

# SPECTRUM

## Metanoia by John Valk

## Pride by Raphael

### Homosexuality, bisexuality and the whole socio-political thing

Let's face it, right now being gay is causing a tremendous uproar in the world. No matter where you look, homophobic material, gay styles and gay sub-culture is making itself known. Slowly, mainstream culture is assimilating "gayness" as part and parcel of the society at large. However, it's not been an easy road. Homophobia and discrimination are still making things difficult.

Early Spring of this year, sexual orientation was included as part of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, marking a major step in the equalization of gay rights in Canada. This can be seen as another critical step in the equality of gay rights since the Stonewall Movement that sparked the beginning of the gay rights movement. Meanwhile, nationwide support for, and opposition to gays, lesbians and bisexuals has led to various issues actually being debated and raised; family matters, adoption, spousal benefits and homophobia are just some of the issues we face.

Yet, alongside some of the progress that we have made, there have also been some opposition in the form of homophobic remarks, physical and verbal assaults on ourselves and our families, and subtle discrimination from the public and the government. The socio-politics of being gay, have been assaulted by religious dogma, so-called moral "rightness" of things, the "perverseness and abnormality" of homosexuals and bisexuals and the constant touting of "traditional" values (especially the traditional family unit). It is interesting to note that we are just as much a part of society as the rest of the population. We function "normally" in the community, we pay taxes, work, live and love like others, EXCEPT that who we choose to spend our lives with is seen as wrong. Boy talk about nit-picking! As an example of the politics of being gay, we have one that occurred in Fredericton not three months ago.

In the local political scene, the friction between the gay community of Fredericton and Mayor Brad Woodside continues. This year, and in previous years, members of the gay community have requested a Gay Pride Week as a means of celebrating our culture and advances in equality (remember that socio-political thing). That request has consistently been turned down. Woodside believes that sexual orientation does not belong in the council chamber. He has also been quoted as saying that "...a proclamation that removes from the general population a group of people because of sexual orientation is discriminatory." But he "...will continue to recognize groups who contribute to the community, but not their sexual orientation." (The Daily Gleaner, June 30, 1995). Excuse me Mr. Woodside, but right now, while equal rights (and that's equal, not special, rights) is being denied to homosexuals and bisexuals, sexual orientation does belong in the council chamber. It belongs in the courts, and federal and provincial government buildings until we are not treated like outsiders. If you believe that "...a proclamation that removes from the general population a group of people because of sexual orientation is discriminatory," then a proclamation that removes...a group of people because of: culture (e.g. The Irish Festival, The Highland Games), religion (e.g. various church parades), or national pride (e.g. Veterans Day) should also be

"discriminatory". But hey, wait a minute, these groups contribute to the community, so they should be allowed to have a means of celebrating their "culture". What...gay people don't contribute too? Wake up to the real world! We are as much contributors to the community as the next person; we are teachers, counsellors, government officials, city workers and a host of other contributing agents. In some ways though, this negativity is positive. It can be a measure of the progress we as gay men and women, and our supporters, have made. I mean think about it. Several years ago hardly anyone would talk about homosexuality and bisexuality, much less have celebrities come out as positive role models. Still we have a long way to go before we become just another part of society. Until then, socio-politics and being gay go hand in hand.

#### The Preacher

At one time, and not so long ago, preachers were held in high esteem. Ministry was a noble and respected calling. Many Catholic parents dispensed their eldest son to the priesthood.

Things have changed today. Not only has the pedestal been whittled away, with the discovery that preachers too are human, but the importance of ecclesiastical engagement itself has eroded.

Yet a good preacher, as human as he or she may be, offers a unique view of the nature of our existence, when we care to listen. One in particular reveals insights of inestimable value. It is Qoheleth, the Preacher, more commonly known as Ecclesiastes.

Written probably in the third century BCE, the inclusion of this Hebrew wisdom book in the Scriptural canon testifies to the depth and breadth of the Judeo-Christian religion. It does not seek to ignore, nor avoid, the intellectual problem of human existence. It faces the tough questions of life.

The Preacher is notorious for his pessimism: "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." All is meaningless. There is nothing new under the sun, declares the Preacher, life is but an endless cycle. Generations come and they go. We all live and we all die. Such is the outcome of our labours, of our toil under the sun.

Skeptical is the Preacher of all our human endeavours. They appear to have little lasting value. In the end even a

university education appears to be meaningless? But why such pessimism?

