
*Christians at the Border* is a book written from a particular point of view and a specific context: the presence of the Hispanic community in the United States. The author is of mixed background, a Guatemalan mother and an American father (U.S.). He is qualified to address the immigration issue through the eyes of a Hispanic, and knows both the situation of the origin and destination countries of a Hispanic immigrant. Daniel Carroll spent not only his summer vacations in Guatemala, but also taught at El Seminario Teologico Centroamericano for fifteen years before moving to Denver Seminary where he presently teaches Old Testament courses.

The aim of the book is to “move Christians to reconsider their starting point in the immigration debate,” and to create “awareness of what might be a divine viewpoint on immigration” (19). Described as a “primer for a more Biblically and theologically informed approach” rather than an “academic tome full of specialist jargon and bewildering charts” (20), *Christians at the Border* deals not only with the issue of geographical migration but also with the necessary Christian response.

The first chapter (about forty pages) summarizes the history of Hispanic migration to the United States, both documented and undocumented, and emphasizes the role of religion and its implication on the destination country. In fact, the author invites the reader to reflect on the issues involved from a Christian viewpoint. Carroll also deals with the issue of American identity and the perceived invasion of Hispanics into North America and its economic impact. He proposes a different perspective on the issue: an economic and religious opportunity.

Chapter two focuses on the Old Testament and invites the reader to rethink the definition of humanness. The author looks at Gen 1:26-28 and challenges the reader to think of immigrants as fellow human beings, having the same worth and the same rights. As human beings, immigrants are created in God’s image and are in a relationship with him. Carroll lists two main reasons people of faith from the Old Testament found themselves as immigrants: hunger and forced exile. He also analyzes how they were treated in the host countries, drawing implications for today.

Carroll continues the analysis of immigration in the Old Testament in the third chapter by looking at the laws and practices recommended by God to his people as hosts to other sojourners. The author emphasizes the
hospitality widely extended in the Ancient world to travelers and visitors as an element lost in today’s culture. Then, a good portion of the chapter is devoted to show that Old Testament laws are not passé but have a practical application today. Carroll shows that the identity of the People of God implied a welcoming attitude toward immigrants, strangers, and sojourners. Israel was supposed to offer work, provision, and protection, while the immigrants had both rights and responsibilities. The Old Testament model is proposed as a paradigm for today’s treatment of immigrants.

The fourth chapter turns to the New Testament for clues about immigration issues. The gospels present Jesus as a sojourner and exile, but also confront us with the way he treated people who were culturally different or beyond acceptability. A true follower of Jesus is one who transcends cultural identity. The author parallels Israel and Jesus to the Church, showing that Christians are also sojourners and aliens on this earth. He argues that hospitality is not a concept related just to Old Testament times but is found in the New as well, and is required of Jesus’ followers. Addressing the issue of obedience toward governments and authorities, Carroll explains that laws are imperfect and invites governments to write laws from a biblical perspective. He considers that biblical principles are above human laws, and frequently immigrants find themselves caught between the two.

In the last chapter, the author returns to his main concern, the Hispanic immigration to the U.S., and tries to bring home the arguments from previous chapters. Although recognizing that the situation is complex, Carroll believes that “an appropriate response to the complicated situation in society will not come from detached, objective analysis, cost-benefit calculations, efficiency quotients, and cultural arguments. The decisions that are made and courses of action that are recommended should be commensurate with the life of Jesus—his actions, his teaching, his cross” (139). He invites us to return to the Bible for solutions to complex situations as immigration.

Christians at the Border is a timely reminder that modern society may find solutions for its problems in the Scripture and in the principles and examples contained in it. Christians are also encouraged to become involved in proposing and supporting better legislation, but also in practicing the ancient virtue of hospitality, caring for the needs of documented or undocumented immigrants. The call is clearly for everyone to treat aliens with dignity, as fellow human beings created in the image of God.

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