



Preface

+ Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo

Chancellor of the Pontifical Academies of Sciences and of Social Sciences

Following a wish expressed by Pope Francis and handwritten on what is now a famous envelope, on 2 December 2014 a joint meeting was held at the Casina Pio IV, in the Vatican, inviting the leaders of the world's main religions to sign a Joint Declaration Against Modern Slavery. This declaration committed them to work together in spiritual and practical action to eradicate this crime against humanity and restore dignity and freedom to its victims. Before the signing, each religious leader spoke on the subject and described his or her motivations – based on the ideals of his or her own religious beliefs – for adhering to this declaration.

In a powerful demonstration of solidarity, perhaps this was the first time that religious leaders had come together, adding to their ongoing inter-religious dialogue, to make a common statement to affirm that the other is a free person like you and must be recognized as such, and that you must treat others as you would treat yourself. You must love your neighbour as yourself. This means upholding and defending the true identity of human beings which is compromised by the globalization of indifference whose gravest consequences can be seen in modern forms of slavery and human trafficking – the systematic deprivation of a person's liberty, and abuse of his or her body, for example through mutilation or organ removal, for the purposes of commercial exploitation.

No one can deny that 'the trade in human persons constitutes a shocking offence against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights' and is an accelerator of criminal wealth creation in this new century. The Second Vatican Council stated that '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' are 'infamies' which 'poison human society, debase their perpetrators' and constitute 'a supreme dishonour to the Creator'. In one of the few documents of the Magisterium of the Popes on this issue, St. John Paul II added that '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'. Moreover, he affirmed that the problem is a central one for the social sciences and natural sciences, in particular in the context of globalization: 'The alarming increase in the trade in human beings is one of the pressing political, social and economic problems associated with the process of globalization; it presents a serious threat to the security of individual nations and a question of international justice which cannot be deferred'.[1]

No less important is Pope Benedict XVI's 2011 address to the new German ambassador to the Holy See, when, after expressing his gratitude to the German government, he expressed his grave concern about the sexual discrimination of women, because 'Every person, whether man or woman, is destined to exist for others. A relationship that fails to respect the fact that men and women have the same dignity constitutes a grave crime against humanity. It is time to vigorously put a stop to prostitution, as well as to the widespread dissemination of material with an erotic or a pornographic content, also on the Internet'.[2]

Pope Francis has made eradicating modern slavery a central programme of his pontificate. The workshop on 'Trafficking in Human Beings: Modern Slavery' organised by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences and the *Fédération Internationale des Associations de Médecins Catholiques* in November 2013, was the first major attempt to respond to Pope Francis' appeal. Its Final Statement condemned for the first time, modern slavery and all forms of exploitation, particularly prostitution, forced labour, the harvesting of human organs and the use of children as drug dealers and in the production of pornographic material, especially on the Internet. It concluded by stating that '**Trafficking in human beings in all its forms, and in particular trafficking for sexual exploitation and prostitution, must be declared a crime against humanity**'.

The International Labour Organization states that the total profits obtained from the use of forced labour in the private economy worldwide amount to US\$150 billion per year. Two thirds of this total, i.e. US\$99 billion, come from commercial sexual exploitation. With a global average profit of US\$21,800 per year per victim, this sector is six times more profitable than all other forms of forced labour, and five times more profitable than forced labour exploitation outside domestic work.[3] UNODC estimates that the vast majority of the trafficking victims detected globally are females; either adult women or underage girls. Each year, about 2 million people are victims of sexual trafficking, 60% of whom are girls. Organ trafficking affects 0.3% of trafficking victims who are forced or deceived into giving up an organ (liver, kidney, pancreas, cornea, lung, even the heart), not without

the complicity of doctors, nurses and other medical staff who have pledged to follow Hippocrates' oath *Primum non nocere*. But these chilling figures 'are only the tip of the iceberg', [4] as criminals generally go to great lengths to prevent the detection of their activities. Some observers speculate that, within ten years, human trafficking will surpass drugs and weapons trafficking to become the most profitable criminal activity in the world. Recent trends, however, indicate that human trafficking already occupies first place, so that far from being a declining social crime it is becoming ever more threatening. International sex trafficking is not limited to poor and undeveloped areas of the world – it is a problem in virtually every region of the globe, and countries with large (often legal) sex industries create a demand for trafficked women and girls. Because of the human and moral scandal involved, and the interests at work, which lead to pessimism and resignation, many international institutions have turned their backs on the problem. It is almost 'politically incorrect' to mention this crime.

This is why it is so necessary to follow Pope Francis' mission *sine glossa*. Today, against these new forms of slavery, we need to adopt the same attitude as the Catalan Jesuit St. Peter Claver who saw African slaves in Latin America as fellow Christians and, when he was solemnly professed in 1622, signed his final profession document in Latin as '*Petrus Claver, aethiopum semper servus*' (Peter Claver, servant of the Africans forever). In short, this great saint embodies the real Christian revolution, unknown to the Greeks and the Romans and to all previous civilizations, which began explicitly with the famous letter of St. Paul to Philemon. Indeed, St. Paul urged Philemon to consider Onesimus 'no longer as a slave, but something much better than a slave, a dear brother'. In other words, as stated by the Second Vatican Council, in our times 'everyone must consider his every neighbour without exception as another self, taking into account first of all His life and the means necessary to living it with dignity, so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus', by recalling the voice of the Lord, 'As long as you did it for one of these the least of my brethren, you did it for me' (Mt. 25:40).

