

ETHICAL RURAL GOVERNMENT: HAVE WE GOT IT RIGHT? PASTORAL VERSUS SELF CARE

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In Honour of Bill Reimer
25th CRRF Annual Conference, Thunder Bay
23 October 2013

Main Point

Government and governance are about grouping transactions to make them easier to eliminate or reduce their cost.

The argument put forward here is that ethics is not only one, but a significant determinant of the cost of transacting business, whether of a government, household, business or volunteer association. Unethical conduct actually invents and invokes transaction costs, dampening initiative and burdening decision makers. Ethical practices, on the other hand, liberate human will helping drive both competition and cooperation. Therefore, quite apart from outcomes for morality, ethics is required to keep economic, social and environmental transaction costs, including political costs to a minimum.

Governance in the case of rural government has to go beyond a petitioning relationship with its citizens and the economy. Petitioning is part and parcel of the pastoral ethos linking business, volunteer associations and households, with their municipal government. More formal engagements to discover and pursue common interest in rural vitality would change the ethical game and expand the need to understand ethics.

Pastoral care has a long history in rural municipal government. Pastoral care in its essence is the extension into government of the father's 'meticulous' concern with the total wellbeing of his family. It goes back to the time when over 90% of the population was uneducated and engaged in agrarian pursuits organized around families and clans or tribes.

The extension of the pastoral model to government was advocated by Rousseau in the late 1700s and lies at the core of Machiavelli's style of governance. To this day the model is popular in the minds of electors and elected alike, even as resistance to the inevitable paternalism and categorization and control of individuals grows.

The problem is that the pastoral concept creates the wrong kind of governance transaction costs in the sense that they are opaque and often high, uncertain and unpredictable for investors, business and social organizations. Dealing with the pastoral model of rural government is a pain.

The purpose of rural government therefore has to shift to inciting self-care, away from pastoral care, to address investment and productivity riddles. Rural economies suffer

from the small market syndrome, risk premiums and low export multipliers. Local consumption fed by pastoral care cannot drive revitalization.

Ethics

This story is about how ethics can revitalize rural governance. Governance is how humans create and manage arrangements to manage their day to day lives and the jostling among interests, power and authority. Ethics govern this jostling.

Ethics is how we conduct our relationship with ourselves, not as isolated beings, but in the context of our connectedness to others and to the wider universe of relationships. It helps to unpack the meaning of ethics by referring to four aspects, the substance of moral judgement, the manner in which a person fulfills moral obligations and submits to rules or codes, the self-forming work or reflection a person carries out to approach greater ethical perfection, and fourth the kind of being one aims to be or the 'brand' one wants to carry (Foucault 1983).

A helpful way to think of the connection between ethics and morals is to view a person's ethical conduct as following a personal moral compass. Everyone discovers and settles on a way to conduct their relationships with themselves. Ethics is the operational component of one's morality, the way we fashion and discipline our wills and freedoms.

Thus, unethical conduct on the part of an elected official is first and foremost a judgement based on a community's idea of the moral compass. Second, unethical practices in political office or business and volunteer life signal failure on one or more of Foucault's four aspects of ethics.

When failure is suspected, it likely originates in the strategic and tactical exercise of power, including pastoral power while going about the work of governing. This is fertile ground for unethical shenanigans. The way power is exercised, say by an elected rural official, governs and exposes one's relationship with oneself to corruption.

Corruption of one's ethics is insidious, hard to recognize, and easy to rationalize. It is often invisible and instinctively camouflaged from public view. That is why sound ethical behaviour is rooted in self-examination about the truth in one's relationship to oneself, making the invisible visible.

Unethical shenanigans hide in the diverse perspectives of where the moral red lines are drawn in the community and in the very private understandings of truth. For unlike the individual's need to explore the truth in one's attitude to oneself, the community can only act on its idea of the does and don'ts bookending what is permissible. People are reluctant to judge another individual's relationships with themselves even when several personal transactions may have been uncomfortable based on their personal code of conduct.

