

Fr. Perozich comments —

Attacks on responsible Americans and Catholics by civil and church authorities regarding immigration policies are appalling.

The arguments are essentially fallacious with lots of attacking the man for not accepting whatever the speaker says, and the false appeal to an authority which neither the prelate nor the politician holds.

A speaker is not an authority simply because he is a government official or a prelate of the church.

The actions of government and church leaders to facilitate unregulated immigration are neither Christian nor responsible.

The mantra of “our immigration system is broken” is false. It would bring order if it were enforced. Those who claim it is broken have no idea of the law.

Catholic prelates need to get back to proclaiming the gospel to the immigrants as well as to citizens of their nation, rather than getting involved in every virtue signaling action proposed by the new world order.

Government officials need to know the immigration laws, enforce them, and take care first of their citizens before opening too wide the border gates.

Once people arrive legally, in the civil sense, they need to be housed, integrated into the language, culture, and economy of the United States, while respecting the language and culture they bring.

In the church they need to be welcomed and offered Word, Sacraments, and Charity in a language they can understand, and be formed to do the same for future immigrants while having a thankful respect for the American Catholics, the American culture and way of life into which they have found their way.

Eduardo Echeverria offers some insight to to the chaos which exists because neither prelates of the church nor government officials respect church guidance or civil law regarding the movement of peoples.

“Erga migrantes caritas Christi” On the Church’s social doctrine and immigration

A distinction should be made in reflecting on a culture of welcome between “assistance in a general sense (a first, short-term welcome), true welcome in the full sense (longer-term projects) and integration (an aim to be pursued constantly over a long period and in the true sense of the word)”.

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Immigrants gather at a makeshift camp stranded between border walls between the U.S. and Mexico on May 13, 2023 in San Diego, California. / Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images

The Church's social doctrine is therefore of a theological nature, specifically theological-moral, "since it is a doctrine aimed at guiding people's behavior." "This teaching ... is to be found at the crossroads where Christian life and conscience come into contact with the real world. [It] is seen in the efforts of individuals, families, people involved in cultural and social life, as well as politicians and statesmen to give it a concrete form and application in history." In fact, this social doctrine reflects three levels of theological-moral teaching: **the foundational level of motivations; the directive level of norms for life in society; the deliberative level of consciences, called to mediate objective and general norms in concrete and particular social situations.** These three levels implicitly define also the proper method and specific epistemological structure of the social doctrine of the Church.¹

This essay is a reflection on "*Erga migrantes caritas Christi.*"² The epigraph to my reflections on the Church's social doctrine and immigration helpfully structures this doctrine into distinct levels of theological-moral teaching.

First, there is the foundational level of motivation. At its root this motivation is biblical: "The love of Christ towards migrants urges us (cf. 2 Cor 5:14) to look afresh at their problems, which are to be met today all over the world." This Christ centered love promotes an "authentic *culture of welcome*" (no. 39). "Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom 15:7). This **welcome entails respect for the dignity and fundamental rights of the human person from different cultures (no. 5), and hence their different cultural identities.**

There is a directive level of norms that grounds this culture, namely, legal norms that "ensure the rights of migrants, refugees and their families" (no. 6; see also, no. 29). Still, significantly, **the Church, in particular, Vatican II, "recognized the rights of the public authorities, in a particular context, to regulate the flow of migration"** (no. 21). Thus, on the one hand, as John Paul II correctly states:

In her pastoral activity, the Church's . . . proclamation of the Gospel is directed towards the integral salvation of the human person, his authentic and effective liberation, through the achievement of conditions of life suitable to his dignity. The comprehension of the human being, that the Church acquired in Christ, urges her to proclaim

the fundamental human rights and to speak out when they are trampled upon. Thus, she does not grow tired of affirming and defending the dignity of the human person, highlighting **the inalienable rights that originate from it. Specifically, these are the right to have one's own country, *to live freely in one's own country*, to live together with one's family, to have access to the goods necessary for a dignified life, to preserve and develop one's ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage, to publicly profess one's religion, to be recognized and treated in all circumstances according to one's dignity as a human being.**

But on the other hand, there is “**the right of every country to pursue an immigration policy that promotes the common good**” (no. 29). John Paul explains:

These rights are concretely employed in the concept of universal common good, which includes the whole family of peoples, beyond every nationalistic egoism. The right to emigrate must be considered in this context. The Church recognizes this right in every human person, in its **dual aspect of the possibility to leave one's country and the possibility to enter another country to look for better conditions of life.** *Certainly, the exercise of such a right is to be regulated, because practicing it indiscriminately may do harm and be detrimental to the common good of the community that receives the migrant.*³

In his message for the World Day of Migrants and refugees of 2013, Benedict XVI echoes his illustrious predecessor's very point, “**Certainly every state has the right to regulate migration and to enact policies dictated by the general requirements of the common good.**”⁴ Harm to the common good of the community occurs, in my judgment, when innocent citizens and law-abiding immigrants bear the consequences of “open borders” such that migrants who illegally enter the country “qualify for scarce public resources such as Medicaid, welfare, and other public assistances; and the costs of all these things would be borne by the American taxpayers.”⁵

Furthermore, there is a religious dimension to immigration and hence to the Church's pastoral ministry, which reflects her missionary and dialogical task, which includes the proclamation of the Gospel, as well as an inter-religious dimension, of the Church in

dealing with cultural and religious plurality, particularly with “basic questions such as the meaning of life and history, suffering and poverty, hunger, sickness and death” (no. 30). The Church carries out its fundamental task in this context in the following ways: “Being communion. . . Being missionary. . . and Being the People and family of God, mystery, sacrament, Mystical Body and Temple of the Spirit” (no. 37).

