

Applying the “Christian Sociological Re-Imagination” Approach: An Analysis of Illegal Immigration in the U.S.

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Abstract

A well-established analytical method of introductory textbooks in sociology has been to examine social issues from the viewpoints of the three main theoretical frameworks in the discipline: structural functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist theories. Yet these analyses reliably offer mutually exclusive and competing explanations for social phenomena, with no attempt to produce a holistic view of societal issues, as they in fact present themselves empirically. Therefore, the status quo in this case falls short of the noble aims of the sociological imagination. This article demonstrates, via an illustrative examination of the issue of unlawful immigration, how the “Christian Sociological Re-Imagination” (CSR) approach represents a viable alternative to the fragmented nature of sociology’s traditional use of these disparate theories. Based on the biblical meta-narrative of creation, fall, and redemption as an overarching conceptual framework, the CSR approach yields a faith-discipline integration model that is well equipped to take on the complexities of our social world. It does so by employing a frame alignment strategy which affirms the value and maintains the conceptual robustness of the secular sociological theories, while evaluating and unifying them within an overarching Christian sociological framework which jointly emphasizes the values of principled order, social justice, and human concern.

Keywords: sociological theories, Christian Sociological Re-Imagination, worldview, creation-fall-redemption, faith-discipline integration, illegal immigration

Introduction

As illegal immigration to the United States persists as a central social concern in contemporary political and cultural debates, sociologists can offer an important mediating voice by presenting well-balanced and holistic analyses of this complex issue to academic, professional, and lay audiences alike. The societal impact of this careful mediation can render to the ongoing debates over unauthorized immigrants coming to the U.S. the *gravitas*, data-driven insights, and sensitivity they rightly require. Yet our discipline must evolve if we consider how such important topics are examined conceptually in most of our mainstream introductory textbooks.

In an article previously published in this journal entitled “Constructing a Christian Sociological Re-Imagination” (Chiareli, 2019), I reviewed and critiqued the dominant theoretical frameworks in the field of sociology from the perspective of a Christian worldview. I argued that their disparate and competing approaches to examining and explaining social reality, while valid in most respects, fall short of fully grasping empirical intricacies as isolated theoretical lenses, because of their limited sociological scope. I then proposed and developed a unifying analytical framework at the meta-theoretical level for studying social problems, which I termed the Christian Sociological Re-Imagination (hereafter CSR) approach. The main purpose of this article is to work out the practical application of this novel and previously introduced approach to one particular social problem: illegal immigration to the United States. With this illustrative application, I aim to affirm the value of employing a unifying conceptual model for understanding social problems and proposing solutions thereto.

As I argued in the previous article, this new integrated approach “presents students with a view of society that is biblically guided, sociologically sound, and epistemologically coherent with the complexity of the social world in which we live, navigate, and negotiate daily” (Chiareli 2019:29). The model utilizes a blended and balanced integrative method of social analysis that asserts as a necessary prerequisite the balancing out of mainstream sociological frameworks – functionalist, conflict, and interactionist theories – against one another and in relation to a Christian worldview. This search for equilibrium is a function of the conviction that empirical reality is not contained by any of these singular perspectives. Rather, a more fitting treatment of the complexities of the social world requires that we combine such theories, so that in blended form they can together approach a fuller, more holistic conception of social reality. Moreover, as a Christian sociologist, my standard for truth must come from Holy Scripture. As such, as isolated understandings of societal dynamics and problems, these predominant sociological lenses not only fall short of the promise of an all-encompassing sociological imagination, they also fall short of the fullness of God’s view of social reality, as revealed in Holy Scripture. The use of the overarching biblical meta-narrative of creation-fall-redemption (hereafter CFR) as a paradigm that is not only theological but also sociologically and empirically

relevant, can provide a unifying construct for bridging the evident gaps in said sociological perspectives.

I have already dedicated an entire article to addressing the question, “why and how should Christian sociology offer a new approach that seeks to integrate or unify the traditionally discrete and competing sociological theories?” Some may still question whether integration is necessarily preferable to a plurality of analytic frames. Do such theories, as separate frameworks, not occupy an important theoretical space distinct from one another? Does theoretical pluralism not better reflect the respective and well-argued thought traditions and critical intent? Indeed, these are important considerations if we are to treat these perspectives as “theories” only. As theoretical traditions, they remain vital to sociological thought, and perhaps their ubiquitous presence in our introductory textbooks should be maintained as foundational viewpoints, at least as part of an overall proposition for sociological study. My concern, however, stems from what current ASA president, Aldon D. Morris, professes: “Sociology is to be done out there in the streets!” Based on this bold affirmation, which I hold true, I must critique the practical viability of these predominant theories when complex, empirical reality is thrust upon them. Do they truly hold sufficient explanatory power as distinct frameworks when faced with the often-confounding complexities of social reality? My answer is “no.” Sociology must evolve into a ground-level discipline equipped with tools of both thought and action that merge into an integrated view of society.

CSR is premised on the understanding that all of social reality – all natural law, as well – can be distilled to one essential construct: (social) things are created; (social) things experience decay or problems; and (social) things must be restored or transformed. This fundamental assertion is congruent with the CFR biblical meta-narrative, and therefore forms a basic conceptual framework that is able to unify the sociological frameworks in light of God’s truth. The following chart (Chiareli 2019:30) briefly showcases the conceptual evolution of the CSR approach:

Developing a Christian Sociological Re-Imagination Model

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|--|---|--|--|
| • <u>Sociological View</u> (disjointed) | • Structural Functionalism-----//----- | • Conflict Theory-----//----- | • Symbolic Interactionism |
| • <u>Application Lens</u> (disjointed) | • System-Based-----//----- | • Change-Based-----//----- | • Experience-Based |
| • <u>Empirical Reality</u> (unified) | • <i>Social things* are established</i> _____ | • <i>Social things* experience decay</i> _____ | • <i>Social things* must be restored</i> |
| • <u>Biblical Meta-Narrative</u> (unified) | • Creation_____ | • Fall _____ | • Redemption |
| • <u>Christian Sociological Re-Imagination</u> (unified) | • Creation View_____ | • Fall View_____ | • Redemption (Potential) View |
| • <u>CSR Application Lens</u> (unified) | • Created Order-Based_____ | • Social Disruption-Based_____ | • Restoration-Based |

**“Social things” here refers broadly to a whole range of social relationships, groups, organizations, networks, institutional arrangements and services, structures of power, systems, cultures, societies, etc.

