

Slavery in the 21st Century

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

Before reading any farther, take this quiz to see how much you know about slavery in the world today.

1. In the world today there are:
 - (a) No slaves
 - (b) 2 million slaves
 - (c) 27 million slaves

2. How many people were taken from Africa during the entire trans-atlantic slave trade?
 - (a) 13 million
 - (b) 30 million
 - (c) 1 million

3. Slavery is:
 - (a) Illegal everywhere
 - (b) Legal in some countries
 - (c) Legal everywhere

ANSWERS: 1. (c) — 2. (a) — 3. (a)

Source: Free the Slaves,
http://www.freetheslaves.net/files/edpack_1.pdf

Story of a Modern Day Slave

When Victoria was 17 years old, she had just graduated from high school in Chisinau, the capital of the former Soviet republic of Moldova. But having graduated, her dreams seemed to disintegrate. She explained, “There was no work, no money.” So when a friend—”at least I thought he was a friend”—said that he could help her get a job in a factory in Turkey, she took up his offer to drive her there, through Romania. “But when I realized we had driven west, to the border with Serbia, I knew something was wrong.” It was too late. At the border, they were met by a group of Serb men who gave her a new passport that said she was 18, and her friend left her there. The men led her on foot into Serbia and raped her, telling her that she would be killed if she resisted. Then they sent her - with guards to prevent her from escaping - to Bosnia. Victoria was treated as a piece of property and bought and sold ten times over the next two years by different brothel owners, for an average price of \$1,500. For these brothel owners, Victoria was kept as a debt slave. Payment for her services went straight to her owner until her “debt,” or the amount she had been bought for from the previous owner, could be paid off. But each time she began to approach that amount, she was sold again and had to begin to work towards a new amount all over again. Finally, after three years, Victoria escaped when she was four months pregnant and fearing a forced abortion. She went into hiding in the Bosnian city of Mostar and is being sheltered by a group of Bosnian women.

Source: National Geographic Magazine, <http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0309/feature1/>



What types of slavery exist today?

There are more slaves in the world today than were captured from Africa during four centuries of slave trade. Today, an estimated **27 million people are enslaved around the world** in some form. The organization Free the Slaves uses these categories to differentiate types of modern day slavery:

Bonded labor

A person becomes bonded when their labor is demanded as a means of repayment of a loan or money given in advance. There are 20 million people working as bonded laborers worldwide. This is particularly common in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Brazil and the Caribbean.

Forced labor

This affects people who are illegally recruited by governments, political parties or private individuals, and forced to work, usually under threat of violence. Every year, Burma's military dictatorship enslaves tens of thousands of people to work as porters for the army or on government construction projects.

Worst forms of child labor

This refers to children who work in dangerous or exploitative conditions. While not all child labor is slavery, millions of children worldwide work in conditions of slavery.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children

Children are exploited through prostitution, trafficking and pornography. They are often kidnapped, bought, or forced to enter the sex market. Child sex tourism is particularly common in Asia.

Trafficking

This involves the transport and/or trade of humans, usually women or children, for economic gain and involves force or deception. Often migrant women and girls are tricked and forced into domestic work and prostitution. Women from Asia, Africa, Central and Eastern Europe and South America are trafficked frequently to regions such as the US, EU, Japan and the Middle East.

Early and forced marriage

Women and girls are married without choice and forced into a life of servitude, and often physical violence. This occurs in North Africa and some Asian countries.

Traditional or 'chattel' slavery

Today people are still bought and sold as commodities. They are often abducted from their homes, inherited or given as gifts. This is common in West Africa, particularly Mauritania.

Directions: Read the case studies on the next 2 pages. Into what category of slavery (from page 2) can you fit each of the following case studies? (Some may fall into more than one category.)

Case Study: Iqbal

In Pakistan, desperately poor families go to a feudal employer, usually a brick kiln owner or a carpet manufacturer, and ask them for a loan, perhaps to pay for medical treatment for a sick child. In return for the loan, the entire family is turned into the private property of the employer. They are forced to work long hours for a very low wage. Half of these wages are kept by the factory owner as payment towards the loan. The loan may take a generation or more to pay off. But until it is paid, the family is held in slavery.

At the age of four, Iqbal, now 12-years old, had been sold to a carpet manufacturer to pay back his mother's loan. For years he spent twelve hours a day, seven days a week working in carpet factories. Many children like Iqbal work in dangerous and hazardous conditions. The ventilation is bad. Therefore, asthma, bronchitis, tuberculosis are common because of inhalation of the fibers.

Case Study: Asibit

Asibit's experience is typical of many former slaves in Niger. She was a slave for 50 years. She was born a slave, her mother, husband and children were all slaves. She had to work all day from early in the morning, preparing food for the master and his family, milking camels, collecting water and firewood, and doing all the household chores. She had to move her master's heavy tent four times a day so he and the mistress remained sitting in the shade. She was never paid, She was only given one tenth of the camel milk and leftovers.

Case Study: Maria

In 1997, Maria was approached by an acquaintance who told her about restaurants in the United States in need of workers. Hoping to make enough money to support her daughter and parents, Maria accepted the offer and was brought from Mexico to Texas. When she arrived, however, she found that there was no restaurant job. The boss expected her to work as a prostitute to pay off her smuggling debt. When she resisted, she was beaten. If she or the other women with her refused a customer, they were raped. She was 18 years old, with no money and no way to get home. She found herself constantly under guard. She and the other women were transported to different locations every few weeks, so they never knew where they were. The armed guards also threatened to injure their family members in Mexico if the women tried to escape.



Case Studies (cont.)

