

# The Cardus Daily

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## Melt, Baby, Melt

—Peter Stockland—

Standing outside the newspaper industry looking in is like watching a plastic bag tossed into a fire pit. It is unable to so much as burst into multi-colored flame. It will just shrink and shrivel until it eventually melts away.

Even people who haven't read, never mind bought, a newspaper for years would agree it's not a pretty sight. Most would also agree that the looming disappearance of substantial local daily newspapers is a sad and serious thing. Simultaneously, dabbling at their tears, they rush to embrace the abundant forms of e-content commonly blamed for rendering print publications irrelevant.

Their contrary behaviour embeds in the hearts and minds of newspaper owners a paradoxical combination of handy excuse and death wish. Nobody wants to read newspapers anymore, the logic goes, so let's cut the heart out of them and make them so bad nobody wants to read them. Wish fulfillment becomes self-fulfilling prophecy.

Such was certainly the line of thought evident in Postmedia CEO Paul Godfrey's memo to employees yesterday that there will be yet another round of layoffs in the chain's newsrooms, and that the *Calgary Herald*, *Edmonton Journal*, and *Ottawa Citizen* will stop producing Sunday editions.

"Along with moving editorial production out of our local newsrooms, each of our operations will implement various programs aimed at reducing print-related infrastructure costs with a focus on investing our energies and resources in digital platforms," Mr. Godfrey's memo said.

Now, I must make clear that I have complete respect for Paul Godfrey. When I worked for him in the heyday of the Sun newspapers, and indirectly when he was on the board of the corporation that owned *The Gazette* in Montreal, he proved to be honourable, honest, and generous as a leader. He also loves newspapers, which is why he returned to Postmedia to try to save it from the catastrophic incompetence of its previous owners.

Yet yesterday's memo outlining the current cuts—or updating the meltdown status if you prefer—was, at best, a sin of omission. It failed to include the truth that, at a time of intense content competition among all media forms, some Postmedia papers are being pressed to rake in almost 45 per cent EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxation, depreciation and amortization).

By contrast, when I was editor-in-chief of *The Gazette*, we were giddy at achieving about 32 per cent EBITDA. That was a decade ago when newspaper circulation and readership were far more robust than currently.

I was told that Conrad Black and David Radler, always caricatured as rapacious capitalist villains, had fantasized about pushing the operating cash flow above 20 per cent when they owned the papers a few years previous.

So, in an era of ferocious fighting for consumer interest, publishers must squeeze more than double the EBITDA out of their papers compared with what could be only dreamed of 15 years ago. And they must do it with a product produced by about half the previous editorial staff. If what I have read is correct, for example, *The Gazette* will have a newsroom of fewer than 100 journalists after the current cuts go through. When I was editor in chief, our full time equivalent staff peaked at about 190. Do the math to see the future.

In fairness, Paul Godfrey may have written yesterday's Black Monday memo but he certainly didn't dictate it. The dictation would have come from the Wall Street moneybags who hold Postmedia's debt. They could not possibly care any less about newspaper audiences across Canada. Nor, arguably, should they.

Their only interest is in earning interest from their debtors. And if newspapers are too poor to fill their bags with the requisite cash, their programmatic response is to fire employees.

Sad and serious, yes. But let's not blame technology for it all. The shriveling, the shrinking, the melting away is the fault of an industry that has stumbled into a pit of its own making.

## The Loudest Exclamation: Humility

—Ray Pennings—

Surely by now we realize scholarship and devotion belong together. In "heads, hearts, and hands" Christianity, this is a given. The only things that remain are proportions, and posture.

Regent College historian Dr. Bruce Hindmarsh opened on Monday the National Forum for Christian Higher Education Canada (CHEC) by speaking to this topic. As befits a historian, Dr. Hindmarsh sketched where we are in our cultural moment. Most recently, we've been through a "battle for the Bible" in the earlier half of the twentieth century, as Christian "fundamentalists" responded to liberal theology. We then engaged a "battle for the mind," as the subsequent generation grew tired of the fundamentalist generation's neglect of intellect in favour of absolute pronouncements of biblical truth. Citing Mark Noll's famous 1994 book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* ("the scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind"), Hindmarsh suggested that the past few decades have come a long way in addressing that scandal. There is much good work that is taking place today of first-rate Christian scholarship—and, I might add, also in public theology.

But as we stand today, making a counter-cultural argument in our über-rational age, this must be the ironic exclamation point: a posture of humility.

Hindmarsh warned that with measured success comes danger. Has our focus on cultivating the Christian mind eclipsed our call to cultivate the Christian *spirit*?

A spirit of intellectual integrity, he argued, should include "a commitment to think about all we know about the world with all that we know about God." Triumphalism, he suggested, is an act of intellectual dishonesty.

The public theology work that *Cardus* engages in can be thought of as translation work. Day to day we use the language of everyday life, researching practical social questions and proposing tangible solutions to public issues. We do so, however, taking serious the reality of God and the wisdom



Dr. Bruce Hindmarsh.  
Photo from regent-college.edu

that he provides. Understanding and applying that wisdom requires diligence and humility. Christian public theology rejects the hubris of worldly wisdom which implies that if God should only be listened to if his input fits into our existing frameworks of solutions. But right theology also rejects our triumphalism—"pretending that we have all the answers," says Hindmarsh, when in fact sometimes the best we can do is struggle together with the important questions.