The history of colonial settlement in rural Canada sheds some light on ethics in governance. Our Greek and Roman heritage bequeathed a legacy of disregard for freedom for those governed. Tyrants and despots do surface in the form of rural warlordism. Well meaning people are elected to office only to see their ethics tried beyond their abilities and courage.

The cost benefit ratios of whistle blowing are unfavourable in most rural communities.

This paper explores some of these issues concluding that vigilance and ongoing investments in the four aspects of ethics at all levels are possible and required. Governance through shared powers of elected officials with leaders of business and volunteer organizations, invokes greater ethical vigilance and investment than does the conventional pastoral care model of governing.

Setting the Scene

Government is the organization, machinery, or agency through which a political unit exercises authority and performs functions, which are usually classified according to the distribution of power within it. Government is the complex of political institutions, laws, and customs through which the function of governing is carried out (Merriam-Webster 2015).

Governance produces decisions that define expectations, grant power, or verify performance. It consists of either a separate process or part of decision making or leadership process typically administered by a government (Wikipedia 2016). However, governance, or the ‘how’ of governing, applies broadly to how people manage the full range of corporate dimensions in their lives. Ethics governs the personal and private dimension and therefore is a big part of the meaning of ‘good’ in good governance.

The first and original job for rural government was security. It started with securing territory with population, securing raw materials and food supplies with resource extraction, and securing states with young men for armies. It would seem that this initial rural focus on national security has diminished with time and technology. National security policy has been separated from the rural governance agenda for some decades now.

The pastoral care model applied to the new rural economy has evolved into pastoral service delivery from Rousseau’s interested and watchful care and Machiavelli’s tactical control of the rural household economy extracting its productivity. Rural government and its governance are and always have been about political management, which now have to meet ever expanding national standards of service and justice. Rural populations do not necessarily see it that way.

Local rural government in Canada is a constitutional and mainly administrative construct of Provincial Governments. The equivalent of a ‘Municipal Government Act’, different for each Province, essentially establishes a limited subsidiary level of government to administer local services, such as roads maintenance. Generally an administrative officer is hired by an elected Council to run the municipality. Operations are organized within a small bureaucratic framework with a fairly horizontal set of responsibilities. In the beginning and up until recently, elected councillors provided considerable hands-on management. Rural people still expect their councillor to direct activities although most Acts frown upon micro-management by elected officials.

Periodic elections are governed by a separate provincial ‘local elections act’ to select community representatives to direct and oversee the administration. They form the municipal council. A Provincial department for municipal affairs provides oversight and institution-building. Conflicts and alleged irregularities are referred to a ‘Minister of Municipal Affairs’ for investigation by his or her Department. Investigations are usually

conducted within a philosophy of capacity-building as opposed to correction.

Local rural governments could be seen as analogous to protectorates of provincial governments, with little authority, little to govern, and a weak tax base. Social services, education and health care have been removed to provincial agencies from local councils. Regionalization has further reduced the purview of rural municipalities in some provinces.

The reality is that the vitality of a rural community is governed largely by its economic and social system, leaving very little for municipalities to govern, as opposed to administer. The economic part of vitality is driven by consumption, investment, productivity, exports and remittances. Rural municipal government is preoccupied with pastoral care, really just an additional layer of transaction costs. Indeed a public works department provides much of the identity to rural governments.

Bruno Jean and Mario Carrier however, view rural governance as much more than maintaining local infrastructure. The implication of their thinking is that the pastoral care model characterizing rural municipalities is inimical to progress. Governance from this development and economic revitalization perspective is how different governing 'authorities' align their political, social and economic wills. Elected officials, business and volunteer leaders need to engage in a process called 'concertation' in French to arrange their relations one to the other to take decisions to advance the prosperity and progress of their jurisdictions. Their work with Serge Cote presupposes that these three levels or parts constitute an alignment, 'arrimage' or coming together for action through an exchange of ideas that gets people onto the same page (Carrier and Cote 2000).

