



# EBF Anti-trafficking Resource Book 4

Root Causes

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# Root Causes of Human Trafficking and Prostitution

*By Lauran Bethell*

When I arrived in as a new missionary in Thailand in 1986, I had never previously heard the term “human trafficking”. But every day during that long, hot year studying the Thai language, I had to walk through a red-light district on my way to school, and I would see hundreds of young women working in prostitution. I couldn’t imagine that they were all there “by choice”, and so I started a research project in my free time to find out why they were working there. I volunteered and taught them English—just so I could hear their stories and answer my silent, unstated question: “Why are you here?” Their answer shocked me: they told me that they were supporting their moms and dads and brothers and sister, and sometimes their own children. They were providing them with food and shelter and transportation and schooling. Never in my life had I ever imagined that I would have been expected to drop out of school and go to work to support my family. And NEVER would my family have encouraged me to work in prostitution to support them.

Over these past twenty-plus-years, I’ve talked to hundreds and hundreds of young women who have worked in prostitution all over the world, and I always have the underlying question in my mind: what drove you into prostitution? Their reasons were many and various. This paper will present underlying causes for people working in prostitution and dispel the myth that prostitution is a “choice”. Yes, in some cases, a choice was made. But I often say that “choice” has a very thin veneer: scratch beneath its thin surface and you find deep and complex issues and vulnerabilities which predispose and push towards prostitution. As we shed light on the vulnerabilities we can begin to address them and work towards preventing prostitution and helping victims to be restored to new life.

## *The Scope of Human Trafficking:*

Human beings are trafficked for both labor exploitation as well as sexual exploitation in the prostitution and pornography industries. It includes BOTH cross-border AND domestic situations and can also include involuntary servitude, slavery, debt bondage, and forced labor. Women, men and children are victims of human trafficking—but the majority of victims are women and children—and the vast majority of women and children are trafficked into the sex industry. Hence, I will focus this presentation on the trafficking and prostitution of women and children.

And about statistics with regard to human trafficking: due to the covert nature of the crime, the invisibility of victims and high levels of under-reporting, actual statistics are often unavailable, and very often are contradictory. For example, the United Nations estimates are between 700,000 to 4 million women and children who are trafficked around the world for purposes of forced prostitution, labor and other forms of exploitation every year. That's a huge range. And human trafficking is estimated to generate between \$7 billion and \$31 billion dollars annually. Those are enormous statistical gaps that simply cannot be verified. What we know for sure is that human trafficking is big business—and is second only to drugs in the world of illegal activity in this world. And what I know for sure, is that once your eyes have been opened to the reality of human trafficking in your midst, you will find it all around you.

My definition of human trafficking is “the exploitation of vulnerability”. **Human trafficking equals the exploitation of vulnerability.** (“HT=Exploitation of Vulnerability”). And the very nature of the word “trafficking” implies a movement. **The movement is from exploitation to vulnerability.** The aim of this paper is to look at the major vulnerability issues and then discuss ways that we as Believers in Jesus and in Jesus’ Teachings can address and prevent exploitation and vulnerability and also bring hope and healing to victims.

So why are people vulnerable to the victimization of human trafficking? My own experience, interviews and research points to 3 major broad categories. They all overlap in some ways, but I believe that these 3 categories illustrate the majority of reasons for vulnerability and victimization.

## *The First Vulnerability—Poverty:*

The first is the most obvious, as I have already discussed: economic hardship. Poverty. But not all impoverished women and girls work in prostitution. Twenty-five years ago, when I was first meeting Thai women and girls in prostitution in Bangkok, they told me that they were working in prostitution in order to send money home to their mothers and fathers and to support their brothers

and sisters. They were providing food and new houses and vehicles and school fees for their families. They would tell me that they were “sacrificing” themselves for their families. They were raised from birth to believe that the value of their life was dependent on how much money they could make for their families. Their families’ economic difficulty combined with the cultural value of familial obligation creates vulnerability that is exploited. In many community-based cultures around the world, the girl child is raised with this value—that she is economically responsible for her family. And if she has little or no education, and sees prostitution as the way to make the most money possible for her family, then she will sacrifice herself in this way.

One time I asked the father of a young woman why he had sold his daughter into prostitution not once, but twice. His answer: “whatever my daughter can do to make my life better is what she should do”. At the Center where I served, we were able to help this young woman receive an education and get a good job. But every month up until the day he died, this young woman sent fully half of everything she earned back to her father—even though she knew that most of the money was going to support his opium addiction. Though we begged and pleaded and tried to help her in every possible way to do otherwise, it was deeply engrained that she had an obligation to support parents—no matter what. This familial commitment, especially in community-based cultures, is exploited by traffickers and perpetrators alike. How often I heard men justify their use of women and children in prostitution in Thailand, saying that by paying for sex, they were helping the girl’s family because she was sending the money home. Poverty and culture interplay and create vulnerability that is exploited.

### ***The Second Vulnerability: Childhood Sexual Abuse***

If poverty and culture are exploited in developing countries, then why are there so many women and young girls who are victims of human trafficking and prostitution in developed countries? The second vulnerability factor is the incidence of childhood sexual abuse. In my own country, the USA, as many as 70-95% of those working in prostitution have been sexually abused as children in their families or communities. Sexual abuse does inestimable harm to the soul of young person. Children who have been abused live with immense sexual confusion which can lead to their identities being defined by sexual expression. One young woman I know was abused at a young age by her step-father. She told me that when she came into adolescence, the only way she could relate to boys was through sex. By the time she was 18, she said “I had given away sex so many times that I decided I should at least make money from it.” A pimp, poised as her “boyfriend” encouraged her, took most of the money she made, acted as her

“protector” and exploited her vulnerability. She descended into addictions to drugs and alcohol and continues to struggle with multiple mental health issues.

In the USA, Canada and the UK, substance abuse and prostitution very often go hand in hand. People often say, “they’re working to support drug habits”. That may be true. Often, drugs are used to numb the emotional pain of an abusive childhood—and result in the downward spiral of addiction to both the drugs and to the prostitution that supports the habit. In many cases, the pimps have forced the drug abuse in order to keep the girls and women dependent and in an endless cycle of working for drugs—and providing money for him.

In the USA the vast majority of women who are working in prostitution began when they were 12-14 years old. Often, they were running away from dysfunctional family and community situations, most often, as noted, victims of childhood sexual abuse. In their confusion they were met in bus stations and on the street by people who offered them shelter and food—and who exploited their immediate need and their vulnerability. After accepting the perceived “generosity” of their benefactors, they were raped and sometimes beaten and threatened into submission. Their “benefactors” turned into pimps posing as “protectors”. What they do, should not be labeled “prostitution”. It is child abuse. It has only been in this decade that this form of domestic human trafficking has finally been more widely identified for what it is: the trafficking of minor children. Human trafficking does not necessarily mean that geographic borders have been crossed—although more often than not, the girls and women they become, are moved from one city to another, one step ahead of the law, and precluding them from developing any significant relationships which might enable them to seek alternatives for their lives.

### ***The Third Vulnerability—Grooming:***

For a number of years, I only used the 2 broad categories of poverty/culture and childhood sexual abuse that I have just named to describe vulnerability factors. And then I was confronted by a dear Christian woman in a wealthy country who chastised me: “My daughter is also a victim of human trafficking and prostitution” she told me. “And she is neither poor—nor was she abused. Rather she was “groomed” into prostitution by a man who developed a relationship with her with the goal that he would become her pimp and have her working in prostitution.” I learned from this broken-hearted woman that I must include the category of “grooming” to describe a 3<sup>rd</sup> major vulnerability factor.

