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Je voudrais tout d'abord remercier bien sincèrement l'Université Western Ontario du témoignage d'amitié qu'elle me rend aujourd'hui en me conférant ce doctorat d'honneur en droit civil. J'en suis extrêmement flatté, mais j'aimerais dire que j'accepte ce doctorat au nom du Canada français. Je n'ai pas la prétention de croire que mes propres qualités me valent à elles seules l'honneur dont je suis aujourd'hui l'objet. Lorsqu'une université rend un tel hommage à une personne, elle pose en réalité un geste symbolique. Je considère donc plutôt ce doctorat comme une marque de confiance et d'estime à l'endroit du peuple que je représente ici et, à ce titre, je vous en suis très reconnaissant.

Those of you who are graduating today are ending a course of study which has brought you to the doorstep of your careers. I was very kindly asked to say a few words to you on this occasion, and it gives me great pleasure to do so.

With your permission, I would like to suggest a subject for serious thought. You now belong to the Canadian élite, and as a result you will be called upon to accept certain responsibilities. You cannot remain indifferent to the difficulties which are at present disturbing our country. You are perhaps not yet in a position to solve them, but to a great many amongst you, the opportunity to take part in the solution of these problems will probably present itself more quickly than you think. All the citizens of Canada are facing a common problem today: the very future of their country. I know that we often have the habit of speaking about the prospects for Canada's progress in the most encouraging terms*. And – it must be admitted the abundance of our natural resources, the size of our country and the energy of our people justify these optimistic expectations to a great extent. Nevertheless, for some time now, a new factor has taken shape in our country which may somewhat modify these forecasts. We are not all equally aware of it, and this is the unfortunate part. This factor is extremely complex, but it can be given an approximate definition in a single sentence: it seems that a great many French-speaking Canadians do not feel really at home in Canadian Confederation.

This feeling obviously does not date from yesterday; it is present throughout the history of the last hundred years. What is more recent, however, is the awareness that has suddenly appeared in French Canada, and particularly in Quebec, of the part which the French-speaking Canadians should play from now on in our country. As I mentioned a moment ago, it raises an acute problem of a very urgent nature.

That is the cause of this new awareness? It comes first of all from the fact that Quebec has developed enormously over the past few years. For a long time, the people of Quebec, like any minority people, lived unto themselves, looking backward upon a glorious past. Today, this is no longer the case, and it will never be so again. The bucolic image which people had of us and which many still have must be definitely abandoned. Quebec, and with it the whole of French Canada, has just entered a new era. And just as any adult nation would do, it now wants to grow in all the sectors of human activity.

At the moment when I am speaking to you, we have made an important step in the economic sphere, which has traditionally been our weakest point. We are still living in an era when we must get our inspiration from experience gained elsewhere. We must still have the help and support of others to achieve the economic objectives that we have set for ourselves. We are still going through a period in which we are seeking ways to channel all our energies in order to assert ourselves economically. However, a day will come – the day is coming – which you of the present generation will see, I am sure when it will be the others who will come to Quebec to see how we have carried out our work of renewal.

It must not be forgotten that the rapid development of Quebec has produced another outstanding phenomenon. No new development takes place without raising the question of the former order of things. This order of things includes several elements. Certain ones have to do with our educational system, others with our social welfare activities, others – and I have just spoken about them – concern the part that we are playing in the economy as a people. Now, one of these elements is Confederation itself. It too, and I will not hide it from you because you are certainly aware of it through the newspapers, it too is being questioned. This was to be expected because it forms part of the framework of Quebec political life, one of the sectors which has historically interested us the most.

Of course, throughout their history, the French Canadians, especially those of Quebec, have often reproached our federal system for a great many things. However, they did so at certain precise moments, particularly at times when they were having economic and social difficulties. Periods of popular restlessness were followed by several years of apparent indifference, and so on. One can therefore be led to think that the critical examination to which Confederation is at present being subjected by our people will not last long and that very soon no one will talk about it any more. In my opinion, we would be seriously mistaken if we were to interpret the French Canadian's present dissatisfaction with Confederation as being a capricious and passing tendency. On the contrary, it must be looked upon as being deeply permanent, and we must convince ourselves that only a radical reorientation of our federal system and everything that it calls for will succeed in removing the causes of this dissatisfaction. The present state of mind, in Quebec and in the rest of French Canada, is not a surface manifestation; it is the logical result of the rapid development which has taken place there, and has nothing to do with motives of a sentimental nature. It results more from a close and realistic examination of our general situation as an ethnic group. This is why the aspirations of the French Canadians would not be satisfied by half-measures from now on. I have just mentioned the reorientation of our federal system. Many of our English-speaking fellow-countrymen are wondering just what we mean by this.

