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THE MEDIA THE LEFT & THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Dancing Around the Caravan

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The press has shown a curious reluctance to explore the roles of two key actors in the ongoing drama at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Over the past several weeks, whenever my thoughts turned to the caravan of Central Americans making its way up through Mexico toward the U.S. border, I recalled a Jesuit religious I encountered in Manhattan in the fall of 2001. Brother Joel Magallan had arrived there a few years earlier at the invitation of the archdiocese to work with the region's growing Mexican immigrant population. Brother Joel soon developed a reputation as an aggressive, rather opportunistic advocate who managed to alienate many of his colleagues in the Catholic social service bureaucracy. He was perhaps most notorious for loudly criticizing the archdiocese's inadequate response to the ever-increasing numbers of undocumented Mexicans arriving in the region, even as he hosted a weekly radio program broadcast back in his native Mexico that advised those contemplating the journey to make their way north and enter the United States illegally.

I "met" Brother Joel shortly after 9/11. Out of an old convent on West 14th Street, he was running an impromptu shelter and social service agency for the

many Spanish-speaking migrants who had lost either loved ones or jobs when the World Trade Center Towers fell. I say “met” because as I walked into the building and extended my hand to him, I was summarily told to leave. My presence as an uninvited outsider asking questions was not welcome. Not much Christian charity or love was forthcoming from Brother Joel that day.

Recently, however, such sentiments have been much in evidence—at least among the well-meaning and the well-off—toward the several thousand men, women, and children who undertook the arduous, even dangerous journey from Central America and now await their fate in Tijuana. Yet these sentiments, especially on the part of the media, have left little room for curiosity, never mind skepticism, about how such an extraordinary event came about. In part, this negligence reflects the bias of journalists whose professional milieu discourages viewing migrants as anything other than men and woman in pursuit of the American Dream. Not unimportantly, this pursuit typically involves toil in the service sector upon which not only employers but affluent consumers have become dependent. This bias (to which this writer is not immune) has been reinforced by the mean-spirited and alarmist tone of restrictionist commentary on recent events.

Also at work here has been the media’s aversion to exploring the roles of two critical actors in these events. The first is the somewhat shadowy outfit that calls itself Pueblo Sin Fronteras (PSF: People Without Borders). I say “somewhat shadowy” because PSF *does* maintain a website as well as a Facebook page. And its activists and leaders have been visibly involved in this most recent as well as earlier such caravans. Nevertheless, the media—at least the mainstream media—have been reluctant to explore not only PSF’s precise role here but also its intriguing origins and history. A bit of digging reveals these to be Marxist-Leninist, which is presumably inconvenient or embarrassing to those sympathetic to the Caravan and its participants.

The other actor whose role in these events has been overlooked, not only by the media but also by the rest of us, is the Catholic Church. Indeed, the Church’s position in our decades-old immigration debate has been hidden in plain sight. In part this is because the media’s bias has led it to regard the Church as a sympathetic ally in the political debate, whose religious views can be discounted or simply ignored—not unlike the way liberals and progressives have dealt with black Protestant churches. Yet what everyone has overlooked and must now ponder more seriously is the Catholic Church’s revived role as a transnational, global organization whose interests and ideology are becoming a distinct force in the post-Cold War world, especially when it comes to migration issues.

Among these three elements—the mainstream media, leftist activists, and the Catholic Church—there is now a synergy that has both facilitated recent events on the ground and contributed to the general lack of insight into what has been driving those events. In what follows, I want to focus on the interplay among these three actors in the context of the Caravan and what this portends for the future.

Reporters Without Questions

Not least among the issues that have been scrupulously underplayed by the media is the degree of corruption and violence immediately south of the border; Mexico is not merely a major trading partner but a source of social chaos, violent crime, and mayhem. Another neglected story is the consternation

of Tijuana's Mayor and many of its citizens, who, when the Caravan began arriving there, strenuously objected to being overwhelmed by what they view as outsiders, non-citizens, and criminals. Apparently, such "racist" responses to migrants are worthy of attention only when traceable to the privilege of middle-class, white Americans.

