

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating July 21, 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 Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *River of Blood*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>.

Last year witnessed centenary commemorations of the end of World War I, the war with more fatalities and less "causes" than any other. Four years earlier, similar commemorations focused on that war's beginning. Both of my grandfathers were involved, albeit in different ways. Grandfather Blasi rushed his family onto a ship bound for Italy so that he could offer his services to his homeland; too old for the military, he administered a refugee camp in the North. The U.S. military drafted Grandfather Marshall, a blacksmith, who worked on military horses in Bordeaux. The war also affected someone who was, as it were, the patron saint of Pax Christi, Angelo Roncalli. The future Pope John XXIII, who had once served as a draftee in the Italian army, was called up and assigned to administer a hospital for the war wounded. Just about everyone was affected by such a massive war, a war like many wars that did not really resolve any issue.

After the poem, below, an extract from a 2014 article in the *Guardian* by Joanna Morehead traces the wartime experience of Clement and Thomas Atlee. Clement was the prime minister of Great Britain when I was a very young child; I only remember him being referred to in the past tense. When Clement went to war, Thomas registered as a conscientious objector. Journalist Morehead interviewed the grandchildren of Thomas.

Pax Christi San Antonio member Sister Martha Ann Kirk wrote a fine essay on compassion for the san Antonio *Express News* (July 14, p. K3), comparing Temple Beth-El's help when the St. John's Orphanage burned down in 1912 and the efforts to help poor people in the third world today.

Calendar

In Austin

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&EventTimeId=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).

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, pdelgado@hotmail.com, or pdelgado3583@gmail.com.

In Houston

Wednesday July 17, 6:30pm, film "Thirst for Power," on the science of water and energy, with a focus on France, California, and Texas. Rice Media Center, Cinema Auditorium 100. Drive to Entrance #8 via University Boulevard and Stockton Dr. Parking lots nearby are Moody Visitor Lot, West Lot 2, and Greenbriar Lot.

In San Antonio

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

Saturday August 3, 1:30pm, film, "The River and the Wall," about the Rio Grande environment. Christus Heritage Hall, 4707 Broadway.

Second Reading (Colossians 1:24-28)

The common translation of this passage from the deuteropauline *Letter to the Colossians* obscures what the author is trying to say, using fiscal terminology. "Now amidst sufferings I rejoice over you, and in my flesh I am disbursing the balance of the afflictions of the Messiah for his body, which is the church..." It is not that what humans did to the divine presence in the body of the Messiah had fallen short, as the usual translation would have it, but that Paul's mission disbursed that valued presence and

humans respond in the same way as they did to Jesus himself. Thus the continuation of the sentence follows naturally: "...a minister of which I have become in God's ministry assigned for you, to deliver the word of God in full..." Again using fiscal language, the valued word has been paid in full: The "mystery that has been hidden from the ages and from the generations, but made manifest now to His saints, to whom God wished to reveal among the gentiles the worth of wealth of the glory of this mystery, which is Messiah among you, the hope of glory..."

Third Reading (Luke 10-38-42)

This is the narrative about Martha and Mary welcoming Jesus into their home, an episode peculiar to the *Gospel of Luke*. Many sermons seek to set priorities on the basis of this passage—be not distracted by worldly worries, for one matter only is important. Yes such active service as that performed by sisters in active religious communities is commendable, but a higher calling, so the sermons go, is that of contemplation within monastery walls. I must admit to a skepticism from the time of my childhood about such claims.

Among the gospels, that of Luke is more concerned with the role of women than are the others. With that in mind, contemporary exegetes point out that Mary, who was "sitting at the feet of the Lord" and "listening to his discourse" was doing what disciples of rabbis did, and that such disciples had traditionally been men. In Luke's depiction, therefore, Jesus is commending Mary when she neglected what is sometimes called "women's work" and absorbed herself in aspects of religion that were usually reserved for men.

Not too long ago I was making inquiries with Catholic institutions about arranging for a public viewing of a documentary about the Vatican investigation of American sisters' communities for their "radical feminism." Some were sympathetic but afraid the video would upset Church authorities. I wonder whether those authorities fully approve of the *Gospel of Luke*.

But there is a more fundamental matter in question. Why is there "women's work" and "men's work" in the first place? In a similar mode, why are minorities who earn their way into the learned professions so readily marginalized? Why are people whose insights are heeded before retirement not expected to have insights of equal value after retirement? It appears essential to distinguish between the capabilities that God creates in people and the categories that humans contrive.

Poem

River of Blood

It was the 1980s.
With neither approval nor permission
from We the People,
our nation's CIA hired mercenaries.

