

HISTORY AS A GUARDIAN OF LIVING TRADITIONS

Your Eminence, [Cardinal Villeneuve] Your Excellency, [Lord Tweedsmuir] Your Worship, [Mayor E. Gregoire] Ladies and Gentlemen: I come before you very late with a subject that is very old. Luckily, nothing at a Conference could be more novel than to discuss the set subject!

History as a guardian of living traditions ... a wonderful title on the whole, and one which I intend to take as an homage to my craft, the great discipline of history, and to historians, those meddlesome craftsmen who, not content with disturbing the dead, must also disturb the living. History, the most dangerous product ever engendered by the chemistry of the intellect: a “narcotic, an artificial paradise to intoxicate whole nations, breed false memories, maintain old wounds . . .” So say the decadents in their fit of pique and paradox, taking great notice of history for fear that it should later take no notice of them. History would indeed be a silly and futile discipline if all it could do was conjure up lifeless, unreal reflections of a nation. The past is nothing if it is not the truth, if one cannot expect from it, as from a grain in the earth, the potential for life, the germ of a vital thrust towards the future. But this is precisely the question: is all history simply a lie? Is the past really dead, a charnel house of impotent and deceptive shades? Must we refuse to allow it any extension into the present, any influence on life? Only those who have a most childish conception of the dynamic sequence of historical periods could possibly think this way. Without any paradox, I would say boldly that history is the most living of things and that there is nothing so present as the past. Nor even is there any need to write or relate history in order to release its driving force. We carry its potential in our minds, in our eyes, in our veins. The doctrines our fathers preached, the monuments their genius erected, the human features they stamped upon their homeland, in short, the sum of hereditary elements they transmitted—all these act upon us, upon our senses, our intelligence, our emotions; they condition, often without our knowledge, most of our reflexes and our actions. We carry in our very bones the mind and marrow of our forebears. No, a nation cannot separate itself from its past any more than a river can separate itself from its source, or sap from the soil whence it arises. No generation is self-sufficient. It can and does happen that a generation forgets its history, or turns its back upon it; such an act is a betrayal of History. And if we are here today in

quest of faith, our hearts heavy with anxiety, is it not because a preceding generation may have lacked faith and forgotten to be anxious?

History, a reconstitution and condensation of the past, thus carries within it an awesome dynamic quality. As long as nothing distorts its teaching or renders it inadequate, then history can act as more even than a rudder or compass in the life of a nation. History not only indicates the goal, it advances, surges towards it through some irresistible inner force. History preserves something essential to any nation: a living tradition. Here again—a weighty word, an august reality about which we must not be confused. For some, tradition is synonymous with minor customs: family customs, parochial or national customs such as our own New Year's custom of paternal benediction and the distribution of gifts by the child Jesus. Traditions, yes, but flowers or fruit of a deeper and truer tradition, involving the Christian spirit of the family, the Christian patriarchal authority of the father, and linked in turn to the great Catholic tradition of our race. For others, and they are the majority, tradition means simply a rigid, static routine, a sort of archaeological residue, long petrified at the bottom of people's hearts.

Simple etymology would protest such definitions. Tradition means transmission, bestowal. And since it is the transmission of a moral bequest by a living organism in a constant state of evolution, the reality must surely be that this moral bequest, which may well remain the same in its fundamentals, never ceases to be modified from generation to generation, and to be continually enriched with new elements. In other words, tradition means continuity, constant progress, continual enrichment; and therefore there can be no tradition but a living tradition. In the widest sense of the word, does it not mean simply the major characteristics and features of history? Tradition has been aptly defined as 'a nation's constants', its guidelines, its blueprint. The word connotes an intellectual design, an architectural plan by which a nation builds its history, and, faithful to the special impulse of its own nature, lives, creates, evolves, without ever breaking away from its fundamental pattern, remaining in harmony with its past, its ancestors, the very genius of its race.

