

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating November 25, 2018

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, the Second and Third Readings commentaries are inspired by the Sunday readings for the Feast of Christ the King, the final Sunday of the liturgical year. Tom Keene's poem is *History's Misunderstood Man*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>.

Last month at the meeting of the Religious Research Association and Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Las Vegas, the well-known sociologist of religion R. Stephen Warner offered a precis of a book on disability ministry. The book, *The Social Contexts of Disability Ministry. A Primer for Pastors, Seminarians, and Lay Leaders*, by Albert A. Herzog, Jr. (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017), was featured in an "author meets critics" session, where experts comment on a book and the author responds. Dr. Warner's precis, written as an introduction to the session, follows the poem. Steve Warner and Al Herzog are old acquaintances of mine; when I served as editor of the *Review of Religious Research* I selected Al to serve as book review editor.

Every week we have been mentioning Bishop Pierre Marie Théas in our masthead. Who was he? The World War II era bishop of Montauban, France, Pierre Marie Théas (1894-1977), joined a 1942 denunciation of the Nazi roundup of Jews for deportation to death camps. At the time, Montauban was under the Vichy government, a puppet regime in southern France of Hitler's Reich. Bishop Théas wrote in a pastoral letter, "I give voice to the outraged protest of Christian conscience and I proclaim...that all men, whatever their race or religion, have the right to be respected by individuals and by state." One Marie-Rose Gineste transported the letter by bicycle to over forty parishes. The French Resistance smuggled the text to London where the *Radio Londres* service of the BBC broadcast it to France. In 1944, by which time Hitler's Germans were in direct control of southern France, Bishop Théas gave a sermon in his cathedral, again denouncing the treatment of Jewish people by the Nazis, after which the Gestapo arrested him; he spent ten weeks in a concentration camp. In retirement he was known as an advocate of liberation theology.

Calendar

In Austin

Thursday January 17, 5:00pm-6:30pm, Dr. Eric Winsberg on climate science chaos, and unpredictability. Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. For parking permit: <https://www.stedwards.edu/contact-us/main-campus-united-states>. Refreshments served. Register: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/cel-speaker-series-eric-wisberg-on-philosophy-and-climate-science-tickets-46804971931> .

In Houston

Sunday November 25, (9:30am-10:20am, Veterans for American Ideals, non-partisan group promoting belief that the U.S. is strongest when its policies and actions match its ideals. St. Philip Presbyterian Church, 4807 San Felipe.

Wednesday November 28, 6:30pm doors open, 7:00 film showing, *Living the Change* (stories of people pioneering change for sustainability). Rice Media Center, 2030 University Blvd., Cinema Auditorium(Room 1000). Info: Maria Martinez, arts@rice.edu, 713-348-4862. \$5.00 parking at West lot 4.

Thursday November 29, 5:30pm-7:30pm, Interfaith Homeless Memorial Service. Congregation Emanu El, 1500 Sunset Blvd.

Thursday November 29, 6:30pm-8:30pm, panel and performances, *Black Lives Matter: Reimagining the Black Future*. Moody Center, Lois Chiles Studio Theatre, Rice University. Use Entrance 8; parking in Moody Lot or West Lot 2 by credit card. Info: cercl@rice.edu

Friday November 30, 8:00am-9:00am, Bob Thomson, "Judge Not? Fear, the Bible, and Racialized Criminal Stereotyping." Lovett Hall, Room 402 (Use Entrance C), Rice University. Info: Hayley Hemstreet, hjh2@rice.edu, 713-348-3974. Register: https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20181130/event_id/19381

Sunday December 2, 7:00pm-8:30pm, Climate Change & Laudato Si. Jones Hall, St. Thomas University, 3910 Yoakum Blvd. Information: Nicole Labadie, driscond@stthom.edu .

In San Antonio

Tuesday November 27, 7:30pm-9:00pm, Mark Shields, "Politics and Policy: How Will History Judge Today's Headlines?" Stieren Theatre, Trinity University, One Trinity Place.

Saturday December 1, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. Residence of Maria Tobin, 8715 Starcrest Drive, #27.

