

SPECTRUM

The opinions found in Spectrum are not necessarily the views of The Brunswickan. People interested in writing for Spectrum must submit at least three (3) type-written articles of no more than 500 words each to the Brunswickan.

Gay and lesbian spirituality

Jesus said, 'If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you,' from the gnostic "Gospel of Thomas" in the Nag Hammadi papyrus.

For many, perhaps even most, gay men and lesbians brought up in the Judeo-Christian tradition, their sexuality and their spirituality constitute two fundamental parts of how they define themselves. Our spirituality usually has its origins at a stage of our lives well before we have any real inklings of our sexuality. The path of self-discovery in which "coming out" is a major milestone, is often defined in spiritual terms, and much of the hatred and intolerance that we encounter is justified within the framework of that same Judeo-Christian tradition. Its hardly surprising that many gay men and lesbians resolve this conflict by simply rejecting that tradition completely. Complete rejection is not difficult to understand - on the face of it few of the institutional churches within the Judeo-Christian tradition present endearing faces to the gay and lesbian community. However, if by this rejection, gay men and lesbians hope to gain freedom from oppression, they rapidly discover that theists have no monopoly on intolerance and bigotry. Try having a rational discussion about spirituality with a fundamentalist atheist if you don't believe me. Its an experience every bit as depressing as arguing with a God-botherer! Furthermore, those of us who choose to remain within the tradition are often inspired by the desire for change. Recalling our own experiences of intolerance and conflict, we share a desire to ease the way for those coming behind us, often a motive that propels us into activism of any kind.

Among those who do reject the Judeo-Christian tradition, spirituality does not necessarily die. Some connection with the transcendent lies behind the current growth of interest in New Age movement(s), Wicca and the oriental religions such as Buddhism. I shall not attempt to do justice to these aspects of spirituality here (perhaps someone with more experience might like to take up the challenge. Hint! Hint!).

Thankfully, few of the Judeo-Christian religions are as monolithic as they like to appear. The stereotype of believer equals bigot is as divorced from reality as any other stereotype. The space thus opened up has actually been filled by some of the fastest growing Christian

communities of the last two decades. These developments have occurred against a backdrop of major changes within the institutional churches, and one independent development, the founding of the Metropolitan Community Church.

During the 1960's, and beginning with the doctrinal re-examination encouraged by Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council, a number of Catholic theologians re-addressed issues of sexuality. In parallel with this, similar processes were at work in most of the reformed churches and in Jewish congregations as well. Though the conservative forces in all these churches have fought hard and bitter rearguard actions, the issue of homosexuality is firmly on the agenda, and is not going to go away any time soon. Alongside the deliberations of theologians and clergy, vital grassroots organizations have come into being. The first was founded by Troy Perry in 1968, after he was forced from his ministry in the Pentecostal church. Ostracized because of his sexuality, Perry founded the Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles. Twenty three years later, the congregation that began with a dozen men and women meeting in Perry's apartment now boasts a six

figure following on four continents - all achieved without the advantages of tax-exemption, satellite broadcasting and direct mailing. Ecumenical and charismatic, the MCC welcomes gay men, lesbians, their families and friends in Christian fellowship.

Alongside the MCC, and enjoying more mixed fortunes, gay and lesbian organizations exist in the Anglican, United, Roman Catholic and Unitarian churches, the Society of Friends, and the Reformed Synagogue. The largest, the Catholic organization "Dignity" has become the target of a particularly vicious campaign - part of the Vatican's anti-Modernism crusade since 1986 - involving attempts to deny it the use of church and forbidding the involvement of supportive clergy. Demonstrating that truth is the first victim of any war, "Dignity" has had to face the creation of a sinister shadow organization called "Courage" sponsored by such archconservatives as Cardinal Connor.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, it is curious flattery indeed that a number of organizations like "Courage" have appeared and all operating in much the same way. "Turnabout" and Exodus" are both sponsored by the Evangelical

Positively Pink by Adrian Park

Movement. You can identify their modus operandi quite easily, "Turnabout" defined its aims as follows in one of its earliest pamphlets:

"Homosexuality can usually be put down to one of three causes, 1. seduction or abuse during childhood/adolescence, 2. a dysfunctional relationship with parents (usually the father), 3. demonic possession or oppression. The cure lies in making the individual whole again, and particularly addressing the relationship with the responsible parent."

Its the same old hocus-pocus "let me amplify your guilt and then provide the means to resolve it", dressed up in psychobabble. The old guilt-manipulation power trip in new clothes.

