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*“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”*

**AN ASSAULT ON THE SOUL:  
AN INTERNATIONAL PLAQUE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

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Human trafficking is a modern day form of human slavery. The most widely accepted definition of human trafficking appears in the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000). The protocol defines human trafficking as:

“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power, or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at minimum, the exploitation of prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

Human trafficking is manifest in the recruitment and enslavement of children, women, and men for commercial profit including exotic dancing, prostitution,

domestic servitude, marriage, and labor. The trafficking of human beings is an ancient phenomenon. I believe that it has re-emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a scourge against society. The abuse against victims invades every aspect of the psychological and physical life of the victim. The depth of abuse is so pervasive and evil that it can only be described as an assault on the soul. I believe that the only healing that can occur is the healing that comes from God.

Although men are not excluded from this modern day form of slavery this presentation is focused on the sexual exploitation of women and children for commercial profit.

The phenomenon of human trafficking has emerged in western societies and former communist countries since the fall of the Soviet Union. The desperate economic conditions in the former soviet countries created a depth of poverty seldom experienced in western societies. The desperation to secure money for basic necessities such as shelter and food has caused individuals and families to become vulnerable to evil persons whose goal is to profit during this time of suffering and insecurity.

Desperate to secure work to support children, parents, and other family members in need, women have fallen victim to scurrilous individuals and networks of gangs and criminals who promise a better life, jobs and prosperity in the city or abroad. Once lured away from home and isolated from familiar surroundings the victim is sold into slavery and forced into submission.

Trafficking in human beings is a profitable business. The United Nations estimates that trafficking brings in more than 7 billion dollar each year and has

exceeded the international drug trade in profitability. It is now ranked second only to the trade in guns in criminal activity and profitability (Ryf, 2003, United Nations 2006).

Traffickers operate in criminal networks of varying sizes. The largest are associated with international networks of organized criminals. These networks include gangs such as the “Italian Camorra, Chinese Triads, Russian Mafia, and Japanese Yakuza” (Leuchtag, 2003, p.12). They are powerful criminal organizations that are comprised of traffickers who specialize in the recruitment of victims, pimps, brothel keepers, forced labor lords, and gangs that have connections and operate globally (Leuchtag, 2003).

This international criminal entity has created its own ecosystem of crime. At the micro-level in poor countries individuals are recruited by trusted members of their own community who reach out to them with an understanding of the individual’s commitment to their families and desperation for basic needs. Desperate to provide for their children, siblings, and parents, victims are lured by these trusted persons to leave home for good paying jobs and to send money home to help their family. In the United States pimps and pedophiles look for vulnerable children and adolescents or teens on the run.

At the mezzo level local criminal networks buy and sell women and children. Women are moved from one brothel to another. They are sold as prostitutes at truck-stops. Some are forced to walk the streets as prostitutes and service customers on demand. A sociologist in Greece studied the criminal network (Cockburn, 2005). At the mezzo level orders are placed by telephone for one or two women at a time by

brothel owners. At the smallest level brothel owners pay for the women in cash and in person. Women are moved from town to town and across borders to near-by countries.

At the macro level criminals place orders for women and children via the internet. Money is exchanged international through internet banking. Women are transported around the world to meet the need for their specific ethnicity.

Once trafficked women are broken in and trained to accept their fate. They are physically abused and gang raped. Compliance with the demand of pimps and brothel owners is coerced. Methods include the selection of one woman who is beaten, raped, and often murdered as others look on. They are told that this is their fate if they refuse any demand from their owners. Other methods include the threat of physical harm and death of loved ones, such as their children or other loved ones. Once compliance is gained the women are often groomed to specialize in specific sexual acts. It is estimated that approximately 800,000 people are trafficked each year. Most of these victims are thought to be women.

#### Psychological Impact on Victims

The psychological damage changes the course of the lives of victims forever. They will never be the same and can never fully return to their prior. Some are never able to return home.

The age at which victims are recruited has a critical impact on the degree of damage to the development of the self. Children and adolescents are at serious risk of permanent damage due to the psychological impact on the normal development of identity and issues of autonomy. Psychology attempts to discover the ability of the

self to be resilient and understand how individuals accommodate for environmental deficits. However, modern society has never faced an evil such as human trafficking or one that attacks the soul of its victim in such a pervasive sense.

Another level of psychological damage occurs to children who are born to women who are living in brothels. Children born to women in brothels often live with their mothers in the rooms where sexual services are provided. Missionaries in India and Nepal report that children sleep under their mother's beds as their mothers service customers. The male children are used as runners to make purchases such as cigarettes for customers who frequent the brothels. Female children are groomed to be prostitutes like their mothers. The identity that women and children in brothels assume is that of a whore.

Psychological issues that emerge from these environments could be the development of anti-social personality, boarder-line personality, narcissism, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and addictions of all kinds. Often women and children are turned in to drug addicts or alcoholics to help them with the process of becoming whores.

