


Testimony
A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating October 6, 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-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Beliefs and Faith*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is a reflection on refugee life by columnist Bret Stephens, first published in the *New York Times* a few weeks ago.

Calendar

All locations

Tuesday October 15, 2:15pm-3:45pm (1:15pm-2:45pm EDT), webinar, "Tools to Guide Congregations and Communities through the Energy Transition." Register at <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/2923556738704287489>

In Austin

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>.

Monday October 14, 5:15pm, "Doubt as an Integral Part of Calling: The Qur'anic Story of Joseph" Yunus Mirza (Georgetown University). Carter Auditorium, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

Sunday October 20 (3rd Sunday of the month), 7:00pm, Pax Christi Austin meeting. Fr. Payne House, St. Ignatius Church, 126 Oltorf St.

Wednesday October 30, film *The Penalty*, on the death penalty, followed by a panel discussion. Carter Auditorium, St. Edward's University 3001 S. Congress.

In Dallas

Wednesday October 2, 6:00pm-7:00pm, "Love your Enemies" Arthur Brooks (Harvard Kennedy School) on contemporary political climate in the U.S. Crum Auditorium, Southern Methodist University. Information: Candy Crespo, 2147683436, ccrespo@smu.edu.

Monday October 14, Reception 6:30pm, program 7:00pm-8:30pm, Faiths in Conversation: The Role of Intellect from the Major Faith Perspectives. This is the second of a series. Students free; price varies for others \$10-20 per session. Information, location, and tickets: dallasinstitute.org/faith-in-conversation/

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).

In Houston

Sunday October 6, 9:45am, "Calvin, the Valois Dynasty, and the French wars of Religion," John H. Zammito (Rice University). St. Philip Presbyterian Church 201, 4807 San Felipe.

Sunday October 13, 9:45am, "The Second Vatican Council and Ecumenical Efforts Towards Dialogue" Garland Pohl. St. Philip Presbyterian Church 201, 4807 San Felipe.

In San Antonio

Wednesday October 2, 6:00pm, Blessing of the Animals, in memory of St. Francis of Assisi. Entrance to the Headwaters, University of the Incarnate Word campus.

Thursday October 3, 5:45pm, Women's Global Connection Gala. McCombs Centre Rosenberg Sky Room, 847 E. Hildebrand. See <https://www.sanantonio.gov/Portals/0/Files/health/News/Reports/StatusOfWomen/StatusOfWomen-Full.pdf>. \$80; tickets at <https://secure.givelively.org/event/womens-global-connection-of-san-antonio/2019-women-of-the-world-wow-gala>.

Saturday October 5, 9:30am-11:30am, Proposed Texas Constitutional Amendments, Justice Rebecca Martinez, State Senator Jose Menendez, others. International Conference Center Auditorium, University of the Incarnate Word, 847 E. Hildebrand.

Saturday October 5, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting, residence of Tom Wakely, 16406 Ledge Point St.

Mondays October 7, 14, 21, & 28, 7:00pm-9:00pm, "Stewardship of Planet Earth," David Young, Ph.D.. \$40, register by September 30 at <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration/>, \$40. University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell; park off Shook.

Saturday October 12, 9:00am-12:00pm, Sustainability Tour, includes meal. Pick up/Drop off Eco Centro, 1802 N. Main. \$35; register by September 30 at <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration/>

Tuesday October 15, 6:00pm, program begins 6:30, Sierra Club, "Inequality and Climate Change," Michael McGuire, Ph.D. (Incarnate Word). Eco Centro, 1802 N. Main.

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 (2 Timothy 1:6-7, 13-14)

The Christian epistle, usually modeled after the authentic letters of Paul, began with a greeting followed by a thanksgiving for the fellowship of the addressee. The author of the Pastorals worded the thanksgiving section of *Second Timothy* in these terms: "I give thanks to God, Whom I serve, as did the ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I continuously remember you night and day in my prayers, longing to see you, having called to mind your tears so that I may be filled with joy, seizing the memory of the genuine faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I have been convinced that it is in you as well." The style of the time, with a series of relative clauses and participial phrases following a subject, is clearly evident; it makes for rather pesky reading in English.

The excerpt found in the Lectionary for today picks up from the fictive author, Paul, thinking of the faith in the hearts of Timothy and his maternal family: "For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is in you from the laying on of my hands...." Carrying on the legacy had become a burden as persecution developed, and the author brings the readers back to Christian origins so that they could reset themselves.

Third Reading (Luke 17.5-10)

"'Increase our faith.' But the Lord said, 'If you have faith like the mustard seed, if you said to this mulberry tree, Be uprooted and be planted in the sea, it will even obey you.'" This is one of those cases where Jesus' reply does not at first sight appear to answer what was said to him, but upon further consideration turns out to be a thoughtful response. The disciples' request, "Increase our faith," is Luke's narrative. Luke found the Jesus-saying about faith being like a mustard seed in the source that Matthew also used, called "Q" in scholarly tradition. So why does Luke place it at this point in his narrative?

"Increase our faith." Is faith something that comes in quantities? Does it have a metric similar to that of a yardstick? Is "more" of it somehow better than a lesser quantity of it? Evidently the answer is, "No," given the saying about faith being small like

a mustard seed but still powerful enough to yank out and replant in the sea a mulberry tree.

