

Social Justice Network

Sept./Oct. 2009

The Great 'Disconnect'

"Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, that you do unto me." - Matthew 25

Jesus was integrally connected to the poor during his public life. Christians who are disconnected from the poor of the world are disconnected from Christ whose following words I reflect on in the context of our times.

"When I was hungry," you gave me no food but stockpiled your fridges and freezers and wasted food that could have fed me.

"When I was thirsty," you invested in companies that privatized drinking water so that I could no longer afford to buy this basic need.

"When I was sick," in Africa, you deprived me of the medicines that I needed to live. I could not afford your profit-driven privatized health care and education.

"When I was imprisoned," you tortured me and abandoned me in a foreign land.

"As long as you did it to the least of my people, you did it to me."

Billions of God's people and the Earth itself have been, and continue to be, violated by our Western greed.

The 'Disconnect' from our Creator God

I remember in my early 20s coming to the conclusion that ignorance was the result of people's not making connections – connections that could transform their lives and the world.

Many of the evils of our time are caused by what I believe is a "disconnectedness" from God. One of the most powerful images of our disconnectedness from the God of creation is a graphic I saw that depicted a huge cross, with Christ nailed to it, lying in the centre of garbage waste that stretched in every direction across valleys and over distant hills.

The massive waste pushing in on the figure

of the crucified Christ is an image of our disconnectedness from our Creator God. Our consumer-driven way of life fills God's earth with overflowing garbage dumps across our nation. **Canadians produce more municipal waste per person than any other country in the world.**

The garbage strike in Toronto this summer and the television images of garbage 'flowing out of long-since filled container bins onto the streets, dumped into parks and arenas, rolling onto the roadways' filled people with anger, frustration, and fear of disease. I wonder if Torontonians and those who viewed the growing daily spectacle on TV saw the gross scenes as a blatant

example of how much we waste, of how much greenhouse gas our garbage releases into the environment. I pondered the irony that if one had to pay even \$3 for each bag of waste collected from one's residence, he/she would soon be reducing the amount of waste, not out of concern for the environment but concern for one's wallet.

The majority of Canadians are eager to save the environment as long as it ***"isn't expensive, noisy, uncomfortable or labour intensive"*** (Carol Goar, *Toronto Star*, July 10/09). It is this dichotomy that reveals the disconnect between ourselves and our creator God.

I am inspired by an 85-year old woman in Ottawa who, even if it is more work, lives totally connected to the environment. The smallest piece of paper, tags from the store,

The 'Disconnect' from God's Family

While the economic crisis that hit like a tsunami across the globe was propelled by the rich, it is the poor who are suffering the most. I had hoped that the results of this catastrophe, which clearly revealed the corrupt core of our 'business as usual' model, would push people to demand a new business order governed by ethics and the common good. However, global and national governments, financial institutions and many of us are disconnected from the poor of our world and unwilling to risk a change in the current business model to one that is more sustainable and just for all.

The majority of ordinary people have lost faith in the G-8 whose results are negligible as far as the poor, the environment, and the major issues of our time are concerned. These outdated summits are totally disconnected from the over six billion people living on less than a dollar a day; from 'the mother who has to decide which children she can

receipts are put into the recycle box. She just had an environmentally-friendly toilet installed in her bathroom.

For her, care for the environment is a spiritual issue. The Scriptures remind us that the earth is given to us as gift from God. It is not just for our generation – it is for all future generations and peoples. It is a moral issue each of us needs to address with a strength of conviction that examines every aspect of our life. And at its centre is our connectedness with, or our disconnected from, God.

The Scriptures challenge us to ***'Choose life that we and our descendants may live in the land God has given us'***. To 'choose life' means to become aware of our connectedness to God and God's creation – both the earth itself, and each member of God's global family. **We choose death when we violate either.**

feed; from the sick who die as medicines become scarce or unaffordable; when children have to leave school to work; and when people die from food inequities'.

It is no wonder that Pope Benedict XVI's latest encyclical calls for a **global order based on ethics and the common good**. At a conference at the Ottawa Congress Centre a couple of years ago, four peasant farmers from Mali, Africa, reminded us that small farms (the majority of them run by women) were the backbone of their economy and produced enough food to feed all the people of their country – until big agri-business moved in with their **cheaper food**. The Bill and Belinda Gates Foundation gave **\$5.4 million** to a biotechnology firm funded by Monsanto to lobby African governments to promote the entry of genetically modified crops to the continent .

