

# Christianity and Human Trafficking

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## Abstract

Christian involvement with advocacy and activism on human trafficking, an umbrella category that refers to the variety of processes by which individuals become enslaved, has proliferated during the last 15 years. This essay briefly introduces the topic of human trafficking, and provides an overview of three social movements that set important historical precedents for Christian anti-trafficking activism in the present: 19th century abolitionist movements, late 19th- and early 20th-century social purity movements, and the late 20th century religious freedom movement. Next, I explore two of the anti-trafficking frameworks that underlie much Christian anti-trafficking activism and advocacy in the U.S., noting their different assumptions about freedom and slavery. While Christians are largely of one mind that human trafficking is wrong, the strategies that they use and the ends they hope to accomplish are varied and even conflicting.

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## *Human Trafficking: An Introduction*

Human trafficking is defined in sundry ways. Generally, the term ‘human trafficking’ (or ‘trafficking in persons’, or sometimes just ‘trafficking’) refers to the wide variety of processes by which individuals become physically enslaved. An individual is said to be physically enslaved when she or he is unable to leave a situation without fear of violence, and is forced to work while paid nothing or next to nothing for any duration of time.<sup>1</sup> As distinguished from the institution of chattel slavery, the enslavement that is the outcome of human trafficking does not imply a fixed and permanent state. Today, slavery is not necessarily a lifelong condition and often lasts for a significantly shorter duration. The key attribute of modern-day slavery is not the duration of enslavement but the enactment of violent control of one person by another (Bales 2005, 2007). So rather than a permanent state or legal status, human trafficking designates the *processes* by which individuals become enslaved. Accordingly, any process that leads to physical enslavement in which an individual cannot leave a situation without fear of violence and is forced to work for nothing or next to nothing can be labeled human trafficking.

Human trafficking is an umbrella category that is applicable to many different scenarios. David Feingold explains that the label ‘trafficking’ usually is applied as “an ex-post facto designation of a migration event”, and notes that people typically are not aware that they are in the process of being trafficked until they are actually enslaved (Block 2004). In addition, not all individuals who could legitimately claim to be ‘trafficking victims’ think of themselves as such, and may even resist being thus categorized (Agustín 2005; Chapkis 2003; Kempadoo 1998). For these and other reasons, accurate statistics about the rate and frequency of human trafficking crimes are extraordinarily difficult to generate. The ILO (2005) estimates that worldwide there are between 9.9 and 14.8 million people are enslaved at any given time, and a 2004 study by Free the Slaves and Human Rights Center estimates that at least 10,000 people are enslaved in the U.S. at any given time.<sup>2</sup>

According to the world's leading trafficking expert Kevin Bales, the root causes of the resurgence of slavery since 1945 are threefold: First is the increase in world population in a 50-year period from 2 billion to over 6 billion people. Second are the massive social and economic changes that have created extraordinary wealth for some countries and unprecedented poverty for others. Since 1945, the number of people living on <\$1 a day, a level of extreme poverty that Bales characterizes as "life without options", has risen exponentially (Bales 2007, p. 15). The world's poorest countries also tend to be the ones with the highest levels of slavery. Third is corruption, especially of the police. Citizens are vulnerable to becoming enslaved when governments fail to protect their citizens and maintain the rule of law. Slavery is no longer a legal institution anywhere in the world. The presence of slavery therefore indicates the existence of social and political positions where the rule of law does not adequately protect its citizens. In short, the key to keeping people enslaved is maintaining them in situations where the law cannot protect them. Together, these three factors combine to create at-risk populations that are vulnerable to becoming enslaved.

The designation 'human trafficking' specifies neither who is enslaved nor the nature of the activities they are forced to perform. Human trafficking crimes take place across a wide variety of labor sectors, including domestic service, agricultural work, sweatshop manufacturing, restaurant and hotel work, entertainment, construction, textile weaving, and sexual services; and can also involve international adoptions, forced or exploitative surrogate pregnancies, medical tourism, and human organ sales. Men, women, and children can be trafficked. Women and girls make up approximately 56% of all enslaved people (U.S. Department of State 2010). Nevertheless, gender is not the most significant variable in predicting human trafficking. Vulnerability is far more significant predictor than gender. Individuals who have access to economic, social, and political power are therefore unlikely to become trafficking victims (Bales 2005).

