

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating January 27, 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 section, the Sunday reading reflections are based on the lectionary selections for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Unity*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>.

In 1845 a French merchant, Rene Guyard, purchased some land near what is now yards north of the U.S.-Mexico Border. He built a small building, La Lomita (the hillock) in 1865 gave it to the Oblate priests and brothers in 1871. The Oblates used it as a chapel, from which their famous "Cavalry of Christ" missionaries rode up and down the Rio Grande to visit widely dispersed Catholic churches, to baptize, marry, and bless the deceased. They rebuilt the small chapel in 1899, and added other building. The city of Mission, Texas, is named for the site. The chapel is no longer used as a church, but it is considered a sacred historical site, shrine, and tourist destination. But now the Trump administration wants to seize it to make way for his proposed border wall. Bishop Daniel Flores of the Diocese of Brownsville is contesting the seizure in federal court (see the article in the January 10 *Daily Beast*: <https://www.thedailybest.com/trump-would-destroy-this-historic-church-to-get-his-wall>). After the poem below, the statement from the Oblates on the matter follows.

Calendar

In Austin

Monday February 4 to Wednesday February 6, Mid-Winter Lectures. Dr. Robert M. Franklin, Jr., "Moral Agency and Leadership." Dr. Miroslav Volf, "Trampling on Pearls? Theology and What Matters the Most." Katelyn Beaty, "New Norms for New Era." Shelton Chapel, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 100 E. 27th St. For details and registration, see <https://www.austinseminary.edu/page.cfm?p=3657>.

Thursday February 7, 5:00pm-6:30pm, Rita Stephan, "Women in the Muslim World." Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress Register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/cel-speaker-series-rita-stephan-on-women-in-the-muslim-world-tickets-46805163504>. For parking permit: <https://www.stedwards.edu/contact-us/main/main-campus-united-states>.

Friday February 8 & Saturday February 9, 7:30 performance, "Sister Moses. The Story of Harriet Tubman." Desert Dance Theatre. Contact Huston-Tillotson University.

Saturday February 16, 8:00am-4:00pm, Texas Coalition against the Death Penalty 2019 Annual Conference: Uniting for Justice. St. David's Episcopal Church, 301 E 8th St. Information: tcadp.org

In Dallas

Friday February 8, 8:00am-10:00am, Tom Wong, "Public Charge & Voter Mobilization: Immigration Policy Concerns Debunked." 5th Floor, Jones day Law Firm, 2727 N. Harwood St. Information: Bora Laci, tower@smu.edu, 214-768-4716; or use "register" button at <https://calendar.smu.edu/site/centerinstitutes/event/lcld-policy-forum/>

Friday February 8, 12:00pm-1:30pm, Bolin Family Public Life Personal Faith Scholarship Luncheon. Judy Woodruff, PBS Newshour, interviewed by Peggy Wehrmeyer. Information: John Martin, johnma@smu.edu, (214) 768-2026.

Friday February 8, 2:00pm, Jeffrey Kopstein, "Intimate Violence: anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust." Davidson Auditorium, University of Texas Dallas.

In El Paso

Wednesday January 30, 12:00pm, death penalty vigil, in front of El Paso County Courthouse, 500 E. San Antonio.

In Houston

Tuesday January 29, 7:00pm-8:30pm, panel discussion, "Religion and the University." Sewell Hall, Room 309, Rice University. Information: Hayley Helmstreet, hjh2@rice.edu. Free, but register. See https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20190129/event_id/23533.

Wednesday February 13, 7:00pm-8:00pm, Richard Rothstein, on government creating racial segregation. Museum of Fine Arts, 1001 Bissonnet St. Paid parking available at 1144 Binz St.

Thursday February 21, 7:00pm-9:00pm, panel on spirituality ("Spiritual but not religious") and public action: Ashley Clemmer (Ruthko Chapel), Sean Fitzpatrick (Jung Center), moderated by Elaine Howard Ecklund, Ph.D. (Rice University). Jung Center, 5200 Montrose.

Friday February 22, 8:00am-9:00am, Tony Brown (Sociology, Rice University), "Disaffiliation among emerging adults: Implications for life satisfaction, moral relativism, and support of social justice." Lovett Hall 402, Rice University (use Entrance C). Free, but register at https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20190222/event_id/20202. Information: Hayley Hemstreet hjh2@rice.edu.

In San Antonio

Sunday January 20, 4:00pm-6:30pm, Martin Luther King 32nd annual City-Wide Interfaith Worship Service. Second Baptist Church, 3310 E. Commerce.

Monday January 21, Annual Martin Luther King March. The march begins 10:00am, 3501 Martin Luther King Drive and ends at Pittman-Sullivan Park, 1101 Iowa.

