

# Testimony

## A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating November 3, 2019

Communications with the editor may be sent to [j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com](mailto:j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com). 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 Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poems are available at <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the commentaries on the readings is the remarkable *Pastoral Letter to the People of God of El Paso*, by Bishop Mark J. Seitz, on the occasion of the mass shooting of innocents last August 3, published October 13.

I call attention to the San Antonio calendar entry for Monday November 18; Pax Christi San Antonio is sponsoring a showing of the video, *American Prophet*, which features the involvement of Bishop Tom Gumbleton in the racial integration of his parish in Detroit despite massive opposition, and the emergence of his commitment to nonviolence in that setting.

### Calendar

#### In Austin

**Wednesday October 30**, 7:00pm, film, *The Penalty*, on the death penalty, followed by a panel discussion. Carter Auditorium, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. Free, but register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-penalty-cel-film-series-tickets-66336527339>. Information: Sherri Defesche, [sherrid@stedwards.edu](mailto:sherrid@stedwards.edu).

**Wednesday November 6**, 5:00pm-6:30pm, Paul Allen Miller (U. of South Carolina), Internationalizing the University. Prof. Miller discusses the rise of nationalist movements in the U.S. discouraging international students from studying in the U.S. Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. Register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/paul-allen-miller-on->

internationalizing-the-university-cel-speaker-series-tickets-63300782344. Information: Sherri Defesche, sherrid@stedwards.edu.

**Thursday November 14**, 5:00pm-6:30pm, Rita Stephen, "Women in the Muslim World." Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. Information: Sherri Defesche, sherrid@stedwards.edu.

**Sunday November 17 (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month)**, 7:00pm, Pax Christi Austin meeting. Fr. Payne House, St. Ignatius Church, 126 Oltorf St.

### **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**

**Monday November 11**, 7:00pm-8:30pm, continuation of the Faiths in Conversation series. Information, location, and tickets: [dallasinstitute.org/faith-in-conversation/](http://dallasinstitute.org/faith-in-conversation/)

**Thursday November 14**, 5:30pm-7:30pm, film: *The Penalty*, about the death penalty, followed by discussion. Harold Clark Simmons Hall 101A, \$15.00. Tickets at <https://bit.ly/SMUDRpenaltyfilm>.

**Friday November 22**, 12:00pm-1:30pm, Nicholas Bucerda (Linfield College), "The Fire is Upon Us: James Baldwin, William F. Buckley Jr., and the debate over Race in America." Forum (Lower Level), 3140 Dyer St. Free, but reservations required: <https://whozin.com/M79-4CY-9EUM-NMDF>.

### **In El Paso**

**October 30**, 12:00pm-1:00pm, execution vigil in front of the El Paso County Courthouse. Information: 740-3962. (Check whether execution has been cancelled.)

### **In Houston**

**Friday November 1**, 8:00am-9:00am, Brandon Vaidyanathan (Catholic University of America), "Mercenaries and Missionaries: Capitalism and Catholicism in the Global South." Lovett Hall, Suite 402 (accessible via Door C), Rice University. Free; register at [https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20191101/event\\_id/55440](https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20191101/event_id/55440).

**Sunday November 10**, 5:00pm-9:00pm, Houston Peace and Justice Center Peacemaker Awards Dinner & Auction. Crowne Plaza Hotel, 2712 Southwest Freeway, \$80-100. Register: <https://www.hpjc.org/event/2019-hpjc-peacemaker-awards-dinner-auction/>

**Monday November 11**, 7:30pm-9:30pm, Karen Armstrong, "The Lost Art of Scripture: Rescuing the Sacred Texts." Congregation Emanu El, 500 Sunset Blvd. \$45.00-\$150.

**Wednesday November 13**, 6:00pm, Earl Lewis (University of Michigan), "Race: It's Always Personal." RMC/Ley Student Center, Farnsworth Pavilion, Rice University. Info: Campbell@rice.edu.

**Thursday November 14**, 6:00pm, Earl Lewis (University of Michigan), "What Our World Needs Now: Undoing the Third Slavery." RMC/Ley Student Center, Farnsworth Pavilion, Rice University. Info: Campbell@rice.edu.

**Sunday November 17**, 9:45am, Ross Pierkowski (More to Live), "Telling Our Stories," on transgender. St. Philip Presbyterian Church 201, 4807 San Felipe.

**Sunday November 24**, 6:00pm-7:00pm, Lisa Brenskelle, "The Ecological Crisis & the Response of Faith." Live Oak Friends Meeting House, 1320 W. 26<sup>th</sup> St.

### **In San Antonio**

**Tuesday October 29**, 6:30pm-8:30pm, conversation on economic segregation in San Antonio: Christine Drennon (Trinity University), Simon Salas (Good Samaritan Center), Veronica Soto (City of San Antonio), Linda Carmen (Metro Health), and Andrew Hill (St. Philip's College). Little Carver Theater/Civic Center, 226 N. Hackberry. RSVP at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/minding-the-gaps-a-conversation-on-economic-segregation-in-sa-tickets-74705212301?aff=ebdssbeac>

**Wednesday October 30**, Our Lady of the Lake University Peace Day. 9:00am Immigrants and Refugees: Our Brothers and Sisters; 10:30 am Provoking Violence or Bridges to Understanding; 11:15 About Face: Veterans Against the War, etc. Full schedule given after some previous events: <https://www.uiw.edu/PeaceDay/schedule-2019.html>

**Saturday November 2**, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting, 16406 Ledge Point St.

**Monday November 4**, 7:00pm-8:30pm, "Mass Incarceration: A Policy Crisis." University of the Incarnate Word Concert Hall, 4301 Broadway. Information: Lisa Epstein, [epsteinl@fsatx.org](mailto:epsteinl@fsatx.org). Co-sponsored by UIW and the Jewish Federation of San Antonio.