Commercial sexual services, especially prostitution, are widely perceived as the most prevalent and morally abhorrent form of human trafficking. While it is not uncommon for sexual abuse to be part of the violent control that is exerted over victims in relationships of slavery, only 1 out of every 10 enslaved persons is forced to work in the commercial sex industry. Labor trafficking, including both forced and bonded labor, is by far the largest category of human trafficking (Feingold 2005; ILO 2005; U.S. Department of State 2010). The State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (2009) estimates that just 1.39 million individuals out of the 12.3 million persons enslaved worldwide are trafficked into the commercial sex industry. Yet while sex trafficking accounts for only 11% of human trafficking, this form of human trafficking has for years monopolized political and media attention, and has successfully created an impression that human trafficking is concentrated primarily in the sex industry. Anthony M. DeStefano's (2008) analysis of the U.S. anti-trafficking policy shows that between 2000 and 2006, sex trafficking served as the primary point of departure for virtually all federal-level policy discussions and debates about human trafficking. Although the U.S.'s federal anti-trafficking law, *Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000*, acknowledges that "trafficking in persons is not limited to the sex industry" (§102 (b)(3)) and defines illegal trafficking as any labor performed under conditions of force, fraud, or coercion (§103(8)), a special concern for sex trafficking is abundantly clear in the statute.

International law similarly defines human trafficking more broadly than commercial sexual exploitation. The United Nations *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* defines human trafficking as

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments of benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation (United Nations 2000a, Article 3).

This definition highlights the non-consensual nature of human trafficking to distinguish it from other forms of migration. The defining feature of human trafficking crimes therefore is not the market sector in which labor takes place (for example, the sex industry) but, as the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women explains, it is “the non-consensual and exploitive or servile nature of the purpose [of human trafficking crimes] with which the definition concerns itself” (United Nations 2000b, pp. 8–9). The constitutive element of human trafficking crimes according to international law is the non-consensual, exploitative, or servile nature of the employer/employee relationship. A 2010 multi-lingual review of the literature on human trafficking indicates that most definitions of human trafficking reference the UN Protocol (Damone 2010, p. 6).

In summary, the processes by which individuals can become enslaved, or human trafficking, can take innumerable forms, and in an enslaved state, individuals can be forced to do a wide variety of things. The key indicators of an enslaved state are when an individual is paid nothing or next to nothing for any duration of time or is unable to leave a situation without fear of violence (Bales 2007).

### *Historical Precedents*

#### ABOLITION

The moral imperative to end human trafficking draws in significant ways on the precedent set by abolitionists who worked in Britain and the U.S. during the 18th and 19th centuries to end chattel slavery, a race-based institution which permitted the legal ownership of one human being by another. Former U.S. president George W. Bush drew on this legacy overtly when he spoke about human trafficking in his 2003 speech to the UN General Assembly in New York. He told the delegates,

We must show new energy in fighting back an old evil. Nearly two centuries after the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, and more than a century after slavery was officially ended in its last strongholds, the trade in human beings for any purpose must not be allowed to thrive in our time (Bush 2003).

Here, the fight against human trafficking is framed as a continuation of the earlier abolitionist cause.

When anti-trafficking work is framed by the 18th and 19th-centuries abolitionist movements, the role of Christian convictions in shaping the moral sensibilities of abolitionists is often highlighted as well. Britain’s most notable abolitionist, William Wilberforce, began his parliamentary campaign against the British slave trade following his conversion to Christianity. As a result of the efforts of Wilberforce and others, the *Slave Trade Act* abolishing the slave trade in the British Empire was passed in 1807, as was the 1833 *Slavery Abolition Act* that abolished slavery itself in most of the British Empire. The U.S. followed Britain’s lead by also abolishing the import and export of slaves in 1808. But it was not until over 50 years later and a bloody civil war that the 13th Amendment outlawing slavery finally was amended to the United States Constitution.

