

**“EUCHARIST WITHOUT BORDERS:
THE EYE OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING
ON BORDER ISSUES”**

University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas

**Most Rev. Ricardo Ramírez, C.S.B.
Bishop of Las Cruces, New Mexico**

On November 2 of every year for the past several years the People of God from both sides of the Mexican-United States border gather to celebrate the Eucharist to pray for those who have died trying to cross the border. We place two tables, one on the Mexican side, the other on the U.S. side and concelebrate a “Mass without Borders,” led by Mexican and American bishops and priests.

What always capture my attention and imagination are the sights and sounds surrounding the Mass. First there is the ugly fence, separating us physically. Then there are the people on both sides of the border, praying together as they share the common concern of immigrants and those who live the ugly reality of the culture of death.

Making up part of the crowd on the U.S. side are officers of the U.S. Border Patrol and hovering over us are helicopters, also from the Border Patrol, keeping an eye on us. Several times during the Mass there are long cargo trains of Southern Pacific, some going west, others east. I surmise they are carrying goods across our continent, perhaps transporting goods from Asia to our country or to Europe, or from Europe and the U.S. to Asia and other points west of us. To me these trains represent, in a most vivid way, the contemporary phenomenon of globalization, a major factor that influences the migration of people around the world.

Leaning along the fence on both sides are small crosses with the names of those who have died along the border.

High above all this on a mountain near the spot where the three states of Texas, New Mexico and Chihuahua come together, also keeping watch, is a huge statue of Christ the King.

In such a setting, committed Christians have no trouble being reminded about what intentions need to be brought to the altar.

What can we make of this scene? The fence represents a world divided by political borders meant to keep people out. The trains remind me of the phenomenon of globalization which is unquestionably affecting the border in most significant ways. Besides influencing worldwide migration, globalization in many places has also caused higher incidences of poverty.

The heavy presence of U.S. Border Patrol while the Mass is going on is a vivid reminder of our country's emphasis on border security and enforcement policies. These are costing us taxpayers: the budget of Customs and Border Protection agency increased by 90% from \$6 billion in 2004 to \$11.4 billion in 2010. In the same period, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) went from \$3.7 billion to \$5.7 billion.¹

¹ McCombs, Brady, 2010. "Border 101," Arizona Daily Star, October 24. See: http://azstarnet.com/news/local/border/article_dc909571-05b9-5f70-be39-bfa148091380.htm.

The Eucharist being we celebrate under the vigilant eye of Christ the King, tells us that there *is* a God of justice, of peace and of truth, and that the Church, the instrument of God's kingdom, is equipped, through its social teachings, to shed moral light on the issues we face along the border.

THE REALITY OF BORDER ISSUES

Current United States immigration laws, policies and practices are resulting in a significant number in border deaths, human trafficking networks, family separation, inhumane raids and the creation of an underclass, often living in the shadows of our society.

Factors which have contributed to the present reality:

- Wage differences between the U.S. and countries south of the border
- Negative impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Central American Free

Trade Agreement (CAFTA) on workers, especially rural communities in Mexico and Central America.

- Out migration due to flooding of domestic markets with cheaper imported food from the U.S.
- Cartel wars, refugees and asylum seekers
- Food prices have risen (food processors buy cheaper grain from the U.S., use it to make products like tortillas, control the market, and raise prices as they eliminate local competition.)²
- In our country there is a significant disparity between labor needs and legal avenues for low wage work. Then there are the backlogs in the processing of family reunification due to an antiquated visa system.

“Immigration as a problem of social policy involves intersecting legal, political, and economic considerations regarding labor, border security, trade policy, cultural integration, and criminal justice. As

² Harvey, Dr. Neil, New Mexico State University Department of Government. “Economic Aspects of Immigration”, City of Las Cruces Forum, January 20, 2011

presently framed, the immigration quandary pits the interests of different constituencies against one another: native and foreign-born workers, industry and organized labor, cultural conservatives and social justice advocates, even different generations of immigrants.”³

Needless to say, the situation is very complex. Compounding the situation is the tragic and horrendous violence related to drug trafficking and the battles between the cartels. In Ciudad Juárez, since 2007, 8,700 people have been killed. So far this year, the number is approaching 900. For all of Mexico, the murder toll is now at least 40,000 since the beginning of the term of President Felipe Calderón. This includes the senseless killing of young people at family and social gatherings, and at times soccer fields.⁴

A few days ago *The El Paso Times* reported that a quarter of Ciudad Juárez homes are empty. The number of people who have left the city in the last three years is about 230,000. Empty houses are

³ Ibid.

