

# SPECTRUM

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## METANOIA

# Ethics have a public expression

by John Valk

Do religious values—Judeo-Christian, Native, Muslim, Eastern—have anything to do with economics? There are those—business leaders, academics, students—who insist they do not. Religion, they argue, belongs in the private sphere; in the home, church, synagogue or mosque. Economics, on the other hand, belongs in the public forum, where “business as usual” views dominate: maximized profits, economic bottom lines and material prosperity. These, it is argued, are religiously neutral. But are they?

Is such a private/public split any longer tenable? Interestingly enough, that very dichotomy is no longer tolerated when it comes to gender issues. Not only is it a biased view, feminists argue, it smacks of an oppressive (patriarchal) ideology. What kind of ideology dominates in the area of economics when religious values, Christian for example, are excluded?

Can values, or ethics, be contained merely in the private realm? Hardly. They also have a public expression. One’s business ethics reflect one’s view of the world, one’s religious orientation. Economics is not free of such views, in fact it is permeated with them. Consider, for example, the familiar expression “time is money”. What particular view of life gives only that kind of value, or meaning to time?

The word *economy* comes from two Greek words. *Oikos* means “house” or “household”. *Nomos* means “rule” or “custom”. Put together, these two words point to the “management” or “stewardship” of a household. An *oikonomos* was a steward or manager, and economics had to do with the management of the resources of a household. A steward was responsible for the goods which were produced, distributed, shared and consumed for the well-being of the household members.

Economics, therefore, has to do with managing material goods and services for the well-being of humans. It is not a separate part of human reality. Rather, it impacts our very existence. How an individual, a family, a business or a government manages its goods and services within its “household” says something about its view of the meaning and value of human life, and most particularly its view of “prosperity”. And, the production, distribution and consumption of material goods and services has not only to do with large pulp mills, steel firms and mining conglomerates. It has also to do with the family farm, corner store and local book barn.

Economics has to do with power. It has to do with access to and use of resources, such as lumber, land and

oil. But it also has to do with the way men treat women when it comes to production, distribution and consumption, or Bay Street attitudes towards Native land claims, or how rich nations view poor nations. What principles govern these relationships? Is it maximization of profit, justice for all, environmental preservation? Whichever we choose will be reflected in our dealings with and priority given to, women, children, Native peoples and poor nations.

Today we are feeling the ravages of a national as well as a global recession. We hear much talk about “belt-tightening”, “falling currency” and “down-sizing”. However, whenever we hear such terminology, we ought immediately ask who it is that is gaining by all this, and who it is that is being ruined. Whose decisions are producing enormous government deficits, why are such decisions being taken, and who ends up suffering the consequences?

When one asks such questions, it becomes apparent that economics always involves value judgments. Economics is not a neutral sphere. What underlying values or “hierarchy of values” are the basis on which judgments are made? Are they Native, capitalist, Christian, feminist? Who are the principle decision-makers, in this province

or country? Whose “world view” dominates?

A public university is a forum where all points of view are to receive an equal voice. Do Economics Departments and Business Administration Faculties in our universities, particularly UNB, dialogue with or discuss these different “world views”? Is a Native or Judeo-Christian view regarding the just and equitable production, distribution and consumption of material goods and services considered? Do these views enter meaningfully into that which is taught? Does the Catholic Bishops’ Statement on the Economy, or the booklet “Christian Faith and World Economy Today” from the World Council of Churches become required class reading material?

With great interest I note that the Faculty of Administration has a Bank of Montreal Executive-in-Residence program. No doubt such a program is of great value. But are only the voices of banking officials and their views of the world heard? What about economists associated with organizations such as Ten Days for World Development, Bread for the World, Mennonite Central Committee? Are they also given an opportunity to engage faculty and students?

The latter voices have economic views specifically grounded in the

**ECONOMICS/** *It is not a neutral sphere, nor is it a separate part of human reality.*



Judeo-Christian religion. If our public university is truly to be open to all, these voices must also be heard. If this is done in a credible manner, we may begin to see that the term “prosperity” cannot be properly understood in its present (and narrow) material sense, something our current governments (and banking officials?) have difficulty doing.

