

HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND MODERN DAY SLAVERY—INTEREST GROUP

Topic: Salvation and Hope  
Convener: Nichole M. Flores, University of Virginia  
Moderator: Shawnee Marie Daniels-Sykes, S.S.N.D., Mount Mary University  
Presenters: Mary Doak, University of San Diego  
Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Boston College

The Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery Interest Group met for the second of its three-year term. The group's previous discussion on human freedom and theological anthropology set the stage for a challenging conversation on the meaning of Christian salvation in light of human trafficking.

Mary Doak presented a paper entitled, "Salvation: Christian Hope, the Church, and Human Trafficking." She explored the meaning of Christian salvation in light of sex trafficking. While acknowledging that human trafficking takes place in many contexts and industries, Doak focused her analysis to the sex industry. She critiques theological responses to sex trafficking that focus on the meaning of sexual activity in a legalistic manner, arguing that this emphasis obscures the serious evils of coercion and rape at issue in sex trafficking. Instead, she argues that salvation should be framed in terms of *theosis*—communion with the divine. Salvation is the fullness of union with others, with the cosmos, and with God. It is through this communion that human beings become their true selves in relation to God. It is also through this communion that salvific grace is offered to those who suffer, including women and children who have been victimized by sex trafficking. The Church, as a source of graced communion and a sacrament of salvation for the world, is called to disrupt economic structures that perpetuate trafficking. Turning to the theme of salvation and healing, Doak argues that parishes need to become communities that can welcome those who have been abused in the sex industry. "The task of the church," says Doak, "is to make present this beautiful, compelling, and gratuitous saving love of God as a healing power needed in all of society but preferentially among the marginalized and despised."

Nancy Pineda-Madrid, responding to Doak's presentation, suggested two avenues for further theological development: (1) alienation as a distinguishing marker of the social sin of sex trafficking; and (2) further elaboration of salvation as communion as related to *theosis*. Pineda-Madrid argues that trafficked people, treated as commodities, experience extreme alienation in relation to their bodies, their selves, and their communities. The process of salvation, then, needs to be one that overcomes alienation. This is the same alienation that is constitutive of Christ's experience of crucifixion. Toward this end, Pineda-Madrid stresses the need to see trafficked people as the broken body of Christ. The alienation and suffering of the cross is an essential aspect of *theosis*: that Christians participate in the crucifixion-resurrection dynamic of divine love. *Theosis* thus demands the pursuit of justice for those who have been exploited in the sex industry. Participation in divine life by advocating on behalf of those who have been victimized by trafficking can be dangerous work; it can mean participating in the divine life by placing one's own life at risk. But this action on behalf of sex trafficking victims seeks to bring them down from their crosses, says Pineda-Madrid "so that evil does not have the last word."

These presentations were followed by a series of questions concerning the role of women religious in leading anti-trafficking initiatives. Does the Church "outsource"

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anti-trafficking work to these communities? Others warned against putting women religious on a pedestal and exhorted more involvement in anti-trafficking initiatives from across the Church. Another question emerged about the distinction between the experiences of trafficked people and people who consent to sex work. How ought we discuss agency in relation to sex work? One rejoinder questioned whether the language of agency fully illuminates the issues of coercion and violence operative in sex work and sex trafficking.

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