

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating June 2, 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 Ascension of the Lord. Tom Keene's poem is *Unity?*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>.

Pax Christi International has drafted a contribution to the formulation of a EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024), the successor of a present plan that will expire at the end of 2019. A major feature of the draft is its treatment of environmental issues from the perspective of human rights. The text of the contribution follows the poem.

Calendar

In Austin

Monday June 3-Thursday June 6, 9:30am-1:30pm, Church History course, sponsored by Catholic Diocese of Austin. Fleck Hall 206, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. \$60. Register: <https://secure.acceptiva.com/?cst=98ad94>

Monday June 10-Thursday June 13, 9:30am-1:30pm, Ecclesiology course, sponsored by Catholic Diocese of Austin. Fleck Hall 206, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. \$60. Register: <https://secure.acceptiva.com/?cst=98ad94>

Saturday June 15, 10:00am-12:00pm, 787 Studio—Community Experience. Fatima Mann, Community Advocacy and Healing Project. \$5.00 suggested donation. Register at <https://www.austinseminary.edu/page.cfm?p=4663>. McCord Guest Center Room 203, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 100 E. 27th St.

Monday June 17-Thursday June 20, 9:30am-1:30pm, Morality course, sponsored by Catholic Diocese of Austin. Fleck Hall 206, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. \$60. Register: <https://secure.acceptiva.com/?cst=98ad94>

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 San Antonio

Saturday June 1, 9:00am-1:00pm, Water Saver Saturday. Register for one of the following: Series 1 Sustainable Landscape Design, Composting. Series 2 Rain Water Harvesting, Gardening with Native Plants. Series 3 Permaculture, Home Efficiency. Series 4 Water Conservation in Your Vegetable Garden. Palo Alto College Performing Arts Center, 1400 W. Villaret Blvd. Free; register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/watersaver-saturday-tickets-60710169752?utm-medium=discovery&utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&aff=esli&utm-source=li&utm-term=listing>

Saturday June 1, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. Residence of Tom Wakely, 16406 Ledge Point St. Informal presentation by Rick McClatchey of Americans United.

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.

Sunday June 23, 4:00pm-6:00pm, 50 Years of Hope: A Pride Interfaith Service. 50 years after the Stonewall Riots. Madison square Presbyterian Church, 319 Camden St.

Liturgical Readings

In some locations the readings will be those of the Seventh Sunday of Easter, with the Ascension to be observed on Thursday, while in most the Sunday readings will be those of the Solemnity of the Ascension.

Second Reading: Solemnity of the Ascension

The Lectionary provides two options for the Solemnity of the Ascension, one from Ephesians 1:17-23 and one from Hebrews.

Ephesians 1:17-23

Some ancient manuscripts indicate that this essay was addressed to the Christians in Ephesus, but not all do. Since it was bad form in antiquity to put one's own name at the head of an essay, writers routinely named as authors founders of their school of thought or one of their teachers from the past. Moreover, Christianity was an illegal sect in the Roman Empire; authors had a good reason to mask the true authorship of a Christian essay.

The excerpt for today is a Trinitarian prayer for the Christian reader, "that the God of our Reverend Jesus, Messiah, the Father of glory, may grant you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowledge of him...." It fits the Solemnity of the Ascension because of its reference to Jesus raised from the dead, elevated "above ruler, authority power, and dominion...."

Hebrews 9:24-28, 10:19-23

Hebrews was an early Christian writing, the first to identify the Christian movement as a new separate religion. As such, it drew a contrast between the sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem, which was still standing at the time the author was writing, and the heavenly sanctuary Jesus entered as he was exalted after the Resurrection. The Jerusalem Temple had a huge curtain depicting the stars of heaven, which Mark would refer to metaphorically as ripped apart, and which the Romans would capture and triumphantly parade through Rome. *Hebrews* refers to the depiction of the stars in the heavens in the course of drawing its contrast: "For the Messiah did not enter hand-made sanctuaries, replicas of the genuine ones, but heaven itself...." *Hebrews* goes on to more than a denominational claim: "Then, brothers and sisters, having the courage from the blood of Jesus for entrance into the sanctuaries, which entrance he inaugurated for us as a fresh and living way through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and having a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in the fullness of faith...."

