



## **“Where meek souls will receive him still”**

If all goes according to schedule, I’ll be a grandfather by the time this column hits the pages of *New Frontier*. Hard to believe! Our Jeremy, who was born in 1976 while Laurie and I were soldiers at Hollywood Tabernacle, is about to become a Dad!!

I was in England last March when I got the transatlantic call to tell me a baby was on its way. I’m sure glad God has given babies a nine month gestation period. It’s meant I’ve had time to adjust to the surprise—yea, shock—of the realization that I’ll be married to a grandmother.

(Have you noticed how Sears and WalMart put all the baby stuff between the entrance and ladies’ wear? Nor had I until last March. Now we can’t miss it. “Look at those booties! Aren’t they cute?”)

Fortunately, I can say that whether it’s arrival at this time was a surprise or not, this baby will be welcomed by loving parents and a supportive extended family.

Would that that were true of all the children born the same day. Earlier this Fall, Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, traveled to Bosnia to announce the arrival of the baby who had been identified as the six billionth person living on Earth. Perhaps you saw the picture.

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The reaction of some was to voice their concern about an overcrowded planet. Of children being born in places of strife. To parents—or a parent—without the means of feeding, clothing, and educating the new arrival.

I understand the reaction. Collectively we do need to pay attention to the sustainability of the world's population. And yet, as I looked at that Bosnian baby's face, I wanted him to know that he was welcome. He has a place here too.

My grandchild will be born early in Advent, the time of year when we Christians relive the anticipation of Jesus' birth. The Bible tells us Mary was able to rejoice in his coming. Joseph's first response may have been a manly, God-fearing decision to "accept" Mary's pregnancy, but I like to imagine that by Christmas he was happy about becoming an adopted Dad. Even so, immediate family was the exception, Scriptures say. "He [Jesus, the incarnate eternal Word] came to his own, and his own received him not."

To reject a baby in a cradle. What more telling condemnation could be made of the moral character of a society!

While I do not agree with Catholic ethics concerning birth control, I agree heartily with what John Paul II has called "the Gospel [i.e. good news] of life": "At the dawn of salvation, it is the Birth of a child which is proclaimed as joyful news....but Christmas also reveals the full meaning of every human birth, and the joy which accompanies the Birth of the Messiah is thus seen to be the foundation and fulfillment of joy at every child born into the world."

And the newborn needs more than the joy of his or her parents. The child needs a whole community to celebrate. When Jeremy was born, we were living in California.

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Blood relatives were far away. But surrogate grandparents (Wilf and Doreen Mountain come vividly to mind) and surrogate aunts and uncles abounded. The Tab was his family in every sense of the word. And now a generation later we pray that Jeremy and Kristen will find that kind of family support from their church. They will need it just as we needed it.

Marva J. Dawn (who, by the way, will headline our Ethics Centre conference next November) puts it this way: “when Ephesians 6:4 emphasizes, ‘Fathers, do not provoke your children...’”, our faith community can encourage the men to take the plural here seriously. No one can father alone. He needs the wisdom of the grandfathers in the community, the support of all parents, the teaching of those who explicate the Lord’s instruction. Children are less likely to get provoked if they recognize that their mothers and fathers are themselves also disciplined and instructed, that their parents are agents of the Lord’s work, that all the parents of the congregation are agreeing together on certain standards.”

Increasingly, I think, the attitude with which we either receive or reject children may differentiate Christian ethics from secular values. This Advent, let’s be a community whose arms readily embrace new members.

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