

THE BAPTIST RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS OF
UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRATION

by

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M.Div., Mercer University, December 2010; B.A. Spanish, Shorter College, *summa cum
laude*, May 2007

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty
of McAfee School of Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF DIVINITY

ATLANTA, GA

2010

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This thesis is dedicated to those twelve million immigrants still living in the shadows who by their nature as human beings deserve our love and solidarity. My prayer is that every one of them might see the love of God in their Baptist brothers and sisters as we seek to serve and minister to them through our teachings and advocacy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my parents, Rick and Brenda Grammer, who have nurtured my faith all my life; my boss and favorite immigration attorney, Robert C. Divine, for all his knowledge and feedback in this process; and my best friend and editor, Heather Gentry, for her consistent help and support in all of my seminary writing endeavors. I give glory to God for a wonderful group of family and friends who have encouraged me as I have grown, most especially those directly involved in my writing and my transition to ministry: from Shorter College: Dr. Carmen Acevedo Butcher and Dr. Robert Wallace; from McAfee School of Theology: Dr. David P. Gushee, Dr. Nancy deClaisse-Walford, and Dr. Larry L. McSwain. Your inspiration has led me to embrace my calling in ways I never thought possible. It is because of you that I submit this thesis and because of you that I have the profound opportunity to continue my journey as a minister and writer.

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The Baptist Response to the Crisis of Undocumented Immigration
(Under the direction of DR. DAVID P. GUSHEE)

With the fierce political debate continuing over undocumented immigration to the United States, what should be the Baptist church's response in terms of its moral teachings, compassion ministries, and policy advocacy?

This thesis explores the current realities of undocumented immigration in the United States, the ethical resources available from the Christian faith to address these realities, the past and current responses of the Roman Catholic Church as well as Baptist denominations, and finally, what Baptists can and should be doing to address the issue in local ministries and advocacy.

A deeper understanding of both the history and intricacies of undocumented immigration and the Bible is needed to fully address the profoundly complex issues surrounding undocumented immigration in the United States, and while some limitations will remain in place for this study, it does allow for further in-depth analysis of the current reality and potential of Baptists to adequately respond in their local frameworks. As Baptist denominations and churches lag behind the more organized Roman Catholic Church in their responses to the issue of undocumented immigration, this study hopes to offer alternative solutions that Baptist individuals, churches, and denominations can use as a guideline for their cooperative approaches to the issue on a personal, local, and national level. By using the Bible as the foremost reference, rather than culture, the Baptist churches in America can

re-focus their energy on a fundamental Christ- and Kingdom-centered ethic governing how they approach the policy issue and the issues facing undocumented immigrant peoples. Millions of undocumented immigrants are here in this country, and their future depends on the resolution of this issue. Baptists thus face a major human issue that they ought to be prepared to understand and respond to accordingly.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem and Sub-Problems

The issue of undocumented immigration cannot be described as either a *problem* or a *possibility* in the current political climate – it simply is a *reality*, and how Baptist churches respond to it relies heavily on each member’s understanding of the current social reality of undocumented immigration, the biblical witness, and the historical and current church responses to the issue. This study will review the possibilities open to Baptists as well as offer some avenues of understanding to allow believers to use their faith to influence their political choices, thereby advocating both in teachings and in action the importance of their faith in their social arenas. A deeper understanding of both immigration and the Bible is needed to fully address this situation, and while some limitations will remain in place for this study, it will allow for further in-depth analysis of the current reality and potential related to the Baptist response to undocumented immigration in the United States today.

This thesis will seek to address this problem: With the fierce political debate continuing over undocumented immigration to the United States, what should be the Baptist church’s response in terms of its moral teachings, compassion ministries, and

policy advocacy? In order to fully address this question, the thesis will be divided further into sub-problems:

1. What is the current reality concerning undocumented immigration in the United States?
2. What ethical resources can be brought to bear from the Christian faith to deal with the issue of immigration?
3. How are Baptist denominations and other Christian churches in America responding to the ongoing immigration problems in the United States?
4. What should be Baptists' response to undocumented immigration in the United States in terms of their moral teachings, compassion ministries, and policy advocacy?

Limits

The purpose of this study is to address the issue of *undocumented* U.S. immigration; therefore, it will not be directly concerned with *legal* or *documented* U.S. immigration, and it will only deal with immigration in the United States and will not include any other countries. It will also be limited only to immigrants and not to temporary nonimmigrants.¹ The study will be limited by excluding the issue of the refugee policy of the United States, opting instead to focus specifically on undocumented migration and undocumented immigrants currently residing in the United States.² In order to limit the scope further, the study will only cover issues surrounding *current*

¹ See "Definition of Terms" section for a more complete explanation of "immigrant" versus "nonimmigrant."

² See "Definition of Terms" section for the complete explanation of "undocumented" versus "illegal."

undocumented immigration, including the years 1986 – present time.³ And, because of the breadth of the information available concerning undocumented U.S. immigration statistics, this study will only use statistical data from government-sanctioned and generally recognized reputable and relatively impartial sources, including Pew Hispanic Center,⁴ the Department of Homeland Security, and the Immigration Policy Center.⁵ This information will include the numbers of undocumented immigrants located within the United States from 1986 – present and their countries of origin, their employment pathways, as well as state and national responses to undocumented immigration.

³ The year 1986 was chosen because one of the first major immigration reform bills dealing with the unauthorized population of immigrants was passed that year. See it here: *Immigration Reform and Control Act*, online: <https://www.-oig-.lsc.gov/legis/irca86.htm>, (accessed 7 December 2008).

⁴ “Founded in 2001, the Pew Hispanic Center is a nonpartisan research organization that seeks to improve understanding of the U.S. Hispanic population and to chronicle Latinos' growing impact on the nation. The Center does not take positions on policy issues. It is a project of the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" in Washington, DC that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. It is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, a public charity based in Philadelphia,” online: <http://pewhispanic.org/about/>, (accessed 1 January 2010).

⁵ “The Immigration Policy Center (IPC) is the research arm of the American Immigration Council (AIC). IPC was established in 2003 with the mission to provide policymakers, academics, the media, and the general public with access to accurate information about the effects of immigration on the U.S. economy and society. The IPC attracts nationally recognized scholars as research fellows and guest authors, and publishes timely reports on the role of immigrants and immigration policy. Together, the IPC director, fellows, and staff have been a major voice in the national debate on immigration. They have testified before Congress and regularly serve as experts on immigration law and policy issues for members of the media.” AIC is the political arm of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) and does tend to promote pro-immigration solutions; however, despite its slight bias, it is recognizably more responsible in its research than many of its counterparts, online: <http://immigrationpolicy.org/index.php?content=about> (accessed 1 January 2010).

This study will also explore only certain relevant biblical material.⁶ The first of this material is found in the Old Testament and includes the themes of human dignity as found in Genesis 1, the stories of the patriarchs and their migration in Genesis, the story of the immigrant Ruth, and the experience of the Hebrews in Egypt as recounted in Exodus. The study will further examine the Hebrew law concerning the “sojourner,” more specifically discussing the Hebrew terminology for the sojourner, including the nouns *gēr* and *tôšab* and the adjectives *nokrî* and *zār*.⁷ Additionally, this study will explore the tensions in the Old Testament texts concerning outsiders and foreigners in relation to the nation of Israel.

The second part of the biblical material will come from the New Testament, focusing on the works of Jesus, especially in regard to Jesus’ interaction with and teachings about the Samaritans and other “outsiders,” as found in the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, and the use of outsiders in Jesus’ teachings, such as the parable of the compassionate Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 and Jesus’ hospitality to outsiders in Luke 14 and Luke 19. In addition, the study will discuss the

⁶ This study is a study in Christian Social Ethics and will not be an in-depth exegesis of each biblical reference. Instead, the work will draw relevance from each brief biblical story to apply to the study. As stated by Ron Sider in “Toward An Evangelical Political Philosophy,” in *Christians and Politics Beyond the Culture Wars: An Agenda for Engagement* (ed. David P. Gushee), “To develop a normative biblical framework, we must in principle examine all relevant biblical passages, understand each text according to proper principles of exegesis, and then formulate a comprehensive summary of all relevant canonical material.” Gushee, David P., ed., *Christians and Politics Beyond the Culture Wars: An Agenda for Engagement* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 83.

⁷ This Hebrew word study and Old Testament study will rely foundationally, though not entirely, on the study conducted by M. Daniel Carroll R. in his book, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, 63-112.

early church's views on "welcoming the stranger" and the idea of "heavenly citizenship" for Christians, as described in 1 Peter. Lastly, the study will discuss Romans 13, often described as the "rule of law" passage.⁸

The study will focus primarily on the response to undocumented immigration to the United States as offered by the Roman Catholic Church at the international, national, and local levels, beginning with the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican (1962-1965). The Roman Catholic theological and cultural responses are the most comprehensive of any Christian denomination. This study will specifically explore Catholic Social Teaching concerning immigration as well as the documents, statements and books issued by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and their subsequent campaign for immigration reform, *Justice for Immigrants*,⁹ primarily relying on the principles put forth in the jointly issued pastoral letter "Strangers No Longer: Together on a Journey of Hope"¹⁰ created with the help of the Mexican Catholic Bishops. In addition, this study will limit further Roman Catholic responses to the other groups involved with

⁸ The New Testament study will foundationally, though not entirely, rely on the study conducted by M. Daniel Carroll R. in his book, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, 113-34.

⁹ Documents and statements available at: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, online: <http://www.usccb.org/mrs>, (accessed 7 December 2008). The "Justice for Immigrants" campaign has a website at: "Justice for Immigrants: The Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform," United States Council for Catholic Bishops, online: <http://justiceforimmigrants.org/>, (accessed 7 December 2008).

¹⁰ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, "Strangers No Longer: Together on a Journey of Hope: A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003).

the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' campaign *Justice For Immigrants*, most specifically the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, INC. (CLINIC).¹¹

Secondarily, the study will explore various Baptist responses in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including the Baptist General Convention of Texas' ISAAC project,¹² the teachings and policy advocacy of the American Baptist Churches (ABC), most especially the ABC policy settlement against the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in 1990,¹³ and other Baptist statements with little or no comprehensive action, such as Southern Baptist Convention resolutions on the issue.¹⁴

¹¹ "CLINIC History," *Catholic Legal Immigration Network, INC*, online: <http://www.cliniclegal.org/clinic-history> (accessed 29 March 2009).

¹² "The Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) and Buckner Children and Family Services, Inc. have collaborated to create the Immigration Service and Aid Center (ISAAC). It is a nationwide effort to establish a network of local church-based immigration ministries. ISAAC will help local churches and other like-minded organizations set up a federally "recognized" immigration ministry centers which will then be allowed to legally provide immigration assistance. ISAAC also empowers churches to set up ESL/Citizenship Classes and other ministries to serve the 'Strangers in our Land.'" For more information on this project, see: Immigration Service and Aid Center, Buckner Children and Family Services, Inc. and the Baptist General Convention of Texas, online: <http://www.isaacproject.org/>, (accessed 7 December 2008).

¹³ Information available on the ABC settlement at: "American Baptist Churches v. Thornburgh (ABC) Settlement Agreement," United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, online: <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f6-14176543f6d1a/?vgnnextoid=86d796981298d010VgnVCM10000048f3d6a1RCRD&vgnextchannel=828807b03d92b010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD>, (accessed 7 December 2008).

¹⁴ "On the Crisis of Illegal Immigration," SBC Resolutions, Southern Baptist Convention, online: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1157>, (accessed 7 December 2008).

Assumptions

Several assumptions form the foundation of this research. Foremost, it is assumed that Christians have a responsibility to address major contemporary social problems and to do so as effectively and faithfully as possible. It is also assumed that the proper church response contains three steps of review and change:

1. What the church should think – its theology and teachings
2. What the church should do in its everyday life – its incarnation
3. What the church should advocate – its articulation of a public witness to state and culture

Also assumed is that the data found at the Pew Hispanic Center, Department of Homeland Security, and the Immigration Policy Center is as reliable and objective as can be found for this subject.¹⁵ Lastly, the study assumes that the biblical material reflects a different cultural context and that it is difficult, but not impossible, to draw meaning from the biblical laws to be relevant to today's society, understanding that there is no direct one to one correspondence.

Importance of Study

The issue of undocumented immigration in the United States is one of the most important policy issues of the first part of the twenty-first century and one of the most hotly debated on Capitol Hill and in the media. The problem is that too often, “the discussions default to the passionate ideological arguments, economic wrangling, or

¹⁵ Though the study recognizes IPC's pro-immigrant slant, this group provides for the immigrants as people and proposes practical solutions rather than spouting demeaning rhetoric about immigrants and their presence in the United States. See the Center for Immigration Studies for competing, anti-immigration viewpoints: *Center for Immigration Studies*, online: <http://www.cis.org/> (accessed 19 October 2010).

racial sentiments that dominate national discourse”¹⁶ rather than focusing on what the Bible teaches Christians about the underlying principles governing what Christians should say and do in regard to immigrants. Because this issue will most likely be taken up again by Congress in the months to come, the exploration of this issue for Christians matters even more as their elected officials make critical decisions about immigration on their behalf. As one scholar puts it,

Almost everyone agrees that immigration historically has been a positive ingredient in the shaping of the United States. A major part of this country’s identity is its immigrant character...Some came for religious freedom, others for political freedom, while still others, very likely the largest number, came to escape economic hardship or stifling social constraints to seek out a better life. The Statue of Liberty continues to function as one of the most powerful symbols of the distinctive meaning of this nation. Members of this country like to think of ourselves as a people who welcome the persecuted and downtrodden of other lands... [But] Immigration often evokes negative feelings and impressions as well...Christian involvement in the struggle over migration policy should not simply be that of another partisan voice on one side or another. We should also be contributors to the dynamic task of shaping the public moral ethos that undergirds and informs policy enactments.¹⁷

The issue is also important for Christians not only because of its political significance, but because it is an issue that tests the capacity of Christians to resist ideologies that undermine a Kingdom ethic¹⁸ – xenophobia, racism, and greed. If

¹⁶ Carroll R., *Christians at the Border*, 18.

¹⁷ Dana W. Wilbanks, *Re-Creating America: The Ethics of U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy in a Christian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 13-18.

¹⁸ A “Kingdom Ethic” is based upon the assumption that God’s reign has been inaugurated in Jesus Christ, and that its ultimate consummation remains a future event, and as such, Christians are to participate fully in the present reign of God by keeping the “seven marks of the kingdom” described by Christ in reference to the book of Isaiah when speaking about the “Kingdom of God.” These seven marks include: Deliverance (Salvation), Righteousness/justice, Peace, Joy, God’s Presence as Spirit or Light,

Christians look to the Bible as their guide on moral decision-making, then they must look beyond the cultural and political significance of the issue and present a Christ-centered ethic that upholds the actions of Jesus Christ in his earthly ministry, as portrayed in the New Testament, and of God and God's people, as portrayed in the Old Testament.

