

The U.S. Catholic Hierarchy — Prophets or Profiteers?

By JOHN VINSON

The Bible declares that one cannot serve both God and Mammon (money), but it seems that the U.S. hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church is doing exactly that with its advocacy of amnesty and other benefits for illegal aliens. That advocacy is explicit and forceful.

Just one of many examples is the heading “Migration Policy” on the website of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). It states that a “major public priority of the church” is a policy “designed to unite and mobilize a growing network of Catholic institutions . . . in support of a broad legalization program and comprehensive immigration reform.”¹ To be fair, it may be that many of the Church’s leaders sincerely believe that their faith requires them to take this as a prophetic stand. But one certainly cannot fail to notice they are profiting quite handsomely from that prophetic role.

“Why do Catholic officials,” asks Cliff Kincaid of Accuracy in Media, “want to encourage illegal immigration? The answer is quite simple. Most of the illegal aliens are Catholics. Plus the church makes lots of government money by hosting and serving the immigrants.”² And just how much money do the Catholic Bishops get from the government, i.e., the taxpayers of America? That amount, says Kincaid, is one-third of the USCCB’s annual budget, a total of \$51 million a year, “with a lot of that money used to cater to immigrants, legal and illegal.”³ According to James Russell, a Roman Catholic, and author of *Breach of Faith: American Churches and the Immigration Crisis*, “the USCCB is generally recognized as the single most active and most influential religious force for liberalization of American immigration policy.”⁴

At this point, an interesting question arises. With

a fair share of taxpayers’ money, through the Catholic Church, going to promote immigration policies and benefits for immigrants that many Americans oppose, one wonders why the ACLU and other leftist civil libertarians are silent about this rather obvious breach of church and state distinctions.

Commonly they rail about this principle when even the smallest cross appears on public property, but public money to benefit the agenda of a particular church seems to raise no concern. The benefit, once more, does seem quite apparent. As Russell notes, “When Catholic immigrants become naturalized, they may vote for candidates who support church policies. The network of Catholic agencies relies on high rates of immigrants in need of social services to maintain government funding...”⁵

In the case of the ACLU and its ilk, the likely reason for silence is that mass immigration is an agenda they share with the church. As some Catholic leaders view immigration as a means to fill up pews and collection plates, the left views immigration as a means to build a powerful “progressive” voting bloc, a strategy set forth by Democratic strategist Robert Creamer.⁶

Nevertheless, one doesn’t have to be a staunch advocate of church and state division to criticize a religious subsidy with public money. Still, one hears little criticism of this policy from any political faction, left, center, or right. One reason, no doubt, is that many fear the charge of anti-Catholic bigotry if they raise the issue. Such a concern is understandable, but it should not inhibit critical evaluation of what the church’s hierarchy is doing.

The issue is not Catholics or Catholicism. It is the improper actions of Catholic leaders who, in fact, do not represent the beliefs of most American Catholics. A Zogby Poll done in 2009 bears this out.⁷ The poll found that 69 percent of Catholics think that current immigration levels are too high. And 64 percent of Catholics opposed conditional amnesty for illegal aliens, preferring instead a policy of enhanced immigration law enforcement to

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encourage illegal immigrants to go home. In addition to these sentiments of the laity, there are a number of lower echelon Catholic leaders who disagree with their higher-ups on immigration. Commonly they are in a position to see the negative impact of mass immigration firsthand.

One was the late Father Patrick Bascio, author of the book *On the Immorality of Illegal Immigration*. In that work he charged that top Catholic leaders were corrupting themselves by promoting “all the evils connected with illegal immigration.”⁸ Father Bascio strongly criticized the negative effects of such migration on the job prospects and wage levels of disadvantaged citizens, particularly black Americans.



Cliff Kincaid speaking in 2011 at the National Press Club

Also, with respect to blaming Catholics for breach of church and state on immigration, one should consider that other religious bodies, Protestant and Jewish, are doing the same thing. This is particularly the case with refugee resettlement programs, which, like similar Catholic programs, involve extensive use of public funds. These other bodies also in many cases engage in advocacy for illegal aliens similar to that of the Catholic hierarchy.

