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Abstract: The issue of immigration is a difficult and complex topic that raises several conflicting sentiments for Christians. How Christians should react and think about immigration? Are there any biblical principles or guidelines to enlighten a Christian response?

The misunderstanding or ignorance of the general aspects of the history and attitudes of the Immigration Policies in the US have produced a biased evaluation and reaction to the topic of Immigration that could affect the way in which Christians could react to the immigration debate according to Christian values.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the major aspects of the history and attitudes of the US Immigration policies and the main arguments used in the immigration debate and discuss some of the Christian responses that have been proposed and offer a biblical perspective to the issue of immigration that could shed light on how we should approach the issue of immigration from an informed position and according to Christian values.

HISTORY AND ISSUES ON THE IMMIGRATION DEBATE

In the Uprooted (1951) Oscar Handlin claimed: “Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were the American history”. For some this declaration seems like an overstatement in order to attract the attention to a neglected topic in the American history books at that time. However, the current debate on immigration in America, still remind us that immigration and America history are more intertwined than most people will like to admit.

Since its inception as a nation, the issue of immigration was considered as an opportunity or as a threat to the development and identity of America. For Example, George Washington, the first president of the United States in his address to Irish immigrants in New York in 1783 stated:

“The bosom of America is open to receive not only the Opulent and respectable Stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations And Religions; whom we

shall welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges, if by decency and propriety of conduct they appear to merit the enjoyment”¹

On the other hand, Benjamin Franklin’s warning in 1751, declared that Pennsylvania was becoming “a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them and will never adopt our Language or Customs any more than they can acquire our Complexion”.²

Brief History of Modern American Immigration

This polarity of feelings toward immigration could be perceived in the proposal that Roger Daniels offers to divide the modern American history of immigration.

According to Daniels it could be divided into five periods:

High Immigration and Growing Restriction (1882-1924): here we find an “exclusion of Asian immigrants”³, according to Daniels the first evolving immigration policy was base on race, but will eventually move to the issue of ethnicity.

Low and Decreasing Immigration and Severe Restriction (1924-43): In this period immigration experienced a major reduction and it become more drastic under the effects

¹ Washington George, "Address to the Members of the Volunteer Association and Other Inhabitants of the Kingdom of Ireland Who Have Lately Arrived in the City of New York", The Claremont Institute http://www.pbs.org/georgewashington/collection/other_1788dec2.html (accessed February 2 2013). Ruth Bjorklund, *Immigration, Debating the issues* (New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2012), 7.

² Peter Schrag, *Not Fit for Our Society : Nativism and Immigration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 3.

³ Roger Daniels and Otis L. Graham, *Debating American Immigration, 1882--present*, Debating 20th century America (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 8. Asian immigrants were “aliens ineligible to citizenship” in American law, which after 1870, limited naturalization to “white persons” and those of “African descent”. Under the fourteenth Amendment anyone born in the United States was a birthright citizen.

caused by the Great Depression of the 1930s, the creation of the “Immigration Act of 1924”.⁴

The implementation of the Immigration Act of 1924 promoted the “restriction of white immigration”⁵ and established a quota system.⁶

Low but Increasing Immigration and decreasing Restriction (1943-65): the World War II marked a positive turning point in American immigration policy, because questions of ideology and international politics began to supersede questions of race, ethnicity, and narrow nationalism. While there was no general change in the immigration

⁴ This legislation will allow the migration of 2 percent of the number of foreign-born from each country that had been listed in the census of 1890. Immigration Law by 1920 starts it to be developed under some guiding ideas that will shape the once free and unrestricted immigration policy. It became limited, and eight categories of people were barred from immigrating: contract laborers, Asians (except Japanese and Filipinos), criminals, persons who failed to meet certain moral standards, persons with various deceases, persons likely to become a public charge, certain radicals, and illiterate individuals. Most Americans felt that their country was letting in too many “wrong” kinds of people.

⁵ Daniels and Graham, *Debating American Immigration, 1882--present*, 12. Eastern seaboard states, who where especially concern about the Irish Catholic immigration, which follow the aftermath of the potato famine of the mid-1840s and it was composed largely of desperately poor immigrants. This was followed by a heavy immigration in the early 1850s, largely of Irish, Germans (a minority of whom were Catholic), and Scandinavian, coupled with the growing crisis over slavery, led to the first anti-immigrant mass movement in American history. One is able to perceive that this anti-immigration movement was fueled by several factors: religious, economical and political. For example in Massachusetts, this movement got the state constitution changed to deny the vote to naturalized citizens until two years after they had become naturalized. At the national level unfulfilled goals included an extension of the waiting period for naturalization from five to fourteen years, various proposal to limit immigration, and a constitutional amendment barring foreign-born persons from holding any public office.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 24. Daniels shows part of the motivation for the Immigration Act of 1924 in the comments of the law’s chief author, Albert Johnson, whom celebrated the law’s presumed effects in 1927:

