

Transcript of Part 4
Impact on Women and Families

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by
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Pursuing the common good must also robustly engage women, particularly given the feminization of poverty and of migration across the globe. As unaccompanied women undertake these journeys in increasing numbers, today we have about half of migrants worldwide are women. They face unique threats from sexual assault by smugglers and officials, to harassment on the job, to manipulation in detention facilities. Less likely to qualify for employment-based immigration than men, the majority of migrant women work in unregulated jobs in the informal sector.

Whereas undocumented immigrants earn lower wages than citizens in the same job, women routinely earn less than their male counterparts. Undocumented women are often perceived by predators as perfect victims. They remain isolated, uninformed about their rights, and they're presumed to lack credibility. So women farm workers, for instance, often hide their gender with bandannas and baggy clothing. 80% of women of Mexican descent working in California's Central Valley report experiencing sexual harassment as opposed to 50% of all women in the U.S. workforce who experience at least one incident.

So beyond well-founded fears that reporting abuses will result in job loss and then family separation via deportation, such women also lack access to legal resources and face cultural pressures and language barriers. Many also just still remain indebted to their coyotes, to their smugglers. And so they understand that immigration officials collaborate with law enforcement, oftentimes so they rarely seek help from the latter.

Today we have over 16 and one-half million people in the U.S. living in mixed-status families. And in the aftermath of detention or deportation, these families face major instability with documented poor health and behavioral outcomes for the children. So in spite of immigrants' courage and resilience, many of these patterns obscure their full humanity as spouses, as parents, and children. Families comprise our most intimate relationships. And so policies that undermine family unity really frustrate this core relationality and harm the common good.

So beyond a critique of economic idolatry, the sanctity and the social mission of the family indicate how conditions that perpetuate family separation really undermine the common good. So enforcement raids or deprivation of stable work opportunities really impede

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immigrant families' access to social goods. And I would say these are real threats to family values despite the narrow construal of that term, often in our political and religious rhetoric.

So migrant women's experiences of assault on the move, together with disruption to family life, exposed patterns at odds with Christian commitments to human rights and the sanctity of family life. So again, if the Good Samaritan parable attunes us to see the face of immigrants and these women at Casa Nazaret, we're reminded that migration decisions are rarely personal choices alone. A migrant woman's decision to abandon her children for better long-term prospects for them, or to have relations with another male migrant to ensure safe passage or to work without documents, occur within constrained social contexts. These means are not morally or otherwise desirable.

But understanding the realities shaping these choices, I think shows us the shortcomings of individualistic paradigms. They highlight the inadequacy of approaches that flatly criminalize. So "what part of illegal don't you understand?" that type of approach. So in closing, talking points that highlight scarce resources, scheming lawbreakers, or demographic threats, fail to register the social contexts that compel migration and its harmful consequences, ruptured family lives, border deaths, gender-based violence.

Christian understandings of economics, human rights, the social mission of the family, issue a prophetic immigration ethic. And so I think in contrast to reductive sound bites and fear mongering that dominate our airwaves, pursuing justice in terms of the common good reorients these political questions.

Migrant deaths in the Arizona desert and the Mediterranean alike, make poignantly clear the stakes of nations failing to understand themselves as collectively responsible for these challenges. I would say U.S. migration policy should consider its complicity in generating migration flows, rather than perpetuate amnesic scapegoating.

A retreat from short-sighted and enforcement-only approaches should entail policy steps toward long-term solutions, offering undocumented immigrants a viable path to citizenship with a clean DACA reinstatement in the interim, if needed. Certainly the common good tradition swims against significant cultural tides beyond anti-immigrant sentiment. Ideological polarization, moral privatism, each of which I think hardens resistance to communitarian claims.

So the all-American credo that we "pull up our boot straps and make our own fate" is as entrenched as it is incompatible with a solidaristic idea that we share each other's fate.