Moreover, regarding cultural plurality, not just anything goes, that is, accepting cultural identities indiscriminately (no. 30). Again, on the one hand, the Church is open to all that is true, good, and beautiful in this cultural plurality; but, as Benedict XVI puts it, “it has always been critical of culture also, and it must continue fearlessly and steadfastly to critique culture, especially today.”⁶ The Pontifical Council elaborates:

“Inculturation” begins by listening, which means getting to know those to whom we proclaim the gospel. Listening and knowing lead to a more adequate discernment of the values and “countervalues” of their cultures in the light of the Paschal Mystery of death and life. Tolerance is not enough; needed is a certain feeling for the other, respect as far as possible for the cultural identity of one’s dialogue partners. **To recognize and appreciate their positive aspects, which prepare them to accept the gospel, is a necessary prelude to its successful proclamation.** This is the only way to create dialogue, understanding and trust. Keeping our eyes on the gospel thus means attention to people too, to their dignity and freedom. Helping them advance integrally requires a commitment to fraternity, solidarity, service and justice. The love of God, while it gives humankind the truth and shows everyone his highest vocation, also promotes his dignity and gives birth to community, based on the gospel proclamation being welcomed, interiorized, celebrated and lived. (no. 36)

A distinction should be made in reflecting on a culture of welcome between “assistance in a general sense (a first, short-term welcome), true welcome in the full sense (longer-term projects) and integration (an aim to be pursued constantly over a long period and in the true sense of the word)” (no. 42). In this connection, we must consider the legitimate requirements stemming from the **responsibilities of civil authorities to preserve order, protect citizens, and punish wrongdoers (Rom 13:1-17), and hence of**

“order, legality and [national] security” in our understanding of welcoming the migrants.

Consequently, **civil government must attend to national sovereignty.** The latter informs immigration policy, entailing **the right to determine the criteria for legally admitting foreigners into the country.** In this connection, the common good means that **“immigration policies should principally benefit citizens, not harm citizens’ well-being.”** This means, in my judgment, that **immigrants must obey the laws of a nation, including its laws of immigration, such that “illegal immigration is morally wrong.”** **Entering the USA without a valid visa and inspection is illegal activity.** “Lawbreaking aliens bear moral responsibility for their unlawful actions.”⁷ I don’t use the term “illegals” as a noun, but it is correct to refer to the activity of an individual as illegal.⁸

Lastly, there is the deliberative level when considering the multi-dimensional causes of migration. The latter is taken not only for economic reasons but also for cultural reasons, for the good of children and family life. (no. 1) In particular, the Pontifical Council stresses, “migration raises a truly ethical question: the search for a new international economic order for a more equitable distribution of the goods of the earth” (no. 8; no. 3). Whatever one makes of a international economic order, and the corresponding notion of globalization (no. 4), **the framing of this ethical question as a matter of “equitable distribution” is also problematic, in my judgment.**

At issue here is the principle of the universal destination of created goods.⁹ I agree with this principle of Catholic social doctrine but it should not be interpreted as supportive of a form of state socialism, which would include the government’s redistribution of wealth. John Paul explains in his social encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*:

The original source of all that is good is the very act of God, who created both the earth and man, and who gave the earth to man so that he might have dominion over it by his work and enjoy its fruits (Gen 1:28). God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone. This is *the foundation of the universal destination of the earth’s goods.* The earth, by reason of its fruitfulness and its capacity to satisfy human needs, is God’s first gift for the sustenance of human life. But the earth does not yield its fruits without a particular human response to God’s gift, that is to say, without work. It is through work that man,

using his intelligence and exercising his freedom, succeeds in dominating the earth and making it a fitting home. In this way, he makes part of the earth his own, precisely the part which he has acquired through work; this is *the origin of individual property*. Obviously, he also has the responsibility not to hinder others from having their own part of God's gift; indeed, he must cooperate with others so that together all can dominate the earth.¹⁰

Clearly, John Paul II doesn't see a conflict between this principle of the universal destination of created goods and individual liberty and a free market. **He does not support the idea of the common ownership of all material goods because private property would then be impossible.**¹¹ The notions of liberty, including economic liberty, and a free market, raise the question: "Should capitalism . . . be the goal of the countries now making efforts to rebuild their economy and society? Is this the model which ought to be proposed to the countries of the Third World which are searching for the path to true economic and civil progress?" John Paul answers the question this way:

If by "capitalism" is meant an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative, even though it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of a "business economy," "market economy" or simply "free economy."¹²

In short, to deal with the economic issues of the causes of migration, **we need to focus not on the distribution of wealth but about the creation of wealth**, as formulated above by John Paul II.

(Note: This paper was presented at an ecumenical meeting of the USCCB and the Methodist Church.)

Endnotes:

¹ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 73.

² "Erga migrantes caritas Christi," Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People," no. 1. Further reference to this source will be cited parenthetically in the text.

³ John Paul II, Message for the 87th World Day of Migration, 2001. Emphasis added in the last sentence.

⁴ Message for the 99th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2013 (12 October 2012) | BENEDICT XVI (vatican.va).

⁵ James R. Edwards, Jr., “A Biblical Perspective on Immigration Policy,” September 2009, Center for Immigration Studies, 5.

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, “Communication and Culture,” in *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 42-52, and at 49.

⁷ James R. Edwards, Jr., “A Biblical Perspective on Immigration Policy,” 2, 8.

⁸ *Pace* Matthew Soerens & Jenny Yang, *Welcoming The Stranger, Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate*, Revised and Expanded (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Books, 2018), 16.

⁹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2402; 2405. Also, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nos. 171-175.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, Encyclical Letter 1991, no. 31.

¹¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2403. Also, Also, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nos. 176-181.

¹² John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no, 42.

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