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OPINIONS

Hidden Costs of Prosperity

—Brian Dijkema—

Brian Lee Crowley's piece in yesterday's *Financial Post* is the most provocative piece I have read in some time. It not only contains one of the most open challenges to Canadian sovereignty I've read, but it is written at a time when Europe—a continent which reflects most closely the policy proposal he offers in the article—is in the midst of a 26-alarm economic and political disaster.

Mr. Crowley proposes a planned disintegration of North American borders in favour of integration of economies. To wit:

The economic energy of North America surges in all directions, and is increasingly unconstrained by considerations of political jurisdiction—unless, of course, jurisdictions forcefully intrude, as in the case of, say, the Keystone XL pipeline or “Buy America.”

There's the rub. Politicians respond only to national voters, and so live in a closed political system. Alas, that closed polity is superimposed on an open economy.

The integration of the North American economy is a good thing. It is usually positive when artificial barriers to trade are removed, so that individuals and companies can trade and produce in a way that best serves themselves or their customers. In fact, Cardus has done a great deal of work on this exact issue through our trade corridors project.

But on the other hand, there is something about this proposal which is sinister and worthy of strong dissent. The proposal assumes that politics—democratic politics—

is an “imposition” to business and that we would be better off to minimize politics in favour of the prosperity which will come as a result of easier trade.

I'm skeptical that politics—the hurly burly accommodation of a diverse set of individual and institutional interests according to a common constitution—is something that should be jettisoned, even for something as desirable as prosperity. “Politicians respond only to national voters,” Crowley writes. Whom else should they be responding to? The answer, Crowley implies, is business interest.

Business—big or small—should absolutely influence Canadian politicians, but surely there are other voices—other interests—that need attention. Hear Janet Aizenstat's understanding of what our parliament is for:

The Canadian Parliament is a national institution, representing all Canadians. Each Member of Parliament speaks for her/his home constituency and also for the country of Canada from coast to coast to coast. The great strength of a parliament is that in law each member must debate national issues with his home constituency in mind, and matters of importance to his constituents with the nation in mind.

Increased trade? Sure, but it better be something that is subject to the approval of responsible government. The Mr. Van Rompuy's of the world can keep what they have—an economy in shambles and the imposition of unelected technocrats on a nation's electorate—on the other side of the pond.

The Anvil on the Cliff Edge

—Peter Stockland—

Immigration Minister Jason Kenney's edict ordering Muslim women to remove their veils while taking Canada's citizenship oath seems eminently reasonable.

The problem is, the response from Muslim women outraged by the edict seems just as reasonable.

Kenney went public Monday with an order that during the few minutes at ceremonies where new Canadians become citizens of Canada, veils are verboten (as is, presumably, any facial covering.) His rationale was practical and political. Since those assembled are taking an oath, the minister said, their faces must be visible to the whole court and especially to the citizenship judge.

More, he said, the moment of swearing an oath to Canada requires a visible affirmation of the value of equality among all Canadians. In his eyes, and many Canadians would see it similarly, a veiled female face attests to the inequality of the woman who must live her life unseen by her fellow citizens.

Who could argue with that? Errrr . . . Islamic women's groups in Winnipeg, Calgary, and no doubt elsewhere across the country, that's who.

Rather than thanking Kenney for his self-proclaimed liberation of their phizogs, the women demanded to know just who he thought he was interfering with their religious freedom, deciding for them what their faith requires of them and (here's where any husband would have seen the warning light flashing) telling them what to wear to the party.

This is one of those classic cases where the right lies equally with both sides in a balance so delicate it can only be compared to the anvil resting on the very lip of the cliff high above the desert floor where Wile E. Coyote is standing.

Personally, I don't know why anyone—man, woman, or child—would want to wear a veil. Yes, it's true we live in a winter country where people walk into banks in January wearing balaclavas and no one even notices, much less hits the floor. We also live in a country where grown men earn millions of dollars wearing opaque, unbreakable masks to stop their faces being shattered by pucks hitting them at a hundred miles an hour.

Generally, though, we are a barefaced bunch, we Canadians. What perplexes me about women wearing veils in public is the paradox of their modesty actually drawing extra attention. When all you can see of someone on the street is her eyes, well, you notice.

But if I don't understand the wearing of veils, I also don't understand why everyone doesn't love golf, the Montreal Canadians, mustard on popcorn, the Pope, and the Apple iPad as much as I do. Nor do I understand how anyone could cheer for the Toronto Maple Leafs, buy Microsoft products, or be “spiritual but not religious.”

