Evangelicals and Immigration: Two Views[1]

Juan Carlos Téllez

Introduction

Illegal immigration is one of the most contentious issues of our day. Responses to illegal immigration range from granting undocumented immigrants a path to citizenship to their immediate deportation. Given the ethical dilemmas immigration poses, religious ideals would be expected to be a dominant factor in

1. This paper was originally submitted as part of a PhD program at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in November 2018. It is reprinted here in a slightly edited form with the author's permission.

Juan Carlos Téllez was born and raised in Bogotá, Colombia. He serves as the campus pastor of Grace Church of Northeast Atlanta, a multiethnic church that meets in homes. He has been married for eighteen years to Emily and together they have four children. Juan Carlos is a PhD student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.



BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 13 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

the conversation, yet, in the United States, only 7 percent of people identify religion as their top influence on their views on immigration.[2] Among the religious, a surprisingly low number (12 percent) of self-proclaimed Christians consider the Bible a key influence that informs their views on immigration.[3] But does the Bible address illegal immigration? What biblical principles govern the ethical dilemmas illegal immigration presents? Does it view undocumented immigrants as lawbreakers, or are they "the least of these" of whom Jesus spoke? How does the Bible speak to the tension regarding the protection of national borders, considering the mounting plight of the sojourner and stranger in our day?

This article will center on the debate among evangelical Christians who disagree on whether the term "stranger" in Scripture applies to today's undocumented immigrants in the United States. Should Christians today, considering scriptural principles, welcome and accept undocumented immigrants or find ways to curtail their influx into US American society? This essay will trace the most salient biblical and hermeneutical arguments, as well as the sociological and political underpinnings, for each position.

There are two main views among evangelicals regarding how to approach undocumented immigrants.

2. Pew Research Center, "Few Say Religion Shapes Immigration, Environment Views," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, September 17, 2010, http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/17/few-say-religion-shapes-immigration-environment-views/.
3. LifeWay Research, "Evangelical Views on Immigration," February 2015, http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Evangelical-Views-on-Immigration-Report.pdf, 16.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 14 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

The first will be referred to as the "pro-reform" view, given its emphasis on reforming current immigration laws to be more compassionate toward the plight of undocumented immigrants. One of the main organizations which advances this view is the Evangelical Immigration Table (EIT), "a national movement of Christians committed to learning more about what the Bible says about 'welcoming the stranger,' and living out these biblical principles in our churches."[4] Notable groups supporting the EIT include the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and World Relief. The EIT finds in M. Daniel Carroll R. one of its most prominent Old Testament (OT) theologians. Carroll is the Blanchard Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College and in his book *Christians at the Border* outlines the main tenets of this view.[5]

Should Christians today, considering scriptural principles, welcome and accept undocumented immigrants or find ways to curtail their influx into US American society?

The second approach will be referred to as the "pro-law-and-order" view given its high regard for adherence to current immigration laws and the emphasis on "the rule of law." Some of the organizations upholding this view include the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), "the nation's only think tank devoted exclusively

4. "Welcome to the Table," *Evangelical Immigration Table*, n.d., http://evangelicalimmigrationtable.com/.
5. Daniel M. Carroll R., *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 15 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

to research and policy analysis of the economic, social, demographic, fiscal, and other impacts of immigration on the United States"[6]; as well as Evangelicals for Biblical Immigration, "an ad hoc movement of those seeking the whole counsel of Scripture about immigration, citizenship and how we're to honor, steward and shape our culture."[7] Both organizations utilize biblical arguments from an evangelical perspective to support their view. One of the contributors for the pro-law-and-order view is Dr. James Hoffmeier, an OT scholar who teaches at Trinity International University. Hoffmeier has authored many books, the most relevant to this discussion being *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens and the Bible*,[8] in which he outlines many of the ideas used in support of restrictive immigration policies based on biblical passages.

There are two main views among evangelicals regarding how to approach undocumented immigrants: "pro-reform" and "pro-law-and-order."

While the aforementioned organizations have produced a wide array of materials, the scholarly discussion becomes more evident as one looks at Hoffmeier's and Carroll's works. The rest of this study will utilize their works as a foundation from which to demonstrate the arguments of each view.

6. "About the Center for Immigration Studies," *Center for Immigration Studies*, n.d., https://cis.org/About-Center-Immigration-Studies.
7. "Evangelicals for Biblical Immigration," *Evangelicals for Biblical Immigration*, 2014, https://evangelicalsforbiblicalimmigration.com/about/ (site discontinued).
8. James K. Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 16 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

Balancing Compassion and Biblical Conviction

Carroll and Hoffmeier both assure readers that their positions come from first-hand understanding and experience of the plight of immigrants, while maintaining a high regard for biblical principles. Hoffmeier tells of living as an immigrant in Canada for over a decade, his years in Egypt as the only foreigner in a small rural village, and the struggles his family continually faced as they tried to get their immigration documents renewed to remain in Egypt legally. He also lived as a refugee in Cyprus for two months because of the political instability in Egypt in 1967, which forced his family to leave with little prior warning. He conveys unequivocally that he "is sensitive to the plight of immigrants."[9]

Carroll, on the other hand, had a bilingual and bicultural upbringing. His mother is Guatemalan and his father, US American. He has lived and held academic positions in Guatemala and the United States. Carroll, given his deep connections to and roots in both places, hopes for his perspective to be a bridge between the majority culture and the Hispanic minority culture.[10] Yet both Hoffmeier and Carroll hold the Bible in high regard and advocate that the whole counsel of Scripture is to be taken seriously. They are both Old Testament scholars, teaching at prestigious evangelical academic institutions.

9. Hoffmeier, *Immigration Crisis*, 17.
10. Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, xxv.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 17 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

Despite the personal experiences of immigration for these authors and their high biblical regard, they understand the Bible from markedly different perspectives as it pertains to how God relates to immigrants. Incidentally, Hoffmeier does not see his 2009 work in *The Immigration Crisis* as a response to Carroll's work (originally published in 2008) but does acknowledge the "slightly different approach" from which both authors see the issue.[11]

This essay has three sections. The first looks at the hermeneutical paradigm from which Drs. Hoffmeier and Carroll approach their work. The second section delves into the linguistic argument behind who is the "stranger" in the Old Testament. The final section analyzes the way Romans 13 is used by each group to frame how Christians should relate to the government, particularly in regard to immigration.