⁴ Molloy, Molly, New Mexico State University Librarian, information provided May 20, 2011. For more information on Ms. Malloy, visit <http://newscenter.nmsu.edu/news/article/7508>.

both the cause and consequence of some of the city's major problems. They attract crime and are often vandalized or serve as hideouts for thieves and drug addicts; in some cases, hit men have even used them to dump bodies.⁵

We should all agree that the root cause of the cartel violence is the insatiable thirst in our country for illegal drugs, as well as the relatively easy importation of guns, including assault weapons, brought in from the U.S. where they are legally and readily available. It is hard to imagine a drug related violence-free Mexico as long as Americans need to satisfy their addictions.

How can the social teachings help the Church respond both in its teaching mission and in pastoral approaches to this heartbreaking situation?

SOCIAL TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH

⁵ "A Quarter of Juárez Homes are Empty", El Paso Times, Monday, May 23, 2011, Section 6A

This year marks the 120th anniversary of the most well-known encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, “*Rerum Novarum*,” considered the groundwork for the social teaching of the Church. It was not the first of the social encyclicals for even before “*Rerum Novarum*” Leo XIII had written important encyclicals on political concerns and on the social order. Also pre-Leonine popes had also written encyclicals on the subject of social teachings.⁶

The encyclical “*Rerum Novarum*” teaches that the main function of the state is the common good which is not reduced to one’s nation but considered from a world standpoint; awareness that this good cannot be limited to material goods but must include the moral good of society, placing priority on people and families; respecting the free initiative of people; and aiding their neediest in society.⁷

Subsequent popes since Leo XIII have written extensively regarding matters of social justice and peace. There is a common

⁶ Himes, OFM, Kenneth R., *101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching*

⁷ *Rerum Novarum*, Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on Capital and Labor, May 15, 1891

thread running through the fabric of papal and Episcopal teachings expressing the deep concern of the Church on modern issues that affect peoples, some on a global scale. I will cite some of these as they apply to the challenges we face at our southern border.

IMMIGRATION AND GLOBALIZATION

Robert J. Shreiter suggests this definition of globalization: "...it is about the increasingly interconnected character of the political, economic and social life of the peoples of this planet."⁸

I am sure that you, my audience today, are familiar with the epochal changes that globalization has created just about everywhere on the face of the earth. Thomas Friedman, who has written extensively on the subject, points out how aspects of globalization have been around since at least the middle of the 19th century. But

⁸ Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll NY.: Orbis Books, 1997), 4-5.

what is new today is the degree and intensity with which the world is being tied together into a single globalized marketplace.⁹

In 1900 the daily foreign exchange trade was in the millions of dollars. In 1992, it was \$820 million a day, and by 1998 it was \$1.5 billion a day. The figures as of April, 2010, the average daily foreign exchange market had reached \$3.9 trillion.¹⁰

“To be against globalization as such is like being against electricity,” writes Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, recognized as the founder of liberation theology. He goes on to state, “However, this cannot lead us to resign ourselves to the present order of things because globalization as it is now being carried out exacerbates the unjust inequalities among different sectors of humanity and the social, economic, political, and cultural exclusion of a good portion of the world’s population.”¹¹

⁹ Friedman, Thomas, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1999), xv.

¹⁰ <http://au.ibtimes.com/articles/110821/201110210/what-is-foregin-echange-currency-conversion-financial-markets-forex-foreign-exchange-markets.htm>

¹¹ Gustavo Gutierrez, “Memory and Prophecy,” in *The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology*, 32.