To clarify, the labels “disjointed” and “unified” are contrasting terms connoting that, relative to empirical reality, the sociological perspectives and their respective application lens are separate and distinct from one another, each offering a variant and incomplete view of society precisely due to their discrete and narrow perspectives. By themselves, they represent either micro or macro-level analytical frames. Additionally, in isolation, while one promotes conformity to the status quo, the second advocates for structural change in the system, while the third is based on assumptions about subjective and experience-based interpretations of reality. Structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism, though important theoretical perspectives in their own right, are mutually exclusive frameworks, conceived in antithetical historical succession, and containing competing aims that did not envision reciprocating interaction with one another, nor any thought of theoretical integration whatsoever. Hence the re-imaginative aspect of the proposed approach, which does envisage their great potential as co-participants in a new mode of sociological analysis.

The apparent simplicity of the CSR model is not to be mistaken as a crude or naïve conception. On the contrary, as the application of this approach will demonstrate, it possesses adequate conceptual sophistication, as it incorporates robust sociological wisdom and a firmly biblical reading of the world held together in necessary tension. This careful joining of worldviews renders possible interesting analyses of social problems that sustain in equilibrium notions of individual and institutional or societal sin, social order, and social justice, as well as complementary social roles by concerned individuals and groups engaged in redemptive endeavors, including the healing role of the Church in the world. The study of societal problems through this prism takes on great significance for the Christian sociologist, who sees her or his role as an educator and scholar as one that is uniquely prophetic and important in these troubling times, both in the discipline, in the world, and in the Church.

Finally, creation, fall, and redemption-based readings of the world have been around as a central schema in Reformed theology for decades. Therefore, it is true, at least initially, that this is not an entirely new or re-imagined approach. Nevertheless, the CSR approach is not proposing a theological view of society. The CFR schema is used here not as the primary lens for a theological explanation for social problems in a fallen world. Rather, this narrative serves principally as a thematic device, used to newly reorganize sociological perspectives in relation to one another, which holistically engender a completely new and integrated sociological model for reading the social world and its woes. This model more accurately and adequately reflects empirical reality, emphasizing the combined societal and godly values of principled order, social justice, and human concern (See Appendix C).

The remainder of this article first overviews the respective central tenets of the three sociological theories to the issue of illegal immigration, and then applies the CSR approach to the issue.

Frame Alignment Between the Sociological and the Christian Worldviews: An Analytical Exercise Applied to Illegal Immigration

The following schema outlines a model for examining social problems in light of the Christian Sociological Re-Imagination approach. It begins with a summary of each of the three main sociological paradigms as applied to the issue of illegal immigration (see Appendix A and B). For each perspective, the model briefly highlights its analytical emphasis for examining social issues. Next, it provides a summary of that theory's main argument relative to the issue at hand, followed by perceived causal factors, and the related societal impact or problem. Finally, a summary of the solution from the vantage point of each sociological perspective is presented. This review culminates in the formulation of the Christian Sociological Re-Imagination approach, following a similar sequence of emphasis, argument, causal focus, societal impact, and proposed solutions, each in light of the complementary creation, fall, and redemption views. Ultimately, "frame alignment" between the Christian and sociological approaches and worldviews results in an integrated, unified, and holistic view of social reality (David Snow et al. 1986; Chiareli 2019).¹

Analysis of Illegal Immigration in the Discipline of Sociology:

Structural Functionalist Theory

Analytical Emphasis

- Focused on System Stability; Based on Order

The Argument

- While illegal immigration can serve as a functional *de facto* substitute in the absence of well-designed policies which directly address problems of demographic or labor shortages, it is untenable as an ongoing solution. Continued unlawful immigration will bring about negative outcomes and ultimate destabilization for the system that therefore render it undesirable for the society. Unauthorized immigration, which involves disorderly, non-normative, fraudulent, and criminal activity must therefore be addressed as a violation of a society's laws and intended order, and be corrected politically, socially, and criminally in order to preserve the status quo and ensure proper societal functioning in the long run.

Causal Factors

- The impact of community dysfunctions and social problems caused by a culture of crime and gang-violence force many affected individuals and families to emigrate from their country and pursue greater security the United States;
- Poor decision-making and irresponsible choices due to participation in nonconforming subcultures or personal moral failings lead people to emigrate from their country toward the southern U.S. border;
- The high pressure of poverty in economically depressed nations and communities constitutes a strong push factor² to emigrate in search or economic security elsewhere;
- The influence of present-oriented values and life-views that see an “escape to America” as the preferred of many difficult choices, coupled with persuasive criminal enablers such as “coyotes” and other means of human trafficking to the U.S. border, leads to increased migrant flows toward the United States;
- False, unrealistic, or altogether distorted views of reality derived from media regarding the “Promised Land of Opportunity” and its perceived pull-factors, such as guaranteed employment, provides a significant stimulus and impetus for migration;
- The liberal political agenda and its challenge to current immigration law, coupled with the deviant actions of Sanctuary movement churches and districts, encourages sustained illegal immigration flows into the U.S.

