

The Connection between Human Trafficking and Work

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The connection between human trafficking and work is at the center of the Social Teaching of the Church, and that is the way that Pope Francis tells us, and that we must start right now.

I would like to have a conversation about why, in the 21st century, humans became a commodity in the new industrial productive system. In the past, the human was a commodity as worker, but at the beginning of the 21st century, the human became a commodity in the post-financial system, a migrant commodity, a commodity in private prisons, an organ-replacement commodity, a drug-dealing commodity, a soldier in illegal armies commodity. It means that the body is in the market, but doing another function. We must understand what human trafficking means today, otherwise it is an empty category.

The rule of law - in the 21st century - has become a new feudalism. Secular government became a secular religion which unmasked our sacred symbols. Presidents arrive to the government after campaigns or publicity with the Bible, in the name of God, with the image of the Virgin Mary, with the rosary; and at the center of the political publicity is not the rights like in the past, such as civil or social rights but rather social conflict issues like abortion, LGTB, migration presented as religious conflict. In the end, it is not a political campaign but a bioethical campaign. This is a big change, because people are not voting for civil or social rights. Pope Francis named this as a time of change, and we must understand exactly what it means.

We are here to speak about the victims of human trafficking, but maybe we are speaking about ourselves. Even though we tend to think that human trafficking is a problem about others, if we are to understand the modality of human trafficking today, we must ask, like Hemingway, for whom the bells tolls. Maybe we are victims of the system of human trafficking. With 62% of the world's active population unemployed, maybe we will be next; perhaps our sons and daughters who are in our universities, our students at the best universities may not have a job, a dignified job. Maybe they can become victims of human trafficking, because human

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trafficking is a system. We usually think of the victims as being the lowest members in the social network. But this network involves all the social classes, and all the academic disciplines, because the system needs lawyers, economists or medical doctors, as in the case of the organ market. The system needs logistics, transportation. When we think of human trafficking, we think of a movie villain, but the system is not possible only with one person. So we must not think of an individual; we must always think of a system. Otherwise it is impossible to tackle the problem.

Why, according to Pope Francis, is the non-recognition of the dignity of work related to human trafficking? Here is the problem. When our students interview for a new job, we must listen to who interviews them. I know one example of a company that sells arms to governments of Latin America. It offers a job to a highly educated young graduate of our universities. So, we are involved in the system of human trafficking: poor young people sell guns as dealers in the narco trafficking network, but highly-educated rich young people also sell arms ... and drugs and public debt junk bonds in the system. So, it is important to understand that we are part of a big system that involves all of us.

But this is not new in the Social Teaching of the Church. Pope Francis does not have a new discourse; he does not have a new theology like Theology of the People nor Liberation Theology. No. His theology is the same theology of the Social Teaching of the Church. It is the same theology because it is the same Gospel, but in a different moment. Since the problems are different the solutions must be different. Along with all the Social Teaching of the Church that began with *Rerum Novarum*, the center always is the human being as worker. This is the start of the Social Teaching of the Church: the human condition of workers. In *Laudato Si*, at the center is not climate change, it is the human being as a worker. We must read the encyclical with other glasses, because ideology changes our vision - as Zizek says. Ideology is like glasses that distort our vision of the world. Be careful, because in *Laudato Si* the center is the human being as worker. This is consistent in the Social Teaching of the Church.

Pius XII spoke about migration and about a system that kills also, but in a different mode. In the pontificate of Pope Francis, the problem of the poor is another. In the times of Pius XII the problem was migration as forced migration as a consequence of World War II, but now, migration is the consequence of another problem. Always the Social Teaching of the Church spoke about migration, and about the problems that appear around migration: exploitation,

slaves, etc. But the idea is not to continue speaking about the migration trafficking only as a category; we must understand which is the problem that moves people to migration.

The Social Teaching of the Church disciplines us to not talk about human trafficking without at the same time talking about the dignity of work as a constitutive part of the human creature. What does it mean? We have a lot of centers, especially in the United States, to assist those migrant people; and that is great, especially as spiritual assistance. I am a professor at the School of Ministry and my students are preoccupied with assisting those migrant people. But the solution is not only spiritual assistance. The solution is integration, this is the method that Pope Francis proposed. What can we do for migrants? Receive and integrate, but: integrate to where? At the Church? yes. But the Church is not only the wall of the building. The Catholic church is university and union workers also, specially in the United States, Argentina and Brazil, where from the beginning it was the Catholic Church which organized workers. The Catholic Church organized workers, business men, and communities. So, when we speak about integrating migrants, we must be concrete. Pope Francis calls for “concretezza” (concrete measures).

How to integrate migrant people? We must integrate them in industry, in the sanitary system, in the university... But in order to do that, we have another problem, because it is not easy to integrate a person without documents. However, the migrants exist, and Pope Francis said that they exist, and they are part of the wealth, because this world that God created was built by workers; we are collaborators of God in the re-creation of the world. And that work is done by migrants in the worst conditions.

Pope Francis calls us to integrate migrants in the network of work, because doing that is a concrete mode of integration to recognize dignity. And that modality is not only to say: oh, poor people “I love you; you are important to me; we are brothers and sisters”... No. To recognize is to pay a dignified salary. That must be at the center of our concret activity as Catholic Church. Of course this is not new. I don't want to repeat here all the Social Magisterium of the Church but, for example, in *Mater et Magister*, Juan XXII spoke about employment as a problem, as cause of social conflict. In *Pacem in Terris*, he is absolutely clear about the violation of justice. However, for the last few years it was impossible to speak about social justice, for example in the United States because it was a tainted phrase. But this is at the heart of the Social Teaching of the Church, I quote Juan XXIII, and *Gaudium et Spes*, for

example, is clear about human trafficking, the document denounces slaves and exploitation at the same level of prostitution or sale of women and children. That document is from 1965; this is not a new problem. In *Octogesima Adveniens*, for example, speaking about this problem, the document says that we must proclaim equal dignity.

