

**Transcript of Part 3**  
**Catholic Social Teaching**

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**by**

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So a Christian immigration ethic is grounded in its vision of the person as inherently sacred and made for community. Our persons are created in the image of God, loved into being by God, and therefore worthy of inherent dignity and respect. Whereas this vision doesn't compromise autonomy, it understands humans to be profoundly interdependent, to be a person is to be in relationship. Hence human rights are claims to goods necessary for each to participate with dignity and community life.

Catholic principles of economic and migration ethics protect not only civil and political rights, but also more robust social and economic rights and responsibilities. These established basically persons' right to remain, right not to have to migrate to fulfill their basic human rights in their homeland, and their right to migrate if they cannot support themselves or their families at home.

This vision of the person is not profoundly at odds with our national narrative at its best. As NETWORK social justice lobby Sister Simone Campbell put it on one of her Nuns on the Bus Tour, "Fear is crippling us and promoting an unpatriotic lie of individualism. After all, the Constitution begins 'we the people,' not 'we who got here first,' 'we the owners of businesses,' or even 'we the citizens.'" She worried we would lose our democracy if we could not return to living in community.

Once people do immigrate, the Catholic Tradition profoundly critiques patterns wherein stable receiving countries accept the labor of millions without offering legal protections. Such shadow societies risk the creation of a permanent underclass, harming both human dignity and the common good. From Pope Leo XIII's 1891 warnings against employer's exploitation through Pope Francis's condemnations of harmful global economic practices, the protection of human dignity has remained the central criterion of economic justice.

The Tradition makes clear that every economic decision and institution must be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines human dignity realized in community. Pope John Paul II condemned the exploitation of migrant workers based on the principle that capital should be at the service of labor and not labor at the service of capital. This is one of my favorite pictures of him. He's touring a soda manufacturing plant. I mean, it's an Italian chemical plant, but they're making soda in 1982 here.

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So this idea that the economy should serve the person raises serious concerns not only about the freedom of markets compared to people, but also the significant financial stakes in a broken immigration system. Detained immigrants fill beds, private buses are filled with deportations. So we inherit a counter-narrative of economic ethics critiquing global dynamics that allow capital and goods and information to flow freely across borders, but not laborers.

Pope Francis has been outspoken about the dictatorship of faceless economies. His image of humans as commodities in a throwaway culture, particularly resonates, I think, with vulnerable migrant workers' experiences. The Southern Poverty Law Center's interviews with undocumented women across sectors of the food industry indicate respondents overwhelmingly feeling like they're seen by employers as disposable workers with no lasting value, to be squeezed of every last drop of sweat and labor before being cast aside.

And I include Archbishop Oscar Romero here, as I think he more poetically elaborates the understanding in the tradition of work as necessarily intelligent and free. He writes, "How beautiful will be the day when all the baptized understand that their work, their job, is a priestly work. That just as I celebrate Mass at this altar, so each carpenter celebrates mass at his workbench, each doctor with the scalpel, the market woman at her stand is performing a priestly office. How many cabdrivers I know listen to this message, they're in their cabs. You are a priest at the wheel, my friends. If you work with honesty, consecrating that taxi of yours to God, bearing a message of peace and love to the passengers who ride in your cab."

Hence, the Catholic Social Tradition explicitly protects the basic human rights of undocumented migrants in host countries in light of longstanding teachings on human and workers' rights that do not depend on citizenship status. With 66% of undocumented immigrants in the United States having lived here for over 10 years, a double society increasingly threatens the common good. One, visible with rights, and one invisible without rights.

Obstructing viable paths to legalization for the majority of immigrants that we welcome in the marketplace but not the voting booth, the college campus, the DMV, the stable workplace, risks making permanent this underclass of disenfranchised persons. And I think that undermines not only Christian commitments but significant civic values and interests. Ultimately an approach rooted in human rights championed by Catholic commitments must both reduce the need to migrate and protect those compelled to do so as a last resort.

During his first people visit outside Rome to Lampedusa, Pope Francis commemorated the then 20,000 African immigrants who had died over the past 25 years trying to reach new life in Europe. His homily there within sight of the graveyard of wrecks noted the pervasive idolatry that facilitates migrants' deaths and robs us of the ability to weep. He lamented a globalization of indifference and international structures that treat migrants as pawns on a chessboard. I don't know if you all remember this; I found this incredibly moving. So the altar was made of pieces of the shipwrecked books, boats rather, the chalice. I mean, there was so much symbolism in the ritual, not just the word.

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But I was mostly moved that he repented. He didn't condemn the world out there, but he repented. He admitted even he himself remains disoriented. He said "Forgive us, Lord, for being so closed in on our own well-being in a way that leads to anesthesia of the heart." At the border Mass that he celebrated in Juarez two years ago, he also spoke of "tears that purify our gaze, and enable us to see the cycle of sin into which we often have sunk. Tears," he said, "that can soften our hardened attitudes and open us to conversion."

I think also Pope Francis reminds us that sin is not merely a private transaction. He highlights the impact of social sins through our participation in harmful structures. So whether in forms of cultural superiority or profiteering, social inducements to personal sin in the immigration context abound. And I think social sin can help us see how powerful narratives casting immigrants as takers are connected to collective actions or inaction, like votes on the Dream Act in Congress.

So portraying immigration through a lens of individual culpability obscures these multilevel dynamics at play. At a more subtle level than overt xenophobia, I think a consumerist ideology shapes citizens' willingness to underpay or mistreat migrant laborers directly or indirectly through our demand for inexpensive goods and services. A preoccupation with having over being can impede solidarity with immigrants, then, as much as distorted nationalism. It shapes loyalties, frames questions, informs votes. I've actually been struck, preparing both of our sons for First Reconciliation, that these more social dimensions of sin so seldom register in our rights and on our radar.