

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating July 14, 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 Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Ode to Resurrection*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Recent news reports note a new Vatican document concerning transgendered (or to use a more technical term, transsexual) persons. The document was not issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, but by the Congregation for Catholic Education. Since it was not taken up by the former, one wonders how much support it has even in Vatican circles. My sources indicate that it is quite controversial. When I read it, I saw more rash judgment and ignorance than prudence and wisdom. I give the reasons why in an essay that follows the poem.

A group of seven peace activists engaged in a symbolic protest against nuclear weapons April 4, 2018, in St. Mary's, Georgia, and they now face a trial in criminal court for doing so. They are known as the Kings Bay Plowshares 7. You can read their story at <https://www.kingsbayplowshares7.org/>

Calendar

In Austin

Monday July 15, 6:30pm, "Courageous Conversations on Race" meeting, Family Life Center, Holy Cross Catholic Church, 1610 E 11th St.

Sunday July 21 (3rd Sunday of the month), 7:00pm, Pax Christi Austin meeting. Fr. Payne House, St. Ignatius Church, 126 Oltorf St.

In Dallas/Fort Worth

Saturday September 14, 8:00am-4:00pm, conference, "Compassion in Action: Applications in Today's Times." For information see <https://compassionconference2019.simpletix.com/SimpleTixExpress/Events/EventsSectionDetail.aspx?Showid=41594&EventTimeld=10124#ShowDetails>. First United Methodist Church, 503 N. Central Expressway, Richardson, TX 75180. \$55.00 to \$65.00.

In El Paso

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

Sunday July 14, 3:00pm, film, *True Conviction*; three exonerated Texas join forces to help other wrongfully convicted prisoners obtain freedom. St. Joseph School Auditorium, 1314 Travis, across the street from the church rectory.

Friday July 26, 6:30pm-11:30pm, Rock the House annual fundraiser for Isaiah House, transition house for men coming out from incarceration. \$30 per person, includes dinner. Information and tickets: Bobby Valenzuela (915) 274-6209, jvalen4933@aol.com, or Pat Delgado (915) 740-3962, phdelgado@hotmail.com, or phdelgado3583@gmail.com.

In San Antonio

Wednesday July 10, 6:00pm-7:30pm, film, *In the Light of Reverence* (about sacred spaces of Native Americans). Sinkin Eco Centro, 1802 N. Main.

Saturday August 3, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. Residence of Tom Wakely, 16406 Ledge Point St.

Second Reading (Colossians 1:15-20)

This passage reads as poetic praise to the risen Messiah, Jesus. Hearing it can be an experience similar to hearing the Alleluia Chorus from Handel's *Messiah*—nice, but the mind can wander. But focus on the section's first sentence: "He is the image of the invisible God..." No one can see God, but it is possible to see this image. The "...first born of all creation..." The Word is the createdness of all creatures. The passage goes a step further later on: "He is also the head of the body, the church." It follows that the church is to make the divine visible in the world in its connectedness to the Messiah. This is not merely glorious cosmology, but a moral imperative.

Third Reading (Luke 10.25-37)

You "...shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6.5) and, "You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself..." (Leviticus 19.18). Luke omits the language about not taking revenge or holding grudges, but his early readers, who were familiar with the passages from the Torah, would have had the omitted wording in mind. The lawyer who was asking Jesus the question wanted to "justify himself"—that is, straighten out his own thinking, which is what the Greek likely meant. So he asked who the neighbor was against whom one

should not take revenge or hold grudges. Then follows the parable of the merciful Samaritan.

Is it virtuous to take no revenge or hold no grudges against one's "own people" but be vengeful and resentful toward strangers? A law that would be so lacking in impartiality would hardly seem to be a law at all. The lawyer had a good question.

The parable is usually cited in terms of mercy. "Good Samaritan" laws protect from law suits people who help imperiled strangers. That application is good so far as it goes, but the parable is really about reaching out beyond religious and ethnic barriers. In our present era, when public figures engage in hate-speech rants, simply not acting that way seems to be virtuous. But the point is to *make* neighbors.

Today we take the European Union for granted. There was a time, however, not too long ago, when Germans and French were mutually hostile and had three wars. Similarly, Protestant and Catholic Irish promoted mutual hatred in the aftermath of British colonialism over the whole of Ireland. Responsible public figures used trade to unite mainland Europe in peace and used negotiation to bring Northern Irish factions into reasonable coexistence. Creating neighborhoods with neighbors in them is practical; it takes people with moral insight to be practical in that way. That is what moral leadership does.