But abolitionists were not alone in availing themselves of Christian teaching to defend their position on slavery. According to religious studies scholar Lucinda Peach (2000), Christian slaveholders also frequently based their justifications of the institution and practice of slavery on the theological teachings of Christianity. Some argued that the institution of slavery was part of God's plan to Christianize Africa, while others used Christian scriptures to justify the obedience and submission to white authority that they required from slaves (Boles 1988; Peach 2000). Additionally, Jeremy Scott (forthcoming) points out that a constellation of religious and theological ideas that Max Weber famously coined 'the Protestant ethic' was quietly underwriting America's fledgling capitalist economic system during the antebellum period. The Protestant ethic encouraged a "thoroughgoing Christianization of the whole of life", particularly through the adoption of lifestyles marked by a combination of dedicated industry and thrift (Weber 1992, p. 124). This religious prescription to take advantage of and exploit every available financial opportunity found an ideal partner in the capitalist system in the U.S. The wide spread growth in personal wealth that it facilitated was interpreted as confirmation of religious election. The equation of profit-making activity with divine sanction set the stage for white slaveholders to interpret the economic rewards slavery produced as *de facto* evidence of the institution's moral legitimacy. Scott argues that because the practice of slavery was situated *within* the profit-making economic activity that many Christian slaveholders understood as evidence par excellence of divine approval, it was difficult for them to comprehend that not just the 'mistreatment' of slaves, but slavery *itself*, was fundamentally morally abhorrent. The extent to which slaveholders and other Americans had been socialized to accept the Protestant ethic's fundamental proposition that equated profit and divine favor meant that abolitionists' claims about the incompatibility of slavery and Christianity were largely unconvincing so long as the economic system in which slavery was situated continued to generate profit.

For this reason, the relationship between Christianity and chattel slavery has been a morally ambivalent one. While Christianity can a powerful anti-slavery force, it was not always or necessarily so. To the extent that Christianity has been used both to denounce and to legitimate the institution of slavery, Peach (2000) calls Christian legacies vis-à-vis slavery, "antithetical and mutually contradictory" (p. 73). Remarking on the ambivalence of the moral legacy that frames contemporary Christian anti-trafficking activism, ethicist Katie Cannon (2008) contends that the continued economic exploitation and underdevelopment of the descendants of African slaves into the present raises significant questions about the mission of the Christian church that have yet to be adequately addressed.

#### SOCIAL PURITY MOVEMENTS

Following the abolition of slavery, a series of social purity movements led by middle-class evangelical Christian reformers and other social purists gained momentum in the late 19th century. Rooted in assumptions about women's 'natural' moral nature as pure, pious, and submissive, these movements sought to use female moral influence as leverage for enacting wide scale social change. Tackling issues that included alcohol use, the sexual double standard and male violence against women, the goal was to eradicate 'vice' (understood primarily as prostitution and other forms of sexual immorality), thereby bringing all of society into conformity with the Victorian moral values prized by middle-class evangelical Protestant evangelicals (Coontz 2005; Grittner 1990; Hunt 1999; Pascoe 1990; Pivar 2002).

Fear about 'white slavery' was crucial to the leverage that the social purity movement achieved in western Europe and in the U.S. 'White slavery' referred to white women

held against their wills, usually involving some combination of force, deceit, or drugs, and forced into prostitution. It elicited images of crazed men preying on defenseless white women. Replacing the degraded black slave with the demoralized white woman, the rhetoric of 'white slavery' drew on and updated earlier abolitionist rhetoric about chattel slavery. Yet the 'new abolitionists' appropriation of the earlier abolitionist rhetoric concerning chattel slavery was riddled with racist undertones. 'White slavery' subtly insinuated that the enslavement and sexual abuse of white women was somehow categorically different than the enslavement and sexual abuse of blacks. Further, 'white slavery' implied that the sexual abuse of white women was a far more serious moral violation than the sexual abuse sustained by black women in chattel slavery (Doezema 2000; Irwin 1996). 'White slavery' not only suggested that the sexual enslavement of white women was categorically different than the enslavement and sexual abuse of black women, but that such abuse was far more serious as well.

