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For most of my career I have been chiefly a student of federalism and intergovernmental relations. So much so that Alain Cairns, perhaps Canada's pre-eminent student of federalism, and my boss on a federal Royal Commission, wrote the following limerick. 'There once was a scholar named Simeon/For whom federalism was like a religion/He argued its strength, at inordinate length/With a passion quite close to a sermeon.'

Cairns did not get it exactly right. Indeed, in the Canadian context, I have consistently argued for an asymmetrical model of federalism to accommodate Quebec, and a decentralized model to accommodate strong regional interests and identities. I have also argued that — through effective programs for re-distribution ('equalization' as we call it in Canada), and central government responsibility for income security — decentralization, national unity and social justice can be effectively reconciled.

But my advocacy of federalism is by no means unalloyed. First, I do not see federalism, defined as an institutional framework, as embodying a political value in itself. Like all other institutions, it must be judged and assessed in terms of whether or not, and how, it serves other more fundamental values: democracy; the ability of societies to develop, and implement, policies and programs that meet their real needs, and — crucially, for our project — its ability to help reconcile differences within diverse and divided societies.

In this regard, I see federalism as Janus-faced — pointing in two directions. Under some circumstances it can promote democracy; under others, subvert it. Under some circumstances it can promote responsive, effective, accountable policy-making, and under others it can subvert that goal. And, under some circumstances it can help promote accommodation and reconciliation of differences; and under others it can entrench, exacerbate and institutionalize the very conflicts it is designed to manage.

The interesting question, then, is: under what circumstances will the potential virtues of federalism outweigh its potential vices? And that depends on a great many other factors: On the specific design of federal institutions (which can vary enormously); on the relations of federal institutions to other national institutions; on the demographic and social context in terms of the distribution of ethno-cultural identities and interests across a particular territory, and so on. Stable federalism depends on a blend of 'shared rule' (what do country-wide societies want to do together?) and self rule (what do the constituent communities wish to do for themselves?) That is a very difficult balance to achieve, especially in societies undergoing rapid processes of democratization, or emerging from deep conflict, as many cases in our project are doing. Just as a constitution is largely meaningless without an underpinning and sustaining culture of 'constitutionalism,' in which both elites and citizens embrace the values that shape words on the page, so federalism is ineffective and unstable without a minimal degree of cultural commitment to the rule of law, mutual trust, and to what Canadians call 'federal comity,' Germans call 'Bundestreue,' and South Africans call 'ubuntu' — an acceptance of both commonality and difference.

Federalism is also inherently unstable, a process, not a fixed state, a mid-point between a unitary state, and separate states. And its dynamic can vary hugely. In some countries, especially in the past, federalism has been a 'coming together,' a way-station on a path towards a more unitary system (United States? Germany? Australia?). But in others it is a way-station on a path towards 'coming apart,' a



stepping stone to independence for the constituent units (Belgium, Spain, Iraq, former Yugoslavia?). Which direction the train is moving in is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of federal systems.

The debates are nicely illustrated by some contemporary issues. 'Should Quebec have constitutional recognition as a 'distinct society' within Canada?' According to some (including myself): yes, it is a condition for maintaining the Canadian union. According to others: no, it is a recipe for secession. Should power be devolved to Scotland? Yes to some: it is a condition for maintaining the British Union; no, for others, it is again a recipe for dis-union. Interestingly those who make such statements are not only expressing their own preferences, but also are making 'social scientific' predictions: 'if we do this, then this will happen.' But who is right, in various circumstances remains unclear. These are the kinds of federalism questions that I wish to explore.

Most of my early work focused on the Canadian case, one that combines several dimensions of difference in a single polity: bi-nationalism; regionalism and provincialism; indigenous groups seeking to rectify past injustice; and immigrant groups embracing 'multiculturalism.' But by the 1980s I, and many of my Canadian colleagues, began to realize that the Canadian debates had many parallels elsewhere in the world – experiences from which we might learn, and to which we might help contribute.

Some of us also realized that in any system, federalism and decentralization were only part of the picture. The larger context of institutional structures, and of civil society, also needed to be taken into account in order to understand the politics of divided societies.

So in recent years, while I have continued my interest in Canadian federalism and intergovernmentalism, my work has become both increasingly comparative in focus, and increasingly concerned with institutional design more broadly conceived. Two examples exemplify this. First is my continuing work with my colleague, Professor Christina Murray (University of Cape Town), since 1995 on the design, and then implementation, of multilevel government in South Africa and on the progress of democratization in that country. Second is my involvement as an academic adviser to the Club de Madrid, an association of 69 former Presidents and Prime Ministers of democratic countries, many of whom were leaders in the struggle for democracy. In conjunction with the Club, I have written several papers on democratic consolidation and become involved in the constitutional review process in Bolivia.

I believe that in all my work, both scholarly and otherwise, there is a consistent thread: bridge-building. In any conflict, my instinct is to look for the middle ground; to find a synthesis that accommodates competing models, values, interests. (Even if this once earned me the student comment 'Professor Richard — on the one hand this, and on the other hand that — Simeon') I deeply value sharp expressions of differing points of view; they are critical to the evolution of public discourse. But that is not my personal self-conception as we approach this project. *Rather my conception is not either/or, but and/and.* With respect to federalism debates, for example, my personal mantra is what I call 'building out, and building in.' Building out is about empowering territorially concentrated minority groups to make their own decisions without fear of the tyranny of the majority. Building-in is about ensuring those same minorities representation and voice in central institutions. Both are essential for stable solutions. And this empowerment/integration dynamic, I believe, must inform all institutions, as well as civil society.