

American Baptist Resolution Against Slavery

BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

Written in the setting of slaveholding cultures, Scripture gives examples of how poverty makes people vulnerable to slavery (eg., 2 Kings 4:1). In the experiences of Hagar, Bilhah, Zilpah, Joseph and others, Scripture demonstrates that enslaved people, women and men alike, are subject to sexual exploitation (Genesis 16:1-2; 30:1-13; 39:6-20) and proclaims judgment upon those who “traded boys for prostitutes and sold girls for wine...” (Joel 3:2b-3). Scripture announces God’s plan to anoint his Servant “to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners (Isaiah 61:1-2). Though his followers have not always recognized its implications, Jesus understood that plan to be at the core of his mission (Luke 4:18).

MISSION CONTEXT

From the start of our efforts to “make disciples of all nations” to the present day, American Baptists have repeatedly found ourselves drawn back into the struggle against slavery. The record of that struggle includes many heroic people and episodes.

- George Liele, identified by many as the first Baptist foreign missionary from America, was a freedman. In 1782 at the close of the Revolutionary War, Liele indentured himself to a British colonel to buy passage on a sailing ship to Jamaica. With this initiative and ingenuity, Liele defeated the attempts of his former master’s heirs to re-enslave him and fulfilled his vision to plant the gospel among people enslaved in Jamaica. This ministry in Jamaica began thirty-two years before our mission society was formed in 1814.
- Lott Carey purchased his own freedom in 1815 and organized the Richmond African Baptist Missionary Society. This society urged the Triennial Convention (now International Ministries) to start mission work in Africa. Lott Carey became the first American Baptist missionary to Africa and, with former slave Collin Teague, pioneered mission in Liberia. There Carey died in 1828 from a tragic gunpowder explosion while preparing a defense against an attacking slave ship.
- As Evan and Elizabeth Jones began ministry in the Cherokee nation in 1821, they urged the Cherokees to resist slaveholding. In 1859 Evan and his son John B. Jones, both missionaries, led the traditional Cherokees to form the antislavery Keetoowah Society.
- In Burma in the 1830s, American Baptist missionaries reached out to the ethnic Karen minority, dominated as virtual serfs by the majority Burmese who forbid them to possess books or learn to read. Enslavement, beheading and crucifixion were punishments for those who violated the restrictions. Because they were found with books, several early Karen Baptist converts were shackled in heavy irons and forced to work as slaves on the grounds of Shway Dagon pagoda in Rangoon. The American Baptist missionaries persistently petitioned the Burmese king regarding religious and civil liberty.

- In 1843 Baptists in the north formed the American Baptist Free Mission Society to do mission on an anti-slavery basis separate from the Triennial Convention.
- When the Baptist Board of Foreign Mission refused to appoint slaveholders as missionaries in 1844, many southern churches withdrew to create the Southern Baptist Convention that would appoint slaveholding missionaries. After the Southern Baptist withdrawal, our work took on the new name of “The American Baptist Missionary Union.”
- In 1868 after twenty-two years of separation, the American Baptist Free Mission Society rejoined the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU).
- In the 1890s our missionaries were among the first to raise protest against King Leopold of Belgium’s use of slavery in Congo.
- The Free Will Baptist Foreign Mission Society, with its strong anti-slavery heritage, united with the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society in 1911.
- American Baptist missionary Mary Ann Claggett traveled through Korea, Manchuria and Siberia in 1919 documenting the location of some 6,000 enslaved Japanese women, about 5,000 of whom had been trafficked into sex slavery.
- The plight of women enslaved in the brothels of Thailand was made public as early as the 1960s by American Baptist missionaries Paul and Elaine Lewis. Lauran Bethell (now an International Ministries Global Consultant) helped form the New Life Center in 1987 to rescue and care for these women.
- About one tenth of current International Ministries missionaries are now active in some aspect of the work against human trafficking and the entrapment of people in prostitution.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

March 25, 2007 marked the 200th anniversary of the 1807 Act of Parliament that outlawed the slave trade in the British empire. In 1833 Britain emancipated slaves throughout its Empire (about a third of the world’s population). Some nations had abolished slavery earlier (Prussia - 1807, Spain - 1811, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela -1821, Chile - 1823, Mexico -1829) and others followed later (Sweden - 1843, Denmark - 1847, France - 1848, Russia - 1861, Holland - 1863, United States - 1865, Cuba - 1886, Brazil - 1888). In 1948 the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights banned slavery globally.¹

But slavery has returned.

