I first met Larry Nemer when lecturing at YTU, and since then we have encountered each other regularly in the Mission Education and Research Network of the SVD Asia-Pacific Zone (Prior 1998). It was Larry who encouraged me to join the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS), that global, ecumenical association of cross-cultural mission professionals where I am active in the group for Biblical Studies and Mission (BISAM) (Prior 2012). My ongoing involvement in these networks, together with my teaching at the Yarra Theological Union (1990-2008), drew me out of my comparatively “splendid isolation” of pre-internet eastern Indonesia, into affirming and challenging global associations of professional friends and colleagues. Larry himself graciously shares his own historical research on mission in his teaching, in his writings and in personal exchanges; unsurprisingly he has been a popular lecturer and seminar organiser whether at CTU (Chicago), the MIL (London) or YTU.

Transparent to his own limitations, Larry is one of the more sensitive confreres I am privileged to know. That is why for his well deserved Festshrift I am taking up a crucial mission issue in Southeast Asia, namely human trafficking. If Bishop Francis of Rome has been focusing on mercy as the crux of his global ministry, then Larry comes across, with all his erudition and in his multivarious involvements, as extravagantly compassionate. And here I perceive a link between Larry and the theme I have chosen, for it is precisely this fusion of compassion and erudition that shapes the ministry of inter-congregational teams across Southeast Asia’s national borders in their journeying with victims and survivors of human trafficking. The Southeast Asian region is a major hub in the forced displacement of people; here religious institutes, both Sisters and Brothers, have taken up this humanitarian and human rights challenge as a key priority. This essay is a small acknowledgement of their presence, patience and persistence in this, at times, dangerous ministry.

Trafficking: The Underbelly of an Unregulated Global Economy

“I am a stranger, learning to love the strangers around me.”

(June Jordan 2007:387)

Singapore, April 2013

Geyland Road links Singapore’s central business district with the eastern suburbs. Each of the many lanes off the main road caters to a specific niche in the commercial sex industry according to the language spoken, nationality, age, experience and preferred sexual performance. One street caters for Thai women, another for Filipinas, others for Burmese, Vietnamese and Indonesians. Overseas male workers, as well as tourists, come at night to the niche of their choice to size up the young women who stand in small groups along the pavement, then negotiate a price and so enter one of the many shoddy short-time hotels that specifically cater for this trade.

1 Compare Deuteronomy 5:6, 15; Exodus 20:2-3; 1 Peter 2:11.
Not just lonely, male overseas workers come to hunt for a moment’s sexual gratification; there is also a small group of Singaporean Pentecostals and Catholics who come regularly, night by night, to befriend, albeit briefly, these women, some of whom have been trafficked into the sex industry. And so, during a congress on human trafficking organized by Southeast Asian Major Superiors (SEAMS) in April 2013, 33 participants from 24 religious institutes split into groups of around half a dozen and accompanied local ecumenical rescue operators. Our mixed group went to the street marked out for Indonesian commercial sex workers. A smile, a few friendly questions, and an invitation to pray briefly as we stood embracing each other tightly, a momentary warm circle during a long, dark, humid night. And then we moved on as rough looking pimps, lurking in the background, come forward to regain control of their goods.

When any of these women feel ready to leave their forced employment, they know whom to contact. The FMM and Good Shepherd Sisters, as well as Pentecostal elders, have safe houses with members of parish support groups, many of whom are prosperous charismatics. There are opportunities for therapy and debriefing before they return home, where Sisters, or other network members, are ready to welcome them and reintroduce them back to their families. Not every religious is called to street ministry, but to those who have received this particular God-given gift, their non-judgmental presence is radically transformative.

