REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH TO STUDY THE PROPRIETY OF THE RECEPTION OF ILLEGAL ALIENS INTO CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction

II. The broader theological discussion
   a. Roman Catholic social thought
   b. Evangelical and Reformed responses
   c. Summary and analysis

III. A theology of strangers
   a. Proper interpretation of “alien” passages
      i. The OT passages
      ii. The NT fulfillment
   b. The church’s conduct towards strangers and aliens

IV. The relationship between church and state
   a. Scriptural considerations (Romans 12.1-7 and 1 Peter 2.13-17)
   b. Confessional considerations
   c. Theological analysis
   d. Summary

V. The question of church membership

VI. Advice for presbyteries and sessions

I. INTRODUCTION

The 73rd General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) responded to an overture requesting that the denomination elect a committee of three and one alternate to study the issue regarding the reception of illegal aliens into the membership of the OPC. The assembly elected Messrs. John V. Fesko, (chairman), Todd Wagenmaker, David Winslow, and Charles K. Telfer (alternate). The committee of three met in Woodstock, Georgia, on 25-26 October 2006 and held a conference call on 11 January 2007. According to its mandate, the committee was given the task “to propose to the 74th General Assembly advice for presbyteries and sessions” concerning the propriety of the reception of illegal aliens into the membership of the OPC.

The committee’s report seeks to offer the General Assembly of the OPC advice on this matter by first noting some general observations about the issue of illegal aliens and the church. Given the very public national discourse on immigration and border security issues together with the presence of a reported ten million or more illegal aliens living in the country, it is not surprising that this societal problem should touch the life of the church. This is especially true when one considers the missionary zeal of the OPC to take the gospel to the nations, and that the nations are pouring into the United States, in a sense bringing foreign mission fields to our very doorsteps. We can more broadly observe that Providence is presenting many Reformed denominations, including the OPC, with a great opportunity with these immigration patterns, legal and illegal. A large percentage of the newer immigrants, our new neighbors, are of Hispanic origin and together with those of longer standing combine to comprise the largest ethnic group of the residents in the United States (US). Given the OPC’s small but ongoing and growing efforts to minister the gospel to Spanish-speakers across the country, and given


2 The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension of the OPC now supports five Spanish language mission works and two Portuguese language mission works.
the estimate that 15-25% of the Hispanic immigrants who have arrived in the US since the beginning of the
1990’s may be illegal, it is understandable that the OPC faces an issue of significance to the entire denomina-
tion. 3 We should, however make several caveats concerning the issue of illegal immigration.

First, we must not characterize the illegal alien issue as a strictly Hispanic problem, since immigrants
from all over the world have found ways to enter illegally, or if they came legally to remain beyond the time-
limits granted on visas or work permits. Second, one should not assume that issues of economic status are con-
nected to race. In other words, not all aliens, legal or not, are faced with financial poverty. Third, we should not
automatically assume that because someone comes from a particular nationality, that they are automatically sus-
pact for violating immigration laws—there are many legal aliens dwelling in the US.

Though immigration policy, border security, and illegal aliens are social and political issues with which
the nation wrestles, the General Assembly has properly narrowed the focus of the study committee’s work. As
American citizens we may have all sorts of opinions and may debate about national policies regarding immigra-
tion, the borders, the economy, politics, and law enforcement. But as citizens of the kingdom of heaven and
gatekeepers of the church, ministers and elders need to maintain their focus on what is appropriate to their
Christ-given authority. The issues that the state and its citizens face and those which the church and her citizens
face will have some relationship. Romans 13, for example, certainly has bearing on the Christian’s dual-
citizenship. There may well be some correlation between one’s views on the national scene that affect the eccle-
siastical policies one chooses, but they are different issues. Immigration and border policy are for the most part
extraneous to what is at the heart of our ecclesiastical issue. For us in the OPC, this is not primarily a debate
over issues of governmental immigration policy, or economics, or integration into American society. Rather, it
is a question of ministering the gospel to lost souls, spreading the gospel net, drawing into the church those
whom God is saving; and of what to do with them when they want to profess their faith in Christ, and it turns out
there are concerns with their legal standing in the eyes of the civil magistrate. They are illegal aliens.

A question that helps us think about the issue of propriety is this: Can an illegal alien who seeks to pro-
fess his faith in Christ make a confession that an OPC session deems credible? If the answer to that question is
“no,” then it would be inappropriate to receive him into membership. But if the answer is “yes,” and if the per-
son seeking to profess his faith in Christ desires to join in the life and worship of the local church in submission
to the elders, is it appropriate for the session to deny church membership to such a one? It is this narrow ques-
tion that the committee seeks to answer and provide advice to the General Assembly, presbyteries, and sessions
of the OPC. In our effort to give the denomination this advice, we will proceed along the following lines.

First, we want to consider typical responses to the broader issue of illegal aliens from a variety of perspec-
tives, as it is important to see what Roman Catholic, Evangelical, and Reformed authors have written on the
subject heretofore. Though there is a paucity of literature on the subject, there is nevertheless an existing on-
going theological discussion of which we should take note. It is important to see what opinions exist on the
matter so that presbyteries and sessions understand what sets apart a Reformed response to the question. This is
also very important because many illegal aliens come from countries where Roman Catholicism is dominant. It
is crucial that the OPC be prepared to distinguish its own views from those of the Roman Catholic Church
(RCC).

Second, we will survey some important exegetical ground, particularly passages such as Exo 22.21, Lev
19.34, 25.23, and Deut 10.17-19, as participants in debate over illegal aliens (Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evan-
gelical, and Reformed) frequently appeal to them. A proper understanding of these Old Testament (OT) pas-
sages that address the issue of “the stranger” or “alien” is crucial to the subject at hand. What is of particular
interest is how the New Testament (NT) handles the ideas presented in these OT passages.

Third, we then proceed to discuss the foundational issue of the relationship between the two kingdoms,
church and state. While we have already noted the broader questions of immigration policy, and we do not want
to address those issues, as they are not germane to the spirituality of the church which is the ministry of word

3 Camarota, “Immigration at Mid-Decade.” The number of foreign-born immigrants has reached 35
million in 2005 a number that is almost double that of 1990 and as a percent of the total population approaches a
level not seen since the wave of the early 1900’s. Mr. Camarota basing his estimates on comparisons between
the March 2000 CPS and the March 2005 CPS states, “This means that 2.5 to 2.7 million, or about half of the 5.2
million growth in the foreign born between 2000 and 2005 was due to the growth in the illegal population.” He
further notes that illegal aliens account for “a little over one-fourth of the total foreign-born population.”
and sacrament. At the same time there are questions concerning the responsibilities of the church to the state. We especially want to bring to bear on this issue our corporate understanding of the teaching of Scripture which is reflected in our Standards.

Fourth, with the gathered exegetical, historical, doctrinal, and confessional information, we will address the specific question regarding the propriety of the reception of illegal aliens into the membership of the church. Fifth, and finally, we offer our advice to the General Assembly, presbyteries, and sessions of the OPC.

II. THE BROADER THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

There are a number of existing opinions from a broad theological spectrum on the subject of illegal aliens. Familiarization with the literature is therefore a necessary first step in answering the question of the propriety of the reception of illegal aliens into the membership of the church. Consequently we must first survey Roman Catholic, Evangelical, and Reformed literature on the subject.

A. Roman Catholic social thought

A good portion of the current literature on illegal aliens comes from the RCC. The RCC attempts to cut a via media (a middle path) between the ideas of abstract liberalism and communitarian political thought. Abstract liberalism was born out of the Western Enlightenment during the eighteenth century in France and Germany which championed a new individualistic school of natural rights. This type of political theory has been famously captured in the words of John Stuart Mill (1806-73): “The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it.” The individual, argues Mill, must be freed from the “despotism of custom” of both aristocratic and ecclesiastical constraint.

One finds similar strains of this type of thought in the American Declaration of Independence (1776):

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

We see in the opening statements of this most famous document that the “laws of nature and of nature’s God” entitle people to certain inalienable rights—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. One should also note that government derives its power “from the consent of the governed,” and that it is the “right of the people to alter or to abolish it.” Under abstract liberalism, authority lies within the individual. Under this type of politico-theoretical construction citizenship in a country is not a moral-ethical issue because such matters lie within the purview of the individual to decide. Each individual has the inalienable right to pursue life, liberty, and happiness apart from constraint. However, at the same time, if a group of individuals unites to form a government and

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close its borders to outsiders, once again, there is no moral-ethical dilemma, as these individuals have the right to
pursue their life, liberty, and happiness in a manner of their choosing.

On the other side of the spectrum of political theory lies communitarian thought. The starting point of
communitarian ethics is the “situated self,” embedded within a particular community and endowed by birthright
with a distinctive cultural heritage.” Unlike abstract liberalism, it is not the individual who is autonomous, but
the extended family or community. It is the community that establishes the cultural norms and ethical mores.
The primary motivation in communitarian political thought is the desire to maintain the national identity of the
community. Can a community survive if it allows a constant flow of immigrants, especially those who seem
unwilling to assimilate into the linguistic and cultural norms of the community? It is between these two posi-
tions that we find the RCC offering its own understanding on the theology of illegal immigration.

Roman Catholic theologians claim to put forth a via media between abstract liberalism and communitari-
anism. Unlike liberalism, which places emphasis upon the individual, or communitarianism, which places em-
phasis upon the community, the RCC argues that each individual must endeavor to be the neighbor of absolutely
every other person. From this presupposition the RCC sets forth a case for its understanding of immigration on
several key points. First, they argue that the general obligations of charity and love for one’s neighbor demand
that each person has equal dignity and worth because he is created in the image of God and has been redeemed
by Christ. In Pope John XXIII’s (1881-1963) encyclical, Pacem in Terris, he writes:

Any human society, if it is to be well-ordered and productive, must lay down as a foundation this prin-
ciple, namely, that every human being is a person; that is, his nature is endowed with intelligence and
free will. Indeed, precisely because he is a person he has rights and obligations flowing directly and
simultaneously from his very nature. And as these rights and obligations are universal and inviolable,
so they cannot in any way be surrendered. If we look upon the dignity of the human person in the light
of divinely revealed truth, we cannot help but esteem it far more highly; for men are redeemed by the
blood of Jesus Christ, they are by grace the children and friends of God and heirs of eternal glory.