**Monday November 4**, 7:00pm, video *The Death Penalty*, on capital punishment. Lago Vista Room, Cypress Campus Center 121, Northwest Vista College, 3535 N. Ellis Dr.

**Wednesday November 6**, 7:00pm-9:30pm, Bishop Robert McElroy, "Rebuild My Church." Conference Room A, St. Mary's University, One Camino Santa Maria.

**Monday November 11**, 3:30pm, video, *Inhabit—A Permaculture Perspective*. Christus Heritage Hall, The Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

**Thursday November 14**, 6:00pm doors open, 6:30pm-8:00pm program. “Island Energy—From The Penalty 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>.

**Monday November 18, 6:30pm, video, *American Prophet***, followed by a panel; sponsored by Pax Christi San Antonio. The video focuses on the early career of Bishop Gumbleton and his emergence amidst the then-controversial racial integration of Catholic parishes in Detroit. Tom Gumbleton would later become the Bishop President of Pax Christi USA. Christus Heritage Hall, The Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

### **Second Reading (2 Thessalonians 1:11-2:2)**

As is well known, the Sunday lectionary readings toward the end of the liturgical year feature end-time discourse. The passages are often taken, mistakenly, to be foretelling of signs and times of the end. The passage read this Sunday warns against such.

In the authentic Pauline letters, Paul is often seen to think that the end time was imminent. Evidently, he was not infallible! The author of *Second Thessalonians* was familiar with other “letters of Paul” that, like his, were not written by Paul; after all, Christianity was illegal and one would not put one’s own name on a piece of Christian literature. Thinking, mistakenly, that *First Thessalonians* was one such deuterion-Pauline works, the author models his own composition on it, inserting a different theory of the end times, suggesting the end is not imminent: “Now concerning the coming of our Reverend Jesus, Messiah and our assembling with him, brothers and sisters, we request that you not be either quickly disturbed in mind or frightened either on account of a spirit, statement, or letter written as if from us, as though the day of the Lord has come.”

The author would have Christians take a responsible approach to this world, not dismiss it out of a theory that God does not take seriously what God has created.

### **Third Reading (Luke 19.1-10)**

Before Jesus said anything to Zacchaeus about mercy and justice, Zacchaeus was already undergoing a moral conversion. The Lukan account seems to symbolize this with the narrative of him climbing a sycamore tree in order to

see Jesus over a crowd. Zacchaeus was giving half of his wealth to the poor and making restoration to people against whom he had been guilty of extortion. Today we would say that he was engaged in “restorative justice.” All the people in the crowd grumbled about Jesus even having anything to do with Zacchaeus. So we have in Luke’s narrative a contrast between restorative and punitive approaches to wrong-doing.

Restorative justice is usually spoken of with respect to crime, but as a principle it is obviously broader in its relevance. Restorative justice seeks to repair the harm caused by crime and to transform both the perpetrator and the victim by having them meet to decide how the restoration can be brought about. The approach may not succeed in every instance, but it does lead to questions that are germane to every instance. What led to the crime in the first place? What barrier prevented the perpetrator from seeing matters from the standpoint of the victim? What baggage prevents the victim from seeing the perpetrator as a person? If the victim were in a position to be tempted and succeed in victimizing, would the course of action be other than a reciprocal of what the perpetrator had done?

Restorative justice is more than mere restoration; it is justice. Is it not a lack of justice that keeps people apart in the first instance, unable to see the world from one another’s standpoint?

“Today salvation came to be in this house.” “He too is a son of Abraham.”

### **Pastoral Letter to the People of God in El Paso**

*Night will be no more, nor will they need light from lamp or sun, for the Lord God shall give them light, and they shall reign forever and ever.*

(The Revelation to John 22, 5)

In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity. Amen.

#### **Introduction**

August 3rd, 2019: *Matanza en El Paso*

*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?  
Why so far from my call for help,*

*from my cries of anguish?*

Psalm 22, 2

1. On August 3rd, 2019, El Paso was the scene of a massacre or *matanza* that left 22 dead, injured dozens and traumatized a binational community. Hate visited our community and Latino blood was spilled in sacrifice to the false god of white supremacy.

2. The killing became part of a growing litany of deadly shootings in the United States. It is a list so long that each mass murder competes for our attention and memory. What happened was swallowed up in a spectacle of debate on gun control that holds our children and families hostage. It made our community cannon fodder in a political battle rending the soul of our nation. Yet once the country's attention moves on, who will remember the names of the dead?

3. Faith assures us that because of the Resurrection of Jesus, death cannot have the last word, for 'death no longer has power over him' (Romans 6, 9). But to encounter meaning in the *matanza* of August 3rd with integrity, we must brace ourselves for the task of naming truths which are uncomfortable and perhaps buried inside all of us.

4. After prayer and speaking with the People of God in the Church of El Paso, I have decided to write this letter on the theme of racism and white supremacy to reflect together on the evil that robbed us of 22 lives. God can only be calling our community to greater fidelity. Together we are called to discern the new paths of justice and mercy required of us and to rediscover our reasons for hope (cf. 1 Peter 3, 5).

5. This letter comes shortly after the recent pastoral letter against racism by the bishops in the United States, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*, which I recommend to our priests and community. My brothers in the episcopate have also published penetrating reflections on the intersection of race and violence, especially Bishop Edward Braxton.<sup>1</sup> This letter is an attempt to complement those efforts and to reflect on these issues from the perspective of the border.

6. In the first part of this letter, I hope to bear some of the weight of the reality of racism that has been part of the experience of many here on our border. In the second part, we will shoulder this reality in the light of the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus. Finally, we will ask how grace can heal the shared wounds

of our borderland community and transform the awful events of this summer into something meaningful.