The Preacher has discerned that humans are caught up in a state of constant flux. All things end where they begin. We cannot control time and destiny.

Of course, we do try. We seek to ward off the inevitable, through pleasure, riches, and work. North Americans especially are known for their pleasure seeking, relentless pursuit of wealth, and self-absorption in their work. But for what purpose? We die anyway. All is vanity.

The idea of one's own death tends to focus the mind on the present, in a heightened kind of manner. We scramble to live life to the fullest. Yet time rolls by. We search for a permanent foothold. We also dream, inquire and study, because eternity has been implanted in our minds. We cannot conceive of our own demise, as sociologist Peter Berger argues. Yet we cannot uncover what God has done from beginning to end.

Our existence is a mystery. So is the concept of right and wrong. Life quickly teaches us that good is not necessarily rewarded, that evil all too frequently triumphs. What are we to do then, if through our labours and endeavours, our piety and justice, we gain but little?

The response of the Preacher is simple. Take life as it comes, enjoy the little pleasures, and be moderate in all things. That is good common sense, even in a day when such good sense is not so common. Perhaps that is the profoundness of the

Preacher. Do not chase after wind. Enjoy life while you have it, it is a gift.

Enjoyment, of course, has its limits. We must recognize this. Enjoyment is not absolute. It must never be at the expense of others, or the environment. Much touted as pleasurable today is as destructive as it is hollow and meaningless, including some of that done on campus.

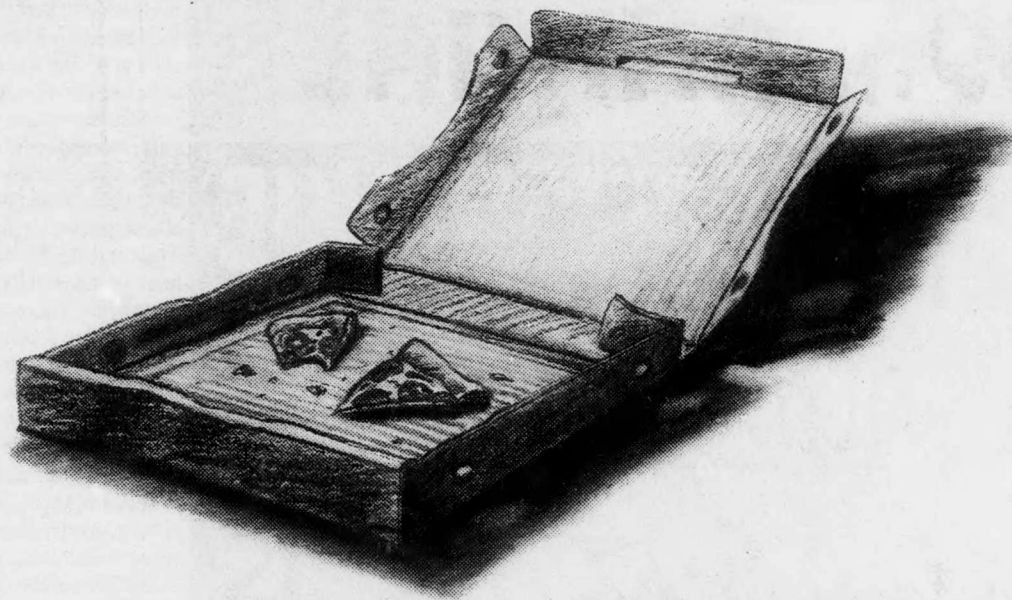
Where is God in all of this? The Preacher does not pretend we can live without God. God is the Elohim of Judaism: the universal creator and sovereign who remains beyond human understanding. The existence of God prevents our slide into nihilism and anomie.

In a world of so much rapid change—the world we face today—the wisdom of the Preacher strikes with certain poignancy. No need to resort to the religions of the East. Profound answers to the problem of our existence lies within our own spiritual traditions. Might it also restore in the public mind the value of the preacher?

An attempt will be made to wrestle with the profound insight and wisdom of the Preacher. A study of Ecclesiastes will take place every Wednesday 12:30 - 1:30 PM in the Senior Common Room of McConnell Dining Hall. No academic credit will be given, though one might be credited with having gained some wisdom and insight into life, all the while seeking its enjoyment. For more information call me at 459-5962 (mornings).

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