Societal Impact

- A recurring, ever-increasing, and destabilizing cycle of illegal immigration due to the perception of previously successful attempts by other migrants who, encouraged by liberal political propaganda in the U.S., continue to see compelling benefits of making the risky voyage northward;
- The influx of illegal (and legal) immigrants is associated with their demonstrable dependency on government social resources, which represents a great incentive for obtaining admittance to the U.S. as asylum seekers;

- An illegal immigration crisis leads to mass deportations of unlawful immigrants at great cost to U.S. tax-payers;
- Illegal immigrants negatively affect local receiving communities in the U.S. and burden their economies and American society as a whole by their deviation from social and cultural norms, as well as by adding to the economic strains on an already overstretched and ailing infrastructure of state and local health and human services;
- School districts must struggle to absorb the added costs of allowing into their systems unauthorized immigrant, non-English speaking children of asylum-granted families and illegal immigrants, who manage to enter into the U.S.;
- Documented cases as well as anecdotal evidence of drug smuggling and terrorist entry into the U.S., culturally dissonant lifestyles and values, as well as fears of possible epidemics due to poor health or disease management among illegal immigrants, cause much public alarm;
- Illegal immigration results in billions of dollars in expenditures on costly and expansive border security measures and additional immigration law enforcement activities every year;
- Although many U.S. industries have relied heavily on foreign migrants to meet labor demands not easily met by the American labor supply, illegal immigrants represent an economic threat in the form of potential wage depression, industrial accidents due to communication problems, and employment competition with legal immigrants and Americans.

Solution Summary

- The U.S. government must enforce a structure of psychological and material disincentives and social control deterrents against illegal immigration, including the following actions:
- Enforce legal immigration laws and place significant restrictions and harsh penalties on the entry of individuals and families into this country without permission via the U.S. southern border, while also drastically decreasing the number of admissions for asylum each year;

- Conduct systematic and widespread ICE raids against illegal immigrants in the U.S., and enforce severe punishments on anyone and any business that harbors or employs illegal immigrants, as a way of creating disincentives and obstacles for further illegal immigration;
- Build a passage-detering border wall, increase patrolling, and build a military complex along the U.S. southern border, paid for by emergency reallocation of public funds when necessary;
- Put economic and political pressure on governments in sending and transiting countries to increase barriers and police apparatuses employed against unlawful immigrants heading to the United States;
- Devise economic and social assistance aid packages to sending country governments, thus addressing endemic structural causes of social problems as a means of diminishing push factors that can lead to illegal migration toward the United States.

Conflict Theory

Analytical Emphasis

- Focused on Challenging the System; Based on Tension

The Argument

- Due to their extremely vulnerable economic status and weak social position, undocumented immigrants suffer victimization, both as a marginalized population in sending countries and as a criminalized group. They are subject to discrimination in receiving countries, where they are caught in the crossfire between being culturally antagonized and politically reviled as a threat to society. Improving their status and empowering them at multiple levels is the imperative of social justice that is largely dependent on the agency of conscience constituents³ (McCarthy and Zald 1977) from among members of the native-born and established immigrant populations, as they become determined to take up the undocumented immigration cause vis-a-vis the culture and the state.

Causal Factors

- The perpetuation of an unjust and oppressive social structure that is biased against the poor, minorities, and other vulnerable groups in both sending countries and in the U.S.;
- The lack of economic opportunities in sending countries, coupled with low educational attainment and little to no available social services from their governments, increases the marginalization and exclusion of large segments of their population from mainstream society, resulting in pressures to emigrate;
- Poverty-stricken and chronically deprived individuals and families in Mexico, Central America, and other regions, are caught in a vicious cycle of socioeconomic exclusion due to forces outside themselves or their communities (e.g., unemployment, disruptions in labor and communities caused by globalization, deindustrialization, organized crime, drug trafficking, and addiction), and cope by acting on their desire for a better future in America for themselves and their families;
- The focus on the present by these individuals and families derives from the reality of their subsistence being situated far from the society's mainstream and its accompanying values;
- Restrictive U.S. immigration laws biased against minorities and the poor leave no options for those who are fleeing poverty and hoping to be admitted legally into the United States, thus engendering a crisis of unauthorized immigration (See Appendix B).

Societal Impact

- Empirically observable problems of illegal immigration related to human-trafficking, growing population pressure at border entry points, a humanitarian crises due to needs outweighing resources at border-crossing holding facilities, increasing backlogs in immigration processing due to legal maneuvers by the U.S. federal government, apparent misapplication of asylum laws, overwhelmed ICE personnel left to deal with mismanagement, and inept federal government strategies for dealing with pressing immigration realities;

- A politically-driven, disingenuously manufactured illegal immigration crisis at the southern U.S. border;
- Questionable reallocation of government funds away from needed social services, including natural disaster management funds, toward border security and policing against undocumented workers;
- Unjustified and cruel family separation practices, and the push for mass deportations;
- Interruption of flows of workers to industries dependent on immigrant labor in the United States, especially in agriculture, fishing, meat-processing, construction, restaurants and entertainment, tourism, and additional service sectors;
- High and questionable political and economic pressure on, as well as manipulation tactics against less powerful sending nations as a coercive means of gaining their cooperation with U.S. government immigration policies.

