

## HISPANICS AND THE FUTURE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

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*This article was based on a talk given at the Center for Catholic Studies at Nassau Community College, Garden City, N.Y., on June 25, 2007. It discusses various themes concerning Hispanics and the Catholic Church in the U.S. These themes include the research of Prof. Philip Jenkins of Pennsylvania State University on the global charismatic revolution in Christianity, the attraction of Hispanics to rich and traditional Catholic liturgy and devotions, the trend of defections of Hispanic Catholics to Protestant groups, the socially conservative views of Hispanic Catholics on abortion and marriage, and the effect of immigration on the Catholic Church in the U.S. The thesis of the talk is that the Catholic Church in the U.S. will become more orthodox and charismatic due to the increased Hispanic presence. The talk has been edited for publication.*

### **Introduction**

Let me begin with the obligatory ethnic introduction, given our topic. I am fully Hispanic on both sides of my family. My parents were Cuban immigrant/refugees from communism. I was born in New Orleans about one month after they arrived in the U.S. in 1962. As best as I recall, I spoke Spanish before I spoke English. I now live in Michigan and attend Christ the King Catholic Church in Ann Arbor. It is a charismatic Catholic parish and is primarily non-Hispanic.

To pre-empt the question that is always the elephant in the room among American Catholics, doctrinally, I am a “conservative, orthodox” Catholic who is strongly pro-life and who reaches for the Catechism at the slightest excuse. I don’t regularly attend a Tridentine Mass, but I love Latin. By the way, I fully embrace and accept the documents of Vatican II. Everyone can find something to like or dislike in that description! These biographical facts will resonate with the five themes presented in this article.

## **I. Prof. Philip Jenkins has documented the global Pentecostal and charismatic revolution.**

Jenkins is a Pennsylvania State University professor who writes excellent books on Christianity in the Third World (or, as he likes to say, “2/3 World”). From all indications, the fastest-growing segment of Christianity today is “Renewalist” [Cf. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), pp. 63, 67]. “Renewalist” is an umbrella term that covers non-Catholic Pentecostals and also charismatics in the Catholic Church, plus charismatics in denominations such as Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, etc. I first came across this label in the crucial Pew Research Center report on Hispanics and religion, which I will shortly introduce. Jenkins also makes the point that Christianity as a whole is the fastest growing world religion—period—although the media gives the impression that Islam is winning the religious competition. It appears that Christianity is winning worldwide. (See *The Next Christendom*, pp. 5, 8)

Now, my talk is about the Hispanic challenge *in the U.S.* But the U.S. is in the middle of the world described by Jenkins. Last year, Dr. Jenkins, along with Fr. Neuhaus, gave a talk in an Evangelization Conference sponsored by the Archdiocese of Detroit. Jenkins basically said that the Third World has come to the U.S. And so it has. So the trends we see *outside* our borders are also trends *within* our borders.

Providentially, the Pew Research Center has recently provided—I like to think just for this talk here today—reputable and immensely interesting data on what is happening in our own borders, in a study of the Hispanic influence on American religion. The Pew Center is a reputable and well-known research group.

The study, released on April 25, 2007, and entitled “Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion,” is the work of the Pew Hispanic Center and Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. The study is available on the web for free (at <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=75>). The study is based on surveys conducted in the latter part of 2006. Find the study on the internet and print it out. You won’t regret it. I do not present the entire report here. *But I will say that what leaped out to me as the single most significant finding for us American Catholics: Over half of Hispanic Catholics consider themselves to be charismatic. Only about 10% of non-Hispanic Catholics in the U.S. do so.* I am part, as noted in my introductory comments, of that majority of Hispanic Catholics in the U.S.

Well, it has been forty years since the modern Catholic Charismatic Renewal began in 1967 in Pittsburgh, spreading from there first to Notre Dame and to Lansing, Michigan. I know some of the pioneers. They are my fellow parishioners in Ann Arbor. But what is all this charismatic talk really all about, and why should any Catholic care? There's no way to avoid this threshold issue if we are to make sense of the Pew report.

