

A PLURALISTIC QUEBEC
IN THE LIGHT OF AN INTERCULTURAL PRACTICE

Memorandum To The
Consultative Commission on 'Reasonable Accommodation' of
Cultural Differences in Quebec



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Introduction

This brief aims at proposing a view, other than an institutional one, on the pluralistic society of Quebec, and on the relations of reciprocal influence and conviviality within its population, which have moulded and continue to mould the pluralistic culture of Quebec. We would like a voice to be heard, one that is often marginalised by official, institutional, political and ideological views, and to share here the knowledge and experiences of daily life, within very diverse communities with whom we are in contact since the foundation of our organization.

Our aim is not to oppose the concept of reasonable accommodation, a primarily legal model, for the «management of diversity» in our society. However, we are inviting the Commission to consider the fact that social relations are not only based on a social contract managed by the State: we also need to listen to the knowledge and practices that have been in operation for many decades by community-based organizations. In keeping with this vision, the preferred approach has been to enrich community life through intercultural dialogue and understanding. The citizens involved in this approach, are themselves the creators of the knowledge and networks that transcend what is “manageable”, all the while enriching the fabric of society, in the measure in which we are able to maintain links between these different levels of reality. Through this memorandum to the Commission, we wish to contribute to the search for paths towards real collaboration between all levels of society, and towards the creation of alternatives acceptable to all.

This brief presents a vision of Quebec as a pluralistic society, as well as an approach to interculturality as a way of living together in this society. This vision and approach are drawn from an experience of action, reflection, and research which have spanned over four decades at the Intercultural Institute of Montreal (IIM).

In the first part, we shall draw a portrait of the diverse innovative programs and activities offered in the field of intercultural relations within Quebec, in Canada, and on the international level. We shall then try to present a different view on the issue the cultural and religious diversity of Quebec by high-lighting dimensions that are too little explored or neglected in the present debate. Finally, we shall present a brief exposé of the vision of pluralism and interculturality that has been developed within our organisation, followed by some concrete propositions as orientations for society.

1. A presentation of IIM

1.1 Its foundation

IIM was founded in 1963, in Montreal, under the name «Centre Monchanin», by a Québécois of French-Canadian origin, Father Jacques Langlais. Its motto was: «The time has come for the feast of nations». Initially a centre that fostered exchange and understanding between «two solitudes», the francophone and the anglophone, it soon became an interpersonal, intercultural meeting and dialogue centre for young and adult Québécois of all religious and cultural origins.

It is important to note that the mission of this organization, which has been called the Intercultural Institute of Montreal since 1990, was linked to a profound awareness of the pluralism inherent to all of Reality, and to all human societies. The pluralism of Reality, as

understood here, is the sense that the diversity present in nature and in human cultures is a given reality of itself. Our conviction has always been that the transformation of society is only possible through a synergic process that originates from people, expands to communities and finally affects the whole structure of a society. IIM operates neither as a service organization for immigrants, nor as a lobbying group for immigrant rights, but rather as an organization for social education fostering interculturalization.

A short overview of IIM's philosophy and action

Since its foundation, each decade has been marked by a new development. Such has been IIM's tradition, constantly sustained by the initial intuition of the pluralism of Reality and of the Cosmos, and by the intercultural imperative; a tradition of adaptation and adjustment to the changing tendencies and needs of the social, political and cultural environment; a tradition consistently responding to the challenges posed by the powerful forces of globalization.

Although the international dimension has always been present in our vision and action, it was during the 80's that the international context became the basis for the framework in the elaboration of our philosophy and our intercultural practices. The confrontation of cultures in international affairs; the colonial history and its vestiges; the stratification of Northern and Southern cultures on a cultural scale (as being modern/non modern or civilized/primitive), were seen as crucial elements in our efforts to theorize interculturality. As a result, applying an intercultural approach to the fields of development and international cooperation, of human rights, and of international aid, became an essential part of our work.

1.2 Characteristics of IIM's programs and approach

IIM has always sought to offer proposals, not to erect rigid opposition to the dominant approach, but towards the introduction of alternatives as regards pluralistic societies throughout the world. We offer a series of programs and services in a spirit of cooperation; from its foundation to this very day, our programs have run a long and innovative course. The evolution of our programs and services were marked by the following characteristics:

The 60's: The intercultural socialization of youth and adults coming from different ways of life and different cultural and religious origins; the experience of cultural apprenticeship and of intercultural/interreligious dialogue; the establishment of an information and documentation service on cultures, religions and intercultural studies; the founding of the international Journal INTERCULTURE.

The 70's: The development of closer links with Indigenous Nations, the creation of programs to support and sensitize the public to the way of life of First Nations, and the socio-political issues with respect to their self-determination; the introduction of a program of intercultural education for children and workshops of cultural sensitization for teachers; intercultural consultation and reference services; the promotion of the rights of minority cultures.

