

● (2030)

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I deeply regret that the Liberal Party and its members do not understand the necessity for an affirmation of the principle of the supremacy of God in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms; because it is God, and it is not one political party, not any one man, it is not a charter of rights and freedoms, to whom Canadians should look for guidance. Faith in God gives meaning and purpose to human life. That principle should be enshrined in the charter of rights and freedoms.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I wish to comment on the unseemingly haste of the government in this matter. I reject the suggestion that there has been a 54-year delay in settling the matter of constitutional reform, just as I earlier criticized the premiers and prime ministers who have not applied themselves to this important subject. I am, however, in favour of telling the provinces to get on with their proposals. Instead of press conferences and premiers' meetings, they should decide on an acceptable amending formula, introduce the appropriate resolution in the provincial legislatures and give some finality to those things which they are so free to talk about at press conferences. There should be some finality to the provinces' position.

I would also suggest, Mr. Speaker, that if they applied a similar process to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, all Canadians would benefit and we would then truly have something of which we can all be proud.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gilbert Parent (Welland): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member for Simcoe North (Mr. Lewis) has stated, we in this House of Commons cannot play the role of Solomon. We all come here with different perceptions of Canada, and I think it is time for each one of us, in his or her own way, to share with the others his or her vision of Canada.

I remember from the play "Cyrano de Bergerac" where the hero was once asked to write something which was flattering but untrue, and he stated in the play: "A man should neither utter nor write a word which he first has not heard in his own heart." Tonight, Mr. Speaker, I share with all of my colleagues in the House words that I have heard for the first time in my own heart.

With the return of the landmark constitutional resolution from committee, it is at last appropriate to speak of Canada entering the early minutes of a new era; in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, a splendid new era. The yeoman work of creating a new constitution has now been completed. Oh, there will be more debate and perhaps some important amendments; but with this major body of philosophical and technical work complete, it should now be possible for all of us to begin exploring the vital prospects that flow from constitutional renewal.

In our quiet moments, Mr. Speaker, many of us have wistful yearnings for a new way to articulate our nationhood. There are ordinary people everywhere in this country who feel some-

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thing for Canada. They have been seeking a way to describe vague, but powerful, stirrings virtually bursting for release and each, in his or her own way, has wished to pay this amazing country its full due. But, somehow, in 113 years of confederation, we have not quite found the right words.

The Canadian nationalist, the person moved by an explicit love of this country, has been the exception, rather than the rule, through much of our history. Since the first European explorers staked claim to this part of North America, people living here have been inclined to focus attention outside of Canada. We have been shaped by foreign symbols and events, many of them from the distant past. With each generation, this focus has been less appropriate; and with each generation a sense of unease has increased for the substantial body of Canadians, like me, with deep roots in this country.

There have been no words to describe our place, those of us who were born here, maybe two or three generations of us. This is our land. There have been few symbols to which we could attach our meanings; the 69 years before we could proclaim our Canadian citizenship; the 97-year wait for our own distinctive flag, which is to your right, Mr. Speaker; and the 113 years without an official anthem served as much to underline this point as to correct it.

I have discovered, Mr. Speaker, that the stirrings that I feel—the stirrings that I share with so many Canadians—are those of the nationalists. I am a Canadian nationalist. I am not an Ontario nationalist, or a Quebec nationalist. I am not a western nationalist, and I do not put the maritimes before everything else.

My nationalism is reserved for what distinguishes all 23 million of us, from Swedes, or Frenchmen, or Britishers, or Americans. I am not talking here about the sort of nationalism that isolates a people, that makes them arrogant or narrow-minded or exploitative. That is the nationalism of ideologists. I am talking about the sort of nationalism that makes it possible for a people to reach out, to be magnanimous, secure in the knowledge that they have something unique and precious to give to the world.

This nationalism flows from a feeling of belonging, from a sense of national commitment. It hinges on the ability of thoughtful citizens to capture the inspiring essence of nationhood in words and in symbols. Without a sense of national commitment, without a pride that rises above local boundaries, what remains? The answer is painfully clear because it is currently being demonstrated in our beloved Canada. What is left is competition for spoils fostered by wealth that has not been committed to greater common ends. Without a sense of national commitment we could vigorously exploit our material treasure for a thousand years, and still be impoverished.

I want Canada to excel in spheres in which we are particularly gifted. I want us to produce goods better than anyone else. I want us to celebrate the forms of artistic expression that best reflect our soul. I want us to pioneer new branches of knowledge and to develop an even more humane social system.