Solution Summary

- Concerned U.S. citizens and immigration advocates must engage in a process of organized political action to address immigration laws that unjustly punish poor and minority immigrants who are currently structurally excluded from authorized immigration categories (See Appendix B), by bringing pressure to bear on authorities to enact comprehensive reform in the system;
- U.S. foreign policy must get to the root of the ongoing marginalization of individuals and families who are forced to emigrate from sending countries, even without having secured proper documents, while also acknowledging the historical role of the United States in contributing to structural crises in those countries that have given rise to emigration pressures;
- Denounce political and economic manipulation tactics against less powerful sending nations that are intended to coerce their collaboration with U.S. immigration policy goals;

- Foment a growth in the Sanctuary movement in the United States which can serve as grassroots resistance, while mobilizing whole communities and local leadership in the struggle for decriminalization and against the exclusion of undocumented workers;
- Decry abusive immigration control measures that inflict fear, intimidation, and deplorable actions against defenseless immigrants and their families, including the forcible separation of children from their parents;
- Protest against indiscriminate and widespread ICE raids against undocumented persons, who have often been well integrated into their communities for several years. Expansion of the Sanctuary movement in cities and churches around the country can act as a buffer against the adversarial actions of federal law enforcement.
- Pressure politicians to vote for the defunding of a border wall and to impede the reallocation of government funds from needed social services and other important public safety net programs;
- U.S. industries which rely on a guaranteed and routinized flow of migrant labor must lobby the government to expand immigration categories to include poor immigrants, and in so doing be able to fill needed job vacancies, which will cause an immediate decrease in overall number of undocumented immigrants.

Symbolic Interactionist Theory

Analytical Emphasis

- Focused on Shared Culture; Based on Experience

The Argument

- Few social roles are experienced as oppressively as being poor, socially weak, and the excluded “other” within a given society. The undocumented immigrant especially represents one such “outsider,” and she or he experiences the “double-jeopardy” of having transitioned from one condition of psycho-emotional and material distress in her or his own country, into a different condition of criminalization and exclusion as the undesired stranger in the new one. But the expectation and dream of a better life, and the

strategically vital support of a welcoming community often keeps hope alive. Also, to the extent that the label and stigma around the powerful master status of being “illegal” can be diminished culturally, the self-perception, lived experience, and interactions of undocumented workers in the new society can improve considerably.

Causal Factors

- The dire experience of crippling poverty, sustained marginalization, physical threat from state or social violence, and cultural deprivation in one’s own society creates for affected individuals and their families a sense of acute psycho-social strain and desperation, the common reaction to which is to search for ways to ameliorate their situation, including the notion of emigrating out of their country, despite risks or legal standing questions;
- The prospect of a better life of safety, security, a hope, and a better all-around future represents a lifeline for an otherwise hopeless situation for an individual or family, even if it means making the difficult decision of saying goodbye to one’s own community and country;
- The dream of securing employment and higher wages, and providing economic abundance, comfort, and educational opportunities for oneself and/or one’s dependents, is a powerful incentive for braving the harsh journey and life of an immigrant, even at the cost of assuming a deviant role of an illegal immigrant in the new society;
- When bureaucratic and policy obstacles to obtaining a legal means of immigration seem insurmountable, when the subjective perception of stories of successful undocumented immigration to the United States seem to abound, and when one receives encouragement from primary group members to take the risk and go even without lawful visa documents, one’s determination can be strong;
- Pull factors stemming from recruitment efforts by some industry sectors in the U.S. dependent on immigrant labor serve as a powerful determinant in decisions to emigrate to America.
- Push and pull factors can be overpowering and compelling reasons to migrate, even against the concerted efforts of the United States government to

dissuade anyone about unlawfully immigrating, or against the possibility of criminalization and ultimately deportation back to their country of origin.

Societal Impact

- The social role of the illegal immigrant in the United States is one often met by the native American population with fear and a prejudice that is cognitive, affective, and conative, including discrimination in its many forms (economic, social, housing, educational, employment, and so on);
- Political debates in American society around illegal immigration can be divisive and create an atmosphere of intimidation, uncertainty, and sometimes outright terror for the undocumented person and families;
- The social sphere of undocumented workers is commonly unpredictable and characterized on the one hand by negative perceptions and antagonistic treatment by a disgruntled public, and on the other by genuine concern and proactive compassion by individuals and humanitarian groups. The frequent result is socially hidden forms of subsistence, where such undocumented persons must live almost invisibly and make a living in the shadows of society in order to survive;
- The relationship between the undocumented immigrant and the state is a source of much confusion, anxiety, and fear, exacerbated by language and communication barriers, sociocultural distance, a constant sense of threat (of persecution, arrests, prison, and deportation), and a frightful, deep lack of understanding about the laws and one's rights as a foreigner with an illegal status;
- The experience of exclusion, if only temporary, can translate into personal and intergenerational poverty, strained interpersonal and family relations, psycho-emotional challenges, interruptions in normal life cycles (education, marriage, employment), challenges in self-care and wellness, disruptions in life goals and aspirations, and other problems;
- While oppositional interests in the body politic and citizenry defend increased restrictions on immigration policies, as well as the criminalization and deportation of illegal transgressors, other individuals and civic or religious organizations interested in promoting human rights mobilize politically and

socially to oppose the malevolent and unjust treatment of undocumented immigrants, to give support in community, and to raise the public's awareness of related issues, which are mitigating factors in her or his experience as an outsider.

