



President Robert Bugbee

Canada at 150 Years

With all the focus on the 500th Anniversary of Luther's Reformation, there's another milestone Christians in our country should not miss. About the time you get this issue, we will be almost exactly at the 150th birthday of our country. Canada's confederation dates to July 1, 1867.

Christians are citizens of "two kingdoms" at the same time. We have our truest home in the kingdom of God and Christ (Philippians 3:20), where the Lord rules us by His Word and Spirit. This kingdom is ours, even if we move from one country to another or "change our citizenship" in this world. This kingdom remains unshaken, even if our country would be conquered and go out of existence in its present form. This kingdom is the one where we shall dwell forever with Jesus, Who died for us and was raised again. This is why it is sometimes called the "kingdom of the right hand."

We also live in another kingdom, which Christians call the "kingdom of the left hand." In our case, it's Canada. Canada is not held together by faith or the forgiveness of sins. There's a place in it for people who confess Christ, but also for adherents of other faiths, or even of no faith at all. Canada is built upon laws and human structures. It's not eternal. Go back far enough and there was no Canada. And at the end of all things—if not sooner—the institutions and structures that form our country will be done away with.

The 150th Anniversary of confederation gives us a helpful opportunity to ponder our own place in this country and society as followers of Jesus Christ. We can begin with a big dose of gratitude to God. He has blessed us in Canada in an

incredible way. Even those of modest means here are among the wealthiest people in the world, compared to countless other nations. Canada's farms, waterways, and resources have met our needs in undeserved ways. God has blessed us with peace and security in that we're not threatened by foreign invaders. Despite their shortcomings, our governments have functioned in an orderly way. They have not subjected us to the horrors endured by people in totalitarian dictatorships. As Christians, we have been able to organize congregations, build churches and schools, and to carry on the Lord's work without being outlawed or imprisoned. Don't take this for granted! Canada's 150th birthday is the right moment to praise God for it all.

At the same time, Canadian society is developing in ways that cause us legitimate concern. It's fair to say the Christian faith has lost its hold on Canadians. As our country drifts away from commitments it once made to the defenceless unborn, to historic understandings of marriage and family, and opens the door to physician-assisted death, we have cause for sorrow and even alarm.

To be sure, Christians who struggle with these societal changes are not compelled to take part in them. But the changes themselves are symptoms of the fading Christian influence in our country. And we do have reason to worry sometimes about claims to respect religious freedom. After all, attempts are being made in Canada to keep certain Christians from practicing law, not because of evidence that they would violate court rules, but because some professional associations don't approve of the faith-based institution

where they receive their training. More recently in Ontario, the push is on to compel Christians and others with conscientious objections to physician-assisted death to either help facilitate it or to stay out of medical practice.

The apostle Paul recognized that the Roman empire was not a "Christian" country. He was still thankful for the benefits it brought (Acts 27:2-3) and encouraged Christians to respect secular government (Romans 13:1). At the same time, Paul was not afraid to insist on his rights to fair treatment as a Roman citizen (Acts 22:23-29).

What does this mean for Christians in Canada? We ought to be grateful for what God has given us here. We ought to be supportive and respectful of our land and institutions whenever possible. At the same time, in a democratic society, Christians have as much right as anyone else to speak their piece on public policy.

Perhaps things seemed easier for Christian people and churches in an earlier time. But God has determined that you and I should live and give our witness here and now, not in some other time. This means, however, that we aren't going to be able to "coast along" the way church members did in an earlier era, confident that the community and its leaders were supportive of our faith and mission. This moment is much more like the days of the early church. It's going to require a faith-life that is much more deeply rooted in Scripture and prayer, so that we will understand our society from the Lord's perspective, and will grasp the most faithful way to respond.

By the way, that would not only do the church good; it would be a great gift to our country for her 150th birthday and beyond!