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## OttawaWatch 5: Hope, music under the Peace Tower

By Lloyd Mackey

*In writing OttawaWatch, I often opined that, despite the contention of some Christians that faith was absent on Parliament Hill, I maintained the opposite. God, as I understood him, showed up often in the most surprising places. Here was one example. And, later in the piece, I will report on the continuing Parliamentary discussion on same-sex marriage.*

Given that winter has descended even earlier than usual, on the national capital, (-49 with wind chill this past Monday) it has been tempting, during working hours, to hunker in the warmth of the “Hot Room”. (That is the traditional name for the press gallery office, on the third floor of the Centre Block of the Parliament Buildings.)

Several noon hours, on these wintry days, the sound of music has wafted up the Hall of Honour and around the corner to our office. That was the signal for two or three of my colleagues and I to be drawn to the source, to enjoy yet another retelling of the Christmas story.

Given that we are alleged by some to be a nation that persecutes Christians, by telling us that we are not allowed to keep Christ in Christmas, I am happy to report that there are still many people who join us each time a school or church choir sings under the Peace Tower.

And some of the listeners cannot stop themselves from breaking into song, or at least humming conspiratorially, when the choirs grace that allegedly secular corridor with *Silent Night*, *Joy to the World*, or *It Came upon a Midnight Clear*.

Incidentally, the taxpayers provide a grand piano to accompany the choral renditions, no questions asked about the content of the songs sung.

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This week, most of the members of parliament are back home in their ridings. Some, like Newfoundland’s John Efford, minister of natural resources, are checking with the religious leaders in their ridings, before they decide how they will vote, early next year, on the same-sex marriage legislation.

Speculation had it on a recent CBC *Politics* media panel with Don Newman, that Efford was likely to be advised by his clergy contacts, to vote with the opposition, for keeping the male-female definition of marriage. The reason? Apparently his Avalon riding is

heavily populated with Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists and Catholics, all of whom are not quite ready to gallop into full approval of same-sex marriage.

Efford is only one of a whole raft of MPs on both sides of the aisle who will be checking closely with their constituents, because they could well be facing the polls sometime late in 2005 or early 2006. How they vote on this issue, now that the Supreme Court has freed the politicians from a mandatory obligation to redefine marriage, could determine their long term opportunities for continued public service.

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Preston Manning provided a good backgrounder to this whole conversation in the December 16 issue of the *Globe and Mail*. In that piece, he turn on its head, the Supreme Court's assertion that the Charter was a "living tree", and thus should be responsive to change in societal attitudes on such things as sex and marriage.

His point was that "if the tree is to survive, we must also preserve principles and values from which our identity is derived and which support our tree when it is buffeted by winds of change."

Cutting to the chase, he noted that "the Supreme Court says Parliament has both the authority and the responsibility to rule on this issue and *to reconcile, if it can*, (italics mine) the conflicting demands of heterosexual and homosexual unions."

When he was opposition leader, Manning had this odd and, some would suggest, quaint, habit of encouraging reconciliation in an adversarial setting. The principle in which he rooted that thinking was the idea that "politics is the reconciling of conflicting interests," an intriguing application of the biblical text of 2 Corinthians 5: 18 and 19 (and a few verses before and after, to keep it in context).

As a now fairly-widely-acknowledged "senior statesperson", Manning can offer some outside-the-box thinking to politicians who feel obligated to assume that the only equality acceptable under the Charter is to extend the definition of marriage to same-sex couples.

He does that in the closing paragraph his *Globe* piece, by suggesting that one possible "reconciling" action "would be for Parliament to affirm the traditional, religiously-informed definition of marriage, while leaving the provinces free to provide a legal framework for other unions, including same-sex unions."

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All of this brings us to the point of the Season. I am grateful for the people who read OttawaWatch. Whether you agree with its analysis, I encourage you, in whatever sphere of influence you work as a Christian leader, influencer or communicator, to try to observe the body politic through these Peace Tower-affixed eyes.

And, at Christmas, from the warm and mysterious place called the Hot Room, I would like to extend the wish that the reconciling Savior will grace you with his presence, both now and throughout 2005. And Edna, from her office a few hundred feet away, where she handles administration for one of dozens of believing Christian MPs from all parties, joins me in expressing these wishes.

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