In The Netherlands, those who “groom” teen-age girls into prostitution are called “lover-boys” by those girls. However, there’s no true “love” involved—only exploitation. “Lover-boys” hang around places where teen-age girls would

be: on the edge of high school grounds or shopping malls, at discothèques or beaches. They compliment the girls as they walk past: “oh you’re so beautiful”. If the girl has a strong sense of self-esteem, she will just say “thanks” and keep walking. But a girl who doesn’t hear many compliments, whose self-esteem isn’t so strong, will stop, the compliments will continue, dates will be made—and the “lover-boy” knows that he has her hooked. She’ll first be given a cell phone which he calls multiple times a day, developing a co-dependent relationship. He will do everything to convince her that he is her only love—that her family and friends don’t love her as much as he does, and in this way, he attempts to isolate her from her primary relationships. A sexual relationship develops, and thereafter, he convinces her that she should have sex with his friends. There may be gang-rape. And then comes the moment as she approaches her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, which is the legal age in The Netherlands for working in prostitution, when all of the sudden he has no money. And, he continues, since she’s had sex with so many men already, working in prostitution will not be any different and will solve all their financial problems. She comes to believe that the more money she makes for him, the more he will love her—or love her again. By this time, she’s found out that he has 3 or 4 or 5 other women working for him—but she’s sure that she’s the one he loves the most.

“Grooming” girls into prostitution as a form of human trafficking was previously an invisible phenomenon—and certainly wasn’t identified as trafficking. The public preferred to wear blinders and believe that since the women were not chained to the brothels and could walk away at any time, they had obviously “chosen” to work there. And yes, there is an element of “choice”. Again, “choice” has a very thin veneer. Scratch the thin surface of “choice” and you find the story behind the story behind the story of woundedness and helplessness and hopelessness. I know what little self-esteem I had at 15 or 16, and am thankful that, by the Grace of God, no one set out to groom me into prostitution.

### ***Demand:***

Up to this point in this paper, I’ve been focusing primarily on the victims of human trafficking and prostitution. But there would be no victims if there was not a demand. Simply put: demand fuels human trafficking and prostitution. It’s economics at it’s simplest: take away demand, you don’t need supply.

Fortunately, we have an example of governmental legislation that has done just that. In 1999 in Sweden, the society recognized that prostitution promotes violence against women by normalizing the sexual exploitation involved in prostitution. The prevailing attitude in Sweden is that all people in prostitution are victims and therefore should not be criminalized. Rather, they should be



offered social assistance. However, those who use people in prostitution—who buy sex--ARE criminalized and are fined. At the same time, they, too, are offered social services including individual and group counseling. Sweden is one of the only countries in the world where human trafficking has declined in the past decade—it's simply not a “friendly environment” for traffickers. Norway and Iceland adopted a similar laws in 2009—and now it's known as the “Nordic Model”. I'm thankful that Swedish officials are using their example and the research they have generated over the past decade and, with missionary zeal, are presenting programs all over the world, to try to convince governments to consider adapting forms of their law as a way of preventing human trafficking and exploitation.

To recap: **Human Trafficking = the Exploitation of Vulnerability which is fueled by Demand.**

The three major vulnerability factors are:

- 1) Poverty exacerbated by cultural attitudes towards girls
- 2) Childhood sexual abuse
- 3) “Grooming”

### ***Where is the Hope?***

When I started working on the streets of Bangkok in 1986, I could only find one small Christian project that offered shelter to 8 young girls who had been rescued from brothels. Since then, God's Spirit has been pouring out on this earth, and the numbers of people being called to minister into these very dark corners of the earth is increasing exponentially! There is much reason to hope! At the same time, the sophistication of the traffickers, the ease of travel, the use of the internet and the fall of borders and boundaries has meant that we must use all of our God-given resources, ingenuity, wisdom and creativity in confronting this evil. I have the privilege of witnessing just such a global outpouring of God-infused energy and talent.

In 2005, the EBF boldly appointed a working group to encourage endeavors in anti-trafficking work through the Baptist churches in Europe. Through conferences, books and networks, individuals and churches have become significantly involved with the issues. We would pray that as we continue to raise awareness, offer encouragement and provide information, more people in our churches would hear God's Call to reach into the darkest corners of our world and offer freedom to those trapped by human trafficking.

Though it seems an overwhelming task, there is great HOPE! God is at work, calling women and men to creatively enter into places where many Christians would rather pretend didn't exist. God is at work, and brings Hope where some would simply feel overwhelmed. God is at work, desiring that all—abused and abuser, those prostituting as well as pimping—come to know God's Help, Healing and Hope for an eternal future!



# Poverty as a Social Evil and the Response of the Church

*By Dr. Vladimir Ubeivola*

## *Preface*

The existence of poverty is attested throughout history. There have been poor and needy people at all times and in all countries. At the same time, there have always been people who, aware of the seriousness of poverty, have worked hard to find a solution. Some want to use education to persuade people to change their worldview, others try to raise people's revolutionary enthusiasm and still others seek to lead by altruistic example, giving away their wealth to the poor. In this section, we will look at the phenomenon of poverty in the Eastern European context from sociological and theological perspectives.

Over the last hundred years, the Church has become more concerned about poverty, although it should be noted that practical assistance for the needy has always been a part of Christian service. Nowadays, theologians and missiologists are both worried about the extent of the problem. Increasingly, missions and charities, as well as influential bodies such as the World Evangelical Alliance and the Baptist World Alliance, put poverty on their agendas.

Each generation of Christians hopes to see this problem solved. However, new approaches have failed to bring about change. Moreover, the poverty problem becomes increasingly serious, and, today, the situation is critical in many regions of the world. Unemployment, economic and social instability, unrealistic expectations and broken dreams intensify the process of marginalizing people. Poverty does not allow society to realize its potential and, consequently, slows down development.

As I research human trafficking, I notice that there are two "poles" in the causes of the problem. On one hand, there is a demand for cheap labour (sexual or other kinds of work). On the other hand, there are those who offer themselves as cheap labour. These people usually come from the context of poverty.

Demand, however, is universal. Let us take the example of Europe. Despite the economic crises, Western and Northern Europe are still attractive to different kinds of migrants. Eastern Europe is trying hard to integrate into the “old Europe” as migrants travel from the east to the west and send money back to the east.

Human trafficking and poverty are closely related, but the relationship is complex – too complex to cover in a short article like this. All the same, the church does not have the right to remain silent on this issue. The stratification of society and the increasingly evident gap between rich and poor create new problems for both local churches and mission. Here I will give a definition of poverty and consider its causes. I will discuss the theology of poverty and suggest practical recommendations for churches and missions.

### ***Definition of poverty***

It is not easy to give a definition of poverty as the concept is relative. Broadly, poverty is considered to appear when there is a discrepancy between the average level of means required for proper existence and the possibilities of meeting the needs of specific groups of people. In other words, there is a certain average consumer level: there are those whose consumption is far above average and there are those who cannot reach the average level. The latter are referred to as poor. Moreover, the average level may differ from country to country. For instance, the average consumption level of Norway or Sweden compared to that of Ukraine or Moldova will be very different. Similarly, if we compare the consumption levels of these countries with those of (say) India or Tajikistan, the difference will be even greater. The condition of the poor in one country differs from the condition of the poor in others. While the lives of rich people are similar in most of the countries, those of the poor vary substantially.

The poor build their own life values, ethical principles and often their own “language”. In other words, they develop their own subculture. These subcultures are usually peaceful, but sometimes they form a threat to the existing social order and, in certain cases, even wipe it out (for example, Russia in 1917, Egypt and Libya in 2011).

At the same time, it is indisputable that the concept of “poverty” should not be defined only from a financial point of view. Jesus spoke of the “poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3). Nowadays, the phrase “spiritually rich person” is very popular. The Orthodox Church, as well as some Catholic orders (Franciscans, for example), consider that people who have voluntarily given away all their material goods are spiritually rich. Therefore, speaking of poverty, we should keep in mind such components as worldview, social relationships, educational

level, access to basic means for proper existence (clean water, housing, clothing and food) and health care.

