

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating January 3, 2021

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 readings for the Feast of the Epiphany. Tom Keene's poem is *Epiphany*. After the poem is an interview with Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of San Antonio about the spate of executions by the United States federal government under the administration of President Trump. Speaking in English, a second language for him, the archbishop's wisdom nevertheless comes through. The interview, conducted by John Lavenburg, appeared in the December 16, 2020, issue of *The Tablet*.

Throughout December religious leaders in San Antonio, including Archbishop Gustavo, have been publicly announcing that they will be vaccinated against COVID 19. This was an effort, coordinated by Rev. Ann Helmke, the city's liaison to the faith communities, to encourage people to be vaccinated.

Calendar

Saturday January 2, 2:00pm, online Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. On the agenda is planning the 2021 schedule of events, along with the University of the Incarnate Word. The Zoom link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82903399332?pwd=YTdsbFlINHBpck9UZ0JPbEdPKzdEUT09>

Tuesday January 5, 10:00am (11:00am ET), **Wednesday January 6**, 3:00pm (4:00pm ET), OR **Thursday January 7**, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET), film and breakout group discussion "The Story of Stuff," presented by the Mercy Earth Challenge. Register for one of the times at:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScNhaezeWv8UcozdEujKAaYQxOABZH5Lyj6h45-DjpFs2fTAw/viewform>

Friday January 8, 11:30am (12:30pm ET), online, “Killing in Our Name: Federal Executions and Pro-Life Witness,” Bishop Daniel Flores (Brownsville); Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy (Catholic Mobilizing Network); Sr. Helen Prejean, c.s.j. (advocate for abolishing the death penalty); and Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan, Jr. (Ohio Council of Churches); moderated by Jack Carr (Initiative on Catholic Social Thought, Georgetown University). RSVP at:
<https://catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/events/killing-in-our-name-federal-executions-and-pro-life-witness#rsvp>

Monday January 11-Thursday January 14, 6:30pm (7:30pm ET)-9:00pm (10:00pm ET), students only (undergraduate & graduate): online seminar: Creating a World Free of Nuclear Weapons: Developing the Next Generation of Specialists & Activists of the Catholic Community; Drew Christianson, S.J. (Georgetown University), George A. Lopez (University of Notre Dame), Maryann Cusimano Love (Catholic University of America), Gerald Powers (University of Notre Dame), and others, hosted by the Kroc Institute, University of Notre Dame. To register, contact Hannah Heinzkehr (hheinzek@nd.edu), Lisa Gallagher (lgalleg3@nd.edu), or aortega@nd.edu.

Wednesday January 13, 11:00am-12:15pm (12:00pm-1:15pm ET), webinar “A Policy Playbook on Nonproliferation Sanctions,” Linda Gerber (Fourth Freedom Forum), Trita Parsi (Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft), Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins (Women of Color Advancing Peace, security and Conflict Transformation), and George A. Lopez (University of Notre Dame), moderated by Maura Policelli (University of Notre Dame). Register at:
https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/1116079731340/WN_xAiXJygrUqZ6lzbrrGnng?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Register%20Now&utm_campaign=Washington

Thursday January 21, 7:00pm-9:00pm, and **Thursday January 28**, 7:00pm-9:00pm, online workshop, “Am I My Brothers’ Keeper: The Racialization of America,” Joyce Jones (Archdiocese of St. Louis), and Jeff Schulenburg (Sacred Heart Parish, valley Park, Missouri, Peace & Justice Commission). Sponsored by West County Collaborative and Justie 4 All Team. Information and links for the two dates at:

<https://files.constantcontact.com/bbbab666001/9d56db3b-a392-4d63-bac3-99e4f4d42ac3.pdf>

Sunday January 24, 9:30am, online “Immigration Update—It’s still a Mess...But I s There Hope?” Nancy Kral (prof. retired, Lone Star College). Access at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86564638381?pwd=MTBtSF16eVhoTUF3SXJ2VlBWd0N2QT09#success>

Notices

Anti-Nuclear Weapons Banners: Please take a look at the picture of the banner in the attachment. It refers to an international treaty that the Holy See has ratified. Pax Christi Dallas is working with the Nuclear Free World committee for the Dallas Peace and Justice Center to find good places in Texas to put them for the month of January--high traffic areas near a traffic light or stop sign where cars have to stop so then the drivers will have a chance to read them. In the bottom corners you will see the website link to ICAN (www.icanw.org) so that folks can go there and finds lots of information. ICAN is the International Coalition to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and won the Nobel Peace Prize about a year ago. For a banner, contact Joyce Hall: hallmj@sbcglobal.net