To the many people in both the United States and Mexico who have wondered who is responsible for organizing the Caravan, the media's answer has been loud and clear: *not George Soros!* To be sure, I have seen no evidence that Soros's billions have helped to plan, initiate, or sustain the Caravan. Yet it does not seem unreasonable to believe that *some* funds from his various Open Society Foundations have found their way into the accounts of individuals and organizations sustaining this undertaking. After all, Soros's foundations declare on their joint website that their mission is to build "vibrant and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable and open to the participation of *all people*," as well as "addressing inequalities that cut across multiple lines, including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, *and citizenship*." (my emphasis). And given the media's biases in this realm, I am dubious of their exempting Soros from any role in recent events. But neither do I believe that he can or should be held responsible for orchestrating them. Indeed, my focus here is on what I consider more important and much overlooked factors.

Nor have the media completely avoided these. But their curiosity has been sharply delimited. For example, we have been repeatedly reminded that PSF, which openly claims credit for last spring's Central American caravan—as well as other such efforts over the past 15 years—has *not* "organized" this one. Nevertheless, it has been widely reported that individuals with PSF have been "accompanying," "guiding," or "traveling with" the current caravan, though not in any "official" capacity. In a recent article, the *Washington Post* manages to conclude that PSF "clearly plays an essential role" with the Caravan, though its headline meekly asserts: "Group that *escorts* migrant caravans draws more scrutiny." (my emphasis) Whatever evasive word-games the media have been engaging in, it strains credulity to suggest that PSF has not been playing some kind of critical role in this on-going drama. Meanwhile, on its Facebook page PSF almost exclusively features the Caravan, including images of its activists directly on the scene.

As to why journalists—with the notable and predictable exception of Fox News—avoid exploring these topics more forthrightly, one can only speculate. Instinctive partiality toward anything or anyone condemned by Donald Trump is certainly a factor. So, too, is a virtually institutionalized sympathy toward migrants, especially "people of color" from less developed countries. Indeed, this frame long ago rendered all but the most hard-headed, and hard-hearted, observers incapable of viewing migrants as human beings making rational but nevertheless difficult and, at times, tragic choices. Instead, migrants are consistently depicted as passive victims of forces far beyond their control.

In this instance, however, thousands of such "passive victims" have apparently mounted a stunning logistical feat, providing themselves with food, shelter, medical care, and transportation during a journey across 2,000 miles of difficult, often dangerous terrain. This suggests that these individuals are perhaps not so helpless and desperate as to merit the asylum status that many will claim when they finally get to make their case to U.S. officials. On the other hand, if these thousands have been aided by an organization ideologically committed to delegitimizing national boundaries, that might also threaten to undercut their

claims to asylum. Hence the bind that sympathetic journalists have found themselves in.

Journalists' curious lack of curiosity about PSF may also involve its hard-left ideological provenance. As the name might suggest, its origins can be traced back to efforts to organize Mexican workers in Chicago and Southern California in the 1970's. At that time, Cesar Chavez was still struggling to establish the United Farm Workers as a trade union, which meant focusing narrowly on organizing field hands in U.S. agriculture. By contrast, a small group of Marxist-Leninists sought to develop "transnational class consciousness" and "international solidarity" among workers on both sides of the border.¹ This group attempted campaigns among Mexican immigrants more or less settled here, as well as among more transient undocumented workers. But they failed to organize workers in Mexico. Despite the fact that very few activists were advancing such an explicitly transnational agenda at the time, the masthead on the Marxists' bilingual newspaper, *Sin Fronteras/Without Borders*, declared: "We are One Because America [referring to the continent] Is One."²

Out of the mouths of Marxists 30 years after the defeat of communism, such rhetoric rings embarrassingly anachronistic and naive. Out of the mouths of globalists during the heady 1990s, however, similar rhetoric rang surprisingly plausible. With history declared at an end and the world deemed flat, capitalist triumphalism led to talk of "an American Common Market" and "a borderless world." And dazzled by images of Germans joyously celebrating their nation's unification, many Americans persuaded themselves that effective, secure barriers at our southern border constituted a resurrected "Berlin Wall."