How can one then overrate the role of tradition? Can one build the life and future of a country without paying the slightest attention to the foundations or the building stones, without even consulting the blueprints of its destiny? Such reckless behaviour is sometimes evinced by

statesmen who consider knowledge or commonsense to be mere hindrances; or by a people afflicted with adventuresome or suicidal madness; it is never the hall-mark of true leaders of nations nor of true French, rational people. Is it not obvious, then, that to define the role of tradition is also to define the role of History? Who is capable of drawing out the 'constants', the guidelines, from the tangled profusion of fact? Who is capable of tracing their course in the scenery of the past as clearly as major routes on a touring map? What is the purpose of History? It helps a nation avoid deviations from the proper path, prevents it from building its life, its mores, its education along entirely wrong lines, protects it from hasty, improvised solutions to its economic, social or political problems, saves it from being a mere guinea pig in the hands of politicians, endows these political leaders with consistency of purpose and a capacity for leadership. These are the services we can expect of a country's History, not to mention a few others of similar insignificance!

II

But, you may ask, what are these constants in our French Canadian history? Can you show us the guidelines visible in our past? An easy task: our first constant is so obvious it springs immediately to mind. Our religious tradition, our Catholic faith, you say. Yes, and no. Catholicism has created everything about us: very often it has undertaken the task of healing and restoring our people. In it, we see more than a great tradition. It transcends all our life, it invigorates all our being and, because it has played this supreme role, I hesitate to call it a tradition; it is rather the heart and soul of all our traditions. In any case, I intend to place my discussion strictly on the human and national level, and I say therefore that the first constant of our history has been our agricultural vocation. We are country men, born and bred on the land. All the founders of our country, from Champlain onward, all our governors and intendants, our kings, Richelieu, Colbert—all of them conceived of New France as an agricultural country, a country of farmers. Of course they had other ambitions for the colony, but first and foremost, they wanted to throw down sturdy roots and thus gain a solid footing on the soil of the Laurentian Valley, When Richelieu, echoing Champlain and the early priests, gave the Hundred Associates the task of doing missionary work among the Indians, the great minister insisted also on the support of a settlement of Catholic and French peasantry. In any case it is hard to imagine how the country could have been settled, except by a constant march forward of men of the

stamp of Louis Hébert and Robert Giffard, pushing new clearings through the forest, building new farms beside the old, and dotting the land with steeples—almost the work of magicians!

At the same time, just note the almost split personality of these peasants or sons of peasants from Normandy, Perche, Anjou, Poitou, Saintonge, from Picardy or Champagne: as they set up pastoral realities, they dreamt of heroic deeds. Half their sons they gave to the cultivation of the soil, half to adventure. Founded as a missionary post, the colony was drawn by this apostolic mission away from the Laurentian Valley toward the Indian tribes living far to the west, the south, the south-west, and the north. Geography and the fur trade soon added their powerful attraction to this religious ideal. The expansion of the French colony, which had begun with Champlain, the missionaries, the employees and interpreters of the companies, which had gained new momentum and been regulated by Talon and Frontenac, was soon to spread, as you know, across the continent. Its advance was stopped only at the Gulf of Mexico, Hudson's Bay, the base of the Rockies, and the western slopes of the Alleghenies. Never perhaps had such a tiny handful of men encompassed such spaces. Never, in any case, had such a small people shown such vigour in disseminating its civilization and faith over such an extensive territory. Had the mother country seen fit to support them at this point, these Frenchmen would, without a doubt, have conquered and civilized two-thirds of the North American continent—an achievement without any parallel in colonial history.

The constant pattern of our early history thus emerges with great clarity; a strong farming settlement within a small domain; and surrounding this domain, satisfying an extraordinary need for action, for conquest, for missionary work, a vast unbounded territory for adventure, heroism and glory. All around the pastoral, the immense epic. "Whether we like it or not, we are marked by our race," I recently read in a work written by a young French Canadian. Yes, we are most strongly marked by this history, and by the heredity it has bestowed upon us. When I see these Frenchmen, who only yesterday set out to conquer an empire, forced today into the role of servants and labourers, and not even masters of their own Quebec reserve, I understand that our young people rebel against such a fate and swear by their fathers never to accept it!