Today, instead of a well-knit homogenous citizenry, we have a body politic made up of all every diverse element. Today, instead of a nation descended from generations of freemen bred to a knowledge of the principles and practice of self-government, of liberty under law, we have a heterogeneous population no small proportion of which is sprung from races that, throughout the centuries, have known no liberty at all. . . . In other words, our capacity to maintain our cherished institutions stands diluted by a stream of alien blood, with all its inherited misconceptions respecting the relationships of the governing power to the governed. It is out of the appreciation of this fundamental fact . . . that the American people have come to sanction –indeed demand– reform of our immigration laws. They have seen, patent and plain, the encroachments of the foreign-born flood upon their own lives. They have come to realize that such a flood, affecting as it does every individual of whatever race or origin, cannot fail likewise to affect the institutions which have made and preserved American liberties. It is no wonder, therefore, that the myth of the melting pot has been discredited. . . . The United States is our land. . . . We intend to maintain so. The day of indiscriminate acceptance of all races has definitively ended.

law three groups experienced the benefits of wartime alterations: “refugees, Mexicans and Chinese”.⁷

High and Increasing Immigration and relatively Low Restriction (1965-80) In the midst of the Civil Rights era, the Immigration Act of 1965 change the focus of the discussion from the law and its administration to the immigrants themselves, the categories under which they gained admission and the regions from which they came. There was an emphasis on family reunification. The 1965 act added parents of U.S. citizens to the admitted without numerical restriction category and allocated 74 percent of preferences visas to family members, as opposed to 50 percent in the 1952 act.⁸ Immigrants after 1965 increasingly practiced chain migration, as immigrants to America had done since the seventeenth century.⁹ “

High and Increasing Immigration and Increasing but essentially Ineffective Restriction (1980-present): According to Daniels, the beginning of Reagan presidency in 1981 could be understood as the turning point against the liberalism of the 1960s on immigration¹⁰. There was a resurgence of the “new nativism” with special concern about the cultural unity of the nation due to the cultural values of some immigrants but also the abilities of their children to conform to not fully specified standards.¹¹

⁷ Ibid., 29.

⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁰ Ibid., 48, 49. In the early 1980s Ronald Reagan made inflammatory comments about the danger of our being overrun by “feet people” from Central America.

¹¹ Ibid., 51. Daniels mentions the comments made by Republican senator from Wyoming Alan K. Simpson, who was a member of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy (1978-81) and wrote: A substantial proportion of these new persons and their descendants do not assimilate satisfactorily into our society.... They may well create in America the same social, political, and economic problems that exist in the countries from which they have chosen to depart. Furthermore, if language and cultural

Again, voices are raised on the need of a new immigration reform that could balance or control the legal and illegal immigration flow to America¹².

Issues on Immigration

This brief history of the immigration policy in the United States illustrate that the major concerns of the anti-immigration arguments may be grouped under two major headings: economic and cultural.¹³ However, after the September eleven, national security has become an additional important element to be considered in the discussion of immigration in America.¹⁴

Proponents in favor of a more benevolent immigration policy on the other hand will try to respond to these major concerns trying to prove the positive effect of immigration in the economy and culture of the United States and argue that they do not represent a threat to the security and welfare of the nation.

Economic

Is the effect of immigration on the economy positive or negative? This type of question cannot be answer with a simple yes and no answer. What proponents on both

separation rise above certain level, the unity and political stability of our nation will-in time-be seriously eroded.

¹² Bjorklund, *Immigration*, 8. Senator Charles Schumer of New York says that our immigration system is broken. Reform is necessary. In a speech before Congress he said, "Any reformed immigration system must be successful in encouraging the next Albert Einstein to emigrate permanently to the United States while, at the same time, discouraging underpaid, temporary workers from taking jobs that could and should be filled by qualified American workers.

¹³ Daniels and Graham, *Debating American Immigration, 1882--present*, 63.

¹⁴ Bjorklund, *Immigration*, 22. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Congress focused on strengthening immigration enforcement, reforming immigration laws, and securing the nation's borders. At the time, the secretary of state, Colin Powell, declared that the attacks had "fundamentally changed our view of the openness or our society." In 2002 Congress created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which took over and reorganized various immigration agencies and increased the number of immigration agents, investigators, and persons working in immigration detention centers. Since the DHS was formed, there have been several attempts by law-makers to address immigration reform. As late as 2011, no comprehensive reform bills were passed by Congress.

sides have made clear is that legal and illegal immigration have positive and negative effects on the economy.

On the positive side it has been recognized that the contributions of illegal immigrants to the Social Security Administration estimated about \$6 to \$7 billion each year on Social Security tax revenue and \$1.5 billion in Medicare taxes each year, for benefits which they would not receive and cannot claim represents a fortuitous event that nobody seems to be concerned especially when the Social Security system is facing a crisis.¹⁵

Also the IRS, with the creation in 1996 of the Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), more than 11 million numbers have been issued. In 2005 tax returns of household member reporting on an ITIN number accounted for more than \$5 billion in federal taxes.¹⁶ Even for those paid “under the table” there is the contribution of the sales taxes of their purchases and payments.¹⁷ Some economist even argues that the average immigrant pays about \$80,000 more in taxes than he or she receives in benefits over a lifetime. However, that net benefit to the government, though, it is the result of paying

¹⁵ Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang, *Welcoming the Stranger : Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2009), 34. Bjorklund, *Immigration*, 47. One representative from the Social Security Administration (SSA) said that immigration helps the system “remain solvent”. He admits that in its financial planning, the SSA relies on immigrants ‘contributions to Social Security taxes.

¹⁶ Soerens and Hwang, *Welcoming the Stranger : Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate*, 35. Vernon M. Briggs Jr. and Stephen Moore, “Still an Open Door?: U.S. Immigration Policy and the American Economy” in Richard John Neuhaus, "Immigration and the Alien Among Us," in *Immigration : Debating the Issues* (ed. Nicholas Capaldi; Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1997), 187. Aviva Chomsky, *"They take our jobs!" : and 20 other Myths about Immigration* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2007), 39-45.