Given this theological understanding of the universal brotherhood and the imago Dei (image of God) in all men,
it is therefore the duty of every individual, but especially the church, to protect our neighbors from malnutrition,
torture, or economic destitution. Second, every person, according to the RCC, has the right to immigrate. Every individual has the right to
freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own country, and when there are just reasons,
the right to immigrate to other countries to take up residence. An important point should be noted here, namely,
“The fact that one is a citizen of a particular state does not detract in any way from his membership in the human
family as a whole, nor from his citizenship in the world community.”

We are thinking also of the precarious situation of a great number of emigrant workers whose condition
as foreigners makes it all the more difficult for them to make any sort of social vindication, in spite of
their real participation in the economic effort of the country that receives them. It is urgently necessary
for people to go beyond a narrowly nationalist attitude in their regard and to give them a charter which

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7 O’Neill and Spohn, “Rights of Passage,” p. 95-96; see also Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984), pp. 204-43.

8 O’Neill and Spohn, “Rights of Passage,” p. 98; see also Catechism of the Catholic Church (Ligouri: Ligouri Publications, 1994), §§ 1825, 2196, 2443-49.


will assure them a right to emigrate, favor their integration, facilitate their professional advancement,
and give them access to decent housing where, if such is the case, their families can join them.\footnote{12}

While this ethical treatment of immigrants is incumbent upon all people, it is especially so of Christians who are
supposed “to work with energy for the establishment of universal brotherhood, the indispensable basis for
authentic justice.” To support this point, Octogesima Adveniens cites 1 John 4.8: “Anyone who does not love
does not know God, because God is love.” It is fair to say, therefore, that in Roman Catholic social thought, the ethics of immigration are driven by
the scriptural imperatives that we must love our neighbors. As William O’Neill and William Spohn explain,
“Love of neighbor, after all, is the supreme Christian commandment. It may be translated, in part, into the ethi-
cmal maxim of equal respect for persons as moral agents.”\footnote{13} This means that the imperative to love one’s neighbor
transcends the categories of legal and illegal as they modify the term immigrant or alien. Given the universal
brotherhood of all men and the Christian’s duty to love all men and recognize their citizenship in the global, not
national, community, Christians have this moral obligation. O’Neill and Spohn state that “in Jesus’ reading of
the law, ‘the world with its sure arrangement of insiders and outsiders’ is subverted by God’s reign.”\footnote{14} O’Neill
and Spohn offer several biblical texts to support their contention regarding the supremacy of love over categories
of insider and outsider.

The first text they bring to bear is that of Lev 19.33-34: “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land,
you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and
you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” O’Neill
and Spohn argue that “no command is repeated more frequently in the Old Testament, with the exception of the
imperative to worship the one God.”\footnote{15} The second passage they bring to bear is the parable of the good Samari-
tan (Luke 10.25-37). They argue that this parable invites the listener to make a decisive response and let the
parable become our own story. As we see the alien who resides in our midst (Lev 19.33-34), we are called to
love him. O’Neill and Spohn write: “Loving the resident alien thus becomes the reenactment of the Exodus
story and the revelation of Israel’s identity. So too, the Christian follows Jesus’ exodus to the Father by becom-
ing neighbor to the anawim [poor] in the way (hodos) of discipleship (Luke 10.33).” This means that when the
Christian sees the alien, legal or illegal, he has a choice to emulate Jesus by “seeing and having compassion”
(Luke 10.33-34), or to emulate the priest and the Levite who “saw and passed by on the other side (10.31-33).”\footnote{16}

O’Neill and Spohn, gleaning from the thought of Liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez (1928 - ) and existen-
tialist philosopher Albert Camus (1913-60), explain that the Christian must not merely love his neighbor but
place himself in his neighbor’s shoes, he must take the side of the one who is oppressed.\footnote{17}

\footnote{12 Octogesima Adveniens, § 17, in Catholic Social Thought, p. 271.}

\footnote{13 O’Neill and Spohn, “Rights of Passage,” p. 102.}

\footnote{14 O’Neill and Spohn, “Rights of Passage,” p. 103.}

\footnote{15 O’Neill and Spohn, “Rights of Passage,” p. 84.}

\footnote{16 O’Neill and Spohn, “Rights of Passage,” p. 104.}

\footnote{17 O’Neill and Spohn, “Rights of Passage,” p. 104; cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Toward a Theology of Lib-
Theology primarily reads the Bible as a political text. The exodus narrative, for example, is read, not in terms of
redemptive history and typology, but in terms of political liberation. Hence, the exodus narrative is not about
the antitypical redemption from Satan, sin, and death, but about liberation from political and socio-economic oppres-
sion (see James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation Ethics [Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990], pp. 87-102,
127-28; Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation [Markyknoll: Orbis, 1988], pp. 86-89; and Leonardo Boff
and Clodovis Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology [1986; Markyknoll: Orbis, 2006], pp. 3-4, 24, 28-29, 32,
51, 54, 94-95). One finds similar trends in the theology of Jürgen Moltmann, who has been categorized as a lib-
eration theologian (see idem, God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology [Minneapolis: For-
tress, 1999], pp. 5, 63, 70). However, one should note that Roman Catholic theology is not a monolith, and Ro-
man Catholic Liberation theology is not representative of the whole (cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Congregation for the
Roman Catholic social thought, then, has offered a theological response to the issue of immigration, one in contrast to liberalism and communitarianism. Their theology of immigration is one that is based in the inherent value and worth of human beings because of their creation in the image of God, a truth that is irrespective of nationality or citizenship. It is also based in the ethical imperative of love—we who have been redeemed and loved by Christ have the responsibility to love aliens, and such a command transcends categories of inclusion or exclusion, legal or illegal. The RCC, however, has not been alone in its contribution to the subject of illegal aliens. There have also been other contributions from the evangelical and Reformed community.

B. Evangelical and Reformed responses

When it comes to literature on the question of illegal aliens from the evangelical and Reformed communities, one does not find a sustained body of literature produced by a denomination or institution that compares to the literature of the RCC. Instead, one finds individual contributions and even then, it appears as though the majority of the literature was written during the mid-1980’s and early 90’s; at the time the illegal alien issue was at the forefront of national public debate when the Reagan administration offered amnesty to illegal aliens in 1986. It seems, however, given the recent media attention, that we will see new contributions on the subject. Nevertheless, from what information one can gather, it appears that the published responses echo many of the thoughts and sentiments found in Roman Catholic social thought. In an article from Christianity Today from 1993 one finds evangelicals, such as Ron Sider, the then executive director and now current president of Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) arguing that North Americans have an obligation to bridge the economic gulf between the US and Mexico and Central America. One means of accomplishing this, according to Sider, was to support the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). While such a response is political in nature, at the same time he urged that Christians had to view the illegal alien controversy in the light of the biblical standard that “everyone is a creation of God and is my brother or sister.”18 While one cannot draw too firm of a conclusion from this small statement, it bears striking similarities to Roman Catholic social thought which identifies core issues such as the creation of man in the image of God and the universal brotherhood of man.

Other Protestant theologians cited in this brief article include Eldin Villafañe, professor of Christian Social Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. It seems as though Villafañe draws a similar conclusion to that of Sider concerning this issue. Villafañe is quoted as saying, “The bottom line for Christians is still the scriptural warranties rather than the constitutional warranties.”19 In another context, however, Villafañe has identified illegal immigration as one of the issues that the church must confront.20 Villafañe believes that God created the world and gave man a cultural responsibility towards the creation.21 Nevertheless, because of the fall, sin has entered the world and infected cultural institutions such as government. Villafañe writes:

Theological understanding of Kosmos, as used in the New Testament, is the evil social order—in whatever form or agency it manifests itself. It refers not to creation, or for that matter to human culture efforts per se, but to all elements in the social order which embody ‘corporate flesh’—social or corporate reality (i.e., structures, systems, institutions, ideologies) which are dehumanizing and in opposition


21 Villafañe, Liberating Spirit, p. 188.
to God and God’s redemptive/liberating purposes. In a theological sense what sarx (‘the flesh’) is to
individual, personal existence, the Kosmos (‘the world’) is to social existence.  
Villafañe identifies the structures and social institutions as the family, schools, laws, religion, political and social systems. It is these corrupted social structures that the church must confront. The church must understand that its struggle is with the flesh and its social correlates, the sinful social structures of the kosmos. 

How is the church supposed to confront sinful social structures? It is supposed to recognize that there is a vertical-transformation that occurs in redemption and outpouring of the Holy Spirit that has a horizontal aspect (1 John 4.7-13). Villafañe states that the Spirit’s love constrains us to feed the hungry, visit the sick and prisoners, shelter the homeless and poor—to express God’s love in social concerns. Therefore it is through a Spirit-empowered ethic of love that the church is supposed to confront the powers that be, whether individually or institutionally manifested and whether morally, physically, or spiritually expressed. Villafañe therefore sees that it is the church’s responsibility to address social evils, though he is careful to note that the church must not confuse its redemptive and transformative mission with that of the government. Villafañe believes that the church must see itself not only as the place for personal liberation, then, but also as a place for social liberation. Now, while Villafañe does not explicitly state the following, it seems that it is a logical consequence of the structure of his social ethic: it is redemption and the love of Christ that must confront the corrupted social structure of the state. Stated more specifically, the church must love all aliens, whether documented or undocumented, as the divine imperative to love is greater than the unjust immigration laws of the corrupted state: “Actions on behalf of the oppressed in the arena of politics and society at large are actions of love.”

One finds similar patterns of thought expressed in a recent short essay written by David Moran, pastor of Key Biscayne Presbyterian Church (PCA), published on the Presbyterian Church in America’s on-line magazine, byFaith Online. In this brief article Moran argues that there are various aspects of the illegal alien debate that many do not consider. One such aspect is that since God is sovereign over the movement and migration of people (Acts 17.26-27), that it is perhaps possible that he is moving Hispanic peoples to the US because they have a “traditional culture,” one that has a high regard for human life, family, and reproduction. He sees this traditional culture as compatible with the dominion mandate to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1.28), and therefore suggests that many Christians should be grateful and welcome undocumented aliens. In terms of the Christian’s responsibility to be subject to the governing authorities, Moran argues that while the government has immigration laws on the books, that its enforcement is random at best, and therefore sends a confusing message. In other words, the government’s lack of enforcement is a mitigating factor against those who would view undocumented immigrants as illegal aliens, though Moran stipulates that Christians should obey the law.

