

8<sup>th</sup> Annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture

# **The Society of Difference/ La Société de la Différence**

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For more information, please visit [www.lafontaine-baldwin.com](http://www.lafontaine-baldwin.com)

I'm honoured to be delivering the 8<sup>th</sup> annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture—a lecture which commemorates the two great reformers of Upper and Lower Canada, Louis Hippolyte LaFontaine and Robert Baldwin. These two men lived through the tumultuous decade from 1837, when the rebellions in both parts of Canada happened, to 1848 when the reforms actually took place. These reforms changed the way in which our society developed. These two men were French-Canadian and Anglo-Canadian and they managed to assert the right of people elected to do the governing and to put through democracy in place.

As John Ralston Saul pointed out in his first lecture eight years ago, “1848 was the moment when the very legitimacy of our society was switched from the colonial elites to the citizens.” That initial establishment of what we now call “Responsible Government” was not perfect by any means—the population was largely illiterate and poor. Women did not participate in the franchise. However, it was a start for something which was so critical to our history, happening at exactly the right time for us.

We could think perhaps that it was simply the union of reformers from English and French Canada. And in a superficial way, that is how it looks. But these two men were foresighted and determined. They looked into the future and saw what Canada could be if it took on its proper destiny. In his speech to the electors of Terrebonne (his riding in Quebec), LaFontaine said in 1840, before the achievements of Responsible Government, that there was a principle that would define Canada in the world: that immigration was and is first about citizenship. Because the ongoing creation of Responsible Government was an exercise in the creation of a civil society, which implies the deepest meaning of the exercise of the powers of the citizen. LaFontaine said this:

“Canada is the land of our ancestors; it is our country as it must be the adopted country of the various populations which come from diverse portions of the Globe, to make their way into its vast forests as the future resting place of their families and their hopes. Like us, their paramount desire must be the happiness and prosperity of Canada,

as the heritage which they should endeavour to transmit to their descendants in this young and hospitable country. Above all, their children must be like ourselves, CANADIANS.”

In that small paragraph are enunciated all the principles by which we as Canadians live in an immigrant society. It has never been enunciated better. Look at the key words in it—“adopted country”, “diverse portions of the globe”, “the future resting place”, “their paramount desire for the happiness and prosperity of Canada”, “this young and hospitable country”. When you parse that paragraph, you have everything that we have continued to live for in the next hundred and fifty years. It was never stated better and it should continue always to be our guiding light as we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and see the logical evolution that has taken place because of our fundamental belief in what was first enunciated by Louis LaFontaine.

When I was growing up, there was a distinct pall cast over us when we saw ourselves as so big, and so diverse. The fact that we were not all the same; the fact that we came from scores of different backgrounds, philosophies, religious beliefs, races was gradually accepted and we now live with it. The great danger is that we don’t know how we have got here. We don’t know what the road has been. We don’t know what the gasoline in the tank has been; it may turn out to be ethanol. And if we don’t know what’s gotten us here, then we are in great danger of not being able to continue.

Difference now defines our society in Canada. The accommodation of Anglophones and Francophones, Catholic and Protestants, speaks to that fundamental truth. The recognition of our society including a third element, the Aboriginal people, is essential, but has been regrettably the least successful.

We have to examine how we have the same values but look so different. Are there profound intellectual and ethical differences, or do we load the slight shoulders of visible difference with the heavy weight of crippling significance? When we take away the visual, what are we as a people? Why is difference looked upon with a mixture of trepidation and acceptance?

Let's begin with the idea of what we are as a country. I think we are a country that has imagined itself into being, the way in which Aboriginal peoples have always imagined the land and made it part of their understanding, of how they were to live their lives close to the land and be responsible to it. We live in an imagined land because we can only know a limited number of people in our lives. Even the Governor General, who travels the country and meets people endlessly for six years, will probably not meet more than 30,000 people altogether. Most of us in our private lives have a circle more restrained than that, so we can't as individuals know everybody. But what is important is that we imagine that other people are part of the same country. To a great extent we can imagine what it is like to be a Canadian in Yellowknife or Winnipeg or Bonavista Bay. We aren't geniuses at imagination so we can't describe the smell of the sea or the crunch of the ice exactly as it exists, but what we can do is say that it is our imagination that allows us to feel that we are all part of the same country, to assume the existence of others who are part of us, whom we will never know. Once we have closed down our imagination, nobody belongs in the country, not even us.

The other reason why the imagination counts is that we are able to think of the other as somebody outside ourselves. And therefore, if we develop the right attitude which our history is leading us towards, we will be able to say that it doesn't matter whether the other is an Inuit or a Croatian. Those origins lose their electricity because the imagination should be great enough to comprehend all the people, even the ones we can't visualize, as part of our country.

Because of the way our history has gone and with the introduction of the Charter of Rights in 1982, the emphasis is put a great deal on the individual as opposed to the community. And I say opposed because that's the way it often sounds, that the individual has certain rights but the community demands others and implicitly means the individual is giving up something.

In his work, Charles Taylor deals with this and talks about the difference between fragmentation and community. He carefully notes that fragmentation leads to the sense of powerlessness and in fact this powerlessness is one of the greatest enemies we have in the creation of the society which is the one we want to live in. We have to try and understand what it is that divides us and what it is that puts us together. What divides us, I believe, is not that we are all individuals and therefore must have our rights and make certain that others have theirs in as accommodating a way as possible. Rather we start from another point of view; that basically we must concentrate on our connective tissue which creates communal efforts.

In the kind of society we live in today, which has endless means of distraction and of methods of using up any economic resources that we may have spent all our time earning, it is I think healthy to think back to some of the real impulses of difference.

I know that people talk about difference really as the way people look and act—whether they wear veils or turbans, or think they are sacramentally drinking wine that represents blood. But in fact, all of those differences are things that we can accept in each other if we only analyze how we became separate.