¹⁷ Soerens and Hwang, *Welcoming the Stranger : Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate*, 34.

\$105,000 more over a lifetime than the benefits received to the federal government, while receiving \$25,000 in benefits more than what is paid to state and local governments.¹⁸

Scholars like Borjas had argued that while natives as a group gain from immigration because it raises the national income that build up to natives;¹⁹ it also induces a substantial redistribution of wealth.²⁰ According to Borjas calculations each year native workers on the whole, lose about \$133 billion a year, or 1.9 of GDP in a \$7-trillion economy, mainly because immigrants drive down wages of competing workers. At the same time, employers and other users of immigrants' services, such as farm industries gain substantially. These gains are on the order of \$140 billion, or 2 percent of GDP. But while the net gain is small, some Americans gain very much.²¹

Another economist even argues that the net gain is within the average annual growth that is about 2 percent anyway, and this surplus for practical purposes is nugatory.²² In other words native workers are not gaining anything out of immigration.

There is however an ugly implication as result of this analysis, Americans owners of capital benefits from immigrants at the expense of their fellow Americans.²³

¹⁸ Ibid., 121.

¹⁹ George J. Borjas, *Friends or Strangers : The Impact of Immigrants on the U.S. Economy* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 221. Borjas argues that the admission of immigrant affects national income not only because he produces additional output, but also because the immigrant flow alters the productivity of natives. If the two groups have similar skills and are interchangeable in the production process, native productivity and wages decline as result of immigration. Alternatively, immigrants and natives may be complements in production, in which case the entry of immigrants into the U.S. labor market increases native productivity and wages.

²⁰ Idem, "Know the Flow," in *Immigration and the Alien Among Us* (ed. Nicholas Capaldi; Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1997), 194.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Carol M. Swain, *Debating Immigration* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 159.

²³ Ibid., 160, 164. According to Peter Brimelow, who quotes the study of two Columbia University economist using trade theory approach have estimated the losses to U.S. natives from

While the need for low-skill workers in the agriculture sector of the economy is essential in some areas in the long run low-skill immigrants are more likely to become consumers of the welfare system. Here we find again this ambivalent value of immigrant on the economy. This problem is also present in the analysis of a more selective immigration process that favors the input of high-skill workers to the economy as an essential element for the survival of the U.S. economy in a competitive market;²⁴ they too bring a negative effect on the earnings of native high-skill workers.²⁵

The cost of immigration also has been recognized in the Education system and the stress that brings to the Health Care system.²⁶

Remittance also has been point out as drain of resources to foreign economies. However, under a global economy this is not considered as something completely bad.²⁷

Is immigration positive or negative to the economy? Immigration brings an economic paradox that produces antagonistic sentiments depending on what aspect to the economic life of the nation are we concern with.

immigration at 0.8 percent of the GDP-or \$96 billion in today's \$12 trillion economy. That is an average loss of \$833 for each native worker.

²⁴ Borjas, *Friends or Strangers : The Impact of Immigrants on the U.S. Economy*, 223.

²⁵ Swain, *Debating Immigration*, 164. Immigration impacts the wages of all native workers, including even new native-born college graduates. This is also affects the earning of native-born PhDs over immigrant PhD student. Bjorklund, *Immigration*, 32,33. A recent Duke University study showed that in the past decade, immigrants founded 25 percent of all new American engineering and technology companies. Immigrants were also listed as inventors or coinventors of 24 percent of all international patents in 2006..

²⁶ Idem, *Immigration*, 31, 32. The Federation for Immigration Reform reported that the cost of educating illegal immigrants' children is as high as \$28 billion each year. In 2009, there were more than 650,000 international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and Universities. They paid nearly \$18 billion in tuition and other education-related expenses. William Barbour, *Illegal Immigration, Current Controversies* (San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, 1994), 82-84.

²⁷ Chomsky, *"They take our jobs!" : and 20 other Myths about Immigration*, 46. In 2004, immigrants from Latin America sent over \$30 billion to their home countries-in 2005, over \$50 billion. The amount was between \$1,000 to \$2,500 a year, or 10 percent of their annual income. (The total income

Cultural

Perhaps this section in the discussion of immigration is the less likely to become upfront in the dialog but it has been clearly identified as one of the major concerns for people who perceive that immigration erodes the American identity, values and unity.²⁸

While these ideas most of the time portray discriminatory images of the American society, if we considered from an historical point of view it has been present in arguments against immigration since the foundation of this nation.²⁹ Some of these ideas could be categorized today as xenophobia and nativism.

Several notions however could be considered without historical support such as an American race³⁰ and a monocultural foundation of America from European immigrants.³¹

Another contested idea of culture and immigration is the concept of the melting pot, which represents more the assimilation process of white immigrants to America, where becoming American would imply becoming Caucasian.³²

of Latin American immigrants in the United States is \$450 billion). But this 10 percent here represents about 50 percent to 80 percent of the household income in Latin America.

