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## **Child Slavery and Child Labour.**

**Stephen J. McKinney, Robert J. Hill and Honor Hania**

*In this article we discuss the worldwide phenomena of child slavery and child labour in the contemporary world and the response from Catholic Social Teaching. Child slavery and child labour deny children their God-given dignity and freedom and deny them their right to education. Catholic Social Teaching is unequivocal in resolute condemnation of child slavery and child labour, in all of their forms.*

### **Introduction**

Over the last few months, we have presented a series of articles in the Pastoral Review on the topic of contemporary slavery and the responses from scripture and Catholic Social Teaching. We have discussed the scope and scale of contemporary slavery and the serious effects of slavery on the lives of millions of people. In this latest article we examine child slavery and the related problem of child labour. We also examine and discuss the very consistent and forcible condemnation of all forms of child exploitation and slavery in the response from Catholic Social Teaching. This response has three stands: first, a strong commitment to raising awareness and identifying the extent and the effects of child slavery and child labour; second, the Church draws on the Christian understanding of the dignity of the individual and her/his rights to challenge child slavery and child labour and third, a call to action, to intervention, on whatever scale, to support the efforts to eliminate child slavery and child labour.

### **Distinguishing between child labour and child slavery**

Children are defined by the United Nations as a person under the age of eighteen unless otherwise legally specified. There are estimated to be around 8.4 million child slaves in the contemporary world. Child slavery is closely connected to the larger numbers of children who are engaged in child labour that is also exploitative and it is important to examine both child slavery and child labour. We need to take care to clarify that there are many forms of work undertaken by children that are not necessarily classified as child labour. Some types of work enhance the life of children, their future, and the life of their families: contributing to the household chores, earning extra pocket money, assisting with family business and work that provides children with valuable experience and supports the development of skills.

Child labour, by contrast, is not life enhancing, but is a serious blight on the life of the child and their future development. Child labour is described by the international Labour Organisation as work that:<sup>1</sup>

*...deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.*

One of the key characteristics of child labour is that it prevents children from attending school, or can disrupt regular patterns of attendance and affect performance at school. There may be as many as 168 million children (almost 11% of the world's child population)

working in the world and many of these are working full time.<sup>2</sup> This figure may seem shocking but this represents a significant decrease from the year 2000 when the figure was 245.5 million. A substantial majority of the worldwide total of children who are in work are located in Asia and the Pacific (almost 78 million) and in Sub-Saharan Africa (59 million). These figures represent 9.3% of the children in Asia and the Pacific and 21% in Sub Saharan Africa. Other areas that record high levels of child labour are Latin America and the Caribbean (12.5 million) and the Middle East (9.2 million). A much higher percentage of boys (99.8 million) than girls (68.2 million) are involved in child labour, though these figures may not accurately reflect some forms of domestic work. The majority of children who labour are used for agricultural work (58.6%) and a large number are used for services such as retail, hospitality and domestic work. Around 85.3 million children are used for some form of hazardous work. Hazardous work may involve working underground, under water, with dangerous machinery, with dangerous chemicals, substances, or in unhealthy environments. This category includes those children who are exploited for sexual purposes and child soldiers.

### **Child slavery**

Children in slavery share the plight of all those who are enslaved, they are exploited by others for profit, have restricted freedom, have little or no contact with their families and are unable to access legal rights. Child slavery can take a wide variety of forms: child prostitution; child trafficking; forced begging; criminal activities such as petty theft; involvement in the drugs trade; forced labour in agriculture, factories, mines or retail; child soldiers and domestic work.<sup>3</sup> Children can be forced or coerced into becoming child soldiers. Children who are enslaved lose their childhood and are also often traumatised by their experience of slavery. They are unable to access school education and this has a major impact on their adult lives. As can be discerned from the discussion above, it can be very hard to distinguish between some forms of child labour, especially child labour in hazardous conditions, and child slavery.

### **Children involved in armed conflict**

There are estimated to be around 300,000 children engaged in armed conflict throughout the world. The use of children as soldiers deprives the children of their dignity and freedom. Children can be used by armed forces in diverse ways: fighting, laying mines, spying or in support roles such as cooking and other domestic tasks. Girls are frequently exploited for sexual purposes.<sup>4</sup> In the last ten years children have been used in armed conflict in places such as Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Thailand and India. Children involved in armed conflict are highly vulnerable: they can be captured by opposition forces, injured, disabled or be killed. They may even be complicit in war crimes. If they are released or freed from the armed conflict there can be challenges in tracing the families of the children and reuniting them. There can be a stigma attached to children who have been associated with armed conflict and the children often suffer serious psychological effects. They can find it difficult to reintegrate into their families and communities. Some of the children may return to their families with disabilities or they may be dependent on alcohol or drugs. Many of the children require some form of accelerated or specialised educational provision.

