

The Bible Is Not a Friend of Immigrants

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One agent knocked at the back door. Another agent knocked at the front door. They were from what was then called the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

The agents arrived to take my cousin away (a daughter of my grandmother's brother) because someone had called the INS to report her. She lived with us along with my great aunt (sister of my grandmother). My cousin and great aunt were undocumented. Fortunately, the INS agents did not find my great aunt, who had hidden in our bathroom. Now, it is humorous to me that they did not even think to look there.

It was the late 1960s, and I was in elementary school in Glendale, Arizona. I lived with my grandmother, who worked as a housekeeper. We were both immigrants from Mexico, but she and I had already received our permanent resident status with the assistance of one of my grandmother's employers.

Because I was the only one in my family who knew some English, I was asked to accompany my cousin to the INS offices in Phoenix. I remember the feeling of terror in my cousin.

It is one thing to be an immigrant from an English-speaking country or an immigrant with English-speaking abilities. It is another thing to confront official authority figures, especially as a female, when you understand little or nothing of what is being said to you.

My cousin was taken back to Mexico. I was taken back to my home with my grandmother. I remember the grief of my grandmother and great aunt at not knowing what would happen to a family member who was taken away so suddenly. I was afraid and confused about what it all meant.

On July 4, 1976, and while still in High School in Glendale, Arizona, a friend from Tucson came to visit along with his brother-in-law, who was new to me. In the evening we went to the Sky Harbor International airport in Phoenix because watching planes take off and land was one of the few entertainment activities allowed in our evangelical Pentecostal church.

A stranger who did not read English approached me and inquired about the time of his flight to Chicago. I thought I would be kind and obtain that information for him. Then, he asked me to show him to the gate, and I did. At the gate, a policeman asked him for his ticket and apparently determined that he was

an illegal alien trying to get to Chicago. I was suspected of being this stranger's accomplice or "coyote."

I ended up being questioned and detained for hours in a separate area and cell belonging to the Border Patrol. I was released in the early morning hours of the next day when they determined that I was really only there to watch planes take off and land, and that I did not know the man who approached me.

The Border Patrol did take away my friends's brother-in-law after he could not produce "papers" indicating his legal status. My grandmother was frantic when we had not returned when expected.

While in High School, I also was briefly questioned by a Border Patrol agent while trying to board a Greyhound bus in Tucson. That time, I had not done or said anything that would cast any suspicion upon me. I came to understand what racial and ethnic profiling was about.

Today, I am both a naturalized citizen and an academic biblical scholar who has written on biblical views on immigration (Avalos 2016). INS ceased to exist by that name in 2003. Some of its functions are part of ICE (United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and CBP (Customs and Border Protection), which is commonly called The Border Patrol.

Although I am a naturalized citizen, I still despair at what I witness in discussions of immigration policy. My current despair is not only in seeing others go through experiences similar to what I and some of my family members have had with immigration officials.

My despair also derives from watching academic biblical scholars, both on the right and on the left, both conservative and liberal, perpetuating a uniformly benign view of the Bible and Jesus when it comes to immigration.

This benign view of the Bible's stance on immigration has been particularly visible since the justified backlash against the policy of separating children from parents who cross the border illegally.

The policy, which had been discussed already in early 2017, was more formally introduced in a memorandum from Jeff Sessions, the Attorney General of the United States, and dated to April 6, 2018 (see Sessions in our bibliography).

Although that memorandum, does not specifically mention separation of children, other statements by Sessions indicate that he deems that separation as part of the "zero-tolerance" policy he announced (see also Diaz, 2017). Around 2,000 children have been affected according to some reports since that policy was implemented (Naylor).

At least two positions can be identified among those who appeal to the Bible to formulate their responses to undocumented immigrants (a third position rejects all use of the Bible as a moral authority):

- 1) A **legocentric** (law centered) position is followed by those who believe any aid to immigrants must be undertaken in conformity with national laws even if it means expelling undocumented persons *en masse*. Although other names have been applied to this position, I follow scholars of comparative law in adapting the more formal term “legocentric” to describe this view (Reimann and Zimmerman 2008, 691).
- 2) A **non-legocentric** position describes those who believe that national laws do not take precedence over humanitarian and “higher” laws.
- 3) **Post-scripturalism**, which argues that sacred texts are not useful in formulating any modern policies regarding immigration, and sacred texts should not be used as moral authorities in any case. One need not be an atheist or secularist to adopt this position.