Hermeneutical Paradigm

How do biblical laws and regulation apply to the modern-day immigration debate? Is there a link between the way in which migrants were treated in the Ancient Near East (ANE) and today? Hoffmeier argues that people who reference OT passages in defense of "illegal aliens…make a simplistic correlation between the ancient Israelite social law and the modern situation as

11. Hoffmeier, *Immigration Crisis*, 17.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 18 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

if the Bible was addressing the same problem."[12] This raises the important question of whether the Old Testament speaks through its legal code to issues of social concern today. Hoffmeier does not seem to discredit this possibility altogether; he insists, rather, that in the case of immigration law, it does not. Carroll, on the other hand, advances, "Some might contend that the Bible does not present details of the lives of immigrants but rather of refugees or deportees. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to appeal to the Scriptures for a study on immigration per se…this argument overlooks that immigration is not only about the reasons and mechanics of the move *to* another place; it is about life *in* that new setting."[13]

How do biblical laws and regulation apply to the modern-day immigration debate?

Hoffmeier also argues that the larger ethic of the Scriptures would agree with his position on undocumented immigrants. He constructs his ethical argument by laying out four approaches to the way in which the Bible, particularly the OT, should be applied to situations today. One looks at current issues and modern laws, trying to find a direct correlation between biblical law and today's legislation. Hoffmeier deems this approach "simplistic and naive."[14] A second approach "is to take seriously the demand for justice found in Israel's prophets," which Hoffmeier commends but does not see

12. James K. Hoffmeier, "The Use and Abuse of the Bible in the Immigration Debate," *Backgrounder*, December 2011, http://www.cis.org/sites/cis.org/files/articles/2011/bible-use-and-abuse.pdf, 1.
13. Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 52.
14. Hoffmeier, *Immigration Crisis*, 26.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 19 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

as going far enough in recognizing the way Scripture can function as a "moral sounding board for our laws and can serve as an ethical foundation to challenge immoral laws."[15]

The third approach Hoffmeier sees as viable is to understand the principles that lie underneath the OT law and utilize the doctrine which arises to critique today's laws. To Hoffmeier this approach is beneficial to evaluate current-day laws and, in the places where Scripture does not speak, the OT principles that arise from the law can be used to erect laws that are in accordance with God's intent for humanity.[16]

The last approach, credited to Dr. Christopher J. H. Wright, entails taking "a more comprehensive view of the teaching of the Bible in theological, social, and economic areas and thereby establish[ing] a biblical worldview as a way of evaluating contemporary social and legal issues."[17] According to Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis* is an attempt to apply Wright's comprehensive approach to the dilemma of how to uphold national laws while applying biblical justice.[18]

Hoffmeier, Carroll, and Christopher Wright

Given the vastly different conclusion to which Hoffmeier and Carroll arrive, it is puzzling that both authors point to Christopher Wright's works as the paradigms

15. Ibid., 25, 27.
16. Ibid., 27.
17. Ibid. 26.
18. Ibid., 27.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 20 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

from which they derive their ethical approach to Scripture. A closer look at Wright's writing is pertinent given his works' centrality to both authors.

Both authors point to Christopher Wright's works as the paradigms from which they derive their ethical approach to Scripture.

Christopher Wright is an Irish theologian with a doctorate in Old Testament economic ethics from Cambridge University. He has authored several books, most germane to this study, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord*,[19] on which Hoffmeier bases his paradigm,[20] and *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*,[21] on which Carroll bases his paradigm.[22] Below is a brief summary of Wright's works as they pertain to Hoffmeier's and Carroll's arguments.

Walking in the Ways of the Lord

In *Walking in the Ways of the Lord*, Wright, advocating for the use of the Bible as story, recognizes that people will undoubtedly use Scripture in ways that befit the particular argument they are advancing. That is why he purports that the Bible must be used in the way it was intended, as "a story, with a beginning, an end and a middle," an approach which respects the "canonical form" in which God chose to present the Scriptures.[23]

19. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord: The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995).
20. Hoffmeier, *Immigration Crisis*, 26–27.
21. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004).
22. Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 82.
23. Wright, *Walking in the Ways*, 14–15.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 21 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

Wright advocates, therefore, for a comprehensive view of Scripture, where the metanarrative of Scripture can be seen in its fullness and complexity, from creation, to fall, to redemption, concluding in the new creation.[24] A cursory look at how Hoffmeier organized his work shows that the book is constructed basically around the metanarrative of Scripture, starting with Abraham, tracing Israel's exodus from Egypt, moving on to the law, and dealing with the prophets, the exile, and the New Testament.

Carroll's Use of Wright's Hermeneutic

Carroll points to Wright's *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* as his source for viewing the way Israel approached God's ethical imperatives, as outlined in the law, as a *paradigm* for how God intended his people to regard all aspects of life.[25] In the referenced work, Wright addresses the "social dimension of redemption" as one of the angles (along with the theological and economic angles) that construct a framework to understand God's ethical imperatives for his people.[26] The social angle, according to Wright, not only gave Israel a set of standards by which to live, but it also presented Israel with the role of being a blessing to all other nations (Gen 12:3) by having an ethic that set them apart from other nations. One of God's people's imperatives was their mission, "and the key to…that

24. Ibid., 14–21.
25. Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 82.
26. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 48.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 22 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

mission would be their ethical distinctiveness."[27] Wright goes on to explain that, "Israel as a society was intended from the start to be a paradigm or model to the nations, a showcase of the way God longs for human society as a whole to operate."[28] Carroll, then, applies this paradigm by looking specifically at OT laws and stories regarding foreigners and strangers to make sense of God's ethical expectations for his people today.

Hoffmeier's Use of Wright's Hermeneutic

Hoffmeier points to Wright's paradigm as the most beneficial because of its comprehensive nature and its focus on the overarching narrative of Scripture. As previously stated, it is clear that Hoffmeier does use Wright's paradigm to shape the form of his work, yet the centrality Hoffmeier affords the Romans 13 injunction to obey civil authority stands in contrast to what Wright appears to advocate. As Wright contends, if the goal is to "respect [Scripture's] form…or content" to see what it teaches "as a whole" to ascertain a biblical subject, a more nuanced treatment of civil government's role would have helped underscore Hoffmeier's point regarding the whole counsel of Scripture as it pertains to immigrants and government.[29]

Hoffmeier, likewise, atomizes the discussion by focusing on linguistic nuances, correct as they may

27. Ibid., 50.
28. Ibid., 74.
29. Wright, *Walking in the Ways*, 15.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 23 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

be, emphasizing small details rather than Scripture as a whole. Carroll, on the other hand, seems to provide a broader Scriptural ethical perspective, more in line with Wright's paradigm, which appears to follow God's heart for the oppressed. Yet the question of how Christians are to relate to the current, pre-reform legal system does not seem as clear in Carroll's work. Should undocumented immigrants continue to make their way into the United States? How should the church respond in the here and now, while immigration reform has not been achieved, not just toward the undocumented immigrants who are already here, but also toward those who are considering coming into the United States illegally?

