

# SPECTRUM

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## AIDS, innocence, guilt, and the "Wrath of God"

"(Lepers shall be excluded since) some of them, endeavouring to contaminate others with that abominable blemish, that so, to their own wretched solace, they may have more fellows in suffering."

Edward III, King of England, 1346.

"Thus they spent, or rather, squandered their talents, and wearied their bodies with fooleries and wanton pleasure. But God, in this matter, as in all others, brought marvellous remedy."

Chronicle of Henry Knighton, c. 1360

Here comes that feeling of déjà vu again. The King of England blamed the spread of the pestilence on the malice of lepers, his royal and episcopal cousins in Europe blamed a Jewish conspiracy against Christendom (incidentally, Edward was not showing signs of nascent liberalism, his grandfather had expelled all English Jews 60 years before, so his choice of scapegoat required more imagination!). Its spread brought out the more fanatical snake-oil salesmen from the ecclesiastical woodwork. The pestilence, "God's marvellous remedy" in Knighton's Chronicle, was the Black Death.

In the absence of any medical explanation or cure, the religious establishment promptly divided into two groups - those who used fear of contagion and death to promote their own social agenda, and those, true to the teachings of Christianity's founder, who stood by the stricken offering comfort and support. Very few senior clergy succumbed to the plague. Village priests, friars and nuns who remained with their flocks, perished in huge numbers.

In some ways little has changed in 600 years. AIDS has been with us little more than 10 years, and despite the incredible advances in knowledge about the etiology of the syndrome, its epidemiology, and the ready availability of proven preventive measures, the progress of the epidemic in the developed world has been accompanied by a chorus of malicious self-interest.

"AIDS = America's Ideal Death Sentence" read graffiti from the early days of the epidemic in 1982. At least such sentiments are honestly expressed, straightforward hatred. More insidious and influential has been the rhetoric of the Moral Right, the advocates of the Neo-Calvinist theocracy and their bed fellows in the renewed anti-Modernist crusade, striking chords of fear and ignorance at every turn. The principle of unconditional universal love, and the dictum "Judge not, that ye not be judged" are lost in a doctrine of unadulterated hate, and an obsession with determining who, amongst the human family, God prefers. In this hideous cosmology, homosexuality is the Mark of Cain, if not the Beast, and illness becomes the meta-

phor for sin. Sex equals death, and gay sex in particular equals lingering, painful death, over which the chosen may gloat in self-righteous glee. Apparently the God of this nightmare is a disciple of the Pentagon school or warfare. In his vendetta against gay men he accepts collateral damage with the nonchalance of the tacticians of limited nuclear war.

This cosmology is nothing if not innovative. If the "collateral damage" analogy is inadequate to explain how hemophiliacs, recipients of tainted blood transfusions, Haitians, Africans and new born babies of HIV positive mothers somehow contracted a pestilence aimed at gay men and IV drug users, the concept of "innocent" and "guilty" victims can always be trundled out for service. Waiting in the wings also lies the threat from "the others", the willful promoters

of contagion. Such concepts have ancient pedigrees, and their employment is quite arbitrary. They are not used to explain the pattern of infection and death from influenza, for instance. Historically, they are reserved for the sexually transmitted diseases, and the diseases of poverty like leprosy and TB. In the early 1900s it was syphilis, with Erlich and his co-workers being accused of thwarting God's will by developing a cure for this formerly incurable and fatal ailment. Somehow hepatitis B escaped notice, possibly because it was the co-operation of a group of Gay men in New York that was instrumental in finding a vaccine. Then again, the tabloid press had not labelled hepatitis B the "gay plague". But an unusual God emerges from all this, on the one hand an omnipotent creator, on the other, on who is thwarted by an injection of penicillin, or a sheath of

latex.

Some questions the "wrath of God" school of theology never answer (curiously, as they seem to know god's mind with unswerving accuracy) are these. If AIDS is God's punishment for homosexuality, is Alzheimer's his punishment for growing old? Are sickle-cell anaemia and Burkitt's lymphoma punishment for being black? And what of lupus, MS, cancer, cystic fibrosis. . . . .

It strikes me that by Christian standards, and particularly the doctrine that humans are created in God's image, the 'wrath of God' peddlers are themselves guilty of downright blasphemy - creating a God in their own image: malicious, spiteful and vindictive. By non-Christian standards they are as dan-

## Positively Pink By Adrian Park

gerously irrelevant as they were 600 years ago. Then, despite the pilgrimages of the flagellants and burnings, the Black Death wiped out 20 to 40% of Europe's population. Now, as then, the followers of Christ's teaching are in the thick of it, supporting the sick, comforting the dying, counselling the bereaved without preference. They are down among the "lepers", eating and drinking with them, loving them, not preaching at them. Sharing their loneliness, pain and grief, not exploiting fear and promoting guilt. Sharing their witness with all those who refuse to distinguish between the members of the human family.

