

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating May 5, 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 *Liturgical Reading* reflections are based on readings for the Third Sunday of Easter. Tom Keene's poem is *In the Balance*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is my review of a new book by Helen T. Boursier, *The Ethics of Hospitality*, which focuses on the rude and heartless treatment accorded Central American Refugees, with interfaith responses as experienced and witnessed here in San Antonio.



Photo by John Dauer

Calendar

In Austin

Tuesday April 30, 12:00pm-1:00pm, discussion: What is the Future of Speculative Journalism? (re nyti.ms/2MBsDRv). Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. Information and parking: <https://www.stedwards.edu/contact-us/main-campus-united-states>.

Beginning Tuesday May 7, the Dialogue Institute, Austin, is sponsoring a series of Ramadan Iftar Dinners at various churches and other groups. One is scheduled for almost every day of the month of May and some in June. A schedule is located at <https://www.dialogueatx.org/events/2019-05/>

In Dallas

Wednesday May 1, 11:30am, SMU Yom Hashoah Holocaust Memorial Service. Guest speaker: Serge Frolov (SMU). Perkins chapel, 6001 Bishop Blvd.

Beginning Monday May 6, the Dialogue Institute, DFW, is sponsoring a series of Ramadan Dinners at various churches and other religious centers. A schedule is located at https://www.facebook.com/pg/DialogueInstDFW/events/?ref=page_internal

In El Paso

Fridays, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Pax Christi joins Border Peace Presence in front of the Federal Courthouse (corner of Campbell and San Antonio).

In Houston

Thursday May 2, 6:00pm doors open, 6:30 screening, "Mark of War" (psychological effects on combatants). Rice Media Center, Auditorium 100. Vouchers for parking in West Lot 2 or Moody Visitor Lot will be made available at the screening.

Saturday May 4, 5:00pm, film: "Naila and the Uprising" (nonviolent mobilization in Palestine, 1987). Rice Media Center, Auditorium 100. \$10.00

Saturday May 4, 7:00pm, documentary "Imprisoning a Generation." Follows four young Palestinians imprisoned under Israeli military occupation. Dir. Zelda Edmunds will answer questions after the screening. Rice Media Center auditorium room 100. Information: 713-348-4853 or 713-348-4882.

Sunday May 5, 9:30am, Walker Fair (Texas Solar outfitters), "Solar Power: Green is the New Black." St. Philip Presbyterian Church 201, 4807 San Felipe.

Thursday May 9, 6:30pm, Pink Iftar: women only Ramadan Iftar dinner, with discussions on women's experiences in Islam. \$45. St. Philip Presbyterian Church, 4807 San Felipe. Tickets: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/pink-iftar-2019-tickets-60166179663>.

Sunday May 19, 9:30am, Joel Goza (U. of St. Thomas), “America’s Unholy Ghosts: The Racist Roots in Our Faith and Politics.” St. Philip Presbyterian Church 201, 4807 San Felipe.

In San Antonio

Tuesday April 30, 6:00pm (doors open), 6:30pm (program begins). Roger Enriques (UTSA), “A Nation of Immigrants: The Past, Present and Future of Immigration Law.” Casa Hernan, 411 E. Cevalles St. Information: edda.wallace@utsa.edu, 210-458-5110.

Saturday May 11, 8:30am-4:00pm, Social Justice Teaching 101 (for K through 12 teachers). Free, but register at <https://bit.ly.tmipl>. TMI, The Episcopal Academy, 20955 W. Tejas Trail.

Tuesday May 14, 6:00pm-8:30pm, Andries Coetzee, “When the Powers that Be Co-opt Sacred Texts: Dinner and Conversation.” \$25. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). Register: <http://www.upcsa.org/registration/>

Saturday June 1, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. Residence of Tom Wakely, 16406 Ledge Point St.

Monday June 10, 4:00pm-Wednesday June 12, 8:30pm, Daniel P. Horan, ofm; Alana Levandoski, David Haas, Meg Hunter-Kilmer, and Ron Rolheiser, omi, Summer Institute 2019: Fear and Faith. Examines fear as a factor in stoking hatred. \$75-\$290. Whitley Theological Center, Oblate School of Theology. Lodging available in Oblate Renewal Center. Information: Noemy Colon, ncolon@ost.edu, or 210-341-1366, ext. 212.

