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**Left in the Shadows:**  
**An Examination of Work, Family, and**  
**Immigration in Catholic Doctrine**

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“The human soul has still greater need of the ideal than of the real. It is by the real that we exist; it is by the ideal that we live.”

– Victor Hugo

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## The Initial Challenge

The Catholic Church often uses the rhetoric of light and darkness as metaphors that correspond to their teachings. Members of society most in need such as the poor, the disabled, the homeless, the despised, and immigrants are those who the Church describes as being cast aside in the dark shadows. The Church can often help guide them out of the darkness and into the light. Since many immigrants lack legal status in the United States, they are the people left in the shadows, perhaps even more than other groups. I have decided to examine how the Catholic Church has considered this issue and what role it may have provided in helping immigrants out of the shadows.

I began this process when I discovered the Postville immigration raid and read of how the local Catholic Church was taking up the disaster relief for the impacted families in the community. As I learned more of the situation in Postville, it became apparent that this small Church was deeply involved in all aspects of this event and the aftermath that followed.

On May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008 immigration authorities raided the Agriprocessors kosher meatpacking and slaughterhouse and arrested 389 immigrants working in the plant.<sup>1</sup> This raid and the response by the local Catholic Church piqued my interest in understanding the theological position of the larger Catholic Church on

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<sup>1</sup> Spencer S. Hsu, "Immigration Raid Jars a Small Town," The Washington Post 18 May 2008.

issues of labor, church/state relations, family, and ultimately, immigration issues. I wanted to gain a clear view of what the Church viewed its responsibilities to be towards these immigrants and their families. Did the theological doctrine of the last hundred years match up with the practical actions of the Catholic Church? Are the papal encyclicals just the words of one man or do they carry real implications? What are the moral principles of the Church regarding the issues of labor, political involvement and immigration? Ultimately, I sought to understand how well, at least in the case of Postville, the Church lived up to the moral ideals that it professes. While the local Catholic Church had clearly provided a great deal of assistance, what actions did the greater Catholic Church hierarchy take to support the unfortunate immigrants?

I went back to examine three papal encyclicals, two on labor and one on the family, and a recent letter from the American Bishops regarding the political responsibility of Catholics. The papal encyclicals and Bishops' Letter proved to provide invaluable moral principles that could certainly be applied to Postville. The Catholic Church uses absolute moral principles as a guideline to understand and make difficult choices. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of the teachings of the Church on the issues of greatest relevance to Postville was critical to establish in my work. Through my examination, I learned that the Catholic Church cares deeply about labor conditions, fair wages, reasonable working hours, family unity, issues relating to poverty, and the welfare of immigrants and families everywhere. The Church does this under the theological



principles of human dignity, preferential option for the poor, the stranger in the foreign land, and family. I have learned of the incredible value of both the theological teachings that establish these principles and the moral certitude with which the Church pronounces them. My work seeks to examine these teaching strengths, but simultaneously recognize the practical difficulties and failures of implementing these moral ideals.

All too often the Catholic Church is identified with its stances on issues relating to sex, due to its massive and vocal public outreach on these issues. Its failure, as an institution, has been to remember the many biblical and doctrinal teachings in support of immigrants and to speak out on their behalf. The Church will vociferously reiterate its position on issues including birth control, same-sex marriage, female clergy members, premarital sex, abortion, and more, but does not put the same efforts into issues relating to immigration. Foundational theological concepts such as the preferential option for the poor, the emphasis on fair labor agreements and adequate labor conditions, and the importance of the dignity of every human being and the unity of the family are all core underlying concepts incorporated in the issue of immigration. Through my analysis of Catholic doctrine, I saw the emphasis on the support of family, the poor, the values of justice, kindness, solidarity, but I also saw how difficult it is to actualize these principles. In light of what I have learned from this study, I offer some possible roles for the Church and call the Church to embody the many strengths of its moral teachings.

## **389 Families Disrupted: The Destruction of the American Dream**

An examination of recent events in Postville, Iowa, reveals both the strong background and the weak foreground of the Catholic Church's policies. The positive response of the local Catholic Church, Saint Bridget's, and the services provided illustrate the support of the Church towards immigrants. However, the challenges facing St. Bridget's and the lack of response from the larger Catholic Church to work to change current immigration policies show the limitation and flaws in current thinking.

Postville, Iowa, which calls itself, "Hometown to the World," is a small and remote town in the Midwestern United States. Postville was a quiet, tight-knit community in rural Iowa; despite the closeness of the community, nothing could have prepared the town for the events that were to come. On Monday, May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008, the largest single-site immigration raid in United States history occurred at the Agriprocessors, plant in Postville (Hsu). Three hundred and eighty nine undocumented immigrant workers were arrested in the raid, which was led by the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) but which also involved sixteen local, state, and federal agencies (Hsu). After their arrests, most of the immigrants were held without bail while awaiting trials or hearings for prison time and/or deportation. Their families, including a number of citizen children who were born in the United States, were left without support.

As Steven G. Bloom, in his 2000 book, Postville, A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America,<sup>2</sup> described it, Postville was, “Untouched by the vitality and vulgarity of America’s urban sprawl, Postville had everything modern cities do not: innocence, tranquility, cohesion, a sense of order” (Bloom, 39). Despite these seemingly positive characteristics, Bloom also noted the isolation of the small town in Iowa, “The last time any kind of official census was taken in Postville, the number stood at 1,465. Postville was fifty miles from the nearest freeway and thirty miles from the closest McDonald’s. The nearest traffic light was the one in the county seat, Waukon, twelve miles north” (Bloom, 40).

In part due to this isolation, Bloom described the tight-knit community as virtually familial, “Postville was the kind of place where drivers automatically wave to each other and then think about whom it was they just waved to. The farmers in their pickups had it down to a science: They barely lifted an index finger (if they still had an index finger) off the big steering wheel, and then nodded their head ever so slightly. No one used turn signals because everyone knew where everyone else was going” (Bloom, 40). Bloom’s narrative illustrates the character of the town and contextualizes the events that were to come.

Despite these small town pleasantries, Postville was far from a homogeneous community. As Bloom traces in his book, the town had a large Hasidic Jewish community stemming from the Agriprocessors kosher meatpacking and slaughterhouse that opened in the late 1980s. In recent years,

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen G. Bloom, Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America (Orlando: Harcourt, 2000).

the plant had hired hundreds of immigrants from Mexico and Central America, thus creating a large immigrant community within Postville. The majority of immigrants in Postville worked at Agriprocessors, where they could make two or three times as much money as they had been making in their home countries. By the time of the raid in May 2008, many of the immigrants had been residing in the town between five and ten years, working, educating their children, and trying to build a better life for their families.

The largest business in Postville was the Agriprocessors plant; prior to the raid, Agriprocessors, Inc., was the largest processor of Glatt<sup>3</sup> kosher beef in the United States. Agriprocessors, Inc., was founded by Abraham Aaron Rubashkin and moved from Brooklyn, New York, to Postville in 1987. Prior to the immigration raid, Agriprocessors had produced about sixty percent of America's kosher beef and forty percent of its kosher chicken for a market of eleven million customers and sales of approximately \$10.5 billion annually (Levine).<sup>4</sup> It is now clear that much of the company's success was due to illegal and immoral work practices. Allegations of worker abuse and exploitation were numerous and included denial of the minimum wage, using child labor, violating laws on working hours, using violence against workers, sexual misconduct against female workers, as well as other abuses.

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<sup>3</sup> Glatt, meaning "smooth" in Yiddish, refers to meat that has adhesion-free lungs and therefore is spiritually clean.

<sup>4</sup> David Levine, (15 October 2008), "A Beef with the Rabbis," <[www.portfolio.com/news-markers/national-news/portfolio/2008/10/15/kosher-meat-business](http://www.portfolio.com/news-markers/national-news/portfolio/2008/10/15/kosher-meat-business)>.

This was not the first instance of inappropriate conduct by Agriprocessors. Prior to the raid, the rogue company brazenly broke federal and state laws, including regulations regarding environmental, health, safety, and labor laws. In fact, Mark Lauritsen, a vice president for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union said of Agriprocessors, “They are the poster child for how a rogue company can exploit a broken immigration system” (Preston).<sup>5</sup> The abuses that occurred in Agriprocessors are virtually innumerable and were perpetrated upon those who were most vulnerable. For example in 2004, the U.S. Agriculture Department's inspector general accused the company of "acts of inhumane slaughter" after animal rights advocates publicized an unauthorized video of a stumbling, dying cow (Hsu). In 2006, the Environmental Protection Agency fined Agriprocessors \$600,000 for dumping wastewater in the Postville sewer system. Furthermore, that same year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.) cited Agriprocessors with 250 health and safety violations – a number that rose to 389 in 2008, according to U.S.D.A. documents. Since the raid, the Iowa Division of Labor Services found that the company had employed fifty seven underage workers at the plant, and Iowa’s attorney general filed charges alleging of 9, 311 violations of child-labor laws against Agriprocessors (Levine). In general, however, the government seems to have focused on the workers and not the company, since workplace arrests have increased greatly, but few criminal arrests have involved company personnel officials (Hsu).

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<sup>5</sup> Julia Preston “After Iowa Raid, Immigrants Fuel Labor Inquiries,” The New York Times 27 July 2008.

Bloom described how few Postville natives worked at Agriprocessors and explained, “Not many of the Postville locals were so down and out that they were forced to work in the grimy packinghouse. Wal-Mart was always hiring, and those jobs paid more, were easier, some even said pleasant, and they came with a 10 percent employee discount” (Bloom, 133). Bloom observed that the immigrants in Postville appeared to be filling positions that Americans would not take. Furthermore, this division between the immigrants, who worked at Agriprocessors, and the locals, who found other, more pleasant jobs, was noticeable. Bloom also recognized the appeal for recent immigrants and noted that, “The work required no English, and the plant was a haven for immigrants who spoke just a smattering of English or none at all” (Bloom, 134).

Despite the division in the type of work that existed in Postville, natives and immigrants grew accustomed to each other and the community functioned well together. Natives and immigrants formed relationships as neighbors and children of both Postville natives and immigrants who were born in the town or were attending the public schools built friendships in the small town (Hsu).

Despite the promise of higher wages and opportunities for success that originally drew the immigrants to the United States, the realities of working at Agriprocessors was anything but what they had expected. The immigrants found Agriprocessors was more akin to the terrible working conditions in Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* than to the vision of the golden-paved streets of America, where anyone could become someone. They had to endure dangerous working

conditions, unfair wages, and unacceptable treatment of workers, all of which violated United States labor laws. Furthermore, given their precarious immigration status and economic situation, the immigrants were left with few options but to tolerate their work situation.

It is now apparent that the non-unionized immigrant workers were grossly underpaid. One plant worker “told federal officials that undocumented workers were paid \$5 an hour for their first few months before receiving a pay increase to \$6 per hour” (Duara).<sup>6</sup> In Iowa the minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour. In addition, these immigrant workers reported that they received no additional compensation for overtime work (Preston). These inequities at Agriprocessors were commonplace and many of the immigrants had no idea that a minimum wage existed.

The accounts from those who worked at Agriprocessors after the immigration raid were disturbing as workers described their dangerous working conditions, unlawfully long shifts, and other illegal practices that went on in the plant. Elmer L., a Guatemalan who worked at Agriprocessors, said he was sixteen years old when he began working on the plant’s killing floor. Elmer worked seventeen hour shifts, six days a week at Agriprocessors. In an affidavit he described how he did not have time to do anything but work and sleep and stated, “I was very sad, and I felt like I was a slave” (Preston). It is illegal in

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<sup>6</sup> Nigel Duara, William Petroski, and Grant Schulte “Claims of ID Fraud lead to largest raid in state history” The Des Moines Register 12 May 2008. Hereinafter cited as Duara.

Iowa to employ anyone under the age of eighteen on the floor of a meatpacking plant, due to the dangerous nature of the work (Preston).

Elmer said in an interview that he told the floor supervisors that was he under eighteen: “They asked me how old I was, they could see that sometimes I could not keep up with the work” (Preston). Awareness of his young age and difficulty completing his work did not affect the behavior of the supervisors towards him. Elmer explained how the fear of deportation and desperation affected his ability to alter his working conditions stating, “My work was very hard, because they didn’t give me my breaks, and I wasn’t getting very much sleep. They told us they were going to call immigration if we complained” (Preston). The threat of deportation and therefore unemployment is a clear example of the type of exploitation that occurred at Agriprocessors.

The dangerous nature of the work which occurred at Agriprocessors cannot be overstated. Elmer described an injury he received while working at the plant and the treatment that followed from his employers throughout the ordeal. On August 26th, 2007, Elmer L. said he had been clearing cow innards from the slaughter floor when one of his supervisors he described as a rabbi began to yell at him and proceeded to kick him from behind. The sudden force of the kick caused a freshly-sharpened knife to fly up and cut Elmer’s elbow. He said he was sent to the hospital where the doctors closed the wound with eight stitches. Elmer returned to the Agriprocessors plant later in the day, but since his elbow was still bothering him at the time, he asked his supervisor for some time off. His



supervisor denied his request and ordered him back to work. The next day, as he was lifting a cow's tongue, his stitches ruptured and the wound bled again. Elmer said that he was given a bandage at the plant and then sent back to work. This incident is confirmed in a worker's injury report filed by Agriprocessors with the Iowa labor department on August 31st, 2007 (Preston).

Like Elmer, many of the workers who were interviewed were underage and were trying to help support their families. "Gilda O., a Guatemalan who said she was 16, said she worked the night shift plucking chickens. She said she was working to help her parents pay off debts" (Preston). Another Guatemalan, fifteen year old Joel R., "said he dropped out of school in Postville after the eighth grade and took a job at Agriprocessors because his mother became ill. He said he worked from 5:30pm to 6:30am" (Preston).

During the course of their investigation and prior to the raid, immigration authorities had sent an immigrant informant into the plant to witness potential violations of labor law. The informant cited numerous labor abuses in his report. He witnessed "a rabbi who was calling employees derogatory names and throwing meat at employees" (Preston). The informant also reported watching a floor supervisor blindfold an immigrant worker with duct tape and hit him. The informant stated, "The floor supervisor then took one of the meat hooks and hit the Guatemalan with it" but did not cause "serious injuries" (Preston). In addition to immigration charges, federal prosecutors were investigating other labor abuses including allegations of sexual harassment of women at the plant.

As Bloom wrote, “Flouting the law, Agriprocessors didn’t require its employees to supply work permits or proof of U.S. citizenship, employees told me” (Bloom, 134). As one immigrant worker in Bloom’s book explained, “The reason we work here, is that you don’t have to be legal. The business is flourishing because of that. Rubashkin has lots of profit from cheap labor and illegal labor. People here work harder. They push you to work hard. It really is crazy now. There is too much pressure. The bosses are very demanding. You cannot slow down. And it’s freezing inside. Sometimes we get no breaks. It’s just work, work, work. But, still, we are grateful to Rubashkin for hiring us” (Bloom, 137-138). It is quite unlikely that non-immigrant workers would have accepted minimum wages or less for a dangerous and difficult job on the floor of the meat packing plant. In addition, it is important to reiterate that the working conditions in the plant were extreme and there was little incentive for natives to work there if they had other job options. Therefore, the immigrants in Postville were prime targets for exploitation. As Bloom’s book illustrates, the situation in Agriprocessors was atrocious; however, this paled in comparison to the challenge presented to the immigrants when the plant was abruptly raided in military-like fashion.

