

# CHRISTIAN-RIGHT--A RISING POWER IN CANADA

*Posted on May 12, 2010 by Keghart*



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By Antonia Zerbisias, [Toronto Star](#), 11 May 2010



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What's more, *The Armageddon Factor*, which examines the religious right across the faiths and how Stephen Harper's government has forged bonds with it, comes after weeks of reports on Conservatives opposition to abortion and family planning, the defunding of activist womens' groups, the withdrawal of subsidies to gay pride events across the country, the cuts to KAIROS and the publication of an unprecedented amount of grants to Bible schools.

"My problem was, as my book went to bed, headlines were coming daily," McDonald says over the phone from her Toronto home. "All my worries about having to prove my case that this government is intent on cultivating the social conservative constituency in this country were nothing to worry about. They were doing it so openly that you could hardly keep up with the headlines."

The book, which sprang from her controversial 2006 piece for *The Walrus*, "Stephen Harper and the TheoCons," is a clarion call to Canadians — and to the Ottawa press gallery — to pay attention to how the religious right, especially evangelical Christians who belong to many ethnic groups, is increasingly influencing both foreign and domestic policy. That while growing and gaining greater access to the corridors of government.

"This was not a polemic I wrote; I do not reveal that Stephen Harper has a secret altar in his basement. But I did try to connect the dots because everybody was telling me this isn't happening

here, not in nice, tolerant, moderate Canada," says McDonald.

In her book, she tracks how the transformation of Canada has been happening incrementally but inexorably.

Consider one of the Harper government's first moves: the cancellation of the Liberals' long-promised national daycare program for a \$25/week taxable stipend per child.

"That showed the canniness of Harper's strategy," explains McDonald. "Most people saw it as, 'Oh yes the neocons don't like government-funded social policies.' What they didn't realize was that he was also pandering to social conservatives who don't believe that the government should have any role in child-rearing, who believe that mothers should be at home bringing up their children or who send their children to religious daycares and schools. It was one of those policies that cut across both of his constituencies, economic and social. That would characterize most of his policies."

Then there's abortion. Despite Harper's repeated claim that he doesn't want to re-open the debate, his caucus never closes it.

For example, two years ago, it was a private member's bill to protect "the unborn child." Most recently, it's an attempt by Winnipeg-South MP Rod Bruinooge, chair of the Pro-Life Caucus, to charge anybody who "coerces" a woman to have an abortion.

Says McDonald: "Harper won't associate the government with (abortion) by putting forth a government bill. He will test the waters with private members' bills. That's where the gradual erosion will take place. You get a restriction here, a restriction there, and pretty soon ..."

Her voice trails off.

Many of these policies are coming not only from MPs and the party grassroots but straight from the PMO where senior staffers such Darrel Reid (Focus on the Family) and Christian educator Paul Wilson advise Harper.

"I just want people to know the facts," says McDonald. "It is the connections, the depth of the organizational roots, that these organizations have put down in Ottawa. These are not known. Four years ago, they were not being catered to, they weren't being invited to VIP receptions, they weren't being asked for special election events, they weren't having special letters read out their rallies, they weren't getting (security) passes to Parliament Hill.

"And I am talking about fairly radical groups."

These groups have been aided in their mission by some of the most extreme elements of the Christian right in the U.S. Groups headed by the likes of Pat Robertson and the late Jerry Falwell, who blamed 9/11 on "the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians." Groups led by Toronto's Charles McVety, who railed against same sex rights in Canada, and who, last month, organized the defeat of Ontario's new sex education curriculum.

"Without the same-sex marriage debate, I don't think this movement would be as strong, it wouldn't have come together, it wouldn't have been galvanized," notes McDonald. "American groups wouldn't have jumped to fund or to send in their rhetoric here practically prepackaged because they were afraid the infection would seep over the border. So why should we be surprised when Gay pride is defunded?"

According to The Armageddon Factor, evangelicals believe Canada has to clean up its act on abortion, feminism, and homosexuality because it has a special role to play in the "end times."

That's because of Psalms 72: 8-9, which leads off the book, and foretells of "dominion ... from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth."

Never mind that it was likely about an ancient tribal leader's turf. Many evangelicals see it as a sign, as they see how Parliament Hill's Peace Tower clock, which stopped because of electrical problems for the first time ever in 2006, stopped at 7:28.

That brings us to The Rapture which, as McDonald describes it, is "that mythic moment when some born-again Christians expect to be snatched up to salvation before the battle of Armageddon."

But only if you're saved of course.

"Canada seems to be the only country to have its geography described in the Bible," notes McDonald, not entirely joking. "Canada must fulfill its Biblical destiny. That's why evangelicals want to see Canada declared a Christian nation."

Don't think it can't happen. There is, officially, no separation between church and state in Canada, despite what many assume.

"I think we should be vigilant," says McDonald. "We have to decide what kind of a country we want to live in. We have to stay on top of these issues because this is a government wedded to secrecy.

"It's the old story about cooking a frog. You don't put the frog in boiling water, it will jump out. You put it in a pot of cold water and slowly turn up the temperature.

"This government has chosen a strategy (that) risks changing the Canada that most of us have agreed we want to live in and the tolerance that we have built, faulty as it is."