I don't believe that people are inherently tribal or that they only care about themselves. Evidence would prove that many people in moments of acute crisis do not behave out of individual selfishness but out of a sense of their connection to others. It's important to realize that we probably evolved as human beings in a way which meant that we had to look out for each other, because we were only one little group evolving in the time of great threat and physical danger and that the initial instinct, I believe, is to reach out and help another human being.

I had so many examples of this when I gave out Bravery Awards to Canadian citizens who had risked their lives in order to save other people. A typical medal for bravery would be given to a man who is driving down one of our large eight-lane highways and sees a car or truck ahead of him burst into flames and swerve onto the

shoulder and stop. The man in the car following stops and attempts to take the driver out of the truck or the car by breaking the window, trying to pull back the sunroof while flames are engulfing the vehicle. He yanks the person out, who by this time is not conscious, and drags him to safety minutes before the whole vehicle blows up.

This was a scenario that happened over and over again. And it always made me wonder why somebody would stop and help a total stranger, endangering their own lives and not knowing whether or not they would really succeed. One day I asked one of the medalists what was in his mind when he was attempting to break the window and get at the passengers to pull them out and he just said to me: “I looked at that guy and I thought that guy is me.” That, in fact, is the total imagination of the other; that you are the other, that there is no separation between you and the other human beings that exist.

Or you’re driving down a highway and you see somebody jumping off a bridge and into the Fraser River at the beginning of April. You stop the car, you leap into the river, swim to the person, drag them to shore. In this particular case, the person is trying to commit suicide and you have saved them. You could say: “Well, they didn’t want to be saved, so why bother?” But that isn’t the point. The point is that the instinct on the part of the other person was to save a life and save it they did. Soldiers save each other in war, but that can be rationally explained in terms of loyalty and friendship.

When one remarks on the idea that strangers save each other, you have to delve quite deeply into the idea of what people actually really are. I believe that we are all part of one manifestation—human beings. And in that moment when the threat happens, all the societal restraints which we have grown up to accept as valid—looking after yourself, taking no risks—dissolve. The need for people to look after each other is something that I believe is ingrained in human nature. It’s not very fashionable to talk about human nature these days when everything is quantified, legalized and rationalized.

I witnessed people who, often bewildered, performed acts of heroism which had nothing to do with the people wanting to be heroes. It also had nothing to do with whether the people being saved wanted to be saved. It had to do with that fundamental, primitive impulse to ensure that as many of the members of the human race survived as possible.

I firmly believe that it is society, and the structures that we have created, that have made us the way we are in terms of being competitive, individual, driven people. There is too much evidence that our intuitive instincts, unfettered by structure or ideology, become the basis for the good action. This use of intuition is one which, I think, we must work on if we are to live together as human beings. I firmly believe that there are no road maps for creating the kind of society that we are creating. Nobody else has ever done it before with exactly these elements.

And what are the elements? Well, a population that comes from over a hundred different countries in the world, countless religions, and a diversity of political, religious and social beliefs. The problem I have with people writing about difference is that they seem to feel that there is some way in which we can look at this and impose a pattern on it. What I think is exciting for Canada, and challenging to us all as Canadian human beings, is that there is no pattern for this and there is no simple recourse to custom or law.

I mentioned that connectivity and community are the ways in which I see our country in development. I can't help thinking that it must be that we have instincts and intuition and do not always follow what the official line of our country is. When I first came to Ottawa as a child I was three years old and my mother, my father and my older brother and I were virtually stateless; we had one suitcase apiece, we had to begin again.

And officially what Canada was like was a white country which wanted to stay that way. In which Chinese were not welcomed and had very recently paid head tax and in which the other large group of Orientals, the Japanese-Canadians, had been uprooted

from the West coast, their civil rights trampled, and forced against their will to move to the interior of British Columbia where they were virtual prisoners.

And yet, our actual experience of living in this little tiny frozen capital was very different from anything that you could understand officially. We had some advantages as people coming to this country: we spoke English because we came from a part of the British Empire—one of those other little pink spots on the globe. We were familiar with Tate and Lyle golden syrup and Cow and Gate condensed milk. We were part of a system that was called imperial and had some sense of borrowed security from being part of that Empire.

Like many people who come to this country, we knew we were different. But I don't think we ever worried too much about the fact that perhaps our life would have been different elsewhere. On our long trip on the Red Cross boat—the Gripsoholm—we had made port in South Africa—Cape Town to be exact—among our many stops in the two-and-half-month voyage it took us to come from Hong Kong to New York. Once, my father told me that he had been offered a job in the few days that we had spent in Cape Town. What this meant I wasn't clear about. Perhaps it meant that he had gone looking for work in those couple of days that we were in port, always thinking ahead, always looking for the main chance. A resourceful, wily, and true gambler, he believed that you could take a chance but only knowing that you had to take that chance while not letting go of whatever it was you still had in your hand. It was in South Africa that we as children saw black people for the first time. My parents always told us that we did not seem to notice the difference between black and white people.

I thought of that when I used to go and pick up my granddaughter from her daycare and there were two or three black children of her age. When I remarked on how cute one of them was and asked what her name was, my granddaughter said: “Which one?” and I said: “The little dark girl.” My granddaughter replied to me: “Oh, you mean Jane in the grey suit.” The colour-blindness that I think is automatic among human beings has to do mainly with our not feeling instinctively that these things are important. It is

only our structures and our self-interest that make things like race or difference important.