Slavery in our time is of massive proportions. Although firm statistics are difficult to secure, reliable estimates indicate that some 27 million people are held today in various forms of slavery, forced prostitution or bonded labor.²

“Human trafficking,” is the most-used term for the modern slave trade and refers to “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of people for the purpose of exploitation.” Between

800,000 and 900,000 people are trafficked across national borders every year, including at least 17,000 people who are trafficked annually into the United States as slaves.³ The United Nations and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent all calculate a higher figure of four million women trafficked annually both within and across borders.⁴

People are trafficked into varied forms of forced labor such as quarriers of stone, road builders, rug makers, domestic servants, child soldiers, farm laborers, factory, hotel and restaurant workers, but the largest numbers are trafficked into prostitution. Some 80% of trafficked people are women and 50% of these are children.⁵ An estimated 65% of such victims are trafficked into prostitution. Even when not forced directly into the sex industry, the situations of all enslaved people expose them to sexual abuse. The US Government's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief notes that "individuals who are exploited through the sex trade, victims of rape and sexual assault are at particularly high risk for contracting HIV/AIDS."⁶

The modern slave trade is driven by the poverty of the vulnerable and the huge profits that can be earned by the traffickers. The CIA calculates that profits from one trafficked woman alone average \$250,000.⁷ The sale of human beings rivals the sale of illicit drugs and illegal weapons sales as the largest global criminal economy.⁸ In the United States, forced labor is prevalent in five sectors of the economy: prostitution and sex services (46%), domestic service (27%), agriculture (10%), sweatshop/factory (5%), and restaurant and hotel work (4%).⁹

RESOLUTION

Therefore, whereas slavery is contrary to Christ's mission and an assault against humanity, be it resolved that the American Baptist Churches USA

1. reaffirms American Baptists' historic stand against slavery and renews our struggle to end human trafficking.
2. urges the appointment of missionaries to disciple-making ministries that address the needs of those who are vulnerable to, or are victims of, human trafficking and calls for priority to be given to ministries of prevention, rescue and aftercare for people involved in prostitution and who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation.
3. affirms that God's amazing grace of forgiveness and transformation is offered to oppressors as well as to those whom they oppress and encourages the development of ministries to those guilty of enslaving, selling, buying, transporting, or using human beings as slaves.
4. commends and urges support of the American Baptist Women's Ministries "Break the Chains: Slavery in the 21st Century" initiative, recognizing that God is calling Christian women to reach out to those entrapped in slavery and prostitution, and the American Baptist National Ministries "Children in Poverty" initiative, recognizing that poverty is a major factor making children vulnerable to human trafficking.

5. commends the European Baptist Federation for forming an anti-trafficking workgroup within its External Relations Division to assist people who are victims of human trafficking and encourages use of the EBF Anti-Trafficking Resource Book.¹⁰

6. calls upon American Baptist churches and individuals to participate with ABCUSA in the cause against slavery. Recognizing that the struggle to end human trafficking and slavery surpasses our wisdom, strength or life span, we will persevere trusting that what is impossible by human effort alone is indeed possible with God.

Adopted by the Board of International Ministries – June 26, 2007

Adopted by the General Board of American Baptist Churches USA – June 2008
63 Yes, 0 Against

POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement of Human Rights, December 1976

American Baptist Resolution Against Sexual Exploitation of Children, June 1999

American Baptist Resolution on Sudan, June 2000

International Ministries Resolution on Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism, June 1995

ENDNOTES

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abolition_of_slavery_timeline

² “Human Trafficking and Slavery” *CQ Researcher* March 26, 2004 Vol. 14, No. 12
<http://www.hrusa.org/workshops/trafficking/CQResearcher.pdf>

³ Pres. George W. Bush, Speech to the United Nations General Assembly, New York City, September 23, 2003.

⁴ Joanna Apap, Peter Cullen, and Felicita Medved, “Counteracting Human Trafficking: Protecting the Victims of Trafficking”; Salvation Army International Conference of Leaders, Hamilton Park, NY, 29 April-7 May 2004.

⁵ U.S. Department of State, *2005 Trafficking in Persons Report* (Washington, DC).

⁶ US Department of Health and Human Services, *FACT SHEET: HHS Fights to Stem Human Trafficking* (Washington, DC) March 15, 2006.

⁷ Dina Francesca Haynes, “Used, Abused, Arrested and Deported: Extending Immigration Benefits to Protect the Victims of Trafficking and to Secure the Prosecution of Traffickers,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 26 (2004), 22.

⁸ US Department of Health and Human Services, *op. cit.*

⁹ Free the Slaves and Human Rights Center, *Hidden Slaves: Forced Labor in the United States* (Berkeley, September 2004).

¹⁰ (http://www.ucebi.it/documenti/ebf_korr_3.pdf)