²⁸Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., "The Disuniting of America", in Neuhaus, "Immigration and the Alien Among Us," 230. Schlesinger rightly argues that the American identity will never be fixed and final; it will always be in the making. Changes in the population have always brought changes in the national ethos and will continue to do so; but not, one must hope, at the expense of the national integration. According to Schlesinger the question America confronts as a pluralistic society is the cohesion-common ideals, common political institutions, common language, common culture, common fate-and that today empower people of all continents, races and creeds. Lawrence Auster, "Immigration Is Harming American Culture", in Mary E. Williams, *Immigration : Opposing Viewpoints*, Opposing Viewpoints Series (San Diego, Calif.: Greenhaven Press, 2004), 71-79. According to Auster the influx of immigrants from non-Western nations is particularly dangerous, because the beliefs of these cultures often conflict with American values and customs. Moreover Americans themselves contribute to the immigration threat when they uphold the principle of nondiscrimination toward other cultures. Widely diverse cultures cannot coexist within the same borders. Americans must come to see themselves as a distinct people and drastically reduce immigration if they wish to preserve their nation.

²⁹ Schrag, *Not Fit for Our Society : Nativism and Immigration*, 108-138.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

However, the effect of immigration and intermarriage practices among Hispanics for example will produce another whitening just as Poles, Italians, and the other “inferior” immigrants were whitened a century before.³³

It will not require a special kind of reader of history to understand that racial tension and discrimination has been part of the U.S. immigration policy and practices of the American society.³⁴ This is the reason why late president John F. Kennedy in his book “A Nation of Immigrants” argues that the contribution of immigrants can be seen in every aspect of our national life. We see it in religion, in politics, in business, in the arts, in education, even in athletics and in entertainment. There is no part of our nation that has not been touched by our immigration background. Everywhere immigrants have enriched and strengthened the fabric of the American life. He was after all the great-grandson of Irish immigrants.³⁵

National Security

For many people concern with the security of the U.S. against terrorism the country’s attitude of tolerance of extremist views and its embrace of immigrants represent a source of threat that will continue to make America vulnerable to terrorism.³⁶

³¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., “The Disuniting of America,” in *Immigration and the Alien Among Us* (ed. Nicholas Capaldi; Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1997), 221.

³² Schrag, *Not Fit for Our Society : Nativism and Immigration*, 139. Chomsky, “*They take our jobs!*” : and 20 other Myths about Immigration, 77-90. Chomsky argues that if non-Europeans have not assimilated in the same way that Europeans have, it’s because everything from the Constitution to immigration and naturalization law, to the political, social, and economic factors have perpetrated the notion that the United States is, and should be, a white country.

³³ Schrag, *Not Fit for Our Society : Nativism and Immigration*, 224.

³⁴ John F. Kennedy, “A Nation of Immigrants”, in Neuhaus, “Immigration and the Alien Among Us,” 124. Swain, *Debating Immigration*, 206-219.

³⁵ Williams, *Immigration : Opposing Viewpoints*, 51.

³⁶ Barbour, *Illegal Immigration*, 90.

The security issues that terrorism has raised are not always reflected in changes of U.S. immigration policy. While America was at war in the 1990's with Iraq the census data shows that 68,000 Iraqi immigrants were allowed into the U.S. during that decade. Even more, all the countries on the State Department's list of sponsors of terrorism are eligible to send immigrants to the U.S. and have in fact sent hundreds of legal immigrants here over the last ten years.³⁷

However the capability to control illegal and legal migration to prevent terrorism is still something to be developed. Given the estimated four hundred million annual land crossings by shoppers, workers, tourist and students; the scores of millions of travelers arriving by plane and the cargo arriving by ship; the one-third-plus illegal residents, visa overstayers who arrive in the country legally in addition to the contraband from Mexico the construction of more fences, walls and Border Patrol agents could not deterred a determined terrorist to enter the U.S. After all each of the 9/11 terrorist entered the country legally.³⁸

Terrorist acts in the United States have been committed by citizens and by immigrants and for causes related to domestic as well as international issues.³⁹

On the other side of the coin the military has develop a program that allows temporary immigrants, including students and refugees, to enlist if they have lived in the United States for a minimum of two years. In 2010 it was estimated that there were

³⁷ Williams, *Immigration : Opposing Viewpoints*, 108.

³⁸ Schrag, *Not Fit for Our Society : Nativism and Immigration*, 222.

³⁹ Chomsky, *"They take our jobs!" : and 20 other Myths about Immigration*, 180. The potential that a citizen will commit a crime or even a terrorist act is just as real as the potential that an immigrant will. No country has the monopoly on violent lawbreakers, and in no country are they nonexistent.

30,000 to 40,000 noncitizen service members in the military, there, temporary immigrants fight and defend U.S. democracy from enemies within and outside America.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO IMMIGRATION

Ethical Issues on Immigration

As it had been observed the issue of immigration brings several important issues in collision, ethics included.

Several ethical concerns are related to the topic of immigration. Some consider that immigration present us with the necessity of grappling with the tension between two important moral demands: justice to our fellow citizens and humanitarian concern with the plight of poor persons abroad.⁴⁰

However is necessary to recognize that most of the time the ethical issues of immigration are discussed from the perspective of the host not the hostee. Also a great deal of the public debate is utilitarian in nature, does immigration bring balance, beneficial or harmful results for American society?⁴¹ This utilitarian approach is presented on two different ways: one that it is inclusionist and maintains that immigration is largely beneficial, the other is restrictionist who argues that immigration is more harmful.⁴²

For both groups apart from economy, they recognized that issues of race, cultural unity and diversity and national moral traditions are topics of priority in which they do not share common ground.⁴³

⁴⁰ Swain, *Debating Immigration*, 81.

