

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

March 15, 2011 at 12:56pm

The bishops, the DREAM act and militarization

by Timothy Rieger

Immigration and the Church

Opinion

As reported by the Catholic News Service on Feb. 9, Archbishop of Los Angeles José Gomez told a group of Catholic business leaders in Florida that "the church's approach to immigration -- like the church's approach to every social issue -- is never about politics. It is about preaching the good news of God's love for all peoples. It is about transforming the city of man into the family of God."

Despite the compassion that Gomez as well as now-retired Cardinal Mahony have demonstrated for the plight of undocumented immigrants, a closer look at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops immigration stance reveals something quite the opposite: the bishops seem totally willing to play politics, and their oral compromise on the DREAM Act, the immigration legislation that was defeated last year in Congress, is a case in point.

Last year, thousands of the undocumented, mostly young adults from Latin America, advocated for the DREAM Act, legislation that would give these youngsters two paths to U.S. citizenship: enrollment in college or enlisting in the U.S. military.

Such an enlistment, of course, would come at a time when the United States is already mired in two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. If the reportage about U.S. military planning for an attack on Iran is any indication, plus the reality that there are powerful interests in this country always pushing for war with Iran, the U.S. could find itself in a third shooting war on the not-so-distant horizon.

If you want to keep building the "city of man," however, as opposed to the city of God, convince an undocumented 18-year-old who has been in this country since he was two, and who is not academically inclined, that he is not entitled to U.S. citizenship unless he risks his life in these controversial wars of

choice, military service that the vast majority of his white, native-born peers have rejected outright.

Sadly, last fall the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops pushed for passage of the DREAM Act with great fanfare. Just as disturbing, the bishops did indeed acknowledge the fact that these youngsters were brought to this country by their parents as minors; they acknowledged that the U.S. is the only country they've ever known.

Yet that was not enough for the bishops to reject the most manipulative, blatantly anti-Christian provision of the bill: an attempt to compel non-academically inclined youngsters to enlist in the military during a time of war if they want citizenship.

If such a cruel ultimatum were to apply to the white, native-born Americans who live right alongside these same undocumented youngsters, millions would be compelled to risk life, limb and mental health for the wars of choice carried out by this country's ruthless political class, and all to advance the bottom line of the military industrial complex, as well as to advance the bottom lines of -- as our beloved president might put it -- a "whole host" of foreign interests.

Friends and supporters of our nation's undocumented immigrant community, be they Catholic or of other faiths or no particular faith, certainly want our friends, whom we know to be good and loving people, to realize the dream of living in our society free from fear, free to love, free to create, free to learn, free to raise their families and free to advocate for their workplace rights.

The question, however, must be asked: At what point do we end up purchasing that freedom with checks payable to the military-industrial complex?

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The DREAM Act, a manipulative backdoor to a draft for a vulnerable population, is that tipping point, and then some.

There are many pro-human life solutions to America's immigration woes: unconditional citizenship for those who were brought to this country by their parents as minors; the establishment of NGO-staffed human rights centers inside our nation's federal immigration detention facilities to guard against human and civil rights abuses; a public-private partnership between the USDA and growers to create an Agricultural Worker Safe Transport Fund, which could utilize modern air transportation for workers from Mexico and Central America to come and go in peace and safety and thereby take pressure off the border.

Whatever immigration solutions we find, however, the children of God who happen to be undocumented immigrants must never be sacrificed on the war altar of the city of man. If the church hierarchy is always above the nitty-gritty of politics, as Gomez claims, then the bishops in attendance at the upcoming conference on immigration at the Catholic University of America should explain why they acquiesced to a provision in the DREAM Act that so clearly aids in building the city of man, not the city of God.

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