Today, disruptive populist movements in Europe and the United States make it increasingly inconvenient for elites to acknowledge how global capitalism has undermined national sovereignty in ways too numerous—and too subtle—for Cold War Marxists to have envisioned.

The Catholic Church Weighs In

The final story, overlooked not just by the media but by the rest of us as well, is an older but still relevant challenge to national sovereignty, one relating to religion. It began to surface during the 1980s, when violent civil wars raged in Central America. In response to the Reagan Administration's resistance to granting refugee status to those fleeing right-wing violence in Guatemala and El Salvador (as opposed to those fleeing leftist-repression in Nicaragua), religiously motivated human rights activists began opening up churches as sanctuaries. Over time, the sanctuary movement shifted its focus from political asylees to the growing numbers of undocumented migrants at risk, as U.S. border control policies forced such migrants into increasingly inhospitable, deadly terrain. And as the Cold War receded into the past, religious activists took a page from the playbook of the capitalists toward whom they had expressed either disdain or suspicion and embraced the emergent reality of a borderless globe.

This perspective found a welcome home with many Roman Catholics, whose church has a long, complicated history as a transnational institution. Thus it was not exactly a surprise when on January 23, 1999, at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, Pope John Paul II delivered *Ecclesia in America*. As the title of this "apostolic exhortation" suggests, John Paul, still enveloped in the aura of his triumphant defiance of Soviet communism, sought to impress upon the faithful that all of the Americas are one.

Addressed to all of “the bishops, priests and deacons, men and women religious, and all the lay faithful . . . in America,” the papal document reminds “the peoples of the continent” that they comprise “a single entity.” Accordingly, it declared Our Lady of Guadalupe, hitherto the patron saint of Mexico, as the “Patroness of all America.” Appraising such developments, Georgetown sociologist Jose Casanova affirms: “Throughout the [20th] century one can observe an amazing resurgence of the transnational dimensions of medieval Catholicism which for centuries had been recessive or dormant.”

Four years later, on the anniversary of *Ecclesia in America*, the Catholic bishops of the United States and Mexico issued an unprecedented joint statement, *Strangers No Longer: A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration*. That historic document is addressed “to public officials in both nations” and reminds them of their respective responsibilities to provide opportunities for their citizens to work and provide for their families *without having to migrate*: “All persons have the right to find *in their own countries* the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life.” (my emphasis) The bishops also specifically cite Mexico’s corruption and human rights abuses, particularly along its southern border with Guatemala. And they stipulate that “the Church recognizes the right of a sovereign state to control its borders in furtherance of the common good.”

Yet despite these affirmations of *both* governments’ responsibilities, the burden of the bishops’ argument falls most clearly and heavily on the United States. Declaring that “more powerful economic nations, which have the ability to protect and feed their residents, have a stronger obligation to accommodate migration flows,” they state that “we, the Catholic Bishops of the United States and Mexico, pledge ourselves to defend the migrant” and “the right of human persons to migrate so that they can realize their God-given rights.” Indeed, the bishops end up accepting mass migration as inevitable: “In the current condition of the world, in which global poverty and persecution are rampant, 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.”

Most striking about this document is its clear contradiction of the evidence, both historical and contemporary, that migrants (that is, individuals departing freely, as opposed to refugees) seldom come from the most destitute strata of sending societies. Desperate poverty is *not* a major driver of migration; on the contrary, migrants are typically men and women with aspirations and the means to plan for and embark on a journey to a foreign country far from home.

To be sure, as migration streams become known and networks get established, costs and risks diminish, and less well-situated individuals and families get drawn into the current. But the bishops’ sentimentalized view of migrants as the poorest of the poor is fundamentally flawed. In their hands, the “preferential option for the poor,” intended to challenge entrenched elites in Latin and South America, has transmogrified into “a preferential option for migrants,” affording those same elites a safety value that reinforces the status quo in their countries.