7. This may be hard. I know it will be difficult at times for me. Words like *racism* and *white supremacy* make us uncomfortable and anxious and I don't use these labels lightly. We live in a brutally unforgiving culture where these words are tossed about like weapons. But perhaps we are also aware that these conversations may require changes to the way we think and live. Challenging racism and white supremacy, whether in our hearts or in society, is a Christian imperative and the cost of not facing these issues head on, weighs much more heavily on those who live the reality of discrimination.

8. Perhaps we thought that prejudice and intolerance were a cancer of years past. Maybe we felt that El Paso was immune from the xenophobia ravaging the United States. On August 3rd, we were robbed of that innocence. But do not be afraid. The Lord Jesus can lead us through this dark moment into something bright and unexpected. For even if a whole army of hate should threaten us, if we are faithful to Jesus and hold on to love, in the words of the poet Julia Esquivel, what can they do but *threaten us with Resurrection?*

## **Part I: This is Racism**

*Do not stay far from me,  
for trouble is near,  
and there is no one to help.*

Psalm 22, 12

9. How do we begin to understand the El Paso matanza? How should we think about racism and white supremacy?

10. The never-ending mass shootings leave us feeling dazed, wounded, fearful and helpless. Causes and solutions seem evasive and our nation's political life is broken. The Catholic Church in the United States supports the ban on assault weapons that lawmakers senselessly let expire in 2004 and our Church continues to advocate for reasonable regulations on firearms that Congress still won't pass.<sup>2</sup> The constant pressures on families and the embarrassing lack of access to mental healthcare in this country surely also play a role.

11. But the mystery of evil motivating attacks like the El Paso matanza goes deeper than these. It is something more complex than laws and policies alone can fix. What else explains the perversity of attacks on African Americans, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and other communities?

12. This mystery of evil also includes the base belief that some of us are more important, deserving and worthy than others. It includes the ugly conviction that this country and its history and opportunities and resources as well as our economic and political life belong more properly to 'white' people than to people of color. This is a perverse way of thinking that divides people based on heritage and tone of skin into 'us' and 'them', 'worthy' and 'unworthy', paving the way to dehumanization.

In other words, racism.

13. Racism can make a home in our hearts, distort our imagination and will, and express itself in individual actions of hatred and discrimination. Racism is one's failure to give others the respect they are due on account of being created in the image and likeness of God. And it is more than that.

14. If we are honest, racism is really about advancing, shoring up, and failing to oppose a system of white privilege and advantage based on skin color. When this system begins to shape our public choices, structure our common life together and becomes a tool of class, this is rightly called institutionalized racism. Action to build this system of hate and inaction to oppose its dismantling are what we rightly call white supremacy. This is the evil one and the 'father of lies' (John 8, 44) incarnate in our everyday choices and lifestyles, and our laws and institutions.

15. The theologian Father Bryan Massingale has aptly named all of this *soul sickness*. Truly we suffer from a life-threatening case of hardening of the heart. In a day when we prefer to think that prejudice and intolerance are problems of the past, we still find acceptable groups to treat as less than human, to look down upon and to fear.

16. A series of shootings -- Roseburg, Charleston, Orlando, Pittsburgh, and Oak Creek, just to name a few -- now undeniably demonstrates that our unwillingness to stamp out racism continues to accrue debts being paid for in blood, the blood of people of color and those we deem different. Abraham Lincoln's anxious premonition about the terrible consequences of slavery seems to ring true -- 'if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said *the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether*'<sup>3</sup>.

17. The matanza in El Paso focused our attention on the grave racism directed at Latinos today, which has reached a dangerous fever pitch. Latinos now

tell me that for the first time in their lives they feel unsafe, even in El Paso. They feel that they have targets on their backs because of their skin color and language. They feel that they are being made to live in their own home as a 'stranger in a foreign land' (Exodus 2, 22).

18. Our highest elected officials have used the word 'invasion' and 'killer' over 500 times to refer to migrants<sup>4</sup>, treated migrant children as pawns on a crass political chessboard, insinuated that judges and legislators of color are un-American, and have made wall-building a core political project. In Pope Francis' words, these 'signs of meanness we see around us heighten our fear of the other'<sup>5</sup>. The same deadly pool of sin that motivates the attack on migrants seeking safety and refuge in our border community motivated the killing of our neighbors on August 3rd. Sin unites people around fear and hate. We must name and oppose the racism that has reared its head at the center of our public life and emboldened forces of darkness.

19. This hatred of Latinos is not new. Ancient demons have been reawakened and old wounds opened. One of my brother bishops has rightly called racism 'the ugly, original sin of our country, an illness never fully healed'<sup>6</sup>. The El Paso matanza is reminiscent of a long history of importation of hate here in this community, killings, matanzas and racism directed at Latinos, Asians, Blacks, Indigenous, mulattoes and mestizos in the southwest that goes back centuries. El Paso historian Dr. Yolanda Leyva has observed that the El Paso matanza 'is the predictable outcome of 200 years of a White supremacist idea's growth.'<sup>7</sup> It is a story often forcibly pushed underground.

20. In the next section I will attempt to summarize some of the history of white supremacy in our borderland community, though it is not exhaustive. A sincere reckoning with our past and lamentation over it are essential for transformation. We need spaces in our churches and community to do that. As Bishop Mario Enrique Ríos noted when publishing the definitive account of the racially motivated massacres of the Guatemalan conflict, 'The recovery of memory is irreplaceable in the work of winning peace'<sup>8</sup>. So the first step for all of us in El Paso is to recover a buried memory that lives in each of us. It is a story of race, deeply embedded in our society, yet deeply counter to Jesus' life and teaching.

