

SPECTRUM

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Human rights

MIETANOIA

With John Valk (Campus Ministry)

On Monday November 19 Dr. Paul Marshall, professor of Political Theory at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, gave a noon hour lecture at UNB as part of Campus Ministry's "Lunch and Learn Lecture Series". The series is entitled "For God's Sake: Culture, Politics and Religion". The lecture was entitled "Human Rights as Liberation and Oppression".

While most people are advocates of human rights it is not always clear what one might mean by them. Marshall was helpful in pointing out and clarifying some of the underlying assumptions.

Marshall stated that the basis of human rights lies not in people themselves. It is not due to our intelligence, ability, wealth, or particular colour of skin that we have rights. Rights also do not come from some social, military or democratic power or authority. Basic human rights come from God, and God gives these to all humans; poor, women, unskilled, and handicapped included. God demands rights be given to all, and it is up to political powers to recognize them. We all have rights because we all stand equally before God.

All humans have a right to life, to protection, a right from harm, from being mutilated, aborted and maimed. We all have the right to food, shelter, work and education. We have the right to remain single, marry, and have children.

We also have rights of speech and association. These, however, are not absolute. They are limited to their effect on others. If one's speech provokes hatred, harm, or immoral behaviour, it is to be limited.

Rights are also to be seen as relational, and are intertwined with responsibilities; rights and responsibilities are two sides of the same coin. People are to be given the right to live out their responsibilities. But while government can legislate rights, it cannot legislate responsibilities. Laws can protect people from violence, and ensure freedom of speech and movement. Government cannot legally prevent one from choosing a slothful life, entering a bad marriage or breaking apart a family. It can, however, promote an environment conducive to solid citizenship, marriages and families.

In our society, we have tended to focus largely on individual rights. In that vein, we insist on a right to our bodies, to shop on Sundays, to make a profit, and to our own sexual expression. We almost accept the notion that anything deemed good or desirable for the individual is a human right. And, in conjunction, we have almost come to believe that by increasing individual rights our society in turn improves.

One wonders, however, if such is really the case. To what extent do individual rights not impinge on communal or group rights? One may insist on the right to speak, be spoken to and use the language of one's choice. But in Quebec this individual right has detrimental effects on francophone language and

culture, particularly because the rest of the country is awash in English. In order to protect, preserve and enhance the dominant language and culture of that province, group rights may need to take some precedence over individual rights.

Native peoples have always insisted that they be dealt with as distinct communities, not as a collection of individuals. What may be just for individuals within a community, may not be just for the community as a whole. To acknowledge the right to an education is not the same as acknowledging the right (and need) to a native

education. To recognize the need for justice is not the same as recognizing the need for native justice in a native community.

In this country, we also legislate against religious discrimination. Everyone is free to pursue their own religious preferences or leanings. We have, however, relegated that pursuit largely to the private domain. We have come to think that religion is something individuals do on Sundays (or Saturdays) and in churches, mosques or synagogues of their choice. We seldom think of religion in the context of individual or group activity

done throughout the week, in education or in the market place. We feel religion has no place in the public domain.

Not everyone accepts that, however. There are many organizations, schools, counselling services, and hospitals that operate in the context of specific religious commitment. And, that means more than prayer and Bible reading.

To insist that one must park their religious beliefs at the public door is not only a virtual impossibility, but it also infringes on the right to religious expression. To argue that the only adequate public expres-

sion is religious neutrality is really to argue for the public acceptance of secularism, and that is itself religious.

The recognition of human rights is an important and vital step for any society which strives to recognize and promote the worth and dignity of people. An equally important and vital step is acknowledging that human's rights need necessarily to be understood in terms of groups, as well as individuals, and particularly in a pluralistic society.

Date rape



Sexual assault is a serious social problem. One in four females and one in ten males will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. Sexual assault can be defined as any form of unwanted or forced sexual contact ranging from touching, fondling and/or kissing to sexual intercourse.

A large percentage of sexual assaults occur in situations where the victim and the attacker are known to one another. Too often, the parties involved are girlfriend/boyfriend, friends or neighbours. This type of sexual assault has been termed acquaintance rape or date rape. It often occurs during the hours of 10pm to 2am on weekends - the prime dating hours.

For any victim of sexual assault, the psychological effects can be quite severe. However, for victims of date rape there is an added burden of guilt. Because the victims know their attacker, they often feel that the assault was in some way their fault. They feel that there has been

a betrayal of trust and that they can no longer trust anyone. They also begin to question their judgment and believe they can not differentiate between their attacker again and this is often very traumatic.