The rest of this essay will explore how the legocentric, non-legocentric and post-scripturalist positions view the role of the Bible. As a biblical scholar who happens to be an atheist, I do not use the Bible to favor either the legocentric or non-legocentric position. I favor the post-scripturalist position.

But my principal task is to understand what the biblical texts are saying, as far as I can determine, in their original contexts. I also see my task as challenging religious and bibliocentric biases that inherently permeate all arguments that do appeal to the Bible as an authority.

In order to understand the discussion among these positions, one first must understand what I mean by “the Bible.” In general, I am restricting myself to the Protestant and Catholic canons of the Bible, which have 66 and 72 (or 73) books, respectively. The main reason is that this is what my expected readership regards as “the Bible.”

Second, the Bible was written over a span of centuries by authors with different ideological and religious agendas. Some of their ideas about immigration, ethnic identity, and nationalism are very different from our own, and so one must be cautious when making cultural comparisons.

Third, we should not expect biblical authors to agree with themselves on every issue any more than we should expect modern Jews and Christians to agree on every issue. In general, the more conservative approaches to the Bible emphasize unity and seek to harmonize all of the biblical authors. On the other

hand, the more “liberal” and historical-critical approaches see much diversity, tension, and contradiction in biblical positions.

Finally, much of the debate centers on the meaning of particular words used in Hebrew and Greek. For example, the Hebrew word that is one of the most frequently discussed is *gēr*. Depending on the biblical version or scholar, it has been translated as “sojourner,” “immigrant,” “stranger,” or “resident alien,” among others. There are questions about the historical evolution in the use of these terms, and also in how different literary traditions within the Bible use them (Awabdy 2014; Van Houten 1991).

Yet, none of these translations of *gēr* or *tôshab*, another related term, may be quite the equivalent of our “undocumented” or “illegal” alien. There were not any “documents” that people carried around in ancient Israel describing their citizenship status. A *gēr* may be someone from another tribe, and not just from another nation. All of these linguistic issues complicate any search for what the Bible “really says” about undocumented immigration.

The Non-Legocentric Position

I begin with the non-legocentric position because my non-scientific survey of biblical scholarship has encountered more works by scholars supporting this view (e.g., Carroll 2008; Houston 2015; Moss 2018; Myers and Colwell 2012; Smith-Christopher 2007).

The non-legocentric position argues that secular law should not be the main determinant in how to address the issues of undocumented immigration. There are degrees to which the law should be followed, but this position holds that humanitarian grounds are primary. Furthermore, it holds that the Bible supports the non-legocentric position, or it also affirms that legocentrists misunderstand the immigrant-friendly message of the Bible.

In an otherwise sound critique of Jeff Sessions’ use of Romans 13 to uphold his child-separation policy, Candida Moss (2018) remarks: **“Given that both the Hebrew Bible and Jesus have particular concern for the treatment of orphans and children in general (Psalm 68:5, James 1:27, Matthew 19:14), it seems especially strange to suggest that separating families is somehow biblical.”**

On a broader theological level, this position emphasizes that all human beings are created in the image of God. For M. Daniel Carroll R., **“the creation of all persons in the image of God must be the most basic conviction for Christians as they approach the challenges of immigration today”** (Carroll 2008, 67). Rights that human beings have by virtue of being made in the image of God must take precedence over national borders or economics.

The most prominent passages used by non-legocentrists includes Lev. 19:33-34: **“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God”** (see also Exod. 23:9, Deut. 10:18-19; Heb. 13:1).

Ched Myers and Matthew Colwell, who have been very active in The Sanctuary Movement, emphasize that **“the principle of sanctuary was codified in Torah through the establishment of ‘cities of refuge’”** in Exod. 21:13 and Num. 35:9-28 (Myers and Colwell 2012, 56). For Myers and Colwell, such a principle authorizes Christians to defy national laws to protect and give sanctuary, whether in churches or in cities, to undocumented individuals.