We must thus be grateful to Pope Francis for identifying one of the most important social tragedies of our times and for establishing, for the first time, on 8 February 2014, an International Day of Prayer for the Victims of Human Trafficking, on the Feast of St. Josephine Bakhita, herself a Sudanese woman who was a victim of slavery in the first half of the twentieth century. As he said during the canonization of the Mexican St. Guadalupe García Zavala: 'this is called "touching the flesh of Christ". The poor, the abandoned, the sick and the marginalized are the flesh of Christ. And Mother Lupita touched the flesh of Christ and taught us: not to feel ashamed, not to fear, not to find "touching Christ's flesh" repugnant. Mother Lupita had realized what "touching Christ's flesh" actually means'. Pope Francis' words are a clear response in the light of Jesus Christ's message to this new form of contemporary slavery which constitutes an abhorrent violation of the dignity and rights of human beings.

In the same spirit, we are grateful for the active participation of the religious leaders who were willing to sign the Joint Declaration Against Slavery with us. I would like to recall some of the important statements contained in their personal addresses.

Mohamed Ahmed El-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, represented by his Deputy, Dr. Abbas Shuman, made very clear that at no point did Islam condone slavery between the people whom it deems as being equal from the same father, Adam, and the same mother, Eve. Through some wise policies to limit the sources of slavery and expand the means of emancipation, which anticipated what constitutes decent work employed today, and through the extension of education especially to women, the practice of slavery initiated in pre-Islamic Arabia came to end only a short while after the advent of Islam. We cannot fail to mention that Al-Azhar recently issued the first fatwa against modern slavery and human trafficking.

Amma expressed very penetrating insights into the situation of women in India and stressed that, in relation to modern slavery, we must keep in mind a certain pedagogical principle of progress which is fundamentally based on education and health. She herself established two important institutions, her university and her hospital, to educate and assist the poorest of the poor and prevent them from falling into the trap of modern slavery. The principle that guides her is the Golden Rule which she formulates with a very good metaphor, saying that just as one hand spontaneously reaches out to soothe the other hand when it is in pain, we should all console and support others as we would ourself.

Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh (Thay), represented by Venerable Bhikkhuni Thích Nữ Chân Không, focused on human dignity and compassion for the victims and stressed that, by having peace in ourselves, and clarity in our minds, we will be able to have compassion even for the traffickers themselves and touch the seed of compassion in their hearts, helping them abandon their exploitation. We will only succeed in this fight not as lone warriors but as part of a spiritual community.

Rabbi Abraham Skorka highlights the role played by the prophet Amos whose words can be read as a precedent of the *crime against humanity* concept. The prophet describes actions of cruelty and devastation which will be punished by God, as their magnitude sets aside any possibility of forgiveness or absolution. These are crimes

committed by different peoples –from Damascus, Gaza, Tzor, Edom, Bnei Ammon, Moab – ending with those committed in Judah and Israel, referring especially to individuals being taken captive and sold as slaves. In the prophet's view, such attitude must be considered a serious offense against morality and any sense of human justice. Also, the exploitation of women and children has been condemned since biblical times by Judaism.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew showed how two emergencies of the globalised world, climate change and modern slavery, are interrelated. Therefore, if we really want to eradicate this social exclusion of slavery, we should also be concerned with reaching climate stability.

I was interested in the words of Grand Ayatollah Sheikh Basheer Hussain al Najafi who recognised that the enslavement of human beings has become a moral burden in relation to justice and fairness. Modern slavery, prostitution and trafficking in human organs are illegal and derive from a corrupted society where God no longer has a place.

I greatly admired the letter that Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi al-Modarresi sent to Pope Francis in which he deemed the words of Jesus Christ so exquisite that they make Aristotle seem sophomoric. Praising the stance of Christ against corruption and injustice, the Ayatollah prayed 'to God in the name of Christ and his blessed Mother Mary, to bestow His mercy upon all and relieve the world of pain, persecution'. In his speech he urges us to act united for the salvation of human beings from injustice and slavery, from poverty and illness, from the proliferation of mass destruction weapons, from the obscene disparity between the North and the South and from the devastation of the environment.

Finally, I would like to thank the Holy Father, Pope Francis, for hosting and taking part in this ceremony at the Casina Pio IV, headquarters of the Pontifical Academies of Sciences and Social Sciences, which are under his direct protection.

Similarly, I would like to thank His Grace, Archbishop Justin Welby, for his decisive contribution without which it would have been impossible to organise this ceremony. Archbishop Welby's strong message reveals the Christian roots of the idea of the dignity and freedom of every human being. God has made humanity in the divine image and, through Jesus Christ, Christians believe that the divine life was lived fully and uniquely in the flesh and blood of a human being.

Footnotes

[1] Letter of John Paul II to Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran on the occasion of the international conference *Twenty-First Century Slavery – The Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings*, 15 May 2002.

[2] *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Reinhard Schweppe, New Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See*, 7 November 2011.

[3] International Labour Office, *Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour*, 2014.

[4] UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2014*, p. 1.