

The Social Teaching of the Church at the Service of Humanity in Europe

*I thank you for the opportunity to address this conference on
Catholic Social Teaching at the service of Humanity in Europe.*

Introduction

As you are aware there is a vast body of Catholic Social Teaching (CST). I can only make a selection within this time constraint addressing the social issues facing humanity. I propose to examine that body of Catholic Social Doctrine for inspiration and direction in our action to combat the crime of trafficking in persons. Catholic Social Teaching has evolved over the centuries and is continually developed in the context of social, political and cultural situations. I can only make a selection within the time constraint we have this morning. I will conclude by adding a few thoughts on the challenges which Catholic Social Teaching presents in the face of the crime of trafficking in persons.

In this session we will look at the evolution of Catholic Social Teaching over the centuries relating to:

- Work
- Dignity of the human person
- Migration
- Trafficking In Persons

Historical Development of Catholic Social Teaching

In its historical context The Catholic Social Teaching is rooted in the Hebrew prophets and the teachings of Jesus. It was developed through the era of the early Fathers of the Church and the Scholastic period. More recently, it has been greatly developed in Papal Encyclicals and other addresses from the Vatican. Its evolution through the centuries has been shaped by the social, economic, political and cultural realities of the time.

Catholic Social Teaching highlights the fact that to achieve full human dignity it is critical that one's basic human needs are fulfilled. The sources consistently denounce injustice and announce key values, challenging us to work for justice. Catholic Social Teaching generally deals with broad principles for application at the local level. It is time- bound in the sense that it arises out of the signs of a particular time and situation. Our Catholic Social Teaching emphasises the dignity of the human person; the importance of real human development and of global solidarity.

Scripture gives us many examples.

Starting with tIn the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah gives us one of many we could select as a good example:-

“This ... is the fasting that I wish:
Releasing those bound unjustly,
Untying the thongs of the yoke....
Setting free the oppressed,
Sheltering the oppressed and the homeless. Is.58:6-7

However, in the history of the Old Testament, the people of God didn't always reflect Isaiah's ideal. But the prophets spoke out against almost everything the Jews of their times were doing. They spoke against the assumptions and norms of behaviour. Their criticism of the status quo was almost always constructive. They appealed for change in the light of what they saw.

There are numerous further examples of the same values in the New Testament . The following are a few.

The Mission of Jesus is outlined for us in the Gospel of St. Luke: Chapter 4:18 :-

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and new sight to the blind; to free the oppressed and announce the Lord’s year of mercy.’ Lk. 4:18

When Jesus spoke these words in the Temple, he identified himself with the great Hebrew prophets whose twofold task was to denounce injustice and announce a new way of being.

Jesus’ primary concern is for the most vulnerable. – He is attentive to the marginalised – those who had no money, the sick, those with leprosy, the suffering. He shows concern for the prostitutes who can seem to be less appealing to deal with in the eyes of many. The woman caught in adultery is a prime example – ‘Has no one condemned you?’ Gospel of St. John 8:1-11.

Patristic Era

During the early years of the Church the social teaching was contained in the writings and sermons of the ‘Fathers of the Church.’ Examples are:

Justin Martyr, who lived in the second century A.D. (150 – 155 AD). In his *First Apology* he – denounces the exposing of children saying

‘...there are some who prostitute even their own children and wives’

Tertullian from the same period (155- 220 AD) – in *De Spectaculis*¹ refers to prostitutes as :-

‘.. the victims of public lust ...’

St. Ambrose in the fourth century, as Archbishop of Milan², in his *Treatise of The Clergy*, speaks of – the slave market and prisoners:

‘So once I brought hatred on myself because I broke up the sacred vessels to redeem captives ... Would not the Lord himself say, ‘Why did you allow so many needy to die of hunger? Surely you have gold... Why are so many captives brought to the slave market and why are so many unredeemed left to be killed by the enemy? It would be better to preserve living vessels than gold ones.’

From these few examples it is clear that the early Church tried to address the social problems of the day.

Medieval Times

Let me digress for a moment to reflect on the backdrop to the kind of social issues we are dealing with as they pertained in medieval times. In Europe during the Middle Ages the only recognised religion was Christianity, in the form of the Catholic religion. The lives of the Medieval people of the Middle Ages were dominated by the church. From birth to death, whether you were a peasant, a serf, a noble, a lord or a king, life was dominated by the church. Various religious institutions became important, rich and powerful. The Church acquired great power and wealth especially through taxation and was then able to influence the kings and rulers of Europe. It controlled marriage, baptismal registers replaced birth registers and sexuality was controlled.