It's the old 101 flavours of ice cream view of the world. What moves me from perplexity to nervousness is when the State starts arbitrarily limiting those flavours to suit the tastes even of as capital a fellow, and as exemplary a minister of the Crown, as Jason Kenney.

The State does have the prerogative to forbid the sale of, oh, say, Baby Kitten ice cream—if it's actually made with baby kittens. Canadians don't eat baby kittens. We just don't. End of discussion.

But if the State has a limited power to limit what we eat, does it have equal wherewithal to tell us what to wear? The vast majority of Canadians would say absolutely not. We will wear that goofy looking green and red toque in January if we please.

So, if someone wearing a veil seems to us, for personal, practical, or political reasons to be silly, well, that's the kind of egocentrism mirrors were made to correct.

Kenney, of course, argues that he's not banning veils, only requiring them to be removed for a few moments in the specific setting where the State confers the ultimate gift of citizenship on new Canadians. Again, it seems reasonable unless we accept that the veil is necessary garb of modesty for those who wear it. If I were asked to swear an oath of loyalty in my birthday suit, even by Jason Kenney and even for only a few minutes, I would tell the good minister to put his citizenship where the sun doesn't shine.

And if I can stretch my imagination enough to think how I would respond were I a veil-wearing woman asked to remove my veil to become a citizen, I know that I would

find the request absurd. How can I be free to wear a veil the instant after I have become a full citizen, but not be allowed to wear a veil at the instant of becoming a citizen? It makes no sense. Either I am free or I am not. Either we accept veils or we do not.

That is really the anvil balanced on the lip of the cliff. For three generations, we Canadians have gloried in undermining our traditions, our identity, our sense of what we do and do not do. Now we find an existential need to draw the line between who we are and who we are not.

With good reason, the immigration minister is one of those trying to do just that. Wile E. Coyote, looking up from the desert floor, understands the problem.

Veiled Interference in Freedom of Religion

—Ray Pennings—

For the record, I think Minister Jason Kenney is right in insisting that when taking the oath of citizenship, new Canadians are required to show their faces. He is quoted as saying, “The citizenship oath is a quintessentially public act. It is a public declaration that you are joining the Canadian family and it must be taken freely and openly.”

The issue is controversial, of course, due to the practice of certain Muslim women of wearing a niqab or burka in public. While Minister Kenney's edict sounds reasonable, as Peter Stockland noted in this space yesterday, the response of outrage to the announcement also sounds reasonable. Recognizing that freedom of religion is a greatly attacked freedom these days, I am usually inclined to bend over backwards to protect it, but here—in matters as basic to our citizenship as swearing public oaths, establishing identity, or witnessing at a trial—I think the state has a more reasonable argument, to ensure it functions properly. These essential processes in the state's functioning are part and parcel of the very package of freedoms that allow for the freedom of religion, which in my mind does allow for the wearing of religious head coverings on other occasions.

My greater concern, however, comes from the Minister's defence during his announcement indicating since Muslim women do not wear the burka during their participation in the Haj (a religious pilgrimage), that therefore it was not essential for them to do so during citizenship ceremonies. On that issue, I find myself agreeing with Mohammad Fadel, whom the *Globe and Mail* cited as an expert in Islam and law at the University of Toronto. Fadel said this is irrelevant, noting that religious rituals have their own rules that are different than those that might apply to citizenship ceremonies.

The extent to which wearing the veil is a *bona fide* religious requirement or simply a cultural practice is one on which I am not qualified to comment. But neither is the state qualified. Wearing a turban, a head covering, or other items is part of various religious traditions. It is not for the state to determine whether the wearing of these is legitimate or not. In fact, given the value we place on religious freedom, the state should go out of its way to accommodate those religious practices where possible.

Yet, the right of freedom of religion is not an absolute right. The state has a duty to protect itself against practices claimed in the name of religion which violate our basic principles. Lines must be drawn. In the process of acquiring citizenship, the state has every right to determine that each person seeking those rights is doing so with integrity.

This is, at root, a process question. The democratic process of conferring citizenship (unlike, for example, the democratic process for conferring a driver's license) requires a visible face for a solemn oath. So, in this instance, and as part of the whole package of citizenship's rights and responsibilities, the right to freedom of religion is subjugated here to the state's democratic process.