Wednesday January 23, 6:30pm-8:30pm, film, *Why Women Kill*, followed by panel discussion (William S. Bush, Ph.D., Texas A & M; Patricia S. Castillo LMSW, P.E.A.C.E.; Cathy Marston, Ph.D., Free Battered Texas Women; and Doshie Piper, Ph.D., University of the Incarnate Word). Mabee Library Auditorium, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway. Information: ldamico@uiwtx.edu.

Thursday January 24, performance, “¡No Es Justo! Emma Tenayula’s Struggle for Justice.” McNay Art Museum, Chiego Lecture Hall, 6000 N. New Braunfels Ave.

Friday January 25, 6:30pm, Dream Week panel, “San Antonio in the Holy Land.” University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell Ave. (parking off Shook St.). Sponsored by Jewish Voice for Peace.

Sunday January 27, 3:00pm-5:00pm, Blessing of the Peacemakers. 2019 San Antonio Peace Laureates: Patricia Castillo, Rebecca Flores, Nickie Valdez. Sponsored by peaceCenter of San Antonio. Whitley Center, Oblate school of Theology, 285 Oblate Dr.

Wednesday January 30, 12:00pm-1:00pm, death penalty vigil, across from Bexar County Justice Center, 300 Dolorosa.

Wednesday January 30, 6:00pm, Former Congressman Charles Gonzalez and Sheriff Javier Salazar, “Gun Violence: What Can Be Done.” Central Public Library, 600 Soledad.

Wednesday January 30, 6:00pm-8:00pm, film, *Renewal* (documentary on religious environmentalist activists). Sinkin Eco Centro, 1802 N. Main.

Tuesday February 5, 4:00pm=5:00pm, William Egginton, Ph.D. (Johns Hopkins University) on our educational system embodying the very social and economic inequality it should challenge. Chapman Center Auditorium, Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Parking at Alamo Stadium.

Tuesday February 19, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Green Sacred Texts (environmentalist passages in the Bible). \$10. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). Register at <https://www.upcsa.org/registration/>

Thursday February 21, 3:00pm-6:00pm, pre-immigration symposium. Keynote speaker, Sarnata Reynolds, “Building a Lifeline: A Proposed Global Platform and Responsibility Sharing Model for the Global Compact on Refugees.” Sarita Kenedy East Law Library,

Law Alumni Room, St. Mary's University, 1 Camino Santa Maria. Information:
pmartinez46@stmarytx.edu.

Tuesday February 26, 7:00pm, Marie Dennis, "Active Nonviolence: A Paradigm Shift to a More Peaceful World." Student Engagement Center Ballroom, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway. Marie Dennis was a primary organizer of the 2016 Conference on Nonviolence and Just Peace co-sponsored by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and Pax Christi International.

Tuesday March 5, 6:00pm, 14th Annual Dialogue and Friendship Dinner. Keynote speaker, Abdulhamit Bilici (former editor *Zaman*, newspaper in Turkey), "Free Press and Democracy: An Exiled Editor's View." University of the Incarnate Word Rosenberg Skyroom, 847 E. Hildebrand. \$45; RSVP at www.dialoguedinner19.eventbrite.com.

Tuesday March 19, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Green Sacred Texts (environmental passages from diverse traditions). \$10. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). Register at <https://www.upcsa.org/registration/>

Second Reading (1 Corinthians 12:12-30)

"If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not part of the body,' it is not on that account not part of the body; and if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not part of the body,' it is not on that account not part of the body." This continues Paul's discourse on the variety of assignments in the church, the reading of which began last Sunday. In the development of his argument, a fundamental distinction is made between what someone claims and what is true.

We have been witnessing in current affairs extravagant departures from reality in political discourse. Of course, I have in mind the debate over "the wall," but there are many other cases as well. Rhetorically we hear about an invasion of thousands of terrorists from the Middle East (There's a stereotype, for sure!) sneaking across the U.S. border with Mexico; in reality there are refugee families trying to escape gang terrorism in Central America. Rhetorically we hear about a "humanitarian disaster" that requires a wall; in reality the refugee question has become a "disaster" because a dishonorable government refuses to live up to treaties about the treatment of refugees. Also in reality, a wall would neither feed, clothe, nor house anyone.

Walls do not provide security half as well as justice does. The Berlin Wall did not protect the Communist regime of the former East Germany from the quest for freedom. The big walls between Israeli occupied lands and Palestinian communities will be gone before the century is over because the injustices they harden will in the long run undo the false legitimacy they are intended to shield.

What are such walls really for? The reading actually alludes to an answer: "...one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slave or free...." A wall is essentially a symbol of a division—a division that is ultimately a falsehood.