Online Resource for families or small groups: If you’re needing some social interaction with depth, more than just listening to zoom webinars, longing for the

social time that used to happen before and after Mass, consider using the *Maryknoll Weekly Reflection Guides*. Gather as family or small group and use these guides in Facetime, Skype, Zoom etc. This an easy online structure with prayer, an introductory theme, a link to the Sunday Readings and some reflection questions to guide group conversation. Using the SeeJudgeAct methodology, you will be led as a group to consider where, in light of the shared reflection, the Spirit is calling you this week. The Global Solidarity charism of the Maryknoll family will feed you spiritually for these challenging times. Find the Guides in both Spanish and English at:

<https://mission.maryknoll.us/reflection-guides-ordinary-time>

Second Reading (Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6)

The Lectionary uses a translation that breaks up a long sentence in the Greek into shorter sentences in translation. When it deletes verse 4, the result is different in content from deleting verse 4 in the Greek. Here is what the full sentence says:

Surely you heard of the stewardship of God's favor that was given to me for you, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above, so that upon reading you will be able to comprehend my insight into the mystery of the Messiah, which was not made known to the children of humans in other generations as it has now been revealed by the spirit to his holy apostles and prophets, that the gentiles are coheirs, fellow members, and sharers of the promise in Messiah Jesus, through the good news, of which I became a minister according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of His power.

It helps to read such a sentence phrase by phrase.

God's favor was given for you. The author speaks in the name of St. Paul, and the pronoun *you* refers to the readers. The important point of this phrase is that God's favor, often referred to as *grace*, was given not to benefit St. Paul but others. There is always a danger of making faith too individual a matter.

The mystery is made known by revelation. This is not only a matter of doctrines that challenge our very mode of thinking, such as the Incarnation and the Trinity, but the very frame of mind we call "faith" is not a delivery of a

statement but itself is above the very thought-form of statements. There is always the danger of reducing religion to the imposition of orthodox statements.

Upon reading, we will be able to comprehend Paul's insight into the mystery of the Messiah. It is not the mystery that is comprehended, but Paul's insight, his faith.

The people who approach faith from outside one's own religious forms are coheirs, fellow members, and sharers of the promise in Jesus. For Paul, his own nationality was not the only one in which faith can arise. For us, it is not our nationality that is the only one in which faith can arise. This inevitably leads to the question: How much of what I trust and believe is a matter of nationality and how much from insight into revelation?

Third Reading (Matthew 2.1-12)

In the passage that describes what is traditionally termed *Epiphany*, Matthew blends several themes together. There is the infant Jesus, Messiah but very un-Messiah-like. There are the magi, representatives of foreign religion. There is Herod the Great, obsequious to Caesar but obsessed that there not be any alternative to his own petty tyranny. There are the high priests and scribes who know where the Messiah should be but who do not know the Messiah. The scene does not deviate from according centrality to the humble Messiah, but it does give a place of honor to the foreign religions, which point to the Messiah without knowing where to look, until the contours of nature and the potentate's fears show the way. And the Hebrew scriptures of the Jews are given respect.

Matthew wrote about fifteen years after Mark, using Mark's gospel and a Greek version of Jesus' sayings for source material. The narrative about the great star in the east came from a separate tradition that the early Christian bishop of Antioch on the Orontes (today Antakya, in Turkey), who wrote *en route* to his martyrdom in Rome, reproduced in a letter:

Now the virginity of Mary and her giving birth were hidden from the ruler of this age....How, then, were they revealed to the ages? A star shone forth in heaven, brighter than all the stars; its light was indescribable and its strangeness cause amazement. All the rest of the constellations, together with the sun and moon, formed a chorus around the star, yet the star itself far outshone them all, and there was perplexity about the origin of this strange phenomenon which

was so unlike the others. Consequently all magic and every kind of spell were dissolved, the ignorance so characteristic of wickedness vanished, and the ancient kingdom was abolished, when God appeared in human form to bring the newness of eternal life....

(Ignatius to the Ephesians, Ch. 19, ca. 110 CE)

Superstition and spells are called into question when the appearance of simple humanity comes into view in an infant, and tyranny marked by ignorance trembles when such simple humanity receives the honor due it. God knew what appearance to take on and what kind of Messiah to become to change the perspective, if not, unfortunately, the course, of history.

Poem

Epiphany

Did the Eternal Word that Judean night
leap down from bright celestial height
collapsing the light years of distance
into the micro-measurement of presence?

Or like the shapeless zygote, from which we rose,
did Eternal Form reach itself into toes
and teeth, eyes, ears, fingerprints and face
to drink the mother-milk of our race?

Or like the reverse of the universe's primordial explosion
into space and time, did Utter Extension find implosion
in an infant dropped from ancestor's dreams of destiny
down a maiden's womb into Bethlehem's epiphany?