'Concertation': Government by Self Care

From the transaction cost perspective, concertation is about strategic internalization of governance transactions to improve their cost efficiency. This idea has long historical roots going back to the 16th century. It is about coherent arrangements of political, economic and social governance, ideally in the name of progress.

Coase's particular interest in why firms exist is about concertation. It is all about the cost of transactions, in this case obligations, commitments, rights and prerogatives that lie at the core of any concertation process. In general Coase's firms or concerted alignments and accords happen because transactions that are costly, complex or cannot be priced are cheaper and less time consuming in a framework of 'concertation' (Coase 1937).

Every relationship in these kinds of transactional frameworks involves power differentials for which the transactions are governed primarily by ethics. Ethical conduct frees up personal wills to be creative and energetic by reducing transaction costs to smooth the exchanges that constitute action. Unethical conduct separates interests and prevents timeliness.

Economic governance is embedded in markets, firms and households. Social governance takes place in multiple social and mainly autonomous organizations. These include the economic institutions as well as churches, schools, hospitals, libraries, and volunteer associations of all sorts. All governance has a political aspect, which typically comes together in the political institution of government.

Boundaries have shifted with advancing governmentality so that social services and safety nets that used to be provided by religious groups are also or mainly provided by big-G Government, not local rural government. School and hospital boards in rural Alberta, for example, used to be made up of municipal councillors, but have been restructured into larger jurisdictions with elected and appointed governing boards respectively. Territorial boundaries are no longer congruent with rural municipal boundaries.

Correspondingly, three types of power intersect for rural local governance. The first is the political power of citizens making up the rural municipality and its connectedness with other levels of government and neighbouring jurisdictions. Economic power is wielded through investment and productivity by business enterprises, both private and public. The third is the organizational power of citizen groups, volunteer associations and now social media.

Taking the view that power is fluid and dynamical, leads to understanding that the influence on outcomes of these three intersecting sources of power is dynamic and open to leveraging. Jean goes further and hypothesizes that rural places experiencing devitalization are actually demonstrating weak intersection and indeed even separation of essential governing powers that can introduce unmanageable transaction costs and prevent synergies and innovation suitable for progress.

The hypothesis underscores the idea that power is not a stock but rather flows through alignments. Concerted power is greater than dispersed power, in part because of lower transaction costs. Concertation is not about limiting freedom of participating individuals or institutions, but rather is about coming together to reconfigure the free spaces for wills that drive constituent interests as new forces or powers to expand and drive the autonomous part of vitality.

The 'space' occupied by jostling wills in which all this 'concertation' works does not coalesce into a social contract. Alignment leaves the individual wills of the participant groups intact, not aggregated. Ideally they are 'turbo-charged' by a new and agreed resolve to share power in these alignments to produce creative outcomes that could not have been imagined by any of the participants acting alone.

The matter of governance ethics therefore extends beyond 'elected government' to include representatives from all three groups in this concerted form of rural government. Not only are they accountable for their ethical behaviour within their original spheres of influence, but they must be able to trust each other's tactics and strategies in alignments. Ethical malpractice can generate transaction costs, often to the point of derailing transactions needed to make things happen. Serious attention to ethics therefore is prerequisite to successful outcomes both for citizens and higher levels of government on which rural municipalities are always dependent.

Concerted power is unlikely to come together without confidence in ethical practices. Wider and deeper commitment to alignments is always under construction. Commitment is vulnerable to accusations of betrayed loyalties and to leader turnover. Unethical truth-seeking or duplicity inhibits concertation. Therefore, extending Jean's hypothesis, underperforming rural economies may be evidence of unresolved ethical issues that suppress and even subvert the dynamical or fluid nature of power.

Power struggles and turf wars incite unethical practices, both from the resistance to and the application of power. ‘Concertation’ invites push-back from unengaged or deposed rural warlords. Interests and especially those of elected officials that fight or manipulate power, often reveal ethical deficiencies.