In an interview after the raid, a Guatemalan immigrant named Elida explained, “I have two children. I brought them here because of the situation in our town in Guatemala. We couldn’t survive because we were poor. We came here to make a living, to work. But, where we worked they exploited us. We

didn't have any option, but to accept the work because we knew we needed the money" (Sojourners).<sup>7</sup> Elida continued, "I think it's very unjust what they're doing to us because after they needed the work of our hands to do this labor, now they're paying us like this. If they could only realize that all of us here are so traumatized by what happened" (Sojourners).

There are few official documents describing the exact details of the Agriprocessors raid, however interviews with witnesses have helped to piece together the events that occurred that day. The raid began with helicopters, buses, and vans that encircled the western edge of town at 10 a.m. on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008. According to witnesses, hundreds of agents surrounded the plant in ten minutes and began interviewing workers and seizing company records (Hsu). By early afternoon, the immigrants were transported by bus to the National Cattle Congress grounds in Waterloo, Iowa, about seventy five miles from Postville. Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) held three hundred and thirteen male immigrants at an exhibit hall and seventy six female immigrants in local jails for administrative violations of immigration law (Hsu).

In the aftermath of the raid, hundreds of people sought refuge at Saint Bridget's Catholic Church in Postville. Many feared that ICE would return to arrest those who hadn't been working at the time of the raid or other family members residing in the town. The pews of St. Bridget's were filled with immigrants and their family members and many people stayed for days in fear.

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<sup>7</sup> Sojourners, (21 May 2008), "Postville Immigration Raid," [www.sojo.net/sojotube](http://www.sojo.net/sojotube). Hereinafter cited as Sojourners.

For the first five days after the raid, St. Bridget's fed between three hundred and four hundred people a day and comforted the many families who were distraught and feared for their relatives and their own futures (Sojourners).

One such immigrant was Antonio Escobedo, who ran to get his wife when he saw a helicopter circling overhead and immigration agents approaching Agriprocessors where they both worked (Hsu). Like hundreds of other Guatemalan and Mexican families, the couple hid in the pews of St. Bridget's for hours, fearing arrest and for their children's futures. Escobedo has raised his three children in Postville for the past eleven years and like many other immigrants expressed confusion at the purpose of the raid, "I like it here in Iowa...Are they mad because I'm working?" (Hsu).

Due to the man-made emergency which ensued, the local priest, Father Ouderkirk, who was formally of Saint Bridget's, came out of retirement. Father Ouderkirk expressed shock at what had occurred to his beloved community stating in an interview, "This happened after 10 years of stable living. These people were in school. They were achieving. It has ripped the heart out of the community and out of the parish. Probably every child I baptized has been affected. To see them stunned is beyond belief" (Preston).

Saint Bridget's played a major role in the lives of those affected by the raid and in the weeks and months that followed. The church helped family members to gather information about where their loved ones were and what was likely to happen to them in the future; they drove temporary released immigrants

to court appearances, and fed families who had lost their source of income (Drash 1).<sup>8</sup> As the story became widely publicized, the vast impact on the local Catholic Church became apparent to all.

Sister Mary McCauley, a nun from Saint Bridget's who first responded to the immigrants' arrival after the raid, said, "This situation poignantly calls our country to find a way in which we can welcome people, truly live what we see on the Statue of Liberty and recognize the giftedness of people" (Belz).<sup>9</sup> The poem written on the Statue of Liberty by Emma Lazarus states, "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" (Lazarus).<sup>10</sup> Sister McCauley worked hard to comfort the people as much as she could. According to one church member, she works tirelessly and "consoles women whose husbands are gone, moves through lunch lines greeting children, speaks with reporters, collects donations and even washes laundry" (Belz).

One example of the impact of the raid on the immigrant families and the importance of the shelter of the church can be seen in the case of one of the Agriprocessors workers named Irma Lopez. She was arrested along with her

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<sup>8</sup> Wayne Drash, (15 October 2008), "Priest: 'Nobody can tell me to shut up'," <http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/10/15/postville/priest/index.html>. Hereinafter cited as Drash 1.

<sup>9</sup> Adam Belz "Legacy lands nun in Postville spotlight," *The Cedar Rapids Gazette* 24 May 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Emma Lazarus, (17 October 2008), "The New Colossus," <http://www.libertystatepark.com/emma.htm>

husband Marcelo in the raid after having worked at Agriprocessors for six years. She was released temporarily to take care of their two-year old daughter. Lopez said, “I pray to God for the opportunity to stay in this country so my daughter can be educated here, that was my dream” (Preston). She explained, “I came to the church because I feel safe there, I feel secure. I feel protected. I feel at peace. I feel comforted” (Preston).

Another immigrant, Rocelia Hernandez, who had worked at Agriprocessors for three years and has four children, admits she was living in the United States illegally, but says she came to improve her children’s lives. She said, “Since I arrived here, I haven’t done anything but work because I wanted to have a house and have better things in the future for my children” (Drash 1). She is confused as to why the United States, a country she views as generous and as the land of opportunity, would want to punish those seeking a better life. “I want my son to learn the language and stay here and have a better life,” she goes on, and then poses the question, “If the Americans have such a big heart or the government has such a big heart for other people, why don’t they protect those of us who are already here? Why do they kick us out?” (Drash 1). Her question is undoubtedly warranted since the immediate response of the United States government was to arrest, incarcerate, and deport these exploited people who sought only to work hard, despite dangerous working conditions, to provide a better life for their children and families. These families were attempting to fulfill

the “American Dream,” but were met with contempt by both their American employer and the U.S. government.

The promise of a better life and an opportunity to succeed are a central part of the “American Dream,” and education is most often the path to achieve this notion of success. This is precisely why so many of the immigrants spoke of the importance of their children’s education. It is interesting to note the negative effect of the immigration raid on the entire school system. On the day following the raid, half of the school system’s six hundred students were absent, including ninety percent of the Hispanic children, because their parents were either arrested or in hiding. Postville’s Schools Superintendent, David Strudhoff, said the sudden incarceration of more than ten percent of the town’s population of 2,300 “is like a natural disaster – only this one is manmade.” Furthermore, he said, “In the end, it is the greater population that will suffer...” (Hsu). The arrested immigrants were an established part of the community and their absence had a noticeable ripple effect throughout Postville.

In addition to the sudden terror of the raid, there was undoubtedly a massive impact on children, families, and the entire community at large. The raid appeared to have devastated the entire town. Many residents described how it was as if there had been a natural disaster and one-third of the town had been wiped out. Children lost their friends and classmates in school, parents lost their spouses, friends, and neighbors; the impact was painful and widespread. Parents worried about how the local economy and town would suffer with the dramatic

closing of the largest business in Postville, and children wondered when and if they would see their family members and friends again. Lisa Powell, one such Postville resident, spoke of the likely economic consequences of the raid for the entire community,

“This is a potentially fatal blow to this specific community, this is a severe blow to probably to a four county area...without the money, without the economy, everybody here is going to suffer. You just destroyed the housing market in this community, a lot of the businesses are going to permanently close, the people aren't there to buy the goods” (Sojourners).

When analyzing the many interviews with the affected immigrants in Postville, one notices trends in what they primarily discuss. Despite their experiences working at Agriprocessors, virtually all of the immigrants mention their positive perception of the United States as a welcoming and generous nation, say that their desire to come to the America was in order to improve the lives of their families, and express their lack of understanding of the raid. It is clear that they came to the United States and worked in terrible conditions at Agriprocessors in order to improve the lives of their children and families. They were willing to sustain harassment, abuse, dangerous working conditions, unjust wages, unreasonable working hours, and to perform the work that most people are unwilling to do, all for the possibility to better the lives of their children and to provide the opportunity for them to succeed.

Although not always explicit, the “American Dream” is present in all of the interviews with the released immigrant mothers from Postville. Each mother speaks of the opportunity that the United States provides and their desire for this



opportunity for each of their children. None of these women mentioned their own personal hopes, dreams, or desires, but only the potential betterment of the lives of their children. Like many parents, these women are self-sacrificing and fulfilled the Catholic notion of self-sacrifice in imitation of Jesus.

This commonality amongst parents is recognized by the Catholic Church. When one asks parents what they want most for their children, most answer they want their children to be happy and be able to succeed in whatever they choose, and not to be subjected to a life of forced poverty with little chance of improving their situation. To many parents, violating a law by crossing an arbitrary border hardly seems a high price to pay to secure a better life for one's children. Steven Bloom writes that, "immigrants were a third element to Postville society, a rerun of the classic American story: Newly arrived in the land of plenty, working in the lowliest of jobs, between shots of anesthetic to deaden the pain of their labors, they scrimped and saved, sending money to their wives and children back home" (Bloom, 135).

At St. Bridget's, Father Ouderkirk expressed his indignation at the sudden and excessive nature of the government's actions: "They had attacked this town with a military-style raid – brought in 900 immigration police to arrest 389 people. I mean, what is that other than a military raid on this town?" (Drash 2).<sup>11</sup> He further expressed his outrage by stating, "If the elected politicians couldn't do

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<sup>11</sup> Wayne Drash, (14 October 2008), "Mayor: Feds turned my town 'topsy turvy'," <http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/10/14/postville.raid/index.html>. Hereinafter cited as Drash 2.

any better than this to come up with good, just immigration laws, they should hang their heads in shame” (Drash 2).

Since these immigrant families have no means of support, St Bridget's parish has provided help for them. Father Ouderkirk explained that it is costing St. Bridget’s \$80,000 a month and that the Church only has enough money to provide for these families until the end of the year. He declared, “It’s pathetic when you have what was labeled by the man who directed the raid here as a ‘very successful raid.’ How successful is this when it does this to the children and breaks up families?” (Drash 1).

Father Ouderkirk further reflected on the importance of opportunity to succeed, “I think of the chances my ancestors had. Here are people who’ve been here 10 years, and to get torn up like this, it doesn’t make any sense to me. It cuts so deep. Like Sister Mary says, once you’ve cried for two straight weeks, you don’t have any more tears. But it doesn’t mean that you stop feeling” (Freedman).<sup>12</sup> Father Ouderkirk says “he’ll keep speaking his mind. He invites vocal opponents of illegal immigration to come to his church and ‘walk in the shoes’ of the immigrants he’s helping. He says he’s ‘gotten hate letters like you wouldn’t believe’” (Drash 1). Furthermore, Father Ouderkirk explained, “If people have a right to spout off like that, then I have a right to speak in defense of these poor people” (Drash 1). He continued, “This is a free country. I have a right to speak what I believe in, and I have a right to speak up for poor people whose

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel G. Freedman “Immigrants Find Solace After Storm of Arrests,” The New York Times 12 July 2008.

voice is being denied” (Drash 1). Father Ouderkirk’s commitment to the immigrants has been clear and unwavering. As one New York Times reporter observed, “The only redemptive thing that can be said, perhaps, is that in the crisis at Postville...the beacon of the Roman Catholic Church to immigrants has rarely shone more brilliantly” (Freedman).

## Over One Hundred Years of Catholic Doctrine

In my analysis of the case-study of the Postville Immigration raid, I will examine a number of papal encyclicals and an important statement by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in order to gain a better understanding of the appropriate Catholic response in light of modern Catholic social teaching. I seek to understand what, if any, are the moral obligations of Catholics to respond to a situation such as Postville, where both U.S. laws and Catholic moral teaching are being violated.

There are a vast number of documents published by the Catholic Church which could be examined in relation to the complex issues of labor, immigration, family, and political responsibilities. Since much of my interest was in understanding the moral and political obligations of the Catholic Church to immigrants in light of Postville, I examined modern documents in which the Church iterated its latest stances on political and moral matters and the duties of Catholics to society at large.

I have limited my analysis to four major documents, three papal encyclicals and a statement by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on political responsibility and morality.<sup>13</sup> The three papal encyclicals which I

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<sup>13</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States (Washington, D.C., 14 November 2007). Hereinafter cited as Bishops.

have chosen to examine are: *Rerum Novarum* (1891),<sup>14</sup> *Centesimus Annus* (1991),<sup>15</sup> and *Familiaris Consortio* (1981).<sup>16</sup> Each provide vital information in understanding the positions of the Catholic Church on a number of issues, but each has also enhanced my understanding of what the Church values through what is emphasized in its teachings. A papal encyclical is considered by the majority of clergy members, as well as lay Catholics, to be an authoritative document. Thus, the weight which I give to these encyclicals is simply reflective of the views of the Church. Doctrinally, I have analyzed these encyclicals with the deep reverence that the Church itself has itself attributed to these documents. I have begun with the most recent document, the statement by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and then will use the earlier papal encyclicals to help understand the basis for the Church's current position.

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<sup>14</sup> Leo XIII, *Encyclical Letter: Rerum Novarum: On Capital and Labor* (Rome, 15 May 1891). Hereinafter cited as *Rerum*.

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II *Encyclical Letter: Centesimus Annus: On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum* (Rome, 1 May 1991). Hereinafter cited as *Centesimus*.

<sup>16</sup> John Paul II *Encyclical Letter: Familiaris Consortio: On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World* (Rome, 22 November 1981). Hereinafter cited as *Familiaris*.

**“Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political  
Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States”**

In November 2007, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published, “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States.” This document was meant to help American Catholics understand both their political responsibility to society and how the Catholic Church expects them to participate politically. The Bishops’ Statement is strongly rooted in numerous papal encyclicals, the Catholic Catechism, and the Bible. This document is critical to my analysis because it addresses the central problem of my work: how Catholics are to relate to the modern world and to respond, politically, effectively, and morally to the current problems of the day. The Bishops’ statement seeks to aid Catholics in formulating conclusions to challenging modern issues with regards to the teachings of the Church. Through explicit and established positions, the Bishops’ statement gives Catholics another foundational source from which to base difficult moral and political choices.

The U.S. Bishops discussed many issues of “social justice” including immigration in their section on Faithful Citizenship and “Applying Catholic Teaching to Major Issues” (Bishops 19). The key statement upon which I will focus is the Bishops’ discussion on Immigration and Immigration Policy in the United States. The Bishops stated, “The Gospel mandate to ‘welcome the stranger’ requires Catholics to care and stand with immigrants, both documented

and undocumented, including immigrant children” (Bishops 24). This may be the most explicit declaration by the Catholic Church in the United States in support of immigrants. The Bishops’ choice of words is particularly purposeful. The statement that the Gospel mandate “requires” Catholics to care and “stand with immigrants” is evidence of the Bishops’ strong conviction of the need for Catholics to be on the side of immigrants, including “both documented and undocumented” (Bishops 24). It is uncommon for the statements by Catholic clergy to be so explicit, particularly regarding those who have violated a U.S. law. The Bishops’ clearly-worded statement is much more significant considering the long tradition and history of Catholic documents often being far less than explicit. Due to the strength of the position taken (and the choice of words by the Bishops), the letter should be more widely taught by the Catholic Church to its members, many of whom are likely to be unaware of the Church’s view of immigrants.

The U.S. Catholic Bishops do more than make definitive statements on the Catholic position on documented and undocumented immigrants; they also call for specific political resolutions, including establishing important criteria for the creation of any U.S. immigration policy solution. The Bishops explained how Catholics can fulfill the “Gospel mandate to ‘welcome the stranger’” by demanding comprehensive immigration reform (Bishops 24). They stated, “Comprehensive immigration reform is urgently necessary to fix a broken immigration system...” (Bishops 24). This recognition of the need for political reform in addition to the support and care of the Catholic community is important.

