Crisis of Faith at the Border: The American Church’s Missiology Towards Immigrants and Refugees

Antwan D. Brown

Omega Graduate School

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Dr. Curtis D. McClane

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**Thesis**

While some argue that Christians must obey governmental authorities—thereby placing allegiance to immigration laws above responsibilities to immigrants and refugees—the American Church's missional identity necessitates it to prioritize compassion and mutual support for the displaced. Rooted in the Great Commission and the biblical mandate to make disciples of all nations (ethnos), the Church's true allegiance lies not with national borders but with the Kingdom of God. As spiritual sojourners and foreigners, American Christians are to personify a missiology that transcends nationalism, recognizing that faithful discipleship demands active support for and ministry to immigrants and refugees.

In recent years, immigration has remained one of the most hotly debated topics in American life, often dividing public discourse and challenging the ethics of the American Church, with many siding with the argument that most aligns with their political ideology. It is here that the Church stands at a theological and missional crossroads. Among some in the Church, there has arisen the ideology of "nationalism," which advocates for the defense and superiority of national sovereignty and, to that end, contends for strict adherence to immigration laws. Others within the Church argue that the Church's calling and divine commission is to embody and pursue the mission of God, which transcends ethnicities and national boundaries.

This conversation, which has sometimes been less than civil, has revealed tension within the Church between the adherence to "the laws of the land" and the responsibility to extend biblical hospitality. This revelation has exposed a rift in the American Church's unity, missiology, and ethos. On one side of the argument, those who seek to build walls around the borders of the United States (specifically the Southern border) are also attempting to rebuild the "wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14, NASB 1995) that has been broken down by Jesus on the cross.

This paper asserts that although Christians are biblically instructed to respect governmental authorities, the Church's identity (ethos), as the body of Christ following the lead of her Head, demands that it heed His command and demonstrate compassion and advocate for immigrants and refugees (ethnos). This command is not rooted in nor founded upon political ideology or partisan rhetoric. Instead, it finds its basis in the adherence and obedience to the last words of Jesus, which is the first work of the Church, that is, to "make disciples of all nations (or nationalities)" (Matt 28: 19-20, NASB 1995). To this missive, the Church is called to pledge allegiance, which stands as the constitution of the Kingdom of God and erases borders and identities that seek to exclude.

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