BECOMING A REFUGE:
SEX TRAFFICKING AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

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Abstract: This paper explores the issue of sex trafficking through the lens of biblical ethical principles derived primarily from the ideals of the institution of the בֵית-אָב (“patriarchal house”) in the Old Testament. After a short survey of the state of trafficking today and an examination of some of its structural causes such as poverty, demand, and the psychology of the client, the author calls the church to embody biblical ideals; being God’s house; and actively taking responsibility for the discovery, rescue, and restoration of trafficked victims “within our gates.”

Key Words: sex trafficking, human trafficking, prostitution, immigration, Old Testament ethics, slavery, patriarchal house.

I. INTRODUCTION

In his well-known book The Rise of Christianity, Rodney Stark speaks about the pagan emperor Julian who admonished his pagan priests to match the morality of the Christians in works of charity. Stark notes that

there was little or no response because there were no doctrinal bases or traditional practices for them to build upon. It was not that Romans knew nothing of charity, but that it was not based on service to the gods. Pagan gods did not punish ethical violations because they imposed no ethical demands—humans offended the gods only through neglect or by violation of ritual standards.¹

People often ask me, “How does biblical scholarship match with ministry to trafficked women?” And my response is that it is precisely biblically-based doctrine that animates social ministry and, conversely, social ministry is where biblical doctrines come to life. For example, the doctrine that every human being is in the image of God is what we cling to when we speak to a girl in a brothel. Not when we find ourselves among respectable equals who are clearly image-bearers to us, but when we find ourselves among “lessened” humans, “dehumanized” humans, who look nothing like divine icons.

Even issues regarding biblical history are morally tested here: Why is it important that the Exodus was a physical, historical exodus of actual bodies and not a spiritual tale? Why is it so important that Jesus’s resurrection is a bodily resurrection

and not a mere spiritual reality? A denial of the physicality of these stories carries the danger of anesthetizing the church to the importance of the physical along with our spiritual mission and would thus be morally suspect. Insisting on the historicity and physicality of these stories binds us with an inescapable social responsibility. If bodies mattered in Scripture and these stories are not simply allegories of spiritual truths, then bodies matter today and the church is unable to rest in a world where bodies are used, abused, or raped.

Also, systematic categories such as the divine attributes must “hit the ground.” For example, God’s omnipresence is to be reflected by his church, meaning that we, as his body, must also be “everywhere,” not shy away from certain areas as if there was such a thing as profane territory. Divine presence infuses the space that was once regarded “unclean.” A brothel can be a temple where prayers and offerings can be lifted up to God, as Malachi expresses “in every place incense will be offered to my name” (Mal 1:11). This is often a reaction we get from the girls in the brothels: “We cannot pray here. There is no way God has anything to do with this place.” Omnipresence is to be acted out. So, yes, anti-trafficking work is doctrinally grounded, whether one is aware of its doctrinal roots or not. Likewise, human trafficking can be doctrinally based. Joe Carter wrote recently that the Islamic State has theological justification for the rape of young girls and they consider sexual slavery of apostate women to be a sign prefiguring the Day of Judgment.

All our beliefs against human trafficking are not disconnected articles of faith: they emanate from our God’s very essence. He is the God who brings people out of trafficking, out of slavery.

In the OT, God manifests himself as a refuge for Israel (Ps 46:2) and for the poor (Ps 14:6), but at the same time, he ascribes responsibility for this security and protection of the most vulnerable to his people, predominantly through the institution of the 배民宿 (“house of a father”). The house of a father was probably the most significant structure dictating life in ancient Israel and whoever was found lacking a close association to a 배民宿 was most vulnerable and in need of special protection. The emphasis given by the OT to orphans, widows, foreigners, Levites, and even runaway slaves betrays God’s intention that the father’s house should be a place of refuge for those in need. Repeated exhortations in Scripture, as well as God’s “soft spot” for the poor, show that the boundary lines of the patriarchal house (or patrocentric house) were constantly pushed further and further so that the security enjoyed by the nuclear family would extend outwards.

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4 See, e.g., the significance of this structure in texts such as Gen 12:1 and 1 Sam 22:1 and the addressees of the Decalogue in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Cf. the study of J. David Schloen, The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East (Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant 2; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbraus, 2001).

