

Human Trafficking as Modern-Day Slavery

The *Social Action Handbook* (SAH) is a summary of the reports and recommendations adopted by the General Assemblies of The Presbyterian Church in Canada from 1954 to the present.

The quoted statements and discourses that appear below *in italics* refer to human trafficking, slavery or biblical references to slavery. They have been compiled from the *Social Action Handbook* (The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2014), available for reading and downloading at <http://presbyterian.ca/justice/>



Called to work for justice

As a result of WMS advocacy, the following recommendation was adopted by The Presbyterian Church in Canada in 2010:

[that] the Moderator of the 136th GA communicate to Prime Minister Stephen Harper and other relevant Cabinet Ministers, the church's concern about human trafficking in Canada, and urge the government to develop and implement a national strategy to combat human trafficking (specifically in the sex trade).

(From SAH, Book Three: Community; Refugees, Immigrants and Migrants, p. 76)

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Our call to work for justice for all people and to be partners with others in caring for each other is discussed in an excerpt about identity and calling from "Response to the Constitutional Proposals", the BCL Report, 1992. The discussion begins in the context of Galatians 3:28.

The unity of slave and free in Christ implies that in the new creation of Christ there is neither oppressed nor oppressor. Extreme individualism and the exploitation of one segment of society by another are incompatible with the biblical emphasis on community and mutual service. We are called to work for justice for all peoples.

The unity of male and female in Christ implies that in the new creation there is to be no domination of male over female. The unity of Jew and Greek implies that there is no domination of one ethnic group over another, of nation over nation. Neither

authoritarianism nor passivity is an appropriate role in individual or corporate relations. We are created as partners with other human beings to care for one another and to exercise stewardship over God's creation.

Ephesians 2:14 can help us discover our calling: "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us." We are Christ's body in the world and our calling is to carry on the ministry of breaking down walls between people and groups of people. By our attitudes, opinions and behaviour we contribute either to wall building or to the breaking down of walls. As Christians, we do not have any choice about what our responsibility is. How do we respond to situations in our society and the world? Do our responses create or maintain barriers, or are they attempts to remove barriers?"

As we seek to fulfil our calling, we affirm that our primary allegiance is to Jesus Christ and not to any individual group or institution. The "Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation" [Book of Forms, Appendix E] states:

The one holy Triune God, sovereign Creator and Redeemer, has declared and established His Kingdom over all powers in heaven and earth. By the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and by His exaltation to the right hand of the Father, all things have been made subject to Him, so that even age-long evil is overruled for good.

In all of the issues that confront us then, in our national and international relationships, we are to be aware of our primary identity as Christ's people and our calling to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation.

(From SAH, Book Four: Nation, Canada and Its Peoples, Canadian Constitution, p. 118-119)

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Understanding scripture

In 2008 there was a discussion of how the call to proclaim the gospel in the world involves a challenge of translation into the culture in which we live. The following excerpt comes from "Growing in Christ: Seeing the Image of God in Our Neighbour" in the Policy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for Dealing with Allegations of Racial Harassment, Assembly Council Report, 2008."

Even the early church encountered this challenge of translation. In a God-given dream, Peter is confronted by the very gospel he proclaimed and realizes, for the first time, that Gentiles are to be welcomed into the grace of Christ (Acts 10). In a different account, Philemon is challenged by the return of his runaway slave, Onesimus, who has become a Christian and who now returns as more than a slave; he is a brother in Christ (Philemon). These stories illustrate the radical challenges faced by the early followers of Christ as, by the Holy Spirit, they learned to give new answers to the old question, "Who is my neighbor?"

In John's gospel we read that God loves the world God has created (John 3:16). This includes everyone without exception. All are made in the image of God. As the wisdom writer states, our relationship with others is to be determined by the reality that God is their creator: "Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honour him" (Proverbs 14:31). The dignity of all human beings is not something that is achieved or earned; it is God who gives it (Isaiah 42:5)...

...Seeing others in a new way is central to the gospel. Our reconciliation with God is meant to lead us to reconciliation with one another...

