the brunswickan

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Opinion

New Beginnings

January, 1988. The first month of yet another new year. That first page of the bright new calendar, with its refreshing wintry scene, gives us the feeling of a new beginning. Everyone likes, and needs, new beginnings, large or small. New beginnings mean new chances: new semester, new challenges, new relationships, new job possibilities. These are real, and they are important.

One might have the feeling, however, that the sense of a new beginning is, to a large extent, merely psychological. When the final remnants of the past festive season have been shoved out the door, are we not again faced with the same concerns of who we are and what we are doing?

Life all too quickly begins to take its normal course. The stark reality of day-to-day existences does not cease to stare us in the face. Those New Year's resolutions, concocted with new found fervour and diligence, quickly prove impossible to keep. Our best intentions fall victim to an all too patterned way of life. It becomes difficult to give up familiar vices we know we would do much better without. Our basic habit remain virtually unchanged. Our personal committments and relationships continue to reflect the amount of energy we put into them.

Does this mean that 1988 will, after all, simply repeat the past? Will it leave us locked into a pattern we have adopted, one to which we have grown accustomed or enslaved? Is the outlook then really pessimistic?

Developments in the recent past certainly leave this impression. The stock market crash continues to uncover the personal and corporate crises of those who over-speculated. Skirmishes in North Africa and South Africa, clashes in the Middle East and the Far East reveal all too clearly that the "Peace on Earth" many sang about is still far from being accomplished. Instant television communication not only brings to our very living rooms the disasters of the world, but also numbs us to their severity. Air, water and noise pollution, waster and over-industrialization, alarming by-products of our "advanced" way of life, continue to exact their toll on our lush green planet.

How do we avoid slipping into a pessimism when we survey the global scene? What do we do in this new year to stave off a "doom and gloom" attitude? Do we look to free trade, with its promises of increased material wealth, to bring a better tomorrow? Do we continue to resort to military force or the courts of law, to enhance our security and protect our way of life, never mind that of the other? Do we further assert our individuality, in hopes of securing our uncompromised, individual rights and choices, as the only way to personal freedom?

To implement this seems only to bring more of the same cancerous growth that is slowly dehumanizing and destroying our world. The corporate, military, economic and individualistic trends continue to dominate. But, their toll on human suffering, misery and bloodshed is heart-rendering.

The festive Christmas season has just passed. Has its meaning, like all the Christmas trimmings, been put into a box for another year? Must we quickly recover from the sentimentality of that event? After all, does it really fit into our fast paced 20th Century existence?

Of course, simple solutions for complex problems gets us nowhere. But neither does the all too common "me first" strategy. There is something in the actions of the 1979 Nobel Peace prize winner which the world can ill afford to ignore much longer. From the horrifying slums of Calcutta, Mother Theresa's message to the world was to trade in our "get what we can" self-centredness for a "give what we can" outlook.

That essentially may mean no more than extending that "good feeling" of the Christmas season to the entire year. Now, to appropriate that on a permanent basis would surely be a new beginning for a lot of things. I wonder what it would do for 1988?

John Valk
Campus Ministry