5 Exod 22:22–23; Deut 10:18; Ps 68:5; 146:9, etc.

The more “inclusive” the בֵּית אֵב, the more justice would cover the land of Israel. The more inward and restricted the patriarchal house, the more displeased the Lord would be with his people, as the needs of the most vulnerable remained unattended. Women, especially, would find themselves in danger of being exploited, and often turning to prostitution as the only means left for survival. Individualistic moral judgments about such women could easily miss the societal neglect that led them to such a plight.

Biblical principles regulating the בֵּית אֵב were relevant not only for a time when Israelite society was regulated by heads of households but also formed the criteria for prophetic indictment by figures such as Amos, Micah, and Isaiah. These principles are adapted for changing circumstances in Israel, holding accountable whoever had enough power to regulate justice in the land (e.g. kings, officials, the elite; see, e.g., Ezekiel 22). This testifies to the adaptability of these moral principles and their continuing relevance under any socio-economic and political regime. The driving biblical demand is the same throughout: the most vulnerable people in our world must be secure. בֵּית אֵב values are binding on us and our households, but they cannot be restricted to the sphere of the private. As with the prophets, these values form the ground of our critical stance against larger institutions, systems, and powers operating in our world.

One should be careful to differentiate between Israelite patriarchy and the ideals expressed in biblical patriarchy. The goal of this paper is neither to defend nor to object to a patriarchal model. I am suggesting that biblical values that came to control, critique, and regulate Israelite patriarchy, when properly and responsibly extracted from Scripture, are binding for the church in whatever the social model it operates. Biblical patriarchy offers values that can inspire both men and women to image God as a refuge for the victims of one of the biggest challenges of our world today: human trafficking. I shall attempt, at various points of this article, to show how these values can penetrate into the way we think about human trafficking.

II. WHAT IS TRAFFICKING? A SHORT HISTORY

After widespread abolition of institutional slavery globally in the 19th century, the League of Nations and later the United Nations Organization began to address a form of slavery that was less formal, less public, and harder to detect than institutional slavery: human trafficking.
Six successive treaties were signed to address the problem, with the last one being the 2000 UN Anti Human Trafficking Protocol. In order to combat human trafficking and forced labor, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) was passed by the U.S. Congress in October 2000, signed by President Clinton, and later reauthorized by Presidents Bush and Obama. Out of the TVPA grew the Trafficking in Persons Report, which ranks various countries according to their compliance in tackling human trafficking. The report categorizes countries into tiers from fully compliant (Tier 1) to noncompliant (Tier 3). The latter are then subject to sanctions by the U.S. government.

In these documents, human trafficking has been generally defined as “the act of recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for compelled labor or commercial sex acts through the use of force.” Participation in any of these stages constitutes a crime of human trafficking and it can have many different faces, such as sex trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage, domestic servitude, and child soldiering.

For most countries there were no specific national laws prohibiting trafficking in persons as “a crime that encapsulates deception, transportation, coercion and

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11 The first two treaties (the 1904 International Agreement for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic and the 1910 International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic) were signed prior to the establishment of the League of Nations and four treaties followed later (the 1921 International Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children [1921 Anti Human Trafficking Convention], the 1933 International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women of Full Age [1933 Anti Human Trafficking Convention], the Geneva Convention of 1949 for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of Others [1949 Anti Human Trafficking Convention], and the 2000 United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime [2000 UN Anti Human Trafficking Protocol]); ibid., 26–27. Various parameters such as ethnicity, age, and consent, as well as gender, were gradually refined. For example, it was not until 1949 that both genders began to be viewed as possible trafficked victims (pp. 31–32). The impact of the adoption of the UN Protocol has been remarkable, since, today, more than 150 countries have become a party to the Protocol. This means that countries are in the process of updating their legal framework to better address this crime and they are also monitored to ensure that the Protocol is implemented allowing for no cultural variations whatsoever. U.S. Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report, July 2015, http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2015, 11, 20.


16 Ibid., 7–8.
exploitation as a broad process. Trafficking issues have been and often are approached as an issue of illegal immigration and prostitution rather than illegal detention or coercion.”¹⁷ When we speak with trafficked girls in the streets of Athens, they will spot the police patrolling the area and, instead of running to them for rescue, they immediately run to hide, because they know that if a girl is caught by the police, she is immediately charged with illegal prostitution and given the status of an illegal immigrant. On these grounds, the authorities will then deport her by force back to her country, in effect delivering her right back into the hands of her traffickers. These women are completely trapped within this legal system which treats them as criminals instead of offering protection. The structure of the laws themselves is problematic and must be examined to see who they ultimately protect. How just is a legal system in which a victim is doubly victimized?