There are occasions in which believing something that is less plausible comes to be credited as reflecting “more” faith. Some would maintain that taking the Genesis creation poem literally reflects “more” faith than regarding it as a poem and accepting the plausible theory of evolution. Some would assert the historicity of the legend of Noah’s ark or maintain, on the basis of the New Testament book of the *Revelation of John*, that only 144,000 people will be saved. And largely on the basis of the difficulty of a moral teaching, some would oppose contraception. Again, largely on the basis of difficulty, some exclude women from ordination.

Is God, and was God’s self-revelation in Jesus, so mean-spirited that humans would be endowed with intelligence only for that intelligence to be a stumbling block? A few verses before the request, ‘Increase our faith,’ Luke has Jesus saying, “That stumbling blocks not come is impossible; rather, woe to the person through whom they come.”

Poem *Beliefs and Faith*

What a difference.
One is about what.
What’s out there?
The other is about who.
Who are we becoming?

One puts its trust in authority.
The other in experience.

We believe in atoms
not because we saw but
that’s what our teachers said.
Like they told us in the army:
*“There are three ways to do things.
The right way, the wrong way, the army way.
Do it the army way.”*

That worked.
Saved us the fuss and bother
of figuring it out for ourselves.
Secure as oysters in their shells.

But faith. That is another matter.
There we undergo happenings
like hope and fear, love and hate,
by living them.

Developments that envelop us,
change us, so we can never go back
to whatever we were before.

Now and then they make us deep.
We feel a freedom to risk.

Even mistakes become
windows to see,
doors for going through
to brave out our becoming.

Tom Keene and Muse
January 17, 2019

Blessed are the Refugees
Under Donald Trump, America is Ceasing to be the Last Best Hope

Bret Stephens
New York *Times*, Sept. 13, 2019

A woman and her young daughter, no older than 6 or 7, are shopping for groceries in a corner store of a bombed-out city. It's sometime around 1947. The war is over, the Germans are gone, the Gestapo is no longer hunting Jews. Some of their local henchmen have been imprisoned or shot. Many just took off their uniforms and returned to their former lives.

The mother speaks with the trace of a foreign accent. As she reaches for her wallet to pay, the grocer says: "Why don't you people go back to where you came from?"

Where, precisely, would that even be? The woman had fled Moscow for Berlin as a girl, after the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917 and arrested her father, who was never to be heard from again. Later, when still in her twenties, she had fled Berlin for Milan, sometime between Hitler's coming to power in 1933 and Mussolini's enactment of the racial laws in 1938.

She and her daughter were citizens of no country, living under a made-up name. They had nowhere to return, no place to go, no way to stay, and nothing they could do about any of it. To go back to the Soviet Union would have been suicidal. Israel did not yet exist. Germany was out of the question. America's doors were mostly shut.

This was the life of a refugee in postwar, pre-reconstructed Europe. It changed dramatically the following year, when Harry Truman signed the Displaced Persons Act, marking the first time that U.S. immigration policy became actively sympathetic to the utterly dispossessed.

Thanks to the law, mother and daughter arrived in New York on Nov. 13, 1950, with only \$7 between them, but without the weight of fear on their backs.

What Truman did became precedent for decisions by subsequent administrations to admit other refugees: Some 40,000 Hungarians fleeing Soviet tanks after 1956 (including a young Andy Grove, later the C.E.O. of Intel); hundreds of thousands of Cubans fleeing Castro's repression after 1959 (including a young Gloria Estefan); as many as 750,000 Soviet Jews fleeing persecution by a succession of Kremlin despots (including a young Sergey Brin).

There were so many others. More than a million Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians after the fall of Saigon. Hundreds of thousands of Iranians after Khomeini's revolution. Over 100,000 Iraqis since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Similar numbers of Burmese. Altogether, some three million refugees have been welcomed by the U.S. since the Refugee Act of 1980, more than by any other country.

By almost any metric, America's refugees tend to succeed, or at least their children do. Whatever they do to enrich themselves, they enrich the country a great deal more. [Empirical data on immigrant success](#) overwhelmingly confirm what common sense makes plain. People who have known tyranny tend to make the most of liberty. People who have experienced desperation usually make the most of opportunity. It's mainly those born to freedom who have the knack for squandering it.

But beyond the material question of enrichment is the spiritual one of ennoblement. Of what can Americans be more proud than that we so often opened our doors to those for whom every other door was shut?

All of which makes this a moment of unique shame for the United States.

The Trump administration has made no secret of its xenophobia from its first days in office. The number of refugees arriving in the country plummeted from around 97,000 in 2016 to 23,000 in 2018. Last week, *The Times* reported that the White House was considering options to cut the numbers again by half, and perhaps even bring it down to zero.

As if to underscore the spirit of cruelty, the administration also declined to grant temporary protected status to Bahamians devastated by Hurricane Dorian. And the Supreme Court issued an order allowing for a new rule that effectively denies asylum protections for refugees arriving through a third country — a victory for executive authority when that authority is in the worst possible hands.

Critics of this column will almost certainly complain that the United States can't possibly take everyone in — a dishonest argument since hardly anyone argues for taking in "everyone," and a foolish argument since America will almost inevitably decline without a healthy intake of immigrants to [make up for a falling birthrate](#).

Critics will also claim that "very bad people," as Donald Trump likes to say, might take advantage of a generous asylum and refugee policy. Here again I'm aware of nobody advocating a "let-the-terrorists-come-too" immigration policy. Only a person incapable of kindness — a person like the president — can think that kindness and vigilance are incompatible, or that generosity is for suckers.

The mother and daughter whose story I told at the beginning of this column are, as you might have guessed, my own grandmother and mother. I thank God it was Harry Truman, not Donald Trump, who led America when they had nowhere else to turn.

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/