Then there was 1760. We lost our empire, but we kept the stronghold of our agrarian position. Recoiled into our Laurentian soil, we girded our loins for an effort as moving and audacious as

the conquest of America: our French survival. Following the Treaty of Paris, our forefathers took stock of their numbers and saw immediately that they were the most insignificant people on earth and, apparently, the most unstructured. Happily, they were strengthened by their Catholic faith which had taught them not to attach absolute value to material things but to live according to transcending ideals. Their culture, that of seventeenth-century France, had shaped their nature, making it strong and well-balanced. Their own history, on their own land, had marked their spirit with a grandiose vision and an exalting pride. Before the conquest they had relied on the support of their peasantry as they advanced to conquer a continent: now, retrenched behind those same peasant lines, what ambition they could still display! Incorporated into an empire with foreign laws, faith and language, which, at the outcome of the Seven Years' War, had risen to be the first power in Europe, a group of sixty-five thousand impoverished peasants formed this resolution: to remain themselves, to live their own lives, to protect their own flame and carry it high. It was to be a peasant's struggle, the struggle of a stocky, patient athlete, unaffected by moral or physical fatigue, who knows that with both feet planted on firm ground he will eventually win out against his opponent. Look at him: the guidelines of his history are again easy to discern. The only goal he set for himself was this: to escape from the grasp of the conqueror, to free himself a bit more each day, gradually increasing his autonomy and tending with all his might towards the dignity of a French destiny. Please note as well that this goal included the defence of his laws, his mores, his schools, and, above all, the defence of his language. But it included more: it aimed still higher. Its goal was full self-government, full political power: that sum of powers which enables a people to keep its own attributes and national character and to ensure above all an organic life, a complete fulfilment of material and spiritual potential. Wonderful, providential circumstances abetted the efforts of this small and audacious group. 1774 brought civil and religious freedom, 1791 the beginning of political freedom and, theoretically at least, the establishment of the province as a French state. During the fifty years that followed there was a continual struggle to obtain greater political freedom: having gained control of Parliament, we determined to gain control of the Government. Next in this endeavour came two tragic setbacks, the uprising of 1837 and the annexation of our province to Upper Canada in 1841. Not quite a year was to elapse, however, before the situation was remedied: we transformed the unitary state into a federal one and, in 1843, shared political power in a coalition government, the result of a colonial autonomy partly of our making. Finally, in 1867, we flung off the last shackles of 1841:

Lower Canada regained its national and political identity; the state of 1791 was reconstituted with, this time, executive as well as legislative powers. That year, we might at last have witnessed the solemn triumph of all the efforts we had made since 1760 to free ourselves and fulfill our own destiny, to acquire the profit and joy of a destiny of our own. What then was lacking? More than ever we needed to keep our guidelines in sight. Why, at that decisive hour, did the authoritative voice of History choose to be silent? Instead of the shortsighted flunkies we were given, why did Providence not send us true leaders, men of sufficiently realistic and sound intellect to grasp the implications of the recent political evolution and above all to see the direction of our future, the only one allowed by our past and its constants? Had we been so fortunate, seventy years ago, we might well have insisted upon and obtained a French state, with policies distinctly French and national, and we would not be here at the end of June, 1937, questioning our fate in an atmosphere of setbacks and defeats. Instead, we would be consolidating our position and continuing along the ascending curve of our history.

III

Let us now see how costly it can be for a people to deviate from the natural guidelines of its life. But pity the poor historian obliged to sketch such a dismal picture!

Firstly, we lost our agrarian position. I admit that we did retain our old agricultural territory. We even enlarged it in some respect. Still, the fact remains that we are no longer predominantly an agricultural country, a country of farmers. We are now hurtling towards the proletariat and no one knows how to apply the brakes. A disorder resulting from an incredible lack of foresight! This disease is not a trifling one; in the economic and social spheres it is one of the most serious that a people can experience. We have facilitated it by the debasement of our middle class, the very class which most nations regard as their best safeguard. Nor did the trouble occur overnight, as the result of some dire calamity. It spread slowly through our whole organism like a cancer. Its long and silent gestation was followed by a hideous eruption and it has now been gnawing at us for a century. The emigration of our people to the United States was a terrible, interminable, hemorrhage caused by the same disease. Prior to 1848, when our lands were administered by a small committee in London, or prior to 1867, when we had only partial control of our policies, we could claim that others were responsible for our miseries. But after we became masters of our

own government, not only did we not succeed in halting the evil, we even managed to aggravate it. In former times it was dire necessity that made our people uproot themselves; now, it is mere whim. Yet anyone can see what pariahs our countrymen have become in the pay of inhuman employers and an inhuman financial system; we all feel the harsh economic slavery weighing this province down. These observations, along with our past and our instincts, should indicate that we still retain a liberating power—the land. But, alas—and here the responsibility of our leaders becomes apparent—the farmers think of nothing but leaving that land!