It clearly demonstrates that the Catholic Church views itself as more than just a moral institution. The Catholic Church, like any other institution, has particular interests which it desires to be achieved by the State, and works to accomplish these interests. Although the Catholic Church understands the need for the separation between church and state in the United States, it also recognizes the enormous power of the state and the important role the Church plays in calling for morally sensitive policies.

Interestingly, the Bishops not only called for a broad change in immigration policies, but also made recommendations as to what types of modifications are necessary to accomplish meaningful immigration policy reform.

The Bishops stated that reform,

should include a temporary work program with worker protections and a path to permanent residency; family reunification policies; a broad and fair legalization program; access to legal protection, including due process and essential public programs, refuge for those fleeing persecution and exploitation; and policies to address the root causes of migration (Bishops 24-25).

These policies are consistent with those recommended by many groups who advocate for more open and liberal immigration policies in the United States. In addition to moral considerations, they reflect an understanding of globalization and the need for increased free movement for workers. The Bishops also call for policies to “address the root causes of migration” in recognition that much of immigration results from larger systemic problems and economic inequalities. Again, statements by the Catholic Church often lack this level of specificity and detail, reiterating the strong support of the Church for these remedies.



The Bishops were strong in their convictions for fair and compassionate reform by the state, yet they did not forget the challenging obligations of nations to enforce their laws, protect their citizens, and provide effective policy solutions to problems. They stated, “The rights and responsibilities of nations to control their borders and to maintain the rule of law should be recognized” (Bishops 25). The Bishops did not propose simply idealist options such as a world with completely free and open borders, but offer viable possibilities for reform.

### **General Principles of the Political Responsibility of Catholics**

In addition to a strong focus on issues of immigration, the Bishops’ document provides invaluable insight and guidance on many general principles of the political responsibility of Catholics. Their discussion of Catholic principles in relation to political responsibility is critical to understand the Church’s view of the role of Catholics in society, as well as how it navigates its own difficult institutional role. I will particularly focus on the political and moral issues that were discussed and are most relevant to immigration policies and the treatment of immigrants in the United States at this time. These major themes include: the development of individual conscience, the moral obligation to political participation, the principles of human dignity and love of one’s neighbor and their societal implications, labor rights, the importance of family in policy formation, and the notion of solidarity (Bishops 5-6).

First, the U.S. Catholic Bishops addressed the importance of individual conscience in reaching moral political decisions. The Bishops cite the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to explain, “Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right” (Bishops 7). This definition of conscience appears to be straightforward, but, in fact, the obligation of Catholics to act according to what is “just and right” has significant implications because the Catholic Church defines what is just and right.

The Bishops clearly think that Catholic teaching has prepared the laity and their conscience to deal with the challenges of modern life. The importance of conscience relates to Catholics’ moral and political obligations because, “The Church equips its members to address political and social questions by helping them to develop a well formed conscience” (Bishops 6). Furthermore, the Bishops explained that the formation of the conscience is not based on a singular event but that, “Catholics have a serious and lifelong obligation to form their consciences in accord with human reason and the teaching of the Church” (Bishops 6).

It is not sufficient for Catholics to use their conscience simply to live their individual lives, rather the Bishops argue that it is also essential for Catholics to participate and use this conscience in the political process, “The Church’s

obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith” (Bishops 3). Furthermore, the Bishops explicated, “The work for justice requires that the mind and the heart of Catholics be educated and formed to know and practice the whole faith” (Bishops 2). This emphasis on truly understanding Catholic teachings is of great importance to the U.S. Bishops since it often informs Catholic voters’ political actions and choices. In the Catholic tradition, the Bishops wrote, “responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation” (Bishops 4) Moreover, this obligation is rooted in the baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and bear Christian witness to all one does (Bishops 4). The Bishops cite the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to reiterate this point. It states, “It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person...As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life” (Bishops 4).

Participation in the political process, however, does not necessarily mean that all Catholics will vote the same way. The Bishops acknowledge that Catholics may think differently on what is the best solution to challenging political issues, but declare that all Catholics must be united in a commitment to their shared values. They state, “Catholics may choose different ways to respond to compelling social problems, but we cannot differ on our moral obligation to help build a more just and peaceful world through morally acceptable means, so that the weak and the vulnerable are protected and human rights and dignity are

defended” (Bishops 7). This strong message of the moral obligation of Catholics to help build a more just world and to work for the protection of the vulnerable and weak is clearly applicable to the Postville case and, more broadly, to helping address immigration issues as a whole. The Bishops do not believe that all Catholics must unite in a specific immigration policy, but rather should work to support immigrants, not only as our “brothers and sisters in Christ,” but as vulnerable people.

The idea of the “respect for the dignity of every person” as the “core of Catholic social and moral teaching” is a key theme of the Bishops' statement (Bishops 3). It is in part from this essential notion that they derive all of their political positions and teachings. The Bishops cite the Second Vatican Council and explain, “the Word made flesh, in showing us the Father’s love, also shows us what it truly means to be human. Christ’s love for us lets us see our human dignity in full clarity and compels us to love our neighbor as he has loved us” (Bishops 3). Again, one can see how the concept of human dignity is used to understand the biblical teaching, “Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,’ and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying, (namely) ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Romans 13:8-10). Catholics are not exempt from loving one’s neighbor in any circumstance, even when one’s neighbor is an undocumented and poor immigrant. Further, this

“love for our neighbor” is the true expression of the Catholic faith and the teachings of Jesus. The actions of Jesus towards the despised members of society were those of kindness, generosity, and love. His disdain was reserved for those who were unkind to the misfortunate members of society. Thus, to treat an immigrant with love is not only a requirement of Catholics, but in fact, is exactly the mission of the Catholic religion, to live as Jesus did.

The love of their neighbors is expected to be shown in concrete ways by Catholics. In this document the U.S. Catholic Bishops did not hesitate to be explicit in the expectations of Catholics to help the neighbor, stating, “The moral imperative to respond to the needs of our neighbors – basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work – is universally binding on our consciences...” (Bishops 8). The Bishops discussed the importance of rights in all society and included the rights to food, shelter, healthcare, family life, education, employment, housing, and freedom of religion. However, they also noted that these rights do not come without subsequent expectations; the Bishops wrote, “corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families, and to the larger society” (Bishops 14). This is an important point when considering what is required of Catholics in the context of a larger and mostly secular society. The moral obligation to work towards a better society is clearly present in Catholic teachings and is emphasized in this latest work on “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,” where one may begin to

understand how working towards just and compassionate immigration policies amongst other issues is vital to Catholics.

It is clear that the Bishops have expectations for society and the state, in addition to those for individuals. In another section of their document, the Bishops discussed the importance of work and the rights which are attached to all who work. The reiteration of the importance of labor rights by the Bishops when addressing political responsibility of American Catholics is indicative of how serious they take labor rights to be. The Bishops describe the dignity and rights of workers, “to productive work, to decent and just wages, to adequate benefits and security in their old age, to the choice of whether to organize and join unions, to the opportunity for legal status for immigrant workers, to private property, and to economic initiative” (Bishops 15). The importance inclusion of the clause, “the opportunity for legal status of immigrant workers” is not mentioned in either *Rerum Novarum* or *Centesimus Annus*, the two encyclicals which address workers' rights. This specific clause shows awareness of the U.S. Bishops of the current importance of immigration policies with regard to workers in the United States.

The Bishops also described their desire for policies which reflect their commitment to workers, “Social and economic policies should foster the creation of jobs for all who can work with decent working conditions and just wages” (Bishops 22). Further, the Bishops argue that these policies should include a multifaceted approach to labor issues and workers' rights. They described the

moral importance of workers rights through the biblical concept of human dignity, discussed the political necessity of improving policies in order to better incorporate these values, and called for Catholics to understand the moral significance of these concepts and to work for political reform in a moral capacity.

A significant public policy issue raised by the Bishops includes the importance of the family in the consideration of reforms. Although family is undeniably important to society, it can be lost in the discussion of public policy. The Bishops wrote clearly on their vision of the preeminence of the family, “Respect for the family should be reflected in every policy and program” (Bishops 14). They claimed that virtually all policies should favor or give credence to families first: “Policies on taxes, work, divorce, immigration, and welfare should help families to stay together and should reward responsibility and sacrifice for children” (Bishops 21). The Catholic stance on the importance of family and the view that it should be paramount in the formation of public policy is not only seen here, but is reflected in the encyclicals examined later.

Although it may seem obvious that workers' rights and their families are related, this thought can be lost in discussions of reform; however, the Bishops noted that worker wages should be formulated specifically with the family in mind, “Wages should allow workers to support their families, and public assistance should be available to help poor families to live in dignity. Such assistance should be provided in a manner that promotes eventual financial

autonomy” (Bishops 21). The dual political and moral commitment to families is ever-present in Catholic teaching, and, in particular, the call to address those families who live in poverty is apparent.

Another important view the U.S. Bishops utilized in much of their teachings, which relates both to human dignity and the importance of family, is the notion of solidarity. The significance of the notion of solidarity is that all people are part of a universal human family that transcends national borders and differences in race, ethnicity, economics, and ideology (Bishops 16). The Bishops go on specifically to mention immigration as an example of this important moral concept, “Solidarity also includes the Scriptural call to welcome the stranger among us – including immigrants seeking work, a safe home, education for their children, and a decent life for their families” (Bishops 16).

In summary, the U.S Bishops have issued this timely statement to help shape the Catholic view towards a number of interrelated political and societal issues. They highlight a variety of important issues including opposing “unjust immigration policy” as “serious moral issues that challenge our consciences and require us to act” (Bishops 9). Furthermore, they declared, “These are not optional concerns which can be dismissed. Catholics are urged to seriously consider Church teachings on these issues” (Bishops 9). Their urging of strong political involvement in order to help the downtrodden members of society, and specifically immigrants, should be considered as a call to action for serious immigration policy reform.



### *Rerum Novarum*

The statement by the U.S. Bishop on immigration reform and care for workers could be viewed as a opportunistic attempt to support immigrant Catholics, rather than a reiteration of the basic premises of Catholic doctrine. However, there are many documents in the history of the Church which demonstrate the foundation for the Bishops' statement. I will consider three of them in this work, beginning with the oldest, *Rerum Novarum*, which help provide the basis of the Church's position on workers and immigrants.

Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (Of New Things: On Capital and Labor") specifically seeks to address the Condition of the Working Classes. It is the first major document on labor and the rights of workers to come from the Catholic Church and is an important piece of evidence of the support of the Church for these workers. In this encyclical, Pope Leo XIII chiefly discussed the plight of the working class and the role that government should play in addressing its needs. He emphasized the importance of labor issues in relation to the poor and laid out numerous principles to protect workers and their families. Finally, Pope Leo XIII explained the larger context in which labor issues and workers exist, the theological significance of work, and the impact of laborers on society as whole. In addition to affirming the rights of workers, this encyclical is known for its enunciation of the values of private property rights and for its condemnation of both socialism and unbridled capitalism. In *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII underlined the Catholic Church's right to make declarations on

social issues as they relate to moral questions, including those of a political nature.

Pope Leo XIII began his encyclical by stressing how the conditions in which the poor live are unacceptable and must be addressed. He wrote, “the poor must be speedily and fittingly cared for, since the great majority of them live undeservedly in miserable and wretched conditions” (Rerum 5). Pope Leo XIII described how conditions for workers had deteriorated over the course of the previous century and deplored “that the present age handed over the workers, each alone and defenseless, to the inhumanity of employers and the unbridled greed of competitors” (Rerum 6). Furthermore, the Pope pointed out that the situation facing most workers, “has been brought almost entirely under the power of a few, so that a very few rich and exceedingly rich men have laid a yoke almost of slavery on the unnumbered masses of non-owning workers” (Rerum 6). Clearly, the condition of workers as described by the Pope, a state of virtual slavery and powerlessness, was and is unacceptable to the Catholic Church and thus compelled Pope Leo XIII to speak out. Slavery fundamentally violates Christian principles and in particular the principle of the human dignity of every person, a concept which Pope Leo XIII stressed when considering the question of the treatment of workers.

In the next major portion of his encyclical, Pope Leo XIII established the theological connection between the importance of the protection of the worker and the concept of the human dignity of every person. He explained the necessity

of the protection of the human spirit or soul in order to honor God and the dignity of humanity. He stated, "...in the case of the worker, there are many things which the power of the State should protect; and, first of all, the goods of his soul" (Rerum 57). Pope Leo XIII recognized that the worker is not just a tool of capitalistic society or a necessary part of an assembly line, but is first and foremost a human being and a work of God's creation, something which many employers at the time did not consider.

This fundamental protection of workers as human beings first, set up the future direction of the Catholic social tradition. This tradition seeks to connect the larger and, at times, abstract moral principles to the realities of human existence. When applying the principle of preservation of the dignity of the human person, one must consider whether an event or policy is humane and provides the appropriate rights that should be accorded to all human beings. *Rerum Novarum* is a work that urges applying these essential moral principles to the struggles of workers at the time.

Like the later Bishops' statement, Pope Leo XIII specified what the Catholic Church considered to be crucial rights that all workers require. In a critical passage of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII asserted the importance of a just wage which enabled one to live and support one's family. He wrote,

Let the working man and the employer make free agreements, and in particular let them agree freely as to the wages; nevertheless, there underlies a dictate of natural justice more imperious and ancient than any bargain between man and man, namely, that wages ought not to be insufficient to support a frugal and well-behaved wage-earner (Rerum 63).

Although Pope Leo XIII began by calling for free agreements to be made between employers and workers, he acknowledged a need for broader principle of just wages under a “dictate of natural justice” (Rerum 63). Pope Leo XIII taught that moral considerations must mitigate the free operation of market forces in all societies in the name of justice. Furthermore, Pope Leo XIII was adamant that this was a role of the Catholic Church, continually to relate this message of justice for all and never tiring of imparting its difficult message.

In addition to describing the boundaries of the setting of workers' just wages, the Pope expanded the concept that justice between the employer and the worker was the critical factor in labor relations. Pope Leo XIII went beyond simply asserting the need of employers to provide a “just” wage, but more specifically stated that employers must account for the number of hours worked and pay workers accordingly. Pope Leo XIII gave priority to ensuring that workers received the wages that they had earned as a means to establishing justice in an otherwise hierarchical relationship. He set up this principle clearly: “Among the most important duties of employers the principal one is to give every worker what is justly due him” (Rerum 32). He further cited the Bible as the primary source from which he developed this position. Pope Leo XIII referenced the passage from St James, “To defraud anyone of the wage due him is a great crime that calls down avenging wrath from Heaven, ‘Behold, the wages of the laborers which have been kept back by you unjustly, cry out; and their cry has entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts’” (St. James, 5:4) (Rerum 32). He felt

that that it was clear from this biblical passage that the abuse of power by an employer over a worker is always unacceptable. From either specific reading of the text or moral contemplation of the overarching Christian principles, the understanding of the need for a just relationship in labor relations is apparent and unwavering in this encyclical.