Third Reading: Solemnity of the Ascension (Luke 24:46-53)

The Ascension is the conclusion of the third gospel, the conclusion to the first part of Luke's two-part work. Before the excerpt that is read at mass, Luke characterizes the excerpt with an introductory sentence: "Then he opened their mind to understand the scriptures" (Luke 24.45). So the passage that is read at mass speaks of the meaning of scripture—at the time of Luke's writing, the Hebrew Bible.

First, "...the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day...." Second, this "...will be preached for conversion in his name for the forgiveness of sins in all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." Third, "You are witnesses to this." So he instructed them to stay in Jerusalem until they would be empowered. After that he blessed them, "...stood apart from them and was carried up into heaven."

The doings of Jesus himself would be impermanent; he would suffer, die, and rise. His activity would not be contained within Jerusalem and all that Jerusalem stood for but would be preached to all the nations, with their sinfulness dismissed. The disciples of the Messiah are witnesses to this impermanence and non-containment. They were to remain in Jerusalem and all that Jerusalem stood for, but their stay would be temporary, since they were to break out of its confines. Their witness will begin in Jerusalem and go out from Jerusalem, but the point of their witnesses would not be carrying Jerusalem with them, or for that matter any package of traditions. As Jesus stood apart and ascended beyond all that, so would they.

Second Reading: Seventh Sunday of Easter (Rev 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20)

The reading consists of fragments from the conclusion of the *Revelation from Jesus, Messiah*. This book is actually very sectarian, drawing strong contrasts between

the Christian movement and the ruling power of the age, the Empire of a purportedly deified ruler. First comes a positive reference to the final judgment: "Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me to pay all according to their works. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those cleansing their robes, so that theirs will be the right to the tree of life and they might enter into the city by the gates." Then the lectionary deletes this: "The dogs, sorcerers, fornicators, murderers, idolaters, and all who love and practice deceit will be outside." The language used by a movement under persecution will be strong.

Third Reading: Seventh Sunday of Easter (John 17.20-26)

In the Sundays after Easter, the Christian narrative often appears in the second reading from the *Acts of the Apostles*, the second volume of Luke's two-part work, and the third readings consist of excerpts from the *Johannine Gospel*. This excerpt is from one of the versions of Jesus' last Supper discourse in the *Johannine Gospel*, the famous discourse about Christian unity: "...that all would be one, as You, Father, are in me and I in You...." The passage attempts to put into words what usually goes by necessity unsaid, even in prayer.

We usually think, that is speak to ourselves, of right conduct toward others in "contrary to fact" terms: If I were her, if I were in the place of him, how would I feel if.... This is at the basis of ethics, of *discourse* about what should be done. But discourse is advice, not motivation. Prayer has a mystical element in it wherein one senses a unity with the divine and a oneness along with the divine with humans and with even the physical world. It goes beyond discourse—hence the experience of prayer without words. Translating this element back into discourse could lead to a pantheism, wherein unity would become banalized into equivalency and our mere anthropomorphisms about god become a fundamentalist diminution of the divine. It is better to leave the mystical element mystical and let god be God.

But what does this do to right conduct toward others? The *if* dissolves. I am she, I am he. I am no more equivalent to her or him any more than I am equivalent to God, but, as the passage tries to say it, God is in me and I am in them. This is not ethical discourse but motive.

Poem

Unity?

Is it really all one anyway?
That up and down
are somehow the same?
Also, right and left,
crazy and sane,
evil and good?

That in the end,
and even now,
the dualities dissolve back
to Unity?

Will murderers and their victims
each understand self and other
enough to embrace?

Will war makers and peacemakers
come to terms as illusions
of otherness terminate,
and the truths of being One begin?

Is Adonai Echad, the Lord our God is One,
our first, last and ultimate prayer?

Some Great Spirit within us
that leaks truth,
arouses love,
inspires courage,
that connects our separations,
completes our accord with
all that was, is now,
and will become?

Some Creator of all
abiding in all creation?

Some One Source
from which we come,
to Whom we all return?

Tom Keene January 19, 2008

Contribution of Pax Christi International to the Drafting of the 2020-2024 EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy

Introduction and general remarks

Around the world, members and partners of our peace movement are confronted with **increased attacks on human rights and democratic values** by governments, businesses, armed groups and others. Those who defend human rights and the rule of law, which are necessary for democracies to function and to be strengthened, face a **shrinking space** in which to do their work. The stigmatization, criminalization and

threats endured by human rights defenders, including those from faith-based organisations, and the lack of protection and of access to justice are deeply worrying.

