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Christian Perspectives on Immigration.
A forum held Sunday April 22, 2007
University Christian Church, Austin, TX.
Questions and Answers.

Re: Laws to prevent many from coming to USA and staying exist, and are ignored. Guest worker programs or anything like amnesty is rewarding illegal behavior. Response?

Answer: The existing laws are not being ignored by governments or states. The Border Patrol and added elements of the National Guard apprehend and return 900,000 illegal border crossers per year on the southern border. 300,000 do make it successfully. The raids on the Swift meat packing plants closed down entire towns of apparently illegal worker in Cactus, TX in Nov, 2006 and several other locations. Swift itself does cooperate in a program of documentation checks, but many documents presented were stolen identities. There are calls for use of biometrics (photos, finger prints etc) on national identity cards, which may eliminate a lot of fraud. It is true that most illegal aliens apprehended are returned without prosecution because the case load would be overwhelming.

Coming up with a better guest worker program, perhaps with some similarities to those being used in the Middle East, would not be rewarding currently illegal behavior, but regularizing and controlling a needed worker flow. There should always be a clear path towards immigrant status and US citizenship. The fine proposed by President's Bush's initiative, would be a way to punish illegal behavior while rectifying irregularities, and not causing additional hardships and fragmentation of families in the USA. A fine paid off by attachment of wages in manageable payments to the US government would be just, and would not be too different than paying coyotes 2-6,000 dollars just to try to get to the USA.

Many countries have immigration challenges, does your understanding of the ethical outlines of a just immigration policy apply to these (foreign) situations as well? Why? How?

It is always right to strive towards realizing the values God has established, and to establish just, fair, humane and reasonable policies and actions in any country. A Christian and therefore biblically based ethic for dealing with immigrants is applicable globally, though there are elements of the biblical law that were for Israel alone, and which do not apply today for the reason that national governments today are not Hebrew theocracies and the Law, though not the implementation of its values, was superceded by the grace of Jesus Christ who enables believers to live in accordance with the expectations of God. Where supposed theocracies do exist, there are principles in Islam, Bahai, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism that seem to underline a global sense of decency toward all human beings and reflect a dependence on natural law. From a Christian point of view:

All people are valuable, made in the image of God. They should be treated with dignity even when out of desperation they attempt to circumvent laws. Therefore there should be a protective system of advocacy for foreign workers, laws against exploitative use of foreign workers, against violence, domestic and public. Prosecution of abusive employers. Regular and fair payment of workers. Decent and affordable housing. (Gen 1:26-27-2:3; Matt. 6:25-33; Gal.6:10)
The need to earn a living, have enough food and shelter and safety should be respected by everyone in countries with resources and jobs. This means people should be free to cross borders when desperate. This is clearly established in the rules for alien and poor workers in Scripture, and exemplified in the case of Ruth in the Old Testament. Boaz, who allows a foreign

woman, Ruth, to glean in his fields, and offers her protection from his own male workers, safety, respect, water, and shelter is not simply coming on to a nice foreign, but vulnerable female worker, he is acting decently and in accord with national laws. (See also Ex.12:49; Lev 19:9-10; Deut 24:19:22)

National governments are basically a unit of governance that are established by God and in a sense serve him. (Mt 12:17;Romans 13) They are there for the wellbeing of the people, even though some slip into violent or self serving ends. In any case their rule must be respected. The US or any other country has a right and duty to establish policies for the wellbeing of its people. Those policies must be respected by natives and foreigners alike. A nation has a duty and right to establish a reasonable (manageable) rate of flow of foreigners who immigrate or migrate for economic and other reasons.

What immigration policy would Jesus advocate?

It seems the only mandate he gave regarding immigration was that, as his disciples would go into all the world, they would make disciples of all nations! (Matt 28:19-20). He sees all Christians on the move as disciple-makers. I'm sure his mother and father told him stories of finding refuge in Egypt as a baby following the cruel edicts of Herod the Great. He knew what it meant to be a stranger within his own country, gripped by regionalism in which he was disparaged as a Nazarene and Galilean. He said "The son of man does not even have a place to lay his head," (Mt 8:20) so he was a man of the road, he knew about marginalization, as Virgilio Elizondo has written in Galilean Journey, and he ministered from the margins.

So Jesus' policy would reflect solidarity with migrants, understanding, compassion and respect, while he would also urge due respect and honor to governments. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus although they are different persons of the Trinity. When the Spirit works, it is not different than what Jesus would do. The first thing the Holy Spirit did at Pentecost in Acts 2 was to make the blessings of God clear so that people from 14 nations present at that moment could understand. God is interested in all the peoples of the world. He is a global God, and his Spirit is an international spirit. Christ's immigration policy would stress ministry to migrants, and also the responsibility and privilege of Christian migrants to spread the Gospel wherever they find themselves.

Dr. Pocock: There are Christians who hold theological positions similar to your own, but whose immigration policy recommendations would be more restrictive. Though it is not your position, could you tell us how they arrive at theirs? What Biblical warrants are used to support these positions?