## **Part II: 'Heart-Sick': The Legacy of Hate and White Supremacy on the Border**

*They open their mouths against me,*

*lions that rend and roar.*

Psalm 22, 14

*Tú no vales. You don't count.*

21. We in the borderlands understand in our bones the reality of hate directed at Mexicans and how people can be 'othered'. Our faith community was born in the fraught encounter between Indigenous communities and Spanish colonists, a 'choque de culturas'. In that encounter, an insidious message was sent like the report of cannon fire throughout the American continent which reverberates to the present day: *Tú no vales. You don't count.*

22. A sober reading of the history of colonization can discern both the presence of a genuine Christian missionary impulse as well as the deployment of white supremacy and cultural oppression as tools of economic ambition, imperial adventurism and political expansion.

23. The Spanish colonists who brought faith to the Americas also brought with them their own human circumstances intertwined with the 'tricks and powers' of the world. They came from the experience of a nation newly united just as much around Catholicism as a nationalism built on the violent subordination and expulsion of Jews and Muslims. They brought these exclusionary attitudes with them to the New World. It was in the encounter between the Spanish colonists and Indigenous communities that fateful identities were co-produced and sinful notions of *civilized* versus *uncivilized* and the invention of the *savage* were born. Such notions began a new era of a 'heart-sick' world. It was Pope Benedict XVI who told us that 'it is not possible to forget the suffering and injustice inflicted by colonizers on the Indigenous populations, whose fundamental human rights were often trampled upon'<sup>9</sup>.

24. Few things were more important in the story of race and the community in El Paso than Popé's Pueblo Revolt in 1680. The successful revolution resulted in the expulsion of colonists from New Mexico to Paso del Norte where the provisional capital of the royal province was established. At this time, Paso del Norte also became home to the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, who have shaped the history of the borderlands ever since. The suffering, exploitation and divestment of culture, language, religious tradition and memory experienced by the Pueblo peoples at the hands of colonists and, yes, members and leaders of the Church, must be acknowledged. The pain and experience of estrangement is still experienced by some communities today.

25. Rooted in our history, many here can rightly say that we did not cross the border but that the border crossed us. Even the Church in El Paso fell at different times under different national flags and under the jurisdiction of the Mexican dioceses of Guadalajara, Durango and then under Texas dioceses only after the Mexican-American War. 'Manifest Destiny' as well as shifting colonial, nationalistic and expansionist winds led to constantly shifting borders.

26. In Latin America there has been more fluidity between races through inter-marriage and more blending of cultures and religions when compared to the experience of Native Americans and African Americans. Yet the attitudes of the Spanish colonizers included the erroneous notion of racial purity based on light skin, a belief which in some places continues today, even in internalized fashion. This type of racism collided in the borderlands with the more overt racism of the United States. This was the racism of the 'one-drop theory' (whereby one drop of African blood renders all descendants the members of a slave class) used to justify the criminal practice of chattel slavery. Both the racism that privileges lighter skin over Indigenous, Ladinos, Mulattoes and Mestizos as well as the racism based on hypo-descent used to subjugate African Americans linger troublingly on the border today.

27. Prior to 1835, the area known as Texas was part of Mexico. American immigrants settled in the Mexican territory and brought with them Black slaves. By 1825 one out of five American immigrants living in Texas was an enslaved African.<sup>10</sup> Historians acknowledge that the most significant factor in determining the economic development and ideological orientation of Texas at the time was slavery.<sup>11</sup> The 1835 Texas Revolt and the establishment of the Republic of Texas in 1836, were driven, among other factors, by the will to protect the institution of Black slavery after its abolishment by Mexico in 1829.

28. During this time, many Irish, too, arrived to escape the stifling racism they were subject to in the eastern United States. Many Irish felt more solidarity with Mexicans on account of their shared Catholic faith and shared experience of racial discrimination; the famous *San Patricios* battalion fought on the side of Mexico during the Mexican-American War. The coming of the railroad not long after the entrance of Texas into the United States in 1850 brought more Irish as well a large number of Chinese laborers into our region as part of the project to connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. These workers were paid much less than their White counterparts and received the most dangerous and even deadly assignments. After the railroad was completed, the Chinese workers quickly became the target of racist anti-immigrant legislation and policies like the Chinese

Exclusion Act of 1882,<sup>12</sup> one of the first examples of anti-immigrant legislation in US history.

29. After its entry into the United States, Texas saw dramatic mass migration into the state from White settlers from other parts of the country. These settlers brought new industrial farming practices which cleared desert brush and cacti as well as the expansion of the railroad network and impressive economic growth. But they also brought with them harsh, prejudicial attitudes towards Mexicans, Mexican Americans and Indigenous in the region as well as legalized discrimination against African Americans. In their wake came 'Juan Crow' laws of segregation, the prohibition of then-common interracial marriage, new racial hierarchies, the dispossession of tribal communities, efforts to disenfranchise Mexican residents and a true campaign of terror. This campaign included the lynching and murder of likely thousands of Latinos, terror undertaken just as much by vigilantes as by official state actors like the Texas Rangers, and often in concert.<sup>13</sup> What was it that they feared?

30. Just one example of this campaign of terror was the Porvenir matanza, which took place only hours from El Paso in Presidio County. 15 men and boys of Mexican descent were murdered, with impunity, by vigilantes, army soldiers and Texas Rangers. In that moment of horror, did not Jesus look through the eyes of those young children at their victimizers and ask, 'What do you fear?' Their families, petrified, took their bodies across the river into Mexico for burial. This experience of persecution at the hands of state authorities was the experience of many families in this region. Their stories were brutally suppressed their pain has been passed down in intergenerational trauma. The ripple effects of this campaign shape perceptions of law enforcement and immigration enforcement to this day in our region.