The 80's: Intercultural forums on social topics of the day; training in intercultural communication: 45 to 60 hours training programs for professionals in education, social and health services in many institutions and community organizations; training programs for agents of international development and cooperation, and for defenders of human rights.

The 90's: Setting up an International Network for Cultural Alternatives to Development (INCAD): promoting movements of regeneration of local communities and of their systems of knowledge throughout the world; establishing a data base on specific issues, with regard to groups such as youth, elders, and immigrant families within ethnocultural communities of Quebec; and, more recently, on interculturality within community development and social action.

2000 to today: Since 2001, the events of September 11th, have incited us to reorient our reflection and action, with regard to interreligious dialogue. Hence, we have constituted an Interreligious Committee for social action. Within the framework of this Interreligious Committee and in collaboration with the Chaire de Recherche Universitaire sur la Diversité au Québec (CRIDAQ), we have developed an action project within the school milieu on the theme: «Youth, Identity and Religiousness: the role of the school». Participants in this project comprise students from the secondary IV and V, parents, teachers and spiritual animators. In 2007, we held the Colloquium «Pluralism here and elsewhere» in order to deepen our reflection on the diversity in our society from an intercultural perspective.

2. Who is Québécois? A look at Québécois diversity

2.1 Forgotten «roots»: the Native heritage

With due respect to the constraints of the Commission to abstain from issues pertaining to the governance of Native nations, our reflection situates itself at the level of identity and of day-to-day relationship in proximity with the indigenous peoples. For it is impossible for us to by-pass the troublesome forgetfulness constituted by the omission of indigenous influences with regard to the identity construction of so-called francophone Québécois «de souche» (old stock).

"There once was an old Indian lady from Saskatchewan* who decided one day to narrate her life, starting with these words: «Oh! You know, in those days, there were only indians and canayens, the Whites came much after». Such a testimony needs no commentary, it refers to a reality about which we cannot insist enough." Jean Morisset¹

We call ourselves Québécois and we are proud of it, but do we know that this name, derived from the word Québec, originates from the Algonquian Kébec? In fact, this Algonquian name means «a strait, a narrow area, an escarpment» to signify «the place of the city where the St-Laurence River is narrow».² That is not the only lapse of memory in the construction of the Québécois cultural identity. Even if we often find much evidence of this Native presence in Quebec's toponymy, it seems to be related more, in our memories, to vestiges of a foregone past than to a «founding» heritage of our identity.

Should we not question ourselves with respect to this occultation of this first intercultural encounter? Do we not have something to learn here about our incapacity to understand Native Nations in terms of their own world visions and with respect to their cultures? The Native person uses Western language to express his vision of the world. How is it that the Westerner practically never uses the Native language to make himself understood by the Native people?

¹ Morisset, Jean (1992) : Amérique sans nom. Post-scriptum pour un quinquantième, pp.7

² Under the direction of Alain Roy (2005); "Dictionnaire culturel en langue française", Tome III, Dictionnaire Le Robert : Paris, pp. 2286.

Can one construct a solid Québécois identity by omitting a part of its origins and foundations? We cannot better express the reality of this aboriginal, biological and cultural heritage, than Pierre Lepage, in his excerpts in Mythes et Réalités on Native peoples³:

"Far from living in rather unenviable conditions and from desiring to integrate and assimilate to the French colony, the Indigenous people, quite to the contrary, have fascinated the Europeans. Mixed marriages, for example, at a certain time, took place rather to the detriment of French society. It is easier, Mother Marie de l'Incarnation would say, to make an Indian out of a Frenchman, than vice-versa".

[...] "In many ways, the influence was reciprocal, and undoubtedly this mutual influence has contributed significantly to the birth of a truly Canadian identity, distinct from the Metropolitan French. [...] Exploration, the discovery of the land and of its resources, could not have taken place without the contribution of Natives."

This past and present omission of the reality of the first inhabitants of the territory, and of their unequivocal influence in the construction of the identity of the Québécois "de-souche", even if it can be explained as Denys Delage shows⁴, by the history of North American colonization, is nonetheless inexcusable.

The fragility of identity, as an explanation for all the fear and insecurity often justifying withdrawal, happens to be a reality that is rather well shared among non-Natives; it cannot be bypassed through refusal and denial of facts. The development of healthy intercultural relations with Indigenous people will not be able to take place without correcting, among the population of Quebec, the ignorance and misunderstanding of the indigenous historical contribution, and without transforming the negative and folkloric representations that we have of it.

