



Renewing Canada's Social Architecture

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Delivered October 2008

Introduction

Let me begin on a personal note. I live between the realm of ideas and the frontline of action. I spend just enough time with ideas to be periodically dangerous and just enough time with actions to never cut a perfect mitre in my home renovations. Maybe this explains my fascination with the architect - the person who steals ideas from musicians and philosophers but knows he or she can't be a master carpenter. I love architects. Most days, I am better suited to a marketing meeting than reading Augustine's Confessions. But other days, I would rather pour a concrete floor than read the auditor's report. I was born with too many interests. Finding beauty in art and ideas has me taken – and so does the pleasure of building the back shed. For this, the folks at Cardus have given me two straightforward tasks: first, to seek out the public intellectuals that will together paint the picture of our new social architecture. Second, seek out the resources – money, networks, community, other ideas, and people - that will give movement to our ideas.

Why is this project called Cardus needed at this moment? Here lies my central argument. Civic, social, cultural and economic flourishing requires a new and different arrangement of our social institutions. This can only happen with a different understanding of culture-change and a new openness to public exchange which allows the sharing of our most deeply held convictions.

Surely, these are not only my ideas or my arguments. They are the arguments of the staff and senior fellows at Cardus and they are the ideas of a broader community of thinkers and doers. At Cardus we live in a



tradition - a tradition of Jewish and Christian public intellectuals who have established powerful foundations upon which we build and nuance the ideas of tomorrow.

Social Architecture – A Structural Argument

Let's think about the first argument: that civic, social, cultural and economic flourishing requires a new and different arrangement of social institutions. The last two generations have increasingly built an undifferentiated society. What do I mean by this? Simply put, we naturally default to fewer and fewer institutions to solve the problems of the day. Today our default is toward the government or the markets. The coinage of our contemporary debate is the left or the right - what governments should do and what they shouldn't do. The result of this debate has produced the pan Canadian consensus of the last few decades in Canada.

This conversation has run its course. These deep assumptions about the possibility of governments and the markets are simply unable to tackle the challenges we face.

There are a multitude of examples of this, but let me note two of them. The first is the challenge of demographics and future economic growth. Jonathan Wellum, Chief executive of AIC and also a Cardus Senior Fellow, makes this argument in his most recent lecture on short-termism: the demographic trends of some of our major global economies cannot sustain economic growth into the future. Countries including Japan, Russia and even China do not have the cultural fortitude to reproduce themselves, to create new producers, consumers, GDP creators, or knowledge workers, - all economic terms for our children. The majority of our economic measurements are premised on the assumption of growth. But what really is behind this assumption?



The next big economic question is, problematically, *not an economic question* and I am not sure that we even know how to converse about this as a society.

Let me add a practical example. I recently observed a roundtable consultation with a number of government officials, related social agencies and many seniors. Two conversations struck me with their sadness. The first was the difficult challenge of unethical telemarketers selling to vulnerable seniors. The second was the troubling recognition that the community service vans could not even come close to meeting the needs seniors had to get to the doctor, buy medicine and visit Tim Horton's. The default for this conversation landed on two public policy fronts: one being the consumer protection legislation and the other being increased funding to municipalities and the problems of downloading. The essential problem was never mentioned. Who could have imagined that loneliness and family breakup would create difficult public policy issues such as consumer protection and municipal mobility for seniors?

These are only case study examples of the limits of both the markets and the state. A recent Globe and Mail article poignantly illustrates the broader habits we have cultivated around who the next saviour will be. The headline read, "Market Meltdown: the Buck Starts Here." The article was an interesting book review of the just-published *Chain of Blame*. It stated,

Most of us turning to this book would hope to find a single culprit. But the authors argue, in their book's title, that it is a chain of blame. They give full-fledged portraits, not villainous caricatures. People who meant well. People who didn't mean well. People who sensed something was wrong. People oblivious to the coming storm. All tied together in a chain of profit.