Solution Summary

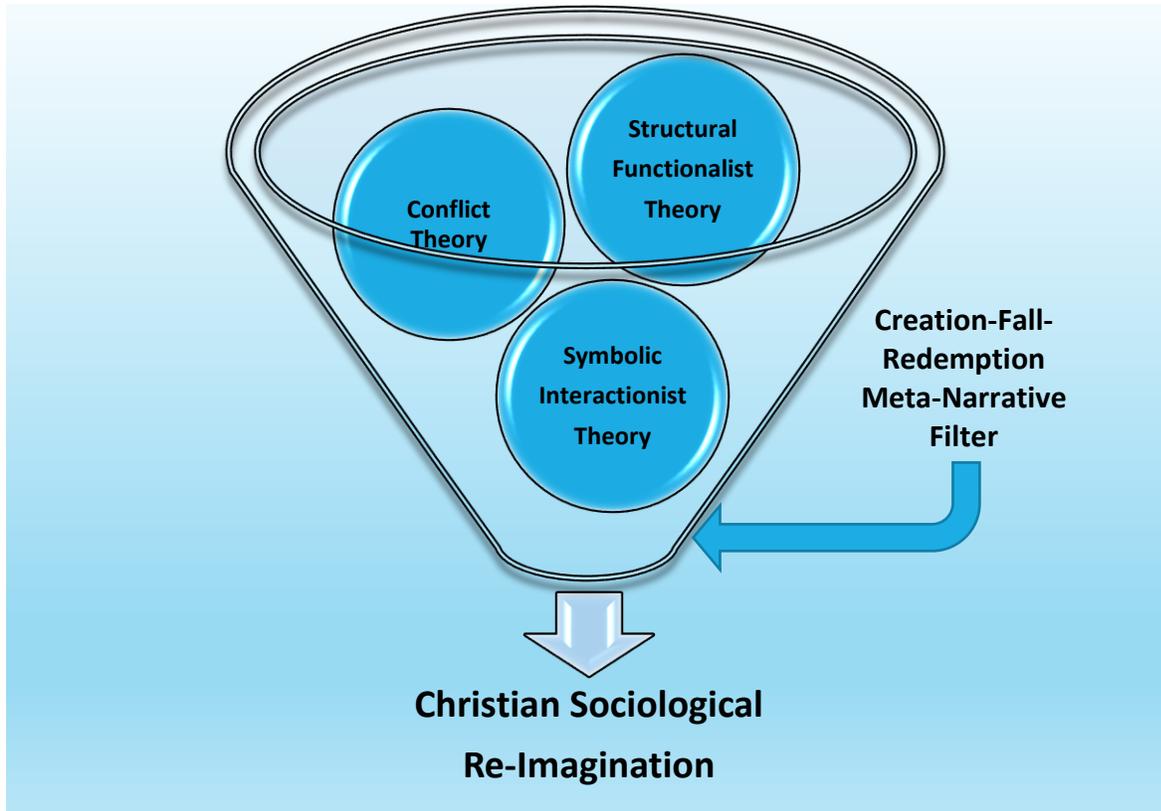
- From the standpoint of illegality as a deviant master status, with corresponding stigmatizing effects brought on by cultural labeling and adverse reactions thereto, a primary way of resolving this problem is to remove negative meanings associated with the label of being an illegal alien, immigrant, or worker. This can be accomplished first by fundamentally changing immigration policy to where legal categories are somehow expanded to include currently undocumented workers, and second by eradicating pejorative terms like “illegal alien” and replacing them with much more sanguine labels;⁴
- Growth in the interpersonal and public awareness of and sensitivity to the difficult plight of the immigrant in America, especially the “illegal” immigrant, can lessen the sense of threat, oppression, and exclusion experienced by undocumented individuals and families, thus contributing to the humanization of this group so often vilified and objectified in the cultural and political war-zones surrounding immigration;
- Community-based action involving role-models, mentorship, family outreach by assistance groups (public, private, religious, or secular organizations), and cultural adaptation support, can address areas of maladjustment that accompany the experience of the immigrant in a new society;
- Sanctuary movement organizations and sympathizers can play an important role in helping to diminish the grave sense of ostracism and isolation that can predominate in undocumented immigrant experience. Close-knit support groups can provide needed assistance, whether legal, economic, emotional, educational, and otherwise. Ethnic congregations and community organizations located in distinct ethnic enclaves can reach out to immigrant compatriots and provide social linkages that are nationality-specific, thus diminishing the social distance between the immigrants and the home populations.

Having presented this brief set of secular sociological analyses of illegal immigration, as well as their respective proposed solutions, we now turn to the treatment of this issue according to the Christian Sociological Re-Imagination framework.

The Christian Sociological Re-Imagination: A Frame Alignment Approach

The Christian Sociological Re-Imagination approach is committed to elements in each of the three mainstream sociological perspectives reviewed above that align with godly precepts and biblical truth. It acknowledges that their theoretical contributions can hold value and promise for analyzing social issues, but that, by themselves, each theory is narrowly conceived and insufficient for fully grasping the empirical intricacies of the issue of illegal immigration, or any other issue for that matter. Applying the CFR biblical meta-narrative to their treatment of social problems, as the following figure illustrates, enables us to weave the sociological theories together into a broader assessment of social conditions that plague society, arguably arriving at a more holistic understanding of the problem at hand. This integrative analytical process results from establishing a conceptual frame alignment between the sociological claims and key Christian principles, as shown by the following schema. Achieving this alignment is important, since it is instrumental in enabling the formulation and application of an approach that strives to transcend the dividing line between sociology and theology, each of whose contributions to our proper understanding of social reality can benefit much from their mutual truth-committed conversation (Chiareli, 2002).

The Integration of Sociological and Creation-Fall-Redemption Meta-Narratives: The Christian Sociological Re-Imagination⁵



A CSR examination of Unlawful Immigration to the U.S.

Analytical Emphasis

Principled Order; Social Justice; Human Concern

Creation: *Social things are established*

This component of the analysis draws from elements in structural functionalism that are frame aligned with advancing a careful and intentional consideration of God's created-order principles. It calls out sinful and deviant abuse of societal systems, and affirms that the social structure ought to reinforce values of respect for authority and order. Such values must also be guided by high ethical commitments and moral standards, accountability at all levels, rewards for conforming conduct, and social sanctions aimed at reforming non-conforming behavior. It also emphasizes harmony with transcendent truths in Scripture which speak

against law transgressors energized by folly, sinful rebellion, and evil intent.