Maybe we can find solutions from the right and from the left, and maybe good solutions. Maybe we can find good solutions from liberalism and from socialism, and that is fine; but from Catholicism we have another solution. But, sometimes, when we are looking for solutions for these social and political problems, we suddenly go to the right or to the left, but the proposal of social teaching is another. The solution is dignity, it is to recognize the dignity of the human being. Of course, this is a short sentence, but our work is how to explain it, to say what it means. According to Pope Francis, and to all the Social Magisterium, dignity is being recognized by a formal job ... with social guarantees, with a just salary. That is recognition; it is not to shake hands. No. We are in the liberal system, so recognition is inclusion; but inclusion in the network of production.

But how to do this inclusion, because in the moment when we are speaking about synodality, which means in concrete. The church is synodality. The Catholic Church is not the same as other Christian churches. The Catholic Church is public word, and not a ritual inside the room. The Catholic Church is public word about the common good. We are not doing politics or Catholicism if we are here speaking about our latest artistic creation or any individual interest or necessity. Catholicism is our word, as assembly, as ecclesia, in the public space about the common good. That public space is essential to Catholicism. At the moment, we are in a system that tries to privatize the voices of Catholicism, but that is another religion. It is important to understand that when Pope Francis says “integration” or “synodality”, it is another mode to say “participation”. For us Catholics, democracy is participation. If some of you look for “democracy” in the documents of the Social Doctrine of the Church, especially in Pope Francis’ documents, I am not sure you can find it, because the word is “participation”. At the moment, we have democracies where the people only vote, but after that, they are absolutely excluded from the system.

Democracy is not only the moment when we go to vote for a candidate at presidente of a country. For the Catholic Church, democracy is participation in the system or production, and not only as workers or owners, but taking place at the same level, at the table of decision. Pope

Francis' Exhortation *Querida Amazonia* expresses this. The decisions are about: how to integrate migrant workers to prevent from ending up in the human trafficking network at the different levels. Why different levels? Because to be involved in human trafficking network is not only a problem of the latest victims. If we have young students with high formation, speaking many languages, hyper-educated and we cannot offer dignified work, of course he will participate "as worker" in the network of human trafficking. So, to take place at the same level of the table of decision means that all of us must participate in the discussion about the condition of work and the production and reinvestment. If we want to stop the climate change that forces people to move to other territories, and then when they arrive there, and they have no job, they will be vulnerable to be taken in the human trafficking network. This is one of the beginnings of human trafficking. We are worried about how to prevent human trafficking, but it is not easy to link climate change with human trafficking.

The social solution from the Church is different. When from the right or from the left the people speak about democracy, we from the Church speak about synodality, not democracy, as a method to listen to the Holy Spirit from the poor and from the earth. The International Organization of Labor speaks about decent work, but the Church speaks about dignified work, because the consequences of human trafficking are considered in that context. Decent work is when we have formal work, look for better and decent conditions of work, like eight hours of work per day. That was the 20th century. In the 21st century formal work ended, and that is the reason why the popular organizations start to speak about dignified work. At the moment, some people confuse crime as work.

I recommend reading the encyclicals directly. They are on the website of the Holy See in all languages. .Don't read books about the encyclicals, not even mine. Because that is e traduction, not only from one language to other, but that is a cultural translation in their own context. For example, some authors put 'democracy', where the document puts 'participation', and that is not the same. Others put 'decent work' where the documents put 'dignified work'.

On December 9, 2024, at the Press Office of the Holy See, we had an important conference with four cardinals: Cardinal Czerny, Prefecto of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development; Cardinal Spengler, President of CELAM (Latin American Bishops Conference); Cardinal Castillo, Archbishop of Lima; Cardinal Chomali, Archbishop of Santiago de Chile; and myself as Secretary of the Pontifical Latin America Commission. The

press conference launched a new Latin America initiative: “Life hangs by a thread”. We are working on this initiative because life in the periphery is considered valueless.

What does the concept of God mean? The concept refers to the owner of life and death. We believe that our God is the owner of life and death. But at the moment, we must recognize who is taking that place in our society. Today we have mortal gods. It is mortals who are the owners of life and death on our planet. And I am not sure if that *Deus Mortalis* - in Hobbsean terms - is the rule of law at the moment. In the idea of a new diplomacy to which *Laudate Deum* refers, we must redefine what diplomacy means. It is an activity of diplomats to speak with the owner of life and death in order to survive. It was this way at the beginning of diplomacy, but then the rule of law replaced it. At the moment, I am not sure if the rule of law is who takes that decision; so, which is our role as professionals, as academics concretely addressing the problem of human trafficking? Who and where are, today, the real mortal gods? In 2019 in Brazil, a catastrophic dam collapse killed hundreds of people because of bad practices by a large iron mining company. The story was underreported, but surely everyone heard about the flooding in Valencia.

Today our lives depend on the decisions of a few people who are the owners of big companies. Does the rule of law exist at this moment? Does the rule of law have the capacity to prevent our people from dying? Who makes that decision? I propose to think beyond assisting the victims of human trafficking, because maybe all of us at the moment are part of the system of human trafficking.