The Global Scene
Unregulated economic globalization is impoverishing whole regions, is failing to improve the miserable lot of women and children in many countries, and so facilitates global criminal networks. Globally, a majority of migrants are women (59%) who have access only to subordinate roles and job opportunities, where, even among those poorly paid, women fare lower and their sexuality is easily exploited (UNODC 2012:25). It is estimated, that at any one time some 20.9 million persons are in forced labour around the world, including sexual exploitation. Of these, some 11.4 million are in Asia and the Pacific (UN-GIFT 2007:1-2). In his detailed studies, Siddharth Kara (2010, 2012) highlights ubiquitous and disturbing trends such as the heavy involvement of law enforcement agencies and personnel in this modern form of slavery. He estimates human trafficking to be a USD 152 billion business with annual profits of USD 92 billion. Economic downturns increase the rate of trafficking. Forced labour rakes in USD 31.6 billion from trafficked victims caught in bonded labour (ILO, 2005:55). The largest profits - more than USD 15 billion - are made from people trafficked and forced to work as cheap labour in advanced economies such as those of Australia, the USA and Europe.

Trafficking also represents lost opportunities domestically, including an irretrievable loss of human resources and future productivity (US Department of State 2011). Trafficking also results in a huge loss of remittances to developing countries, because trafficked persons often have to pay off the “debt” they incur for being trafficked - which they may never do. The two million

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2 Siddharth Kara, a former investment banker and executive turned human rights advocate, uses theoretical economics and business analysis to propose measures that could eradicate sex trafficking by undermining the profitability of the illegal activities associated with the crime. His research in Southeast Asia was in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam.

3 The ILO document Global Estimate of Forced Labour (2012) describes in detail the revised methodology used to generate global estimates of forced labour, covering the period from 2002 to 2011, and the main results obtained.
population of Flores island, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, where I live, survives from remittances sent home by migrant family members. How much of this is from trafficked persons, has yet to be calculated. Given that the annual level of remittances to developing countries is an estimated USD 325 billion, the lack of remittances from trafficked victims could imply a loss to development - according to Danailova-Trainor and Laczko (2010) - of approximately USD 60 billion.

Southeast Asia
Southeast Asia is a major source of human trafficking. For the whole Asian-Pacific region it is estimated that three persons for every 1,000 inhabitants have been trafficked. Internal trafficking is larger than cross-border trafficking (Mathi 2013:22). In Southeast Asia the majority of persons are trafficked as a cheap labour source, whether domestically (from marginal village to industrial city or rural plantation) or across national borders. Nearly every country is involved in this web of trafficking, either as a country of origin (127 countries), destination (137 countries) or transit. In Southeast Asia principal countries of origin are Vietnam, Laos, Burma, Thailand and Indonesia, while countries of destination include Australia, Brazil, France, India, Israel, Japan, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States. Singapore is both a country of transit and destination; while Malaysia receives more cross-border trafficked persons than any Southeast Asian country (UNODC 2006:89; Mathi 2013:21-22).

Key Characteristics
To begin to understand this phenomenon and its role in the global economy, we need to “follow the food chain” from the runners/recruiters, to the pimps, to the owners/employers in the place of forced labour, to cut-priced goods in markets and malls. Trafficking differs from economic migration in certain key areas: in deceptive recruitment, in unauthorised transportation, in incurring the victim with debt. Thus they may receive no (or minimal) pay after months of labour – literally bonded service - after which the employer might report them to the authorities as “illegals” and have them deported. The employer then obtains another batch of trafficked persons who likewise receive no payment.

Fourteen ladies in their mid twenties arrived in Malaysia from Burma in two groups. The first group of eight arrived on 29th September 2008, the second on 13th January 2009. They were employed in a garment factory where they worked from 8:30am until 00:00am with an hour’s break for lunch. Overtime pay was refused and huge sums were deducted from their pay for their working permits and other levies. Their passports and other documents were held by their employer. (APJPN 2009:4)

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4 This differs globally where 27% of victims are trafficked domestically, 45% are trafficked within the same subregion but across national borders, while 24% are trafficked across different regions or continents (UNODC 2012:17).