In another crucial section of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII spoke out explicitly against misuse and exploitation of workers by employers. He stated, "If through necessity or fear of a worse evil the workman accept harder conditions because an employer or contractor will afford him no better, he is made the victim of force and injustice" (Rerum 63). Pope Leo XIII's awareness that workers are often forced to accept deplorable working conditions due to necessity, fear, or both is not only an insightful observation but accurately depicts the plight of many workers, particularly the experience of workers of the late nineteenth century when he was writing *Rerum Novarum*. The Pope's denunciation of this exploitation as immoral was another significant move to promote workers' rights and one which is clearly in concordance with Catholic principles. Unfortunately, the problem of worker abuse is not limited to the nineteenth or twentieth century. An examination of many of the current conditions and abuses of both undocumented and documented workers shows that Pope Leo XIII's words are still relevant and timely today as in 1891.

Pope Leo XIII also explicitly discussed the importance of the rights of workers to have reasonable working hours. He stated, "Now as concerns the

protection of corporeal and physical goods, the oppressed workers, above all, ought to be liberated from the savagery of greedy men, who inordinately use human beings as things for gain...With respect to daily work, therefore, care ought to be taken not to extend it beyond the hours that human strength warrants” (Rerum 59). As Thomas Shannon, professor of religion at Worcester Polytechnic Institute notes, the Pope’s argument “...is that humans cannot be used as instruments for making money: ‘It is neither justice nor humanity so to grind men down with excessive labor as to stupefy their minds and wear out their bodies’ (33)” (Shannon, 137).<sup>17</sup>

Pope Leo XIII also wrote of the need for workers to be able to observe the Sabbath and use it for labor rest. He stated, “Rest combined with religion calls man away from toil and the business of daily life to admonish him to ponder on heavenly goods and pay his just and due homage to the Eternal Deity” (Rerum 58). He explains how the need to observe the Sabbath is explicitly expressed in the Bible, “God has sanctioned the same in the Old Testament by a special law: ‘Remember thou keep holy the Sabbath Day,’ [30] and He himself taught it by His own action; namely the mystical rest taken immediately after He had created man: ‘He hath rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done’ [31]” (Rerum 58). Again, this reiteration of specific rights of workers was imperative

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas A. Shannon, “Commentary on *Rerum Novarum* (*The Condition of Labor*),” Ed. Kenneth R. Himes, Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005). Hereinafter cited as Shannon.

to securing the basic needs of so many people, who in many cases, could not speak for themselves.

In addition to addressing the exploitation of workers, Pope Leo XIII wrote on the importance of the protection of children from becoming workers: "...as regards children, special care ought to be taken that the factory does not get hold of them before age has sufficiently matured their physical, intellectual, and moral powers" (Rerum 60). While it seems obvious that the Church would oppose child labor, the Pope recognizes the need to emphasize this point as part of important Catholic moral obligations.

Pope Leo XIII also briefly discussed the importance of justice as a function of a stable society. He wrote, "Wherefore St. Thomas says wisely: 'Even as part and whole are in a certain way the same, so too that which pertains to the whole pertains in a certain way to the part also'" (Rerum 26). Consequently, among the numerous and the weighty duties of rulers who would serve their people well, this is first and foremost, namely, that they protect equitably each and every class of citizens, maintaining inviolate that justice especially which is called distributive" (Rerum 49). The Pope's call for distributive justice among classes strongly supports the needs of workers, but also appeals to the desires of the state to form a well-functioning society. This is just one example of the strength behind many of the arguments made by Pope Leo XIII; while his moral arguments are based on Catholic teachings, they also are tailored to appeal to broader constituencies with a variety of moral, political, and economic concerns.

Pope Leo XIII made clear that it is the responsibility of the Catholic Church to speak out regarding moral issues, including the defense of workers. He wrote, “It is the Church, again, that strives not only to instruct the mind but to regulate by her precepts the life and morals of individuals, that ameliorates the condition of the workers through her numerous and beneficent institution, and that wishes and aims to have the thought and energy of all society united to this end, that the interests of the workers be protected as fully as possible” (Rerum 25). However Pope Leo XIII also noted the broader important role of religious traditions in the protection of workers' rights. He wrote, “Rights indeed, by whomever possessed, must be religiously protected; and public authority, in warding off injuries and punishing wrongs, ought to see to it that individuals may have and hold what belongs to them” (Rerum 54). He explained, however, that it is also the job of the state to give special consideration to wage workers as a vulnerable group in society. Pope Leo XIII stated, “...since wage workers are numbered among the great mass of the needy, the State must included them under its special care and foresight” (Rerum 54). It is clear that while the Catholic Church views its own role to be in tackling issues of labor and social justice, the protection of rights by both religious institutions and public authorities is critical to achieving success.

Pope Leo XIII also articulated the role of the poor in any discussion of labor and the treatment of the workers. Thus, Pope Leo XIII acknowledged the low economic class of the majority of workers as one of the focal points of his



encyclical. As Michael Schuck, professor of theology at Loyola University Chicago explains, the Pope argued that “states have a special obligation to oversee the ‘interests of the poor’” (Schuck, 85).<sup>18</sup> Pope Leo XIII wrote, “...workers are not sufficiently protected against injustices and violence, and their property, being so meager, ought to be regarded as all the more sacred” (Rerum 32).

In addition to expressing this concern for the poor, Pope Leo XIII introduced a monumental new concept, that of the preferential option of the poor. He introduced this concept by stating, “...the favor of God Himself seems to incline more toward the unfortunate as a class; for Jesus Christ calls the poor blessed, and He invites most lovingly all who are in labor or sorrow to come to Him for solace, embracing with special love the lowly and those harassed by injustice” (Rerum 37). Although it had always been emphasized in Christ's teachings, this statement was the first time the Church had expressly declared that God is on the side of the poor, however by placing in his encyclical the concept that the poor must be the preferential option in Church doctrine, Pope Leo XII gave this idea a unique status in the Church’s consideration of social issues. This consideration is frequently referred to in the U.S. Bishops’ statement, bridging more than a century of Catholic's emphasis of Christ's caring for the poor and desolate of society.

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<sup>18</sup> Michael J. Schuck, That They Be One: The Social Teaching of the Papal Encyclicals 1740-1989 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991).

In a corollary to the preferential option for the poor, Pope Leo XIII wrote of the increased need of the poor, rather than the rich, for assistance from the state, “The richer classes have many ways of shielding themselves, and stand less in need of help from the state; whereas the mass of the poor have no resources of their own to fall back upon, and must chiefly depend upon the assistance of the state” (*Rerum* 37). This insight in conjunction with the preferential option for the poor helped further to legitimize the Church’s position that the state must take measures to aid the poor and to attend to their needs to the fullest extent possible.

Although Pope Leo XIII was firstly a moral leader, he was also keenly aware of the challenging economic realities which impact all people. His understanding of morality and economics was one of the primary reasons for his writing *Rerum Novarum*. Thus even when deep in discussion of the requirements of the state, economic systems, and class issues, he never forgot to remind readers that, “True dignity and excellence in men resides in moral living, that is, in virtue; virtue is the common inheritance of man, attainable equally by the humblest and the mightiest, by the rich and the poor; and the reward of eternal happiness will follow upon virtue and merit alone, regardless of the person in whom they may be found” (*Rerum* 37). As Schuck specifies, “Such assistance should include housing, clothing, health care, and employment. Regarding relations between employers and employees, states should monitor workplace conditions, wages, and Sunday rest” (Schuck, 85).

Finally, Pope Leo XIII concluded that religion must be the answer to “remove the evil” and that Christian morals need to be re-established and followed. He stated, “And since religion alone, as We said in the beginning, can remove the evil, root and branch, let all reflect upon this: First and foremost Christian morals must be re-established, without which even the weapons of prudence, which are considered especially effective, will be of no avail, to secure well-being” (Rerum 82). Furthermore, Pope Leo XIII explained that it is a requirement of the Church to respond to the social problems which plague its people, “...since the safeguarding of religion and of all things within the jurisdiction of the Church is primarily Our stewardship, silence on Our part might be regarded as failure in Our duty” (Rerum 24).

It is important to understand the emphasis which Pope Leo XIII placed upon the role of the Church in addressing and solving social problems. Not only did he feel that it is an obligation of the Church to express its views on social issues, but it also must work to enact the proper solution to these social problems. Pope Leo XIII wrote, “...the Church does not consider it enough to point out the way of finding the cure, but she administers the remedy herself. For she occupies herself fully in training and forming men according to discipline and doctrine; and through the agency of bishops and clergy, she causes the health-giving streams of this doctrine to be diffused as widely as possible” (Rerum 40). The Church sees itself as an invaluable source to drive the resolution of social issues. Furthermore, the Pope sees the job of the clergy as one that disperses the Church’s teachings

and their application in order to achieve the goal of social improvement in the name of God. As Pope Leo XIII describes, the teachings of the Church, "...can properly penetrate the inner recesses of the heart and lead man to obedience to duty, to govern the activities of his self-seeking mind, to love God and his neighbors with a special and sovereign love, and to overcome courageously all things that impede the path of virtue" (Rerum 40).

*Rerum Novarum* is still considered a critical and vital document on the social teachings of the Catholic Church. It established principles which are crucial both to the rights of workers and the role of the Church in assisting them. By devoting an encyclical to the role of the Catholic Church in the plight of the working class in 1891, Pope Leo XIII established one of the founding documents of the Catholic social tradition. His stance on behalf of the poor and working class provided a continual source of vital themes, including the preferential option for the poor and the commitment to practical issues such as just wage, reasonable working hours, and more which, relate to the dignity of the human person. Furthermore, as Shannon described, "the significance of this encyclical is not only that it spoke to the issues of the day, but also that it set in motion the tradition of the popes continuing to address the social problems of the day" (Shannon, 127). Despite the age of this document, the themes promoted in this encyclical remain important and timely, and they help form many of the current views of the Catholic Church towards workers and issues of social justice.

### *Centesimus Annus*

The importance of *Rerum Novarum* is shown by the writing of *Centesimus Annus* (The Hundredth Year), the Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II. *Centesimus Annus* was issued in 1991 on the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, and is another important document that must be examined in order to understand better Catholic social doctrine on workers. Pope John Paul II said that *Centesimus Annus* was meant to honor *Rerum Novarum*, but he also explained that the purpose of his “rereading” was to issue, “...an invitation to ‘look back’ at the text itself in order to discover anew the richness of the fundamental principles which it formulated for dealing with the question of the condition of workers” (*Centesimus* 3). He further wrote, “But this is also an invitation to ‘look around’ at the ‘new things’ which surround us and in which we find ourselves caught up, very different from the ‘new things’ which characterized the final decade of the last century” (*Centesimus* 3).

In *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II affirmed the principles regarding workers’ rights, the dignity of work, and needed actions by the state, religious traditions, and society at large as outlined by Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*. The new encyclical was not, however, purely a reiteration of *Rerum Novarum*; rather it was an expansion of both the essential concepts and the explicit language regarding workers’ rights and duties of society at large. It is interesting to note that many of the issues raised by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 were still relevant one

hundred years later. Consequently, *Centesimus Annus* proved to be a critical work to laborers and one which permanently expanded Catholic social doctrine.

Similar to Pope Leo XIII, Pope John Paul II observed the challenging position of workers throughout the world in his time. He noted how throughout the last hundred years, "...labor became a commodity to be freely bought and sold on the market, its price determined by the law of supply and demand, without taking into account the bare minimum required for the support of the individual and his family" (*Centesimus* 4). Pope John Paul II continued to explain how this resulted in increasingly problematic conditions for workers, writing, "Moreover, the worker was not even sure of being able to sell 'his own commodity,' continually threatened as he was by unemployment, which, in the absence of any kind of social security, meant the specter of death by starvation" (*Centesimus* 4). Thus the fundamental issues of security and dignity for workers were reaffirmed.

In addition, Pope John Paul II both praised and affirmed the legacy which Pope Leo XIII began in *Rerum Novarum*. He explained that Pope Leo XIII's intention was to restore peace among the economic classes but that, "...the Pope was very much aware that peace is built on the foundation of justice: what was essential to the encyclical was precisely its proclamation of the fundamental conditions for justice in the economic and social situation of the time [11]" (*Centesimus* 5). Pope John Paul II noted, "In this way, Pope Leo XIII, in the footsteps of his predecessors, created a lasting paradigm for the Church. The Church, in fact, has something to say about specific human situations, both

individual and communal, national and international” (Centesimus 5). Pope John Paul II further described these statements on “specific human situations” as one of the responsibilities of the Church: “She formulates a genuine doctrine for these situations, a corpus which enables her to analyze social realities, to make judgments about them and to indicate directions to be taken for the just resolution of the problems involved” (Centesimus 5).

In addition to his declaration of the importance of the principles established in *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John Paul II expanded the concept of the rights of workers by writing unequivocally about the need for individual freedom of expression and adequate free-time for workers. He wrote, “...‘humane’ working hours and adequate free-time need to be guaranteed, as well as the right to express one’s own personality at the workplace without suffering any affront to one’s conscience or personal dignity” (Centesimus 15). As with *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John Paul II reinforced the crucial idea that the preservation of personal dignity should be a driving force in the relationship between employers and immigrants.

One of the main developments in the protection of workers' rights in the time preceding *Centesimus Annus* was the creation of trade unions; hence the discussion of trade unions was a key component in Pope John Paul II’s encyclical. Pope John Paul II described the many benefits which trade unions can bring to facilitate the expression of the interests of workers and therefore, praised their existence. His support of trade unions recognized the necessity of group

protection and a body to speak up for workers' rights and needs. He praised the positive effect of trade unions on workers in multiple capacities and stated,

This is the place to mention once more the role of trade unions, not only in negotiating contracts, but also as 'places' where workers can express themselves. They serve the development of an authentic culture of work and help workers to share in a fully human way in the life of their place of employment (Centesimus 15).

He also praised trade unions' ability to block the exploitation of workers stating, "The role of trade unions in negotiating minimum salaries and working conditions is decisive in this area" (Centesimus 15).

In similar fashion to Pope Leo XIII, Pope John Paul II urged all to refocus discussions of labor to consider the principle of human dignity. The Pope described, "...if a person's work and very being are not to be reduced to the level of a mere commodity" then he explains it, "...still constitute a goal to be reached..." (Centesimus 34). He further states, "Here we find a wide range of opportunities for commitment and effort in the name of justice on the part of trade unions and other workers' organizations" (Centesimus 35). These groups, "...defend workers' rights and protect their interests as persons, while fulfilling a vital cultural role, so as to enable workers to participate more fully and honorably in the life of their nation and to assist them along the path to development" (Centesimus 35). His vision of work as more than just a means to accomplish one's livelihood exemplifies his expanded view of the relationship between employers, workers, and society. These principles need to be considered in my future discussions of labor and immigration in the case of Postville, Iowa.



Pope John Paul II also used *Rerum Novarum*'s teachings to draw implicit conclusions that he wished to discuss in greater depth. For example, the Pope wrote on the importance of the protection of citizens from unemployment. He stated, "...*Rerum Novarum* points the ways to just reforms which can restore dignity to work as the free activity of man. These reforms imply that society and the State will both assume responsibility, especially for protecting the worker from the nightmare of unemployment" (Centesimus 15). Pope John Paul II, like Pope Leo XIII, understood the vulnerabilities that workers face when presented with the threat of unemployment, including possibilities of exploitation, and He called upon both the state and society at large to address this challenge. Pope John Paul II's call for responsibility to protect against unemployment is a clear expansion of the scope of *Rerum Novarum*'s teachings for the current times.

