

## Amnesty for Illegal Immigrants: A Policy of False Compassion

By John Vinson, president AIC Foundation

A large number of religious leaders claim that the United States has a moral obligation to grant amnesty, i.e., legal status and the option of citizenship, to the 11 million illegal aliens now estimated to reside in this country.<sup>1</sup> Some cite various scriptural texts. Others base their claim on a general sense of what they see as compassion. It is significant, however, that the majority of rank and file believers in most denominations oppose amnesty.<sup>2</sup> They have good reasons for their position, which this paper will set forth.

To determine the propriety of amnesty it is necessary to consider a more fundamental question. That is the significance of nationhood. Specifically, do nations have a preeminent right to maintain their national identities through such means as effective border control?

A great deal of secular thinking today professes that they do not. Some come to this view from the conviction that they are “enlightened” people who have grown beyond loyalty to country to embrace a global vision. Others are members of the business community who view borders as barriers to their profit making, and still others are radical leftists who see national loyalty as an obstacle to the socialist utopias they hope to build and rule over. From these points of view, open borders and unauthorized immigration are a solution, not a problem.

Many of America’s elites (including opinion makers) share these anti-national sentiments.<sup>3</sup> Thus it is not surprising that their influence, at least to some degree, extends beyond their circles. This influence could be one reason why some conservative Christian leaders have endorsed legal status for illegal aliens.

Nevertheless, the relevant issue for Christians is not what the secular culture says, but what the Bible and Christian tradition have to say about nationhood. Both, without question, affirm its importance as a principle of divine order. The Book of Genesis describes the division of mankind into nations and God’s judgment against men at Babel when they strove to ignore national division and become as one.

In Deut. 32:8, God explicitly affirms His plan to divide “the sons of Adam” into nations. Acts 17:26-27, in the New Testament, adds to this statement that God created the nations and that He set boundaries among them so that “they would seek after God.” Thus, biblically speaking, there is a direct link between robust nationhood and godliness. Conversely, the Bible reveals (Isaiah 14:12) that it is Lucifer (Satan) who weakens the nations.

As the Christian prophetic writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote, “The disappearance of nations would impoverish us no less than if all peoples were made alike, with one character, one face. Nations are the wealth of mankind, they are its generalized personalities: the smallest of them has its own particular colors, and embodies a particular facet of God’s design.”

God’s prototype for nationhood in the Bible was the nation of Israel. Though it was diverse, being divided into 12 tribes, Israel had a core identity based on religious belief, culture, ethnicity, and language. Throughout the Old Testament it was God’s plan for Israel to maintain its national integrity. When Israel went against this design, by blending and diluting her character with that of surrounding nations—what today we call “multiculturalism”—God’s wrath came down on her.

This is the context to consider when proponents of open borders and amnesty cite passages which they claim are supportive of their positions. Among them is Lev. 19:34 which commands Israelites to treat “strangers,” (i.e., foreigners) as natives and to love them as themselves. Israel did admit “strangers” to dwell among them. Commonly these were “sojourners,” foreigners who came for a time and left. They entered and remained, however, only on the condition that they obeyed the laws of Israel, as stated in Num. 9:14; 15:16 and Lev. 18:26; 24:22.

Can there be any similarity or parallel between the lawful strangers in ancient Israel and foreigners living in the United States who have crossed our border illegally, used false identification, cheated on taxes, used public services intended for Americans, taken jobs Americans wanted, destroyed property, and committed crimes of violence?

To suggest that we owe them welcome and benefits on the basis of Old Testament law is to ignore the balance of obligations in that law—and also its clear statement that they were to be treated as natives. Is there any suggestion in the Old Testament that natives didn’t deserve punishment when they broke laws?

Israel had other restrictions as well. Some foreigners evidently stayed longer than the sojourners, even becoming part of the religious congregation. Nevertheless, they had to be from families that had resided in Israel for several generations (Deut. 23:7-8). Some nationalities could never be admitted (Deut. 23:3). And no foreigner was allowed to rule over Israel (Deut. 17:15).