As the debates grow on talk radio and other political media, Christians are bombarded with messages about economic fears. These fears, while somewhat warranted politically, may not be fundamental for a Christian response to undocumented immigration. The question then becomes – are Christians more “American” or more Christian? This study seeks to help Baptist individuals, churches, and denominations see themselves first as citizens in the Kingdom of God, then as citizens of the United States of America. Baptists, along with other Christian denominations and churches, need to find out to what extent national borders matter in a Kingdom perspective, and to do so, must separate loyalty to law and nation from loyalty to God's Kingdom while performing their duties as citizens of both:

We cannot deny the fact that the immigration issue has the potential of either polarizing our society or enriching our narrative. [The] hope is for the latter. A hope that the spirit of compassion, love, and tolerance stemming from the Judeo-Christian ethos and embedded in our collective narrative will once again prevail and embrace righteousness and justice for all. A hope that the Christian community will rise up, speak vociferously from the pulpit of reconciliation to all corridors of our society, and demand an end to extreme ideologies from all sides of this debate.¹⁹

Healing, and Return from Exile. For more information, see: Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Samuel Rodriguez, “Foreword,” in *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* by M. Daniel Carroll R. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2008), 11.

As Baptist denominations and churches lag behind the more organized Roman Catholic Church in their responses to the issue of undocumented immigration, this study hopes to offer alternative solutions that Baptist individuals, churches, and denominations can use as a guideline for their cooperative approaches to the issue on a personal, local, and national level. By using the Bible as the foremost reference, rather than culture, the Baptist churches in America can re-focus their energy to a fundamental Christ- and Kingdom-centered ethic governing how they approach the policy issue and the issues facing undocumented immigrant peoples. Millions of undocumented immigrants are here in this country, and their future depends on the resolution of this issue. Baptists thus face a major human issue that they ought to be prepared to understand and respond to accordingly.

Methodology

This thesis is a study in Christian Social Ethics. Christian Social Ethics attempts to bring Christian moral norms to bear on urgent contemporary problems. Most works in Christian Social Ethics employ a version of the following methodology:

1. *Identification of a significant moral problem:* In this study, recognizing the need for a Christian Social-Ethical study about undocumented immigration in the United States.
2. *Framing of that problem in terms of a moral dilemma requiring ethical analysis:* In this study, developing a question of how the Baptist Church should respond to the problem raised by undocumented immigration (problem).
3. *Gathering of relevant empirical data related to the issue:* In this study, depicting the current reality of undocumented immigration (sub-problem 1).
4. *Exploration of the resources available to address this problem in scripture, Christian tradition and experience, and contemporary Christian moral analysis:*

In this study, gathering useful biblical and church history resources to review the historical church's response to the alien/outsider/immigrant (sub-problems 2-4).

5. *Construction of some normative proposal for what Christian people in a particular community or denomination should think, say, and do about this issue:* In this study, devising a Baptist response to the issue based on the data gathered (sub-problem 5).

In this thesis, the identification of the significant moral problem is determined by the ongoing national debate over undocumented U.S. immigration in the present time in the media and in Congress. The framing of the problem as a moral dilemma that requires ethical analysis has been done many times over by various Christian and non-Christian writers seeking a moral answer to the problem of undocumented U.S. immigration.²⁰ This study will seek to gather the relevant empirical data related to undocumented U.S. immigration, explore the Christian and biblical traditions, and construct a normative proposal for what Baptist Christians in America should think, say, and do about the issue.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this thesis, certain terms must be defined as follows:

“Immigrants” are those people who have left their home country to enter the United States seeking permanent residence. They may either enter through a recognized port of entry or enter without inspection (i.e., they “sneak in” through other non-patrolled entry points in the U.S. border). For the purposes of this thesis, all those undocumented immigrants will have entered either with or without inspection, and either have never been granted status or have overstayed their current status (as in the case of a person granted a visitor visa who has overstayed the time granted for their visa). This term

²⁰ See extensive bibliography for further resources to substantiate this claim.

implicitly excludes any person with nonimmigrant, or temporary, status. “Nonimmigrant” will be defined as those workers, students, or visitors who come to the United States seeking short-term, or temporary, stay.

In addition, the terminology used to describe these immigrants who are in the country without legal status shall be “undocumented immigrants” rather than the widely used “illegal aliens,” as the latter can denote that the people themselves are criminals (which often is not the case) rather than denoting simply that they lack proper documentation. Describing immigrants as “illegal aliens” criminalizes the persons themselves as if they committed egregious crimes, but most immigrants would gladly regularize their status but do not have the avenues to do so.²¹ Instead of labeling them as criminals, this study recognizes that they only lack proper documentation required by the government for work and residence.²² As the term “alien” can evoke feelings of xenophobia that are not supportive of the biblical perspective presented, the term “immigrant” will replace it and serve as a more objective and more definitive description of these people living in the United States with long-term aspirations to stay, but not

²¹ Carroll R., *Christians at the Border*, 22.

²² The study does recognize that because undocumented immigrants are here in violation of current U.S. law and are subject to removal by law enforcement (Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE), and in a few cases can be prosecuted criminally for it, their actions are arguably “illegal.” However, this study will refrain from labeling any human being as “illegal” no matter their actions. Just as a convicted criminal is not “illegal,” neither shall persons living unlawfully in the United States be dubbed “illegal.” Additionally, the truly “criminal” alien references are for aliens who have violated other U.S. laws besides immigration laws and therefore have a more serious basis for their removal (and inadmissibility – or not having legal allowance for entry).

currently having proper documentation.²³ And, the term “Baptist” will denote all those congregations, associational groups, and denominations that self-identify as Baptist.

While the term “Baptist” draws many meanings for many different people, the general principal governing what constitutes a Baptist is that Baptists are:

1. Members of the whole Christian family who stress the experience of personal salvation through faith in Jesus, symbolized both in baptism and the Lord’s Supper
2. Those believers who under the Lordship of Jesus Christ have bonded together in free local congregations, together seeking to obey Christ in faith and in life
3. Those believers who follow the authority of Scriptures in all matters of faith and practice
4. Those believers who have claimed religious liberty for themselves and all people
5. Those believers who take seriously for the whole membership the claim of the Great Commission to take the message of the Gospel to the whole world.²⁴

Outline

I. Introduction

A. Statement of Problem

1. Problem
2. Sub-Problems

B. Limits of the Problem and Basic Assumptions

C. Importance of the Study

²³ The study does recognize that current U.S. immigration laws do use the term “alien” in its strictest sense: a person from a foreign country; thus, using this term is not incorrect nor is it wrong. This study chooses to describe these undocumented immigrants as specifically as possible – as migrants seeking permanent residence but lacking proper documentation or status.

²⁴ Commission on Baptist Heritage of the Baptist World Alliance, “Towards a Baptist Identity,” (July 1989), quoted in *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 1993), 66.

- D. Methodology
- E. Definition of Terms
- F. Outline

II. Description of the Current Reality of Undocumented U.S. Immigration and the Christian and Baptist Responses to It

- A. Statistical Analysis of Data Concerning Undocumented Immigrants in the U.S. from 1986 – Present
 1. Current Undocumented Realities of Immigration in the United States
 2. The Legal History and Realities of Immigration in the United States
 3. Breaking Down the Current Problems with the System

III. Biblical Resources for Understanding the Appropriate Christian Response to Undocumented Immigration

- A. Old Testament Resources
 1. Image of God – Genesis 1
 2. The stories of patriarchs, matriarchs, and other immigrants
 3. Hebrew law concerning the “sojourner,” more specifically discussing the Hebrew terminology for the sojourner, including:
 - a. the nouns *gēr* and *tôšab*
 - b. the adjectives *nokrî* and *zār*
 4. Further issues concerning the foreigner or outsider in the Old Testament
- B. New Testament Resources
 1. The works and life of Jesus Christ, especially in regard to the Samaritans and “outsiders”
 2. The early church’s views of “welcoming the stranger” in 1 Peter and Hebrews
 3. The passage in Romans 13, often described as the “rule of law” passage

IV. Historical and Current Church Responses to the Realities

- A. Roman Catholic Church’s Historical Approaches to the Issue of Undocumented Immigration in the United States
 1. Catholic Social Teaching Concerning the Issue of Immigration
 2. U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Documents, Statements, and Campaigns
- B. The Baptist Church’s Historical Responses to the Issue of Undocumented Immigration in the United States
 1. Texas Baptist Initiatives, Including ISSAC
 2. American Baptist Actions, Including ABC Policy Settlement Against the Former Immigration and Naturalization Service

3. Other Baptist Statements, such as Southern Baptist Convention Resolutions on the issue with no direct action

V. Description of the Baptist church's proposed response to undocumented immigration in the United States in terms of its moral teachings, compassion ministries, and policy advocacy

- A. What the Church Should Teach about Undocumented Immigration and Undocumented Immigrants
- B. How the Church Should Act Toward Immigrants and Their Families
- C. What Baptist Christians Should Advocate For in the Public Sphere

VI. Conclusion

VII. Bibliography

CHAPTER 2
THE CURRENT REALITY OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRATION IN THE
UNITED STATES

Undocumented Immigrants in the United States

Since it is clear that U.S. citizens will once again have to consider legislation related to undocumented immigration,¹ Christians are seeking more information about who these undocumented people really are, where they come from, and how they help, hurt, or drain us when they get here. Americans consistently gather information related to this topic through the news networks and other television programming, which often can lead, unfortunately, to misinformation and enflamed passion from the under-informed. For instance, former CNN talk show host Lou Dobbs made his name in blaming immigrants for much of the United States' economic woes. In his opinion, the U.S. population is being degraded as more "illegals" cross the border, bring disease and crime, and force Americans out of their jobs. The problem with much of his editorializing (and that of many others) is that it is fictional and does not allow the American public much room to contemplate the facts regarding undocumented immigration. He made appalling statements about immigrants that simply were not true and encouraged the public to dehumanize all immigrants, regardless of their story. One such report he made in April

¹ Julia Preston, "Obama to Push Immigration Bill as One Priority," *New York Times*, online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/09/us/politics/09immig.html?hp> (accessed 29 March 2009).

2005 claimed that illegal aliens caused over 7,000 cases of leprosy in the past three years, when in fact the U.S. government reported that there had been only 137 reported cases the previous year, and the 7,000 figure was for the last *thirty* years, peaking in 1983.² In light of so much false reporting in the last few years, American Christians must look beyond the editorializing and into the facts surrounding undocumented immigration in the United States today.

The contemporary immigration debate begins with finding information about those people in the center of most of the controversy – the undocumented immigrants living within U.S. borders. While any accounting of the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States is only an estimate, Pew Hispanic Center has used a method of gathering the number of foreign-born and subtracting those with legal and trackable statuses in order to decide on a general number of individuals present without status. According to Pew, 11.9 million unauthorized immigrants were in the United States in March 2008, which represents 4% of the total U.S. population. Pew estimates that from 2005 to 2008 the population of undocumented immigrants grew more slowly than earlier in the decade, and the inflow of immigrants who are undocumented fell below that of new Lawful Permanent Residents. Further, they estimate that between 2000 and 2004, the inflow of undocumented immigrants averaged 800,000 per annum, while from 2005 to 2008 the inflow per annum fell to 500,000. The inflow of legal immigrants, in contrast, stayed steady during this period. While growth may have slowed

² David Leonhardt, “Truth, Fiction and Lou Dobbs,” *New York Times*, online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/30/business/30leonhardt.html?pagewanted=2> (accessed 29 March 2009).

in the past few years, the population of unauthorized immigrants has increased since 2000 by more than 40% (it was 8.4 million at the turn of the century).³

The Department of Homeland Security concurs with this data, claiming 11.8 million undocumented immigrants were present as of January 2007. Its data, sometimes relying on the calculations of groups such as Pew, spans the last two decades and notes that 35% (4.2 million) of the undocumented immigrants as of 2007 entered the United States since January 1, 2000. As of 2007, 8% (890,000) came in 2005–2006, while 28% (3.3 million) came between 2000 and 2004. Its data indicates that 45% of undocumented immigrants as of 2007 came to the United States during the 1990s, and 19% entered during the 1980s. The majority of these undocumented immigrants came from North and Central American countries, the highest population from Mexico. They estimate that the undocumented immigrants from Mexico increased from 4.7 million in 2000 to 7 million in January 2007. The other countries with high rates of unauthorized immigration were El Salvador (540,000), Guatemala (500,000), the Philippines (290,000), and China (290,000). The top ten countries of origin represented 82% of the undocumented population in 2007, and although Mexico continues to lead in undocumented entries or “overstays,” the greatest percentage increases from 2000–2007 were from other countries, including Brazil (89% increase), India (81% increase), Guatemala (74% increase), and Honduras (70% increase).⁴

³ Jeffery Passel and D’Vera Cohn, “Trends in Unauthorized Immigration: Undocumented Inflow Now Trails Legal Inflow,” *Pew Hispanic Center*, online: <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/94.pdf>. (accessed 29 March 2009).

⁴ Michael Hoeffler, Nancy Rytina, and Bryan C. Baker, “Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2007,” *Department of Homeland Security*, online:

It is important to remember, however, that most people of foreign birth in the United States have legal status. Of the approximately thirty-seven million foreign-born people living in the United States based on evidence from 2007, about 35% have already naturalized and become citizens and 33% are Lawful Permanent Residents. That means that seven out of ten foreign-born individuals in the United States have legal status, and only three out of ten have no legal status, having either entered without inspection or overstayed their temporary visas.⁵ Many “legal” immigrants came to the United States to work, having been drawn away from their home countries in search of better wages or work conditions. Some are skilled laborers and sponsored by their companies for work, while others provide unskilled manual labor under special categories of temporary visas that allow for seasonal work in areas like agriculture. Still other immigrants have come to the United States to unite with family members already here.

According to Dana W. Wilbanks in his book *Re-Creating America*, the most influential view about why immigrants come to the United States is the “push-pull” theory. The “push factors” in the home country are circumstances that make individuals want to leave the country. The “pull factors” from within the United States are ways in which the United States lures migrants, which can include tangible necessities, such as better jobs and wages, or intangible desires, such as better general opportunities. He also states that other forces may be at work besides simple push-pull factors, such as the

http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_ill_pe_2007.pdf (accessed 29 March 2009).