Although the Catholic Church is deeply concerned with individual abuses and the protection of individual rights, Pope John Paul II viewed collective and societal problems, such as unemployment as requiring group responsibility and action. As Daniel Finn, professor of theology at Saint John's University notes, "The Pope is particularly concerned about the status of the unemployed who, though willing and able to work, are unable to find gainful employment. Employers have a strong obligation to their employees but when there is no employer for an able-bodied worker, both society and the state must recognize

their obligation in meeting needs” (Finn, 457).<sup>19</sup> Pope John Paul II did not hesitate to call on the state for reform in order to address the problem of unemployment. He further reiterated that evils such as unemployment are not individual, but societal problems and, thus, required solutions from the state. It is interesting to note that Pope John Paul II did not expect the Church or its members to be able to solve these immense challenges without governmental support and initiation. He recognized that at times the role of the Church must be to demand action from the state to address some of the most pressing of societal issues, including unemployment.

The problem of unemployment is of great relevance to immigrants and immigration issues. The vast majority of immigrants who come to the United States seek work in order to provide for their families and to improve their future. The possibility of unemployment and the instability which results from being in a new country often makes immigrants particularly vulnerable to exploitation, specifically with regard to work. Pope John Paul II was quite cognizant of the people who are most plagued by the problems of unemployment and wrote dutifully with this awareness. In addition, his focus on unemployment as a societal issue reflects the Church’s view that all people must take up responsibility for each other and support the common goals which unite all people.

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel Finn, “Commentary on *Centesimus annus (On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum novarum)*,” Ed. Kenneth R. Himes, Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005). Hereinafter cited as Finn.

Pope John Paul II's concern with the issue of unemployment led him to take up the problem of exploitation of workers which often arise from the threat of unemployment. Thus, he wrote on both the importance of the protection of workers from exploitation as well as the necessity of an adequate wage, issues that Pope Leo had raised previously. He, again, called on both the state and society to ensure the protection of workers, "...society and the State must ensure wage levels adequate for the maintenance of the worker and his family, including a certain amount for savings" (Centesimus 15). One can see that although the Pope recognized the rights of individual workers, he did not forget the larger society and family that each worker is a part of and ultimately is responsible for care. It is for this reason that Pope John Paul II believed that wage levels must account for not only the individual, but also for the ability to provide for one's family as well. The constant awareness of how issues affect both the immediate as well as the entire human family is characteristic of the Catholic social tradition.

Pope John Paul II declared that this awareness of how an issue or policy will affect families must not only occur in the Catholic tradition, but should be the central consideration in the creation of a policy by the state. He explained, "It is urgent therefore to promote not only family policies, but also those social policies which have the family as their principal object, policies which assist the family by providing adequate resources and efficient means of support..." (Centesimus 49). Furthermore, it is the job of religious institutions to remind the state of this important duty and the morality behind it. *Centesimus Annus* reinforces the idea

that personal dignity and the family should be critical factors in social policies in general, but specifically as affects workers.

The Church also expressed its belief that society should look to the family as a model of necessary societal reforms, including notions of group responsibility and solidarity. Pope John Paul II explained, “In order to overcome today’s widespread individualistic mentality, what is required is a concrete commitment to solidarity and charity, beginning in the family...the family too can be called a community of work and solidarity” (Centesimus 49). This view only further established the primacy of the family in the Catholic vision of society.

This discussion of workers, their families, and the role of the state is a constant theme in both *Rerum Novarum* and *Centesimus Annus*. The Church makes it clear that they are always on the side of families and those working to support families and urges all governments to do the same. The protection of individual is largely based on the principle of human dignity. This protection of the individual is the basis of the protection of the family. The protection of the family ultimately protects the entire community as a whole.

The Pope continued to expand on the concept of the entire world as part of the human family and thus on the duty of the Church to all of humanity. He explained, “Sacred Scripture continually speaks to us of an active commitment to our neighbor and demands of us a shared responsibility for all of humanity” (Centesimus 51). Pope John Paul II further explicated, “This duty is not limited one’s own family, nation or state, but extends progressively to all humankind,

since no one can consider himself extraneous or indifferent to the lot of another member of the human family. No one can say that he is not responsible for the well-being of his brother or sister (cf. Gen 4:9; Lk 10:29-37; Mt 25:31-46)” (Centesimus 51). This concept may be viewed as radical by some, but is central to understanding how the Church comes to its conclusion in the Catholic social tradition and feeds its sensitivity to immigration.

A crucial aspect of *Centesimus Annus* is Pope John Paul II’s call for political intervention on behalf of workers. Unlike Pope Leo XIII, Pope John Paul II specified the need for political action and legislative measures to prevent the exploitation of workers, and especially to protect immigrant workers. He stated,

This requires a continuous effort to improve workers’ training and capability so that their work will be more skilled and productive, as well as careful controls and adequate legislative measures to block shameful forms of exploitation, especially to the disadvantage of the most vulnerable workers, of immigrants and of those on the margins of society (Centesimus 15).

It is this crucial statement which underlined the Catholic position on the protection of the rights of immigrant workers and the lack of distinction between immigrants and citizens. In contrast, governments have often persisted in the distinction between rights for citizens versus immigrants, particularly in the area of workers' rights.

This expanded position has been attributed by many to differences in the time periods in which each encyclical was written. In 1891, when Pope Leo XIII was writing, many still believed the creation of a Catholic state to be a real

possibility. It is probable that Pope Leo XIII did not want to appear to be advocating this political action and thus may have chosen to be less explicit on political affairs. By 1991, this was no longer viewed to be likely to occur; hence Pope John Paul II was able to speak more candidly of the political needs and legislative measures of society.

It is important to recognize, however, that despite political sensitivities, both Pope Leo XIII and Pope John Paul II noted the necessity of private property and condemned both socialism and unbridled capitalism. Both Popes were very much aware of global political systems and wrote within the existing context in their calls for reform. In *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II explained,

Pope Leo wrote: “those whom fortune favors are admonished...that they should tremble at the warnings of Jesus Christ...and that a most strict account must be given to the Supreme Judge for the use of all they possess”; and quoting Saint Thomas Aquinas, he added: “But if the question be asked, how must one’s possessions be used? The Church replies without hesitation that man should not consider his material possessions as his own, but as common to all...,” because “above all the laws and judgments of men stands the law, the judgment of Christ” (*Centesimus* 30).

Pope John Paul II asserted the power of the Catholic Church doctrinally to discuss both the importance and the morality of work, “Today more than ever, the Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of actions than as a result of its internal logic and consistency. This awareness is also a source of her preferential option for the poor, which is never exclusive or discriminatory towards other groups” (*Centesimus* 57). The reiteration by Pope John Paul II of Pope Leo’s proclamation of the preferential

option of the poor is vital to understanding both issues of immigration and labor in light of Catholic thought. Through remembrance of the importance which God places upon the poor, one recognizes the moral necessity of all Catholics to assist, defend, and love the poor as Jesus had done.

Pope John Paul II reiterated the Church's unremitting message on the issue of poverty, "The Church's love for the poor, which is essential for her and a part of her constant tradition, impels her to give attention to a world in which poverty is threatening to assume massive proportions in spite of technological and economic progress" (Centesimus 57). The Pope continued and stressed the enormous and direct impact of poverty upon immigrants and refugees, "In the countries of the West, different forms of poverty are being experienced by groups which live on the margins of society, by the elderly and the sick, by the victims of consumerism, and even more immediately by so many refugees and migrants" (Centesimus 57). He also noted the need for international coordination to address the widespread poverty which afflicts the most vulnerable members of societies throughout the world: "In the developing countries tragic crises loom on the horizon unless internationally coordinated measures are taken before it is too late" (Centesimus 57).

Pope John Paul II, continuing to discuss the role of the Church in the improvement of work and poverty wrote, "Furthermore, as she has become more aware of the fact that too many people live, not in the prosperity of the Western world, but in the poverty of the developing countries amid conditions which are

still ‘a yoke little better than that of slavery itself,’ she has felt and continues to feel obliged to denounce this fact with absolute clarity and frankness...”

(Centesimus 61). Labor issues, including workers' rights, always reflect a central theme of poverty. Those who are financially stable are much more likely to be able to demand rights from their employer and it is those who are more vulnerable financially who are most likely to be exploited. A worker’s economic situation is likely to influence their actions, or lack thereof, against their employer for fear of unemployment and ultimately, the inability to survive. The heavy burden of poverty is ever-present in discussions on labor and immigration and thus was considered by Pope John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus*.

Pope John Paul II describes how many Christians have been actively involved in the Church’s devotion to the poor, vulnerable, and to immigrants. He explained,

...confraternities as well as individual men and women of all states of life devoted themselves to the needy and to those on the margins of society, convinced as they were that Christ’s words ‘as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ (Mt 25:40) were not intended to remain a pious wish, but were meant to become a concrete life commitment (Centesimus 57).

These statements restate Pope Leo’s proclamation of the preferential option of the poor and its basis in Christ's teachings.

The implementation of this moral conviction provides a unique view of how we choose to treat each other. The words of Jesus, “as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt. 25:40), appear to be simple, when in fact, the people who are the most vulnerable and in need are often the



ones who are furthest from our minds. Despite the seemingly straightforward words of Jesus and many pious American Christians, the least of our brethren are frequently those who are excluded from consideration in our policies.

Immigration policy in the United States typifies this issue.

The preferential option for the poor is explained by the Pope in relation to justice in his statement, “Love for others and in the first place love for the poor, in whom the Church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice” (Centesimus 58). Pope John Paul II further clarified this principle and stated, “...it is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which in fact our world abundantly produces; it requires above all a change of lifestyles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies” (Centesimus 58). Pope John Paul II continued, “Nor is it a matter of eliminating instruments of social organization which have proved useful, but rather of orienting them according to an adequate notion of the common good in relation to the whole human family” (Centesimus 58). The Pope called for a change in perception, away from individual notions of pure self-interest and towards a communal view of the not simply the immediate biological family, but that of the entire human family.

Jose Miguez Bonino, Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at Instituto Universitario in Argentina, makes an interesting and important point as to why churches need to be involved in fighting against marginalization, exploitation, and oppression. Bonino wrote, “...the systems of oppression and

marginalization have not been created and perpetuated without the participation of Christian individuals and churches. The churches cannot address society as if they were outside it, untouched by its struggles, unspotted by its sins and injustices, exempt from responsibility” (Bonino, 399).<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, he explains how the notion of the Catholic Church taking some portion of responsibility directly affects its credibility, “The churches can only be credible if they recognize their involvement and, in the necessary reforms that they demand for society, endeavor to make the corresponding reforms in themselves” (Bonino, 399). Thus, Catholic social teaching not only seeks to promote the moral values of the Church, but to increase the credibility and relevance of the Church within society.

*Centesimus Annus* is an important document because it reaffirmed and expanded the principles established in *Rerum Novarum*. Like *Rerum Novarum*, it serves as a quintessential document of the Catholic social tradition and an affirming resource for workers. Pope John Paul II confirmed the benefit of trade unions, spoke of the responsibility of states to protect against unemployment, expanded the essential rights of workers, called for political intervention and protection on behalf of workers, and re-established the concept of the preferential option for the poor.

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<sup>20</sup> José Míguez Bonino, “Social Doctrine as a Locus for Ecumenical Encounter,” The Ecumenical Review 43, (October 1991).

### *Familiaris consortio*

Both of the encyclicals on work also highlighted the family, as we have seen. The final vital encyclical that I decided to examine emphasizes the importance of family; it is the 1981 encyclical by Pope John Paul II entitled, *Familiaris consortio* (Apostolic Exhortation on the Family). This encyclical focused on the role of the Christian family in the modern world. *Familiaris consortio* discussed the importance of marriage and family and the role of families in larger society. It also addresses the role of women in the family and society, clarifies its stance on different types of marriage, such as mixed and civil marriages, condemns polygamy, and touches on the complexities of divorce. Although the encyclical reiterated the Church's opposition to abortion and birth control, the focus of the document was on the expectations of the Christian family to practice communal prayer, education, service to the poor, and the promotion of Christian values. This focus on family is often overlooked in favor of more popularized topics such as abortion, birth control, and divorce. I have chosen to examine the crucial portions on family in this encyclical which emphasize the primacy of the family in society and the Church, because the Church has viewed social issues largely by their effect on the family.

Pope John Paul II began by describing the significance of family love as foundational to Christian life. As Pope John Paul II remarked, "we must say that the essence and role of the family are in the final analysis specified by love.

Hence the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride” (Familiaris 17). In addition to describing the family as defined by love, Pope John Paul II notes the need for the family to “...guard, reveal and communicate love...” (Familiaris 17). Pope John Paul II cites four general tasks for the family: forming a community of persons, serving life, participating in the development of society, and sharing in the life and mission of the Church (Familiaris 17). He further explicates the ways in which the family can accomplish these tasks of love.

Pope John Paul II explained how the mission and responsibilities of the family can be understood through its role in society. He wrote, "The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do. The role that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is...Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored and that specifies both its dignity and responsibility: family, become what you are" (Familiaris 17).

In another crucial section in *Familiaris consortio*, Pope John Paul II went further to introduce the concept of the domestic church. He wrote, “The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called ‘the domestic Church’ (58)” (Familiaris 21). It should be noted that the Church has a deep reverence for the family. For the Catholic Church to refer to the family as a form of itself shows its

supreme regard within Catholicism and thus its preeminence in Catholic social doctrine. Pope John Paul II discussed the important ways the family acts as the “domestic Church”: “All members of the family, each according to his or her own gift, have the grace and responsibility of building, day by day, the communion of persons, making the family ‘a school of deeper humanity’ (59)” (Familiaris 21). The building of a “communion of persons” is repeated throughout *Familiaris consortio* and corresponds to the Catholic notion of the human family, as that which encompasses the whole of humanity. Pope John Paul II continued, this community can “...only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice” and “...where there is mutual service every day;” (Familiaris 21). Service and sacrifice are essential components which characterize the family as the “domestic Church” and help readers to understand the role of the family in society.

The responsibility of the family to develop this “communion of persons,” as noted by the Pope, is a unique and notable trait required of Catholic families. Lisa Sowle Cahill, professor of theology at Boston College, referenced the significance of this attribute in terms of history of Catholic social thought, stating, “particularly important and characteristic of Catholic social tradition is the emphasis on the contribution to and participation in the common good, here seen from the perspective of families” (Cahill, 371).<sup>21</sup> The Church recognizes society

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<sup>21</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Commentary on *Familiaris consortio* (Apostolic Exhortation on the Family),” Ed. Kenneth R. Himes, Modern Catholic Social

as being made up of families and simultaneously sees the enormous potential for good that exists in the family. Pope John Paul II thus calls for the family to both encompass and reflect love -- love of each other, love of one's neighbor, and love of the community as a whole.

As Cahill explained, the Pope's view of the family as the "domestic Church" comes with many important implications. Parents, in addition to being responsible for the spiritual formation of the family, must ensure the family is working towards "fulfilling a mission to serve the common good, especially society's poor and vulnerable members" (Cahill, 363). This is exemplified in Pope John Paul II discussion on the importance of hospitality, "...from opening the door of one's home and still more of one's heart to the pleas of one's brothers and sisters, to concrete efforts to ensure that every family has its own home, as the natural environment that preserves it and makes it grow" (*Familiaris* 44). Furthermore, the Pope explains the biblical significance of this work in the context of the family,

In a special way the Christian family is called upon to listen to the Apostle's recommendation: 'Practice hospitality,' (108) and therefore, imitating Christ's example and sharing in His love, to welcome the brother or sister in need: 'Whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.'(109) (*Familiaris* 44).

