

SPECTRUM

NOT that you asked... by Frank Pearce

It is long past time for the Canadian government to legalise marijuana. Not only that, but it is also time for the drinking age to be lowered to the age of majority and for all hard drugs and narcotics to be legalised. Essentially, all chemical products of this nature should be made available to all Canadians of voting age according to the same distribution policies which are in effect for alcohol as sold to legal aged consumers. It is ironic that, in a political climate which constantly cries out for the removal of government's hand from the people, the willingness to accept government restrictions on this issue remains as strong or stronger than ever.

The only chemical substance which the government has managed to effectively govern the distribution of, to any extent, is alcohol. Back in the 1920s Canada and the United States tried the experiment of prohibition. It proved to be a dismal failure, with countless bootleggers and rum runners providing alcohol to Canada and the US without any thought of government taxes. When prohibition was lifted, the legal sale of alcohol was placed under the control of the provincial governments, and ever since then the taxes added to alcohol have served as a major source of revenue.

The taxes added to tobacco are another important source of revenue to Canada's provincial governments. However, the smuggling of tobacco has reached proportions equal to that of the smuggling of alcohol during prohibition in terms of both the volume and the danger. If tobacco were to be sold exclusively in government stores or in licensed establishments (akin to the licensed establishments for alcohol), it is very likely that the amount of smuggling would go down accordingly. The way tobacco is sold at present, with every single corner store offering them for sale, represents a nightmare for regulation. If the number of outlets for the sale of tobacco were greatly reduced and the control of these outlets put into the government's hands, then it would become far easier to find some method of easily and quickly identifying smuggled tobacco.

As contentious as the above policy might be for Canada's smokers, any pro-

posal for the legislation of all drugs across the board is even more contentious so far as mainstream Canada is concerned. Still, the economic rationale for this proposal remains valid. In fact, since virtually all sales of marijuana and hard drugs within Canada is illegal, it stands to reason that Canada gains virtually no revenue from these sales. However, if a policy for these products identical to the one suggested above for tobacco and the one actually in place for alcohol was to be established, then the smuggling of these products would soon cease to be significant and Canada would have acquired an entirely new large source of revenue.

The naysayers to a policy of this kind often argue that the legislation of drugs would plunge Canada into a moral sewer. There is a haunting image of Canada as a nation of heroin addicts which lends itself towards the acceptance of such an argument. However, just as there is no evidence that prohibition ever succeeded in getting Canadians to alter their drinking habits, there is no evidence that making heroin legal would lead to an increase in the number of heroin users in Canada. The public could still be educated the potential dangers of drugs. In fact, this education would probably be more effective than it is today, since it could be located at the very spots where these products are being sold. The proof of the susceptibility of chemical users to education can be found in the drop in the consumption of tobacco since its dangers to health become common knowledge. Canadians have not continued to smoke to nearly the same extent as they did before this discovery, despite the fact that smoking has always remained legal.

Ultimately, as strong as the economic reasons for the legislation of drugs may be, the simple right of Canadians to freedom of choice is far stronger. Even should the moral alarmists prove to be correct a policy such as this would be a moral cesspool. This should not change the right of Canadians to choose the cesspool of their desires. Every Canadian should find him/herself outraged by the fact that Canada's government has decided for him/her what chemicals are suitable for his/her consumption. By what rights does the government make

Metanoia by John Walk

"I Thirst"

State sanctioned executions practised in Roman antiquity involved more than eliminating someone who had run afoul of the law. Death sentences were, in effect, statement; grim reminders for anyone who contemplated defying civil authority. Hours of severe beatings typically preceded death by crucifixion.

With crucifixion, death was anything but instant. It eventually came through physical shock or respiratory asphyxiation. Muscles used in breathing would slowly begin to collapse through increased fatigue. Life slowly drained from the hapless victim.

The Gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus hung on the cross some six hours. Other sources indicate that some have hung on crosses for as long as three days before succumbing. To add further insult to such death, some victims were left on the cross to rot, to serve as carrion for scavenging birds. Not much regard here for human dignity.