Congress passed the *Mann Act*, also known as the *White Slave Traffic Act*, in 1910, criminalizing the transportation of women and girls across state lines "for the purpose of prostitution, or debauchery or for any other immoral purpose".<sup>3</sup> However, most historians acknowledge that 'white slavery' more accurately expressed a particular constellation of white, middle-class social fears than it did an actual social reality. 'White slavery' was largely "an ideological narrative masquerading as a reflection of reality" (Doezema 2005, p. 74). At the same time, the *Mann Act* is widely regarded by social historians as marking the ascendance of a new social perception of prostitution as a social problem to be solved rather than as simply constituting a social fact (Doezema 2000; Irwin 1996; Roberts 1993). Even though accounts of 'white slavery' were more fiction than fact, sociologist Elizabeth Bernstein argues that the way these stories circulated conveyed "mounting tensions over migration, urbanization, and the social changes brought by industrial capitalism ..." (Bernstein 2010, pp. 49–50). Unfortunately, the *Mann Act* was more frequently used as a means for targeting individuals whose sexual practices differed from the white Protestant mainstream with accusations of moral violations, than it was to redress the unjust treatment of women. The *Mann Act* became a convenient way to target black men and immigrants, particularly Jews, for offending the Victorian moral sensibilities of the white, Protestant middle class (Doezema 2000; Zakhari 2004).

The racial formations embedded in present-day concern about human trafficking have shifted since the days of the turn-of-the-century campaigns against 'white slavery'. Rather than an exclusive concern with white women from western countries, contemporary depictions of human trafficking typically center on the plights of non-western, and particularly 'third world', women. Yet the extent to which portrayals of human trafficking continue to be marked by the same motifs of deception, abduction, youth/virginity, and violence that served as the discursive foundations of the 19th century social purity campaigns, the discursive foundations of 'white slavery' remain remarkably intact in present-day depictions of human trafficking. Although the racial identity and/or region of origin of the quintessential trafficking victim have changed, the use of sensational descriptions and emotive language in descriptions of human trafficking mark contemporary anti-trafficking activism as the ideological heir to the late 19th century social purity movement's intense preoccupation with 'white slavery' (Doezema 2000).

#### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM MOVEMENT

During the mid to late 1990s, many American Christians became alarmed by reports of Christians in China, Vietnam, Sudan, and in the third world more generally, being

subjected to religious persecution. Until this point evangelicals were known for political activism only on domestic social issues, with foreign policy issues remaining largely beyond their purview. On the issue of religious persecution, however, not only did the sustained activism and the political pressure that Christians applied to congressional leaders lead to the passage of the *International Religious Freedom Act* (IRFA) in 1998 (Danchin 2002); the processes of advocacy and activism that produced this legislation became the catalyst for a new faith-based human rights movement in which evangelical Christians are prominent players.

Political scientist Allen D. Hertzke argues that religious freedom was a watershed issue for evangelical Christians, explaining: “In the ecology of human rights, the struggle for the IRFA shaped the environment for future initiatives. *Without the IRFA there would be no ...human trafficking law*” (Hertzke 2004, p. 184). Many Christians saw religious persecution and human trafficking as parallel issues, perceiving activism and advocacy on human trafficking as a “logical follow up” to the work on ending religious persecution (Hertzke 2004, p. 325). The relationships formed in the course of the religious freedom effort were integral to evangelical anti-trafficking activism, and involved many of the same key players and constituencies. Michael Horowitz is one such individual whose activism in the religious freedom movement carried over into the anti-trafficking movement. Horowitz explained that the aim of the faith-based anti-trafficking movement was, “to expand women’s rights issues to include the protection of sold and abducted sexual victims every bit as much as it redefined the human-rights agenda to include the rights of religious believers” (Cromartie 1999, p. 54).<sup>4</sup> The considerable similarities between the anti-trafficking legislation that this group proposed in 1999 and the IRFA further amplified the perception of religious persecution and human trafficking as parallel issues (Hertzke 2004; Zimmerman 2008). The earlier movement to end religious persecution was used to frame religious anti-trafficking activism to such an extent that many Christians perceived human trafficking as a religious issue.

#### CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY IN CONTEMPORARY ANTI-TRAFFICKING MOVEMENTS

The spate of public attention human trafficking has garnered since the late 1990s rests not only on these historical precedents, but also coincides with larger shifts in perceptions of human trafficking. Prior to the late 1990s, secular NGO-led anti-trafficking efforts tended to focus broadly on labor trafficking and the structural preconditions of the exploitation of labor. The relatively recent transformation of human trafficking from an obscure issue that interested only a small group of labor activists, to a high profile human rights issue went hand-in-hand with the re-conception of human trafficking as a matter of abusive and exploitative sex, and especially of female sexual slavery (Bernstein 2010; Ditmore 2002; Jakobsen & Bernstein 2009). During the years of the Bush administration, for example, it was the U.S.’s official position that human trafficking consisted primarily in the forced prostitution and sexual enslavement of women and children.<sup>5</sup> Sex was so central to the understanding of human trafficking endorsed by the Bush administration that it was often treated as the *de facto* constituent element of trafficking crimes; as if human trafficking involved exploitative sex by definition. The administration also designated human trafficking as the major focus of its gender policy (Jakobsen & Bernstein 2009; Soderland 2005).

Leading up to the passage of the federal anti-trafficking legislation, significant coalitions comprised of politicians, secular feminists, evangelical Christians, and other religious groups formed in support of the various anti-trafficking proposals under consideration. According to feminist leader Laura Lederer, evangelical Christians were valuable partners

in these coalitions because of the moral clarity that they brought to the issue – the idea, as she put it, that “we’re made in the image of God; you don’t do this” (Hertzke 2004, p. 326). This moral clarity was on full display in June 1999 when over 130 religious leaders signed a statement of conscience calling on Congress to pass federal anti-trafficking legislation. The statement explained that, “The God-given dignity and integrity of each individual compels us to take action to combat this evil” (Schleicher 1999, p. 17; See also Carnes 2000).

The interest of religious groups in human trafficking received a major boon by the Bush administration’s expansion of President Clinton’s ‘charitable choice’ initiative granting religiously based social service programs unprecedented access to federal funding. The Bush administration considered the issue of human trafficking as especially suited for faith-based interventions and so the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was especially amenable to faith-based organizations interested in anti-trafficking work (Miller 2005a,b; Nir 2005; Zimmerman 2010). Many evangelical Christian organizations took advantage of this affable climate by either expanding or creating anti-trafficking programs. Throughout the following 8 years, evangelical Christian organizations were awarded increasingly larger proportions of the federal anti-trafficking funds (Bernstein 2010; Butler 2006; McKelvey 2004).

The Salvation Army is one of the faith-based organizations whose anti-trafficking projects, particularly its ‘Initiative against Sexual Trafficking’, benefitted from the availability of federal anti-trafficking funds for religious groups. The Salvation Army’s anti-trafficking advocacy efforts reflect the centrality of sex and sexual morality for many conservative Christian approaches to anti-trafficking work. For instance, the goals of shifting the U.S.’s policy on sexual trafficking to officially recognize prostitution as inherently dehumanizing and to acknowledge a causal link between prostitution and sex-trafficking are named among the organization’s core objectives related to the elimination of human trafficking. From the Salvation Army’s perspective, the Bush administration’s addition of the Prostitution Loyalty Oath to the U.S.’s anti-trafficking policy in 2003 and the release of a State Department report entitled ‘The Link between Prostitution and Sex Trafficking’ in 2004 represented welcome shifts in the U.S.’s policies on sexual trafficking (Zimmerman 2010).<sup>6</sup>

The Salvation Army’s stance on and approach to anti-trafficking activism and advocacy is indicative of the way many conservative Christian groups, including the Wilberforce Forum, Concerned Women for America and others associated with the Christian Right, approach the issue. Reminiscent of the early 20th century social purity movements, much conservative Christian anti-trafficking activism and advocacy is animated by the larger goals of reinstating ‘traditional’ gender roles and the centrality of monogamous marriage within U.S.-American culture and extending these arrangements throughout the world. While the issues of divorce, abortion, and homosexuality have served as the predictable sites for cultural battles around gender and sexuality; human trafficking, by contrast, is popularly perceived as a new issue on which the battle for the conservatization of U.S.-American culture to be re-made with a humanitarian face (Jakobsen & Bernstein 2009). Particularly for women, the merits of love-based, monogamous heterosexual marriage and of ‘traditional’ gender roles are thus re-formulated as crucial bulwarks against the abuse, exploitation, and violation of human dignity within human trafficking.