The acknowledgement of their contribution must enter our lives as an unavoidable reference. It requires of us to open our eyes to our own historical reality. It implies change in our representation of ourselves and of the Native people, changes rooted in that reality. In that perspective, it behoves us to give to Native people the place and visibility that belong to them as cultural communities. In whichever way we may be able to support their aspirations to recovery⁵ from the intergenerational and multigenerational⁶ trauma, and to the revitalisation of their cultures, we will also be contributing to the regeneration of our own.

Since the 1970's, IIM's experience with the different First Nations of Quebec has been enriched through contacts characterized by listening and showing respect, which have along

³ Lepage, Pierre (2002) : Mythes et Réalités sur les peuples autochtones, Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse; Montréal, pp. 6-8

⁴ Delage, Denis (2005) : Des influences refoulées, interview realized by Jean-Claude Ranet, in Relations, January, pp.12-15.

⁵ Morency, Judith and Kistabish, Richard (2001) Intervention en milieu autochtone : comprendre le passé pour mieux agir aujourd'hui, Psychologie Québec : Juillet, pp. 14-17.

⁶ Fondation autochtone de guérison, 1999 : AS : "The intergenerational or multigenerational traumas are present when the effects of the traumas are not resolved during the life of a generation. When traumas are ignored and nothing has been done to solve them, these traumas shall be transmitted from one generation to the next. What we learn as being normal when children, we transmit to our own children. [...]"

the years, made it possible to establish a relationship of confidence so that the IIM has been, and remains in their eyes, a trustworthy interlocutor. We refer here to the training sessions offered during the course of 30 years, at the IIM and in secondary schools and CEGEPs, to initiate better relations with Native people. There is also the present-day "summer school" which gives an opportunity to participants to immerse themselves in Native Culture and to develop attitudes conducive to dialogue with the differences that this represents. This ongoing dialogue with the Natives and the Inuit, was also published in the book Nations Autochtones en Amérique du Nord⁷ written in collaboration by Ntsuk^w and Robert Vachon.

Thanks to these relationships, IIM has been able to maintain communication between the government or its institutions and the traditionalist Natives, among others, during the dramatic events of Akwesasne and Oka. In this last case, a bicultural committee of about 15 participants, was set up with people from the Kahnawake and Kanesatake Mohawks and francophone Quebecois from the towns of Oka and Chateauguay, in view of renewing dialogue and working towards resolving the crisis. The resulting reflection was published in four issues of the Journal INTERCULTURE⁸ between 1991 and 1993. The work of this committee identified elements of the misunderstanding through an approach of intercultural dialogue. In this case, it made it possible for the participants to focus on an important source of misunderstanding that lay in their different visions of relationship to the earth: while the Québécois are in a relation of ownership with regard to the land, the Mohawks see themselves rather as its protectors, which explains, in part, the conflicts related to self-determination and land-claims. Our observation is that such a practice, based on constant, prolonged and equality-based dialogue, could spread if it were supported in places having the means to facilitate this kind of encounter.

In 2007, during the colloquium «Pluralism here and elsewhere» organized by IIM, Michael Rice from the Mohawk Nation, approached the discussion on reasonable accommodation by mentioning that Native people have been accommodating for centuries. He quoted Chief Canassatego's speech in 1774 on education, and the Seneca chief Red Jacket, that reflect efforts on the part of Native Nations to accommodate Europeans culture, without losing their identity. Mr. Rice asked if something could not be learnt from these Native people's experience of Quebec and Canada, to welcome new immigrants. And he ended with these words «If we wish to realize a reasonable accommodation with others, we must plant the tree of peace in our hearts, minds and spirits».

2.2 The diversity of the Francophone majority group

2.2.1 Three sociocultural origins of reference

The public debate with regard to reasonable accommodation was initiated by groups of so-called «Québécois francophones de souche». As well, the majority of opinions and memoranda within the framework of the Commission, were presented by persons and organizations coming from this group.

⁷ N^wTswk^w and Vachon, Robert (1983) : Fides, Montreal

⁸ Vachon, Robert (1991-1992) «The Mohawk Nation and its communities» in Interculture issues 113 and 114. Vachon, Robert (1993) «The Mohawk Dynamics of Peace» in Interculture issues no. 118. Vachon, Robert (1993) : «The Mohawk Nation» in Interculture, issue no. 121.

The majority group, all the while sharing a common origin, presents a socio-cultural diversity that we must take into consideration in order to better understand the different positions concerning questions of cultural diversity.

2.2.2 The three poles of reference with regard to cultural diversity

a) The French-Canadian group

In spite of the changes that took place during the "Quiet Revolution", a non-negligible portion of the francophone Québécois «de souche» has continued to identify itself as French-Canadian, notably pertaining to the Catholic religious dimension. It is found mainly in the non-metropolitan regions but also present in certain social strata of the metropolitan areas. Here are some of its characteristics:

- An acute sense of historical memory;
- An important attachment to the Catholic religious tradition, which has been one of the major elements of the configuration of the French-Canadian identity;
- An attachment to a more «traditional» system of values, as much at the ethical and moral levels, as at the social, economic and political levels;
- A more communitarian social outlook, without diminishing the value accorded to individuals and their sense of initiative.

