

February 20, 2007

OttawaWatch109: Wilberforce and friends

By Lloyd Mackey

I am constantly amazed at the power of various search engines. That said, the links provided in 2007 to the various statements cited may be difficult to find a few years later – but not impossible.

Two Order of Canada appointments caught my attention this week, as I perused the list released Tuesday morning, February 20, by Governor-general Michaëlle Jean's office.

The two are Norgrove Penny and the late Harry Lehotsky.

Penny, a Victoria medical doctor, is well-known in British Columbia and some parts of Uganda for both his vibrant Christian witness and his ground-breaking work in medical development in Uganda, supported in fair measure by many Vancouver Island Christians.

Lehotsky, who died tragically just a few months ago from a form of virulent cancer, was a Winnipeg Baptist pastor and social activist who particularly instigated and advocated for initiatives to overcome homelessness and poverty in the inner city.

More will be appearing in national and regional Christian newspapers about these two remarkable people, within the next few weeks.

* * *

Another remarkable person, who did most of his political and advocacy work in the 18th and early 19th century, is the subject of an upcoming movie: *Amazing Grace*, due for release March 23.

William Wilberforce, who worked for 47 year to eliminate the British slave trade, was a long-time member of the British House of Commons.

Like C. S. Lewis, Wilberforce is coming to the attention of many Christian educators and politicians as a person who has much to teach us from out of British history and thinking, about the ways in which the Christian faith, life and politics can interplay to the public good.

In Ottawa, recently, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada hosted a screening of *Amazing Grace* in a theatre just a block away from The Hill, which drew a fair selection of members of parliament and senators from at least three parties.

Among the politicians who had some pretty constructive comments about the film are Bill Blaikie (NDP), John McKay (Liberal), Dr. Maurice Vellacott, Joy Smith, Jason

Kenney and Ed Fast (all Conservatives – Kenney being a cabinet minister.) As well, Senator Len Gustafson, a former Brian Mulroney cabinet minister, took note of the event.

Bill Blaikie’s comments were actually uttered in the House of Commons, as a member’s statement.

Readers of *OttawaWatch* might want to click onto www.efc-canada.ca and follow the reference to *Amazing Grace*, to get the full context of those comments.

* * *

Also worth noting this week is the speech that Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered at the opening of a Health Partners International medical aid distribution centre in Mississauga.

That the opening of such a facility should attract the prime minister is a credit to HPA, in its ability to communicate evangelical Christian relief and development values to the highest political levels. The fact that the HPA board chair is Jake Epp, a bit of a senior statesman and the highest-level evangelical in Brian Mulroney’s 1980s cabinet, indicates the value that HPA holds for good political communication.

And, on the government’s side, it indicates the apparent skill with which Harper listens to the evangelical relief and development community. My suggestion is that Mark Cameron, a devout Catholic who was raised in an academic evangelical venue in Vancouver before his denominational change, helps the PM articulate clearly in that area. But I do not doubt, either, as one of his biographers, that Harper is well able to think faithfully and intelligently on this subject.

To have a close look at the speech, go to www.pm.gc.ca, click on media centre, then speeches and choose the one that is headlined: “Prime Minister Stephen Harper attends opening of Health Partners”

* * *

Next week, I will be returning from Victoria to Ottawa, and will have some comments on and excerpts from Agriculture Minister Chuck Strahl’s speech at Trinity Western University’s Mel Smith lecture. It has been an interesting exercise to get a copy of the speech, but I have it now and it is a humdinger.

* * *