Ruth Karras³, a contemporary psychologist and expert on Medieval Europe, tells us that prostitution in Europe was an active and profitable enterprise in the Middle Ages⁴. Historians examining town records have found that most towns and cities had some sort of brothel, often an official one that was actually publicly owned. d. Prostitutes, while an inevitable part of urban and town life, existed in a rigorously restricted space, both in a physical sense and in less tangible but no less noticeable ways. In most places, the poorer women were only allowed to sell their sexual services on certain streets or in certain neighbourhoods. Laws mandating that prostitutes should dress in a manner different from other women were passed. The Grand Council of Venice in 1358 declared that prostitution was “absolutely indispensable to the world”⁵.

While most medieval prostitutes were probably not coerced into their trade, becoming a prostitute wasn't any woman's childhood fantasy, either. As for the actual reason, Karras makes the observation that whereas for men prostitution sometimes substituted for marriage as a sexual outlet, for women it substituted for marriage as a means of financial support. Prostitution, she claims, may have been the only acceptable way for some women to support themselves.

Accurate statistics about rape in medieval times are almost impossible to come by, if only because few agree about what constituted rape and because few rapes were reported. People knew about rape and were concerned about it. Young men were not likely to await marriage for sexual activity, so women were at risk.

An interesting point is that as far as we can judge prostitution was institutionalised as a form of rape control. City leaders recognised the need to protect their wives and daughters. They licensed certain specific buildings, taverns, or bath houses, and they stipulated the kinds of women who could be prostitutes in these establishments.

Many cities decided to take advantage of the situation and earn a little money. Municipal brothels were set up. Today's trafficked women would have welcomed the laws they introduced – These had laws and restrictions prohibiting beatings of the prostitutes by brothel keepers, and restricting the number of customers a prostitute might entertain in one day. The brothel owners, of course, demanded a certain percentage of all earnings.

We may also note an interesting development in Venice. In 1403, about forty years after ending a long policy of expulsion of prostitutes, the municipal government in Venice established its own brothel in the Rialto, which has since become the traditional centre of prostitution in the city. Later, there were attempts to set up other brothels, but this only led to more expulsions in order to regulate the trade and finally to strict compromises between these businesses and the church.

The Church and prostitution

During the Middle Ages the Church in Europe witnessed a universal paradox of tolerance and condemnation regarding prostitution. The earlier teachings of the church attributed both lust and greed, in generous measure, to women as a group, according to Ruth Karras. Prostitutes as individuals were marginalized within medieval culture, although prostitution as an institution was central to the medieval understanding of what it meant to be a woman⁶. Later a shift in thinking occurred away from the strict condemnation and uncompromising intolerance of prostitution by the early Church Fathers to a view of accommodation.

Records indicate there was some disagreement among the clergy. By the 14th century the clergy tended to accept, if not exactly encourage, the practice of prostitution. They tended to think that, while fornication for any purpose but the procreation of children was a sin, they also recognised it as a “natural,” sin, and therefore a lesser sin. The clergy tended either not to stand in the way of prostitution or quietly to support the city leaders in their policies about it. While they had some moral reservations about the practice of prostitution, the New Testament Bible provided the clergy with the example of Mary Magdalene and they found themselves officially forgiving prostitutes. They sometimes allowed prostitutes to be buried in church grounds. The moral position of prostitutes was uncertain.

While the church did not hesitate to denounce prostitution as morally wrong, on researching this paper I was more than a little surprised to find that St. Augustine in 386 explained: “If you expel prostitution from society, you will unsettle everything on account of lusts”⁷ Those who enjoyed their trade were usually considered beyond forgiveness, but those who plied their trade because it was the only way they could support themselves were more easily forgiven. General tolerance of prostitution was for the most part reluctant, and many canonists urged prostitutes to reform. Pope Innocent III even stated in 1198 that it was a great act of Christian charity for a man to take a former prostitute as a wife, thus helping to save her soul by taking her forever out of the brothel.

