

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating October 13, 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-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *We Misfits*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is my essay on just and unjust taxes, prompted by the prospect of voting on a Texas constitutional amendment next month prohibiting personal income taxes.

Calendar

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" Younus 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.

Thursday October 24, 5:00pm-6:30pm, Doug Smith, "Imagining Justice Outside the Prison Cell." Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. Information: Sherri Defesche, sherrid@stedwards.edu.

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 Columbus, Georgia

Saturday November 16, 7:00pm, Pax Christi USA program at the school of the Americas protest, "The Spirituality of Nonviolence Lived Out in the Central American Martyrs and Today." Our Lady of Lourdes Church, 1953 Torch Hill Road.

In Dallas

October 8, 7:00pm, debate: Are Anti-Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) Laws Good Policy?" Umphrey Lee Center 241, Southern Methodist University. Information: 214-768-3028.

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/

Tuesday October 22, 1:00pm-3:30pm, "Restorative Justice and prison Abolition," Vincent Lloyd (Villanova University) and respondents. Prothro hall 106, 5901 Bishop Blvd.

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).

October 16 and 30, 12:00pm-1:00pm, execution vigils in front of the El Paso County Courthouse. Information: 740-3962. (Check whether executions have been cancelled.)

Friday October 11 to Sunday October 13, Latinx Catholic Leadership Coalition meeting. Early Childhood Head Start Center, 11670 Chito Samaniego. Information and registration at <https://www.hopeborder.org/jornadaporlajusticia>.

Saturday October 12, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Charlie King Concert for Immigrant Justice. Columban Mission center, 816 Magoffin Ave.

Sunday October 13, 3:00pm, film "91%: A Film About guns in America." St. Joseph School Auditorium, across from the church rectory at 1315 Travis St.

In Houston

Tuesday October 8, 4:00pm, "Panoply: The Apocalypse" (Matthias Hinze on apocalyptic beliefs and their politicization, Scott Solomon on ecological demise, Moshe Vardi on artificial intelligence diminishing humans.) McMurtry Auditorium, Duncan Hall, Rice University.

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

Wednesday October 23, 7:00pm-8:30pm, Henry Cisneros, "Building Equitable Cities." Museum of Fine Arts, 1001 Bissonnet St.

In San Antonio

Monday October 7, 3:30pm, film, *Return of the River—Changing Course Is Possible*. Christus Heritage Hall, The Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

Tuesday October 8, 6:30pm-9:00pm, “Tallying Texans: The 2020 Census, Representation, and Voting Rights,” Charles Cotrell, Patricia Mejia, Andy Kennedy, Nina Perales, George Korbel. Alumni Room, Sarita East Kenedy Law Library, St. Mary’s University, One Camino Santa Maria.

Wednesday October 9, 12:00pm-2:00pm, Jeremy K. Everett, “Who Is My neighbor?” on inequality in San Antonio. Tri Point, 3233 N. St. Mary’s.

Wednesday October 9, 6:30, Texas Coalition Against the Death Penalty meeting. Oblate Renewal Center, 5700 Blanco Road, building #4.

Friday October 18, 6:00pm-8:00pm, “Butterflies without Borders: Migration, Immigration, Climate change,” John Burnett and Rodrigo Medellin. Pearl Stable at the Historic Pearl Brewery, 302 Pearl Parkway #300.

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>.

Thursday November 14, 6:00pm doors open, 6:30pm-8:00pm program. “Island Energy—From Hawaii to the Texas Grid,” Jim Ajello (Hawaiian Electric Industries) and Cris Eugster (CPS Energy). Chapman Great Hall, Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Register at <https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/EnergyInnovationCenter/t4p-1.html>.