The non-legocentric position sometimes notes how the founder of Christianity was a refugee (Carroll 2008, 115-16; Houston 2015, 134-136). According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, refugees are **“persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution...”** (UNCHR 2015).

The UNHCR distinguishes refugees from migrants— persons who **“choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons”** (UNCHR 2015). It is assumed that migrants can safely return home. Jesus in the Gospel of Matt. (2:1-15) would qualify as a refugee because his life was endangered by the policies of Herod the Great.

Popular among non-legocentrists is the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), who helped a wounded man without first asking about his ethnic, religious, or legal status. Jesus’ concluding instruction is: **“Go and do likewise”** (Carroll 2008, 121).

Finding analogies between ancient biblical narratives and modern immigrant populations is an important part of making the case for mercy toward immigrants (Ruiz 2011, 18). Examples include Gregory Cuellar’s *Second Isaiah 40-55 and the Mexican Immigrant Experience* (2008) and Virgilio Elizondo’s *Galilean Journey: The Mexican American Promise* (1983).

Also popular are Jesus’ statements in Matt. 25:40, 42-43 (RSV): **“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me...for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’”**

However, not all non-legocentric scholars believe that “my brethren” refers to everyone. For Carroll, **“the least of these my brethren”** refers only to

fellow Christians, and not all human beings (Carroll 2008, 123). Houston and other non-legocentric scholars interpret this passage to mean that Christians have an obligation to care for all disadvantaged human beings, including immigrants in need (Houston 2015, 145).

When laws conflict with humanitarian values, then the solution is offered by Acts 4:19 (see also Acts 5:29), where Peter and John challenge secular law with this response: **“Whether it is right in God’s sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge.”** Carroll (2008, 132) quotes this passage to argue that it must take precedence over Romans 13:1-7, which is often quoted by those who believe God demands that Christians follow all earthly laws.

In general, higher divine and humanitarian needs supersede secular laws. Accordingly, undocumented immigrants, and especially refugees fleeing violence, deserve to be helped even if it sometimes contravenes national laws.

The Legocentric Position

James K. Hoffmeier, who is a main representative of this position, describes as the **“law-and-order camp”** those who are for bestowing primacy on the law of the land when addressing the issue of undocumented immigrants (Hoffmeier, 2009, 22; see also Tooley 2014).

Although Hoffmeier (2009, 17) indicates that he did not intend his book to be a response to Carroll, the fact is that he does respond directly to some of Carroll’s main arguments. After surveying many of the biblical passages dealing with immigration, Hoffmeier (2009, 146) concludes: **“I see nothing in Scripture that would abrogate current immigration laws.”**

As mentioned, the meaning and usage of key words is where the debates often center. Hoffmeier (2009, 52) argues that the Hebrew word, (*gēr*) usually translated as “sojourner,” “alien,” or “stranger,” refers to authorized or legal residents who respected the borders of their host countries.

Hoffmeier adds that borders did exist, and Israel often had to ask for permission, as in Judg. 11:17: **“Israel then sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Let us pass through your land’; but the king of Edom would not listen. They also sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh.”** Jacob sought permission from Pharaoh in Gen. 47:4: **“We have come to reside as aliens in the land; for there is pasture for your servants’ flocks because the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now we ask you, let your servants settle in the land of Goshen.”**

Romans 13:1-7 is a key text for Hoffmeier, who remarks **“governments are ordained by God, and laws and ordinances made by human, unless they**

clearly violate divine principles or teaching, should be followed” (Hoffmeier 2009, 152).

Exceptions might include violating a law in order to save a human life, as in the case of the Hebrew midwives in Exod. 1:15-21. In that case, God rewarded the midwives for not following Pharaoh’s laws. According to Hoffmeier, such disobedience to national laws today might biblically allow a health care professional to refuse to perform abortions in a hospital.

On June 14, Jeff Sessions quoted Romans 13 in his effort to defend the separation of children from their families, and he was rightly criticized by a wide range of theologians and scholars (e.g., Moss 2018; Woods 2018). In addition, Romans 13:1-7 could be used by authoritarian regimes to justify their rule, and we might have to repudiate our Founding Fathers for their rebellion against Britain.