Fall: *Social things experience decay*

This component of the analysis draws from elements in conflict theory that are frame aligned with an acknowledgment and serious examination of persistent forms of structural sin that corrupt individuals and communities. It advances a prophetic call for social justice and liberating change in oppressive social structures, and for responsibility towards self, others, and society.

Redemption: *Social things must be restored*

This component of the analysis draws from elements in symbolic interactionism that are frame aligned with a focus on restorative and proactive agency from caring members of receiving communities and of their surrounding society. Civil, religious, and governmental organizations ought to work with, minister to, and relate compassionately with vulnerable individuals and groups, while modeling mitigating values, especially to nefarious and destructive elements in the culture and social structure in general.

The Argument

Societies founded on and interested in godly principles of liberty and justice for all must center their immigration policies on universal human rights values undergirded by just and inclusive laws that must be respected and supported by the culture and its members. While protecting national interests, such laws ought also to safeguard the well-being of the new immigrant as an image bearer whose life has been disrupted due to structural injustices outside of her or his control. Such systemic oppression ought to be opposed wherever present both in their home country and in the United States. Broken, vulnerable, and powerless, the needs and participation of immigrants in a new society are important moral and ethical considerations for both the government and the public. Whether documented or not, such immigrants inherently deserve to be treated justly, with due process, and with respect for their humanity, at both the systemic level and the interpersonal level by the citizens with whom they will share the society. As immigrants are welcomed into their new communities, their lives will be restored.

Causal Factors

Creation View (Aligned with Functionalist Theory; Based on Created Order)

The violation of society's intended order and stability by deviant or unlawful forms of immigration results from the choices of social actors who knowingly seek entry into the United States without proper permission.

The behavior of system violators immigrating illegally is conditioned by life coping mechanisms that reflect non-mainstream subcultural norms and "lower-class value stretch"⁶ within their communities of origin, which then creates an impetus for mass migration outflows that ultimately create an immigration crisis in the United States.

Fall View (Aligned with Conflict Theory; Based on Social Disruption)

The violation of the dignity of individuals and their communities by deep and systemic socioeconomic inequalities, and by an unjust U.S. immigration system biased against poor minorities from the global South.

Extreme and unjust economic inequality and powerlessness produce structural conditions for the poorest segments of sending countries in the global South, which gives rise to desperate actions by victimized groups that lead to out migration flows to the United States as they search for a better and more secure life and future. Unable to satisfy stringent and narrow requirements of the law, which intentionally exclude immigration stemming from socioeconomic distress (See Appendix B), these individuals and families are automatically deemed unfit to immigrate, usually without recourse, except for a comparatively small number of highly scrutinized asylum cases.

Redemption View (Aligned with Interactionist Theory; Based on Restoration)

The violation of the psychological and emotional health of individuals and their social groups by non-redemptive, xenophobic treatment, influences, and interactions with authorities and some antagonizing members of American society.

On their own, undocumented immigrants are defenseless against a culture of prejudice and a system of discrimination against poor immigrants, which structurally and relationally dispossesses them of their inalienable human rights, subjecting them to abuse and criminalization. This evidences the need for transformation of the ethos and normative

framework of the culture, and for the redemptive agency of members of society.

Societal Impact

(See societal impact as depicted by the three sociological perspectives combined)

Solution Summary

Creation View

The state must devise governing laws about immigration that punish perpetrators of illicit activities, fraud, and abuse, without sacrificing due process, human rights, and freedom principles for those who immigrate because of great oppression and dire economic need.

Principled Order

Clarify and simplify immigration statutes that regulate entry into the United States based on criteria that are stringent against breakers of just laws, while being compassionate toward the plight of the poor and weak;

Invite the decriminalization of undocumented immigrants who are just as deserving of basic human rights as are documented immigrants;

Apply mechanisms of social control and border security that flow out of laws that uphold justice and mercy toward immigrant populations.

Pray for wisdom for those under whose leadership laws governing immigration to this country are created and regulated, so that principles of justice and goodwill prevail.

Fall View

Understand and counteract the pervasive nature and effect of the fall in individuals, communities, social institutions, and the entire society in all human endeavors, including immigration.

Social Justice

Work to redeem each of these within society with a combination of sound theory and research-based social policy, as well as collective action that mobilizes participants from civil society, grassroots activists, the community of academics and specialized practitioners, corporate and financial sectors, and public officials involved with immigration matters;

Promote socially conscious intervention at the local level via social and political mobilization, participatory action research, community organizing and development, social outreach programs, and agencies focused on Sanctuary principles;

Experience and work God's grace and redemption for just change in self, communities, social institutions, and the entire society.

Pray that awakening consciousness may be realized in the population and among key agents of structural political and economic change, so that a much greater emphasis may be placed on benevolence and well-being, rather than on power and profits for privileged classes.

Redemption View

Mobilize concerned groups and the Church (the Body of Christ and its earthly religious institutions), especially those who energize the Sanctuary movement, to get involved socially and politically, at both the national level and the local level of their specific communities, and directly in the lives of undocumented immigrants.

Human Concern

For Christians and the public at large, commit to learning about, understanding, and responding to the plight of poor and undocumented immigrants. Defend, walk with, and minister/outreach to those individuals and families who are vulnerable, hurting, and in need, by responding with compassion and restorative assistance. Offer dedicated and competent discipleship/mentoring to immigrants who can be catalysts for beneficial change in their own communities and interpersonal relationships;

For believers, commit to applying the refreshing and renewing, Holy Spirit-filled and prayer-enabled, healing agency of Christ's Body in a broken world, in order to help mend the ruptured lives and spirit of these disadvantaged groups. "Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God."⁷

Pray for liberating, godly conviction in the hearts and minds of all those whose actions can directly impact the status and fate of immigrants to this country, including those who, though unauthorized, see America as an enduring beacon of hope against their desperate human condition.

