

Catholic Social Teaching on Human Trafficking

Catechism of the Catholic Church

The seventh commandment forbids acts or enterprises that for any reason - selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian—lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit. St. Paul directed a Christian master to treat his Christian slave “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, . . . both in the flesh and in the Lord.”

—Paragraph no. 2414

Pope John Paul II

The trade in human persons constitutes a shocking offense against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. . . . 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.

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.

—Letter on the Occasion of the “Twenty-First Century Slavery - The Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings” Conference, 2002

Pope Benedict XVI

One of the recognizable signs of the times today is undoubtedly migration, a phenomenon which during the century just ended can be said to have taken on structural characteristics, becoming an important factor of the labor market worldwide, a consequence among other things of the enormous drive of globalization.

Naturally in this “sign of the times” various factors play a part. They include both national and international migration, forced and voluntary migration, legal and illegal migration, subject also to the scourge of trafficking in human beings.

—Migrations: A Sign of the Times,
World Day for Refugees and Migrants Message, 2006

Vatican Council II

... [W]hatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are supreme dishonor to the Creator.

—Gaudium et Spes, 1965



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U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Human trafficking will never be truly defeated without eliminating the consumerism that feeds it and prosecuting those actors in receiving countries, including our own, that benefit because of the exploitation of vulnerable human beings. ...

Human trafficking is a horrific crime against the basic dignity and rights of the human person. All efforts must be expended to end it. In the end, we must work together—Church, state, and community—to eliminate the root causes and markets that permit traffickers to flourish; to make whole the survivors of this crime; and to ensure that, one day soon, trafficking in human persons vanishes from the face of the earth.

—On Human Trafficking, 2007

The Catholic Church ... in the United States stands ready to work with our government to end this scourge. We cannot rest until trafficking in human persons is eliminated from the globe.

—Statement of Bishop Thomas Wenski,
Chair of USCCB Committee on Migration. 2004

Bishops of British Columbia and Yukon

We are all called to live in solidarity with all those who are exploited. Education makes us increasingly aware of the harmful moral and human effects that human trafficking has on victims, on their perpetrators, and on society as whole. The victims of trafficking are persons created in the image and likeness of God. They are always to be treated with the love, respect and compassion that belong to each of God's children. As a community committed to the following of Christ, we dedicate ourselves to making every effort to help those who have been victimized to regain their sense of dignity. We call upon all men and women of good will to eliminate the mentality that treats human beings as commodities of commercial exploitation and as objects for pleasure. With God's help this can be accomplished by strong legislation, use of the media, and above all through prayer and good example.

—Pastoral Letter on Human Trafficking, 2009