However, not all Christian anti-trafficking activism and advocacy turns on concerns about immoral sex. In fact, Bernstein observes that some of the most passionate campaigning around human trafficking has come from those who have taken deliberate steps to distance themselves from the sexual politics of the Christian Right. Self-describing as socially ‘moderate’ and ‘progressive’, this constituency, which includes David Batstone,

Tony Campolo, Richard Cizik, Gary Haugen, and Jim Wallis, presents human trafficking in a manner that is consistent with the “leftward sweep on the part of many younger evangelicals ... toward a globally oriented social justice theology” (Bernstein 2010, p. 47). Framing human trafficking as a progressive issue, this constituency has developed forms of activism and advocacy that center on what they understand to be uncontroversial and consensus-building aspects of the issue.

This framework conceptualizes freedom human trafficking in terms of formal economic participation. Growing numbers of Christian humanitarian organizations have adopted strategies that aim at to facilitate the participation of formerly enslaved persons in the formal global economy, for example, by funneling former sex workers into entry-level jobs in the service industry (Jakobsen & Bernstein 2009; Jewell 2007). Moreover, consumer-friendly politics have become a stock feature of the social justice activism of evangelical anti-trafficking campaigns. Bernstein explains that activists are “summoned to make purchases that will contribute to faith-based organizations ... or by purchasing items that women who have purportedly been freed from sexual slavery have crafted” (Bernstein 2010, p. 64). Purchasing consumer goods in the name of fighting trafficking solidifies the distinction between slavery and freedom that this form of moderate-progressive evangelical anti-trafficking activism assumes in two ways. First, in the ‘business as mission’ model, ‘slaves’ become ‘free’ by entering into ‘free’ market as producers of commodities for Western consumers, and second, ‘freedom’ resides in Western consumers’ ability to purchase the goods that former ‘trafficking victims’ produce (Bernstein 2010). In short, as compared to the Christian Right’s anti-trafficking strategies that center on reinvigorating ‘traditional’ sexual morality by emphasizing marriage and family, the new leftward-leaning evangelicals’ anti-trafficking strategies focus on pro-business social remedies that rest on forms of political engagement designed to be consumer-friendly. Ironically, these apparently disparate and conflicting strategies form a functionally seamless model since in modern society, the institution of marriage serves the State every bit as much as the impetus to make producers and consumers serves the ‘free’ market. Because the analyses of the problem by the Christian right and the left both fail to adequately comprehend and critique the hegemony of State and market forces at play in human trafficking, the ways these projects imagine freedom from trafficking remain almost fully ensconced within the logic of these totalizing institutions.

### *Conclusion*

As human trafficking has emerged as a major human rights issue locally, nationally, and internationally, Christians have become increasingly significant players in activism to end human trafficking even though Christian anti-trafficking activism and advocacy is marked by considerable internal variation. Today, Christian anti-trafficking activism and advocacy is far from monolithic, and several significant issues mark the intersection of Christian thought with the issue of human trafficking.

First is the issue of sex and sexual morality. Although sex and sexual morality have long been central Christian concerns, how central is sex to Christian concerns about human trafficking? As previously noted, evangelical Christians were regarded as contributing a strong and distinct moral clarity about human dignity to an emergent anti-trafficking coalition in the U.S. Yet because of the way human dignity and sexual integrity are often linked in Christian theology, Christian affirmations of human dignity often carry specific views on sexual morality. This sexual morality holds that monogamous, heterosexual marriage is the single relational context in which sex is fully consistent with respect for beings

created in the image of the divine. Whether consensual or un-consensual; commercial or unremunerated; abusive or loving, *all* non-marital sex is regarded as immoral and as in violation of the human dignity of beings created in God's image (Brock & Thistlethwaite 1996; Kretzschmar 2009). Because many formulations of Christian thought presume that nothing harms human dignity more profoundly than sex that takes place in the wrong relational context, it is not uncommon for affirmations of human dignity to go hand-in-hand with particular kinds of preoccupations about sexual morality. As pertains to Christian opposition to human trafficking, this raises questions about the nature of the specific objection being raised to human trafficking. That is, is human trafficking objectionable because sexual trafficking involves immoral (i.e., non-marital) sex? Or does the objection to human trafficking turn on something besides sex itself; for example, the abridgement of consent and use of violence to compel action from individuals?

