

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating September 8, 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 Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *When We Sit Down to Eat*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is an essay by Robert Montgomery of Ashville, North Carolina, *A Fatal Attraction*, first published last August 8 in the Ashville *Citizen-Times*. Bob had been a Presbyterian missionary to Taiwan, where he observed that a large part of the small aboriginal population embraced Christianity. Intrigued by that, he studied sociology at Emory University late in life, earning the Ph.D. He has since written several books on the spread of world religions.

Calendar

In Austin

Wednesday September 4, 6:00pm, Listening Session on Racism. Bishop Shelton J. Fabre (Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana), and Bishop Joe S. Vasquez, Rev. James A. Misko, Deacon Ron Walter, DeKarlo Blackmon, all f Austin, and others. Mabee Ballroom, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. Register at <https://tinyurl.com/yys502vu>.

Sunday September 15 (3rd Sunday of the month), 7:00pm, Pax Christi Austin meeting. Fr. Payne House, St. Ignatius Church, 126 Oltorf St.

Tuesday September 24, 6:00pm, screening of *Documented*: journalist Jose Antonio Vargas's development as an activist for immigrant rights. Carter Auditorium, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. Contact: Jennifer Ansier, jennj@stedwards.edu.

Thursday October 10, 7:00pm-8:30pm, author Jose Antonio Vargas on human rights of immigrants. Recreation and Convocation Center, St. Edward's University, 3001 S.

Congress. Free; register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/jose-antonio-vargas-freshman-seminar-speaker-tickets-65683054785#tickets>.

In Dallas

Monday September 9, Reception 6:30pm, program 7:00pm-8:30pm, Faiths in Conversation: What Is Religion. This is the first of a series. The Dallas Institute, 2719 South St. Students free; price varies for others \$10-20 per session, \$40-80 per semester. Information and tickets: dallasinstitute.org/faith-in-conversation/

Tuesday September 10, 6:00pm-8:00pm, Language, Violence, and Activism: A conversation about Mexico Today. Yasnaya Elena Aguilar and John Gibler. On indigenous population rights and activists' efforts. McCord Auditorium (Dallas Hall) Southern Methodist University.

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&EventTimeld=10124#ShowDetails>. First United Methodist Church, 503 N. Central Expressway, Richardson, TX 75180. \$55.00 to \$65.00.

Sunday September 15, anti-Defamation League Walk Against Hate at Victory Plaza In Dallas. See <https://support.adl.org/team/246032>.

Saturday September 14, 8:30am-after 3:00pm, The Open Window, a conference on priestly ordination of women in the Catholic Church. Featured speakers: Gretchen Klotten Minney, author of *Called—Women Hear the Voice of the Divine*, and Rev. Patricia Sandall. White Rock United Methodist Church, 1450 Old Gate Lane. Pre-registration \$35.00; check made out to The Open Window should be mailed to Joan Dolan, 3732 Townsend, Dallas, TX 75229-3722, along with name and contact information. Walk-ins \$40.00. Lunch included in the conference fee.

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

Texas execution dates: September 4, 10, and 25, unless stays are granted. 12:00pm-1:00pm, in front of the El Paso County Courthouse.

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).

Tuesday September 3, 6:45pm, Pax Christi El Paso meeting. Centro Mujeres de la Esperanza, 1101 Birch St. Visitors welcome.

Sunday September 8, 3:00pm, film *Dolores*, about Dolores Huerta. St. Joseph School Auditorium. Enter through school parking lot across the street from the rectory, 1315 Travis St.

Sunday September 15, 2:30-4:00pm, Follow the Money: Campaign Finance in El Paso, Kathleen Staudt (University of Texas El Paso) and Rosemary Neil (retired from El Paso County). Maud Sullivan Gallery, El Paso Public Library Downtown, 501 N. Oregon

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

Tuesday September 3, 12:15pm-1:30pm, Simranjit Khalsa, "Experiencing Othering: The Intersection of Religion and Race among Sikhs in England and the US." Kyle Morrow Room, Fondren Library, Rice University. Information: Shirley Tapsatt, sht1@rice.edu.

Tuesday September 3, 7:30pm, Reflection on El Paso: A Time for Unity. Panel discussion and vigil, led by Rice University President David Leebron. RMC/Ley Student Center. Information: tolerance@rice.edu.

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.