Racism divides the church and slanders Christ by stating that we are not all equally treasured in God's covenant or that we are not all one in Christ's love. Paul vigorously contends that, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). This does not mean that these differences ceased to exist in Paul's time. But it does mean that these distinctions are no longer barriers to God's grace in Christ – a gift which removes human barriers and human boasting. Instead of being divided by race, culture and gender, the church is to be understood as a household (Ephesians 2:29-22).

...The challenge for the church, therefore, is to show an open love and respect for all, refusing to let the cultural traditions of any one group become a dividing wall for the full inclusion and participation by another.

(From SAH in Book Three: Community, Diverse Races and Ethnic Origins, pp. 64-65)

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In 1996 in an excerpt from "What does the Lord require of us?" in the Life & Mission Agency (LMA) report, 1996 there is a discussion about the biblical meaning of the word "justice."

In the Bible, justice is the standard by which the benefits and penalties of living in society are distributed. Justice is a state of being right, of right conduct or being in a straight way. When applied to God in scripture, justice designates the perfect agreement between God's nature and God's acts, providing a standard for humankind.

The biblical concern for the poor, the economically marginalized, is both general and specific. The Old Testament repeatedly draws attention to the condition of the widowed, the orphaned and the foreigner, the most vulnerable and least protected of their day. Jesus expressed a similar priority, not only addressing their needs, but confronting those structures and practices that excluded them. In defining his vocation (Luke 4), Jesus borrowed the Old Testament concept of the jubilee (Leviticus 25, Deuteronomy 15, Isaiah 58, 61, 65).

Both the Sabbath year and the jubilee were based on a critical social analysis of economic realities that called for drastic, periodic and systemic reversals of the upward

funneling of wealth. During those years, debts were canceled and debtors' prisons emptied; land was redistributed and left for fallow; workers rested and slaves were freed. Right relations between landholders and peasantry, between the beneficiaries and the victims of economic injustice, between the farmer and the land were restored.

*Though theologians have argued for centuries over the application to their day of the jubilee mandate, God's intention seems clear. To love God and neighbour is to practice jubilee: to turn back the forces of economic injustice in favour of the excluded, making full community for all God's people a real possibility (F. Ross Kinsler, *The New World Economic Order: Challenge to Theological Education*, 1995, p.11). (From *SAH*, Book Four: Nation, Social and Economic Issues, p. 137-138)*

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In 1995 in an excerpt from "A Theological Reflection on Debt and Poverty" in the International Affairs Committee (IAC) Report, there is a discussion that connects the biblical references to poverty, debt and Jubilee practices with Christian action today.

Usury, the charging of exorbitant interest on loans, and the general problem of debt and poverty are among the oldest moral concerns of the Judaeo-Christian tradition (Deut. 24:10-13; Hab. 2:5-8). Most of the biblical references pertain to survival loans rather than loans to finance new enterprises. Numerous passages prohibit interest on loans to the poor and measures that deprive debtors of their livelihood or of the necessities of life. Although lenders had a right to fair, agreed-upon payment, loans held legal obligations for only six years (Deut. 15:1-2). People who had sold themselves or their labour to pay off debts were to be released in the seventh year (Ex.21:2-3; Deut. 15:12). Other passages, however, protested the whole practice of debt slavery (Neh. 5:1-13).

Old Testament economic ethics often speak of restoring creation to a proper balance, to the state of well-being and wholeness known as shalom. Every seventh year, the land was to be rested to prevent its depletion and to allow poor people and wild animals to gather food (Ex. 23:10-11). The year of Jubilee was to occur at the end of seven cycles of seven years (Lev. 25), when land would be restored to its original owners to counteract the displacement of small landholdings and the growth of huge estates, a social evil contrary to God's will (Isa. 5:8-9). All debts would be forgiven, all slaves set free. The link to reconciliation with God was clear: Jubilee would begin on the Day of Atonement, when as sacrifice removed everything unclean from the temple and from the people.

