

# *Social Justice Network*

Nov./Dec. 2009

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## REFLECTION

My most favourite quotation in all of literature is T. S. Eliot's "The gift half-guessed, the gift half-understood is Incarnation" from Eliot's Four Quartets. The first time I read John Shea's poem called '**Sharon's Christmas Prayer**', I thought of how uniquely he expressed through this five-year old girl, the excitement and hope we are called to when we truly understand the implications of God's becoming a human being and entering into our history.

### Sharon's Prayer

She was five,  
sure of the facts,  
and recited them  
with slow solemnity  
convinced every word  
was revelation.  
She said  
they were so poor  
they had only peanut butter and jelly  
sandwiches to eat  
and they went a long way from home  
without getting lost. The lady rode  
a donkey, the man walked, and the baby  
was inside the lady.  
They had to stay in a stable  
with an ox and an ass (hee-hee)  
but the Three Rich Men found them

because a star lited the roof.  
Shepherds came and you could  
pet the sheep but not feed them.  
Then the baby was borned.  
And do you know who he was?  
Her quarter eyes inflated  
to silver dollars.  
The baby was God.  
And she jumped in the air  
whirled round, dove into the sofa  
and buried her head under the cushion  
which is the only proper response  
to the Good News of the Incarnation.

- John Shea, *The Hour of the Unexpected*  
Allan, Texas: Argus Communications,  
c1977. 1<sup>st</sup> edition.

May our Advent be a time of reflection on the meaning of Incarnation in our life so that our celebration of Christmas will be truly a celebration of Incarnation.

## INFORMATION

The birth of Christ in human flesh reminds us that 'no human is more human than another'. It challenges us to be part of a just human society in which every individual is treated with dignity and respect.

am a part of was praying Vespers together. During the intercessory prayers, one sister, 89 years of age, prayed for our soldiers in Afghanistan, their families at home – and the Taliban!

One evening in October, the community I

I was profoundly touched by the last part

of her prayer. It spoke of a woman who saw behind the enemy to the human being. Behind the media images that demonize them, she recognized that they too are children of God. What an incarnational insight!!

Imagine if our Christian leaders prayed for the Taliban at the Sunday services. Most of the congregation would probably fall out of their pews. It would be considered politically incorrect and unpatriotic at the least. Yet Christ's teaching calls Christians to love their enemies. We don't have to like the things they do, (and I don't imagine they like the things we have done and still do) – but can we believe and act out of the reality of Incarnation which makes no human more human than another? There is no 'axis of evil'. The world isn't divided between human and less human.

I find it tragic to look at our failure to live the reality of Incarnation both as individuals and as a nation. Look at our record with the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. We have always treated them as second class citizens certainly ignoring the truth that no human person is more human than another.

Why do so many people around the world hate the West? Look at the Western

world's foreign policy that has, past and present, wrecked havoc in the Middle East. Perhaps this reflection might bring us to understand why people have resorted to terrorism. They proclaim us 'heretics' because they have experienced our hypocrisy and injustice which contradict who we say we are. Just think of the Iraq war and its devastating consequences!

When I learned last night that a pro-life group had just given Bush an award for his commitment to pro-life, I was shocked. Bush is responsible for a war rooted in lies that caused the death of thousands of innocent men, women, and children in Iraq. There is nothing pro-life about that reality!

To live as Christ lived in the context of our global reality, we must claim the equality of all humans on this earth. As Christians we can do this only by living the Incarnation. Religion is about far more than going to Sunday services: it is about seeing the God within each human being and acting accordingly.

The Incarnation was a union of the divine and the human in the person of Jesus Christ. As peoples of God, we often fail to realize that 'human dignity is indivisible'.

***What if our beliefs were not what divided us,  
but what pulled us together. – Mitch Albom***

### **A Stunning Statistic**

One of the greatest tragedies not only in our time, but throughout our recorded history is the millions of people who have died violently and continue to do so in the name of religion. What a total betrayal of our Creator who made all peoples in God's

image and likeness. Reading David Kilgour's article in the November 4 *Ottawa Citizen*, I was stunned by his statistics of the number of people worldwide who died violently because of their religion between 1900 and 2000.

The numbers are staggering: “70 million Muslims, 35 million Christians, 11 million Hindus, 9 million Jews, 4 million Buddhists, 2 million Sikhs, and 1 million Baha’is.”

