

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating August 18, 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 Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Prophetic Voices*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is the first part of my review—more a summary than an evaluation—of *Father Luis Olivares. A Biography*, by Mario T. García of the University of California at Santa Barbara. Claretian Father Olivares was a native of San Antonio who brought a characteristically San Antonio perspective to his activist ministry in East Los Angeles. He had become a highly successful bureaucrat before undergoing a conversion that led him to reach back to his childhood values.

Calendar

In Austin

Thursday August 15, 9:30am-3:30pm, Texas Convening Bibles, Badges, & Business for Immigration Reform. Speakers include Ali Noorani (National Immigration Reform), Jeff Moseley (Texas Assn. of business), Travis Wussow (Southern Baptist Convention), Julian Aguilar (Texas Tribune), Andy Harvey (Palestine Police Dept.), Loren Steffy (Rational Middle Media), David Smith (Austin Baptist Assn), Laura Goldberg (Center for Houston's Future), and Matthew Soerens (World Relief). Austin Stone Community Church—For the City Center, 500 E. Saint Johns Ave. \$15.00; tickets at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/texas-convening-bibles-badges-business-for-immigration-reform-tickets-65806279353>.

Sunday August 18 (3rd Sunday of the month), 7:00pm, Pax Christi Austin meeting. Fr. Payne House, St. Ignatius Church, 126 Oltorf St.

Friday August 23, 6:30pm, Courageous Conversation on Race meeting. Family Life Center, Holy cross Catholic Church, 1610 11th 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.simplenetix.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.

Friday September 20, 11:00am, to **Saturday September 21**, 5:00pm, conference: The Art of Resilience—Latinx Public Witness in Troubled Times. Speakers include Fernando Segovia (Vanderbilt Divinity School), Daisy Machado (Union Theological Seminary), Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (Duke University). Free; registration required, at door or online up to September 13 at smu.edu/artofresilience. Multiple locations in Meadows School of the Arts and Perkins School of Theology. Information: <https://www.smu.edu/Perkins/PublicPrograms/LatinoCenter/Events/The-Art-of-Resilience>

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 August 11, 3:00pm, film: *Threads*, on World War III. St. Joseph School Auditorium; enter through the school parking lot across from the church rectory, 1315 Travis.

Thursday August 13, 6:45pm, Pax Christi El Paso meeting. Guests welcome. Centro Mujeres de la Esperanza, 1102 Birch St.

Thursday August 15, 12:00pm-1:00pm, death penalty vigil, in front of El Paso County Courthouse.

Friday September 27, 7:00pm, film: *The Sultan and the Saint*, about the meeting of Sultan Malik al Kamil and Saint Francis of Assisi. Following the viewing, panel discussion moderated by Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv. Of Lexington, Kentucky, bishop-president of Pax Christi USA.

In Houston

Wednesday August 21, 6:30pm, film: *Ay Mariposa*, documentary on attempt by US Border Patrol to seize the National Butterfly Center for a border wall site in the Rio Grande Valley. Panel discussion follows. Rice Media Center, Cinema Auditorium, room #100. Use Entrance #8 via University Boulevard and Stockton Dr. Information: info@cechouston.org.

Sundays September 22 and 29, Bruce Yeager, "The Jail and Torches that Never Were: Debunking the Scopes-Trial Myth (Background to the Trial). St. Philip Presbyterian Church, room 201, 4807 San Felipe. Information: mmcgm63@gmail.com.

Saturday September 28, 3:00pm, film: “Out of Order,” documentary on struggles of LGBTQ clergy. St. Philip Presbyterian Church, 4807 San Felipe. Information: tolerance@rice.edu.

In San Antonio

Monday August 12, 12:00pm, “A Day of Remembrance, Reflection and Re-Envisioning Our World: A Call to Compassion, Peace, and Community,” Mayor Ron Nirenberg, in co-ordination with San Antonio’s sister cities.

Tuesday August 13, 6:00pm-8:00pm, “Dare to Listen—The Migrant Journey,” with David Martin Davies (Texas Public Radio), Jonathan Ryan (RAICES), Sr. Denise LaRock (Interfaith Welcome Coalition), and Colleen Bridges (City of San Antonio). The conversation will connect the use of superhero iconography to immigration issues. San Antonio Museum of Art, 200 W. Jones Ave.

Wednesday August 14, 6:00pm-7:00pm, Town Hall on gun violence and mass shootings, organized by San Antonio Councilmember Manny Peláez. Hardberger Park Urban Ecology Center Auditorium, 8400 NW Military Highway.