5 Numbers differ. UNODC (2012:39) estimates 18 per cent of victims globally are for forced economic exploitation with 79 per cent for commercial sexual exploitation, while ILO estimates it to be 32 per cent for forced economic exploitation and 43 per cent as commercial sexual exploitation. In Southeast Asia, despite the existence of global magnets for sex tourism, the majority of trafficked persons are for labour exploitation.
Debt bondage can keep migrant workers with the same employer for years. Passport and immigration matters are in the hands of the trafficking mafia who confiscate the documents on arrival at the place of employment; the trafficked persons are trapped in their workplace, cannot change employers, and are afraid of reporting to the police. Work conditions for undocumented migrants are way below legal minimal standards. Working hours are criminal, health and safety ignored, living conditions grossly overcrowded. Not able to look to the future, victims lose hope, their dream of supporting family back home dashed. Dehumanised, they lose their dignity and self respect.

Motivation
Victims, like so many of the poor, have been taken in by the commercialized dream of the good life forever propagated in every type of media. Bombarded with pictures of a consumer-rich life, they are willing to trust the recruiter, to believe in the one-off opportunity to support family. Too late they find themselves prey to the avarice of their agent and their employer. Many victims come not just from the economically deprived areas of the source countries, but from areas torn by social conflict. Contributing factors include the slow pace of development, corruption at all levels, the lack of local work opportunities, and cycles of debt in the village or town. Often, these economic and political issues fuse with the tradition whereby male children migrate temporarily as a rite of passage before marriage, or whereby younger children migrate as their older siblings inherit the family farm.

Adult Sex Trafficking
While cheap labour is the major motivation for trafficking in Southeast Asia, there is also sex trafficking whether to supply women and boys to domestic brothels or to those overseas. They should be distinguished from those who have entered the sex industry voluntarily, although these too often find that they cannot leave voluntarily. Commercial sex venues established in Thailand and the Philippines to service the needs of the US military during their war in Vietnam and Laos (1961-1975), have expanded, now supplying sex tourism. There victims survive on drugs, suffer severe human rights violations, and quickly lose their self-respect. Sexually-transmitted diseases are rife including HIV, whether through sexual contact or intravenous drug injection. Traffickers recruit women and men for sex work through deceptive means including falsified employment advertisements for domestic workers, restaurant waitresses and other low-skilled work. Traffickers include those involved in highly sophisticated networks of organized crime and may be as close to home as a relative to the victim.

Deer is from Sisagate Province in Thailand. She befriended a woman who one day exclaimed that she empathized with Deer’s difficult life and would like to help her. She explained that Deer could work as a waitress or as an assistant cook or a shop assistant in Bahrain. That woman handled her travel documents. Two months later she landed in Bahrain with a debt of 90 thousand Baht (AUD 3,140) for transportation and documentation. The only available vacancy was as a sex worker. On her first day she

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6 47% of those trafficked in South, Southeast and Northeast Asia and the Pacific are for forced labour (women often for domestic servitude), 44% for sexual exploitation. The other 9% are for other reasons such as begging and petty crime, illegal adoption, organ removal or forced marriage (UNODC 2012:34-38).
received 20 men. She lived in a small room with 14 other Thai women, with no fixed working hours. Work began the moment a customer arrived. (APJPN 2011:10)

Credible stories collected from those rescued include widespread rape, incidents of torture, forced abortions, starvation, and threats against the family back home.

Trafficking Children
Stories about the trafficking of children in Southeast Asia are horrific. UNICEF (2009:18-37) accepts the ILO 2002 estimate that 1.2 million children are being trafficked each year for forced labour exacted by commercial interests, but also by the military. Child labour is widely used in the footwear industry, in forced labour in agriculture and in the mining of precious stones, as domestic workers, child soldiers and in the fisheries sector.