Governments are often keen to punish certain crimes, not seeing that often a much more serious crime is “lurking in the shadows.” We have such examples in the OT where Israelite patriarchy rushes into criminalizing the innocent. In Judah and Tamar’s story where the patriarch is ready to implement judgment, the voice of biblical patriarchy demands a court ruling that goes beyond the obvious to the much more serious offense: the neglect of the widow by this patriarchal house. Actually, executing the law would have resulted in Tamar’s double victimization. Christians operating under בָּא יִבְנֵי ethics will go beneath the surface of simplistic categories of crime such as “illegal immigration,” because, as in the cases of so many trafficked victims, by applying this law we actually cooperate with traffickers instead of protecting the weakest in our midst on whom they prey.

The security of the mistreated is fundamental to בָּא יִבְנֵי ethics as the law in Deut 23:15–16, unique in the ancient world, shows with respect to the runaway slave. While ANE law dictates that the right thing to do is to return a runaway slave to his or her master or country, biblical law breaks away from this norm and forbids such a “deportation.” Giving asylum to such refugees was a distinctive of Israelite law marking them apart from all other nations. Biblical patriarchy places more weight on the victim’s motives for fleeing, rather than the rights of the master, and the patriarchs are obliged to offer protection and secure residence to the victim.¹⁸ Daniel Snell says about this law that “if consistently applied, such a prohibition would have eroded the entire institution of slavery.”¹⁹

In the U.S., Germany, and perhaps other countries, granting legal residence to human trafficking victims is currently dependent on the victim’s cooperation in prosecuting human traffickers. A victim’s receiving long-term residence is an ex-

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¹⁸ See the discussion on fugitive slaves in David L. Baker, Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in OT Law (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 130–35.

ception, not the rule. Most victims are subject to repatriation after they have made their contribution to the prosecution and those who refuse to aid the prosecution (always due to severe traumatization or fear of the trafficker and his associates) are never given access to residence in their country of exploitation. Yet both the U.S. and Germany claim to take a victim-centered approach to combating trafficking. One explanation for this contradictory policy is that “some policy makers assert that granting legal residence as a victim’s right would lead to a large increase of immigration and to large-scale fraud.”

While this may be true, no serious deterrent against human trafficking is given and that contributes to the increase of the crime. If one compares human trafficking with, say, a case of drug trafficking, the sentence for slavery is perhaps ten years, while distributing a kilo of heroin may carry a life sentence.

Now it is worth comparing this law with the biblical runaway slave law, each in their own contexts. Biblical patriarchy sees its primary role as being a place of refuge for vulnerable people in danger. While in the ANE the temple could have this role of a refuge which one could run to for protection from their masters, in the case of these refugees the entire land of Israel functions as a sanctuary offering permanent asylum.

III. SEX TRAFFICKING

In this article I focus on sex trafficking, not because other forms are less condemnable, but primarily because this is the area with which I am mostly involved in ministry and in relation to which many of my Greek Bible College students do their internship. Our street work takes place in the center of Athens, in the red light districts but also in brothels, bars, cheap hotels, etc., where trafficked victims are most likely to be found. We approach them, have coffee with them, we try to get to know them and eventually let them know that we can help them escape.

But our opponent is formidable. The actual revenue generated by sex trafficking is almost five times greater than labor trafficking, making sex trafficking the most lucrative form of exploitation by far.

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20 Morehouse, *Combating Human Trafficking*, 51. Extradition is important in the case of traffickers:

Due to the global nature of human trafficking, national governments have to overcome national sovereignty limitations in order to investigate, access and prosecute perpetrators who operate in multiple countries. When national governments do not agree to extradite suspected human traffickers and to exchange the necessary information to facilitate extradition, then the international nature of the crime becomes an advantage for the perpetrator. National borders become a protective shield behind which the perpetrator can hide. In such a case globalization and the freedom of movement mutate into instruments of oppression and human rights abuse. (p. 57)