I will let three others talk about the Renewal who rightly have much more prestige in Catholic circles than I will ever have. First, Peter Kreeft, Catholic apologist, writer, and philosopher at Boston College:

When Paul visits the church in Ephesus (Acts 19), he notices something missing—I think he would notice exactly the same thing in most of our churches and preach the same sermon—and he asks them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2). Why would he ask that unless he saw a power shortage? Why did twelve fishermen convert the world, and why are half a billion Christians [we now have about two billion Christians worldwide] unable to repeat the feat? The Spirit makes the difference . . . . [p. 142]

We have received the Spirit by faith and baptism. "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Rom 8:9). But we need the release, the empowering, the anointing of the Spirit. Such empowerment is probably what the New Testament means by baptism in (or of or with) the Holy Spirit. It is supposed to happen at confirmation. Apparently, it usually does not. Millions of confirmed Catholics receive it afterward, usually in charismatic prayer meetings or seminars. *The charismatic movement is obviously God's answer to Pope John XXIII's prayer for a new Pentecost. Popes Paul VI and John Paul II both blessed it but said that it will fulfill its purpose only when, like the early liturgical movement, it ceases to have a separate identity of its own and is absorbed into the whole Church.* In other words, every Catholic should be a charismatic, baptized in the Spirit, empowered like the apostles.

The difference this baptism in the Spirit makes is not primarily in any particular charismatic gift, such as tongues. Paul clearly says not to get hung up on tongues (1 Cor 12-14). The difference is far greater: like the difference between a picture and a live person, between dead orthodoxy and living truth,

between words and power. If we are not certain that Jesus Christ is present in us, working, acting, making a difference, rather than just being a teacher, an example, a lovely but remote historical figure, then we need Pentecost. And when that happens, the world will be won again [p. 143]. (Peter Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith: Essays in Christian Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988) pp. 142-43, italics added)

Second, is Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, since having gone up in the world, in something he wrote in the summer of 1982:

I also urge them [Christians] to pay special attention to the Cardinal's [Suenens'] double plea, which deserves the greatest consideration: on the one hand, his appeal to those responsible for the ecclesial ministry—from parish priests to bishops—*not to let the Renewal pass them by but to welcome it fully*; and on the other, his appeal to the members of the Renewal to cherish and maintain their link with the whole Church and with the charisms of her pastors.

(Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Foreword to Joseph Cardinal Suenens, *Renewal & the Powers of Darkness* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983) (italics added) (entire book available at <http://www.jcu.edu/suenens/Renewal%20&%20the%20Powers%20of%20Darkness%20by%20Leon%20Joseph%20Suenens.pdf>).

Third, for those of a more, let us say, “liberal” persuasion, here is a quote from the late Cardinal Suenens of Belgium, who was a hero of Vatican II:

I believe that the Charismatic Renewal provides an answer to one of the most urgent pastoral questions now facing the Church today: *how to transform nominal Christians into authentic Christians*.

Christians today have to rediscover the heart of the Christian message; they have been sufficiently “sacramentalised;” they have not been sufficiently “evangelized.” We are now faced with the task of rediscovering and explaining what really makes a Christian. We must help Christians to become more continually aware of their faith and to live it on a more personal level. Many must exchange a sociological or an inherited

Christianity for a full and active life of faith, based on a personal decision and embraced with full consciousness.

From my experience of the Charismatic Renewal, I strongly believe that this special action of the Holy Spirit today constitutes an answer to the questions now facing the Church. The personal experience of those who have been “renewed in the Holy Spirit” include several constant elements that favor the transformation of passive Christians into active ones.

(*The Tablet*, Sept. 19, 1992 (italics added), available at <http://socrates58.blogspot.com/2007/01/recent-popes-and-bishops-statements.html> (the website of Catholic apologist David Armstrong).

What is this modern charismatic renewal? The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is a rediscovery of the charismatic gifts discussed by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12-14, gifts or charisms available to all Catholics by virtue of the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. It is a path of deep, radical conversion—although, as I myself know well, we remain far from perfect human beings.

It is interesting to see how the ostensibly secular, non-Catholic survey team at the Pew Center defines “charismatic”: “Those Christians who practice the gifts of the Holy Spirit but who are not members of historic pentecostal denominations. Most belong to Catholic or Protestant denominations, although they engage in spiritual practices, such as speaking in tongues, that are not common in these churches” (see Glossary of Pew Report cited above).

