

FOR PUBLICATION 16/6/2019

CEC SUMMER SCHOOL ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Rights under threat – Stand up for Refugees & Migrants Rights

2-6 July 2017 – Palermo, Italy

THEOLOGICAL PAPER ON TRAFFICKING ORTHODOX APPROACH

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Introduction

Living in the 21st century and speaking about human trafficking sounds rather contradictory. Almost twenty-one centuries of preaching the Gospel and nearly two couples of centuries after the Enlightenment humanity should enjoy the fruit of its spiritual struggle as well as its other fights for freedom, equality and solidarity (liberté, égalité, fraternité). The salvation message of the Gospel on the one hand, and the social fights, the financial, technological, scientific and cultural development on the other, should have brought to people prosperity and joy. Nevertheless, issues such as human trafficking -which is actually a modern term to express slavery in its worst form- points back to a premature age of humanity. As the prophet Amos says: “they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes”¹, reminding and bringing the past into the present and introducing as to the very essence of the problem.

Slavery and Human Trafficking

Probably, slavery and human exploitation are issues as old as the human species. Slavery was a common social status quo, a certain characteristic, in the Middle East civilizations, including the ancient Israel. Slavery was known in the ancient Greece and in the Greco-Roman world more widely, as slaves constituted a special social class in the society's structure. Sometimes, to be a slave (δούλος) was a matter of origin that means that a human was a slave by birth, if

¹ Amos 2,6-7.

his/her parents were slaves. Also, a slave was a person whose freedom was deprived at some moment and he/she turned to be the property of his/her master, working for him and serving him according to his wishes. Usually, a human's freedom could be deprived because of his debts during war times or severe crisis. It was possible that a captured could be sold as a slave in one of the many slave markets of the ancient world. Furthermore, slaves could be peasants or well-educated people; or they could be natives who decided to live like that², as a mean to live. For example, in the New Testament times some people chose to be slaves in order to have their needs covered by their masters, like the parable of the Lost Son who came back to his father asking to accept him as one of his servants³.

Later on, during the colonization, slavery was not a matter of financial status anymore but a matter of race and skin colour. Actually, in the New World black people were considered to be slaves just because of their origin and their skin colour. A certain mentality was developed that time according to which black people were inferior and meant to be slaves by God's will. This mentality contributed greatly to the increase of "man-stealing", which is what happened in Africa especially in the 19th century. Slave-hunters went all over the black continent, stole African people and sold them to slave-traders. They were trafficked to Northern America and as many of them managed to survive during the voyage they served as very cheap working hands at farms and plantations.

In any case, slavery is the opposite of freedom; still, humanity took great advantage of human slavery in order to establish its domain and build its high prestige all over the world. The sharp dichotomic distinction between free people and slaves provided the paradigm for the development of states and reigns, for colonies, farming, agricultural production and every kind of financial activity⁴. Usually, slavery has been seen as something natural or as simply an inevitable evil, a way of doing business aiming to the growth of the economy and the wellbeing of the ones who could afford to have slaves. This is somehow the case nowadays as human trafficking is "the fastest growing criminal activity in the world and one of the

² Lev. 25:39–40; Deut. 15:12.

³ Luk. 15:11–32.

⁴ Παβλ. *Did slavery make economic sense? Slavery worked for slave-owners but for very few others at*

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2013/09/economic-history-2> where one can find bibliography list as well.

most lucrative”. Human trafficking is considered to be the third more profitable enterprise, following the gun trade and the drug trade. Seen from another sight, human trafficking is a complex political, social, legal and police trouble⁵.

