

Leaving No Darkness Behind

Conference speaker Christine Caine has shone Christ's light in the world's darkest places. Now she's bent on exposing—and abolishing—the \$12.3 billion global sex-trafficking industry.

Christine Caine is only 44, fit and healthy, but she already knows what she wants her epitaph to say.

She has thought about it and often tells the story of a missionary in the 19th century who was sent with a one-way ticket to evangelize a tribe in the New Hebrides. Eventually, after 35 years, he died and was buried there. His epitaph reads: “When he came, there was no light, but when he left, there was no darkness.”

“I think, for me, that would be the ultimate legacy,” Caine says. “Wherever she went, there was little light, but when she left, there was no darkness.”

For more than two decades, Caine and her husband, Nick, have been taking the light of Christ around the world, preaching, teaching, mentoring and illuminating some of the spiritually darkest nations on the planet. Their ministry Equip & Empower aims, as the name states, to do just that with pastors, leaders, women and youth in more than 52 nations—and it is leaving an indelible imprint on the global church.

“She has the ear of some of our globe’s most influential people,” notes Bible teacher Priscilla Shirer, “yet has a heart that is also inclined to the most destitute among us.”

Renowned Bible teacher and friend Joyce Meyer describes Caine as a gifted speaker with a passionate desire to lead people to Jesus. Caine’s pastor, Bobbie Houston of Hillsong Church in Sydney, agrees, acknowledging her faithfulness, loyalty and character as qualities that endear her to Hillsong and the world stage. International speaker and author Lisa Bevere

calls Caine “passion on steroids”—describing an extremely effective communicator and a natural leader who brings people to Christ and then builds the local church.

Shirer adds: “Christine’s capacity to communicate is unparalleled. Somehow she cuts straight to the heart of very serious matters while engaging the most resistant listener. Hearing her speak is like experiencing a blast of adrenaline that captivates you and then catapults you into action.”

Dino Rizzo, pastor of Healing Place Church in Baton Rouge, La., describes Caine as “one of the great voices in this generation of the church, a reflection of the incredible church and pastors she serves with.”

If Caine were satisfied to be one of the most sought-after and influential speakers in both charismatic and evangelical circles, then that would be significant enough. But she’s not. In 2005, Caine and her husband came up with a plan to infiltrate one of the most spiritually barren continents: Europe.

On a Rescue Mission

“One hundred years ago, 70 percent of Europe were Christians; today it’s less than 1 percent,” she says in outlining her vision for Project Europe, a global endeavor aimed at seeing the church thrive in Europe and the millions who live in darkness to come to faith.

The scale of the vision doesn’t stop there. Two years ago, Caine and her team took on yet another massive challenge: the \$12.3 billion global sex-trafficking industry—a criminal enterprise she was awakened to after reading the book *Not for Sale* and by being involved with the International Justice Mission. But it wasn’t until 2007 while en route to a conference in Greece that she was personally confronted and arrested by the injustice.

"I was transiting through Thessaloniki Airport when I noticed posters of young girls and women who had gone missing, some as young as 6," she recalls. Asking the pastor accompanying her some questions, she discovered the girls had been trafficked.

That night in her hotel, Caine says God clearly spoke to her through Luke 10. "While I was so troubled by what I had seen, I was still thinking, *I am the Good Samaritan*," she explains. "But then God clearly said to me, 'No ... you are the Levite and the priest in the story who walked to the other side.' And then it hit me: The Good Samaritan gave of his time, talent and treasure.

"It was then I felt the Holy Spirit saying: 'You know, Christine, most of My church thinks they are compassionate because they cry or, like you, they feel bad when they see injustice. That's not compassion—that's just emotion. Compassion is when you cross the street.'"

And with that, Caine decided to cross the street. "We had no clue what we were doing when we started," she recalls. "What did I know about human trafficking or the Russian and Albanian mafia? I'm a chick from Lalor Park [suburban Sydney]. What I've noticed is that with a bit of boldness and a little light, you don't actually need enough light to illuminate everything; just enough light to illuminate the next step."

