

SPECTRUM

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Ozone and suffer the little children

It was rather disheartening to hear last week that the protective ozone layer had diminished further. The federal Environment Minister warned parents to "keep their children out of the sun." To remind us of the decreased state of affairs, Environment Canada plans a daily report on the level of harmful ultra-violet rays coming through the thinned atmosphere. Such reports are standard fare in Australia and New Zealand.

My wife and I have three young, energetic sons. In the spring when the weather becomes warmer their great delight is to spend increased time playing outside. In the summer when the weather becomes hotter their greatest delight is playing in the sand at the water's edge, wearing scantily more than a bathing suit.

That is the great outdoors for them. And, their activity consists of basic, inexpensive and play-based fun. It is part of the essence of childhood. Unfortunately, it is now also dangerous to their health. Imagine that. Something that comes most natural to childhood - playing outdoors in the warm sun - is now dangerous.

Is this progress; is this advancement? Or is this merely one of the drawbacks of pursuing the Western Dream? Is not having young children play outside in the sun yet another cost?

We have taken the future away from our children. One-third of our tax dollars goes not to providing superb education and social care for them, to guarantee an adequate future, but to servicing an enormous public debt we incurred from the recent past. How much of their tax dollars will be needed to eliminate that debt. Further, we have so polluted our environment that again many of their (future) tax dollars will be required to repair the damage we have made.

Now we are taking away the present from them as well. I must tell my children that what came most natural to them yesterday is to be avoided today. Coverage from head to foot, in hot and muggy weather, will need to become standard procedure.

All of this, of course, doesn't make sense to them. And so it shouldn't to us either. Nonetheless, we do need to put all of this into perspective, don't we? I'm going to suggest, however, that the perspective we need, to make sense of this new predicament, comes to us not from the present, but from the past.

The God spoken of in the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures mandated humans to "till and keep the garden". That garden is the earth. Humans are to be stewards, caretakers of it. They are to uncover the rich, unfathomable potential that lies within them as earth creatures. In respecting who they are, what they are and where they are, they would develop into the kind of people God had intended, with enough sustenance for everyone. People would lack nothing. Peace and prosperity would abound.

In all of this humans were created with freedom of choice. It would not do to coerce them, to force them to do what is good for them. Only if they freely entered into this arrangement

would it work.

We, of course, like freedom of choice. That has been bred into the very psyche of us Western types. But God also warned humans of the risks inherent in being free. Once a free decision was made not to do what humans were created to do all kinds of consequences would or could develop. If humans became captivated solely by the beauty of (material) "things", or considered the powers of this (created) world to be their god, or were seduced by their own wealth, egos, individualism, greed, etc., their "house" might very well come crashing down on them. For the people of

ancient Israel this happened, and more than once.

Such warnings from the past come to us today, if we care to listen. But, "our hearts have been hardened" twice over. First, we insist that it is not fashionable to listen to the voice of religion, least of all Judaeo-Christianity. Second, we seldom speak about (false) gods, to which we sell our souls. Instead we speak proudly of "self-made men", freedom of choice, independence, individual rights. We do speak of growth and development, but generally in economic rather than human terms.

Now think about this. What cre-

Why Pink Triangle Day?

"... the (nation) state is an absolute before which individuals and groups are relative." Benito Mussolini, *The Doctrine of Fascism*, 1923.

February 14th, a day for lovers and the festival of a Christian martyr, the bishop of Umbria, a dissenter judicially murdered by the Roman state in or around the year 273. For the last few years this day has also been designated Pink Triangle Day, partly in memory of those murdered because of their sexual orientation during the years of the Third Reich. The 50th anniversaries are now racing by at a furious pace, from Kristallnacht to the fall of Berlin; last month saw the anniversary of the Wannsee Conference where the Final Solution for the Jews was planned and set in motion. The statistics are, by now, all too familiar, six million Jews (at least, if the latest research into recently released Soviet archives is any guide), another 3 - 5 million Soviet prisoners of war, gypsies, gay men, Jehovah's witnesses, anti-socials and political prisoners. Each were given coloured triangles as badges, pink for gay men, black for lesbians (who were often classified as antisocial or mentally ill) and fed either into the slave labour concentration camps that spanned occupied Europe, or processed into the human abattoirs in the east.

Pink Triangle Day is not about jumping on a band wagon of grief, vicarious justification through suffering, attempting to guilt-trip an indifferent society, or just an excuse for recounting horror stories from a time long passed. It's all too easy to dismiss the events of those years as irrelevant, an historic aberration, something those "nasty Germans" did - or even to deny it happened at all. The Nazis and Fascists have been so successfully demonized it is hard to see them as humans at all, let alone relate the horror of what they did to our present day or circumstances. What is forgotten all too easily is that fascist parties existed in every European country before 1939, and their relatives flourished all over the world. The seeds were widely scattered and there were few countries where they did not strike roots. To change the metaphor, in Germany, the disease erupted in a particularly virulent form, but the infection was truly systemic elsewhere. In Germany, Italy, Spain,

and later in Nazi occupied Europe, the world got a glimpse of the Fascist New Order.

