

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating February 6, 2022

Communications with the editor should be sent to 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 Sunday Liturgical Reading reflections are based on the readings for the Fifth Week of Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Never Alone*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem is my reflection on the "synodal listening process," drafted after a session in which I and others in a virtual audience did all the listening while a few chosen people did all the speaking.

Calendar

Times are given for the Central Time Zone.

Tuesday February 1, 11:30am (12:30pm ET) online "Faith, Politics, and Policy in 2022. What Is a Faithful Agenda Now?" Angela Espada (Indiana Catholic Conference), Ruth Graham (*New York Times*), Alvin Herring (Faith In Action), Russell Moore (*Christianity Today*), and Jim Wallis (Georgetown University), moderated by John Carr (Georgetown University). Register at: <https://catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/events/faith-politics-and-policy-in-2022#rsvp>

Tuesday February 15, 5:30pm-7:30pm (6:30pm-8:30pm ET) online, Network's 50th Anniversary Intergenerational Dialogue, between the sister founders of Network and younger social justice advocates. Individuals in the latter group (ages 18-30) are invited to apply to join the panel: <https://networklobby.org/intergendialogue/>. All applicants will receive a recording of the event. Special guest speaker will be Olga Segura, author of *Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church*.

Tuesday February 15, 3:00pm (4:00pm ET) online From Rhetoric to Reality: What is Really Happening on the US/MEX Border? Rafael Garcia S.J. (Sacred Heart Parish, El Paso) and Cristina Coronado Flores (Missionaries of Society of Saint Columban). Register at: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_XcC9Q-yVS8CzEwP_fcbu7A

Wednesday February 23, online "Women in Ministry: What About the Diaconate?" Phyllis Zagano (Hofstra University). Information at: <https://www.sacredheart.edu/academics/colleges--schools/college-of-arts--sciences/departments/catholic-studies/center-for-catholic-studies-spring-speaker-series/>

Wednesday February 23, 7:00pm-8:00pm online Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty membership meeting. Register at: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeMcPfsnWvWSjOz0sKvjMsL5pLJOg4Q0F__xiWoeXg5k8GZzQ/viewform

Saturday February 26, 9:00am-2:00pm, online, Texas Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty annual conference. The keynote address will be given by Sister Helen Prejean. There will be four concurrent breakout sessions, as well as a panel discussion on successful abolition efforts in other states: LaKeisha Cook (Virginia), Rep. Robert Renny Cushing (New Hampshire), and Denis Maes (Colorado). Prices vary by category: \$50 to \$90. Register at: <https://tcadp.org/tcadp-2022-annual-conference-registration/>

Wednesday March 2, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET) online "Women's Ordination and the Synodal Church" KateMcElwee (Women's Ordination Conference) and Heidi Schlumpf (National Catholic Reporter). Information at: <https://www.sacredheart.edu/academics/colleges--schools/college-of-arts--sciences/departments/catholic-studies/center-for-catholic-studies-spring-speaker-series/>

Saturday March 12, 1:00pm (11:00am Pacific), online "The Nonviolence of St. Francis and St. Claire," Ken Butigan (DePaul University). Register by March 8 at: <https://beatitudescenter.org/>

Saturday April 9, 11:30am-2:00pm (12:30pm-3:00pm ET) online "White Supremacy and American Christianity," Robert Jones (Public Religion Research Institute), Bryan Massingale (Fordham University), and Marcia Chatelain (Georgetown University). Register at: <https://networklobby.org/uschristianityconvo/>

In Austin

Thursday February 24, 6:00pm-8:30pm, Community Engagement Meeting Hosted by the Austin Police Department. Holy Cross Church Family Life Center, 1110 Concho St., Austin.

First Reading (Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8)

The vision reported in the reading connects the experience of the divine presence with the author's call to prophesy. The divine presence is marked by the thrice repeated "Holy!" a device that is also used in the mass and in hymn often sung on great feasts, the *Te Deum*. There is also a reference to smoke, calling to mind some of the imagery found in Genesis to describe the manifestation of God to Moses in the Sinai sojourn. The burning coal brought to the author to purify his mouth, clearly not a naturalistic depiction, links the experience of the divine to the new prophet's speaking.

