



Part Two on
Immigration:
Worthy of Welcome

Jose Gomez of Los Angeles reminds us that the United States was founded on an explicit openness to and encouragement of people coming here from beyond our borders. The Declaration of Independence lists the King of England's restrictive immigration policy among the serious grievances he committed against the Colonies, for he refused to allow "the naturalization of foreigners" or to "encourage their migrations." The new nation would follow a much different course. In the words of our first president, "The bosom of America is open to receive not only the opulent and respectable stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all nations and religions; who we should welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges, if . . . they merit the enjoyment." Little over a century later George Washington's arms-open attitude cleared the way for my grandparents to leave Ireland and settle in Oregon. If you search your memory, do you find that you too are a beneficiary of America's traditional openness to foreigners?

We rightly trace our country's founding to the English-speaking Protestants who settled the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Southern coasts. It is a heroic and inspiring story worthy of veneration, but it is not the whole story. The "rest of the story," Archbishop Gomez reminds us, "is not Anglo-Protestant but Hispanic-Catholic"; its center is "not in New

England but in . . . New Spain." It began in the 1520s with the first Spanish settlement in Florida and in the 1540s across the continent in California—long before the English settlement at Jamestown in 1607 or the arrival of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock in 1621. From this perspective we Westerners are not late-comers to the national story; rather, we can trace our roots back even earlier than Easterners—for example, to the settlement and development of our largest and most prosperous state, California.

Forgetfulness or ignorance of the rest of America's story, Archbishop Gomez suggests, has repeatedly given rise to a "nativist" impulse that defines our national identity along narrow racial, ethnic, and religious grounds. As Abraham Lincoln recognized, the nativist assumes that those who came here earlier are somehow "more equal" than those who came later—poor, uneducated, with a different language and religion. For two centuries nativist suspicion has fallen successively on German, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Polish, and Mexican immigrants and found them unworthy of welcome. The reasons are always the same, Archbishop Gomez notes: "they are inferior people; they don't work hard; they aren't smart enough; they won't learn our language; they're loyal to their own country; and they resent our laws and traditions." One ethnic group after another has settled into America and disproved these assumptions, but they continue to color our national debate.

My next column will turn to that debate in an attempt to find a way to be faithful to the whole story of the American promise.