Nevertheless, regardless of whatever goals the Protestant and Jewish groups have, they don't seem to be using the refugee programs to build up their congregations. The refugees and illegal immigrants currently arriving aren't significantly Protestant or Jewish for that to be a plausible motive. Thus the suspicion remains that the Catholic leaders significantly set their immigration agenda to increase the number of Catholics in the U.S.

What might dispel this suspicion? One thing cer-

tainly would be a concerted campaign by the church to encourage Mexicans and other Latin American Catholics to remain where they are. Obedience to law is consistent with Christian teaching, and when the church tacitly and explicitly encourages lawbreaking, it weakens its moral credibility. Catholic leaders probably would reply that concerns for compassion override those of legality. But is it truly compassionate to create a climate of anarchy, undermine America's poor, and — most significantly — destroy incentive for the source countries to offer more opportunities to their people?

To cite the leading example, it is scarcely a secret that the wealthy oligarchs who rule Mexico want to export their poor to the U.S. In effect, they want to use our country as a safety valve to relieve social pressure which otherwise would force them to undertake needed reforms. Aside from advising potential migrants to stay home, the church also might encourage them to do so by speaking forcefully and prophetically to their leaders about the need for change.

To illustrate, a leading member of Mexico's elite is telecommunications magnate Carlos Slim. Reputedly the richest man in the world, Slim has an estimated fortune of \$63 billion. According to Mexican economist Celso Garrido, Slim's monopolistic practices prevent the growth of smaller companies and thereby inhibit the creation of decently paying jobs in Mexico.⁹ The lack of these jobs is a significant reason why Mexicans illegally enter the United States.

The American Catholic bishops, once again, constantly tell Americans that we must have compassion for these migrants. Yet they rarely consider that it would be more compassionate to find ways for them to stay home. The truth is they most probably would prefer the familiar surroundings of home to exile in a foreign land — if only they could attain even marginally better economic opportunities. And certainly it would be better for Mexican families if breadwinners weren't far away for long periods of time. Family life is indeed one thing the U.S. bishops and other American Catholic leaders claim to support.

Thus one wonders why the U.S. Catholic Church doesn't make greater use of its powers of moral suasion to promote reform in Mexico, with particular attention to the hearts and minds of its rulers. Surely Mexico could have no objection to this, as her leaders constantly try to influence opinion in the U.S. Specifically, the U.S. and Mexican Catholic leaders might suggest to the 72-year-old Carlos Slim, a professing Catholic, that he can't take his money with him to the next life, and that he might peel off a few billions — money he'd never miss — to

promote economic development in his homeland. That, and relaxing his monopolistic control, surely, to some degree, would make Mexico more prosperous.

As it is, Slim and the rest of his fellow elites sharply criticize U.S. immigration law enforcement. They prefer to export their problem people and have middle class and working class Americans pick up the tab to provide public services for the migrants. Could moral suasion by churchmen persuade them to change their minds? No one can know until they try, and try with at least the same determination they now use to influence U.S. immigration policy.

And if they don't so endeavor, Americans of good will will have every right to keep on suspecting that the U.S. Catholic hierarchy is serving Mammon—by profiting from more parishioners—at least as much as it is serving God. ■

Endnotes

1. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/
2. Cliff Kincaid, Catholic Church Facilitates Foreign Invasion, 4/29/10, www.aim.org.
3. Ibid.
4. James C. Russell, *Breach of Faith: American Churches and the Immigration Crisis*, P. 109. Representative Government Press, Raleigh, NC, 2004.
5. Ibid., P. 105.
6. Robert Creamer, *Stand Up Straight: How Progressives Can Win*, p. 555, Seven Locks Press.
7. Steven Camarota, Religious Leaders vs. Members – An Examination of Contrasting Views on Immigration, Center for Immigration Studies Background, www.cis.org, December 2009.
8. Father Patrick Bascio, *On the Immorality of Illegal Immigration*, AuthorHouse, 2009. Cited in Kincaid, op. cit.
9. Andy Porras, (7/13/07). “Mexico’s wealthiest mogul spurs controversy,” *Hispanic Link*. <http://www.scrippsnews.com/node/25270>. Retrieved May 27, 2009.