More importantly for the immigration debate, Hoffmeier (2009, 147) argues that **“breaking immigration laws to improve one’s economic standard does not rise to the same moral level as a medical professional refusing to perform an abortion.”** Similarly, Hoffmeier (2009, 81) argues that “sanctuaries” in the Hebrew Bible were meant to protect those who had accidentally killed someone, and not those who violate borders.

Overall, Hoffmeier (2009, 145) argues that **“for Carroll’s position to have merit, current American laws must be inherently unjust.”** Aiding the undocumented might include being an intermediate between the government and the undocumented individual in the effort to find legal solutions to any current plight. Anything beyond that is not “biblical” for Hoffmeier. It is unclear where Hoffmeier would stand on the current child-separation practices.

The Post-Scripturalist Position

The post-scripturalist position affirms that sacred scriptures are neither useful nor morally authoritative in solving any social problems today, including immigration. Aside from objections to the use of theology in any area of biblical studies, the main post-scripturalist objections to both the legocentric and non-legocentric views may be outlined as follows:

- 1) *The Bible offers both pro-immigrant and anti-immigrant sentiments, and so it is arbitrary to choose one or the other as representative of the Bible’s “core” or “essential” message.*
- 2) *The texts chosen to represent each stance usually overlook other problems or are permeated by a bibliolatrous perspective, which deems the Bible as offering a superior set of ethics when compared to non-biblical cultures.*
- 3) *Advocates of both sides often omit or do not fully address texts that are not consistent with their respective positions.*

In regard to the first point, even some non-legocentric scholars grant that both pro-immigrant and anti-immigrant sentiments can be found in the Bible. As Daniel L. Christopher-Smith notes, “...**bigoted attitudes toward foreigners (especially the threat of foreign women) complete with pejorative terms, also co-existed within Israelite society with more open and welcoming attitudes**” (Smith-Christopher 1996, 129-30).

For example, the prohibition in Deut. 23:3 (“**No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to assembly of the LORD**”) shows that not all immigrants are to be treated equally. The basis for discrimination can be religious, cultural, or some past transgression for which the descendants are held responsible.

On the other hand, both the legocentric and non-legocentric rightly show that there are passages (Exod. 23:9, Lev. 19:33-34) instructing Israelites to treat migrants and strangers well. The problem is determining what “treating immigrants and strangers well” really means.

After all, the same book of Leviticus prohibits Hebrews from owning fellow Hebrews, but yet allows them to own non-Hebrews (Lev. 25:44-46). Making distinctions between Hebrews and non-Hebrews insofar as slavery is concerned does not reflect an ideology where strangers are to be treated the same as natives.

On June 11, Eugene Robinson, the Pulitzer Prize winning columnist, was a guest on MSNBC’s *Morning Joe*. In discussing the current family-separation issues, Robinson asked skeptically where the Bible endorsed separating children from parents.

Joe Scarborough, the former congressman who gives his name to the show, also thought that it was against Jesus’ teachings to separate children from parents. Robinson and Scarborough are typical of many pundits and journalists who are not familiar enough with the Bible to make such statements.

But many academic biblical scholars make conclusions akin to those of Robinson and Scarborough. Indeed, neither Hoffmeier nor Carroll adequately address Ezra 9-10, where Ezra, the priest and leader of the repatriated exiles, demands that Jews send away foreign wives and their children.

As is stated in Ezra 10:3: “**let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.**”

Ezra's attitude toward people of a different religion could support those who argue that the Bible allows the deportation of people on the basis of their religion, even if it means separating fathers from their children. Ezra's position would provide support for those who argue that difference in culture or religion can be a justifiable reason for deportation.

Slavemasters were allowed to keep the children and wife of any slave in some circumstances: **"If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's and he shall go out alone"** (Exodus 21:4).

Numbers 31:16-17 endorses an even more violent form of separating families: **"Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him. But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves."** Many Christian scholars will protest that this is the "Old Testament" or that it has to do with war, but this practice would be held as immoral today, whether in war or in peace.