⁵ Jeffery S. Passel. “Growing Share of Immigrants Choosing Naturalization,” *Pew Hispanic Center*, online: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/73.pdf> (accessed 29 March 2009).

dynamics of the global economic systems which move labor across borders, as well as established trade of labor between neighboring countries.⁶

Despite the reasons these undocumented immigrants come, many Americans still struggle with how their presence is affecting the U.S. economy, public welfare, and taxes. Many assume that undocumented immigrants are draining the U.S. economy and costing billions to maintain, largely due to the voices of commentators like Lou Dobbs and more militant immigration opponent groups such as the Minutemen Project. This group, based in California, wants the immediate forced removal of all “illegals” as well as stricter border enforcement (often resorting to their own patrol of the border). They say that with undocumented immigrants living on social welfare and working under the table, many are costing taxpayers more money than the average middle-class citizen family.⁷ Still other groups, such as the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), which was named to sound like an immigration-neutral think tank, are in fact distributing anti-immigrant propaganda, systematically working to increase restrictions on foreigners and to limit immigration reform. Closely allied with the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR),⁸ this specific group provides “facts” concerning foreigners and aims to demonize their presence in the United States.⁹

⁶ Dana W. Wilbanks, *Re-Creating America: The Ethics of U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy from a Christian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 68.

⁷ David Storobin, “Exclusive Interview: Jim Gilchrist of Minuteman Project on Immigration, Terror, Elections,” *Globa Politician*, online: <http://www.globalpolitician.com/22904-immigration> (accessed 29 March 2009).

⁸ FAIR is a self-proclaimed, “nonprofit, public-interest, membership organization of concerned citizens who share a common belief that our nation's immigration policies must be reformed to serve the national interest. FAIR seeks to improve border security, to stop illegal immigration, and to promote immigration levels consistent with the national

When the numbers are evaluated, however, the picture changes. For example, a new law in 1986 made employers legally liable for hiring undocumented immigrants, so many undocumented immigrants have since resorted to using fake IDs, including fake social security numbers, to gain employment. Employers thus have hired the workers under the impression that the worker had legal status. When the Social Security Administration (SSA) began to see in the 1980s that these numbers were not matching the bearer's name (or were simply fake), they held off fully investigating the matter and began receiving a surplus of money from these “no match” social security numbers.¹⁰ Over \$189 billion worth of wages was recorded in this SSA fund in the 1990s. The file is now growing, on average, “by more than \$50 billion a year, generating \$6 billion to \$7 billion in Social Security tax revenue and about \$1.5 billion in Medicare taxes.”¹¹ While

interest—more traditional rates of about 300,000 a year,” FAIR, online: <http://www.fairus.org/site/PageNavigator/about/> (accessed 4 April 2010).

⁹ Bruce and Judy Hake, “What the Bible Really Says about Immigration Policy: An Analysis of ‘A Biblical Perspective on Immigration Policy’ and ‘And You Welcomed Me: Immigration and Catholic Social Teaching,’” *Bender’s Immigration Bulletin*, online: <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/perspectives/what-bible-really-says-about-immigration> (accessed 5 January 2010).

¹⁰ The SSA began sending “no match” letters to employers in 1994 when a social security number produced a “no match.” Largely employers ignored these violations. In September 2007, the Department of Homeland Security proposed its safe harbor rule that required the SSA to insert a letter from ICE with the “no match” letter to the employer. This letter warned the employer not to ignore the “no match” designations because they could be fined heavily. President Obama has now pulled that rule and the SSA has not resumed sending “no match” letters. See this explanatory article for more detail on the history of “no match” letters and the SSA: “Social Security ‘No-Match’ Letters: A Primer,” *Migration Policy Institute*, online: http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/BR5_SocialSecurityNoMatch_101007.pdf (accessed 10 October 2010).

¹¹ Eduardo Porter, “Illegal Immigrants Are Bolstering Social Security With Billions,” *New York Times*, online:

the SSA cannot definitively say that all of the money from the “no match” numbers is from undocumented immigrants, they suspect a large percentage is. The SSA’s chief actuary says that the administration thinks that about three-fourths of undocumented immigrants pay payroll taxes using false or fake social security numbers.¹² In addition to payroll taxes, all undocumented immigrants also pay sales tax when they shop and pay property taxes (either directly as homeowners or as part of their monthly rent payment), consistently adding to the U.S. economy’s growth.¹³

Undocumented immigrants may actually help with the deficit of money in government agencies because they are ineligible for most government benefits. Undocumented immigrants cannot legally obtain Temporary Aid for Needy Family (TANF), or welfare, cannot collect food stamps or live in public housing, have no disability benefits, and cannot get Medicare or Medicaid. In some states, the only public aid an undocumented immigrant *might* be eligible for is “emergency and prenatal healthcare, immunizations and treatment for communicable diseases, certain nutritional programs aimed primarily at children, and noncash emergency disaster relief (such as in the wake of Hurricane Katrina).”¹⁴ Children of undocumented immigrants may attend school as well, but no undocumented immigrant can legally receive any cash benefit from the government. Even many documented immigrants are ineligible for public benefits. Immigrants need to have been permanent residents for at least five years before they can

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9803EEDD1F3FF936A35757C0A9639C8B63&scp=2&sq=illegal%20immigrants%20taxes&st=cse> (accessed 29 March 2009).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang, *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009) 34-35.

¹⁴ Ibid, 42.

receive any welfare funds for their family (with a few exceptions).¹⁵ While it is true that many undocumented immigrants use stolen or fraudulent identities to gain employment, there is no way to calculate what government benefits, if any, they have obtained using those same identities. Unfortunately, the systems used by welfare agencies to check identity can only detect fake identities, not stolen ones. ICE is leading an investigation into identity theft by immigrants; however their efforts are not well funded due to more pressing concerns, such as drug smuggling and violent criminals.¹⁶ Many immigrants use fraudulent and stolen identities mainly to seek employment, not maliciously.¹⁷

The Legal History and Realities of Immigration in the United States

While immigration has a long and colorful history prior to and early in the twentieth century (beginning with the first numerically controlled immigration laws passed in 1927), more recent U.S. policies have greatly affected the population of immigrants here today. First, due to a growing public awareness of undocumented workers arriving from Mexico in the 1970s, a bill was finally passed in 1986 called the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which primarily dealt with the issue of undocumented immigration. This bill provided amnesty for certain undocumented persons who had been present since 1982 (or who had worked on farms for several seasons during that time), allowing them to seek temporary and then permanent

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “ICE Investigations: Mission Roles in Multi-Agency Areas of Responsibility,” *Immigration and Customs Enforcement*, online: http://www.fbiic.gov/public/2008/may/ICE_Mission_Roles.pdf (accessed 10 October 2010)

¹⁷ John Leland, “Some ID Theft Is Not for Profit, but to Get a Job,” *New York Times*, online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/04/us/04theft.html> (accessed 10 October 2010).

residence. A second main feature of the IRCA was the “employer sanctions.” This provision made it illegal for employers to knowingly hire undocumented workers. Both amnesty and the employer sanctions provided legal avenues for immigrants to avoid being treated unfairly under the law, but amnesty did not provide new and better avenues for continuing immigration, and the employer sanctions made the employers liable to enforce immigration laws, which some still continue to ignore while hiring more undocumented workers and exploiting them for cheap labor.¹⁸

In 1996 another major response to illegal immigration was passed called the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA), which addressed border enforcement and the use of social services by immigrants. More border patrol agents were deployed, new border control measures were implemented, government benefits were reduced for immigrants, avenues of relief and defense from deportation were limited, and the government introduced as a pilot program the “employment verification program,” a voluntary electronic program whereby employers and social service agencies can attempt to verify the identity and eligibility of a worker or immigrant applying for public service benefits. Then, after the terrorist attacks of 2001, Congress passed the Homeland Security Act of 2002, which moved the former INS into the newly created the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).¹⁹ In addition, “the federal government instituted a number of law-enforcement measures that targeted people of particular nationalities in the name of national security. Most infamously, a ‘special

¹⁸ Wilbanks, 76.

¹⁹ Congress of the United States, “Immigration Policy in the United States,” *Congress of the United States Congressional Budget Office Report*, online: <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/70xx/doc7051/02-28-Immigration.pdf> (accessed 29 March 2009).

registration' system (NSEERS) and a 'voluntary interview' program were instituted in 2002 that singled out foreign-born Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians."²⁰ Also, several new laws that combine anti-terrorism concerns with renewed attempts to control undocumented immigration have been passed. According to the Immigration Policy Center,

The Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002 implemented new procedures for the review of visa applicants and required that travel and entry documents be machine-readable, tamper-resistant, and include biometric identifiers. The REAL ID Act of 2005 required states to demand proof of citizenship or legal immigration status before issuing a driver's license, and to make driver's licenses resistant to fraud or tampering. The Secure Fence Act of 2006 called for the building of an additional 850 miles of fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border.²¹

Reactions to the latest immigration laws have been intense. *Time* has reported claims that the border fencing and increased patrol of normal crossing areas are funneling the undocumented into remote deserts, leading to the deaths of many more than in previous years, while proponents say the fence and extra border control is working, keeping more people out of the country each day.²² Since 2006, Congress has been debating various new immigration bills, with many members of Congress wanting full-scale reform of what they see as a broken immigration system. Even as some of the more conservative members of Congress dismissed the bills as amnesty measures and the more liberal

²⁰ Walter A. Ewing, "Opportunity and Exclusion: A Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy," *Immigration Policy Center*, online: <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/images/File/factcheck/OpportunityExclusion11-25-08.pdf> (accessed 29 March 2009).

²¹ Ibid.

²² David von Drehle, "The Great Wall of America," *Time*, online: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1816488,00.html> (accessed 29 March 2009).

members would not pass them without more open-border and family reunification provisions, President George W. Bush pushed unsuccessfully for a decision from both parties.²³ Only recently are new bills being proposed for comprehensive immigration reform, though none have bi-partisan support.²⁴

The overall pattern of laws, which have increasingly tightened U.S. borders, has never effectively dealt with undocumented immigrants living in the United States nor has it much deterred the entrance of those without documentation. As the first decade of the twenty-first century draws to a close, the United States remains as collectively conflicted as ever when it comes to the issue of undocumented immigration. Most recently, to deal with the immigration dilemma, states are tightening immigration laws and seeking to use state power to control federal immigration law. Some states have restricted undocumented immigrants seeking driver's licenses or in-state tuition, but others have gone even further.²⁵ For example, Arizona passed a state law SB 1070²⁶ that "includes

²³ Jim Runtenberg, "Bush Takes On Conservatives Over Immigration," *New York Times*, online: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/30/washington/30immig.html?_r=1&ref=business (accessed 29 March 2009).

²⁴ "The Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2010: A Summary," *Immigration Policy Center*, online: <http://immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/comprehensive-immigration-reform-act-2010-summary> (accessed 19 October 2010).

²⁵ For more information on state immigration laws, see "Immigration Policy Project," *National Conference of State Legislatures*, online: <http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=19897> (accessed 19 October 2010).

²⁶ "In April 2010, Arizona enacted two laws addressing immigration, SB 1070 and HB 2162. These laws added new state requirements, crimes and penalties related to enforcement of immigration laws and were to become effective on July 29, 2010. Before the laws could go into effect, the U.S. Department of Justice filed a lawsuit asking for an injunction against these laws arguing that they are unconstitutional. On July 28, Judge Bolton granted the request for injunction in part and enjoined those provisions related to state law officers determining immigration status during any lawful stop; the requirement

provisions adding state penalties relating to immigration law enforcement including trespassing, harboring and transporting illegal immigrants, alien registration documents, employer sanctions, and human smuggling.” The United States public is concerned for many reasons about the presence and activities of the undocumented population. Without federal immigration reform (more open or less open), states will continue the trend of attempting to preempt federal law with measures designed to restrict benefits of functioning in the state as an undocumented immigrant (dubbed “enforcement through attrition”).

Immigration: The Process

Even when new immigrants want to follow the law, the complexities of the systems involved for immigration make the process difficult. In order to immigrate permanently to the United States, for the most part an individual must be sponsored by either an employer or qualifying family member, be randomly selected from countries who do not send many immigrants through sponsorship paths, or show fear of persecution in one’s home country on account of immutable characteristics. To obtain status, the parties involved must complete a series of forms and processes and prove financial support. The costs for these processes can be substantial, as the government filing fees alone for just one step in the process can be over \$1,000 per person. Many immigrants need help filing their documents, which adds on attorney fees or requires help

to carry alien registration documents; the prohibition on applying for work if unauthorized; and permission for warrantless arrests if there is probable cause the offense would make the person is removable from the United States. Arizona Governor Jan Brewer has appealed the injunction and arguments will be heard by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of appeals on Nov. 1, 2010.” “Analysis of Arizona’s Immigration Law,” *National Conference of State Legislatures*, online: <http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=20263> (accessed 19 October 2010).

from a local charitable organization. Employer sponsorship often involves processes to show unavailability of U.S. workers. Numbers of visas in each category are limited and issued on an annual basis with arbitrary visa number caps. Waits for visa numbers can take years, even decades for some lower-skilled workers or family members of permanent residents or siblings of U.S. citizen sponsors. The process is simpler and the line shorter, however, for the higher-skilled laborers, executives, and close family members, such as spouses and children of U.S. citizen sponsors. Once immigrants obtain permanent status, they receive a permanent resident card, more commonly known as a green card,²⁷ that allows them to live and work in the United States permanently. Nevertheless, even a permanent resident can still be deported for such offenses as claiming to be a U.S. citizen, voting, staying abroad for too long a period of time, or committing certain crimes. Permanent residents in turn can sponsor other qualifying family members. After holding a green card for five years, permanent residents can apply for naturalization by submitting a lengthy biographical questionnaire, undergoing biometrically-based criminal record checks, and passing an English and U.S. history/civics examination. The current government fee for this process is \$675, plus any private fees to cover help with learning English or understanding U.S. civics.

²⁷ The “green card” is a common name for the (until recently, pinkish-white) card, form I-551. The card contains a photo of the immigrant, details the immigrant’s name, date of birth, alien registration number (“A” number), date of admission as a permanent resident, and expiration date of the document itself (as the status does not expire). As of May 2010, these permanent residence cards are green once again, with further security measures in place to protect against fraud (see USCIS online at: <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=79bd3893c4888210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=68439c7755cb9010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD> for further information on these recent changes).