Summing up their position, the bishops affirm that “we recognize the phenomenon of migration as an authentic sign of the times.” Indeed they do. Yet they neglect to explain why this particular “sign of the times” merits more deference than others. What if the bishops were to approach issues of human

sexuality in the same spirit of ethical realism that animates their posture on migration? Wouldn't they have to regard people's motives in matters ranging from birth control to premarital sex and perhaps even to early-term abortion as shaped by societal forces beyond the control of any one individual or institution? And having done so, wouldn't they have to accept people's choices as regrettable, perhaps, and leading to problematic outcomes, perhaps, but nevertheless inevitable? Indeed, under such assumptions the Catholic Church would have long ago reconciled itself to birth control, premarital sex, and perhaps even early-term abortion.

An Ecumenical Effort

Such speculation aside, it is important to consider the impact the Church's teachings have had on both the migrants on the ground and policymakers. Sociologist Jacqueline Maria Hagan, a careful student of such matters, has concluded: "Although largely unsuccessful in their attempts to reform U.S. and Mexican border policies, religious leaders have been quite effective in delivering their plea to local clergy, lay workers, and parishioners who counsel and provide for the poor and potential migrant."³ Hagan is referring here not just to Catholics but to other denominations and religious groups with whom the Church has often worked on these issues. These include Quakers, who have long maintained a presence along the U.S.-Mexican border, as well as mainstream Protestant denominations in both the United States and Mexico—for example, the Mexican National Episcopal Conference. The roster also includes various Evangelical and Pentecostal sects, a growing presence in Mexico and Central America.

But as Hagan makes clear, in terms of resources and commitment, the Catholic Church is the prime mover. Indeed, she highlights a critical difference in orientation toward migration between sectarian Protestant ministers in the region and their Catholic counterparts:

Most ministers of small evangelical Pentecostal churches or independent ministries in Central America reluctantly endorse the migration of their members. Recognizing the devastating effects migration could have on family left behind, and also the financial loss to an independent church itself, many evangelical pastors first attempt to discourage the migration of their members before granting approval and providing a blessing. In contrast, most Catholic priests, while counseling the potential migrant on the consequences of family separation, rarely discourage the migration itself, recognizing that the need to migrate to feed and provide for one's family is a fundamental right.⁴

Without greater familiarity with the specific circumstances confronting individuals and families, it is impossible to judge the relative merits of these divergent pastoral perspectives. It is nonetheless evident, though widely blinked at, that the Catholic Church has a particular institutional bias in favor of migration. But because this bias is at work on both sides of the border, the dynamic here is more subtle than American bishops filling emptying churches with Latino immigrants. After all, migration leads to the opposite outcome for their Mexican counterparts. Perhaps the latter, not unlike Mexican political elites, view migration as a kind of safety-valve.

The larger point is that Catholic priests and other religious in Mexico, Central America, the United States, and other nations around the globe see themselves

as part of a centuries-old transnational institution that affords them access to financial, organizational, and intellectual resources that self-sustaining Protestant congregations simply lack. And as Hagan reminds us, such considerations have significant implications for how different religious actors and institutions respond to migration.

This is especially true for Catholic religious communities such as the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) or the Maryknoll Congregation (Maryknollers) that routinely operate across national boundaries. Of particular interest with regard to migrants is the Saint Charles Missionaries of the Scalabrini Congregation. Founded in 1886 to minister to the needs of Italian migrants dispersing around the globe, the Scalabrini today work with all variety of migrants in over 20 countries, including Mexico, Guatemala, and the United States. For Catholics and non-Catholics alike, they publish prayer books meditating on the travail of migrants, and a magazine, *Migrante*, providing news and information on migration trends. Both are distributed to churches and parishes along migration routes.

