

Talitha Kum Study, Prayer and Action Packet: Neoliberalism and Human Trafficking in a Time of COVID

Part 1: Introduction

The Talitha Kum International Assembly in 2019 identified three priority areas of structural injustice to address in the fight to end human trafficking. This discussion paper addresses the 2nd Priority:

“The dominant model of neo-liberal development and unfettered capitalism creates situations of vulnerability that are exploited by recruiters, traffickers, employers and buyers.

We denounce this unjust economic model that prioritizes profit over human rights, creates a culture of violence and commodification, and decreases funding for necessary social services, putting people at greater risk of being trafficked. This also affects programs of prevention, protection, support, integration and reintegration of trafficked people. We denounce the widespread corruption that allows this evil to continue.

We call on the Church to continue to use Catholic Social Teaching to critique social structures and promote economic and social justice. We call on governments to adopt just alternatives to the neo-liberal model of development; to implement anti-trafficking laws; and allocate more funding for the support of long-term programs to prevent human trafficking and assist survivors in their process of healing to re/integrate into society. These programs should be created with input directly from survivors and those who work with survivors such as Talitha Kum networks.

We commit ourselves to just and sustainable economic practices within our networks. We also commit ourselves to create spaces of interdisciplinary reflection, collaboration, and advocacy within the various ecclesial, interfaith, government, and international organizations according to Gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching.”

What is Neoliberalism?

Neoliberal economics has emerged over the last decades as a political and economic ideology and regime that is characterised by free market trade and capitalism, deregulation of financial markets, and the shift towards the privatisation of public assets and services. It advocates “casualisation” of the workforce to maximise profit, loosening of regulatory controls, reducing taxes, and the weakening of organised labour. Neoliberalism emphasises the pursuit of profit and economic growth, holding that private business creates wealth (for individuals) that will *trickle down* to the community – that private wealth for some is good for everyone.

What does this have to do with us?

Neoliberal economics have led to changes in the way countries and communities function, not least of all emphasising individual wealth and national economic growth over community interests:

- Public assets and services, such as education, health and aged care are sold or contracted out and become profit driven businesses;
- Casualisation of the work force leading to job insecurity, unpaid sick leave and reduced or no social protections;

- Aggravated inequalities between people and countries. The COVID Pandemic has highlighted class, gender, race, age, geographic and economic inequities e.g. for individuals, the ability or not to isolate, access to healthcare, internet/WiFi access, job security, financial security;
- Women are overwhelmingly and disproportionately negatively impacted. Women are the predominate workforce in highly impacted and low paid industries e.g. health and aged care, hospitality, manufacturing, textiles. The feminisation of poverty is increasing;
- Reliance on a “just-in-time” inventories that are heavily dependent on overseas markets. Many countries were therefore unable to provide adequate medical and protective equipment at the start of the pandemic because they were reliant on overseas supplies which were unavailable;
- Increasing national GDP targets are depleting the earth’s resources and contributing to a global climate crisis;
- Estimated financial cost to the community of each person trafficked is over €300,000;
- Contrary to the UN aim to “leave no one behind” the gap between rich and poor is widening – currently the world’s 26 richest people own more wealth than half the entire world’s population (7.8 billion!).

More people are currently victims of human trafficking and slavery than at any time in history.

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Part 2: Sources for Education, Analysis, and Further Reading

The Economy of Francesco (2020) <https://francescoeconomy.org>

Universal Basic Income - Building a new future (EN). Edmund Rice Centre, 2020
https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/erc/pages/1728/attachments/original/1602733933/Just_Comment_Vol_22_No_3-21_Soil_Soul_WEB.pdf?1602733933 (see also endnotes and references)

COVID-19: What has COVID-19 Taught Us about Neoliberalism? (EN/SP)
<https://www.wilpf.org/covid-19-what-has-covid-19-taught-us-about-neoliberalism/>

The COVID-19 pandemic: Lessons on building more equal and sustainable societies (EN)
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1035304620927107>

Coronavirus spells the end of the Neoliberal Era. What's Next? (EN)
<https://www.resilience.org/stories/2020-04-03/coronavirus-spells-the-end-of-the-neoliberal-era-whats-next/>

