



*Following is the text submitted by Archbishop Smith for publication on the editorial pages of the Edmonton Journal on May 21, 2014.*

### **Mr. Trudeau's Indefensible Stand**

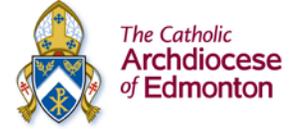
Last Friday's edition of the Journal published two responses to a letter sent last week by Thomas Cardinal Collins, Archbishop of Toronto, to Mr. Justin Trudeau over the latter's recent declaration that only those who are staunchly "pro-choice" on the matter of abortion would be accepted in his party as candidates for political office. The first was that of [Mr. Trudeau himself as reported by Mark Kennedy](#) of the Ottawa Citizen; the second was [contributed by the editorial board of this paper](#).

In defence of his position, Mr. Trudeau is quoted by Kennedy as taking refuge in his Catholicism, stating that he had been brought up by his father to be "very Catholic". The use of one's Catholic identity to justify a pro-abortion stance would mystify anyone familiar with the Catholic Church's unshakeable commitment to the protection of all human life, beginning with the child in the womb. Mr. Trudeau is correct to associate his respect for human rights with his Catholic formation. Our God-given human dignity is a bedrock principle of Catholic moral and social doctrine. However, a selective application of that principle so as to exclude an entire category of humanity, namely children in the womb, is abhorrent to the Catholic Church and would never be countenanced by it. A pro-abortion stance is irreconcilable with Catholicism. Period.

It appears from that same article that Mr. Trudeau's lack of understanding extends also to the constitutional dimension of this issue. He bases his self-defence on the belief that the right to an abortion is protected in this country by our Constitution. This is wrong. There is no constitutional right to abortion in Canada. Surprisingly, the Journal's editorial board shares this misapprehension of the facts. They hold that Mr. Trudeau is taking his stand "on behalf of rights that flow from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as determined by the highest court in the land in its famous 1988 rejection of former abortion laws." When the Supreme Court of Canada in 1988 struck down the law of the day dealing with abortion, it simply asserted that the particular law in question was unconstitutional. Far from thus establishing a constitutional right, the Supreme Court justices indicated in that same decision that Parliament could act to restrict access to abortion. In the often-cited words of the then Chief Justice Brian Dickson, the "protection of foetal interests by Parliament is also a valid governmental objective." What we have in our country is not a constitutional right to abortion but a failure of political leadership to address the matter.

The Journal editors hail Mr. Trudeau's stand as "clear" and "unequivocal." They also believe that Cardinal Collins is wrong to suggest that Mr. Trudeau has overstepped political authority by intruding on personal conscience and religious faith. On all counts I beg to differ.

A "no choice but pro-choice" position is anything but clear; it is, rather, self-contradictory. Furthermore, when placed against the backdrop of Mr. Trudeau's promise to have an open nomination process, the decision to close the door on many good prospective candidates is hardly unequivocal. When open means closed, equivocation has reached new heights.



The editorial board sees no intrusion by Mr. Trudeau into matters of conscience and religious faith. In their view, he has simply said that those who wish to advocate in Parliament for restrictions on abortion will have to "offer their arguments under another banner" than the Liberal Party of Canada. That is an astonishingly casual dismissal of the fundamental role of conscience in a democracy. As the Cardinal points out in his letter, insistence by political authority on party unity and discipline has its place, but it is not unlimited in scope. There are issues that transcend political partisanship and must never be subordinated to a thirst for power. Respect for human life is foremost among these.

On matters of such fundamental import for the common good, we need all elected officials of every party to be free to make decisions on the basis of conscience, whose dictates are discerned through careful deliberation and not predetermined by the party leader. Freedom of conscience and religion is recognized by our Charter of Rights and Freedoms as a fundamental human right. Therefore, Cardinal Collins is perfectly correct when he asserts that people who are willing to serve in public office should not be excluded by any political party because of their fidelity to conscience. Indeed, they should be welcomed.

Most Rev. Richard W. Smith  
Archbishop  
The Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton  
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