In her analysis of the *Familiaris consortio*, Cahill noted, "The family imitates Christ's self-giving love for the human race, communicating Christ's

love for others, so that the family itself becomes ‘a strong community’” (Cahill, 372). Pope John Paul II reminds readers that Christian families “...recognize with faith all human beings as children of the same heavenly Father...” (Familiaris 41). Therefore, one can understand how the family is “the most effective means for humanizing and personalizing society” and is “the first and irreplaceable school of social life, and example and stimulus for the broader community of relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love” (Cahill, 372).

Pope John Paul II stressed that the family, “is not closed in on itself, but remains open to the community, moved by a sense of justice and concern for others, as well as by a consciousness of its responsibility towards the whole of society” (Cahill, 373). This statement is representative of one of the foundational messages of the encyclical, that is, families both epitomize God’s love and also spread the Christian teachings through their love of others. This love of others is a manifestation of their recognition of responsibility beyond themselves and within a broader societal context. Pope John Paul II’s message of service and love of others in imitation of the life of Jesus benefits both the family and society at large and is emphasized as a requirement placed on Catholic families. The Pope’s message is apparent: families are defined by love, serve as a model of love, and must work to “communicate love” to all of society.

Importantly, Pope John Paul II explicitly discussed the political obligations of the family to work for policies which support and defend the family

in society. He wrote, “The social role of families is called upon to find expression also in the form of political intervention: families should be the first to take steps to see that the laws and institutions of the State not only do not offend but support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family” (*Familiaris* 44). Pope John Paul II was unambiguous that political intervention on behalf of the family was a moral obligation of Catholic families. Furthermore, the importance of the family as the “domestic Church” means that all issues that deeply impact families are issues of central importance to the Catholic Church. Thus, immigration and the abuse of immigrant workers are issues which clearly and profoundly influence families and therefore are crucial issues for the Catholic Church.

In the case of Postville, this message of political action for Catholic families is of particular importance. No matter where one stands on immigration policies in the United States, the immigration raid in Postville was undoubtedly damaging to families. The abrupt separation of parents from children and wives from husbands can readily be seen as an attack on the family. The policy of immigration raids is one that Catholic families are morally obligated to speak out against since it is a direct assault on the family unit. The Postville immigration raid and the policies against families typify the type of situation that Pope John Paul II described in *Familiaris consortio*. Furthermore, although not directly discussed in the encyclical, the family is also important to the Catholic Church for other reasons as well. The family serves not only as the essential unit of society, but also is responsible for the persistence and propagation of the Catholic faith.



The possible disintegration of the family unit threatens Catholicism in its entirety and thus is a serious concern not only morally, but practically as well.

In addition to the effects on immigrant families, Pope John Paul II reminded readers that there are groups of people, such as migrants, that may be thought of as families, who do not have access to adequate resources or a political community to advocate on their behalf. The Pope stressed that these people should be able to find help and a home in the Church. He wrote, "...it is necessary to call special attention to certain particular groups which are more in need not only of assistance but also of more incisive action upon public opinion and especially upon cultural, economic and juridical structures, in order that the profound causes of their needs may be eliminated as far as possible" (Familiaris 77). The Pope went on to specifically mention the families of migrants as one of these groups which may need more assistance. He explained,

The families of migrants, especially in the case of manual workers and farm workers, should be able to find a homeland everywhere in the Church. This is a task stemming from the nature of the Church, as being the sign of unity in diversity. As far as possible these people should be looked after by priests of their own rite, culture and language (Familiaris 77).

This same view is reflected in the Pope's call for the acceptance into the Church of isolated people who need help. The Pope declared that the Church is a family to all and is especially there for those who have no other family. He wrote, "For those who have no natural family the doors of the great family which is the Church-the Church which finds concrete expression in the diocesan and the parish family, in ecclesial basic communities and in movements of the apostolate-must

be opened even wider” (Familiaris 85). The Pope was clear in expressing the Church’s view of all people as part of the human family that the Church seeks to honor and serve stating, “No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who ‘labor and are heavy laden.’ (181)” (Familiaris 85). One can see the intersection of the important Catholic principles of human dignity, protection of the family, and the welcoming of the stranger in this declaration by Pope John Paul II.

Pope John Paul II summarizes much of the Church’s view on families and labor and clearly reflected on the principles previous established in both *Rerum Novarum* and *Centesimus Annus*. As in earlier portions of *Familiaris consortio*, the Pope contextualized the Church’s goals for families and society by noting its task of political action and public awareness.

It is also the Church's task to appeal to the public conscience and to all those in authority in social, economic and political life, in order that workers may find employment in their own regions and homelands, that they may receive just wages, that their families may be reunited as soon as possible, be respected in their cultural identity and treated on an equal footing with others, and that their children may be given the chance to learn a trade and exercise it, as also the chance to own the land needed for working and living (Familiaris 77).

*Familiaris consortio* emphasized the importance of the family in both the Catholic Church and society as the model of love and as the “domestic Church.” It also established the requirements of the family to work to advance just policies which support families and to educate and serve their communities through their promotion of Christian values. This encyclical emphasizes the value of which the Catholic Church places on families. Pope John Paul II’s sentiment on the

importance of the family may best be described in his statements in *Familiaris consortio*, "The future of humanity passes by way of the family" and "The Church knows the path by which the family can reach the heart of the deepest truth about itself" (Familiaris 86).

## **Main Themes from Analysis of Catholic Documents**

There are four central themes which arise from the analysis of the Bishops' Statement and the papal encyclicals including: the dignity of the human being, the family, the caring of the "stranger," and the preferential option for the poor. All of these concepts are purposefully linked and often connect and overlap in the Catholic social teaching about work. Through consideration of each concept individually one can begin to see how each theological idea is valuable, and how they simultaneously build upon each other to create a comprehensive moral perspective for Catholics. These documents also merge these concepts into the moral treatment of workers by their employers.

### **Dignity of the Human Person**

As the Bishops' statement declares, "respect for the dignity of every person" is at the "core of Catholic social and moral teaching" (Bishops 3). This statement is reflected in virtually all of Catholic doctrine and is clearly present in each of the pieces of Catholic teaching which I chose to analyze.

In their Statement, the Bishops' explained how human dignity and rights are inextricably linked and vital to society, "Human dignity is respected and the common good is fostered only if human rights are protected and basic responsibilities are met" (Bishops 14). These rights correspond to the essential needs of the human condition, as the Bishops put it, "a right to access of those

things required for human decency – food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing, freedom of religion and family life” (Bishops 14). The Bishops conclude that, “Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families, and to the larger society. Rights should be understood and exercised in a moral framework rooted in the dignity of the human person” (Bishops 14).

The Bishops’ further contextualize this fundamental concept of the dignity of human beings in terms of the impact on societies. They wrote, “How we organize our society – in economics and politics, in policy and law – directly affects the common good and the capacity of individuals to develop their full potential” (Bishops 14). Further, the Bishops insist on the duty of all to work to have society better embody this notion, “Every person and association has a right and a duty to participate actively in shaping society and to promote the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable” (Bishops 14).

One section of particular relevance arose in the Bishops’ Letter; this passage discussed labor, morality, and immigration and illustrates the primacy of human dignity within all aspects of Catholic teachings. The Bishops explained, “Work is more than a way to make a living, it is a form of continuing participation in God’s creation. Employers contribute to the common good through the services or products they provide and by creating jobs that uphold the dignity and rights of workers – to productive work, to decent and just wages, to adequate benefits and security in their old age, to the choice of whether to

organize and join unions, to the opportunity for legal status for immigrant workers, to private property, to economic initiative” (Bishops 15). The worker deserves fair working conditions, but the Catholic Church makes its argument on the principle of individual dignity.

### **The Family**

The family is most clearly revered in the papal encyclical *Familiaris consortio*, but is addressed throughout Catholic social teaching, including the Bishops’ Statement on Faithful Citizenship and Political Responsibility and the other encyclicals. It is a central tenet in the Catholic social tradition and could be viewed as one of the Church's greatest contributions to discussions of immigration issues.

The Bishops stated, “We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be” (Bishops 16). The Bishops connect the notion of global unity to the theological concept of caring for the “stranger.” In conjunction, these two themes form a unique moral perspective that is lacking in the modern world. One generally does not associate one’s family as including the entire “human family” or view ourselves as the “keepers” of all people. Utilizing a Catholic perspective when thinking about challenging social and moral issues often alters one’s view of responsibilities, rights, and ultimately, even potential solutions.

The Bishops mince no words in their absolute commitment to the family: “The family is the basic cell of human society. The role, responsibilities, and needs of families should be central national priorities” (Bishops 21). In both *Rerum Novarum* and *Centesimus Annus*, family is undoubtedly present in many of the conclusions reached by the Popes. Throughout both encyclicals, labor rights are tied to the needs of families. The core outlook is one of total commitment to families in recognition of their importance to society and the Church.

The Popes and the Bishops affirm the strong connection between families and issues of labor and workers rights. They contextualize the importance of just wages within the notions of the importance of the dignity of the human person and the importance of the dignity and protection of families. As the Bishops stated, “Wages should allow workers to support their families, and public assistance should be available to help poor families to live in dignity” (Bishops 21).

One can see that in multiple documents describing the Catholic Church’s stance on workers and labor issues, the underlying sentiment in defense of workers is concern for families. The justification of many of the rights of workers rests on this importance given to families and to the protection of families as the building block of society. This rationale is logical; families make up the Catholic community as well as secular society. To express concern for families is universally understood and appreciated and, therefore, serves as a compelling argument to virtually all people.

### **The Caring of the “Stranger”**

The moral obligation to care for the “Stranger” in the foreign land appears in the Book of Matthew. Jesus says to Matthew, “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink!... And the King will answer them, ‘as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ ” (Matthew 25:35-40). The Bishops choose to draw most directly from this widely-known passage because of the many implications which follow from its message.

The Bishops are resolute in the implications of this biblical passage for Catholics writing, “The Gospel mandate to ‘welcome the stranger’ requires Catholics to care and stand with immigrants, both documented and undocumented, including immigrant children” (Bishops 24). Further, the Bishops described some of the societal implications which result from acting out the gospel mandate of “welcoming the stranger,” stating, “Loving our neighbor has global dimensions and requires us to eradicate racism and address the extreme poverty and disease plaguing so much of the world” (Bishops 16).

As the Bishops discuss in their letter on political responsibility, the theological concept of solidarity results in the call for Catholics to take up the



work of caring for the “stranger in the foreign land” which the Bishops see most clearly in immigrants.

### **The Preferential Option for the Poor**

Although the first mention of the Preferential Option for the Poor did not appear until *Rerum Novarum* was written by Pope Leo XII in 1891, its importance in Catholic social teaching since then is undeniable. In fact, the establishment of this principle was part of what made *Rerum Novaram* a particularly well-known encyclical. In their Statement on Faithful Citizenship and Political Responsibility, the Bishops devote an entire section of their document to emphasizing this vital concept. The Bishops’ wrote, “While the common good embraces all, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need deserve preferential concern. A basic moral test for our society is how we treat the most vulnerable in our midst” (p.14). This litmus test for society is crucial to Catholic social thought; the Catholic Church urges all to consider the most vulnerable members of our society as the first priority in the formation of policy. Furthermore, the Church reminds Catholics that this notion is imperative to living up to the tenets of their faith.

The Bishops also referred to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as another source to explain the preferential option for the poor. The Catechism states, “Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of *a preferential love* on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and

liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere (No. 2448)” (Bishops 15). The Bishops described the preferential option for the poor as including, “all who are marginalized in our nation and beyond” including the “victims of injustice and oppression” (Bishops 15). This is mostly clearly understood in the context of immigrants, who exemplify the marginalized and poor in our midst. Thus, Christ's love would be great for these immigrants and the Church's actions should reflect that preferential love.

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As this Bishops’ Letter and the encyclicals illustrate, the Church has been writing significant social and moral teachings in relation to work, family, and immigration for over one hundred years. All four major themes of the dignity of the human person, the importance of family, the caring of the “stranger,” and the preferential option for the poor, weave together in the social teachings of the Church, and in particular, in its teachings on work. An analysis of the Catholic Church’s stance on work must recognize the centrality of these themes.

The Catholic Church’s view of immigration is long-standing and durable and developed over more than a century. When put to the test in the case of Postville, however, these long-held moral teachings were not sufficient without a strong political backing by the Church. It seems that the Church hesitated when the opportunity arose, and has been slow to recover. This was not a result of the inadequacies in the doctrine, but an unwillingness by the Church to act on its

principles. It is surprising that the Church did not follow the example of its local parish, St. Bridget's and Father Ouderkirk, the local priest, who condemned the raid and fought vigorously on behalf of the arrested immigrants and their families. A broader more powerful condemnation by the Church hierarchy would have been a more appropriate response in keeping with the spirit and the actual writings of the encyclicals and the Bishops' Letter.

Prominent in recent years due to globalization, the public view of immigrants in general is an unfavorable one. The Catholic Church's support of immigrants and of pro-immigrant policies is, in fact, a reiteration of its long-standing principles, rather than a recent trend fueled by opportunity, as cynics could suggest. Furthermore, as I have written, based on the life and teachings of Jesus, the Church's defense of immigrants is clearly the stand that Christ would take. The encyclicals reflect these ideas; however, it is likely that most Catholics are not well-versed in this doctrine, and the Church needs to remind its people of these guiding principles. Furthermore, since encyclicals are considered revered messages of God, writing through the Pope to his people, they are not to be taken lightly within Catholic doctrine. In Catholicism, these written principles need to be specified and reinforced from the pulpit in sermons at Sunday mass. The power and messages of these encyclicals can easily be lost if they are not kept alive at both the local and higher levels; only then will Catholic doctrine fulfill its promise to actively support immigrants.

## Postville Postscript

“With quiet anguish, a mature all-American woman, a mother, said something striking, as only the plain truth can be. ‘This is not humane,’ she said, ‘There has to be a better way’ (Camayd-Freixas 15).<sup>22</sup>

As I have discussed, the raid in Postville raised many questions for the Catholic Church regarding its actions on the treatment of immigrant workers. The Church positions have been well delineated for many years, and the issues of fair treatment for all workers, the dignity of all people, and the preservation of families remain prominent in the world at large and are still on the forefront for Postville as well.

The information available on Postville since the raid has been scant and therefore it is difficult to know many of the desirable details about the state of the town during the last year. It is known that since the Postville raid, the town has continued to face a variety of challenging issues and experienced a serious economic downturn.

The majority of the unauthorized immigrants were convicted of identity theft, placed in jail to serve their five month terms and then deported to their home countries (Krogstad).<sup>23</sup> One reporter described the results, “...nearly 300 of

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<sup>22</sup> Erik Camayd-Freixas “Interpreting after the Largest ICE Raid in U.S. History: A Personal Account,” The New York Times 13 June 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Jens Manuel Krogstad, “First Group of Postville immigration raid detainees deported to Mexico,” Waterloo and Cedar Falls Iowa Courier 7 June 2008.

them were charged with felony counts of aggravated identity theft and fraudulent use of Social Security numbers. Those slaughterhouse workers were tried and convicted in less than two days on a cattle fairground where Iowans typically come to cheer cowboys who lasso raging bulls” (Drash 1). The government clearly wanted to make an example of the Postville workers, since the charge of “aggravated identity theft” was inappropriate given the circumstances. The prosecutors used this law to imprison people who thought they were paying for a legal work permit. The workers who were fortunate enough to receive social security numbers that did not belong to others could not be convicted of identity theft and were simply deported (Camayd-Freixas 10). This is yet another example of the inappropriate government action against these immigrants.