Third Reading (Luke 1.1-4, 4.14-21)

It is tempting to skip over Luke's introduction to his gospel, but we can learn some things about early Christianity from it. The practice was to catechize new Christians with the sayings of Jesus: "...the sayings by which you were catechized." These would include such passages as the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and the parables. Luke says he was adding the narrative of the deeds of Jesus, which he was putting in a serviceable order:

Whereas many attempted to reorder the narration of the doings that have been confirmed among us, as eye-witnessed from the outset and those who became ministers of the word handed down to us, I too, having traced everything accurately from the beginning, thought to write it in an order for you, O excellent Theophilus, so that you may learn to have confidence in the sayings by which you were catechized.

The focus of the good news was the largely ethical content of the Jesus sayings, which also appear in Matthew's gospel. The narrative of the actions of Jesus, which appears to have come largely from the Gospel of Mark, were in an order in that gospel that Luke found less useful for teaching purpose. Luke may well have had such works as the Gospel of Mathew in mind when he mentions other attempts at reordering, but he does not appear to have used Matthew's gospel as a source. We should remember that an early Christian church was in place before a Christian Bible was published. The written Bible came from the church, not the church from the written Bible. Taking the Bible as the literal words of God rather than as traditional words witnessing to the Word, is to mistake the messenger for the message. Luke himself felt free to change the presentation in the service of what was to be presented.

Luke designed the excerpt from the fourth chapter of his gospel to present the theme of Jesus' teaching. Already a reputable teacher elsewhere in Galilee, Jesus enters the synagogue in Nazareth and reads from a few passages of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus did not turn to the Law or teach the Law; that was not his theme.

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me." *Anoint* is the same word stem as that of *Messiah* or, in Greek, *Christ*. It refers to the conferral of a life's mission. The spirit "...has sent me to announce good news to the poor." What is good news to the poor is not, at least superficially, good news to the rich. The Isaiah selections go on to speak of the release of people from prison. That would be debtors' prison. Before the modern era, criminals were punished physically or executed, not imprisoned after being convicted; but poor people who could not pay their bills were held in prison until friends, family, or a sympathetic person paid off the debt, or they might be sold into slavery. To proclaim release to the imprisoned would be far more destabilizing to an oppressive system of rule than to help one or two criminals escape.

Isaiah, as quoted by Jesus, also proclaims a "recovery of sight to the blind...." This is from the widely used "Septuagint" Greek translation; the Hebrew probably intended to refer to prisoners emerging from darkness into the light of the outdoors.

Either way, the release of the poor and the abandonment of restricting the poor involve an enlightenment. Those who would otherwise keep the poor in darkness, unseeing, would "...send away free those who have been oppressed."

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Poem

Unity

As body and music become one in our dance,
as single seeds in soil and air, water and light,

can become one orchard, one forest,
aggregate elements all, alive in a community of life,

this body/soul/self finds its cosmic heritage
to reach across borders, rescue lost cats and dogs,
give refuge to refugees, handouts to homeless,
march in the streets demanding justice for all,

doing what it takes to bring down
the walls of isolation
and parade the unity of us all.

Tom Keene and Muse
January 11, 2019

Official Statement on the Border Wall at La Lomita Oblates of Mary Immaculate

After consulting with several Oblates who do ministry in the Rio Grande Valley, I make the following statement on behalf of the United States Province of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate:

One hundred sixty-nine years ago, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, immigrants themselves, first set foot in South Texas. We have been ministering as Catholic Priests and Brothers in this region almost as long as Texas has been a part of the United States. From our earliest days, La Lomita has been a sacred place to us and to those whom we serve, regardless of one's country of origin. It has been and remains a true place of "sanctuary" in every sense of that term – a place for safety, respite and worship, accessible to all, giving peace and security in human and spiritual form. To divide this site with a border wall would destroy what this place has been, and continues to be, for Catholics and others on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border.

As Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, we stand with Bishop Daniel Flores and the Diocese of Brownsville, asking that this sacred site not be divided by any wall. We firmly believe that this wall, in this location, is a major step in the wrong direction for people on both sides of the border. Our 169 years of ministry here convince us that its conception is rooted in prejudice, fear and misunderstanding toward those who seek

residency or asylum. No mere border, however fortified, can begin to address the varied reasons why people take enormous risks and make incredible personal sacrifices to seek an appropriate and dignified life for themselves and their families.

Citizens of all nations involved deserve real solutions to the complex problems of immigration, asylum, and the conditions that spur people to choose these paths. No citizens deserve these solutions more than those whose lives, families, communities and faith will be compromised by such a wall in the Rio Grande Valley. This wall is not such a solution, at La Lomita or anywhere.

Very Rev. Louis Studer, OMI Provincial

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/