Coming together strategically can be spontaneous, but more usually requires initiative from a powerful player, such as the municipality, a leader or an external force or crisis. Achieving realignments of power in ways that are actually believed to supplement private and individual interests requires ethical character. The sovereign ability of individual citizens to take care of their self interests should be enhanced by coming together.

‘Concertation’ is both an ethos and a model. Jean’s concept is a complete break with the 16th through 19th century concept of pastoral care. ‘Concertation’ is self care, the opposite of pastoral care. It is about how to create new knowledge and ‘savoir’ from power. Pastoral care is about those with power over outcomes taking care of those without power, such as shepherds and their sheep. And in doing so those dispensing outcomes, like the shepherd, are strongly tempted to take care of themselves.

The problem for rural governance then is that subservience may constitute subjugation of the ability of a whole community to take initiative, a ‘slave morality’. Indeed the pastoral care model is often evident in the way higher levels of government and rural elected officials craft power in their relationships with each other and with the rural public.

Pastoral Care versus Self-Care

Pastoral power in Foucault’s words, clearly influenced by Rousseau, is analogous to caring for “a household, souls, children, a province, a convent, a religious order or a family” (as cited in Bernhauer and Mahon 2003, 155). Pastoral care may be useful in the restricted sense of a social and spiritual safety net for those who are in no position to take care of themselves. In the wider ethical sense, Foucault outlines a political ethic that requires rejection of the pastoral care model with the same ethical energy that resists any domination and exploitation of free will.

Nevertheless, the current versions of the pastoral care model remain influential, impeding uptake of the concertation model. Rural people are used to being governed, not governing. Municipal government legislation and its administration in many provinces continues the colonial style ‘district governor’ pastoral model still used in less developed countries, particularly ex-colonial nations. The main difference is that the chief administrative officer’s employment is at the pleasure of the municipal elected council rather than the Governor or the Crown. By retaining much of the pastoral care model, this relationship is fertile ground for ethical corruption and irregularities in rural municipal government.

Leaders agreeing to engage in concertation bring not only their authorized powers, but also their personal reasons for being in business or volunteering in the first place. Volunteers contribute for myriad reasons, often quite distant from their advertised purpose. Officials too usually have private unadvertised reasons to run for election. Ethics, once they engage in concertation, has to be at the top of their consciousness, perhaps for the first time.

The public purpose of concertation may even be seen as a threat to these private interests. People choosing a rural lifestyle to exercise natural liberties can feel quite threatened when latent parochial and populist emotions are incited in the process of concertation. Lifestyle farmers, small businesses and “those impatient with the yoke of servitude” [Rousseau, p 20] view self care quite narrowly.

Elected officials hold only a modest part of the authority to lead ‘concertation’ relative to that held by volunteer organizations and the economy. The term, ‘herding cats’ comes to mind. Nevertheless, elected officials hold a large and disproportionate responsibility to reinvest the power that comes with that authority. This is the ethic of governing self care: To align the powers bestowed upon them with those of social and economic organizations to increase the creativity of self governing markets and social organizations to benefit the whole community with its whole collection of diverse wills.

Power, Authority and the Servant Ethic

The moment election results are announced, an elected official is accorded the right to exercise power under the constitutional authority of the municipal act and existing bylaws and policies of the municipality. One feels the power. One sees and is easily tempted to admire his or her reflection in the mirror of sudden attention paid by groups looking for exemptions, speakers and head table guests. Easily forgotten is that the majority vote also confers the authority to exercise power on behalf of all the voters, not just those who voted for the winning candidate. Holding both authority and responsibility calls forward the idea of a servant ethic in the form of ‘servant leadership’ (Greenleaf Centre for Servant Leadership 2016).

The servant ethic is about aspiring to leadership inspired from serving the public in the pastoral service model. Advocacy of the servant ethic originates with Robert K Greenleaf. This ethic, while applying quite generally to putting the customer first, specifically places the purpose of members of an organization above the corporate interests of the organization. In municipal terms, this ethic places service to citizens first, not just to ratepayers, as a necessary condition for advancing the corporate interests of the municipality, such as economic development or building a tax base.

