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# Womyn'say

## Womyn's voices must be heard in all forums

Recently I attended the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) Conference held in Montreal by the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada. It was intended to be a forum for discussion on the recently published recommendations of RCAP for students, academics, professionals, and, of course, Aboriginal peoples.

A three-day conference, it consisted of numerous panel discussions and plenary sessions where leading authorities, academics, Native leaders and commissioners presented their opinions on a variety of specific topics. Now, it was all very well-intentioned but, as a woman, it was difficult not to notice that the conference was essentially being dominated by the white, male opinion. In fact, the only female panel discussion was held on the role of Aboriginal women in the governing process which included Andrea Bear Nicholas (STU) and Patricia Monture Angus (USask) and a third Inuit woman. While it was refreshing to see that the panel concerning issues affecting Aboriginal women consisted exclusively of Aboriginal women—that was, to a large extent, IT for female representation. In fact, that was basically IT for female voices! In all the other panel discussions female representation and participation was markedly absent and a growing frustration among woman participants was obvious. In traditional Aboriginal society, women have a strong voice in their community. But to one, particularly the white men dominating the panel discussions, listened to what these women, or any women, really had to say. Sure they heard our voices when we were allowed to speak but they did not listen—especially not to the Aboriginal women. Sure women managed to ask a few questions but, in one session I attended, after listening to a white man and several other questions I finally stood up, after having been passed over by the moderator and said: "I am tired of sitting here listening to what white men have to say about everything. Women make up 50% of the population but one would never know this from this conference. Moreover, this conference is not about us as white/nonNative people but about Aboriginal peoples—so it is time for us to stop talking and to start listening to those who are affected by the recommendations of this Commission!"

Imagine if the commission were on what to do with white men in society—how would they feel if their voices weren't heard? Essentially, my point is: what womyn say is important and valid! Women have a lot to say—the problem is, we are never heard. Men must learn to listen—and womyn must be listened to. Though this conference was not expressly about women, and I do not wish to detract from its purpose, it was about oppression and the perpetuation of that oppression—upon Aboriginal peoples. But, as Patricia Monture Angus once said: To be a Mohawk Woman is to face double oppression.

And that is what womyn say.

Gabrielle Slowey



## More than Eros

One day each year love takes centre-stage. It happens on Valentine's Day. I am encouraged to love my partner. I can express this love by means of flowers, chocolates, various sized and shaped hearts, etc. And, the more creative, the more romantic. Or is it the more romantic, the more creative? Eros strikes!

Jesus said I should also love others, and that I should find creative ways of expressing this. In fact, his insistence that I do so was issued as a new injunction: "this new command I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 13: 34).

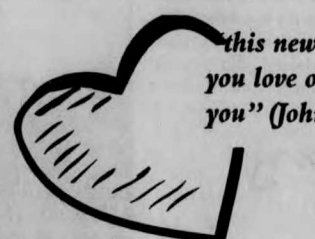
I don't think Jesus had a Valentine's Day romantic (er) kind of love in mind, though. He meant more a brotherly/sisterly generous benevolent kind of love (agape). And this I am to have for all people; a 365 day a year "love your neighbour" kind of love. That's not an easy thing for me. Mostly I simply exist with others, in a distant friendly minding my own business sort of way.

Jesus was quite serious about that new commandment. In fact, he stressed it so seriously that it is found throughout the Scriptures. The apostle Paul talks about it and he put it most succinctly. He says that without love I am nothing but a noisy gong, a clanging symbol (1 Cor. 13: 1).

Paul pursues the point. He says if I

am such an incredible individual that I have immense insight, or am so perceptive that I understand all worldly mysteries, or am so bright that I am a walking "knowledge park," or have such strength of character that I can accomplish most anything, but have no love, I am nothing.

Nothing? Imagine! Paul is surely



offensive. All that is so important to me — insight, knowledge, understanding, strength of character — really amounts to nothing, nothing, nothing, without love. Perhaps Paul got carried away.

Not really. I see this emphasis elsewhere. It is strongly stressed by the apostle John in a short passage in Revelation. The injunction to love forms the theme of the first of seven letters he writes to the Christian churches. That first letter is written to the Christians in Ephesus, a rather "big shot" Roman

city in Asian Minor (modern Turkey). I miss the point in John entirely if I do not recognize why Christianity caught on so fast at that time. In an empire beset with religions and gods, Christianity spread like wildfire within a few decades of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Why would anyone want to adopt Christianity? Did it have something unique to offer?

