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Does anybody care about human trafficking?

Phyllis Zagano | Jan. 15, 2014 Just Catholic

The story is 20 years old, but it is true. Two Chinese girls came to the United States. Taken to a New Jersey motel, they were raped repeatedly and forced to work as prostitutes in New York City's Chinatown.

The girls were never left alone or allowed out of their apartment-brothel. They spoke no English, but they could watch television. Soon, they figured out that dialing 911 on the telephone would bring police. But where were they? A customer supplied the address. So on a slow afternoon, one girl gave their guard special favors while other dialed 911. Within minutes, a Chinese-speaking cop showed up. Game over.

That's just two Chinese girls in New York. The United Nations reports [1] that at any given time, 2.5 million trafficking victims fuel a $32 billion industry. Half are children. Most are younger than 24. For every 800 persons trafficked, there is but one conviction.

It is all over the world. It is not stopping. Small scale or large, the slave trade continues.

Not long ago in New York, Indian consulate official Devyani Khobragade, 39, was deported amidst charges [2] she lied on work visa paperwork for a servant she paid $3.31 per hour. That victim was paid. Many are not. And forced servitude is the least of it: Nearly half of trafficking victims -- mostly women and girls -- become sex slaves of one sort or another.

Whether an Indian diplomat in New York underpaying and overworking her servant or the sleazy element that provides prostitutes near sporting events and trade shows, the people who trade in human flesh have networks large and small to keep things going.

The heartbreak is that trafficking is growing, not declining, and those who should know better seem to wink and turn aside because, you know, boys will be boys, and it's the world's oldest profession, and the girls wouldn't be doing it anyway if they didn't like it, and it's private behavior and no one is getting hurt. And, hey, did you see "The Wolf of Wall Street" [3]?

The global moral collapse is not stopping. Yet another UN study will count the victims, but can it ever count the cost?

I think you can draw straight lines from the fact of genuinely gross movies suddenly becoming mainstream to unbridled anger exploding on the Internet to the basest disrespect of the human person through trafficking.

The real "trickle-down effect" is behavioral. Bad behavioral.

Too many men in this world have no respect for women.

When Pope Francis says women should be called to service, not servitude [4], his words can be applied to the cappa magna crowd as well as to the traffickers. In a very real sense, there is not much daylight between the ways these folks look at women. I will never get one comment out of my head: "Ordaining a woman is the same

as ordaining a lamp post or a cat." I heard that in a seminary classroom from a priest professor of sacramental theology. The obvious implication is that women are not fully human. The second shoe is that they cannot image Christ.

That is what Francis needs to fix. Maybe he can start with trafficking. He's been asked to call a world day of prayer focused on the global cancer of human trafficking. Some Italian nuns suggested Feb. 8, the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita, the 19th-century African slave woman kidnapped as a child, so young she forgot her own name.

Bought and sold at least five times and then given away, when she was 19, Bakhita's owner left her caring for his young daughter at an Italian convent. When he returned, she refused to leave. Italian courts ruled in her favor, since slavery had been outlawed before her capture in both her Sudanese homeland and in Italy.

Bakhita is Arabic for "lucky." She got her freedom. But there is still a lot of trafficking in and through Sudan [5] . There are still many employers who abuse their servants. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of persons trafficked every year from China. The sex trade still slithers along a highway or byway near you.

The answer begins with two questions: What does it mean to be human? And what does it mean to care?

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