

A Gift for Canada

—Ray Pennings—

On July 1, 2017, Canada will celebrate its 150th birthday. Yesterday, thirty prominent Calgarians gathered to discuss what a suitable gift for the occasion might look like.

It's not that these Calgarians had nothing else to do, given that the group included executives representing major oil, media and investment companies. The CEO of the Calgary Stampede was there as was the publisher of the *Calgary Herald*. The Mayor and Chamber of Commerce President, a university of Calgary representative and CEO of the community foundation—they all cleared their schedule to answer the invitation issued by former Epcor Center CEO and prominent Calgarian Colin Jackson who, with a few other civic leaders, launched Imagination 150. And, the Governor General, His Excellency David Johnston was in town and had agreed to be the honorary patron of this civic movement. He presided over a discussion preparing for a party that is still 5 years and 138 days away.

The premise for the discussion was simple but inspiring. There's going to be a party in 2017, whether we do something or not. But the group was challenging each other to bring a gift to the party that would leave a legacy. The bulk of our time together was spent in an open brainstorming exercise, and the reflective comments of these community leaders were insightful. There were no rose-coloured glasses. The group was conscious that global economic and social measures were not all trending positive. There was a widespread recognition that many Canadians, and especially the aboriginal community, would not view Canada's 150th as a particular reasoning to celebrate. The resource-driven prosperity enjoyed by Albertans was a source of resentment for some others in the country, and the demographic challenges were only likely to sow further seeds of intergenerational discord.

Still, the "can-do" attitude that characterizes entrepreneurial Calgary pervaded. An honest evaluation of challenges and a wide range of ideas regarding a birthday gift for the country were tabled:

- ending homelessness;
- building on the strengths and broadening the reach of our education system;

- finding a way to overcome the challenges in the aboriginal community;
- expanding the experiences of Canadian, especially young people, by imagining ways to encourage people to travel the country and meet their fellow-citizens across the land;
- or maybe focusing closer to home, facilitating a national day of service in which we all volunteer for a local community organization on a common day and serve our neighbours in that way;
- encouraging the 8% of Canadians who live outside of the country to come home for a visit in 2017;
- recognizing that there is already an initiative to connect the trails from coast to coast by 2017, perhaps match this investment in physical infrastructure by an investment in social infrastructure?

The two hours flew by quickly, and the point was not to come to any concrete conclusions at the meeting but rather to go from here inspired and both working together and in our own networks and organizations, catalyzing a national conversation about what we might give to Canada for her 150th birthday.

His Excellency the Governor General adjourned the meeting referencing a quotation from George Bernard Shaw, "Some men see things as they are and say why—I dream things that never were and say why not."

It was a privilege to be invited to participate in this conversation. As I left the meeting, my mind was spinning with the possibilities that were explored. I must confess that starting to plan a party and thinking about a gift more than five years in advance is something I had never done before, but as someone reminded us in the conversation, perhaps the greatest gift we can bring to the party are not noble statements of what we intend to do, but rather a set of accomplishments of what we have done. Two hours of conversation hardly counts as an accomplishment, but I suspect I am not the only participant who left invigorated and enthusiastic to translate some of the ideas into concrete actions so that Canada's sesquicentennial not only reminds us of our history and celebrates our present, but also is a nation-building exercise in its own right.

Ignoring a Key Reason for the Decline of Unions

—Brian Dijkema—

Canada's unions are in trouble, but what is to be done?

A discussion paper released by the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) and the Communications Energy and Paper Workers (CEP) suggests that unions are "fac[ing] an enormous and historic moment of truth." While Canadian unions are known for their overuse of hyperbole, the list of problems they themselves provide suggests the problem is genuine. But what you don't see in the list of obstacles is, arguably, the deepest, most serious problem in Canadian unions today: the corrosion wrought by secularism.

If you listen to Lew Daly, a thoughtful writer and thinker with solid left-wing bona fides, secularism is at least one of, and perhaps the primary source of trade union

decline. Speaking to the American union movement (a community in worse shape than Canada's), Daly suggests that while the technical problems noted by unions such as CAW and CEP are important and require technical solutions including, perhaps, the merger that CAW and CEP are proposing,

the deficits in these areas reflect deeper problems in our legal and political culture, likely with no immediate remedies at hand. And this brings us back, ultimately, to the question of religion . . . [W]idespread indifference and even hostility toward religion among progressives and Democrats in recent years has helped to reinforce certain trends in our political and legal culture that are equally hostile to the goals of organized labor and, indeed, to the very idea of organized labor . . .

The Great Issue of Our Day

—Michael Van Pelt—

Presented (3:00 pm EST) February 14, 2012, to the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, Pre-Budget Consultations.

The great issue of our day is whether we can order our world with flourishing institutions apart from government and markets. This is the key question behind the very taxing challenge facing the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance today.

The future of charitable giving, and the vibrancy of the charitable sector, will be influenced much more by social and cultural conditions than by the limited tools available to government. Tax incentives comprise only one such tool, but they constitute a powerful tool. We must use them in the very best way we can.

As tax tools go, Canada's charitable tax credit is one of the most successful ever implemented. It is a two billion dollar investment that may be our most effective lever available to animate more than 80,000 charities across Canada.

The charitable tax credit represents less than one percent of the whole federal budget. Yet is treated like the oil of Elijah that, as the Old Testament tells us, never ran out.