Jesus lauds the man who helps the Samaritan without regard to ethnicity or national origin. On the other hand, Jesus uses a denigrating epithet for foreigners ("dogs"), and he seems hesitant to help the Syro-Phoenician woman in Matt. 15:21-28 (Mark 7:24-30) until she declares his lordship (for flawed defenses of Jesus on this issue, see Avalos 2015, 235-244).

Jesus asks disciples to follow him (Mark 1:15-20), despite the fact that it would leave some children without a father. Many Christian academic scholars call this **"radical discipleship"** or praise the disciples for being courageous. It does not seem to occur to some of these scholars that Jesus is asking for at least some of his followers to abandon their children (see further Avalos 2015, 201-203; 2016). Most Christian scholars may assume that Jesus' request is "good," which is a theological judgment.

Jesus tells us that the purpose of his coming is family disunity in Matthew 10:34-37: **"Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household."** Elsewhere I refute the interpretation of this as a "result" clause rather than a purpose clause (Avalos 2015, 93-94).

More dramatically, Jesus actually asks followers to hate their children in Luke 14:26: **"If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."**

Many, if not most, Christian scholars deny that Jesus meant such thing literally. Elsewhere I devote a whole chapter to explaining why the usual defenses (e.g., figurative interpretations, linguistics of Greek/Hebrew/Aramaic, or legal grounds) eventually reduce to theological arguments (Avalos 2015, 50-89). It is not for nothing that Elizabeth Clark (1995), a past president of the American Academy of Religion, has noted the anti-familial tendencies of ancient Christianity.

Hoffmeier can point to Romans 13:1-7 to claim that God has set up laws and Christians must obey them. However, Carroll can argue that Acts 4:19 (and Acts 5:29) allows Christians to violate laws when they conflict with God's laws. The dispute about what counts as a valid exception ultimately devolves into a theological argument that cannot be adjudicated by any objective means.

Stephen Colbert, host of *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* on CBS, noted on June 14 that Romans 13:10 also speaks about loving one's neighbor, but he fails to understand the definition of "love" that Paul or Leviticus 19:18 have in mind.

The directive to "love your neighbor as yourself" in Lev. 19:18 is not as clear as some may think. For example, John P. Meier (2009, 651), the prominent scholar of the historical Jesus, concludes:

There is no good reason to think that, when Jesus cited, Lev. 19.18b, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself', he meant anything other than what the Hebrew text means by *rēa'*, namely, a fellow Israelite who belongs to the cultic community that worships Yahweh alone as the one true God (as proclaimed in Deut. 6.4-5).

If Jesus changed any originally more restrictive meaning, then his authority to change the meaning rests on a theological presupposition that he has such authority to reinterpret scripture. If Jesus did change the original meaning of Leviticus 19:18, then Jesus is misusing and de-contextualizing scripture as much or more than Jeff Sessions (see also Avalos 2015, 32-33, 376; *pace* Friedman, Becking).

Both the legocentric and non-legocentric positions overlook problems in the texts chosen to represent them. Consider Leviticus 24:22, a text cited by both the legocentric and non-legocentric position: **"You shall have one law for the alien and for the citizen: for I am the LORD your God."**

Although the idea of having one law for the native and for the foreigner appears to be friendly to immigrants, it can mean that immigrants will be subject to various penalties for religious practices that do not conform to the host's religion.

In the case of ancient Israel, it may mean that immigrants can also be put to death for not observing the Sabbath laws (Exod. 31:15). This sort of “equal” treatment of immigrants is not so dissimilar from that of the Islamic State (ISIS), which punished or executed both natives and foreigners who violated its version of Islamic law within its territories. So, “equal” is not always as benign as it may appear.

Ruth is one of the most famous exemplars of an immigrant-friendly attitude cited by both the legocentric and non-legocentric camps (Hoffmeier 2009, 103-107; Carroll 2008, 74-75). Nevertheless, Laura Donaldson has pointed out that Ruth was accepted only because she was willing to give up her religion and culture.

In other words, Ruth is an example of how acceptance by Hebrew culture demanded her Moabite deculturation (Donaldson 1999). A similar observation holds for Isaiah 56:1-7, where foreigners seem well accepted as long as they submit to the Yahwistic religion.