As we are all brought up to believe that structure is everything and that content must fit into structure, we therefore believe that everybody innately knows that they are different. I don't think this is necessarily true for any kind of difference—racial, sexual or social. I've only come to this kind of conclusion very, very recently because I reject the idea that somehow we have gone against the “natural grain” of exclusive identities. Learning this early in my life has meant only that it came to the surface rather much later in my life. As I say, my initial contact with this country was a cold, white place but full of good, individual people—the Jewish pharmacist, the French-Canadian relatives of a former friend in Hong Kong—they all treated us as people in need of friends and help. We make a mistake I think when we emphasize how much an abstract structure in a country will have an influence on its population. Rather than saying the country was racist and the people weren't, I think one could say the people were not racist but somehow the country got structured into certain racist dimensions out of ignorance and fear of the unknown.

We were outsiders, yes, but then so were the French-Canadians in Lower town compared to the English-Canadians in Upper town, so were the Catholics compared to the Protestants.

We like to think that we have only recently become a diverse population, but I recently found an old photograph of Kent Street School in Ottawa when I was in Grade 4 and we had a United Nations Day. In the years immediately following the war the United Nations was so important and the schools went out of their way to celebrate it. We are all posed on the large wooden staircase, which those grand old public schools used to have, and there we are in different kinds of national dress; my friend Natalka in her Ukrainian blouse and dirndl skirt with her long golden braids hanging down, Dimmi a Russian Cossack with high boots which were actually his shoes with cardboard bent around them up to the knees, and me a Chinese bride in a red silk embroidered top and skirt wearing

my hair in braids over my ears like earphones, and of course, my friend Gail and her brother George, both in kilts.

The war had had such an impact on us that we made a great deal of the Declaration of Human Rights every year in a little ceremony and I suppose that was an acknowledgement of an internationalism which was a logical outcome of our contribution to the war effort. We also were accepting an unprecedented flood of refugees and displaced persons and immigrants.

Now when I look back on it I realize that what ordinary people—school principals, teachers, neighbours—were trying to do was to say that they understood what had happened to us as a result of the war. It seems to me that it was an effort being made to understand, to be part of the larger picture, to be part of a sense that we could, however timidly, contribute to a kind of internationalism which had not been ours before. It was the beginning of imagining what we could be, of imagining the others who would take their place among us.

Where did this strength come from? It's worth asking the question because Canada is not a country that has done things and evolved without awareness. Its leaders have been smart visionaries with a practical turn of mind like LaFontaine, Baldwin, MacDonald and Laurier. But Canadians, it seems to me, have always been aware that we had to, at the best, absorb and, at the worst, cobble together the basic divergence of our population and our history.

By the time I got to high school there were a few other Chinese students who were part of the original Chinese population in Canada, the descendants of the people who built the railroad or those who had come as migrant workers, sending remittances home to their villages. But there weren't any Japanese or Korean. Increasingly, there were Dutch, Polish and Italians.

I think this is when we all began to realize that we were going to have a different population. But I, probably like many, thought of them only in context of what war had done. War had thrown out people and those thrown out had been accepted by us. This experience was one that I knew personally. Because we had all been through the war in Canada there was a subconscious understanding on the part of Canadians that war had done this to the world and we were accepting the consequences of it by accepting the people who no longer belonged where they had come from. The world was shaken up like one of those Victorian glass balls where the snow falls on a little homogeneous village when you turn it over. Things looked the same, but actually they were very different.

We made the right steps after the Second World War because we allowed our deep intuitive reactions as human beings govern us. And this eventually overcame the structural indifference and fear which had guided our immigration policies in the past. And those steps could not have been made without the ground work laid in 1840 when Louis LaFontaine made his speech to his electors.

Canada's welcome of immigrants, while necessary to the opening of an enormous country, never happened on a smooth, graded path. You only have to go back and look at the debates carried on in the press in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to realize that there was much consternation at the thought of Slavs coming to inhabit the country and queries as to whether or not Slavs were really white people. Each time a new group approached, like the Italians, the same question was asked: are these people white? This was like a code for: "are they like us?"

But a pattern had been laid down by the words of LaFontaine. Why would he, a gentleman of the landed gentry of French Canada and part of its 250-year history, encourage immigration? First of all, he was a political genius and, second, he saw the future because he understood how huge the country was and how people would want to come to it—to its natural riches, to its nature, to the kind of structure that he and Baldwin were building through ensuring freedom and Responsible Government. I think he was

also probably a very decent human being who saw that in our country, which was very poor, we could quite suitably take in poor people who were desperate. Out of that desperation, longing and striving he understood that people could get together and we could make a country that was less poor.

In every language in the world there are unflattering (to put it mildly) ways to categorize the stranger in their midst. It is when those characteristics become bound up with the sense that you must describe the other in a pejorative way or else you might not be the superior person and might not have the materialistic advantage, that problems start. I am using a scientific model here by saying that we have all evolved at the same pace and are equal on the evolutionary scale. But all the great world religions have basically accepted this—Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism—that people are of the same family and therefore what they look like only differentiates them but does not make them unequal or un-human. This extends to the choices they make that make them different. Roméo Dallaire puts it succinctly: “Everyone is human and there is no one who is more human than another.”

The Oxford philosopher C.D. Broad theorized that all human beings’ minds and nervous systems are linked and are a part of one large unit. He proposes that we at any time are capable of understanding and taking in everything that is happening in the entire world, in all of humanity. It’s what Carl Jung talks about when he deals with the “collective unconscious”. But as we are only time-limited pieces of this great sanctioned intelligence, we individually organize our minds and our nervous systems so that we basically shut out everything that is not useful to each of us as a particular individual. This idea that we actually are part of everything and of the universe is not a matter then of belonging but rather of being a part of. It is a very different thing. If we are all equal on the evolutionary ladder, then that part of our minds and nervous systems are the same whether we are Richard Cheney or a bushman in the Kalahari.

If we understand that we can only have an idea of ourselves as a country by imagining what the other 31 million people are like, then why is it not possible to imagine that we are all part of the same sanctioned intelligence?

I believe that if we were to make ourselves more aware of this with our particular circumstances and choices of welcoming the world and of making the world at home with us we could refine that idea of universal intelligence to our great benefit and to the benefit of the world.

