

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating February 20, 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 Seventh Week of Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Mixed Feelings*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. **Please note that we have just learned today that Tom passed away January 29.**

After the poem is an article sent to us by *Sojourners* on resisting war in Ukraine.

Calendar

Times are given for the Central Time Zone

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

Tuesday February 15, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET) online panel "What Is Going on with Latino Voters? Faith, Politics, and the Latino Community in 2022," Luis Ricardo Fraga (University of Notre Dame), Ana Gonzalez-Barrera (Pew Research Center), Sabrina Rodriguez (*Politico*) Gabby Trejo (Sacramento Area Congregations Together), and Maria de Lourdes Valencia (Catholic Diocese of San Diego). RSVP at: <https://catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/events/what-is-going-on-with-latino-voters#rsvp>

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 (1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23)

The Lectionary editors deleted many details from a narrative about David, leaving the reader with the main point: King Saul had made himself an enemy of the charismatic young David and set out with an army to capture and kill him. When the king and his army retired for the night, David was able to infiltrate the camp and, if he wanted to, assassinate the king. Despite a companion's urging to kill the king, David would not do it; government was from God and should be respected.

The point is not that revolution is never permitted; the text simply does not say never to overthrow a government. Rather, David's refusal to kill the king exemplifies the respect to be granted government as such. Rebellion is not something to be undertaken lightly. Rebellion simply to put oneself on the throne is something seemingly disallowed.

In our own time, we have witnessed an effort to overturn a legitimate election by an angry mob (January 6, 2022). We also hear claims that common sense measures of public health should be resisted as a matter of "freedom." Some officials of various churches even associate such willful resistance with Christianity. One can only wonder where true loyalties reside.

Second Reading (First Corinthians 15: 45-49)

The way the Lectionary extracts the reading from *First Corinthians* makes what Paul is getting at quite opaque. He is talking about the resurrection of the

dead. Before the reading, he says, "Something is sown in decay, it is raised without decay; something is sown without honor, it is raised in glory; something is sown in weakness, it is raised in strength; a natural body is sown, a spiritual body is raised." From there, the reading takes up the contrast between the "first Adam" and the "last Adam." It is possible to respond to such a reading by setting one's sites on an escape from this world, but Paul was not writing to people who were worried about their own condition in this world. They had lost loved ones to death and were concerned about the deceased. The passage has nothing to do with escapism.

In my years as an educator, I learned early on that young people have trouble coping with death, more so than those of us who have lost a number of family members and friends. I remember in particular when a student named Frankie died. He had arrived as a freshman in college, able to walk, but much misshapen. His classmates joked about him and avoided getting to know him. Over the course of a few years, he gradually lost the use of his muscles, as his disease progressed. By the time he was in my upper division social theory class, he was wheelchair bound, unable to use his hands, and barely able to talk. As his physical powers diminished, he transformed his classmates, who had taken to pushing his wheelchair for him and inviting him to study groups and parties. When he died, no doubt rising in spirit, they were devastated.

Third Reading (Luke 6.27-38)

It is a principle of criminal law, at least as we know it, that victims of crime as well as their family and friends are not to serve as prosecutor, judge, or jurors in the case in which they have been victimized. The point of the law is that the state, as a neutral party, should administer justice, that uninvolved jurors should decide upon guilt, and that not even the appearance of revenge should taint decisions to prosecute, convict, or punish. The establishment of such a system of justice rather than one of blood revenge and duels is an important step in civilizing humanity.

This passage from the Sermon on the Plain in Luke's gospel, which parallels the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, would have a follower of Jesus who is victimized accept the mistreatment. Where there is an effective rule of law, "turning the other cheek" and similar behavior is not hyperbole or an

exaggerated ideal, but eminently practical. The implication is that civilized people should actually behave this way.

But there is more. The Christian should endeavor to be at peace with someone who would perpetrate some injury. Offering the other cheek or a second garment can disarm. It might establish a relationship, as might giving to someone begging for a handout.

The stance of a disciple of Jesus contrasts that of those who seek to walk about carrying guns and looking at the world as someone ready to take aim.

Poem

Mixed Feelings

Over generations we puzzle:
If God is good, if creation is good,
why do we suffer?

*It's hard to explain, says God,
according to what the mystics tell.*

I wonder too and recall a story:
We talked as we sat
at the tavern's bar, a stranger and I.

He'd just gotten out of the army,
I was still in. How do you feel
about it, I asked.