Had the writings of the author of the first part of the biblical *Book of Isaiah* (First Isaiah) been written as a book, this vision of the call to be a prophet would have been placed at the beginning. The biblical book, however, is a collection of poems, proclamations, and narratives.

Second Reading (1 Corinthians 15:1-11)

"Now I am making known to you, brothers and sisters, the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you already received, in which you have also made your stand and through which you are being saved..." If the Corinthians had received what Paul had proclaimed, why does he set about making it known again? We find out later on: "But if it is preached that the Messiah has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say there is no resurrection from the dead?" (1 Cor 15:12) Exactly what *resurrection* means is difficult to begin with. Somehow it was easier for the Corinthians to apply the idea of a transformed life to Jesus than to themselves. So Paul proceeds to repeat the elements of the creed he had

received: “for I handed down to you principally what I also received: that the Messiah died because of our sins....”

Keeping safely in the past what is hoped for is something modern people also do. We have our familiar world and make our daily life in it. For Jesus to upset ancient hierarchs, tyrants, and empires was impressive, but rarely are we in our day ready to do likewise.

Third Reading (Luke 5.1-11)

Jesus, seated in a boat, had finished teaching the word of God to a crowd on the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret, or Sea of Galilee. He said to Peter, “Put out into the deep and let your nets down for a catch.” This can be taken as a simple miracle narrative: “Master, laboring all night we caught nothing, but on your say so I will cast the net.” Then the catch is so great that with a second boat they still have difficulty bringing it in. But the narrative of the ministry of Jesus as taken over from the *Gospel of Mark* had plenty of miracles. Why did Luke add this one?

Unlike the other Evangelists, Luke not only followed the narrative of Jesus up to the Passion and Resurrection but also added that of the founding of the Church. The narrative in Luke’s *Acts of the Apostles* features several movements within the Church; today we would call them denominations. There were the movement led by James the Brother in Jerusalem, the movement led by Peter first also in Jerusalem but later in Antioch on the Orontes and eventually in Rome, and the movement led by Paul in cities of what are now Turkey and Greece. The movement led by James would disappear from history and from Christian consciousness, hinted at by a few references in Paul’s *Letter to the Galatians*, a few legends recorded in *Acts* and in the history written by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, and the self-identification of the author of the *Letter of Jude* as one of the Brothers from James’ community. The author of the *Letter of James* seems to have used the pen name *James* in memory of that community.

Luke’s narrative would feature the movements around Peter and, especially, Paul. A rivalry developed between the two movements, and Luke went to great lengths to make them both a part of the one Christian narrative. His imagery, that of two boats with their crews working together to bring in a catch too large for both, has an evident meaning for us.

Poem
Never Alone

Always, air to breathe.
Always, in company with
 light of day, dark of night.
Always, encircled by life alive.

Always, within us, every atom
of every particle coupling with all.

Tom Keene and Muse
September 13, 2019

On Synodal Listening
Anthony J. Blasi

Begun by Pope Francis, the global Roman Catholic Church has begun a "synodal listening" process. The basic idea is to follow up the Second Vatican Council of over a half century ago by asking new generations about whether and how the Council's practical innovations have been implemented. The term *synodal* refers to a discussion process; it is a contemporary model based on the conciliar principle of collegiality, but going beyond the college (as it were) of clerics. The insight behind it calls for involving those people whom the previous clerical model has, in practice, marginalized. The term *listening* implies both the laity—including the marginalized—listening to the ecclesiastical officialdom and the ecclesiastical officialdom listening to the laity—again, including those who have been previously marginalized.

Vatican II had contributed to the development of doctrine in its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (*Lumen Gentium*), and the practice of being church should, of course, be well integrated with its doctrinal development, but the synodal listening process is not to be principally centered on doctrine or theology. Rather, the listening process is designed to center on practice. In fact, most of the Vatican II proceedings featured practical concerns—liturgy, use of scripture in homilies and daily life, the involvement of the Church in the modern world, the

role of bishop, priestly formation, the life of vowed religious, the life of priests, missions, education, relations with non-Christians, and freedom of religion. There is greater room for spontaneity in these practical matters than in doctrine first because doctrine develops in tradition by drawing out implications rather than introducing new contents, and second because successes, setbacks, and possibilities can only be discovered in reports of actual experiences on the part of the whole of God's people.