Of course there can be a misuse of difference and that would lead to what Charles Taylor calls the fragmentation in which people are increasingly less capable of forming a common purpose and of carrying it out. That is when people take refuge (and that is what it is, not a goal but a last resort) in their ethnic minority, their group of fellow believers, the people they went to school with. The history of a human society shows how eagerly people will make groups to belong to and there's nothing wrong with that as long as the meaning of the group is inclusion and not the group that is formed in order to exclude others. It is exceedingly dangerous for democracy if people become more attached to their small group; they will find it increasingly difficult to assemble around the common goals which are the project of a free society.

The kind of Responsible Government which gave us our democracy and our exercising of it as Canadians over the last 150 years is a paradigm for what has happened in many of the western industrialized countries. Where Canada is different is that we have virtually insisted on making our society one which accepts and wishes to integrate people from all over the world. At first glance, this seems like a foolish and farfetched notion. How do you make a country out of such disparate elements? How can you have children wearing turbans and veils and head scarves? What do you do about your Christmas tree and about the fact that people observing Ramadan may be very cross for forty days because they can't eat between sunrise and sunset? A lot of these questions seem very trivial and yet their very triviality makes them important in the day-to-day lives of Canadians.

First of all, we must conquer the ignorance that we have about other people's habits and customs. How many people understand that every year there are Christian festivals like Easter and the Muslim ones like Eid-Al-Fitr are set by the phases of the moon? Do we know what the purpose is of going to confessions in the Catholic religion or making the pilgrimage to Mecca in Islam? Can we balance out what Buddhist monks actually mean when they wear their saffron robes and carry begging bowls without asking for food? Do we actually know what circumcision signifies? Without attempting to overcome this ignorance and learn something about others we can only hide in refuges of bigotry and prejudice.

The recent remarkable event in the small Quebec village which has prohibited women from being stoned to death is simply a manifestation of an unease with not only what is not understood but what seems to be not understandable. The fact there is nobody asking to stone a woman to death or that the situation hasn't really arisen where female circumcision could be banned is immaterial in this particular case because it's really all about fear of the unknown. And yet in this little town there are black families and black adopted children who are happily accepted by the village. Again it's a case of "but we *know* them". The fear of the unknown is so huge that it can crush all reasonable judgements. The fact that the black family is headed by a former school principal and a town councillor who has lived in the village for thirty years and that the Haitian boy who was adopted by a white family has been happily at school and integrated for seven years does not seem like a contradiction to the rules against stoning. Perhaps this is simply a way of people reacting to what they fear is going to happen to them rather than what is actually happening.

That is why we must persist in our creation of a country which has every possible difference in it. We must encourage difference. When Voltaire went in exile to England and saw the numerous religious sects that had grown up, he observed: "If there were only one religion in England, there would be danger of despotism. If there were only two they would cut each other's throats. But there are thirty, and they live in peace."

We have seen this in our own history in Canada when there were only Catholics and Protestants. We had the Orange Order attempting to rip apart the fabric of the country and tear Catholicism out of it like a living sacrifice. And the Catholic Ultra-Montagne movement demonized Protestants circling themselves in narrow prejudice. As the country opened up to everyone over the next hundred years, these pitched forces declined completely in vitality. The difference of dozens led to a harmonious civil society.

There is no question that the multiplication of difference has helped us not to tear each other's throats out, but on the other hand we have to recognize that the introduction of difference has often meant that there is a period, not always concurrent, of misunderstanding, miscalculation, confusion and adjustment. But if the long term goal is to create a democratic project in which everyone will have a positive civic identity then we simply have to be constructively patient while the rough places and the rough edges get smoothed and eventually buffed.

It's a great challenge for us as Canadians because they're not managing to pull it off in Britain, France, Germany, Holland or even in Scandinavia, which we have always regarded as the holy of holies of democratization. So here we are out on our own, doing different things with different people.

It's important to remember how we got here, that we started out with a very narrow base and as we have enlarged it, it has brought us to a greater and greater understanding of what life can be like in a civil society. After all, a civil society is a relationship of human beings and without that fundamental condition we do not have the basis with which to negotiate our living together. When pessimistic voices are raised as to how long we can continue with our project, we have to be ready to come up with ideas which will not solve future problems but will give us exercised muscles with which to deal with problems.

I'm always extremely interested when people worry and have worried in the past about things like the RCMP wearing turbans. It caused varying degrees of consternation at the time, but now RCMP wear turbans and nobody thinks twice as they see the Musical Ride with one or two turbans in it. The very fact that people are allowed to express their identity without coercion is something which we should be grateful for. The discussion and the unease also are something we should be relaxed about. We don't have to be happy about everything- DeGaulle with his typical acerbic asceticism said "Happiness is for idiots".

The way in which difference manifested culturally or expressed philosophically or religiously can help us is that we can learn about what others believe and try to understand even if we don't believe the same thing, but also, if a society is healthy, it will look at what other people believe and it will cause them to look at their own beliefs and see what foundations they have for their Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism or atheism. To be able to observe others in their belief system and to question one's own beliefs is an inherently healthy thing. The worse thing is looking at other people's belief system and assuming them to be bad because they are not your own. This is the very basis and foundation of the feeling of exclusion because it seeks to destroy connectedness and community. I believe it to be simply a bad thing.

The concept of acceptance incorporates both understanding and tolerance. Acceptance in our country, I think, can be anything from wanting to know all about it—and embracing it—to "I don't want to know anything about it as long as it doesn't hurt me". Most people fall somewhere in between and don't think about it one way or the other. We do not ever want to get into a position in this country where we force people to decide what they want one way or the other. The idea of coercion in a country like Canada is anathema and counter to everything our history and experience has taught us.