In the light of this challenging context, we welcome that the EU is preparing the **new EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy**. We consider this tool to be a core policy instrument as it will **guide both EU Member States and EU Institutions** in their work, including EU delegations working with some of our members and partners on the ground. Considering the importance of the upcoming action plan, we offer the following general suggestions:

- **Human rights and democratic principles should be mainstreamed** into all EU's policies, including in the fields of migration, environment, trade and investment and security and defence.¹ Next to political choices to ensure that all EU policies contribute in a coherent manner to better protecting human rights and democracy, greater investment is needed to **train personnel** and ensure **effective human rights impact assessments**.
- The new action plan can contribute to the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) and in particular to conflict prevention and peacebuilding (SDG 16), specifically by **assisting countries in taking SDG actions** through a human rights based approach as well as by **enhancing the participation of human rights and democracy guardians in national and international SDG for a**, especially those who are working on the ground with the most vulnerable populations left behind.²
- The action plan should be **action and result-oriented** so it can contribute to concrete changes for our members and partners on the ground and **strengthen the involvement of civil society** in monitoring and evaluating its progress through yearly reviews. Also it should make it possible for civil society to give input on the **new EU Human Rights Country Strategies and their advancement**, as the new strategies will implement the action plan through national priorities and actions.
- The strengthening of alliances with UN and regional systems is important. In particular, promote the resuming of the procedures for accession to the **European Convention on Human Rights**. Also, through the **yearly EU's priorities at UN level**, monitor the reform of the UN peace and security architecture emphasizing the peacebuilding responsibilities of the entire system and push for the independence and effectiveness of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, treaty monitoring bodies and UN Special Procedures.

Strong inclusion of the business and human rights agenda

¹ Pax Christi International is worried about the increased focus on EU security and defense cooperation and has joined other peace organizations in a statement on the risks of the new EU Defense Fund, see: http://enaat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/181115_ENAAT_JointStatement-DefFund_FINAL-with-signatures.pdf.

² In 2017, Pax Christi International organized an UNESCO-funded SDG training for its Asia-Pacific members and partners, including Catholic church leaders. For more information: <https://www.paxchristi.net/news/pax-christi-interntiona-publishes-traiing-guide-sdgs-asia-pacific-relgion/6942>.

In Africa, Latin America and the Asia-Pacific, our members and partners support **communities which are heavily affected by the activities of companies exploiting natural resources**, such as oil, gas, gold, silver iron, copper, and tin, as well as by other large-scale development projects. We are concerned about the social, health, political, cultural and environmental impacts the extractive industry has on communities, **especially indigenous and Afro-descendent populations**, which we are witnessing through our Latin American project which helps build communities' capacity to resist extractives projects through nonviolent approaches.³

At EU Member State level, we have members who lobby and campaign towards companies, shareholders, clients and the general public to raise awareness about the social and environmental impacts of extractives industries and push for changes of companies' policies.⁴ In support of this work and considering the worrying situation, it's urgent that the **EU steps up action for businesses to respect human rights in their activities and helps communities and environmental defenders**. We thus suggest these points for the new action plan:

- To take up the **improvement of the implementation of policy initiatives at the EU and international level** regarding companies and human rights, amongst others through the establishment of a **national and EU mechanisms** who can monitor and research compliance with such policies as well as investigate concrete human rights abuses and **to share best practices** of businesses who have changed their policies in cooperation with civil society.⁵
- To include the contribution to the implementation at national, regional and international levels of the UN Guiding Principles on business and Human Rights (UNGPs), while also come forward with the long-awaited **EU Action Plan on the Implementation of the UNGPs**.⁶ In complementarity to the UNGPs, the EU should participate in a constructive way in the negotiations for a **UN binding treaty on business and human rights** guaranteeing the primacy of environmental and human rights.
- To enable **objective human rights and environmental research** to be carried out, including by universities, with truthful information on the real impacts of the extractive industry that can oppose disinformation spread by extractive companies to mislead the public opinion. Also, to continue to develop a robust and methodologically sound approach to the analysis of **human rights and**

³ Pax Christi International is working with member organisations in Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, Chile and Paraguay, who accompany communities resisting and defending their land from the extractives industry.

⁴ To illustrate, our Dutch member organization PAX has contributed to the decision of four major European energy companies to ask from their coal suppliers in Colombia to begin a process of reconciliation with victims of past human rights violations: <https://www.paxforpeace.nl/stay-informed/news/energy-companies-seek-solution-for-blood-coal-victims>.