We have raised serious issues about children being coerced or forced into becoming involved in armed conflict. There are other issues, however, about the legal age for entry into armed forces and how this coheres with the definitions of being a child. In the United Kingdom, for example, the voluntary recruitment age for joining the armed forces is 16, an age that is inconsistent with the UN definition of childhood and with the increasing global pressure for a ban on anybody below the age of 18 being legitimately recruited by armed forces.

### **Child labour and slavery in the chocolate and tobacco industries**

Western Africa (mainly Ghana and the Ivory Coast) supplies 70% of the world's cocoa.<sup>5</sup> Child labourers are trafficked or even sold by their relatives to work in this cocoa trade. Child labour is favoured by some employers as this keeps the costs of production low. The children often work long hours, live in intolerable conditions, can be forced to handle hazardous equipment and be exposed to dangerous chemicals. Some estimates suggest that at least 300,000 children are working as child labourers in the cocoa trade in the Ivory Coast and Ghana (these estimates may be conservative). There is also evidence of children being used in the tobacco industry throughout the world.

### **Child slavery: an affront to the human rights of the child**

It is important to recall that child slavery is publicly prohibited by the United Nations *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* (1948) (which prohibits all forms of slavery) and *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). The worst forms of child labour are prohibited under the conditions of the International Labour Organisation (a specialised agency of the United Nations) *Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999* and *Recommendation No. 190 concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour*.<sup>6</sup> Governments throughout the world are called upon to honour the rights of the child and intensify their efforts to eliminate child slavery and the worst forms of child labour.<sup>7</sup> They are also called upon to maintain, or work towards, free and open access to education, especially for girls.

### **Response from Catholic Social Teaching**

The response from Catholic Social Teaching to the issues of child slavery and child labour has a number of key strands. The first strand is that there is a strong commitment to raising awareness and identifying the scope and the extent of child slavery and child labour and the consequences. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (2004) provides a clear list of some of the worst forms of child slavery and child labour:<sup>8</sup>

*Moreover some serious problems remain unresolved: trafficking in children, child labour, the phenomenon of "street children", the use of children in armed conflicts, child marriage, the use of children for commerce in pornographic material... (paragraph 245)*

The Compendium also addresses the stark reality of the denial of the rights of the child (rights that have been prescribed by the United Nations) that is one of the major consequences of the existence of child slavery and child labour:

*The situation of a vast number of the world's children is far from being satisfactory, due to the lack of favourable conditions for their integral development despite the existence of a specific international juridical instrument for protecting their rights, an instrument that is binding on practically all members of the international community (paragraph 245).*

Child slavery, like all forms of modern slavery, is illegal and usually concealed. Many people working and recreating in their daily lives have no direct contact with child slavery, nor most forms of child labour. Pope Francis (2013) has highlighted child slavery, child labour and the hidden nature of these forms of exploitation in this extract from *Evangelii Gaudium* (paragraph 211):<sup>9</sup>

*I have always been distressed at the lot of those who are victims of various kinds of human trafficking. How I wish that all of us would hear God's cry: 'Where is your brother?' (Gen 4:9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labour?*

Pope Francis has also emphasised that child slavery and labour can be found everywhere and many people, however unknowingly, benefit from the effects of child slavery and child labour.

*Let us not look the other way. There is greater complicity than we think. The issue involves everyone! This infamous network of crime is now well established in our cities, and many people have blood on their hands as a result of their comfortable and silent complicity (paragraph 211).*

The second strand of the response of Catholic Social Teaching is that the Church draws on the Christian understanding of the God-given dignity of the individual, her/his rights to freedom and the respect that each individual deserves and applies this specifically to children. The Compendium (paragraph 244) reiterates the words of John Paul II (1981) in *Familiaris Consortio* (paragraph 26):<sup>10</sup>

*In the family, which is a community of persons, special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a profound esteem for their personal dignity, and a great concern for their rights.*

John Paul traces this responsibility back to the teaching and example of Jesus:

*By fostering and exercising a tender and strong concern for every child that comes into this world, the Church fulfils a fundamental mission: for she is called to reveal*

*and put forward anew in history the example and commandment of Christ the Lord, who placed the child at the heart of the Kingdom of God: “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”* (paragraph 26)

The third strand of the response of Catholic Social Teaching is a call to action, to intervention, whether on a small or large scale. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops provide a very good example of raising public awareness of social issues such as human trafficking in their website and publications.<sup>11</sup> Further, They also provide a series of indicators that can be help to identify potential victims, in this case victims of child trafficking, and a series of contact numbers, addresses and websites that can be used to report suspected case