For Caine and her team the next step was a global fact-finding mission, which only made her more determined to put a plan together for the anti-trafficking organization A21, an abbreviation for Abolishing Injustice in the 21st Century. And then, in a God-inspired twist of fate, she met two Greek pastors who also happened to be lawyers. Between them, the decision was made to set up a shelter in Thessaloniki, Greece. The area not only is a gateway to the European Union but also is renowned as a transit destination and hub for human trafficking.

Initially working under the radar, Caine says, the team took baby steps. But incredibly, as God fast-tracked the process, those baby steps became giant leaps forward for A21.

“One thing after another started to happen,” she recalls. “The government gave us a 12-bed shelter; we won favor with the governor, who enabled us to operate; we got a license really quickly. It was one supernatural door after another being opened, and then the anti-trafficking authority started to bring us victims.”

The first woman referred to A21 was 21-year-old Zoe. She was lured to Greece from eastern Europe by the promise of work, but soon after arriving she was violently raped and transported from brothel to brothel—11 in all—where she was forced to service up to 60 men a day.

“When she arrived, she had not eaten for three days,” explains Phil Hyldgaard, operational manager for A21, which is based in Greece. “She was a wreck. But within a few days, she was smiling. The love she received melted her heart. Today she is completely transformed by the love of Christ and the staff, and is now engaged to be married.”

‘Only God ... ’

Since opening its doors to Zoe in December 2008, A21 has cared for 69 girls of separate nationalities and reached out to 800 more women. Remarkably, this fledgling anti-trafficking organization also has played a key role in the identification and conviction of a sex trafficker who is now in prison.

And while A21’s first conviction is a significant step forward, there’s still an ongoing war to be waged against a crime that’s becoming more lucrative than the drug trade. The buying and selling of people, mainly women and children, is earning sex traffickers about \$324,000 every year, Caine says, and every three minutes someone somewhere is trafficked.

“The girls referred to A21 by local authorities have been coerced in varying ways,” Hyldgaard says. “Some have been abducted and sold as sex slaves by their families; others have been lured by traffickers. And then there are those who are targets for young men who pretend to fall in love with them and then entrap them.”

When the girls arrive at the shelter, most of them are traumatized—some are so damaged they are unable to speak. After completing formalities with police, health practitioners and lawyers, the girls, who are between ages 16 and 25, take part in a 12-week rotational program called Empower, which helps them prepare for reintegration into society. They learn life skills, computer skills and creative activities that are designed to help them with their transition.

“Over time the women develop confidence and skills, eventually learning to value who they are despite the horror they have been through,” Hyldgaard says.

Recounting some of those horrors, Caine recalls a young girl trafficked from Bulgaria who had been burned and whipped to the point where she couldn’t sit down. “She was so traumatized, she couldn’t speak,” Caine says.

And then there was the young African girl stuffed with 60 others into a shipping container with only one faulty oxygen bottle between them. By the time the container arrived in Turkey, 30 of the girls had died. Caine also recounts the story of the Bulgarians who were forced to service men during the day and sleep in a barn at night, being thrown only scraps of food.

While the stories are unimaginable, Caine is optimistic. “Just recently we put out a global prayer request calling for prayer for all the ‘-stan’ nations,” she says. “Two days later, one of two Uzbekistan girls who had been praying to Allah for a year and a half, and nothing happened, was rescued. She told

me she remembered the God of Europe. 'We think His name is Jesus,' they said to me. The two girls were twin sisters—they have been saved and water baptized. It's then you say, 'Only God.'"

"Out of all the justice projects on the earth, this is the one that keeps me awake at night," Caine says. One night she woke up weeping. "I could hear the screams of the girls, and out of the mother heart in me, which has never happened to me before or since, I can remember shouting, 'We are coming to get you!'"