Thinking economists are grappling with why their profession has made our lives worse (EN)
<https://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/thinking-economists-are-grappling-with-why-their-profession-has-made-our-lives-worse-20200922-p55xzj.html>

The Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Women in Vulnerable Sectors and Economies (EN)
https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news20_e/info_note_covid_05aug20_e.pdf

Pandemic Profits for Companies Soar by Billions More as Poorest Pay Price (OXFAM)
<https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/pandemic-profits-companies-soar-billions-more-poorest-pay-price>

Study on the Economic, Social and Human Costs of Trafficking in Human Beings within the EU
https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/study_on_the_economic_social_and_human_costs_of_trafficking_in_human_beings_within_the_eu.pdf

Women and the Environment: Notes for a Different Economy
Prof. Marcella Corsi & Prof. Giulio Guarini. UISG Bulletin, No. 172, 2020, pp. 12-19.
http://www.internationalunionsuperiorsgeneral.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Bollettino_172_ENG.pdf

Pope Francis's rejection of 'neoliberal' economics. Bruce Duncan. "Pearls and Irritations", 25 October 2020. <https://johnmenadue.com/pope-franciss-rejection-of-neoliberal-economics/>

How Pope Francis is Reviving Radical Catholic Economics
<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/how-pope-francis-is-reviving-radical-catholic-economics/>

El Neoliberalismo en Default (SP) 30 Agosto 2020 <https://www.celag.org/el-neoliberalismo-en-default/>

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Part 3: What Our Catholic Tradition Teaches About Economic Justice

Inspiration from Scripture

1. Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers (Genesis 37:1-36)
2. The fasting that God desires (Isaiah 58:6-7, 61:1)
3. “They sell the just person for silver...” (Amos 2:6-7)
4. The Magnificat (Luke 1:46–56)
5. Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)
6. “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (Matthew 19:21)
7. “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” (Luke 3:10-11)
8. Feeding the multitude (Matthew 15:32-36)
9. “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Luke 12:34)

Resources from Catholic Social Teaching

1. Governments must then make efforts to ensure “greater opportunities and a fairer distribution of wealth so that everyone can share equitably in the goods of creation. Solutions must be sought on the global level by establishing a true economy of communion and sharing of goods, in both the national and international order.” (*Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life)*, Pope John Paul II, 1995, #91)
2. Today we also have to say “thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. ...Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape. (*Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*, Pope Francis, 2013, #53)
3. Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a “throw away” culture which is now spreading ... In this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting. (*Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*, Pope Francis, 2013, #53-54)
4. Within the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for a dignified life. (*Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)*, Pope Benedict XVI, 2005, #20)
5. Some economic rules have proved effective for growth, but not for integral human development. Wealth has increased, but together with inequality, with the result that “new forms of poverty are emerging”. (*Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis, 2020, #21)

6. Modern finance, commerce, transportation and communications provide opportunities for the unscrupulous to enter into the system of entrapping and exploiting human persons. In industries such as agriculture, fishing, construction and mining, human trafficking has expanded through collaboration among numerous and various perpetrators, making the phenomenon more complex and complicating the assessment of its origins and impact. The crime is easily hidden within current business models. Outrage, while utterly appropriate, tends to obscure the cold logic of human trafficking as extremely profitable, implanted within even well-regarded businesses. When well-meaning efforts to block human trafficking are undertaken, unscrupulous entrepreneurs simply shift their tactics to avoid the counter-measures. (***Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking***, #29)

7. Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature. Otherwise, the paradigm of consumerism will continue to advance, with the help of the media and the highly effective workings of the market. (***Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home***, Pope Francis, #215, 2015).

8. In the meantime, economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment. Here we see how environmental deterioration and human and ethical degradation are closely linked. Many people will deny doing anything wrong because distractions constantly dull our consciousness of just how limited and finite our world really is. As a result, “whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule”. (***Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home***, Pope Francis, #56, 2015).