Israelite society had as much difficulty as ours in living up to this ethic. Slavery was reformed, but not abolished. Although resting the land and debt remission every seventh year were sometimes observed, jubilee remained only an ideal. This made Jesus' invocation of the Jubilee tradition even more radical. "He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor ... to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. ... Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk. 4:16-19, Is. 61:1-2, Ps. 146:5-9).

Planting and reaping, labouring and resting, became metaphors for the rhythm of God's creation and grace. The same themes of rest and release from toil or bondage applied to human relations. The jubilee theme of debt remission is most prominent in Matthew's Greek version of the Lord's Prayer (6:9-13, "forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors"), which echoed the first Greek version of Leviticus 25. Our social and spiritual relationships are inextricably linked. (2 Cor. 8; Acts 4:32-35).

What would the world be like if Christians dared to act on the vision of jubilee, which Christ proclaimed as the central focus of his ministry? Could we build a world where all people could share the freedom and security that is God's shalom? Ideal? Yes, that's what jubilee is meant to be. Impossible? Not when God is at work, as God was when Moses made an ideal, impossible request to Pharaoh: "Let my people go". Dare we believe that the year of God's favour is possible? Forgiveness, release, freedom, what an occasion for joy. There is hope for all of creation if we dare to believe and work towards the vision of jubilee. Christ did. Will we do the same?

(SAH in Book Five: World, The Problem of Foreign Debt, pp. 211-212)

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Working for justice in challenging times

In an excerpt from the 1995 "Serving the Common Good" in the LMA Report some principles for ethical reflection were provided in a discussion about the right of all persons and their communities to be treated with human dignity – with justice, love, compassion and respect – and their responsibility to treat others the same. In addition to fiscal fairness and ecological sustainability, these principles included:

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- *Mutual responsibility: The obligation of the community to care for and share with its people, so that basic needs are met.*
- *Social equity: The right of all people to adequate access to basic resources, and to full participation in the life and decision-making of the community.*
- *Economic equity: The right of all persons and communities to adequate access to the resources necessary for a full life, including access to worthwhile work, fair employment considerations, and income-security provisions, and their responsibility to use such resources responsibly.*

Social security should enhance human dignity and enable all Canadians to be integrated into the mainstream of economic and social life. ...Meaningful employment is essential to dignity and self-respect. The federal government cannot afford to ignore the devastation wrought by the social deficit in order to address the difficulties presented by our financial deficit. Social deficits will bring problems that will increase financial deficits. We cannot allow the present situation to jeopardize our ability to analyze, to hear the voices of the exploited, to imagine alternatives, to act in solidarity, and to be faithful to God.

(SAH, Book Four: Nation, Social and Economic Issues, p. 137)

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Impact of modern slavery on indigenous people

In 1993 an excerpt from “Indigenous Peoples” in the IAC report reminds us that indigenous people are particularly impacted by modern slavery in the form of human and sexual trafficking:

Indigenous peoples include not just tribal peoples whose way of life or social condition differ from other groups within a nation or region, but also peoples who are descended from the populations which inhabited a nation or region at the time of conquest or colonization, or before the establishment of existing national boundaries. Worldwide, roughly 300 million indigenous people live in more than 70 countries; an estimated 30 million in the Americas, of whom more than 900,000 live in Canada. ...indigenous peoples throughout the world face a reality of exclusion and marginalization from economic and political life.

The lands inhabited by indigenous peoples are often wanted by the state or commercial interests for economic exploitation, while indigenous peoples are denied the right to sustainable and equitable development. Because they often live in ecologically sensitive areas, indigenous peoples have suffered much from the worldwide degradation of the environment. Much of the world’s tourist industry does not benefit local populations, and is particularly hard on indigenous peoples. Their cultures have been destroyed, their beaches and even their sacred sites taken over or intruded upon by hotels or resorts. Irresponsible tourism can introduce or expand local alcohol and drug abuse, as well as prostitution and even slavery.

This economic marginalization reflects the implicit and explicit racial discrimination that continues to “ravage the lives of indigenous peoples in both developing and developed countries.”

(From *SAH*, Book Five: World, Human Rights, p. 232)