

**Remarks at Faith and Immigration Event
St. Peter's Catholic Church in Charlotte, N.C
Sept. 4, 2012
Bishop Anthony B. Taylor
Roman Catholic Diocese of Little Rock**

This book, *Caring for Migrants: A Collection of Church Documents on the Pastoral Care of Migrants* [Fabio Baggio CS and Maurizio Pettenà CS, editors. St. Pauls Publications: Strathfield, Australia, 2009. www.stpauls.com.au] contains a 1200+ page compendium of official documents of the Catholic Church issued over the course of the last 60 years on the topic of immigration. My task is to apply all of this in 10 minutes to the issues we face in public policy today. The fullest expression Catholic teaching on immigration and national borders and the human rights of immigrants is rooted the dignity and transcendence of the human person as revealed in Scripture, but for our purposes today it is very helpful to notice that what Jesus has revealed to us regarding human rights can already be found in Natural Law--and so are truths that are accessible to anyone with an open mind who reflects on the meaning of human existence, regardless of religious belief. The most basic of these truths for our purposes today is the fact that all human beings have rights that are inherent in the human person as such. These rights are universal (they belong to all, regardless of ethnicity or place of birth), they are inviolable (no one--not even the state--has the authority to deny us these rights) and they are integral (they must not be applied in a selective or discriminatory manner). But other than the right to life itself--which in the case of innocent life is absolute, and hence the absolute inadmissibility of abortion--these other inherent human rights are not absolute because they are limited by the common good. The state has a role in organizing the exercise of these human rights for the common good, but it cannot licitly impede the exercise of these rights because these rights do not derive from the state, nor does our possession of these rights depend on their recognition by the state. These truths of Natural Law were expressed eloquently by the authors of our Declaration of Independence as follows: "*We hold these truths to be self-evident (meaning they derive from Natural Law) that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...*" The fact that our country has never lived up to these truths, especially regarding African-Americans and Native Americans is our nation's original sin, the consequences of which reveal very clearly the damage we all suffer when anyone is denied their fundamental human rights.

Most immigrants who come to this country due to extreme poverty or fleeing oppression, do so exercising their fundamental right to life because the right to life includes the right of access to the basic necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, basic medical care and decent employment that pays enough to provide for one's family. Moreover, parents are obligated to provide the necessities of life to the children whom God has entrusted to their care, so if the circumstances are such in one's place of origin that one is unable to provide for oneself or one's family, people have the right--and in many cases, in practical terms, the obligation--to move to another

locale where they will be able to secure and provide the necessities of life. National borders are at the service of the common good of both nations that share that border--not just the perceived self-interest of the more powerful of the two--and so should serve to facilitate the demographic flow between nations rather than impede that flow, especially when there are strong economic and social reasons for that migration. In most cases, the flow itself is generated by the economic principle of supply and demand.

Once here, immigrants have the same basic human right of participation in the community as any other resident, including the right to a legitimate share in the exercise of power and the equitable distribution of the goods and services of the community. Legal marginalization of any part of the population is a violation of the inherent dignity and transcendence of the human person. There should be no second-class residents in the community. Therefore the path to citizenship should be short and readily available.

Regarding respect for the rule of law, in most circumstances the Church does not condone the breaking of laws, but we do teach that it is a sin to obey an unjust law and that beyond a certain point, unjust laws lose their binding force. I would add that unjust laws, like our current immigration system, undermine respect for the rule of law far more than violating unjust laws does--we learned that in the struggle for civil rights. Therefore, in my opinion the word "amnesty" is an inappropriate term to use when discussing the regularization of the status of undocumented immigrants--amnesty is forgiveness for a wrong done. Those who enacted unjust laws and those in government who refuse to correct this injustice are the ones who need forgiveness, not those who incurred unavoidable infractions in the exercise of their intrinsic human right to immigrate when circumstances so required. Welcome is the correct term, not amnesty! We who benefit from the resultant exploitation of our nation's undocumented workforce, are the ones in the wrong, not the immigrant...and thus apology, not blame, is the correct attitude for us to bring to the question of regularizing the status of undocumented immigrants today.

Let me close with 3 brief quotes from Pope John Paul II in a message regarding Undocumented Migrants in 1996:

"(2)...The immigrant's irregular legal status cannot allow him to lose his dignity, since he is endowed with inalienable rights, which can neither be violated or ignored.

(5) ...Solidarity means taking responsibility for those in trouble.

(6)...'I was a stranger and you welcomed me' (Mt 25:35)...Today the undocumented migrant comes before us like that 'stranger' in whom Jesus asks to be recognized. To welcome him and to show him solidarity is a duty of hospitality and fidelity to Christian Identity itself."

Message of Pope John Paul II for World Migration Day 1995-96, available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/migration/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_25071995_undocumented_migrants_en.html