

The Church and Human Trafficking

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The book covers a very important topic, namely human trafficking. Due to the underground nature of human trafficking it is difficult to come up with statistics, but where statistics are available there appears to be an increase worldwide and especially in Africa. South Africa is seen as a favourite destination, source and transit country for human trafficking. It seems that despite the urgency of the matter there is little awareness of this phenomenon. Therefore this book makes a valuable contribution with regards to raising awareness. The first part deals with the concept of human trafficking. In an attempt to define human trafficking it is referred to as “Modern Day Slavery”.

Human trafficking cannot be defined as one single crime but is more complex as it is related to other heinous crimes such as drug smuggling and prostitution. The process of how human trafficking takes place is described in order for the reader to grasp how meticulously this process is planned and executed. It is described as organised crime because different networks operate together to keep people captive like slaves. Human trafficking is described further as cause and effect of socio-economic challenges, such as poverty and lack of education. Many victims live in dire poverty and do not have opportunities to better their circumstances and therefore easily become the victims of human trafficking syndicates. These victims are deceived with promises of opportunities elsewhere, but on arrival they are forced to be sex slaves. Human trafficking is also embedded in other social ills such as gender inequality. O'Connor points out that children and women are the most vulnerable groups for human trafficking. It is relatively easy for traffickers to exercise control over children – their vulnerability makes them easy prey to be trapped. The effect on children is devastating as they are in most cases violently removed from their family; they lose opportunities to develop, become drug dependent and face difficulty re-integrating when they are able to return home.

Due to the complex nature of human trafficking and the direct relationship with other crimes, the author argues that it should be addressed at different levels. First it should be recognised and addressed as a crime. She points out that “South Africa has been slow to pass legislation criminalising human trafficking and only did so on 29 July 2013”. In order to assist victims the South African government earmarked 13 existing shelters around the country to accommodate rescued victims. Human trafficking, however, is not only a crime but is also about justice and human dignity.

The stories of some survivors are documented and from these it is clear how inhumanely they were treated. Victims were removed by force from their communities, deceived by promises of a better life and exploited, as others were in total control of them while they were powerless to change their situation. Human beings are treated like objects in the process in order to make money for those who own them as sex slaves. In the words of the author human life is viewed as “cheap and disposable”. In human trafficking the weak and powerless are preyed upon and therefore this matter constitutes a justice issue.

The author suggests a theology that starts with the oppressed, poor, marginalised and exploited to address human trafficking theologically. She further argues that in order to be aware of the “signs of the times” we should be close to the dehumanized in society. The recovery process of victims is long and difficult and all sectors of society should make a contribution to help victims to be reintegrated into society. The pastoral role of churches is emphasized to assist victims on their road to recovery and healing.