Breaking Down the Current Problems with the System

The Immigration Policy Center recently issued a report entitled “Breaking Down the Problems: What’s Wrong With Our Immigration System” in October 2009. In its opinion, the problems with immigration in the United States do not center solely on the problem of 11.9 million undocumented immigrants, but instead involve a broader range of issues, including structural failure of the current immigration system and inadequate responses on the part of the federal government to address these issues. The general information contained in this report will be summarized here.²⁸ There are other organizations who take differing stances toward these problems and how to solve them; however, because the Immigration Policy Center focuses its energies on protecting families and supporting immigrants (biblical goals, as explored in later chapters), this study will primarily focus on these issues and strategies.²⁹

The IPC report begins by highlighting five areas of the immigration system “that are broken and need remedy.”³⁰ First, family-based immigration has backlogs that keep families separated. There are three main causes for this: (1) “Demand exceeds supply”: U.S. citizens can apply for visas for their immediate family (spouses, children, and parents) without regard to number caps, but other family members such as children over

²⁸ Immigration Policy Center, “Breaking Down the Problems: What’s Wrong With Our Immigration System?” *Immigration Policy Center*, <http://immigrationpolicy.org/special-reports/breaking-down-problems-whats-wrong-our-current-immigration-system> (accessed 3 March 2010).

²⁹ See the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) for competing views that focus on deportation/removal of most, if not all, immigrants in the United States, along with enhanced border control and stricter immigration laws, *Center for Immigration Studies*, online: <http://www.cis.org/> (accessed 19 October 2010).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

the age of twenty-one must wait years. In addition, those immigrants who only hold a green card must wait even longer to sponsor family members; (2) “Per-country limits create long backlogs in certain countries”: A 1976 law created per-country caps for all countries, meaning Mexico has the same numbers available as all other even with a higher number of immigrants in demand from that country – specifically, 7% of the total in any category. That means countries that have higher immigration rates to the U.S. (Mexico, China, the Philippines) must wait much longer for visas than those from other countries; (3) “Processing delays and inconsistent policies heighten problems and create more illegal entry”: Lack of resources and rigid bureaucratic procedures have not allowed the immigration system to work expeditiously to conduct quick background checks or coordinate visas between agencies (the DHS and the Department of State). While waiting for a green card, family members have almost no chance of getting a temporary visa to travel to visit the U.S., leaving families apart for the many years it takes to procure one.³¹

Second, the “employment-based visa system is not responsive to employers’ labor needs.” Only 140,000 employment-based green cards are available annually to qualified immigrants. This arbitrary number was chosen by Congress many years ago without regard to real labor-market needs and “has not been updated to conform to current economic realities.”³² The ebb and flow of need in an economy would require consistent monitoring to know how many visas should be issued each year. For example, in a recession, the 140,000 may be sufficient, but when the economy turns around, U.S. employers will need more workers. Some will only need temporary workers, but others

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 8.

will require permanent workers for their positions and may not be able to procure a permanent visa under that year's allocated numbers (or any upcoming years, as they allow the worker to remain in temporary work visa status waiting on a permanent number). As such, the current system cannot meet the ever-changing economic needs of the United States. Additionally, there are only 5,000 visas allocated annually for less-skilled workers, such as hotel workers, landscapers, and construction workers. IPC believes the insufficient number of green cards for these workers is at the heart of the unauthorized immigration issue. The industries that need these workers cannot meet their demands with local labor pools and petitioning for workers is backlogged for many, many years. IPC states, "until there are more legal avenues for employers to hire immigrant workers to meet economic demands, unauthorized immigration will continue to fill the gap, and we will not be able to regain control over immigration."³³

Third, "millions of unauthorized workers and other immigrants, many with U.S.-citizen families, reside in the United States with no means to become legal residents."³⁴ The laws and regulations that penalize behaviors such as overstaying a visa or working without authorization "often produce unintended and illogical results."³⁵ Many of these minor infractions carry extreme consequences with few exceptions for waivers. For example, the IIRIRA of 1996 "created bars on admission to the United States for individuals who have been unlawfully present in the country."³⁶ These bars state that persons who have been unlawfully present in the United States for more than 180 days

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

but less than one year and who voluntarily depart may not enter the country again for three years. People unlawfully present for more than one year are subject to a ten-year bar on re-entry. Because of such laws, people otherwise qualified for work or family visas are unable to adjust their status and if they leave the country to get a visa at a consulate abroad, they cannot re-enter the United States until the time of the bar has elapsed. Thus, unauthorized immigrants who are eligible for visas often are encouraged by these laws to remain in the country without status rather than risk separation from their families for three or ten years (or possibly permanently).³⁷

Fourth, “unscrupulous employers who hire unauthorized workers in order to maximize profits are lowering wages and working conditions for ALL workers.”³⁸ Without status, unauthorized workers are vulnerable to abuse by unscrupulous employers because they cannot organize to petition against poor working conditions or low wages for fear of deportation. And, those employers trying to follow the law are competitively at a disadvantage because they choose not to use low-wage labor to enhance their bottom lines.³⁹

Fifth and lastly, “inadequate infrastructure causes delays in the integration of immigrants who want to become U.S. citizens.”⁴⁰ Integration (learning English, understanding and adapting to U.S. culture, etc.) is an important aspect of immigration for most Americans because it enables immigrants to contribute to the country and realize their full potential. The United States, however, has no comprehensive integration

³⁷ Ibid., 9.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.

strategy. Immigrants have little access to ESL programs as funding continually gets cut for these programs, despite higher demands. And, as stated previously, the naturalization process is costly and demanding.⁴¹

The report goes on to discuss the inadequate government responses to these issues. Even when the federal government has been spending billions of dollars on border enforcement, the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States has nearly tripled since 1990. In addition, 25-40% of all unauthorized immigrants do not sneak across the border but instead enter legally and overstay their visas. Since 1992, the annual budget of the U.S. Border Patrol has increased by 714 percent and the number of Border Patrol agents along the southwest border has grown 390 percent.⁴² But “border security without adequate legal channels for immigration has created a more dangerous border and reduced ‘circularity’ of migration.”⁴³ The enhanced border security at traditional points of entry has diverted immigrants to more dangerous areas, and the probability of death or injury has increased dramatically, up to one per day. Because of this danger, many immigrants cannot survive the journey alone and hire a smuggler, most of whom charge thousands for their services. The debt owed the smuggler often ends up following the immigrant for months or years and can endanger the lives of the immigrant’s family members. Once here, the immigrants are very likely to stay because of the enhanced security measures. Before such measures were in place, many immigrants were ‘circular’

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 13.

⁴³ Ibid., 14.

meaning that they would come for short periods to work and then return to their home countries in a repeating pattern.⁴⁴

The report then notes that this “enforcement culture” created by the enforcement measures is actively criminalizing immigration violations and resulting in mistakes by law enforcement and in the violation of immigrants’ civil rights. Because of the focus on identifying and detaining unauthorized immigrants for deportation, the government has expanded its priorities to include the ever-expanding Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention system. “ICE operates the largest detention and supervised-release program in the country. A total of 378,582 immigrants from 221 countries were in custody or supervised by ICE in FY 2008.”⁴⁵ The crimes for which immigrants may be deported and the crimes for which immigrants get mandatory detention have expanded, and the budget for ICE has nearly doubled between 2005 and 2009. The report notes that many unauthorized immigrants live in mixed-status communities (meaning some family members and neighbors are U.S. citizens and Lawful Permanent Residents). When ICE raids workplaces and perform door-to-door raids, these family members and neighbors are directly affected, especially the U.S.-citizen children who are left in an untenable situation when one or both parents are deported. Moreover, this enforcement has led to numerous mistakes and violations of civil rights; even U.S. citizens have been erroneously detained and deported.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The report then states that “the enforcement-only model has pushed immigrants further underground, undermining community safety and national security.”⁴⁷ Undocumented immigrants are less likely to report crimes or cooperate with authorities in criminal investigations for fear of deportation, making everyone in a community less safe. Sometimes ICE works directly with local police to find and detain undocumented immigrants, frightening the immigrant population and slowing the criminal processing for other, violent crimes. Furthermore, the enforcement-only method is not enhancing national security. By spending billions identifying undocumented immigrants and creating a border situation where smugglers and traffickers decide who makes it into the country, the American public cannot feel secure. The government needs to bring these undocumented individuals out of the shadows by correctly identifying them and encourage people to enter the country through legal channels. This in turn would allow law-enforcement and border-enforcement agents to focus on people who pose a threat to public safety or national security.⁴⁸

In closing, the report notes that:

It is clear that relentlessly building up enforcement resources has not worked in the past and is not a realistic solution to our current problems. The underlying flaws of the legal immigration system must be addressed first. The United States must create a fair, humane, and practical immigration system for the 21st century that is responsive to the needs of our economy and encourages legal behavior.⁴⁹

In order for a democratic society to address this issue, each voting citizen must seek to better understand how to morally address the issue from his or her personal moral

⁴⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 18.

grounding. Thus, as Christians and Baptists, we must look to the faith-based resources available concerning how to treat immigrant peoples properly.

CHAPTER 3

IMMIGRATION AND THE BIBLE

Biblical Resources for Responding to Undocumented U.S. Immigration

Practically addressing immigration reform in the United States does not necessarily require religion; a reasonable and sensible plan could be implemented to make sweeping changes to address many of the issues discussed in the prior chapter without any redress to religion. But as Christians (and especially as Baptists), the role of scripture and theology in determining a course of action must shape how these decisions are decided on personal, community, and national levels. These basic convictions concerning ethical responses to political engagements are fundamental to finding appropriate ways to interpret and attend to the issue.¹

Old Testament Narrative and Law

First, as Baptists, a serious consideration of scripture must be undertaken by believers in order to gain a theological perspective.² This study necessarily must begin

¹ “Character ethics criticizes a rationalistic ethics that is grounded in allegedly universal philosophical premises and that accordingly neglects theological beliefs. Holistic character ethics is grounded in the larger drama or narrative of life that is crucial for character... This is the narrative that Christ-followers are called to make their own, to inhabit and orient their lives around,” In Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 60.

² As noted by prominent Baptist historian Walter B. Shurden, “Bible Freedom is the historic Baptist affirmation that the Bible, under the Lordship of Christ, must be central in the life of the individual and church and that Christians, with the best and most scholarly tools of inquiry, are both free and obligated to study and obey the scripture.” In *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 1993), 9.

with a discussion of what it means in scripture to be human and to be a migrant. Genesis 1 opens the discussion to the movement of *human beings* as immigrants. To be human is to be loved by God and made in the *imago dei* (image of God). Without first recognizing the humanity of the individuals involved, the tendency is to treat the “illegals” as less than human, not deserving of consideration.³

Following this grounding in human dignity, the Genesis narratives provide specific examples of God’s special care for the “alien” or “sojourner” living outside his or her homeland.⁴ The stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs are fraught with instances of kindness to strangers; oftentimes, they are strangers themselves in foreign lands. For example, Abram (later Abraham) begins his journey from his homeland of Ur as an immigrant to Haran and later to Canaan (Gen 11:31-12:9), stopping in Egypt as well (Gen 12:10). When confronted with strangers in his own home, he serves as a model of hospitality, eagerly offering them food and drink and running out to greet them (Gen 18:1-6). Abraham knew the perils of being a stranger in a foreign land and made these strangers (messengers of God, unbeknownst to him) feel welcome.

Abraham’s family continued the tradition of becoming the stranger in the persons of Isaac (Gen 35:27), Jacob (Gen 28:4; 32:4), and Jacob’s sons (Gen 47:4, 9). For example, Joseph, who was sold into Egypt, faced many challenges as an alien, being blamed for someone else’s misconduct (Gen 39) and then finding through inspired events

³ Daniel G. Groody, “Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees,” in *And You Welcomed Me: Migration and Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. Donald Kerwin and Jill Marie Gerschutz (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 4.

⁴ This Old Testament and Hebrew word study will rely foundationally, though not entirely, on the study conducted by M. Daniel Carroll R. in his book, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2008), 63-112.

a refuge with the Pharaoh himself (Gen 41:41). Joseph's influence in Egypt protected his family for many generations (Gen 41-50). When this protection ended, however, the nation of Israel was forced into slavery by the Egyptians (Exod 1). This story of the Hebrews' sojourn in Egypt "provides a cardinal example of the potential for tyranny and oppression on the part of a community or people over strangers and aliens who reside in their midst."⁵ This was because the Egyptian Pharaoh feared the population of Hebrews was growing too rapidly, and his subsequent restriction of the population (Exod 1:16) led to God's conflict with the Pharaoh and the miraculous freeing of the Hebrews from his control. Other Old Testament works such as Psalms and Second Isaiah remember Israel as sojourners in Egypt (Ps 105:23; Isa 52:4) and God's deliverance is remembered in how the Israelites were expected to treat the strangers in their midst.⁶

Some figures in the Old Testament traveled *into* Israel as immigrants, such as Ruth, the immigrant from the land of Moab. She married a foreigner (an Israelite) while in her native land and even after his death chose to continue to live with her Israelite mother-in-law Naomi, migrating back to Judah with her. In this new land, Ruth became an immigrant in a society where the law was not favorable to Moabites (c.f. Num 22-25; Deut 23:3). Through perseverance and hard work gathering in the fields to provide for herself and her mother-in-law, this immigrant woman won the favor of Naomi's kinsman Boaz who redeemed Naomi's property and married Ruth. This marriage later resulted in the lineage of King David, and subsequently of Jesus. The Old Testament portrays many

⁵ Patrick Miller, "Israel as Host to Strangers," in *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays*, ed. Patrick D. Miller, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, no. 267 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 560.

⁶ Ibid.

other immigrants but not all can be discussed here; suffice it to say that the story of the immigrant is prevalent in the Old Testament narratives of heroism and struggle.