The Sixth World Congress for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees had as its theme “A Pastoral Response to the Phenomenon of Migration in the Era of Globalization.” Archbishop Antonio María Veglio, president of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, made the following remarks in his inaugural speech:

“Globalization has created a new labor market and, consequently, forced many to emigrate, also in order to flee from poverty, misery, natural catastrophes and local and international conflicts, as well as from political or religious persecution. This has opened markets to international intervention, but it has not torn down the walls of national boundaries to allow the free circulation of people, even with due respect for the sovereignty of States and their constitutional charters safeguarding legality and security.”

“Specific pastoral care in relation to migrants is summarized in the value of welcome. This must be shown to people of various nationalities, ethnicity and religion and helps to make the authentic

face of the church visible.” Archbishop Veglio concluded, “The present globalized world calls the Church to face, day by day, the causes of migration and the consequences it has in the lives of migrants and local people....She is called to defend their cause in various contexts, also through collaboration in promoting adequate laws, at the local and international levels, that favor proper integration.”¹²

Blessed Pope John Paul II wrote often about the phenomenon of globalization. In his encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, marking the centenary of *Rerum Novarum*, he wrote that the market economy responds to people’s economic need and respects their free initiative, but that it has to be controlled by the community, the social body with its common good.¹³

In 1999, when he spoke to the “*Centesimus Annus – Pro Pontifice*” Foundation, he said, “the objective of all your activity in

¹² “Pastoral Care of Migrants in the Era of Globalisation”, Catholic News Service, November 3, 2009

¹³ Blessed Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, Encyclical Letter, 34, 58

the financial and administrative field must always be never to violate the dignity of man and, for this reason, to build structures and systems that will foster justice and solidarity for the good of all.”¹⁴

In 2001, he that said globalization, *a priori*, is neither good nor bad. It will be what people make of it. “No system is an end in itself, and it is necessary to insist that globalization, like any other system, must be at the service of the human person; it must serve solidarity and the common good.”¹⁵

The newly beatified pope also said the following, “The more global the market, the more it must be balanced by a global culture of solidarity that is attentive to the needs of the weakest....The economy, even if globalized must always be integrated into the overall fabric of social relations....Globalization also requires a new culture, new rules, and new institutions at the world level. Politics and economics must

¹⁴ “Holy Father’s Speech to the ‘*Centesimus Annus-Pro Pontifice*’ Foundation,” September 11, 1999, no. 3

¹⁵ “Address of the Holy Father to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences”, Friday, April 27, 2001

collaborate (in the) cancellation or at least reduction of the public debt of the world's poor countries.”¹⁶

OFFICIAL CHURCH TEACHING ON IMMIGRATION

The Church has long defended the right to migrate. Based on the Gospel, the teaching of the Church has provided the basis for the development of basic principles regarding the right to migrate. This teaching cites the causes of migration, poverty, injustice, religious intolerance, armed conflicts, all of which must be addressed, if migrants can't remain in their homeland and support their families.

Pope Pius XII, in his Apostolic Constitution, *Exsul Familia*, affirms that all peoples have the rights to conditions worthy of human life, and if these conditions are not present, the right to migrate.¹⁷ The Pope also established that this right is not absolute, that the needs of

¹⁶ “Address of the Holy Father John Paul II to Business and Trade-Union Leaders on the Ethical Dimension of the Global Economy”, May 2, 2000, no 3

¹⁷ Pope Pius XII, *Exsul Familia* (On the Spiritual Care to Migrants), September 30, 1952.

immigrants must be measured against the needs of receiving countries.¹⁸

Blessed Pope John XXIII, in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, explains that people also have the right not to migrate, and make the decision to remain within the confines of their own country.¹⁹

The encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* of John Paul II, refers to refugee crises as “the festering of a wound.”²⁰ In his 1990 Lenten message, he writes of the right for refugees to be reunited with their families and their right to a dignified occupation and just wage. He also stated that the right to asylum must never be denied when people’s lives are truly threatened in their homeland.

In *Ecclesia in America*, Blessed Pope John Paul II reiterates the rights of migrants and their families and the respect for human dignity “even in cases of non-legal immigration.”²¹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Blessed Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth, April 11, 1963).