There are several measures which you can take to prevent incidents of date rape. First of all, always let someone know where you are going and with whom. Remember that drugs and alcohol cloud your judgment and leave you less able to defend yourself. It is also advisable to carry pocket money on you at all times so that you are not dependent on someone for transportation. Incidents of date rape may also be prevented if you maintain control of the situation and appear confident. Don't be afraid to be assertive and always say what you mean. If you mean no, say it!

Sexual assault is a criminal offence and can result in a prison term of up to ten years for the offender. If you have been as-

saulted, you should always get medical attention. The doctor will check for internal bleeding, sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. It is also important to save all evidence. This includes clothing and not taking a shower until you have been properly examined. The evidence will be very important when you report the incident to the police.

If you are a victim of sexual assault, there are services designed to help you. The Rape Crisis Centre is open seven days a week and has a 24 hour crisis line. They have counsellors who will talk to you and help you make any decisions. These counsellors will also be present for support and accompaniment to the hospital, the police station and court. On Campus, you may contact Counselling Services and the Student Health Centre for support.

Rape Crisis Centre
PO Box 174

384 Queen Street
Fredericton, N.B.
E3B 4Y9
Telephone: 454-0437

Counselling Services
Telephone: 453-4820

Student Health Centre
Telephone: 453-4837

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Information obtained from Acquaintance Rape. Fredericton Rape Crisis Centre. Counselling Services
Telephone: 453-4820
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Gay-bashing

"The parents of slain gay activist Joe Rose have launched a damage suit against the Montreal Urban Transit Corp. over his death in March, 1989. Rose, 23, was stabbed and killed by a gang of youths who had been tormenting him aboard the bus." (From the "Toronto Sun" April 1990)

Probably one of the biggest concerns in the gay community is that of gay-bashing. Gay-bashing can occur in a number of different ways but the most common type is verbal insults and physical violence. The problem ironically seems to be increasing every year and all people, including heterosexuals must be concerned.

Despite reassurances from people that times are getting better for the gay community when I see youngsters wearing T-shirts saying "FAGS MUST DIE" I have to wonder. I have to wonder because how can times get better for homosexuals when our next generation of people have such a hateful and distorted image of us? Children have to be brought up to believe that gays are human and not some kind of target group that can be beaten up on a Friday night. Statistics show that the age range of gay-bashers are 14-17 year olds. So this goes to show what the future holds for the gay community.

The recent events of gay-bashing taking place across this "great land of ours" tells the whole sad story: "a man is stabbed and beaten by two teenagers in Toronto while leaving a gay bar;" "in Vancouver two gay lovers are shot at in their own home by homophobic neighbours;" "in Halifax a gay man is physically beaten by four thugs in a park who knew of his sexual orientation." Bringing the matter closer to home the amount of gay-bashing incidents here in Fredericton have increased dramatically over the last 3 months. This is due in part because of the bad publicity aimed at gay men and AIDS by the Daily Gleaner. In August a homosexual man was held at knife point on King St. This brings me to the questions: where the hell is the humanity? Where the hell is the law?

One of the most well-known incidents of gay-bashing to take place in Canada occurred over a year ago in Montreal. Joe Rose, an openly gay activist, was murdered in a subway station by a gang of youths who knew of his sexual orientation. This proves that people will go to any lengths to show how much their hate escalates. Gay-bashing is a serious issue: an issue of life and death.

Why does gay-bashing occur? It occurs because people do not have enough education on what homosexuality is. People have to realize that gay people have feelings who laugh and cry like anyone else. All the hatred and violence will not make us go away.

Another important point to make is that heterosexuals may also be a target for gay-bashing. People who are perceived to be gay, but are not can be verbally or physically assaulted. A friend of mine was at a local pub one night when someone shouted an anti-gay word at him. My friend in not gay.

We in the gay community owe it to ourselves and to others to speak up if we are bashed. I know I make it sound easy when I say "speak up if you hurt" because I am open about who I am, but remember keeping quiet will only make things worse. Leaving someone get away with violence will only enable them to hurt others or even you again. Think about it.

However, the gay community is fighting back. A group of gay men and women in New York City called "The Panthers" patrol the streets looking for gay-bashers and protecting their own. These people are not looking for violence, but when faced with it they will fight back. After all people's lives are at stake.

We apparently live in one of the greatest countries in the world where food, clothing, shelter, and housing exist for the asking. As a gay man I enjoy these benefits just like a heterosexual. However, there is one benefit that I don't have and that is the right to live my life freely that way I want to. As a homosexual I want to be able to tell someone that I'm gay without facing a negative reaction; as a homosexual I want to raise children and marry someone of the same sex, but more importantly as a homosexual I want the simple right to hold hands with my lover on a campus sidewalk if I want to. Is this really asking for much? Whoever said this is a free country?

... "O Canada. Glorious and free???"

THE GAY FORUM

... Terry Richards ...

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