

Immigration

The Reality and Its Solution

By Tarcisio Beal

The issue of immigration has become the major divider during the present presidential campaign. Millions of immigrants, mostly from Central America, have been pouring into the United States from Florida to California and have alarmed federal and state authorities whose actions to stop these “il-legals” have little to do with humane and Christian values. Not surprisingly, although widely ignored, immigration into the United States began to skyrocket in 1987, during Ronald Reagan’s administration, and has now, in 2024, reached the peak of hundreds of thousands per month. It was Reagan’s intervention in Central America (ironically called “Operation Wellbeing!”) in favor of its dictators and their alliance with militarized gangs in control of the drug trade that preyed upon the masses of the starving poor and killed hundreds of thousands:

In **Guatemala**, ruled by Gal. Efraín Ríos-Montt, a Pentecostal who viewed the Catholic Church as “satanic,” 150,000 Amerindians were expelled from their ancestral homes and 15,000 citizens killed, including priests and hundreds of catechists. Sadly, Ríos-Montt’s dictatorship received the support of the American evangelicals of Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network and of Jerry Falwell’s “Moral Majority.”

El Salvador’s dictatorial regime and its wealthy supporters were also greatly strengthened by Reagan’s policy for Latin America. During his presidency, one thousand Salvadoran soldiers were brought to the US to be trained at the School of the Americas (later named Western Institute for Security Cooperation). In El Salvador, the slogan of these “white warriors” was: “Be a patriot: kill a priest!” From 1978 to 1990, 75,000 Salvadorans were slaughtered, including four Jesuit professors of the University of San Salvador plus their maid and her daughter, all killed by the US-trained Atlacatl Battalion, a rapid-response, counter-insurgency battalion of the Salvadoran Army created in 1961. The better-known victim of such savagery was San Salvador’s Archbishop **Oscar Romero** (now St. Romero).

Honduras, along with Nicaragua, was already occupied by 2,600 American troops in 1906, during the presidency of Teddy Roosevelt. He believed that the USA should be the policeman of the world and ordered the occupation of the whole area of the Panama Canal. **Reagan’s** support of Honduras’

dictatorial rule of Gal. Juan Alberto Melgar Castro meant the crushing of the strongest peasantry of Latin America (140,000 members) and the arrest or murder of any defender of the poor. The most horrendous crimes took place in the **Los Horcones Ranch** of the Olancho Province in Honduras: Two fearless defenders of the peasantry, namely, Father Iván Betancourt, a Colombian Franciscan priest, and Father Michael Jerome Cypher (Padre Casimiro), a priest from Milwaukee, Wis., were

arrested along with five peasants by Sargent David Ártica and Major José Enrique Chinchilla and taken to **Los Horcones Ranch** owned by José Manuel Zelaya. The five peasants were quickly killed, then their bodies plus two other peasants and two young women were thrown alive into a 150 ft. well; the priests **Betancourt and Cypher** had their tongue, eyes, fingernails, and teeth gouged out, then thrown into the same 150 ft. deep well and turned into ashes by three sticks of dynamite. The provincial

army commander Major Jose Enrique Chinchilla, Lieutenant Benjamin Silver, Manuel “Mel” Zelaya and Carlos Bahr were sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Better known is the story of the most shameful Cold War actions of the Bush and Reagan administrations against **Nicaragua**, actions that favored the bloody dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza and his heirs, the **Contras**, actions that drew the support of the Unification Church’s **CAUSA Internacional**. During Somoza’s four decades of dictatorship, **30,000 Nicaraguans were slaughtered**. The US intervention against the Sandinistas was “justified” with 14 lies, including that the anti-Somoza rebels were Communists allied with the Soviet Union, that they were waging a genocidal war against the Miskito Indians, and that they were persecuting Jews and Christians while also trying to create a schism within the Catholic Church.

There is little doubt that it was George Bush’s and Ronald Reagan’s intervention in Central America that ultimately forced hundreds of thousands of its people to seek refuge northward, especially in the United States (cf. Chomsky, Noam, *U. S. Intervention in Central America and the Struggle for Peace*. Boston: South End Press, 1985; Bonner, Raymond, *Weakness and Deceit: U. S. Policy in El Salvador*. New York: Times Books, 1984; and Lernoux, Penny, *People of God plus Cry of the People*. New York: Viking, 1989). Actually, the



Ríos-Montt merece la cárcel, El pueblo IXIL merece ¡Justicia!

nation in the worst possible conditions right now is the Republic of Haiti. Its government fell apart and is under the control of groups of gangsters who have no respect for human life, killing anyone who stands in their way. About 10 million Haitians are just trying to survive. No wonder that hundreds of thousands have moved out of the country to at least save their lives. This kind of tragedy has also been the fate of millions of Central Africans victimized by dictatorial governments or by militarized gangs.

Now, compare the Central American policy of George Bush and Ronald Reagan with the socio-political approach of John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Lyndon Baines Johnson. Central to Kennedy's policy for Latin America was the **Peace Corps**, which Bush and Reagan, unfortunately, ground out. **The Peace Corps displayed the best kind of American foreign policy ever.**

I was fortunate to have been directly involved with the Peace Corps training programs in 1964, 1965, and 1966 at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wis., and in 1967 at the School of International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont. Up to some 50 young men and women, including young couples, joined each of the four programs to be trained so that they could go to Brazil to help the poor improve their living conditions. As Coordinator of "Cultural Training" and Instructor of Portuguese language, I witnessed the idealism and dedication of **a generation that represented the best of America**. I was also able to verify the success of the Peace Corps volunteers by traveling to Brazil's Northeastern States of Rio Grande do Norte and Maranhão, and was touched by their dedication to the poor and needy. They lived with the poor and shared their troubles and worked tirelessly to uplift their lives. Not surprisingly, as I spoke with the Brazilian local authorities, they were not only surprised, but also marveled that Americans would temporarily leave their comfortable lives to experience and improve the living conditions of another



country's poor.

So, now we are hearing from Trump and the Republicans the false accusation that the immigration crisis has been created by President Biden and the Democrats and that the borders must be shut off completely, when the **main instigators of "illegal" immigration are the multiple organizations of gangsters who prey on and make their fortune poisoning the people.** Furthermore, what is sorely missing in

the whole debate over immigration is its **moral implication and the need to see and treat the refugees with dignity as human beings, and not just through a militarized solution.** In Texas, for example, the Governor ordered the arrest of tens of thousands of refugees and their busing to other States and places like New York and Chicago, specifically to cities administered by the Democrats. How can anyone defend and justify such immoral tactics while claiming to be Christian or Catholic, thus manipulating the Bible and in total contradiction with the example of Christ?! Meanwhile, we hear from Trump, who is selling Bibles, and from his MAGA leaders, pious statements about their intent to officially make the U.S. a Christian nation. What a parody! Fortunately, **hundreds of truly Christian/Catholic organizations are involved in defending the most basic human rights of the "illegals" in San Antonio, El Paso, and other border cities.** It is they who prove that yes, thank God, true Christianity is alive in the United States.



Graffiti decrying Rios-Montt policies.

BIO: Tarcisio Beal is professor Emeritus of History at the University of the Incarnate Word who has written extensively in La Voz de Esperanza.

Heavy steel Normandy fence installed along the Rio Grande near Presidio, Texas to prevent vehicle crossings of the river when it becomes dry during summer months shown Nov. 20, 2019. Credit: U.S. Customs and Border Protection photo/Greg L. Davis

