

Pope Francis' strong words in his fight against sexual exploitation



1. Affirm the principle that all men and women are equal and free

Pope Francis maintains that human beings are born free and equal to all others. He is a creature of God, and deserves the same rights as the rest of us. In this sense, men and women have exactly the same rights and are equally worthy from birth.

"Women are sources of life. However, they are continuously offended, beaten, violated and pushed to prostitute themselves and suppress the life they carry within."

"To live in a better world, one that is a house of peace and not a court of war, we must have at heart the dignity of every woman."

For several decades and especially recently, the Church has denounced the violations of human dignity through prostitution. The current Pope Francis himself has spoken out in numerous addresses against prostitution.

« A person can never be offered for sale. »

Prostitution is very present in the Bible. It is mentioned, especially in the Gospels, and never to condemn it definitively: everyone is called to conversion. The more recent period testifies to a real awareness. Pius XII, in September of 1948, raised the issue with Christians who were beginning to want to fight against prostitution, and said that if there were enemies, the hardest thing would be to overcome the indifference, irony and carelessness of Catholic Christians.

In the Bible, prostitutes were used to play important roles. The prostitute is one of the most used metaphors of repentance in the Bible. **Repentance that every Christian must engage in.**

The fundamental issues that the Catholic Church is facing in relation to this subject in the coming years are the following:

- To develop the debate on **human dignity**: the discourse of the regulators revolves around the defense of the freedom of the person who must be able to dispose of his body. **It is therefore necessary that human dignity be put first.**
- **To sensitize the public authorities.**
- **Talk again about prostitution and not only about human trafficking.**

In the Bible, from the Old Testament, prostitution is mentioned in the book of Genesis. Judah does not recognize his daughter-in-law, Tamar, whom he takes for a prostitute and has a sexual relationship with her. (Genesis 38:15-16).

Through prostitution, the body becomes a mere tool for commodification. It is then up to parents and the church to teach children about the value our Lord places on our bodies: « Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God, and that you are not your own? » (1 Corinthians 6:19)

The Pope considers that prostitution is a form of violence against women and children. *"Their cry of pain cannot leave indifferent either individuals or institutions. »*

2. Denounce modern slavery as a crime against humanity

In the middle of the 21st century, the phenomenon of slavery is more important than ever: **more than 30 million people are victims of trafficking** throughout the world. This represents an annual turnover of 300 billion euros (Source: UN), which is of the same order of magnitude as the drug or arms trade.

Globalization has changed the reality of trafficking. The free movement of goods and services has had an impact on the way trafficking crimes are presented. As an economic and criminal enterprise, traffickers can move people within the country and around the world with an ease never before possible.

Pope Francis I has spoken out on many occasions against modern slavery and all its manifestations : **sexual exploitation, forced labor, forced marriages, trafficking, organs, etc.**

"Today, as in the past, at the root of slavery is a conception of the human person that admits the possibility of treating him or her as an object, of violating his or her dignity. Slavery is our "undignity."

"Slavery is not something from another time. It is a practice that has deep roots and still manifests itself today in many forms: human trafficking, debt labor exploitation, child exploitation, sexual exploitation, and forced domestic labor. Each of these forms is more serious and inhumane than the others. Despite the lack of information in some parts of the world, the numbers are dramatically high and, most likely, underestimated. According to some recent statistics, there are more than 40 million people, men, but especially women and children, who suffer from slavery."

"All forms of prostitution are enslavement, a criminal act, a disgusting vice that confuses making love with relieving one's own instincts by torturing a defenseless woman."

The different forms that human trafficking takes in each corner of the world responds to the economic conditions and cultural landscape of each region.

"There are those who are directly involved in criminal organizations who do not want to know about it, simply because they benefit greatly from the new forms of slavery. There are also those who, despite their knowledge of the problem, don't want to talk because that's where the 'consumer chain' ends, as consumers of 'services' that offer men, women and children who have become slaves."

"We cannot be distracted: we are all called to come out of all forms of hypocrisy, facing this reality that we are part of the problem. The problem is not something external to us: it involves me. We are not allowed to look the other way, to declare our ignorance or innocence."

Certain local cultural characteristics contribute to the acceptance of certain forms of trafficking, or to the indifference of public authorities. This is in response to the local nature of the crime of trafficking. These cultural realities may constitute **obstacles** to the condemnation of certain forms of trafficking, such as child sex trafficking, forced marriages or child labor.

"Despite the significant efforts of so many, modern slavery remains an atrocious scourge that is present, on a large scale, throughout the world."

3. Protecting the most vulnerable

Pope Francis I, as a man of Jesuit faith, focuses his work on helping the most vulnerable. All human beings are worthy and equal in rights, and thus it is the obligation of all to ensure that those in the most difficult situations are given opportunities.