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22 Villafañe, Liberating Spirit, p. 177. Sider seems to draw similar patterns in terms of the church’s relationship to the social order. For analysis, see Craig L. Blomberg, Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions, NSBT (Leicester: Apollos, 1999), p. 23.

23 Villafañe, Liberating Spirit, p. 175.

24 Villafañe, Liberating Spirit, p. 163.


28 Villafañe, Liberating Spirit, p. 201.


At the same time, Moran states that Christians are not only obligated to submit to the governing authorities but also to love our neighbor, strangers in particular (Exo 22.21; Lev 19.9-10; Heb 13.2; 1 Pet 2.11; Eph 2.14, 19). Moran writes:

The motive is given in Exodus 22.21 for showing love and compassion to aliens is that the Israelites were disadvantaged aliens in Egypt for 430 years and now enjoy a special status of grace. The standard and universal application made in the New Testament is this: that we were once ‘aliens’ to grace. And that now, under grace, as aliens in this world, we should show compassion to any person who might be disadvantaged or marginalized.

Moran also contends that “all Christians and nations are subject to the law of compassion.” Given these theological presuppositions, Moran believes that the PCA should be willing to advise undocumented persons to obtain legal advice, offer medical assistance, and evangelize all people regardless of their legal status.

C. Summary and analysis

In all of the surveyed literature on the subject of illegal immigration there seem to be common threads that run throughout, whether in Roman Catholic, Evangelical, or Reformed writings. First, soteriology, combined with a misconstrued view of eschatology and christology seems to take precedence over the authority of the civil magistrate. Given the redemption received through Christ and applied by the Spirit, it is the church’s responsibility to love others regardless of a person’s legal status. In Roman Catholic thought, for example, the RCC draws a line connecting the redemption of Christ and the universal brotherhood of man, and on this basis obliterates national boundaries. Note that Paeam Terris states: “Men are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, they are by grace the children and friends of God and heirs of eternal glory.” Likewise Octogesima Adveniens states: “It is everyone’s duty, but especially that of Christians, to work with energy for the establishment of universal brotherhood, the indispensable basis for authentic justice and the condition of enduring peace.”

Though it is not stated, there is an underlying assumption that the redemption of Christ has the goal of producing a global universal community, one that is not necessarily tied to the church, as these two papal documents do not construe the creation of the universal brotherhood in terms of evangelization but in terms of social action. This represents a confusion of the two kingdoms, into an undifferentiated institution colored by a this-worldly eschatology, one that sees progress, not so much in terms of evangelization and redeeming people out from under the bondage of Satan, sin, and death, but in terms of social progress—a liberal form of postmillennialism.

There are two likely contributing factors to this Roman Catholic form of postmillennialism, namely, their understanding of church and state and the doctrine of the anonymous Christian. The anonymous Christian is perhaps best summarized from the conclusions of Vatican II’s (1965) Lumen Gentium: “The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, first among whom are the Muslims: they profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge humanity on the last day.” Lumen Gentium also states: “Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—these too may attain eternal salvation.” With the doctrine of the anonymous Christian, all that is required, then, is not the evangelization of the world but merely that the world live relatively moral lives. Hence, the doctrine of the anonymous Christian creates a this-worldly eschatology, an earthly kingdom that is advanced by social progress rather than the gospel.

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31 Pacem Terris, § 10, in Catholic Social Thought, p. 132.

32 Octogesima Adveniens, § 17, in Catholic Social Thought, p. 271.


34 Lumen Gentium, § 16, in Vatican II, p. 222.
In terms of the Roman Catholic confusion of church and state, a likely source comes from the historic statements of Pope Boniface VIII (ca. 1236-1303) in his papal bull *Unam Sanctum* (1302) where he acknowledges the existence of the two distinct powers of the church and state, represented by its respective swords, a spiritual and temporal one. However, he also stated:

> And we learn from the words of the gospel that in this church and in her power are two swords, the spiritual and the temporal that both swords “are in the power of the church, the material sword and the spiritual. For when the apostles said, ‘Behold, here’ (that is, in the church, since it was the apostles who spoke) ‘are two swords’ (Luke 22.38)—the Lord did not reply, ‘It is too much,’ but ‘It is enough.’ Truly he who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter, misunderstands the words of the Lord, ‘Put up thy sword into the sheath (John 18.11).”

This position was in contrast to Pope Gelasius I’s (d. 496), who first used the terminology of the *two swords* and who argued: “There are two powers, august Emperor, by which this world is chiefly ruled, namely, the sacred authority of the priests and the royal power.” Gelasius saw the two swords as two distinct powers, the church wielding only the sword of the Spirit, whereas Boniface seated the authority of both swords in the church.

Hence, it should be no surprise to read of the Roman Catholic condemnation of democracy in Pope Pius IX’s *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) which condemns the idea that “the state, as being the origin and foundation of all rights, possesses a certain right of its own, circumscribed by no limits.” In other words, democracy saw its source of existence, as the Declaration of Independence, “from the consent of the governed,” rather than seeing its need to submit to the divine authority of the church.

The Roman Catholic insistence upon the supremacy of the church over the state was officially codified in the pronouncements of Vatican I (1870) which states that the “Roman church possesses a preeminence of ordinary power over every other church . . . not only in matters concerning faith and morals, but also in those which regard the discipline and government of the church throughout the world.” Likewise,

> Since the Roman pontiff, by the divine right of the apostolic primacy, governs the whole church, we likewise teach and declare that he is the supreme judge of the faithful, and that in all cases which fall under ecclesiastical jurisdiction recourse may be had to his judgment. The sentence of the apostolic see (than which there is no higher authority) is not subject to revision by anyone, nor may anyone lawfully pass judgment thereupon.

Vatican I was stating its belief that the RCC was not in any way “dependent on the civil power.” We see, then, that according to Vatican I, the Pope has supreme authority in the world and that his decisions can be contravened by no one, not even the civil authorities. Based upon the RCC’s confusion of church and state, and its doctrine of the anonymous Christian, the ethical imperatives of love take precedence over the laws of the state—the church has the right to contravene the state in these matters because it ultimately holds authority over the

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III. A THEOLOGY OF STRANGERS

It is evident that in much of the literature on the subject of illegal immigration, whether from a Roman Catholic, Evangelical, or Reformed perspective, there is frequent appeal to “alien” or “stranger” passages in the OT.

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40 Here Villafañe’s construction of the *kosmos* as the societal counterpart to the Christian’s *flesh* is strikingly similar to Walter Rauschenbusch’s (1861-1918) arguments for social or institutional conception of sin and salvation (see Hart, *Secular Faith*, pp.102-12, esp. 112; cf. Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* [rep.; New York: Abingdon Press, 1945], pp. 69-77).

41 One should wonder, at least in the case of Roman Catholic social thought, the degree to which Liberation theology has influenced its position. It is interesting to note, for example, that Leonardo Boff (1938 - ) lists among the influential books of the Bible in Liberation thought: Exodus, the prophets, the gospels, Acts, and Revelation. Noticeably absent are Paul and Peter’s epistles (see *Liberation Theology*, pp. 34-35).
Given the frequent appeal to these passages, it is important first to set forth their correct interpretation so that we may place the specific question of the propriety of the reception of illegal aliens upon the proper exegetical footing. It is paramount that the church correctly understand these OT passages, as they do not address the issue of immigration but rather the church’s identity in Christ vis-à-vis the world and the attitude that it takes towards unbelievers, or those outside the covenant. Specifically, we must understand that the passages that deal with aliens in the midst of Israel do not address matters pertaining to immigration policy but rather primarily point to the future incorporation of Gentiles into the covenant, or more specifically that the church will consist of both Jews and Gentiles, not how churches or governments are supposed to treat illegal aliens in terms of immigration policy.

A. Interpretation of “alien” passages

1. Old Testament passages. When we come to the OT and the issue of the “alien” passages, we must first establish the context in which we find them. There are a number of passages where we find the topic of aliens in the land addressed, but the primary passage upon which we should focus is Exo 22.21: “You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.” This command instructs Israel not to do wrong to the τῶν (gēr), which the ESV translates as sojourner but other translations render as alien (NIV), stranger (NAS; KJV), or foreigner (NLT). It is clear, therefore, that within this historical context, we are dealing with Israel’s formation as a nation, set apart by God’s covenant, specifically the Mosaic covenant, as we find this verse following the covenantal administration of the Decalogue. Given this covenantal context and Israel’s special relationship with Yahweh, we should understand that the alien is the non-Israelite or Gentile who dwells in the promised land in Israel’s midst. The alien was a Gentile, one who was not born in the promised land, one who was an alien to the covenant promises of God. At this point, therefore, it is important that we note that Exo 22.21 is based: (1) in God’s redemptive dealings with Israel from Egypt; (2) Israel’s exclusive identity as God’s covenant people; (3) Israel’s identity with reference to the Gentile nations. What is significant, however, is that this OT legislation primarily deals with how Israel should treat the Gentile in their midst as they reside in the promised land. It is not directed towards those Gentiles, for example, who were considered enemies of Israel, such as the inhabitants of the promised land prior to the conquest, those whom God commanded that they be destroyed. That there would be Gentiles, however, dwelling among Israel is interesting, as the implied message here is that there will be Gentiles who dwell in the land and who pass through, but there will also be those who dwell in the land permanently, those who seek God’s presence. Israel is therefore supposed to love the Gentile in their midst who seeks to worship the one true God and who seeks to dwell in the presence of God by residing in the land.

