



## Five Reasons to be Concerned About Our Clothes

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reminds us: "Purchasing is always a moral – and not simply economic – act" (#206). Five reasons, then, why we need a "fashion makeover"

### Human Trafficking

Human trafficking, a form of modern slavery, is a multi-billion dollar criminal industry that denies freedom to 20.9 million people around the world. And no matter where you live, chances are it's happening nearby. From the girl forced into prostitution at a truck stop, to the man discovered in a restaurant kitchen, stripped of his passport and held against his will. All trafficking victims share one essential experience: the loss of freedom. Specialists agree that more people are trafficked in the garment industry than any other industry. It can be disturbing to learn that things we take for granted in our daily lives—[chocolate](#), [clothes](#), [coffee](#), [cellphones](#)—are frequently made under conditions that aren't simply unjust, but that can only be described as slavery.

### Care for Creation

In his [Message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation](#), Pope Francis wrote: As individuals, we have grown comfortable with certain lifestyles shaped by a distorted culture of prosperity and a "disordered desire to consume more than what is really necessary" ([Laudato Si'](#), 123), and we are participants in a system that "[has imposed the mentality of profit at any price, with no concern for social exclusion or the destruction of nature.](#)" Let us repent of the harm we are doing to our common home.

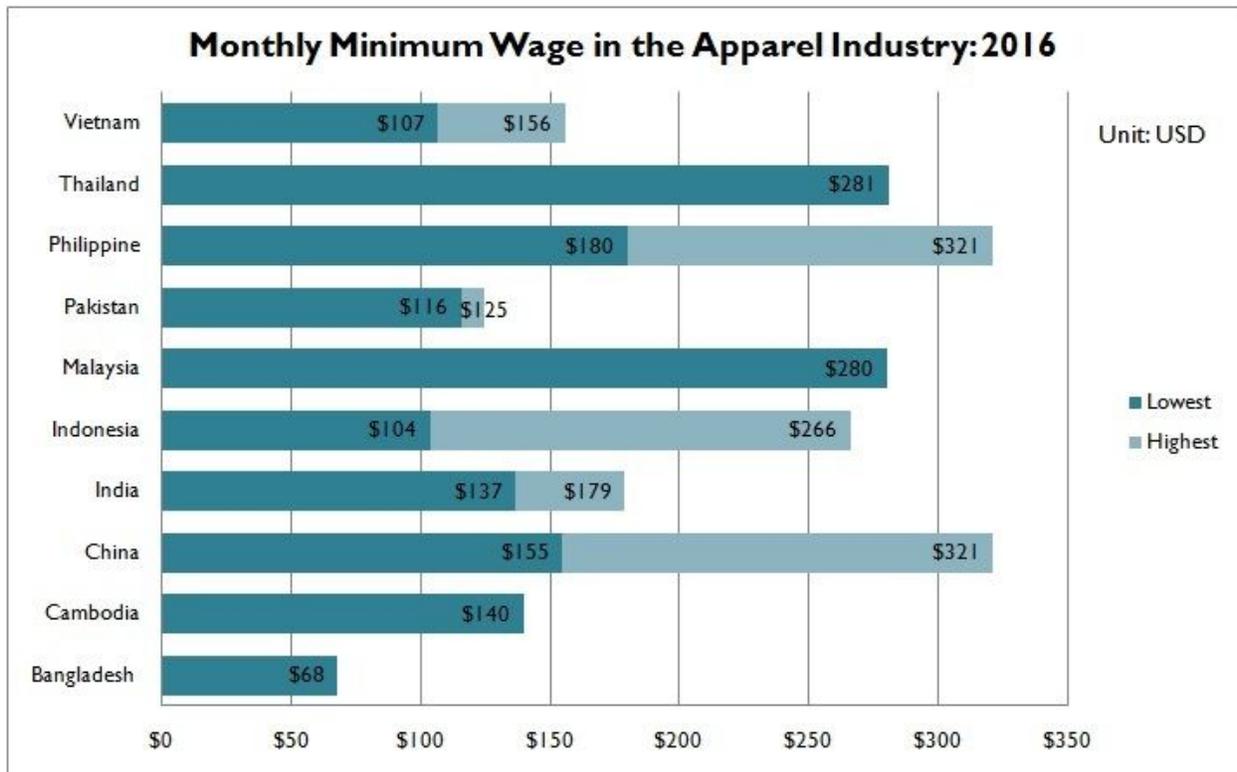
### Women's rights: Wages and Violence

Today, a garment worker makes \$68/ month in Bangladesh. Even adjusting for cost of living, the UN says that anyone under \$2/ day is in extreme poverty. If these workers have dependents, they are in extreme poverty. Clothing today is cheaper than 1985. Cotton costs are up. Energy costs (to run the machines) are up. Wages are down as we offshored our garment manufacturing.

We know about a gender wage gap in the U.S. Women earn \$.78 on the \$1 of men. African-American women earn \$.62. The single biggest driver on the global gender wage gap is the garment industry, overwhelmingly staffed by women. As for violence, a July 2016 report

revealed that one in seven women working in Indian garment factories suffered sexual abuse in the workplace. As victims often are reluctant to acknowledge sexual abuse, this number is low. Living wage

The world's only living wage, unionized garment factory is [Alta Gracia](#) in the Dominican Republic. Their salaries are triple neighboring factories. Almost every university bookstore sells some merchandise from them. [Notre Dame's "The Shirt"](#) is made each year by Alta Gracia. Economist John Kline concludes that their success is not simply charity from bookstores and other merchandisers. They occupy space on racks and would be replaced by other more profitable merchandise if it did not sell. He argues, not that they will replace Nike, Under Armor and Adidas, but that these apparel lines have no reason for not paying a living wage.



### Christian Stewardship

We have five times more clothing today than 35 years ago. We prize bigger, walk-in closets to accommodate our clothes. **Clothing purchased this year will have seven uses on average before being discarded by the purchaser.** Our overflowing landfills aren't the only obvious signs of a "throwaway culture." The purchase of discardable clothing lends itself to thinking of the workers as disposable as well. Pope Francis often reminds us that our "throwaway culture" leads us to throwaway not only "things" but also relationships, people, beliefs, and even dreams.

The old notion of a "good buy" is that it is cheap and makes you look thin. A renewed notion: a "good buy" for us as Catholics has ethical content. How was it sourced? How does it care for creation? How were the workers treated in the making of this garment? How were they paid?

<http://www.humanthreadcampaign.org/FiveReasons>