

Reflections on Canada Day

On July 1, our brothers and sisters north of the border celebrate Canada Day. The national holiday commemorates the July 1, 1867 proclamation of the *British North America Act*, which resulted in the Confederation of the British colonies of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and the United Province of Canada (divided by the Act into the provinces of Ontario and Quebec) into what was known then as the Dominion of Canada.

Did you know that for her first 102 years, Canada was staunchly pro-life?¹ Prior to Confederation, the British North American colonies had strict laws protecting babies in the womb, that followed those in Great Britain. These laws were maintained after Confederation, affirmed in 1869, and incorporated into the Criminal Code as section 251, in 1892. Of note, the very first Prime Minister of Canada, Sir John Alexander Macdonald (1815-1891), is quoted as having said, “Abortion saps the lifeblood of the nation.”²

All of this began to change in 1969, when the government of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau (1919-2000) modified the Criminal Code to allow for abortion in hospitals for the “life and health” of the mother. In their 1988 decision on *R. v. Morgentaler*, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the abortion law, opining that it prevented women from having equal access to abortion, in violation of their rights enumerated in the 1982 *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Yet, the decision did not identify a constitutional right to abortion, it simply left it to Parliament to pass a law that balanced the rights of a woman with those of her baby in the womb.³ The government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (b. 1939) attempted such a bill in 1990 (*Bill C-43*), which passed the House of Commons but failed in the Senate, due to both pro-life (still left babies in the womb at risk) and pro-abortion (too much restriction) opposition.

Thus, abortion is legal in Canada. Like everywhere else, the issue may be dampened by legislation, but ultimately, the solution rests in changed hearts. We are thankful for all of our brothers and sisters in our Canadian congregations, who are Gospel-motivated voices for life in their communities, reaching out to their neighbors in love, advocating for the sanctity of life from fertilization to forever, and in the end sharing Jesus! They plant and water, but ultimately it is God who gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6). To our family in Canada: we love you, we support you, we pray for you, and we pray that God will use you to help restore His sanctity of life ethic in your glorious land.

Notes:

1. Information from Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform, “History of Abortion Law in Canada,” at <https://www.endthekilling.ca/classroom/history/> (accessed 21 June, AD 2023)
2. Quoted in, Anonymous, “Thousands stand on guard for life.” *CLC National News*, June 2017, at <https://www.campaignlifecoalition.com/shared/media/monthlynewsletter/260/newsletter.pdf> (accessed 21 June, AD 2023). Note that Macdonald’s approach to the First

Nations peoples of Canada has come under scrutiny, much like Thomas Jefferson's (1743-1826) treatment of slaves.

3. See, Anonymous, "The Supreme Court of Canada's 1988 Morgentaler Decision," at <http://www.morgentalerdecision.ca/1988-decision/> (accessed 21 June, AD 2023)