Poem

Ode to Resurrection

You body:
you extension of eternal me
into finite time, limited space
immersed in the ocean
of living, dying and rising anew,

you spiral strands of DNA,
in genes and cells
of organs humming in concert:
 blood and breath,
 skin and skeleton,
 muscles and nerves,
each and all
knowing what to do,

coming alive, passing away,
birthing again,
day by day, year by year,
ever-old-ever-new.

Tom Keene and Muse
November 2, 2018

The Vatican on Transgendered Persons

Anthony J. Blasi

Recent press accounts have informed us that the Vatican has issued a document condemning the practice of “changing” or “choosing” genders. I looked for such a document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, wondering why the phenomenon of transgendered persons would be a doctrinal issue at all. I could not find it on that Congregation’s website. Rather, it was issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education under the title, *“Male and Female He Created Them” Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*. So the “Vatican document” in question does not enjoy the status of a doctrinal statement. That does not mean, however, that it is not of interest.

The text proposes engaging in a dialogue, and it notes that for genuine dialogue to take place one needs to begin with “listening.” It proceeds to summarize a position, which it labels “gender theory” and eventually “transgenderism” and which it finds confused, unsound, and socially detrimental to the well-being of the world’s families. While there are many citations of statements purportedly critical of “transgenderism,” all from popes and Vatican offices, there are no citations of the people the authors say they are listening to. No “gender theorist” or “transgenderist” is identified. As I read, I found the impression emerging that the authors (Giuseppe Cardinal Versaldi and Archbishop Angelo Vincenzo Zani) were arguing against a caricature, not listening to actual people.

The authors acknowledge the difference between sex and gender—a distinction I made for years in introductory sociology classes.

Sex is seen as defining which of the two biological categories (deriving from the original feminine-masculine dyad) one belonged to. Gender, on the other hand, would be the way in which the differences between the sexes are lived in each culture.

In other words, they are saying sex is biological and gender socio-cultural. Sex is determined by either an XY or an XX genotype and the presence of male or female reproductive organs. There are, however, very rare intersex conditions, which the authors do not acknowledge. Gender, contrary to the authors’ claim, is a matter of masculine and feminine traits that may be either of biological or socio-cultural origin. “A trait is masculine or feminine if it is sex-skewed and present in one sex more than the other sex, even though both sexes have some of the trait.”¹ Biological traits tend to be distributed around a central tendency in normal distributions, with extreme “tails” of greatest and least strength or presence of the trait in small numbers of individuals. Socio-cultural traits are not created randomly and hence are not in evidence in normal distributions; for example, one does not find polygyny randomly distributed in most western socio-cultural settings.

The Congregation’s authors continue:

¹ Well phrased by Jay R. Feierman, M.D., an established research psychiatrist in a personal communication to me.

The problem here does not lie in the distinction between the two terms, which can be interpreted correctly, but in *the separation of sex from gender*. This separation is at the root of the distinctions proposed between various “sexual orientations” which are no longer defined by the sexual difference between male and female, and can then assume other forms, determined solely by the individual, who is seen as radically autonomous. Further, the concept of gender is seen as dependent upon the subjective mindset of each person, who can choose a gender not corresponding to his or her biological sex, and therefore with the way others see that person (*transgenderism*).

What? The authors first confound two quite different phenomena—sexual orientation and sexual identity.² And neither of these is a social construct. Moreover, social constructs are not “subjective mindsets” that one can choose whimsically. The ecclesiastical authors are evidently not listening well.

Let me begin with the last of the authors’ claims. Social constructs are subject-dependent, but they cannot be adopted or not (chosen) readily. Power is subject-dependent, but one is not free to, for example, not pay taxes. Mathematics is subject-dependent, but try choosing a different math with one’s bank account. So also some gender norms are subject-dependent, but there is social resistance to conducting oneself out of gender. So a victorious male soccer player might grab his jersey and throw it into the air in the exhilaration of the moment without provoking much comment, but the case was quite different for a female soccer player. Such gendered norms can change, of course, but by the virtue of their being normative, efforts to change them meet with resistance. In contrast, sexual orientation and sexual identity are recognized subjectively, or not, but when someone attempts to reject, suppress, or ignore them, they still intrude upon the consciousness. A homosexual adolescent, no matter how great the desire to conform to other adolescents of the same sex in the environment, remains attracted to those same-sex adolescents and not the opposite-sex adolescents to which the same-sex companions are attracted. Conforming to gender norms can mask the difference, but not eliminate it. In the case of transsexual persons, someone experiencing a dysphoria in sex identity can hardly be unaware of the difficulties involved; it is not a matter of willful choice.

