

Bill Rea ? I can feel sorry for what Rob Ford's been going through

I'm one of those guys who gets upset when I see a person in a high position suddenly fall, even if they deserve it. Thus I feel sorry for what Toronto Mayor Rob Ford is going through, although he's absolutely right when he says he has no one to blame for this mess but himself. I doubt very much that anyone else pushed him into smoking crack.

Still, I have to feel for someone who has experienced such reversal of fortune.

I recall back about 25 years to a very upsetting photo that appeared on the front page of many daily newspapers in the Western Hemisphere (including in this area), of a sobbing and handcuffed Jim Bakker being conducted into a car. Now I have very limited time, patience or use for evangelists, which is why I very seldom watch them on TV. And there was something about that guy that always bothered me. The only reason I ever watched him at all was he and his wife Tammy Faye were on late at night. These were the days when I was working nights waiting tables, and I seldom felt like going straight to bed when I got home. I'd channel hop if there was nothing appealing on Johnny Carson, and sometimes watch a couple of minutes of proselytizing. I could seldom stand more than a couple of minutes of that rubbish, but it was enough to make me appreciate that Bakker had done rather well for himself. I guess there could have been a bit of jealousy there too, but I'm inclined to doubt it.

But even if I had little use for the guy, I had to feel sorry for him when he eventually fell, imagining what it must be like to have been a high as he had once been, and then brought so low.

I had similar feelings for the likes of Conrad Black, Alan Eagleson, Derek Sanderson, and even Richard Nixon. I even have a bit of such sympathy for O.J. Simpson (please note the word 'bit?').

Now it is true that several of these guys managed, as the cliché goes, to land on their feet. That's possibly a function of luck, or ability or combinations of those, along with other attributes.

Sometimes it takes a massive fall from grace for some people to get the message that they need to straighten themselves out. Bakker is something of an example of that. I have read that he was in a prison cell before he read the Bible straight through for the first time, and that was when he realized he had taken some parts of it a long way out of context. I think it says something telling of the evangelist trade that Bakker was able to fly as high as he did on his magic carpet for as long as he did without anyone straightening him out.

Jimmy Swaggart, however, was another matter. True, he made a tearful confession in front of the world not too long after Bakker's fall. But I have never been able to understand why very few people, at the time, remembered that he was one of the people active in the torpedoing of Bakker, calling him 'a cancer on the body of Christ.'

I might have sympathy for people in a spot like that, but I guess there is also a certain malicious satisfaction in watching big mouths like Swaggart having to eat their own words.

And I hope he chewed them well.

I believe the Rob Ford situation was predictable and inevitable. But I don't believe it's necessarily the end of him, either as a man or a politician. It is clear, and he has said so himself, that his act needs a lot of cleaning up.

It's not surprising that there have been calls for him to resign. You hear calls like that directed at any political leader when he or she steps into disfavour, whether they deserve it or no.

I get a couple of emails every week from an outfit calling itself Freedom Watch, occasionally calling for the resignation of American President Barack Obama (I hear from a couple of other groups pushing essentially the same message). I'm not sure why these jokers want him out. I seldom take the time to read this stuff because I can find better sources of drivel, but I'm sure partisan politics has a lot to do it with.

Such allegiance (often blind allegiance) to a point on the political spectrum is nothing new. And I do believe it's something that has been plaguing Ford since the day he got elected. There are plenty of people out there who can't stand seeing someone they don't like getting elected. I think they are called sore losers.

I don't think it's necessary for Ford to resign, understanding of course that he's got a very important job to do, while at the same time sorting out his personal issues. If he can deal with both matters at the same time, then more power to him. If it's necessary for him to take a leave of some sort while he takes care of other business, then I think there would be a lot for support for the guy.

It is, however, a shot only he can call.

The last week saw a certain amount of progress, combined with various revelations being gradually unveiled. I'm generally occupied with other things Sunday afternoons, so it was not often that I was able to listen to the radio show Ford used to do with his councillor brother Doug Ford. But I made a point of listening to last Sunday's offering, which turned out to be the last (the show has been cancelled). I believe the mayor started the process by apologizing, although I thought he took much too much time specifying

what he was sorry about. My thoughts went back a couple of decades to the blubbing apology Swaggart came out with. He never got specific. If memory serves, it was the media who filled in the gaps. Swaggart's performance was drenched with tears, but dry when it came to specifics.

Although I was born and raised in Toronto, I haven't lived there in more than a quarter of a century, and I last worked there during the 20th century. I have never met Rob Ford, and I have seen him in public only once.

My brother still lives in Toronto. We were talking on the phone in the last week, and the topic of swapping mayors came up. He was a lot keener than I, but I think he still pines for David Miller. He is of that political persuasion. I sometimes wonder what excuses he makes up to explain me.

But the big metropolis to the south plays an important part in the lives of the people surrounding it, including up here. The kind of mayor people in the big city elect impacts on us, even if we don't get a vote. There is no mechanism for removing him from office, but City council has an obligation to keep an eye on things.

In this province, we are all going to be able to elect our municipal representatives about a year from now. If Rob Ford can clean up his act enough to win re-election, good for him. From what I've been hearing over the last week (and things have been changing day-to-day), a re-election campaign is on his agenda.

As it should be, the issue will be decided by the voters

