

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating November 21, 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 the readings for the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, better known as the Feast of Christ the King. Tom Keene's poem is *The Man Misunderstood*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Vicky Lott, of Pax Christi Austin and member of the Pax Christi USA Anti-Racism Team, wrote a brief essay, *The Catholic Church in Black and White*, which Pax Christi USA recently posted. Her essay follows the poem.

Calendar

First Reading (Daniel 7:13-14)

The vision that this passage describes follows ones that referred to past empires that had dominated the Hebrew people: those of the Babylonians, Medes, Persians, and Greeks. These were purely human dominions rising up from the lower depths of the cosmos. The new vision describes a divine dominion descending from heaven, with a personage who is like a human. The inference is that in contrast to human domination there is a divine one. The gospel for the feast, of course, narrates a dialogue between the two dominions, in the persons of Pilate and Jesus.

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."

Poem

The man misunderstood

"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.
So don't cling.
If you want to meet me, then feed the hungry,
free the prisoners, touch your enemies with love.
They are the Unique Particularities
in which Universal Compassion abides,
and where I wait for you.

Tom Keene and the muse

The Catholic Church in Black and White

by Vicki Vernon Lott

Member, Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team

I recently watched the powerful Netflix docuseries “Colin in Black and White”, which depicts how Colin Kaepernick’s high school years led him to become an activist. To me, certain challenges that he faced in both Black and White spaces are similar to my experiences and observations as an African American female in the predominantly white Catholic Church.

I could point out numerous instances of the Church’s historic systemic racial exclusion, racial exploitation, racial oppression, and racial marginalization of Black people based on race. However, my purpose here is not to admonish the Church for past and present shortcomings regarding the life and dignity of all human beings — the first theme of Catholic social teaching. Rather, my purpose is to briefly consider challenges among Blacks and Whites in the call to family, community, and participation by “seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable,” the second theme of Catholic social teaching. Moving forward in this regard requires that we take a few strategic steps based on historic lessons we should have learned. But first, it’s imperative that we tell the truth about history.

The Black Catholic Church

The lingering effects of centuries of the oppression of African Americans has resulted in what Joy DeGruy calls “Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome”. It’s necessary for Black people to be aware of history in order to avoid inadvertently continuing “internalized racial oppression” due to unawareness. In the Church, this trauma often manifests itself in overt or covert ostracization, or if not, in self-isolation or a siloed effect after having been diminished as a people for so long.

There are serious issues of distrust based on centuries of dehumanization. The reluctance to engage even in conversations about race is often due to unhealed generational scars about which we may even be unaware. This deep-seated historical mistrust sometimes results in an unwillingness to fellowship with White people. By the same token, work is needed internally within the Black community to discuss historic, intergenerational trauma, and explore ways to heal.

Unfortunately, recent Church history in terms of either complicity by silence, such as today’s voter suppression efforts, or criticism of issues that

matter to Black people, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, have only served to widen the chasm.

Consequently, Church people should not be surprised when an event is organized for Black people's involvement without their being co-designers in all phases of the planning process, and then only a few Black people show up. In this regard, my Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team (PCART) colleagues and I know of and have talked about several cases in point around the country.

The White Catholic Church

A prerequisite for community-building is trust. A prerequisite for trust is telling the truth. Telling the truth requires an awareness, understanding, and acceptance of real history. It is imperative that the Church not only acknowledge the truth about the history of this country from the days when the first Africans were enslaved on these shores in 1619, but that they understand their lingering effects today. This requires intentionally talking about race in depth.

All — ALL — layers of the Church must be involved.

- For clergy: diocesan and parish priests should receive anti-racism training as a part of their continuing education to the extent that they become comfortable preparing and delivering homilies on social justice issues, and that they do so. Deacons and seminarians should also have this training.
- For the laity: workshops or classes in anti-racism should be required for directors of religious education (DREs), CCD classes, and Catholic schools.

If the Catholic Church truly wishes to be pro-life, then anti-abortion must be only one portion of right-to-life campaigns. In other words, the Church must visibly promote infant and maternal health, opposition to excessive use of force in policing, and abolition of the death penalty. Their words and actions must also demonstrate that Black lives do matter.

For more information, or ideas on how to become more engaged in anti-racism work, contact Pearlette Springer, Chair of the Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team (PCART) at littlepreciousgems@yahoo.com.

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/>