The servant ethic is consistent with Foucault’s perspective on ethics. The ethical principle at play here is that behaviour in a relationship should advance the capability of individuals to exercise their will as they define and pursue their self care on an ongoing basis. This capability underpins the need for willing compliance in all governing arenas.

The servant ethic plays out differently in the pastoral care and the concertation models of rural governance. The model described above is conventional pastoral care. Making pastoral care more responsive, more efficient, more inclusive is the least of the potentials to be gained from concertation. However, the servant ethic is most easily understandable in these pastoral terms.

It means that public office should attract candidates who aspire to serve the public interest as opposed to satisfying an unusual power drive or seeking material gain, often as basic as a pay cheque. It all seems rather good. Yet candidates for elected office who seek authority and access to power to achieve goals, rather than aspiring to service hold a perverse understanding of governance as coercive rather than consensual according to

this ethic.

The servant ethic is less easily understood in terms of relationships with other levels of government, neighbouring municipalities, social agencies, and with chambers of commerce, businesses and volunteer associations. Concertation by definition draws in leaders among these whose success has been based on market, bureaucratic or reciprocal power measured in terms of winning and losing. Concertation is not about winning and losing. Policy making, lobbying, land development, heritage, cultural and sports activities are quite different from service delivery.

Corporate identity, or a 'brand,' whether for a Ukrainian dance group or an oil company, signals a competitive focus or strategic goal, additional to whatever service goal may be involved. For example the three pillars of corporate responsibility, profit, community building and environmental responsibility dilute the servant ethic. Typically difficult tradeoffs among long term, short term, territorial and vested interest outcomes easily swamp the servant ethic.

Thus the concertation model places heavier yet less intuitive demands on the servant ethic than does the pastoral care model. Aligning interests means that all the parties to concertation have to embrace the servant ethic and then learn how to apply it to the whole bundle of interests, not just their own constituencies of interests. Each party brings to the table its own authority to wield power. Their legitimacy and understanding of truth have to be acknowledged, respected and worked through for concertation to work.

Their right to exercise power in the context of their own servant ethic, however understood, is nested within the context of their membership or source of authority. The parties hold authority commensurate to their popular base. This in general means that the municipal representatives present at the table through universal suffrage, feel authorized to wield wider and greater power relative to other participants.

That said however, concertation builds a different kind of relationship among participants from that which connects them to their constituencies. Consequently governance transactions are different because they produce accords or commitments to action or support by constituents to a wider goal as opposed to commitment by a board or council to serve constituents' interests.

All parties carry forward to the table the legitimacy of their corporate exercise of power to build and negotiate outcomes on behalf of their publics. The servant ethic for pastoral care seems somehow subordinate to protecting and even gaining corporate power to influence and secure outcomes for their organizations. This corporate sense is the way organizations, including the municipality conventionally understand their capacity to deliver services.

From the pastoral care perspective, gains and losses are interpreted in terms of relative corporate power, prerogatives to exercise their corporate wills and even the scope to their authority. Outcomes of concertation, viewed in terms of gains and losses for associations, businesses and municipal partners in governance clash with the 'concertation servant ethic.'

This servant ethic inspires the consensual use of power essential to aligning interests and wills. Authoritarian behaviour, perhaps acquired through the corrupting effect of pastoral

power, for example in the form of paternalism, needs to be replaced by this inspiration and aspiration to lead by consent.

Power to consent flows from the mandated or mission inspired authority brought to the table. Recall three types of authority, statutory, merit and moral. All three may be amplified by humility and an attitude of helpfulness and empathy, part of the necessary culture of concertation. The exercise of power is more effective and more consensual the more these types align and reinforce each other. Community leaders who have been able to bundle all three forms within their own organizations prior to concertation are more likely to be leaders of the concertation process.