Therefore, I'm very much for the promotion of what I'd like to call passive acceptance. Now I know most people don't like to use the word "passive" because it somehow seems to mean impotence, weakness or indifference. I don't think it needs to imply these things. And although it is the popular creed in our society to be active and make everything work, I would like to plead for a little bit of room in a society that is as mixed as ours for passivity. This kind of passivity I don't see as exactly the opposite of action. The passivity I am talking about is mixed with a kind of watchfulness and of course, always, latent curiosity. In passive acceptance there must be built-in curiosity as well.

In the unitary states, like the European ones, where the nation is defined on racial, religious and cultural grounds, it is very hard to accept things that make difference visible. The French have gone into pretzel-like shapes in order to be able to ban the *hiqab* (the head scarf) in public schools. They have then also been obliged to make it forbidden to wear crosses and stars of David. Talk about cutting off your nose to spite your face! It seems that this kind of secularism can only define itself against religion and cannot take as a larger and more interesting ground where all cultures are accepted as equal in value and can be openly discussed and debated. It is this very nature of openness and debate which is so lacking in these tempests that arise over modes of dress and accoutrements.

We are a secular state and we have long accepted ourselves that way. But the virtue of the passivity of our secularism is what saves us from the kind of ludicrous assertion of our right to live in this negative space. The outward signs of difference are ones which we must learn to accept. Why is it that we as travelers mourn the loss of native dress in Thailand and note with regret the ubiquity of blue jeans? The cultural inheritance that clothing brings is something which is innately important to people who feel that they've been uprooted in other ways.

My mother insisted on making her own *cheong sam*—the colonial Chinese woman’s dress of Hong Kong—for the first twenty years of her life in Canada. With a great deal of skill, she managed to replicate what she was familiar with in her youth and her expression of her own femininity. Eventually she mixed these with trouser suits, blouses, but as far as I remember there were only one or two skirts and they were never the kind of dresses that I was used to wearing from the time I was a tiny child—what my mother would have called European dress. Her clothing gave her a security and also a kind of stardom—nobody in Ottawa looked like her in the 1940s.

In our country, of course, the obvious differences are in colour and forms. But one of the most interesting things about the Canadian climate with its three seasons of winter is that national dress is subsumed by the covering of a dark blue anorak and overshoes. Perhaps the visible sense of difference is not as great in our country because of the chilling effect of our winter. I don’t think it’s a trivial thing but on the other hand I think that dressing for winter equalizes all of us because we know we have to wrap ourselves up completely in order not to die. A lot of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century settlers did come from snowy climates—the burly men in the sheep coats and their sturdy wives. Once we have accepted anoraks and overshoes, we are equalized.

But there are unseen differences which govern people’s lives and customs and which we should also have curiosity about. We know that in Canada the arranged marriage is still very much a desired and accepted custom among Canadians from Southeast Asia. In talking to my friends and acquaintances who had arranged marriages, I sense that they have a certain complacency about it. They feel that it has worked out as well as most marriages have, which is not saying very much considering our divorce statistics. There has been no real concerted effort to understand what the advantages of arranged marriages are. We hear only of the headlines of the violence against women to gain their dowries or a sense that women are totally victimized because they are “married off”. When you realize the subtlety and the care with which these marriages are arranged, we realize the wisdom of them: the organization of people of common background, the agreement of families, the acceptance of the same values. It is interesting that when we

talk about marriages in the western mode, it is always about the choice having somehow gone wrong. And that again is an expression of guilt for the individual because a choice must, by definition, be made by one person. In the arranged marriage, the whole of the small community is involved and that is both a support and a diffuser of the values of the relationship.

There are invisible signs of difference like male circumcision which is a religious rite among Jews and Muslims. To the wider population, it is an optional health precaution, sometimes in fashion but currently quite out of fashion it appears. Or was circumcision originally a health precaution for desert societies which became a religious ritual? In any case, it does not seem to have stopped the reproductive capabilities that the cultures that use it have maintained. Again I think curiosity could play a great role in helping us to understand why others behave as they do, but also to examine our own rituals and purposes.

A society of difference allows for comparisons and contrasts and that is one of its great values. It is not about which is better. Again, we keep in mind always that each of us is equal in our human evolution and that we are all contemporaries. Therefore it is fascinating to see how we have dealt with the questions of our private lives as well as our public faces, a given that we all live now together in this world. I think it is very hard for us to accept the fact that we are equal in our evolutionary capacities but that we are different in our manner of expressing them.

This is why I believe that when we accept to become a part of Canada as a citizen we must accept totally the history of this place. The identities we bring with us or the “impossible sum of our traditions” as the scholar Malcolm Ross has so aptly put it, is already going to be there reverberating in our memories and not only in our individual consciousness but that of our group. If we are to believe the philosopher C.D. Broad, whom I quoted earlier, then we will also be able to insulate ourselves from the larger intelligence to the intelligence of the group and then eventually to our own individual one. But all of this implies that each of us has an equality inherent in our very

humanness. And as we become part of the imagined group with which we associate ourselves when we become citizens of a country, we can say to ourselves that we are part of it because we are consciously inserting ourselves into what looks like an almost chaotic structure. In an average citizenship ceremony involving 50 people, there will 26 countries involved. And each of those people must realize as they become Canadians that they must accept all of Canadian history as theirs and they are simply taking another part of the universal consciousness and making it part of themselves. That our wonderful history of freedom, Responsible Government, and public education is to be accepted as much as the intolerably ugly acts of the past like dispossessing the Japanese-Canadians or refusing entry to Jewish refugees.

The beauty of this idea of total consciousness, of which we are all a part, is that we are not able then to say “This all happened before I got here and I am not part of it.” The “here” doesn’t make sense in this context because what we are accepting when we become citizens is the larger unspoken future and the frequently repeated past. Only by consciousness and by acceptance of the larger imagined inclusive world of others can we possibly hold together a society which rejoices so much in its differences. By that I mean that the groups within it feel that they have the possibility of remaining different. But what are we to give to our country and how are we to give it?

