

## Thoughts on Our Church

# Movement's Dark Origins Exposed

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Few issues elicit such vehement and vitriolic responses from the Catholic faithful like those dealing with immigration. Such was the case recently when our Maryland Catholic Conference pledged the support of the Catholic Church in Maryland for a bill that will allow immigrant students to attend Maryland's state institutions of higher learning at the same tuition rate as other resident students of Maryland.

Concerns about the vast extent of illegal immigration in our country are completely legitimate, and as we have said in the past, the Church does not condone breaking the law. But we also recognize that our country's immigration system is impossibly broken, and that practical and humane solutions to this issue must come from the federal government. In the meantime, as a Church, and as Marylanders, we are called to recognize that all of our neighbors, including those who look and speak differently than we do, are deserving of our welcome and compassion.

The bill to provide in-state tuition rates to immigrant students in fact is fashioned to clearly balance many of these concerns. To counter claims that immigrant students would take highly coveted spots at Maryland's colleges and universities, the bill will only allow these students to apply at first to community colleges, which have open enrollments. After two years students are then eligible – if they qualify academically – to apply to state universities at the in-state tuition rate. If they are accepted, their seats may not be counted among the seats the University of Maryland system is required to reserve for resident students. They are not eligible to receive scholarship assistance. They must provide documentation that they or their parents have and will continue to pay income taxes.

Most importantly, we must remember that this legislation affects children who are here through no choice of their own, and who do not deserve to be held responsible for the fact that their parents may have brought them here illegally. These are our students who often have spent most of their lives in classrooms with all children in Maryland, and who at a minimum must have attended Maryland high schools for at least three years. They

are also students who *want* to further their education, and who are making the right choices in order to lead productive lives. If we are to face the reality honestly, that these students are likely to remain in our country, isn't it in the best interests of all that they be encouraged to contribute positively to our society?

Both the Archdiocese and the Maryland Catholic Conference have received a number of complaints about the Church's support for the bill, and some opponents are even pursuing efforts to overturn the law by petitioning it to a statewide referendum. Given the emotional, and sadly, sometimes uncharitable, reactions we have witnessed on the issue of immigration, we hope the referendum efforts will not go forward and further divide our state on this issue.

Voices of opposition regarding this issue have also been expressed in other parts of the country, many of which have been amplified by powerful grassroots organizations that have emerged to lead the charge against immigration, legal or illegal.

*The New York Times* highlighted the relatively unknown founder of the three most prominent such groups, Dr. John Tanton.

Some 30 years ago, as he viewed the impact of increased immigration rates from his home in rural northern Michigan, Dr. Tanton, "a beekeeper and amateur naturalist" who spent 20 years "planting trees, cleaning creeks and suing developers," sought allies – including Planned Parenthood and the Sierra Club – to curb the source of unwanted population growth.

In the years that followed, he would create three organizations aimed at reducing immigration, legal and illegal, that would yield immense influence in Washington, D.C., and throughout the country:

- Numbers USA – Credited with the downfall of President George W. Bush's 2007 immigration reform plan that included a path to citizenship for many illegal immigrants;
- The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) – Perhaps the largest and best-known of the three, helped draft the controversial Arizona immigration law that gives sweeping authority to police departments to enforce immigration laws;
- The Center for Immigration Studies – Played a crucial role in the recent defeat of the Dream Act, which would have created a path to citizenship for people brought to the country illegally as children.

What was particularly troubling in the *Times* article is its chronicling of a man whose motivation revealed a sinister ideology. “He increasingly saw immigration through a racial lens,” the article said of Tanton, who once wrote to a large donor of one of his “prime concerns ... about the decline of folks who look like you and me.”

Tanton’s writings also revealed a bent towards eugenics. “Do we leave it to individuals to decide that they are intelligent ones who should have more kids?” Tanton wrote. “And more troublesome, what about the less intelligent, who logically should have less. Who is going to break the bad news to them.”

It is of little surprise, then, that he sought the support of Planned Parenthood to advance his cause. After all, it was Margaret Sanger, the group’s founder, who said, “The most merciful thing that the large family does to one of its infant members is to kill it.”

While there are legitimate concerns about the extent of illegal immigration in our nation, we must also be wary of an anti-immigration movement afoot in our country, including right here in Maryland, that is fueled in large part by a man who has spent much of his life, albeit it at a great distance, playing on people’s fears and prejudices to advance his own racist and classist agenda.

People, many unwittingly, are donating money to and registering outrage with their elected officials because of the vitriol being spread by such groups, founded by a man who opposes the immigration of any people to this country.

While I certainly do not believe everyone opposed to immigration shares Tanton’s misguided thinking, it is appropriate that such motivations by the founder of three of the largest efforts in a growing anti-immigrant movement should be exposed. Perhaps it will cause others to examine the true motivations of their own beliefs.

To help further the introspection as to why many are so strident on this issue, let me pose this simple question: Would we happily welcome immigrants to our country if they were here legally?

For us Catholics, our Church’s stance on immigration has been consistent throughout history, and has played an integral role in the growth of the Catholic faith in our country. Our own Cardinal James Gibbons, an outspoken advocate for racial and ethnic equality, perhaps said it best in 1915, when he posed the following question in opposition to a national literacy test for immigrants. It is a question that still resonates today:

*“What would this country have amounted to as a nation had its founders immediately*

*after the Revolution closed its portals to honest but illiterate immigration? Many of the nation's greatest men in every field of service were immigrants or the sons of immigrants. We still cherish the hope that this is 'the land of the free and the home of the brave,' and the refuge of those honest and virtuous men and women who conscientiously believe the land which gave them birth does not give them the rights or advantages that good men crave to live peacefully and well."*