Four Hebrew words are used in the Old Testament to refer to foreigners: the nouns *gēr* and *tôšab* and the adjectives *nokrî* and *zār*.⁷ Unfortunately, English translations of the Old Testament text are often inconsistent when rendering these terms. Sometimes the same English word is used for several of them and sometimes different English words are used for the same Hebrew term. The last two words, *nokrî* and *zār*, describe someone or something that is non-Israelite. Sometimes this is neutral usage; for instance, Ruth tells Boaz she is a foreigner (*nokriyyâ*, Ruth 2:10). Other times, these terms can carry a negative connotation. They can be used to describe enemies (*zār*, Isa 1:7; 29:5), strange gods (*zār*, Deut 32:16; Jer 2:25), or foreign women who could corrupt Israel's men (*nokrî*, 1 Kgs 1:11). Still other times, *nokrî* (and sometimes *zār*) can refer to foreigners dwelling in Israel. The scant textual evidence available suggests either that the people have not been in the land very long (2 Sam. 15:19) or that the people have not fully integrated into Israelite life (Deut 17:15; Isa 2:6; 1 Kings 8:41,43).⁸

The term *tôšab* only occurs a few times in the Old Testament and thus is hard to define. It is almost always found together with other nouns such as the Hebrew words for “hireling” or “sojourner.”⁹ This type of foreigner seems to be economically dependent on society and there seems to be a distinction between the *tôšab* and the *gēr* (sojourner) for them to be mentioned together. They also appear with the *nokrî* in the prohibitions about

⁷ Carroll R., 99.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ With “hireling” Exod 12:45; Lev 22:10; 25:6, 40; with “sojourner” Lev 25:23, 35, 47; Num 35:15, Carroll R., 101.

the Passover (Exod 12:43, 45), so it is possible that they too are not fully assimilated into the culture. But without much textual evidence, conclusions cannot be firmly drawn.¹⁰

The most pertinent term in this study is the word *gēr*. This word appears in much of the legal material of the Pentateuch and is translated in various English translations as “alien,” “resident alien,” “stranger,” or “sojourner.” The verb from which the noun derives (*gûr*) means “to dwell for a (definite or indefinite) time, dwell as a new-comer without rights.”¹¹ The *gēr* was an outsider who entered the culture/nation of Israel to live for an indefinite time. The *gēr* might have come because of famine, searching for food, or because of military or other conflicts in their native land. The *gēr* would likely live in his or her new community permanently, or at least an extended period of time. For example, in 2 Sam 1:13, the Amalekite messenger who brings David the news of Saul’s death describes himself as the son of sojourners. His family has thus been in Israel some time, as he had become a soldier in the Israelite militia. This might suggest a more appropriate modern term of “resident alien,” conveying both that the person was a stranger to the culture/nation of Israel and that the person now resides within Israel.¹²¹³ Additionally, the term might be used to describe an Israelite outside of his or her homeland. When Moses’

¹⁰ Carroll R., 101.

¹¹ Miller, 552.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Contrary to some interpretations, however, this term cannot be equated with a “permanent resident” as described in U.S. law. While the Old Testament offers guidance on how to treat foreigners, proper interpretation cannot simply be a one to one correspondence with modern laws and must be taken within its own context [c.f. James K. Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009) for an example of a one to one interpretation].

son was born in Midian, he named him Gershom because “I have been a *gēr* in a foreign land” (Exod 2:22).¹⁴

Old Testament legal codes contrast sharply with the contemporary Ancient Near Eastern law codes on the issue of the sojourner. For instance, other law codes in existence in the ancient Near East (Assyria, Babylon, and Persia) offer little to no guidance concerning people emigrating from these nations. There are very few laws dealing with the rights of someone who leaves and returns (c.f. Laws of Eshnunna, law 30; Laws of Hammurabi, laws 30, 31, 136).¹⁵ And even the one reference to a foreigner in Law 41 of the Laws of Eshnunna (possibly a merchant, though its interpretation is disputed) lacks any substance regarding the foreigner who came to live there, whatever the reason or circumstance. The Old Testament, on the other hand, offers numerous references not only to stories of strangers and immigrants, but cites them in laws and deals with different types of sojourners and foreigners directly. These laws are not just numerous; they are often gracious as well.¹⁶

The Old Testament has clear mandates for the love and mercy given to the immigrant. As stated, these laws were formulated to remind the nation of Israel of their history in Egypt, as oppressed aliens in a foreign land. God commanded them that given their experience, they should gladly welcome the stranger (immigrant) among them and not fear them, as the Egyptians had done to the Hebrews. Leviticus 19:33-34 states,

¹⁴ Thomas M. Horner, “Changing Concepts of the ‘Stranger’ in the Old Testament,” *Anglican Theological Review* 42 no. 1 (January 1960): 50.

¹⁵ James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 161-98.

¹⁶ Carroll R., 102.

“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”¹⁷ The most common laws regarding the sojourner or alien are the gleaning laws. These laws provide for the sojourners and aliens in that the Israelites are “enjoined from picking up the remnants of the harvests of grain, olives, and grapes” (Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut 24:19-21).¹⁸ In addition, other laws, such as the tithing laws (Deut 14:28-29; 26:12), provided for the aliens’ and sojourners’ welfare. Israelites were to tithe to provide regular donations of food for those persons to eat.¹⁹

Because of the immigrant’s vulnerability, God commands special care for them. Often, the Hebrew word for “alien” or “sojourner” is accompanied by the words for “orphan” and “widow” (e.g., Deut 10:18, 14:28-29, 16:11-14, 24:19-21, 26:12; Ps 146:9; Jer 22:3; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5). Widows were entirely dependent on the (male-dominated) social structure because they had no rights, no physical strength. Orphans were often not of an age to be able to fend for themselves. Immigrants too were dependent on the society to which they had immigrated, having no family ties or inheritance to sustain them. In most cases, widows, orphans, and immigrants were poor and easily outcast, but the laws of God demanded specific care for them. The laws of the Torah were directed at those groups with the most precarious social positions – and the very delineation of words for different stages of immigrants suggests that Israel (like all cultures) saw them and treated

¹⁷ All scripture citations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

¹⁸ Miller, 562.

¹⁹ Ibid., 563.

them differently, and sometimes in a hostile way. The laws concerning the immigrant offered a specific answer to the question of “why should I?” noting that all Israelites should care for the outcast in society because it is a special concern for God (Ps 146:9; c.f. Deut 10:18).²⁰ The prophets continued to admonish the people of Israel, often strongly chiding them for its failure to care for these powerless. They claimed it was a breach of faith in the LORD and that the LORD would not tolerate their disobedience (Jer 23:3; Ezek 22:7, 29; Mal 3:5; c.f. Ps 94:6).²¹

One of the most intimate ways Israel opened its heart to the sojourner was through allowing the sojourners to participate in its religion, its foundational identity as a people. Sojourners could participate “in the Sabbath, the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29-30), the Passover (Exod 12:48-49; Num 9:14), the Feast of Weeks (Deut 16:11), the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 16:14), and Firstfruits (Deut 26:11). Forgiveness for unintentional sin was extended to them (Num 15:27-29), and they were afforded access to the cities of refuge (Num 35:15).”²² In addition, the sojourner’s assimilation into the culture included some expectations and responsibilities. For example, they were to be present at the reading of the law (Deut 31:10-13) to learn how to be a member of the society. They were subject to “penalties of criminal laws (Lev 24:22), many dietary restrictions (Exod 12:19; Lev 17:10-15), the sexual taboos (Lev 18:26), purity laws (Num 19:10)...the prohibition against the worship of other gods and blasphemy against the LORD (Lev

²⁰ Donald E. Gowan, “Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament: The Case of the Widow, the Orphan, and the Sojourner,” *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 341-53.

²¹ Carroll R., 103.

²² *Ibid.*, 105.

20:1-2; 24:10-16; Num 15:30-31).”²³ Still, the sojourners were distinct in that not all dietary laws applied (Deut 14:21).²⁴

Thus, while many Old Testament texts unmistakably welcome the immigrant as neighbor to the children of Israel, some obvious tensions in the scriptures concerning Israel’s relationship with foreign cultures are present. The rhetoric of Deuteronomy 7, in which the Deuteronomistic Historian poses a complete annihilation of various outside ethnic and religious groups (Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, etc.) tends to shock modern readers who are not reading in context with the writing. The words are harsh and call for unmerciful destruction of nations, “utterly destroy[ing]” (Heb *herem*) them and avoiding all contact with their way of life. One scholar noted the following concerning *herem* (“utter destruction”):

1. The extreme force of the injunction to destroy is a negative counterpart to the first commandment ‘only YHWH’ That is, because YHWH is a jealous God and will tolerate no rival, every such practitioner is subject to destruction as an act of obedience to the command of YHWH.
2. The threat of the other religious options is perceived not simply as political and cultural, but as *mythic*. That is, alternative religious practice has the potential to bring deep disorder into the community. The elimination of such a religious option therefore is to overcome the danger of *chaos* and so to assure the good order of society intended by YHWH as creator.
3. Because the seven nations are long gone, the rhetoric in this text is now to be understood *symbolically and not literally*; Israel has long since given up its readiness to undertake such barbaric actions.²⁵

Whether or not Israelite readers saw the Deuteronomistic Historian’s rhetoric as symbolic, the theme of keeping order in community on a theological level is very clear.

²³ Ibid., 106.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 95.

Association with rival religious and cultural groups had the potential to cause great social breakdown in post-exilic Israel (presumably when this book was composed, or at least edited into a whole). “The actual issue is that an alien presence and ideology, presumably the Assyrians, currently threaten Israel, and the danger of assimilation to foreign practices is very real.”²⁶ This airtight social separation kept Israel from making a counter-covenant against YHWH through their covenant with these peoples.²⁷

Deuteronomy 23 continues the theme of exclusion, despite many calls for care for sojourners in the land in the same book. The reluctance of the Deuteronomistic Historian to include other nationalities in temple worship continues the tradition of the post-exilic community “struggling with its identity and integrity.”²⁸ The tradition of Ezra-Nehemiah drew on laws such as these to require Israel to put away foreign wives and children (again, a decision many modern readers abhor – e.g., Ezra 9-10; Neh 13). Ezra’s words and actions were drenched in fear, as Israel fought to regain a foothold in their native land after many years of exile. The ‘abominations’ perpetrated by these people of the lands were likely issues of syncretism, which could have endangered the integrity of Israel’s faith. Nehemiah continued this strand in Nehemiah 13, saying “the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation forever.” Nehemiah takes seriously the commands concerning foreign wives, speaking of the sins of Solomon, insisting again that strange wives should be sent away. Neither Ezra nor Nehemiah,

²⁶ Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 99.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Brueggeman, 229.

however, deals with the issue of the *gēr* and the injunctions about kindness toward the *gēr*. Jewish scholar Hyam Maccoby notes that

The danger of oppression of the *gēr* occurred only in a settled Israelite community, where a population of *gērîm* arose through influx from outside countries, attracted by economic or religious motives. The community of Ezra-Nehemiah...did not yet attract such incomers, and the injunction to be kind to the *gēr* had no practical relevance. In later times, the issue became a live one again.²⁹

Despite the fact that the command to love the alien in their midst is the second most repeated commandment (other than to worship only one God),³⁰ Israel, like most cultures, had intense struggles in dealing with outsiders. A consistent tension exists in the text between the command to remember the deliverance from Egypt, thus providing for and welcoming the stranger, and the commitment to Yahwism resulting in exclusion of foreign peoples because of their religions and cultural practices. Caring for the stranger, the outcast, and the wholly dependent in society, however, is a pervasive theme in the Old Testament that translates directly into the ministry of Jesus in the New Testament. The theme survives into the ministries of the prophets, where a future, more universal faith in YHWH, brings foreigners into the fold of Israel (c.f. Ezek 47:21-23; Isa 14:1; 56:1-8).

New Testament Life and Teaching

The Gospels do not directly teach on the subject of strangers, nor do they explicitly deal with the issue of migration or sojourning; however, the actions of Jesus in

²⁹ Hyam Maccoby, "Holiness and Purity," in *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, ed. John F.A. Sawyer (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 169.

³⁰ William O'Neill, "Christian Hospitality and Solidarity with the Stranger," in *And You Welcomed Me: Migration and Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. Donald Kerwin and Jill Marie Gerschutz (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 149.

his ministry and the witness of early Christians presuppose an inclusive theology toward all outsiders. To begin, the narrative of Matthew paints Jesus as a refugee in Egypt fleeing the persecution of Herod, who sought to kill him (Matt 2:13-23). Jesus is described as a “divine immigrant” leaving the glories of the heavens to “live among us and save us on earth” (c.f. Phil 2:6-8).³¹

Particularly, Jesus’ call to minister to the outsider made many of his contemporaries uncomfortable. Take, for instance, Jesus’ treatment of the Samaritans. The Samaritans practiced a form of Judaism (though explicitly rejecting the temple and holy sites of the Jews) but were not accepted as equals by Jews and often found themselves in bitter conflict with Jews living near them. The hostilities of the groups escalated in the early first century, just as Jesus was growing up in Nazareth, causing irreparable harm to the groups’ relationship. Samaritans no longer were just “outsiders,” but enemies. Still, Jesus engaged Samaritans on a number of occasions. John 4 shows that he met with a Samaritan woman at a well, offering her (a Samaritan, a woman, and an adulterer) entrance to the Kingdom of God.³²

Jesus risked his own reputation to teach his disciples the importance of crossing the cultural and political boundaries with the message of God’s kingdom. When asked by a shrewd lawyer, “Who is my neighbor?” in Luke 10, Jesus responds with the story of the Compassionate Samaritan, a story which underscores the faith of an outsider over against

³¹ Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang, eds., *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 86.

³² Carroll R., 116-22.

the faith of the priests and Levites in Israelite religion.³³ “Jesus lays aside the exclusivistic mores and negative feelings of his cultural heritage toward Samaritans for more important things: their value as persons and the potential of their faith.”³⁴

In addition, Jesus is painted as the ultimate gracious and inviting host, including those of all backgrounds and life situations (e.g., Matt 9:9-11, 15:31-33, 21:30-32; 26:25-27; Mark 2:14-16; Luke 14, 19:1-10; John 6:4-6). Most importantly, Jesus shared meals with outsiders – a central theme to most biblical stories of hospitality. In the “context of shared meals, the presence of God’s Kingdom is prefigured, revealed, and reflected.”³⁵ Jesus dined with many different kinds of people, challenging “the prevailing religious and cultural boundaries by the company he kept,” exposing “the hidden patterns of social exclusion.”³⁶ Jesus gathered at the homes of people with varied (often questionable) backgrounds: “Most writers now agree that eating with ‘sinners’ was one of the most characteristic and striking marks of Jesus’ regular activity. ...Jesus was, as it were, celebrating the messianic banquet, and doing so with all the wrong people.”³⁷

The great banquet depicted in Luke 14:7-24 at the Pharisee’s house is a high point in the gospel that parallels the messianic feast described in Isa 25:6-9. Isaiah’s messianic feast depicts all nations participating in the banquet without even bringing any gifts to honor Yahweh. In the Lukan parallel (vv. 7-14), Jesus gets upset as the guests vie for

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 125.

³⁵ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 30.

³⁶ Ibid., 73.