Wednesday August 14, 6:30pm, Texas Coalition Against the Death penalty meeting, Building 4, Oblate Renewal Center, 5700 Blanco Road.

Thursday August 15, 12:00pm-1:00pm, execution vigil across the street from Bexar County Courthouse, 300 Dolorosa.

Tuesday August 20, 6:00pm, Alamo Group, Sierra Club meeting: Daniel Boice (Scientific Studies & Consulting) and Michelle Garza (San Antonio River Authority), “The Head is On! Understanding San Antonio’s Urban Heat Island Effect and What We Can Do about It.” Eco Centro, 1802 N. Main.

Wednesday August 21, 12:00pm-1:00pm, execution vigil across the street from Bexar County Courthouse, 300 Dolorosa.

Saturday September 7, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. Guests welcome. Residence of Tom Wakely, 16406 Ledge Point.

Wednesday September 11, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Gilbert King, author of *Beneath a Ruthless Sun. A True Story of Violence, Race, and Justice Lost and Found.* The book “plunges the reader deeply into the legal practices, civil rights battles, and stubborn sexual inequalities of the mid-20th century...” McCombs Center Rosenberg Skyroom, University of the Incarnate Word, near the entrance at the US 281 northbound frontage road immediately north of Hildebrand.

Wednesday September 18, 7:00pm-9:30pm, Peter Steinfeld, “Sex Abuse and the Future Church.” University Center, Conference Room A, St. Mary’s University. Parking in Lots

D and H. Information: Cynthia Stookesberry, cstookesberry@stmarytx.edu, 210-436-8054.

Thursday September 19, 4:00pm-8:30pm, symposium, "Moving the Church Forward," featuring Peter Steinfeld. University Center, Conference Room A and Foyer, St. Mary's University. Information: Susie Elias selias@stmarytx.edu, 210-436-3516.

Monday September 23, 4:00pm-6:00pm, Stephen Sheehi (William and Mary University), "Decolonizing the Humanities." Northrup Hall 040, Trinity University, One Trinity Place.

Second Reading (Hebrews 12:1-4)

The author encourages the reader to have faith and keep up the struggle against whatever may lead one to be discouraged. The previous paragraphs recalled a series of personages from the Hebrew Bible who had faith, most notably Abraham. The author refers to them as a "cloud of witnesses." That is a strange expression indeed. First, they are "witnesses"; they are important not for themselves but God, in whom they had faith. Second, they are a "cloud." Because of a near homonym in English, we might hear this as "crowd" rather than "cloud." "Crowd" suggests an assemblage of distinct individuals. "Cloud," in contrast, suggests an absence of distinct boundaries and separations.

Third Reading (Luke 12.49-53)

Here Luke assembles fragments from the *Gospel of Mark* and from another source he had in common with Matthew ("Q"), forming a statement about casting fire on the earth and disturbing the peace. "Do you think that I came to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather dissension." Note that peace is not set in opposition to violence but to dissension.

It is well known that we do not intellectually grasp actual things in the world when we see them, but rather we grasp *images* of things, images mediated by reflected light, eye lenses, retinal nerve endings, and intellectual habits. We are limited to formulating more or less useful statements about images. Pope John XXIII used to emphasize the difference between truths and how we as a church present them. Sometimes quite contrary and seemingly contradictory statements are both true and both false. Jesus would have fire cast on the earth, but he was busy not with fire but with a water dunking, a baptism. We know that in the nativity section of Luke's gospel, the heavenly choir proclaims peace on earth; we even echo this at Mass with the traditional prayer known as the *Gloria*; but now Jesus says he is bringing dissension.

Peace is godly, for sure, but not always; and dissension too is godly, but only sometimes. There are circumstances, arrangements, customs, practices, injustices with which we should not be at peace, and assumptions and attitudes from which we should dissent, even while peace and harmony are in themselves and on many occasions divine. The Spirit is present when we know when.

Poem

Prophetic voices

Our custodians ply their counsel:

*“Beware the voices,
who proclaim dangerous truths
that we have carefully hidden.*

*Ignore any who question our wisdom,
Drown them out,
lest we all go down.”*

“Not for drowning are we,”
say the voices.

“On your roaring waves
these truths float,
slipping onto shores
of searching minds.

They are seeds
spread on the wind,
taking root between
the cracks in your concrete.

They are fires under your ground,
spreading, growing, building to eruption.

They are cornerstones of the coming world
where painful truths are welcomed,
comforting lies disdained,
where no child lacks food for body or brain,
where prisons are turned into schools,
weapons allowed to rust.”