The *Des Moines Register* was able to track down two of the immigrants who had been deported to Guatemala. Dimas Morales and Maria Merino Matias were among the hundreds of Guatemalans working at Agriprocessors for a number of years prior to the raid. On May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008, the day of the raid, Dimas managed to avoid arrest, but Maria was not as lucky. She was arrested, served a five-month prison term, and then was deported. Both are currently jobless, but are hopeful that they will receive some of the nine hundred dollars still owed to them by the company. They said they would use it to help keep their four children in school (Leys).<sup>24</sup> It is probable that others convicted in the raid are also owed money by Agriprocessors, but it is also doubtful they will see much of that

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<sup>24</sup> Tony Leys, “In Guatemala, former Agriprocessors workers react to proposed fines,” *The Des Moines Register* 29 October 2008.

money. The company has declared bankruptcy, and it seems highly unlikely that the court will look out for undocumented immigrant workers among the list of creditors who need to be paid. It seems that the negative repercussions of this raid outlast even its notoriety.

While the effects of the raid on the immigrants seem obvious, there have also been many dramatic changes for the town of Postville and its current residents. Shortly after the raid, many Somali men moved to Postville to fill the jobs of those arrested in the raid. The Somali men are refugees with legal status in the United States; consequently, “Now the stoops and haunts once occupied by Hispanics are being filled by about 150 Somali men” (Jackson).<sup>25</sup> The influx of new immigrants are, “forcing a remote Iowa town to make another cultural shift” (Jackson). However this was not the only cultural shift within Postville.

The Somali refugees are not the only ones who journeyed to Postville to find work at Agriprocessors. The vice president of Palau (an Island nation in the Pacific Ocean) traveled thousands of miles to Postville and offered approximately 160 of his countrymen for the open jobs at the plant (Drash 2). Under an agreement with the U.S. government, residents of Palau can legally live and work indefinitely in the United States. Postville resident, Dave Hartley described how the situation in the town has thrown many residents off balance, “We’re just always adjusting and it’s scary, it’s hard. We get all these new people and we don’t know who they are” (Jackson). Furthermore, since the plant is currently

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<sup>25</sup> Henry C. Jackson, “After raid, Iowa town deals with Somali immigrants,” USA Today 28 July 2008.

closed, and its future in doubt, both the Somali refugees and the citizens of Palau have joined those in Postville looking for work.

In addition to the cultural adjustments to the town, the result of the raid have been particularly damaging to the Postville economy. In addition to the arrest and deportation of over three hundred of its residents, many other immigrants have left Postville in fear of a similar fate. Agriprocessors, the largest business in the town, had been under continued investigation and temporarily closed. In an ongoing trial, a number of the managers and the owner of Agriprocessors have been charged with over 9,000 violations of child labor laws, conspiracy charges for harboring illegal immigrants, aiding and abetting aggravated identity theft, and bank fraud. In November 2008, Agriprocessors filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy due to the considerable amount of money owed to creditors, including of course, some of the immigrant workers (Schulte 1).<sup>26</sup> Currently, a few companies have bid on Agriprocessors, including the land and the plant itself, and the bidding is up to over five million dollars (Schulte 1). The economic effects and the loss of the plant in Postville could jeopardize the town's future in a particularly difficult time.

The economic effects of the raid extend beyond Postville into the larger issues affecting the State of Iowa. Bruce Berven, executive vice president of the Iowa Cattlemen's Association, explained the larger effects of the raid on the economy, "we are losing another 500 head-per-day beef processing facility in the

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<sup>26</sup> Grant Schulte, "Agriprocessors has bid of only \$5.5 million," The Des Moines Register 24 March 2009. Hereinafter cited as Schulte 1.

state. That's one of the infrastructure needs we have in this state...Most of our cattle are being shipped out of state to be harvested" (Schulte 2).<sup>27</sup> Thus the raid will likely have a lasting deleterious effect on the state's economy, while in the midst of a severe economic downturn.

To reflect on the aftermath of Postville: over three hundred poor families lives have been ruined, the Postville economy is severely damaged and unlikely to recover anytime soon, and a new group of hopeful foreigners seeking work has entered the town. It is apparent that immigration issues will not disappear; no matter how many immigrants are deported, there will always be new people eager to build a better life. With the exit of so many immigrants, Saint Bridget's may have a less publicly prominent role to play in Postville; however with the economic woe, it is likely that the people of Postville will continue to need their help as much as in the past.

When looking at the state of the town of Postville today, the depth of injustice is clear. The disastrous consequences for the entire community show the lack of a vigorous response by the Church and the need for a moral voice. While the larger institution of the Catholic Church has been whispering to date, it is not too late for it to speak up and be heard. The current and past residents of Postville and towns all over the world still need the help of the larger Catholic Church.

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<sup>27</sup> Grant Schulte, "Agriprocessors faces nearly \$10 million civil penalty," The Des Moines Register 29 October 2008. Hereinafter cited as Schulte 2.



### **Lessons Learned: High Ideals, Difficulties On-the-Ground**

“My concern is, as they held up the law, they totally neglected the integrity of the person, and the integrity of the family... little children who are being educated, future bilingual wonderfully gifted people for our total United States community and we now have deprived ourselves of that gift. So I think the real call for all of us is to work towards immigration reform” - Sister McCauley of Saint Bridget’s Catholic Church in Postville (Sojourners).

Through this study I have come to respect the Church’s doctrine on all issues pertaining to my questions. I have found many important and comprehensive principles within the teachings of the Catholic Church that can be applied to the events in Postville and, more broadly, to questions of immigration. However, I have also come to see that far too often these principles are ineffective and hidden, the most glaring example being the failure by the larger Catholic Church to support Saint Bridget’s in Postville. In many ways, Saint Bridget’s serves as the ultimate example of the dual strengths and weaknesses of the Church’s principles on this topic. The incredible work taken up by Father Ouderkirk, Sister McCauley, and others illustrates the strength of Catholic principles and the result of their implementation at the local level, but the larger Catholic Church seems to have offered only principles and not active help.

As a Catholic, my initial reaction to the abuses which occurred at Postville was that of disgust, anger, and concern. My response upon learning of the actions of the U.S. government in the raid were almost equally jarring, however, neither

of these aspects were the focus of my work. What intrigued me the most about Postville was the involvement of the Catholic Church. Perhaps this intrigue arose because my interests lie in how religious traditions are to interact with political institutions, due to the separation of Church and State in the United States. Given that the Catholic Church considers itself a religious group and not a political organization, where do its political responsibilities lie? Should the Catholic Church lobby the government? What are the political obligations of Catholics to speak to moral issues? Do American Catholics possess separate identities, that of Americans and of Roman Catholics, or do they merge? Are there political obligations for both identities?

What drew me to write about Postville were my many lingering questions and my knowledge of the Catholic Church. As a Catholic, I held many beliefs about my Church, which initiated some challenging questions regarding their involvement in the aftermath of the Postville raid. My view of the Church was that of a benevolent institution whose main purpose, beyond moral and spiritual guidance, was to serve the poor and those most in need. Although I had perceived the Church as a home to all people, a special emphasis had always been placed on the poor and vulnerable people in our midst. Furthermore, I knew of the long history in the United States of the Catholic Church as being the “Church of immigrants.” For years, Italian, Irish, Polish, Romanian, and other immigrants sought the comfort, community, and spiritual guidance of the Catholic Church. With these notions of the Church as my foundation, I began to think about

Postville and both the response from the local Catholic Church of Saint Bridget's and the lack of response from the larger institution of the Catholic Church.

Through my research, I have come upon countless news articles praising the work of the local Catholic Church throughout the Postville ordeal and afterwards. Saint Bridget's fed, advised, and comforted the families in need, as well as the entire affected immigrant community in the town. My initial reaction was that of support for the actions of Saint Bridget's. Even as I thought the Church's actions were certainly positive, I also felt their response was appropriate given my understanding of Church. The majority of the people who were most affected were members of Saint Bridget's and were deeply connected to the Church. Saint Bridget's actions were simply fulfilling the mission of the Church, to serve people in need, specifically its own people in need.

A sense of uncertainty towards the reaction of the greater Catholic Church to Postville soon followed. While I read the many articles praising Saint Bridget's as illustrating that, "the beacon of the Roman Catholic Church to immigrants has rarely shone more brilliantly" (Freedman), however I was expecting a serious response and the promise of action by the Church. A less aware observer of the Church might be satisfied with the support that Saint Bridget's provided the people of Postville, but knowing the immense doctrinal support for immigrants in the Church, I found the response to be inadequate. Again, I do not want to diminish the work of Father Ouderkirk, Sister Mary McCauley, or others who worked tirelessly to care for these people; however, the

lack of larger support for Saint Bridget's and the reluctance of the Catholic Church to use its powerful voice to condemn the events in Postville and to speak for the immigrants is unacceptable. Some could argue that any criticism of the Catholic Church in this event is misplaced, but I disagree. I believe that the Catholic Church, as a moral authority for millions, should be held to the highest of standards, that of its own ideals and its professed doctrine.

Until the Postville raid, there was minimal reaction from the Church regarding the treatment of immigrants and this reaction was largely at the local, and not the global, level. There was little direct action from the Vatican and no calls for an active political movement from Catholics. To characterize the response from the Catholic Church to these issues, one must recognize that they did not have an immediate response, and that in general, the reaction has been one of late and careful calculation. Given the Church's long-standing position in support of immigrants, their lack of a resolute response and call for action is deplorable.

Recently, some high ranking U.S. Catholic clergy have spoken out against immigration raids and in support of the needs of immigrants, both documented and undocumented. On March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Iowa's four Catholic Bishops went to the statehouse to speak with legislators on behalf of immigrants, particularly the immigrants and children of immigrants from Postville. The Bishops expressed particular concern with the health and general welfare of the children of undocumented immigrants in Postville, many of whose parents have been

deported. Dubuque Archbishop Jerome Hanus spoke of how things got "terribly messed up" in Postville and of his worry that our society has grown "callous to the suffering of vulnerable people" (Henderson).<sup>28</sup> Davenport Bishop Martin Amos described himself as both "pro-life" and "pro-kids" and spoke of how those "undocumented" children in Postville need the state's help. Bishop Amos explained, "I realize money's tight, but I wonder if - in the long term - we aren't saving money and we're talking about children. It's not their fault. We're talking about disease" (Henderson).

The Des Moines Bishop, Richard Pates, called on legislators to be especially attentive to the needs of those who are more likely to "fall through the cracks" (Henderson). He stated, "We are very conscious, I think, in times such as this that the common instinct is to pull together, to work for one another -- especially for the poor, the recently arrived in our country, the children, all those who would otherwise be neglected and perhaps overlooked" (Henderson).

Finally, Sioux City Bishop R. Walker Nickless said he and the other bishops are following the example of Jesus Christ, who some say was one of history's best political activists. The Bishop explained his view, "You know, the church shouldn't stay out of politics and we really have to be aware of the things that we can do to help people understand certain issues and do our best to do that, so that's why I'm here" (Henderson). This statement claims to fit with Christ's teachings and his willingness to challenge authority on behalf of the needy.

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<sup>28</sup> O. Kay Henderson, "State's four Catholic bishops lobby legislators," Radio Iowa 5 March 2009.

Although the responses from the four Iowa Catholic Bishops are positive and in line with established Catholic doctrine, the time delay before the responses occurred is problematic and illustrates one of my central critiques. That is, there are a number of Catholic principles and doctrine which supports immigrants and “requires Catholics to care and stand with immigrants, both documented and undocumented;” (Bishops 24) these principles, however, are not readily grasped or easy to practically implement.

There is no doubt that the Bishops had good intentions of standing up to defend immigrants and immigrant children, as vulnerable people deserving the attention of legislators; nevertheless, it must be noted that the raid occurred almost a year ago. At this point, families have already been torn apart and many parents have been deported. Thus the actions of the Bishop are delayed and can have negligible benefit for the effected immigrants. Furthermore, the four Iowa bishops response was primarily due to a logistical need because the churches in Iowa who are trying to support many of the immigrant children and their family members could no longer fill the void.

There has been some additional reaction from the Catholic Church to Postville, but it has been fragmented and uncoordinated. For example, on September 10, 2008, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ committee on migration, condemned the practice of immigration raids, stating they considered

it, “unacceptable in a civilized society” (Duin).<sup>29</sup> The Catholic Bishops emphasized that while it is the right of the government to enforce immigration laws, they questioned the effectiveness and humanity of the work-site enforcement raids (Duin). Utah Bishop John C. Wester, chairman of the Bishops’ committee on migration stated, “What these actions have accomplished, sadly, are the separation of U.S.-citizen children from their parents, the dislocation and disruption of immigrant communities and the victimization of U.S. permanent residents and citizens, including children” (Duin).

In addition to its violation of Catholic principles of family unity, the Bishops also agreed on the destructive nature of the terror of workplace raids. Bishop James A. Tamayo of Texas said, “Work-site enforcement raids not only undermine basic human dignity and family unity, they pit human beings against each other in a violent and frightening way” (Duin). Furthermore, he declared, “The vast majority of immigrants are not criminals. They are simply attempting to work and support their families” (Duin).

Dubuque Archbishop Jerome Hanus has said, "This state of terror for families is evidence that our political system has not adequately addressed the demand for labor, the inadequacies of our present immigration policies and practices and the broader economic challenges" (Duin). Reflecting his understanding of both the massive destruction which resulted from the raid and many ways in which our policies regarding labor and immigration are deeply

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<sup>29</sup> Julia Duin, “Catholic bishops call raids on workplaces ‘unacceptable’” The Washington Times 11 September 2008.

flawed, Archbishop Hanus stated, "Some of the weakest members among us are bearing the brunt of the suffering, while legislators and other leaders, as well as many of us in the general public, have failed to give this issue the priority that it deserves" (Reinitz).<sup>30</sup> In this statement the Archbishop calls on leaders as well as the general public to take responsibility and work towards addressing this difficult situation (Reinitz). This view, however, has not been adequately expressed by the larger Catholic Church nor has it been adequately conveyed to the millions of its Catholic members.

One obvious role that the Catholic Church could play in the improvement of conditions for immigrants would be to remind its people of Christ's message for the poor and vulnerable. This reminder would help counter the unfortunate stigma of undocumented immigrants as criminals. An example of this opportunity is again seen within the town of Postville. In interviews, Father Ouderkirk of Saint Bridget's Catholic Church spoke of his view of the criminality of immigrants and their treatment within society, "This is no way as a democracy to treat people. I don't care if they are legal or illegal. You don't tear families apart like this. The women and children we're taking care of right now are no more criminal than people driving down the street breaking the speed limit" (Drash 1).