Conservative Christians are not a monolithic block with identical beliefs religiously, biblically and socially. They do frequently mirror their conservative religious convictions in their cultural and social values. Many are or have been dependable conservative Republican voters. Their flag issues have been conservative views on homosexuality and abortion. They are not ready to abandon their convictions on those two issues, but have discovered in immigration matters, a solidarity with a wide spread of Americans who feel the country is being overwhelmed by illegal immigration.

Among the more conservative, President Bush's initiatives seem far too broad, unworkable, and do not deal with sufficient severity with those who have broken the law to enter and stay in the United States. It is actually hard to find major Christian spokespeople or organizations that have proclaimed one way or the other on the issue of immigration reform, whether it is Jerry Falwell, James Dobson, the National Association of Evangelicals or major religious bodies. This is probably due to conflictive feelings about immigration in themselves and in their constituencies. One tends to discover conservative Christian values relative to immigration in personal conversations with individual believers and by listening to conservative Christians who are in politics.

Conservative Christians understand that America is a land of immigrants and that all their parents at some point immigrated to this country. They look favorably on the U.S. as a land of opportunity and a magnet to the world's people. Generally they do not seem to realize that we are not the only country to which the world's 191 million immigrants have gone. Thirty five percent of immigrants globally go to Europe. About 23% to the United States.

They fear that currently high levels of both legal and illegal immigration are unmanageable, are changing the fabric of the country and culture and that many newcomers do not truly value America more than as a place to make some money. They feel that illegal immigrants in particular cost more in social services than the contribution they make to the infrastructure of schools, hospitals and other community services from which they draw. Most of these fears are shared by other Americans, regardless of their religious persuasion.

The acknowledged basis of their opinions is a mix of pragmatism and certain biblical values. Conservative Christians hold a mixture of opinions about what to do with illegal aliens that include some or all of the following:

- They are against amnesty for illegal aliens.
- Favor their return to their country of origin.
- Cutting educational services to children of illegal aliens.
- Limiting access to hospital services.
- Reversing the birthright citizenship provision of children born to illegal aliens in this country.

They will usually cite obedience to the law as their basis. They refer to Matthew 12:17 ("Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's") and Romans 13 ("All governments are ordained by God...") as indication that Christians and citizens in general should support the government and its laws. America is a land of laws that should be respected. An illegal alien is by definition operating outside the law so should be denied benefits to citizens. They should be brought into compliance with the law by return to their country and applying under existing immigration law.

Conservative Christians face a good deal of internal tension about the presence of so many foreign-born people, whether legally or illegally present. They hold strongly to biblical values of mercy, hospitality and generosity. They extend a great deal of help to newcomers. Having spoken with a number of ministers and reading accounts of their work, I gather that the majority of conservative Christian churches minister to newcomers without respect to their legal status. They teach English, sponsor refugees, hold after school programs and citizenship classes as well as evangelistic and church establishment ministries. A great many have a congregation, or several, speaking other languages under their roof.

Conservative Christians are likely to view the presence of so many foreign-born people in this country as an indication that God has brought what was previously an overseas mission field to them here in the United States. It is their obligation and privilege to reach out to them in the spirit of Christ's Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). Conservative Christians are not pluralistic. They are not hostile to, and do respect the right of all peoples to choose their faith, but they do believe strongly that the Christian biblical faith in Christ is the only way to God. (John 14:6, Acts 4:12).

What constitutes a real, positive public policy of immigration reform from your perspective?

One that recognizes the reality of the long term residence and positive contribution of nine to twelve million undocumented foreign-born people in this country and seeks to regularize their status and put them on a path towards citizenship if desired, instead of forcing their return to their countries which is unrealistic, unworkable and in many cases, cruel.

One that makes undocumented but otherwise decent people aware that they have broken the law and must pay some monetary and civic penalty which could be paid in manageable installments to the government or community in which they live. Required community service penalty, like working on Habitat for Humanity construction.

One that seeks assimilation without cultural suffocation. This would include required English capability.

An expanded guest worker program that permits workers to serve a variety of employers instead of a single designated employer. (H visas) This permit would allow workers to seek work, instead of having to be matched with an employer prior to entry. A time limit could be established for finding such work, and possession of an adequate amount of money while looking for work. This approach recognizes the reality that much of the work needed is day labor, but day labor leads to regular employment where workers show their value. Guest worker visas would give the right to return home to family and back for work without the necessity of illegal and very dangerous border crossing. A quota system keyed to the condition of the work market should be established.

Establishment and staffing of more consular guest-worker permit offices in primary locations in foreign countries.

Introduction of biometric national identity cards to help eliminate identity theft and fraud. (Doris Meissner and James Ziglar, "Immigration's destructive effects-and how to fix it." Dallas Morning News, 4-18-07, 15A)

Employers required to check certification of workers with national database, possibly one connected to ATMs because of their availability and because ATM's and credit card companies should also move to biometric bank cards. Fine employers who knowingly employ undocumented workers once a more comprehensive system is established.

Strengthen border controls. I do not like walls but they have been shown to reduce crossings in the San Diego area and Mexicali. Walls at strategic high crossing locations may allow better oversight of unfenced areas.