Case Study: Drissa

Drissa was forced to work as a slave on a cocoa plantation in Cote d'Ivoire. He was stolen from his parents, shipped to the Ivory Coast and sold to the cocoa farmers. He earns no money for his work, is barely fed, and is beaten if he tries to escape. He and the other child slaves have to work from six in the morning until about 6:30 at night in the cocoa fields. He probably will never see his family again.

Case Study: Laxmi

Laxmi, 10, and her elder sister, were married on the same day. Laxmi had completed grade 5 in school, while her sister had never attended school. Shivnarain, Laxmi's new husband, continued on in school until he passed grade 10, while Laxmi was not allowed to finish. Now, Shivnarain will go off to the central reserve police force and Laxmi will return home until he returns. Laxmi's sister also returned home because her husband had severe psychological problems and her parents are now among arranging a second marriage for her.

Case Study: John

In 1992, the American corporation Unocal entered into a joint venture with Burma's military dictatorship (then called the SLORC, or State Law and Order Restoration Council) and a French corporation to construct and operate an oil pipeline running across the interior of the country to Thailand. It was eventually discovered, however, that the SLORC "forced hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of ordinary Burmese...to 'contribute' their labor, often under harsh working conditions, to construction projects," according to the U.S. State Department). John was one of the people who experienced the slavery firsthand. Soldiers ordered the people in his village to relocate, allegedly because the village was in the way of the pipeline. John says that the soldiers really wanted the village to move to where it could be an easy pool of labor. Every day, the villagers say, large numbers of villagers were rounded up and sent out to perform exhausting labor clearing roads, serving as porters, or cleaning the soldiers' camps. The villagers say that those who refused to work, or who became too weak, were often killed. Others, they say, were beaten and tortured. Many of the women conscripted for work on the pipeline tell stories of being raped at knifepoint by soldiers as their families stood by helplessly and watched.

Where Slavery Exists

Directions: On the map below, show the areas of the world in which the different types of slavery defined on the previous page are still widespread. Use the geographic areas mentioned in the definitions on page 2 to complete the activity.

- ◆ Use a blue pen to show where forced marriage is most common.
- ◆ Use a black pen to mark where traditional or ‘chattel’ slavery is still common.
- ◆ Use a purple marker to show where bonded labor is prevalent.
- ◆ Use a green marker to show where people are trafficked from. Use a red pen to show the recipient countries of trafficked women (where the women are trafficked to). Draw a line from the green to red.
- ◆ With orange, circle the continent where the commercial sexual exploitation of children is most common.



Slavery in Pictures



“Profitable Pain,” by Jodi Cobb, National Geographic

This boy, Krishna, is a beggar at Mumbai’s Chatrapati Shivaji railway terminal. Krishna’s scarred back draws sympathy from passersby and he collects more money than uninjured beggars. The two women are part of a network at the railway terminal that controls stable begging and they take every rupee that Krishna collects. He sleeps in the station, finds water to drink and wash from puddles under train cars, and survives on scraps of food from passersby.



“Tainted Treasure,” by Jodi Cobb, National Geographic

These children are forced to handweave carpets in India, and their owner sells the carpets for high prices in the U.S. and other rich countries.



“Life in a Cage,” by Jodi Cobb, National Geographic

This girl, Surekha, has been forced to spend most of her life in this four-by-six foot brothel cell. She has been infected by HIV as a result of being kept as a sex slave in the brothel.

Facts on Slavery in the 21st Century

- ◆ Slavery is illegal in every part of the world, but there are about 27 million people still held in slavery.
- ◆ Modern day slaves are not usually held in chains, and they are rarely bought or sold in public.
- ◆ Slaves can be male or female and may be as young as 4 years old (but a person can also be born a slave), and may continue to work until death.
- ◆ Slaves may work up to 20 hours a day, sometimes more, up to 7 days a week, and 365 days a year.
- ◆ Debt bondage is the most common form of slavery. People become bonded laborers when they take or are tricked into taking a loan for as little as \$36 – the cost of medicine for a sick child in some countries. To repay the debt, they are forced to work long hours, usually in secret locations. Often, they continue to be held in slavery long after the original debt has been repaid.
- ◆ The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates there are more than 80 million children under 14 worldwide who work in conditions hazardous to their health. At the worst end of that spectrum are child slaves who receive no wage. There is no accurate estimate of their numbers.
- ◆ The US Government estimates that 700,000 to 2 million women and children are trafficked across borders each year to be used as illegal labor or sex workers. This does not take into account those trafficked within a country nor does it include men. Trafficking is the fastest growing form of forced labor.
- ◆ There may be up to 10 million slaves in India alone, while other parts of Asia, Africa, Central and Eastern Europe and South America, make up most of the rest. The U.S., EU, Japan and the Middle East are the most common recipients of trafficked women.
- ◆ Out of 6 billion people in the world today, 1.5 billion live on less than \$1 per day. People who are poor and desperate can be tricked into debt bondage or may be captured and forced to work in houses, on farms, as soldiers or even as prostitutes. Slaves can be replaced easily when they are too ill or old to work as there are many more people who can be tricked into working for nothing.
- ◆ Huge profits are made by today's slave holders, as slaves are paid little or nothing. The total yearly profit created by slaves is around \$14 billion.

Prayer

Freeing God, you look with love and pain upon the many people in this world who are enslaved. Help we who are free to work for the liberation of those who are not. Help us to remember our privilege and to be constantly motivated to use our influence to change what is unjust. Amen.

Discussion Questions

Who is most likely to become forced or tricked into slavery in today's world?

What principles of Catholic Social Teaching does slavery violate?

What should be done to better protect those who are most vulnerable to slavery? What do you think are at the roots of the problem and what changes need to be made?