This would have been defense enough for Minister Kenney's new rule. There was no need, and indeed no jurisdiction, for a Minister of the Crown to stray into adjudicating *bona fide* religious requirements.

The Disgrace of Grace

—Kyle Bennett—

When asked what he thought about current philosophy curricula in higher education, the late Richard Rorty once said he would much rather have his students learn a new language than take symbolic logic.

That has always struck a chord with me. I dropped out of symbolic logic after only the second class.

I've thought a lot about language this year. I heard Marilyn McIntyre speak at the Kuyper Conference in April, and read her marvelous little gem, *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies* (a must read for anyone who considers him or herself a human being). Then, over the summer I read a little pamphlet by Calvin Seerveld. My heart skipped when I came across the brisk remark: learning a language is an “act of grace.”

I am still digesting the meaning of that.

As Christmas approaches, I am reminded that Jesus moved into the neighbourhood, as Eugene Peterson so eloquently put it. But I am also reminded that he learned a language—in fact, he didn't just learn a language, he learned how to use it. He knew how to speak to the Samaritan woman as well as the disciples. One needed water, the other food. Both were spoken to and both understood.

In Philippians 2:7 Paul gives us the impression that Jesus had to suffer more than the cross. In many ways, his very existence was a sacrifice. The incarnation was a taking up of something, but it was also a laying down of something else. In Christian theology this is referred to as *kenosis*: Jesus laid down particular divine characteristics in order to take up human ones. One thing Jesus had to take up was learning a language (or languages, if we're being precise).

It's an odd thought, isn't it? The God of the universe took time to learn and speak a language.

Learning a language involves a certain level of disgrace. Patience, honesty, wisdom, indeed. But vulnerability and humility, absolutely. Learning a language requires sensitivity to and longing for what is beyond oneself. Before one can learn a language, and know how to use it, one must give oneself to it. And this giving can be disgraceful.

As the New Year approaches my mind is flooded with aspirations. Resolutions. Vacations. Jobs. Children. A President. The Pittsburgh Pirates. But, how many of these aspirations are for others? How many of these involve humility and care? How many of these involve sensitivity to and longing for what is beyond me? What I am going to lay down this year for the benefit of others? What am I going to take up instead? To whom and for whom am I willing to be disgraced for an “act of grace?”

Good question.

The Joyful One

—Alissa Wilkinson—

I discovered, as I was making sure I had my facts straight about the third Sunday of Advent, that it's known as the “joyful Sunday.” Not only that: tradition dictates that the candle itself is pink, in contrast to the others, which are usually purple. (Now you know!)

What's up with that? Why a pink candle? Here's the beautiful reason. The Advent season is a season of waiting and penitence—a bit like a mini-Lent. And so, three of the four candles are purple, which represents that penitential tone of the seasons.

Penitence is hard. It is hard to be reminded that we are fallible, imperfect, inclined to do evil. It's even harder to adopt the attitude of humility and brokenness about those fallen states we are in. It's difficult to be told that we are doing the right things for the wrong reasons, or to realize how selfishly we conduct our lives, or to see how limited we are in our own abilities. Being humbled is rough.

I don't know about you, but I feel like this has been a year of humbling for pretty much everyone. We have tricky economies to deal with. We have widespread unrest. We see our human inability to fix all the bad stuff. We work as hard as we can, but things never turn out as well as we want them to. And next year doesn't look a whole lot more promising.

Advent is a time in which we must make ourselves open to being humbled, to feeling our own limits. Three purple candles: three Sundays, one still to come, of serious humbling, of waiting.

But this is the interesting thing: God knows this is difficult. (Why? Well, he was here, too, and felt the limits of human existence and frailty.) He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. And so, we celebrate the third Sunday—the “joyful” Sunday—with a pink, celebratory candle. It's a bit like a Sabbath celebration in the middle of the penitential season. Many traditions encourage adherents to break their fasts on the Sabbath, even in the great penitential season (like Lent). I think of this as God's way of reminding us that we are not just slogging through a miserable existence because he asks us to. He wishes us to find joy here, now, as a taste of what we can expect—as a reminder of what we're waiting for.

This is the beauty of the rose candle. It is a beauty that reminds us that even when we are to be repenting, even when we must feel the limitations of our humanity, there is something bigger under us, holding us up, holding all things together. I've come to believe that we can only experience joy—we can only smile, and celebrate—when we know that the good things are a gift from the one who sees the bad and still tells us, rest, delight, be joyful.