There are 800,000 child prostitutes in Thailand, 400,000 in Indonesia (and a similar number in India), and 100,000 in the Philippines (UNODC 2006:88-89). With the advent of HIV/AIDS, there is a growing demand for young children aged between 15 and 17 and a preference for virgin sex workers. Not a few of the child sex workers from Southeast Asia have been sold by their desperately poor families, or have been abducted from rural villages to work in urban brothels in their own countries (Väyrynen 2003:15-19). Thailand, Cambodia, and Bali have become magnets for tourist paedophilia. Engrossed by the promises of the runner/recruiter, despite hearing stories of what happened to friends, the youngsters convince themselves that “It will not happen to me”. Globally, 10% of trafficked persons are boys, 17% are girls, but in South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific some 39% of all trafficked victims are children. Only in Africa and the Middle East are percentages of children among the total trafficked higher – some 68% (UNODC 2006:75-79).7

Definition
The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children defines trafficking in persons as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs …

The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used; …

7 The first of planned bienniel reports on patterns and flows of trafficking in persons at the global, regional and national levels; one of the outcomes of the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons adopted by the General Assembly in 2010.
(c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;
(d) “Child” shall mean any person under eighteen years of age. (UN Trafficking Protocol, 2000, art. 3)

Smuggling and trafficking must be distinguished. In the case of smuggling, undocumented migrants give their consent, and so smuggling is a migration issue, a crime against the state involving the illegal crossing of state borders. In the case of trafficking no consent is given; it is thus a human rights issue, a crime against the person, while also involving either internal or cross-border issues. Human trafficking negates key fundamental rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR 1948): the right to life, to live in freedom and safety (art 3); not to be treated as a slave (art 4); the right of an adult to a job, fair wages and to join a union (art 23).

Anti-Trafficking Laws in Southeast Asia (ASEAN)
The charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN Charter 2008) is based on a single market with the free flow of goods and services (art 1.5), which aims to enhance the well-being and livelihood of the peoples of ASEAN by providing them with equitable access to opportunities (Art 1.11). ASEAN has an Inter-governmental Commission on Human Rights which seeks to uphold the right of the peoples of ASEAN to live in peace, dignity and prosperity (art 1.2), while promoting the full implementation of all ASEAN instruments related to human rights (art 4.6).

Just four years after the UN Trafficking Protocol was signed, the ASEAN countries adopted their own Declaration against Trafficking in Persons Particularly Women and Children (29 November 2004), which established a regional focal network to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, particularly women and children, in the ASEAN region (art 1). The declaration urges governments to adopt measures to protect the integrity of their respective passports, official travel documents, identity and other official travel documents from fraud (art 2); to undertake regular exchange of views, information sharing on relevant migratory flows, trends and patterns; to strengthen border controls and monitoring mechanisms, and enact applicable and necessary legislation (art 3); and to distinguish victims of trafficking in persons from the perpetrators, and identify the countries of origin and nationalities of such victims. A year earlier the Philippines had already passed its own law and today, apart from Singapore and Laos, all the other ASEAN countries have legislated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Nature of Penalty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>No specific human trafficking law</td>
<td>5 years to life imprisonment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (2007)</td>
<td>3 to 20 years imprisonment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma/Myanmar</td>
<td>Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law (2005)</td>
<td>3 years to life imprisonment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (2003)</td>
<td>1 year to life imprisonment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>No specific law on human trafficking</td>
<td>Imprisonment, fine, whipping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (2008)</td>
<td>6 months to 15 years imprisonment,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The critical issue is not with the legislation itself, but rather with the patriarchal way it is being implemented by uncomprehending and untrained governmental authorities and agencies.

Presence, Patience, Persistence

All of us are part of unjust systems of commerce and exploitative patterns of life that feed human trafficking, for instance shopping for cheaper designer clothes, and food. Recognising this gives us a place to begin working with God to nurture relationships, build policies and develop practices that make us accountable to one another and so be neighbour to all.

As we journey with victims of human trafficking we may well pass through feelings of despair and anger, frustration and fury. Rather than allowing ourselves be overwhelmed by the horror of trafficking or diverted by anger, the shocking scenario should focus our mission. In this regard, if we wish to attack root causes and not simply assuage symptoms, four biblical mindsets can help shape a practical response.