One of the things that make me really nervous is people thinking that love will iron out all the differences between us. Maybe the tooth fairy will accept this along with a molar, but I don’t think anybody else should. The evocation of emotion to resolve issues of civil society is not useful in a society of difference. To talk about love and invoke it as the only way for us to be united, misleads and deludes us about what gives us our strength as a unique society. The problem with a love scenario is that it doesn’t leave room for differentiation and that the mind and heart will go sometimes in different directions. To just love people is not something which you can ask of a state. Nor do many nations set out to be lovable. Many of them have made a great success out of being frankly unlikeable and sometimes loathsome.

Our society must be created through a different set of tensions which include love but also includes analysis, acceptance and curiosity. Going hand in hand with this is the idea that we should understand that we cannot create a civil society on the basis only of getting together with the people we like and with whom we feel similar interests and goals. It would be the easiest thing in the world to create little groups of people who are fond of each other. They're called friends. And friendship is a remarkable and necessary thing for individuals. But the kind of love resolution that 1960s love can bring is not realistic because unless you are God you cannot love that many people and a country is also going to be made up of quite a lot of people.

Our society has to be created through the syncretic tensions that are inherent in our differences. Our true strength will come in making a good society not only with those whom we like, admire, share values with but in creating the society with those whom we do not like. We must recognize that we have to create the society which is the relationship between human beings at its very basic level with people whose values are different from our own, whose inherent beliefs we do not like, and with whom we would not wish to share a park bench or a sandwich. It is with these people, as well as those whom we respect, love, emulate, that we have to create our society. It is totally unrealistic and a dead end to think you can make a society of only those people who are like yourself. The only way in which we can accept what we do not like is to understand that it is part of the greater consciousness, that it is part of the world to which we belong and in which we must play our part.

Let's drop useless sentimentality and the shoddy illusion that affectionate feelings will cure all ills. We are fortunate in our society to have the differences that point out exactly how we might not like each other and how in order to create a better place to be we must learn to cope with these varieties.

The society we built here didn't just happen; it required vigilance and planning and a constant effort, and it still does. We have a perfect national anthem in French because it says "O Canada, terre de nos aïeux" which means "Canada, the land of our ancestors". Though we are all different, we also come from all sorts of different roots and everybody is our ancestor. I think it's a wonderful circumstance that the national anthem actually talks about how we come from ancestors in a country which is bound to have been thought of always as an immigrant country. We know that we have built this country by hard work and by being cunning and downright smart. Out of this large consciousness, which I believe we share, we have drawn our individual personalities but it's still out of the larger pool which surrounds us, the larger pool in which we are immersed.

We've never been hooked on an ideology. We've been practical, we've been experimental and we've been rewarded by something that works most of the time. Of course to have an ideology gives great comfort because you can be certain that you're right and that everybody who believes what you believe is right. Together you're going to be able to create a perfect world. That kind of certitude is total nonsense but it's surprising how ideology still rears its reptilian head from time to time. And to my amazement, people still sometimes believe that ideology of any kind is the way to fix things.

But a society is not about fixing things. A society is about managing to live together so that we can have the maximum amount of liberty within a structure that gives security so that we can exercise our responsibilities. It's like living in a condominium—you have the building, you have the condo fees, and you have the fact that you're going to have to share that building with other people who are strangers.

The delusion that we can love other people into a democratic state is pathetic at its best and dangerous at its worst. We all know that democracy is untidy and that dictatorships are the ways to get things done neatly and on time, but that doesn't mean that by trying to love everybody we will make things work. If we believe that love will

cure everything and all we need to do is to learn how to love everybody, we will inevitably be polarized.

The animals in a modern zoo don't have bars: they just have currents of hot and cold air run around them which keeps them in line. We don't want to be, even metaphorically, like animals that have to be kept in line by jets of love and indifference. The healthy society must be diffused. There's too much sentimentality in the idea of being able to love everybody and creating a community of love and interest and hoping it will become a polarizing force.

We need to understand with our passive acceptance, our curiosity and our awakened knowledge of those who are not like us and will never be that our society cannot be built simply on one element. That is the great advantage that difference can give to us.

We have to be very careful when we look at examples of what it means to be tolerant or accepting in a society. I remember when I first went to Paris as a young student in 1961 and seeing that there were black and white couples in the street together. Nobody stared at them and I thought that this was a wonderful sign of how great French society was because it approved of these kinds of couples. What I learned, as I lived there longer, was that the French were simply indifferent to what foreigners were doing in their country of liberty, equality and fraternity. It simply never occurred to them that relationships between black and white couples would happen on a large scale in their own society, but they were perfectly able to see it happening to strangers. There was what I would call a sense of non-implication.

Twenty-five years later when I was Agent General in France and had a great deal to do with many French politicians during François Mitterrand's regime, the leader of one of the centrist parties said to me with explosive goodwill: "Well, of course, you can accept all these people into your country! You are already mongrelized." To make that kind of judgement about others and to call that tolerance—letting others do what they

wish as long as you don't have to become involved—has a certain useful logic. But it ignores understanding, it ignores the common good and it ignores people's abilities to make decisions once they have all the information. There are certain kinds of tolerance which seem to be positive because they operate on a utilitarian basis, until you realize that that kind of tolerance can make a virtue of civilized contempt.

Just because people aren't like you and they're not your friends it doesn't mean you should tolerate them in the most limited sense of the word. Just because somebody is not your friend does not imply that they are an enemy. The ground in between is the one in which we have to operate as a decent society. The philosopher Michael Oakeshott says that you know that you can be a friend to somebody when they are very different from you but you don't have the impulse to change them. He says that if you wish to change them, then you cannot possibly be their friend. He says the true friendship is a contemplation of the other. You contemplate the person but you do not want to change them; you accept them exactly as they are.