31. We can see uncomfortable parallels in the treatment of asylum seekers from Mexico during the time of the Mexican Revolution in the early 1900s and in current policies like the deployment of troops to the border, the punitive Remain in Mexico policy and the forced detention of families. Then as now, fears were callously whipped up and there was talk of 'invasion' which led to brutal actions against refugees. In 1913, 'Texas governor Oscar Colquitt dispatched over 1,000 state militiamen and the Texas National Guard to appease residents of Brownsville and El Paso'<sup>14</sup>. These soldiers transformed the border into a militarized zone, replete with 'barbed wire, spotlights, tanks, machine guns and airplanes used to surveil Mexican residents'<sup>15</sup>. A prison camp was constructed for

refugees across 48 acres at Fort Bliss, which included electrically charged barbed wire<sup>16</sup>. Deployments like these would happen again and again.

32. The legacy of hate towards Latinos is not just part of the distant past. Many in our community are the proud children and grandchildren of *braceros*, Mexican workers who supplied agricultural labor needs from 1942 to 1964, including the time of the Second World War. Just as the Chinese were greeted with harsh repressive measures after the completion of the railroad, many *braceros* were forcibly deported back to Mexico after laying down roots here in the United States as part of the infamous Operation Wetback, the largest mass deportation in American history.

33. Older generations of El Pasoans still talk about entrenched attitudes against Latinos and how the system was stacked against them growing up. Latinos were excluded from political life by a closed network dominated by White, wealthy men. Latino children at school didn't see themselves, not in the faces of their teachers or school leadership, but only custodial and cafeteria staff. It was expected that they would be confined to schools and neighborhoods south of the I-10 highway. It was forbidden to speak Spanish outside the home or at least highly discouraged. Names were frequently anglicized and many were denied opportunities for higher education and pigeonholed for low-wage jobs. Many Native Americans felt even more homeless, doubly discriminated against, and sometimes still feel impelled to hide their roots.

34. The wall is a powerful symbol in the story of race. It has helped to merge nationalistic vanities with racial projects. Wall building at the border didn't start in 2016. El Pasoans have watched its growth in fits and starts. We saw steel barriers go up at the time of NAFTA; at the very moment when NAFTA ensured the right of wealth to cross the border freely we limited and criminalized human mobility.

35. Some cannot understand the visceral reaction of many in the borderlands to the wall. It is not just a tool of national security. More than that, the wall is a symbol of exclusion, especially when allied to an overt politics of xenophobia. It is an open wound through the middle of our sister cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. The wall deepens racially charged perceptions of how we understand the border as well as Mexicans and migrants. It extends racist talk of an 'invasion'. It perpetuates the racist myth that the area south of the border is dangerous and foreign and that we are merely passive observers in the growth of narco-violence and the trafficking of human beings and drugs. The wall is a physical reminder of the failure of two friendly nations to resolve their internal

and bi-national issues in just and peaceful way. It validates James Baldwin's fear that Americans are addicted to innocence. It is a destructive force on the environment. The wall kills families and children. There will be a day when after this wall has come crumbling down we will look back and remember the wall as a monument to hate.

36. Everyday in El Paso there are subtle ways that the voice of the poor is removed from them. Our biases prevent us from seeing that the slow erosion through active neglect of our communities south of the I-10 highway, as well as the loss of schools, housing, and culture to gentrification, are really an attack on the right to a good and dignified life. Our bias won't let us feel within our bellies the injustice of the environmental contamination in the Chamizal and its effects on *their children*. Those communities, too, have every right to be, as Pope Saint Paul VI said, 'artisans of their destiny'<sup>17</sup>.

37. The Mexican farmworkers who pick our pecans, pistachios, onions, tomatillos and chiles often sleep on our streets downtown. Invisible to many of us on the street and in the fields, they labor to exhaustion to produce abundance on our tables but are still paid little more than slave wages, without adequate health, disability or retirement benefits. Why don't we reward their efforts and their skills when the work they do is so essential for our life and health?

38. After 9-11, our people felt the interrogating stares of authorities and fellow citizens, questioning whether they belonged. Today, darker skinned residents and citizens are routinely asked to show identity cards by border enforcement agents when crossing in the middle of the international bridge while lighter skinned individuals pass by unimpeded. Recently we saw the frightening presence of armed militia from outside our community herding migrants like cattle. Even some of our seminarians have talked about experiences in seminaries in different parts of the country where it was presumed that their academic preparation was inferior and when they were the butt of jokes suggesting that their families must know something about drug trafficking.

39. This is a history of racism and its deadly effects. Why is there greater poverty, less access to education and health care and lower wages in our border community? Not because anyone is inherently inferior, criminal or lazy. But because on these criminal pretexts people on the border have had less opportunity. This is institutional racism. And yet the people of the borderlands are not victims. Resilience and dignity are the jewels in the crown of this long and ongoing struggle and are the mark of our people. The people of the borderlands have built a real community. Against walls and inequality and fear, we have

maintained our vital connection with Ciudad Juárez. In spite of this story of oppression, railroads and highways are built, food is grown in abundance, our sons and daughters battle and die with valor in the armed services, our people build wind turbines and airplane consoles, we paint murals of beauty, we speak many languages, our young people are passionate about justice and the environment, we thrive in the desert.

40. Great progress has been made in recent years, with the passage of civil rights legislation, victories in the courts, and hard won wins of civically engaged communities, genuine public servants and organizers in the workplace. Latinos have worked hard to build a more just society. Our schools and universities are more reflective of our population and are more bilingual. Our children have graduated from distinguished academic institutions to become fine theologians, teachers, doctors and lawyers. Our community has demonstrated remarkable hospitality to migrants and refugees. Borderland culture is more and more seen as an asset to celebrate rather than a deficit of which to be ashamed. Our Church has also made progress; Patrick Flores was named bishop of El Paso in 1978, the first Mexican American bishop in the United States. Those in leadership in our diocesan church increasingly reflect our population. Our liturgies, with diverse language and song, more fully anticipate the diversity and unity of the Reign of God.