Protecting the Person: Upholding Dignity

Each and every one is created in the image of God (Gn 1:27; Mt 19:4; Col 3:10). We are all children of God (Mt 5:9, 45; 1 Jn 3:1-2). Hence we need to consider how to frame this issue in such a way that the full humanity of trafficked persons, not just their vulnerability, is expressed. We need to be truly present and see a person not simply as a victim of slavery but as a whole person with a name, a family, a history, a way of speaking, laughing, crying ... This implies a human rights based approach to human trafficking, an approach that never reduces a person simply to “victim” status, where a person can become little more than an object. We should insist on viewing a victim as a whole person, respecting their culture, their choices and their integrity.

Members of religious institutes who accompany victims and survivors do not present themselves as heroes, but simply as sisters and brothers. The journey to empowerment from victim to survivor is harrowing. A careful, conscientious approach models what it means for human beings to support fellow human beings. With Ruth to Naomi, we say: “where you will go I will go.” (Rt 1:16 NJB) Surely such loyalty (ḵesed) will ultimately spell the defeat of slavery in our day.

Parish networks and members of religious institutes often began their ministry by becoming involved with issues of protection. Protection begins when a victim is rescued and reunited with family, and continues when they are assisted in re-building their lives. It may include keeping victims safe from threat, violence and abuse, counselling, help with income generation, education and vocational training. This is where concerned religious usually begin their rescue ministry. Those with the charism are on the street or outside the factory, while others run support

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8 The motto of Dom Rosendo Salvado who founded the New Norcia Benedictine town in the Swan River Colony of Western Australia among the Yuet and Balardong Aborigine communities in the mid-nineteenth century. Salvado’s saying seems particularly pertinent for those immersed in ministry with the victims and survivors of human trafficking.

9 Three of the following four sub-headings - Prosecution (art.5), Protection (art. 6-7) and Prevention (art. 9) are categories from the UNO Protocol (2000), while the fourth – Partnership - is taken from the US Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report (2011), 43-45.
homes and shelters where trained personnel are available to deal with trauma. Patiently, survivors are accompanied as they re-build their self-esteem.

Networking among religious institutes is facilitating the sharing of best methods in each of the “five Rs”: the rescue, recovery, rehabilitation, return and reintegration of victim/survivors. Cyber-networking within and among religious institutes has made possible not only the sharing of costs, but immediate collaboration across borders at all stages and levels of the problem. The presence, patience and persistence of individual religious are making a marked contribution to the protection of victims. An example of proactive victim identification:

Sisters stationed at Kupang airport in the Christian majority Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur, see a group of young unsophisticated women or men being shepherded onto a flight. They immediately text sisters at the next airport who then try to contact these vulnerable persons before they can reach their possible trafficking destination. Such emergency texts are flooding into hand-phones and email inboxes daily.

Faith-based NGOs accredited to the United Nations such as Vivat International, an NGO initially established by the Holy Spirit Sisters (SSpS) and Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) and now belonging to nine mission institutes, daily text contacts, information, suggestions and support. Similar NGOs among the Good Shepherd Sisters (RGS) and the Franciscan family interlink across the region as well as with the Commission for Human Rights in Geneva and pertinent United Nations commissions in New York. 10

Prevention: Reaching to the Heart

A second biblical stance is to reach into the heart of the most vulnerable (Dt 30:14; Jr 31:33; 2 Cor 3:2-3; 11:29; Heb 10:16, 22), and acknowledge that the survivors of slavery are the experts on slavery, that they must be at the forefront of shared analysis and action to end trafficking. What is generating the demand for cheap, expendable labour? We have to identify the major suppliers of the high-volume demand products at the lowest possible cost. Then the proper causes of human trafficking can be recognized; and we can ascertain how and where the wider community can impact these causes.

Many religious institutes, and some parishes, are letting the voices of victims and survivors be heard in worship. On occasion the trafficked person herself gives personal witness, otherwise experience garnered from the biennial Trafficking in Persons Reports, and the records of organisations engaged in work against human trafficking, are read out and prayed over. Such case studies can be quite graphic. And then the worshipping community explores biblical texts using the lens of human trafficking for both sharing and in worship; and after worship, concrete preventative action.

