

March 2016

**ser·vi·tude** (sûr'vi-tûd), *n.* **1**, the state of being a slave or completely subject to someone more powerful; **2**, *synonyms: slavery, enslavement, bondage, subjugation, subjection, domination.*

**deg·ra·da·tion** (deg'ra-da'shûn), *n.* **1**, the act of treating (someone) with contempt or disrespect; **2**, *synonyms: humiliation, shame, loss of self-respect, abasement, indignity, ignominy.*

Dear Friend,

There is a modern moral consensus that treating people as property is wrong. And yet, a certain type of servitude still exists in Canada today.

And while most Canadians have zero-tolerance attitudes towards domestic violence in our homes and bullying in our schools and workplaces, many have turned a blind eye to a certain type of violence, oppression and degradation that still occurs every day across the country.

I'm referring to prostitution. In today's culture, many have come to regard prostitution through a morally neutral lens as an inescapable fact of social life. "As long as it's not happening in my backyard, then what goes on between consenting adults is none of my business."

This attitude needs to change. We must refute the notion that buying sex is an inevitable part of our society. Prostitution is not the world's oldest profession; it's the world's oldest oppression. The culture of prostitution is one of coercion, abuse and violence. It involves the sexual exploitation of mostly young women who are vulnerable because of homelessness, poverty, broken families, abuse, addiction, mental illness or racialization. Those who began working in their early teens often did so against their will, or were forced to sell their bodies for cruel survival. In fact, research tells us that between 88-96% of women in prostitution are not there by choice and would "get out" if they felt they had a viable alternative.

God has created all people *in His image*. Such knowledge – that He created our inmost beings – was "too wonderful" for King David (Psalm 139). Should we be any less overwhelmed by this truth? We need to remind ourselves what it means to be image-bearers of God. It means we are all equal. We are equal in dignity and worth. It means we are *duty-bound* and *compelled* to love, respect and value one another as fellow image-bearers. How we treat each other *matters!*

*9 Let us not become weary in doing good...*

*10 ... as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people... (Gal 6:9-10)*

Once we truly grasp this, our hearts should grieve at the thought that any person's body should ever be sold for another's gratification or profit. Prostitution violates human dignity and is an affront to gender equality because it involves the subordination of women and the assumed right of men to buy and exchange women as objects for sexual use. That this is still happening in our country should motivate us to fight to put an end to it.

*over please...*

Until very recently, our laws had tried to restrict prostitution by punishing the women who were being sold for sex. This approach was ineffective because, as long as there are johns offering money for sex, pimps and traffickers will continue to exploit women (and children) for profit. As well, criminalizing prostituted women further victimizes them and makes it even more difficult for them to exit prostitution.

There is a better way. Several years ago, the EFC began to closely examine the “Nordic model” of law that would make it a crime to *buy* sex. The resulting decrease in business from johns who are not willing to risk criminal charges and potential jail time would undermine the work of pimps and traffickers. Under this model, Sweden, Norway and Iceland have seen significant declines in prostitution and sex trafficking.

For many years now, the EFC has been engaged in the national debate about our prostitution laws. The EFC has been travelling across the country with Defend Dignity, raising awareness and calling the Church to action. We intervened before the Supreme Court in the *Bedford* case, where the previous prostitution laws were challenged. We educated parliamentarians about the realities of prostitution and the need for law reform, and we called on them to adopt the Nordic model. And when the previous government introduced legislation to reflect these realities, we testified before the Justice Committee and the Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs on the strengths and weaknesses of that legislation.

We did all of this because we care deeply about this issue and the people affected – because we envision a Canada where our boys will never grow up believing that they can approach girls and offer to pay for sex, and where our girls will never grow up believing that their bodies can be treated like consumer goods to be bought, sold, or traded. We are passionate about working towards a society that is free from any form of exploitation.

In December 2014, Bill C-36, the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, which adapted the Nordic model to the Canadian context, became law. For the first time ever in Canada, it is a crime to purchase or attempt to purchase sexual services *anywhere* – on the street, in a private residence, massage parlour, strip club or brothel. The new laws now punish the purchasers and purveyors of sexual services – the johns, pimps and traffickers – instead of those who are being sold. At the same time, the government pledged \$20 million to support programs assisting individuals exiting prostitution.

Our work continues. There are groups who want to remove the criminal offence of purchasing sexual services and are actively pressuring the current government to scrap the new laws or to amend them substantially. The EFC has sent letters to the Minister of Justice, and we will continue to educate and encourage MPs to uphold the laws and to promote strong support for the programs that assist people leaving prostitution.

Will you also pray for our efforts and consider supporting our work on this issue with a financial gift? With your prayers and your donations, you become an integral part of our work to fight sexual exploitation against women and children in this country. Please help.

Sincerely,



Bruce Clemenger  
President

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