Second Reading (2 Timothy 2: 8-13)

The lexicon and most published bibles paragraph this reading apart from what precedes it. I see it as a continuation of an encouragement that appears at the beginning of chapter 2: “You, then, my child, be strong with the grace that is in Messiah Jesus, and the things you heard from me through many testimonies. Entrust these things to faithful people who are competent for teaching others as well.” The author would have us imagining Paul writing to Timothy, encouraging him to encourage others after him. After drawing comparisons with soldiers and athletes, the passage continues where the lexicon picks it up: “Remember Jesus, Messiah, raised from the dead, from the lineage of David, according to my good news; for it I am suffering to the point of imprisonment as a criminal, but the word of God has not been fettered.” This encouragement to keep up the good fight leads to a saying that the author cites: “For if we die with him, we will also live with him....”

Third Reading (Luke 17.11-19)

According to chapters thirteen and fourteen of *Leviticus*, a person afflicted with skin spots or sores was supposed to show them to a priest. In this respect, the Israelite priests served a medical function in antiquity, and they had people with such skin disorders seclude themselves for a time; if the condition cleared the person would be readmitted to society after arranging for a purification ritual. In the gospel reading, ten people with skin disorders ask Jesus for mercy. Evidently, Luke understood the request to be for a cure. Jesus, since he was not a priest, advised them to show themselves to one of the clergy. In so doing, he was acting as a teacher of the law, not as a worker of miracles.

The legend came to Luke without much detail. The narrative vaguely places the events on a journey "through the middle of Samaria and Galilee." The journey would have begun in Galilee in the north and then cross southward through Samaria, heading toward Judea and Jerusalem. Travelling through Samaria was theologically fraught since Samaritans were rivals to the Judean population; Galileans were descendants of migrants from Judea and generally keen on maintaining their Judean identity.

The ten with skin disorders found themselves cured before they could show themselves to a priest. The clear implication is that Jesus had something to do with their healing. We do not know whether the ten were going to a Samaritan priest or a Judean one. Perhaps nine of those cured went to a Judean priest, and the one Samaritan could not accompany them safely. To Luke, that was not important. Rather, he focuses on the one from the ten who returned to Jesus rather than arranging for a ritual in a temple.

For nine, participating in their religion was a distraction from following the messiah, and for one not participating in religion became the occasion for turning to the messiah.

Poem

We Misfits

"What we would like to do is change the world...by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, of the poor, of the destitute. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever widening circle will reach around the world." Dorothy Day

After all these years speaking out for justice,
working for peace, our friends tell us,
 Well, from the looks of things
 you're not doing so good.
And we laugh.

Then we gather our odd-ball selves

to talk, make music, sing,
let our levity lift us
from our immersions in absurdity,

then back to our reality,
to being ripples that matter
in our system's tsunamis.

Tom Keene
June 17, 2016

Just and Unjust Taxation: An Ethical Examination

Anthony J. Blasi

Along with death, taxes are said to be a sure thing. The adage about both, however, is a simplification with respect to taxes; people may be required to pay more or less of them. Some taxes are visible when we pay them. We may see a sales tax charge on a cash register receipt or notice on a gasoline pump indicating a federal excise tax. We know about our income taxes when we file our returns, and our property taxes when we send our payments to the county tax assessor. However, when a property tax is passed through to renters by landlords, they are not visible but simply become part of the rental price. The value added tax (VAT), which we do not have in the United States, imposes a charge at every step between raw material and final product sale, with only the last imposition made visible in a manner similar to a sales tax. Tariffs, which are in effect sales taxes on imported goods paid by wholesalers, are passed on to customers at the retail stage as part of the purchase price; they are invisible to the public. There seems to be something inherently dishonest about taxes that are not readily visible.

Who should pay how much tax is an ethical question of great importance. The issue usually arises in discussions of income taxes, which can be more "graduated" or less "graduated," and often have an income level below which an individual pays no income tax at all. As the usual discussion has it, fortunate people in higher income brackets should pay higher percentages of their incomes because they can afford it. Then the issue becomes how much more should the wealthy pay, compared to what the "middle class" and "working class" pay. The discussion often becomes vague when it comes to defining such categories in terms of dollars or some other currency. Nevertheless, because of the graduated rates, income taxes are said to be "progressive" or more just while sales taxes are said to be "regressive" and relatively unjust. This coming November the citizens of Texas will be asked to vote on an amendment to the state constitution that would prohibit the legislature from imposing a personal income tax. Since no major offices will have candidates on the ballot in an odd numbered year, the turnout will be light. People with a sense of justice should turn out anyway and vote against that amendment, and they should do so at least in part out of disgust for the sneaky way of guaranteeing that the tax regime will remain unjust, since

the amendment process in Texas is usually used for minor uncontroversial details of governance.