Having lost or compromised our first strategic position, did we at least retain the others? What became of the mystique of our French destiny? I repeat: 1867 could have, and should have, served as the springboard for a renewed attempt to gain greater autonomy and an increasing fulfilment of our French being. However strange and imperfect the federal constitution, and however confused the national ideology of the Fathers of Confederation, nonetheless, 1867 did reconfirm two vital principles in our favour: provincialism and nationality. Political institutions were placed in our hands here in Quebec—incomplete, I admit, and badly defined. Nevertheless, I am convinced that a nation of virile, skilful and, above all, energetic men, could have obtained from these institutions whatever they desired. Such men—they do exist in this very province—would never have been hindered by constitutional texts or obstacles. But such activity required constant reference to the guidelines of our history and retention of a blueprint of our national life. This is elementary foresight, after all, and minimal political sense but were we guided by either? I acknowledge, moreover, that some kind of harmony and co-ordination had to be established between the central government and the provinces, but harmony to my mind does not mean the invariable subordination and sacrifice of one to the other. Did we make such distinctions? Instead of elaborating a frank and loyal provincialism, co-operating with others on every point except the inflexible one of our constitutional stand, we have generally tended to treat provincial matters as narrow and petty and to look to Ottawa rather than Quebec as the place where we could play our most brilliant role. We complain, nowadays, of not exerting any influence in the country as a whole and of occasionally meeting with deep contempt for our people. But what stress have we put on our French Canadian characteristics? It is not only in the drawing rooms of our Anglophile, bourgeois families that these characteristics are hard to find. For the majority of our so-called political leaders, the most fashionable and orthodox type of French Canadian is the one shorn of all his peculiarities, divested, like an old penny, of all his markings, squeezed by a

procrustean bed—all so that we can elegantly dub him an unhyphenated Canadian. Why not admit it openly: our national policy since 1867 has not been to free ourselves as much as possible, but to bind ourselves more closely each day with no exit and no recourse. Then too, our greatest fear has no longer been to be less French Canadian, but to be too much so—when we have not gone so far as to apologize for being French at all! And now, after eighty years of attempting to efface ourselves, to fade into oblivion, we suddenly notice our eviction from all the federal civil services; some of us are alarmed, with cause, at the increasing incursions of federal power; provincial powers in general and ours in particular are said to be in danger. But history will record that we French Canadians more than any others laid the groundwork for this legislative union.

Was our error any the less at the provincial level? Did 1867 really provide a new and glorious milestone along the road towards our French emancipation? Who would dare make the claim without any cynicism that we are masters in our own province? Who would even claim that we are taking every possible step to gain that mastery? The retreat of our tiny people from its strategic position and, perhaps more than anything else, its state of confusion and internal anarchy on the national question, show us where we are today. Anyone who attempts a simple definition of our national doctrine should be pitied. Country, homeland, patriotism, nation: all words for which we are still seeking definitions in the dictionary. We may well believe in the existence of a homeland, but where would we situate it on a map? As for knowing whether we do or do not constitute a nation, it would be most unwise to put the question to a referendum. And here is another sign among many of the inconsistency and incoherence of our patriotism: the veritable plethora of so-called national flags and banners we fly in this day and age. No people in the world has as many flags as the French Canadians; as a result, no people has so few nor can so often fly someone else's flag. But what am I saying? We, a people? A nation? Come, come. A mere collection of groups.

Have we even managed to retain some of the sources of inspiration which sustained our fathers in their trials and poverty, allowing them to retain their pride? For example, what images, what memories have we retained of our great past, of that great epic created by the conquerors of America? The harsh truth is that our tiny people, so greatly in need of the stimulation it could derive from its historical greatness, knows practically nothing about it. Ask these inheritors of

that splendid history to name a single one of the famous explorers of the American hinterland. You would search in vain through our schools, our convents, our colleges, to find a map showing the ancient settlements of French America. And I would plead with you to resist the temptation to ask the average French Canadian or even some of our professional people and politicians for a definition of the constant features of our history and the guiding laws of our life since 1760. Meanwhile, we have our pundits contemptuously reprimanding us for stirring up the past. Leave the dead to bury the dead, they advise. Stop imitating that silly legendary figure who died contemplating his own features in the looking glass of a stream. Unfortunately, as I listen to the echoes and complaints of this Congress, I fear there is quite another form of suicide threatening us at the moment.

