

# All people of faith need 'courage of convictions,' says Cardinal Collins

In a speech that touched on religious freedom, conscience rights, euthanasia and Christian persecution, Cardinal Thomas Collins evoked the life of St. John Henry Newman to urge people of faith to be courageous in the face of "an aggressively secular society."

Newman, who was declared a saint last month by Pope Francis, is a model of someone who steadfastly valued truth and conscience, said Collins, the Archbishop of Toronto.

Newman walked away from the Anglican Church, a successful academic career and the respect of his peers to become a Catholic, joining what in the 19th century was "a despised minority."

"In social terms, he left the winners and joined the losers, and all because in conscience, he was convinced that pursuit of the truth required that," said Collins, who went to Rome for Newman's canonization. "In this also he is a model for us, for we, like him, need to have the courage of our convictions."

"All people of faith, living in what is more and more an aggressively secular society, must manifest the courage of their convictions."

Collins – the former Archbishop of Edmonton – was speaking to an audience of about 1,600 people at the 40th annual Cardinal's Dinner, held Nov. 5 at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. Billed as the largest community dinner in Canada, its head table included religious and political leaders, including the Vatican nuncio to Canada, Archbishop Luigi Bomazzi, and Ontario Premier Doug Ford.

Collins urged the audience to be mindful of the cause of religious freedom. He pointed to the situation in Quebec where a new law prohibits most public employees from wearing religious symbols.

"This is deeply distressing in a country that prides itself on diversity and religious freedom," he said. "We reject the idea that freedom of religion means freedom from religion. Religious communities are fundamental to the life of our country, in which they harmoniously work together."

The cardinal condemned religious violence and pointed out that Christians are the most persecuted group on Earth "by far."

"They are the victims of 75 per cent of the world's religiously-motivated violence," he said.

The "countless martyrs of our present age" will be remembered in a prayer service on Nov. 20 at St. Michael's Cathedral, which will be illuminated in blood red, Collins said.

The cardinal also spoke about how it is "deeply troubling" that "the culture of life seems to be eroding more and more in our country."

He pointed to Canada's lack of a law on abortion and a government that seems intent to loosen safeguards on euthanasia at a time when promises to increase palliative care "have taken a backseat to death on demand."

"I find this to be appalling," he said.

In light of this situation, Collins called on the provincial government to enact legislation to protect the rights of health care workers.

"In such a grim situation, it is critical that we at least respect the conscience rights of those health care professionals who do not wish to participate in killing their patients," he said.

Over the past 40 years the annual Cardinal's Dinner has raised more than \$6 million to support local charities. In 2018, 32 charities benefited from the dinner proceeds.

*Below is the complete address from Cardinal Thomas Collins, Archbishop of Toronto.*

As always, it is a great joy to be with you tonight, for the 40th annual Cardinal's Dinner.

To begin, a few words of gratitude. To our dinner chair, Mary Ann Leon, who has served the Catholic community faithfully for so many years. Thank you Mary Ann, to you and to the planning committee for organizing such a beautiful evening of fellowship and dialogue.

I would also like to bring greetings to our distinguished head table guests and those with us tonight representing leadership in the religious, political, corporate, and community sectors.

I extend warm wishes to the religious leaders present from other faith communities who make such a profound impact in our cities, province and throughout the country.

Finally, I would like to extend greetings to the clergy, religious men and women, and parishioners from across the Archdiocese of Toronto. I am deeply grateful for your example of fidelity and commitment. In a special way I thank you for your generosity to so many charitable causes, especially ShareLife,

which once again this year raised more than \$13 million and allows us to serve those most in need.

At this time of year, as we approach Remembrance Day, we call to mind in prayer all of those who have given their lives for our country, and those who serve in our military. Theirs is a difficult life of sacrifice, and they are in our prayers. We are honoured to have with us this evening Maj.-Gen. Guy Chapdelaine; Father Chapdelaine is the chaplain general of the Canadian Forces, and through him we extend our appreciation to our military and to the chaplains of many faiths who offer them pastoral care.

### **Federal Election and Engagement**

Our country has just had a federal election and we pray for all those who have been elected to serve Canadians from coast to coast. The Archdiocese of Toronto was particularly engaged throughout the campaign, offering non-partisan resources and hosting our first ever debate from a Catholic perspective, with a live audience of more than 1,000, and with many thousands more gathering to watch it throughout the country. We are currently preparing to launch Parish Action groups in the parishes of the archdiocese in the new year. Our faith invites us to engage in the public square – as I mentioned at the debate: “people of faith disproportionately contribute to (the) well-being (of Canadians) in works of charity and justice without which Canada would be a colder and darker place. We have earned a place at the democratic table, and we expect our voices to be heard.”