The sojourner, τῶν (gēr), is distinguished from the foreigner, γῆρ (nokri), or ββ’ΑΤ (tōšāb), in that the sojourner has settled in the land for some time and sought refuge into another community, such as Abraham in Hebron (Gen 23.4), Moses in Midian (Exo 2.22), Elimelech and his family in Moab (Ruth 1.1), or the Israelites in Egypt (Exo 22.20). Though the sojourner was not permitted to own the land, he enjoyed the rights of assistance, protection, and religious participation. He had the right of gleaning (Lev 19.10; 23.22), participation in the tithe (Deut 14.29), the Sabbath year (Lev 25.6), and the cities of refuge (Num 35.15). His participation in religious feasts assumes that he would have also been circumcised (Exo 12.48; cf. Deut 16.11, 14). He was also permitted to bring offerings and was obligated to the Levitical purity laws (Lev 17.8-16). At the same time, however, the sojourner was to observe the same prohibitions (Lev 16.29; 18.26) and receive the same punishments (Lev 20.2; 24.6, 22) as the Israelite. In the light of this information, it is interesting to note that the Septuagint (LXX) translates the term τῶν (gēr) as προσχύτοι (proselytos), or proselyte. In fact, the LXX term “is used especially in those texts referring to the inclusion of the resident alien as a full participatory member in the religious community (ca. 70x), giving it the nuance of the later, more technical meaning of a convert.” It is clear from this data that the sojourner or alien, therefore, was not merely an immigrant but rather one who sought the presence of Yahweh—one seeking redemption.

In Lev 19.34 we find similar characteristics as what we find in Exo 22.21, namely Israel’s treatment of the aliens in her midst based upon her identity as God’s redeemed people: “You shall treat the stranger who so-

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journs with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” One also finds comparable characteristics in Deut 10.17-19: “For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.” Here we see that Israel’s conduct towards the aliens in their midst was supposed to be one that reflected the love and mercy that they had received during their bondage in Egypt. It is also important that we note that all of these passages, whether Exo 22.21, Lev 19.34, or Deut 10.17-19, are predicated upon the exodus-redemption and subsequent cutting of the Mosaic covenant between God and Israel. This is especially evident in the relationship between the Exodus narrative material and subsequent revelation in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Leviticus builds upon Exodus; Deuteronomy is the renewal of the Sinai covenant between God and the new generation of Israelites as they prepared to enter the promised land (Deut 4.13). Keeping these things in mind, we may draw some basic conclusions thus far before we proceed to consider these passages in the light of the NT.

First, these passages establish Israel’s conduct towards the Gentiles or aliens who would settle in their midst and who desired to dwell in the presence of Yahweh. One should recall that these commands do not characterize their conduct toward Gentiles in general, as there were many Gentiles who were to be treated as enemies, such as the previous inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless, it is perhaps the opening of the narrative of Ruth that best characterizes the desire of the alien dwelling in Israel’s midst: “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1.16). Here Ruth, a Moabite, a Gentile, desired to live in the land of Israel, but even more so, sought to become part of the covenant community and worship Israel’s covenant Lord.

Second, when we explore Israel’s significance as a nation, we cannot do so merely as a geo-political entity and thereby appeal directly to the OT to formulate either immigration policy for 21st century geo-political entities or the church’s own position on illegal immigration as so much of the previously surveyed literature does. In other words, the NT does not appeal to these passages to substantiate or establish geo-political ethics. Rather, the manner in which the NT interprets these OT passages is in terms of type and antitype. Or, as our Standards explain concerning the administration of the covenant of grace in the OT: “Under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foresignifying Christ to come” (WCF 7.5). In other words, Israel as a theocracy is not a blueprint for geo-political entities but rather is first and foremost a type of the one who was to come, Jesus Christ, and of his kingdom: “To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging under any now, further than the general equity thereof may require” (WCF 19.4). In this regard, God’s relationship with Israel is perhaps most intimately characterized, not merely as a civil authority, but as one between Father and son: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos 11.1; cf. Exo 4.22).

Third, Israel’s identity was permanently shaped by the exodus-redemption for several reasons. Not only did the exodus-redemption represent the formal birth of Israel as a nation with the Red Sea crossing and the cutting of the Mosaic covenant, but it was also the continuation of the Abrahamic covenant. The exodus shaped Israel’s existence, which as we have seen was connected to Israel’s relationship vis-à-vis the Gentile nations. However, just because Israel was now a holy nation and a kingdom of priests (Exo 19.6), at the same time they were still considered aliens. When God gave Israel instructions concerning the ownership of the land, for example, he instructed them: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos 11.1; cf. Exo 4.22). Here God explains that Israel’s occupation of the land is predicated upon his...

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45 All references to the Westminster Standards unless otherwise noted come from *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church with Proof Texts* (Willow Grove: The Committee on Christian Education of the OPC, 2005). The Standards are abbreviated as: Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF); Larger Catechism (LC); and Shorter Catechism (SC).

ownership of the land, not Israel’s, and for this reason Israel is considered to be {\textit{ybi}²{\textit{v}AT} > {\textit{yrI}ô{\textit{g}E}}. Here we find the term \textit{gër} (\textit{gërîm wûtôšäbîm}). We find the term \textit{rGE} (\textit{gër}), sojourner or alien, but we also find God characterizing Israel as \textit{bv'AT} (\textit{ tôšäb}), which is a class of individual that is even more temporary than an alien.485 Israel’s status as “stranger and sojourner” is specifically tied to the year of Jubilee and the requirement not to sell permanently the land. It is therefore these three elements of which we must take note when we move forward to consider these OT teachings in the light of the revelation of Christ.

2. The New Testament fulfillment. When we cross over into the NT the christological and typological significance of Israel’s identity becomes clear. We see that Israel has its significance terminate, not upon the nations in general, but in terms of its typological relationship to Christ, the antitype. Hosea 11.1, for example, is cited by Matthew in his gospel as being fulfilled in terms of Christ’s own exodus from Egypt: “And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son’” (Matt 2.14-15).47 We also see much in the gospels to commend the fact that it is Jesus as one greater than Moses who now leads the people of God on the final exodus out from under the bondage and power of Satan, sin, and death.

It is in Luke’s gospel, for example, where we find Jesus on the mount of transfiguration discussing his impending crucifixion: “And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9.30-31).48 Earle Ellis comments that Luke’s use of the term \textit{exodus} “probably includes the whole of Messiah’s redemptive work: death, resurrection, and ascension. The ‘exodus’ typology is clearly in view. Jesus is the new Moses who establishes a new Israel, gives a new covenant, and through his death and resurrection delivers God’s people from the ‘Egypt’ of sin and death.”49

Likewise in other portions of the NT we find the imagery of the church’s current existence portrayed in terms of Israel’s OT wilderness wanderings, their pilgrimage to the promised land (Heb 3-4). It is in this way, then, one that is based in Israel’s exodus-redemption and her own sojourning to the promised land, that Israel’s laws and identity are fulfilled in the person and work of Christ and his redemption of the church. In the light of these broader points of fulfillment in terms of Israel, Christ, and the church, we find the general interpretive trajectory set forth concerning Israel and the aliens in her midst confirmed by the other portions of the NT.

The apostle Paul expounds upon the connections between Israel, Christ, and the church, particularly in terms of the church’s identity as \textit{aliens} or \textit{strangers}: “Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2.12-13). It is here in Eph 2 that Paul inerrantly gives the theological significance of OT Israel’s stance towards the Gentile nations. Rather than being strangers and aliens, Paul explains: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph 2.19). In other words, Gentiles are now, along with the Jew, full members of the covenant. But because Christ has come, the Gentile is no longer a sojourner dwelling in God’s presence with fewer rights than the Jew, but rather both Jew and Gentile are now equal in the sight of God. The status of \textit{stranger} or \textit{alien} is erased in Christ.50 We must also remember that Paul is not dealing with geo-political entities but in terms of the


48 Modified ESV: \textit{kai idou andrej dup sune}lav|oun auwb|oi[the] j h\aj\ h\aj\j kai. M\liaj\j o{\textit{i} o\j o\j xaj\j \j \j doxh|egon th\j n \j exodon auub|h\j h\j mel\j len pl\jrou\j \j \j \j \j \j Werosalh\j m}


redemptive covenant, the redemption that comes through faith in Christ. When one places his faith in Christ, he
is no longer a stranger or alien to God’s covenantal redemption.

At the same time, like OT Israel, the status of the one who is united to Christ by faith changes vis-à-vis
the unbelieving world. We find in Peter’s first epistle that he addresses the Jewish and Gentile Christians as
“sojourners and exiles” (1 Pet 2.11). It is particularly in light of the exodus from Satan, sin, and death, that Je-
sus, our great shepherd, leads us as we pilgrim towards the promised land, just as Moses led Israel in the wilder-
ness. Our pilgrimage does not terminate, however, in the earthly land of Canaan but in the New Jerusalem and
in the year of the Lord, the great eschatological Jubilee (Luke 4.16-21; Heb 11.13). We see Peter characterize
the Jewish and Gentile Christians in terms of Israel’s stance towards the Gentile nations when he instructs them
to “keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable” (1 Pet 2.12).

All of this exegetical data points in the direction that the NT counterpart to OT Israel is not the nations
but rather, more specifically, Christ and the church. It is no longer the nation of Israel that is the holy nation and
kingdom of priests, but rather the church (1 Pet 2.9; Rev 1.6, 5.10). Or, more specifically, the US is not the
counterpart to OT Israel. In terms of the issue at hand, therefore, one may not directly appeal to OT law con-
cerning strangers and aliens for the question of illegal immigration and the church’s stance on the issue. Rather,
the OT stranger and alien laws must first be read in light of their fulfillment in Christ and the church.

It is from the very opening chapters of Scripture that we see God telling his people through the proph-
ecy of Noah, for example, that the sons of Japheth would seek shelter in the tents of Shem, or in the light of later
revelation, that the Gentiles would find shelter in the tents of Israel (Gen 9.27; cf. Acts 14.27; 1 Cor 16.9). This theme continues forward in the alien passages in the OT, which instruct Israel to love the sojourner, the
Gentile who seeks to dwell in the presence of God. These passages all point to the NT fulfillment in Christ and
the church where both Jew and Gentile find shelter in the covenantal redemption wrought by Christ in his life,
death, and resurrection. In this light, it is therefore important to see that the church must treat all strangers and
aliens, or those seeking redemptive shelter in Christ and the church, with love regardless of their country of ori-
gin, whether they are American, Mexican, Iraqi, Chinese, or North Korean. As Paul writes, “So then, as we have
opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6.10).
The issue of one’s immigration status, legal or illegal, is not at all in view. Given this data, therefore, we can
bring to bear a proper understanding of the alien passages of the OT as they are interpreted by the NT against the
specific question of the church’s conduct towards illegal aliens.