³⁷ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 431.

prominence and explains to the host “that the special guests at a banquet in God’s sight would be the poor and the sick, those of no social standing who would not have the means to repay the gesture.”³⁸ In verses 15-24, Jesus gives the host a parable about a host inviting his peers to a banquet. These invited guests may make excuses when they do not come, but the host (who has a change of heart as the empty excuses pour in), seeks to invite instead “the crippled, the blind, and the lame” (v.21) – those in the community with no social standing: outsiders. One scholar exegeted the passage thusly:

The church is to participate actively in the life of the world as slaves and envoys of the true King, in a manner akin to Jesus, extending an invitation to those, like they were previously, who are not worthy guests, who are marginalized in the wider society, who do not consider themselves invited, and who have not even heard there is such a banquet available. Some will reject the invitation, others will accept, and some will need encouragement to believe that such an invitation includes them. The invitation is not to revelry or idolatry, but to the messianic feast that has already begun. Like Jesus, the speech and action of the church is simultaneously centrifugal – they go out into the world – and centripetal – the world is drawn into participating in the banquet.³⁹

Jesus goes on in the Last Supper to fill the basic elements of a shared meal with symbolic meaning and instructed his followers to remember him likewise – at the table of hospitality and equality. At that table, “we remember the cost of our welcome, Christ’s broken body and shed blood, [and] we also celebrate the reconciliation and relationship available to us because of his sacrifice and through his hospitality.”⁴⁰ This is further repeated in scripture in Jesus’ post-resurrection encounter with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). Jesus comes to the disciples as a stranger and is

³⁸ Carroll R., 130.

³⁹ Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Moral Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Aldershot, Great Britain: Ashgate Publishers, 2006), 135.

⁴⁰ Pohl, 30.

welcomed as a guest. In their sharing of table fellowship, the disciples recognize the risen Lord. Showing hospitality in breaking bread is an “anticipation of the Eucharist and a foretaste of the final Kingdom banquet.”⁴¹

Early Church Hospitality

The early church followed the example of Jesus’ welcome to others, and the epistles demonstrate the importance of hospitality in the daily lives of early believers:

Paul instructs believers to practice or pursue hospitality (Rom 12:13), the writer of Hebrews reminds believers not to neglect hospitality (Heb 13:2), the author of 1 Peter challenges the community to offer hospitality ungrudgingly (1 Pet 4:9). Hospitality, in each of these passages, is a concrete expression of love – love for sisters and brothers, love extended outward to strangers, prisoners, and exiles, love that attends to physical and social needs...Hospitality is not optional for Christians, nor is it limited to those who are specially gifted for it. It is, instead, a necessary practice for the community of faith.⁴²

In Greek, one of the key words used to describe this hospitality Christians were to practice is *philoxenia*, which is a combination of *phileo*, a general word for love or affection for people who are connected by kinship or faith, and *xenia*, the word for stranger. It is clearer in the Greek that this practice of hospitality is meant for strangers. Sometimes these strangers were other Christians needing assistance, but it is also clear that Christians were to show hospitality to the larger society as well (1 Thess 3:12; Gal 6:10).⁴³

Hospitality toward others was practiced for theological reasons, but it also had a practical side. First, the early Christians, like all humanity, had to eat. Since the church “had all things in common” (Acts 2:44), they often shared meals. In the course of these

⁴¹ Ibid., 31.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

shared meals, “tensions surfaced between rich and poor believers; meals provided the context for instructions on equal recognition and respect”⁴⁴ (Acts 10-11; Gal 2:11-14; 1 Cor 11:17-34; Jas 2:1-13). Second, the gospel spread through believers traveling widely and these missionaries depended on the hospitality of others to spread their message (Acts 16:14-15, 29-34; 18:1-3, 11; 28:30). Third, the early believers often met in households to worship, necessitating a gracious host, and fostering “family-like ties among believers...[providing]...a setting in which to shape and to reinforce a new identity.”⁴⁵

First Peter provides a beautiful description of Christians as sojourners (strangers) in the world. Whether this means literally that their citizenship is in heaven alone or that these Christians were really considered foreigners in their land, they all became distinctly outsiders in their social location as followers of Jesus Christ and adherents to a new and distinct way of living.⁴⁶ These social outcasts mirror those immigrants, strangers, and outsiders living alone and isolated among the dominant culture, some with no faith community to serve them. Christians must continue to seek the vision of Christ and the Kingdom by reaching and ministering to these so-called “others,” no matter the social cost; for, just as 1 Peter suggests: “Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed” (1 Pet 3:13-14a). The early church embraced this alien status to further the gospel to all people:

As members of God’s household, Christians were to live as aliens in the world – aliens who practiced hospitality to strangers. Alien status suggested a framework

⁴⁴ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Carroll R., 128-29.

for transformed loyalties and relationships, and a distinctive life-style for citizens of heaven who were simultaneously residents on earth...Offering care to strangers became one of the distinguishing marks of the authenticity of the Christian gospel and of the church. Writings from the first five centuries demonstrate the importance of hospitality in defining the church as a universal community, in denying the significance of the status boundaries and distinctions of the larger society, in recognizing the value of every person, and in providing practical care for the poor, stranger, and sick...We, like the early church, find ourselves in a fragmented and multicultural society that yearns for relationships, identity, and meaning.⁴⁷

Despite the example of Jesus and the imitation of Christ by the early church, some passages in the New Testament struggle with the issue of authority over against radical action on behalf of others – just as Israel in the Old Testament struggled with the issue of migration and how to deal with foreigners. More conservative Christians seek to adhere to the laws of a nation based on specific theology derived from a few New Testament passages, effectively ignoring the radical stance of Jesus and the early church concerning strangers. For instance, Jesus speaks of paying taxes to Caesar (Matt 22:15-22) and confirms the authority of the Romans to levy taxes on Jews.⁴⁸ Additionally, Paul reinforces state authority in Romans 13, which some Christians assume means that all law is good and just and should be followed at all times. The problem with that narrow interpretation lies in the preceding chapter of Romans, where Paul “exhorts believers not to be shaped by the ‘pattern of this world’; they should serve others, show love and have compassion, and help their enemies (Rom 12:3-21).”⁴⁹ Christians must accept that a

⁴⁷ Pohl, 32-33.

⁴⁸ Though this too affirms that Jesus recognized a difference in Divine Authority and the Imperial Authority of Rome, to be discussed in a later chapter.

⁴⁹ Carroll R., 133.

government has a set of rules and seek to follow those rules; however, Christians must also measure those rules against their faith and convictions.

When laws are unjust and do not conform to the gospel, Christians have the responsibility to address them from a faith-based perspective, just as Jesus did in first-century Palestine. Jesus' gospel was radical and posed itself against the culturally accepted rules of his time; it held a *theological* basis for a *social* revolution. This revolution was not a battleground for war, but a "calling into being cells of followers committed to his way of life."⁵⁰ This proclamation of a new kingdom, opposing armed resistance and calling into question the very grounds of the Jewish leaders' teaching, initiated an invitation and a challenge. Those who drop everything to follow Christ receive a summons, a call to duty, and should expect opposition, much like what Jesus faced in his ministry, yet are blessed with the peace of God for their service.⁵¹ Simply put:

Jesus does not resolve the tension between hospitality and holiness present in the Old Testament, but he does relate those two imperatives in a particular way. Jesus relates hospitality and holiness by inverting their relations: hospitality becomes the means of holiness. Instead of having to be set apart from or exclude pagans in order to maintain holiness, it is in Jesus' hospitality of pagans, the unclean, and sinners that his own holiness is shown forth. Instead of sin and impurity infecting him, it seems Jesus' purity and righteousness somehow 'infects' the impure, sinners, and the Gentiles...[and] Jesus' hospitality is not to be isolated to himself: he calls his disciples to 'Go and do likewise' (Lk 10:37).⁵²

⁵⁰ Wright, 297.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 298-304.

⁵² Bretherton, 131.

Conclusions Concerning Biblical Material

The experience of the stranger is normative for the people of God in both the Old and New Testaments. The Israelites as well as the early Christians understood themselves to be aliens and sojourners as a reminder of their dependence on God. The Israelites knew what it was to be a literal stranger in a foreign land and were called to remember it in their treatment of the sojourner. The early church understood itself as alien to its culture (whether literally aliens or not). They had new loyalties and a new way of life, leading to a sharing of lives and a transcending of significant social and ethnic differences.⁵³ Moreover, early Christians sought to understand their hospitality within the context of understanding Jesus as both ultimate host and potential guest: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matt 25:35).

⁵³ Pohl, 105.

CHAPTER 4

CHURCH RESPONSES TO IMMIGRATION

Responding to the Issues: Roman Catholic Church's Response

Churches and Christian charitable organizations for many years have grappled with how best to deal with the trend of unauthorized immigration to the United States. Christians who have searched scripture and found a command to love the immigrants as God does have sought to support immigrants through church ministries and policy advocacy. One of the most visible of these organizations in the United States is the Roman Catholic Church and its affiliated charities.

Catholic social teaching has a long history concerning migrants. This social teaching is based in scripture, papal teachings, and the statements of the U.S. Bishops. Roman Catholics claim that the gospels affirm the movement of peoples, like Jesus himself, who fled Herod's terror to Egypt. They cite Jesus' later teachings concerning the stranger and his appearance on the road to Emmaus, as a stranger. The papal teachings to support this theology begin with the first social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Labor) in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII, which established that people have a right to work to survive and to support their families. Later, Pope Pius XII's apostolic constitution *Exsul Familia* (On the Spiritual Care of the Migrant) affirms that migrants have a right to a life of dignity, and therefore have a right to migrate to attain that dignity. Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) states that migrants

have the right to migrate by saying, “Every human being has the right to the freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of their country; and, when there are just reasons for it, the right to emigrate and take up residence elsewhere.”¹ Pope John Paul II in 1985 reiterated this statement in his address to the New World Congress on Pastoral Care of Immigrants:

Every human being has the right of freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own country. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to migrate to other countries and to take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor of citizenship in the universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of men.²

The U.S. Bishops then applied these principles to the immigration debate in the United States, when in 2003 they jointly issued the pastoral letter *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope* with the Mexican Catholic Bishops.³ There, they set forth five principles that govern how the Church responds to public policy proposals related to U.S. immigration. These principles include:

1. *Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.* This means a person has a right not to migrate, and their homeland should provide an opportunity for them to work and support their family in safety and dignity. This also means advocating global economic equity and peacemaking.

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Catholic Social Teaching and Migration,” *Justice for Immigrants*, online: <http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org/documents/immigration-and-catholic-social-teaching.pdf> (accessed 3 March 2010).

² Ibid.

³ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, *Strangers No Longer: Together on a Journey of Hope: A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003).

2. *Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.* When people cannot find work or support themselves in their homeland, they have a right to migrate.
3. *Sovereign nations have a right to control their borders.* This right is not absolute, however. Nations must also promote the common good, as stated by Pope John XXII in *Pacem in Terris*, and should seek to accommodate migration. That means that economic powers like the United States should make attainable legal pathways for those workers attracted to the nation so that they may find dignified work and reunite with family members.
4. *Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.* Safe haven and protection should be afforded to those fleeing persecution in their homelands.
5. *The human rights and the human dignity of undocumented migrants should be respected.* People without legal status in the United States should be treated with respect and not detained in deplorable conditions for lengthy periods, shackled by their feet and hands, or abused in any manner. They should be given due process and allowed, if applicable, to articulate a fear of return to their home country. They should not be blamed for the social ills of a nation.⁴

Because of their findings and subsequent statements on immigration in the United States, the U.S. Bishops created the *Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope* campaign in June 2004 in conjunction with The Catholic Legal Immigration Network, INC. (CLINIC). CLINIC, a social organization developed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 1988, works with “176 diocesan and other affiliated immigration programs with 290 field offices in 48 states.” It has roughly 1,200 attorneys and “accredited” paralegals who serve 600,000 low-income immigrants each year.⁵ Through their cooperation with the affiliated programs of CLINIC and their own jointly-issued statement with the Bishops of Mexico, the USCCB sought to secure comprehensive

⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Catholic Social Teaching and Migration,” *Justice for Immigrants*, online: <http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org/documents/immigration-and-catholic-social-teaching.pdf> (accessed 3 March 2010).

⁵ “CLINIC History,” *Catholic Legal Immigration Network, INC*, online: <http://www.cliniclegal.org/clinic-history> (accessed 29 March 2009).

immigration reform, with a special emphasis on legalization. In their own words, the campaign's primary objectives are:

1. To educate the public, especially the Catholic community, including Catholic public officials, about Church teaching on migration and migrants;
2. To create political will for positive immigration reform;
3. To enact legislative and administrative reforms based on the principles articulated by the bishops; and
4. To organize Catholic networks to assist qualified immigrants to obtain the benefits of the reforms.⁶

To reach these goals, the USCCB calls for broad-based legalization, or permanent residency, for the undocumented of all nationalities, including reform of family-based and employment-based immigration pathways so that families may be reunited and workers can work in a safe, humane, and orderly manner. They call for an abandonment of the border "blockade" enforcement strategy and a restoration of due process protections for all immigrants. Because so many immigrants are leaving poverty-ridden countries and so many continue in relative poverty in the United States, the Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform works closely with the Catholic Campaign Against Global Poverty to address not only the needs of immigrants in the United States, but also those living in poverty in their home countries.⁷ Catholic Charities, an organization founded to support the many different component groups of the Roman Catholic Church's outreach, oversees much of this work along with the USCCB. According to Catholic Charities' figures for 2007, Catholic-based organizations helped 375,982

⁶ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "About the Campaign," *Justice for Immigrants*, online: http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org/learn_about_justice.html (accessed 29 March 2009).

⁷ Ibid.

immigrants and 85,743 refugees with immigration-related services.⁸ The USCCB's Justice for Immigrants website offers parishes learning materials related to the realities of immigration, promotes ways in which parishes can become involved with work related to immigrants and their families, and gathers the many church documents and statements concerning migrants to offer to Catholic lay leadership.⁹

Responding to the Issues: Baptist Responses

The Roman Catholic Church's comprehensive approach is unparalleled in church responses to undocumented U.S. immigration; nevertheless, Baptists have not been completely unheard in the arena. Two of the largest Baptist institutions in the United States, the American Baptist Churches, U.S.A. (ABCUSA) and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), have directly addressed the issue in recent years, along with a large state organization, the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT).

In a joint statement on Immigration Reform, the General Secretary of ABCUSA, Roy Medley, and the Executive Director of the ABCUSA National Ministries, Aidsand F. Wright-Riggins, outlined for American Baptist churches their reactions to the possible antiterrorism legislation of 2005. If it had passed into law, this bill would have criminalized undocumented immigrants and those charitable organizations that supported them. Their statements call for comprehensive immigration reform, welcoming the

⁸ "At a Glance," *Catholic Charities Network*, online: <http://community.catholiccharitiesU.S.A..org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=363> (accessed 29 March 2009).

⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Justice for Immigrants*, online: <http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org> (accessed 29 March 2009).

stranger in their midst, and support for “fair and humane immigration reform.”¹⁰ Also in 2005, the ABCUSA signed an interfaith statement in support of comprehensive immigration reform, calling for help for hard-working immigrants and their families and border protection policies consistent with humanitarian values.¹¹ They then renewed this statement and submitted it to the Obama transition team in 2009.¹² Their call to action within their denomination is based on an appreciation of diversity, as Jesus was appreciated as an alien and as Jesus appreciated aliens in his midst. Their National Ministries (NM) office has pushed a new Intercultural Ministries Initiative to help unify their churches in the mission and cause of Christ.¹³ In addition to statements, the ABCUSA has worked directly with the government in more than just lobbying. Early in the current immigration debate, ABCUSA, working with a group of religious organizations and refugee advocates, filed a class action lawsuit against the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) (now USCIS), Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), and the U.S. Department of State (DOS). In *American Baptist Churches v. Thornburgh*, a group of asylum seekers claimed EOIR and DOS treated the

¹⁰ A. Roy Medley and Aidsand F.Wright-Riggins, “Joint Statement on Immigration,” *American Baptist Churches U.S.A.*, online: http://www.abc-U.S.A..org/documents/Immigration_Reform.pdf (accessed 29 March 2009).

¹¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Interfaith Statement in Support of Comprehensive Immigration Reform,” *U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops*, online: <http://www.usccb.org/rs/interfaith.shtml> (accessed 29 March 2009).

¹² “Interfaith Platform on Humane Immigration Reform,” *Obama-Biden Transition Project*, online: http://otrans.3cdn.net/9035be1c399b19923c_9km6ba35v.pdf (accessed 29 March 2009).

¹³ “Many Voices, One People, One Mission: A Call to Increased Understanding and Appreciation of Our Diversity,” *National Ministries of the American Baptist Churches U.S.A.*, online: http://www.nationalministries.org/intercultural/docs/ICM_Many_Voices_One_200809.pdf (accessed 7 December 2008).

Guatemalan and Salvadorian plaintiffs with discrimination. The claim, settled in 1991, provides additional benefits to asylum seekers in the categories covered by the settlement agreement. These special provisions affect such things as employment authorization and detention of eligible class members.¹⁴ The ABCUSA has clearly stayed involved in both the ethical and legal issues surrounding the issue of undocumented immigration.

The SBC, finding that more and more immigrants are seeking work in the Southern states, with the most obvious growth in border states like Texas, New Mexico, and California, has also publicly addressed the issue. Richard Land, President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the SBC, helped to draft the SBC resolution on the issue of undocumented immigration. This resolution, passed in June 2006, provided Southern Baptist churches an important springboard to action, noting that Christians are to respect both the alien in their midst and the nation in which they live. It calls for the church to care for strangers, while it dually calls for the government to enforce immigration laws as well as address the broken immigration system in place by passing new laws in Congress. Their statement places more emphasis on enforcement than does the ABCUSA statement, but the emphasis on the care for the immigrant on the local church level remains the same.¹⁵ Richard Land personally has continued the conversation from his position as an ethical spokesman for the SBC. He regularly has

¹⁴ “American Baptist Churches v. Thornburgh (ABC) Settlement Agreement,” *United States Citizenship and Immigration Services*, online: <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=86d796981298d010VgnVCM10000048f3d6a1RCRD&vgnnextchannel=2492db65022ee010VgnVCM1000000ecd190aRCRD> (accessed 7 December 2008).

¹⁵ “SBC Resolutions: 6. On the Crisis of Illegal Immigration,” *Southern Baptist Convention*, online: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1157> (accessed 7 December 2008).

written commentaries concerning amnesty (and how the SBC resolution is NOT amnesty),¹⁶ the need for guest-worker programs, and the need for Southern Baptists to think biblically, rather than just politically, about the immigrants themselves.¹⁷

Such calls for care of the immigrant and respect for one's country have not fallen on deaf ears. The Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) is a long-time proponent of immigration reform and care for immigrants. The BGCT has recently launched a campaign to help regularize the status of many undocumented immigrants living in communities around Texas Baptist churches. This campaign, a joint effort of the BCGT and Buckner International,¹⁸ is both legally- and biblically-based, offering churches relevant information concerning current and past immigration issues as well as biblical ways in which to interpret the issues through speaking, seminars, and information found on their website. The aptly-named Immigration Service and Aid project (ISAAC)'s main objective is to equip local congregations to provide legal aid to undocumented immigrants seeking to regularize their status. This accreditation, a lengthy process requiring hours of training for workers, provides churches with an avenue to reach the

¹⁶ Richard Land, "Immigration Reform and Southern Baptists," *The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptists Convention*, online: <http://erlc.com/article/statement-by-richard-land-on-truly-comprehensive-immigration-reform/> (accessed 29 March 2009).

¹⁷ Richard Land, "Immigration Crisis Requires Biblical Response," *The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptists Convention*, online: <http://erlc.com/article/immigration-crisis-requires-biblical-response/> (accessed 7 December 2009).

¹⁸ "Buckner International is a global Christian ministry that seeks justice for 'the least of these' by providing care and resources for orphans and at-risk children in the United States and more than fifty countries around the world. Through international orphanage support, humanitarian aid, short-term missions, foster care and adoption, Buckner has made a lasting impact in some of the world's most poverty-stricken and socially desperate countries." <http://www.buckner.org/aboutus.shtml>

undocumented in their communities by equipping church volunteers to help immigrants fill out and file immigration documents and navigate the complicated laws governing immigration, all for nominal fees (much less than those required by immigration attorneys). They also provide training for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes as well as citizenship classes for those immigrants wishing to learn U.S. civics in order to become citizens. Their ministry is even beginning to branch out of Texas; having shared a presentation at the New Baptist Covenant in Atlanta, Georgia in 2008, they now seek to train all Baptists seeking accreditation to help immigrants with their paperwork, and have begun work in Florida.¹⁹

Conclusions Concerning Church Responses

The Christian response to the nearly twelve million undocumented immigrants living in the United States has been wide and varied. While the Roman Catholic Church continues its institutional lead, there remains hope that Baptists are finding ways to serve undocumented immigrants and their families and support comprehensive immigration legislation. The highest hurdle Baptist churches must face is their inconsistent unity as a group. Because Baptists focus on the autonomy of the local church, and are found in so many denominations, they lack the centralized structure to accomplish large tasks. Clear ambition at the local level and the drive to meet needs in their own communities makes Baptists strong candidates to serve immigrants in their midst. The issue then becomes the following: how can Baptists think biblically about immigration and how can they then put that contemplation into action in their local communities?

¹⁹ Immigration Service and Aid Center (ISAAC), *Buckner Children and Family Services, Inc. and the Baptist General Convention of Texas*, online: <http://isaacproject.org/> (accessed 29 March 2009).

CHAPTER 5

THE BAPTIST RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRATION

How Should Baptists Respond?

As outlined in the introductory chapter of this study, Baptists are Christians who freely worship together as a body of believers. They are a diverse group, but tend to hold certain characteristics in common:

1. Members of the whole Christian family who stress the experience of personal salvation through faith in Jesus, symbolized both in baptism and the Lord's Supper
2. Those believers who under the Lordship of Jesus Christ have bonded together in free local congregation, together seeking to obey Christ in faith and in life
3. Those believers who follow the authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice
4. Those believers who have claimed religious liberty for themselves and all people
5. Those believers who take seriously for the whole membership the claim of the Great Commission to take the message of the Gospel to the whole world.¹

Walter B. Shurden has carefully outlined four essential freedoms of Baptist life in his book *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*.² These four characteristics undergird the Baptist faith and inform Baptist roles and identities. First, Baptists affirm Bible Freedom –

¹ Commission on Baptist Heritage of the Baptist World Alliance, "Towards a Baptist Identity," (July 1989), quoted in Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 1993), 66.

² Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 1993).

“the historic Baptist affirmation that the Bible, under the Lordship of Christ, must be central in the life of the individual and church and that Christians, with the best and most scholarly tools of inquiry, are both free and obligated to study and obey the Scripture.”³ Thus, for Baptists, the search for coherence in theology and social action must be based on the Scriptures, under the assumption that Jesus is “the norm by which the Bible is to be interpreted.”⁴ When pursuing answers to profoundly theological queries, the Bible must be the foremost authority in decision-making and must be interpreted in light of the living Christ.

Second, Baptists affirm Soul Freedom – “the historic Baptist affirmation of the inalienable right and responsibility of every person to deal with God without imposition of creed, the interference of clergy, or the intervention of civil government.”⁵ Baptists are inherently individual in their faith; they see salvation as a personal commitment. “It is relational, not ritualistic. It is direct, not indirect. It is a lonely, frightened, sinful individual before an almighty, loving, and gracious God.”⁶ In light of this affirmation, Baptists believe faith is voluntary and believers are those baptized into the churches. Baptists are intensely personal in matters of faith because Christ asked for the decision from his disciples personally: “Who do you say that I am?” (Matt 16:15). Baptists believe faith is a part of each Christian person and thus it will manifest itself in different ways in different lives and communities.⁷ When coming to conclusions about decisions of morality, ethics, and theology

³ Ibid., 9.

⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁷ Ibid., 28-29.

Baptists employ a personal inquiry, in their hearts and prayers and search of scriptures, and in the struggles of their local congregations coming together to wrestle with an issue.

Third, Baptists affirm Church Freedom – “the historic Baptist affirmation that local churches are free, under the Lordship of Christ, to determine their membership and leadership, to order their worship and work, to ordain whom they perceive as gifted for ministry, male or female, and to participate in the larger Body of Christ, of whose unity and mission Baptists are proudly a part.”⁸ A Baptist church is local and made of individual Christians seeking unity with like-minded believers. These individuals, in local community, can, as the early church, work together to better their local social conditions. Because each Baptist who is a professed believer is considered a priest, each person is given a voice (authority) in the church. Baptists practice democracy to individualize local churches for their congregations; thus, Baptist ministry is best served by the individuals who make up the community around a given church. This kind of interconnectivity with the local community makes each Baptist church uniquely suited to serve in its location.⁹ When seeking to find norms by which the church’s members can live, each Baptist church works together in community to seek guidance, with scripture as its authority and with Jesus as Divine Leader. Baptists hold true to the voice of the individual in community, and in their attempts to find justice in moral issues, they will seek to make sure individuals and communities of individuals are heard and understood in the debate.

Fourth, Baptists affirm Religious Freedom – “the historic Baptist affirmation of freedom *OF* religion, freedom *FOR* religion, and freedom *FROM* religion, insisting that

⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁹ Ibid., 34-37.

Caesar is not Christ and Christ is not Caesar.”¹⁰ The Baptist passion for religious liberty is rooted in the nature of God, humanity and faith. Christians are free beings because they were created that way by a sovereign God. Faith cannot be forced or denied by the state; it can only be authentic if it is truly a free choice. To be truly faithful, a believer must be able to freely choose his or her religion. And, all persons must be free to practice or not practice a religion at all. This is especially important in light of the pluralistic society America has become. Baptists decided many years ago to insist the United States must be founded upon the conviction that the state could not “make [a] law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”¹¹ Baptists today who affirm historic Baptist values seek to give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s (Matt 22:21). Baptist Christians, in light of a recent conservative move toward civil religion must “work hard at distinguishing between pietism and patriotism, assessing critically where one begins and the other ends. When the cross of Jesus is wrapped in the flag of any nation, danger, if not downright heresy, is close by.”¹²

To come to a consensus on social issues, Baptists have to identify their core values and seek to build upon those values to inform their political ideals. Ron Sider seeks to understand what he calls an “Evangelical Political Philosophy,”¹³ which can easily be applied to Baptists who are seeking to understand and address political issues. First, Jesus must be Lord in all discussion. This poor carpenter and sovereign God has to be the measuring rod by

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 46.

¹² Ibid., 52.

¹³ Ron Sider, “Toward An Evangelical Political Philosophy,” in *Christians and Politics Beyond the Culture Wars: An Agenda for Engagement*, ed. David P. Gushee (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 79-96.

which all policy advocacy must be considered. Christians cannot uncritically endorse one party over another in secular politics without first looking to their faith to understand the issues before them. Sider suggests a four-component paradigm for grappling with political decisions for Christians:

1. *A Normative Framework*: Seek first the revealed truth of the Scriptures, using a biblical view of the world and persons (the biblical story) and an understanding of biblical teaching related to concrete issues (biblical paradigms).
2. *A Broad Study of Society and the World*: Because the Bible does not address modern, concrete issues, Christians must seek to reflect on historical developments of society, economies, political systems, etc. to shape a political philosophy.
3. *A Political Philosophy*: It is impossible to research mountains of information for each political decision a Christian must make. Thus, Christians should have a “road map” for their personal politics – not derived solely from some non-Christian source, but emerging from the normative biblical framework and understanding gained from extensive socioeconomic and political analysis.
4. *A Detailed Social Analysis on Specific Issues*: To fully understand a specific piece of legislation or an election, Christians must seek to “do their homework” on the specific issue. This involves careful analysis of many different sources relevant to the issue at hand.¹⁴

Another important characteristic Baptists should seek to embody as they form normative frameworks and political philosophies is humility. They must hold their “specific political conclusions with great humility and tentativeness” while still advocating boldly for specific policies because they have “sought to ground [their] specific conclusions in a biblical framework and responsible social analysis even as [they] invite friend and foe alike to help [them] promote [their] analysis of both the Scriptures and society at every point.”¹⁵ In light of this humility, a better dialogue can be formed within a community of faith. This

¹⁴ Ibid., 83-84.

¹⁵ Ibid., 85.

formulation in faith communities is vital, as the political philosophy adopted needs to be created on a basis of biblical leadership under Christ. Without engagement within faith communities, Christians often end up adopting secular norms and ideologies, thus compromising their ideals to a very un-Christian political engagement.¹⁶

Baptist churches must come together locally and nationally to form a Baptist response to the crisis of undocumented immigration. Understanding Baptist polity and faith, as well as adopting the paradigms above to formulate workable political engagements within communities are important first steps to finding concrete ways Baptist Christians can confront the disparities in the law and the church and seek to undo the harmful effects of harsh political discourse in very human matters like immigration. If Baptists seek to engage their political arena, they must:

1. Teach in each local church a consistent ethic of how to treat undocumented immigrants in their midst, based in biblical interpretation at a local level;
2. Minister to all outsiders' needs, physical and spiritual, without prejudice – including the undocumented immigrants in their communities; and
3. Seek to formulate a political philosophy to support their political advocacy as it relates to undocumented immigrants.

