

July 11, 2006

Ottawa Watch 85: Two seas or three?

By Lloyd Mackey

Some of the Christian people toiling to bring faith to The Hill couched much of what they had to say in language that hinted at the longing to bring spiritual revival or renewal to the nation. Depending on what agenda they were reflecting, that renewal could take many different forms, some of which are sketched out in this piece.

If Dennis Bevington, the NDP MP for the riding of Western Arctic, has his way, Canada's motto could soon have an extra sea added. It would then read "from sea to sea to sea." Or, on the coat of arms, the Latin version would appear as: "a mari usque ad mare ad mare."

Bevington of course, would have a bit of a vested interest in the change. He was elected an MP for the first time in January, defeating Liberal cabinet minister Ethel Blondin-Andrew, who had held the seat since 1988.

Blondin-Andrew, of aboriginal roots, was latterly minister of state for northern development, a fairly appropriate position for a politician representing a fair chunk of that part of the country bordering on the Arctic Ocean.

Bevington, for his part, will want to keep up the profile for the north, and he has some good company. Gary Doer, the NDP premier of Manitoba, whose only ocean harbor is on the Hudson Bay, is in favor. So is Adrienne Clarkson, who created some controversy during her tenure as governor-general, by organizing a somewhat expensive circumpolar junket for Canadian arts community leaders. And some aboriginal groups whose main residency is in the north, are also supportive of the move.

On July 10, the *Globe and Mail* had two pieces commenting on the proposal. One was an editorial that spoofed the idea with some fairly erudite counterproposals. Their exposition outstripped my two years of high school Latin, picked up more decades ago than I care to remember. The other was a national news story by Ingrid Peritz, entitled *Sea change coming for our motto?*

Both pieces made reference to the fact that the "sea to sea" motto is part of a longer passage taken from the Bible, Psalm 72 to be specific. Readers of *Ottawa Watch* will recall my referring to this passage periodically. Some of its words are inscribed in stone on the Peace Tower. And perhaps more significantly for purposes of a Christianly-aware readership, the passage, in all its fullness, is frequently invoked by Christian leaders, when they bring tour groups to Parliament Hill.

This Saturday, July 15, in fact, the passage will undoubtedly be examined once more, when Faytene Kryskow, a young and energetic "prophet" from Vancouver's charismatic

Christian community, leads Cry 2. That event will probably attract at least a few hundred – perhaps several thousand – young people to the lawns fronting on the Peace Tower.

Cry 2 is a repeat of a similar event that drew a crowd estimated from 6,000 to 10,000, back in 2002.

Here is some copy from the promotion for this Saturday's Cry:

In Aug of 2002 thousands of young and young at heart gathered in Ottawa on Parliament Hill to lift a CRY to heaven.

They prayed feverently.

They praised passionately.

They danced with freedom.

They met GOD.

It was a historic event in our nation.

We believe the heart of God is listening and longing to hear the CRY of our generation again.

If the 2002 Cry theme is repeated, there will be clear reference to the full Psalm 72 passage and the story about how part of it came to be inscribed on the Peace Tower.

The passage, in contemporary scripture, reads: "And he shall have dominion from sea to sea; from the river to the ends of the earth."

I have observed two different approaches to this passage and its place in our Canadian history, among people who want to see its enactment.

Some take it very literally, believing that it was meant to have a prophetic implication for Canada, because of the reference to the river – presumably the St. Lawrence – and the ends of the earth, interpreted as the Arctic Ocean or even the North Pole. And they suggest that the Fathers of Confederation recognized the significance of the prophecy in choosing the national motto.

Such people believe that a spiritual revival – beginning perhaps in Ottawa – will bring to pass God's dominion in Canada, perhaps even through the choosing of a political leader anointed by God. While one possible leader or another is sometimes singled out for attention or "blessing", the leaders in this movement have generally been inclined not to name anyone.

Other Christian leaders have a more spiritual interpretation, with fewer literal implications. They believe that if Christians allow Christ to shape their lives on a personal and corporate basis, Christ's dominion in Canada will – and possibly does already – prevail, despite rumors to the contrary.

They believe that it is important for the Christian community to help shape, in biblical ways, the thinking of politicians whose own interests are to understand the people they are chosen to represent. And they believe this to be a continuing task, in which Christians, exercising servant leadership, help political leaders to do the right thing, whatever the issue may be and whichever party is in power.

To come back to the initial premise of this piece, the interest in changing the motto to include the third sea, there is something to be said with respect to the political implications.

The question is: Does adding the third sea reference water down (pun intended) the original intention of those Canadian leaders who saw Psalm 72 as their guide to nation-building?

From this corner, it would appear there is no problem. After all, the northern ocean is as much a natural boundary to the “dominion” as are the other two.

Further, the implications of global warming – particularly with respect to making the north more inhabitable and its ocean more navigable – bring timeliness to this Arctic awareness. The shapers of Confederation could have considered it only in their wildest dreams.

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