Prevention reduces the vulnerability of the person or community to become a victim of trafficking. To be effective, factors that make a person or community vulnerable must be

10 The SSpS/SVD site is www.vivatinternational.org, that of the RGS is www.buonpastoreint.org, and the Franciscans’ site is www.franciscansinternational.org.
correctly identified. Tackling demand is another way of prevention. For example following the “food chain” from mall to trader to producer, and then educating consumers about how their lifestyle choices impact others, how particular brands of cheap food, clothing and footwear depend upon indentured child labour, or under-compensated farmers. While members of a few religious institutes have long been involved in protection, only more recently have they been engaged in prevention. This involves educating those most vulnerable to trafficking, and also educating the wider community and the relevant government agencies.

Religious communities have for some years now been advocating gender justice issues. But in the prevention of human trafficking, gender justice needs mainstreaming, and this in the overly patriarchal societies of Southeast Asia. Here the stigmatization of the victim is widespread. Prevention also entails sexuality education, both in schools run by religious institutes, but more so in state schools, parishes, the mosque, in parliament. Trafficking needs to be seen as a human rights issue by those at risk and by religious and government authorities. Thus compassion needs to be complemented by professionalism in advising and supporting those at risk, and those rescued. Increasingly, comprehensive data and expert advice are more readily at hand.

In a global economy people are forever going to be on the move. Economic development is stunted in many areas, and so the migration of people seeking work is not going to go away. The vast mass migrations of today have produced a host of security issues across borders which are usually tackled from a state-centred approach according to the needs of business. Faith-based and humanitarian groups urge a people-centred focus. The latter approach would treat victims according to humanitarian values and neither stigmatise nor criminalise them. As close witnesses at every stage of the trafficking route, faith-based networks such as religious institutes have a vital contribution to make as governments, business and NGOs collaborate to end this appalling form of slavery.

Prosecution: Naming the Sin

A third biblical approach is to name the sin (Ul 19:16-21; Yes 3:14-15; Yeh 7:3, 8; Mat 6:24; Lk 16:13; 1 Tim 6:10). By disseminating data and engaging in campaigning, religious are removing the veil of moral legitimacy that adorns current forms of business and permits these abuses to continue. Local, regional and global networking is managing to connect the dots, trace the food chain back to apparently “respectable” traders and companies. This removal of moral legitimacy from established ways of doing things has entailed confrontation, on occasion with apparently pious traders; it demands courage and humility to stand eye to eye, non-violently.

Prosecution ensures that the victim receives full justice, including meaningful prosecution of the perpetrator. It requires rigorous law enforcement, fighting corruption, identifying and monitoring trafficking routes, and cross-border coordination. However, prosecution is still somewhat hindered by unsystematic and often inconsistent data; also by a lack of clarity in definitions and in the implementation of the law, and by the meagre capacity of front-line officers.

Recently bodies established by religious institutes, such as JPIC Commissions and human rights NGOs, have been engaged in advocacy, pushing for necessary legal reform. Apparently only in Norway and the Netherlands is it the client paying for sex who is prosecuted, while the sex worker receives therapy and rehabilitation. ASEAN governments are being urged to ratify the
trafficking protocol of 2004. To implement the protocol, immigration officers and the security forces need training, indeed a specialised unit for trafficked persons could be created. Other vital areas have yet to come into the ambience of church-based groups, such as seeking special visas for witnesses at trials (rather than simply deporting the victim), adequate access to justice, and seeing to the cost of witnesses.