Linguistic Argument

Another place where the ideological differences are readily palpable between the pro-reform and pro-law-and-order groups, and where the argument becomes most nuanced, is in the words translated as *alien, foreigner,* or *stranger* in the English Bible. While these terms are closely related in English, the Hebrew words from which they are so rendered, *nkr* (also *nakar* or *nokri*) and *ger*, demonstrate the divide. A passage that clearly exemplifies the confusion in the English text is that of the instructions for the Passover in Exodus 13 in the New International Version Bible. While on the one hand there is an unequivocal restriction that "no *foreigner* may eat [the Passover meal]" (12:43, emphasis

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 24 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

added), a few verses later it states that "A *foreigner* residing among you who wants to celebrate the Lord's Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised" (12:48, emphasis added). While one verse prohibits *foreigners* from participating in the Passover meal, the other gives conditions under which *foreigners* may participate. The ESV, NASB, RSV, and NKJV, on the other hand, use *foreigner* for 12:43 and *stranger* for 12:48, while the KJV uses *stranger* in both cases. The semantic overlap in English, as well as the popular use of "foreigner" and "stranger," obscures the nuance of the Hebrew text, which uses *nkr* for 12:43 and *ger* for 12:48. What difference, then, is there between the *nkr* and the *ger*?

The argument becomes most nuanced in examining the words translated as alien, foreigner, *or* stranger *in the English Bible.*

Below is a brief look at the most salient terms germane to the "stranger" discussion, followed by the ways in which the pro-reform and pro-law-and-order groups use these words to support their views. An assessment of their linguistic use will conclude this section.

Zar, Goyim, and Toshab

In addition to *ger* and *nkr*, three Hebrew words further nuance the discussion: *zar*, *goyim*, and *toshab*. The closely related semantic domains of these five Hebrew words makes differentiation between their referents highly complex. *Zar* conveys the idea of something or

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 25 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

someone "strange, foreign, different, unlawful."[30] The basic sense of the word is of someone or something that is neither related to nor acquainted with one's group.[31] Likewise, *goyim* conveys the idea of a people or nation, such as the 'Gentiles,' or a "national group or groups that are not Jewish, with the associative meaning of being uncultured, pagan and heathen" (as in Nehemiah 5:8).[32] Despite the fact that this word is difficult to translate with certainty given the various uses it is assigned (i.e., Ge 10:5 where the word happens twice with two different senses), it basically refers "to specifically defined political, ethnic or territorial groups of people without intending to ascribe a specific religious or moral connotation."[33] *Toshab* is identified as being on a "lower socio-economic status than the Ger, certainly not owning any real estate, was forever a wage earning, lower class laborer who depended for his livelihood on Hebrew landowners."[34] Special attention is given here to *ger* and *nkr*, as *zar*, *goyim*, and *toshab* are used with less frequency in the Hebrew text and are less prominent in the literature.

30. William Holladay and Ludwig Kohler, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Brill: Leiden, 2000), 91–92.
31. L. J. Wood, "541 רוּז," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. Electronic Edition*, ed. by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 238.
32. James Swanson, "*gôy*," in *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
33. Marvin R. Wilson, "326 הוג," in *Theological Wordbook*, 154.
34. Max M. Rothschild, "Aliens and Israelites—I," *Dor Le Dor* 9, no. 4 (1981): 198.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 26 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

Ger

Ger (pl. *gerim)* connotes the idea of someone who resides as a "foreigner and sojourner"[35] but has likely severed social ties with her country of origin.[36] Hobbs advances that "the exact nature of the *ger* is still a matter of considerable debate, but he is not one who is by nature an outsider to the community, that is, a threat."[37] The *gerim* enjoyed many of the privileges of native-born Israelites, were "loved" by God (Dt 10:18), and were to be protected from oppression, like orphans and widows (Dt 14:29).[38] What further complicates identifying who the *gerim* are is the fact that the term is used in different ways in different parts of the OT.[39] The *gerim* enjoyed certain social and religious rights[40] like being in a protected category along with orphans and widows (Dt 24:17) but also enjoying a higher economic status as landowners later in the OT.[41] Despite the inclusion of the *gerim* into Israelite life, the *gerim* and the native-born Israelite are not equal in all respects. For instance, in Deuteronomy the *gerim* are allowed to eat the meat of a dead animal after it dies, while Israelites are not (14:21); and in

35. Holladay and Kohler, *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 58.
36. Michael Guttmann, "The Term 'Foreigner' (nkry) Historically Considered," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 3 (1926): 1.
37. T. R. Hobbs, "Hospitality in the First Testament and the 'Teleological Fallacy,'" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 26, no. 1 (2001): 20–21.
38. H. G. Stigers, "330 רוּג," in *Theological Wordbook*, 156.
39. Yu Suee Yan, "The Alien in Deuteronomy," *The Bible Translator* 60, no. 2 (2009): 115.
40. G. D. Mailhiot, "La actitud de Israel con respecto al extranjero en el Antiguo Testamento," *AnáMnesis* 7, no. 13 (1997): 32.
41. Rothschild, "Aliens and Israelites," 198.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 27 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

Dt 28:43 Israel's disobedience to the covenant "will result in the *gerim* gaining power over the Israelites" which demonstrates the perpetuation of a distinction between the *ger* and the Israelite.[42] The *gerim* appear to have been viewed favorably to the degree that they followed the Torah laws and were willing to participate in Israel's rituals, like circumcision.[43] Nevertheless, given Israel's general suspicion and apprehension toward outsiders, it is significant that, by in large, the *gerim* were viewed as partial members of the covenant community.[44]

Nkr

Nkr (pl. *nokri*) is defined as "foreign, alien, i.e., pertaining to that which is not in the same clan, land area or religion as the speaker and so not in close association or limited association."[45] The term pertains to a non-Israelite who is seen as foreign, carrying the idea of unknown, unfamiliar, odd, or surprising.[46] Hobbs identifies the *nkr* as one "who is not part of the community," viewed as posing a threat, and, in contrast to the *ger,* the *nkr* is a "temporary resident, a prisoner of war, whose destiny is death or in rare cases, repatriation."[47] And Guttmann adds that

42. Yan, "Alien in Deuteronomy," 114.
43. Stuart Krauss, "The Word 'Ger' in the Bible and its Implications," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2006): 266.
44. Yan, "Alien in Deuteronomy," 113.
45. J. Swanson, "*nāḵrî*," in *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*.
46. Marvin R. Wilson, "1368 רָכָנ," in *Theological Wordbook*, 580.
47. Hobbs, "Hospitality," 21.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 28 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

"What is characteristic of the [*nkr*] therefore is that he maintains the connection with his native country or with the country he has left" and "persists in keeping, politically and socially, his former status."[48]

Given the differences between these terms, some scholars note that, just as some translations have done (i.e., the New Revised Standard Version and the New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh), the distinction should be clearly maintained between *ger* and *nkr*. This distinction is consistently maintained by the LXX, which translates "*nokri* as *allotrois*, and *ger* as either *paroikos,* or *proselytes*."[49] It should be noted, given the English cognate *proselyte*, that rendering *ger* as "proselyte" is anachronistic as the word did not acquire this sense until late in the OT period.[50]

Some scholars note that the distinction should be clearly maintained between ger *and* nkr.

