**Jack Layton's strength had Sunday school roots**

***NDP stalwart Bill Blaikie remembers his friend***

**By Bill Blaikie | Tuesday, August 23, 2011**



NDP leader Jack Layton died August 22. PHOTO SUPPLIED

"Love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful, and optimistic. And we'll change the world."

With these final words, penned just days before his untimely death on August 22, Jack Layton expressed the firm foundation of his worldview. It was a way of looking at the world that had its roots in his United Church upbringing - a spiritual inheritance he cherished and nurtured as his life progressed.

I remember Jack telling me about how his father, Robert Layton, was the Sunday school superintendent at the United Church in Hudson, Quebec where Jack grew up. At one point his father started a youth group, which went by the name of the "Infusers." Everything was to be infused with the spirit and energy of the gospel, to be permeated with the teachings of Jesus about the kind of world God wants.

As someone who also grew up in the United Church of the 1950s and 60s, I remember the Sunday school hymns that inspired then and inspire now. "All Things Bright and Beautiful;" "Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight;" "This little light of mine, I'm going to make it shine;" and of course, "Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone."

Jack Layton's light always shone for a more inclusive, loving, environmentally sensitive world. He dared to believe God's will could be done on Earth as it is in heaven if those who wanted to anticipate the kingdom and its justice pursued it with discipline and courage.

Canadian Christians, whatever their politics and whatever their disagreements might be, should recognize that in losing Jack Layton we have lost a great example of a public life significantly shaped by the church.

Jack ran the race set before him and fought the good fight. I am as sure as one can be in this life that the words "well done, my good and faithful servant" welcomed him into God's care and keeping.

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