Second is the relationship between human trafficking and consumer capitalism. To what extent are slavery and the free market fundamentally incompatible or, as in the past, can slavery exist within and even support capitalism? Most pro-business models used by Christian anti-trafficking initiatives reject the idea that human trafficking is a byproduct of capitalism and capitalistic practices. Rather than seeing human trafficking as a logical and even predictable outgrowth of globalization and of gendered labor and migration, this model juxtaposes slavery with participation in the free market (Bernstein 2010; Jakobsen & Bernstein 2009; Scott forthcoming). 'Freed slaves', Bales explains, "... become what a slave can never be: a consumer" (Bales 2005, p. 18). Capitalists and bolstering capitalistic practices generally are therefore presented as the *solution* to the problem of human trafficking. When Christians adopt this model of anti-trafficking activism, the common accompanying presumption is that Christianity is an inherently and unequivocally anti-slavery force. Though ideologically attractive, the presumption that Christianity casts its moral lot in opposition to slavery is more ideological than historical. That is, to uncritically presume this betrays a certain historical amnesia about the complex and morally ambiguous relationship that has obtained historically between Christianity and slavery. In modern history, Christianity has far more consistently aligned itself with the economic system of capitalism than it has dissented from immoral practices of slavery. Thus, the current move to posit the former as tantamount to the latter is not without profound risk.

Christians around the world are largely of one mind that human trafficking is wrong and should be eliminated. Yet as this brief overview of U.S.-based Christian anti-trafficking activism indicates, there is considerable variation between the theoretical models that different groups use, the concrete strategies they endorse, and even the ends they hope to accomplish. Departments of religion should study the intersection of Christianity and human trafficking not only with an eye to Christian engagement with this major human rights issue, but in relation to the ethical implications of how particular constructions of freedom and human dignity function as they are applied in diverse contexts.

### *Short Biography*

Yvonne C. Zimmerman earned a BA from Goshen College, a MTS from Emory University's Candler School of Theology, and a PhD in Religious and Theological Studies from the University of Denver and Iliff School of Theology. Her research explores the relationship between freedom and sexual regulation in the U.S.'s human trafficking policies, with particular attention to the implications for the sexual freedom of women and sexual minorities. Zimmerman is an Assistant Professor of Christian Ethics at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> On definitions of human trafficking, see Wijers (1998), Bales (2005), Kempadoo (2005), Bales (2007) and Free the Slaves (n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> This ILO report is commonly cited as the source for the figure of 12.3 million people who are enslaved globally. The report notes that this number is an estimate that reflects the larger range cited here. Kevin Bales's research estimates a much high number of enslaved people, between 23 and 27 million people (Bales 1999, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> *The Mann Act*, 61st Cong. (1910) at Chap. 395 §2. Genealogies that link human trafficking and *The Mann Act* include Walkowitz (1980), Irwin (1996), Haag (1999), Doezema (2000) and Balos (2001).

<sup>4</sup> The religious anti-trafficking constituency was not made up exclusively of evangelical Christians. Horowitz, for example, is Jewish.

<sup>5</sup> The Obama administration's anti-human trafficking policy has so far taken a very different approach that prioritizes forced labor generally, rather than commercial and/or exploitative sex exclusively. See generally, <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/>.

<sup>6</sup> The Prostitution Loyalty Oath is part of the *Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2003* (TVPRRA 2003); see generally, Center for Health and Gender Equity (2005) and Wietzer (2007). On the alleged link between prostitution and sex-trafficking, see U.S. Department of State (2004), Miller (2005b) and Wietzer (2005, 2007). It is no longer the U.S.'s position to assert the existence of this link.

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