

However, there is no point in casting aside old myths just to create new ones. In Canada we have established extremely flexible institutions to solve our problems. All we have to do is use them. Quebec, in separating, would become an island in a sea of Anglophones. Quebecers would be hard pressed to demand that others in North America communicate with them in French. Conversely, a strong Quebec in a united Canada ensures the blossoming of the French culture in North America, and it is Canada's tolerance and encouragement of cultural diversity that has made this possible.

In inviting all Canadians from coast to coast to use their institutions to solve their problems, I have overlooked one aspect which is often mentioned with respect to Quebec - its right to self-determination and independence. Independence - and this is my third theme - is said to be essential since it is natural for a people with their own language, culture and territory to form a country.

I would not like to give you the impression that I am taking these matters lightly, but if everyone subscribed to this theory, there would be no fewer than 2,500 independent countries on Earth meeting these criteria perfectly. However, we cannot base our reasoning on absurdities. After all, the federal system exists precisely because it allows many ethnic groups to co-exist. Many countries have adopted a federative system of government because the presence of several ethnic groups or the size of their territory forced them to do so. In the United States, Brazil, Canada and India, for example, both of these factors came into play: the vastness of the territory and ethnic diversity. Many unified countries are trying to introduce certain federative structures into their system of government to meet current needs. This process is a sound venture since it does not imply a break but rather continuity and adjustment.

By constantly emphasizing the circumstantial and "opportunistic" characteristics of federalism, people tend to forget, I think, one important aspect: the feeling of unity it generates. It is often said that the federal system enables groups to benefit from the economic and political advantages of the union without denying their distinctive characteristics. This is undoubtedly true. However, I do not think that this is the only feature of our system. Federalism and mercantilism are not synonymous. At the outset, federalism may be a marriage of interests or convenience, but in the long run an identity and a sense of belonging are born which sooner or later transcend the material basis of the initial alliance. Paradoxically, this feeling emerges only if the rights of the founding groups are protected, their cultural identity preserved and their autonomy respected. That is true self-determination. In this respect, I