We children listen:

We hear the truths and feel the pain.
Our hands tremble with the destiny they hold.”

Tom Keene
July 5, 2008

Book Review, Part 1

Father Luis Olivares. A Biography. Faith Politics and the Origins of the Sanctuary Movement in Los Angeles, by Mario T. García. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. Reviewed by Anthony J. Blasi.

We all know the name *César Chávez*, and those with a conscience celebrate the bearer of that name. Many also know of Dolores Huerta. Fewer know of Chávez' friend and confessor, Fr. Luis Olivares (1934-1993). This book is the priest's biography. It begins with an account of a dinner in 1990 in his honor at a church he pastored in Los Angeles—Our Lady Queen of Angels, popularly known as La Placita. A second scene in the introduction is Olivares's funeral three years later at Mission San Gabriel. At both events, homeless Latinos gathered in the street to join the invited guests and dignitaries inside and cheered spontaneously, "¡Viva Padre Olivares!"

The author, professor of Chicano and Chicana Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara, says that he writes the biographies of Latino American leaders because Americans are entering into a new era of resistance against anti-minority forces and that all, but especially Latinos, need to be inspired by past resistance. Based on his earlier historical research on the Chicano movement, author García is convinced that politics and faith cannot be separated, that it would be a destruction of history to narrate the development of either without narrative the development of the other.

Father Olivares' parents were both refugees from the Mexican revolution of 1910; they both settled in San Antonio, where they met, married, started a family, and a decade later sheltered refugees from the Cristero War. Their parish, Immaculate Heart of Mary, in the heavily Latino west side of San Antonio, was staffed at the time by Claretians who had also escaped from the violence in Mexico. Both parents had relatives in the city. Damaso, who had worked in a restaurant as a busboy, earned an electrician's certificate in a correspondence course to obtain better employment during the Great Depression. Victoriana, whose father had been murdered by followers of Pancho Villa, fled to Texas with the children of the family after a Villista officer wanted her as a concubine. Damaso worked as a building engineer and Victoriana as a pecan sheller. Both served as actors in a drama group whose performances served a fund raising role in the parish. Both Damaso and Victoriana were also active in the parish charities. Victoriana would die in 1938, when Luis was only three. Paternal grandmother Inez and paternal aunt Concha stepped in to help with the children.

A number of Mexican clergy fled Mexico during the Cristero War of the 1920s, and the Olivares family assisted a number of them, sometimes having to hide them. The family came to know some of them as friends over the years. The household of eleven (including grandmother, aunt, and the aunt's daughter) lived in one small house at 1210 S. Laredo St. after Victoriana's death. They were poor, but did not know themselves as poor people. Grandmother Inez saw to it that Catholicism was the center of daily life—and that people who came begging for food during the Depression were invited in. She also visited the sick, taking some of the children with her; she was often asked to pray over the sick.



An aspect of the household culture was to always be immaculately dressed. Inez had been a teacher in Mexico, and she taught her grandchildren to read and write Spanish before they began school so that it would be easier for them to learn English. Aunt Concha also stressed education. Despite limited means, the children were sent to Catholic schools, which were known to be better than the segregated and underfunded public schools where teachers had low expectations of Latino students. Luis and his brother Henry served as altar boys at Immaculate Heart and came to see the Claretian priests there as role models. Luis learned to play the organ at the church.

Among the Olivares children, Luis was spoiled by his grandmother and aunt. There seemed to be no resentment over that. He was also very self-disciplined and organized, and played a leadership role among the children. He also had a marked sense of humor. He was sometimes teased as the dark one, because his skin was darker than the others'. He also displayed an intellectuality in school, especially liking history; and most classmates respected him for it. While his home language was Spanish, the school influence made him, as with most of the students, English-dominant.

Grandmother Inez died in 1947, when Luis, or Louis as he came to be called, was thirteen. Louis's brother Henry left for the high school level Claretian seminary in Compton California, and Louis followed in 1948, along with two other boys from the west side. He had never been on a train before, and never outside San Antonio. His new home was Del Amo minor seminary, in a rustic location near Compton. The daily life at the unaccredited school was regimented. There were only about fifty students, and about half who began the course dropped out before completion. Classes were in Latin, conversation in English most of the time, and all casual talk was allowed only in certain recreation periods. Notably, the curriculum included the social teachings of the Church. The cuisine was American rather than Mexican, and meals were eaten in silence, except on special days. Sexuality was repressed, and a schedule of continual activity helped distance it. Louis was a good but not outstanding student, in the eyes of the Spaniards on the faculty; he was not athletic at all. But everyone respected him and liked him. He exercised leadership as the choir director.