Let’s make some corrections to this definition from the Pew Report’s glossary: All Christians who are living the Christian life exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The charismatic difference is that *all* the biblical gifts of the Holy Spirit are taken seriously today as important ways to build up the Church. Nothing is “red-lined” or “excluded” from the biblical listing of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (the Greek word for “gift” is *charisma*, hence the term “charismatic”).

It is also good to consider Peter Kreeft’s advice and not get “hung up” on praying in tongues. It exists today. It is common among Catholic charismatics. It is a great way to praise God and resist temptations to sin. But praying in tongues is not the center, as St. Paul makes clear.

Finally, let’s keep in mind that just because Protestants do something doesn’t mean it’s not originally, biblically, and historically Catholic. If Protestants have something that is truly good, authentically

Christian, and biblical, then by that very fact it is already Catholic! Pentecost is Catholic. All the charismatic gifts are Catholic. The Diocese of Rockville Centre, where the talk this article is based on was presented, has a Renewal ministry, as I noticed on the diocesan website. I also noticed that Spanish is used extensively on the website.

*Conclusion:* Hispanics in the Catholic Church will make the Catholic Church in the U.S. more charismatic. The Third World is making the universal Catholic Church more charismatic. Who knows? We might one day have a Pope right out of the Renewal movement of the Third World.

## **II. Hispanics are indeed attracted to rich and traditional devotions in contrast to the “Anglo-light” liturgical styles dominant in large sectors of the Catholic Church in the U.S.**

By the way, I owe the phrase “Anglo-light” to the founder of this Catholic Studies Center, Sociology Professor Joseph Varacalli of Nassau Community College. Hispanics are indeed attracted to traditional Marian devotions, especially to familiar patrons, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe. Each Latin country usually has had an officially approved Marian appearance, but, curiously, not the U.S. Interestingly, even some Latinos who become Protestant still have some devotion to the saints. This fact indicates a potential for reversion. Here are the Pew Center report figures:

(a) 9 % of Latino evangelicals and 23% of Latino mainline Protestants “acknowledge praying to saints in times of trouble” (Pew, p. 20);

(b) “Belief that Mary is the mother of God and that she watches over believers is very common among Latino Catholics (88% agree). Though rarer, the belief is also espoused by some Latino Protestants . . . About four-in-ten (43%) Latinos who are mainline Protestants and one-in-three evangelicals (35%) agree with this belief” (Pew, p. 22).

Liturgical art among Hispanics also tends to be different. The corpus on crucifixes is bloodier; statues are more dramatic. In general, the style is more Baroque, as seen in the proliferation of candles and ornate altars. Given the customs of their strongly Catholic countries of origin, Hispanics are more open to very public street processions—such as Corpus Christi processions.

So it is no surprise that a bare Catholic church is not likely to provide the devotional warmth to which Hispanics are drawn by culture and temperament. I recall a news story from Chicago in which some mainline Protestant churches started using images of the Virgin Mary to attract Hispanics. Some Hispanic Catholics have even reported baptizing children in some liturgical, mainline Protestant churches under the mistaken impression that these churches were Catholic. I also recall an Episcopal church in downtown Indianapolis advertising a “Holy Mass” in Spanish. That can be quite misleading to Latinos new to the religious diversity of the U.S.

*Conclusion:* More Catholic churches need to re-introduce statues and Marian devotions, especially celebration of Latino Marian appearances. Of course, if it’s not done out of genuine religious conviction, such a devotional revival will likely be exposed as insincere or manipulative. In other words, sincerely bring back the candles, the statues, and the Infant Jesus of Prague while you are at it.

### **III. Hispanics in the U.S. tend to switch to Protestantism when confronted with “Anglo-light” liturgies.**

To respond effectively to the Hispanic challenge requires a deep examination of theological and liturgical conscience by the U.S. Catholic Church. The need for such an examination of conscience is the subtext of this entire talk. You have to know who you are before you can attract anyone. It is a common-sense necessity that applies to both individuals and institutions. It is unlikely that the “Anglo-light” liturgies will attract Hispanics given the emotional dryness Hispanics detect in such liturgies. But the same can be said about some Tridentine liturgies.

