

Christian Labour as Competitive Advantage

—Robert Joustra—

There are a lot of good reasons to be a Christian labour union, none of which are tied to being competitive or being efficient. But I think two overlapping trends in the next decade(s) will actually turn what has been a liability—a religious designation—into a competitive advantage: the global resurgence of religion and the dawning post-American world.

Think about religion: God is back, say the pundits, and there is more than enough evidence to prove it. But three questions immediately follow: 1) how? 2) where?, and 3) is it a good thing?

To the first, the return of God in the latter half of the twentieth century has not only been characterized by a return in spirituality or piety. It is specifically the return of activist religion, political and social religion that is beginning to take root in the global south. Which answers *where*, but also forecasts a trend, since birth rates are plummeting concomitant with a slower economic growth in the global north, by comparison.

Whether it's a good thing is a thorny question. The next Christendom is a rosy picture if your chief concern is religious belief, but it paints a complicated one if you're interested in how religion can and should be part of the public square. The global south, after all, is not renowned for its strong and cosmopolitan democracies. The old maxim of religion that is "a mile wide, but an inch deep" comes into play. How to enlist religious sensibility into productive, public conversation is a very different question from whether, empirically speaking, more people are believing in God than not.

Even the terms of the debate serve to obscure more than enlighten. Secularity has at least nine common definitions (at my last count), and religion is more normative than descriptive. To speak of religion at all, the great invention of the late medieval period, is to implicitly speak of its dual sibling, the secular. If only when we talked about religion, says Thomas Farr, we had some disagreement. Alas, the best we usually get is confusion.

As for the post-American world, it is not so much a prophecy of American collapse, as the rapid, outpacing growth of the rest, such as the now famous MIST (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey) and the BRIC's (Brazil, Russia, India, China).

The tallest building in the world is now in Taipei, soon to be overtaken by one being built in Dubai. The world's richest man is Mexican, and its largest publicly traded corporation is Chinese. The world's biggest plane is built in Russia and Ukraine, its leading refinery is under construction in India and its largest factories are all in China.

In short, global economic productivity is shifting to the cultures and societies where we see more and more public and activist religion. The opportunity for organizations with a thick, pluralist perspective on politics, with tangible and practical enlistments of religion in the service of the common good, has never been greater.

These are long-term trends. No one will make profit off them tomorrow in the global north. But as capacity shifts, and newcomers fill demographic gaps, it may be that religious literacy, and clear, respectful conversation on ultimate belief will be the hot market skill of tomorrow.

Contesting the Defence of Liberal Hegemony

—Brian Dijkema—

Dr. John Stackhouse thinks Catholics and Protestants are overreacting in their response to the Supreme Court's decision about religious education in Quebec.

Here's a snippet of the Supreme Court's ruling on parental requests to remove their children from state-mandated religious education, which prompted the discussion:

the suggestion that exposing children to a *variety of religious facts* in itself infringes their religious freedom or that of their parents amounts to a rejection of the multicultural reality of Canadian society and ignores the Quebec government's obligations with regard to public education. (emphasis mine)

Stackhouse criticizes the EFC and Cardus for "arguing quite wrongly" about the case. Putting aside the fact that Cardus has, to date, not published anything official on this case, I want to query John on two matters in his argument which I think will help the discussion along.

After reviewing the curriculum, John says that it is a *bona fide* effort to educate its citizens about the religious realities on the ground in Quebec and should be understood as such. Specifically he says,

The curriculum does not say anything one way or another about whether one religion is better than another, whether one particular religion is the best of the bunch, or whether only one religion is valid . . . The state here takes the common-sense approach that there are in fact lots of religions in Quebec and that the state will not privilege one religion over another—not in terms of access to power, nor in terms of pedagogical endorsement. There are various religions in Quebec, and the state's interest lies in acquainting its citizens with the facts of those religions and in helping its citizens cooperate with each other for the common good.

I wonder though, if it is possible

to present—as the courts suggest—"a variety of religious facts" while withholding judgment about "whether one particular religion is the best of the bunch." In a world where some religions consider other persons less human because of their lineage or gender, would we *want* such an approach even if it *was* possible?

In fact, John's second point belies any suggestion that the state will present all religious perspectives equally. He says about parents' positions on gender, race, and science:

You don't like Canadian values on these matters? Feel free to acquaint your kids with your resistance to science or your embrace of racism or sexism, but your kids—our vulnerable fellow citizens—deserve what we have collectively agreed is a proper education so that they can eventually make up their own minds on such matters . . . Canada isn't just about you: it's about us and it's about us caring about each other, including each other's (and not just our own) kids.

The important question that arises out of this train of thinking, of course, is at what point does that "it's about us"—the collective and ethereal notion of Canadian values—trump the "it's about you." The notion of a collective political perspective overriding that of the individual and their children seems logically at odds with a charter of rights that aims at protecting individual freedoms. It seems we have a Stephen Macedo-like defence of the moderate hegemony of liberalism, instead of a neutral presentation of a variety of facts. And this hegemony, it should be noted, is a contested reality, not a settled one.

Now all of this might not necessarily make the broad strokes of John's argument incorrect, but it does point to the internal contradictions of the philosophy of liberalism which dominates our legal thinking in Canada, and it lends some credence to the parental concerns that John too lightly dismisses.

A Child by Any Other Name

—Richelle Wiseman—

How early does a fetus become a baby become a human being? Our politicians may be loath to debate it, but it seems even our hospitals need more work to get their nomenclature straight. Contradictory practices within single hospitals cannot be serving anyone well.