I find it painful, as you can well imagine, to continue with this analysis. Once we had lost the memory of our past and our national aspirations, once our minds had been emptied of their inspiring visions of greatness, it was inevitable that we should fall under the spell of the dazzling, glamorous, Anglo-Saxon fortunes we could see displayed beside us. But, instead of maturely confronting the attraction as a spiritual enrichment, we were spell-bound in a most servile, slavish way. This infatuation made of our middle and our labouring classes,—indeed of all of us—a resigned and defeated people, mournful plagiarists. A confirmation of the tragic dilemma which, according to Gonzague de Reynold, faces all small nations and small countries: “For them there can be only two solutions,” the great Swiss writer has commented. “Either they must live according to the original character conferred upon them by nature and history, or they inevitably will be drawn into drab servitude as satellites of the greater powers.” “Drab servitude . . .” How many signs there are warning us of this fatal metamorphosis! An alert and courageous man, Mr. Victor Barbeau, has demonstrated and proved that the French language has already sunk in our estimation to the rank of an inferior language: a capitulation which our country throws in our face. Like unnatural children besmearing their mother’s portrait, we have disfigured the majestic features of New France. Quebec is doing its best to erase its own French character. And yet, we try to attract tourists, especially American tourists. Even if we were completely devoid of pride or national awareness, our interest would demand that we make the most of the original character of this province. We don’t even have this amount of common-sense, Our psychological deficiencies are revealed once again in this further symptom: unlike all other nations endowed with a minimum of personality, we are impotent to create a synthesis of

the various cultures surrounding us. We are unable to discriminate between the various customs and fashions which lie within our grasp. With passive receptivity we accept everything, imitate everything: arts, customs, fads, especially those most abhorrent to our Catholic conscience and our French commonsense.

Do we need a further yardstick to measure the extent of our deprivation? What has become of our ancestors' veritable passion for action, their desire to extend their influence to distant parts of the continent and thus expand the homeland, desires which are characteristic of all people who are morally strong and overflowing with life? This thirst for greatness and this need for an extended influence are not completely extinguished. I can discern signs of them in the extraordinary propensity of our young people for foreign missions. This apostolic surge is an act of faith, no doubt. But make no mistake, it is also a protest against the all too general mediocrity of our lives. In any case, it surely indicates what the old instinct of our ancestors could have accomplished on home ground. When the horrifying emigration of our people to the United States and other parts of Canada occurred, it opened up vast new fields for our activity. We could have followed these brothers whom we could not retain and brought to their exile the comfort of our memories and our fraternal feelings. Such a mission would have been spontaneously undertaken by a strong, or even an aware state. To be quite fair, our clergy and our religious communities, as well as a few patriots and some national societies, did fully understand their duty. But let us be honest, and concede that, apart from these few examples, our behaviour towards our dispersed brothers has simply been abominable. Since we were incapable of unity, even in our own province, how could we possibly bring unity to those who had gone away? Only in their gravest hours of peril, after they had repeatedly called for help, did we finally listen to them. At other times, we merely provided them bad examples. We could at least have avoided those actions likely to scandalize our brothers in exile; we could have kept the faith here so that it should also be kept afar: we could have created here, in the heart of New France, a centre of intense life and civilization to shine forth upon the large French family of America. But all this, at least until recent times, has been the very least concern of our people and especially of our leaders. The fact that, at this very moment, French girls and boys in Saskatchewan or Alberta can ask their parents 'what is the province of Quebec,' as they might ask 'what is Greenland or Indo-China,' reveals a great deal about the power of our civilization to radiate its light abroad. And so all around us we witness the miseries which result when nations forget their past and stray away

from their guidelines: incoherence, disintegration, acceptance of mediocrity and servitude, the impossibility of a collective life, the triumph of every kind of individualism—all signs of ultimate doom. And yet perhaps not. In all this misery, one point of solidarity remains: political parties! At a time when the plague of Marxist class struggle is rightly denounced with such vehemence, I hope my political friends will forgive me if I am so bold as to say that party struggles—with all their stupid hatred and divisions, with the collective hysteria and distortion of conscience which they foment in French Canada—are as destructive for a nation as any class war. In any case, for a tiny people driven to tragic solutions, the substitution of party for country, party for nation, party mystique for national mystique may well mean death; it is certainly insufficient for life.