Emotional expression is very important for Hispanics, especially among so many of the immigrants who are mostly of working class or peasant background. But even a Hispanic white-collar professional can feel repelled by such coldness. I recall a Hispanic pharmacist telling me how he was struck by the lack of emotional expressiveness in some Catholic liturgies in the U.S. and how delighted he was, finally, to encounter in a Catholic charismatic parish, which was overwhelmingly composed of non-Hispanic white parishioners, the expressive praise of God that he was seeking. This issue of emotional expressiveness in the liturgy raises important questions:

(a) Is a significant degree of emotional expression essential for all healthy human beings, or is it merely culture-specific? Is significant emotional expression in the liturgy good or bad?

(b) Does the Christian liturgical tradition encourage significant emotional expression? Based on my own reading of the Bible, my answer is “yes” based on the witness of both the Old and New Testaments (cf. Psalms 20:5; 32:11; 33:1; 42:4; 71:23; 132:16; Pauline letters: esp. Eph. 5:18-21; Colossians 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:26).

Interestingly, the Pew survey data shows that “the Masses attended by Latino Catholics often exhibit the kind of exuberant atmosphere that is more characteristic of pentecostalism than of traditional American Catholicism” (Pew, p. 37). The study continues: “Among Latino Catholics who attend church services, for example, more than six-in-ten (62%) say that the Masses they attend at least occasionally include displays of excitement and enthusiasm such as raising of hands, clapping, shouting or jumping” (Pew, p. 38).

Yet, for many Hispanics, being charismatic goes hand in hand with Catholic orthodoxy: “[T]he adoption of many key features of renewalist Christianity by Hispanics does *not* appear to be undermining their commitment to a more traditional or orthodox Catholicism. On the contrary, Latino Catholics generally tend to be quite devoted to the church and are traditionalist in their practice of Catholicism” (Pew, p. 38; emphasis added). Here is the Pew Center data:

(a) “Nearly nine-in-ten Latino Catholics, for instance, believe that in the Mass the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ—a core Catholic belief. More than eight-in-ten say that they pray to the Virgin Mary. A sizable number of Latino Catholics (43%) also say they pray the rosary at least once or twice a month and 43% report going to confession at least once or twice a year. Slightly larger shares of charismatic than non-charismatic Catholics report taking part in these activities, but the differences are quite modest” (Pew, p. 38; emphasis added).

(b) Likewise, the Pew center reports: “Latinos who are charismatic Catholics, however, are nearly *twice as likely* as other Latino Catholics (28% vs. 15%) to serve their parishes” in roles such as lectors, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, choir members, parish council members, or leader of small group/ministry (p. 39; emphasis added).



The biggest reason given by Latino evangelicals for leaving the Catholic Church is that “they do not find the typical Catholic Mass to be lively or exciting” (Pew, p. 45). It does not appear that social-activist issues such as the treatment of women or being welcoming to immigrants play a major role in Latinos’ leaving the Catholic Church (Pew, p. 46).

While it is true that typical “Anglo-light” liturgies do not appeal to Latinos, the likely solution will be surprising to many conservative U.S. Catholics. The data indicates that Latinos want a combination of charismatic and orthodox Catholic liturgies. Based on the data and my own personal impressions, I do not believe that ignoring the charismatic element in worship leads to the most effective evangelization of Hispanics.

In fact, my own charismatic, non-Hispanic parish in Ann Arbor combines those traits: being very orthodox with charismatic adaptations *authorized by the local bishop*. We live in interesting times, and the model that will appeal most to Hispanics may very likely be the current liturgical practice in my own non-Hispanic but charismatic and highly orthodox parish.

#### **IV. Hispanics are naturally conservative on family life and abortion issues and thus will have an impact on these issues.**

Given the continuing pro-life struggle, recently marked by the great Supreme Court victory over partial-birth abortion, whether Hispanics are pro-life or not is a looming question, especially in presidential politics. Hispanics are more socially conservative on these issues than non-Hispanic Americans. Again, here is the recent Pew survey data from 2006:

(a) 57% of all Hispanics “say abortion should be illegal” compared to 40% of non-Hispanics (Pew, p. 69). This is a high percentage for a blanket prohibition of abortion.