Remarks on Slavery and Human Trafficking

At this point, it is useful to note a few remarks:

- ◇ Slavery still blossoms in the form of trafficked people⁶ who are indeed the modern slaves. This modern form of slavery is expressed in many different and probably more severe forms than in the past: women, men and children are subjects of sex trafficking, sexual abuse, rape; human labour trafficking; trafficking for organ trade; forced marriage as well as surrogate mothers. In order to control these people, forced drug use and addiction is used that makes the problem even worst and entraps the victims in the drug affair.
- ◇ These forms of human trafficking address to numerous buyers, not only corrupted people. Especially, when it comes to trafficking for organ trade, individuals are involved in order to save ill members of their beloved families and things are getting complicated. Sometimes, those individuals choose not to have any knowledge about the origin of the organs they need for transplantation in order to avoid the ethical dilemma and the feeling of being guilt.
- ◇ Still, all these forms of human trafficking have the same characteristics which sum up to violence, injustice and humiliation of the human being. No doubt that here lays a crucial issue that challenges the Churches to think how to react and what to do.
- ◇ Human trafficking is a crime that takes place all over the world. There are human trafficking networks spreading in all continents, using the transportation means and every kind of communication, especially the internet and the social media, in order to organize and conduct their enterprise. Thus, as a global problem, human trafficking requires the cooperation of

⁵ See indicatively Ιω. Ταμιχτοής, *Το έγκλημα της παράνομης διακίνησης και εκμετάλλευσης ανθρώπων: Μια συνοπτική παρουσίαση του ζητήματος*, στο «ΠοινΔικ 10/2008 at https://www.academia.edu/2013796/The_crime_of_Human_Trafficking (9/9/2019).

⁶ Trafficked people are held against their will and they are forced to work for traffickers or others. See indicatively the UN documents at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking> (8/6/2019).

nations, governments, peoples and institutions; religious communities; Churches and inter-church bodies like the Conference of European Churches, the World Council of Churches and other organizations as well. An organized effort to develop “a global, multi-stakeholder strategy”, to create synergies for anti-trafficking activities and to coordinate similar efforts throughout the world is made by the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, known as UN.GIFT⁷.

- ◇ There are many statistics pointing out that more than 27 million people live in slavery worldwide, a number that is more than double of the total number of slaves transported during the transatlantic slave trade⁸.
- ◇ Human trafficking seems to increase as part of a growing mentality that considers the human being as an exploitation product and disregards its value as God’s creature, as well as its role in his providence.
- ◇ Poverty, inequality, injustice, unemployment, oppression, fear and despair contribute a great deal to the disorder of the human nature. Victims of human trafficking are vulnerable people such as women and children, especially refugees and emigrants. Recently, during the refugee waves coming from Syria and Afghanistan to Greece, it is estimated that a huge number of children and teenagers is missing. According to some statistics based on NGO and civil services, more than 10,000 underage refugees were disappeared from the European database during a time of 18 months (late 2015 – 2016). Nobody knows where they are or whether they had been kidnapped⁹.
- ◇ Similarly, in other countries there is the same problem. Although there are no any certain data about the missing persons, it is estimated that in some European countries 50% of unaccompanied underage persons are missing from the reception places¹⁰. For example, in Great Britain, the British Asylum Screening Unit reported that 60% of unaccompanied minors that are hosted in social care centres are usually

⁷ See United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UN.Gift, *Human Trafficking: An Overview*, United Nations, New York, 2008 at <https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2008> (8/6/2019).

⁸ See <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19831913> (8/6/2019).

⁹ See <http://www.kathimerini.gr/848548/gallery/epikairothta/ellada/ta-e3afanisma-na-paidia-twn-prosfygikwn-rown> (8/6/2019).

¹⁰ op.cit.

disappear and they never appear. In Sweden, in the city of Treleborg, 1,000 unaccompanied minors out of 1,900 that arrived in September 2015 have been disappeared. In Germany, on the 1st January 2016, the Federal Police (BKA) reported that 4,749 unaccompanied minors are considered to be missing¹¹.

Where are those children of God? Are they still alive or not? Is there any chance that Church and Theology might offer them any help? As far as Theology can tell, the answer is positive, it can serve to this global fight, to work out this issue, to find the biblical sources and to reflect on the biblical teaching and the Church tradition throughout the centuries; to rise interest and awareness and make people to react and condemn human slavery wherever they meet it; and it can bring into dialogue the concern of the secular world and thought with the Gospel message and the eschatological perspective of the Church, which is the salvation of all creatures in the Kingdom of God.

Slavery in the Bible and Human Trafficking nowadays:

1) Slavery in the Bible

There are multiple references to slavery in the Old as well as in the New Testament. Already in the Book of Genesis the story of Joseph is one of human theft and slavery. His brothers sold Joseph, the son of Jacob, as a slave to the Ishmaelites¹².