IV

Two questions arise. Our whole history seemed to incline us towards pride and faithfulness. What happened? Who is to blame? And, secondly, can we be cured? As for attributing blame, why bother? History is not a court of retribution. I would rather consider the second question, for I am one of those who believe that we can be cured. We have not gathered here to intone a funeral dirge but to prepare a song of joy and triumph.

Nothing could be easier than to indicate the remedies. We have lost our socio-economic base as well as our historical base. The most urgent effort must be to recover them. The former will be restored by the reconstitution and maintenance of our peasantry. The agricultural vocation of our people seems obvious to me, certainly more obvious than being on relief! There has been much talk in recent years about human capital, about how much more valuable it is than other forms of capital. The time is ripe for our leaders to remember that no environment has been better suited to the production of a healthy and strong group of men attached to their family and national traditions than the fertile atmosphere of a rural life. We would remind those who might consider our policies of agriculture and colonization too expensive, that the improvement of our farming communities is the best insurance we could have against social upheaval. In all respects, French Canada's agrarian policy remains its most vital policy. No doubt it would be foolish to neglect a certain industrial predilection in this province. But we should make the attraction to the country as strong as the attraction to the city. The essential for a country is not to possess the largest

industries or the largest cities. It is to possess health, which is the result of a balance between economy and society.

The first article of our programme, the foremost rule for all our leaders, could well be the following: to restore the dignity of the soil in the eyes of our rural communities; to place as many French Canadians as possible on every square mile of land; to reconquer all Quebec's land to the last arable mound; and hence to enforce the principle that not an inch of land can belong to the timber merchant, the American landlord, or the parasitical sportsman, before it can belong to the farmer's son.

The second remedy is equally urgent. When a nation is unhappy and disoriented because it has broken with its past, the first thing to be done is to weld it once more to its history. If only we could at last discover that we are French, and determine to remain so! Such a discovery would solve many of our problems, starting with the problem of our education. One thing is certain: our schools must have a national orientation. We cannot afford to be anything other than genuine, energetic Frenchmen. We are a tiny people confronting the American monster: we do not have the option of being French in a soft, dilettante sort of way. We cannot flirt with every passing fad: we have to be French through and through, intransigently, energetically, audaciously—otherwise we shall cease to be. But to make true French people no method has been found other than to raise them in a French way, in French schools, in a French atmosphere, guided by French ideals. This does not mean that we should neglect or scorn other cultures; it simply means that second languages and cultures must not be given priority.

Our national orientation also raises the political question. Let me broach it openly on the assumption that a French priest has as much right to freedom of speech in this country as an English clergyman. The constant in our political and national realms, as I have repeated, and as is sufficiently obvious, has always been a passion for autonomy, a refusal of absorption, a striving—insofar as it was possible and legitimate—towards a truly French destiny. This means that we cannot accept any undue infringement of our authority, even from Ottawa. We are part of Confederation, but only as long as it remains a Federation. We accept co-operation for the common good of the country, but we feel that other provinces should also co-operate with us. And we maintain, furthermore, that we should co-operate only if it is as much to our profit as it

is to others. What the older generation thinks of the matter is of little importance. I know what the younger generation thinks, and that is the generation which will count tomorrow. Do not ask them to choose between their French life, their French future, and a mere political regime. They are fully convinced that we did not enter Confederation to lead an impoverished existence but rather to find an enriched national and cultural life; not to be less French, but to be more French. For my part, I cannot see what constitutional texts, what moral or judicial obligations, what supreme reasons of state could possibly make us impose limits on the development of our French culture or our French ambitions. And consequently we refuse to sacrifice ourselves—or to be the only ones sacrificed—to support or strengthen Confederation. The purely supportive role of naive and servile Caryatids groaning under the weight of some shaky superstructure can never fulfill the ambitions of our national life!