Just try to imagine what a different world we would have if all religions learned to respect differences and to accept one another as equal persons under the banner of the ‘Golden Rule’.

### ***The Loss of the Sacred in Life***

The Christmas tree, the coloured lights, the singing or listening to the Carols, the family get-togethers, the food preparation are all part of the wonderful celebration of Christmas. But in many ways the spiritual celebration of Christmas has lost its meaning in our secular world.

It is politically incorrect to call the tree a ‘Christmas’ tree or to have a Christmas Crib at the Federal or Provincial seats of Government. Even the cards from political party leaders no longer have a ‘Christmas’ wish or symbol on them. They could at least send a wish for Peace on Earth! In being ‘politically correct’ we have lost what has, for over two centuries, been a sacred tradition in Canada. Now, for many, Christmas is a secular celebration where ‘shop til you drop’ for things people don’t need, is the order of the day. Gradually, we have lost touch with the sacredness of Christmas, of peoples, and of life itself.

One powerful example of the loss of sacredness in life is a bill Parliament is now considering to legalize euthanasia. It was introduced on May 13, 2009 by Québécois MP Francine Lalonde (whose husband, Guy Lemarche is the Communications Director of the euthanasia lobby group).

Living on the top floor of a long-term facility for the past eleven years, I visit the Special Care Unit every second day. People in this unit have dementia and Alzheimer’s. I am incapable of imagining anyone doing away with these people who are the face of the suffering Christ. What a betrayal of some of God’s vulnerable people! It is like saying that ***‘Worn-out people may be equated with worn-out products: both can then be seen as disposal problems’*** (Margaret Somerville).

We are challenged, as people of God, to examine the changes in our society that have created a growing demand for the legalization of euthanasia. Bill C-384, if passed, will lead to disastrous consequences for the most vulnerable in our society.

**When we respect life, every human being is sacred and no-one is disposable.**

As one Australian politician described euthanasia:

**“When you are past your best-before, or use-by date, you should be disposed of as quickly, cheaply and efficiently as possible”** (Margaret Somerville, *Ottawa Citizen*, Oct. 23/09).

## A Family's Christmas Gift

I was inspired by the story of a husband and wife who are part of the Social Justice Network whose gift-giving at Christmas is a celebration of Incarnation. Their children and grandchildren have everything they need, so last year they sent each of their family a pair of socks and a card with a message that was the essence of Christmas. The card told each member of the family that in their name, \$1,500 was being sent to Yamasa in the Dominican Republic to help build a badly-

needed clinic. This year they will do the same. The family all thought it was a marvellous idea and the grandchildren continue to ask how things are going re the clinic. This 'family affair' to help God's people in Yamasa lies at the heart of Incarnation. People who have everything they need choosing to help people who have so little. It is a recognition that no human is more human or more deserving than another. We are all part of God's human family whom Christ has called by name.

### ACTION

**Suggested Actions** to make Christmas an Incarnational feast this year:

parish, or school decide on a project during Advent that will be in the spirit of Incarnation.

Stand up for the sacredness of life by sending the enclosed letter to your **Member of Parliament**. (No postage.) The address is **House of Commons, Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6**. Or better still, write your own letter which counts for much more. Put the name of your MP after the 'Dear' and **be sure to put your address after your signature**.

Think of ways you can make the Incarnation the focus of your celebration and gift-giving at Christmas. There are many ways which you may think of, both great and small, from buying Nativity stamps, Christmas cards with a spiritual message; giving monetary or other special gifts for the poor and the vulnerable in someone's name; making a Christmas basket of goodies for a shut-in; inviting a lonely or needy person to share in your Christmas meal.

As an individual, family, community,

### PRAYER

God, we believe that the 'Word became flesh to dwell among us', to call us to establish a reign of justice and peace, a reign where no person is more human than another. Help us, as we prepare for the Feast of Incarnation, to examine how our lives contribute to establishing your reign in our world today.

May we see the connectedness between our lives and the lives of the poor in our own nation and around the world – especially the reality that more than 24,000 children under the age of 5 die each day. Give us the grace to find ways to connect with the poor this Christmas. May we be channels of your love, bringing Christ's message of justice and peace to our world. Amen.

***May you celebrate the essence of Christmas in a special way this year.***

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