Those who think in terms of the stratification of society often speak of a “lower class”. Watson, the well-known American sociologist, speaks of the “higher-lower class” and the “lower-lower class”. The first group is comprised of wage-workers who are relatively financially stable, but are in constant dependence on the upper classes regarding their income; they also have limited access to quality education. The “lower-lower class” includes the poor, homeless and unemployed. To this group, I would add illegal migrants. Some sociologists expand the second list to include people whose income constitutes less than half the income of the average full-time industrial worker.

In Eastern Europe, especially in those territories which until 1991 were part of the Soviet Union, the phenomenon of poverty is even more diverse. Here are some examples. A large proportion of adults, who had worked for many years in state-owned enterprises, received free apartments. During the Soviet era people could neither sell nor buy those apartments, but after the collapse of the Soviet Union practically all apartments became private property. To date, the cost of a small apartment (two rooms with an area of 30 square meters) in cities such as Chisinau can cost up to fifty thousand Euros. The same apartment in the center of Moscow can cost up to half a million Euros. A considerable number of those who benefitted from free apartments have now retired. We can hardly say that a person who owns a real estate worth 50-100 thousand Euros is poor. But, the monthly income of a family of pensioners in Chisinau in one of these apartments can amount to less than 150 Euros. Their utilities (electricity, water, etc.) costs can exceed 200 Euros in winter. These people can not sell their flats and move to cheaper ones, and, so, they have to choose between dying of hunger and not paying the bills. If they do not pay the bills, they risk having the electricity, water and gas supplies cut off.

Another example of the diversity of poverty in Moldova is the life of rural people, for whom it is practically impossible to find a paid job. Twenty years ago, the great majority of rural people worked for the state. Now it is difficult for them to set up their own business because 1) they lack an entrepreneurial spirit, which was suppressed during the Soviet era and was not inculcated during the years of independence, and 2) tax laws favour large companies and enterprises while strangling small businesses. People are forced to seek places of work outside their community, and, frequently, outside their country. Moldavians leave mostly for Russia and Italy. Almost 1 million Moldavians work abroad (around 30% of the whole population)--on average, one parent from almost every family. There are also thousands of families in which both husband and wife work

outside Moldova—often in two different countries. Thus, the children are left alone without parental care. As a rule, parents do not arrange for guardianship by someone from the family, in an attempt to avoid additional bureaucracy. Children are left totally to themselves. Parents send them a monthly financial support of several hundred Euros. As a result, for example, two teenagers, a girl of about fourteen and a boy of about twelve live in a house and have enough money to pay for commodities, food and even entertainment, but they are completely deprived of parental control, care, love and communication. Naturally, this leads to the impoverishment of their emotional and social world. The critical questions which arise in this situation are as follows: can we say that these children are well-off? Or, are they poor?

With regard to the classification of poverty, it is worth noting that there are groups of people who cannot meet their basic physiological needs. Others have enough material resources to meet their basic needs, but do not have access to social benefits (restricted access to education, medicine, recreation). Still others consider themselves poor, even though they have no need of any material or social benefits. Their arguments are based on the comparative analysis of the quality of the benefits they receive. For example, they have food, but it is of poor quality; they have shelter, but it does not allow them to have a so-called “private” space. In addition, it is important to point out the phenomenon of “intellectual poverty”. There is a category of people who have managed to break the cycle of poverty (for example, on the basis of unequal social marriage). But, even though they can access all kind of benefits, they cannot get used to this and behave as the poor: they overeat fearing a lack of food the next day, or use old appliances and household appliances, and storing new ones for “the black day”. In Romanian there is a saying: “the one who was hungry for three days, remains hungry forever.”

From a financial perspective, we note at least two levels of poverty: absolute poverty, from which, according to official data for 2010, about 22% of the Moldavian population suffers (their income being less than 70 Euros per month), and extreme poverty, which affects about 2% of the Moldavian people (their income being less than 30 Euros per month). The data for 2011 show that about one-third of the population live below the poverty line. Moldavians spend eight times less money on health care than on food and thirty-nine times less on education than on food. Thus, the major part of income is spent simply to survive. This has an influence on life expectancy in Moldova, which is relatively low. Men live on average 65 years and women 72, whereas in Sweden and Italy the average life expectancy is about 80 years. In Belgium and Greece it is around 78 years.

About 80% of poor Moldavians live in rural areas. It should be noted that there are two forms of poverty: stable and mobile. The first is related to the fact that the low level of social security, as a rule, leads to poor health, loss of professional skills, and, ultimately, fewer resources. Poor parents give birth to potentially poor children, as determined by their health, education, and qualifications. People who are born “persistently poor” remain poor throughout their lives. The second form (mobile poverty) is much rarer: some poor people are making extraordinary efforts and can break out of their social class, adapting to new conditions. Naturally, it is not only subjective, personal factors which play a part in such kind of changes but also the objective conditions created by the state and society. It also happens that the rich can become poor. In Eastern Europe, many such cases were noted during the change of regime in the early 90s. Then, a considerable part of society had a privileged position due to employment in the civil service, and party affiliation. When the socialist system collapsed, those people lost their source of income, their position and the opportunity for career development in just one day. Many of them were not able to cope with the new realities of life.

As we have seen, the definition of poverty is relative, because it is based on the comparison of the living standards of poor people from one country (or one region) with the poor from another. In the 1970-80s, liberation theology tried to draw people’s attention to this discrepancy. It focused on the fact that today’s rich countries obtained their status due to centuries of colonization of the “third world”. It called for a redistribution of wealth between countries and continents.

The last phenomenon which should be mentioned in this context is the poverty of vulnerable people. Wealth may be lost for a variety of reasons: for example, a change of system, bankruptcy, crisis, alcoholism. Under favorable circumstances, such people can rise above the poverty line and start a new life. But there is also a category of poor people in Eastern Europe, who are unlikely to have the chance of escaping from the circle of poverty. These are people with serious injuries, pensioners and in some countries, orphans. The state and social system is set up so that powerful people supplant the weak ones. The state can only help this category of people to meet their most basic physiological needs. Even when civil society tries to alleviate such suffering, lack of government subsidies means that it can provide only individual, local and temporary assistance.

Particular attention should be paid to the issue of abandonment in Eastern Europe. In Russia, for example, there is a state program designed to guarantee housing to all orphans when they reach the age of eighteen. We can not say that it works flawlessly, but, nevertheless, it is available. In Ukraine, the move-



ment “Ukraine Without Orphans” counted the number of all Christian churches and organizations in the country, as well as the number of orphans. It turned out that these two figures are almost equal. The movement puts the emphasis on the adoption by every Christian church of at least one orphan. In Moldova, a state program has been launched aiming at eliminating boarding schools for orphans. Its purpose is to encourage families to adopt orphans. But, there is very little assistance for families. Recently, many temporary care centers for orphans have been opened. Children are looked after for only six months. During this period it is expected that families will eventually adopt them. In practice, children spend six months in a center, and then are transferred to another one and so on.

The NGO (non-governmental organization) “Beginning of Life”, where I serve as president, runs a rehabilitation center for survivors from human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Between 2009 and 2012 the center has sheltered about 40 women. More than 30 of them were orphans. Most orphans do not have access to full secondary education. Thus, they do not have any opportunities to benefit from higher education, and, therefore, to have a good job in the future. The best they can afford are vocational trade schools, where they are taught professions which are not in demand in Moldova or are underpaid. During the training, orphans live in hostels, but, after graduating, even those who find employment discover that their income is not enough to rent an accommodation. They are forced to live in squats in large groups (often mixed-gender). Thus, they become easy targets for pimps, traffickers and recruiters.

