. Catholic Bishop, John Wester, New Mexico, "Living the Light of Peace" Jan. 11, 2022).

Sincerely,

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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
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