

Breaking My Silence on Immigration  
August 5, 2014  
Phillip D. Fletcher

I want to take a few moments to make a clear statement on the current situation of children crossing the southern border of the United States. My statement comes as a culmination of serious reflection during the month of July. I want to make clear that I am against the deportation of any child because of his or her illegal movement into America on the basis of inept federal leadership and the highest principles of the Gospel.

I have six points that I want to share with you. I credit Dr. Martin L. King's speech on "Beyond Vietnam-A Time to Break Silence," given on April 4, 1967 as the framework for my words. My words are not for the people of Central America or her presidents. My words do not extend to the people of Mexico. My words are directed to the men and women of our United States. I hope that my words inspire you to moral courage. I hope that these are words of wisdom sound an alarm in the noisy streets to simple people (Proverbs 1:20). I hope that when I am finished you would not move quickly to critique, but reflection and loving action.

The first point is that I have fought to overcome my problem of silence. Martin L. King Jr. said, "The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people." My conscience constrains me to say something because my silence has honestly become a stumbling block in my own life. I don't know what my voice contributes to the alleviation of the situation, but I do know to go against my conscience, to continue to sit in silence becomes a self-imposed condemnation which should not exist. There exist many voices, from all sides who have raised the alarm as tens of thousands of children cross from Mexico into the southern region of the United States. These voices do not choose silence but they choose to argue for a position which objectifies the individual and uses him or her as a means to some other end. Therefore, I have wrestled with what to say as I see the faces of people in media images, as I observe talking news heads, and read articles which create sadness and anger. I also understand that I have other responsibilities which may be affected because of my position. I have weighed the cost. I have consulted my wife and friends. Above all, I believe as a son of God, my Father has led me to this moment. Thus, it would be morally wrong of me to hide behind any of these responsibilities when my conscience says otherwise. The current situation requires the voices of good people who are willing to demonstrate the good of humanity.

This leads to my second point in which my daily work with the Hispanic community influences my position. I walk the streets with these men and women. In my nonprofit work, I have sat at table with families to enjoy meals and enjoy great conversation. I have cried with a mother and her children when a husband and dad was brutally murdered. These men and women trust me with their children who have hopes and dreams to become doctors, build houses, and become eye doctors. And I do not concern myself with his or her citizenship status. I would be a fool to admit that relationships do not influence my position. If we would be honest, don't relationships influence all of our positions? As a man who lived in Southern California for eighteen years, I

know and understand the strong family dynamic and hard work ethic of Hispanics. I understand much of their devotion to the Catholic and Pentecostal traditions of the Christian faith. These men, women, and children seek the same opportunity as many of your ancestor's desired generations ago. What makes the children in this current situation different than the Pilgrims? What inherent difference exists between these youth and the Puritans? I read the stories of Pilgrims and Puritans and learn about people who left one land and came to another land in hopes of freedom and opportunity. We need to understand that these Central American and Mexican children possess the same value and worth as the Pilgrims, Puritans, and your own family which immigrated to the shores of America. We all want to be free. We all have the innate desire to become something greater and we take a risk to seize that opportunity.

My third point involves the reality that we are all humans. I must be honest I despise the terms which persons assign to these children. "It's an invasion." "Aliens." "They carry diseases."

"These illegals." "Send them back." Have we become so enamored with our nationalism and citizenship we reduce children made in the image of God to objects, imaginary creatures, and carriers of pathogens? We spring from one father and mother. We are bound to return to the same earth at death and stand before the same God whose image and likeness we are made. What we have here is what Martin Buber terms the "I-It" relationship. When I view you as an object-less than the magnificent human you were made-I will treat and speak about you as an object to be manipulated, denigrated, or discarded. The "I-It" perspective causes a person to view these children as subjects to score political points and commerce for traffickers. Martin Buber suggest another perspective; the "I-Thou" perspective. When we view these children from the perspective of "I-Thou," we sympathize with their plight, we engage with the story of their arrival, and we pursue to love them as we would want to be loved. I am not ignorant of the possibility and reality that unsavory elements have taken advantage of this situation. But can we be completely honest that just as there are unsavory elements seizing advantage of these children; for decades immigrant children and adults have been subject to unsavory activities on the part of citizens and politicians from our own country? I am concerned about the soul of our country if we position ourselves to use children as a commodity for some other outcome; an outcome that does not involve their personal welfare.

I am concerned about the moral soul of our nation as we pursue a course that does not have as guide the higher principles of love, grace, and mercy. We are nation that was forged by the providence of God as men and women immigrated to these eastern shores to flee religious persecution and no longer live in tyranny. While imperfect, the founding fathers had the foresight to declare the absolute truth, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Do we still believe this? Do we believe this extends to all men, women, and children regardless of their country of origin? Is America, still a place where men, women, and children can flee and find new opportunity? Or has the soul of this nation become so corrupt with the triple idols of nationalism, materialism, and relativism we cannot act in a manner that is human? Our soul corrodes at the altar of nationalism when we value boundaries over the life of a human. Our soul becomes callous as we clench our fist around our material goods with full

knowledge that a child is in desperate need. Our soul loses its way at the altar of relativism when we reject a standard that governs us. What will we give for the soul of our nation?

How can I take a stand to support the non-deportation of these children? I ultimately take this stand not because I am American. I love this country. I have fought war for this country and served her honorably. I take this stand on behalf of these children because it is in keeping with the highest principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am a minister of his Gospel and brother of the true King of Heaven and Earth in whose name all men and women shall bow. His Gospel expressly declares that God becomes man and through love demonstrates the highest level of grace and mercy to lawbreakers. His Gospel says to a lawbreaker like you and me, "Come, dine, and eat. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David." His Gospel says to me a foreigner who lived outside his kingdom, "these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." America now is the time to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before your God. America now is the time to keep justice and do righteousness for soon his salvation will be revealed. I take this stand because I look for a day in which we as a people can gather around the multitude of these children and see God turn a child's mourning into joy and give a child gladness for sorrow. I anticipate the objection that I support the breaking of our immigration laws. I respond in two ways. One, our federal government does not seem interested in enforcing its own laws. Second, there is a higher governing law which Jesus follows as he breaks the Sabbath to feed his disciples. I firmly believe this example of considering the welfare of a human honors the higher principle of love for children who God made in his image and likeness. This is the ministry of the Gospel as we demonstrate the higher principle of love not only to children but also to the politicians, coyotes, and human traffickers. Love must extend to those who make a dollar or advance a political agenda on the backs of people. Love which originates from the Gospel must free these men and women from the idolatry of materialism and relativism so that they too may know what it means to be human.

Therefore, I have something to say to my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Please consider that among the multitude of children there is a brother and sister in Christ. Consider your citizenship in heaven greater than your nationalism or political party. Look with those eyes that the Holy Spirit opened to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and prayerfully consider that Jesus walks among these children. And to those in political office. To the men and women who are specifically charged with holding federal office your leadership is needed to honor humanity and honor the principles of this country. Therefore, pursue laws which are equitable and just for all people. In the end, let us be a people that individually and collectively lifts up the cause of humanity for the sake of love, for the cause of justice, and the glory of God.