### *Causes of Poverty*

The term “poor” applies to those who cannot meet their basic needs according to the average level of life satisfaction. The problem of poverty is related to forms of social alienation - of people from each other or from society, from work and its results. It is characterized by a significant restriction of basic goods consumption and the formation of an environment in which the subculture of the poor becomes a destabilizing factor for the society. We have already highlighted some personal causes of poverty. Now we will consider some of the systemic causes of poverty.

#### • **The crisis of the political system**

The collapse of the Soviet Union changed the life of people living there in every way. The map of Europe had been redrawn — with catastrophic consequences. Those Christians who for decades prayed for the fall of the Iron Curtain and the elimination of the totalitarian regime in the Soviet Union could hardly

have imagined what was to ensue. Besides the fact that wars broke out, thousands of people committed suicide and millions lost their jobs and, consequently, their means of existence. In a simplistic worldview, the fall of the USSR may be seen as having brought positive change as Christians became free to express their faith. But, when we examine the issue from a holistic point of view, we cannot say that the process was entirely good. The hundreds of women who sell themselves on the streets and brothels of the European Union came out of former socialist countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, and Russia).

The opening of borders made the spread of the Russian mafia to Prague, Warsaw and New York possible. Millions of the Eastern European unemployed went abroad, hoping to survive. (Unfortunately, such processes continue – the “Arab Spring” is likely to have consequences that European countries cannot imagine.) While the politicians may have made the right decisions, the results are mixed. On the one hand, millions of refugees and illegal migrants pose a threat to wealthier countries, while, on the other hand, they provide a source of cheap labor and a market for substandard and outdated products — as well as girls and women for the sex industry.

- **The economic crisis**

The global economic crisis is not likely to stop. The U.S. financial crisis, the stock markets, the weakening of hard currencies, the long-lasting problems of Greece, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and other European countries, show that the situation is far from under control. People lose their jobs, and in the EU there is a growth of the so-called lower-middle and upper-lower classes along with a decrease of the higher-middle class. Hundreds of thousands of people from the new EU member countries (Romania and Bulgaria) have gone to the West and the North in search of better jobs. Social ties are broken down and the risk of exploitation of vulnerable people increases. The activity which is most lucrative and which requires the least training is human trafficking. Men and women are sold not only because they are overwhelmed by financial need. It is made possible by the weakening of the traditional family ties. Social and financial poverty brings people into the streets.

- **Social isolation**

Having left their usual environment, individuals and groups face completely different cultures, and it can take years to readjust. Many communicate with those closest to them by means of the internet. However, this kind of communication does not lead to social integration. More and more people become

lonely - their “social capital” lessens from year to year. They do not keep in touch with their old acquaintances and do not make new ones. In case of accidents, emergencies and illnesses, these people have nobody to ask for help. And, even if the state or the company provides financial compensation, this is not enough to help people meet their basic existential needs. Only a very small number of people can be helped.

- **Criminal and social threats**

The trafficking of arms and drugs becomes more and more profitable every year. In Moldova, in 2011, the official arms trade increased by over 100% compared to 2010. Ninety-five percent of people who buy guns say they do this primarily because they are uncertain about the future. In addition, many people own unregistered weapons bought in the 90’s. All these factors increase the likelihood of criminality and, indeed, the number of crimes is increasing every year. Drug addiction causes many young people to fall into marginal subcultures. Most are unemployed and their sole source of income is drug selling and criminal activity. A new generation of orphans from Eastern Europe, whose parents have been working in the EU countries for many years, will soon become a real threat, not only for Moldova, but for the whole of Europe. Given that nearly 800,000 of Moldavian citizens appealed to the Romanian Consulate for Romanian citizenship, we can assume that in a few years, most of them will go to one of the EU countries.

- **Theology of poverty**

We cannot ignore the biblical perspective on the problem of poverty or the necessary response of the church to its presence in modern society. I would like to draw attention to the words of Christ, to His teachings, which have their theological foundation in the Old Testament. Because of His personality and ministry, his words give a different perspective on the issue. One very important text is Luke 4, which shows the role of marginalized people in Jesus’ ministry. This text is interesting primarily because of Jesus’ reminder that he had come to preach good news to the poor. This is particularly pertinent for Eastern European societies in which the gap between rich and poor is so wide. Despite the fact that Evangelical churches have many more wealthy members than ever before, the majority of the inhabitants of these countries are miserable and poor.

I would especially like to mention the situation in Moldova. We need to note a dual phenomenon in this country. First, from 1990 to 2000, the number of members of Evangelical churches at least doubled. Second, during these years

Moldova became the poorest country in Europe. Thus, there is an urgent need for Evangelical churches to formulate a response to poverty in this country.

Jesus cites Isaiah 61:1. The words “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” emphasize not just the special importance of the words that are to follow (in a similar way to the phrase “The word of the Lord that came to the prophet” (Micah 1:1; Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1), but also denote an undeniable authority. In the last thirty years the words ‘because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor’ have been the subject of heated discussions amongst theologians. What kind of poor people is Jesus referring to? And depending on the answer, the term “to preach the gospel” takes on a specific meaning.

Some of the greatest twentieth century missiologists think that the good news of the Kingdom is that Christ’s work means liberation from the rule of sin, Satan, and death; hence, the church must reflect liberation from the influence of the ‘dominion of darkness’. But who are the “poor”? Opinions differ. Some think that the Old Testament does not consider the poor to be those who are economically poor, but those who live in complete dependence upon God. According to D. Dorr, however, in the Old Testament the term “poor” refers to “those groups of people who are economically deprived, who have no social status, and who are treated unjustly by foreign rulers or by the authorities in their own land”.

Th. Houston, one of the leaders of the Lausanne movement, notes the importance of the meaning of the Greek words. The words “poor” and “needy”, he says, are *penes* and *ptochos*. *Penes* refers to the person who is oppressed, underpaid, and the working poor. *Ptochos* refers to the person who has no work to do and has to beg. For D. Bosch, *ptochos* is a generalizing concept to cover all the unhappy people. Luke, of all the evangelists, spends a lot of time on the issue of the poor and the rich (Luke 1:53; 3:12-14; 7:11-17; 18:2-5; Acts 11:27-30). With Bosch we ask, “What kind of good news did these poor people need?” Houston is helpful: “It was the kind of Good News that brought a prostitute to wash Jesus’ feet with her tears and wipe them with her hair, and then had Jesus say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ (Luke 7:36-50, TEV)”. And further, ‘The Good News of the kingdom of God is that sin, disease, and oppression are never the last word. Where Jesus is King, he brings forgiveness, healing, and liberation.’

“The Spirit of the Lord has anointed Him to preach the gospel to the poor.” (Lk 4:18) In the Old Testament the act of anointing separates an individual for a special mission. The idea of “sending” is also important for Jesus’ mission-- he is sent to heal the brokenhearted. The brokenhearted are those who, for different reasons, have emotional, psychological (or as people call it “heart”) wounds. This can be due to poverty or other reasons (loss of the close ones, war, fam-

ine, natural disasters, disappointment in relationships). All these categories of people need healing of their hearts. Some commentators see a parallel between the phrases “to preach deliverance to the captives” and “to set at liberty those who are bruised”. Do these words have a physical or spiritual meaning? Jesus announces that He came to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. This is the year that according to Moses’ law was celebrated only once every 50 years, a year in which all debts were forgiven and slaves were set free. The land taken under guarantee was to be returned to the owners (Lev.25). Jesus said to those listening that this Scripture had been fulfilled “in their hearing”, but the people were surprised and angry. The liberator promised by scripture had come, but they were waiting to see him in a different form. This one-way declaration of Jesus does not leave any doubts — He is the long-awaited Messiah of Israel.

### ***Conclusion***

The threat of poverty looms over certain socio-professional groups of citizens. “The social bottom” absorbs many disparate groups: farmers, unskilled workers, engineers, teachers, intellectuals and scientists. In society, there is a mechanism which takes people to the “bottom”. This mainly consists of current methods of carrying out economic reforms, the unrestrained activities of criminal organizations and the state’s inability to protect its citizens.