⁴¹ Dana W. Wilbanks and Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy, *Re-creating America : the Ethics of U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy in a Christian Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press in cooperation with the Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy., 1996), 82.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 82-92.

It is also important to observe that the ethics of immigration can be discussed from a nationalistic perspective but also from a global perspective. From a nationalistic perspective it is possible to argue the ethical right of exclusion of a nation to people who represent a danger to the economic and social welfare and to the safety of their society. On the other hand if immigration is view from a global perspective the emphasis is place on the right of the individuals for free international movement under the scope of international law and global governance. So the question is whether the states have the unilateral right to determine their membership rules or immigration and citizen rules should be brought under the scope of international law.⁴⁴

However, if the state has the right to exclude according to their own needs and values as some ethicist have argue U.S. policy depends a great deal on the moral character of Americans.⁴⁵ Another related issue is how Americans see the immigrants.

Ethical proposals could be classified under two major headings: a) National interest, b) Humanitarianism.⁴⁶ Then it could be divided like this:

1- Open Gates: focused on the individual right of movement. (Like emigration)
This option is an inclusionist view that is subordinating national interest to humanitarianism.

2- Guarded Gates: focused on the right of exclusion of states (limited control: allowing refugees and selection criteria base on needs). This option offers a limited

⁴⁴ Christopher Heath Wellman and Phillip Cole, *Debating the Ethics of Immigration : Is There a Right to Exclude?*, Debating ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

⁴⁵ Wilbanks and Policy, *Re-creating America : the Ethics of U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy in a Christian Perspective*, 141.

⁴⁶ Dana Wilbanks, "The Moral Debate between Humanitarianism and National Interest about U.S. Refugee Policy: A Theological Perspective," in *Moral Issues and Christian Responses* (ed. Patricia Beattie Jung and L. Shannon Jung; Australia; Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2003), 313.

inclusion or limited restriction of immigrants combining national interest and humanitarianism.

3- Closed Gates: This is a radical restrictive view that focuses humanitarianism not in terms of admission of immigrant but providing international assistance separating national interest and humanitarianism. (Fortress America)

Christian Ethics and Immigration

While many other issues in social ethics could be understood and discuss in Christian ethics from the perspective of general biblical principles and philosophy in the case of immigration we found a wealth of information and examples from which it is possible to develop a more biblically sounded Christian ethic on immigration.

First of all, viewed from a Christian perspective, migrants are not perceived simply as burdens or benefits.⁴⁷ The biblical stories and images about sojourners and strangers offer exhortations that are not so easy to dismiss about welcoming and loving the stranger. Some ethicist argues that they offer dynamic ways to perceive migrants along with appropriate moral responses.⁴⁸ Christian ethic is therefore shaped by the narratives of the Bible, but also on the legal attitudes express in the Scriptures. These materials contain both deontological and teleological features.⁴⁹ The Bible and the Christian tradition are shape also by an ethic of hospitality that is not delimited by national borders.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Wilbanks and Policy, *Re-creating America : the Ethics of U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy in a Christian Perspective*, 97.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 113.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 123.

It is interesting to notice that also in Christian ethics is easy to perceive the dualist division between the national interest and the humanitarian views both argue from the Bible.

Those in favor of a more restrictive view supporting the national interest will argue their position from the New Testament teaching and principles of government authority and the submission of Christians to the protective functions of government in favor of society. They also recognize that the Old Testament offers no normative principles for Christians today and that the systems of government in the Old Testament Israel and the United States differ substantially in form and operation.⁵¹

Others recognized that immigration offers a moral dilemma from the standpoint of basic justice, especially distributive justice, where every nation has special obligations to “their own” poor, before assuming responsibility for the poor in the world.⁵²

Finally those in favor of a more inclusionist view would consider valuable the information offer by the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. However depending on the hermeneutics and ethical system they hold, some will argue in favor of legal immigrants only to be considered for inclusion. They also argue that no faithful Christian could remain as such, as an illegal immigrant.⁵³ (Their major concern is the legal status: the focus is on the national interest) Others on the other hand, while accepting both Testaments will argue for both types of immigrants as candidates for inclusion and considered that illegal immigrants could be Christians but facing moral

⁵¹ Swain, *Debating Immigration*, 46-62.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 63-81.

⁵³ James Karl Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis : Immigrants, Aliens & the Bible* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2009).

challenges. (Their major concern is need of the immigrant: their focus is on humanitarianism).⁵⁴ Conservative theologians will be more restrictive while liberal theologians will be more inclusionist.

Biblical Ethics on Immigration

The flow of peoples from one place to another was constant in the Ancient Near East.⁵⁵ They migrated among other reasons, because their home conditions became intolerable: famine or other natural disasters forced them out;⁵⁶ reports of great opportunities led many to try another locale, including commerce;⁵⁷ mercenaries were required by a newly emerging dynasty promising outstanding rewards; and semi-nomadic peoples took occasion for the establishment of a new estate to settle down. Evidence of each of these kinds of movements into the new nation of Israel is apparent in the Bible.⁵⁸

The people who came in contact with Israel were designated with different linguistic terms to differentiate from the native-born Israelites. The words for aliens in the Hebrew text are: 1. אֲרָם, of another family (Dt. 25:5) or race (Job 15:19), an alien (Is. 61:5), barbarian (Is. 25:2, 5), even enemy (Jl. 3:17); 2. גֵּר the resident alien (Ex. 22:20 ; the Israelites in Egypt, Lv. 17:12 ; the Canaanites in Israel; opp. אֲרָם Lv. 19:34); 3. תּוֹשָׁב

⁵⁴ Ben Daniel, *Neighbor : Christian Encounters with "illegal" Immigration*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 13-24.