Further, the Scalabrini maintain a network of migrant shelters, Casas del Migrante, along the Guatemala-Mexico and Mexico-US borders. As University of Southern California sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo notes, these and similar efforts constitute “a panoply of mostly Catholic but also Protestant-affiliated organizations, congregations, and NGOs, clergy and budding faith-based movements . . . actively addressing the spiritual and practical needs of undocumented migrants in transit. Their offerings include shelters, shrines, know-your-rights booklets, water stations, and blessings.”⁵

Caravan, Pilgrimage, or Protest?

Along with overlooking the critical role of this religious infrastructure in migrant caravans past and present, the media have paid precious little attention to the religious frame through which migrants themselves make sense of this arduous, often dangerous journey. For many, it is viewed as a kind of pilgrimage. This is especially true in the spring around Easter, when Latin Catholics perform vivid re-enactments of Christ’s Passion, beginning with his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and culminating in his Crucifixion. Around Christmas, other religious themes and traditions are drawn on. For Catholics and Protestants in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, Las Posadas (the Inns) is the annual reenactment of Joseph and Mary’s search for shelter in Bethlehem. Over the course of nine evenings, culminating with Christmas Eve, a procession of the faithful—typically in costume and often accompanied by musicians—prays, sings, and eventually rejoices as it wanders from house to house in pursuit of refuge.

To be sure, this religious folk tradition has no necessary connection to migrant caravans. But neither has it been difficult for political activists to appropriate it for their own ends. This is what emerged in San Diego in 1994, when “La Posada Sin Fronteras” was organized on both sides of the border. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo describes this as “a hybrid political and religious event that condemns violence at the border and commemorates those who died at the border crossing.”⁶ This year, the 25th annual event was advertised on the website of the Catholic Diocese of San Diego, one of many sponsors. And Las Posadas processions were replicated in communities along the border, in Southwestern communities further inland, and even among Latinos in Boston—all with special intensity, in light of recent events. Indeed, the event in San Diego was held at Border Field State Park, not far from where, a few weeks earlier, Border

Patrol agents had fired tear gas at members of the Caravan who were charging the border fence.

As mentioned earlier, such religiously inflected protests have been nurtured by networks going back to the sanctuary movement of the 1980s. These got reactivated and new ones initiated in the spring of 2006, when undocumented immigrants and their supporters flooded in protest onto the streets of cities across the United States. The object of their outrage was legislation passed by the Republican-dominated House that would have cracked down on illegal immigrants, including criminalization of any efforts to help them remain here. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops took this as a direct challenge to its mission and vociferously denounced “the Sensenbrenner bill,” which never became law.

This history suggests that when Pope Francis celebrated Mass along the U.S.-Mexico border in February 2016, it was hardly a one-off event. For many Catholics, as well as their religious and secular allies, that mass was an unmistakable symbol of the Church’s rejection of the legitimacy of claims by sovereign nations to determine membership in their political communities. For many such individuals, the emotional impact of that event might be compared to what millions around the globe experienced when in June 1987 Ronald Reagan stood at the Brandenburg Gate and demanded “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.” However flawed, this symmetry was surely not lost on Vatican planners.

The Catholic Church and Its Fellow Travelers

By highlighting the critical but overlooked role of the Catholic Church in sustaining the recent Caravan and its predecessors, I am not suggesting that the Church merits exclusive or even primary responsibility for the developing crisis at the border. In this regard the Church has important political allies on the left. And when it comes to committed individuals such as those within PSF, the Church shares not only principled opposition to border enforcement but a physical presence on the ground with the migrants. This affords considerable credibility and legitimacy to the efforts of such religious and political activists—especially those working with the Church, which will of course remain there long after youthful leftists have moved on.