⁵ For example, our member organization Human Rights and Environment (DHUMA) in Peru has successfully facilitated dialogues between the indigenous community of Condoraque and a mining company for the restoration of environmental damage. For more information: <https://maryknollmagazine.org/2017/07/healing-burnig-waters-condoraque/>.

⁶ The Responsible Business Conduct Working Group (RBC Group) of the European Parliament has in March published a Shadow EU Action Plan available on this website: <https://responsiblebusinessconduct.eu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SHDOW-EU-Action-Plan-on-business-and-Human-Rights.pdf>.

environmental impacts of trade agreements, including through consultations with civil society.

- To make reference to addressing **collective rights of communities**, especially indigenous and African-descendant populations as well as those of rural and urban mestizo communities, in national, regional and international policy meetings and to recommend policies and practices to stop violations committed by businesses. In the light of criminalization of community leaders resisting extractives projects, **trainings with officials of national judicial systems about collective rights** are highly needed.
- To make sure that in human rights dialogues with governments demands are made for **effective processes of consultation** with communities to obtain their free prior and informed consent to extractive projects. Next to helping with funding for the organization of such consultations and communities their activities for mobilizing people, it's important to push governments and businesses **to respect the outcomes of the consultations**.

Increased partnership with civil society including faith-based organisations

As part of **civil society**, our members and partners are contributing to human rights and democracy, often working with the most vulnerable populations and working in remote areas. Several of them are supported by the EU through its policies, funding programmes and EU-civil society dialogues on **human rights and democracy, human rights defenders** and **environmental activists**. It's important to further increase partnership with civil society members, especially **with those who are more difficult to reach**, as they have valuable information on local and national realities and what can work on the ground.

In particular, we hope that the EU can increase **collaborations with faith-based organisations**, as in many contexts where the EU wishes to advance human rights and democracy religion plays a crucial role. **Faith institutions have a massive reach** through schools, parishes, universities, diplomatic representations and faith leaders have **influential roles in policy processes for peacebuilding** through cooperation with other faith leaders and policy officials. With regard to civil society and faith-based organisations, we wish to make the following recommendations:

- To include actions to **support civil society members, including those who are faith-based**, through empowerment, protection and legal assistance and to do it as much as possible through their organisations directly as help from governments doesn't always reach them or is insufficient. **Enable exchanges between civil society members in regions and also between regions** to share about common challenges and for the building of strategies.
- To refer to the taking up of **cases of human rights defenders, environmental activists, faith-based activists at risk during dialogues with governments**, while using these spaces to more strongly pressure governments to comply with human rights and democratic values. When EU and EU Member state delegations visit countries, it's crucial they both meet government officials as well as civil society members as they can provide additional information about the context in the country.
- To take up as action **storytelling campaigning** promoting the crucial work of human rights and democracy guardians, while specifically highlighting the **value**

and strength of nonviolent actions in response to conflict situations and violence which have brought about concrete changes in contexts around the world. Especially, successful examples of nonviolent activities by women and youth could be featured through the campaign.⁷

- To mention the importance of **reaching out to faith-based activists and leaders** in the implementation of this action plan⁸ and to stimulate this through increasing the **training of personnel in faith literacy** and develop tools both at EU headquarter and EU delegation levels for the making of **mappings on ways to involve with faith-based activists and leaders** so that officials can tap more into faith networks, their experiences and resources and new partnerships can be built.
- To assess how **religious leaders can be involved in peace-making and mediation processes in which the EU is involved**. Religious leaders often enjoy significant credibility, are well-known and have access at every level of the society. As moral and spiritual guides they also are able to interpret sacred texts and invoke religious imagery for conflict transformation.⁹ Faith leaders have acted as mediators or helped facilitate peace talks in many countries round the world and have frequently done this on an interfaith basis.

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>

⁷ In 2018, Pax Christi International launched a project with its members in the Great Lakes region of Africa to train young people on active nonviolence and carrying out #ThisIsNonviolence social media campaigns: <https://www.paxchristi.net/our-work/nonviolence-project-african-great-lakes>.

⁸ On the basis of article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty the EU holds high-level meetings, or working dialogue seminars, on an annual basis with churches and non-confessional and philosophical organisations.

⁹ Bercovitch, Jacob and S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, "Religion and Mediation: The Role of Faith-Based Actors in International Conflict Resolution", 14 Int'l Negotiation (2009), 197-199.

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/