In summary, concertation requires the parties to hold or carry actual authority to the table to legitimize their exercise of power. Real authority in turn requires more formal lines of accountability to constituencies in the community. Authority requires the expectation that parties respect the boundaries to their particular bundle of rights to exercise power. In other words all parties need to know when they risk exceeding their authority to transact rights, prerogatives and obligations. They need to be clear on what authority they bring to the table. Perhaps the most difficult challenge to the servant ethic for rural municipalities is not only remembering constituent interests, but to inspire their servant ethic within the alignments sought by concertation.

Rural Cynicism: A Hurdle

Cynicism in rural life tends to produce elected leaders who appeal to a parochial autarkic populist ethos. Despite best intentions, electoral power modulated by this ethos can not only perpetuate cynicism but impede collaboration on wider development matters. Constituents get treated by these kinds of leaders as subjects, clients or ratepayers rather than citizens.

Subjugation is tantamount to a culture of entitlement to govern and be governed. It contributes to the dependency syndrome that goes along with cynicism. Consequently the courtier or petitioning approach is used to pursue concerns with councillors who instinctively play a fixer role or act out the political gatekeeper role, both reinforcing their political power and reminding their constituents of their dependency.

Cynicism incites friction in relationships the more autarkic it becomes. It invites force, coercion and preferential treatments to secure willingness, similar perhaps to the mix that pops up from time to time in families and households. This kind of behaviour and the practices that evolve are inimical to ethics and add transaction costs of their own making between families. Carried forward into governing institutions, cynicism is destructive to purpose and efficiency and of course impedes concertation. Parochial and populist rhetoric appealing to cynicism distorts choice, devitalizes initiative and sabotages the servant ethic.

Nevertheless, autarkic instincts lurk in rural lifestyles, ready to be awakened. Many rural people, like the Cynics of ancient Greece prefer a natural life-style, sourcing their pride and sense of worth and self respect in self-reliance. A natural life eschews the subordination to culture, society, civilization, opinion, and even markets. Most of the oratory of the ancient Cynics seems to have been directed against social institutions, the arbitrariness of rules of law, and any sort of life-style that was dependent upon governing

institutions or laws. In short, their preaching of the 'truth' was that social and political institutions harm society insofar as such institutions hinder one's freedom and independence.

This sounds familiar. Cynicism is a reactionary form of aggressive individualism which arose with the collapse of the political structures of the ancient world. One could argue that the cynicism about government found in rural communities today also reflects a breakdown of public trust in elected officials government and the justice system. It may also reflect the residual effects from decades of economic and social marginalization as urbanization and dependency have progressed.

Rural and rural aboriginal enterprises, other than natural resource extraction have become irrelevant to national economic growth. Rural occupations, under employment and seasonal unemployment are characterised as a way of life rather than determinants of productivity and national competitiveness. Redundancy, education, aging, under-employment and long term unemployment feed rural cynicism about performance outcomes.

Why is rural cynicism an issue for governance and ethics? The high value which the ancient Cynics attributed to a person's way of life did not mean they had no interest in what went on. Instead it reflected their view that the manner in which a person lived was a touchstone of his or her relation to truth, as was also the case in the Socratic tradition. They were truth-seekers, the core practice essential to working through ethical dilemmas.

The conclusion they drew from this Socratic idea, not to mention the implications of their understanding of truth from the execution of Socrates for his teaching, was that they had to proclaim their understanding of truths in a manner accessible to everyone. They believed they had to walk the talk in very public, visible, spectacular, provocative, and sometimes a scandalous way of life, such as Diogenes wearing only a barrel. Rural cynics don't wear barrels, but they are often unconventional and cynically opinionated about municipal governance.

Rural cynics basically reject both the pastoral care and concertation models of governance. Cynicism about processes underlying governance impedes their participation in conversations. Rants are more likely than reasoned conversation. For the early Cynics, the main condition for human happiness was autarkeia, self-sufficiency or independence, where what you need or what you decide to do is dependent on nothing other than you yourself. As a consequence, since Cynics have the most radical of attitudes out there, they simply want their road ploughed; ... now. Most cannot be drawn into active civil life, beyond expressing a grievance and opposing taxation. Elected officials soon learn to minimize grief to the extent of avoiding conversation as simply another opportunity for people to complain.