Her dreams for A21 are big. Eventually Caine and the team hope to take A21 to any place in the world where human trafficking operates. They are currently in the process of registering A21 in Ukraine. She is also quick to point out that the dream isn't about her. "Part of fulfilling your dream is to create something big enough where other people can dream," she says.

A Personal Stake

"My dream for human trafficking is that we keep rescuing the one, and that it never becomes more complicated than that," Caine states, revealing another aspect of her journey—that her mission to rescue trafficked girls is deeply personal.

She was raised a second-generation Greek immigrant in a working-class suburb of Sydney. The middle child in the family (she has two brothers), her memories of growing up are bittersweet. While she describes her life as a metaphor for the hugely successful movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and describes the days of taffeta dresses, permed hair and working in a relative's fish-and-chips shop, she also recalls being sexually abused for 12 years by four men in her world.

School offered no reprieve. As a minority, she was called racist names and taunted for having Greek food in her lunchbox. Nonetheless, it was during her years at school that she developed several passions, including a desire to do

something more with her life, and a strong sense of justice.

“I definitely hated injustice,” she says. “I would always stick up for the kids who were beaten up. I would speak up for the ones who didn’t have a voice.”

After leaving high school, she studied for a degree in English and economic history at Sydney University. It was there, at a campus evangelistic crusade, that she met itinerant Greek evangelist J. John, who reignited in her a passion for God and living for Him. From that point, although she knew she was called by God, she had no frame of reference for ministry other than the Greek Orthodox Church she grew up in. “I thought I was called to be a nun,” she says. “I had even enrolled at a Greek Orthodox theological college in the U.S.”

The real turning point for her came in 1989 at age 22, when a friend took her to Hillsong Church for the first time. “As soon as I walked into church, not knowing which way was up, I just knew it was right,” she recalls.

Immersing herself in church life, Caine completed a year of Bible college and then helped to establish the Hills District Youth Service. A few years later she was handed the reins to Youth Alive and launched Equip and Empower in 2002.

“My whole journey is strange,” Caine says. “I have a background of church leadership and [fighting] human trafficking and, of course, my own personal story [which includes learning she was adopted at age 33] and the victory God has given me. God has put it all together. I feel like I am helping to awaken people to this injustice, and it’s huge.

“Incredibly, God is raising up other advocates out there—young people, churches, individuals,” she adds, describing the support she has received from the global church. “Without the church community, I don’t know how I could do this.”

Having now a global platform, some of the world’s most

influential people as friends, several successful books and CDs under her belt, and two beautiful daughters, is she living the dream?

“I can’t sit here and say I am living the dream because the dream isn’t about me—it’s about people,” she says. “So while there are people being trafficked and there are still people who don’t know Jesus, I’ve got a big job to do.”

Nicole Partridge *is a freelance writer based in Sydney.*

Have you made it a priority to seek out dark situations to bring the light? Visit [.com](#) to learn why Caine says you must.

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Reality Check

\$12 billion a year goes to organized crime from trafficking women

1.4 million victims are in servitude in the commercial sex industry

90 percent of victims trafficked into the EU go to the sex industry

25 percent of sex-trafficked victims are from eastern and

southern Europe

20,000 girls and women are in the Greek sex industry

Greece is notoriously known as “the center of trafficking in Europe”

2 percent or less of all victims are rescued

1 in 100,000 traffickers in Europe are convicted in court

Join the Fight!

Want to help A21 rescue, restore and rebuild lives? Here's how you can:

Pray

Never underestimate it! Download a bookmark prayer guide for your Bible at

Fast

On the 21st of each month, fast for A21 work in Greece, Ukraine and other global locations

Invest

Your financial donation will help pay for legal fees, health costs and housing for rescued victims

Organize

Join the A21 Abolition Program and get equipped with resources for organizing your own fundraisers