## I'll be home for Christmas. If only in my jeans

This is the first Christmas since I was twelve years old that I actually received what I really wanted. I'll never forget Christmas 1963. That was the year I got a man. His name was Ken, and although on close inspection I had a vague suspicion he was missing the part about which I was most curious, he nonetheless completed my family. Now Barbie had a boyfriend, her plain friend Midge had even more reason to be jealous, and her litter sister Skipper had someone else to tattle on. For what more could a girl ask!

Christmases flew by and I eventually got another man; this one breathed and was anatomically correct, and not long after the marriage, three "anatomically correct" children followed. Unlike my Barbies" this family would not stay tucked in their Kleenex box beds until I felt like playing Mother.

Twenty-plus Christmases have come and gone, and like many women of my generation, I was most pleased when they had "gone".

Every year I had wished for peace on earth but this year when all three were invited to spend the holidays out-of-province I was quite willing to settle for peace in my apartment.

The day finally arrived when not a creature was stirring (except Ralph, the hamster). Whatever would I do with all this time on my hands? Shopping was done, no baking to do, no decorating, or digging in the cedar chest for that stupid apron with Mrs. Santa embroidered on the front.

I think Christmas is like a Wimmin's final exam. A time when all her "womanly" skills are put to the ultimate test. Can she bake a cherry pie, decorate a fourteen foot tree, arrange everyone's travel plans, buy and wrap twenty-seven perfect gifts, drop the red dress off at the dry-cleaners, and stuff a twenty pound turkey — all on her lunch hour.

For about thirty-seconds the mythical sword seemed to slip closer to my head; maybe there was some

truth to the adage that one should be careful for what one wishes. . . Then it struck me. No, not the sword, but the realization that I didn't have to play the role of the patient and energetic Christmas Angel in the house.

I poured a bath (and a glass of wine) and let the cheap bubble bath and my "mother guilt" go down the drain. I read the newspaper in its entirety, undisturbed. I read Joseph Conrad, napping at the boring parts (that was the day I slept a lot). I watched old movies, one after another and experienced what power there really is in having complete control over the remote control. I lounged around in my flannel nightgown and wool socks and slurped spaghetti and scratched, unobserved (I had a rash from the bubble bath). I stacked the dishes, slept in until ten and went for long walks.

Sure, I missed the children, every little now and then, but I did not miss the exhaustion and frustration of

## THE WIMMIN'S ROOM

attempting to please them all by recreating some idyllic Victorian Christmas like those that had haunted me from the pages of Woman's Day magazine.

On their arrival, just in time for New Years, the children informed me they had had a great time. Something stopped me from telling them I had a "great time" too.

I'm sure that to be left to her own devices is not every wimmin's Christmas wish, but every twenty years or so, it might not be such a bad idea to give your Mom, your Grand-Mother, or yourself, a break from it all.

I hope you also got what you wanted this year, but if not, don't stop wishing, for sometimes (with a little careful planning) wishes do come true. So, on behalf of the student Wimmin's committee, I wish you all the best in 1992.

## ...about Frederickton drivers...

Whoa! Here I go again, breaking a New Year's "Revolution" (for me they tend to be more revolutionary, as opposed "resolutions".)

Anyway, I resolved (among other resolutions) that I would not be so sarcastic this year and that I would not poke fun at Frederickton (area) drivers. I suspect that's two I'm about to break. Anyway, did you have the opportunity to drive on Monday the Sixth of January? We're talking "magastupes"!

Let's set the record straight. I learned to drive in northern states, in

the snow (and all that entails), in Pennsylvania and Upstate New York. Sure, I lived in southern states for nearly fifteen years. Those clowns down there were something else! For instance —

"Whatta ya mean if my wheels are spinning that spinning them faster isn't so must better?"

"What's wrong with stopping on this hill to get my thoughts together?"

"Wow, far out! Ya mean if I gently turn the wheel toward the direction I'm sliding, I won't lapse into an irreversible skid slamming us all into the ditch, killing and/or

maiming all of us?"

In Fayetteville, Arkansas (home of the razorbacks) any snow/sleet etc.; it was demolition derby time. Open season on street signs, the other guy/gal's fender, a clumsy pedestrian, it was mayhem. In Florida, with all of those old flatulations, when bad weather struck, it was not safe. Interestingly enough, there seems to be at least two universal rules of whom not to follow. First, watch out for... "Old man with a hat." If he's in an old pickup, it only exacerbates the problem. Second, "Little old lady, who

Well, this is  
what I think.  
By D.J.  
Eckenrode

is so short, she needs to sit on the greater Toronto phone directory just to see through the wheel." This problem is compounded if she's driving a twenty-seven year Chrysler New Yorker with one head light.

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