

The Alien Among Us: A Conservative Christian Perspective

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By Jonathan Moore

Most of those involved in the immigration debate agree that immigration policy needs to be reformed. How to reform the system exactly is a matter of considerably greater disagreement.

Immigration is a complex issue affected by numerous factors like welfare policy and public education. Thus, clear solutions to the conundrum are difficult to arrive at. What we can get at, however, is a broad set of principles (which some Christian conservatives have a difficult time grasping) that policy makers should consider in any reform effort to construct a rational, God-honoring immigration law.

1) God created man in his own image, and as such, human beings need to be treated in a compassionate, loving manner. As God's image bearers, humanity has intrinsic, literally God-like value, and should be cherished.

The Bible has much to say about how to treat God's image bearers, even when they are foreigners. For instance, in Leviticus 19:33-34, the children of Israel are taught to love the alien in their midst as they would one of their own: "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself."

In short, a moral and just immigration policy should reflect God's attitude towards immigrants. To paraphrase Kepler, man is at his best when he "thinks God's thoughts after him."

One of the most loving ways to decrease global poverty is to create new opportunities for people to work themselves out of poverty and provide for their families.

Few foreigners have opportunities to care for their families in their home country like they would in the United States. Allowing them to come to here to better their lives is a Christ-like option.

2) The more people, the better.

Conservatives hold this to be true in matters such as abortion, eugenics, and forced sterilization. More people produce more goods and services for society. Even those deemed a "drain" on society should be valued.

Yet on immigration, many conservatives find themselves on the same side of the issue as people who have values diametrically opposed to their own; population-control advocates.

In a puzzling twist, conservatives have recently found themselves using the same rhetoric as zero-population-growth advocates, arguing that allowing more people to enter this country is a net loss for society due to increased unemployment, increased consumption of social services, etc. They would never accept the same arguments as justification for ending the lives of (or deporting) disabled children, the elderly, or other individuals who consume more societal resources than they contribute.

3) Government regulation and control of any commodity through quotas or price control is always bad.

This is something most conservatives will agree on. They understand that government intervention in markets creates distortions, as seen by their stringent opposition to the stimulus package.

The American immigration system is a quagmire of quotas and controls that does nothing to reflect supply and demand. Not surprisingly, a thriving black market of illegal immigrants, who do not have the time or money to navigate America's prohibitively complex immigration system, has arisen to satisfy American employers' and consumers' need for inexpensive labor.

Most illegal immigrants are not breaking the law because they enjoy breaking the law. Most come here because they want to give themselves and their families a better life, free from oppressive government regulation.

4) Enforcing existing immigration laws is both futile and destructive.

In 2009, the Department of Homeland Security estimated that there were 10.8 million illegal immigrants in America. Deporting all or most of the illegal population is, frankly, impossible. It would be tantamount to rounding up the state of Michigan and deporting every one of its citizens.

Further, the Cato Institute estimated that if border enforcement were increased enough to stop the flow of immigrants, American economic output would be reduced by \$80 billion annually for ten years. Coupled with the deportation of illegal immigrants already here, that number could double.

The Center for American Progress estimates that the administrative expenses of all these deportations would be roughly \$200 billion over five years.

Laws should be enforced, but destructive laws should be repealed and replaced with new laws. In this case, it seems that having an immigration system based on arbitrary quotas is a bad idea both morally and economically.

So, what should we do? It is clear that neither amnesty alone nor increased enforcement are wise options to solve the immigration problem. Allowing illegal immigrants to stay without creating a path to entrance for new immigrants will only result in the same problems we face now. And stepped-up enforcement of bad laws could damage American prosperity.

A middle way between these two must be found. By following the principles and understanding the facts above, America can have a sensible, God-honoring, and prosperity-promoting immigration policy.

— *Jonathan Moore is a research associate at the Competitive Enterprise Institute and a former student fellow with [The Center for Vision & Values](#) at Grove City College. The views expressed in this editorial are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Competitive Enterprise Institute nor The Center for Vision & Values.*