Thus the governance of Israel made national cohesion, through the rule of law, a top priority. The New Testament (Romans 13:1-7) justifies government on the grounds of maintaining order against lawlessness. Amnesty promotes law-breaking by rewarding it. American immigration laws are not unreasonable. Perhaps half-a-billion people, or more, potentially would like to move to the United States.<sup>4</sup> Our powers of assimilation, and our nationhood, could not sustain such an influx.

Even as we see compassion as a virtue, we must understand that compassion has its limits. Beyond those limits, compassion becomes permissiveness, which ends in chaos and destruction. As has been shown, the Old Testament offers no suggestion that a nation must open its doors, despite the consequences. Nor does the New Testament—though some amnesty supporters cite Matthew 25, where Christ states “I was a stranger, and you invited me in” as a mark of righteousness and justification for open borders.

While verse 32 mentions “nations” at the judgment, the focus of the chapter is on personal ethics and personal salvation. Eternal judgment in the Bible is always an individual matter. Nations are judged in this life, but not in the next. The phrase “a stranger” does not denote a massive influx of foreigners. It is one person who receives mercy from another, and that recipient—in this context—is not necessarily from a foreign country. It simply could be someone the benefactor doesn’t know well. Also, Christ says that the recipients are his “brothers,” the New Testament’s term for Christians.

Thus the passage deals with generosity among individual Christians, rather than a prescription for a nation’s immigration policy. Indeed, the Bible confirms a separate set of ethics for governments of nations, as opposed to individuals. As one example, the state may take vengeance against evil doers (Romans 13:4), but individuals may not (Romans 12:19).

The chief purpose of governments, in the biblical scheme, is to maintain order. Governments can act in a merciful fashion, but mercy by nature is primarily a virtue of the individual heart. Without order, and the rule of law, the ensuing social breakdown will make personal virtues difficult to practice as people have to turn inward to protect their immediate interests. This no doubt is why the Bible links nationhood and government to righteousness.

With respect to amnesty, it is not compassionate to weaken our rule of law, which is definitely happening along our southern border today. Nor is it compassionate to encourage the unending illegal entry of foreigners who take jobs and benefits from poor and disadvantaged Americans. And most of all, it is not compassion to imagine that we can make any serious dent in world poverty by opening our doors to endless streams of people. World population currently grows at the rate of about 75 million a year, and most of the growth takes place in poor countries. Certainly there is no way America can admit any significant percentage of these people without self-destructing.

If they are ever to prosper, the vast majority will have to do so in their home countries. By leaving our border open and offering amnesty, we raise false hopes abroad and weaken the incentive of foreign peoples and governments to deal with their problems. An outstanding example is Mexico where entrenched wealthy elites shun reform, preferring instead to encourage their “excess” people to relocate to the United States.

American Christians who genuinely feel compassion for foreign countries might consider doing mission work in them, particularly if they have practical skills to impart to the native peoples. This is a choice much more ethical than the kind of legislated “compassion” that considers no consequences and takes no personal responsibility. In any context, biblical compassion humbly considers the limits of what it can accomplish (Proverbs 3:27). Arrogantly ignoring natural limitations and real dangers is not, according to the Bible, an act of faith—but rather, a presumption against God (Matt. 4:6-7).

Also crucial to consider is that for many advocates of open borders and amnesty, compassion is simply a cover to advance selfish gain. The business interests seeking an endless supply of cheap labor are one example. Others are the radical leftists who promote amnesty as a means to gain political power. One example is Robert Creamer, a prominent strategist of the Democratic Party’s “progressive” (i.e., socialist) wing. He maintains that amnestied illegal aliens will help to create a voting bloc that will give “progressives” a lock on American politics.<sup>5</sup> The strategy, it seems, is to dilute the American electorate with unassimilated and easily-manipulated voters. Christians should be wary of aiding this disreputable agenda.

Amnesty advocates claim that letting illegal immigrants stay and keep the jobs they have is basic compassion. But why do they also include U.S. citizenship in the package, as if it were some kind of fundamental human right—rather than a privilege to be earned through the proper channels? The inclusion of citizenship suggests motives other than pure charity.