21 McCabe and Manian, eds., *Sex Trafficking*, 152.


23 Of course, people enslaved in other forms of trafficking are often exploited sexually as well: “Female victims of forced or bonded labor, especially women and girls in domestic servitude, are often sexually exploited as well.” Some child soldiers, both male and female, are often sexually abused and are
Traffickers have various methods of enslaving girls in sex trafficking, and this is where poverty plays a decisive role. They will promise a high-paying job (supposedly recruiting for, say, domestic work), good benefits, and reasonable working conditions, and in this way induce them to take employment. Given their often miserable circumstances in their country, they will take the risk for a better life abroad and the opportunity to send some money to their families as well. We know that in the U.S., massage parlors are often fronts for prostitution. Many of the Asian girls who work there, once brought into the country, are told that they owe a large amount of money to the owner and they will have to work in order to repay it, not only by performing massages but also through sex work. Refusal means rape and severe beating.

Traffickers will also spend time courting the girls and promising them marriage in order to get the girls to follow them. A small number of them do know ahead of time that they will be working in prostitution, although they do not know the oppressive conditions they are entering. For this reason, the UN Protocol holds that initial consent or the signing of contracts is irrelevant since deception about the conditions of the work has been used in order to achieve such consent.

IV. STRUCTURAL CAUSES

Numerous structural factors help explain sex trafficking, including social inequality, market downturns, and attitudes to gender, but in this article I will focus on the factors of poverty and demand for prostitution with some observations on the profile of the client.

1. Poverty. Poverty is one of the main reasons, if not the primary reason, for the flourishing of human trafficking and the vulnerability of the victims. Poverty is what motivates people to consider migration. Both real and relative poverty are strong enough motivators for migration and both expose people to the dangers of trafficking. Relative poverty is the perceived inequalities which arise through economic comparison, an inevitable process in our current reality of globalization. Whether we are aware of it or not, our comforts, beautiful homes, cars, and elec-
tronic gadgets contribute to the formation of people’s self-perception as poor. We create “perceived” poverty, which is just as powerful and alluring for dangerous risk-taking as is real poverty. In other words, the “American dream” has its victims.

When Ezekiel writes his incredible three chapters (26–28) against the city of Tyre on account of its excessive wealth, arrogance, and economic injustices, one gets the sense that he is describing the world of today. Actually, Tyre, one of the richest cities in antiquity, is also the one attacked for human trafficking by the prophets (e.g. Amos 1:9; Joel 4:6; Ezek 27:13). The hubristic excesses did not leave the prophets indifferent who seem to regard injustice as endemic to wealth accumulation, or rather, wealth concentration.30

While many humanitarian organizations respond to poverty through philanthropic donation and acts which often serve the public image of celebrities, they “emphasize rather than bridge the distance between giver and receiver and too often leave intact the structures of inequality.”31 Luke Bretherton reminds us that kenosis or renunciation, that is, ongoing surrendering of idolatrous ties to property, kinship, comfort, and status for the sake of meaningful relationships to God and neighbor is entirely absent in secular humanitarianism but is a mark of the Christian.32 Or, it ought to be! יָמשָׁא לְאִישָׁא ideas of justice presuppose an identity of absolute identification with the receiver (e.g. Deut 15:15: “Remember that you were once slaves in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you! That is why I am giving you this command” [NLT]; cf. Deut 24:18). Victims of sex trafficking are not mere recipients of our charity but they are our most treasured guests at our table.

2. Demand and the client. Persistent demand, of course, is the beginning and the end of human trafficking. A few years ago, the discussion on human trafficking began to focus more on the client. Various studies have shown that anyone can be a client of prostitution.33 In the street work of Athens, I witnessed groups of young boys coming to the brothels, old men who could barely walk up the stairs, Greeks, immigrants, Christians, Muslims, sober people, drunk people, low-wage poor-looking people as well as wealthy, handsome, successful men in their suits, pulling their expensive car to the side of the street, paying for their quick service, and heading back to work. Men who would literally step out of church, visit the brothel, and then return to their pews.