The Family Metaphor: A Shibboleth

The family metaphor applied to politics has serious corrupting consequences for ethics. The metaphor rationalizes leaders acting like parents. The public plays the role of children in a model of attentive but exclusive pastoral care. This model favours, even encourages a shift in the perception by elected officials to the governed as subjects. Children are told what to do, and admonished if they do not do it. They are expected to

follow the rules and be loyal to parents. The paternalism in many rural families easily translates into viewing the population as needing protection from outside influences, resurrecting the long standing preoccupation with security and defence of jurisdictional interests. This particular sense of protective power is difficult to transact in concertation.

The family analogy at its most perverse is expressed in the form of corporate and council solidarity relative to the population. It is about circling the wagons with the citizens on the outside, potentially hostile, to be kept in the dark with sketchy council minutes, in-camera sessions, unanswered letters, damage control and minimal audits. Just as children are not kept in the know or permitted to exercise sovereignty until the age of majority, so individuals in the population are not viewed as holding legitimate sovereign interests without surveillance and control.

Unethical temptations abound as an elected official gains access to whole new realms of special 'governing' knowledge, including Foucault's political knowledge, that no one else in the population has access to. Information is managed as the main tool of governmentality. Cynicism is reinforced, not resisted, on both sides of the wagons.

The family analogy when invoked, is also problematic for the exclusiveness inherent in all kin relationships. The wagons do not have to be actually circled to prompt an instinctive sense to well up in elected officials of being a class apart from the general population with all it implies relative to collegial loyalty and 'going along to get along.' This loyalty extends to closing ranks on matters of expense accounts, family travel on official business and all other perquisites such as mileage allowances. Solidarity in public is expected from colleagues on ethical matters sliding easily into cover-up and complicity. Loyalty to the collegial 'family' inside the wagons gets tested in this manner by fellow officials in incremental ways with often imperceptible and corrosive consequences for personal ethics.

Concertation Ethics

Recall that ethics is a matter of regulating or governing power in relationships, whether privately within oneself, between two individuals, or among fellow officials and corporate groups. Ethics and governance is about how the power of the electorate and of the elected is governed. From this perspective, therefore, invoking merit by being humble and respectful of the will of others may be less about deference than about modifying or disguising the application of power by those who hold the power in a relationship.

Seen this way, ethics for purposes of concertation is much more than following a moral compass. It is about self-restraint on the use of power by elected officials with the aim of inciting greater levels of public compliance with ever more courageous governing decisions. Compliance means greater sovereign content in the shaping of decisions and in their acceptance by the community. The ethics to address unwilling compliance is a large topic, additional to the purpose of this story.

Concertation extends higher ethical standards to volunteer associations and businesses whose self care ethos differs from the pastoral care ethos. It bears repeating that compliance is not about meekness or invoking passive public response to the exercise of power. It is instead about an ethic of restraint in the use of power. It is about inspiring and meriting trust by those who are being governed. It is about a higher level of trust than that

expected for the public at large.

Governing under concertation is after all about aligning power in the economy and rural community. Consider market relationships. Economic theory has established quite firmly that the public interest in efficient use of scarce resources is best served when markets are competitive. Competitive means perfect information to buyers and sellers, many buyers and sellers, none of whom can affect prices, and easy entry to a market as buyer or seller. Pure and perfect competition is an ethic. It is not at all about providing special entitlements to avoid competition in public procurement or zoning for example or dumping private costs onto the public balance sheet or vice versa.

Rather all players, not only elected and appointed officials are called to understand the ethics of anticipating and preventing the misuse of power. They, who may have strategized to reduce competition all their lives, find themselves in a concertation process on the front line defending competitive efficiency. The effects of imperfect competition and negative externalities in markets are inevitably brought to the concertation table for mitigation so that citizens gain and the public interest is not pillaged by conflicts of interest and corrupted ethics.

