Opinion

Guest Voices



British Foreign Minister David Lammy David Lammy meets with U.S. Vice President JD Vance on Feb. 14 at the Munich Security Conference. (Wikimedia Commons/Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office/Elliot Vick)



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Like JD Vance, I'm Catholic. In fact, like Vance, I'm an adult convert. Like Vance, I believe all life is sacred — although his support for the death penalty makes me wonder if we mean the same thing (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2267). Unlike Vance, however, I have no faith in Donald Trump's leadership and, as a Canadian, I am deeply disturbed by Trump's threats to annex my country.

But I want to thank Vance for something he said in his speech at the Munich Security Conference recently.

Not the part where he pretended not to know why some European governments might want to limit hate speech. Or the part where he criticized the Biden administration for having supposedly bullied social media companies into censorship — as if Elon Musk didn't say that journalists should be jailed for doing their jobs, or as if his president doesn't regularly disregard the media's questions when they don't suit him.

I mean the part where he asked European leaders what their positive vision is. He was right to ask what, precisely, they are defending. Of course, they could simply say their lives, but presumably any invading force would let at least most of them live. Life, Vance rightly implied, is not enough to justify a nation.

This is a question Canadians are grappling with more acutely than ever today, in the face of Trump's distressing and disrespectful threats to annex Canada. Initially my reaction, like that of many Canadians, was one of fear. Fear of becoming part of a country with the highest medical expenses and medical debt in the world. Fear of becoming part of the developed country with the highest number of murders per capita in the world. Fear of becoming part of a country that, from my perspective, always seems to put country above both God and love. But that's not a positive vision.

Like Vance, I have a lot of kids. Yet, unlike the American health care system, where the median cost to parents for delivering a baby is about $13,000, in Canada, it's included in our public health care system. In total, my wife and I probably spent $100 on parking for the children we had. I'd say that makes Canada substantially more pro-life than the U.S., and I think that's something worth fighting for.

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On the topic of life, I know that Vance is very concerned about abortion, so I might add that the U.S. rate of abortion is almost 20% higher than that of Canada, despite Canada's very permissive laws. Also, when my son had cancer, his surgery and chemotherapy were completely covered by our public health care system. Another win for life.

Meanwhile, in the U.S., children without insurance are 1.26 times more likely to die from cancer than those with insurance and have a shorter survival time. Call me Catholic, but I think no child should ever have to die because their family can't afford treatment (CCC, No. 2411).

None of that is specific to Canada; most developed countries, besides the U.S., provide for health care for all citizens, regardless of ability to pay. Yet it is emblematic of a positive vision I think is worth defending, one the U.S. is not known for. A vision of a society where, consistent with Catholic doctrine, social relations are based on love and mutual respect for everyone's inherent human dignity (CCC, No. 2423), profit is not the ultimate goal of the economy (CCC, No. 2424), and the government is committed to "reasonable regulation of the marketplace and economic initiatives, in keeping with a just hierarchy of values and a view of the common good" (CCC, No. 2425) — someone should tell Musk that (although, as a billionaire atheist transhumanist, I doubt he'll care). Of course, that's a vision of a Catholic society, not necessarily Canada — but certainly not the U.S., from what I see.

For me, God is more important than my country, but my country is still worth fighting for. It's my home, and it's where I continue to learn what love is. Love is patient, like listening to Indigenous peoples whose lives were destroyed by Canada's colonial residential school system. Love is kind, like the fact that medical care is available to all Canadians, regardless of ability to pay. Love does not envy, like the fact that people who live in a society like Canada's, with a strong sense of community and social responsibility, don't have to envy the success of others for fear they will suffer — although there are lots of things we could do to improve this. Love does not dishonor others and keeps no record of wrongs — these are values I learned in Canada, they are ingrained in Canadian political culture, and they are worth fighting for. Unfortunately, I haven't seen any of them from Trump in the way

he talks about my country.

I am certain Vance shares these values. I also have no doubt that the European leaders he chastised share them too. They may not express them in the same terms, and they may even have different ideas about what they look like in practice, but they are, as Vance will immediately recognize, Christian values.

In fact, if anything is perplexing to me about Vance's speech in Munich, it's how he hardly mentioned Christianity at all. Perhaps he was trying to be prudent — a quintessential Catholic virtue — but I wonder if it's also because so many of the things the Trump administration is currently doing, and the way it's doing them, contradict Christian values.

About 29% of Canadians, like Vance, are Catholic, but no one calls Canada a Christian nation anymore. And it's not perfect. Indeed, as Vance knows very well, there is no perfect thing on Earth.

But, to the extent that Canada is home to millions of people who are, in their own ways, individually and collectively, learning what it means to love their neighbors, and indeed their enemies too, just as the Gospel teaches, I think it's worth fighting for, and I would appreciate it if, as one Christian to another, Vance and Trump could please start acting more like Jesus, who could see when others were healing in his name and told his disciples to leave them be, and less like Herod, who thought love meant he had to lose.

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