#### Impact on the Family, Community, and Society

The impact on the family, community, and society is significant. In many places around the world there is a shortage of women for marriage. Many victims can never return home because of cultural taboos against prostitution. As much as the rescued women want to return to their homes and families they are know that their circumstances would prevent them from ever being accepted by their families and communities. In some cultures the entire family would be ostracized as a result of the woman's past. Those women must find a way for themselves while in a hostile environment. Without special skills to help them earn a living they have little hope for a future.

Most women and children who escape slavery have AIDs. Their immune systems have already been compromised by the effects of slavery, i.e., malnutrition, stress, drugs, and alcohol. Those who were released by their captors are often showing physical signs and illnesses related to the disease. Many die in captivity. Others are released to the streets to wait for death.

Families of victims are forever changed as a result of the effects of human trafficking. Many parents have sold their children hoping they will be educated and have a life better. Parents deprived of their children forever. Those who learn of the reality under which their children are living suffer psychological pain because of their role in the enslavement of their own child. In some countries they feel shamed. In other cultures they try to gather enough money to look for their children and hope to obtain the cooperation of police to rescue them. In reality, few victims of human trafficking ever return home. They are murdered, commit suicide, and die from diseases, malnutrition, and lack of proper health care. Their bodies are never returned home and they lay in graves of the unknown or disposed of in ways that they are never to be found.

The communities have lost valued and needed members of society. They are no longer able to contribute to society as healthy members. Cultural taboos often prohibit the return of those who have escaped. The population of women available as wives and future mothers has been diminished. Available men must look to other communities for a wife. Those communities may also be experiencing a shortage. Society as a whole is deprived of families and children who are never conceived.

The population of a society is diminished as a result of women of child bearing age lost to human slavery. This reduces the man-power available for work and

productivity. Generations are negatively impacted forever. The possibility of a world shortage of women available as wives and future mothers is a reality that may emerge in the coming years. This shortage could ultimately cause women to become targets for of criminals seeking to profit for other causes such as brides or for their reproductive abilities.

### Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-governmental agencies are leading in the fight to stop human trafficking. In the US and many countries throughout the world concerned advocates of social justice opened safe homes for rescued victims of human trafficking. They provide counseling, job training skills and programs to help survivors recover and begin living an independent life. They support women while they make the decision about testifying in a court of law against the brothel owner or trafficker. They assist the women in receiving health care services.

NGOs have also been very active in supporting legislation across the globe to put a stop to the trafficking of any human being. In the United States the Salvation Army has lead the way as an advocate of legislation against trafficking on a domestic and international level. Along with other faith based organizations the Salvation Army has worked to keep the movement against trafficking alive and continuously monitors international news reports of trafficking issues, victims stories, and efforts by local law enforcement agencies to arrest an prosecute pimps, brothel owners, gangs, and thugs who profit from the selling of women and children.

## Christianity in Action

Christian missionaries around the world have become involved in the rescue, care, and recovery of women and children trapped in modern day slavery. The Assembly of God World Missions in India and Nepal have been involved in the rescue of women and children for a little more than 10 years. As missionaries in the red-light district of Bombay for a program known as Teen Challenge, outreach workers began offering bible studies to teenagers. After a period of time they learned that the teenagers they had become involved with were prostitutes and slaves. Many of the women had children who were living with them in the brothels. The missionaries opened a day school for the children. They tutored them, helped them with their homework, and provided them with a safe place to eat and sleep during the hours their mothers were working. After about a year the women asked the missionaries to take their children and care for them so they would not be groomed into prostitution.

The missionaries stepped forward and provided a home for over 30 children who had been living in the brothel with their mother. They offered regular opportunities for the women to visit with their children. After another year the mothers also asked the missionaries to help them escape their fate in the brothel. Initially the missionaries were purchasing the women from the brothel owners. However it soon became apparent that the brothel owners were using the money to buy new slaves. The missionaries began developing escape plans and helping the women to carry out those plans. Once released they help the women find safe havens in their own countries or communities.

Most of the women who have escaped are malnourished and have AIDs. Most have a short life. The missionaries provided long-term care for the women who have



escaped slavery. Christianity is not forced upon the women; rather the survivors are witnessed to by example. In Nepal the women cannot return to their home communities due to the stigma attached to prostitution. If they returned their entire family would be shunned by the community. There are 7 homes of hope across India and Nepal.

A new effort is underway in Moldova. Moldova is a former soviet country. The Tip report of 2005 indicated that 1/3 of the population in Moldova has been trafficked. Missionaries in Moldova have found that children who are orphans are often trafficked. These children often run away from the orphanage or age out of the orphan system. Once on the streets they are prime targets for traffickers who offer them a better life. In the next year a home will be opened for homeless women and children in an effort to shield them from the traffickers.

Christian organizations across the country had rallied together to provide an array of services. Many of the women in Moldova have survived under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Other Christian organizations have opened half-way houses and centers where women can receive services for their addictions.

In the next year the AG will have a book published for caregivers of trafficking in an effort to help the missionaries who care for the sick and dying woman who contracted AIDs during captivity.

Video:

Fields of Muldan.