Calling themselves Contras,
they raided Nicaragua's isolated villages,
killed the workers for health, literacy
and terrorized the rest.

One of them tells his story:

We found the teacher,
laid him in a newly dug ditch.
Following orders,
I plunged my trench knife into him,
till his screams and breathing stopped.

Later, I went to the river
to wash my hands and face.
In a flash, the river turned to blood.

That night, I slipped away,
never to return.

Imagine us taxpayers walking away
from our Afghanistans, Iraqs, Vietnams
and their rivers of blood.

Tom Keene
August 26, 2017

Conscientious Objectors: Men Who Fought a Different Kind of Battle Joanna Moorhead

Over eight million men served in the British army during the first world war, and as the centenary approaches, their descendants will be remembering them and the battles they fought. A much smaller number of men – about 16,000 – registered not as soldiers but as conscientious objectors. Some accepted non-combatant roles in, for example, the ambulance service; others took on alternative service in other parts of the

world and some were absolutists, who refused to play any part in the war machine, and were often imprisoned as a result.

A century on, how do their descendants view the stance these men took?

Tom Attlee

When Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914, the future prime minister Clement Attlee was on holiday with his brother Tom. Both men knew what they must do: Clement hurried back to London to enlist in the army, while Tom went home to prepare his case as a conscientious objector.

Today, Tom's grandchildren are as proud of him as Clement's no doubt are of him, although Cath Attlee – Tom's granddaughter – points out that if Clement had taken Tom's stance, he could never have gone on to hold the highest office in British politics, as he did from 1945 to 1951. Tom's career – he was an architect – was ruined by his decision to be a "conchie". After the war ended, he moved to Cornwall to escape the jibes and stigma, and never fully practised his profession again.



The Attlee brothers – Tom, Clem and Laurence – 1892.

"What was interesting about Clem and Tom was they were both socialists, both members of the Independent Labour party when the war began," says Cath. "But while Clem saw it as his absolute duty to fight – he was in his 30s in 1914, so quite old to be signing up – Tom took a very different view. He was a committed Christian and believed that war could never be the Christian answer to any dispute – he was prepared to suffer for what he believed in."

In fact, Tom's wife, Kathleen, suffered almost as much as Tom and maybe more: Cath's brother Jeremy remembers another family member once telling him that Tom's decision had ruined his grandmother's life.

Kathleen was from a military family – two of her uncles had been decorated in previous conflicts – and the stigma of being the wife of an objector must have hit her hard, especially as, by the time of Tom's court-martial in 1917, she was the mother of a

toddler and pregnant with her second child. "Coping on her own, without an income, was very hard for my grandmother – my grandfather did three months' hard labour in Wormwood Scrubs and then spent a year in Wandsworth prison," says Cath.

Clement, meanwhile, had been invalided back from the front so that when the armistice was signed in 1918, Ellen Attlee, their mother, had two sons in Wandsworth: one in the military hospital, the other in prison. "Ellen apparently remarked that she didn't know which of her sons she was more proud of, which is really rather lovely," says Helen, another of Tom's granddaughters. "I think there was a strong sense in our family that people were entitled to their convictions, and that having the courage of your convictions was something that everyone respected – and I think we respect that still."

Tom's daughter-in-law Peggy, now 95, wrote his biography and its title – *With a Quiet Conscience* – says it all.

Interestingly, the Attlee children's other grandfather, Peggy's father, was killed in the first world war before she was even born; on Remembrance Day, says Cath, she always wears two poppies, one white and one red, to remember the sacrifices made by both her grandfathers. "I recognise both the principles of the just war and the principles of pacifism," she says.

Jeremy says that as a child he never remembers his grandfather discussing pacifism or his time in prison; but he does know he accepted the fact that both his sons joined the army in the second world war. "I think Tom's view was that Hitler made things different," he says.

The anti-war feeling in Tom's branch of the Attlee family has filtered down through the generations, says Helen.

"I'm not against war in all circumstances, but I have been against many individual wars in my lifetime. I was one of a very small number of people who marched against the Falklands war in 1982, and I marched again, with my three children, against the Iraq war."

Tom died in 1960 when Cath was four, but Jeremy and Helen were in their late teens by then. Jeremy recalls: "He was very accepting of us, of what we thought and believed – his whole life had turned on standing up for what he believed in. We're all very proud of him."



The descendants of Tom Attlee, whose brother Clement later became prime minister. Peggy, 95, his daughter-in-law, is surrounded by Tom's grandchildren Helen, 70, Cath, 57, and Jeremy, 71. Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi for the Guardian

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/