

## Referendum Reflections

More than any other province, Quebec holds the key to Canada's political future. The narrow "NO" victory has given Canadians little respite. To appease Quebec, PM. Chretien has offered recognition as a distinct society, as well as a Constitutional veto for Quebec, Ontario, the Atlantic provinces, and the West. Moreover, the federal government would withdraw from job training. However, Bloc Quebecois leader, Premier. Lucien Bouchard, has already rejected this new form of federalism. It does not matter what the federal government proposes, the separatists won't give up trying to get more. They are religiously committed to their cause and are helped there in by the fact that many people have left the faith of their parents, which in Quebec is predominantly Catholic. They are adrift without moral direction. Separatists have cleverly exploited this situation and have tried to fill the spiritual vacuum with economic, ethnic, linguistic and cultural nationalism - a new religion.

From a Christian perspective, nationalism is idolatry if it takes the place of God in the heart of man; becoming in fact, a belief system replacing Christianity. As David Atkinson of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, England states: "Nationhood is part of the richness of God's providential ordering of His world. But nationhood is not absolute. When nationhood becomes an absolute principle, it becomes demonic."

In the name of 'nationalism', terrorist acts have been applauded, property has been destroyed, and resources have been plundered. In the post-Communist Soviet Union, ethnic nationalism and regionalism have led to bloodshed. Nationalism becomes irrationalism when it requires its followers to sacrifice everything - family, fortune, even life itself - for the "good of the state" if necessary.

A solution put forward to meet the aspirations of French Canadians living in Quebec was the two-nation theory, in which the two founding races - English and French - would have an equal voice in federal affairs, irrespective of their disparity in number. However, Canada's founding fathers never espoused a two-nation concept. They envisioned a Canada based on a federation of provinces; a bilingual Quebec, with English as the common language for all Canadians. Mr. Trudeau's bilingual policy of the 1970's aimed to secure linguistic and cultural equality of French Canadians, without having to resort to a constitutional change. But Bilingualism soon became Unilingualism in Quebec. In 1977, PQ's Bill 101 made French the official language of the province - in the Courts, in the National Assembly, at work, and in labour relations. It also required French language as the language of instruction for all but children of anglophiles already residing in Quebec. The Bill amounted to a declaration that French was the only official language of Quebec. For all practical purposes, official bilingualism applied only to English Canada.

Although Quebec's separatists do their utmost to have their own 'state', we must seriously question whether it is a genuine and truthful option. I do not believe it is. To

demonstrate the validity of my argument, I refer to the classic distinction between nation and state.

A nation consists of people with a common origin, a shared language and history, a common life style and known traditions, which enable people to communicate with one another on a broad spectrum of issues. Dr. Nicholas Wolterstorff, former Professor of Philosophy, Grand Rapids, Michigan states that the members of a nation "jointly and severally hold in memory certain events and leaders, regard certain places as sacred, give allegiance to certain of their members, and so forth... A nation is a complex biologico-historico-cultural grouping." To be a nation, neither territory nor a government are needed. Nations can migrate from one place to another without losing their identity. They can live in several states and still be a viable nation.

For example, the Jews are one nation, though they are living in many states. The Scandinavians trace their origin to one people, but in the course of history they have come to live in three different states. The 15 million Kurds (who are Muslim but not Arab), spread between Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Russia, are a nation and not a state. Iraq splits between Sunni and Shia and Kurds. Syria splits between Sunni and Druze and Alawi. Belgium is a state with two nations, the Flemings and the Walloons. Rivalry between the two nations has long been a critical political issue in Belgium.

Canada is a state with numerous nations. It is a multiethnic state. For years it received immigrants from mainly West and East European origin. In recent years immigrants from the Caribbean and Asia have been predominant. In his essay on "*Nationality*" (1862), British historian, Lord Acton insisted that in the interest of human liberty, multi-ethnic states which guaranteed the equality and autonomous free development of several ethnic groups within one political nation (state) were most desirable.

What will happen to the minority groupings in Quebec? Will justice be done to them if Quebec separates from Canada? History bears testimony that few one-nation states have resisted the temptation to oppress minority ethnic groupings. Minorities have usually been shortchanged. Jacques Parizeau's post-referendum complaint about anglo and allophone voting patterns should be seen within this context.

Parizeau longs for a pure old-stock French Quebec nation-state. But a state must do justice to all its ethnic groupings. Equal justice, irrespective of numbers, wealth, or influence, is the right for every nation within the borders of a state. As Wolterstorff put it so aptly, "A state is to be the state of all its citizens, not the state of some nation among its citizens.

Canada provides ample opportunity for Quebecois to be a French nation, recognizing and appreciating its unique history and traditions. As one of Canada's founding nations it is a full partner in it. Solzhenitsyn observed,

"The disappearance of nations would impoverish us no less than if all the people were made alike, with one character, one face. Nations are the wealth of

mankind, they are its generalized personalities; the smallest of them has its own particular colours and embodies a particular facet of Cod's design."

Canada should not dance to the tune of the Quebec separatists. Canada is a federation of provinces. There is no historical foundation for the claim that Canada is a bilingual country. The only bilingual persons were French Canadians. Canadians should recognize separatists' nationalism for what it is - an idolatrous religion.

Unity of the Canadian federation of provinces is the aim of the Christian Heritage Party. I believe that Canada will be impoverished if the French Canadians in Quebec lose their identity and character. The Province of Quebec and its citizens will be economically, socially and culturally impoverished if they secede from the Canadian federation.

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