Legocentrists and non-legocentrists both use the Exodus as a liberatory paradigm for oppressed Israelites. In this case, both views often overlook the fact that the ultimate goal of reaching the Promised Land would involve the genocide and enslavement of Canaanites whose land the Israelites would take. So, Exodus can also be read as a case where any liberation is for the benefit of the Hebrews, and not for every other oppressed group of immigrants or refugees.

The concept of being made in the image of God is often assumed to mean that all human beings are accorded equal human rights by both legocentrists and non-legocentrists. However, being made in the image of God afforded no protection to the Canaanites who were destroyed because they had a different religion and culture.

The Canaanites, who themselves became internal refugees after the Hebrew conquest, were to be slaughtered because they were potential threats to the religion of God’s chosen people in Deut. 20:16-18: **“But as for the towns of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them... that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do in the service for their gods, and you thus sin against the LORD your God.”** Hoffmeier (2009, 165) does not include this text in his scriptural index.

Even if post-scripturalists hold that the Bible may not be useful in setting social policy on immigration, they would not deny that it does have some historically important lessons. Perhaps the most important lesson is that biblical texts show how there have been three recurrent methods to deal with unwanted populations from ancient to modern times: **1) genocide; 2) enslavement; 3) exile**

(see also Collier). These are all illustrated in Exodus 1-12, when the Egyptian Pharaoh views the multiplication of the Hebrews as a problem.

At any one time today, governments are still using one or more of these policies to deal with unwanted populations. Nazi Germany, of course, is infamous for using genocide against Jews and other unwanted populations. In Syria, genocide and exile are being used by the Bashar Hafez al-Assad regime against those who oppose him. In the United States, mass deportation is openly advocated by some politicians, mainly for Latino immigrants. Virtual enslavement exists for many immigrants who work as domestic housekeepers, sex workers, or in the agricultural sector in many western countries.

For the post-scripturalists, a biblical view on immigration is irrelevant because it is immoral to use a sacred text to authorize any moral behavior or social policy. Furthermore, post-scripturalists affirm that we should love our neighbors not because a text or deity tells us to do so, but because empathize with other human beings.

Conclusions

The Bible is too morally contradictory to be a friend to immigrants. For every immigrant-friendly proof-text, someone else can find one that says the opposite. As a Mexican immigrant and human being who has experienced the pain of forced family separations, I certainly empathize with the well-intentioned biblical scholars who are challenging the current policy of family separations by the administration of Donald J. Trump.

But as a post-scripturalist scholar, I am still distressed by the passive acceptance and/or lack of moral outrage at the treatment of children and immigrants endorsed by some biblical authors.

It is very difficult for Christian biblical scholars to criticize what they worship. Christian biblical scholars are, in general, worshippers or admirers of Christ. Jesus is definitely one character who is “protected” from moral criticism, and one can see it today on immigration issues. He is portrayed as uniformly the friend of immigrants, when his portrayal in the Gospels is far more complicated and contradictory.

The result of these religionist approaches is the perpetuation of a textual imperialism that retains the authority of the Bible. More importantly, the denunciation of “bad” or “illegitimate” interpretations of the Bible, when based on theological rationales, continues an orthodox-heterodox model of biblical interpretation that has caused so much conflict and violence throughout Christian history.

Most biblical scholars I have seen comment on the current family separation crisis are more involved in a sectarian war about biblical interpretation than in a battle against using the Bible to debate immigration issues.

We certainly need biblical scholars who will publicly challenge bad interpretations of the Bible, whether they be from Jeff Sessions or Jesus. But we also need more biblical scholars who will help this world move beyond the very idea that the Bible should be a moral, social or political authority at all.

NOTES TO READERS

-Unless noted otherwise, all quotations of the Bible are from the Revised Standard Version.

-Some URL links may need to be cut and pasted in their entirety to access the contents.

-**This is an extensively revised and updated version** of the chapter “Immigrants ‘R’ US: Attitudes Toward Immigrants in the Bible,” in Frances Flannery and Rod Werling, eds., *The Bible in Political Debate: What Does it Really Say?* (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2016), pp. 33-46. See <https://www.amazon.com/Bible-Political-Debate-What-Really-ebook/dp/B01J3E37G2>

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