²⁰ Blessed Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern), December 30, 1987

²¹ Blessed Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America* (The Church in America), January 22, 1999.

In November, 2002, both episcopal conferences of the U.S. and Mexico issued a joint statement, “*Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope.*” The bishops list five principles compiled from the rich tradition of the Church teachings on migration:

1. Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.
2. Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.
3. Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders.
4. Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.
5. The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected.

The bishops teach recognize the right of a sovereign state to control its borders as well as the right of human persons to migrate so that they can realize their God-given rights. The sovereign states may impose reasonable limits on immigration, but the common good is not served when the basic human rights of the individual are violated.

Given the current conditions of poverty and persecution in the world,

the presumption is that persons must migrate in order to support and protect themselves and that nations who are able to receive them should do so whenever possible.

SOCIAL SIN AND IMMIGRATION

Roman Catholic theology has traditionally claimed that personal sin has social effects, such as murder, theft, and assault. There are ample theological sources that recognize that personal sin may become embodied in societal structures and institutions. The evil effects of sin “continue in history through embodiment in patterns of behavior and relationship and in prevailing attitudes and world views. Once embodied in society and its various structures, sin takes on a relatively independent existence influencing others to sin and inflicting continuing injustice on persons.”²²

For theologian Peter Henriot, social sin refers to “(1) structures that oppress human beings, violate human dignity, stifle freedom,

²² O’Keefe, O.S.B., Mark, What are they Saying About Social Sin?, Paulist Press, New York, 1990.

impose gross inequality; (2) situations that promote and facilitate individual acts of selfishness; and (3) the complicity or silent acquiescence of persons who do not take responsibility for the evil being done”²³

The Latin American bishops, at their III General Conference held in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979, referred to social sin in this way: “We see the growing gap between rich and poor as a scandal and a contradiction to Christian existence. The luxury of a few becomes an insult to the wretched poverty of the vast masses. This is contrary to the plan of the Creator, and to the honor that is due him. In this anxiety and sorrow, the Church sees a situation of social sin, all the more serious because it exists in countries that call themselves Catholic and are capable of changing the situation.”²⁴ The bishops quote Blessed Pope John Paul II who, after opening the Puebla conference in 1987, travelled to the very Mexican Indian state of Oaxaca. There he said, “The pope chooses to be your voice, the voice

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Eagleson, John and Philip Scharper, “Puebla and Beyond,” Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1979.

of those who cannot speak or who have been silenced. He wishes to be conscience of consciences, an invitation to action, to make up for lost time, which has frequently been a time of prolonged sufferings and unsatisfied hopes.” Addressing the very poor farmers in that part of the world, he added, “they have a right to have the barriers of exploitation removed,...against which their best efforts of advancement are dashed.”²⁵

In the same vein, Blessed Pope John Paul II, in *Ecclesia in America*, writes on the gravity of “social sins which cry to heaven because they generate violence, disrupt peace and harmony between communities within single nations, between nations and between the different regions of the continent.”

The concept of social sin is part of the official teaching of the Church in the U.S. The following is found in the *National Catechetical Directory for Catholics in the United States*: “The effect of sin over time in society that causes society to create structures of

²⁵ Blessed Pope John Paul II, Address to the Indians of Oaxaca and Chiapas, January 29, 1979.

sin is, by analogy, called social sin. Personal sin expressed in the structures of society – personal sin that has social implications – is social sin. Social sin resembles original sin because it can exist in structures, because we can participate in an evil not of our own creation, and because sometimes it is the inheritance of our families and communities. Sinful structures set up social relationships that in turn cause systematic denial or abuse of the rights of certain groups or individuals. Organized social injustice, institutionalized racism, systemic economic exploitation and the destruction of the environment are examples of the social consequences of sin.” (no. 43, pp. 171-172)

Dr. Heyer links social sin to immigration. She states, “Social sin serves as a conceptual key to revealing the socioeconomic, legal, and political structures that contribute to undocumented immigration, as

well as to understanding the ideological blinders that foster resistance to an ethic of hospitality and to immigrants themselves.”²⁶