Minor seminary was followed by a monastic novitiate year some miles away, in which the novices, as they were called, were to develop a prayerful spirituality. Conversation, limited by a rule of silence, was in Latin, but a discussion class on

spirituality used English. Louis seemed to come into his own in these classes. At this stage, the would-be Claretians wore cassocks rather than school uniforms.

Their college-level “philosophy” program, with classes taught by Claretians who did not have doctorates, was back in Compton, albeit in a different building. The students, now Claretians under temporary vows, were technically to receive their degrees from Loyola University. The whole student body numbered about forty. Texts in some classes, most notably philosophy, were in Latin and Greek. Thomas Aquinas received particular attention in philosophy classes, though not uncritically.

During this stage, Louis still led choirs, and he also created a Christmas and Easter card project that raised money for the Claretian missions. He edited the college newspaper as well. Louis graduated in 1957 along with two others. They took final vows as Claretians and began “theology,” a final four years of study prior to ordination. The first of the years was in a Claretian program northeast of Los Angeles, in Calabasas, and three more at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. During the final two years at Catholic University, English was replacing Latin in the conduct of classes, and professors presented “liberal” ideas: supremacy of conscience, literary criticism of the scriptures, and promoting justice for the poor. He completed the theology program in 1961 and was ordained in San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio by Archbishop Robert Lucy, who, though autocratic, was a champion of the Mexican American cause. Louis was only the seventh Mexican American to be ordained a priest in San Antonio in 250 years! His first mass was at the Claretians’ Sacred Heart Parish; breaking with custom, he gave the homily himself—in Spanish.

A year of parish “practicum” followed in Washington, and then back to Compton as a staff member of the minor seminary, where he was called “Father Luis.” As the church was seeking lay involvement by conducting worship in vernacular languages rather than Latin, Fr. Luis was organizing a parents’ club for the seminary and befriending many of the local students’ families. He took on administrative duties, including that of finance officer for the seminary. He spent one year in a parish in Phoenix when the seminary was being reorganized, only to be transferred back to California, at Calabasas, as superior of the formation program—now a novitiate and a college-level house of studies whose residents studied at Loyola University. By 1967 he was treasurer of the western province of Claretians. During summers, he earned an M.B.A. at the University of Notre Dame.

Both Luis and his brother Henry worked as Claretians in the Los Angeles area, and their sister Theresa with her husband had also come to the area—re-establishing family for the two priests every Sunday evening. This happy situation did not last. Theresa divorced, and because of opposition in the Claretians to the Vatican II reforms Henry left the priesthood.

As treasurer of the Claretians’ western province responsible for a \$25 million stock portfolio and numerous properties in support of ministries and foreign missions, Luis had a busy CEO schedule. Always fastidious about his appearance, he looked the part with silk suits and Gucci shoes. Corporations, seeking Claretian investment money, would fly him to major cities in the U.S. and abroad and wine-and-dine him. When at home in Calabasas, he resided alone in a mansion next to the house of studies, where the Gillette’s of the razor fortune once lived. Despite all this, he often chose to dine with the seminarians rather than with the priests. On occasion, the

seminarians began to criticize his lifestyle, as did some of the younger priests, and they also criticized the ethics in terms of social justice of some of the companies in which Olivares invested Claretian money.

In 1975 Olivares requested a change in residence from the formation program and Gillette mansion residence to Our Lady of Solitude Church (Soledad Church) in East Los Angeles, though he remained provincial treasurer. A seminarian asked for a summer assignment working with the table grape and lettuce boycott in support of César Chávez' United Farm Workers; the organizing would be centered in East Los Angeles. Olivares, who was never involved in anything like that but was supportive in theory, agreed to supervise the seminarian. The latter asked to use the Soledad church basement for meetings, and Olivares agreed. Olivares attended the meetings to show support, and that experience led to a conversion. Fr. Luis became an engaged activist. He first met César Chávez when Chávez sked the Claretians for some financial support. Though quite different people, the two hit it off well. Olivarez became completely transformed, leaving the treasurer's post in 1977.

Olivares became something of a personal chaplain to Chávez and the Chávez family. The two spent much time together in conversations about the farm workers' movement. The change in Olivares went beyond this friendship, however; he found the picketing farm workers inspiring. He became something of a chaplain to them too. His Mexican ethnic identity reasserted itself as he became, emphatically, "Father Luis." Fr. Luis and other clergy became familiar figures on the grape, lettuce, and Gallo wine picket lines outside Los Angeles area supermarkets.

--To be continued.

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.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/