30 Agrarian Mediterranean societies of the ancient world considered wealth to be limited in quantity, thus becoming rich was generally understood to have happened through corruption. For a full analysis of wealth perceptions, see Brian S. Rosner, Greed as Idolatry: The Origin and Meaning of a Pauline Metaphor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 116–21.
32 Ibid.
33 Studies conducted in various EU countries with differing policies towards prostitution now show that “clients of trafficked prostitution are likely to be ordinary men (professionals and workers, married and single, high and low educated, young and elderly persons); in other words, they are transversal to all social classes and do not represent a particular deviant group of individuals.” Andrea Di Nicola et al., eds., Prostitution and Human Trafficking: Focus on Clients (New York: Springer, 2009), 3–4. Also, Paola Monzini, Εμπόριο Γυναικών: Πορνεία, Μαστροπεία και Εκμετάλλευση (trans. Φωτεινή Ζέρβου; Athens: Melani, 2007), 30; trans. of Il mercato delle donne: prostituzione, tratta e sfruttamento (Roma: Donzelli, 2002).
The first significant study on the client was conducted in the U.S. back in the late 1940s and showed that at the time two-thirds of the men contacted had paid for sex at least once in their lives and 15–20% were regular clients of prostitutes. In Britain, around the same time, the number of men who had purchased sex at least once in their lives was 1 in 4. Some shared characteristics of the client surfaced, such as the need for dominance and/or affection, the (at least partial) awareness of exploitation and the related neutralization techniques. Neutralization techniques are things clients tell themselves in order to justify their use of trafficked victims. The clients neutralize their guilt, as many interviews have shown, by saying that even though they suffer, the girls get good incomes, and they can also send some cash to their families. The clients also believe that they are not the ones responsible to check whether a girl is legally or freely there, and even if they knew that a girl was forced into this business, it would not deter them from buying.

What pushes men to commercial sex? Earlier studies thought of the purchase of sex as a form of psychopathology until this was disproved in the 1980s and 1990s. In 2005 Ben-Israel and Levenkron focused on three macro-categories of motives inducing men to seek commercial sex: biological reasons connected to the “inner” nature of men, individual psychological factors, and social and supra-individual elements.

The biological theory which regards the male sexual impulse as an instinct as uncontrollable as the need for food or drink in contrast to women who are thought to have a weak sexual impulse is now deemed outdated as studies have shown the controllability and the importance of social and cultural factors in the characterization of this male “need.” It must be said that this is an area where the church’s teaching on personal moral purity has played a positive role.

Among the psychological factors, there is the fantasy of a dirty, degraded sexual object devoid of human qualities. There is the need for “real” manhood which demands the submission of female to the male, and also the desire for different kinds of sex not obtainable within the relationship with a regular partner.

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34 Nicola et al., eds., Prostitution and Human Trafficking, 6. In the 1970s, two distinct studies have shown that the majority of clients were married and aged between 30 and 60 and that a large number of them purchased sex when away from home (p. 6).
36 “All of them are exploited. However, they also have good incomes. They can have good clothes and can send money home to their families. Of course they don’t like the life, but they also get some benefits” (Italian client). “Of course I don’t ask for the residence permit. It doesn’t matter to me if they have it or not. If tomorrow they are kicked out into the street, bad luck. I have nothing to do with it” (Dutch client). “If I could differentiate [between forced and voluntary…] it would probably not influence my choice. Because if I like the girl, I would ask her to join me in the room. It is totally wrong of course” (Dutch client). “I do it because of the excitement, but also because of the addiction. Meeting a prostitute doesn’t involve demands, and you get to do other stuff than in your relationship” (Swedish client). Ibid.
37 Ibid., 10–13.
38 Summarized by Nicola et al., ibid., 13.
40 Ibid., 18–21.
tution is an industry in which fantasy is an important part of the product, and it is the force of this fantasy that causes many of the customers to consider the fact that a woman is not voluntarily a sex worker as part of the attraction. This testifies to the formidable powers of the male fantasy. While most clients would recognize the wrongness, the injustice, the dehumanization of women in this industry, it is paradoxically this objectification that attracts them and keeps them compliant to this evil. Even in the case of pornography, where many people are aware of the direct relationship between sex trafficking and the pornographic industry, they persist in blocking justice out of their heads and continue to feed this oppressive business.

Jesus responds to this schizophrenic world by going straight to the heart of the problem. He tightens the law against adultery in Matt 5:27–28 by demanding justice in one’s fantasy realm, taking biblical patriarchy to another level. Biblical patriarchy refined has to execute justice in every realm, even the territory of human imagination.