What great learning opportunities would emerge if the Faculty of

Administration, Economics Department and the Religious Studies Department would hold seminars together to discuss the relationship between religious views and provincial, national and global economics. Unfortunately, UNB does not have the latter department. But its commitment to establishing a Religious Studies program is a small step to making this public university open to all perspectives.

## THE BLACK TRIANGLE

# Spring (and love) are in the air!

by Tristis Bhaird

Spring is in the air! So too, soon, will be the smell of dog doo, but we can ignore that awful truth for now and concentrate on love.

Lots of straight folks, and even gay folks don’t feel homosexuals are capable of long-term, romantic, committed relationships. Gay men especially have a stereotypical reputation for being... well the polite word is fickle.

I remember talking to one fellow who claimed that if he did not have thirty different partners in as many days it was a bad month (Whew boy!) I also know of some very committed gentlemen who are absolutely touching in their devotion to each other. Unfortunately the first fellow is the more noticeable. He is flamboyant and loud. He has nothing to lose because he is young and there will always be men where he cruises in Cape Breton. The others are quiet, private and careful not to direct attention to the life they are trying to build so that it will be safe. And all gay men get a rep for being floozies.

It’s no better for women. Lesbians are expected to shun monogamy over some weird political correct-

ness code. Many dyke communities are actually built on this belief. Some of their members have a heck of a good time, and some get ulcers watching the woman of their dreams neck with their best friend. So naturally, it’s the politically active, we ain’t-buying-into-no-het-institution-like-marriage! dykes who get noticed. The two adorable little old lezzies that I met in Saint John, who have been together for forty odd years are not about to march down the street carrying a banner. Nobody knows they, or the other loving lesbian soulmates even exist.

The poor bisexuals of both genders are generally sneered at from all four corners of the debate. Somehow, “gender exclusives” manage to translate not having a (much of a, or less than total) preference into wanting it all - Now! Bisexuals can argue until they’re hoarse, but they will never convince the one they are with that they have even the smallest grain of sincerity. The result is that bisexuals who want a committed relationship deny everything. They are what their partners want them to be: “What? Bisexual! Me! No way! Bisexuals are cheap and easy!”

So regardless of the outcome of

our fight for recognition of our “marriages” ect. in Canada’s constitution. It is reasonable to assume that common belief is not going to change, and we are still going to be thought of as being led around by raging hormone imbalances and sleazy desires. Unless, that is, we start talking about what our true feelings are. Don’t get me wrong: This is not a call to go marching in the streets with an “I’m in love, damn it!” placard. We can save the politics for the depressing stuff.

This is a call for celebration! For those lesbians who have found one they wish to spend the rest of their lives with, there are some wonderful books that present ideas you didn’t think lesbians were capable of having. Take, for example, a wedding - a spring wedding - complete with all the flowers and lace you can cram into it.

Just because your “politically astute” friends don’t want to “buy into heterosexual ideals” or argue that marriage hasn’t worked for them why should it work for us, does not mean you can’t have some good, old fashioned romance in your life. Do what feels right to you, and let your celebration be your politics.

There are plenty of variation on “traditional” ceremonies, both Euro-western, and the multitude of other cultures. So if any of those old oppressive symbols (like the bride in white to say she’s undamaged goods) bother you they can be removed. If the concept of marriage itself seems bogus, but you still want to profess your love for each other in front of witnesses there are ways limited only by your imagination, and the number of friends you have who will attend.

There is a wonderful book entitled “Ceremonies of The Heart: Celebrating Lesbian Unions” (edited by Becky Butler and published by Seal Press), which is composed of anecdotal accounts of a whole bunch of commitment ceremonies. They are all lesbian, and cover a wide range of cultures and beliefs. Many of them are not weddings at all, but every one of them will warm your heart.

Regardless of your views on commitment, ‘tis the season for tripping joyously through the pretty flowers (you need to visit a greenhouse this year), so let go of your stress, relax your politics, throw off your heavy coat and be careful of the doo-doo.