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METANOIA

With John Valk (Campus Ministry)

Beating our swords into ploughshares

I have never known war. Oh, I have from a distance. But I have never been in a war. I have never experienced the trauma of a war zone: the thundering noise of planes roaring overhead, the ear-shattering bursts of exploding bombs, the continuous shrill of artillery fire, the screams of pain and horror from terrified men, women and children.

My family has experienced war. My parents suffered five years under German occupation in WWII. My father-in-law lost his father when shrapnel from an exploding bomb left little of him intact. So they, better than I, know the atrocities of war.

They also know the bliss of peace. This they love and cherish most highly. But, they say, not at all costs. They will remain continually grateful to the Canadian soldiers who liberated them from oppression. On occasion they have impressed upon me the need to fight evil with force.

We are again in the midst of war. The US led Allied Coalition has come to the defense of Kuwait, a country invaded by its larger neighbour Iraq. At this point any restoration of peace hinges on the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from the occupied territory.

Canada has joined the Coalition as part of its United Nations commitment. So my country is officially at war with Iraq. We are known as a nation traditionally involved in peacekeeping duties world-wide. We nonetheless believe that there are times when aggression must be resisted. With this I do not disagree. Therefore, what must be done must be done.

Yet, much of what we hear sounds too straight forward; too black and white. Our politicians, and particularly those south of the border, engage in a type of rhetoric that is most disturbing. Our media does little better.

We have been dished very one-sided information; wartime propaganda more so than critical analysis. Day after day, the same simple answers are given to the same simple questions. Have we lost my appreciation for the grey areas? Is there, for example, no legitimacy whatsoever to any claims made by the Iraqis, in regard to Kuwait, the Palestinian question, American hypocrisy? Or, should the public not be burdened by these queries?

Attention is focused clearly and without question on the perceived "evil" of Saddam Hussein.

But should it be limited only to the evils of Iraq and its leader? Let us not forget those who supplied Iraq with its weapons: nuclear, chemical and conventional. How many Western corporations made huge profits selling killing machines to Iraq? Where was our moral condemnation then? Or, is business merely business?

We pride ourselves with our technological expertise, even in wartime. We talk of sophisticated weapons, precision bombing and surgical strikes. We show footage from a cruise missile about to blow apart a building. We know the cost of our military hardware. Dare

we measure the cost of human lives, of suffering, of mutilation? We ought to spend as much time and energy searching for peace as we do making our weapons and protecting our selfish standard of living.

Canada is traditionally a peace loving nation. We believe in freedom and the right to self-determination. Yet, even here at home, many of our actions do not reflect such. Our governments have dragged their feet for some two hundred years on the matter of "liberating" the native peoples of this country. Our political masters have turned guns and tanks on

them because they protested the "occupation" of their aboriginal lands. If we insist on pointing a finger at Iraq, let us also admit some of our own hypocrisy.

But, we are not good at that. And so in a rather blatant act — call it an act of support if you will — some UNB students tore down the Iraqi flag in McConnell Hall. According to the Gleaner report, many cheered and none protested.

Students at St. Thomas University, on the other hand, expressed their concern for the war differently. In the chapel a copy of the Qur'an was quietly placed beside that of the Christian Bible.

Candles were lit at a night-time vigil, and in the candle light many students prayed for peace.

The Hebrew prophet Isaiah envisioned a future when people would strive earnestly to "bear their swords into plough shears and pruning hooks, and make war no more." We have not yet reached such a "new World Order", though we frequently speak as if we have. Until we reach that era of peace, however, let us be extremely careful about our rhetoric and our actions. Aggression and self-righteousness are not virtues, nor do they benefit us well.

In The Pink

"Outing" homosexuals can be justified

By Neil Slattery

Recently I was having a discussion with some heterosexual friends in residence about the recent cases of 'outing' in the mass media. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the term, 'outing' refers to instances whereby the press discloses the homosexuality of public figures. Recent examples of this would include the late industrialist Malcolm Forbes and actor Richard Chamberlain. Both of whom had been involved in gay relationships but chose to keep this fact secret. Meanwhile, gay people across the world continue to face constant discrimination and intolerance in their daily lives. The courageous and noble are rewarded with scorn and hatred while the fearful and cowardly remain unscathed.

My friends were quick to jump to the defence of these people citing the 'right to privacy'. They argued that any gay person who chooses to hide their sexual orientation must have their wishes respected. It would be cruel and insensitive to expose these defenceless people who had not as yet come to terms with their own sexuality. Coming out of the closet is a difficult process for everyone, and it would be unreasonably traumatic for someone to have something so intimate entered into a public forum of discussion without their consent. How would I have felt if someone had tattled on

me before I wanted to come out? Wasn't I robbing these people of the opportunity to tell their close friends and family at their own discretion?

I suspect that my experience are quite different from those of political figures and media personalities. I discovered that I am gay when I was fourteen years old and for five years gradually worked on summoning the courage to 'come out of the closet'. For me, this meant telling my parents and all my friends that I am gay. There was then a 'nervous' period when I was indeed very vulnerable and needed their support. I got it. Now, I am comfortable and confident enough about my sexual orientation that I am able to write about it in a student newspaper in the hopes that what I have to say will result in more people doing the same.

I do believe however that comparisons between the lifestyles of the gay rich and famous and the lifestyle of Neil Slattery are incongruous. Outing is not done to people like me who before coming out are only suspected of being gay. Outing is done to people who are already sexually active but insist on cloaking their actions with secrecy. They are not every intending to come out of the closet. They do not give a damn that other gay people endure prejudice. They are able to hide their own sexual

ity and they do so without even a thought to the consequences. What I would give to have the spheres of influence and the power that these public figures possess! How much I could do if I were in their shoes! Instead I must be content to grit my teeth knowing that everywhere there are gay politicians, actors, and musicians who do nothing.

Outing these people is not an act of malice. It is not slander or libel. It is not defamation of character - there is nothing wrong with being gay. These people are gay and they have within their resources the potential to invoke social change - yet they do not. I believe that if something bad is happening to someone and it is within my power to prevent it from happening then it is my responsibility to do so. These people have the power to raise awareness of gay life. These people have the power to legislate humanitarian progressive laws for homosexuals. These people have the power to, if nothing else, add their voices to the struggle for equality. Instead of resisting our attempts to make them accountable for themselves, you should shame them for their cowardice and apathy. Since when are these attributes considered to be virtues?

Recently on an American talk show, a media journalist defended the practices of tabloids and magazines in general by saying that stories about the private lives of

celebrities cannot be considered wrong if they are honest. If Madonna's husband punches out a photo journalist, he has done something newsworthy and it should be published. Tabloids and gossip magazines have been part of North American Pop culture for decades. Why is it only when the medium is used for outing that people become upset? I find it irksome that the many people who are morally outraged by outing remain quite nonchalant about the existence of tabloids. Isn't this a self-contradiction?

Perhaps there is something else going on besides a desire to respect the intimate lives of gay personalities in the closet. Resisting outing could be seen as yet another symptom of homophobia. Maybe people would be a lot more comfortable if they just didn't have to bother thinking about this ten per cent of the population. People oppose outing not because they are sensitive to the lives of gay people, they oppose it because they would rather not hear about us. You must forgive us if we don't oblige.

The gay Forum will be published in next week's issue of the *Brunswickian*. Ed.