⁵⁵ Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis : Immigrants, Aliens & the Bible*, 27.

⁵⁶ G. Johannes Ringgren Helmer Botterweck, John T. Willis, and Heinz-Josef Green David E. Stott Douglas W. Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Eerdmans, 1974), 443. Famine is the most frequent reason given in the OT for people moving from his clan or home.

⁵⁷ William Domeris, *Touching the Heart of God : the Social Construction of Poverty among Biblical Peasants* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 166.

⁵⁸ Joseph R. Rosenbloom, *Conversion to Judaism : from the Biblical period to the present* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1978), 16.

the resident, not necessarily an alien, without civil rights (Gn. 23:4); 4. נְכַרִי and נְכֹן־נֶכֶר the alien who is temporarily in another land (Dt. 14:21).⁵⁹

The existence of legislation for foreigners in the Israelite legal corpus shows how ancient societies could react to the challenge of incorporating newcomers into their social setting. However, research that has been done in order to find comparative legal material in ancient Near East cultures to appreciate the distinct nuances of the Pentateuchal laws has yielded nothing, this appear to be a singular feature of Israel's legal material. Joe Sprinkle commenting on the importance of the stranger [*gēr*] in the Pentateuch states “the regulation on the sojourner shows an enlightened attitude towards non-Israelites for which there is no parallel in Mesopotamian law”.⁶⁰ José Ramírez also argues that

If we take into account that the Old Testament laws are part of the wider legal tradition of the ancient near East, and that even in cases in which there is a different legal treatment, both address usually the same kind of problems, the difference between them in relation to the theme of the stranger/foreigner is, then, striking. This makes the theme of the resident alien a unique concern of the Old Testament with no parallel in the surrounding cultures⁶¹.

⁵⁹ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 8.V5 for נְכֹן־נֶכֶר προσήλυτος (Dt. 1:16), which at a later date, though not for the translators themselves, helped to promote a restriction to the proselyte in the narrower sense. The main LXX equivalents are, for נְכֹן־נֶכֶר ἄλλοτριος (Lv. 10:1) and ἀλλογενής (Ex. 29:33), once even ἐχθρός (Prv. 6:1), for נְכֹן־נֶכֶר πάροικος (Ex. 12:45), which is often used for נְכֹן־נֶכֶר too (Gn. 15:13), for נְכֹן־נֶכֶר προσήλυτος (Dt. 1:16), for נְכֹן־נֶכֶר ἄλλοτριος (Gn. 31:15), for נְכֹן־נֶכֶר also ἀλλογενής.

⁶⁰ Joe M. Sprinkle, *The Book of the Covenant: A Literary Approach*, vol. 174 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1994). 172. Christiana de Groot Van Houten, *The alien in Israelite law* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991). 35 Van Houten seems to find nothing unusual in the singularity of the Israelite law concerning the *ger* when she states: “The fact that the alien is mentioned in all the law collections in the Pentateuch, and not at all in the Mesopotamian codes, does not necessarily mean that the Babylonians and Assyrians were unsympathetic to the plight of the alien. Hospitality to the stranger may have been one of the accepted mores of the culture and yet may not have been included in the legal tradition. The omission can be explained by noting that these law codes are addressed to the citizens of a land in order to establish justice among them. The aliens as non-citizens are not part of the intended audience, although they may in fact be members of the society”. However, the absence of this type of legislation in Mesopotamian law codes shows a special concern for them within the Israelite society.

⁶¹ José E. Ramírez Kidd, *Alterity and Identity in Israel : the [ger] in the Old Testament*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999). 112, 113

Ramirez also have noticed that the precept “to love” in the Pentateuch in itself is unusual. The two commandments to love the *gēr* in the Old Testament are matched only by the two commands to love Yahweh. On the other hand, there is only one commandment in the Old Testament to the fellow Israelite. What makes this commandment for the Israelites to love the stranger significant exception is that Deut 10:18 presents the statement that “[Yahweh] loves the *gēr*”, which precedes the actual divine commandment to love the *gēr*.⁶² The use of the verb (אהב) “to love” with Yahweh as subject, is circumscribed in the Pentateuch to the fathers and Israel.

The *gēr* is included within the humanitarian laws in the Pentateuch that are interested in the *‘personae miserae’*. For example: The gleaning regulation, which is included in some of Deuteronomy’s triads: ‘alien (*gēr*), orphan, and widow’, is mentioned also in Lev 19:10; 23:22; where the *gēr* is coupled with the ‘poor’.

In Deuteronomy 10:18 God declares that He administers justice (צדק) for the fatherless and the widow and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. This concept is repeated in Deut 24:17 where the Israelites are commanded not to pervert (הפך) the justice (צדק) due to stranger (*gēr*), or the fatherless, nor take a widow’s garment as pledge. Then in Deut 27:19 the Levites should declare to the Israelites “Curse is the one who perverts (הפך) the justice (צדק) due to the stranger (*gēr*), the fatherless and the widow”. “And all the people shall say, ‘Amen’”

⁶² Ibid., 81, 82.