(b) *Evangelical* Hispanics are stronger in opposition to abortion (77% compared to 54% among Hispanic Catholics; *ibid.*). The same difference in intensity of opposition to abortion is seen between non-Hispanic white Catholics and non-Hispanic white evangelicals.

(c) 56% of all Hispanics oppose gay “marriage” compared to 42% of all non-Hispanics. Again, evangelical Hispanics are more opposed than

Catholic Hispanics (86% to 52%). Among non-Hispanics, evangelicals are also more opposed than Catholics.

Ironically, given much conservative hostility to the use of the Spanish language, “Latinos whose primary language is Spanish tend to be more conservative than others on abortion and gay marriage” (Pew, p. 70). Frequent church attendance is a big factor in increased conservatism on social issues, as is also generally true among non-Hispanics (Pew, pp. 68-70).

Pro-life and family conservatives should thus be pleased with the rise in Hispanics in the U.S. In fact, social conservatives should favor a continued influx that is less assimilated to American ways, because more assimilation means a decline in socially conservative views (see Pew, pp. 69-70). This statement must be qualified by the fact that newer immigrants obviously participate less in elections. Interestingly, conservative Latino Catholics register at higher rates than liberal Latino Catholics. High voter registration is also likely true among Latino evangelicals (Pew, p. 84).

Hispanic social conservatism will also likely affect the success of unionization among Hispanics. As Fr. George Schultze S.J., has pointed out in a recent book on Latinos and unions, the pro-gay and pro-abortion agenda of many in union leadership will complicate unionization efforts among Hispanics [*Strangers in a Foreign Land: The Organizing of Catholic Latinos in the United States* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2007), pp. 139, 158]. At least two scenarios come to mind: Either unions will become more socially conservative, or at least socially neutral, due to the Hispanic presence; or unions will have reduced success among Hispanics. A third scenario is that Hispanic assimilation and rising secularism make Hispanic social conservatism less of a significant variable in union membership.

In a fascinating three-part series entitled “House Afire” in January of this year in the *New York Times*, reporter David Gonzalez chronicled the life and struggles of a Hispanic (specifically, Dominican) Pentecostal pastor in New York City (see Jan. 14, 15, & 16, 2007, issues, available at [http://nytimes.com/ref/nyregion/houseafire\\_index.html](http://nytimes.com/ref/nyregion/houseafire_index.html)). The *Times* reported that the number of Protestant Pentecostals in New York City will soon exceed 850,000, with one-third being Hispanic (Jan. 14th issue, p. 21). According to the report, that’s “about one in every 10 New Yorkers” (ibid.). By the way, the same issue reports that “Pentecostalism is the world’s fastest-growing branch of Christianity, with roughly 400 million adherents” (ibid.). In a fascinating bit of speculation, given the politics of the liberal Northeast, the reporter noted that “Latino Pentecostals are seen as a large and growing bloc that could

turn to **either** party” (ibid., p. 23; emphasis added). One expert stated, “You could have a huge change in the city” (ibid.). Imagine that: New York City as red on an election map!

*Conclusion:* A continued flow of Hispanic immigration is good for socially conservative causes, because the secular trends in affluent America tend to make those who are more assimilated more socially liberal. Hispanic evangelicals are especially potent allies of socially conservative causes. The sad and almost unspeakable fact for socially conservative Catholics is that more Hispanic evangelicals will be of greater help for pro-life and pro-family causes at the polls than simply more Hispanic Catholics in general. That disparity is an issue for another occasion.

#### **V. At issue today is the effect of the large Hispanic immigration for both the Catholic Church and American society.**

We are in the midst of that debate with very interesting political bedfellows and interesting potential effects on the Catholic Church. A conservative Republican President and former Governor of Texas proposes an immigration reform bill that provides a path for legalization of illegals now living here and also provides a guest-worker program. He is joined by Ted Kennedy and American business interests. But that’s not all.

Organized labor opposes the reform especially due to the guest-worker provision. They are joined by conservatives who object vehemently to the path to legalization—which they view as amnesty—that merely sets the stage for another sequel “amnesty” in the future. How can we make sense of this politically confusing landscape? Here are my own views.