Since we are so determined not to tolerate any infringement on our autonomy from Ottawa, it would be rather inconsistent if we imposed any on ourselves in our own province! Our fate is being decided here in Quebec. Here we have the task of fulfilling our destiny. It was for this that, in 1867, we freed ourselves from the clutches of Upper Canada; for this we brought about the establishment of the federal system and insured the political resurrection of French Canada. What conclusion can be drawn from these premises if not that French Canadian policies cannot be optional in this province, or merely opportunistic, but absolutely necessary; not policies of provocation but, for French Canada, natural and legitimate policies. If our history has a profound sense—and it has—our only legitimate and true destiny, the logical conclusion of all our efforts over the past hundred and seventy-seven years to free ourselves and live our own lives, the goal to which the ever ascending line of our history has been tending must be to create here in America that political and spiritual reality which is the most original masterpiece and the triumph of human efforts on this continent: an autonomous, Catholic and French state.

Moreover, I insist that the creation of such a state is vital for us. During the last few days there has been much talk of language, of its defence and renown. But we should be careful not to pay so much attention to language that we minimize the essential question—the entire national question. We must remember that we cannot graft an artificial love of language into the hearts of a tiny people. No love for a maternal tongue will withstand the force of our economic slavery. The essential task is to convince French Canadians that remaining French will not detract from

their future prospects—quite the opposite, it will strengthen them, They must learn that only through faithfulness to their origin, history, culture and inborn strength will they be able to create the most favourable climate for developing their human and cultural personality and for acquiring the pride and dignity of a free people. Does the state have the right to neglect such a grave problem of national welfare? Can we expect the conditions I have just been discussing to arise spontaneously, without the intervention of the state and its power of co-ordination? The state has an absolute duty, a sacred role, to foster the material and moral conditions, the harmonious combination of economic, social and intellectual policies which will enable French Canadians, as authentic sons of the land, and as the overwhelming majority of the population of this province, to attain their human and national goals.

Proponents of *bonne entente* with the rest of Canada need have no fears. I do not forget that there are other people living beside us. I only hope that we, the Quebec minority, shall soon learn to look after our own affairs without having to ask permission of our neighbours. I am all in favour of co-operation, my Catholic sentiments in this respect being reinforced by long French tradition. But the kind of co-operation I want to see is a mutual, honest co-operation—not a trap for fools. Nor could I recommend co-operation at any price—that degrading policy of bowing and scraping before the mighty lion—but a cooperation founded on mutual respect and equality of rights. In fact, we have always practised this kind of co-operation, even when it was not reciprocated. We can therefore stop speaking about it as though it were our greatest need. Like free and proud people, we should instead adopt the attitude that we can occasionally even manage without it.

To those of our compatriots who are scandalized at the very mention of a French state, who are less concerned about the fate of their own people than the feelings of the English-speaking minority, I would say: “Please take note of the fact that French Canadians number 2,500,000 in Quebec, nearly five-sixths of the population of this province. Please remember that this country is the land of their fathers, that they have the right to live in it, that policies designed to let them enjoy that right can only upset those who are already upset by their very existence and will to survive.” I would also say to them: “We merely claim the freedom to do in our own province what is done in all other provinces, and, indeed, to do it more generously. We have minorities outside Quebec. There are approximately 400,000 French Canadians in Ontario; Acadians make up a third of the population of New Brunswick. Would the advocates of *bonne entente* contend

that it is chimerical to speak of fair treatment of minority groups in Canada or that Quebec should take lessons elsewhere in the art of being fair to everyone?"

To our compatriots of the other language and culture, I would make these remarks which I consider neither impertinent nor rash, far less unfair: "We are two nationalities, two cultures, destined to live side by side and to co-operate in the common interests of our province and our country. As English Canadians, you are proud of your origins, your history, your civilization; and, in order to better serve your country, you are determined to develop along the lines of your innate cultural pattern, to be English to the core. That is your right, and you are proud enough to claim it forcefully. I would certainly be the last person to blame you for doing so. On the other hand, we are just as proud of our origins, our past and our culture; and we maintain that our rights are as valid as yours. We too wish to develop along the lines of our innate cultural patterns, to be French to the core, not only for selfish reasons or through racist pride, but in order to contribute, just as you do, spiritual forces to the country. We are convinced, as you are, that this ideal and determination do not constitute a provocation or a challenge of any kind. *Honi soit qui mal y pense!*"

