



# Matthew 25

*...whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine,  
you did for me.*

The Social Ministry Commission Newsletter  
of St. Mary's Catholic Center, College Station, Texas

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## **Human Merchandise, Shattered Lives**

*By Gerry Hince, Chair of St. Mary's Social Ministry Commission, and  
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Slavery is alive and well...in 2010.

It took an amendment to our constitution to free the slaves ... and still they exist. It took a civil war for all men to be freed ....but still they are in captivity. It took an Alabama lady, a group of Arkansas students and a march on Washington...but still people are in bondage. Human trafficking is alive and well in the world and it is time that we, as Catholics, open our eyes and realize that it does exist and we need to do something about it.

We have this vision of what is right and good in the world, but we see very little of the very evil that continues to exist. The purpose of this Matthew 25 is to create awareness about human trafficking, a contemporary form of slavery.

### **What is human trafficking?**

According to the UN, human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation includes prostitution of others, forced labor or services, slavery, or the removal of organs.

Men, women and children are all being trafficked. However, trafficking affects especially poor women, children and members of disadvantaged minority groups.

### **How bad is it you may ask?**

Human trafficking is a global phenomenon: more than 130 countries have reported cases. It is the fastest-growing criminal industry in the world, and after guns and drugs, human trafficking is the most lucrative illicit business at a worth of \$10 billion. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, between 600,000 and 800,000 victims are trafficked throughout the world each year and at least 27 million human beings are currently enslaved worldwide.

The State Department estimates that more than half of the 14,500-17,500 victims trafficked into our nation are children. Scarier yet, our own Texas Attorney General, Greg Abbot, reports that 20% of these victims pass through Texas! So, in April of this year, our beloved state of Texas created the Texas Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force to raise awareness of the issue, eliminate the demand for this kind of labor, and understand the routes the traffickers use.

### **How does this happen?**

Victims are often recruited by agencies that promise work or schooling opportunities, but once abroad, traffickees are forced to work in sweatshops or as domestics, or are

coerced into prostitution or in the sex entertainment industry. Often the victims do not realize that they are being exploited and think they are working off their debt. They are manipulated through isolation, confiscation of identity papers, threats to report them to authorities or threats to their families for non-cooperation.

The impact on victims is harsh and everlasting. Victims may suffer chronic pain or injuries from dangerous jobs, infection from contagious diseases, or the consequences of rape and sexual abuse. Additionally, many experience fear, depression, shock and guilt so severe that their social and psychological development is severely damaged. International victims have the added stress of coping with a foreign culture and language.

*Whatever is opposed to life  
itself...whatever insults human  
dignity, such as subhuman living  
conditions, arbitrary imprisonment,  
deportation, slavery, prostitution,  
the selling of women and children;  
as well as disgraceful working  
conditions, where people are  
treated as mere instruments of gain  
rather than as free and responsible  
persons; all these things and others  
like them are infamies indeed. They  
poison human society, and they do  
more harm to those who practice  
them than to those who suffer from  
the injury. Moreover, they are a  
supreme dishonor to the Creator.*

*(Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the  
Church in the Modern World, 1965, #27)*

### **Why do victims fall prey to traffickers?**

Poverty, unemployment and stagnant economic development contribute to trafficking. Victims are desperate and see migration as a way to escape an oppressive life in extreme poverty. They hope of finding better opportunity and building a brighter future elsewhere. If the root causes of the problem are economic, this is combined with a demand in developed nations for the services of the sex trade and forced labor.

## What can be done?

In order to effectively combat and eliminate human trafficking, we must respond to the factors creating a favorable environment for this form of slave trade by creating more economical opportunities in migrant sending countries, especially for women. However, human trafficking will never be truly defeated without eliminating the consumerism that feeds it and prosecuting those actors in receiving countries, including our own, that benefit because of the exploitation of vulnerable human beings.

In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI issued a message entitled "Migration: a Sign of the Times" for the 92<sup>nd</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees. He called for respect for all human beings and referred to human trafficking as "a

scourge". He then echoed the condemnation by Pope John Paul II of the "...hedonistic and commercial culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of sexuality and corrupts even very young girls into letting their bodies be used for profit."

The same year, Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, emphasized the need for the universal Church to get involved in recognizing the victims and giving them back their dignity. He went further to place the eradication of human trafficking and slavery as a priority.

There have been some success stories of victims rescued and brought to mission centers, and sometimes even reunited with their families. But more have yet to be realized.

"I never thought about escaping. Because what's out there? What's out there was scarier. We had customers who were police, so you were not going to go talk to a cop. We had this customer from Nevada who was a child psychologist, so you're not going to go talk to a social worker. So who are you going to talk to?"  
(Andrea, woman trafficked from Mexico and victim of sex trafficking)

*"The trade in human persons constitutes a shocking offence against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. It is an affront to fundamental values that are shared by all cultures and peoples, values rooted in the very nature of the human person."*

(Pope John Paul II, Vatican City, May 15, 2002)

## What others are doing about it

The federal government has invested millions of dollars (\$74 million in 2003 alone) in international programs and partnerships to try to put an end to this problem, such as:

- Rescue and Restore Campaign, working on increasing the number of identified trafficking victims and helping those victims receive the benefits and services needed to live safely in the U.S.
- Trafficking in Persons Report, ranking countries on the extent of trafficking within their borders.
- Trafficking Victims Protection Law, coordinating help to victims through their crises by providing education, training and visas in host nation.

The Catholic Church is also active through the Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking consisting of national and international Catholic agencies working to eliminate the scourge of human trafficking.

## What can you do

Pray for the end of human trafficking, for the victims and their families.

Educate yourself by visiting some of these websites:  
[www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking/about/index.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking/about/index.html)  
[www.usccb.org/mrs/trafficking/index.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/mrs/trafficking/index.shtml)  
[crs.org/public-policy/trafficking.cfm](http://crs.org/public-policy/trafficking.cfm)  
[www.humantrafficking.org](http://www.humantrafficking.org), [www.freetheslaves.net](http://www.freetheslaves.net)

Raise your voice and support efforts of effective non-government organizations: visit [crs.org/public-policy/trafficking.cfm](http://crs.org/public-policy/trafficking.cfm) and look at the "Take Action" section.

Join the Catholics Confront Global Poverty Campaign of CRS and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to eradicate poverty in the world, a root cause of human trafficking ([www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty)).

*It is essential to engage in a battle, at the national and international levels, against the violations of the dignity of boys and girls caused by sexual exploitation, by those caught up in pedophilia, and by every kind of violence directed against these most defenseless of human creatures. These are criminal acts that must be effectively fought with adequate preventive and penal measures by the determined action of the different authorities involved.*

(Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, the Vatican, 2004, # 245)

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**Interested in learning more about Social Justice and the Catholic Social Teaching? Join the Conversations about Contemporary Concerns this summer, where each week a social justice topic will be presented and discussed. Come to any of the sessions every Tuesday at 7 PM in room 201 of the Student Center from June 1 to August 3. Check St. Mary's website for more information on the topics to be discussed.**