### **Religious Freedom and Refugees**

We must also be mindful of the cause of religious freedom worldwide. Here in our own country, a neighbouring province has passed legislation prohibiting citizens holding public service jobs from wearing religious symbols. This is deeply distressing in a country that prides itself on diversity and religious freedom. We reject the idea that freedom of religion means freedom from religion; religious communities are fundamental to the life of our country, in which they harmoniously work together.

In fact, we welcome refugees each year from countries where they are persecuted and even killed because of their faith. Religious violence against any faith is unacceptable, but while this fact is rarely if ever reported, we realize that Christians are the most persecuted group on earth, by far – they are the victims of 75 per cent of the world’s religiously-motivated violence. Organizations like the Catholic Near East Welfare Association and Aid to the Church in Need advocate for those who remain in their homeland.

In the first centuries of Christianity, Tertullian – an ancient Christian writer – wrote that “the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.” In coordination with Red Wednesday Services being held around the world, at 7:30 in the evening of Wednesday Nov. 20, St Michael’s Cathedral will be illuminated in blood red, as we hold a solemn ecumenical prayer service for the countless

martyrs of our present age.

Here in our archdiocese, our Office for Refugees works with parishes to sponsor those who must flee, wishing to begin life anew in our country. We thank the federal government for their support in this matter, and continue to urge them to make more space available to welcome both Christians and those of many other religions to Canada.

### **Catholic Education**

We are grateful to the provincial government and other political parties for their continued support of publicly funded Catholic education through which, along with our private Catholic schools and post-secondary Catholic partners, our community engages in the two thousand year old tradition of Catholic education. That tradition, which is also respected by people of other faiths, enriches our whole community by offering education through the lens of Catholic faith and reason, which reveals a loving and insightful vision of the reality of the human person and of human life. In Catholic education we journey with our young people and strive to form young leaders who are compassionate, responsible and faithful in all that they do.

### **Euthanasia and Conscience Rights**

It is deeply troubling that the culture of life seems to be eroding more and more in our country. Canada remains one of the few countries in the world with no law on abortion. The introduction of euthanasia was a sad day for Canada, and all indications are that the government intends to loosen safeguards currently in place. Increased palliative care seems to have taken a backseat to death on demand. I find this to be appalling.

In such a grim situation, it is critical that we at least respect the conscience rights of those health-care professionals who do not wish to participate in killing their patients. As there is limited conscience protection at the federal level, most provinces in Canada have legislative protection in place for their health care workers. I hope that our provincial legislature can work to address this issue in the days ahead by enacting legislation that protects the conscience rights of all health care workers.

### **Seminary and Vocations**

Recently I travelled to Rome. One purpose was to visit our priests who are engaged in further studies there. I believe that this advanced education is essential to the wellbeing of our diocese.

I have tried to send one or two priests for further studies each year, mainly to prepare to teach in our seminary, and currently there are three in Rome. In a few days I will be blessing the construction site of Serra House, where we will be renovating the original house and building an extension so that we can have a base close to the universities for seminarians at that level of

formation. Currently there are 61 seminarians at St Augustine's Seminary and 13 at the Redemptoris Mater Seminary that is connected to it. All together, we have 46 seminarians preparing to be priests of our archdiocese. God willing, in May of next year I will be ordaining seven new priests.

I also wish to thank our clergy who faithfully serve day after day in our archdiocese. In a special way, I would like to acknowledge three senior priests who have recently been named monsignors by Pope Francis. We give thanks for Msgr. Michael Busch, Msgr. Fernando Couto and Msgr. Pat O'Dea for their many years of service to the people of God.

I encourage everyone to pray that all people will follow the vocation to which God calls them, which for most people is Holy Matrimony, the sacred lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, faithful in love and open to the gift of life. But some are also called to the single life, or to a life dedicated to the service of the Church, as lay people, religious sisters or brothers, deacons or priests. Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into the harvest. I encourage all parishes to make available times for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, even perpetual adoration, since all our apostolic activities are founded on prayer.

### **John Henry Newman**

On Oct. 13 Pope Francis canonized five saints, including the great Cardinal John Henry Newman. I was privileged to participate in the canonization Mass. Of course we all know that in the majestic ceremony of canonization at St Peter's absolutely nothing happens to those being canonized: the pope simply authoritatively places their names into the canon or list of those whom we recognize as being extraordinary models of the Christian life, interceding for us in heaven before the throne of God. The pope does not make saints; God makes saints, over the course of their life: but at a canonization we are given certainty that the person is, in fact, a saint. And we are encouraged to ask for their prayers, and to learn from their lives.

