

# Spectrum

## METANOIA

BY JOHN VALK

## The Christian voice in debate

Is there room for the Christian voice in contemporary academic dialogue? Many have argued that religion is irrational, that it is not based on reason, and hence is incompatible with academic pursuits. John Cooper, however, argues that religion, and especially the Christian voice, ought to be recognized because it offers an alternative to the current dilemma in education posed by "post-modernism". Cooper, professor of Religion and Philosophy at Calvin Theological

Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, will come to UNB on Friday November 19 to present his case. He states that religion is an inescapable and integral dimension of life. As such, it may not be ignored or dismissed, especially in the academic enterprise. For more than two hundred years, it was assumed that matters of faith had no place in academia. Only reason, aided by the scientific or empirical method, could give real insight into the nature of reality, especially human nature. It alone was objective, it was argued. Re-

ligion, on the other hand, was a matter of faith, and hence private. Further, its irrational, subjective nature made it unsuitable for establishing objective truth. This rationalistic world view has often been termed as "modern". It signalled a marked shift away from an earlier view affirming the existence of God and human relations to God.

Modernism appears, however, to be collapsing under its own weight. It is seen as reductionistic and inadequate. Many reject the narrow scientific and rational

approach as the sole criterion for determining what is true or right. Furthermore, this approach is not nearly as objective as its advocates claim. Merely the choice, or exclusion, or a topic or area of study is itself subjective. Are other approaches, as a result, necessary today? Some argue that establishing what is or is not valid cannot be so narrowly defined. Feeling, intuition, even religious faith, may be as necessary as the empirical method in discerning what is and what is not truthful and valuable.

ism mocks those who adhere to specific beliefs, especially religious beliefs claiming some form of universality or exclusiveness. But if meaning is indeed relative, why do relativists bother to dialogue with those holding other views, as though meaning is universal. Furthermore, if morals or values are relative, how can anyone criticize people such as Hitler, David Koresh, or even Madonna?

Is such a topic of discussion relevant for the university? Consider the following. One, relativism is the dominant view expressed and taught in our modern universities. Two, the view that each person determines his or her own truth can be terribly frightening, if not destabilizing, for students who are attempting to find some truth as they struggle through their education. Three, issues such as abortion and sexual morality are controversial for the very reason that not everyone agrees that they are simply a matter of personal choice.

There is a fourth issue, and it raises a particular concern. If there is no right or wrong or universal truth, what then is the purpose of the university, which historically exists to discover the nature of truth? If all is relative, are students then at university simply to exchange information, or train for a job? Furthermore, does education merely become power based, with those most politically powerful (or correct) determining the curriculum?

Cooper asserts that a Christian perspective is helpful here. Not only does it shed light on the rationalism versus relativism dilemma, but it also presents an appealing alternative. That alternative ought to be recognized. It has a legitimate place in the discussion, and not least because the university insists it wishes to be open to all perspectives.

John Cooper will argue his position in a free noon hour lecture on Friday November 19, 12:30 PM in Room 103 Student Union Building. All are invited and welcome.

## POSITIVELY PINK

BY COLIN LONGMAN

## Sins of sexuality

Many so called "good Christians", especially the fundamentalists, will tell you that homosexuality is a sin and an abomination against God. They know this because the bible tells them so in passages such as Leviticus 18:22 and of course, the infamous Sodom and Gomorrah story. The bible, however, speaks of many things, not the least of which is homosexuality.

In the bible you will find that women are forbidden to teach men (1 Timothy 2:12), wear gold or pearls (1 Timothy 2:9), dress in clothing that pertains to man (Deuteronomy 22:5) and, that they must be submissive to their husbands (1 Peter 3:1). The bible also prohibits the eating shellfish or pork (Leviticus 11:7,10), no shaving (Leviticus 19:27) and no mixed fabric clothing (Leviticus 19:19). Finally, stubborn or rebellious children should be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 21:18,21) along with adulterers (Deuteronomy 22:5).

Many of the aforementioned Christians

don't think twice about the above rules because they simply don't fit the society in which we live. However, these same people will use the bible to justify and support their own anti-gay attitudes.

Looking back through history, the bible has often been used to support many kinds of discrimination. When society can no longer tolerate its prejudice, the verses that condoned it seem to fall from favour as well. Today, no one would even think of attempting to justify slavery, let alone justify it with the bible. The bible is, however, exactly what many southern ministers did use in attempting to show that God approved of the buying, selling and ownership of human beings (Colossians 3:22).

In using the bible to justify prejudices and discrimination, Jesus' second greatest commandment "You shall love your neighbour as yourself", gets lost. The bible is not meant to be used as a

weapon against those who are different due to their race, religion or sexual orientation nor should it be used as a means of elevating one person or group of people above another. If you believe in the essence of what the bible teaches then it should be bringing us together in the glory of God.