### **Young girls exploited for sexual purposes**

It is important to conclude this section with some comments on the response of Catholic Social teaching to the sexual exploitation of vulnerable young girls. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (section 2355) describes prostitution as a ‘social scourge’ that can involve the use of children and adolescents.<sup>12</sup> John Paul II and Benedict were both vehemently opposed to child slavery and highlighted the plight of young girls used for sexual exploitation. John Paul in his letter to Women (1995) stated:<sup>13</sup>

*Nor can we fail, in the name of the respect due to the human person, to condemn the widespread 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* (paragraph 5).

Benedict XVI (2005) in his Message for the 92<sup>nd</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2006, ‘Migrations a sign of the times’, concurred with John Paul:<sup>14</sup>

*In some cases there are women and girls who are destined to be exploited almost like slaves in their work, and not infrequently in the sex industry too.*

Pope Francis, in a much-publicised interview with the Italian newspaper *Il Messaggero* (published June 30, 2014), decried the exploitation of children, especially the sexual exploitation of girls, some as young as 12 years of age. He stated that he has personally witnessed this in Buenos Aires and in his adopted home city of Rome.<sup>15</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

This article has examined child slavery and child labour. The examples of the exploitation of children that we have provided are shocking and deeply disturbing. Perhaps one of the most disturbing features is the attempt to quantify the world wide scale of the illicit practices of child slavery and the worst forms of child labour. Most estimates are probably conservative. Child Slavery and child labour are very closely connected to poverty and deprivation. Many of the children who are in child labour are trying to help support their families. Some of the children in slavery may even have been ‘sold’ by their families. The response from Catholic

Social Teaching has been a resolute condemnation of child slavery and child labour and a commitment to the elimination of child slavery and child labour.

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<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization (2014) *What is Child Labour*. Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> International Labour Organization (2013) *Marking progress against child labour*. Available at: [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms\\_221513.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_221513.pdf) International Labour Organization (2014) *Child Labour*. Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/child-labour/lang--en/index.htm#a3>

<sup>3</sup> Anti-Slavery (2014) *Child Slavery*. Available at: [http://www.antislavery.org/english/slavery\\_today/child\\_slavery/default.aspx](http://www.antislavery.org/english/slavery_today/child_slavery/default.aspx)

<sup>4</sup> Unicef (2007) *The Paris Principles. Principles and Guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups*. Available at: [http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Paris\\_Principles\\_EN.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Paris_Principles_EN.pdf) Child Soldiers International (2014) *Priority Countries*. Available at: [http://www.child-soldiers.org/country\\_reader.php?id=6](http://www.child-soldiers.org/country_reader.php?id=6)

<sup>5</sup> Food Empowerment Project (2014) *Child Labor and Slavery in the Chocolate Industry*. Available at: <http://www.foodispower.org/slavery-chocolate/> Harrison-Dunn, A. (2014) *Children and Chocolate: the sweet industry's bitter side*. Available at: <http://www.confectionerynews.com/Manufacturers/Children-and-chocolate-The-sweet-industry-s-bitter-side>

<sup>6</sup> United Nations (1948) *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>. United Nations (1989) *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Available at: [http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC\\_PRESS200910web.pdf](http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf) International Labour Organisation (2014) *ILO Conventions and Recommendations on child labour*. Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/ILOconventionsonchildlabour/lang--en/index.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Global Child Labour Conference (2010) *Roadmap for Achieving the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2016*. Available at: [http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929\\_58009.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58009.html)

<sup>8</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004) *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church*. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html)

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis (2013) *Evangelii Gaudium*. Available at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html#Concern for the vulnerable](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#Concern%20for%20the%20vulnerable)

<sup>10</sup> John Paul II (1981) *Familiaris Consortio*. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html)

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<sup>11</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2014) *Child trafficking*. Available at:  
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/human-trafficking/child-trafficking.cfm>

<sup>12</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993) Available at:  
<http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM>

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II (1995) *Letter of John Paul II to Women*. Available at:  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii LET\\_29061995\\_women\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_29061995_women_en.html)

<sup>14</sup> Benedict XVI (2005) *Migrations a sign of the times*. Message for the 92<sup>nd</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees. Available at:  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/migration/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20051018\\_world-migrants-day\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/migration/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20051018_world-migrants-day_en.html)

<sup>15</sup> Zenit (2014) *Full English Text of Pope Francis' Interview with 'Il Messaggero'*. Available at:  
<http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/full-english-text-of-pope-francis-interview-with-il-messaggero>