Social theories have pointed out the massive “exodus” of sexuality in all forms of social media and the use of primarily women’s sexuality for advertisements of various products, thus connecting sexuality with consumerism. Sex has been increasingly constructed “more as a marketed commodity than an expression of intimate relations,” so the clients have fully adopted the identity of the consumer, paying for the merchandise, demanding consumer satisfaction and leaving the scene when the transaction is completed. We tend to think of women as the ultimate consumers, but actually in the U.S. approximately 60% of internet purchases involve the porn industry.

What is dangerous about the consumer identity is that a consumer will rarely ask questions about the supply chain leading up to the transaction. His only concern is getting the most out of the lowest-priced product. In fact, the clients prefer to maintain their traditional role of the ignorant buyer; they want to be invisible, anonymous, and free of any culpability. Assuming a “consumer” identity is morally evasive because consumers do not feel responsible for the journey of the product. They do not ask, “Who collected the raw materials?” or “Who put the pieces together?” or “How was the product transported to the shop?” It is the responsibility of the seller to worry about all this. Carrying this consumer attitude into the sex industry allows these layers of separation to ease one’s conscience.

This attitude is directly opposed to ethics. It is interesting that even in ancient Babylonian law, it was the responsibility of the buyer to establish the legal

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43 Monzini, Εμπόριο Γυναικών, 34–38.
44 Ben-Israel and Levenkron, Missing Factor, 22.
45 Monzini, Εμπόριο Γυναικών, 68.
46 Ibid., 39.
47 See how layers of separation are added in the human trafficking recruitment in U.S. Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report, 14–15.
status of a slave. It was the client’s loss if the slave was sold illegally, that is, if he or she was stolen. As David Baker shows, several laws consider someone who buys a slave a thief if he cannot establish the identity of the seller or has no witnesses or contract to verify the purchase. Of course these laws are there to protect the legal owners of the slave, but at the same time, and especially for Israel, they seek to ensure that the sale of this person did not result from kidnapping. As I have argued elsewhere, kidnapping was a serious crime in the ANE and a capital crime in Israel. Forced enslavement (outside special circumstances of war or service for a crime) was abominable to Israelite identity which was constructed against their former status of Egyptian slavery. God's law holds his people responsible for exposing forced enslavement of citizens and not participating in any way in the benefits of such enslavement. In most countries today, the buyer is still considered outside the criminal chain of human trafficking, but in 2000 the UN Protocol opened the way for the criminalization of the client.

We tend to think that prostitution exists because it satisfies a particular physical need in men, but this is only partially true. Prostitution is the reflection of an existing relational problem between men and women and rests on a particular definition of gender identity in our societies. It is being observed that prostitution has become a safe space where the male feels secure about his performance in relating to the opposite gender. He experiences absolute freedom from the burden of commitment and responsibility. Resorting to paid sex may be interpreted as a form of temporary satisfaction and affirmation of male domination over the female.

One of the clients interviewed said:

Being able to choose without being rejected, this ability just by itself brings great satisfaction, so then you don’t have to invest too much in the performative side of things. It is beautiful being able to choose like a feudal lord and being absolutely certain there will be no rejection from the other side.

Other clients feel that the status of male superiority is being threatened in our age. They feel that feminism is destroying traditional hierarchies and that the battle for equality places more and more demands and expectations on males. Prostitution becomes, then, an escape, a vacation from reality. A forty-year old client returning from a “royal” holiday in Thailand said: “In Thailand I found a very good woman which I … rented for a week … ‘choice’ was no longer a factor, only the satisfaction in possessing, not so much a woman, but a slave.”

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51 Monzini, *Εμπόριο Γυναικών*, 26–27.
52 Ibid., 27.
53 Emancipation of women is a major factor that encourages the demand for prostitution. Nicola et al., eds., *Prostitution and Human Trafficking*, 231.
54 Monzini, *Εμπόριο Γυναικών*, 28.
was pointed out that sexual tourists consider the prostitutes that they meet abroad to be women who have accepted their “role” of subjugated beings who must satisfy men’s sexual needs. This ideal of having a submissive woman is central to the identity of the client. Therefore, Christian discourse about the submission of women, and the leadership and headship of men, must be nuanced and sensitive so as not to merely affirm primitive instincts.