The same cannot be said of the other advocacy groups that have opportunistically hitched their wagons to the Caravan. These include the American Civil Liberties Union, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and other organizations whose legal and political skills, however helpful to those in the trenches, are typically not well informed by on-the-ground commitments or knowledge. Indeed, the further one gets physically and emotionally from the controversy and the directly interested parties, the more one focuses on broader, more abstract considerations. Such perspective and distance can be an asset to those on the ground, but these come at a price, including for the advocates themselves. Georgetown law professor, public interest lawyer, and refugee advocate Philip Schrag puts it well:

For the [refugee] advocates, the most difficult moments of the legislative battle involved the development, timing, and exposure of fallback positions. *Part of the problem is the sense of stewardship that public interest advocates feel for the interests or constituents they represent, most of whom did not choose their representatives, even in the fictitious sense that stockholders choose their boards of directors and*

through them, the lobbyists on a corporate payroll. *Public interest advocates perpetually doubt their right to take less than an absolutist position, even when it is clear that advocating an absolutist position will result in worse legislation than seeking a compromise.*⁷ (my emphasis)

In this same vein, we cannot ignore the fact that such advocates—whether activist lawyers in Washington or committed religious along the border—depend on media attention to nurture and sustain their causes. As Neil Komisar and Burton Weisbrod noted back at the beginning of the public interest movement in the 1970s, such efforts seek not to maximize profit but “favorable publicity.” This is, after all, how advocacy groups—so-called checkbook organizations—raise money. Generally speaking, the more controversy, the more money. In this regard, immigrant and refugee activists and advocates have as much interest in generating controversy and media attention as does Donald Trump.

Yet in fairness to these organizations, fundraising and media attention are hardly their only or even highest priorities. Their *raison d'être* is to push, and push hard, for larger political and policy objectives, using tactics that are sometimes deliberately disruptive. For example, back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the template for much of contemporary advocacy politics was forged, welfare rights organizers encouraged recipients to file for special benefits whose processing would overwhelm government bureaucrats and cause the system to collapse. Toward this end, organizers in cities around the nation descended on the offices of welfare case-workers with scores of angry welfare mothers and their crying children, demanding the supplementary grants the welfare recipients had been coached to believe were owed to them. Out of the ensuing chaos, welfare reform was supposed to emerge. And it did, eventually—although not necessarily along the lines anticipated by the activists.

A similar stratagem can be discerned today amidst the chaos in Tijuana. Aside from provoking the current occupant of the White House, another goal is clearly to overwhelm the capacity of the system to process asylum applications, which was already imperiled during the Obama administration. Crucially, this objective is being pursued amid a global refugee crisis that is straining the regime established in the wake of World War II and overseen ever since by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). For not only are the numbers of individuals at risk skyrocketing, but the criteria for granting them relief are also being challenged as excessively narrow and rigid.

The 1951 Geneva Convention stipulates the grounds for refugee status to be a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” In 2002, the UNHCR issued guidelines that effectively enlarged these grounds to include gender-based persecution. Then in 2015, UNHCR published *Women on the Run*, a study of women fleeing domestic violence in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. This document strongly suggests that domestic violence ought to be grounds for refugee status.

Such proposals have portentous implications for the situation at the U.S.-Mexico border. But the American media, including elite print media, have all but given up on addressing such larger questions in any serious manner. On the political right, there have been incessant charges that the Caravan consists not of legitimate asylum claimants but of individuals seeking social welfare benefits or perhaps work. Others have made unfounded (though not entirely implausible) claims that gang members, criminals, and terrorists are in the mix.

In response, the mainstream media have invariably opted for the simplistic—and evasive—characterization that the men, women, and children in the Caravan are “fleeing poverty and violence,” as if this formulation resolves all questions and, in addition, constitutes adequate grounds for admission to the United States.