Jesus was offered some wine before he was nailed to the cross. This was common practice, perhaps a token gesture of sympathy for the brutality a victim was about to endure. This wine was mixed with gall or myrrh, a mildly poisonous herb. The mixture would produce a bitter drink, but one frequently used as a drug to kill or deaden pain. Jesus, however, refused to drink it. Presumably he wanted to be fully conscious while on the cross, to fully experience rather than escape the pain of crucifixion.

As we reflect on the good Friday events from our 20th C. perspective, we cannot gloss over the horrendous death Jesus endured. The gospels do not go to great lengths describing the gory details. Yet, we cannot merely claim a divine Jesus obli-

gion to the excruciating pain of crucifixion. That kind of theologising denies the fullness of the incarnation; Jesus as fully human as he is divine, one as capable as you and I of suffering physical, emotional or spiritual anguish and pain.

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As the end of his life was rapidly approaching, Jesus uttered a cry, or more accurately a murmur, of thirst (John 19:28-29). Why did Jesus utter these words? The text mentions, in parentheses, that it was to fulfil the Scriptures, though John does not state which. Nonetheless, we are quickly directed to Psalm 69:21: "They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

The gospel writers, John included, frequently made a point of grounding Jesus' words and deeds in the Hebrew Scriptures. They sought to give indication that Jesus was really the predicted Messiah. But it doubtful that John is here merely engaging in some theological proof-texting.

So we are again drawn to the words "I thirst". The text mentions that "a bowl full of vinegar (or sour wine as some translations put it) stood there." This latter drink was not the earlier mentioned wine mixed with gall or myrrh. Rather, this sour wine was a drink quite popular among the poor, and used also by Roman soldiers when in camp. In essence, it was most likely cheap wine. Its proximity suggests it helped the soldiers get through a tedious day or night. Being stationed in and about Jerusalem, among a submissive though rebellious people, was never a delightful assignment for any Roman soldier. Did the soldiers suddenly find some compassion for a dying man? Not according to Luke, who says they continued to mock Jesus.

Again we are drawn to the words "I thirst". It is well known that the human body can do without food for lengthy peri-

ods. We are familiar with modern day hunger strikes, some lasting two or three weeks. But the body cannot do without fluids. It has been said that the most intense agony of the body is that of thirst. To feel one's tongue thicken and one's throat parched for lack of water, especially in the midday heat of the Mediterranean sun, is itself tortuous. "I thirst" is therefore the agonising murmur of a dehydrated human person, a murmur of sheer physical need.

That agony is not, however, only of a man. It is also that of God. Jesus was God incarnate. What we encounter here, in Jesus hanging on the cross, is also God. But it is not God the uncaring deity, some heroic superhuman, some disembodied spirit who feels no human pain. The God enfleshed here is a poor, pathetic, dying man who pleads for a little water to moisten cracked and burning lips.

It is impossible to go through a Good Friday remembrance of reflection and say that God is oblivious to human suffering; that God is unconcerned with human pain, or that God is too big to be bothered with our individual or collective human need. The God of the Gospels is not a deistic God, a remote and disinterested Being who wound up the cosmic clock at the beginning of the time and made a hastened retreat.

In the suffering, parched man on the cross, we encounter a God who knew and fully experienced all the grim realities and suffering of human life. It is that kind of God who, anything but aloof, provides for us a way through our lives. In Jesus Christ, we are presented with a God who is not too big to care, not too far away to notice. Only a God who honestly knows our needs can fully meet our needs.

Today as we reflect on a dying man murmuring thirst, perhaps we are also reminded of our own thirst. Perhaps our hearts, as well as our lips, become hot, dry and parched as we experience a thirst for certainty and assurance, for meaning and significance, for peace and contentment in our lives. At the cross we are not offered any easy answers, any hocus pocus solutions, any rags to riches schemes. What we are offered, however, is knowledge and hope. Through the death, and resurrection, of Jesus, we have seen One who intimately knows our humanity, and One who has opened the way to the waters of healing.

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