In the following Book of Exodus there is another reference to “human stealing” as a crime; the penalty for that action, according the Mosaic Law, was death: “Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death”¹³.

It is evident that in the New Testament slave-traders are considered to be “ungodly and sinful”, similar to the ones who kill their parents; they are alike to murderers, adulterers and perverts, and liars and perjurers¹⁴.

Despite the condemnation of “human stealing”, in another Book of the Old Testament, the Numbers 31, as well as in other passages, the Israelites might take female captives during war times¹⁵.

¹¹ <http://www.iefimerida.gr/news/254628/oli-i-alitheia-gia-ta-asynodeyta-prosfygopoyla> (8/6/2019).

¹² Gen. 37:12-36. Acts 7:9-10.

¹³ Ex. 21:16.

¹⁴ 1 Tim. 1:8–10.

¹⁵ See indicatively Numb. 31:9-12.

In other passages of the Old and the New Testament instructions are given on how slaves should be treated¹⁶. On the other hand, there are advices on how slaves should act towards their masters. For example, apostle Paul did encourage slaves to submit to their masters¹⁷. Still, he does not mean that slavery is good and acceptable as in 1 Cor. 7:21 he urges the victims as following, “If you can gain your freedom, do so”. And this is in accordance to the Jewish Law that gave the possibility to a slave or servant to escape if his master did not treat him well¹⁸.

The Bible teaching

So, which is the biblical teaching in regard to slavery? This is a crucial question and many people think that the Bible, especially the Old Testament, justifies slavery. It needs a careful and clear look to see that it is not truth.

Biblical passages clearly state that kidnapping or stealing and keep capture or sell a human being is punished by death. It is very striking that the Septuagint text refers to stealing of a soul, meaning a living human being: “Εάν δὲ ἀλῶ ἄνθρωπος **κλέπτων ψυχὴν ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν αὐτοῦ τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ** καὶ καταδυναστεύσας αὐτὸν ἀποδῶται, **ἀποθανεῖται ὁ κλέπτης ἐκεῖνος**· καὶ ἐξαρεῖς τὸν πονηρὸν ἐξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν” (Deut. 24:7)¹⁹.

The story of Philemon and Onesimus is probably the one, which sums up the biblical teaching on slavery. Paul urges Philemon not only to take Onesimus back but also to receive him as a fellow Christian, as his brother in Christ²⁰. In other words, Paul asks Philemon to accept his slave as equal to him, because “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). This is a real revolution, a real rebirth of humanity, which has the possibility to live in a new way following the way of Christ. And this is the way the Church shows to humanity a new model of life, the life in Christ. This is the contribution of Christians to the world.

¹⁶ Deut. 15:12-15; Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1.

¹⁷ Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-24.

¹⁸ Deut. 23:15-16.

¹⁹ See the study of M. Theocharous, “Stealing Souls: Human Trafficking and Deuteronomy 24:7” in J.S. DeRouchie, J. Gile, and K.J. Turner (eds), *For Our Good Always, Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block*. Published also in Greek: Μ. Θεοχάρους, «Κλέπται ψυχῶν»: ἡ παράνομη διακίνηση ἀνθρώπων ὑπὸ το φῶς τοῦ Δευτερονομίου 24:7 στο «Σύναξη» 134 (2015), σ. 4-21.

²⁰ See the Epistle of St Paul to Philemon.

Why Churches should be concerned about human trafficking?

There is that story of God's covenant people, Israel, who experienced that bitterness of slavery in the land of Egypt²¹. Israel as the archetype of the Church of Christ knows what slavery means, thus the Church also knows what slavery to any master is, either if it is the Pharaoh or any other human being that wishes to harm God's creature. God helped the people of Israel to escape from Egypt and Christ offered himself as ransom (λύτρο) for the salvation of humanity. Now, there is only one Lord (**Κύριος**) and people might be slaves (**δούλοι Κυρίου**) only to him, because being a slave to him we become really sons and daughters of him (**υιοί και θυγατέρες Κυρίου**).

Also, there are many biblical passages pointing out the responsibility of the Church of Christ towards the victims of this world as Christ himself claims:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour”²².