How do these definitions impact the current immigration debate? Can we discern whether undocumented immigrants today correspond to one of the terms used in the Hebrew Bible? Hoffmeier and Carroll offer different answers to these questions, which directly impacts how each frames his stance toward immigration.

48. Guttmann, "The Term 'Foreigner' (nkry)," 1.
49. Yan, "Alien in Deuteronomy," 114. Rothschild defines *paroikos* as "A person who dwells beside, or near, somebody else, a foreign resident in the land" (Rothschild, "Aliens and Israelites," 199).
50. Rothschild, "Aliens and Israelites," 199.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 29 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

Pro-Law-and-Order Definitions

Hoffmeier commences his treatment of the topic by asking, "Within that [ANE] socio-legal setting, what was a 'stranger' or 'sojourner;' and…How does one obtain this status?"[51] Hoffmeier's emphasis on the *legal status* of these definitions is salient. He argues that *ger* is a foreigner who had "legal standing in the community," as opposed to the *nkr* and *zar* who are also foreigners but have not received legal status.[52] Hoffmeier cites Genesis 47:3–6, where "to sojourn" is *gwr,* which means they were legal residents (*gwr*), based on the distinction between *ger* and *nkr* in a number of passages (i.e., Ex 12:13; Lev 19:9–10; Dt 24:19–22; 26:12–13).[53] Others, likewise, see the *ger* in terms of legal status. Yan describes *ger* as a "semi-citizen" who "has the status of a semi-permanent resident."[54] Others characterize *ger* as a "resident alien."[55] Martin further nuances the definition by adding that the *ger* should not be regarded as "a potentially threatening traveller but [as] a person who has entered the community from the outside and who has taken up residence more or less permanently."[56] Ramírez agrees that the *ger* "came to designate the *legal status* granted to those strangers

51. Hoffmeier, "Use and Abuse," 1.
52. Hoffmeier, *Immigration Crisis*, 73.
53. Ibid., 55.
54. Yan, "Alien in Deuteronomy," 113.
55. Lee Roy Martin, "Old Testament Foundations for Christian Hospitality," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35, no. 1 (2014): 2; Hobbs, "Hospitality," 20–21; Rothschild, "Aliens and Israelites," 198.
56. Martin, "Old Testament Foundations," 2.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 30 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

who, living in an Israelite community, were ruled by its internal regulations."[57]

The foreigner, or *nkr*, in contrast, is a non-Israelite who is not part of the community and who has few rights. Based on this evidence, Hoffmeier concludes, "These passages from the Law make plain that aliens or strangers received all the benefits and protection of a citizen, whereas the foreigner (*nekhar*) did not. It is wrong, therefore, to confuse these two categories of foreigners and then to use passages regarding the *ger* as if they were relevant to illegal immigrants of today."[58] Put more succinctly, "the alien was a permanent resident. The foreigner, on the other hand, was not."[59] This view is shared by Evangelicals for Biblical Immigration, who agree that

> Scripture also teaches us that the Lord placed us in families and nations to steward the good (our cultural mandate). We are to make distinctions between the foreigner (the zar, or nekhar or goyim in Hebrew) who does not come according to the host nation's faith, values and laws, and the "resident alien" or "sojourner" (the ger in Hebrew) who is something like a

57. José Enrique Ramírez Kidd, *Alterity and Identity in Israel: The [ger] in the Old Testament* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 130. Italics in the original.
58. Hoffmeier, "Use and Abuse," 3.
59. Hoffmeier, *Immigration Crisis*, 51. See pages 48–52 for the entire argument in detail.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 31 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

> convert and does come and live according to the nation's essential faith, values and laws.[60]

Based on this differentiation, the only foreigner who is to be accepted into broader society is the one that corresponds to the *ger*, whereas the *zar*, *goyim,* and *nkr* are not.

The important thing here is that Hoffmeier succinctly advances what he deems to be the biblical application of the *ger* and *nkr* distinction. He purports:

> Before we use the Bible to formulate a theological or political position on the status of illegal immigrants, we must first understand the differences between the *ger*, the *nekhar*, and the *zar* in ancient Israel. Based on my study of the Hebrew terms, I believe that the immigrant with a green card in the U.S. corresponds to the *ger* of the Old Testament, whereas the illegal immigrant should be equated with the *nekhar* or *zar*.[61]

Pro-Reform Definitions

In contrast to Hoffmeier's highly nuanced and technical treatment of Hebrew terms, Carroll approaches the *ger* and *nkr* in a more general way. The term *nkr*,

60. "Evangelicals for Biblical Immigration," https://evangelicalsforbiblicalimmigration.com/about/ (site discontinued).
61. Samuel Rodriguez, James K. Hoffmeier, and David Skeel, "What's the Best Way to Reform U.S. Immigration Now?" *Christianity Today* 54, no. 3 (March 2010): 55.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 32 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

Carroll advances, can have either neutral or negative connotations. Ruth calls herself a *nkr* or "foreigner" as she speaks to Boaz (Ru 2:10), and Solomon uses this same term for non-Israelites who would worship God in the Jerusalem temple (1Ki 8:41, 43). On the other hand, as Hoffmeier had also pointed out, the term *nkr* could have negative connotations that could "refer to enemies, strange gods, a licentious woman, or foreign women of another faith who could corrupt an Israelite."[62] But Carroll does not see the differentiation between the *ger* and *nkr* in legal terms as Hoffmeier does, but rather sees God's legal protection and care for the sojourner, the *ger*, as an outflow of God's special care and protection for the most vulnerable in society, regardless of their length of stay.[63] Since Carroll does not see the distinction between the *ger* and *nkr* as plainly laid out as Hoffmeier does, what is most significant for Carroll is the way in which God includes the sojourner into the very fabric of Israelite life. In other words, for Carroll what is key is that there were laws protecting the sojourner and including her in the religious life of Israel, which was at the core of its identity, in feasts such as the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29), the Passover (Ex 12:45–49), the Festival of Weeks (Dt 16:11), the Festival of Tabernacles (Dt 16:14), and firstfruits (Dt 26:11).[64]

For Carroll what is key is that there were laws protecting the sojourner and including her in the religious life of Israel.

62. Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 85.
63. M. Daniel Carroll R., "Biblical Perspectives on Migration and Mission: Contributions from the Old Testament," *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies* 30, no. 1 (2013): 21.
64. Ibid.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 33 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

In sum, while Carroll acknowledges that the Israelites distinguished between different foreigners and made judgments based on their level of integration and contribution to Israel's life, he maintains that "the picture offered by word studies is not altogether clear, so tidy definitions are simply not possible."[65]

Assessment

There appears to be broad consensus regarding the *ger* as a permanent resident in the land of Israel[66] and that the *nkr* were, in fact, viewed generally as permanent outsiders.[67] Carroll, however, disagrees. He refutes even the possibility of being able to ascertain that the *ger* was a resident alien. He questions whether there is enough biblical material to prove that formal permission to enter foreign lands was even required *consistently*, in order to have the hard and set alleged residency status of *ger*.[68]

The discussion becomes even more complex as it relates to today's immigration debate. Hoffmeier utilizes a highly nuanced socio-linguistic approach to draw similarities between the *nkr* and today's undocumented immigrant, while Carroll maintains that the

65. Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 87.
66. Martin, "Old Testament Foundations," 2; Hobbs, "Hospitality," 20–21; Rothschild, "Aliens and Israelites," 198.
67. Hobbs, "Hospitality," 3–30; Guttmann, "The Term 'Foreigner' (nkry)," 1–20.
68. M. Daniel Carroll R., "Review: The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible by James K. Hoffmeier," *Denver Journal*, January 7, 2010. https://denverseminary.edu/resources/news-and-articles/the-immigration-crisis-immigrants-aliens-and-the-bible/.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 34 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

identity of the *nkr* is not clear in the OT and hence cannot be directly attributed to any immigrant group today. Instead, Carroll sees the fact that non-Israelites are included in Israel's religious life and are protected by the law as indicative of God's heart for immigrants, legal or otherwise.

Hoffmeier cautions readers not to make "a simplistic correlation between the ancient Israelite social law and the modern situation as if the Bible was addressing the same problem."[69] He later advances that Scripture does not provide us an "all-encompassing prescription for how to deal with immigration."[70] Yet, by identifying the OT *nkr* with today's undocumented immigrant, a direct correlation has been made that prescribes the way in which undocumented immigrants should be treated today.

Meza, in reviewing Hoffmeier's and Carroll's works, rightly concludes:

> what was not decisive for Carroll is the key point for Hoffmeier, that is, the distinction between a legal and illegal alien...it could be said that Hoffmeier's research is an extended word study about alien status in the Bible. In other words, Hoffmeier's main concern is with the law that regulates the migration and residency of foreigners. As a result, then, his applications

69. Hoffmeier, "Use and Abuse," 1.
70. Rodriguez, Hoffmeier, and Skeel, "Best Way to Reform," 55.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 35 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

support actual American immigration laws and recommend their implementation.[71]

Christians and the State

While there is evidence that evangelicals are one of the groups most opposed to immigration reform,[72] there is reason to believe this is changing.[73] One of the main issues that has exacerbated the divide within the evangelical church has been the growing awareness of and dissatisfaction with the current immigration system. Mark Amstutz identifies discontentment with and the perception of the unfairness of the current immigration system as one of the main reasons why many evangelical leaders have taken up the cause of immigration reform in the last few years.[74] Yet rank-and-file evangelicals have not followed suit and are far behind their leadership in their desire for immigration reform.[75]

71. Sadrac E. Meza, "The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible," *Themelios* 35, no. 3 (2010): 545.
72. Paul Djupe, "Evangelicals and Immigration - A Sea Change in the Making?" PRRI, March 22, 2013, https://www.prri.org/spotlight/evangelicals-and-immigration-a-sea-change-in-the-making; Lyman A. Kellstedt and Ruth Melkonian-Hoover, "White Evangelicals and Immigration Reform," *The Christian Post*, February 6, 2015, https://www.christianpost.com/news/white-evangelicals-and-immigration-reform-133687/.
73. See Christine Chu-Ning Kim, "Three Papers on the Political Attitudes of Evangelical Protestants at the Beginning of the New Millennium" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2017), 1, 37, 77, 110, https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/1044630/Kim_georgetown_0076D_13762.pdf?sequence=1.
74. Mark R. Amstutz, *Just Immigration: American Policy in Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2017), 169.
75. Amstutz, *Just Immigration*, 184.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 36 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

Starting Point

In the same way that evangelical elites and pro-reform advocates align in their call for comprehensive immigration reform, rank-and-file evangelicals and pro-law-and-order advocates emphasize adherence to current immigration legislation. The differences, in great part, center around the theological principles that govern the interaction between the state and the individual, especially as it pertains to immigration. Hoffmeier's and Carroll's approximations to this issue are emblematic of the deeper evangelical divide.

Given the relatively vast amount of biblical material on the relation between the state, individuals, and immigration laws, what should serve as the starting point? For Carroll, the most logical place to commence is the beginning of the Bible, the Genesis creation account. He methodically makes a point for the *imago Dei*—which is inherent to all human beings by their relationship to God—and the subsequent dignity, respect, and utmost care which must be given to each and every human because of being image-bearers.[76] From this point Carroll traces, throughout Scripture, the *imago Dei* motif and how it relates to all people, with special emphasis on the displaced, the "stranger."

For Carroll, the most logical place to commence is the Genesis creation account.

In contrast, Hoffmeier, while acknowledging that every human is an image-bearer, worthy of respect and

76. Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 46–47.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 37 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

dignity, contends that the injunction of Romans 13 to be subject to the authorities is a God-ordained duty that must be central to the immigration discussion. For Hoffmeier, the fact that undocumented immigrants are created in the image of God means they should be held accountable and have the obligation to submit to the government of the host nation.[77] Carroll, while maintaining that individuals are to be subject to the government, advances that the Romans 13 command to be subject to the law is not the best place to begin the discussion but should actually be the "place to end" it.[78] Hoffmeier considers Carroll's position as "cavalier" and amounting to a "dismissive treatment of Romans 13."[79] Carroll responds that Hoffmeier's starting point, "national security and preservation of the status quo," lacks understanding of the realities that brought the laws into existence.[80]

For Hoffmeier, the injunction of Romans 13 must be central to the immigration discussion.

The approach to Romans 13, as can be seen, generates some of the most heated exchanges in this discussion. Romans 13 has been the topic of broader public discussion after the former attorney general, Jeff Sessions, referenced it in defense of prosecuting immigrants crossing illegally from Mexico which prompted a crisis of minors being separated from their families and put in detention. Sessions said, "I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in

77. Hoffmeier, *Immigration Crisis*, 144–45.
78. Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 115.
79. Hoffmeier, *Immigration Crisis*, 144.
80. Carroll, "Review: The Immigration Crisis."

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 38 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

Romans 13, to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained them for the purpose of order.… Orderly and lawful processes are good in themselves and protect the weak and lawful."[81] Given the contentiousness regarding the role of the government in the immigration debate, it is important to see how Romans 13 is used in immigration discourse.