Baptist Churches: Teachings

Baptist churches have historically taught theology and interpretation in a congregational setting (rather than a hierarchical structure of teaching, such as the Catholic Catechism). This is no different for practical theology/ethics. Baptists, using interpretive methods of engagement with the text, need to grapple with the textual tensions of the treatment of the alien in their midst, while continuously affirming the Lordship of Christ and seeking to imitate Christ's likeness in their teachings. Baptist churches should center their

¹⁶ Ibid.

theology (and thus their ethics) on a Kingdom framework, as Christ did. This involves employing the teachings of Jesus in order to frame a holistic character ethic for each member in the congregation. To develop these dimensions, a congregation must explore where their passions and loyalties lie, how they reason through rules and practices, how they see authority, threats, social change and truthfulness, and what their basic convictions are.¹⁷

As Baptists, seeking to keep Jesus as Lord and Scripture as authority, these basic convictions, which undergird the rest of their worldview, must come from an understanding of who Christ was in the scriptures and who Christ is today, as Risen Savior. Jesus emphasized the reign of God, calling for “salvation, justice, peace, joy, and God’s presence. This is the narrative that Christ-followers are called to make their own, to inhabit and to orient their lives around.”¹⁸ Basic convictions include how one understands the character of God, the nature of humanity, forgiveness and discipleship, Christlikeness and justice, and the mission of the church. Jesus specifically addressed these in his teachings during the Sermon on the Mount and lived out the fundamentals of his teaching during his earthly ministry. He taught that the Jews had a “traditional righteousness” such as “You shall not murder” then identified a vicious cycle of “being angry or saying ‘you fool!’” then told his followers to “go, be reconciled” as a transforming initiative.¹⁹ Baptists must reiterate the transforming way of Christ in their teachings, promoting a Christ-centered approach to issues, especially those directly impacting other human beings. With the underpinning of social justice and the message of Christ and the Israelites supporting hospitality to the stranger, Baptist churches

¹⁷ Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 59.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

must find the ways and means to support some of the most vulnerable in society – those immigrants without status, daily living in the shadows of fear and doubt.

In addition to an appropriate theological teaching, Baptist churches must explore and should have the opportunity to learn about their immigrant neighbors, being educated locally by those with first-hand knowledge of the issues. This could be done through a focus group or a Sunday school series, a community center organizer, or even hiring an immigrant to the staff of the congregation. Discussion must be thoughtful and prayerful and must seek to find common ground in spite of differing political ideas. No Baptist congregation will ever fully agree on a social issue; the key is to provide meaningful, humane dialogue on issues so that congregations are well-informed and can make personal and congregational decisions about where to find common ground on issues, rather than allowing debasing secular rhetoric to fill the mouths of gossipers in the pews on Sunday morning.²⁰ The most grassroots way to combat this type of poor judgment is to educate members with truth so that each is willing to speak up when comments are made against others – others made in the image of God and that every Christian is called to love and serve – regardless of their status in society.

Baptist Churches: Ministries/Outreach

To engage a theology of hospitality to the outsider and marginalized in a community, members in the churches must become involved in the life of marginalized people. Many Christians live in a community “bubble,” surrounded on all sides by peoples of different races, economic, and immigration statuses, but they never actually meet anyone outside of their similar life status. This profound lack of interaction between cultures of citizens and

²⁰ For instance, a congregation may never fully agree on which law would be best to help immigrants, but all might agree that they are to treat them humanely and work toward the common goal of advocating for them. The key is continuing, open dialogue and education.

immigrants unfortunately has led to severe stereotyping and bigotry on both sides. Thus, the key to overcoming this reciprocal xenophobia is to intentionally interact with individuals of the opposite position. When undocumented immigrants become people – recognizable faces, rather than statistics – the ministries of the churches and the laws supported by the members become ways to open the doors of the church to real people: to Juan Carlos, my neighbor who lays brick every day; to Lidiana, who alone supports three children on a meager salary because her husband abused her and left her; and to Pedro, who has been here since he was fifteen, who knows nothing of Honduras, and who has no recourse for citizenship.

Church ministries should reach the undocumented immigrant population by integrating them into the community as believers. Churches can employ specific ministries to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of newcomers to the country, including English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, teaching work skills, or navigating the larger community's norms and practices with them to help them integrate into their societies at work and school or in general social interactions.²¹ Baptists can utilize their local congregations for very community-specific ministries, learning where their neighbors have come from (are they Honduran, Mexican, Korean, etc.?) to better reach them in their cultural milieu. Christians are called to be missionaries, sharing the good news. Sometimes this will even involve learning a new language (no one speaks Spanish at church and new Latinos are in town? Perhaps it is time for a member to brush up on their high school Spanish). Sometimes it will involve more organized community change.

²¹ Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang, eds., *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 166.

While Baptists are historically an autonomous local body of believers, many Baptists have learned that to accomplish bigger goals nationally and globally, local churches must work together. To that end, as explored in the last chapter, Baptists have to network with other Baptists in their state or surrounding towns, pooling resources to better equip them for larger ministries to more of the twelve million marginalized people hanging in legal and social limbo. And, Baptists must locally support whatever national or international causes they deem appropriate to aid them in assisting and supporting the undocumented in their communities. These organizations, such as World Relief,²² can assist by providing technical support and training to church members, even helping churches offer worship in other languages to accommodate changing needs of the community as new immigrants arrive. Alternatively, if Baptists have the means available to help the undocumented find pathways to legalization or naturalization, they should employ those means or support organizations.²³ In ministering to immigrants through their congregational leadership as well as national and global ministries, local churches can build a reciprocal relationship with immigrants that will ultimately lead to receiving profound blessings from their immigrant neighbors, beyond anything they were able to give.²⁴

Baptist Churches and Individuals: Policy Advocacy

Beyond simply ministering to undocumented immigrant needs, marginalized people need advocates to stand with them to work to fix the broken immigration system in the United States that keeps them in the shadows. Advocacy means to be “a voice for the

²² For more information, see <https://www.worldrelief.org/>, online (accessed 1 May 2010).

²³ C.f., the “ISAAC” project in the BGCT, discussed in chapter four.

²⁴ Soerens and Hwang, 161.

voiceless, standing in the gap to present the realities of injustice around the world to those in positions of influence who can help change the situation.”²⁵ Undocumented immigrants have no voice in a democracy where only citizens can vote. Their rights are limited by current laws, making them unable to participate in the necessary protocols for change that need to occur in the legal system.

Policy advocacy happens on individual, communal, national, and global levels. Christians are called to address all of these areas with the love and faith of Christ: “Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19-20, emphasis mine). Additionally, Prov 31:8 says to “Speak out for those who cannot speak.” Baptists begin in the local church and work outward to spread the good news of the gospel. Many Baptists have adopted mission strategies through broad mission organizations, funded through state and national conventions. The same can be done for policy advocacy, which serves as a main function of the mission of Jesus: advocating on the side of the downtrodden and becoming the ultimate advocate, giving his life for all humanity.

To be successful advocating for Christ-centered policies, Baptists need to begin locally. This can be done through ministry and education (as noted above), as well as individual voting practices that support those candidates seeking Kingdom principles on this issue. This also means being willing to minister in difficult circumstances, facing opposition from majority cultures that have traditionally felt threatened by a large immigrant presence.

²⁵ Ibid., 181.

Baptists who call for reform will face what many prophets of ancient days faced: “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown” (Luke 4:24).

Moving from local, individual advocacy, Baptists can then further engage policies by signing declarations with other Christian groups supporting immigrant rights and the need for reform of the current system,²⁶ meeting with local congresspersons or their staff to press the issue as concerned citizens, sponsoring immigrant-centered “advocacy days” at a local or state-wide level, or writing editorials for local news publications to express a Kingdom-centered viewpoint on the issue.²⁷ Baptists can use these tools to support measures to deal with the issues addressed in chapter two of this study. These policies might include:

1. A policy of **earned legalization** to make legal status available for the twelve million undocumented immigrants currently in the country. This policy cannot be overly punitive, as it will deter participation, and it must incorporate means to make achievable goals to get the maximum number of people into the system, identify those who should not be here because of criminal activity, and integrate those who can contribute. Any policy that leaves a large undocumented population by default will fail as an illegal-immigration deterrent. This policy must have a straightforward process to measure prospective (not retrospective) eligibility. The program must also focus on integration (paying taxes, learning English, working hard, going to school, or staying out of trouble). The promise must ultimately be permanent residence or the policy will single out certain groups of immigrants, creating more discrimination and abuse. A new system would also use fees wisely, balancing a need for funding from each immigrant as well as implementing ways to keep costs affordable and attainable for immigrants so that the maximum number can take advantage of the benefits. The fees will keep the system from becoming backlogged due to inadequate funding. Lastly, this kind of policy should not “create catch-22s,” meaning for those immigrants who have falsified identities to gain employment while undocumented, the process should not be completely closed to them. Applicants must feel

²⁶ C.f., “Interfaith Platform on Humane Immigration Reform,” *Obama-Biden Transition Project*, online: http://otrans.3cdn.net/9035be1c399b19923c_9km6ba35v.pdf (accessed 29 March 2009).

²⁷ Soerens and Hwang, 182-83.

empowered to come forward and identify themselves without fearing potential negative consequences, such as deportation.²⁸

2. A commitment to **family unification** to keep U.S. immigrants and their close family members together. Currently, family visas are capped at 480,000 per year (excepting parents, spouses, and minor children of U.S. citizens), meaning there are many more people who qualify for family visas than there are available slots for them in the system. These family members wait for years in backlogs, many entering illegally or overstaying their visas to be with family members. A well-functioning family immigration system would remove a key motivation for illegal immigration. Family-based immigration is also helpful in that it “enhances an individual’s ability to integrate and thrive in the U.S. Immigrant families are vital emotional, psychological, and cultural resources that shelter and sustain family members...Stripping away this support would foster social isolation...rather than acculturation.” To foster family unification, current backlogs must be cleared and unused visas must be reclaimed. This could be done by moving spouses and minor children of LPRs to “immediate relatives” and not counting them against the per-country cap, as well as increasing per-country caps for other relatives to fit with twenty-first century requirements (this issue was last visited in 1990). Lastly, the policy should include provisions for USCIS so that it has the funding and personnel resources it needs to unite families.²⁹

3. A functioning and fair **employment verification system** for all workers. The current I-9 verification system and voluntary E-Verify system are in desperate need of reform, as much of the data is inaccurate and the functions are not sustainable. A new policy must close off the so-called “job magnet” for undocumented workers by creating a system to verify all workers while maintaining fair and equitable practices in implementing the system. A comprehensive bill for immigration policy changes should include means to keep data regularly updated and accurate. In addition, the system should provide protections for all workers, seeking to correct quickly any erroneous charges that a worker might not be eligible to work. This includes penalties for employers misusing the program by discriminating against workers who appear “foreign” and providing due-process protections by allowing workers to view their own records and contact the agency to correct any errors. This system would have to be implemented gradually and would likely work best by applying the new policy

²⁸ Summary of: Immigration Policy Center, “Focusing on the Solutions: Earned legalization: Repairing Our Broken Immigration System,” *Immigration Policy Center*, online: <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/earned-legalization-repairing-our-broken-immigration-system> (accessed 1 May 2010).

²⁹ Summary of: Immigration Policy Center, “Focusing on the Solutions: Family Immigration: Repairing Our Broken Immigration System,” *Immigration Policy Center*, online: <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/family-immigration-repairing-our-broken-immigration-system> (accessed 1 May 2010).

to new hires only. Lastly, the government must have adequate resources to run the system in order to make mandatory employment verification a nation-wide requirement for all employers, and within those resources must find ways to reach out to communities to explain the new procedures to employers and workers alike.³⁰

4. A policy that focuses on **naturalization and integration** so that immigrants can realize their full potential and develop deeper ties with their communities in the United States. This is not specifically about reforming existing laws, but instead reaches beyond the laws to generate more “support for sufficient planning and resources to create a more robust integration program. Efforts to prioritize integration and naturalization, to streamline current application processes and to revise existing policies and procedures can be accomplished through administrative action.” Resources from the government should be used to enhance literacy, language acquisition, and civics education so that each immigrant seeking to become a citizen can have ample opportunity to efficiently apply for and receive citizenship and become contributing members of society. Additionally, the government should coordinate its efforts with nonprofit organizations and procure further funding (outside of merely application fees from immigrants) to ensure objectives are met for every immigrant seeking citizenship.³¹

Lastly, Baptists can band together with larger, nonprofit, world organizations to address the root causes of undocumented migration, lessening the need for undocumented labor and helping keep immigrants in their native lands, apart from injustice and poverty, by supporting foreign economies and social structure in order that they might succeed in a global economy when so many are currently failing in the two-thirds world while the United States thrives. This can mean partnering with organizations to support environmental and labor groups dedicated to paying fair wages to farmers in poor countries by buying fair-trade

³⁰ Summary of: Immigration Policy Center, “Focusing on the Solutions: Employment Verification: Repairing Our Broken Immigration System,” *Immigration Policy Center*, online: <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/employment-verification-repairing-our-broken-immigration-system> (accessed 1 May 2010).

³¹ Summary of: Immigration Policy Center, “Focusing on the Solutions: Naturalization and Integration: Repairing Our Broken Immigration System,” *Immigration Policy Center*, online: <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/naturalization-and-integration-repairing-our-broken-immigration-system> (accessed 1 May 2010).

coffee or chocolate at the local supermarket.³² A single Baptist's contribution to world poverty may not be great, but if each Baptist church supported changes in the global economy (even if it means spending \$2 more for coffee), the impact could be significant.

Conclusion

Clearly, Baptist responses will vary, just as Baptists vary. But the strength of Baptists will always be their influence in their local communities. This is where the most advocacy will happen and where Baptists have historically and traditionally done their best work. That said, Baptists must also band together to make their prophetic voices heard on a national level if national policies are to be changed to Kingdom-centered principles. So many times Baptists seek to remain silent on political issues, hiding behind a fear of controversy or a shield of church-state separation. But if Baptists seek to be Kingdom Christians, they must boldly step away from those fears into proclamation for "the least of these." Some evangelical leaders are speaking up on the issue, but still many evangelical (Baptist) pastors have faced strong opposition from an under-informed mass of congregants and have folded on the issue altogether. To adequately address such a broad and sweeping issue, however, each Baptist, in his or her own life and local church setting, must agree with other Christians "on a unified, scriptural position on the immigration issue, one that welcomes the stranger and embraces both God's justice and his compassion."³³ Otherwise, the immigration dilemma in the United States will continue to be the reality for millions of shadowed lives, leaving the churches empty and void of prophetic mission and leaving the mission of God to outsiders at the doorstep of the sanctuary at Baptist churches.

³² Soerens and Hwang, 185.

³³ *Ibid.*, 174.

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