I do not part ways with those who would favor the income tax over sales taxes on ethical grounds because the former are progressive and the latter regressive, but there is much more to take into consideration.

1. If it is just to have income taxes graduated, property taxes should be similarly graduated. The graduating could not only be based on the market values of properties, but also their sizes within such categories as residential, commercial, manufacturing, and agricultural. In fact, acre sizes within categories is probably a better basis for graduating tax rates than market values because the latter involves an appraisal step that wealthy corporations and individuals can manipulate simply because they have “deep pockets” for law firms that contest appraisals until the local appraisal boards exhaust their litigation accounts. It is well known that big box stores and multi-million residential estates are taxed at fractions of their market values. It is also the case that there is social value in encouraging small farms over large farms in the agricultural value and encouraging small residential plots over large ones—the former for encouraging family farms and the latter for encouraging shorter commuter distances.
2. It is not the case that a high income is taxed entirely at a given income tax rate. Rather, the first bracket is taxed at the same percentage as someone’s whose whole income falls within that bracket, the second bracket at the same percentage as someone’s whose income is distributed between the lowest two brackets, etc. If the rationale for the graduated tax is that wealthier people are better able to pay a higher rate, their ability is not lower for the lowest part of their income than it is for the highest part. The way the graduating is carried out does not appear to be reasonable.
3. The ethical relevance of graduating an income tax does not come only from the ability to pay but also from the fact that government does more for the wealthy than for the non-wealthy. For example, some years ago a gentleman running for the United States Presidency was asked how many homes he owned; there were enough of them that he was not sure! If he owned ten homes, and if each home is worth five times as much as an average home price, the police are protecting fifty times more property for him than they are for most citizens. The same goes for loss to invading armies and terrorists, governmental efforts to maintain a stable economy, and indirect benefits from governmentally provided infrastructure. Public outlays to the poor serve to prevent riots and insurrections that would cost the wealthy dearly. The wealthy simply benefit much more from government than do the non-poor who are not wealthy. I see the recognition of this fact as a more compelling argument for graduated taxes, based on justice, than simply citing the ability to pay.
4. The free enterprise system is supposed to encourage entrepreneurship and productive work by rewarding it. To the extent that it actually does so, I do not see a degree of economic inequality inherently unjust. However, our inheritance system allows generations of descendants of successful business people to receive unearned income. There is no justification for such a large percentage of a society’s wealth to be placed into the hands of people who did not earn it, did

not contribute substantially to the larger economy. Rationally, there should be limits on what can be transferred across generations either in the form of gifts or of inherited estates.

5. As far as income taxes are concerned, the same rates within the system of graduated levels should apply to all income. There is no good reason to have a lower rate of taxation applied to dividend income and capital gains income, which people do not work for, than that applied to wages, salaries, and tips, which people do work for. Let all income be treated in the same way.
6. Lest this all seem to be a criticism, I want to praise one current provision—the earned income credit available to the working poor. This is, in effect, what used to be called a negative income tax. Someone whose income falls below a certain level receives money from the federal government, just as people direct money to the federal government when their income rises above a certain level. The design is for people to be better off working when poor and earning what they do have, compared to when they are not working. Where it has been tried, it has been shown to have salutary effects.
7. Generally, regressive taxes should be phased out and replaced with progressive taxes. Our government has been recently perpetrating an outrageous policy of cutting the income taxes on the higher income levels while imposing tariffs—a relatively invisible regressive tax—that are passed on to unsuspecting shoppers, most of whom are non-wealthy and some of whom are poor.

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/