Thomas Aquinas does not treat prostitution as a separate issue. References to prostitution are scattered and occur in the context of broader discussions of other topics. I found this quote from St. Thomas Aquinas in support of the state tolerating certain vices:

“...those who are in authority, rightly tolerate certain evils, lest certain goods be lost, or certain greater evils be incurred: thus Augustine says: “If you do away with harlots, the world will be convulsed with lust.”⁸

Slavery, as far back as 1435 Pope Eugene IV wrote to Bishop Ferdinand of Lanzarote in his Bull, *Sicut Dudum* saying:

“We order and command all and each of the faithful of each sex that, within the space of fifteen days of the publication of these letters in the place where they live, that they restore to their earlier liberty all and each person of either sex who were once residents of said Canary Islands...who have been made subject to slavery. These people are to be totally and perpetually free and are to be let go without the exaction or reception of any money”⁹

From Pope Eugene IV in 1435 protesting the capturing for slavery of natives of the Canary Islands, through to Pope Leo XIII urging Brazilian bishops, in 1888, to work for the abolition of slavery, popes have stood together, reinforcing the condemnations issued by their predecessors.¹⁰

Modern Times

Let me fast forward a few centuries to 1891 when the official Church began a systematic presentation of this body of thought which today we call Catholic Social Teaching. This includes the papal encyclicals, documents of Vatican II, statements from the Synods of Bishops and the Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church .

Papal Encyclicals

Pope Leo XIII

We have some leads from the papal encyclicals. I am sure everyone here is aware of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*. Written in 1891 it was a challenge to the excesses of the industrial revolution. It condemns the treatment of workers as slaves, the oppression of others and the seeking of gain from another's poverty.

Pius XI in 1931

In the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* written 40 years after *Rerum Novarum*, in the midst of a world-wide depression, addressed the issue of social injustice. Among other points he denounces the growing concentration of wealth, the social responsibilities of private property and the obligation to share one's wealth. He also said 'Labour is not a mere commodity. On the contrary, the worker's human dignity in it must be recognized. It therefore cannot be bought and sold like a commodity'.

Pope Pius XII 1944

We come somewhat closer to the issue of human trafficking in the 1944 in Pope Pius XII's Christmas address (during WW2). In this he insists on the dignity and freedom of the human person saying the human being is not the 'object of social life or an inert element in it but the subject, foundation and end of social life'.

Pope John XXIII in 1961.

Thirty years after *Quadragesimo Anno* wrote *Mater et Magistra*. This signifies a turning point in the Church's understanding of social responsibility. It adopts an international perspective, denounces the unequal distribution of the world's wealth and resources. The Church became global in its concerns. This encyclical calls on 'all people of good will' to work together to create local, national and global institutions which would respect human dignity and promote justice and peace.

The Second Vatican Council 1962 – 1965

With the Second Vatican Council, the church embraced the need to ‘read the signs of the times’ as a means of social discernment. This approach is based on the belief that God continues to speak in and through human history. This, of course, implies that if you and I are concerned about the signs of the times today, we need to take a long hard look at the issue of Trafficking in Persons.

The Vatican II Document, *Gaudium et Spes*, declared that the Church is called to be an agent of transformation. Here we find language that really addresses problems like trafficking. It states that the Church must ‘try to read the signs of the times’ so that it can denounce injustices and continue to announce new possibilities. The human person, particularly the plight of the poor is a central concern. Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups. The document lists arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, selling women and children and disgraceful working conditions as ‘infamies which poison human society’. I find it interesting that *Gaudium et Spes* makes the comment that these practices do more harm to those who practice them than to those who suffer from the injury. These are words we find ourselves repeating today in trying to stem the demand for purchased sex.

Pope John XXIII in 1963

Pacem in Terris, written after the Cuban crisis, includes a comprehensive charter of human rights. It addresses a person's social and economic duties and rights. Among the economic rights he lists the right to work and to a just wage. Peace needs to be ‘founded on truth, built according to justice, vivified and integrated by charity, and put into practice in freedom’ he says. Pope John XXIII recognises that one of the signs of the times is the emerging consciousness of women stating:

‘since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as inanimate objects or mere instruments’

Post Vatican II

Pope Paul VI in 1967

Populorum Progressio, with the Vatican Council over, he focuses on the widening gap between rich and poor nations. Of course, in our anti-trafficking work, we know that it is this very gap that is at the core of the problem. This is the first encyclical devoted entirely to the issue of international development. It states that development is the ‘new name for peace’. He makes explicit reference to the harmful effects of the multinational corporations’ growing control of capital resources. He emphasises the need for a society where everyone ‘can live a truly human life free from bondage and where Lazarus the poor man can sit at the same table as the rich man.’

