



Part Three on  
Immigration:  
The Impasse of  
Immigration

Several issues back, reflecting on *Immigration and the Next America* by Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles, I reviewed the ancient biblical roots of Christian concern for the immigrant, culminating in the words of Jesus: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” My next column looked back on the American past from an uncommon angle. In the words of Archbishop Gomez, “A century before the Pilgrims arrived at Plymouth Rock, and long before the English settlement at Jamestown, the Hispanic Catholic presence was firmly established in America.”

This is a significant chapter of “the rest of the story” of the American experiment in liberty, and it opens a path for us to come into the fullness of our national inheritance. Differing recollections of our common past should converge and complement one another as our history unfolds over time; they need not compete with each other for inclusion. Each has a right to its part in the story. It is helpful to keep this perspective in mind as we consider immigration as a political issue.

Millions of people around the world have applied for legal admission to the United States and wait beyond our borders for a long time to be accepted. Within our borders live roughly 11 million people who have not gone through that process of legalization. Most of them have been

here for five years; many more, for ten or twenty years. They have settled here, struggled to make a better life for their family here; in fact, if not in law, they have become our neighbors here. Yet they live under continual fear of deportation. To come fully into public sight would risk everything they have worked for—most of all the unity of their family. So they stay in the shadows. And the shadows spread.

Our failure to resolve this problem does no one any good. It only increases social antagonism and embitters our politics. But we are at an impasse. On the one hand, we cannot simply discount our immigration laws as if they didn’t matter, because they do. Applicants for admission from abroad rightly count on us to enforce them. On the other hand, no one proposes to undertake the impossible task of mass deportation of those who are not here legally. How to find a way out of this dilemma?

It is true that the 11 million are not here legally; it is equally true that they are not going away. Those who were brought here as young children know no other land than ours. They are as innocent as they are powerless. But their life prospects worsen with every year that the immigration impasse continues. It unwittingly fosters the expansion of a sizeable underclass in the legal shadow land of immigration. “We are creating the very conditions that we claim to be afraid of,” Archbishop Gomez argues— “a generation of people who can’t assimilate and who don’t have the education and skills to contribute to our economy.”

National interest and Christian compassion converge on the need to order our immigration policy aright—in a way that does not invite the same situation to happen again. My next column will be an attempt to think forward in that direction.