Aside from compassion, another key Christian virtue is wisdom (Proverbs Chapters 1-3). It consists of determining what is true and workable. Amnesty does not solve any problems, as practical experience has shown time and again. After all of the legalizations we've had since the first one in 1986, we have had more illegal immigration. And that should hardly be surprising, given that rewarding a behavior is the best way to encourage it.

We should not expect foreigners to respect our laws if we don't respect them ourselves, and letting people break them repeatedly with no penalty certainly shows a lack of self regard. Also it shows that we don't value our citizenship or our nation—which does not portend well for our future.

Some amnesty supporters try to turn the argument of practicality around by claiming that there is no way we can immediately round up and deport 11 million illegal aliens. The truth of the matter is that we don't have to do that. An effective alternative is the strategy of "attrition." It consists of slowly but surely tightening enforcement of our immigration laws. In this situation, many illegal residents will decide to return home on their own. This is indeed what happened in 1954 when the Eisenhower Administration cracked down on illegal immigration. For each person deported, as many as ten others went home on their own.<sup>6</sup>

Amnesty supporters will claim that strict enforcement is ungenerous, and even unchristian. But the fact of the matter is that for decades U.S. immigration policy has been generous to a fault. Since 1986 we have given legal status to approximately six million illegal residents, and during that same period we have opened our gates to the largest sustained influx of legal immigration in our history.

The point bears repeating, compassion unrestrained by wisdom and temperance is a sentiment that degenerates into reckless folly, a situation which benefits no one. For righteousness' sake, feeling cannot replace foresight. On a personal and national basis, the words of Proverbs 13:22 apply, "A righteous man leaves an inheritance for his children's children." Preserving our nation also ensures that we will be able to help others.

## Endnotes

1. "Amnesty" is the term this paper uses to refer to the granting of legal status to illegal residents. Some supporters of legalization don't like the word amnesty, saying that it suggests a legal pardon with no conditions, whereas they would require illegal aliens to meet certain conditions such as learning English.

Their claim, however, is not accurate. All commentators called the first legalization of illegal aliens in 1986 an amnesty, and—as the U.S. attorney general at that time, Edwin Meese, noted—that legislation had conditions for eligibility. Edwin Meese, "An Amnesty by Any Other Name," *The New York Times*, May 24, 2006.

2. Backgrounder – "Religious Leaders vs. Members – An Examination of Contrasting Views on Immigration," December 2009, Center for Immigration Studies. The Backgrounder cites a November 2009 Zogby poll.

3. Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We?*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), P. 268. Huntington, a history professor at Harvard, estimated that somewhat less than four percent of Americans, are an elite of "transnationals," i.e., people who "have little need for national loyalty [and] view national borders and boundaries as obstacles that are thankfully vanishing. . . ."

4. David A. Coleman of Oxford University estimates that, currently, 60 million people wish to emigrate from the Third World to the United States. Said Coleman: "Should each of them be followed by seven relatives, as is the present trend, the result of our de facto open-border policy could be an influx of 480 million new arrivals—quite a burden for America's good Samaritans."

He concluded by questioning the morality of those who jeopardize the future of their country by giving "charity to mankind priority over the wellbeing of their families, friends, and neighbors." Source: *Chronicles* magazine (11/07)

A Gallop poll in 2009, however, showed a much higher number than Coleman's estimate who would like to come here, namely 165 million. Multiply that figure times seven relatives, and the total exceeds one billion.

5. Robert Creamer, *Listen to Your Mother: Stand Up Straight!: How Progressives Can Win*, (Santa Ana, CA: Seven Locks Press, 2007), Page 555. Creamer says that legalizing illegal immigrants and making them citizens is a key strategy for creating “a gigantic block [sic] of progressive voters. . . . a block [sic] that could be decisive in the battle for the future. . . .”

6. John Dillin, “How Eisenhower Solved Illegal Border Crossings from Mexico,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 5, 2006.

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