Any strategy aiming at the reduction of the absolute poverty should aim to abolish it completely. In a healthy society, there should not be people living under the subsistence level. The purpose of the fight against relative poverty is not the complete elimination of inequality but its reduction to a level which does not exceed the limits acceptable to a given society, and which, at the same time, does not undermine the incentives of social and economic activity. The main weapon against poverty is policy aimed at the economic growth of the country. The task of the Church does not consist only in helping the poor who find themselves at the very bottom of society. Instead, it should also include the prevention of poverty — at societal and even supranational levels.

## Why Are They There? Does It Matter to Us?

Jesus' commission to the disciples in Matthew's Gospel was: "Go therefore and make disciples...teaching them to obey everything..." Dr. Vladimir Ubeivolc, in his work, **Holistic Approach in Mission: Social Responsibility and--or versus--Evangelism?**, explains why the factors that make women and girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation matter to us. Reminding us that all Christians have a prophetic responsibility, Dr. Ubeivolc calls us to true evangelism which includes concrete action. Here follows an excerpt from this work:

Current voices are heard louder and stronger claiming that social responsibility is the concern of the state and that the church has no social responsibility. The first half of the 20th century was called by Stott, who was echoing many other authors, the "great fall,"<sup>1</sup> referring to evangelical Christians' rejection of social responsibility.

In the Biblical perspective, there is no doubt that the prophet of God is the one who "speaks in the name of God", on God's behalf, with God's authority. Countless prophecies speak about social problems as spiritual issues. One striking example is that of Micah in Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

True prophets are concerned with *whole* people. Nevertheless, as Lesslie Newbigin writes, "again and again voices are heard insisting that 'social service' diverts attention of the missions from their primary objective - evangelism. New missionary institutions were founded which vowed to avoid any involvement in social affairs and concentrate entirely on the proclamation of the Gospel. However, again and again, even the very logic of the Gospel was pushing them

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *New Issues Facing Christians Today*. Chercassy, Smyrna, 2004, 25.

relentlessly to such matters as schooling and education, treatment of patients, distribution of food to starving people, help the needy ones.”<sup>2</sup>

Parushev and Andronoviene write that a passion for holiness became the predominant understanding of evangelical mission in post-Soviet countries: “Ironically, fighting ‘the world’ has been so much of an agenda for these churches during the Soviet time, that they have failed to see how much of this ‘world’ easily, naturally, and, in fact, necessarily made its way into the corporate life of the church and the private lives of its members.”<sup>3</sup>

And further: “If the church avoids social involvement because it values holiness more than compassion, it is on a straight road to legalism and formalism. But if the social politics of the upside-down kingdom of the Sermon on the Mount spring to life first of all in practices of the gathering community, then even the small projects it will attempt for society will have a serious impact.”<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, the call to free those suffering should be heard as an order. As John Stott said: “Social responsibility becomes an aspect not of Christian mission only, but also of Christian conversion.”<sup>5</sup>

Arthur McPhee adds: “The real challenge – and touchstone of authentic evangelism – is the Lord’s own ministry, which integrated the verbal proclamation of the gospel with a ministry of healing and deliverance.”<sup>6</sup>

It is obvious that the presence of the prophet is active. “Presence” means “existence” rather than “observation”. “Presence” is the opposite of “absence”. It is possible to be absent even being physically there where criminal actions are carried out. The presence is manifested in active protest against the occurring processes, which are contrary not only to the personal ethics and the Ten Commandments, but especially to social justice, which was originally conceived by God for His people.

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<sup>2</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Moscow:Center Narnia, 2006, 108.

<sup>3</sup> Parush Parushev, Lina Andronoviene. McClendon’s Concept of Mission. In *Anabaptism and Mission*, edited by Wilbert R. Shenk and Peter F. Penner, Neufeld Verlag, 2007, 260.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 263.

<sup>5</sup> John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1975, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur McPhee, *Authentic Witness, Authentic Evangelism, Authentic Church*. In *Evangelical, Ecumenical, and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation*. Essays in Honor of Wilbert R. Shenk. Edited by James R. Krabill, Walter Sawatsky and Charles van Engen. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2006, 134.

God warns people about the coming judgment through the prophets. Kings and princes will lose their territories and will be captured, and the capitals of their countries will be destroyed. Priests will lose their churches, which are not only a source of income for them (in God's design), but also a source of unjust enrichment. The merchants and landowners will not enjoy the fruits of their trade and land; their enemies will get everything and jackals will live on their lands. Every person will be judged, including the oppressed and the disadvantaged who have already suffered.

But, what is the role of a prophet in *our* time? What is the relationship between prophetic presence and social service? How does this relate to evangelism? What can and should the church do to remain faithful to its vocation? These questions are too serious to be answered fully in a concise manner, but here follow some responses.

It would be hermeneutically incorrect to project blindly the model of the Old Testament prophets, belonging to a theocratic society, onto the modern church, which is separated from the state. The modern institution of the priesthood accomplishes completely different functions than that of the Jerusalem priesthood 2000 years ago. Cultural changes, such as the fact that strangers do not go into villages and fields but huddle in cities and the fact that the status of widows in many countries has changed, must be taken into account. Yet, we can still formulate some principles on the basis of biblical examples.

**Principle 1** - In the Scriptures, God reveals Himself as the God of social justice. The Old and New Testaments show that both the state and the church should pay attention to those who can not take care of themselves and ensure themselves a decent life. The principles of "wild capitalism" or liberal democracy have nothing in common with the Biblical view of the relationship of rich people with poor people. As Reinhard Frieling says: "It is part of the church's message to tell politicians and entrepreneurs in no uncertain terms that a Common Market which is ruled only by so-called *laissez-faire* capitalism has to be corrected, because in the long run it accepts mass poverty in human society."<sup>7</sup>

Western countries, which have worked out their own policies of political and economic democracy, often present their models as the only possible models for organizing state and society. The contraposition of most Western countries' economic crises with the economic situation of some other countries, founded on very different principles, shows the relativity and the relativism of Western democracy. There are active leaders of the evangelical movement calling for li-

<sup>7</sup> Reinhard Frieling, *Our Common Responsibility in Europe*, in *Charta Oecumenica. A Text, a Process and a Dream of the Churches in Europe*, Edited by Viorel Ionita and Sarah Numico. WCC Publications, Geneva, 2003, 64.



beralism and free trade, but Newbigin believes this is a form of idolatry.<sup>8</sup> While evangelicals who disagree with Western capitalism are being harassed, they take comfort in the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:10-12, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Valery Giletsky, a Moldovan Baptist, was twice a member of the Moldovan Parliament’s Commission on Human Rights. His service did not contradict Christian norms, but, in Moldova, there is a lack of such an evangelical presence in the social sector, where social justice is forgotten. In Eastern European countries this topic still remains unpopular. The socially oriented platform of the Scripture became unpopular because of distortions of Scripture by some socialist parties and states. The result is that “the history of Soviet evangelicals is a good illustration of the danger of self-serving seclusion which seriously damages the efforts to fulfill the prophetic task... In order to have any social involvement, the church must be present in the immediate culture.”<sup>9</sup>

Writing on the tension between evangelicals on economic systems, Kirk comments, “One of the ways of understanding the church in the light of the prophetic message about idolatry, justice and future hope is the collective rejection of destructive practices of the modern world. This includes economic and social fatalism, which makes everybody think that only one model of an economic system and one type of society is viable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such a church will do everything possible to stop child labor and the use of children in wars, will make people pay their debts, will provide people with drinkable water, will try fight the spread of diseases, domestic violence, human trafficking...”<sup>10</sup>

Remaining silent, we are absent, and the so-called laws of “liberal democracy” flourish. In fact, the church which does not promote social justice and adopts the economic liberal values risks standing in a row with exploiters and aggressors. As John Chryssavgis, an Orthodox theologian from Australia, said: ‘A true person cannot tolerate creating miserable poverty for the sake of accumulating

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<sup>8</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Moscow:Center Narnia, 2006, 112.