Indeed in 2008, based on the Canadian trend of increased population and higher incomes, the federal government estimated a charitable tax expenditure for 2010 of slightly less than three billion dollars. Clearly, it expected more Canadians to give more—to help replenish the oil of Elijah if I can put it that way.

They didn't.

On the contrary, the charitable tax credit expenditure for 2011 actually went down compared to 2005. Why? Simple arithmetic. More Canadians were giving less, or not at all.

We can all see the arithmetic on the wall: unless Canadians have a greater motivation to give, something in the charitable sector itself is going to give. It simply cannot continue doing more with less indefinitely, particularly when "less" really means "less" than the government itself forecast.

If I might digress briefly, I have the privilege of sitting on Minister Diane Finley's advisory council for social partnerships. We are advising the Minister on social innovation and social enterprise initiatives to leverage the work of government and others. Let me assure you, committee members, that if we discovered a three billion dollar idea able to become a powerful fuel cell for every charity across the country, we would be leaping for joy right over to Min-

Daly's argument is two-fold. First, that trade unions and religious institutions used to find common ground in the "struggle for rights of association and a legitimate, protected place in public law." Think, for instance, of the struggles faced by both the church and trade unions in Nazi Germany. Martin Niemöller, a Lutheran pastor who opposed Nazi Germany, even went so far as to include trade unionists in his famous "First they came . . ." statement. Think also of Lech Walesa, Solidarity and the Catholic Church in Poland or, closer to home, of the struggle shared by trade unionists and the church in Cuba today. The failure of the union movement to defend the institutional rights of religious institutions undermines the same ground that supports a robust union movement.

Second, and this is where he's



Michael Van Pelt at the Standing Committee on Finance on Feb. 14, 2012.

ister Flaherty's shop. We would have every confidence it would be right up there in the highlights of our upcoming budget.

What I am really talking about is a strategy to shore up the great work of Canada's civic core—a small but amazing part of our society. I am asking this committee to tell participants in the civic core that government is behind them; that it will help them to do even more. I am asking you to simply increase the charitable tax credit.

In the meantime, the deep social and cultural questions that really motivate our care and our love for our neighbours must become the next great debate in our country. If this does not happen, no tax incentive will help.

By advising you that you should support increasing the charitable tax credit, I am telling you something many others have also spoken up to support. There are many great ideas out there to complement Cardus' strategy. There are also some that, unfortunately, are not well enough developed to measure up just yet.

Maybe it is time to send an encouraging message to the middle class that their charitable works are equally worthy.

Cardus has done extensive research on the nature of generosity, on the health of the civic core, and on the importance of institutions mediating between government and the market. It is our considered opinion increasing the charitable tax credit is the best idea of the other ideas on the table.

It is best because it is simple. It is best because of its message of support to the women and men and who give their money, time and hearts out of love for their neighbours.

Thank you for your attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Fault Lines in Vatican Foreign Policy

—Robert Joustra—

The Vatican is caught between the rock of the rich and the hard place of the poor, and between the work of theology and political advocacy. Its calls for global financial reform are taking on starker, more particular tones, to the unease and dissatisfaction of many, and the growing relief of more. The Vatican's perspective on the global economy is, in short, exposing the deep fault lines in both the financial infrastructure of the world, and the theological practice of the Church.

Vatican foreign policy has a unique position in the global economy: unlike other developed powers it has less of a stake in the maintenance of the financial architecture that led to crisis and disparity, and an increasing interest in reformation and renovation of the developing world. Catholics aren't as rich anymore, or not as rich as they used to be. The Vatican that used to revolve around power and privilege of the bourgeois Middle Ages has long since atrophied. The material rich, secular global north is bleeding its spiritual authority, as the fulcrum of religious power shifts to the losers of this centuries' financial order. Writes Samuel Gregg in *Foreign Affairs*:

While the Church's senior leadership is disproportionately European in composition, the Catholic Church's epicenter in raw numbers has shifted to the developing world. According to statistics contained in the Vatican's 2011 *Annuario Pontificio*, European Catholics now account for just 24 percent of the world's 1.18 billion Catholics. In 1948, the equivalent was about 49 percent. Today, almost 50 percent of all Catholics live in the Americas, and most of them south of the Rio Grande. Demographically, the European Church has stagnated for three decades. But its expansion in Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the same time period has been staggering. Between 2005 and 2009 alone, the number of African Catholics grew from 135 million to approximately 158 million.

But that shift is not homogenous or straight forward. The response from conservative and libertarian Catholics has been fierce as a battle for Vatican foreign policy is waged between the faithful over the moral architecture of the global economy. Gregg asks, for instance, what stance the Church should adopt toward agricultural subsidies? Many Europeans see subsidies as an essential protection of European food sovereignty. Africans and Latin Americans see EU subsidies as unfair weights and measures, measures designed to blunt the competition of developing countries.

The architecture of global finance is probably the single greatest issue facing the Catholic Church today. Yes, life issues, including euthanasia and abortion. Yes, abuse scandals and other legacies of past mistakes. But those issues are intellectually resolved: the Church knows what it thinks, its' membership is not divided, intellectually or morally on those questions. At least not officially.

On the one hand, the Church advocates a world authority that manages globalization in the interests of economic justice. Yet it is equally committed to open markets, also as a matter of economic justice. Reconciling these two commitments will be this century's major test for Catholic social doctrine. This debate—its resolution, its prayers, and liturgies—will define today's Catholic Church and its prophetic response to the powers of the age. This Vatican, I think, knows that.