*I would not trade it for a million dollars
but I wouldn't give two cents
to go through it again.*

Tom Keene and Muse
June 16, 2021

As Russia Advances, Ukraine's Churches Say 'No' to Military Solution

By Adam Russell Taylor, Rose Marie Berger

The forces that incite and fuel war can feel inevitable. Though the Olympics are usually greeted by temporary truces and international peace building, this year's winter games take place as the Russian Federation amasses troops and military hardware along its border with Ukraine. U.S. military and intelligence assessments estimate that a conflict could result in as many as 50,000 Ukrainian civilian casualties and create up to 5 million refugees — all because of a power struggle between NATO, Europe, the United States, and Russia for dominance in the region and control over fuel supply chains. While the forces of imperialism seem inescapable, the role of the church is to show the way out.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has been incensed with Ukraine since 2014 when the Maidan Revolution ousted Putin's hand-picked Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich and replaced the government with one interested in negotiating with Europe. Putin rallies his own base around a dream of restoring the Soviet empire — as his dominance in Belarus and the occupied territories of Crimea and Donbas demonstrate. Through Putin's current aggressive moves on the Ukrainian border, he also seeks to sow divisions within NATO to weaken both the United States and the Western alliance; former U.S. President Donald Trump only helped the cause by repeatedly threatening to leave NATO during his administration. Putin views Ukraine's desire to join NATO, which was initially formed to oppose the Soviet Union, as a threat and wants assurances from the West that this is off the table — assurances the U.S. and its allies in Western Europe have thus far been unwilling to provide.

While Ukraine and Russia both have state-sponsored Orthodox churches that are susceptible to partisan political conflict, many churches of all denominations at the local level are addressing the current crisis by expanding their social services. According to Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, these churches are working to “supply food, warm clothes, and offer psychological assistance” to those in need. Catholic parishes and staff at Caritas, an international Catholic relief organization, are providing material, spiritual, and psychological aid along the conflict line. Shevchuk said that the priests and nuns will stay with their people whether or not there is an invasion. He hopes that, through these actions, the

church can “say out loud ‘no’ to military action as a solution to problems” and rather promote dialogue, solidarity, and cooperation.

At the international level, we do see prospects for peace. David Cortright and George A. Lopez at Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies are cautiously optimistic about the mix of diplomacy and threats of more severe multilateral sanctions the United States and its allies have been pursuing for the past month. Working in concert with European allies, now is the time for the Biden administration to ramp up negotiations with Russia to de-escalate the crisis, which can include assurances to further demilitarize the region and even a commitment to delay future NATO expansion.

While it is impossible to fully predict Putin’s plans, we strongly believe that Christians must tap into our prophetic imagination to see a path toward peace rather than accept war as a foregone conclusion. Ukrainian Christians are modeling this prophetic imagination and courage: In response to a circulating theory that religious conflict in the region is a reason for Russia’s aggression, Shevchuk strongly reiterates that, though churches have different political views, people at the grassroots are united. Among Ukraine’s religious leaders, says Shevchuk, “it is very clear that religious peace is a matter of national security. So we are avoiding any kind of conflicts among us and we are trying to foster religious peace in Ukraine as much as possible.”

While the prophet Isaiah’s vision of nations beating swords into plowshares (Isaiah 2:4) may seem utopian, the presumption of peace is both a practical and moral imperative. We must channel that vision into advocacy for practical alternatives to conflict — including supporting spaces for Ukrainian civil society to express their views directly to policy makers; supporting ceasefires; protecting local communities in conflict through unarmed civilian protection (UCP); incorporating the training for unarmed civilian-based defense in Ukraine; limiting arms sales by supporting the Arms Trade Treaty that regulates international trade in conventional weapons; taking unprecedented steps toward renewable energy supplies and thus limiting the ways aggressors can hold access to fossil fuels captive; and taking steps toward nuclear disarmament through engaging the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Nonviolent tools can be effective in confronting aggression and preventing war. According to studies conducted by the International Center for Nonviolent Conflict, Ukrainians “show a surprising level of support for the type of resistance that neither Ukrainian policymakers nor their Western backers have considered in their defense planning: mass nonviolent resistance actions against a formidable

military invader.” An unarmed civilian defense strategy can also divert a possible internal coup and the “emergence of a domestic military dictatorship—possibly closely allied with Russia—from overtaking the country's young democracy,” writes Maciej Bartkowski, senior advisor to the ICNC and a contributor to the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative. Civilian-based defense models have a long history in resisting aggression, as well as a modern history in the defense of states living along Russia’s borders. In 2016, the Lithuanian Ministry of Defense issued two preparedness manuals on the “modes and principles of civil resistance” as part of its national defense. Lithuania has entered into civil resistance agreements with neighbors Estonia and Latvia to broaden the strength of their civil defense.

The church and civil society have vital roles to play in resisting autocratic expansion — both in the United States and around the world. In response to Putin’s aggression and the West’s militarized response, on Jan. 27 Sojourners joined a range of denominations and faith-based partners in a statement calling on U.S. President Joe Biden and other political leaders to “do everything in their power to protect human lives and prevent war ... Rather than relying on militaristic approaches, our leaders must invest in efforts to sustain peace and prevent harm to those who would suffer the most from the devastating and long-term impacts of conflict. Only by vigorously pursuing all avenues for peace can we fulfill our sacred duty to respect the equal dignity and worth of every person.”

Religious leaders in Ukraine are leading the way. Catholic Archbishop Visvaldas Kulbokas, Apostolic Nuncio to Ukraine, noted that amid armed military conflict and aggravated political stalemates with all parties protecting their own interests, the church has the role of praying and taking action for peace. We must also pray and act to help convert military and political leaders from the use of force to effective engagement for peace. Kulbokas reminds us of Jesus’ words to the one who cut off the high priest’s servant’s ear, asking him to put his sword back into its sheath.

Other 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>

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/>