B. The church’s conduct towards strangers and aliens

First, the church should not fear indiscriminate evangelization of the lost. The teaching of the Scriptures is clear:
the church is to carry the gospel into all the nations (Matt 28.18-19). At the same time, given the constant influx
of immigrants to the US, it is fair to say that the nations are coming to us, which in some respects assists the
church in taking the gospel to the nations. No church should stop sending foreign missionaries into the field to
work throughout the globe. The great commission sends the church to evangelize people “from every tribe and
language and people and nation” (Rev 5.9), not geo-political entities. Hence, given that people from many na-
tions immigrate to the US, we should evangelize indiscriminately and fearlessly. In other words, we need not
worry whether the person to whom we present the gospel is legally or illegally in the country.

Second, the church should never turn its back on fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, whether they are
legally or illegally in the country. We should be willing to see to the spiritual and physical needs of anyone who
comes to the church. This is where Lev 19.33-34 comes to bear. Yes, when an unbeliever comes to the church,
we should not do him wrong. Moreover, we should treat the unbeliever in all kindness and love him as our-
selves, remembering that we were once strangers and aliens to the covenant promises of God (Eph 2.19). We
should also be willing to see to the diaconal needs of those who seek redemptive shelter in the church (2 Cor
8.8ff; James 2.5-9; Heb 13.2). The church must remember that her mission is not to combat poverty or political
oppression, however noble these enterprises might be. Rather, those aliens and strangers who seek redemption
in the church, which is analogous to the stranger or alien dwelling in the midst of Israel, are those to whom the
church must focus its efforts (Matt 25.42-45). In other words, the church’s diaconal energies must be focused
around its ministry of word and sacrament, the propagation and proclamation of the gospel.

51 Meredith G. Kline, Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview (Overland
Third, it is in the church’s execution of the great commission and its love of strangers and aliens that it must take heed of its responsibilities to the state, or civil magistrate. For in carrying out its ministry of word and sacrament the church does not so in apathy to the laws of the state, but seeking to be obedient to the civil authorities. Moreover, as we saw from the OT alien passages, the alien was to be loved but at the same time had to abide by and was subject to Israel’s laws. Therefore, the alien, the one who seeks redemptive shelter in the church, legal or illegal, must be obedient to our covenant Lord as a part of the corporate body, the church (John 14.15). It is therefore to the relationship between church and state that we must turn.

IV. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE

In any attempt to frame a theological response to the issue of illegal immigration, one must set out the parameters of the church’s relationship to the state. We will do so by exploring several key passages of Scripture, and then by surveying the teaching of the Westminster Standards on the subject (WCF, LC, SC).

A. Scriptural considerations (Romans 13.1-7 and 1 Peter 2.13-17)

There are two primary passages that deserve our attention when considering the relationship between church and state: Rom 13.1-7 and 1 Pet 2.13-17. In the first, the apostle Paul sets forth important boundaries for both the church and state and how the two entities should interact. Paul begins by writing: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Rom 13.1). This is an important consideration, namely that all earthly authority ultimately is from God, or stated more specifically, the state wields the authority of God. This is really nothing novel, as Paul’s teaching rests squarely upon the OT prophetic, apocalyptic, and wisdom tradition of God’s appointment and use of human rulers for his own purposes (see, e.g., 2 Sam 12.8; Jer 27.5f; Dan 2.21, 37-38; 4.17, 25, 32, 5.21). It also represents an authoritative adaptation of Christ’s teaching regarding the Christian’s responsibility to the state (cf. Matt 22.16-22 // Mark 12.14-17 // Luke 20.21-26).

Paul argues that the state, or the civil magistrate, is θεου diakonος (“God’s servant”) (v. 4). The civil magistrate as God’s servant exercises authority on behalf of God to maintain basic civic order. He “has appointed them for the just and lawful government of the world.” The tool that civil magistrate has been given to carry out this responsibility is the sword of steel: “For he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (Rom 13.4). Given that the magistrate is God’s servant and an agent of God to administer divine wrath upon wrong-doers, Paul instructs his recipients that the church, both individually and corporately, must be subject to the magistrate not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience (v. 5). Christians are consequently, διὰ τοῦτο (dia touto), supposed to pay taxes to, respect, and honor the governing authorities (vv. 6-7). To disobey the civil authorities is to disobey God. One should note at this point

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55 Hodge, Romans, pp. 404-05; see also Blomberg, Neither Poverty nor Riches, p. 200. For those who believe that Paul was reflecting upon the early and congenial reign of Emperor Nero and would have not written Rom 13.1-7 in exactly the same manner had he known about Nero’s persecution of the church, there are several mitigating factors against such a conclusion. First, Paul was an adult during Caligula’s reign (37-41), and he was therefore certainly aware of the practice of emperor worship. Second, Paul was all too familiar with the Jesus tradition that Herod and Pontius Pilate were complicit in the death of Christ. He was aware that Christ suffered unjustly at their hands. Third, Paul endured injustice at the hands of governing authorities in his own missionary labor (Acts 16.19-24; 35-40; 17.5-9). And, fourth, as one who had knowledge of the OT and the literature of his day, he was well aware of the corruption and evil promoted by ruling authorities (Exo 1.8-22; Isa 10.5-34; 13.1-23.18; Jer 46.1-51.64; Dan 4.1-5.31; Amos 1.2-2.3; 1 Macc 1.10-2.68) (Thomas R. Schreiner, Paul—Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology [Downers Grove: IVP, 2001], pp. 448-49; see also Herman Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, trans. John Richard de Witt [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975, p. 322].
that Paul’s instructions that the church must submit to the state are not in conflict with the inaugurated kingdom of God, or the inaugurated eschaton. This is something we will explore in greater detail below.

We find similar teaching from the apostle Peter who writes: “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Pet 2.13-14). While this sounds very similar to Paul’s instruction, there are two particularly important points that Peter raises, one in the verse just quoted, and the second in the immediate context. First, Peter specifically mentions the βασιλεύς (basileus), “the emperor,” which would have likely been Nero (AD 37-68) (cf. John 19.15; Acts 17.7).56 Nero’s wickedness needs little if any elaboration; nevertheless, Peter instructs his recipients to submit to Nero’s authority.57

In the overall context in which we find vv. 13-17, one of Peter’s main emphases is that Christians are supposed to submit to authority, “not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust” (v. 18). The connection between the Christian’s submission to authorities, whether to the civil magistrate (vv. 13-17), to one’s just or unjust master, δεσπότης (despotēs), or a wife’s submission to her husband, even one who does not obey the word of God (1 Pet 3.1-6), is that the Christian’s relationship to these various authorities is one marked by submission to them (2.13, 18, 3.1).58 John Calvin (1509-64) gives answer to a common objection to Peter’s instruction, namely, should Christians submit even to tyrannical authority:

If anyone objects and says that we ought not to obey princes who, as far as they can, pervert the holy ordinance of God, and thus become savage wild beasts, while magistrates ought to bear the image of God, I reply that the order established by God ought to be so highly valued by us as to honor even tyrants when in power. There is yet another reply still more evident, that there has never been a tyranny, nor can one be imagined, however cruel and unbridled, in which some portion of equity has not appeared. God never allows His just order to be destroyed by the sin of men without some of its outlines remaining obscured. And finally, some kind of government, however deformed and corrupt it may be, is still better and more beneficial than anarchy.59

It is important, however, that we take note of the two primary grounds Peter gives for his instruction that Christians, both corporately and individually, must submit to civil authorities. Peter does not see soteriology or eschatology mitigating the Christian’s obligation to submit to the state.

First, Peter writes to his recipients: “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2.12). Here Peter adopts the stance of OT Israel’s relationship to the pagan unbelieving Gentile nations surrounding her and applies it to the church, consisting of both Jew and Gentile. In other words, for the church, whether corporately or individually, to disobey the civil authorities, or masters or husbands, was to give unbelievers an opportunity to malign Christ and the gospel (1 Pet 2.15). Therefore, the church’s conduct vis-à-vis the government has as one of its goals the concrete manifestation of the redemption of Christ applied by the power of the Holy Spirit in terms of the corporate and individual witness of the church to the unbelieving world (cf. 1 Pet 1.1-4).

Second, it is important that we note how Peter grounds the church’s conduct in christology and eschatology, themes which one also finds in Paul (e.g. 1 Cor 15.45ff).60 That Peter writes with a cognitive awareness of inaugurated eschatology is without question. That the eschaton has begun is evident in numerous places throughout his first epistle, for example, in his recognition of the flood (Gen 6-8) as a type (ὑπό) and baptism


as the \textit{antitype} (\textit{antitypō}) (1 Pet 3.21). As one commentator explains, “The manner in which baptism is the
antitype of the OT event is expressed by \textit{antitypō}. This word is probably being used already as a technical
term, since through Paul \textit{tupōj} became in early Christianity an hermeneutical technical expression for OT pre-
representations of the eschatological event beginning with Christ (1 Cor 10.6, 11; Rom 5.14).”\textsuperscript{61} So then, one
must take note of the inaugurated eschatological kingdom of Christ. Peter and Paul, however, also ground the
church’s conduct in its union with Christ.

After Peter’s instruction to his recipients that they submit to authority, whether just or unjust, he ex-
plains: “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that
you might follow in his steps” (1 Pet 2.21). The Christian, corporately and individually, has been called to em-
body the suffering of Christ. It is here where the \textit{theologia crucis}, the theology of the cross, comes to play. The
Christian is called to follow Christ in the way of the cross—just as Christ suffered at the hands of unjust authori-
ties, so too the church is called to the same path. Taking these two points, then, one commentator notes: “It may
be tempting for Christian believers, especially in pagan societies, to construe their loyalty to Christ as a license
for rebellion against ungodly authorities that govern them. In Peter’s view, Christians must be subject to even
pagan authorities, even those as ungodly as the Roman emperor.”\textsuperscript{62} How has the Reformed tradition codified
this scriptural teaching?