Partnering: Extending Gospel Community

A fourth biblical outlook is the nurturing of an ever more inclusive community (Mrk 9: 40; Mt 12:30; Lk 9:50; 14:12-14; Acts 10:34-35). As we become aware of our connection with people who are enslaved and people who are exploited, so we spread that understanding of the interlinks. Awareness builds communal support in mobilising for change among key sectors of society such as students and their institutes of higher education, labour communities, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist peoples. A social movement is in the making. A groundswell can effect change in legislative and administrative bodies and in commercial concerns. The nurturing of a social movement is nothing less than extending gospel community – a community of equals, of sisters and brothers putting the last first: “Just as you did it to one of the least of my sisters and brothers you did it to me.” (Mt 25:40 NJB)

Religious institutes in Southeast Asia, working with other professional partners, have yet to put forward compelling new models for business and the broader society. Together with survivors, right now, we are at least beginning to imagine how things might be otherwise, and putting those dreams into action in our religious communities. And this entails working with our neighbourhoods, our colleagues in NGOs, our parishes, mosques and temples.

To Conclude

Human trafficking is the underbelly of the unregulated global economy. Trafficking is a multi-billion dollar business, is being increasingly feminised, and strikes at fundamental human rights. Easy and comparatively cheap travel, the ability of companies to shift to the cheapest sources and producers without a moral qualm, is fusing with the commodification of the migrant worker under the rubric of cheaper, better, faster. Loyalty among employers and employees within a single company guaranteeing financial security and minimal working conditions has long since disintegrated. The earth has become a marketplace for selling and buying - full stop. In the face of this increasingly complex and powerful mode of commercial transaction, human trafficking forms an intricate part. The political will to end this global slavery is seriously lacking.

Nevertheless, objective and relatively solid evidence is steadily increasing. The question arises: What can non-state actors, such as faith-based networks, including members of mission institutes, realistically do – if anything?

It has to be stated loud and clear that the power to transform relationships lies with those whom we serve, with the victims and survivors of trafficking. When fear dissipates and despair is replaced by hope, depression by joy, then helplessness gives way to a new found empowerment within. As those caught up in the trafficking web begin to comprehend their situation, and how they arrived there, and begin to understand the larger economic and political landscape, so change occurs – in themselves, in their families and in their communities. Journeying with them are religious Sisters and Brothers who are truly present, profoundly patient and quietly persistent. Truly present with the victims in their place of bonded labour and exploitation; patiently
developing trusting relationships at the victim’s own pace, entering into relationships not previously imagined; and calmly persevering in the face of the risks, the dangers and the enormity of the horror.

Experience with trafficked persons is greatly expanding the mission horizon of involved religious institutes and deepening their gospel vision. Change is palpable in the hopes, the priorities, the attitudes, the empathy, the compassion, the humility, and the expansive openness of those in street ministry, running safe houses, counselling, or engaged in advocacy. Mission has become a matter or righting relationships, treating everyone as a sister and brother, being neighbour to all, putting the last first. The vision is that of a life-long search for God, and glorifying God in everyone and everything; God’s unconditional, unlimited love shared through respect for others across every social, economic, racial, political and religious boundary.

A ministry of compassion in the world of human trafficking is leading to a reassessment of our own consumer choices and to a determination not to be entangled in materialistic values. Mission at a hub of human trafficking is gifting religious with an ability to meet people where they are, with a capacity to listen to and understand questions from the street, the plantation grove and the factory floor; it is convincing us of the need for adequate training and ongoing systematic reflection, and prising us open to the radical changes that society needs if trafficking is to be a horror of the past. In all this we are rediscovering the power and fragility of the gospel.

As an empathetic heart guides the professional head - which has yet to find paths through the trafficking labyrinth - so we allow the Spirit to be the agent of mission. The immediacy and flexibility of the cyber-world allows for openness to the ever-changing economic and political context. Ministry with misled and betrayed migrants calls for religious to be on the move, for new understandings and the living of religious community. Our one certainty is the God who beckons us forward. A border-crossing religious lives a spirituality of forever seeking and listening, yet a person equipped professionally with the necessary knowledge and skills, one willing to identify with the victim, and constantly prepared for the surprising ways of the God of surprises.

Presence, patience and perseverance: Larry Nemer’s long life and witness also resonate with these human qualities; a true gift to mission.

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