

June 8, 2010

OttawaWatch 277: More and more Summits

By Lloyd Mackey

The references to the various “Summits” by inference also pointed to the existence of a “mountain range” of faith-based interests in the body politic in Ottawa, rather than one “peak”.

One criticism that I tended to direct toward “mainstream” media at the time of the writing of this piece was the attention that they paid to Charles McVety, while ignoring the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada or Canada-based Brian Stiller, who has filled several key evangelical leadership positions in Canada.

Permit me to note carefully: I believe Charles McVety is a good man. His perspective deserves to be listened to. But he does also have a “buffoonish” way of presenting in public. That presentation makes him a tool in the hands of mainstream, anti-right and anti-religious influencers to make evangelicals look like buffoons. Those same influencers will tend to ignore the likes of the Evangelical Fellowship or Brian Stiller because their public presentations do not live up the evangelical caricatures the detractors would wish to portray.

If I could use a 2022 comparison, it would be the way in which someone like Justin Trudeau would wish to portray all social conservatives – blending the moderates with the militants. In my modest view, Trudeau thus demonstrates considerable skill at virtue-signalling.

Last week, we talked about the beginning of what might be dubbed “Summit Month” with some words about *Forgiven*, a “National Summit of the First Peoples of Canada.”

Today, we talk about two more faith-based upcoming Summits, both being triggered by Canada’s hosting of the G-8 and G-20 Summits in Huntsville and Toronto respectively. We will talk more about them later.

But first ...

Further to my comments last week with respect to the linking of the first chapter of Marci McDonald’s book, *The Armageddon Factor: the Rise of Christian Nationalism in Canada* (Random House), to an “unseat Harper” website, there are four points to make.

The first point is that, after McDonald learned – at the end of a rather busy cross-country book promotion tour – that her book was linked to the www.unseatharper.ca website, she asked the site managers to post a disclaimer on the link. It says: “The author wishes to make clear that this does not mean she endorses CRUSH or its aims.” (CRUSH stands

for Citizens Rallying to Unseat Stephen Harper. The reference to “this” is the link to the book’s first chapter, which CRUSH reproduced, without the author’s knowledge, from the publisher’s website.)

Secondly, I want to suggest to Ottawa *Watch* readers that they might want to read the Walrus Blog interview with McDonald, currently posted. It provides, in my modest view, a balanced and nuanced focus on certain aspects of her book. Particularly, she provides a verbal portrait of the unique and helpful part that Preston Manning has played in the interfacing of faith and politics, over the past 20 years. (Just Google “walrus blog” and it should be easy to get to.)

Thirdly, in order to try to be completely fair to McDonald, I would like to point out that I had written a story one week earlier, which appeared on www.canadianchristianity.com, entitled “Armageddon author says ‘demonizing’ was not her intent.” A reading of that column would provide readers with an understanding, I believe, of why McDonald would want to ensure that she is not associated with the claims of a website seemingly committed to do what it can to bring about the downfall of the present prime minister. (That *Armageddon author* piece is still posted in the story list on the left side of the www.canadianchristianity.com website.)

Fourthly, McDonald assures me that she has never had any partisan associations, and that she has written stories – some of which have been posted on the Walrus website – that have been critical of Liberals as well as Conservatives.

* * *

Now for the Summit stuff.

The World Religions Summit, set for June 21-23 at the University of Winnipeg, will “shadow” the G-8 Summit in Huntsville.

It will bring together several dozen major faith leaders from the eight G-8 nations, with the objective of speaking with one voice – despite their diversity – on such subjects as urging the G-8 to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals.

Those goals, as such bodies as the Canadian Council of Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada regularly remind us:

- Affect the world’s most poor and vulnerable.
- Ensure concrete and sustainable progress is made in the areas of eradicating poverty and hunger.
- Help achieving universal primary education.
- Promote gender equality.
- Help reduce child mortality.
- Assist in combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
- Ensure environmental sustainability

- Encourage global partnership and development.

Several events will take place in conjunction with the Winnipeg conclave, including a human rights conference featuring, among others, Janet Epp Buckingham, a lawyer and director of Trinity Western University's Laurentian Leadership Centre in Ottawa

These events have been occurring annually alongside the G-8s since 2005. In Canada, "alongside" means 1,000 kilometres away from Huntsville. The choice of location has something to do with the fact that University of Winnipeg president Lloyd Axworthy is one of Canada's former foreign affairs ministers.

And, as it happens, there is a further symbiotic rapport. When he was in Parliament, Axworthy attended Southminster United Church, where James Christie was the minister. Both men – without being specific – will agree that pastor and parishioner occasionally discussed the relationship between faith and politics.

Now, the tables are turned. These days, Christie is the dean of the theological faculty at U of W and the immediate past president of the Canadian Council of Churches. So former-pastor-and-parishioner-now-fellow-academic-leaders have been working together to bring the faith-based summit to pass, with much of the spadework involving Toronto-based Karen Hamilton, CCC executive director. The EFC's president, Bruce Clemenger has, along with his staff, been quite involved in creating a good working partnership on this event, with the CCC.

More information about the World Religions Summit is available at www.faithchallengeg8.com.

* * *

Domain-savvy Charles McVety, president of Canada Christian College, meanwhile, has been putting together a June 25-26 event with an intriguing set of players.

McVety managed to snag www.g20.ca and has been utilizing it to publicize a "Faith and Business Leaders' Summit", to be held on the college's Don Mills campus in Toronto.

Keynote speaker is Karl Rove, who served as chief of staff to former U. S. President George W. Bush.

Others in the lineup include author Grant Jeffrey, radio and television host Michael Coren, Canada Family Action Coalition executive director Brian Rushfeldt and B'nai Brith executive vice-president Frank Dimant.

* * *