Scientific theories of sexual orientation point to genetic factors, pre-natal hormone factors, and post-natal childhood social factors. Studies of non-human animal life point in particular to the pre-natal hormone factors; ethical concerns prevent experimentation on humans, thereby leaving the state of knowledge with a degree of uncertainty over how much of the variation in sexual orientation is hormonally determined.³

Scientific findings on the relatively rare phenomenon of having a different sexual identity from that suggested by the subject’s reproductive organs point to genetic and

² Jay R. Feierman, M.D., has pointed out in a personal communication to me the example that some transwomen are sexually attracted to biological males and some who are sexually attracted to biological females. He goes on to point out that most effeminate males are homosexual androphiles and also have a male sexual identity.

³ For an overview see Jacques Balthazart, *Brain Development and Sexual Orientation*. San Rafael, California: Morgan & Claypool Life Sciences, 2012.

pre-natal hormonal determinations, with the transsexual identity presenting itself usually before the age of three years. Again, ethical concerns prevent experimental research on humans that would be definitive.⁴ The genitals sexually differentiate in the first trimester of pregnancy and the brain in the third trimester; the hormonal environment sometimes changes over the interval. This is the biological basis of an individual having a different sexual identity mentally from that suggested by the genitals.⁵

As a social scientist, the matter of my craft consists of social constructions. Far be it from me to advocate a reduction of cultural phenomena to biological phenomena. Indeed, I have written against reductionism as a sole mode of explanation. But any competent social scientist will recognize that some phenomena stem from such biological determinants as genes and hormones. The role of the latter appears to be most determinative of both sexual orientation and sexual identity during the course of pre-natal development. The ecclesiastical authors of the Congregation for Catholic Education have ignored the biological evidence rather than admitting it into the dialogue that they say they want.

The Congregation's essay is not wholly negative, however. They call for respecting transgendered persons and against mistreating them. I would encourage them to empathize with the transsexual persons and other sexual minorities as well. Empathy with transsexuals would involve imagining the experience of a natal, pre-existing non-acceptance of an identity that social pressure would impose on oneself. That kind of empathy would lead to a much more realistic assessment of claims that transsexual people individually or willfully opt for an identity change because of contemporary social fads. It would also lead them away from the conclusion that the transsexual experience is a manifestation of "fluidity" in sexual identity.

The 2017 Texas legislative session was in tumult over the Senate, led by the lieutenant governor, demanding a "bathroom bill," one that would require people to use public restrooms signed with sex labels corresponding to those on their birth certificates. At the time, I wondered who would police restroom use and how they could access a database of birth certificate information. The Texas House of Representatives, reflecting the interest of business leaders in avoiding boycotts, wanted nothing to do with the "bathroom bill." Since it is easier to stop something from happening in a legislature than to make it happen, the "bathroom bill" was never passed. Neither the lieutenant governor and his allied senators, with their pandering to anti-scientific "Evangelicals," nor the business interests seemed particularly concerned with the freedom and rights of transsexual people. The recent statement from the Congregation for Catholic Education would have Catholic Church officials and some dogmatic Catholic conservatives side with the anti-scientific "Evangelicals" in promoting hostility against transsexuals, despite the call for respect and the verbalized quest for dialogue.

⁴ For an overview see Milton Diamond, Intersex and Transsex: Atypical Gender Development and Social Construction. *Women's Studies Review* 19 (2012): 76-91. A study by the same author is particularly relevant: Transsexuality among Twins: Identity Concordance, Transition, Rearing, and Orientation. *International Journal of Transgenderism* 14:1 (2012): 24-38.

⁵ Communication from Jay R. Feierman, M.D.

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.txcedp.org

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio
www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/

Climate Change
www.creation-care.com

NowCastSA
www.nowcastsa.com/