Conclusion

The issue of illegal immigration is one among an uncountable number of social problems facing American society that can be examined critically with the use of a Christian sociological lens. The above explication of the Christian Sociological Re-Imagination (CSR) approach to this very issue is meant here to illustrate the plausibility and promise of employing a new analytical model that bridges the gap between the predominant but mutually exclusive sociological theories, while integrating them into a unifying biblical meta-narrative. Unlike a purely theological (creation-fall-redemption) perspective on social issues, the present approach is also solidly founded on robust sociological understandings of social reality. It does not refute nor disqualify secular analytical frameworks that are well established in the discipline simply because they offer extra-biblical wisdom. Quite the contrary, CSR soberly and sensibly acknowledges their important contributions and, while still testing their assertions against biblical wisdom as the center piece of its assumptions about the world, it goes on to develop a unified and holistic analytical framework that is committed to the truth of sociology as an integral component of God's truth.

As I argued when I first introduced and laid out the fundamentals of CSR (Chiareli 2019), sociological theories are not immune from biblical scrutiny under this approach. Nevertheless, the goal of CSR, whenever plausible, is to give credence to functionalist, conflict, and interactionist views of the social world, and present an honest, rigorous, and workable conceptual model for addressing social problems that maintains a deeply sociological footprint, one that is faithful to the Scripture-based Christian worldview, while embedded in and informed by a frame alignment with important theoretical building blocks of the sociological imagination. Ultimately, the benefit and virtue of this approach is arguably that it enables the Christian scholar – and others alike, who may find value in it from many corners of our discipline – to re-imagine sociology as an academic witness to transcendent truth about social reality, as revealed to us in the unified themes of creation, fall, and redemption, of which Jesus Christ is the cornerstone.

In sum, and at its core, Christian Sociological Re-Imagination is many things. Yet it can be distilled into three main guiding values: principled order, social justice, and human concern, with the invested participation of God's people in Christ's Church (See Appendix C). This approach is sociological yet not secular, Christian yet not solely theological, objective yet not value-free, hopeful yet not unreasoned. Ultimately, it strives to be a balanced and thoughtful analytical approach whose aim is to shed light on and help redeem the many broken dimensions of earthly society. Does it try to do too much? Perhaps. I invite readers to apply and work through it with optimism, and then draw their own conclusions.

Lastly, attempting to refine the discipline's lenses of sociological exploration and investigation is certainly a risky venture, not without some contention. However, the beauty

and merit of our discipline lies as much in its invitation to rediscover it and our social world in daring and unexpected ways, as it is to follow the beaten path of well-tested empirical study traditions reliably passed on in our theory-focused courses. Confident in the enduring and creative spirit of the sociological imagination's quest for what is true about all of social reality, I extend a call, especially to Christian sociologists, to keep pushing the discipline's boundaries in search of knowledge which, illumined by God, transforms and renews our minds – and hopefully the world, as well – in the faithful and, yes, even innovative outworking of our craft.

Endnotes

¹ “Frame alignment here means finding and establishing linkages between the secular paradigms and a Christian meta-narrative, such that some set of sociological interests, values, and truth claims are congruent and complementary within an overarching Christian interpretive framework” (Chiareli 2019:31).

² The concept of “push-pull” factors in immigration theory was first introduced by Ernest Ravenstein (1885), who examined census data from 1840s–1880s England and Wales for variables that influenced and explained migration to America. His analysis of push and pull factors generated ten migration laws that led to his conclusion that the primary cause of immigration to America was better economic opportunities. Similarly, push-pull factors here seem to center on economic advantages, but also extend to concerns about peace and security. For a review of significant works examining the macroeconomics of migration, see especially, Harris and Todaro 1970; Piore 1979; Billsborrow, Oberai, and Standing 1984; Stark and Bloom 1985; Borjas 1990; Stalker 1994; Daugherty and Kammeyer 1995; Corry 1996; Bodvarsson and Berg 2013; and Brettel and Hollifield 2014.

³ “Conscience constituents” is a term in social movement theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977) that refers to individuals and groups who do not share in group membership with the oppressed and do not stand to benefit directly from goal accomplishments, but nevertheless lend support to the movement and its members in a variety of tangible and intangible ways due to solidary sentiments around issues of social justice.

⁴ For some time now in Canada, for example, the term “new Canadians” has often been used, both officially and colloquially, in place of the term “immigrant.”

⁵ The application of this model could just as readily have been directed to other pressing issues, including domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, hate crimes, racial discrimination, homelessness, environmental injustice, human trafficking, and others.

⁶ The term “lower-class value stretch” originally comes from Rodman (1963) and is here adapted as a way of describing the choices of lower-class members who espouse mainstream

values to a certain point, beyond which, given realistic expectations due to their economically depressed condition and marginalized social status, they cope with life in ways that do not conform to those mainstream values (i.e., intentionally breaking social norms and societal laws).

⁷ Micah 6:8, ESV. Consider these verses in the Bible that refer to immigrants and/or the stranger and to society's treatment of them: Exodus 22:21; Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Numbers 9:14; Numbers 15:15; Numbers 35:11; Deuteronomy 10:18-19; Deuteronomy 24:21; Isaiah 61:5; Malachi 3:5; Matthew 25:35; Luke 17:18-19; Hebrews 13:2.