As a gay/lesbian person, the next time someone tries to use the bible against you ask them why only certain sections of the bible are being interpreted literally and others, like those mentioned above, are not. Further, ask them who gets to decide how things are to be interpreted. Ask them the last time they ate shellfish and, check the material content of their clothes. There won't be too many who haven't "sinned" in the past or who aren't currently committing a "sin".

When all is said and done, there is but one verse you need remind those who use the bible to discriminate of, Romans 2:1 that states "Judge not lest you be judged". Seems that is another one of God's sayings that has fallen by the wayside.

This shift puts us into a new era of discourse, often referred to as "post-modernism". Today we are open to various interpretations of reality. In a radical departure from the past, we have come to accept that each person has his or her own beliefs and values. These are considered to be "true" for the individual, no matter that they are not true for others. Frequently it is stressed that there are no universal standards or truths, only personal choices.

But is that really the case? Allan Bloom states in his Closing of the American Mind that all students entering university are well steeped in relativism. Relativism asserts that there is no absolute or universal truth. All is relative to one's own situation or context. A person's belief, or religion, is as good, or bad, as any other.

Is such an outlook helpful? Cooper argues that it is not. Relativism destroys community, or unity in society. He demonstrates that it does not follow from the facts that people have different beliefs and cannot agree on how to determine what is true. He further argues that relativism is incoherent and self-defeating.

Relativism insists that it alone is universally true. But that claim is logically inconsistent. If all is relative, then relativism itself can only be one view among others.

For this reason, Cooper argues that it is incoherent and self-defeating. Relativ-

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**WIMMIN'S ROOM**  
BY LIZ LAUTARD

**Opinion response**

This column is in response to Martin Yaqzan's article entitled Opinion: "Rape" Past and Present in the Nov. 5th 1993 issue of the Brunswickan. I am still shocked by the opinions and beliefs expressed in Mr. Yaqzan's article. Although I believe everybody has the right to express their own opinion, I feel I must respond to the comments Mr. Yaqzan made.

First of all, rape and unwanted sexual experiences (sexual assaults) did take place in the past, but it was by no means 'rare'. What Mr. Yaqzan calls the 'routine date rape' of today is Society's realization that rape and sexual assault have not only occurred in the past, but are a pervasive problem (not to mention a crime) today. Finally, rape and sexual assault will undoubtedly continue to be a problem unless everyone changes their attitudes towards women and men. Next, the introduction of the pill meant women could have more control over their bodies. The pill does not necessarily imply promiscuity on the women's part. Third, your comment that men cannot be expected to control themselves sexually and "that while hugging and kissing might be pleasant and adequate experiences for them (girls), they are simply a prelude to sexual intercourse for the boys.

Finally, men cannot be expected to carry on indefinitely (hugging and kissing) perpetuates the troubling and rigid stereotypes of females as passive beings (objects) and males as unable to control their sexual urges (sexual animals). As well, these statements imply women are sexless beings and when they do have sex it is only within marriage in order to procreate. In reality, women (and men) have an immense capacity to enjoy and partake in mutually pleasurable sexual experiences. If boys and men cannot control themselves sexually, why are men like Mr. Yaqzan teaching in an environment where both his students and colleagues are female? This also assumes men and women cannot be friends without the man suddenly sexually assaulting the woman. In reality, women and men can have meaningful friendships.

However, the most harmful assumption Mr. Yaqzan expressed throughout his opinion piece is that of equating rape/sexual assault with sex. Rape and sexual assault are crimes of power. Sex is merely the vehicle (or tool) the violator uses to humiliate and violate their victim. Therefore, I find it very hard (if not impossible) to believe that women simply decide to label

their 'undesirable sexual experiences' as date rape. Mr. Yaqzan is in fact reducing the horror and pain of the experience of date rape by making this sort of statement. I also think it ignorant and cruel that Mr. Yaqzan assumes women who are not virgins and who are on the pill are promiscuous and that they diminish the pain and horror of rape and sexual assault for women who are virgins. A young woman (say, in University) who decides to become sexually active and uses the pill (or some other form of contraception) is smart. She realizes that she has to be responsible if she is to have sex.

Finally, Mr. Yaqzan's advice to a 'promiscuous girl (who) becomes a victim of an unwanted sexual experience' smacks of prostitution. Then again, maybe monetary compensation would be (at least) a beginning, in terms of paying for the counseling the victim may feel she needs to deal with what Mr. Yaqzan calls 'her inconvenience or discomfort.'

The only good thing I can see in publishing Mr. Yaqzan's article is to remind everyone that some people in our society still think like Mr. Yaqzan, and that we all have work left to do in terms of combating sexist attitudes and sexual assault.