Israel as the archetype of the Church had the experience not only of slavery but of God's mercy as well. From captured the people of God became free and reached the Promised Land. Because Israel received this holy gift thus the people of God, the “new Israel” that is the Church should show her gratitude helping her brothers and sisters who suffer.

Besides, Christ's teaching is about “love for those in need”²³. This love is not about a moral principle nor a passive attitude. Love in Christ means to act, as the Book of Proverbs (31:8-9) clearly urges the faithful: “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy”.

2) Human trafficking

Human trafficking has the same meaning as slavery does. According to the United Nations definition human trafficking is

²¹ Lev. 19:33-34.

²² Luk. 4:18-19 (Is. 61:2).

²³ Luk. 10:25-37.

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the 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 a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”²⁴.

In other words, human trafficking includes multiple ways of human exploitation a sick mind could imagine, as “people are viewed as a cash value and a renewable resource”²⁵. As it is typically said, anyone of any race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic level, religion, physical capacity, and age can be a victim. As a matter of fact, human trafficking defies stereotypes”²⁶.

Nevertheless, victims of trafficking are mostly vulnerable people such as orphans, widows, foreigners (refugees, emigrants) poor and needy. For all these the Bible teaching clearly states that they should be respected and protected²⁷. And it is clear that human trafficking is an immediate consequence of forced migration.

There are numerous biblical passages urging us to act supporting the victims of trafficking and fight against this crime. Human trafficking should be a great concern for the Church as it is about caring for people in need. In the person of each of them, we should see Christ, according to the biblical teaching as it is written in Matthew 25:35-46²⁸. Furthermore, one could mention several biblical passages

²⁴ See Article 3 of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/19223>).

²⁵ Tally Flint, *The Girl Next Door: A Christian Response to Human Trafficking*, in “APU Life”, Spring 2011 at http://static.apu.edu/static/src/sites/articles/downloads/apulife/apulife_2011_spring.pdf (8/6/2019).

²⁶ Tally Flint, op.cit.

²⁷ See indicatively Ps. 82:3; Is. 1:17.

²⁸ “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me”.

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a

expressing the same idea of love, compassion and caring, explaining why the Church should be alert in regard to the human trafficking issue. And all conclude to what Psalm 82:3 points out: “Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed”.

Coming back to our initial question about the biblical teaching on human trafficking, we should stress that this is seen as a crime and as “a sin against the victim” and as “a sin against God”²⁹.

As a matter of fact, the Bible does not condemn the practice of slavery and human stealing; but it punishes it, although slavery was different that time as well as the social status. Still the Bible condemns racism and race-based slavery as it teaches that all human beings are created by God and made in His image (Gen. 1:27).

Anyhow, the purpose of the Bible is not to reform society but to make everything new in Christ. Coming back to Joseph’s story, his brothers sold him to the Ismaelites but God did not abandon him. On the contrary, he was with him and he rescued him from all evil. He helped him to turn evil into good, so Joseph became great and he had the possibility to help his family and his people. This story reveals the teaching of the Old Testament, that slavery is not blessed nor justified. It is a human manufacture; the almighty God is revealed in every situation and he can turn evil into good, as the biblical text states.

Religions and Churches towards human trafficking

stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?”

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life”». See the text at <https://www.bible.com/bible/111/MAT.25.NIV>.

²⁹ J. Holcomb, *Human Trafficking in God’s World* at <http://www.christianity.com/christian-life/art-and-culture/human-trafficking-gods-world.html> (8/6/2019).

Religions against human trafficking

In 2014, for the first time in history major leaders of many religions, Buddhists, Anglicans, Catholics and Orthodox Christians, Hindus, Jewish, and Muslims, came together to demonstrate their opposition to human trafficking. They agreed that they are committed to a common aim, to fight against modern-day slavery. They signed a declaration calling for the elimination of slavery and human trafficking by the year 2020. Among the personalities that signed it, there is Pope Francis, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, and the Metropolitan Emmanuel of France as the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

Christians against human trafficking

A very significant inter-Christian initiative to fight human trafficking and modern slavery is the “International Forum on Modern Slavery”. It came up as a result of two major hierarchs’ concern, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby. Their joint efforts started in 2014 and they still go on. The first official step was the Forum’s first meeting in Istanbul from 6 to 7 February 2017, co-sponsored by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church of England. Under the title “Sins before our eyes”, the Forum tried to rise interest for the protection of human life, freedom and dignity. It brought together a number of distinguished scholars, practitioners, and policymakers from around the world. It concluded underlying the role of the Church as well as worldwide religious and human-right communities in the fight against modern slavery³⁰.