V

Are we dreaming when we talk of returning to our traditions in order to fulfill our great dream for the future? Immediately a cry arises from our defeatists: "Too late! Your plan is too ambitious, the risks are far too great! How can we withstand the pressure of the entire continent? How can we maintain this little island undermined by erosion and beaten by the waves?" I know very well that the times are perilous and that there is not a moment to lose. When country people see trees displaying the wrong side of their leaves, they know a storm is approaching. We are a tree displaying the wrong side of its leaves. For nations as well as for trees, I know that there is a point beyond which a twisted limb can no longer be made straight. But we are Catholics and Catholicism has remained our guiding light. I have found evidence of God and His Providence throughout our history; They posited the very bases of our history and They habitually instill order and purpose in their works. Our fate is an exalted one, you say? I would answer that a Catholic people, no matter how small, cannot avoid the call to greatness. The obstacles seem fearful? Heroism can be our only state of security. Our faith will maintain us in such a state. Our

Catholicism, when we learn to live it fully, will prevent us from dying in the shame of oblivion and capitulation.

But the dreadful depression, you insist. Dreadful indeed, but numerous great examples in today's world teach us that, for many nations, the depression has been the starting point of a vital renewal, a renaissance, followed by a march to glory. And the cycle has revolved with extraordinary rapidity. What was the good fortune, the grace that was given to these people? Men who were true leaders imposed a vision of glory on their country. Immediately these countries rose from their decline, shook off their haunting fascination with death to rediscover the pattern of their destiny and, with it, the passion for life and for renewal. Where did those leaders find such visions of glory? In the depths of their past, in their living traditions. Gonzague de Reynold has written of one of these fortunate nations, Portugal: "Any nation wishing to rise from a long decay must look back beyond that period of decline to the greatest, most glorious and fruitful era of its history. In that era it finds examples and, above all, reasons for hope: 'What I was I can still be.'" To restore a discouraged people, sporadic reforms are not enough. What matters, above all, is to inspire it with ideal reasons for life, renew its living traditions, replace it within the profound guidelines of its history. The Italian Duce recently said: "Governing is not merely administering; it is providing a country with high ideals." The Belgian minister of finance similarly commented: "A government must be more than an administrator; it must be a leader, an inspirer." We are not therefore asking anything impossible or superhuman of our leaders when we say to them: "Provide us with a great ideal. Send an electric spark racing through our people, a powerful current of the kind that has not yet been nationalized—a current of moral electricity."

Please don't utter the defeatist reply: "Too late! Our people no longer care!" I shall defend our people with all my heart. Perhaps they have often appeared disappointingly inert but history has taught me that they are usually worthy of their leaders. Moreover, if an entire people is asleep, it must be because it is being lulled into this somnolent state. People who are only half awake themselves are scarcely in a position to blame our nation for its slumber. Too late? Let our leaders spend as much time doing something as they have spent doing nothing, let them pour as many millions, as much organization and propaganda—on the hustings, over the radio, in the newspapers—into a campaign of national revival as they have put into a sixty-year-old campaign to inspire us with the insane passions of politics; let them spend as much time enlightening and

unifying us as they spent blinding and dividing us; then, let them speak of the general apathy of the people!

Too late? But, do you not see, do you not hear what is happening? Visions of glory are beginning to stir a rising generation. A new future already shines forth in the eyes of the more intelligent, determined, forward-looking of our youth. That is why I am among those who still have hope. Because there is God, because there is our history, because there is our youth, I still have hope. I share my hope with all our ancestors who never despaired, and with all those of our people who do not despair today; and this hope rises above my own time, above all discouragement. Whether one likes it or not, we shall have our French state: we shall have a young, strong, beautiful, radiant home, a spiritual, dynamic centre for the whole of French America. We shall have a country with its French nature stamped upon its visible features. The snobs, the advocates of *bonne entente*, the defeatists, all of them can protest as much as they like, crying: “You are the last generation of French Canadians . . .” Along with our entire youth, I reply: “We are the generation of the living. You are the last generation of the dead.”

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