9. Words like freedom, democracy or fraternity prove meaningless, for the fact is that “only when our economic and social system no longer produces even a single victim, a single person cast aside, will we be able to celebrate the feast of universal fraternity”. (***Fratelli Tutti (Brothers and Sisters All)***, Pope Francis, #110)

10. The marketplace, by itself, cannot resolve every problem, however much we are asked to believe this dogma of neoliberal faith. Whatever the challenge, this impoverished and repetitive school of thought always offers the same recipes. Neoliberalism simply reproduces itself by resorting to the magic theories of “spillover” or “trickle” – without using the name – as the only solution to societal problems. There is little appreciation of the fact that the alleged “spillover” does not resolve the inequality that gives rise to new forms of violence threatening the fabric of society. It is imperative to have a proactive economic policy directed at “promoting an economy that favours productive diversity and business creativity” and makes it possible for jobs to be created and not cut. Financial speculation fundamentally aimed at quick profit continues to wreak havoc. Indeed, “without internal forms of solidarity and mutual trust, the market cannot completely fulfil its proper economic function. And today this trust has ceased to exist”. (***Fratelli Tutti (Brothers and Sisters All)***, Pope Francis, #168)

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Part 4: Discussion Guide

This guide is provided to assist discussion, reflection and discernment. It is intended to be used in conjunction with the accompanying information pages outlining current facts, scripture references and Catholic Social Teaching. Some additional reading is provided if participants wish to explore the issue in more detail.

Discussion Leaders may wish to supplement Part 2 with articles from your own context (eg local media, talks, presentations, statements from Conferences of Religious), and Part 3 with some excerpts from documents, policies, or articles published by your local Church (eg Catholic Bishops' Conferences)

Please modify the following to suit your particular context and group.

Process

Begin with a prayer.

Then use the following process (or other, as best suits your group). Invite participants to read the accompanying Information Pages and at least one of the accompanying reference articles.

The 4 phases – *Observe, Reflect, Interpret, Decide* – can be used as a 4-step discussion outline. That is, take each phase one at a time ... pose one or more of the questions, discuss, and then move on to the next phase ... and repeat.

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Discussion Guide

Prayer

Mary, our Mother, you taught your son Jesus the prophetic values expressed in your Magnificat. Be with us now, and stay with us during this perilous time when our world is gripped by fear, division, inequity and exploitation. Open us to healing ourselves and our world by rejecting individualism and consumerism, and reclaiming our unity with each other and all of creation.

We ask that you help us move away from our impoverished need of amassing material things to a deep recognition of the richness of solidarity with and love for our sisters and brothers everywhere, and the exquisite beauty of your creation.

Give us the grace and insight we need to build an inclusive world community that values human dignity, and a global economy where no one is invisible or “thrown away”. Give us the courage to insist that basic human needs must be provided for: that the needs of the many take priority over the privileges of the few; that access to meaningful work is available to all. Guide us to build an economy that moves us in deliberate and meaningful ways toward justice and equality and safeguards the integrity of creation.

Help us to create a community of companions who share these values. Enable us to find creative ways to overcome our divisions and work together to build an economy based on abundance, communion, inclusion and justice: a beloved community committed to building the kingdom of God.

Amen. Let it be so!

St. Josephine Bakhita, pray for us!

(Written by Sr Ann Oestreich ihm)

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Discussion Guide

Observe

1. What words, phrases stood out for you?

Reflect

1. What phrases were challenging / discomfoting? What do you feel?
2. Who are some people or situations, in your experience, who have been most impacted by these economic policies and patterns?
3. Can you identify any source of inspiration in the face of such injustice – people (past or present), countries, literature, Scripture, sources from your local/national Church, cultural or community context?

Interpret

1. What challenge to just and sustainable economic practices are highlighted for you and your Network?
2. What ideas do you have for how could you and your Network could commit to creating “spaces of interdisciplinary reflection, collaboration, and advocacy within the various ecclesial, interfaith, government, and international organizations according to Gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching”? (the more ideas the better – no need to decide anything just yet)
3. What suggestions do you have for the international Talitha Kum network to advance this priority action?

Decide

1. What action can your Network commit to?
2. Can your Network create a statement using the template “we denounce .. we call on .. we commit ...”?
3. Is there a personal action you can commit to?
4. **Share with Talitha Kum!**

Inspire others to take action! Share your action with the Talitha Kum network.

- Write a social media post about it, and share using **#TalithaKum** and **#EconomyWithoutHumanTrafficking**
- Record a short video describing your action, and share it using **#TalithaKum** and **#EconomyWithoutHumanTrafficking**
- Share a prayer or reflection on your action **#TalithaKum** and **#EconomyWithoutHumanTrafficking**