Furthermore, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of All England Justin Welby signed a Joint Declaration, “condemning all forms of human enslavement as the most heinous of sins inasmuch as it violates the free will and the integrity of every human being created in the image of God”³¹. They also “encouraged state leaders to find appropriate and effective ways of prosecuting those involved in human trafficking, preventing all forms of modern-day slavery, and

³⁰ Communiqué: *Forum on Modern Slavery Held at the Phanar* at https://www.patriarchate.org/news-release/-/asset_publisher/N2gTPQxXwPIE/content/communiqu-forum-on-modern-slavery-held-at-the-phanar?_101_INSTANCE_N2gTPQxXwPIE_languageId=en_US. See also *Modern Slavery - A Joint Declaration* at <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/modern-slavery-a-joint-declaration?inheritRedirect=true> (8/6/2017).

³¹ See also *Modern Slavery - A Joint Declaration* at <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/modern-slavery-a-joint-declaration?inheritRedirect=true> (8/6/2017).

protecting its victims in our communities and promoting hope wherever people are exploited”³².

This effort went on with another Conference of the “International Forum on Modern Slavery” that took place in Buenos Aires, 5-8 May 2018 under the theme “Old Problems in the New World”³³. The participants were mostly from Latin America and the American continent in order to rise interest in this special area. A third Conference of the Forum was held on the 7th and 8th of February 2019 in Istanbul, in order to study “Awareness, Action and Impact” on issues of human slavery³⁴.

It seems that this Forum is indeed a joint taskforce on modern slavery, under the auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Archbishop of Canterbury, and it greatly helps to raise awareness and to study ways to overcome this problem of evil.

Last but not least it should be mentioned that the work of KEC greatly contributes to the discussion.

For the Orthodox, human trafficking is a modern “Plague”, like the ten Plagues of Egypt. The Orthodox Church “emphasizes the protection of human dignity and freedom as of vital importance for the Church as well as worldwide religious and human-rights communities. This priority was clearly articulated at the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete (June 2016), where the Orthodox Primates and Hierarchs declared in their final Encyclical: “The Church lives not for herself. She offers herself for the whole of humanity in order to raise up and renew the world into new heavens and a new earth”³⁵”.

Thus, during St Basil as well as John’s Chrysostom Liturgy (4th century) we pray to God for

“Free those who are held captive by unclean spirits;
sail with those who sail;
travel with those who travel;
defend the widows;
protect the orphans;

³² Op.cit.

³³ Press Release, *Old problems in the new world: A Forum on Modern Slavery* at <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/old-problems-in-the-new-world-a-forum-on-modern-slavery?inheritRedirect=true>

³⁴ Press Release, *Awareness, Action and Impact: A Forum on Modern Slavery* at https://www.patriarchate.org/news-archives/-/asset_publisher/N2gTPQxXwPIE/content/awareness-action-and-impact-a-forum-on-modern-slavery?_101_INSTANCE_N2gTPQxXwPIE_languageId=en_US.

³⁵ <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/communiqu-forum-on-modern-slavery-held-at-the-phanar?inheritRedirect=true>

liberate the captives;
heal the sick.

Remember, Lord, those who are in mines, in exile, in harsh labor, and those in every kind of affliction, necessity, or distress”.

Today, as always, we Christians commit ourselves to “the sacred struggle against modern slavery”³⁶ and we join our efforts to defeat it. The ecumenical movement and ecumenical organizations like KEK have a great contribution as they offer the meeting place for the Church-members to discuss and coordinate their fight against evil and sin.

³⁶ See *Sins before our Eyes: Opening Address By His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* at <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/sins-before-our-eyes-opening-address-by-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew?inheritRedirect=true> (8/6/2017).