

Presentation Elena; a reflection on human trafficking

In the spring of 2008 a member of the "Transactions" editorial staff Fr. Frans Kwik, brought a pamphlet in English to one of the meetings. It was called 'Way of the Cross' and was based on the life of a trafficked woman.

The author of the pamphlet, Theresa Helm is the director of the Chigwell Faith and Justice Centre in London. She was inspired by the suffering of Christ, and the similarities with the suffering of a victim of trafficking.

The SRTV liked her idea very much. Initially, the story was translated literally and the drawings copied from the English version. But there was a lot more to this story.

During an editorial meeting Fr. Frans Kwik explained the meaning of the Bible verse in Luke 23:28. In this verse Jesus says to the lamenting women who have lined the road on the way to Golgotha: "Do not weep for me but weep for the suffering of mankind."

His explanation gave us the idea for something more lasting with this English story.

Coincidentally, at that time Mieke Borgdorff, an artist and graff woman, had recently become involved with the SRTV. She was asked to read the story and to make a painting of each station. The SRTV wanted to use the story when providing information to different types of groups. People of various Catholic and Protestant backgrounds were asked to look critically at the text. A small editorial team then went to work. The story was transformed into a beautiful poem which still contained references to the 'Way of the Cross'.

The text and paintings were made into a booklet and presented to interested parties on the 29 January in the Sisters of JMJ convent chapel in Den Bosch.

A spirituality of risk

Professor Maaïke de Haardt, of Nijmegen University and chair of the Catharina Halkes faculty of religion and gender, was invited to speak at this presentation.

As a feminist theologian she was asked to say something about the spiritual and theological aspects of the involvement of everybody involved in the battle against trafficking in humans and in particular trafficking in women. Her inspirational story was based on the work preformed by the SRTV; a spirituality of risk. Here are a few quotes from her speech:

- "The problem itself, "the trafficking of women", is not acknowledged as an urgent problem. I believe the reason for this is not so much to do with the political analysis of the problem, but with the underlying cultural, philosophical and religious ideas, moral values and prejudices."
- "A spirituality of risk is, precisely on this point, challenging the obviousness and the invisibility of the trafficking of women is one of the most important and characteristic dimensions of the work of the SRTV. And this is where the SRTV's spiritual and theological profile comes to the fore."
- "Whatever is invisible or is taken for granted is nameless, unknown, unseen and unheard. And whoever is unseen, unknown and unheard loses his or her dignity".
- "The manner in which the SRTV combats human trafficking shows that this dignity can only be realised through the eyes, the ears and the gestures of fellow human beings. That is precarious because it is going against the flow of things."
- "It's a kind of spirituality in which observance to God is expressed by seeing and hearing and in particular in giving a voice to those that have been made invisible. Elena's story lends a voice and a face to the despair and hope. Very tangibly. "

After the contribution by Professor de Haardt, the film, "Elena, a reflection on human trafficking", was screened. This is a very impressive and shocking story about the suffering of a young woman violated and forced into prostitution. Yet at the end of the film there was a sparkle of light, the essence of Christianity: death is not the end.

Touched by the story, the artwork and the beautiful accompanying music everybody was granted the opportunity to view the original works of art while enjoying a snack and a drink.

The many positive responses and the many orders strengthened our conviction that we made the right decision by highlighting the subject of trafficking in this way.

Ivonne van de Kar
Coördinator SRTV

Information: Elena, a reflection on trafficking in women

Booklet published by SRTV. Booklet (only in Dutch) and DVD (in Dutch, English, French and a version with only paintings and music) can be ordered via srtv@srtv.info or +31-73-615 44 44.