Second Reading (Revelation from Jesus the Messiah 1:5-8)

The *Revelation from Jesus the Messiah*, often called the *Book of Revelation* for short, is one of the most controversial books of the New Testament. Because much of it was written in the literary genre of apocalyptic, it can be difficult for moderns to interpret. People who insist upon a literal reading of scripture have provided us with a surefire way to misinterpret the book as a whole. The reading for this Sunday is from one of the less difficult sections. The author, who says his name is John, is addressing seven brief messages to seven ancient churches located in what is now Turkey. As was customary in ancient Christian letters, he begins with a blessing: "Grace to you and peace from the One Who is Who was, and Who is coming."

Revelation was written between 81 and 96 CE; the greeting in the passage read this Sunday testifies to an early Christian belief that Jesus the Messiah was above time and was therefore divine. It therefore uses the expression *ruler* in an, at best, metaphorical sense, when it describes Jesus the Messiah as the "ruler of the kings of the earth."

In a parenthetical statement, the passage says Jesus the Messiah "made us a kingdom, priests of his God and Father." So the followers of Jesus comprise a kingdom that parallels the earthly kingdoms. While our churches have presiders, for which New Testament Greek uses the expression *presbyter* (elder), here the passage says we are made priests, for which the Greek uses the expression *hieros*, a word also used for the Jewish priests of the Jerusalem Temple. To use such words as kingdom and Temple priest in such an analogous manner highlights the difference between governance and hierarchy in human empires and religious establishments on the one hand, and on the other life in God's kingdom.

Third Reading (John 18.33-37)

"You? Are you the King of the Jews?" Pilate was expecting a much more formidable personage. "Are you saying this on your own or did others tell you about me?" Jesus was not going to answer Pilate's question on the Roman official's grounds because his realm was not established on such grounds. The interrogation proceeds to substantiate Pilate's first impression that Jesus posed no military threat to the Empire. As Jesus put it, "You are saying that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this: to witness to truth." Truth! Maybe Jesus was a threat after all!

For colonial masters to justify their own society's theft from the subject society, there is a need for an official lie. For a political entity to oppress through violence, it must make its functionaries blind to the destruction they wreak and deaf to the cries of those whom they have bereaved. For a society characterized by poverty when its poor produce the wealth its elite enjoy, a fantasy of deserving rich and worthless poor must be propagated. Someone who would witness to truth threatens such comfortable falsehoods.

Economic and political fancies—social superstitions—did not disappear with the Roman Empire and its thugs, nor even with the passing of overt colonialism. There are still ideologies of racism and classism, and these serve to perpetuate the illusion inside

gated communities that the highly prosperous one per cent accumulates its wealth quite apart from the labor of the supposedly inferior, undereducated, and incompetent lower classes that happen to work in their businesses and comprise their customer base. Truth is a threat to such a convenient world view.

Truth is a cognitive reflection of God's creation in the first instance, and exposure of the human corruptions and miss-depictions of that creation in the second instance. Fanciful ideologies are not neutral alternatives to truth but have consequences that benefit some people at the expense of others. Cases of racism, sexism, and the like are obvious, but there is another ideology that faces few questions today—the one that holds “management” should be rewarded with great fortunes, hundreds of times greater than the compensation accorded typical workers. It has not been demonstrated that such management is particularly productive. And the problem is not limited to corporations; it can be found in athletics, universities, charities, and even churches. There are millionaire team coaches who make their fortunes off players' brain injuries. There are entirely dysfunctional millionaire university officials and scandalously wealthy “charity” executives. And, oh yes, there are bishops who build castles.

“You are saying that I am a king.” Don't count on it in the case of Jesus, in the all too normal meaning of “king.’

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Poem

History's Misunderstood Man

“Don't *cling* to me,”
I am said to have said
to Mary, my friend.
I had to go.
Unless I did,
you wouldn't get
the spirit of it all.
You wouldn't get
the whole point of my life,
or of yours.

So surrender forever
the notion you can own me.
It is enough to remember me
with wine and bread,
where you can taste
the blood-spurting, fleshy
meanings of me.

And please don't reduce me to doctrine

or trivialize me with comfy feelings.
If you want God's kingdom,
dump your images of kings.
If you want God's peace,
let go the hope that war will bring it.