This new religious movement spoke of forgiveness, healing, salvation, hope, and communion with God. It also stressed that love encapsulated the entire meaning of these. In fact, love resulted from this new outlook, and it bubbled over. It made people do strange things: "and all who believed were together and had all things in common and then sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (Acts 2: 44-45).

I used to think of Christianity as rules, doctrines and creeds. These spoiled my

seemed to be working overtime. That concerned John.

The Ephesian church leaders had a way of rooting out people who didn't follow the rules, who disagreed with their way of doing things. John did not regard this as a virtue. He reminds them of Jesus' great command "to love one another," the very thing that initially drew them together. His reprimand is rather severe. He states that a failure to return to a loving community will result in the removal of the "lampstand." What did he mean?

The early church was called to be a "light in a dark world." That is, its beliefs, teachings and love of others were intended to be a new way of living — in a world beset by competition, power, and decadence. This is what attracted so many to this new movement. As the new movement became institutionalized, as all movements tend to become, the emphasis shifted from an outward emphasis — reaching out to others in love and acceptance — to an inward focus — protecting what we have and excluding those we dislike.

There is a time when drawing a line is necessary; not all teaching is acceptable. But the manner in which this line-drawing is done is most crucial. Love is at all times to govern these matters. With the little group in Ephesus this had slipped dangerously. Another kind of love appeared to gain the upper hand: the love of putting other people in the wrong, of patronizing and backbiting, of power and hating. If this was going to be a permanent kind of thing among the Ephesians, John said they would contribute "darkness" to the world rather than remove it. Then they would no longer reflect God, for God is love.

Valentine's Day reminds me that I should love my partner. This is good. The Scriptures remind me I should not only love my partner, but I should also love others. This is better.

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## Miss Universe puts on a few pounds and all hell breaks loose...

I saw something on T.V. the other night that was so disturbing I almost fell off the couch. I was watching Entertainment Tonight and they were discussing the current Miss Universe and her weight problem. Apparently, since winning her crown several months ago Miss Universe has turned into an "eating machine." This in the words of the great Donald Trump.

I sat with my mouth open in shock as they showed Miss Universe. She was positively stunning. The woman on the screen was not the gigantic, Jaba The Hut type monster, that I was expecting from their build up. She was a beautiful, tall, curvaceous woman—yet everyone was talking about how fat she had become! Donald Trump and his slim wife, Marla Maples Trump, were talking about the idea that Miss Universe has a certain image to uphold and that her weight was a big part of it (no pun intended).

I suppose that as the owner of the pageant, Mr. Trump has the right to set

standards, but it really concerns me that this is so important. Not once did I hear anyone mention anything that Miss Universe had managed to accomplish during her reign, other than gaining weight. Did she not act as a gracious ambassador around the world? Was she not involved in many important fund-raising events? Forgive me for being naive, but I thought Miss Universe was supposed to be a representative for all people, not just those that weigh one hundred and twenty pounds. From what I could tell, hearing her speak, she is an intelligent, well spoken, graceful woman. Why does it matter if she puts on a few pounds?

With the afflictions of eating disorders on the rise I think that beauty pageants have to be very careful about making perceptions wrong. Young people have too many influences that do not allow them to just be happy with themselves and this is just another one. The message being sent out to young people by this Miss Universe fiasco is that it doesn't

matter what you accomplish: if you do not look a certain way, then you are a failure.

The Miss America contest is also perpetuating this problem. When the pageant aired last week, the question presented to the finalists was about the controversy surrounding Miss Universe and her weight gain. At a time when there are extremely important world issues such as AIDS and political strife, it seems ridiculous to be asking questions about weight gain. The question asked was something like: What would you do if you put on weight like the current Miss Universe?

Does the answer to a question like that indicate whether or not a contestant would make a good Miss America? If so, what does that say about the pageant? Fortunately, the winner, Miss Hawaii, answered that it shouldn't matter what a person weighs as long as they do the best job they can. The appalling thing about it was that some people

complained because she gave a politically correct answer. Well, perhaps she is just a well adjusted human being with actual compassion for man kind and this is the way she really feels about the subject.

If there must be beauty pageants, perhaps the organizers and judges can work a little harder to ensure that the women chosen to wear the crown can hold their heads up as self-confident human beings, regardless of whether or not they might put on a few pounds. I am happy to live in Canada where we no longer have a national beauty pageant and I hope that in time society will learn to fully accept women on merit alone, regardless of physical appearance. In the meantime, this woman will try to learn to accept herself as she is and encourage her friends to do the same.

I can't change the world but I can work on myself.

Jean Brown

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