First, what makes American society so attractive to immigrants is its emphasis on law and order, based on a generally honest judicial system that protects property rights, and thus facilitates economic opportunity and easy credit. So it is important that there be order on the border and that any path to legalization in the legislation not be weakened in the future, so as to make a mockery of the rule of law, which is the basis of American economic opportunity.

Second, there is an unmistakable demand for labor in the U.S. economy that is not being met domestically. U.S. business likes to hire Hispanics. In my view, the temporary-worker program is a natural response to the reality of this market. Thus, I myself am favorably disposed toward the President’s proposal, based on the descriptions I have seen in the media.

What extra-political factors in Hispanic immigration affect the Catholic Church? Most of these immigrants are Mexican. Most are Catholic. If you want a bigger Catholic Church in the U.S., you will be pleased. Compare this situation to Europe, where the incoming tide is Moslem. Our incoming tide is mostly Catholic and almost exclusively Christian. In addition, as just discussed, most of these immigrants hold socially conservative views that match the teachings of the Catholic Church. If you are pro-life and pro-marriage, you will be pleased. If you favor renewal in the Catholic Church, especially in its orthodox charismatic form, you will be happy with these new Catholics. If you are a Catholic liberal who favors the proposed immigration reform, you may regret these effects on the Church; a Catholic conservative who rejects the proposed immigration reform may have to give up the political benefit of having more socially conservative U.S. Catholics who will eventually be voting. Of course, I am assuming that the poor, socially conservative Mexican Catholic immigrant will continue to be a big part of the immigration allowed into the country under any future immigration reform.

U.S. Catholics have to make a theological examination of conscience about the Hispanic effect on the Catholic Church in the U.S. First, we can examine a possible scenario based on current trends. We might possibly end up with three slices, of varying sizes, among U.S. Catholics:

- (a) A small, mostly non-Hispanic white “Tridentine” slice;
- (b) A much larger, mostly non-Hispanic white “Anglo-light” sector that is the same as the dominant sector today; and
- (c) An eventually very large (possibly 50%) piece that is Hispanic and mostly charismatic, doctrinally orthodox, and socially conservative.

Here are some questions we can ask ourselves. If you are a more conservative Catholic, are you hostile to the charismatic emphases among Catholic Hispanics? If so, why? Does the papal embrace of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of the past 40 years make you take a second look?

If you are a more liberal Catholic, do you reconsider your own views when you see so many pro-life and pro-marriage Hispanic Catholics? Do you also reconsider your views of a charismatic renewal which emphasizes supernatural intervention today, such as healings or praying in tongues?

What is our Lord telling us through these trends? We need to pray to see. As a famous Hispanic saint (St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei) liked to say, we should pray that we might see (*ut videam*, in the Vulgate Latin that he commonly quoted), like the blind man in the Gospel story who begs Jesus for sight (Mark 10:51).

## VI. Overall Conclusion & Challenge

The Hispanic impact on the Catholic Church and the U.S. is—and will continue to be—very significant. Theologically, the Church in the U.S. will tilt toward being more orthodox and more charismatic. On immigration, it will be interesting to see if non-Hispanic Catholics react more like other Americans, or more like Catholics. Will secular political considerations have the upper hand, or will religious solidarity play a significant role in how non-Hispanic Catholics view Hispanic immigration?

In his most recent (and enchanting) book on Jesus, Pope Benedict XVI several times emphasizes a particular passage in the Gospels. It is a passage that he endearingly refers to by a German name, *Jubelruf* (which means “Joyful Shout”). Here is the “Joyful Shout” as found in the Gospel of Luke:

In that same hour he [Jesus] *rejoiced in the Holy Spirit* and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to *little children*; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.”

(Luke 10:21 [English Standard Version; italics and bracketed material added; see Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 2007), p. 109]).

Our Holy Father might be exercising, in this instance, a certain discernment arising from the charism of his Petrine office. A discernment that may help us in our own theological examination of conscience about Hispanic immigrants who love to rejoice in the Holy Spirit and who, in their often humble and vulnerable circumstances, fit the biblical image of “little children.”