What Patient Force sought to sire in minds the inconceivable,
that our hungry, death-strewn world now holds the unreachable,
that the fat and strong are cast down from their heights
and the frail and afraid rise in the Wind like kites?

Tom Keene
December 12, 2001

Texas Archbishop: “Conversion of Heart” Needed on Death Penalty

By John Lavenburg, National Correspondent
The Tablet, December 16, 2020

NEW YORK — Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of San Antonio is the latest bishop calling for the Trump Administration to stop carrying out federal executions before the presidential term ends.

“It’s tragic because the death penalty is not the answer to the horrible things that these people have committed. It shows how we are not evolving as people who in facing difficulties we help each other to build up as members of society,” Archbishop García-Siller told *The Tablet*.

The ninth and tenth federal executions of the year were last week. Both were controversial, with eleventh hour calls to halt the executions. There are three more scheduled before President Donald Trump leaves office in January.

Brandon Bernard, a 40-year-old from Texas, was executed by lethal injection Dec. 10 for his role in the murder of two youth ministers in 1999. According to the Department of Justice, Bernard and his accomplices locked the couple in the trunk of a car. Eventually, an accomplice shot both victims. Bernard then lit the car – doused in lighter fluid – on fire.

Nationwide many spoke out against the execution, citing Bernard’s age when he committed the crime and when he was executed.

The other execution was Alfred Bourgeois, a 56-year-old from Louisiana, who was executed by lethal injection Friday Dec. 11. He was sentenced to death in 2004 after murdering his young daughter two years earlier. According to the DOJ, Bourgeois repeatedly slammed the back of her head in his truck’s window and dashboard after she tipped over her training potty. The report also cites previous abuse and torture towards his daughter.

His lawyers claimed his intellectual disability should’ve halted the execution.

In a recent conversation, Archbishop García-Siller spoke to The Tablet about these executions and the culture that exists around capital punishment in the United States.

The Tablet: After two last week, there have now been 10 federal executions since July – what do you make of that number and the fact that there are three more scheduled before the Trump leaves office on January 20?

Archbishop García-Siller: It's just very sad that we perpetrate what the wrong people did in doing another wrong thing. It's just seeing how much these decisions are led by anger and revenge like that's the only way we can heal ourselves by taking people's lives. There should be other ways, humanly speaking, to deal with those things.

A lot was made of the federal execution of Brandon Bernard last week – what do you make of that execution and the controversy surrounding it?

He was young when he committed that mistake and still young dying so that is one piece of difficulty. And in the context of repair or transformed person, he was alive years that he can show a change and can be someone that can be productive in our society. What that is saying in respect to human life is there is not really a value.

There were also legal arguments against the execution of Alfred Bourgeois on Friday.

If he was considered disabled the responsibility that he had, understanding and conscience of the previous actions, well they had to be tempered with his ability to comprehend and understand the situation. There are many people who are disabled who wouldn't have the maturity as individuals to be charged with a crime. If this person was really intellectually disabled why not have that person in a place where they can be helped instead? Justice is needed for peace but executions solve nothing.

It comes to my mind also, what is it trying to teach us? I don't see it. What message is it trying to carry for the working of our society? You have lawyers express that this person was intellectually disabled. What is the purpose when you go to the respect to the life considering that this person was intellectually disabled?

In the cases of Bernard and Bourgeois, the victims' families thanked the Trump administration for bringing them healing and closure – what do you say in response?

I believe when people have experienced, in this case family members, the crimes committed to members of their family it must be very difficult. But even in

those difficult situations I think we as a faith community can accompany those relatives and family members of the victims to deal with the anger and the sorrow with the loss. I think here because we have a system that has allowed us that alternative so people, understandably so, want that because they went through a lot when they lost members of their family.

I don't see it. It's not a call for celebration and closure. A situation like this implies more inner work and people to help them carry on in new ways. Just to see that somebody must be executed I don't know how that can bring someone to peace and healing.

What needs to happen to see change in capital punishment policy? How much involves politicians and how much involved ordinary lay people and the culture?

Politicians represent us and so the conversation has to start with us so that we can elect politicians who will respect life. The expertise of lay people is very important, and the conversion of hearts will be important. We need psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, people involved in education. We need a lot of talents in order to cope with respecting life and to have the hope that the human person can evolve, and society can change.

Part of this will be the values in families. The restoration of the family unit because we come from families. Even people who committed those crimes came from families. It needs to be grassroots from the bottom up so the culture can change things could be contemplated in a new way, in a different way.

What would the first step forward look like?

Prayer. In prayer, I can discover how God through people has been merciful to me. And if I have experienced mercy most likely I will be open to be merciful, to become merciful.

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

Migrant Center for Human Rights

<https://Migrantcenter.org>

Catholic Books Review

<http://catholicbooksreview.org>