\section*{B. Confessional considerations}

Historically the Reformed tradition has explained the Scriptures’ teaching on the relationship between church
and state with the terms of the doctrine of the two kingdoms: the \textit{regnum gratiae} and \textit{regnum potentiae}, the
kingdoms of grace and power. The \textit{regnum gratiae} is Christ’s rule over the ecclesia militans (the church mili-
tant) where he governs, blesses, and defends the church in its earthly pilgrimage for the sake of the salvation of
believers. The \textit{regnum potentiae}, on the other hand, is universal, general or natural—that is, Christ’s rule over
the world and its affairs through the civil magistrate, though his rule is based not upon his role as mediator but as
the second person of the trinity. Others in the Reformed tradition argue that it is God the Father who rules over
the kingdom of power as creator, which is the view reflected in the Westminster Standards. It is important that
we understand that these terms do not represent separate reigns but merely distinctions in the manner and exer-
cise of God’s rule.\textsuperscript{63} While we do not find these specific terms in the Westminster Standards, we do find their
substance. We find the divines expressing the substance of the \textit{regnum potentiae} in the opening paragraph of
their chapter on the civil magistrate: “God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil
magistrates, to be, under him, over the people, for his own glory, and the public good: and, to this end hath

\begin{footnotes}
\item[61] Leonhard Goppelt, \textit{A Commentary on 1 Peter}, trans. John E. Alsup, ed. Ferdinand Hahn (1978;
Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (1982; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), v. 8, pp. 251-59. See also
Geerhardus Vos, “Hebrews, the Epistle of the Diatheke,” in \textit{Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The
\item[62] Jobes, \textit{1 Peter}, p. 174; see also Vos, \textit{Pauline Eschatology}, p. 28, n. 36.
\item[63] Richard A. Muller, \textit{Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Prot-
estant Scholastic Theology} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), q. v. \textit{regnum gratiae}, \textit{regnum potentiae}, p. 260. The
doctrine of the two kingdoms has been articulated by a number of Reformed theologians in both the Reformation
and post-Reformation period, though arguably Martin Luther was one of the first reformers to articulate the doc-
trine (see Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed (1523),” in \textit{Martin Lu-
Lohse, \textit{Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development}, trans. Roy A. Harrisville [Min-
Edition} [1932-38; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], pp. 406-12; for analysis and documentation, see VanDrunen,
\textit{Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms}).
\end{footnotes}
armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the
punishment of evildoers” (WCF 23.1). Here we see in the Confession that God as creator rules over the kingdom
of power, or the civil magistrate.

The civil magistrate is an extension of the reign of God, but the magistrates’ power is for the “public
good” and it is their duty “to protect the person and good name of all their people” (WCF 23.3). God’s rule
through the civil magistrate is a manifestation of his common grace—that which preserves and maintains social
order. The instrument by which he exercises his authority is the “power of the sword.” Civil magistrates are not
allowed to “assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the keys of the
kingdom of heaven” (WCF 23.3). By contrast, the regnum gratiae, or the church militant, is “the visible church,
which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), con-
sists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of
the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation”
(WCF 25.2). In contrast to the regnum potentiae, the regnum gratiae does not have the power of the sword but
rather the sword of the Spirit, or the word of God, as well as the administration of the sacraments, instruments of
God’s special grace: “Unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of
God” (WCF 25.3).

When we compare the two kingdoms, that of the church and state, we see that they are ruled by God as
creator and Christ as redeemer but that they have different ends and purposes. Stuart Robinson (1814-81) ex-
plains how the two kingdoms relate to one another in his book The Church of God, from which we may draw a
summary of the two kingdoms:

1. The civil power derives its authority from God as the author of nature, whereas the church obtains
   its power from Jesus as mediator.

2. The rule for the guidance of the civil power in its exercise is the light of nature and reason, the law
   that the author of nature reveals through reason to man, whereas the rule for guidance of ecclesiastic-
   tical power comes through the great prophet, Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the word.

3. They differ in scope and aim in that the civil power is limited to those things that are seen and that
   are temporal, whereas the aim of the church is that which is unseen and spiritual.

4. They differ in that the significant symbol of the civil power is the sword—it is a government of
   force. By contrast, the symbol of the church is the power of the keys, its government is ministerial.

5. They differ in that the civil power may be exercised as several power by one judge, magistrate, or
   governor. The head of the government cannot confer spiritual power and has no authority to rule in
   the church on spiritual matters.

In the end Robinson explains that the church and state “are the great powers that be, and are ordained by God to
serve two distinct ends in the great scheme devised for man as fallen.” These doctrinal conclusions are not
unique but merely reflect the Scriptures’ teaching on the respective roles and functions of church and state.

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64 Cf. William S. Barker, “Lord of Lords and King of Commoners: The Westminster Confession and the
Relationship of Church and State,” in The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century, ed., Ligon Duncan

65 Perhaps it is now a controversial statement to make that the state, or the kingdom of power, is guided
by natural law. Nevertheless Robinson’s statement is in line with the majority view expressed in the historic
Reformed faith (see Calvin, Institutes, 4.20.14-16, pp. 1503-05; Turretin, Institutes, 11.1.1-23, v. 2, pp. 1-7;
Samuel Rutherford, Lex, Rex, or The Law and the Prince [1644; Harrisonburg: Sprinkle, 1982], p. 3; A. A.
the WCF particularly as it bears upon the relationship between OT law and the state, see Troxel and Wallace,
“‘General Equity in WCF 19.4,’” pp. 307-18. For a broader examination of the subject, see Stephen J. Grabill,
Rediscovering Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). Also see David
C. Theological analysis

As we reflect upon the current literature on the question of illegal aliens, there is a virtual absence of any consideration of the relationship between church and state. A common opinion is that the authority of the state may be contravened in light of the supposed greater socio-economic or redemptive concerns. However, nowhere in the surveyed literature do we find the scriptural recognition that the state is God’s servant and to violate its laws is to reject and rebel against God’s authority. The scriptural view of the state is radically different than either abstract liberalism or communitarianism, which see the authority of the state either in the autonomous individual or in the consent of a group of individuals to be governed. Furthermore, the church as the regnum gratiae has no authority to disobey the God-ordained and appointed authority of the state. Commenting on WCF 23.1, A. A. Hodge (1823-86) explains:

Civil government is a divine institution, and hence the duty of obedience to our legitimate rulers is a duty owed to God as well as to our fellow-men. Some have supposed that the right or legitimate authority of human government has its foundation ultimately in ‘the consent of the governed,’ ‘the will of the majority,’ or in some imaginary ‘social compact’ entered into by the forefathers of the race at the origin of social life. It is self-evident, however, that the divine will is the source of government; and the obligation to obey that will, resting upon all moral agents, the ultimate ground of all obligation to obey human governments.67

Scripture certainly recognizes that there are times when the church must obey God rather than the state because the laws of the state attempt to force disobedience to the preceptive will of God. In such circumstances, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5.29), as Daniel’s three friends disobeyed Nebuchadnezzar’s command to worship the golden statue (Dan 3) and were prepared to face the consequences for that disobedience.

There is a distinction to be made, however, between when the state tries to compel disobedience to God’s law versus when it enacts unjust laws. The state cannot force Christians, for example, to worship false gods, but on the other hand it can create immigration laws, even perhaps unjust immigration laws. The Christian has the obligation to disobey the former and obey the latter. The apostle Peter is clear; just because the laws of the state may be unjust does not automatically give the church the right to reject the authority of the state. In consideration of the illegal alien question, many fail to acknowledge or distinguish the two kingdoms and the responsibilities of each, especially the church’s responsibility to the state, whether corporately or individually. It is the responsibility of the church, therefore, to obey the immigration laws of whatever country in which the church finds itself. By encouraging Christians either to ignore or disobey the immigration laws of the state, two consequences arise.

First, the corporate and individual witness of the church becomes compromised before the unbelieving world because it willingly violates the laws of the state. This opens the church to criticism, namely that the Christian faith encourages disobedience and disrespect for authority. Second, it deprives the church, corporately and individually, of the cost of discipleship—of taking up one’s cross and following Christ. This happens by the church failing to submit to the unjust laws of the state and thereby failing to stand with Christ when called upon to suffer. As William Willimon notes, “Even when preachers urge their congregations to get out and work for a more just society, the ideal society envisioned is a liberal democratic one whose foundational assumptions about the sovereignty of the individual and the sanctity of individual choice undercut the communal, political character of Christian salvation.”68 Both the church and the individual Christian must be marked by the suffering of


Christ—to choose socio-economic stability at the cost of disobeying the immigration laws of the state is to eschew the way of the cross.

To forgo the suffering of Christ and the way of the cross in discipleship and to choose instead to disobey the laws of the state is to turn away from the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. As Peter writes: “For this is grace, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly” (1 Pet 2.19). Indeed, in the midst of suffering, Peter states that the “Spirit of glory and of God” rests upon the one who suffers (1 Pet 4.14; cf. Isa 11.2; Matt 3.16). Peter again writes: “For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil” (1 Pet 3.17). By contrast, for the one who eschews suffering and instead pursues evil Peter explains: “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Pet 3.12; cf. Psa 34.16). In terms of the subject at hand, the one who violates the immigration laws of the state makes himself liable to the punishment of the state, detention, fines, and deportation.

Likewise, while with Roman Catholicism one should acknowledge that all people are created in the image of God, this does not mean that the *imago Dei* entitles man to throw off the restraints of civil government. Additionally, just because man can be redeemed by Christ does not therefore mean he is free to rebel against the state. On the contrary, in both the structure of Paul’s epistle to the Romans and in Peter’s first epistle, the ethical imperatives concerning the Christian’s relationship to the state are grounded in the indicative of union with Christ by faith through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is because of the believer’s union with Christ and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that the believer willingly submits to the state. It is in this way that soteriological considerations must always recognize the eschatological dynamic of the already-not-yet. Yes, the eschaton has begun with the first advent of the eschatological man, Jesus Christ, and the outpouring of the power of the age to come, the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 15.45ff; Heb 6.4). Yes, we now stand in the wake of the inauguration of the Kingdom of God (cf. Matt 3.2; 4.17; Mark 1.15; Acts 1.3; 28.23-31). But at the same time, we live between the times, in the tension of the already-not-yet, meaning that the Christian, though he is raised with Christ and reigns with him in the heavenly places, nevertheless lives awaiting the consummation of all things (Eph 2.6).