41. The Ysleta del Sur Pueblo talk about how by the 1970s their people had dwindled in number to only around 400 members. Today, the community numbers in the hundreds of families and they have created worthy spaces to develop their economy and promote their cultural heritage. They have invested generously in renewing and restoring their mission church, where they were not even permitted to enter through the front door in the nineteenth century. Now during Mass they can proclaim the Scriptures and pray the Our Father in their native language. They can invoke the intercession of the canonized Kateri Tekakwitha through song and dance.

42. In the aftermath of the matanza, we immediately saw the unique spirit of El Paso in an overwhelming community response, a people united in prayer and service, regardless of race, age, nationality, gender, religion or political belief. Yet August 3rd also reminded us that our achievements are to be defended and deepened, not taken for granted.

*Purification of Memory*

43. Pope Saint John Paul II set an example for us all during the Jubilee Year 2000 when he asked pardon for the violation of 'the rights of ethnic groups and peoples'<sup>18</sup> and 'contempt for their cultures and traditions'<sup>19</sup>. On many occasions leaders in the Church did little to disrupt patterns of sin that demonized those who thought differently<sup>20</sup>, looked different and prayed differently. We often took the European experience of Christianity to be normative and failed to appreciate the ways that God was already at work, and still at work today, in indigenous peoples and cultures. We perpetuated damaging notions of power and the desire to dominate and so contributed to the exploitation of peoples and the environment. There are some who still feel estranged from the Church on account of those actions and omissions which diminished the credibility of the Gospel.

44. I am grieved as I reflect upon this and I realize that and nothing I can say will undo that harm. Nor do I have the answers as to how we can move forward together. But I extend my hand in humility and friendship to those individuals and communities who feel estranged from the Church. I want you to know that the Church is with you and stands beside you in your work to build a more just world. I stand beside you and am ready to learn from you.

45. The example and lives of the martyrs also shows us what genuine Christian witness is. We see this example in the lives of Saint Oscar Romero; Blessed Father Stanley Rother; the four Maryknoll women missionaries killed in El Salvador in 1980; the six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter killed in El Salvador in 1989; our own San Pedro de Jesus Maldonado. In the spirit of these examples which make the Gospel credible I wish to build a bridge. They show us that true evangelization is 'to lay down one's life for one's friends' (John 15, 13). Like them I pray that I may speak without fear when it is called for and help to give voice to those who have not been heard.

### **Part III: He Took the Form of a Slave**

*But you, LORD, do not stay far off;  
my strength, come quickly to help me.*  
Psalm 22, 20

*Tú vales.*

46. Year after year, after fall winds bring cooler weather into our desert valley, the ground beneath us in El Paso literally begins to hum in the evenings.

Throughout the land, danzantes and matachines are rehearsing their ritual dance in preparation for the explosion of rhythm, chant, theatre, light and color that will take place on the 12th of December. It is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The origins of devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe are veiled in mystery. But to generation after generation she reveals the solidarity and closeness of God.

Why do they dance?

47. Perhaps like nowhere else, the people of our border community identify with Our Lady of Guadalupe. She is in shopping malls, restaurants, Ubers, hair salons and family altars. There is a beautiful Virgin in the Chamizal special to the women there who lost their manufacturing jobs, whom they lovingly call *Nuestra Señora de los Desplazados*, Our Lady of the Displaced.

48. Despite everything others tell us, we in the borderlands know that this valley between the Sierra Madre and the Rocky Mountains is home to one binational cultural reality. We live in a state of in-betweenness, neither here nor there, *ni de aquí ni de allá*. The weight of a violent history, gross nationalisms, politics, walls, passports, the global economy and the legacy of race compete to define our people, to define us. To make our people feel like foreigners in a foreign land. Truly we are suffering from a heart sickness 'that says we are able to be only one or the other'<sup>21</sup>.

49. The dehumanization of Indigenous and Blacks, and the displacement of the American Indian meant that these communities were deprived of the narratives, land and religious traditions that gave their life consistency and meaning. New racialized narratives for self-understanding were forced upon them and they were forced to see themselves through the eyes of their masters. In other words, *tú no vales*. But no one has the right to impose that type of identity.

50. Against that dehumanization, as once she said to San Juan Diego, who represented a people dehumanized and disenfranchised, Guadalupe says to our people today, 'you count', *tú vales*.

51. To the refugee turned away at the border, she says 'tú vales'. To the worker displaced by *free trade*, she says 'tú vales'. To the border agent who envisioned giving your life in service to a just cause but now struggle in confusion, and to your family, she says 'tú vales'. To the family with mixed immigration status, she says, 'ustedes valen.' To the millennial who left family and culture and tradition in search of *success* and the *American dream* but now feel empty inside, she says 'tú vales'. To those at home in neither English or Spanish or who feel awkward at not knowing enough of either, she says 'ustedes valen.' To the family

that bears the weight of intergenerational trauma expressed in depression, abuse and divorce, she says 'ustedes valen'.

52. Her simple message persuades us, as it did that day on Tepeyac, that she is the God-bearer, *Theotokos*. Only a woman such as this young, brown, mestiza empress, born on the edges of empire and who revealed herself anew on the edges of empire, could have convinced our people of the nearness and tenderness of God. She who shares in our in-betweenness. She is the Mestiza, who takes what is noble from each culture, elevates it and points out new ways towards reconciliation. She takes on our people's pain and trauma and she transforms it to give birth to hope and redemption.