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Appendix A

Lawful and Unauthorized Immigration to the U.S.*

• **U.S. Foreign-born Population (2017): 44.4 million** – 13.6% of total population of 326.5 million

(Although a record in real numbers, the highest immigrant share remains in 1890 at 14.8% of the total U.S. population, or 9.2 million)

• **Lawful Immigrants:** 35.2 million – 77% of U.S. Foreign-born Population

• **Naturalized Citizens:** 20.7 million – 45% of U.S. Foreign-born Population

• **Lawful Permanent Residents:** 12.3 million – 27% of U.S. Foreign-born Population

• **Temporary Lawful Residents:** 2.2 million – 5% of U.S. Foreign-born Population

• **Unauthorized Immigrants:** 10.5 million – 23% of U.S. Foreign-born Population

(Almost a quarter of U.S. foreign-born total, and 3.2% of the total U.S. population in 2017)

* Source: Pew Research Center, 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019)

Appendix B

Categories of Lawful Immigration to the U.S.*

(Total admits in 2017: 1,127,167)

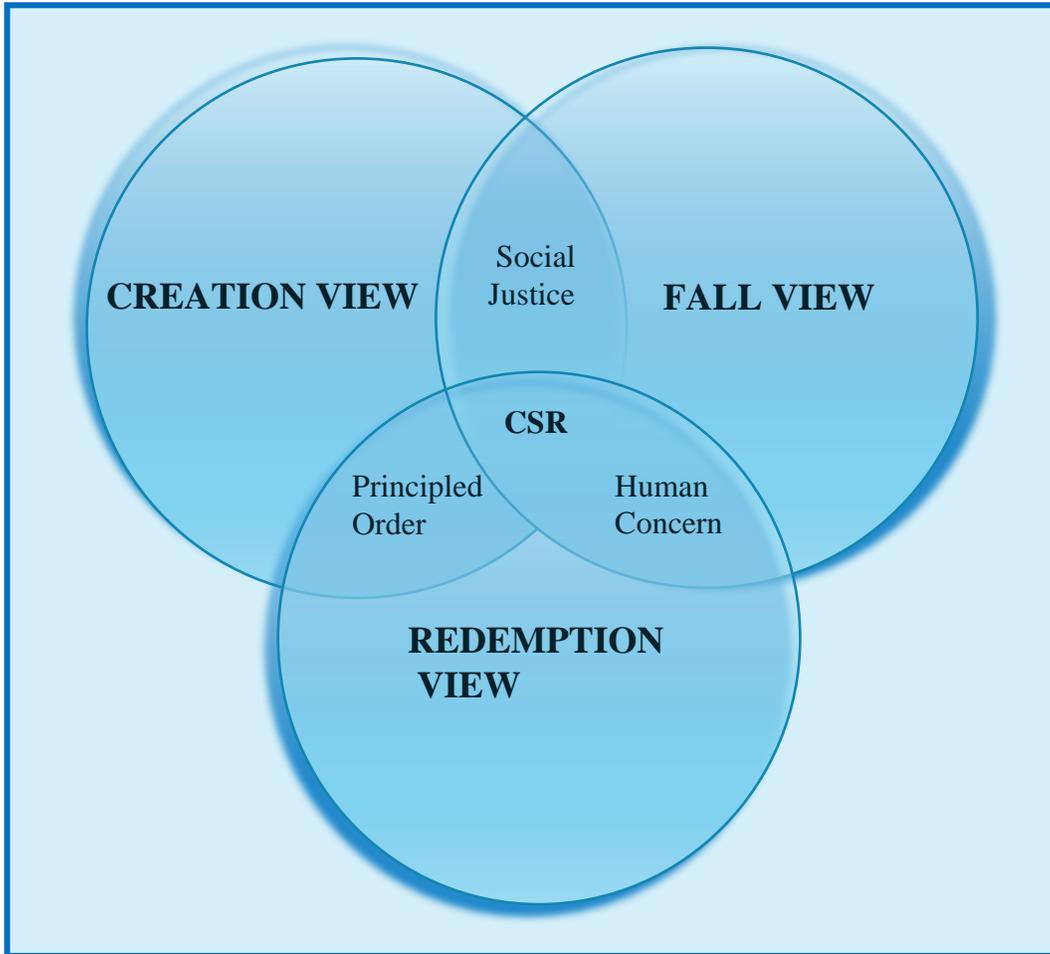
- **Family-sponsored immigration:** 66.4% (748,746)
 - Immediate Relatives: Spouses; Parents; Children (45.8%)
 - Unmarried sons and daughters of U.S. citizens; spouses and children of alien residents; married sons/daughters of U.S. citizens; siblings of U.S. citizens (26.0%)
- **Employment-based preferences/Investors:** 12.2% (137,855)
- **Diversity Programs (random lottery drawing)** 4.6% (51,592)
- **Refugees and Asylees:** 13.0% (146,003)
- **Other Categories** (stays of deportation; Haiti Refugee Immigrant Fairness Act; children of alien residents; other) 3.8% (42,945)

* Source: Annual Flow Report: Lawful Permanent Residents (August 2018 - DHS)

Note: The above legal immigration categories represent almost the entirety of the allowable legal admits to this country yearly. Current immigration law, therefore, makes absolutely no allowances for lawful immigration in cases of poverty or poverty-related distress only. What this means, in effect, is that anyone who seeks to immigrate to the United States of America simply because they are poor and destitute, cannot do so legally. This is inconsistent with the well-established finding in economic studies on immigration, that around the world people migrate due primarily to economic reasons, hoping to find better economic opportunities (See endnote²). Therein lies the crux of the illegal immigration problem in the U.S. in contemporary times. That is, as a nation, we turn our backs to the primary cause of immigration, denying legal entry to those who are poor but who immigrate nonetheless, thus engendering an illegal immigration crisis.

Appendix C

The Christian Sociological Re-Imagination Approach Emphases



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