Tuesday September 24, 6:30pm-8:00pm, Secularity and Science: What Scientists Around the World Really Think About Religion. Elaine Howard Ecklund (Rice University) and John H. Evans (University of California, San Diego). Info: Hayley Hemstreet hjh2@rice.edu, 713-348-3974.

Saturday September 28, 3:00pm, and **Sunday September 29**, 9:30am, film: "Out of Order," documentary on struggles of LGBTQ clergy. St. Philip Presbyterian Church, 4807 San Felipe. Information: tolerance@rice.edu.

In San Antonio

Wednesday September 4, 7:00pm-10:00pm, Fundraiser: Writers for Migrant Justice at Barrio Barrista. Closed list of readers, followed by open mike. Donations accepted for Immigrant Families Together—rapid response to needs of family reunification and assistance in navigating the legal system. Barrio Barrista, 3735 Culebra Rd.

Thursday September 5, 7:00pm-9:00pm, A Community Conversation: Climate Emergency Panel. Chapman Center Auditorium, Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Park at Alamo Stadium.

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.

Saturday September 14, 9:00am-3:00pm, Spirituality and Social Justice Institute, *Restoring Justice: Breaking the Cycle of Violence, Crime, and Incarceration.* Featured speaker: Fr. Greg Boyle, S.J. Whitley Theological Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Dr., Suggested payment \$50.00. Meal included. Information and payment: <https://ost.edu/event/ssji2019/>

Tuesday September 17, 6:30pm, Deborah Reid (Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance), “Enhancing Our Parks and Green Spaces to Assist in Meeting San Antonio’s Air and Water Quality Goals.” Sierra Club meeting, Eco Centro, 1802 N. Main.

Wednesday September 18, 7:00pm-9:30pm, Peter Steinfelds, “Sex Abuse and the Future Church.” University Center, Conference Room A, St. Mary’s University. Parking in Lots D and H. Information: Cynthia Stookesberry, cstooksberry@stmarytx.edu, 210-436-8054.

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

Thursday September 19, 7:00pm, “Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Path to Nonviolence,” Roger Barnes. Mabee Library Auditorium, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

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

Thursday September 24, 6:30pm-7:30pm, William H. Willimon (Duke Divinity School), “Racism as Sin: Confessions of a southern Church Leader.” Parker Chapel, Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Park at Alamo Stadium.

Saturday September 28, 7:00pm, “‘Project Life-Line,’ Children in Crisis-Dehumanization and Immigration detention, A conversation between Doctors and Faith Leaders.” Student Engagement Ballroom, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway. Information: <https://www.facebook.com/events/274017726659120/>

Sunday September 29, 8:00am, one day caravan to the McAllen Detention Center. Leave from the Convocation Center, University of the Incarnate Word. Join by sending message to projectlifeline2018@gmail.com. Information: <https://www.uiw.edu/eccl/Special-Events/index.html>

Thursday October 24, 6:00pm, film, *The Sultan and the Saint*, and interfaith gathering to share the *Document of Fraternity for Humanity for world Peace and Living Together* of Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Al-Tayyeb (Abu Dhabi, February 4, 2019). St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, 4201 De Zavala Rd. Free, but tickets required: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-sultan-and-the-saint-an-interfaith-gathering-tickets-66686409847>.

Second Reading (Philemon 9-10, 12-17)

The letter of Paul to Philemon is a fascinating snippet of everyday life in antiquity. Slavery was a fact of life, and Philemon's slave Onesimus was in Ephesus during an imprisonment of Paul there. Was Onesimus thrown out of Philemon's household, probably some ninety miles away? Or did he run away to Paul for safety? It was not unusual for a slave to flee to a notable for refuge, in the expectation that the notable would set matters right with the owner. Either way, Paul writes to Philemon, "If, then, you have a partnership with me, welcome him as you would me. And if he has somehow wronged you or owes you something, charge it to me."

How did the institution of slavery fit in with the early Christian movement? Paul appears to suggest going on to something better: "For perhaps he was separated for a time for this: so that you may have him fully in eternity, no more as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother...."

Third Reading (Luke 14.25-33)

"And many crowds congregated around him, and turning he said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate one's own father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, and friends, and even one's own life, one cannot be my disciple.'" Then Jesus went on to speak of the cross. Most do not read this saying, which is Luke's elaboration of one found in the *Gospel of Matthew* as well as in the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*, as encouraging familial hate for its own sake, but a willingness to follow the way of Jesus even if family and friends object. Jesus does not endorse familism, a willingness to shortchange strangers in order to further one's own family. Neither does he endorse favoring one's own inner circle, favoritism, at the expense of others.