If mythologize me you must,
let the myths *be* myths,
doors to the Unknown.
Don't bury my meanings
in tombs of words taken literally.
If you would explain me with words,
let them be lyrics to music.

If you want to meet me,
feed the hungry,
free the prisoners,
touch your enemies with love.
They are the Unique Particularities
in which the Universal Compassion abides,
and where I wait for you.

Tom Keene
February 26, 2008

Albert A. Herzog, Jr.'s *The Social Contexts of Disability Ministry*
(Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017)
Precis by R. Stephen Warner

I'll start with the title, every word of which is carefully chosen. "Disability ministry" is a concept developed by Evangelical Christians to speak of what congregations do or ought to do. "Social contexts" nods in the direction of mainline Protestant denominations, which were the primary advocates for persons with disabilities and for systemic approaches to disability. "Pastors, Seminarians, and Lay Leaders" are influential Christians whom the author wants to reach (in addition to scholars and the general public). "Primer" is the author's self-effacing way of stating that although he chronicles the important work that has been done by many knowledgeable and hard-working people, the needed work is only beginning. Most of the words of the title allude to rather than saying outright that the topic of the book is how the Christian church deals with disability. I'm sure that the author would welcome similar efforts to analyze disability in the content of Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist and other religious communities.

The book itself consists of eleven chapters surrounded by an introduction and conclusion. The introduction and first chapter set forth some facts about disability—that disability comes in several types and affects many people, indeed most of us as we become aged—and that there are levels of analysis in approaching disability: individual, social and societal. The author also locates himself in the picture, as a person with disability (cerebral palsy from birth), an ordained United Methodist minister, and a disability advocate who is not a neutral party in the stories to come.

Chapter Two chronicles Disability Advocacy on the part of mostly mainline denominations churches from the 1950s through the 1980s, by which time such work was diminished because of budget cuts. Chapter Three uses mostly up-to-date on-line information to look at Disability Ministry in local congregations, many of them Evangelical ones with large memberships and substantial resources.

Chapters Four through Seven are relatively brief but authoritative treatments of Disability Ministry among persons with different types of disability that represent, as the chapters unfold, often deepening challenges to the church. Physical Disabilities were the first to be systematically addressed through programs of architectural accessibility. Al gives credit for much improvement, but worries that many churches may think that their task ends with providing physical accessibility. People with communication or sensory disabilities—blindness and deafness—have very different needs. Al is also sensitive to the issue raised by the Deaf Community, whether deafness in fact constitutes a disability. Then come chapters six, on people with developmental disabilities (intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, and autism-spectrum disorders) and chapter seven on mental illness (schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, and dementia). Cases in these two chapters raise questions as to the capacity of the church to include all humans, questions that later are the focus of lengthier chapters on disability theology and ethical issues raised by disability.

Chapters Eight and Nine look back on the Biblical heritage and the response of the church to disability through the ages. These stories are decidedly mixed from the point of view of disability advocacy. But in the Bible Al lifts up the Johannine Gospel's chapter nine, where Jesus decisively rejects the idea that a man was born blind because of his sin or the sin of his parents. And in the story of the church, Al cites the evidence that the early church rejected the idea that abnormal infants should be abandoned to the elements. Despite superstition and bigotry, an ethic of mutual care is part of the Christian inheritance.

Chapters ten, on theology, and eleven on ethics, are some of the book's meatiest. The theology chapter is divided roughly chronologically into an early period culminating societally in the Americans with Disabilities Act and theologically in Nancy Eiesland's concept of the disabled God and a contemporary period of a "high theology of disability," where religious personhood is interrogated and ministry to or with persons with severe mental illness is debated. The ethics chapter raises urgent issues of euthanasia by way of physician-assisted suicide and eugenics by way of selective abortion (for example of Down Syndrome fetuses). One of the most striking quotations is this: "No one these days openly suggests that certain kinds of people should be killed; they just should not be born."

The conclusion, entitled "Where Do We Go From Here?" reiterates that disability is ubiquitous and that, for all the heroic work that has been done by people in and out of

the church, much more needs to be done. In particular, AI insists that disability ministry must become a required, not simply offered, part of the seminary curriculum.

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>

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