Criminals take advantage of the extreme vulnerability of the poorest people to find potential victims of sexual exploitation, as the Pope denounces: « Organized crime and illegal trafficking in human beings choose their victims from among people who today have few means of subsistence and even less hope for the future ». To be clearer: « *among the poorest, among the most marginalized, the most discarded.* »

"The fundamental answer lies in creating opportunities for integral human development, starting with quality education: that is the key point, quality education from early childhood, to continue to generate new opportunities for growth through work. Education and work".

Poverty prevention is thus one of the most effective tools to **avoid the capture of potential victims:** *"So that all these concrete men and women can escape extreme poverty, we must enable them to be worthy actors of their own destiny."*

"Integral human development and the full exercise of human dignity cannot be imposed. It must be built and carried out by each person, by each family, in communion with other people, and in a just relationship with all the circles in which human society develops - friends, communities, villages and municipalities, schools, businesses and trade unions, provinces, nations, among others."

Furthermore, he refers to **the obligation of Christians to free the victims of exploitation and to free our societies from modern slavery**: *"It is a disease of humanity, a wrong way of thinking of society. To free these poor slaves is an act of mercy and a duty for all men of good will. Their cry of pain cannot leave indifferent either individuals or institutions."*

4. Do not consider prostitution to be a lesser evil, but incompatible with human dignity

Pope Francis has often spoken out against prostitution, considering himself an abolitionist. He considers prostitution a *"disease of humanity"* and a *"disgusting vice"* that reduces women to slaves.

Here are some of his public statements on the subject of prostitution:

"It is a disease of humanity, a wrong way of thinking of society. To free these poor slaves is a gesture of mercy and a duty for all men of good will."

The pope also tells of visiting a house of welcome of the Pope John XXIII Community, meeting "crucified" women. He explains that he asked their forgiveness *« For the torture they had to endure because of clients, many of whom define themselves as Christians. »*

The fight against prostitution is a fundamental mission of Christians, despite the massive historical counter-witness of Christian societies tolerant and complicit with the prostitutional system, and so the Pope affirms: ***"I ask forgiveness, to you, and to society, for all Catholics who commit this criminal act."***

Thus, he affirms that prostitution is a form of exploitation: *« Every form of prostitution is enslavement, a criminal act, a disgusting vice that confuses making love with the relief of one's own instincts by torturing a defenseless woman. »*

The Pope directly denounces the clients of prostitution, who are the cause of the perpetuation of this crime: *"I prefer a young person who loses his vocation, rather than he becomes a sick religious."*

5. Combating the globalization of indifference

Pope Francis I has used the expression ***"globalization of indifference"*** on many occasions to refer to **the crisis of values that the world is going through at this time. People are increasingly indifferent to suffering, to poverty, to discrimination, and are only looking out for their own interests.** The fight against social injustice and human rights violations is not a priority for most people.

This is due in large measure to a great ignorance, which is a scourge of our societies. **The majority of people do not know or do not want to know the reality behind the prostitution trade,** and are not aware of the **suffering and violence** to which its victims are exposed.

"No one should look away or wash their hands of the innocent blood spilled on the streets of the world.

In this type of crime, doing nothing, saying nothing, not acting and remaining indifferent is a way of becoming complicit in the perpetuation of these crimes.

The Pope affirms that *"no one can wash his hands of this tragic reality, if he does not want to be an accomplice to this crime against humanity. The first duty is to implement a strategy that will allow for a better knowledge of the subject, to tear the veil of indifference that seems to cover the fate of this part of humanity that is suffering, that is suffering. It seems that many do not wish to understand the magnitude of the problem."*

Francis I states that prostitution is largely as important because of a **problem of lack of education**. We live in a **society that does not sufficiently condemn violence against women**. He thus expressed the need to: *"overcome a sick mentality that reduces women to slavery, to the state of merchandise."*

« This immense work, which requires courage, patience and perseverance, requires a common and global effort on the part of the different actors that make up society. The churches must also commit themselves to this task. Although individuals and groups shamelessly speculate about slavery, we Christians, all together, are called to develop a greater and greater collaboration so that we overcome all types of inequality, discrimination of any kind, which is exactly what allows one man to be the slave of another man. »

"A common commitment to face this challenge will be a valid help for the construction of a renewed society oriented towards freedom, justice and peace."

The Pope calls for a great global fight against sexual exploitation, which involves all actors: *« We must act in favor of those who have become slaves: defend their rights, prevent the corrupt and the criminals from escaping justice and from having the last word on the exploited. It is not enough for some states and international organizations to adopt a particularly harsh policy in punishing the exploitation of human beings, if the causes are not addressed... »*

« The deepest roots of the problem. When countries suffer from extreme poverty, violence and corruption, neither the economy, nor the legislative framework, nor the basic infrastructure are effective; they cannot guarantee security, nor property, nor essential rights. In this way, it is easier for the perpetrators to continue to act with impunity. »