A Secular Postscript

Secular governance coupled with freedom of religion is the Western way of handling the trump cards claimed by both sectarian and secular authority over the expression of wills. Sectarian governance may pass the ethical test of the 'Golden Rule,' but fails the test of subjugation of personal and sovereign will. Secular authority in rural municipal governance means that elected officials who invoke God's authority on policy are essentially despotic in the sense that they may exceed their authority flowing from voters and citizens through historic constitutional processes. Acting beyond constitutional powers is the secular definition of despotism. Abuse of these powers is the definition of tyranny.

The influence of religion as a role model for nurturing ethics is both cautionary and instructive, even for non-adherents. This influence is evident in different treatment for compliant (faithful) and questioning (unbelieving) citizens. It features in vengeful decisions, and the courtier practice of petitioning council. But it also offers a confessional process to nurture personal ethics.

Coercive behaviour may extend to political life in rural politics where balancing forces, such as courageous investigative journalism may be weak or absent, consistent with the version of 'truth' found in autarkic philosophies of life. When a proposition is weak on merit and perhaps especially so, force may be applied to 'teach a lesson', expecting compliance and even supplication. Cynically autarkic males in particular may be prone to belligerence and intimidation especially toward women.

Can an elected official be submissive to God's will without asserting Divine right to rule? Religion inspires an ethic of divine power over the sovereign expression of free will by others, including political colleagues. Suppression of free will and deference is not only acceptable within the authority central to a faith ethic, but is also a valued feature of religious belief. Believing in God means willing acceptance and proclamation of His authority to exercise whatever power is necessary to fulfill His Will. The struggles and

debates over the paramount nature of theistic authority have fueled conflict worldwide over the centuries to the present day. The same debates underlie the ethical reflection asked of rural governance.

End Notes

Pastoral care is arguably outmoded as a model for governing communities of diverse self-focussed willed people caring for themselves. This is not to diminish in any way the importance of municipal services. Nor is any particular configuration between in-house and out-sourcing at issue. NRE and CJ researchers and many others before and since have demonstrated that a self-caring rural community in the twenty-first century needs capacity, not pastoral care to learn new forms of knowledge and to achieve economic levels beyond those traditionally experienced.

Concertation is a governing model with potential to open rural places to new forms of knowledge. Yet neither pastoral care nor concertation is intuitive for rural citizens. While having a real sense of being governed, they instinctively value self-reliance over pastoral care, even when that instinct extends to securing entitlements from pastoral care. This value has only been reinforced by their retreat from organized religion with its versions of pastoral care.

Neither is concertation intuitive because for many it is contradicted by a cynical distrust of government. Autarkeia at the individual and family level is so easily perpetuated in fiefdoms and warlordism in rural politics where gains and losses are chalked up to and counted in terms of power rather than accords.

In this context, ethics becomes the dos and don'ts that ensure that sovereign exercise of choice determines the outcomes of acts of governance: That sovereign expression ideally should not be coerced, distorted, misled, deceived or contrived by any means. This is a tall order.

The essence of rural leadership is that people are invited to go beyond their comfort levels for risk, investment and organizational arrangements, that is to say governance. Concertation is one of the processes that challenges comfort levels. Coercion to modify wills, especially the will to defend tradition and convention is an inevitable part of rural revitalization. Coercion is not unethical in itself, despite its involuntary reshaping effect on wills.

The ethical issue rests with the way in which sovereign individuals are convinced to accept willingly a reshaping of the scope of their exercise of free will. Ethics does become a criminal issue when illegal measures, such as fraud, bribes, kickbacks or influence peddling in local government are used to coerce acceptance of reduced sovereignty. Just as troubling, these forms of corruption are almost impossible to challenge, prosecute and correct in rural governance.

Unethical and corrupt coercion steadily pushes the rural economy into dependency on pastoral care, a proven dysfunctional and ethically corrupting form of governance.

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