53. Guadalupe teaches us how we might go about repairing the sin of racism. She shows us that our deepest identity is not given to us by empire, or politics or the economy or the colonist, but is a gift of God. Our identity is formed in the grace-filled relationships we freely pursue with God, others and Creation. In the words of Pope Francis, 'human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself'<sup>22</sup>. On our border we have seen that racism radically undermines those relationships.

54. The story of Guadalupe is the story of Jesus, who divested himself of the privileges of divinity, 'taking the form of a slave', to become flesh like us. His was a Jewish body that embodied Israel's universal vocation to be a blessing for all the nations (cf. Genesis 28, 14). If after the Resurrection, the Church continues Jesus' mission of restoring the 'unity of the whole human race'<sup>23</sup>, then to speak of the Church and the Reign of God is to speak of inclusion and diversity. This is the very opposite of the racist obsession with whiteness and purity and the false promises of resurgent ethno-nationalisms. Understood in this way, racism is a sign of the anti-reign and baptism and the Eucharist are the graced gateway to a fully reconciled humanity.

55. Every race and color and tribe and people and language and culture are threads in the vibrant and diverse tapestry of the Reign of God. Our suffering and pain and dispossession are transfigured in the Jesus who died on the Cross and who invites us to relocate our broken history, our imperfect lives, our desires and aspirations and our work for justice in the drama of His Reign which is unfolding all around us through the power of His Resurrection.

56. That is the drama unfolding in the dance of the matachines each year. That is why they dance.

57. With her knee raised in dance, Guadalupe invites us to leave behind fear and join her in the work of advancing justice in America with joy. We are called to die to an attitude of fear and rise with a will to encounter others in vulnerability, to appreciate the gifts of every culture and people, with a willingness to be changed for the better by right relationships with God, others and the earth. In the Resurrection of Our Lord, now 'there is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear' (1 John 4, 18).

#### **Part IV: They Threatened Us with Resurrection**

*All the ends of the earth  
will remember and turn to the LORD;  
All the families of nations  
will bow low before him.  
Psalm 22, 28*

#### *Our Responsibility to Build the Temple of Justice*

58. The validation that comes from Our Lady of Guadalupe is not static acceptance. Our Lady affirmed Juan Diego against dehumanization. And that affirmation came with a divine charge to make persistent petition before the authorities and build a temple. Guadalupe validates our desire to do good, our longing for transformation and our agency to enact good in the world. And she entrusts us with a mission. To those who know the pain of racism and injustice and live in that place neither here nor there, *ni de aquí ni de allá*, Our Lady of Guadalupe hands on a sacred petition from her Son, to be builders of a new Temple of Justice in the Americas, a Temple of a New Humanity.

59. But as builders of the Temple of Justice here in the Americas, it is not enough to not be racist. Our reaction cannot be non-engagement. We must also make a commitment to be anti-racists in active solidarity with the suffering and excluded. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it well when he said, 'I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be'<sup>24</sup>. The same thing is said in the Mayan tradition, 'In Lak'ech', *tú eres mi otro yo*, or 'you are my other self'. Guadalupe, the Mestiza, teaches us that our destinies are bound up with one another. We must take active steps to defend the human rights of everyone in our border community and their dignity against dehumanization as we work to forge a new humanity. What racism has divided, with the help of God, we can work to restore.

60. The burden of the history of injustice on the border is heavy. We must wrestle deeply with this legacy, lament over it passionately, confront our own biases candidly and repudiate racism completely. God offers us the chance to build a new history where racism does not prevail. The 'manifesto' of hate and exclusion that entered our community can be countered with a manifesto of radical love and inclusion. I want to see an El Paso that addresses both the legacy of racism and one which builds more just structures to eradicate and overcome that history. A new history of respect for human rights, inclusion and bridge building. The Reign of God is reflected in a community that brings together the best of all cultures, where the aspirations of all find a home and where the needs of the poor are put first. If we do this, we can make a vitally needed contribution to the nation from our border, here on the edges of empire, towards turning the page on injustice and hate and white supremacy definitively.

61. 'God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone'<sup>25</sup>. We must work to ensure all our children have access to quality educational opportunities, eliminate inequality in the *colonias*, pass immigration reform, eradicate discrimination, guarantee universal access to health care, ensure the protection of all human life, end the scourge of gun violence, improve wages on both sides of the border, offer just and sustainable development opportunities, defend the environment and honor the dignity of every person. This is how we write a new chapter in our history of solidarity and friendship that future generations can remember with pride. This work of undoing racism and building a just society is holy, for it 'contributes to the building of the universal city of God, which is the goal of the history of the human family'<sup>26</sup>. It anticipates that day when 'night will be no more, nor will they need light from lamp or sun, for the Lord God shall give them light, and they shall reign forever and ever.'

### *The Need for New Leadership*

62. This historical moment also requires a new kind of leadership to which I believe our border community can make a real contribution. In all fields, Latinos have risen to the heights of power. We should not fear power. Power has been given to us as stewards by our God, who asks of us to be co-creators in bringing about His Reign. But we must learn the use of power in new, creative and grace-filled ways, not reproducing the tactics and methods of domination and division that belong to the oppressor. This will require us to stand beside the poor as they find their voice and to take a supportive role in their work for justice. We must

build each other up rather than seeking to outsmart and outflank; that is not the way of true leadership or of love. Love is spontaneous, unselfish, full of surprise, life-giving and forgiving. If we are to move our borderlands towards a reconciled community beyond faction and resentment, we must commit ourselves to a love which is not merely self-directed, a love which we must learn at the feet of Jesus of Nazareth.

63. This new type of leadership must restore agency to those communities and individuals who have been victimized and also center their voices, memories and hopes in discerning the path ahead. In the coming months, I commit to engaging these voices more intentionally in hopes that together we can turn back the tide of racism in our border community.