“At a general level, the scale of undocumented immigration to the United States has fostered a widespread conception of immigrants as threatening the rule of law, social cohesion, and the nation’s economic health. As these concerns get amplified or distorted by xenophobia, ethno-cultural nationalism, or fear, anti-immigrant sentiment has led, in extreme cases, to the demonization of populations of color through increasingly mainstream outlets, as evidenced by the 40% increase in anti-Hispanic hate crimes between 2003 and 2007. Amid a climate of anti-immigrant sentiment, buzzwords such as ‘national security’ and ‘illegal alien’ can serve as idols to conceal a sinful reality and provoke demonization.”²⁷

CONCLUSION

²⁶ Op Cit.

²⁷ Ibid.

We U.S. bishops face the awesome challenge as teachers of the Church's social tradition to convince Catholics and others of good will about immigration. Presently, it appears that the prevailing attitudes and behaviors against immigrants, particularly the undocumented, are shared by a significant number of Roman Catholics. As the U.S. and Mexican bishops note, "part of the process of conversion of mind and heart deals with confronting attitudes of cultural superiority, indifference, and racism; accepting migrants not as foreboding aliens, terrorists or economic threats, but as persons with dignity and rights, revealing the presence of Christ; and recognizing migrants as bearers of deep cultural values and rich faith traditions."²⁸ Dr. Heyer believes that "A change of heart can occur through personal encounters and relationships that provoke new perspectives and receptivity."²⁹

Father Daniel Groody C.S.C. who teaches at the University of Notre Dame, is probably the best Catholic theologian on migration.

²⁸ U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope" no. 40, <http://www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml>.

²⁹ Op Cit.

He has developed the idea that God is a migrant³⁰; his insights have inspired my concluding thoughts.

Jesus shows the way, leads the way to the awesome border -- the frontier -- of the New Kingdom. He invites his disciples to “come and see.” (Jn. 1:39)

Jesus the migrant moved physically from place to place. With Mary and Joseph he went from Bethlehem to Egypt, and then with his family travelled to Galilee. In the Gospel of Luke, his entire ministry was a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, the destined place of his death and resurrection.

Theologically we can say that God continually crosses borders. He crosses the border between divinity and humanity. Crossing that border allows God to make our earth his dwelling place.

³⁰ Fr Daniel Groody, CSC, “Theology of Migration,” *America*

In the person of Jesus, God leads us from the old law to the new law of the Spirit, and from the covenant with the people of Israel to believers everywhere in space and time.

He transfers his ministry from his own culture, the world of the Jews to include the Samaritans and the Gentiles and thus makes his saving plan to include everyone and exclude no one.

From the male-dominant and patriarchal societal and religious customs of his day, he goes to the inclusion of women – even in leadership positions in his ministry.

Today many people around the world are on the move: they are moving from places like Sudan to Chad and Kenya, from Iraq to Jordan and Syria, from North Korea to China, from Libya to Egypt and Tunisia, from the Holy Land to Lebanon and other Christian-friendly places, from Southeast Asia to Australia, from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, to the United States and Europe.

The Church's response must be that of hospitality. We must never lose sight of the idea that wonderful things happen when hospitality is offered. We cannot forget that the entire history of our salvation came from the most generous gesture of hospitality by Abraham and Sara. In his earthly ministry, Jesus, frequently received and offered hospitality: at the wedding feast of Cana, at the miraculous multiplication of loaves and fishes, at the Last Supper, at the meals after the resurrection. In Sacred Scripture, the heavenly banquet is promised, where God and the Lamb will host us for all eternity.

The good news is that throughout our land parishes and dioceses welcome the vulnerable and are attempting to foster solidarity for immigrants as well as a steady work in advocacy for humane immigration reform. The bad news is that many U.S. citizens, among whom are found Roman Catholics, are resistant to an ethic that promotes hospitality and mercy for those who are in this country

outside the parameters of current law.³¹ We bishops and Catholic institutions such as this one have our work ahead of us.

³¹ Heyer, Kristin E., “Social Sin and Immigration: Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors”, Theological Studies, June 1, 2010