



"Sweaters: An Advent Reflection"

Excerpt from Emilie Smith's blog for November 22, 2009:

Today's bus rides, to and forth from Chichi to church, all the curves through the ravines that I am now kinetically memorizing, I couldn't stop thinking of that boy, and that poor man. I've been reading the Boff brothers again, seeking in my own misery, to understand.

Wait, I'm going to count them right now . . . I have FIVE sweaters, plus a stripy black-red sweater-shirt, and a sweater that I brought to give to Rosenda, and a wool vest, because I

like them. I like ALL of my sweaters. I even have three green ones, because green is my favourite colour (and Rosenda's future sweater is green too), one is a cardigan with a hood and a zipper, one is a sports sweater that I used to wear a lot on my bicycle in the in-between times, and one is a pull-over that I bought at the Sally Ann when I was staying with the Sisters last year in San Francisco. I have the red sweater I bought on the ferry with money my mother gave me after the last time I saw her, just before I left Canada, and I'm wearing that now, with the hat she made me, because it's cold again, and I miss her. I have an ugly fleece sweater that I found about 10 years ago in the chapel at VST, and I don't know why, but I always liked it, though I think it's just hideous. I also have a jacket and a rain jacket (thanks Clarence), and a thin hoodie that's really just a long-sleeved tee.

Okay, Boff and Boff, what should I do, noble, frugal me, in my little one room abode?

Can I find the boy and his father, and give him a sweater? That might be nice of me.

Can I find the boy and his father, and invite them to my church, and get the boy registered for a scholarship so that he can go to school and learn a profession or a trade, and not have to starve to death on a seriously-reduced corn farm, where his ancestors lived without starving for 10 thousand years? Hmm . . .

How about all of you send me your extra sweaters? If you all have five sweaters, and can bear to part with two of them . . . I think I could give up the hideous VST sweater and the green sports sweater, that would be about 400 sweaters . . .

How about I ask you to send me money, and you each send me a hundred dollars, and with those \$2000, I go and buy about 400 sweaters, again 400 sweaters, and give them to all the cold children riding buses standing up and sleeping with exhausted heart-broken fathers. No.

To tell you the truth . . . none of this would make a bit of difference.

Aid doesn't help.

Development doesn't help.

Because these don't even get close to the roots of the problem.

It is hard to see, and it is especially hard to see, when you don't have to see it, day after day after day.

Human affluence is irreconcilably dependant on brute human misery. Grinding oppression is required to produce our wealth – we can send money and sweaters until the cows come home but until we decide that the world cannot continue being imagined or organized like this, nothing will change. The problem isn't in lack of resources, knowledge, tenacity, skill, brilliance, courage, hard work and sacrifice in the South. The problem is in the lack of heart, vision, courage, sacrifice and surrender of our great piles of sweaters in the North. We have to think, what do we really need, how are we going to get that really, without hurting a flea, how are we going to limit what we consume?

Only then, when we change, will there be enough damn sweaters, and food.