<sup>9</sup> Parush Parushev, Lina Andronoviene. McClendon’s Concept of Mission. In *Anabaptism and Mission*, edited by Wilbert R. Shenk and Peter F. Penner, Neufeld Verlag, 2007, 261.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Kirk, *Mission Under Scrutiny. Confronting Current Challenges*, Darton, Longman+Todd, 2006, 169.

exorbitant wealth. The moral crisis of our global economic injustice is integrally spiritual; it signals something terribly amiss in our relationship with God, with people, and with things.”<sup>11</sup>

And yet, this has happened repeatedly in history. And, the reason for this is the wrong interpretation of the Biblical texts read from the perspective of rich people. The poor are the most authentic interpreters of the Scripture. “In many cases the poor have a better understanding of the text than those who devoted their lives to its study.”<sup>12</sup> And further: “Experience shows that those who refer to the Scripture with respect and have certain expectations from the reading began earlier practicing it than those who have to look critically to the text.”<sup>13</sup>

Are Western democracies able to let the Bible criticize them instead of taking on the role of critics? Western churches (particularly Western European churches), fascinated by the struggle for human rights, often ignore God’s rights in their so-called democratization. Today’s church, as always, needs repentance. According to Bosch: “The church itself is the object of *missio Dei* [mission of God]. It permanently needs repentance and conversion. The cross the church preaches is also a criterion of its assessment and a symbol of condemnation of any kind of self-complacency related to its achievements. The self-complacent church is depriving itself and its service of the power of the cross. But the cross bears a message not only of condemnation, but also of forgiveness and hope, including, for the church.”<sup>14</sup>

The prophets of the church should denounce first of all the church because of its “prophetic absence”--concealment of powerful people’s sins and of those of their own leaders. If local churches neglect the weak and defenseless people, and millionaires become more and more influential, then these churches forget about the existence of the God of justice, of the impartial God, of the God of the poor.

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<sup>11</sup> John Chryssavgis, *Orthodox Spirituality and Social Activism. Reclaiming Our Vocabulary – Refocusing Our Vision*. In *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World. An Ecumenical Conversation*, Edited by Emmanuel Clapsis. WCC Publications, Geneva. Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts, 2004, 136.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Kirk, *Mission Under Scrutiny. Confronting Current Challenges*, Darton, Longman+Todd, 2006, 161.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 163.

<sup>14</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, *The Bible for All*, St. Petersburg Christian University, “Theology”, St.Petersburg, 1997, 423.

**Principle 2** - In the Scriptures, God calls loyal to Him those who participate actively in the life of the weak. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: “The church is a real one when it exists for others... The church should help ordinary people solve their everyday problems, not repressing, but lending a hand and serving them.”<sup>15</sup>

The image of the church as servant is not popular. Few speak of the church as servant. Even the word “service” has acquired the meaning of honor, status, rank. “Servant” often means not “serving” but “ruling”.

The Anabaptist movement, forerunner of modern Baptist life, emphasized that the church structure should not be intermingled with the state structure, thus avoiding the danger that “serving the society” be confused with “ruling” or “making the rules” as a government would. At one point, “the church had a secure place in society and assisted the government in such matters as maintaining the civil register and the collection of taxes. The Anabaptists confronted and contested this system. They denounced the state-church system because it corrupted the church. They asserted that the church is truly the church only if it is answerable to Jesus Christ alone.”<sup>16</sup>

Believers are called not only to denounce powerful people’s sins but also to help those who have been oppressed by them. James 1:27 says, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” Many churches get so involved in respecting the second part of this passage that they completely forget about the first one.

Some understand the verse in its literal sense: They help only the orphans and widows. It is obvious that in James’ time—a time of political instability, wars and rebellions—these two groups were the most socially vulnerable. In Old Testament times of hope for a developing theocratic state, there were many more such groups: hired workers, poor, beggars, and strangers (Deuteronomy 24:14); and also orphans and widows (Exodus 22:22).

The budget of the church is often used, however, to meet the needs and interests of people donating the money, forgetting about the needy. Hokeyndik stated a little harshly: “If the church refuses to participate in people’s everyday life, if it has no power to influence them, it should be declared heretical.”<sup>17</sup> Heresy is not only a lack of orthodoxy, but also a lack of orthopraxy (right practice). The lack of orthopraxy means not only violation of ecclesiastical eth-

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 410.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 414.

ics but also the lack of social activity and passivity in matters of assistance to the pariah of these days. Snyder wrote: “Church members think about how to bring people to church. Citizens of the Kingdom think about how to bring the Church into the world. Church members are concerned that the world could change the Church. Citizens of the Kingdom are working so that the Church could change the world.”<sup>18</sup>

We are not calling for the rejection of traditional evangelism as proclamation. We declare instead that, by only proclaiming and forgetting the rest, we destroy the balance of the Church’s mission as it was conceived by God. As West said: “The Church exists in order to take on the world’s deepest conflicts, to confront the views of the conflicting parties, directing towards them the power of forgiveness and change, which transforms them into a new community with new hope and a new vocation.”<sup>19</sup>

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Dr. Ubeivoc goes on to raise other questions pertinent to the topic “Holistic Approach in Mission: Social Responsibility and—or versus—Evangelism?” such as “What does *evangelism* mean in a predominantly Orthodox context?”

We propose these questions for further thought:

-How could your church’s social action to address one of the causes of vulnerability to sexual exploitation discussed in this book be a good witness?

-How does your church’s social responsibility extend past feeding the orphans and widows?

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 414.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 513.



# 500 True Stories of the Trafficking of African Young Women in Italy

*By Isoke Aikpitanyi*

I never thought of myself as an author and had no desire to write books and then tour from city to city to promote them.

When I left Benin City I had not finished elementary school. I was out of the habit of writing even the normal daily things.

In Benin, I sold fruits and vegetables with my mother. I decided that I wanted to sell fruits and vegetables in Europe, where, naively, I now realize, I believed I would be able to earn an incredible amount of money. I dearly hoped that by working in Europe I could improve the quality of my life and that of my family. I especially wanted to help my mother who had worked so hard alone and had provided for the survival of my many brothers and sisters and myself after our father had abandoned us.

In Benin City, as a typical teen-ager, I enjoyed visiting the homes of my few friends who had televisions. And there began our hell.

We knew that in Nigeria there was a big divide between rich and poor people. And we had heard from the stories adults told us that there are always violent people who want to have power over others. They told us that to cross the violent ones would be to risk our very lives. It made us feel powerless. But in the “magic box” (the television) it seemed that all our dreams could come true.

We had all had contact with Westerners, *ohibo*, (“the whites”) we called them. The television showed us that they came from the rich world where everyone, indeed *everyone*, has the necessities of life. And we came to believe that the *necessities* of life included the well-furnished house, the car, the cell phone, the school, the hospital, etc. We wanted those symbols of well-being.

Some time ago, some of those whites had begun to offer the youngest and most beautiful women the chance to get to Europe. An ever-growing number of our young women who had arrived in Europe had been able to send money home, and the quality of life of their families improved.

We did not ask ourselves how these women lived or where they got the money. A few--but only a few--returned to Benin City from time to time, loaded with gold and money. They were like young queens whom everyone respected because they seemed to be rich. And they taught other young women how to make their dreams a reality.

We reasoned: If the oil pipeline which carries Nigerian oil throughout the world did not make the country and its people richer but only enriched its corrupt leaders, another "pipeline", the one which carries people, could have, perhaps, a different effect—that of creating "queens" who make their money in Europe.

When it was my turn to stretch out my hand and grasp my part of the fortune in Europe, I was ready to take on the adventure without asking too many questions.