Today, there is even confusion over what Fascism and Fascist mean. All too often they have become trivial terms of abuse, or reduced to oxymoronic inanities like "fascist left." Totalitarian tyrannies are diseases of the extreme left and right, but the diseases are as distinct as rabies and typhoid!

Though doctrinally amorphous, Fascism has a very distinct etiology (the present tense is quite deliberate), as Mussolini's definition quoted above makes clear, Fascism is essentially an extreme form of nationalism, and as such, much given to local permutations. Basically, it is xenophobic ultra-nationalism in which the nation-state is destined to be ruled by an elite group identified by race, language, religion, tribe, clan or class. Though happy to make alliances of convenience in the pursuit of power with religious groups or parties of the democratic right, Fascists demand absolute obedience and tolerate no dissent, rivalry for loyalty, or opposition. Democratic niceties are observed in the pursuit of power, usually from a populist platform in support of a "national saviour" figure and aimed at specific scapegoats, but Fascists consider democracy decadent, corrupt and contemptible. The Fascist mentality is particularly characterized by two neuroses: a paranoid belief that all their enemies and scapegoats are members of a grand conspiracy aimed at the state or dominant culture, and a cult of violence ranging in expression from the thugery of street-gangs to a belief in violence as catharsis, the means of national salvation and purification lying in war.

Few Fascisms political doctrines are unique, and most are borrowed in a very eclectic, if not promiscuous manner from right across the political spectrum. It's essential paranoia also feeds on a smorgasbord of sources. Anti-Semitism is the obvious example, drawing on Europe's 1,800 year tradition of Jew-baiting and hating. The Nazis had little need to produce their own propaganda, and most of what they did was old slanders warmed over, glossed with an added layer of "scientific nationalism." The Nazi campaign against

Metanoia by John Valk

ates the hole in the ozone layer? To what god of progress and development have we listened? What garden path have we been led down? Has our consumer-oriented life-style so consumed us that we now need to sacrifice our own children?

This sounds too religious. Not only that, but it is probably only the

opinion of a minority. Besides, we have industry, science and technology. That is where we need to channel more of our money, time and energy. This triumvirate will get us out of the fix. We just need to get better at what we are good at doing.

Meanwhile, we must teach our children to be patient. Things will be better tomorrow.

Positively Pink by Adrian Park

gay men drew on the same sort of reservoir of ignorance and prejudice. Every myth and distortion that could be used was employed, once again with a patina of scientific respectability. Whereas the "scientific basis" for Nazi race theory could easily be seen for the garbage it was, their theories on homosexuality were developed directly from those of the German pioneers in psychology, and were held in common with most of the scientific world.

Most pertinent to the reason for remembering this on February 14th, is that Fascism did not die with the Nuremberg Tribunals. It was never a single malignancy so easily excised from the body politic. In Spain it remained unchallenged until Franco's death in 1976, and elsewhere Fascists and Fascist parties have paraded around the political fringe ever since, some even gaining power and influence by brandishing impeccable anti-Communist credentials. During times of economic hardship and national angst, these groups have tended to move more towards centre stage, feeding on discontent and frustration with the compromises of liberal democracy, offering scapegoats and national saviours. Their credibility is improved by two external factors. Politicians who dabble in the same fouled waters make it harder to distinguish cynical democrats from the real Fascists, and cut the ground from under their own feet. George Bush would have found it far easier to condemn David Duke had Willie Horton not been practically his presidential running mate in 1988. The other factor is more insidious, and in a liberal democracy with a commitment to freedom of speech, harder to confront. Fascist apologists have become more organized and plausible in recent years, groups like the Institute for Historical Review, and individuals like historian David Irving, have made Holocaust denial more respectable, no longer the preserve of

the lunatic fringe. Even so, it's largely the same old conspiracy theory being peddled. The "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" remains the template, though new scions are grafted onto the old root-stock - now charges such as "Jews encouraging abortion and homosexuality" are thrown in for good measure.

The germs of Fascism are strewn throughout our world of nation-states, with their ethnic, racial, religious and sexual minorities, our liberal democracies where frustration with the political process and cynicism toward politicians are practically universal. In such a world, these germs will always find a suitable medium for growth - wherever stereotypes divide the human family, wherever myths feed ignorance and bigotry, wherever politicians and other social leader capitalize on fear, insecurity, xenophobia or paranoia. No country or society is immune to this contagion.

As victims of the last major outbreak of the disease, and as continued targets of abuse rationalized as "common sense", "God's word", or "Nature's Laws", gay men and lesbians choose February 14th to make their witness: a witness that Fascism is a sickness in the body politic, and that a healthy, confident democracy is one that can accommodate dissent and diversity. On St. Valentine's Day it's worth remembering W.H. Auden's words - "We must learn to love one another, or die." In our day, as at the time he wrote those words, the Fascist alternative to liberal democracy is the unmarked train to the gates of Auschwitz.