The synodal listening process provides the occasion to report our experience with liturgy, for example. Involvement by people who could otherwise be marginalized is probably greater than would be the case if the Tridentine Mass had remained fixed in place, especially in Latin; however, the younger generations are absenting themselves in great numbers anyway. These absentees do not appear to be evil or malevolent people. Is weekly Sunday mass the most opportune venue for participation by people who are subject to being marginalized in one way or another?

What about the practical concerns expressed in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* of the Second Vatican Council? The social doctrines of the Church—actually more reportorial and hortatory than dogmatic in nature—that were so advanced by the pastoral constitution appear to be limited to the discussions carried on by high Church officials and by university professors. One rarely hears of them in homilies, even though their concerns are manifest in the scriptures that are supposed to be explicated and applied by homilies. Why are the social sciences, which are necessary for going beyond superficialities concerning social issues and problems, neglected in priestly formation?

There are major issues the people of the world face today. Modern economic practices of unrestrained production and marketing are destroying the physical creation prepared for us by God Himself. Pope Francis has been writing and preaching about this, but our bishops and priests have not been doing likewise for the most part. Racist and anti-immigrant prejudices and prejudices against sexual minorities are dividing our societies, but whenever we hear of such topics at church it is as likely that prejudicial discourse will be seconded as addressed as the problem it is. The very geographical basis of our parishes tends to separate categories. Wars, especially "civil" wars, are victimizing innocent populations and causing perilous migrations, but Sunday services seem to isolate the faithful from such an unpleasant topic rather than rally well-meaning people against this modern version of mayhem, murder, and violence. Meanwhile, nations continue to threaten one another implicitly by maintaining nuclear weapons that are so

destructive in their murderous capacity that they imperil both those targeted and those targeting. The Vatican has signed on to a treaty outlawing such weapons, but most episcopal ordinaries and most parishes exude unconcern by their silence on what so menaces us.

In the United States and many other nations democracy is at risk. Catholic-based theology since the time of Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas has held that the will of the Creator can be discerned from the contours of His creation, that tradition is the outcome of multitudinous minds so discerning the divine *ratio* through time, that this is to be respected because reason will not contradict the scriptures if they are properly understood (and the scriptures not contradict reason if reason is properly articulated), and that tradition can therefore reverse positive laws (i.e., reverse human legislation). Democracy is a governmental process through which this kind of tradition is able to work. It seems that the American Catholic Church—I cannot speak of other national churches—has neglected the defense of democracy. The faithful in our nation—at least the faithful who still self-identify as Catholic—are divided over the defense of democracy. Large numbers of Catholics have fallen for the irrational ramblings of a demagogue, perhaps prepared for political authoritarianism by their childhood socialization into an authoritarian church.¹

Is this a dire depiction? Maybe, but there are pockets about which one can be hopeful. There are efforts at raising the great issues of the day in religious discourse by our vowed religious, even as many of them age, and by parachurch peace and justice organizations. The Pax Christi movement is among the latter. But then we have the chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, a former ordinary in Texas, denouncing seekers of justice and protesters against racism. This is a scandal, but one would not realize how scandalous it is from the silence of the rest of the hierarchy and the vast majority of the clergy. The result could be a gospel that is no longer good news for the vast majority of humans, a gospel with no sermon on the Mount or Sermon on the Plain, with no judgment day based on what is done to the least of our brothers and sisters, a gospel the words of which are passing away.

So now we have an opportunity and a common human and ecclesial agenda.

¹ If there is anything to this, it is not Catholic education that strengthens authoritarianism, as the early research of the late Andrew Greeley showed many years ago.

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>

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

Catholic Books Review

<http://catholicbooksreview.org>

Beloved Community Project

<http://belovedcommunityproject.org/>