To be sure, U.S. responsibility for the chaos in Central America is not inconsiderable. The impacts of our economic and military involvements in the region have hardly been uniformly benign. And the consequences of our national drug habit have been enormous. Whether these constitute a legitimate basis for admitting any and all migrants as refugees is another matter. Yet the media’s coverage of these issues has been so lackadaisical that, to my knowledge, no major outlet bothered to unearth what General John F. Kelly asserted in 2014—long before he became Trump’s Secretary of Homeland Security or his White House Chief of Staff. As the Miami-based commander of the U.S. Southern Command, Kelly published an article in the *Military Times* on the chaos in Central America and concluded that “all this corruption and violence is directly or indirectly due to the insatiable U.S. demand for drugs.”⁸

Even the most mundane and obvious questions about the goals and motives of those caught up in the Caravan have gone unexamined. For instance, why did this most recent assemblage, like its immediate predecessor last spring, choose the longer route to the California border instead of heading for the closer destination of Texas? One of the very few journalists to consider these questions is Nick Miroff of the *Washington Post*, who has suggested that the “simplest explanation” is that the drug lords controlling the eastern route toward Texas are more ruthless and dangerous than those controlling the western route toward California. On the basis of the arguments presented here, I would highlight two additional factors: the more liberal jurisprudence of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, and California’s larger and more sympathetic media market.

Similarly neglected have been the specific inducements that persuaded large numbers of people to undertake such an arduous and dangerous journey *north*, especially at a time of year when migrant laborers in this region typically head *south*, once the U.S. growing season has ended and the Christmas holidays approach. To be sure, the decision to join such a venture is facilitated by the economies of scale that arise when a critical mass of migrants reduces the per person costs and risks associated with hiring smugglers, whose character and motives are never easy to judge. But then questions arise about one’s fellow caravan members, not to mention the character and judgment of those organizing and leading the caravan. It seems likely that trust in clerics and other religious workers plays an important role in the myriad considerations involved. But since the media and other analysts, including those on the restrictionist right, have not seen fit even to broach such topics, we know virtually nothing about these matters.

Restrictionist commentators see the Caravan as the result of the machinations of left-wing activists like PSF, whose presence and role are undeniable. So, too, is the support, either ideological or material, of globalist elites—whether George Soros, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the media, or NGOs and advocacy groups—who still refuse to acknowledge that there are limits to the generosity and beneficence of Western publics. Meanwhile, those segments of the public that sympathize with the Caravan assume its participants simply have no alternative but to set out on such an arduous and potentially

dangerous journey.

What both perspectives ignore is the role that religion has played in motivating and sustaining the men and women who choose to join such caravans, or pilgrimages, not to mention the religious motives of those who feel called to aid and support them. In this regard, it is difficult to see how such a mass of humanity would venture forth without the critical material and spiritual support of the Catholic Church. And on this side of the border, the Church has been nurturing a social movement among immigrants and non-immigrants alike that could help counter its negative image as an unsympathetic, authoritarian institution in denial and decline. If that possibility is realized, and large numbers of people embrace a revived, transnational church envisioning a borderless world, this will be one more challenge that a troubled America will have to confront.

¹Myrna Garcia, *Sin Fronteras: Activism, Immigration, and the Politics of Belonging in Mexican Chicago* (Ph.D. dissertation; University of California, San Diego, 2013).

²Arnoldo García, “Toward a Left Without Borders,” *Monthly Review* (July/August 2002).

³Hagan, “Making Theological Sense of the Migration Journey From Latin America: Catholic, Protestant, and Interfaith Perspectives,” *American Behavioral Scientist* (July 2006).

⁴Hagan, “The Church vs. the State: Borders, Migrants, and Human Rights,” in Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, ed., *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants* (Rutgers University Press, 2006), p. 97.

⁵Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, “Religion and a Standpoint Theory of Immigrant Social Justice,” in Hondagneu-Sotelo, ed., *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, p. 13.

⁶Hondagneu-Sotello, “Religion and a Standpoint Theory of Immigrant Social Justice,” p. 13.

⁷Schrag, *A Well-Founded Fear: The Congressional Battle to Save Political Asylum in America* (Routledge, 2000), p. 259.

⁸Kelly, “Central America Drug War A Dire Threat to U.S. National Security,” *Military Times* (July 8, 2014). Note that General Kelly’s views on this topic *did* get mentioned in a [*Los Angeles Times* interview](#) days before his White House tenure was to end.

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HIDE COMMENTS