Our blame-game has largely led us to tackle two institutions: the office of the CEO and the government. To be sure, there is much blame to be distributed. Additionally, it will now require much wisdom on the part of our business and government leaders to bring us through this tangled web of international finance, regulated environments and highly complicated relationships. However, our default of blame has ironically overlooked two other major players. The first is the institutional and governance infrastructure of the very companies that have so dramatically come upon this trouble. They are the thousands of directors across this world who approve the paycheques of CEOs and the credit risk policies of their corporations. They are the hundreds of thousands of shareholders who dutifully attend the shareholder meetings and carefully steward their investments. The second gets closer to home. It is you and me and our shared cultural, social and economic assumptions about life. Might our cultural values of consumerism and short-termism have contributed to the situation we are in? Might the social lessons we learn in our families, received from our parents and given to our children, have anything to do with credit trends and stewardship? Have our faith institutions and our educational institutions taught us the basic virtues of thrift, of thinking long-term and of the fundamental principles of loving our neighbour when we are making business transactions?

And let me probe deeper yet: can the principles of the market driving our economic sphere sustain themselves without the key social, cultural and religious values that we hold so deeply?

My point is that this kind of questioning changes the default blame or responsibility. It differentiates the architecture of our economy beyond the market, the individual and the government, to other spheres – social, cultural and spiritual. And this is the very mission of Cardus.



What then of the new social architecture? Canada's new social architecture must come with a commitment to the distribution of authority and responsibility within a re-invigorated civil society and throughout the old and new institutions that form the foundations of that society.

Institutions are not the sum of individual rational choice for reward or for association. They have meaning and purpose and order in their own right. The free association of individuals in a place of worship does not make a church. The grouping of people in a single detached home does not make a family.

Canada's new social architecture is the recovery or discovery that institutions can play a vital role in mediating between government and the individual, between business and labour associations, volunteer associations, cultural institutions, families, faith communities and educational institutions. Unfortunately, many of these spheres of society have deferred their authority and public space to the state, the market, or the individual.

It is relatively easy to speak at the level of principle and broad ideas. What might this new social architecture actually look like in practice? Let me illustrate this new social architecture through the questions we are exploring and cultivating at Cardus, and expressions of the notions we have about the possibility of Canada's new social architecture that we plan to explore.

Idea: We think trade associations will find new life and authority – leveraging a knowledge network economy, cross-fertilizing ideas in a market economy, setting standards to live by. Not long ago, I spent a day consulting with a construction trade association. Even in this rough and tumble frontier, industry ideas of competition are changing dramatically.



The idea of building communities of competitors in the construction industry was a completely foreign idea 10 years ago. Today, not so. The future of institutions like the Chamber of Commerce is bright. It is not that the Chamber needs go back to its job of keeping the integrity of weights and measures as it did a century ago, but rather that this very principle must again come alive in a more complicated and global economy.

Idea: We think families will be a new unit of the economy. Can you recall in the last three decades a Finance Minister of the government of Canada in a federal budget presentation selling the idea of having babies? Welcome to Minister Flaherty's 2008 budget. The young growing family will become the new creative class – creating new and innovative pools of intellectual capital and know-how.

Idea: Labour Groups will get over their ideological fantasies and realize that work is more social than ever– creating economies of scale for training and benefits, building communities in non-traditional employment and devising alternative work arrangements for the provision of social benefits.

Idea: The public school system will be challenged by diverse educational models creating space for alternative educational philosophies, for charter schools, arts schools and faith-based schools. The argument will be a business argument and not just a religious one.

Idea: Is it really churches and other faith institutions that build the richly textured and diverse communities so eloquently described in official plans and city-building documents? How do we create the new urbanism ideal where the rich talk with the poor, the single mom with the local business leader, the academic with the house framer and the grade seven boy with the elderly couple seeking to share in the vitality of life? What institution will be best suited to deliver this dream?



Idea: Will church minivans be the public mobility bus expansion strategy?

Idea: As government capacity creates limits for community services, what will be the increasing effect of philanthropic choices in shaping community?

Will the next philanthropists become the new policy makers?

All of these questions engage the possibilities of civic society and of non-state institutions. Would this kind of civic vitality create cultural flourishing?

Cultural Change – Cultural Flourishing Against Politics First

The second part of my argument is that re-thinking, researching and renewing Canada's social architecture requires a different perspective on cultural change. Peter Menzies, a Cardus Senior Fellow and CRTC Commissioner, gets at this question by contrasting what he calls a “cultural flourishing approach” to a “politics-first” approach. He says, “Politics is rarely capable of guiding culture. More typically it responds to it. Culture, or shared community spirit, cannot be (politically) manufactured.” Politics follows culture, not the reverse. This is a deep irony here in Canada.