What a travesty of justice! Millions of aid

money given by governments of the Western world is put to the service of biotechnology without any input from the African farmers.

Huge agri-business corporations like Monsanto and the governments who support them such as Canada and the US are sinfully disconnected from the poor in Africa. In recent decades, Western governments used their power through the

International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization to write the economic rules and **'impose them on the developing world by ruthless manipulation and bullying'**. Once again, it is the victims of this totally unjust system who are suffering the most in ways it is hard for us to imagine.

The Pope's message to the G-8 Summit in Italy:

"Hear the voice of Africa and the poor".

Disconnectedness

Our Canadian government, corporations and the wealthiest individuals in the world are certainly disconnected from the poor, the working poor and the marginalized. The inequity between the rich and the poor in Canada is disgraceful. The well-being of the poor is not on the agenda of our present federal government nor on any of the several past governments.

The wealthiest individuals in the world have parked \$11,000 billion off shore, **allowing them to dodge \$250 billion in taxes. Corporations tuck \$700 to \$1,000 billion annually into tax havens** (John Christenson, *The CCPA Monitor*, Dec./08 – Jan./09). John is a development economist who went undercover in Jersey's Channel Islands banking system to discover how tax havens operate.

British Columbia has more millionaires per capita than any other province **but has the highest percentage of poor families and the greatest degree of income inequity in the country** (Marjorie Griffin Cohen, *The CCPA Monitor*, May/09).

Connectedness

A Peoples' Tribunal in Bangladesh has branded the World Bank, the IMF, and the Asian Development Bank as being **'anti-people and evil' and has called for them to be banned from the country**. The two-page judgement highlights how these institutions have undermined food and energy consumption, destroyed Indigenous industry, and driven up the cost of basic essentials (*CCPA Monitor*, May/09). This is the voice of the people in one of the poorest countries in the world. Canadians need to find their public voice.

The corruption of financial capitalism and its ersatz wealth have been exposed as a pack of lies and deceptions created for the sole purpose of making the already rich richer. But we are still in denial, determined to maintain *an insane consumer culture* (Murray Dobbin).

In July 2009, the citizens of Tiny Township and surrounding communities in Simcoe County, Ontario, **banded together to stop a garbage dump** from being built on **one of the purest sources of water on the planet** – the Alliston aquifer. Citizens in the area, including many

First Nations people, have argued for nearly 30 years that Simcoe County and the provincial government should explore other options to manage the region's garbage. The province ... has approved a one-year moratorium on the Site 41 landfill so that further scientific assessments can be done. This shows that **people who join together for a common cause really do have the power** to affect the decisions of governments and corporations (from cnews.canoe.ca Sept., 2/09).

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens
can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.
- Margaret Mead*

Care to Care started in the 1990s when Dr. Dale Dewar, a 'country doctor' in rural **Saskatchewan**, became interested in Iraq during the decade-long UN embargo after the first Iraq war. The embargo brought to near-ruin what had been a well-functioning medical system. She worked with the **Society of Rural Physicians** to send educational materials to assist medical professionals. In the fall of 2003 and the spring of 2004, a four-person delegation, including Dale and her husband, travelled to the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq, where **they provided medical education to 900 physicians in five locations**. These trips have continued and now focus on women's care, especially maternity and obstetrical care. The delegation uses a course developed by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada to train physicians and nurses who in turn train local medical personnel.

PRAYER/ACTION

*Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you
says to them, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but
does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?
In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied
by action, is dead. - James 2: 15-17*

Christ's words, "Who do **you** say that I am?", challenge each of us to answer the question:

Who is Jesus for me in the world in which I live?

"Let us go for the jugular vein of authentic spirituality: **words alone**, no matter how inspired, no matter how authoritative from the Bible, will not feed the hungry and starving, provide water for the thirsty of our world, clothe the naked or free the captive (based on a reflection in *Biblical Meditations* by Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P.).

Let each one take time to answer the question: '**Who is Jesus for me in the context of the world in which we live?**

*Sister Catherine Fairbairn, gsic
2865 Riverside Drive, Ottawa, ON K1V 8N5
E-mail: cbairn@ca.inter.net*