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Immigration bill is a compassionate compromise

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The Republican conservatives in the Senate should support the new compromise immigration bill, especially because of the Christian faith many of them espouse to their constituents.

The bill's opponents repeatedly trumpet their opposition to amnesty. Well, one definition of amnesty is forgiveness. Jesus teaches us to forgive our brother, and many of these immigrants have become responsible contributors to our society with established families and long-term employment.

I can understand the Republicans desire for justice and agree it's not fair to favor people who have snuck into our country surreptitiously over those who have played by the rules. But in addition to the God of justice, there is also the God of grace. Grace, commonly defined as unmerited favor, emphasizes our common humanity and the need for mutual understanding. Our laws are tempered with mercy, not blind enforcement. We all have areas in our lives that we are not proud of, and some of them are a lot worse than the passion of illegal immigrants to create a better life for themselves and their families.

While the immigration bill isn't perfect - it tends to favor employment situations over the integration of families - the legislation represents the product of lengthy negotiations and contains hard-fought compromises to all sides in the debate. Enforcement of our borders will increase, and a lengthy fence, while it conjures up visions of the Berlin Wall, may be the only practical way to stop illegal immigration in the future, not to mention the threat porous borders pose to the fight against terrorism.

Another Christian tenet Republican conservatives should consider concerns the perspective of Jesus toward the poor and unfortunate. In fact, Jesus talks about poverty more than heaven and hell. He states that we will be judged by how we treat the least of our brothers as much as how we treat Him. Like all of us, many illegal immigrants are willing to persevere to create a better life for their children, and the new immigration bill offers them hope, combined with stringent requirements such as a \$5,000 fine. These requirements ensure illegal immigrants will not be treated the same as legal ones. In any case, many legal immigrants who did "play by the rules" have demonstrated vigorously on behalf of their less fortunate brothers.

Jesus also emphasized the value and dignity of every human being. The disciples of Jesus were appalled when he spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, because both Samaritans and women were considered inferior and unclean. But Jesus repeatedly reached out to people commonly rejected by the establishment: sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes. I believe Jesus would have reached out to illegal immigrants as well.

As noted above, amnesty means forgiveness, but, even more important, amnesty is based on love. Many illegal immigrants have expressed a deep and abiding love for our country, risking their lives to secure a brighter future for their children. We should acknowledge their commitment in an appropriate manner.

Though everyone seems to object to some part of the new immigration compromise, our democracy is designed to work in this manner. No one faction can get all that they want, but by working together, we can achieve real progress for our people and solve, or ameliorate, real problems.

The writer lives in Hartsdale.