Responses to Human Authority

Does Romans 13 necessitate that individuals, Christians in particular, be subject to any law the government places before them? Different commentators approach the topic in different ways. Christopher Wright, on whose work Hoffmeier and Carroll base their hermeneutical paradigms, offers an insightful analysis. Instead of Romans 13 being the place from which to start or end, Wright advocates that the entirety of Scripture should be viewed, starting from creation, taking into account the fall of humanity and its impacts on social organizations, going on to analyze the "subtle and ambivalent assessment of monarchy in Israel."[82] Wright then looks at the NT, pointing to Jesus's own "confrontation with political authority in his trial" and seeing the relationship between the early church and the Jewish and Roman authorities, as exemplified in

81. Emily McFarlan Miller and Yonat Shimron, "Why Is Jeff Sessions Quoting Romans 13 and Why Is the Bible Verse so Often Invoked?" *USA Today*, June 16, 2018, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/06/16/jeff-sessions-bible-romans-13-trump-immigration-policy/707749002/.
82. Wright, *Walking in the Ways*, 23.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 39 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

the book of Acts and the epistle writers.[83] Wright advances that there are varied responses of Israel as a foreigner under various oppressive powers (i.e., Egypt, Babylon, Rome) "all showing us that there is no single, clear 'biblical attitude' to the state, but a range of responses which depend on the nature of the situation."[84] Monera, focusing on the NT, asserts, "as far as the Christian's relationship to the civil authority is concerned, there is no single, unified attitude that dominates the NT."[85] He goes on to demonstrate three different responses in the NT: "subordination or conformity (Rom 13:1–7; 1 Pet 2:13–17), critical distancing (Mk 12:13–17), and resistance or non-conformity (Rev 13)."[86]

Scripture offers several legitimate responses to civil authorities.

Scripture, then, offers several legitimate responses to civil authorities, ranging from unquestioning submission to conscientious disobedience. As could be expected, pro-reform and pro-law-and-order advocates see current immigration laws quite differently and disagree on whether they are to be obeyed, challenged, or resisted.

Are Current Laws Just?

On what basis does a Christian make the decision whether to disobey a governmental injunction? Hoffmeier takes issue with Carroll's answer to this question

83. Ibid., 23.
84. Ibid., 23.
85. Arnold T. Monera, "The Christian's Relationship to the State According to the New Testament: Conformity or Non-Conformity?" *Asia Journal of Theology* 19, no. 1 (2005): 128.
86. Ibid.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 40 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

advancing that "For Carroll's position to have merit, current American laws must be inherently unjust" and concludes that after carefully looking at Scripture, he sees nothing "that would abrogate current immigration laws."[87] Pro-law-and-order advocates look at existing legislation as the legitimate "law of the land" and do not usually question the law's origin, uneven enforcement, or whom it negatively impacts the most. Simply put, "until new laws are adopted, people must obey existing rules and follow established procedures."[88] For pro-law-and-order advocates, the pursuit of better living conditions does not constitute a reason to resort to illegal entry or civil disobedience.[89]

Pro-reformers, however, do not typically advocate that current laws be violated; rather, they insist that current legislation be challenged through the rightful and legal means available to citizens and that more compassionate, just laws be put in their place. For Carroll, current immigration legislation is inconsistent with the "higher authority," which is characterized by compassion, mercy, and care for the vulnerable, the common good of humanity.[90] The goal, Carroll proposes, is not to have current legislation replicate the laws of ancient Israel, but to recognize that "its moral principles continue to reverberate now" to the point where we can get a glimpse of the heart of God toward the most vulnerable (i.e., the

87. Hoffmeier, *Immigration Crisis*, 145–46.
88. Amstutz, *Just Immigration*, 186.
89. Ibid.; Hoffmeier, *Immigration Crisis*, 147.
90. Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 125.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 41 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

orphan, widow, and immigrant) and that followers of Jesus should advocate for legislation that is in line with the heart of God.[91] He deems current immigration legislation "unjustly exclusionary or apathetic to the overwhelming human needs that drive massive migration today."[92] Current immigration laws are also seen as overly concerned with protecting US interests and not centered enough on, as McCormick and McCormick summarize, the common human "duty to offer protection to those fleeing persecution, to stop the exploitation of immigrant workers in the underground economy, or to bring an end to the tragedies wrought by illegal border crossings."[93]

In contrast, for pro-law-and-order advocates, "human dignity, compassion, and inclusiveness provide a weak foundation for pursuing immigration reform."[94] A better foundation on which to base immigration legislation, Amstutz argues, is "proximate justice," which considers the need to be loving with the reality that all human institutions are partial and have self-interest at their core.[95] "Proximate justice," a concept based on Reinhold Niebuhr's 1957 work *Love and Justice,* seeks to hold in tension the Christian ethic of love, with the reality of how sin infuses all human enterprises with self-interest. The way to counteract

91. Ibid., 19.
92. Ibid., 24.
93. Elizabeth McCormick and Patrick McCormick, "Hospitality: How a Biblical Virtue Could Transform United States Immigration Policy," *University of Detroit Mercy Law Review* 83, no. 5 (2006): 872.
94. Amstutz, *Just Immigration*, 180.
95. Ibid., 218.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 42 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

this sinful self-interest, Niebuhr advances, is by ensuring that human structures are imbibed by the "spirit of justice."[96] Amstutz maintains that "if sin were not part of the human condition, the pursuit of a just world order and equitable migration practices would not present intractable obstacles."[97] The realities of self-interest, then, necessitate the government's role in stressing the rule of law to provide a corrective for self-interest, by caring for its own, and if possible pursuing "moral goals in foreign lands."[98] To Amstutz, proximate justice is best achieved when nation-states give preference to their own citizens, while acknowledging and respecting the dignity of all other human beings, but still distinguishing between lawful migrants (i.e., refugees) and "unlawful aliens."[99]

What is most concerning about the debate, however, is that, at the heart of it, pro-reform and pro-law-and-order advocates seem to be arguing for something deeper, and both camps use the Bible in support of their views. Romans 13 is central to the debate because for the pro-law-and-order camp it gives the necessary biblical rationale for Christians to uphold and support existing immigration laws, insisting they are what God intends. Pro-reform advocates approach Romans

Pro-reform and pro-law-and-order advocates both use the Bible in support of their views.

96. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), 25.
97. Amstutz, *Just Immigration*, 102.
98. Ibid., 102.
99. Ibid., 231. Amstutz outlines several tenets that lay a communitarian foundation, from a Christian perspective, in regard to nation-states, how to view citizens and migrants, and how immigration policies should reflect the "proximate justice" paradigm advanced by Niebuhr (Amstutz, *Just Immigration*, 230–32).

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 43 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

13 more critically, agreeing that submission to the government is expected, so long as the governmental laws agree with God's laws; but where there is conflict between divine law and human law, the divine law stands. Pro-law-and-order advocates do not see a conflict; pro-reformers do.

Assessment

While there is general agreement that the current immigration system is broken, the main emphasis of the pro-law-and-order camp is that current laws, as they are, should be obeyed.