Scan the Canadian government ministries and you will see how deeply embedded politics are in much of our civil society. On the culture and arts front, Robert Fulford, would still characterize this investment of money and administration as following the creative spirit rather than leading the various expressions of Canadian culture and art.

If you want to get close to the production of culture – the real frontlines of cultural change that will paint our future reality – you might want to consider the National Art Gallery in addition to Parliament Hill.



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The American evangelical Christian political right failed for this very reason. Its over-optimistic belief in political power and service to change culture is an experiment with troubled results. What sustaining cultural change can now be attributed to the largest political movement in the history of North America? Ironically, it is this very community that has deep in its character the stuff of culture making – namely, strong and vibrant families, active faith institutions increasingly committed to community, a music and arts realm that is able to dream of a new reality, an international passion for relief and education and a culture of donation-giving unrivalled in the world. If these are not the basics of cultural production and culture making, then what is?

Do not mistake me. Political responsibility is deeply important. Our democratic impulse is the spark plug. Protecting a civil society and political engagement is the energy to strengthen that impulse. I hold this as fundamentally true and can prove it with political scars. Cardus is not, however, a primarily political project but is instead committed to the entirety of our social architecture.

Deep Convictions

This leads me directly to the third piece of my thesis tonight; that new arrangements of our social institutions with a different understanding of culture change require new openness to public exchange which allows the sharing of our most deeply held convictions.

Listen to Jeffrey Simpson explain the seat of our deepest convictions. In commentary on the multi-cultural character of Ontario he says,

Multiculturalism is Ontario's creed; integration is Ontario's practice. Politics is supposed to assist that integration and, in fact, it does rather



wonderfully. True, the province has not yet had a visible minority premier or party leader, but that day will come.

When political (or administrative or judicial) decisions are deemed to thwart integration, the public will react against them. In their private spheres of family and religion, or even in their own communities, people can practise their own creeds and exercise their own cultural preferences.

Bring these into the public domain and insist that it be changed, and the reaction will be overwhelmingly negative. (The Globe and Mail, Oct 11, 2007)

Simpson here presents the view that not only must the public square be secular, but only the secular must be brought into it. His argument, at least as presented here, insists that personal views on matters relating to family and religion – the defining structures of cultural belief – do not belong (or more accurately will be rejected as inappropriate) in the public square.

It is true that the cultural flourishing model requires some necessary distinctions between the public and the political (i.e. public is much more than political) and between the public and the private. The mistaken, though popularly-held pan Canadian consensus approach so aptly described by Simpson is that belief is private and therefore publicly inappropriate or irrelevant and that public issues can always be resolved with neutrality and process.

This unwillingness to engage in or even talk “publicly” about our deepest convictions has widespread effects in community groups, churches, foreign aid, immigration, social services, the arts, racial issues, community services and the like. Pieces of the debate are missing. Official plans are made without reference to faith institutions and corporations are hesitant to donate to charities with a religious foundation. Global corporations



understand little about the strengths and weaknesses of religious commitment and passion – a missing piece of their risk management strategies. Superficial political dialogue is plagued by the fear of media contempt. And the list could go on.

Is this what you make of the world today? Cardus does not. Canada's new debate and that of the world will be one of faith and belief. It will be one of a religious character. Tony Blair's discovery as he left the political arena that religion is public is, I imagine, a discovery that many of you have always known to be true.

And this is good. Within our religious traditions are to be found the building blocks of productivity, of exchange, of creating and building good things. These are the makings of great economies and civil society. Surely this kind of public dialogue is no easy task. Pluralistic engagement needs to be affirmed, and the capacity for non-state institutions to make public contributions needs to be celebrated and released.

You and I both know that history stores many shameful examples of the end of dialogue and of our collective failures to dialogue with humility and grace. Yet this is the task to which we are all called.

In conclusion let me go back to where I began. The Cardus project is cultivating civic, economic and cultural flourishing with new and different arrangements of our social institutions. This can only happen with a different understanding of culture-change and a new openness to public exchange which allows the sharing of our deepest held convictions.

For myself, I know what will get me up tomorrow morning (God willing) and set me to work. My place is at Cardus – yours, somewhere else in Canada's beautiful social architecture. May we steward our time and place well.

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