The phrase "cost of discipleship" is often associated with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the theologian who went against the times and whom the Nazi government executed. Jesus connects such costs of discipleship, as criticism or even estrangement from family and friends, to preparation: "For who of you, wanting to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the expense...?" Thus the focus is not on alienation from family or leaving

an inner circle, but on being *ready* if such are necessary. So "...each of you who does not renounce everything at one's disposal cannot be my disciple."

So anyone who would be a Christian faces the question: What will I be unwilling to do—what lines of work or kinds of employment practices? What am I unwilling to do for followers, friends, family favor, fame? What costs might come on account of the Christian cross?

Poem

When we sit down to eat

Is this happy happening an occasion
to savor, relish, maybe even pray,
and wonder how life is dying to feed us?

And is this dying life's way
to birth itself anew in us?

Are these plants and animals,
in their brief being and going,
episodes, stunned and stunning,
in the Story of All,
teller to teller, listener to listener,
bidding us to get it, make it make sense?

Tom Keene and Muse
October 26, 2013

A Fatal Attraction

Rev. Robert L. Montgomery, PhD

Religion and power are attracted to each other. Looking back, kings and emperors found religion very useful for showing they had divine approval (legitimation) and as a means for controlling many people. At the same time, religious leaders wanted official protection and promotion over rivals. These dual desires still make for a powerful mutual attraction between governments and religions that is corrupting to both, thus a "fatal attraction" or "a marriage made in hell." Political power distorts religion by giving a false picture of God as judging dictator and religion distorts political power by claiming Divine justification for bad political actions. America broke with history by dismantling the state church system, but the fatal attraction continues everywhere.

Complicating the fatal attraction is that nations need agreement on certain values to legitimate the government and keep people united. If a religion is not used, what

then? Some choose a secular ideology. Enter secular democracy that recognizes the importance of religion, but legitimates power in the consent of the people instead of by a religion. How did that happen? I believe the foundation of secular democracy is the recognition of human sin that infects both religious and political power. Many centuries after the Constantine alliance of the church with government, people recognized no single human or human group could interpret the Bible perfectly. Instead, Christians saw that this interpretation is done by the Holy Spirit through groups of believers over time, making errors along the way. Some say the Kingdom of God is not a democracy, seeking to justify the church not being a democracy. They forget the church is not the Kingdom of God. In fact, the church and Christians need continual reformation and improvement. And so do governments and societies. The next step after the democratization of the churches was to carry democracy over to the government. The founders of this nation got the message.

The founders recognized the imperfections of churches and religious people, but they also recognized that political leaders were just as much or more imperfect. People saw that the claim of “the divine right of kings” by the Tudors and Stuarts or any other kings was very dangerous because rulers were just as much sinners as their subjects. Because of this, political power needed to be checked to preserve God-given rights by dividing governmental powers. This plus bad experiences with both churches and states led to the formation of representative assemblies in both religion and government. The term for this was “democracy” or rule by the people (demos) or God through the people. Churches decided to practice democracy (though imperfect) in assemblies seeking guidance from God’s Word and the Holy Spirit. Governments also decided, formally in the case of the United States, that they could not make decisions directed by the church or any religion because appealing to Divine will had been mistaken too many times. Even though the government was founded on the religious principle of God creating all people as equal, the operation of the state would be secular, namely would not make reference to God or religion in governmental actions or favor any one religion. This is not anti-religion, but anti-religious control – religious influence is all right, but not control.

The fatal attraction still exists, but has become more complicated where there are many religions plus a variety of ideological views of government, as in America. Still some religious people hanker after governmental power, as throughout history, to advance their views by coercion. The government, for its part, always wants legitimation, the more the better, and therefore appeals to some religious groups and any other groups for support to gain legitimation. The basic fact that is that basic in American political thinking, and is slowly gaining in the world we hope, is that governments and religions both need continual reformation that has to arise from the people.

In the end, the fatal attraction that is still alive in the world is based in religions wanting the coercive power of government to establish them and their views. Also, they lack faith in God’s work in history through free speech and freedom of religion, particularly the free proclamation of the truth. At the same time, governments fear they do not have the consent of the people and want “God’s approval” plus any other approval they can get. If religion can help, they want it. Let religious freedom continue and governments not coerce in the name of religion!

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/