Pro-law-and-order advocates often link their view of the state to Christian nationalist values.

Meza sums up the drive of Hoffmeier's argument, "the law is fine; it is wrong to enter illegally to any country; illegal immigrants do not have any rights; everybody must follow the law of the land."[100] Meza concludes his analysis of Hoffmeier with, "A better defense of the status quo is unlikely."[101] Carroll also critiques Hoffmeier's lack of understanding of the impact and history of current immigration legislation, its negative impact on the most vulnerable, and its favoring of the wealthy and corporations—realities that go unaddressed in *The Immigration Crisis*.[102]

100. Meza, "The Immigration Crisis," 545.
101. Ibid.
102. Carroll, "Review: The Immigration Crisis."

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 44 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

Even if pro-law-and-order advocates had the opportunity to reform the existing immigration laws, they seem most interested in instituting laws that uphold the nation-state rather than individuals. The law-and-order emphasis is on justice and a system that protects first and foremost its citizens and, if possible, others. The pro-reform camp emphasizes compassion and mercy toward the most vulnerable and sees the individual as more important than the nation-state. Amstutz's work, *Just Immigration*, calls the pro-reform emphasis on the individual over the state *cosmopolitanism*, which "views the world as a unitary global society in which the individual rights of people take precedence over the sovereign rights of territorial states."[103] In contrast, the emphasis of the state over the individual he calls *communitarianism*, which "views the world as a society of nation-states in which the primary responsibility of such states is to protect and enhance the rights and well-being of its own people while also caring for all people."[104]

The supremacy of the state for pro-law-and-order advocates becomes suspect when one considers that its proponents may link their view of the state to Christian nationalist values and ideals, which sees the US as having a special place in God's mission to the

103. Amstutz, *Just Immigration*, 13.

104. Ibid. For an overview of communitarianist and cosmopolitanist political ideologies, see Michael Zürn and Pieter de Wilde, "Debating Globalization: Cosmopolitanism and Communitarianism as Political Ideologies," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 21, no. 3 (2016): 280–301.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 45 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

world.[105] This view is of concern to Carroll and other pro-reform advocates, especially as it pertains to US American national identity being defined in terms of "Anglo-Protestant beliefs and values."[106]

Pro-reform advocates, on the other hand, are on the right path by advocating for more inclusive values that make up the national identity of the United States. At the same time, while pro-reformers should continue to emphasize the kind of compassion and mercy that embraces new migrants, especially the most vulnerable from around the world, they should also stress the financial, social, and cultural costs of responsibly integrating existing communities with new migrant members. Pro-reform discourse must include discussion regarding the types of migrants who should *not* be given access to the country, whether due to criminal activity or other pressing reasons, and the mechanisms that should be put in place to assess the admittance of the right people into the country. It is also important to recognize that having too many migrants too quickly in certain areas may create social backlash, which will prove counterproductive to integration.

Pro-reform discourse must include discussion regarding the types of migrants who should not be given access to the country.

105. Eric Leon McDaniel, Irfan Nooruddin, and Allyson Faith Shortle, "Divine Boundaries: How Religion Shapes Citizens' Attitudes Toward Immigrants," *American Politics Research* 39, no. 1 (2011): 212. Villaseñor links Donald Trump's nationalistic impulse to communitarianist ideology and advances other proponents. See Manuel Enrique Villaseñor Bouvier, "El discurso nacional comunitario de Donald Trump," *Agora USB* 17, no. 2 (2017): 545.

106. Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 18.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 46 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

Conclusion

Missiological Implications

Let us examine some implications regarding the relevance of this topic to the evangelical church and its gospel witness today. First, evangelical animus toward immigrants stands in stark contrast to evangelical advocacy for the rights of the unborn and the protection of the traditional family. It is inconsistent to point to biblical principles, such as the *imago Dei*, when it comes to abortion and gay marriage, but then point to highly nuanced word studies and linguistic technicalities to sustain that compassion for the stranger is predicated on their legal status. The evangelical church would advance a more consistent message if it would advocate for immigration legislation that is based on the biblical command to love and care for the stranger that runs throughout Scripture, as Van Engen advances; such advocacy would help provide a moral compass in regard to all the competing values and priorities that impact the immigration debate.[107] The Christian narrative is an inclusive message with the blessing of the nations at its core, hence "A Christian narrative of the healing of the nations stands at odds with treating those from other nations as aliens."[108] A more consistent and biblical message from evangelicals would

107. Charles Van Engen, "Biblical Perspectives on the Role of Immigrants in God's Mission," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34, no. 1 (2010): 31.
108. Robert W. Heimburger, *God and the Illegal Alien: United States Immigration Law and a Theology of Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 211.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 47 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

consider the real issues at hand with immigration, such as dealing with the poor and underprivileged people already in the US, as well as the real concerns with national security. The biblical care for the stranger can help frame other issues like providing aid to the most vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers, who present the "weightiest claims for admission from a human rights or moral perspective."[109]

Evangelical animus toward immigrants stands in stark contrast to evangelical advocacy for the rights of the unborn and the protection of the traditional family.

Likewise, evangelicals, given their own history of migration and engagement with immigrant peoples, could be well positioned to contribute and provide helpful theological and social reflection to other faith groups who are also going through similar immigration dilemmas and debates in other countries. For example, considering the political fallout in Venezuela in recent years, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelan immigrants have found their way to countries like Colombia and Brazil, with the evangelical church looking for biblical responses. Theological reflection about the proper response to the "stranger," legal or otherwise, is far from simply academic discussion; it is an urgent dialogue that is already taking place. Unfortunately, what seems to be driving the conversation is not theological reflection but rather pragmatic concerns of economics, legality, and national identity. As Carroll points out, "an appropriate response to the complicated situation in society

109. McCormick and McCormick, "Hospitality," 877.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 48 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

will not come from detached, objective analysis, cost-benefit calculations, efficiency quotients, and cultural arguments."[110]

Personal Reflections

As I have processed through Carroll's and Hoffmeier's two very different positions, I would like to advance some of my personal observations. Before doing so, it is important to disclose how my experience has impacted my views on illegal immigration. Our views on immigration are shaped not only by our religious, political, or economic backgrounds but also by our immigration experiences or lack thereof. I, for one, have never had to make the decision to live or travel illegally into the United States or any other country. Yet my life has been directly and indirectly impacted by immigration. My father traveled to the United States from Colombia when I was just four months old. He was undocumented, did not speak English, and had only primary-level education, factors which compounded the effect of being a stranger in a strange land. The stories he tells me—of weeks at a time when he and his older brother would work twenty-hour days, seven days a week, stories of very difficult living situations, with many people packed into a small apartment and so distanced from loved ones—make me appreciate the hard work and perseverance he and many others have

110. Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 133.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 49 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

demonstrated. Why did my father do it? "To give you a better future," he responds.