I myself did not want to write books, but that which happened to me in Europe has ended up in books because someone must tell the truth. And so it falls to me to do it because I have seen how a dream can be transformed into a nightmare.

I was a victim of human trafficking. I became a slave.

My "no's" were too weak, and, in the end, I accepted it all; I suffered it all. I saw my sisters die, assassinated for having said "no" to those who wanted to force them out on the streets to prostitute themselves. I have seen the rapes, the hidden abortions, the illnesses in bodies too young and too healthy to have ever known sickness in Africa.

At a certain point, I rebelled against my traffickers. I said, "Enough!" And I was almost murdered. I knew that the intent to murder me was not solely as a punishment for me. Considering that there are thousands of exploited young women, if one dies or escapes or disappears or ends up in jail, the "business" does not suffer. But, in my case, there were other considerations: I had already tried to help other young women to avoid ending up in the hell called prostitution. The traffickers had no proof, but together with other women, I had acted so that a minor girl would not suffer what we had suffered. We enabled her to escape and we covered up the fact that she ran away.

When I said, "Enough!" other women stood watching, frightened by what they thought would happen to me. To punish me and kill me would have served

the traffickers to teach a lesson to all: No one betrays the *maman* [female pimp] and her friends; no one gets away from the “business”.

Years after my rebellion, the power of the *voodoo* rite that I was forced to participate in before leaving Africa has not killed me. Now many women are beginning to believe that the story that *voodoo* will punish them if they do not obey the *maman* and their collaborators is just a colossal lie and serves just to keep them submissive.

Our families in Africa are threatened with paying a high price for the rebellion of women in Europe. And this, too, is a fear which keeps the women from rebelling and keeps them prostituting themselves in order to pay an absurd debt which reaches up to 100,000 Euro. My family has not paid, because my brothers are big men who are able to defend themselves. My mother died of a bad disease and so cannot be threatened. Also, I have become “important” in Europe and in Nigeria because of my book which tells the truth about the trafficking of Nigerian women. The traffickers occupy themselves with continuing to make money. They have no interest in getting themselves in trouble by attacking a known personality like myself.

The *mamans* say “sooner or later... (Isoke will get what is coming to her)” to the women--still today, threatening my freedom. Every time someone on television or out in the world mentions me, the women ask, “But who is that Isoke? What she says--is it true?”

“No, none of it is true,” answers the *maman*. “That one is just looking out for herself, and she is dead--she is as good as dead.”

Today my family in Nigeria tells me that when I return to Benin City, I must be careful of those who want to harm me. It would not take much money to hire a member of the mafia to hurt me. Trafficking is a business of the mafia. Fifty Euros—or even less--would be enough. It could sound like a lot of money for one of the deprived people from my own village who has nothing against me personally, but who wants to put money in his pocket.

I could lose my life for having said, “Enough!” and then for having written books and toured from city to city to tell the truth.

I did not want to write books. But if traffickers are afraid of the simple courage of a simple person like me, then it means they can be defeated. If more people would talk and if many more would listen, then trafficking could be defeated!

I listened to the wrong drum: I listened to the voice of deceivers who planted illusions and false hope. I paid dearly for my error, and now I have taken up my drum to send out another message: I pound on my drum--books and personal testimony.



But I remain today and for always the same Isoke who dreamed wide-eyed in front of a neighbor's television and thought that Europe was Paradise. I am the same young Isoke who is far from intellectualism and the dominant culture. My childhood dream was of a simple life with only the essentials. But unfortunately, I became the Isoke who was a victim of human trafficking, undocumented and forced to prostitute herself.

...

I speak on behalf of the association of victims and ex-victims of human trafficking founded by myself together with many women friends: "*La Ragazza di Benin City*" (*The Girls from Benin City*). Our plea to you is simple: we want to have a voice. We want to be listened to. We want to be clearly understood. And we want governments, social and religious institutions and individuals to respond.

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# Bible Study #1

## MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

### Genesis 1:27

*By Marion Carson*

In this resource booklet we are considering the root causes of human trafficking. We have seen that there are many contributing factors – confused ideas about human sexuality, about identity, about what will make us happy. All these things make people much more vulnerable to traffickers who exploit these confusions for financial gain. Human trafficking comes about because some do not have respect for the fundamental equality of mankind in God’s sight. They do not respect other people as intrinsically valuable in themselves. The Bible has something to say about this. When God created us, and prior to the fall, there was no confusion at all. Individuals are important in God’s sight. They are made to be part of communities, with responsibility for looking after the earth.

*So God created man  
In his own image,  
In the image of God  
He created him;  
Male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)*

This verse reminds us of how we are viewed by God himself. Each individual is precious in His sight and has certain qualities which reflect the Creator. Each individual is beloved by God and resembles Him in some way. This applies to both male and female. It speaks of a certain dignity. It tells us that we are different from the animals whom God has also created.

This doctrine has ethical implications for the way human beings should treat each other.

It means that it is not legitimate to treat other people with disrespect.

It means that it is not legitimate to use people to achieve what we want from them.

It means that our dealings with each other should be seen against a background of our relationship with God – who is our judge.

It means that we cannot treat others as if they are our inferiors.

It means that human beings cannot be seen as commodities to be bought and sold for profit.

It means that we cannot use others for our sexual gratification.

Yet this is precisely what human traffickers do – they treat people as commodities rather than precious children of God Himself. They use and manipulate people. They do not respect them. They are also clever. They exploit the weakness of those who find themselves in dire need. They exploit the confusion over identity and sexuality, and over what will make us happy, which have come about because of the Fall.

### *Questions for discussion*

- How does our understanding of our relationship to God affect how we treat other people?
- How can our churches help people to have a balanced view of themselves?
- What contributes to the confusions regarding identity, sexuality and happiness? How can your church respond?

# **Bible Study #2**

## **BLESSED ARE THE POOR...**

### **Luke 6:20**

*By Marion Carson*

Another major theme in this booklet is poverty. It is true that many find themselves enslaved because they are unable to find a job, or feel that they have no hope of bettering themselves, or cannot afford adequate medical care, for example. Others, who may not be so poor that they cannot support themselves, may nevertheless find themselves enslaved because they have believed that life will be better if they have more money or possessions. They believe that being richer will make them happy.

Whether slavery and trafficking come about because of abject poverty, or the desire to have more money – the fact is that those who find that they are in slavery are being exploited by others who want to be rich themselves – and they are prepared to do whatever they have to get their way. They exploit those who are weakened by poverty, or are confused about what will make them happy. They exploit the dreams of the vulnerable.

Many people think that if we tackle poverty, we will eradicate the situations in which people find that they are vulnerable to trafficking. There is certainly some truth in this. If people have enough money for their basic needs, then they will be less likely to be forced to go into debt slavery or to be tempted by stories of how they can get jobs which are unavailable to them where they live. But can it be that straightforward? Might there be more to it than that?

*“Blessed are you poor, for your is the kingdom of God.” (Luke 6:17)*

It seems natural to say that poverty is a bad thing, and that we should do our best to get rid of it. If so, these words of Jesus could come as quite a surprise. We

might expect Him to say – blessed are those of you who work towards the eradication of poverty – for you are bringing justice into the world. But he does not say that – he says that poverty is the condition which enables people to become much more open to the rule of God in their lives. It means that they are not in thrall to money and all the trappings that this brings. The state of poverty is that in which God can work.

But does this mean that poverty is in and of itself a good thing?

Of course, this is not what Jesus is saying here. Elsewhere Jesus makes it clear that those who have enough are to help those who are in need (e.g. Matthew 6:1-4). They are to reach out to those who are in poverty and help alleviate the situation.

So what can he mean? We all know that poverty is relative. One person may think he is poor, while in the eyes of another he appears to be rich. Here, Luke says that Jesus is talking directly to his disciples who have given up everything to follow Him. They are not in abject poverty – they are not so poor that they cannot survive – the disciples have enough to eat and drink. But they are not wealthy either. They have enough.