Therefore, God has established in the world certain common grace institutions, such as marriage and government, which have a positive role to play even after the inauguration of the new age. These institutions will abide until the consummation of the age. Hence, the fruit of the believer’s union with Christ by faith is his willingness to submit to God’s servant, the state, in temporal matters. Corporately, the whole church is not yet the *ecclesia triumphans*, or the church triumphant, the church of the blessed and those at rest. Rather, we are a pilgrim people, aliens and strangers in this world (1 Pet 1.1). As we pilgrim to the heavenly Jerusalem, we abide by the common grace institutions ordained by God. It is not until the consummation of all things that these common grace institutions will no longer be needed, since the church will no longer be a people on the way, aliens and strangers in this world, but will have arrived at its heavenly destination. If Christians choose to disobey the immigration laws of the state, they forfeit the way of the cross and can find themselves in opposition to God, and they expose themselves to the sword of the state and God’s wrath. The penalty they suffer, however, is not persecution but rather the consequence of disobedience to the state, which is ultimately disobedience to God.

**D. Summary**

A proper recognition of the two kingdoms leads to a consideration of the inaugurated eschaton, the already-not-yet, and the theology of the cross. To many, this will strike an odd note in the ear, as there is the commonly expressed belief that economic relief should take precedence in any situation, especially in the lives of those who are economically oppressed such as illegal aliens. However, recognizing the two kingdoms, and the church’s pilgrim status, causes us to acknowledge that prior to the consummation the church must pursue a path that leads through, and not around, the cross. Like Paul, the church must be prepared to fill up what is lacking in the suffering of Christ (Col 1.24). It is the theology of the cross and the respect for God-ordained earthly authorities, for example, that impelled Onesimus to return to his earthly master, Philemon (Phm 12, 17). Given current responses to the question of illegal aliens, Onesimus should have sought freedom from slavery, not a return to it,

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69 Modified ESV: *tou to gar carij eiv dia suneidhsin qeou u`poferei tij lupaj pascw n a`wikj*


71 Moo, *Romans*, p. 791.
even if Philemon was an upright and fair Christian master. Nevertheless, such is the theology of the cross; it bids the world to come and die to itself, to take up the cross, and to follow Christ.

Any attempt to answer the question of the propriety of receiving illegal aliens into the membership of the OPC must take into account the need for the church to submit to the authority of the state in temporal affairs, such as immigration laws. When churches encounter illegal aliens wanting to join the membership of the OPC, they must themselves embody the sufferings of Christ by submitting to the laws of the state and must encourage the illegal alien to do the same. While the illegal alien may forfeit earthly treasures in returning to his impoverished condition in his homeland, he nevertheless possesses heavenly riches that are beyond compare (Eph 1.18-19). As the author of Proverbs reminds us: “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death” (11.4). Having considered the relationship between church and state, we must proceed to consider issues pertaining directly to the propriety of church membership.

V. THE QUESTION OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

In light of the church’s duty to minister the Gospel to people of every tongue, tribe, and nation, and in light of our duty to honor the government’s laws, including (even unjust) immigration laws, how should the church conduct interviews for membership applicants who are illegal aliens?

First, the OPC’s Directory for Worship stipulates that prospective members make a credible profession of faith:

Before permitting any one to make profession of his faith in the presence of the congregation, the session shall examine him in order to assure itself so far as possible that the candidate possesses the doctrinal knowledge requisite for active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, relies for salvation on the merits of Christ alone, and is determined by the grace of God to lead a Christian life. John Murray (1898-1975) elsewhere elaborates upon the nature of a confession of faith as it is found in the NT:

Such a confession had far-reaching implications for faith and conduct even within the sphere of human judgment. Mere lip confession, contradicted by other evidence either in the realm of faith or conduct, could not be accepted for entrance into or continuance in the fellowship of the saints. We may, therefore, define the confession as an intelligent and consistent profession of faith in Christ and of obedience to him.

A session is not called to judge the heart and the election of an applicant, but to judge whether the applicant’s beliefs and life conform to biblical teachings for someone who professes to belong to Jesus Christ. Those who contemplate making a public profession of faith in Christ need to understand this significant act and be able to perform it intelligently. Thus, instruction from the pastor or evangelist is a requirement prior to examination by the session. During the examination of candidates a session should be mindful of the four membership questions/vows that constitute what the OPC considers to be a satisfactory or sufficient profession of faith. The elders are to “ascertain the intelligence and consistency of the profession being made” and it is their obligation to demand an intelligent, credible, and uncontradicted confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Those four questions/vows may be summarized: I believe God’s Word, I trust Jesus for my salvation, I promise to serve my Lord, I agree to submit to the Lord in his government of the church. The first two questions encompass faith in Christ and his Word, the third and fourth questions encompass the obedience of faith, or life in Christ.

A profession of faith confesses a present reality and promises future conduct, all because of, and in reliance on, the grace of God. In the third membership question we promise to serve God with all that is in us, to

72 The Book of Church Order of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Willow Grove: The Committee on Christian Education of the OPC, 2005), V.2, p. 134.


74 See Directory for Public Worship, in Book of Church Order, V.5, p. 135.

75 Murray, Christian Baptism, p. 39.
Christ ought to show the present fruit of faith and repentance as well as the prospect of future sanctification. Yet in the exercise of the keys of the kingdom sessions must be mindful that the elders are not welcoming unblemished lambs into the church. They are welcoming those who are weak, thirsty, hungry, infirm and desiring all the spiritual blessings that flow from the Lamb who sits upon the throne. Every membership examination will include an acknowledgement of a person’s sinful condition, and perhaps even uncover besetting sins that are acknowledged and addressed. Membership examinations taken as a whole will display varying degrees of maturity in expressing an active faith in Christ as Savior and serving him as Lord. It is the elders’ duty to discern whether the inconsistencies in the confession of the lips and the conduct of one’s life are of such a degree as to contradict a credible profession of faith.

The requirement of both faith in Christ and obedience to him may well present a problem for an applicant who is an illegal alien and the elders that are examining his profession of faith. Although such an individual expresses trust in Christ alone for his salvation, and has an intelligent and consistent profession of faith in Christ in many aspects of his life in Christ, there may be problems. By disobeying the civil magistrate through entering or remaining in the US illegally the alien, whether consciously or unconsciously, is also very likely to be breaking God’s law. It is important that the pastor/evangelist who prepares such a candidate to profess his faith and the elders who examine him explore carefully and explain the degree to which an illegal alien may be violating the law of God. It is also important to acknowledge that there may be still much work to do with a candidate who is approved for membership and that part of the reception process includes his promise that he will submit in the Lord to this further discipleship. We turn now to a consideration of the ways that an illegal alien may be living in violation of God’s Word.

We must remember that all Christians and members of the OPC violate the law of God as we live our lives, and to violate one part of the law is to violate the whole (James 2.10). Moreover, as we look to identify the sin in others, we should ourselves be mindful of how we might violate God’s law before we confront our brother or sister in Christ (Matt 7.1-5). Nevertheless, there are several commandments with which the illegal alien who professes to be a Christian may find himself in conflict: the third, fifth, eighth, and ninth commandments.

The third commandment states, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” (Exo 20.7). According to the Larger Catechism, this commandment requires that a Christian have an “answerable conversation, to the glory of God, and the good of ourselves and others,” conversation being the seventeenth-century term for lifestyle. As Jochem Douma (1931 - ) explains, “Obedience to the third commandment requires earnestness in our living.” Likewise, according to the Larger Catechism the third commandment prohibits “perjury; all sinful cursings, oaths, vows, and lots; violating our oaths and vows, if lawful” (q. 113). The conduct of the professing Christian who is an illegal alien likely conflicts with the third commandment in terms of his lifestyle as well as possible acts of perjury or violating oaths and vows. The illegal alien must present himself as a legal alien when applying for a job, for example, which is deceptive. Or, if a person legally in the country illegally over-stays his work or student visa, then he violates the implied oath he took when he applied for the visa. J. G. Vos (1903-83) asks the question, “What is our duty with respect to lawful oaths or oaths?” He then answers, “It is our duty to fulfill them conscientiously, in the fear of God, in spite of difficulty or personal loss. To fail to do so is to commit a great sin against God.”

According to the Larger Catechism the fifth commandment, “Honor your father and your mother” (Exo 20.12), requires that Christians owe “all due reverence in heart, word, and behavior” and “willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels” to the commonwealth, or civil government (qq. 124, 127; cf. q. 128).

Again, the Larger Catechism states that obedience to our parents also implies obedience to “all superiors in age, and gifts; and especially such as, by God’s ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family, church, or commonwealth” (LC q. 124; cf. qq. 127-28; Rom 13.1-7; 1 Pet 2.13-17; Matt 22.17-21 // Mark 12.13-17 // Luke 20.21-26; WCF 23.4). This command intersects with the conduct of an illegal alien at several points. The most obvious, of course, is that the illegal alien, whether consciously or unconsciously, disregards

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78 Douma, Ten Commandments, pp. 194-205.
and violates the immigration laws of the US. Under this category of the submission to the state, we may also include the necessity of paying taxes. There are likely two categories under which illegal aliens fall: (1) those who pay no income taxes because they work for cash and do not report their earnings; or (2) those who pay income taxes but do not get credit for payment because they are using either a fabricated or stolen tax identification number. The former would be a violation of the fifth commandment, whereas the latter would be a violation of the ninth commandment, which we will explore below.

The seventh commandment requires that spouses not commit adultery (Exo 20.14). While an illegal alien may not automatically be guilty of such a violation of this commandment, there are some questions that one should ask. First, it is often the case that the head of a household will illegally enter the US by himself and not return for sometime, perhaps even years. The head of household may be sending money back to his family, but sometimes he may not. Questions concerning abandonment are therefore relevant (cf. 1 Cor 7.15; cf. LC q. 138). The Larger Catechism, for example, explains that a failure to cohabit with one’s spouse is a violation of the seventh commandment (LC q. 138).