This is what we are doing when we try to create a society. This is what our challenge has been as Canadians. We are creating a larger circle to whom we grant everything that we grant to ourselves and in all knowledge of their differences from us. This should be our goal; this should be our ideal.

I don't want there to be any misunderstanding about how necessary love is in the world. But I do want to caution that it is not an emotion which can be spread indiscriminately and which will solve all problems. In practical terms as countries and as models of social structures, we cannot talk about what we do only on the emotional level. The "love is all" carried to an extreme where it is thought that it could solve problems could be deplorable and certainly useless. Trying to demand love and appreciation from the other when the other is totally different does not give any hint as to how we can construct things in a socially stable manner.

The feelings that we have, which we channel into love, cannot possibly be answered by a large number of people. It is unrealistic of us to expect that we can love and be loved by people whose beliefs, customs and looks are totally different from our own. Even if in some cases, we are not even curious about them. However, the obligation lies on us if we are to create a country, to include the different with ourselves being the standard of how degrees of difference vary. Each and every one of us in a society like the one we are creating must be certain to say “I am here, and from here outwards there are radiations that I feel for other people.” There’s also the feeling that we cannot possibly include everybody in our interests. But that’s why we have structures. That’s why we have political parties which make people believe that everybody believes what they believe.

To return to my original example of the people who are brave enough to save strangers from drowning or from fire, the level of emotion in those activities is not high. The level of action is. Those of us who have found ourselves in situations where the poverty or suffering are enormous know what this means. Those of us who have witnessed people dying of drought in Africa or a grandmother looking after her grandchildren as all of her children have died of AIDS, it would be easy to say that tears are the response. Unfortunately, tears while probably an unavoidable physical manifestation of distress, don’t help people. It’s not the way in which you can help them.

When I was in the Sahel in the seventies, when the Tuaregs, the nomadic people of central Africa, were starving and seeing their herd depleted from lack of grazing, the Red Cross official with whom I travelled told me: “I know you feel like crying but don’t. Just hold on to yourself and make sure that things get better.”

Sometimes I think of a movie called *Quo Vadis* in which a decadent Nero played by Peter Ustinov says: “I weep for you, Petronius” gathering up several tears from his eyes in a little crystal bottle. The fact is that he had just ordered Petronius to commit suicide and of course he felt badly about it. When we feel compassion, which is a

manifestation of the best kind of love, we should know that our reactions should be much more than that, more than picturesque gestures framed by guilt.

In our own country, where we see injustice or where we know that we cannot heal the rifts that exist in our society, we must restrain ourselves and make sure that what we are doing is not just a kind of emotional exhortation.

We are confronted on a daily basis in this country with differences so great that nobody could have imagined them being in one country a hundred years ago. I advocate a “wait and see” approach and it makes me very happy to see a girl in a head scarf and a boy in a turban singing “Silent Night”. Maybe little things just make me happy, like and idiot.

The fears that people have, which are fears of the other, make me understand that fear is the one thing that can continue to still the most decent instincts in us. Fear is enough to quell our desire to help the nameless other. And it is fear that we must overcome. The people in the town Hérouxville were simply manifesting the deepest apprehensions about a change in their way of life and whether or not they themselves would be asked, or forced, to change. Underlying it all, I suppose, is the feeling that perhaps not somebody of another religion might be stoned but that they themselves might be stoned. All these things are taken very personally by people living their lives who are not part of the elite decision makers. They have not read John Stewart Mill’s *On Liberty*; they don’t realize that other people doing things does not imply that you can be made to do them. I see this as an attempt to end-run difference in our society, to pre-empt it.

One way in which we must look at a difference in our society is related towards our Aboriginal peoples. We know that we have three founding peoples—Francophone, Anglophone and the Aboriginals. The difference of the Aboriginal peoples speaks to the place that they must rightfully have in our society. They do not have it now.

George Erasmus, my predecessor in this series, has described it in this way: “The ideals of a good life [are] imbedded in Aboriginal languages and traditional teaching. The Anishinabek seek the spiritual gift of pinatziwin—long life and well-being that enable a person to gain wisdom. The Cree of the northern prairies value miyowicehtowin—having good relations. The Iroquois Great Law sets out rules for maintaining peace among peoples, going beyond resolving conflicts to actively caring for each other’s welfare. Aboriginal peoples across Canada internationally speak of their relationship with the natural world and the responsibility of human beings to maintain balance in the natural order; rituals in which we give something back in return for the gifts that we receive from Mother Earth reinforce that sense of responsibility. Most Canadians subscribe to these goals: long life, health and wisdom for ourselves and family; a harmonious and cohesive society; peace among peoples of different origins and territories; and a sustainable relationship with the natural environment.”

It almost pains me to read those words because you have to think of why we don’t understand each other when we all do have the same goals. I think the settlers to this country who found the Aboriginals here and made treaties with them have a great deal to answer for. The Aboriginal people made the original difference. We, the immigrants, the settlers, descended upon the first nations and sought to make the difference between them and us, property: and then “WE own this” instead of “WE can share this”.

I felt it myself personally when I re-enacted treaty ceremonies as the representative of the Crown with a tribe of Aboriginal people such as the one that was held at Lower Fort Garry in 2001. I was given a replica of the medal struck at the time to show Governor Simpson and the First Nations Chief. And I also noticed that when I went to such ceremonies there was a deference paid to me as the representative of the Crown in an abstract and personal way. It was with the Algonquin at Aboriginal Day in 2000 that I was addressed as “grandmother” by people of every age.