In Calgary's Foothills Hospital, for instance, the "Pregnancy and Infant Loss Program" is described on the website as one which provides information, guidance and "grief support for parents and other family members who have experienced a pregnancy loss (miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, still birth, neonatal death or termination) through individual, couple and group counseling."

The hospital's care for grieving parents is admirable, but its difficulty in finding "the right words" for the discussion is instructive. One page lists options for caring for the remains of a miscarriage under 20 weeks, and the language varies from sentence to sentence. "Collect the *pregnancy remains/tissue*" . . . "private funeral arrangements can be made for any *pregnancy loss*" . . . "you may have your *pregnancy/baby's*

remains cremated individually" . . . "You may wish to honour *your baby* by planting a tree . . ."

Clearly the variance of terminology even in this hospital website reflects a lack of clarity about what to call a child in utero if it dies. There is the term "fetal demise", "missed abortion of 12 weeks or less," "pregnancy remains/tissue", "pregnancy/baby's remains," and finally, it is referred to as a "baby".

The hospital seems to indicate that it is a *baby* if it dies and the mother experiences grief and loss, but a *fetus* when the mother has made a choice to end the pregnancy.

In the same hospital—where such care is extended to families who have lost infants anywhere along the gestational timeline—abortions are performed up to 20 weeks. Between 20-24 weeks, abortions can be performed only if genetic damage is detected, and after 24 weeks only if the fetus has a condition confidently predicted to be lethal during the first 30 days after birth, according to the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons.

The language describing and the treatment of a fetus/embryo/

Private lies and public causes

—Peter Stockland—



Rex Murphy

Rex Murphy makes the point in the first issue of *Convivium* magazine that we should all breathe deep and turn down the rhetorical heat way down.

Murphy, famous for his acerbic commentaries on CBC Radio and TV as well as in the *National Post*, doesn't suggest for a moment that we become a nation of muffle-mouths.

But in the *Convivium* interview that rolls off the press tomorrow (get yours at www.cardus.ca/convivium, cue the flashing lights and sirens), he says it's time we all set ourselves the simple, personal limit of saying only those things we honestly believe.

So, no more comparing advocates of gun control to Hitler. No more comparing anyone alive today to Hitler. Full stop.

No more referring to Prime Minister Harper as Canada's latter-day Richard Nixon, either. Stephen Harper has no more in common with Richard Nixon than Pierre Trudeau did with Chairman Mao. Neither Canadian, history will show, was responsible for the slaughter of millions in Southeast Asia.

No more asserting the false dichotomy that people must favour either State monitoring of the Internet or child pornographers.

No more posturing that Quebecers uniformly share the same progressive values, that those values are ineluctably opposed by Western Canadians, and that it is worth wrecking the country rather than letting the twain meet.

All of the above have been uttered by sound bite-seeking politicians in recent days. All of them meet Rex Murphy's test of being grossly unbelievable even to those from whose mouths they fly forth.

Or as Murphy expresses it in his inimitable style: "Are you so committed to this ludicrous rhetoric that you're unwilling—in the privacy of your own head—to realize that you're being a fool?"

In the privacy of your own head. What a wonderful formulation. What a wonderful place to begin. For surely it is only from that ultimate private place that public truth or falsehood can emerge.

Of course in our thoughts we can misunderstand, misinterpret, misjudge. We can honestly mispeak as a result. The one thing we cannot do is lie to ourselves. We can only fool ourselves into justifying what we know to be a lie. As George Orwell shows in his magnificent essay *Politics and the English Language* (which should, by the way, be re-read annually by anyone who ever ventures opinions in public) this is the start of an effect becoming a cause.

"A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks," Orwell writes. "It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts."

So, too, the private justification of public lies produces not only the articulation of absurd political untruths but also the inability over time to recognize the corruption of that interior place where falsehood must first be challenged.

The consequences for our actions are obvious. Yet in instances such as the current so-called robo-calling scandal, where the very foundations of democracy were violated by automated phone calls designed to confuse voters on Election Day, we blame 1) individual culprits and 2) the technology that made their actions possible.

Blameworthy both may be. But that's not where the violation starts. Where it begins and ends is in the commitment to ludicrous, lying private justifications that we are unwilling to admit makes us all look like fools.

child seems to be an entirely subjective matter, dependent upon the attitude of the mother and family and the ensuing hospital procedures and assistance.

Surely this points to an obvious contradiction when it comes to defining a human being. In the absence of a legal definition, which takes into account all of medical science's recent discoveries about the development, experience of pain, and abilities of the fetus in utero, we are currently practicing a highly subjective approach in deference to the preservation of everyone's rights . . . but at what cost?

Last month, when Stephen Woodworth, a Conservative M.P. from Kitchener, Ont. requested that Parliament form a committee to study Canada's 400-year-old definition of a human being, he prompted an outcry from opposition members who called it an attempt to revive the abortion debate.

Similar opposition to fetal rights occurred in 2007, when Conservative M.P. Ken Epp introduced Bill C-484, the "Unborn Victims of Crime Act." The law would have made it a separate crime to harm or

kill a fetus during an act of violence towards a pregnant woman. The Bill died when the September 2008 election was called.

Under current Canadian law, Criminal Code Section 223(1) reads: "A child becomes a human being within the meaning of this Act when it has completely proceeded, in a living state, from the body of its mother, whether or not it has breathed, it has an independent circulation or the navel string is severed."

In actual fact, our knowledge of the scientific and biological processes from conception to birth has progressed dramatically since the current definition was penned. Even with sensitive and hard-fought rights at stake, is it not incumbent on us all to ensure a scientifically-based, morally coherent approach to defining what a human being truly is?

For in what other sphere of life would we be so reticent to update definitions based on new discoveries?