So, what is available here in Fredericton? Apart from individually sympathetic clergy and the more tolerant United Church and Unitarian congregations, not a great deal. Perhaps someone out there might like to change that. Grassroots spirituality, like grassroots anything else springs up from below. Some organizations are active in the maritimes and I have included their contacts below.

AFFIRM - Gays and lesbians in the United Church. Contact Al at (902) 423-3072.

DIGNITY and INTEGRITY - gays and lesbians in the RC and

Anglican churches, contact Fr. Mike McDonald at (902) 429-7922.

KINSHIP - Seventh Day Adventist group, call (902) 422-6416.

MCC - Safe Harbour Community Church, for more information call (902) 429-7922.

SPARROW - an Interdenominational Christian fellowship for gays and lesbians, contact Rob at (902) 429-7850.

CHUTZPAH - Jewish social group, was active in the Toronto-Montreal area until 1990 at least, contact (416) 323-3564.

There will be a general meeting of Fredericton Lesbians and Gays (FLAG) on Wednesday November 27th.

The meeting is being called to consider various options for a place where gays and lesbians may socialize and dance.

Provided sufficient interest is shown, FLAG may be reactivated and officers may be elected.

To find out the location of the meeting, call the Gay Line at 457-2156.

If you are interested in maintaining Fredericton's lesbian and gay community, or even if you just want a place to dance, don't miss this important meeting.

You don't have to be a member of FLAG to attend.

Facts and values

We in this country are enamoured with facts. We use them to prove a point. We use them to refute, even ridicule, people. We say "the facts speak for themselves". Facts (or statistics) determine courses of action. Political parties take facts (polls) very seriously, even if they deny it. Many people are in the business of uncovering facts, university people not the least of them. Facts are a fact of life.

Facts have a dynamic of their own. Ideas, opinions and actions, recorded as facts or statistics, change constantly. What was a fact regarding them yesterday may no longer be so today. It may not even be so for tomorrow, even though we may be wise to act upon yesterday's facts or statistics.

Facts are facts, as many are wont to argue. But what we do with them, however, is an entirely different matter. In fact, how we use them says something about ourselves - our values, even our objectives and motives.

Can we so easily separate facts from values? We assume we can. Let me illustrate. The Council of the City of Fredericton has opposed Sunday

shopping. Some members felt opening stores on Sunday was a doomed attempt to halt cross-border shopping or to stimulate the economy. Others felt it was a threat to the family, and the elimination of a much needed common pause day.

How are we to assess these two basic responses? Does one deal solely with the economic reality (facts), and the other merely with values or morals? One councillor apparently thought so. He felt that voting for Sunday shopping "Would be seen as being against quality of life and that's not fair." He "resented being forced to deal with moral issues on council".

Are the Sunday shopping issue or the women's wrestling event that provoked controversy earlier in the year merely economic or legal concerns? Or are they inescapably moral concerns as well? I think they are. Are we then being unfair when we ask our leaders - politicians, educators - to show some direction on the moral level also? Or is this the domain exclusively of moral "specialists", whoever they are?

Who says that moral, value or ethical concerns ought to be held as separate and distinct, even

Metanoia by John Valk

private? Who says that we are to deal in the public realm only with strictly factual matters? Frequently we allow ourselves to slip into thinking that they can be separated. Unfortunately, separating them has social consequences.

Statistics indicate (we are told) that some 85% of university students are sexually active. Statistics also indicate that sexually transmitted diseases (including AIDS) are on the increase. To avoid forcing particular morals and values on others, we assume the best (and most value-free) way to deal with this problem is to instruct people in terms of what the statistics tell us. Presentations therefore become (graphic) demonstrations in safer methods. We are then left to decide for ourselves what to do with this newly acquired information, that is, determine our own morals and values.

But what have we actually learned? We have certainly become more aware of safer techniques. But by centering on safer techniques have we lost an opportunity to speak of healthy human sexuality?

We understand ourselves as "advanced" people. But how

advanced are we really when in the public realm we cannot speak of morals and values, without fear of being branded. Why must we be restricted to using only "safer" facts? And, are our morals and values to be determined only by what the facts tell us? Do statistics become our standards for "right" and "wrong"?

Should we become aware of safer methods? If the facts are as they appear regarding high student sexual involvement and increased sexually transmitted diseases, then we most definitely should. Should we educate ourselves in terms of our human sexuality, not just its "plumbing", but also its more meaningful expression? Again, most definitely yes. In fact, such education ought to be a priority.

Unless I have it wrong, sexually transmitted diseases, along with Sunday shopping, depletion of the ozone layer and the burning of the forests, have to do with lifestyles we have chosen. The way we conduct ourselves as people reveals our morals and values. Our actions in terms of these have negative as well as positive consequences. We may not like that, but that is a fact of life.