And so Hindmarsh's concern speaks to those in public life and to those involved in Christian scholarship. In our concern for integral living, for "heads, hearts, and hands" Christianity, we sometimes forget the importance of our knees. The posture of prayer is a humble posture. We don't pray because God needs to know what is on our mind. We pray because God is pleased to listen to our needs as a caring creator. We also pray because the very act of prayer helps shape and change us, reminding us of our dependence and putting us into that posture of humility.

This is not to minimize the importance of first-rate scholarship or rigorous public theology. By all means our work needs to meet the highest standards. But the head and heart and hands in a body cannot be separated from their soul, nor from the knees that can make us the faithful witness we are called to be.

## Two-Way Streets: Where Efficiency Isn't Everything

—Kathryn de Ruijter—

Hamilton, Ontario is a city with an intricate (albeit confusing) network of one-way streets. These multi-lane expressways are very efficient in their purpose: to get people through the city core very quickly. They are not, however, conducive to building a vibrant and healthy city.

As more and more people are moving downtown in cities across North America, more people are questioning how to revitalize downtowns after decades of flight into the suburbs. In Hamilton, a growing number of voices are pointing to the conversion of one-way streets to two-way as an important next step in this process.

One-way streets were a logical solution when they were first converted in 1956. With so many people driving their cars into work from the suburbs and back again, congestion was an issue. The one-way streets moved cars quickly. These successes, however, come at the expense of many other considerations, including local business vitality, pedestrian safety, and livability (Walker, Kulas, and McHugh offer a succinct analysis of these costs). A study of traffic statistics in Hamilton from 1978-1994 concluded a child was 2.5 times more likely to be hit by a car on a one-way street. As a growing number of professionals and families choose to live downtown, more people are speaking up against the loss of these other important aspects of city life.

There are interesting parallels between Hamilton's one-way networks and North American public life and dialogue.

At times our society resembles a one-way street more than a two-way street. Conver-

sation can be quick to bypass certain opinions and ideas, especially when it comes to religion or morality, as we've seen recently, for example, with the Ontario government pushing the "gay-straight alliance" clubs in all schools, while ignoring the Catholic schools concerns and objections. Disregarding opinions that disagree with one's own is an effective way to move conversation in the desired direction, but it doesn't lead to a healthy public square. There needs to be room for two-way discussion and debate in decision-making.

The name *Cardus* comes from the root word *cardo*, an old Latin word referring to the main street in Roman cities. The *cardo* connected the vital parts of city life: the shops, government buildings, temples, and public spaces. *Cardus* seeks to be a *cardo* in Canadian public life: connecting, strengthening, and renewing our social architecture in order to promote vitality and livability for all. We do this through research and publications that promote dialogue and encourage the exchange of ideas that work towards the common good. *Cardus* is always battling, including with ourselves, to keep the road open and the dialogue two-way between institutions, leaders, and citizens.

The one-way street experiment has run its course in Hamilton and in many cities across North America. The cost of these downtown expressways greatly outweighs the benefits. Drivers can move quickly, but the surrounding city suffers for it. In our public life, devaluing and ignoring the voices and opinions of fellow citizens may move conversation in a certain way, but the divisiveness in its wake is damaging to the country as a whole.

## What Kind of Generosity Do We Want?

—Brian Dijkema—

Anyone who has followed the slow decline of charitable giving and voluntarism in Canada knows that Canadians are not as generous as we think we are. The truth is that the about one quarter of Canada's population carries the other three-quarters in terms of overall giving.

*Cardus* is working for a renewed culture of generosity in this country; we've done studies, and we've proposed policies to this effect. For most of us the key marker of a renewed culture of generosity is one where, to cut to the bottom line, the bottom line is bigger.

A culture of generosity is one where more bucks, more hours, and more people are assisting their neighbours in trouble.

Does more giving equal a renewed culture? What if Canadian giving were to increase dramatically while at the same time we see an increase of giving for the sake of status and accolades?

Margrit Tulpaluru gave a paper yesterday at the Congress of Social Sciences in Waterloo which suggests that Canadian giving is going down exactly that route. Her paper, "Philanthropy Chic: The Emergence of Conspicuous Giving," outlines that giving has joined thick-rimmed glasses, coloured jeans, Instagram, and fair-trade coffee as the latest hip trends. Says Tulpalur, "In the rampantly consumerist Western society of the 21st century, conspicuous giving has become the true status marker."

Who cares? If giving to good causes goes up because some people want the titillation of adulation, why should we care? The goal is to increase the quantity and instances of giving and volunteering, is it not?

I think there are three responses to this. The first response is a version of the "spoils of the Egyptians" argument. This response recognizes that motives are always mixed, and if the poor, the needy, and the afflicted can benefit from the cultural hunger for praise, then some good can come from the weakness of others. The second response is personal: Jesus tells us that giving for the sake of praise is something very dangerous indeed. Giving, and one's approach to it, has eternal consequences.

The final response flows from the second. This response recognizes that the personal response is also a public one. A culture of generosity is one which is indeed marked by increased giving and volunteering, but which is also marked by the stability that comes from a group of citizens who give and care not about public adulation:

Researchers tell us the features that distinguish the civic core are not the sort of characteristics that will automatically replenish themselves—but rather are founded in certain habits of the heart that incline them to the common good.

In other words, giving marked by a habit of the heart is much more lasting, and much more likely to accomplish good public ends, than giving marked by fashion.