Second Reading (Revelation 5:11-14)

A quick glance reveals that most of this passage is a prayer praising God. The author of the *Revelation from Jesus, Messiah*, however, is thoroughly acquainted with the Hebrew scriptures and makes allusions to them even while subverting and reversing their meanings. In this case, he alludes to the Prophet Ezekiel 2:10 (Rev. 5:1) by speaking of a scroll written upon front and back in the right hand of one sitting on a throne. The scroll is sealed with seven seals, indicating, according to ancient practice, that the scroll is the will of a decedent. Then a passage discusses who is worthy to open the scroll. “And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll/And break open its seals/Because you were slain and purchased for God by your blood/Persons from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation...” This stands in contrast to the Ezekiel passage that was cited, which spoke of a mission directed only to the house of Israel.

In the reading for this Sunday, we find this: “And I heard every creature which is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, and on the sea, and all that were among them saying, ‘To the one seated on the throne and to the lamb be blessing, honor glory, and power forever and ever.’”

Third Reading (John 21.1-19)

This is the allegory of Peter going fishing, which weaves several themes together. One theme is the call of Peter. A second is the catch of fish where they were not expected. A third turns on the contrasting images of Peter clothing himself and his having to be clothed by others. A fourth is the three-fold question, "Do you love *me*?" A fifth is the series of commands: Feed, tend, feed. The Lectionary provides the option of not reading verses 15-19, which would eliminate the third, fourth, and fifth themes.

A fragment of the non-canonical *Gospel of Peter* contains what seems to be an introductory narrative to the tradition that we have in the fourth gospel reading: "Now it was the final day of the Unleavened Bread; and many went out returning to their home since the feast was over. But we twelve disciples of the Lord were weeping and sorrowful; and each one, sorrowful because of what had come to pass, departed to his home. But I, Simon Peter, and my brother Andrew, having taken our nets, went off to sea. And there was with us Levi Alphaeus, whom the Lord...." Peter tries to escape the sorrow by turning to work, and even to how things were before Jesus called him: "I am going to fish." But Jesus wanted him changed and unable to go back to how his world used to be: "Simon son of John, do you love *me* more than these things?"

Once Peter is changed, his world could not be what it once had been. The fish were no longer to be found where they used to be found. Try the other side, Peter! As we know from the *Acts of the Apostles*, Peter will end up with a far different church from the one he first knew.

Peter grabbed his cloak and put it on before plunging into the water to go ashore. The evangelist adds an "Amen. Amen I say to you" saying, indicating that events will garb him in the cloak of martyrdom. Peter should not try to set the agenda, but to rise to the challenges that history will raise.

"Then that disciple whom Jesus loved says to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'" Did Peter plunge into the water to run ashore and embrace Jesus? No, he turned to retrieve the net full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. "Simon son of John, do you love *me* more than these things?" "Simon son of John, do you love *me*" "Simon son of John, do you love *me*?" This is catching Peter's attention. This is setting priorities. Where the heart is, the treasure will be.

And how does one love the Lord? "Feed my lambs." "Tend my sheep." "Feed my sheep." How can one love even the Jesus one can see, and hate a neighbor one cannot see?

Poem

In the Balance
(After Tree of Life Synagogue)

Let us
put on one side of the scales
the perpetrators of the Holocausts
of Europe, Cambodia, Rwanda,
this whole hemisphere
of American Natives, North and South,
of Iraq's Sunnis, Shiites, Jews and Christians,
in the hundreds of thousands,
refugees in the millions.

Let us then
balance that with the lives
of one Mother Teresa,
one Gandhi, one MLK,
one Malcom X.

Now let us
consider how all this
is one Family, one People, one Planet
loved by the Source from which we come,
the Source to which we return,

leaving us
poets, tellers of stories
and composers of songs
to find the words, sounds and icons
to transcend our labels
of good and evil.

Tom Keene and the Muse
October 28, 2018

Book Review

Helen T. Boursier, *The Ethics of Hospitality. An Interfaith Response to US Immigration Policies*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington/Rowman & Littlefield.

Reviewed by Anthony J. Blasi

Last March 21 Helen Boursier came to the Mabee Library Special Collections Room at the University of the Incarnate Word to talk about her new book, *The Ethics of Hospitality*. The unifying inspiration of her presentation came from her experience as a volunteer chaplain to refugee families held in detention by the United States federal government. She expanded her analyses by utilizing insights from a variety of sophisticated hermeneutical theories. Hermeneutics is the study of engaging written, artistic, and enacted “texts,” first by understanding them, then by interpreting them in lights of their contexts, and finally by applying them, i.e. taking action on account of them. As a work in religious ethics, the focus was on taking action. The book itself is a more thorough meditation and “call to action” along these lines.

