

SPECTRUM

Metanoia by John Walk

Knocking at the Door

Laodicea was no sleepy town in Asia Minor in the first century CE. It was a prosperous commercial and banking centre, situated on an important trade route. It was known for its textiles. Its bankers were invested throughout the Roman Empire. It had a celebrated medical school, well recognized for its eye medications. Laodicea was a modern city. It even piped hot spring water via an aqueduct from Hieropolis, 10 km away.

We read of this city in the book Revelations, written by the apostle John toward the end of the first century. One of the most difficult (and hence most misunderstood) of the Biblical books. In the middle of the century, a small group of Laodiceans became Christian. They met frequently in a house belonging to a freedwoman named Nympha. Here they shared common meals, supported each another, and gave spiritual meaning to their lives.

This small group was left largely undisturbed by the Roman authorities in Laodicea. As long as they created no breach of the public peace, they were deemed politically harmless.

Thirty or forty years after they first gathered, the spiritual fervour of this group waned. What caused this to happen? From John's letter (Rev. 3: 14-22) we get a good glimpse.

The group did not participate in the well-known debauched and decadent Roman lifestyle. Neither did they openly engage in idolatrous emperor worship. Rather, the waning of their spiritual strength was directly attributed to an increase in their social and economic strength. Their cultural self-sufficiency became their spiritual Achilles heel. Their focus shifted from a reliance on God to a reliance on their independent achievements.



Their secure standing in Laodicean society compromised their spiritual "walk and talk." Their once fervent faith became private and peripheral, lacking both public and communal expression. According to John, they fit too well into the Laodicean way of life.

John responds to their wealth, prosperity, and independence with some harsh language. Rather than applauding such successes, as we tend to do, he states they were "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked" — quite a stinging criticism of their lifestyle.

After these words, we read the following from the passage: "Behold I (ie. God) stand at the door and knock." What, we might ask, does the writer mean by these words? What do they imply? What is the writer talking about? And, what is the nature of that "door." We must attempt an answer!

Is the door that of our individual hearts, preoccupied more with individual, social or economic pursuits than with a focus on God and our neighbour? Is the door that of our places of worship — our institutional churches — often more preoccupied with internal politics and formal Sunday morning traditions than with God and healing words and actions?

One might also ask regarding the form in which God's knocking comes to us. Is it in the cries of the poor, the homeless, the powerless, and the disadvantaged in our cities, our nations, and our world, as in the words of Matthew 25? Is it in the groaning of the environment, in the cries of nature's flora and fauna? Is it in the turmoil of the marketplace, where greed, exploitation and unbridled expansion overshadow fair exchange, limited growth, and economic justice for all the world's peoples? Is it in our local neighbourhoods, where loneliness cries out for community?

John concludes his letter to the group at Laodicea with these words: "He (she) who has an ear let him (her) hear what the Spirit says to the churches." John's call, then and now, put the ball into two courts. The one is our own individual courts, calling us to be people of God, to be community, where we share our resources, our joy and also our pain. The other is the courts of our ecclesiastical institutions, calling them to be symbols of hope and beacons of light in our culture. "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come to them and fellowship with them and they with me."

The Left Jab

Capitalism's Racist Roots by Nik Carrier

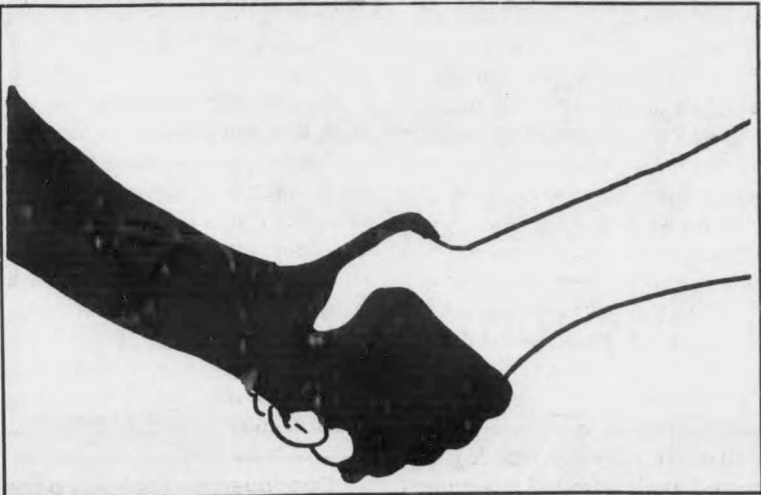
Probably the most common belief about racism is that it comes from human nature, and is therefore a permanent feature of society.

Racism is the systematic discrimination against a group of people because of some characteristic they are supposed to share and which they have inherited as a group. The most obvious example is colour,

although it is not the only one.

The Irish suffered racism in Britain in the nineteenth century every bit as bad as that now faced by black people. Jewish people also suffer racism, regardless of the colour of their skin.

The crudest racists argue that 'races' have different positions in the world because of inherited biological differences. Today a more sophisticated racism claims that 'cultural differences' are at the root of division.



Racism involves people being oppressed because of something they can do nothing about. Black people, for example, can't change their colour. Similarly, being a Jew was enough in Nazi Germany to condemn you to the gas chamber.