I recall again here that the treaty ends by stating that this bond “will hold as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow and the grass grows.” Those treaties were entered into in good faith by the native peoples. I would like us, who came later, who live those treaties, to honour them. I believe that we will not be able to continue to deal with difference in our country until we have honestly dealt with the original promise to our Aboriginal peoples. The evidence of our betrayal lies all around us—in the reserves, in the cities, in the statistics of the health problems, like diabetes and fetal alcohol syndrome. In the history of our nation we have been used to making accords—the Quebec Act of 1774 or the Act of Confederation in 1867 and all the treaties with the native peoples. We understand that kind of complexity, but in the case of the Aboriginal peoples why have we not lived up to our end of the bargain.

When I was in public school, we used to have projects where we would take a piece of beaver board and we were asked to make an Indian village out of birch bark cedar and any materials that we could find. We would build little tepees and make little trees out of pine needles and talk about the Indian way of life, but we never met a single Aboriginal even though the Maniwaki Reserve was less than forty miles away from the very school where we were learning about our original peoples as though they had all disappeared, and what we were recreating was a way of life that was gone.

I would like to think that this fundamental attitude we have towards the difference of Aboriginals will lead to an accommodation which will bring fairness and justice. In every province, if you ask children in a class where there are Aboriginal children to identify themselves as treaty people, only those who are of native origin will put up their hands. In fact, we are all treaty people because it takes two sides to make a treaty, and that’s what we agreed to do.

I think the way in which we will deal with this question in the future will help determine how we are able to deal with the difference that we encounter in newcomers. We have an ethical obligation to make sure that our relationship with Aboriginal peoples is in balance. We need to use what the Inuit call *isuma*—an intelligence that includes

knowledge of one's responsibility towards society. Our society includes Aboriginal peoples and we should use an Aboriginal way in which to make it more just. If we feel responsible towards each other then we will be able to feel that the difference of Aboriginal peoples will become an enriching factor for our society and for all who come to it.

Again, I return to the idea that we are all contemporaries and that we are all on the same step in the scale of human evolution. We have to look to the others who are with us on that step and give them the curiosity, the understanding and the acceptance.

There is another concept which is promulgated by Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and it is the concept of *ubuntu*. It speaks to the very essence of being human, of each person's humanity being bound up with others. It is not "I think, therefore I am", it is "I am because we are". A person becomes a person through other persons. And I take that to mean that you become a person through other persons who are not like you, who are different from you, as well as those who are similar.

Unless we deal fairly with this question of difference, which is right in the roots and history of our society, we will not be able to deal with difference with the people who flood here every year, the quarter of a million who come, and who within three or five years become citizens if they wish to be. The danger we have is that we think that difference can only come from the outside when in fact we have been living with difference for all of our history as newcomers to this continent. We did not come to an empty place. We came to an inhabited land where the people roamed over certain territories but knew how to share it because they knew how to make the most of its resources, and how to share it with others. Probably because we're so stuck on the fact that we must own property and we must exploit everything that we own, we find even the memory of this disturbing. The difference between owning and sharing is the crux of what we must resolve. It is at the heart of the darkness we have let come between us.

About a week after the news broke that the people in the small town in Quebec felt that they should have laws to prohibit the stoning of women, a group of Muslim women went to the village to talk to people. This is a surprising but very healthy response to a situation. It is very much what we should all be doing with each other, which is talking, arguing, confronting without recourse to violence. If we don't understand and feel frustrated that we don't understand there's room for shouting.

Nowadays we're all acquainted with the kind of dialogues that are set up which are generally called "interface" with monks and priests and rabbis globe-trotting to tut-tut with one another. I can quite understand why this is happening. This fits into my category of people who are like-minded and there's nothing wrong with their finding solace in each other's attitudes and trying to come together to bring about harmony. The problem is that you don't get anywhere if you only talk to people who basically agree with each other.

When I talked about people that we did not like and whose values we did not espouse being accepted by us, I meant that we are going to have to talk to extremists and with people at the far end of the spectrum whose prejudices are loathsome to us. But I think what we are going to have to do is actually engage in discussions with people whose points of view we feel instinctively are repugnant. But I'm afraid we are going to have to do this because a dialogue is a dialogue and what we've been engaged in up to now have been parallel monologues.

It doesn't seem to me to have worked to tell people what they can't do and how much we don't respect them for what it is that they do do. At some point, we're going to have to engage in discussions with people who believe in violence, whose prejudices are not matched to our own admittedly prejudiced feelings. This is going to be a real test for us as a country. The like-mindedness that most of us living in a peaceable, quiet country which so far has managed to do a miracle of integration is going to be challenged to its very roots.

In Canada, I think we are ideally suited to help people understand each other even if they feel they might be provoked. Many of our new citizens can help the places that they have come from by exporting from their new country a vision which will help the old one in its internecine conflicts and its settling of old scores. We're going to have to be non-traditional because we have to realize that not talking to them, not understanding, not having curiosity, not being able to engage, will breed larger and larger numbers of people who listen to extremists. Not talking to people reinforces their prejudice and hatred. Not giving people equal access to all the customs and practices of Canada will be a stumbling block to the progress of our country. We need to use the energy of difference to help fuel the strength of our political structure, our care for the environment, our passive acceptance of others.

Why can't we have the strength to deal with difference and confront the ugly and the unacceptable? I believe that dialogue will pull everyone involved toward a middle ground and that is the middle ground where we want to be. To some it may sound naïve or idealistic to imagine that talking will convince people who are tempted by extremism and wish to harm our "way of life". But I think we're going to have to face this and we could very well be able to take a lead in dealing with pluralism in this way. The use of the word "dialogue" must be a real one. The ability to look at difference and not have the instinct to want to homogenize it and make it disappear is the kind of dynamic we should want to work on in Canada.

When we talk about getting on with each other and sense the "make nice" quality that we delude ourselves with, we are standing in the way of being able to help blow a hole in the wall of misunderstanding and isolation. That's not good enough. And what's more, it's not going to last. We have to use the dynamic of difference to find a new way.