

PREFACE

Will this be Canada's century? Many Canadians have asked themselves this question ever since Wilfrid Laurier predicted that the twentieth century would belong to Canada—or words to that effect—in a speech he gave to the Canadian Club in Ottawa in 1904.

While Laurier was wrong about his prediction—the twentieth century obviously belonged to the United States and in every conceivable way—is there any possibility that the twenty-first century could be Canada's century?

Most people would probably say “decidedly not.” In the sense in which we have come to understand what it means for a century to “belong” to a country—that is to say, for a country to achieve a high standard of living, possess a great deal of economic, military, commercial, and financial power, and play the dominant role in the world—most people and likely most Canadians would say that the twenty-first century will belong to China or India. These countries have huge populations, enormous consumer markets, and are growing at rapid rates in economic terms (even if these rates have slowed somewhat in recent years). Indeed, the world's centre of gravity seems to be shifting from west to east. While the future is always an open book, China and India are probably the “best bets” for having the twenty-first century belong to them.

And yet, this type of thinking is based on the current way of looking at things and on the way things have been done in the past. The problem is that looking at matters in this way is no longer sustainable, either for individual countries or for the world as a whole. This has become painfully apparent as a result of climate change, the environmental crisis, huge disparities in income and wealth, the migration of millions of people, numerous immigration and refugee problems, terrorism and terrorist attacks, and conflicts between different peoples, groups, countries, religions, and civilizations. It doesn't take a psychic to depict the kind of world that could result in the not-too-distant future as world population increases, natural resources are used up, unsustainable demands are made on the natural environment, and the finite carrying capacity of the earth is approached. Due to these and other problems, it is evident that things must change—and change substantially—if human survival and environmental wellbeing are to be assured in the future. Maintaining the status quo and staying the course are no longer options. The costs, consequences, and dangers are too great.

Clearly a new course must be charted for humanity and brought into being if these problems are to be addressed successfully in the future. This course must be capable of creating a very different type of relationship between human beings and the natural

environment, reducing the enormous disparities that exist in income and wealth, decreasing poverty, increasing employment, coming to grips with climate change and social, economic, and political injustices, improving relations between the diverse peoples, countries, races, religions, and cultures of the world, and creating a great deal more happiness, peace, harmony, and security in life.

Can Canada play a leadership role in charting this new course for humanity and making it a reality? If so, it might just be possible for the twenty-first century to belong to Canada, despite the fact that the country lacks a vast population or gigantic market.

In order for Canada to play such a role, a chronological and cultural approach to Canadian development is required, rather than a contemporary and partial approach. The value of the chronological approach is threefold: it allows us to see clearly how Canada has evolved in the past and what is most essential to learn from this; it shows where Canada and the world stand at present and what are the most pressing problems facing the country and the world today; and it helps determine where Canada should be headed in the future. The cultural approach is needed to focus attention on the big picture and not just specific parts of it, as well as to ascertain how Canadian culture can be developed most effectively in the years and decades ahead.

When considered in this chronological and cultural manner, it is clear that Canada is capable of playing a leadership role in the world of the future, largely by making the changes in worldviews, values, lifestyles, and individual and collective behaviour that are imperative for this. However, Canada would not be acting as an empire-builder in the traditional sense, but, rather, as an exemplar in the forward-looking and future-oriented sense.

Such a course of action is vital for many reasons: to achieve sustainable development; to come to grips with climate change and the environmental crisis; to reduce the major inequalities that exist in income and wealth; to create acceptable standards of living and a decent quality of life; to enable the country and its citizenry to play a proactive and seminal rather than reactive and imitative role in the world; and to make Canada and the world better and safer places in which to live, work, develop, interact, and thrive.

In order to do this, it will be necessary to capitalize on some of Canada's greatest historical and contemporary assets, most notably the ability to create and maintain a strong and independent country against virtually insurmountable odds, manifest a great deal of creativity, deal with an incredible amount of diversity, and create a distinct way of life. It will also be necessary to strike out in some bold, new, and daring directions in the future—directions that are finely tuned to the needs and aspirations of Canada, Canadians, people and countries in other parts of the world, and the world as a whole.

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**A nation's culture resides
in the hearts and in the soul of its people.**

MAHATMA GANDHI