The eighth commandment states, “You shall not steal” (Exo 20.15). According to the Larger Catechism, the eighth commandment prohibits theft, robbery, receiving anything that is stolen; fraudulent dealing, injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts between man and man, or in matters of trust (q. 142). This commandment comes to the fore particularly in the way in which many illegal aliens obtain identification or immigration documents such as work visas, social security cards, “greencards,” or driver’s licenses. Sometimes illegal aliens will fabricate a false social security number and use this false number when filling out job application forms. Another way to obtain these identification documents and work-permits is to purchase them illegally off the black-market. Still further yet, another common practice is for the illegal alien to steal a US citizen’s identity. Regardless of the means by which an illegal alien obtains these documents, he does so in violation of the eighth commandment. It is difficult, if not impossible, to argue that an illegal alien who professes faith in Christ and continues to use false immigration documents does so out of ignorance. As Vos comments concerning the sins prohibited in the eighth commandment, “These sins are shown to be wrong, not only by the Bible, but also by God’s natural revelation.” In other words, Christian or not, legal or illegal alien, all know that stealing and fraud is wrong. There are other ways that an illegal alien might steal from others, perhaps knowingly or unknowingly, such as public services (healthcare and education).

The ninth commandment states, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exo 20.16). Now, while the setting of this command deals primarily with the importance and necessity of truthful legal testimony in a court of law, we should also recognize that according to the Larger Catechism it has application to the “preserving and promoting of truth between man and man” and “speaking the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever” (q. 144). Likewise, the ninth commandment according to the Larger Catechism forbids forgery and “concealing the truth” (qq. 144-45; cf. Exo 20.7; 1 Pet 2.12; LC q. 112). This commandment therefore bears upon the conduct of an illegal alien in that he is typically trapped in a lifestyle of deception because he must constantly make an effort to conceal his illegal status, whether to the governing authorities or perhaps from those who employ him. Such conduct is at odds with the character of a Christian who must at all times seek to speak and live the truth. There are some who might counter, however, that an illegal alien must be allowed to lie in this case, as his lie is one of necessity—the illegal alien seeks to preserve his life. If the illegal alien is truthful, then he will be deported to his home country where his life will likely be in danger because of his poor economic status. There seems to be little possibility that the so-called mendacium officiosum (lie of necessity) fits the parameters of the illegal alien scenario. As Douma explains, “This kind of lying intends no harm against my neighbor (which harm is a violation of the ninth commandment), but the opposite—to help him. . . . Hiding a Jew during World War II has become a classic example.” In cases where lives are truly at stake, in times of natural disaster, national chaos, civil war, or even persecution, there are legitimate legal immigration options for those seeking refuge or asylum.

Can an illegal alien, then, honestly promise to obey Christ when he knows that he will continue intentionally or perhaps even unintentionally to break the third, fifth, eighth, and ninth commandments? We believe a credible profession of faith requires that the illegal alien seeking church membership should be willing to repent.

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79 Vos, Larger Catechism, p. 382.
of these sins as he comes to understand them in the light of God’s Word and through the ministry of the pastor/evangelist and the elders. What does this mean for the illegal alien? We believe that the illegal alien, out of a desire to serve the Lord with all that is in him, should honor the government by attempting to remedy his unlawful immigration status. The study committee, however, is not in agreement as to what are the necessary steps in correcting one’s immigration status that must take place prior to reception into church membership. On the one hand, there is the view that the illegal alien should give evidence that he has already begun the process of correcting his immigration status prior to his reception into church membership. On the other hand, there is the view that the promise of obedience to the Lord and submission to the elders in seeking to correct one’s illegal status may well be sufficient to satisfy the requirements for church membership. A session can receive such a one because he must promise, in reliance upon the grace of God, to lead a godly life (question/vow no. 3), which means that he will seek to remedy his illegal status. Despite the disagreement as to how much concrete evidence of repentance must be present prior to reception into church membership, the study committee is in agreement that the evidence or circumstances found in each particular case does not automatically preclude an illegal alien from joining the church.

As long as an alien is willing to repent of his sins of the third, fifth, seventh, eighth, and ninth commandments, or takes steps to repent, which reflect the two differing opinions on the committee regarding the evidence of repentance, and as long as the alien professes a saving faith in Christ, we believe that the alien should be admitted into church membership. Although we do not believe that sessions must ask every membership candidate to prove his lawful immigration status, in the course of getting to know a potential brother or sister in Christ, we normally expect that a session will learn about the candidate’s personal history which will determine whether such questions are necessary or appropriate.

Furthermore, the session, in its ongoing efforts to minister the gospel and minister to the stranger or alien, American or not, and especially to “the household of faith” (Gal 6.10), should be prepared to help the repentant illegal alien in his attempts to correct his immigration status. Many aliens will be able to have their illegal status converted to lawful permanent-resident status. It is an expensive and time-consuming process, but the US immigration laws make many provisions to forgive an alien’s unlawful status. Surveying the current state of our immigration laws and the last twenty years of immigration law changes, the best candidates for amnesty are: (1) those who have close family members who are US citizens; (2) those who are eligible to marry a US citizen; or, (3) those who have a bachelor’s degree. We further believe that as long as the illegal alien is seeking to normalize his status and eventually succeeds in his efforts, he will also be able to obtain the identification documents that are required to live and function in the US, such as work permits or a tax identification number (social security card). In summary, as long as the alien is trying to correct his status, we believe this is a good-faith effort to live in obedience to God by following the third, fifth, eighth, and ninth commandments.

Unfortunately, there will be some aliens who do not have good prospects for normalizing their status. There are a certain percentage of illegal alien membership candidates who will be placed in deportation-removal proceedings, and who will not be able to remain in the US. The church should prayerfully consider supporting these brothers and sisters who, having confessed their sins and complied with the law, will have to uproot themselves and return to their country of origin. The church should consider doing all it can not only to resettle the illegal alien in his home country, but ensure the illegal alien associates with a gospel-preaching, Bible-believing church, if possible a Reformed church.

Having stated these general guidelines, it is important that the OPC be aware of the legal ramifications surrounding the question of illegal aliens. The Immigration and Nationality Act does have stiff financial and criminal penalties for those who seek to harbor illegal aliens, that is, encourage them to evade immigration laws. At this point in time, however, the penalties for “harboring” most apply to: (1) individuals or groups who seek to help terrorists or criminal aliens, and (2) employers who break immigration laws by hiring and supporting aliens. Although we cannot give exhaustive legal guidance in a brief committee report, if a session follows our recommendations by encouraging the illegal alien to comply with US immigration laws by attempting to correct lawfully his status, it is difficult but not impossible to foresee any scenario where US immigration officials would bring charges of violating immigration laws, specifically the “harboring” provision. We need to point out, though, that churches as employers, not in their function as the church, must be careful to ensure that everyone they hire has proper employment documentation. A church could be prosecuted under the “harboring” provision if it does not follow immigration law. We also encourage sessions to seek, on behalf of the prospective member, legal advice to deal with the specific challenges from a qualified immigration attorney.

In considering whether to admit illegal aliens to membership, then, the church should consider the costs and the opportunities for ministry. Even if the illegal alien has a reasonably good chance of normalizing his immigration status, it may require thousands of dollars and could take several years. However, taking seriously the
two principles of the love of the stranger and obeying the fifth commandment will not only result in a brother or
sister being restored to legal status, it will also likely result in new ministry opportunities to other illegal aliens.
However, regardless of one’s legal status, the church must always be mindful to seek to care for the diaconal
needs of all who come to her for assistance. The ministry of word and sacrament go hand in hand with a cup of
cold water (Matt 10.42 // Mark 9.41).

VI. ADVICE FOR PRESbyterIES AND SESSIONS

The presbyteries and sessions of the OPC are commanded by Scripture to minister the gospel to all kinds of peo-
oples, thus providing a welcome to the kingdom of God for those who are aliens and strangers to him and who
seek to draw near to the living God of heaven and earth by repenting, believing and trusting in the salvation of
Christ freely offered to them in the gospel and who endeavor to live godly lives in Christ Jesus.

Presbyteries and sessions are encouraged to see that their pastors and evangelists do not ignore the
moral and theological issues that arise among those they are seeking to bring into church membership. This truth
specifically includes dealing with issues which may be inherent to seekers who are illegal aliens. It would be a
disservice to the church and to those who are seeking membership if the seriousness of the moral and theological
issues that may be evident in particular situations were not carefully and lovingly addressed in membership
classes and the membership examination.

While a prima facie case might be made that many illegal aliens cannot make a credible profession of
faith because of their apparent failure to submit to the governing authorities and the covert or deceitful lifestyle
that this lack of submission may involve, it is nevertheless appropriate for sessions to judge the credibility of a
person’s profession of faith based on a case-by-case basis. Consideration of a person’s confession of Christ as
his Savior, repentance for particular sins, and a demonstrated willingness to be discipled by the pastor and elders,
and a willingness to follow Christ regardless of the cost of discipleship are matters that sessions always should
weigh in determining if a profession of faith may be deemed credible. The propriety of receiving an illegal alien
into membership is tied very closely to whether the session deems that he has made a credible profession of
faith.

It is not wise for presbyteries and sessions to determine in advance that a person’s illegal status automati-
cally disqualifies him from membership in the church, neither would it be appropriate to determine in advance
that an illegal status is of no consequence to a session’s determination as to whether one has made a credible
profession of faith. There will be instances where situations are complex and require the exercise of caution and
patience. The report of the study committee tries to give a larger context or framework that sheds light from
God’s word and our secondary standards, but each session must apply that light to each particular case.

It should be the goal of presbyteries and sessions that as much as possible all their members live as legal
aliens or residents in keeping with Rom 13.1-2 and the implications of the fifth commandment (LC qq. 125-128)
and the ninth commandment (LC qq. 144 -145). It is therefore appropriate for the presbyteries and sessions to
provide assistance to members seeking to change their status so that they may live as legal residents. As such
there may well be a diaconal component to ministering to illegal aliens who are seeking membership in the
church that could include assistance with legal expenses as well as the other necessities of life common to all
men. This is part of the cost of discipleship or bearing the cross of Christ that the OPC must bear.

OP missionaries laboring in foreign fields can assist in the discipleship of Christians who may be consid-
ering leaving their own country and illegally entering or remaining in the US, by speaking with them regarding
the moral and theological issues involved and seeking to dissuade them from taking illegal steps, except in the
most extraordinary and urgent cases.

Though it is possible that individuals who are illegal aliens may be received in the membership of a con-
gregation or mission work, the ordination of men who are illegal aliens must receive special scrutiny and care
given the extra measure of Christian piety an officer of the church must exhibit and the example he sets for the
rest of the church community (1 Tim 3). It seems wise that presbyteries and sessions ought to delay ordination
and installation until matters relating to being an illegal alien have been satisfactorily addressed.