The interfaith character of the approach has a point to it. Responding to the refugees is incumbent on a moral “we,” not merely an “I.” The fundamental fact is that the refugees, at present from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, are fleeing for their lives, and our response is required morally to reflect their needs, not our individual, denominational, or faith tradition states of readiness. The refugees are images of God before us; they come on God’s terms, not ours. Those of us who purport to be religious are therefore called to be radically hospitable, i.e. welcoming without imposing conditions.

Part I of the book, consisting of three chapters, confronts us with the context in which the refugees come to us. The migrants are reluctant to leave their home countries, travel under precarious circumstances through a foreign country, and seek asylum in the U.S. All the testimonies reveal that they are families, especially mothers and children, fleeing for their lives. They are not “economic migrants” but refugees from danger; unfortunately, U.S. law does not recognize danger of death as “grounds” for refugee status. Rather, U.S. officials look for reasons to turn people away—they entered through a place other than a “port,” there is no room in holding facilities at a port, etc. When the refugees turn themselves in, they are treated as criminals and “detained” (jailed). All this contrasts the Abrahamic religions and their legacies as sojourner peoples and their ethics of benevolence toward refugees and sojourners. Indeed, encountering refugees expands the faithful people’s idea of God by finding God reflected in a wide array of children of God.

Part II, with two chapters, examines the ideology that shapes U.S. policies and practices as they affect immigrants and refugees. An ideology of “sovereignty” blinds any insight that people and their rights are at stake. Current international treaties fail to grant refugee status to victims of inept or corrupt governments. When the treaties recognize rights to flee, they do not match them with rights to be received. Consequently, within a “rule of law” the U.S. government categories most fleeing people as “illegals.” Even refugees who are admitted into the bureaucratic process of seeking asylum are treated as if they were criminals. Families are separated deliberately as a

deterrent, in the strange hope that endangered people would be discouraged from seeking safety. An entire language develops to dehumanize “cases” and make an idol of the State. Concocted “security” concerns mask an enduring racism that underlies the inhuman treatment of refugees from Central America.

The three chapters of Part III show that the United States is actually complicit in creating the dangers that force people to flee the three northern countries of Central America. Americans import illegal drugs through Central America. The drugs, incidentally, come largely from Central America by sea, not overland. Americans export firearms that are used by gangs in Central America. And when non-nationals engage in crime inside the United States, the U.S. does not really attempt to reform and rehabilitate them but deports them to Central America at the terminus of their imprisonments.

Part IV, also consisting of three chapters, describes the experiences of those, a minority, who are admitted to the U.S. but then “detained.” The refugees—often women and small children—are treated as criminals; they are imprisoned in “coolers” or “refrigerators,” all the while subjected to rude treatment. A step up in the process is being transferred to “dog kennels,” fenced in areas where children 11-12 years old are segregated from their parents. For some reason, the federal government is intent upon ending “catch and release”; rather the preference is to place the refugees in for-profit “family detention” facilities—i.e., specialized imprisonment centers. Conditions in the prisons that are not prisons are better than in the “refrigerators” and “dog kennels,” but a great deal of secrecy characterizes the system. All the while, officials (not trained immigration judges) interrogate the refugees about any credible fear of persecution. There is a pervasive assumption that the refugees who risked the dangerous travel northward are a pack of schemers and liars who (somehow) threaten national security. The detainees, having experienced trauma, seek to repress memories, but are suddenly required to repeat their testimonies in exactly the same way in successive encounters with officials.

Part V, comprised of the four concluding chapters, largely reflects the experiences and efforts of volunteers from the interfaith community to minister to the refugees. The stinginess of the U.S. government is seen as an unholy menace, while the religions are sufficiently independent of the government to relativize the statist, even fascist, claims that the government makes. Despite serving as the public conscience in the matter of the treatment of the Central American refugees, many of the volunteers face criticism from their faith communities, or if not criticism a reluctance to “get involved” or even discuss the matter. The volunteers, including the author, based on their experiences with “detainees” and newly released applicants for asylum, prove to be resistant to such treatment: “We cannot be whole when ‘they’ are locked up in dog kennels, refrigerators, and for-profit family detention centers” (p. 249).

For the volunteers, what some would regard as “political” had become personal. As a sociologist, I am reminded of C. Wright Mills proposing a “sociological imagination” by which one begins to see personal problems as social issues. The author comes close to saying something quite similar: “Instead of all the paid lobbyists on Capitol Hill pushing their agendas with the deep symbols of national security, militarization at the border, and the rule of Law camouflaging xenophobia and exclusion at the border,

imagine what would happen if every single person of God lobbied for the role of Love to be embodied in the public square as the U.S. response to mass migration” (p. 252).

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>

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/