Several cultic regulations in the Pentateuch share the concept of “equal treatment under the law”⁶³ for the *gēr*. The same law that applies to the native born will apply to the *gēr*. Important legal terminology such as ‘torah’, ‘mispat’, and ‘huqqah’ are used to express this notion of equality. Also, as part of this notion of equality and inclusivity related regulations in the Pentateuch coupled the *gēr* with the term (גֵּרִי) “native-born” to express the idea that the same responsibilities and penalties that these laws bear on the Israelite fall also on the *gēr*.

The information conveyed from several of the Pentateuchal laws of the *gēr* seems to operate under two important assumptions: a) the ‘gerim’ identity and experience⁶⁴ of the Patriarchs⁶⁵ [including Moses⁶⁶], b) the ‘gerim’ identity⁶⁷ and experience of Israel in Egypt.⁶⁸

⁶³ Richard H. Hiers, *Justice and Compassion in Biblical Law* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2009), 163. Hiers argue that a related matter of great concern in biblical law was fair and equal treatment of persons without regard to their social-economic or alien status. According to Hiers, biblical law was especially solicitous as to the rights or interest of sojourners, foreigners or aliens residing in Israel-as if Mosaic Law included an Equal Protection clause. Thus laws were to be applied equally to aliens as to native of Israel. Such sojourners, declares Hiers, would have constituted what now might be called “ethnic minorities”.

⁶⁴ Carol L. O'Connor Michael Patrick Freedman David Noel Meyers, *The Word of the Lord shall go forth : essays in honor of David Noel Freedman in celebration of his sixtieth birthday* (Winona Lake, IN : Eisenbrauns, 1983), 322. Spina have noticed that the portrayal of Israel as ‘gerim’ prior the settlement in Canaan is a remarkable consistent biblical tradition that preserves a genuine historical memory. He notes that Ex 6:4 the patriarchs are referred collectively as ‘gerim’ when Yahweh declares to Moses that he had promised to give to their ancestors the land in which they were then dwelling as outsiders ancient tradition of patriarchs as ‘gerim’, seems to function as part of the background to develop the legislation of the *gēr* in the book of Exodus.

⁶⁵ James K. Bruckner, *Implied Law in the Abraham Narrative : A Literary and Theological Analysis* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 11-50. According to Bruckner there is a growing awareness that the narratives of Genesis evidence the existence of implied procedural laws. Joe M. Sprinkle, *Biblical law and its relevance : a Christian understanding and ethical application for today of the Mosaic regulations* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2006), 62. Sprinkle considers that narratives present in Genesis are better understood when read in the light of the laws. He also considers that the writer of these narratives is also familiar with Mosaic laws. Calum M. Carmichael, *The origins of Biblical law : the Decalogues and the Book of the Covenant* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 10-13. According to Carmichael the subject matter of the narratives on which the rules formulate judgments determines the flow of topics. Gordon F. Davies, *Israel in Egypt : Reading Exodus 1-2*

Another important factor that is essential to concede as we read the legislation of the *gēr* in the Pentateuch is the consciousness of the continuous and permanent presence of the *gēr* in the social composition of Israel⁶⁹. It is possible then to consider as an assumed background for the legislation the following ideas:

1. The presence of the *gēr* as a distinct person present among the tribal community.
2. The permanent residential status of *gēr* within Israel.
3. The effect on the community of the interaction between the *gēr* and the Israelite.

The logical presentation of the instructions concerning the *gēr* laws within the Pentateuch complements the persuasive thrust of these laws. The Israelites have the

(Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 161. Davies considers the possibility that Ex 2:22 is used with the intention of excerpt influence to later social legislation to protect foreigners among other outcast in Israel. Ramírez Kidd, *Alterity and Identity in Israel : the [ger] in the Old Testament*, 91. Ramírez has noticed that the traditions of Egyptian “slavery” and “sojourning” could be perceived within Gen 15:13 as expressing two separate moments: a) initial sojourn Gen 15:13a, b) later oppression Gen 15:13b. Which also help us to clarify the relationship between the ‘ger in Egypt’ motive clauses and the ‘ebed in Egypt’ motive clauses. According to Ramírez these clauses do not represent two different interpretations of the same event but refer to two different stages of Israel’s past. The ‘ger in Egypt’ refers to the initial sojourn of well-being under Joseph. The ‘ebed in Egypt’ is related exclusively to the theme of oppression under Pharaoh.

⁶⁶ Davies, *Israel in Egypt : Reading Exodus 1-2*, 161. Davies states that one of the functions of Ex 2:22 is to tie Moses with the Patriarchs, since God told Abraham that his descendants would be ‘sojourners in a land that is not theirs’ (Gen 15:13).

⁶⁷ Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, The Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 545. Dozeman agrees that the motif of the resident alien is woven into the exodus story. Moses is identified himself as a “resident alien” during his sojourn in Midian. The rights of the resident alien were also addressed in the Passover legislation as well as in the law of the Sabbath. Ex 22:21 and 23:9 legislates the rights of the resident alien against oppression.