1971 Marked the eightieth anniversary of a call to action, 80 years after Pope Leo's Landmark Charter, he wrote *Octogesima Anno*, an encyclical that is a call to action. Pope Paul VI says theory is not enough. He makes action in the political arena an integral part of being Christian. He states the urgency of the problems facing us demands Christians to participate in the social and political processes of their countries. It is not enough, he says, to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustices, utter prophetic denunciations; these lack real weight unless accompanied by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and reflective action, he says.

1971, the Synod of Bishops wrote:

“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”

Here the Synod of Bishops recognises that the credibility of the Church's social teaching is determined by its ability to be just in its own life.

1975 again in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Pope Paul VI reaffirms the link between proclaiming the Gospel and struggling for justice. This was taken as a great stimulus to the countless Justice & Peace Groups formed in numerous Dioceses and Parishes all over the world in the wake of the Second Vatican Council.

John Paul II

1979 – Writing in *Redemptor Hominis* also emphasised the strong link between the Gospel and social justice.

Over the following years Pope John Paul II added many more elements to the body of Catholic Social Teaching.

1981 in *Laborem Exercens*, on the 90th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, he reminds us that Leo XIII's call to solidarity was a reaction against the degradation of people as subjects of work. Since 1891, he says, 'the Church has never stopped considering the problems of workers emphasising the dignity of workers and condemning violation of that dignity'.

1987 in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, written on the 20th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, John Paul II addresses the themes of development, global solidarity and the need for structural change

1991 *Centesimus Annus* commemorates the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. Pope John Paul II addresses the relationship of the Church's Social Teaching to major trends and events in the past 100 years. He reaffirms his teaching on human dignity and human rights.

Pope John Paul II – made several specific references to Trafficking in Persons:

May 15, 2002, at the International Conference "Twenty-First Century Slavery" he spoke at length on the issue and I quote;

"The trade in human persons constitutes a shocking offence against human dignity and grave violation of fundamental human rights. Already the Second Vatican Council had pointed to 'slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, and disgraceful working conditions where people are treated as instruments of gain rather than free and responsible persons'. Quoting *Gaudium et Spes* he said are 'infamies' which 'poison human society, debase their perpetrators' and constitute 'a supreme dishonour to the Creator' ¹¹

He continues 'Such situations are an affront to fundamental values, which are shared by all cultures and peoples, values rooted in the very nature of the human person. Who can deny that the victims of this crime are often the poorest and most defenceless members of the human family, the 'least' of our brothers and sisters?

The disturbing tendency to treat prostitution as a business or industry not only contributes to the trade in human beings, but is itself evidence of a growing tendency to detach freedom from the moral law and to reduce the rich mystery of human sexuality to a mere commodity."

"Attention needs to be paid to the causes of the increased 'demand' which fuels the market for human slavery and tolerates the human cost which results. A sound approach to the issues involved will lead also to an examination of the lifestyles and models of behaviour, particularly with regard to the image of women, which generate what has become a veritable industry of sexual exploitation in the developed countries. Similarly, in the less developed countries from which most of the victims come, there is a need to develop more effective mechanisms for the prevention of trafficking in persons and the reintegration of its victims".

The Compendium of The Social Doctrine of The Church', produced by The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in 2004 is also a very valuable resource.

Migrants/immigrants

June 20-21, 2005. At a Vatican-sponsored conference, a statement was written by the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travellers aimed to offer help and pastoral care to victims, especially in sexual slavery. This document stated the importance of recognizing that sexual exploitation, prostitution, and trafficking of human beings are all grave violations of basic human rights. The need for the universal Church to get involved by working to recognize victims and rehabilitate them back to their human dignity was mentioned. Each bishop was encouraged to place the eradication of human trafficking and slavery as a priority on his agenda.

Pope Benedict XVI

(who became Pope in **April 2005**) has spoken repeatedly about the issue of Trafficking In Persons.

October 28, 2005, he issued a message entitled "*Migration: a Sign of the Times*," in which he calls the trafficking in human beings — "*a scourge*," within the migration phenomenon. He calls for respect for all human beings, especially women's vulnerabilities saying: "It becomes easy for the trafficker to offer his own 'services' to the victims, who often do not even vaguely suspect what awaits them. In some cases, these are women and girls who are destined to be exploited almost like slaves in their work, and not infrequently in the sex industry too."