In St. John Henry Newman we have the example of an extraordinary Christian from whom we can learn much, especially since through his numerous writings he brilliantly revealed the heart of the Christian faith, and showed us how to become true disciples of Jesus.

Newman lived from 1801 to 1890, a long life by human standards, about half of it lived as an Anglican and about half as a Catholic. It was good to see several Anglican bishops present in a place of honour at his canonization.

As a young man, Newman was a teacher at Oxford University, and in his parochial and plain sermons gave a challenging vision of the Christian life that touched the hearts and changed the lives of the university students who first heard them; reading them today can have the same effect on us.

Newman chose as the inscription on his tomb the Latin phrase *Ex Umbris*

*et Imaginibus in Veritatem*, which means "From shadows and illusions into the truth". That well describes his life, and is a salutary challenge for each of us: he was a man who wanted to escape from illusion and to find out what is real, what is solid, what is reliable: what is true. So too should we, in a world at least as confused as the one in which he lived, and in which it is easy to be mired in illusion.

Newman sought the truth and, convinced after careful study and earnest prayer that the fullness of religious truth is found in Catholic faith, on Oct. 9, 1845, he became a Catholic. By doing so he gave up his secure position at Oxford, the esteem of the ruling class, and all hope for advancement, and joined a despised minority. In social terms, he left the winners and joined the losers, and all because in conscience, he was convinced that pursuit of the truth required that. In this also he is a model for us, for we, like him, need to have the courage of our convictions. All people of faith, living in what is more and more an aggressively secular society, must manifest the courage of their convictions.

They have reason to fear that fidelity to their convictions, based on the ancient tradition of faith and reason, will be an impediment to advancing in their career. Too often the rich wisdom of Catholic faith, and of other faiths, is caricatured and denied legitimacy by those who are trapped in a shallow secular mentality, and who may seek to use simplistic slogans to terminate conversation.

We surely need to enter into conversation with our secularized friends and neighbours, who have an inaccurate understanding of our faith, and of faith itself. Here, as well, Newman shows us the way. In his writings, as also in his efforts to advance the education of lay people, especially in his superb analysis of *The Idea of a University*, which sets the standard for Catholic higher education, and in his analysis in *The Grammar of Assent* of what it means to believe, Newman sought to understand fully the secular forces already at work in his society, and to prepare believers to respond to them intelligently and effectively.

When he was challenged, Newman was ready to push back, though always with grace and charity. When a blustering Victorian cleric named Kingsley, misunderstanding his writings, basically called him a liar, and said the same of his fellow Catholic priests, Newman wrote *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, *The Defence of His Life*, which despite its Latin title is a masterpiece of English Literature. We can learn from him, in that he did not just deny the false charge, but by telling the personal story of his life he built a bridge of trust, and touched the hearts and changed the minds of those who had so readily believed the false accusations against him. Such misunderstandings are overcome by thoughtful dialogue, which is given credibility by the personal witness of loving actions arising out of an inner serenity rooted in prayer.

When Newman became a cardinal at the age of 78, a lifetime of slow and painful growth in wisdom led him to choose as his motto *Cor ad Cor Loquitur – Heart Speaks to Heart*. This is a quote from St. Francis de Sales, the great French bishop from the time of Shakespeare, who wrote to a young bishop seeking advice on preaching: “the lips speak to the ears, but heart speaks to heart.” Though we must always dispel illusion and base our life on the search for the truth, in doing so we need to have compassion for the people we encounter, and treat each one as a whole person, not as a thing: as a “who”, not as a “what”. This is sometimes extremely difficult to do. We can see that when we consider the sharpness of controversy in politics, in the media, and also, sadly, in the Church. We all need the wisdom of John Henry Newman: Heart speaks to heart.

The life of individual disciples of Jesus, and of the Church as a whole, involves a perilous journey home to the heavenly Jerusalem through this fallen world. A trusty companion on that journey is the great St. John Henry Newman. I will end with his magnificent poem about life’s journey, which he wrote as a young man, a kind of examination of conscience in which he reflects on how God guides us sinners on our way home to heaven:

*Lead, kindly Light, amid th’encircling gloom,*

*lead Thou me on!*

*The night is dark, and I am far from home;*

*lead Thou me on!*

*Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see*

*The distant scene; one step enough for me.*

*I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou*

*Shouldst lead me on.*

*I loved to choose and see my path,*

*But now lead Thou me on!*

*I loved the garish day, and spite of fears,*

*Pride ruled my will.*

*Remember not past years!*

*So long Thy power hath blest me; sure it still will lead me on.*

*O’er moor and fen, o’er crag and torrent,*

*Till the night is gone,*

*And with the morn those angel faces smile,  
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.*