V. REDEMPTION AND HOPE

Biblical patriarchy is accountable for everything that happens “within the gates” and is the guarantor of the flourishing of the vulnerable. The alertness to the cry of the oppressed demanded of the patriarchal house is uncompromised. The patriarchal house must be vigilant in seeking rather than being passively “present.” This is evident in Deut 22:24, the law forbidding the punishment of a woman if a sexual act takes place in a field, because she may have cried out and no one would have heard her. What this law presupposes is that a woman inside the town is safe. She can cry out and people will hear and respond and rescue. It presupposes that windows and doors are wide open, ears and eyes are alert to see and hear any occasion where a victim might need help. This is how safe a town was expected to be. Of course we live in towns and cities today, but do we really live among others in such a way that their cry can be heard? Women continue to cry out in our cities but could it be the case that the church has moved out of hearing range? Has the church removed itself to such a distance that the cry of those who are hurting cannot be heard anymore?

What is happening “within our gates”? In Texas, sex trafficking victims have been discovered, the vast majority of whom were actually U.S. citizens. In Portland, a city called by some “the national hub for child sex trafficking,” underage girls have been found working in the city’s strip clubs. In Atlanta, little girls as young as ten are housed and prostituted by their traffickers. And let us not forget little boys. Fifty percent of victims in New York were found to be boys. Where do these children go once discovered? Who discovers them? Christian organizations all over the U.S. and internationally are becoming increasingly mobilized, and the fact is that approximately one-third of trafficking victims in the U.S. are

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55 Nicola et al., eds., Prostitution and Human Trafficking, 13.
60 Some of these are mentioned by Goss, “Closed for Business,” 13.
discovered by individual citizens, not the police.\textsuperscript{61} Citizens with “ears” tuned in to the cries, imaging God who “hears our cries.”

In all this, the church must be cautious not to snatch people out of their current state by force.\textsuperscript{62} A balance must be observed. In Athens we are very careful to win the trust of the women gradually (not in short-term missions but through long-term commitment) and empower them into a state where they express their desire for freedom themselves. They need to bake their own unleavened bread, prepare their own bitter herbs, and brush the blood on their doorposts as active participants in their own deliverance.\textsuperscript{63}

VI. CONCLUSION

I will close with an excerpt from our last newsletter:

As we entered the brothel, there was Lena. ... right away she asked if we had brought her a Bible. When I said yes, her face lit up. ... Natasha helped her understand where to start and how to read God’s Word. Lena was listening carefully and was getting more and more excited with every word…. [She] told us how thrilled she was to read and get to know the loving Father and Savior Jesus Christ. She recognized she needed to repent and to find God in a more personal way. When we asked her how we could pray for her or if she wanted us to pray with her, in seconds she was down on her knees. We all got down with her. Lena was touched by the Holy Spirit, she could not stop crying. Her tears were tears of sadness, repentance and joy, all at the same time. This image of three girls kneeling down in a brothel and praying, opening the Scriptures and sharing with Lena just stayed with me. The brothel is not that ideal place one would want to kneel in, but in that moment, we were so consumed by the Holy Spirit, none of us realized where we really were.\textsuperscript{64}

The work is hard, slow, and low in numbers. But we are not doing this work because of the high numbers and spectacular successes or the numerous miracles we witness. We do it because of the miracle that happened to us and that these girls get to witness: the miracle is getting to see people leaving their comfort and warm homes to go and seek them out in cold and filthy streets; the miracle is seeing a church that “was, is, and is coming” toward them instead of withdrawing from them and abandoning them in their bondage; the miracle is meeting people who choose to touch them and embrace them without disgust or meaning harm; the miracle is seeing people who long to talk to them out of genuine interest and not in order to manipulate them for their own gain; the miracle is people who are able to look at them, regard them, and treat them as the divine sacred icons of the invisible

\textsuperscript{61} Kara, \textit{Sex Trafficking}, 195.

\textsuperscript{62} Bretherton says that loving concern often produces “modes of domination” (“Poverty, Politics, and Faithful Witness in the Age of Humanitarianism,” 448).

\textsuperscript{63} There are cases where women have been “rescued” against their will. An Indian NGO has been accused of such actions, and the women themselves escaped from the center where they had been placed post-“rescue.” Cameron and Newman, “Trafficking in Humans,” 34.

\textsuperscript{64} Email conversation with anonymous ministry volunteer on July 7, 2014.
Creator instead of as objects of merchandise. Witnessing a church that tells them “we are the same, you and me, both of us guests in the Father’s house, but I refuse to enter it alone without taking you along with me” is the miracle of God, our refuge.