He repeated the condemnation by Pope John Paul II in 1995 referring to "the hedonistic and commercial culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of sexuality and corrupts even very young girls into letting their bodies be used for profit."

18 October 2006 Again for the occasion of the next World Day of Migrants and Refugees Pope Benedict XVI had this to say: 'I feel it my duty to call your attention to the families of refugees, whose conditions seem to have gone worse in comparison with the past. Much is already being done for the integration of the families of immigrants, although much still remains to be done. In recent times, there is an increase in the number of women who leave their countries of origin in search of better conditions of life, in view of more promising professional prospects. However, women who end up as victims of trafficking of human beings and of prostitution are not few in number. In family reunification, social workers, especially religious women, can render an appreciated service of mediation that merits our gratitude more and more. In the camps assigned to them, sometimes there is also the risk of women and children being involved in sexual exploitation, as a survival mechanism.

May 16 2008: Pope Benedict XVI met with bishops from Thailand and strongly condemned the trafficking of women and children. The pope called it 'a terrible exploitation of human beings'. He praised efforts of the Catholic Church in Thailand to alleviate poverty an underlying factor in human trafficking and prostitution. He also criticized the entertainment and media industries for what he called the trivialization of sex.

Organisations actively involved in anti-trafficking

For Trafficking in Persons the experience on which the pastoral responsibility is based comes from those involved in the prevention, assistance and care for persons who have been trafficked or are at risk. There are many examples, locally, nationally and internationally. Some of the international organisations are:

Union of Superior Generals of Religious Women

In its 2001 General Assembly the Union of Superior Generals of Religious Women (UISG) took trafficking in persons as one of their top 3 priorities. They urged religious communities worldwide to address the issue of trafficking of women and children. They set up a Working Group. An Information and Workshop Kit was produced. The aim of the kit was to serve as a catalyst for study and action at local, national and global levels. In December 2004 a Manual on 'Understanding and Counteracting Trafficking in Persons' was produced. This valuable resource was the result of seminars for women religious held in Albania, Nigeria and Romania.

Caritas Internationalis (C.I.)

This is a network of some 170 countries which has called for migration and economic policies that reduce vulnerability to trafficking. It also reaffirms the need to attack the root causes of trafficking by sustained action towards the Millennium Development Goals. Caritas strongly condemns the trafficking of persons as criminal acts, which violate basic human rights and the integrity of the human person. The network of Christian Organisations Against Trafficking in Women (COATNET) began in 2001 on the initiative of Caritas Europa together with members of the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe. The Caritas Commitment on Combating Trafficking in human beings is inspired by and based on the directions given by the Church and in the Catholic Social Teaching.

There are of course many other groups and organisations e.g. Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, Geneva; Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (GAATW) Bangkok; IOM, Geneva etc. With these we can helpfully collaborate even though we may not always share all their values.

Challenges: Our commitment to Christ mandates us to denounce injustice wherever we find it

- In our world there is a large reservoir of uneducated, poor, unemployed, hungry people. Many seek a better life as migrants. They are easily, manipulated and controlled.
- Many find themselves trapped in situations where they are fugitives from justice, being obliged to pay debts.
- Starving people need to eat. Businesses like a cheap labour force.
- Most of us would prefer to eat in slavery than to starve in freedom.
- During the 1980's alone more women and children were enslaved by trafficking from Asia than all the people sold into slavery from Africa during 400 years of slave trade.

The challenge is ours.

Thank you.

¹ This treatise considers the propriety of attending games and shows, and argues that Christians should not. The work is of great interest as a major source of information on the history and operation of the games in the amphitheatre.

² Ambrose, bishop of Milan from 374 to 397 CE and one of the official "doctors" of the Latin church, ranks among the most important figures in the formation of Western Christianity

³ Ruth Mazo Karras, Professor of History, University of Minnesota

⁴ Ruth Karras, Psychologist and expert in Medieval Europe

⁵ Jeffrey Richards, Professor Lancaster University.

⁶ Ruth Karras in *Common Women*, Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England.

⁷ J. Richards, in *The Popes and Papacy in the Early Middle Ages 476-752*, 1979)

⁸ A Thomistic Case for Tolerance, *De Ordine* ii 4

⁹ Panzer in *The Popes and Slavery*

¹⁰ Panzer *ibid.*

¹¹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 27