

**Interview by Lou Dobbs of CNN,
of Fr. Rick Ryscavage, Jesuit priest, Fairfield
University**

Last night on this broadcast we reported on the aggressive new move by the Catholic Church to defeat tough border security legislation. The Catholic Church fears that if this bill passes, priests could be prosecuted for aiding illegal aliens, amongst other things. The Catholic Church is calling upon its members to do all they can to defeat the border security legislation. Joining me tonight to discuss the position of the Catholic Church, one of the leading voices for the church on immigration and illegal immigration. Father Rick Ryscavage is a Jesuit priest of Fairfield University. He's also served as regional head of the Jesuit Relief Service, an organization providing chaplains for immigrants held in detention by the United States.

DOBBS: Father Ryscavage, good to have you with us.

RICK RYSCAVAGE, JESUIT PRIEST: Good evening, Mr. Dobbs.

DOBBS: The idea that the church is openly supportive of illegal immigration, and openly hostile to particularly the Sensenbrenner bill on border security, doesn't that put the church in the exact position of being in politics and risking, in fact its tax-exempt status?

RYSCAVAGE: Well I really think to understand the church's position on migration, you really have to step back historically and realize that the church as an institution predates by about 1,500 years, the establishment of the national sovereign state.

DOBBS: Well, wait a minute, father. I appreciate history lessons, but let me give you one. And that is this country was established to provide freedom of religion and certainly not to allow for the establishment of religion.

And constitutionally and in every code of the federal government, it provides clearly for a tax-exempt status but not political interference on the part of a church.

RYSCAVAGE: Well, I wouldn't call what's going on right now political interference.

DOBBS: You're calling upon your worshipers to defeat legislation, you're supporting illegal immigration, Father.

RYSCAVAGE: The church is primarily a pastoral institution, concerned about the spiritual condition of people, not its citizens, not its citizenship. You know, St. Augustine used to say, "Our citizenship is not in this life. It's all -- you know, we're all migrants pilgrimaging to heaven." And I think the church's perspective is quite unique on this and from that perspective flows a difference perspective on public policy when it comes to illegal immigration.

DOBBS: Well you may have a different perspective, but again the laws

of this land are quite clear. This is not Mexico, this is not Italy, this is not Senegal. This is the United States of America.

RYSCAVAGE: And the church supports the law. The church...

DOBBS: ... Well that's very kind.

RYSCAVAGE: The church has always believed that the government has a right and a duty to protect its borders and to protect its citizens. But it says that that right is not totally absolute. It has to take into consideration the human rights of people, the protection of children, the protection of families. That this has to be part of the public policy mix of any immigration policy.

DOBBS: Father, but what you're saying obfuscates the simple clear fact, the Catholic Church, your bishops in conference supporting the opposition of the Sensenbrenner bill and border security and putting migration -- illegal immigration at the forefront of your concerns in the relationship between Mexico and the United States. It's clear and unequivocal.

RYSCAVAGE: And why is it doing that? It's because the House of Representatives bill is very one dimensional. It isn't a comprehensive solution to the problem of immigration in the United States.

DOBBS: Oh my goodness father, you're also at the same time supporting the McCain/Kennedy legislation. That's a clear, clear statement by your church calling upon your worshipers to support it. That is outright -- I mean, it is no different to me, frankly than Pat Robertson or a radical Islamist holding forth on what shall be secular law.

RYSCAVAGE: I think, Mr. Dobbs, what the church is trying to do is to ensure that whatever legislation passes in the United States, it has protective pieces in it that allows for people to have their human dignity, their human rights and the protection of their life.

DOBBS: In what country, father, do you think that more attention and support and protection for human dignity is practiced than the one in which you and I are talking?

RYSCAVAGE: And that's exactly what church wants to protect, to keep. To keep, not to see it criminalized and to see become more restrictive.

DOBBS: Excuse me father, but isn't it illegal to cross our borders, illegally?

RYSCAVAGE: Of course.

DOBBS: Then why does the Catholic Church support illegal immigration?

RYSCAVAGE: If doesn't support.

DOBBS: Why do you oppose border security?

RYSCAVAGE: It's doesn't oppose illegal immigration. It's calling for a just immigration policy, not opposing illegal immigration. It believes

-- I mean, there has to be enforcement of borders, there's no question about it. But the comprehensive solution has to include humanitarian concerns about people not being sent back to countries for abuse or to protection their children and families.

DOBBS: You also very clearly in several statements from the various immigration arms of the church have laid straightforwardly and clearly, particularly the joint statement between the church and Mexico and the United States, saying the United States was responsible for the deaths of Mexican citizens and Catholic -- members of the Catholic Church.

You put that squarely on the United States. There was not one mention in that statement of the failure of the Mexican government to provide for its people, to attack poverty, to provide security at its border, its corruption, its disgusting performance in human rights. Why is that?

RYSCAVAGE: Well, I think if you looked at the statements...

DOBBS: Oh I did.

RYSCAVAGE: ... of the Mexican bishops and the church in Mexico, you'll find sufficient criticism of the Mexican government. It's not a -- it's isn't a one-sided issue. There's a clear recognition that there's a problem on both sides of the border.

DOBBS: There is a problem to both sides of the border. But my question to you is how does the Catholic Church rationalize its bold outright entry into politics in the United States?

RYSCAVAGE: Well, it's not a new issue for the church. The church has always stood up for the human dignity and the protection of individuals who are migrating. This is an old tradition in the Catholic Church, it goes back into the 19th century in the United States. So this is simply building on a tradition of the church to protect the immigrant that was launched, you know, centuries ago. So I don't see it as any new twist, in a sense, in the church's involvement in politics at all.

DOBBS: Father Ryscavage, we thank you for being here to help us understand the position and whether we agree with it or not, we hope you'll come back to further discuss the issues that will be with us for awhile, it appears.

RYSCAVAGE: Thank you, Mr. Dobbs.