While the Catholic Church may choose not to get involved in the intricacies of immigration policy debates, it can and should have significant

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<sup>30</sup> Jeff Reinitz, "Archbishop to celebrate Mass at St. Bridget Saturday," Waterloo and Cedar Falls Iowa Courier 16 May 2008.



impact on public opinion of immigrants. The distinction which Father Ouderkirk makes between unauthorized immigrants and criminals is one which is notably absent in much of the media and the public debate regarding immigration and immigration policy. The Catholic Church has the potential to dramatically impact the immigration debate and thus have a meaningful policy impact by differentiating between criminals and people who cross the border without authorization. Viewing immigrants as criminals has proven to be one of the greatest hindrances to having productive debates regarding immigration (Jiménez).<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, public opinion of immigration and immigration legislation may be dramatically influenced by this notion of immigrants as criminals. The view of immigrants as criminals poisons the debate and often leads people to believe that because immigrants have “chosen” to break the law, they do not have any rights and therefore deserve any exploitation or mistreatment that they experience. This vast oversimplification and mischaracterization of the immigration debate and the issues involved produces ineffective policy because of the false premise of immigrants as criminals.

The perception throughout much of the world is not that immigrants are God’s creation, our brothers and sisters, or our neighbors deserving of love, but that they are foreigners, criminals, and unwanted people. As I have learned, this view of immigrants is counter to the Catholic perspective and its implications for immigrants are fundamentally problematic to Catholic notions of morality. The

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<sup>31</sup> Luis Jiménez, class lecture, Mount Holyoke College 10 March 2008.

influence of Catholic thought today and throughout history is undeniable and the Church could illustrate its view of immigrants through action. If the Church were to promote a more respectful view of immigrants through an awareness campaign spoken from the altar, much headway could be made in swaying public opinion. When reminded of Christ's preferential option for the poor, and the doctrine of human dignity, Catholics should condemn the stereotype of the immigrant as criminal.

As the encyclicals made clear, the notion of the dignity of all human beings is central to Catholic doctrine. Productive reform can only occur through reasonable understanding and discussion of all the issues that are involved. Undoubtedly, this requires the recognition that immigrants are human beings who deserve to be treated with dignity; they are not criminals or somehow sub-humans. To be “illegal” is not to be criminal. To use Father Ouderkirk’s analogy of those who break the speed limit, it is as if society defined all people who had ever broken the speed limit as “illegal drivers” or labeled all people who had ever had a drink underage as “illegal drinkers” (Jiménez). Furthermore, to have this one act define your entire being, banish you to criminal status, and deny you fundamental rights as a human being is clearly immoral; however, this is precisely what has occurred in the current immigration debate. There is another key difference; unlike those who break the speed limit, or have a drink, the majority of unauthorized immigrants are following their moral principles by making sacrifices in order to better the lives of their families.

Reframing of the immigration debate is essential to achieving comprehensive and just immigration reform. Further, this distinction between immigrant and criminal is in accordance with not only Catholic teachings, but the larger aims of the Catholic Church to make society recognize for the humanity in each person. It is also fits with the notion of incorporating unfortunate immigrants into the larger family of the Church.

As a policy issue, immigration is highly influenced by public opinion. According to a Pew Report study, public opinion in the majority of countries favors further restricting immigration policy (Jiménez). This opinion is independent of the actual number of immigrants residing in the country. The high prevalence of anti-immigrant sentiments in so many countries cannot be ignored. Public opinion has an important political impact on lawmakers, and therefore, on policy. Although public opinion is critical to the agenda of the government, it is not static or uninfluenced. The Catholic Church, with its sixty-seven million members in the United States alone, could have a major impact on the public perception of immigrants and thus on immigration issues and policies. This role, of reminding the public of the humanity of immigrants and the moral responsibilities to each other as members of one human family, is not explicitly political, but it could produce historic change and improve the lives of millions of immigrants. Furthermore, it could easily be achieved without concerns for separation of Church and State.

Another potential major role for the Church in the immigration debate is to remind society of the impact on families. The Church is often the institution whose role is to remind society what it cares the most about and to speak out when what we hold most dear is being threatened. The Church has been consistent in refocusing society to remember the family and how policy decisions affect the family. As this study has shown, a concern for families and how societal decisions impact them is always preeminent in the perspective of the Church towards any social issue. The immigration raids have presented a problematic separation of the family and, in the Church's eyes, they threaten the most fundamental unit of society. Therefore, the recent condemnation of the policy of immigration raids, which is justified on the welfare of families, is internally consistent with both the teachings of the Catholic Church and with its social tradition.

One example of the emphasis on the family in modeling changes in immigration policy has occurred very recently. Cardinal Francis George has called on the Obama administration to end the practice of immigration raids and to make comprehensive immigration reform a national priority. As Cardinal George stated in a speech on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009, "Our Church teaches that the family is sacred. It is the cradle of life, the core institution of society. To separate families, wives from husbands, children from parents, is to diminish what God

has joined” (C Jackson).<sup>32</sup> Organizers of the immigration reform event at which the Cardinal spoke, noted that more than 360,000 families have been split up due to deportation over the past year (C Jackson). Furthermore in reference to these statistics, the Cardinal declared that immigration reform, “will be a clear sign that this administration is truly about change, change in a situation that has already weakened and separated too many family members from one another” (C Jackson). Furthermore, he stated, “We cannot strengthen families when people live in fear from day to day” (Smith).<sup>33</sup> Behind the three hundred plus families affected in Postville stand a hundred times that many in other cases.

As Chicago Tribune reporter Gerry Smith described, “Cardinal George sought to cast the issue in moral terms, calling it ‘a matter of conscience’ and an important step to creating a more peaceful society” (Smith). The Cardinal also condemned the exploitation of immigrants that has occurred in the United States and the inadequate immigration laws which have only worsened the problem: “There is a darkness cast upon many families living among us who have been caught between the need for cheap labor and badly broken immigration laws,” he said. “We . . . are called to be that light for those forced into the shadows” (C Jackson). He concluded in stating, “May this be the year that raids and separation of families stop, may this be the year that our legislators pass comprehensive immigration reform” (Smith).

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<sup>32</sup> Cheryl V. Jackson, “Cardinal George pushes for immigration reform,” Chicago Sun-Times, 22 March 2009. Hereinafter cited as C Jackson.

<sup>33</sup> Gerry Smith, “Cardinal Francis George: End immigration raids, he tells President Barack Obama,” The Chicago Tribune 22 March 2009

Though the call for reform by Cardinal George is important, it is equally important to realize the context in which these statements were made. The Cardinal's remarks were not during a mass, but occurred at an immigrant event in which he was asked to speak. Thus, while these statements are significant and a positive step by the Catholic Church, it is clear that proper attention and emphasis is not being placed on immigration on the ground and in the churches. It would be an appropriate emphasis if the Cardinal were to call for action in all of the pulpits of his Archdiocese on a major occasion. Such strong actions, however, have not yet occurred.

The common response from the nun and priest from St. Bridget's Catholic Church in Postville, the four Archbishops from Iowa, and U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is that each speaks of the damaging effects of immigration raids on families and communities. By separating parents from their innocent children, the raids threatened the survival of these families. An "unauthorized foreigner's" commitment to family is the same commitment that the Catholic Church teaches for all families. Both are motivated by concepts of love and sacrifice. In defending and assisting immigrants, the Catholic Church is not only standing up for the poor and vulnerable, but for families everywhere. The Bible has countless references to helping the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, and the despised. The emphasis on the protection of the family unit as the central organizing feature of life and the importance of its safeguarding by the Catholic Church cannot be understated. In fact, the majority of stances the Catholic Church takes on issues

are justified in terms of families. The political framing of issues as family-centric is crucial to genuinely understanding the origins of Catholic social doctrine.

The importance and responsibilities of the family unit, both morally and practically, to the Catholic Church results in its implied inclusion in both formal and informal Catholic discussions of morality. Whether one is reading *Rerum Novarum* or *Centesimus Annus*, the underlying sentiments are of concern for family, human dignity, and the assistance of the stranger in the foreign land, and the poor. Labor issues and workers rights are placed in the context of their importance to the livelihood of the family. As Pope Leo XIII said, employers and the government should take into account families when considering what might be a “just wage” (*Rerum* 63). Pope John Paul II even wrote on the need to promote, “those social policies which have the family as their principal object...” (*Rerum* 49). These examples in *Rerum Novarum* and *Centesimus Annus*, in conjunction with the message of *Familiaris consortio*, presents a central and unifying theme of family within virtually all Catholic doctrine.

Furthermore, the commitment to families is not simply doctrinal, but has proved to be ever-present in Catholic churches throughout the United States. If the majority of issues are framed in terms of family, then the Church must recognize the enormity of the impact of immigration upon the family and thus the necessity of a strong commitment to address these issues by the Catholic Church. Priests should be having discussions with parishioners as to the damaging effect of our current immigration policies on families and on the need for

comprehensive and compassionate immigration reform. The emphasis should be on how these policies often result in the separation of families thus deepening families into a life of poverty, and how the neglect of reform fundamentally violates Catholic principles.

Catholic clergy often speak of taking one's faith seriously and fulfilling baptismal and confirmation promises. Priests will note that it is not enough simply to attend mass every week, to give the recommended tithing to the Church, or even to do charitable works. Being a Catholic Christian is much more than any one of these things; rather it is a deep and challenging commitment to living one's life in accordance with the life and teachings of Jesus. The faith cannot be condensed into a few actions, but dictates and guides all aspects of one's life. There can be no legitimate excuse for the lack of action supporting immigration reform, given the dramatic destructive effects on poor immigrant families, who are exactly the people that Christ would expect his disciples to aid.

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There was an enormous opportunity after the raid in Postville which could have yielded a mutually beneficial outcome for both the unauthorized immigrants residing there and the United States government. Postville, Iowa, could have served as a much needed test case for reforms in U.S. immigration policy. The majority of the immigrants living there had resided in the town for many years and were productive members of society who helped to contribute to the economic development of the town. Despite their unauthorized status, the



exploited people working in Agriprocessors were far from criminals. They shared the common dreams of other citizens and worked hard to be able to provide their children and families with a better life.

For over a year, Saint Bridget's Church has carried the financial burden of these families without the full support of the larger institutions of either the United States Federal Government or the Roman Catholic Church. Father Ouderkirk, Sister McCauley, and the staff at Saint Bridget's have been incredibly attentive in caring for the needs of the people of Postville. An article in the *Des Moines Register* described Father Ouderkirk and his work since the raid, "The priest, who speaks fluent Spanish, has been a nearly constant presence at the church ever since [the raid]. He has helped feed and house the former workers and their families" (Leys). The article also notes how, in addition to his on-the-ground work with the immigrants, Father Ouderkirk has not hesitated to make his views on the events well-known. As the *Des Moines Register* notes, "he has spoken to countless reporters from around the world, who have quoted his sharp criticisms of the federal government and of Agriprocessors' executives who hired and exploited the immigrants" (Leys). Father Ouderkirk has put extraordinary efforts into helping the immigrants in need, but he has also has spoken out on their behalf and called for accountability and reform. In many respects, with his deep sense of justice and moral responsibility towards all people, Father Ouderkirk represents the many strong moral ideals that exist in Catholic

teachings. He needs no reminder of the importance of the immigrants' families and the Church as a family.

The remarkable work of the Saint Bridget's Catholic Church, especially given the small number of its clergy and staff, should not be understated. The Church in Postville, not the government, unions, or non-profit organizations, was the major resource for all of the immigrants and their families in the wake of the destructive raid. Not only does Saint Bridget's show the strengths of the Catholic Church's teachings, but it also illustrates the potential impact for good that exists when enacted to the fullest extent. The Postville case exemplifies the wonderful theoretical teachings, but the lack of practical commitment by the larger Catholic Church. The important principles which support immigrants are deeply embedded in the Catholic tradition, but one can see that they are not handy (or readily available) for actual use, a gap which severely diminishes their worth. There are political, historical, and institutional reasons for their lack of availability and the lack of practical commitment to their implementation by the Church. These include the history of discrimination against Catholics in the United States, its historical association as the "Church of Immigrants," and concerns about the separation of Church-State as a repercussion of political action.

Despite the many problematic causes for the Church's lack of practical commitment to their teachings which support immigrants, there are also important reasons as to why the Church must overcome these political, historical, and

institutional obstacles. Firstly, one must recognize the Church as a moral authority, a distinction which should be preeminent in understanding why it should not be silenced by these factors. Although the ultimate goal of all institutions, especially of long-standing ones, is survival, that does not permit the Church to abandon its moral principles in a quest for popular ideas to ensure their survival another day. In fact, this is the very antithesis of the views of the Church. The Catholic Church consistently describes its moral doctrine as eternal and as a guide to navigating difficult issues of modern society which often challenge individuals to understand exactly what the moral choice is.

Secondly, it must be emphasized that the Church's teachings are not ambivalent on the dignity that immigrants deserve, on the need to assist them, or on the need for just and comprehensive immigration policy which treats individuals as human beings and not as simply numbers, workers, or criminals. As my examination of Church teaching has shown, one can see that the Church is focused on the poor, the needy, the vulnerable, the family, so the logical question which follows is: Why is it so difficult for the Church to mobilize itself and support what it purports to value so highly?

When considering challenging moral issues, Christians are often asked to turn to the question, "What would Jesus do?" There a number of challenging questions which must be raised given Catholic teachings: In the case of Postville, would Jesus have supported the terrorizing raid which separated husband from wife and parent from child? Would Jesus have condemned the workers for their

illegality and sentenced them to both time in prison and deportation? Would Jesus have left those who were not arrested alone and without a means to support themselves? Would He have degraded them by calling those who were released (in order to care for their children) “criminal” and required them to wear monitoring ankle bracelets? Would He have forced those who were working hard and trying to provide a better life for their children back to a life of poverty and despair? It is difficult to imagine that Jesus would have done any of these things to people who had so little and were working so hard under already unfair conditions, and yet this is exactly what was done by the United States government. Nor were these actions promptly condemned by the Catholic Church.

In the United States, a country which many claim to be a “Christian nation,” there appears to be a failure to honor the life and teachings of Jesus Christ on this issue. In fact, the majority of Americans, seventy seven percent, identify themselves as Christians and of that, twenty five percent are Roman Catholic Christians (National Council).<sup>34</sup> According to the National Council of Churches, as of 2008, these numbers amount to sixty-seven million Catholics in the United States (National Council). How many of these sixty-seven million are immigrants themselves, or have parents or grandparents who came here as immigrants? The Catholic voice on immigration must be unified, loud, and clear. It must stand for the welfare of the poor and immigrant families seeking a better

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<sup>34</sup> National Council of Churches “Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches” 23 February 2008. Hereinafter cited as National Council.

life by demanding fair and compassionate immigration policies in the United States and by working to assist the many who do not have adequate and fair opportunities for success. In the madness of the Postville raid, the local Catholic Church offered a glimmer of the greater teaching but the greater Church was slow, late, and inadequate in its response.

One can see the many potentials and theoretical strengths that lie in the Catholic doctrine on immigration. Yet simultaneously, one can also see the many cracks that are present in these Catholic teachings. These principles which support immigrants are grounded firmly in doctrine, but they are very difficult to implement in both policy and practice. Far too many immigrants, many of whom are the Church's own members, remain neglected with unfair and unjust immigration policies persisting in the United States and elsewhere. In many respects, immigrants have been forgotten by the Church, left in the darkness that it speaks of so often. The Church can help guide us and them to the light, by taking up the work that is difficult, at times political and unpleasant, because its mission, moral principles, and doctrine demand it.

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