Abject poverty – when people do not have enough to eat and drink, or are unable to support their dependents – is a bad situation to be in. It is the Christian's duty to alleviate that kind of suffering. But poverty in relation to great wealth seems to be a good thing – a state in which God can work in people's lives. It is a state in which, Jesus says, people are blessed – they have hope.

### ***Questions to consider:***

- What do you think constitutes poverty?
- Elsewhere, Jesus says “The poor you will always have with you” (Mk 14:7). What do you think he means by this?
- The Matthean version of this saying is “blessed are the poor in spirit”. What do you think this means? How does it help you understand Jesus' attitude toward poverty?

# **Bible Study #3**

## **BUT WOE TO YOU WHO ARE RICH, FOR YOU HAVE ALREADY RECEIVED YOUR COMFORT**

*By Marion Carson*

This is more in tune with what we might expect Jesus to say. People who are rich have the comforts in the present which are denied to the poor. They may become complacent, lacking in compassion. Or they may become consumed with anxiety over how they can hang on to their money. Wealth can also bring about a sense of entitlement and power over others. So Jesus says, those of you who are rich run the risk of denying the rule of God in your life, of shutting off ways in which God can work through you.

But does Jesus say that being rich is a bad thing? Not necessarily. Those who are rich can give to the poor. Those who have more than they need can help alleviate the sufferings of those who do not have enough. And, like the notion of poverty, the idea of riches is relative. Compared to the person with nothing, the person who has a week's supply of food is rich. So Jesus does not seem to be saying that riches themselves are a bad thing – it is what we do with them that matters.

### ***Questions to consider:***

- Poverty is very hard to define – but what do you think constitutes wealth? When would you think you are rich?
- What do you think a Biblical attitude towards wealth might be?
- How can we enable people to desire the rule of God in their lives rather than focussing on money?



# Bible Study #4

## SPEAKING OUT AGAINST EXPLOITATION

### Amos 2:6ff

*By Marion Carson*

*“They sell the righteous for silver,  
And the needy for a pair of sandals.  
Thy trample on the heads of the poor  
As upon the dust of the ground  
and deny justice to the oppressed.” (Amos 2:6ff)*

The problem with focusing on alleviating poverty is that it can lead us to thinking that to give money will always solve the problem. And that, in turn, can lead to the idea that money is all that matters in life. The two opposites in Luke 6 warn us against making money the centre of our thinking. The important thing is that we desire God’ rule in our lives.

So what should we do with regard to poverty and anti-trafficking? We know that poverty is a major reason for slavery. People sell themselves into debt slavery because that is the only way they find that they can support their families. Girls who find that they have no other way of making money are tricked into prostitution. And there are also those who, though not abjectly poor themselves, are deceived into thinking that they can become rich and have all the things which seem to make other people happy. What can we do about this?

We should certainly work towards alleviating the poverty of those who cannot support themselves or their families. We need to enable people to find decent, legitimate employment. We should also be prophetic about the exploitation of the poor by traffickers and those who make use of human “commodities”. Jesus and the prophets



are clear - it is wickedness to exploit the poor. It is wicked to exploit those who find that they are unable to support themselves (or who think that they cannot).

*God declares judgement on Israel  
“They sell the righteous for silver,  
And he needy for a pair of sandals.  
Thy trample on the heads of the poor  
As upon the dust of the ground  
and deny justice to the oppressed.” (Amos 2:6ff)*

God objects to the oppression of the poor, to their being turned into objects rather than people, to their being used as the means for personal gratification. This, of course, is exactly what happens to those who are trafficked. They are oppressed by people who want to use them for their own personal profit and gain. They are sold as objects rather than people. They are trampled under foot like dust – as though they are not precious people made in the image of God. And they are denied justice. They are used, betrayed – denied a voice.

But, here is one more thing to notice here. Jesus’ words are addressed to the disciples and those of Amos to Israel. They are warning those who are followers of God about their attitude towards money; we need to be very careful that we are not exploiting the poor, that we are not somehow colluding in the oppression. We can’t sit back and say that it is the traffickers only who are responsible for the exploitation of the poor.

But neither should we focus our attention on money. It is easy for rich Christian to give money to worthy causes. It is easy for us to contribute to the lie that money will solve all the problems of injustice. To do so is to draw attention away from God’s kingdom and towards the values of materialism.

Let us speak prophetically into the situations of exploitation and oppression which are ruining the lives of thousands of people around the world today. Let us not collude in the lie that money is the answer to human problems

### ***Questions to consider:***

- What might living and speaking prophetically about exploitation of the poor mean in your context?
- How can the church be distinctive in a materialistic world?
- How can we enable people to have a healthy view of money and possessions?

## Resources on Slavery and Prostitution

*(This is a compilation of some of the books which have been most helpful for members of the EBF Anti-Trafficking Working Group)*

### **Bales, Kevin**

2000 *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (revised edition)  
Berkeley: University of California Press

2005 *Understanding Global Slavery: A Reader* Berkeley: University of California Press 2005

### **Bok, F. with Edward Tivnan**

2003 *Escape from Slavery: The True Story of my Ten Years in Captivity – and my journey to freedom in America* New York: St Martin's Griffin

### **Brock, Rita N & Thistlethwaite, S.**

1996  *Casting Stones: Prostitution and Liberation in Asia and the United States*  
Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.

### **Cacho, Lydia**

2010 *Esclavas del Poder: Un Viaje al Corazon de la Trata Sexual de Mujeres y Ninas en el Mundo/A Journey to the Heart of World Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls (only in Spanish)* Debate Editorial

### **Carson, Marion**

2008 *The Pastoral Care of People with Mental Health Problems* London: SPCK

### **Cox, Baroness & Marks, John**

2006 *This Immoral Trade: Slavery in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* Oxford: Monarch Books

**Farley, Melissa**

2003 *Prostitution, Trafficking and Traumatic Stress* Binghampton: Haworth Press

**Gupta, Rahila**

2007 *Enslaved: The New British Slavery* London: Portobello Books

**Iverson, Irene**

*Fiona's Story: A Tragedy of our Times* London: Virago

**Jewell, Dawn Herzog**

2008 *Escaping the Devil's Bedroom* Oxford: Monarch Books

**Kristoff, Nicholas and WuDunn, Sheryl**

2009 *Half The Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women World-Wide* Knopf

**Lloyd, Rachel**

2011 *Girls Like Us* Harper

**Malarek, Victor**

2004 *The Natashas: The New Global Sex Trade* London: Vision Paperbacks

**Mende, Nazer**

*Slave* London: Virago Press

**Robb, Ruth & Carson, Marion**

2004 *Working the Streets: A Guide for Christians involved in Outreach to Prostitutes* Bognor Regis: New Wine Press

**Sanders, Teela**

2008 *Paying for Pleasure: Men who Buy Sex* Cullompton: Willan Publishing

**Smith, Danny**

2007 *Slavery Now - and Then* Eastbourne: Kingsway

**Ubeivolc, Vladimir & Sazonov, Benjamin**

2012 *A New Face of Human Trafficking* (English); *Новое лицо торговли людьми* (Russian); *O altă fațetă a traficului de persoane* (Romanian) Chisinau, Moldova: AO Inceputul Vietii (Beginning of Life)

**Watts, Charlotte**

2006 *Stolen Smiles: The Physical and psychological health consequences of Women and Adolescents trafficked in Europe* The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

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# Prayer

Loving Father, we ask that you would help us to have a healthy understanding of ourselves as created in the image of God. We pray that you would enable your church to help people at risk of trafficking to have a healthy view of themselves. We pray too for wisdom with regard to money and possessions. Give us the courage to speak out against exploitation and oppression of the poor.

**In Jesus' name**

**Amen**