This racism is endemic today, but it has not always existed.

In the slave societies of ancient Greece and Rome the crucial dividing line was between free citizens and slaves. To the Greeks and the Romans the colour of a person's skin was irrelevant to their position in society. For example, Septimius Severus, one of the greatest Roman Emperors, was probably black.

In the Middle Ages the crucial divide was religious. Both Christian and Islamic civilisations discriminated between believers and non-believers. And non-believers could avoid persecution by changing their religion. That isn't an option open to blacks, Jews and other victims of modern racism.

These ancient class societies were based on brutal oppression and exploitation-but not racism. That has existed only in the modern world.

What created it? Modern Racism has developed out of the growth of capitalism.

The capitalist world economy began to take shape between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, due to the expansion of international trade. The Americas were carved up into the first

Continued on page 10

NOTES FROM THE IVORY TOWER

Why Are We Here? by Daniel Goodwin

Most of us at UNB are here to get an education, whether it be in Eastern philosophy or biochemistry. That's simple enough. But if you stop to think about it, why we want to get an education is slightly more complex.

With that in mind, take a couple of seconds now out of your busy schedules to ponder the following multiple-choice question. Feel free to tell the truth. Nobody is going to report you. Your answers won't be used against you when you apply to graduate school and have to write a letter detailing how much you love and respect your discipline. You actually get bonus marks for honesty. Here is the question:

The single most important reason I am paying \$2700 per year (\$2800 if I don't opt out of the medical plan in time) to study at UNB is because:

A) I love knowledge

B) I want to get a job

Alright, it's time to grade yourself. And remember that you were supposed to choose the letter which corresponded to the most significant reason for you. How many of you circled A?

The love of knowledge is certainly a noble sentiment. Many of us might actually experience momentary flashes of it as we meander through the hallowed halls of academia. But I don't think I'm going out on much of a limb here if I assume that the vast majority circled B.

Before I go on, I have to come clean. While I might have framed the question in its quintessentially modern, multiple-choice format, the problem itself goes way back, at least to the time of Socrates. Indeed, Socrates and his weightlifting buddies spent a lot of time batting it back and forth down at the old Agora, the forerunner of our Boyce Market, when they weren't working out at the gym.

I am talking of course about the great educational debate between Socrates and the sophists. The sophists were a group of guys in robes who taught the economically-advantaged young men of Athens how to succeed in political life.

Remember: at that time, political life was the only life worth living. If you didn't have a political life, you were a nobody: a barbarian or a slave. Or both.

The sophists taught rhetoric and

the aims of such an education were naturally practical: political office, the perquisites of power, patronage, one's likeness on every statue; in short, everything which a bright young Canadian might aspire to in our own system.

Socrates, on the other hand, was just one guy in a robe who believed in the pure, unadulterated search for truth and wisdom. He'd hang out in the market all day holding forth on his favourite topics: knowledge, the examined life, justice, morality, why the sophists were bad, and what not, with all his groupies. Some even took notes. And the sophists have had a bad rap ever since.

Whereas Socrates, through an admittedly brilliant propaganda campaign undertaken by his star pupil Plato, has come to stand for the selfless pursuit of knowledge and truth, the sophists have come down to us through the ages as a coterie of mercenary cynics extolling the virtues of personal advancement and material reward.

But the true picture, as is usually the case, is slightly more complex. Far be it from me to take anything away from Socrates, who after all is one of the founding parents of much of our Western thought, but a close look at the demographic composition of his student body reveals, at best, the disingenuousness of his position vis a vis the sophists.

While it is perfectly admirable to study knowledge and truth for their own sake, and while some of us might actually enjoy it, it has been said that man does not live by truth alone. Coincidentally, Socrates' students all happened to be rich boys who didn't have to work.

In fact, they complacently lived off the exertions of their slaves who presumably didn't have the time to pursue truth and who might very well have wanted to if only they had been given the opportunity, say, through a kind-hearted system of student loans in which the conditions of repayment were based on future income.

The lesson to be learned from the example of Socrates and the sophists is simple. While the pure love of knowledge is definitely something to aspire to, most of us are too busy trying to get high grades (not always synonymous with knowledge and sometimes even antithetical to it), to get a job.

But don't panic: it's never too late to pursue knowledge. When you've made enough money at your job, you can retire to a warm place with a lot of sun and clean water. Then you can hang out at the mall and discuss knowledge, justice, the examined life, why sophists are bad, etc. with your pals.

Hmmm...sounds a lot like ancient Greece.

Blood n' Thunder

Continued from previous page

can argue that the couple on Queen Street could cause a traffic accident. I fail to see how Dennis Leary causes any harm unless of course you believe that people listening to it will immediately rush out and club baby seals to install the eyes on their cars. Or get nausea from his lousy singing.

You want to limit the playing of a certain song in residence as offensive? Try it.

Just don't be surprised when

someone walks up to you and tells you to turn off your stereo because they find what you listen to offensive.

This entire year has been a bad one in residence. What is happening in Neill House is only the most public example of an administration that has made very questionable decisions and is apparently insensitive to the opinions of the residents.

Keith Morrison
Bridges House