It is not my intention at this time to get involved in a technical or legal dissertation. In the first place, I would not have the time. It is possible, however, to give you, in a few words, the substance of what we mean by the reorientation, or rather, what we hope to get from a 'reorientation'.

First of all, we want a way of life that will be favourable to our growth as a distinct ethnic group, having its own language and culture. As a people, we want to grow in a manner which suits us. We refuse to accept that ways of thinking and living be imposed upon us, and from this

fact, we object to courses of action which do not take our own priority needs into account.' I am thinking particularly here of joint plans which are made up of conditional payments in one way and another. Often, the conditions which are laid down – and which, from certain points of view, may be very sensible – do not respect our institutional structure and the mentality of our people. They often force us into spheres of action in which we are perhaps not yet ready to act, while other sectors, on the other hand, require our urgent attention.

As I mentioned a few moments ago, we also want our culture to grow and to spread. This will only be possible if a growing number of Canadians understand our language, and if, especially, they are ready to recognize bilingualism and biculturalism. I am well aware of the fact that legal texts and judicial decisions can't be found which establish precedents, and that they can be interpreted as signifying that bilingualism and biculturalism should be limited to Quebec. Now the French Canada of today can no longer accept an argument of this kind. On the other hand, it is not a question of going to the other extreme. This is why it is our duty to discover in a very short time how we in Canada can from now on make a greater place for the French cultural element, as much in those spheres where it is now present as in those where it has not had the chance to develop. In this connection, Quebec is depending a great deal upon the results of the Royal Commission on biculturalism that the federal government has promised to appoint. We would be deluding ourselves, however, if we were to believe that a Royal Commission can solve all our problems. It cannot change opinions that are deep-rooted and often kept up by prejudices that have existed for generations. *À rapprochement* is imperative between the two great founding groups of Confederation, but it must have new scope: it must work both ways. I will admit that the French Canadians often look with suspicion upon the way in which the hand of friendship is habitually extended to them. To us, this has often meant concessions on our part without any being made in return. Exchanges of this kind must no longer have a place in a country which truly wants to safeguard the cultural features of a population that is made up of distinct elements.

For, we have the choice of two things: either we accept the coexistence of two cultures and we must then accept its logical consequences~ or else we do not believe in it, and then the French Canadians appear as a minority that is tolerated but which we hope to see disappear. In this second case, if ever Confederation falls apart, it will not be because Quebec – the political voice of French Canada – has separated from it. It will~be because the way to keep Quebec in it has not been found.

Finally, we want the means to act in order to reach the goals that we have set ourselves. As a province, Quebec is not asking for any special or unduly advantageous treatment in comparison with the other provinces. This would be unfair. I ask, however, for freedom of action in keeping with its position as the mother-country of all those people living in Canada who speak our language and share our culture. We are aware that we are giving our country a cultural difference which enriches it and which protects it from an ever threatening americanization in a world where international boundaries are disappearing. If Canada wants to preserve its own identity, Quebec should be given back – I should say – the economic, financial and political powers which will allow French Canada to grow at every level within a Confederation that is lived in accordance with a new spirit. Back home we often

say: "Quebec is not a province like the others" This is a true saying, and it must be understood in the way in which I have just described it.

The reorientation of the federal system of which I have just spoken is therefore a great deal more than a simple touching-up of the Constitution. It can naturally suggest this, but it calls first of all for a change of attitude towards the place and the role of the French element in Canada. It suggests tangible demonstrations – several tangible manifestations – but French Canada will only be able to accept them if they are based on a firm and sincere understanding and acceptance on the part of English Canada.

If I am speaking in this way to you who are graduating today, it is because you, like myself, have the future of our country at heart. In the first place, I am speaking to you much more as the representative and spokesman of French Canada than I am as Premier of Quebec. And yet, it is difficult if not impossible to dissociate one role from the other.

I would like to end my speech on an optimistic note which is generally the thing to do in similar circumstances, by saying, for example, that – in spite of everything – things will end by straightening themselves out. But, alas, we have reached a point where things cannot straighten out by themselves. This is what characterizes the present situation. It is my duty to tell it to you and to the rest of Canada. It is not very agreeable, but it is necessary.

Nevertheless, I remain confident, because an obvious goodwill exists amongst a greater and greater number of our English-speaking fellow-countrymen. We are counting on them to seek out, with us, concrete solutions which are called for by present problems. They in their turn can count on us to cooperate with them in what has become a vital effort.

I admit that our position, because it is firm and because it reflects the unanimous wish of a whole population, may surprise many people, for they see in it the symptoms of a deep unrest about which they perhaps knew nothing. I will also admit that in expressing our views we are forcing many of our fellow-countrymen to reevaluate a balance which they thought in good faith to be stabilized and definite. However, we must always remember that it is by first of all being themselves that the French Canadians can become better Canadian citizens. This is their own way of contributing actively in the building of the Canada of Tomorrow.