⁶⁸ John E. Harvey, *Retelling the Torah : the Deuteronomistic historian's use of Tetrateuchal narratives*, Journal for the study of the Old Testament Supplement series (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 33. According to Harvey, for the Deuteronomist, the Exodus tradition was a stimulus for ethical behavior. Eugene Charles Ulrich, *Priests, prophets, and scribes : essays on the formation and heritage of Second Temple Judaism in honour of Joseph Blenkinsopp*, Journal for the study of the Old Testament Supplement series, (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 240. According to Van Houten, the Exodus tradition, in the laws dealing with the alien, encouraged the Israelites to remain true to their identity and to their calling. For Israel to be faithful to its story, it must be free, and it must have preferred status and to recognize this as a gift from God. This gift is not to be hoarded, but is to equip them to be generous and open—a blessing to the world.

⁶⁹ Sprinkle, *'The Book of the Covenant': A Literary Approach*, 172. Sprinkle mentions that according to rabbinic counting, the Torah cautions Israel regarding behavior towards a stranger some 36

moral responsibility to treat the *gēr* with kindness and equality. The first reason is because of its common experience of their ancestors and themselves as ‘gerim’ in a different land among different people. Second, the composition of the Pentateuch laws while giving emphasis to the concept of particularity and exclusivity of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, also presents additional inclusive elements that portrays the Israelite community as distinct but friendly to immigration and assimilation. A clear example of this is the run-away slave law in the Pentateuch together with the omission of an absolute ban against intermarriage practices in pre-exilic times.⁷⁰

Scholars that have explored the concept of assimilation or mission in the Old Testament have recognized the *gēr* laws as evidence to support the presence of inclusive elements within the legal material in the Pentateuch.⁷¹

The Israelites also need to understand better the inclusive character of their God, after all if he is the Creator of the world then there has to be some sort of relationship

times, more than the commandments concerning love of God, keeping the Sabbath, circumcision, uttering falsehood, and theft.

⁷⁰ Jacob Milgrom, *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus: a book of ritual and ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 194.

⁷¹ C.H. Pohl, “Hospitality”, in Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001). Pohl has notice that “the covenantal structure of their faith framed Israel’s response to the alien”. Economic provision and protection did not depend on individual hospitality alone, but became the responsibility of the community. Levenson in “The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism” in Mark G. Brett, *Ethnicity and the Bible*, Biblical Interpretation Series (Leiden: E J Brill, 1996), 159. Levenson argues that the Hebrew Bible, which insist “in intensively particularistic terms, upon the special status of Israel can also insist, in intensively universalistic terms, upon special solicitude for the ‘stranger’ or ‘resident alien,’ who is to be not only tolerated, but helped and even loved” G.R. de Lacey “Gentiles” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 336. De Lacey also recognizes that from the Torah onward in Jewish tradition, distinctions were made between various groups of Gentiles, among those Gentiles the “resident alien” in particular being awarded special treatment. James Chukwuma Okoye, *Israel and the Nations : A Mission Theology of the Old Testament*, American Society of Missiology (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006), 56-66. Chukwuma quotes Harmant and declares: “Sinai is the expression of a particular intimacy that does not negate the possibility of other intimacies . . . while God deals personally and with particular communities, the way of the Creator is open to all.”

between God and the rest of the world. The *gēr* laws seem to remind the Israelites that while Israel is the people of God, he relates also to others than Israel as part of his people.⁷²

CONCLUSIONS

America due to his immigration history is in the need to understand the distinction between an ethnic nation and a civic nation. While many argue that the huge influx of Latin American, Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants poses a possible fatal threat to the civic nation because they do not share the undergirding habits and presuppositions that some argues are historically inseparable from cultural and ethnic experience. Are this newcomers capable of internalizing the civic nation's foundational truths?⁷³

However a careful look at American society shows that sectors of the population that have been here for a very long time have for many complex reasons become alienated from the American dream.⁷⁴ American values and privileges are not always being given equally to all of its members.

If America is able to understand that the choice is not between a civic nation of disengaged individuals or an ethnic nation of group solidarity. Then it will be able to acknowledge that the time has long past when America has the option of being a ethnic nation, the hope is to be a civic nation, a community of communities, held together by the shared affirmation of the original definers and founders that "We hold these truths".⁷⁵

Perhaps the words of a late president John F. Kennedy are appropriate here:

⁷² Idem, *Israel and the Nations : A Mission Theology of the Old Testament*, 80. Okoye states that while Israel is the people of God, the person of God is broader than Israel.

⁷³ Neuhaus, "Immigration and the Alien Among Us," 246.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 248.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 249.

Immigration policy should be generous; it should be fair; it should be flexible. With such a policy we can turn to the world, and to our own past, with clean hands, and a clear conscience. Such a policy would be but a reaffirmation of old principles. It would be an expression of our agreement with George Washington that ‘The bosom of America is open to receive not only the opulent and respectable stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all nations and religions; whom shall we welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges, if by decency and propriety of conduct they appear to merit the enjoyment’⁷⁶

SDA and Immigration

Willingly or not as a church we are immerse in the issue of immigration not only because the church as member of society is affected by immigration at large but because in several places around the World and America is not an exception, a good number or our members are immigrants and some of them even illegal immigrants.

The SDA Church is in great need to develop a biblical position to the issue of immigration that could offer guidance to its members and officials to address from a Christian perspective the complexities that immigration arises in society and in the church.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ John F. Kennedy, “A Nation of Immigrants”, in *ibid.*, 126.

⁷⁷ The SDA church at this moment does not possess an official position on the issue of immigration. However this do not mean that at lower levels of the Church attitudes and policies are not been develop to address the problem that immigration raises in the Church.

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