

SPECTRUM

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METANOIA

By John Valk (Campus Ministry)

The forgotten one

We live in a pluralistic society. Many Canadians, myself included, have come to pride themselves with the multi-cultural direction of our society. We have tried to build a nation where all cultural groupings have a place and are encouraged to take pride in their heritage, even though in practice that is often not the case.

Intricately tied in with culture is religion. That is made clear, for example, in the native communities. Their belief that God created the world and all its inhabitants, and that the land is sacred, lies behind their struggles for land claims. For the Sikh community religion is also an integral part of life. We have come to know that for them turbans and kirpans are important religious symbols. For these two cultural groupings religion impinges on all of life. Put another way, life is religious.

For mainstream "white" Canadian society such does not appear specifically to be the case. Reginald Bibby, in a landmark study, indicated that

83% of the population believes in God and 79% assert that Jesus of Nazareth is the divine son of God. Yet, only 44% said they were committed to religion, that is, to Christianity.

Canada is still regarded by many as a Christian nation. After all, many point out, we still "celebrate" Christmas and Easter. We also like to think we still hold to "Christian" morals and values. Yet, Christianity has fallen to a minority status.

Many may not lament that. After all, pluralism requires that room be made for other religious orientations. I can agree with that. But, it does not explain the wide discrepancy between a minority of "committed" Christians and a large majority of the population that say they believe in God and Jesus yet remain uncommitted.

Is it more likely that, for the most part, God is absent from the lives of many? That is, is there little or no room for God in people's day-to-day activity? It would appear that God has

little or no bearing on how people spent their money, use their time, choose a program of study, run their businesses, or engage in their leisure. God comes into play only with the rites of passage: Baptisms, marriages and funerals.

God is the "Forgotten One." God is shoved to the sidelines. God is considered irrelevant to the normal course of events. God has become a private affair. Movies, sports, the media, the top 40 are isolated from religious influence. In fact, religion has become off-limits. One is not to speak of God and religion in polite company. Theologians and sociologists have called this the secularization of Western society.

We are not speaking here about the separation of Church and State. Ecclesiastical institutions ought specifically not to be involved in all aspects of life. But God and religion is greater than ecclesiastical structures. Religion has to do with the meaning and purpose of life. If God is the beginning

and the end (the Alpha and the Omega), that is, the essence of life, why is God excluded from all but life's rites of passage?

Perhaps we have come to believe solely in our own self-sufficiency. Hence, we indulge in the self. In fact, we have come to believe that we have what it takes for self-fulfillment. That is the promise held out; we feel we have great potential. Witness the advertising media. We are led to believe that if we, as one individual put it, "drink, chew, put on, wash with, smell like and own" the right things life will be blissful and we will have self-fulfillment.

But, the promises have a hollow ring. They do not deliver the goods. And, they do not take into account our darker shadow; the uglier side of our being that is impossible to shake off, as history has amply demonstrated. No amount of reasoned, systematic, scientific or psychological endeavors will eliminate it. And so self-indulgence leads invariably, and in greater or lesser degrees, to

greed, aggression, destructiveness, and violence towards others, not least being women and children.

The "Forgotten One" calls. The "Forgotten One" informs us that fulfillment and liberation comes only with a covenantal relationship with the Creator. God counsels us to let go of the pursuits of the ego, the self-indulgence, the pretence. And only in our sharing and service to others -- our parents, spouses, children, "strangers" -- can meaning be found.

In the desire to be open, tolerant and inclusive in our multi-cultural society, perhaps we have "thrown the baby out with the bath water." We have wanted to be less denominationally and theologically exclusive. Instead, we have become content with being Godless in lost aspects of our lives.

GAY FORUM

By Terry Richards

Homosexuality through Hollywood's eyes

"Several advertisers, apparently concerned about a scene depicting a homosexual couple on ABC's prime time show 'Thirtysomething' reportedly pulled advertising from last Tuesday's episode, costing the network about \$1.5 million in lost sales. In the scene at issue were two men in bed."

(From Variety, March, 1990)

CBS's "As the World Turns", was the first network soap opera to deal openly with homosexuality. One of its main storylines involved Hank, a gay character who was trying to overcome the loss of his lover from AIDS. This particular story ran for nearly a year with much positive reaction from the audience. There have also been many made-for-TV movies with homosexuality as their central theme. ABC's "An Early Frost" examined how a homosexual man dealt with AIDS and its impact on his family. "Consenting Adults", another ABC movie of the

week, starring Marlo Thomas, explored a woman's realization that her teen-aged son was gay.

These productions, and many like them, depicted homosexuals as human beings and showed that being gay wasn't a problem but a fact of life. Hollywood is finally showing that we are people with families and careers who can both laugh and cry. "The Women of Brewster Place", Oprah Winfrey's mini-series, examined women in society. One of the important issues it dealt with was lesbianism. As one gay woman in the story told a homophobic person who was trying to get her evicted from her building because of who she was, "I eat, sleep, and pay bills like you. I even make pot roast with hamburger!"

Probably the biggest surprise this year was the creation of TV's first gay soap opera, being aired on independent cable stations. "Secret Passions" is set in a metropolitan city and will be dealing with an array of gay issues.

However, there have been people who have expressed alarm at such a television series. Recently the "Phil Donahue" show ran a clip of "Secret Passions" showing two men kissing. The outcry from most of the audience was negative but many television executives realize the potential of such a program. As one programmer stated, "The role of television is to entertain as well as educate the public."

There have also been many great motion pictures dealing with gay life. Both 1982's "Making Love" starring "L.A. Law's" Harry Hamlin and 1987's "Torch Song Trilogy" showed gay characters coming to terms with who they were. These movies explored gay life in a delicate matter showing the audience the meaning of homosexuality. One of this year's best movies, by critics opinions, is "Longtime Companion" which was released last spring. "Longtime Companion" is the portrayal of the human cost of the AIDS

crisis. The movie shows the long-term impact of the disease on a group of gay men in New York city and stars Patrick Cassidy as a gay actor.

However, like anything in the entertainment medium there is room for improvement as far as gay stories are concerned. In many television shows the problem seems to be the lack of creativity. "Dynasty" was the perfect example. Remember Steven Carrington? Once the writers had examined Steven's acceptance of who he was he really had no story. Issues like gay-bashing, homophobia, and suicide among gay people must be explored more on TV.

One of the biggest controversies in television recently regarded the movie "Rock" - the Rock Hudson story which aired this past January. Just before airing people bombarded the network because it was announced that the movie would show two men kissing for the first time in primetime television. As sponsors responded

by threatening to withdraw their ads the network had no choice but to edit the scene out. The problem that I have about all this is that if networks constantly air explicit bedroom scenes between heterosexual couples, why can't a tender kissing scene between two men be shown? If "Secret Passions" is a hit perhaps ABC, CBS, and NBC will create their own gay soap operas. After all, television networks have been known to copy winning formulas.

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