

*Sunday May 11, 2014*

## **The market value of 10-year-old girls**

By Jim Taylor

Our granddaughter celebrated her tenth birthday yesterday. She's almost an adult, she thinks. And certainly old enough to travel, she says. She wants me to take her to Brazil. (Minor matters like cost haven't crossed her consciousness yet.) She wants to see wildlife in what remains of the untouched Amazon.

Or maybe she wants to samba until dawn.

Not a chance, I told her. The other night, her mother called her for supper. Instead of coming in, she and her friends wandered off for an hour and a half, without telling anyone where they were going or what they were doing.

In the sheltered neighbourhood where she lives, she was exposed to little danger – other than possibly falling over a cliff. But if she had wandered off on her own in parts of Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo, she might never have come back.

I don't want to scare my granddaughter with negative portrayals of human depravity. Life has enough goblins lurking under beds already.

But she's young. And beautiful. And black.

So she's exactly what the street gangs in Rio or Sao Paulo are looking for. She would vanish in minutes into the shady and brutal world of child sex trafficking. According to Wikipedia, children abducted from Brazil have turned up in Spain, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Switzerland, France, Germany, and the United States, and even as far away as Japan.

## **Every mother's nightmare**

Traffickers count on children shipped to another country being unable to understand either the language of their new location or their legal rights. That makes them less likely to resist.

The U.S. Department of State now considers Brazil is now second only to Thailand in the number of children trafficked for sex. Estimates range between 250,000 and 500,000 children. In Thailand, the numbers may be as high as 800,000. Worldwide, up to 10 million children may have been sucked into the bottomless pit of prostitution.

Brazil's problem with child sex slavery is likely to grow worse over the next two years. Brazil will host two major sporting events – the FIFA World Cup this year, and the Olympic Summer Games in 2016. Both will result in a huge influx of tourists.

For some reason, sports fans tend overwhelmingly to be male. When they're not watching athletes excel on the field, a sizeable number seem to seek physical diversions themselves. In bed. In almost every country – Germany may be an exception – international sporting events have been paralleled by a rise in prostitution. Particularly child prostitution.

I won't attempt to untangle the twisted psychology that equates athletic prowess with raping a helpless girl. Perhaps the competition of sports awakes primordial desires to dominate, to conquer, to triumph over someone else. Even if that person is just a child.

## The allure of young victims

Although child sex trafficking is most severe in South America and Asia, the number of children enslaved in prostitution is rising everywhere. Even in Canada.

The Canadian Women's Foundation, through its consultations with 260 Canadian organizations and 160 survivors of sex trafficking, claims that traffickers in Canada can earn \$280,000 for each girl or woman they entice into prostitution.

The financial gain is higher for girls under 18. Vulnerable young girls particularly risk being forced into prostitution by traffickers.

Indeed, traffickers prefer females aged 12 and under. Young children are less likely to rebel against authority figures who control them; they are more easily molded into their new roles. They're also assumed to be virgins. Some customers will pay extra for virgins.

Witness northern Nigeria, where the extremist Boko Haram group bragged about abducting over 300 girls from a boarding school in mid-April. About 50 escaped; 276 remain captive. Last week, Boko Haram seized another eight young girls.

A man claiming to be Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram's leader, declared in a video, "I will sell them in the market, by Allah. I will sell them off and marry them off. There is a market for selling humans."

My granddaughter has difficulty getting her mind around the reality that there are people who see her body as a marketable commodity.

"Women are slaves," Shekau asserted. "I want to reassure my Muslim brothers that Allah says slaves are permitted in Islam."

And he continued, "I will marry off a woman at the age of 12. I will marry off a girl at the age of nine." To a 50-year-old man, probably.

Child marriage is still practiced through much of Asia and the Middle East. The notion that women should defer marriage until they reach physical and emotional maturity is a relatively recent European understanding; the notion that a woman should have the right to choose her own partner is even newer.

My granddaughter simply doesn't understand all that. I hope she never has to.

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## YOUR TURN

Jean Hamilton, who admits to being 82 years old herself, took issue with a common characterization of Donald Sterling (which I also committed in last week's column): "There is something about the way this story is always covered that makes me uneasy and I think it is a subtle kind of ageism. It is always noted that Donald Sterling is 80 and grew up in a time when these attitudes were common, as though that were an explanation. It isn't. I grew up in the same times, and it is a long, long time since that acceptance changed. He is not an old man who has lived isolated from the world; he is an old man who has refused to change -- as you rightly pointed out.

"I am growing increasingly resentful of the presuppositions that people make about the old...they don't like change, they are more likely to vote conservative, and on and on. How about seeing us as individuals: some smart, some not-so-smart; some progressive, some stuck in the mud; some merry, and some dull."

Steve Roney wrote: "I really can't agree with you on this one. I think everyone's piling on Donald Sterling is shocking. It's too easy to scapegoat the other. Ask the Jews.

“Lost in all this seem to be the two vital issues of free speech and personal privacy. The implications for the world we live in from this case are quite disturbing: are we all going to have to carefully guard our speech now even in private?”

“I personally disagree with Sterling’s stated views on blacks, that he does not want his girlfriend publicly associating with them. (This may or may not reflect his real views; they may just have been words spoken in anger in the course of a spat). This does not mean I think it is right to punish him for them. We ought to have the right to disagree. Indeed, we need to have the right for democracy to be possible.”

In response to Steve, yes, I think we do have to guard our speech even in private. Not because of punitive implications, but because as we guard our speech, so do we also discipline our thoughts.

Drucilla Tyler picked up on that thought: “With two disgusting racial comments in recent weeks [from Donald Sterling and Rob Ford], I have been thinking about the unspoken racist thoughts that people have. I don’t want to encourage it, but I know there are people who hold these feelings. I think we need to find a place to create constructive conversation about feelings like this. There are ways to help most people see things in a different light. I think if we don’t have places for these conversations, it will continue to be communicated to children, and it will continue to fester and erupt like a boil.

Dru also paid me one of the nicest compliments I have received: “Your commentaries are delightful -- as sweet as dessert with entrée nutrition!”

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#### TECHNICAL STUFF

This column comes to you using the electronic facilities of Woodlakebooks.com.

If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca).

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Wednesday, called Soft Edges, which deals somewhat more gently with issues of life and faith. To sign up for Soft Edges, write to me directly, at the address above, or send a note to [softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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#### PROMOTION STUFF...

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For other sources worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton’s HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating’s “SeemslkeGod” page, [www.seemslkegod.org](http://www.seemslkegod.org);
- Alan Reynold’s weekly musings, punningly titled “Reynolds Rap” -- [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Isobel Gibson’s thoughtful and well-written blog, [www.traditionaliconoclast.com](http://www.traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Wayne Irwin’s “Churchweb Canada,” an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood’s satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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