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Immigration, exclusion and the church

Kate Oatis | May. 19, 2011
Immigration and the Church

DAYTON, Ohio -- "The immigration situation in the U.S. is a moral crisis ... because it raises disturbing questions about our genuine commitment to the sanctity of human dignity and human rights," said University of Dayton associate professor Mark Ensalaco, during his presentation at the Ecclesiology and Exclusion conference [1] underway this week at the University of Dayton and offered by the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network.

Ensalaco, an associate professor of political science, presented as part of a panel with Gioacchino Campese, a Scalabrinian missionary from Italy. He said the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, along with its Mexican counterpart, La Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, responded to the immigration situation nearly a decade ago with the publication of the pastoral letter Strangers No Longer: Together on a Journey of Hope. The letter "contains a succinct statement on the Church's social teaching as it relates to immigration and sets out five principles that should frame public policy," Ensalaco argued.

The trouble is, those principles "far exceed principles of international human rights law regarding migrants," Ensalaco said. A second problem with the letter, he argued, is that it is vastly less critical of the Mexican authorities' abuse of Central American migrants than it ought to be.

The failure of comprehensive immigration reform can not be blamed on the American bishops, Ensalaco argued. However, the bishops could learn from "the debacle." Specifically, the bishops failed to "translate the lofty moral principles of Catholic social teaching into a persuasive political message."

[Kate Oatis will provide conference snippets from May 19-22 and a wrap up of the conference next week. She is a freelance writer and former features editor for the *Catholic Chronicle* in Toledo and is currently serving as communications director for the Sisters of St. Francis in Tiffin, Ohio.]

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[1] http://exclusionconference.ecclesiological.net/