#### *Our Catholic Community, An Oasis of Justice*

64. The Catholic Church in El Paso must be on permanent mission, an ongoing conversion to the Lord, so that we might be salt and leaven in the work of justice in the borderlands. Charity and justice must be the work of each of our parishes, flowing from the Word of God, our baptismal commitment and our Communion at the Eucharistic table.

65. Our pastors should take care in the celebration of Baptism, especially baptisms during the Eucharist on Sundays, to allow the profound symbols of the sacrament to shine with clarity<sup>27</sup>. In the purifying waters we celebrate the radical transformation and equality that comes from renewal in Christ. In the anointing with holy oils we proclaim a reverence for human life without distinction. The strength of these symbols should flow into our daily parish life and work for justice.

66. Likewise, in our celebration of Mass, pastors can lead our people to a deeper consciousness of the weight of communal and historical sin that we bring to the table of the Lord in the penitential rite. We should ask ourselves carefully who is yet not present, and whose cultures are not yet reflected at the banquet of the Lord that we celebrate at the altar. In our preaching and celebration, we should lead our people to greater awareness of the connection between the love of God celebrated in our temples, and the love of God to practiced outside their doors, including work to end prejudice and discrimination.

#### *Faithfulness to Our Identity*

67. I would like to thank our priests who showed tenderness in ministering to the dead and wounded on August 3rd. Some arrived to the scene before it was

even secure. I thank the courageous first responders. I thank the leaders of the interfaith community who organized prayer and vigils and a space for our people to expose their pain to the healing power of grace. I am grateful to the community organizations that organized financial support and provided legal assistance. I thank our NGOs and public leaders who have deepened their work for justice. I thank the churches and organizations which refused to give into fear and continued to receive migrants. I thank the journalists who continue to work tirelessly to witness to what is occurring at the border with compassion and truthfulness. I thank our teachers and therapists and doctors for accompanying us on the road to healing. I thank our people for their resilient spirit. I thank God for His constant presence and faithfulness to us.

68. I know God will never allow the hate that visited our community on August 3rd to have the last word. We must recommit ourselves to the hospitality and compassion that characterized our community long before we were attacked, with all the risk and vulnerability which that entails. We must continue to show the rest of the country that love is capable of mending every wound. What can they do but *threaten us with Resurrection?*

69. If there is anyone who feels so alone, so isolated and so tortured that you feel your only way out is to succumb to the darkness of racism and violence and pick up a gun, I say to you today: *there is a place for you in our community and our church*. Lay aside your weapons of hate. Put away your fear. Here there is a teacher, a sister, a deacon, a priest, a counselor ... a bishop, waiting to welcome you home and greet you with love. *Tú vales*.

70. I also make a direct appeal to my brothers and sisters in Texas and those in positions of authority to spare Patrick Crusius from execution. Justice is certainly required. But the cycle of hate, blood and vengeance on the border must meet its end. While the scales of justice may seem to tilt in favor of the necessity of lethal retribution, God offers us yet another chance to choose life. Choose in a manner worthy of your humanity.

71. In the absence of immigration reform, I also renew my appeal to the President of the United States, to the Members of Congress and to the jurists of our highest Courts. I beg you to listen to the voice of conscience and halt the deportation of all those who are not a danger to our communities, to stop the separation of families, and to end once and for all the turning back of refugees and death at the border.

*Given this day, the 13th of October, the XXVIII Sunday in Ordinary Time and the vigil of Indigenous People's Day, in the year of our Lord 2019.*

Your servant in Christ,

Mark Joseph Seitz  
Bishop of El Paso

## End Notes

- [1] See Edward K. Braxton, How to come together in response to the gun violence epidemic, America (11 September 2019),
- [2] See United States Conference of Bishops, Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice (2000).
- [3] Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address (1865),
- [4] USA Today Analysis (8 August 2019),
- [5] Pope Francis, Message for 2019 World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2019),
- [6] Charles J. Chaput, Statement of Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, OFM Cap Regarding Racial Violence in Charlottesville, Virginia (2017),
- [7] Yolanda Leyva, The El Paso Shooting Is a Reminder of an Ugly Side of Texas History, Time (8 August 2019),
- [8] Arzobispado de Guatemala, Oficina de Derechos Humanos, Guatemala Nunca Más, Volumen I (Guatemala: ODHAG, 1998), p. XIV.
- [9] Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 23 May 2007,
- [10] See Randolph Campbell, An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865 (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1991).
- [11] Ibid.
- [12] See Stanford University's Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project,
- [13] See Monica Muñoz Martinez, The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in the Southwest (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).
- [14] Ibid., p. 17.
- [15] Ibid.
- [16] Ibid., p. 18.
- [17] Pope Saint Paul VI, Encyclical Letter Populorum progressio (1967), 65.
- [18] Day of Pardon, Universal Prayer: Confession of Sins and Asking for Forgiveness, 12 March 2000,
- [19] Ibid.
- [20] See the Holy See's Commission For Religious Relations With the Jews, We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah, 1998: 'Despite the Christian preaching of love for all, even for one's

enemies, the prevailing mentality down the centuries penalized minorities and those who were in any way different.'

[21] Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), p. 41.

[22] Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* (2015), 66.

[23] The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church '*Lumen gentium*' (1964), 1.

[24] Martin Luther King, Jr., Commencement Address for Oberlin College, 'Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution' (1965),

[25] Pope Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (1991), 31,

[26] Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate* (2009), 7.

[27] See Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), p. 122-125.

## Links

Pax Christi International  
<http://www.paxchristi.net/>

Pax Christi U.S.A.  
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Pax Christi San Antonio  
<http://www.paxchristisa.org>

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative  
[www.msjc.net](http://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](http://www.txccedp.org)

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio  
[www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/](http://www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/)

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