I could endorse the White House proposal for immigration reform, but believe it should incorporate provisions from the SOLVE Act. (Safe, Orderly, Legal Visas and Enforcement Acts) introduced by Democratic Reps. Luis Gutierrez, Bob Menendez and Ted Kennedy, because it addresses family unity and other issues. (See discussion (Navarrette and Waslin. July/August 2004 Issue, "Forum" in Hispanic Magazine _ HYPERLINK "<http://www.hispaniconline.com>" __www.hispaniconline.com_ accessed 4-19-07)

What is the true social and economic impact of legal and illegal immigration? Are we being overwhelmed? What are the problems or dangers posed for people of faith if we base our opinions and actions in regard to immigrants on these concerns rather than religiously based ethics?

We are at a high point in the rate of immigration world-wide and in the USA. Currently the foreign-born population is 35 million, 11.5% of the total population. But there have been higher years. 1880 13.3%, 1900 13.6%, 1930 11.6%. 54% increase between 1990 and 2000. ("United States Immigration," Wikipedia acc. 11.30.06).

Total remittances worldwide of migrants, legal and undocumented estimates were \$232 billion in 2005. In the USA, Buying power of Hispanics alone in 1990 was \$222 billion; 2004, \$686 billion, est. for 2009, \$992 billion. (Juan Torneo "Hispanic Buying Power 1999-2009," Hispanic Trending citing report of Selig Center for Economic Growth, U. of GA. <<http://juantorneo.blogs.com>> Acc. 4-19-07) Of all 35 million foreign-born persons, 11.5 million were undocumented. So two thirds of

foreign-born pay income tax and one third do not. However, all pay sales tax. Lost income tax has been estimated at \$15 billion annually. (Aaron Krowne, "The Illegal Immigration Problem is a Tax Problem," <http://br.endernet.org/akrowne/writings/illegal_immigration/illega...> acc. 4-19-07)

Parkland Hospital in Dallas delivered 15,590 babies in 2005. 70% were to undocumented Hispanic women. Parkland spent \$70.7 million in 2004 with taxpayers covering 40% of the cost. Nevertheless, Parkland administrators say: "Most immigrant parents do have jobs and pay taxes including property and sales taxes. They have a better record for paying their bills than low income Americans." (Sherry Jackson, "Parkland is Brimming with Babies," Dallas Morning News, June 11, 2006)

So yes, legal and illegal immigrants do constitute a burden in many cities, but even those who do not pay income tax are contributing to the system through other taxes. Clearly, bringing undocumented people into the light of legality would also create a stronger tax base among them.

Christian response or attitudes towards legal and illegal immigrants should not be based on pragmatics alone. Whether it is hospitality to strangers, (Rom 12:13) or entertaining those who cannot repay us, (Luke 14:12-14) doing good to all men (Gal 6:10) or considering all people equally no matter their culture or ethnicity (Col.3:10-11), the Bible speaks to our attitude toward those of other races and cultures. The pastor of the Farmer's Branch Church of Christ where Tim O'Hare is member said: "I try to ask myself what God would do?" We should be very careful not to simply go with the conventional wisdom of people around us, nor economic and certainly not racist thinking. We really should love our neighbor as ourselves, not intellectualizing nor spiritualizing, but in concrete expression to who ever is in our community, on whatever basis.

7. What do you see as the basic human rights endowed by God, and how does this factor into your opinions? (Regarding immigration)

The right to be considered fully and equally human, worthy of respect and care because we are made in the image of God. (Gen 1:26, Ps.139)

The right to live without fear of violence. (Gen. 9:6, Rom.12:18)

The right to free movement. (Gen 1:28ff. Acts 17: 26-28)

The right to sufficient food, shelter and clothing. (Gen 1:28ff Matt 6:25-33)

The right or obligation to seek and experience the shalom of God, which is integral well-being, basic prosperity and the salvation which only God himself can provide. (Jer. 29:7, I Tim 2:2)

This means I will treat others as I hope for them to treat me, that I will always treat people, no matter how humble or wretched, nasty or nice with respect. I will respect the yearning of others to live in peace, have enough to feed their families, live where they sense they have a future and enjoy the years God gives them. I will avoid harshness in word or deed toward those who are not like me, and I will seek to show everyone, including newcomers to this land, that real peace and the abundant life is only truly found in Jesus Christ.

The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church states: (Part Three, Sec. Two, Ch. Two, Article V, Para. 2241):

"The more prosperous nations are obligated, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his own country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him." How do you react to that interpretation of our duties as Christians?

I believe this is a statement and aspiration that reflects biblical values, including the obligation of governments to look to the wellbeing of their people and those they are in a position to help. I appreciate the efforts the Catholic Church has made to care for the well-being of migrants. They established the Pontifical Council for the Care of Migrant and Itinerant People. I

wonder when a Protestant parallel will be established. The Church World Service is somewhat like it. At this point, I have not seen the National Association of Evangelicals deal with this matter, but the World Evangelical Alliance does have a commission on Refugees. I would like to see metropolitan area councils formed across America to help work out the best interests of both immigrants and native born people.