Through hard work and government opportunities that arose, as soon as my father was able to legalize his undocumented status, he did so. He became a permanent resident a few years after his arrival. A couple of years later he extended permanent residency to me as well. From the age of seven, I have had permanent resident status in the United States, but much of that time I spent in Colombia. The choice my father and others in my family made markedly improved our socioeconomic standing in Colombia: I was able to go to a prestigious bilingual school, I was able to travel to the US to hone my English skills, we had money for college, we had money even to be generous to others around us. Furthermore, through my interactions with people in the United States, I became a follower of Jesus, a decision that has altered the course of my life. In short, my father's decision to migrate to the United States transformed my family in almost every respect, and the balance sheet has been overwhelmingly positive.

Yet I am conflicted by the choices one has to make in order to travel and reside as an undocumented immigrant. As a follower of Jesus, I believe it is important to be subject to the governing authorities. I also believe it is equally important to provide for your family so they can eat and, if possible, have life-giving socioeconomic and academic opportunities. There is no denying that, for many, the United States offers the potential of

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 50 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

attaining the necessary resources for a flourishing future.

So, while I have not been an undocumented immigrant myself, my whole life is built on illegal immigration. I am not ashamed of it, yet I do not think I could make the same choices. And I am grateful I do not need to. Many around the world, though, are hoping and praying for an opportunity of a better future, and the right way, the legal way, to come into the US benefits those who have the financial and social capital to make a decent living to begin with.

It is important to be subject to the governing authorities. It is equally important to provide for your family.

As I reflect on Carroll's and Hoffmeier's positions, first and foremost I support Carroll's overall emphasis on beginning the conversation with the *imago Dei* concept and the overarching trajectory of Scripture in favoring the stranger, the vulnerable, the orphan, the widow, over and above maintaining power structures. Likewise, I appreciate Carroll's understanding of the wider economic realities that have exacerbated migration, particularly Latino/Hispanic migration, into the United States, especially considering the ways US involvement in Latin America, through military intervention and multinational-corporations, has provoked economic realities that have left many people with no other recourse but emigrate to the "land of opportunities." Unfortunately, Carroll does not spell out a clear direction for what immigration reform would look like.[111]

111. Heimburger, *God and the Illegal Alien*, 9.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 51 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

Hoffmeier, on the other hand, makes a strong case, which is supported by other scholars, about the biblical terminology referring to "strangers": the *ger* was a permanent resident who was largely integrated into the life of Israel. He also makes a compelling case that there were mechanisms in place in the ANE that regulated the transit of migrants from one location to another and that people did, in fact, differentiate between different types of migrants (*ger, nkr, toshab,* etc). However, in my opinion, Hoffmeier, does not convincingly demonstrate that these linguistic and ANE political realities were an outflow of God's heart for the nations. Nor does Hoffmeier convincingly demonstrate that the *ger* in ancient Israel corresponds to today's permanent resident and the *nkr*, to the undocumented immigrant. Heimburger rightly notes that Hoffmeier draws "too close a correspondence between distinctions in ancient Hebrew and distinctions in contemporary United States."[112] In my estimation, Hoffmeier has missed the forest for the trees, in that he has correctly argued for the small details (*ger, nkr*, borders in Egypt and Israel) but has not adequately addressed the big picture and clear Scriptural trajectory of God's love for "the stranger" and his call for people to do likewise (Lev 19:34; Dt 10:18–19).

Can pro-reform and pro-law-and-order advocates work together? I see some areas that could serve as common ground. First, both camps recognize the dignity and value of all people, regardless of nationality,

112. Ibid., 9.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 52 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

due to every person being made in the image of God. From this *imago Dei* common ground, fruitful discussion could be advanced regarding how this dignity is maintained when addressing controversial topics like the separation of families at the border or Dreamers. This common ground also serves as a solid foundation on which ministries in the US could begin or continue to provide essential human services to immigrants, without concern for their legal status in the country. A person's legal status should not, under any circumstance, become a litmus test for Jesus followers to show Christ's love and compassionate care. Engaging immigrant communities through English classes, health clinics, after-school tutoring, shared space in church facilities for immigrant congregations etc., are all ways to practically live out the fact that all people are created in God's image and are to be treated with dignity.

Can pro-reform and pro-law-and-order advocates work together?

Second, both camps recognize the importance of having some way to regulate the flow of migrants into the United States while ensuring the well-being of the country's citizens and the government's role in creating and enforcing laws. While pro-law-and-order advocates emphasize this point, pro-reform proponents also recognize that sensible immigration legislation "respects the rule of law" and "guarantees secure national borders."[113] With this common ground

113. "Our Principles," *Evangelical Immigration Table*, n.d., http://evangelicalimmigrationtable.com/#PRINCIPLES.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 53 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

in place, some important conversations involve the best ways to ensure the integration of newly arriving immigrants and the financial, cultural, and political impact of immigrants in a community. Furthermore, there needs to be more nuanced discussion regarding the aspects of current immigration law that can be maintained and the aspects that should be reformed, as it is a highly complex system.[114]

Summary

This essay has surveyed some of the most salient arguments from the pro-reform and pro-law-and-order proponents within the evangelical church in regard to whether the "stranger" of which the OT speaks can be associated with today's undocumented immigrant. Special attention was given to the works and arguments of James Hoffmeier and Daniel Carroll, who represent and articulate many of the arguments for the pro-law-and-order and pro-reform views, respectively.

This essay first looked at the hermeneutical paradigms from which each author positioned his writing, examining the work of Christopher Wright, a respected OT scholar on whom both Carroll and Hoffmeier base their work. A linguistic analysis of the Hebrew words for "stranger" followed, looking at the way each author built his overall argument based on his linguistic findings. Lastly, this essay surveyed some of the ways the pro-reform and pro-law-and-order proponents

114. Heimburger, *God and the Illegal Alien*, 9.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 54 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.

approach the issue of how Christians should relate to the state regarding immigration, concluding with some missiological implications.

This study sheds light on the complexities associated with the immigration debate and has underscored some of the conflicting reasons why some evangelicals favor more restrictive immigration legislation and enforcement while others champion comprehensive immigration reform that is compassionate and favorable toward immigrants. The truth of the matter is that the myriad of factors that coalesce in such a convoluted topic make it difficult to ascertain whether evangelicals are, in fact, responding to immigrants from a theologically driven ethic or if other realities are shaping their attitudes toward immigrants. For instance, how are factors like nationalism, race, and politics not only shaping but, more importantly, *shaped by* evangelical attitudes toward immigrants? More research is needed to look at how these factors shape the immigration debate among evangelicals.

It is difficult to ascertain whether evangelicals are responding to immigrants from a theologically driven ethic or if other realities are shaping their attitudes.

BOLETIN_TEOLOGICO_JLAT_14.1.indb 55 16/07/19 3:38 p. m.