

Sherwood Park MP alleges anti-Catholic bias against Andrew Scheer

An Alberta Conservative MP says some of Canada's other political parties are playing a dangerous game by trying to smear federal Conservative leader Andrew Scheer by implying there is something sinister about the fact that he is a practicing Catholic.



Garnett Genuis

"I don't see other leaders and candidates being asked theological questions, as if there is some kind of litmus test that only Catholics have to pass to be considered for office," MP Garnett Genuis told the Canadian Catholic News in a phone interview after a Remembrance Day ceremony in his home riding of Sherwood Park-Fort Saskatchewan on Nov. 11.

"I don't think we want to be the kind of country that applies a religious test to running for office," Genuis said. "That is being out of step with what a pluralistic society looks like."

And for those who take their personal faith as Catholics seriously, he said the implications of focusing on Scheer's Roman Catholic faith may have a chilling effect on Catholics being willing to get involved in public life in Canada.

Scheer has continually been asked about his faith – both during and since – the October federal election in which the federal Liberals were re-elected as a minority government. Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is also Catholic, but he has taken positions on abortion that are clearly at odds with the Catholic Church and he portrays himself and his party as a champion of gay rights.

Scheer has consistently been asked if he considers homosexuality to be a "sin" and has not participated in any Gay Pride events and parades since becoming leader of the Conservative Party.

While Scheer has repeatedly sidestepped questions from the media about whether

he personally considers homosexuality to be a "sin", he has continually said that if he were to be prime minister any government he leads would not reopen debates on same-sex marriage or abortion rights in Canada but would not block individual MPs from bringing forward motions in the House of Commons on such issues.

In fact, the pro-life Campaign Life Coalition harshly criticized Scheer after the Oct. 21 federal election for not campaigning on a more morally- and socially-conservative platform.

"The opposition Conservatives led by Andrew Scheer might have formed government if they had not alienated so much of their natural base of social conservatives, with their cynical but ultimately ineffective campaign to diminish the importance of moral issues, and to put on a socially-liberal face," said Jeff Gunnarson, National President of the Campaign Life Coalition.

According to the 2011 National Household Survey released by Statistics Canada, Roman Catholics make up by far the largest single religious group of Canadians with 38.7 per cent self-identifying as Catholic. However, there is a difference between identifying as a Catholic, and actually being faithful to the Church's positions on issues such as homosexuality and abortion.

Genuis said there are a lot of historic reasons why so many Canadians identify as Catholic, but for those who actually practice their religious faith in their personal life there seems to be a double standard that they will somehow have dual loyalties – to the country and to the Church – that he likens to anti-Catholic bigotry.

"There seems to be this thing where they go, 'Oh, he's that kind of Catholic,'" Genuis said. "Some other parties are pushing this idea and anti-Catholic stereotypes of what it means to be Catholic.

"These things are being pushed by other parties, and they should be very careful about what the implications of that are," he said.

Genuis made some of the same points on the CTV Question Period TV show that aired on Nov. 10 where he was a panelist with MPs from the Liberal and NDP parties.