French Canada, especially after the Patriots Revolt of 1837-38, has constituted itself in an identity which is quite homogeneous, articulated around the Catholic faith and the French language. This can facilitate the understanding of certain reactions and perceptions in the face of cultural diversity:

- The expression of a malaise towards the reality of cultural diversity, experienced as another stage in the loss of values specific to French Canadian identity, in which the "Quiet Revolution" represents the first stage. The following sentence illustrate this fear quite well: «They have obliged us to remove the crucifix from the schools and now the immigrants want to impose their religion on us».
- Immigration is perceived as a danger for this already fragile cultural identity, even if, de facto, the immigrant acts more as a mirror than a real cause;
- The fact that many immigrants share their religious and spiritual values is barely noticed.

b) The pole of the Quiet Revolution

The Quiet Revolution was primarily a reaction against the socio-political, religious and cultural reality of the Duplessis era, which has been qualified as «the Great Darkness». This revolution enabled Quebec to enter the modern era, provoking profound changes, among which was the emancipation from the ecclesiastical Catholic strangle- hold on society, as well as modifying the way of understanding and doing politics. Some of its associated characteristics:

- An acute sense of rupture with the past, seen mainly as highly positive. Hence, a certain void at the level of identity, since all possible references to the past are perceived as negative;
- A militant laicism, often within a hairs' breath of anti-clericalism, in reaction to ecclesiastical power which has dominated Québécois society for over a 100 years. Religion is considered a private affair, without a public or collective dimension;
- An attachment to a more «modern» system of values where individual autonomy is a central element, while maintaining the framework of a certain collective solidarity where the political has ascendancy over the communitarian. The latter is no longer organized along religious lines but rather according to state parameters, to a point where some have asserted that the State has become the new Church and «Statism» the new religion.
- This feeling of liberation, associated with the Quiet Revolution, cannot be neglected when we try to understand the reactions in the face of cultural diversity which is perceived as:
- A reality which would contribute to the fragmentation of the national identity of the Québécois people, and would call into question the value system that has resulted from the Quiet Revolution, mainly laicism and gender equality;
- An enrichment for Quebec, on condition that the system of values brought in by the Quiet Revolution is not jeopardized.

C) The pole of globalization and diversity

The Quebec of globalization and of cultural diversity concerns a portion of the younger generation, especially those living in metropolitan areas. It comprises mainly francophones «de souche», and children born of immigrant parents. They have not known a French-Canadian Quebec, and have not experienced the key moments of the Quiet Revolution, all the while growing up within the heart of the impact wrought by these changes, which, in their eyes, are taken for granted. This group seems to us to be defined by certain specific traits:

- These young people are seeking their roots and history, which have not always been transmitted, due to the rupture engendered for their parents by the Quiet Revolution, and for others, by the nature of their parents' immigration;
- Simultaneously, these individuals express an interest in other cultures, and a certain cosmopolitanism which connects them with world-space;
- Depending on their generational and cultural belonging, these youth attach themselves to various value systems, and consider the issue of values as one of a personal research and construction, rather than assuming that it is a de facto transmission.

The reactions to cultural diversity within this group could be summarized thus:

- The promotion of cultural diversity is viewed as an ever-flowing spring of richness for society, thanks to daily proximity with persons of different cultural origins; it is also a shield against intolerance, that an exacerbated national consciousness could be projected against immigrants and cultural communities,;

- There is a certain lack of understanding of the difficulties in reconciling cultural diversity with the historical heritage between the different poles.

These dimensions, added to the Native heritage, form a complex construction of a multi-layered identity of which the three poles can never be closed compartments, or realities independent from each other, but rather creative polarities of meaning to which certain people attach themselves in an inclusive way while others unceasingly transit between these different realities. Each pole, bringing its own elements, influences the way of understanding and of positioning oneself in the face of cultural diversity. It is obvious, that it is immigration and the encounter of an Other which brings us back to «who we are», and creates an opportunity for *intracultural* dialogue, which is indispensable to *intercultural* dialogue.

2.3 Diverse sources of immigration

In the context of an immigration which is increasingly important and diversified, identifying the Québécois nation to the majority ethnic group and to the Anglo-Saxon group gives the impression that they are the only Québécois. While acknowledging their historical precedence, one must not forget that the old stock Québécois are not only those of these two ethnic groups, but also those belonging to the ethnic groups of Blacks, Jews, Chinese, Japanese, Irish, etc. who, while having immigrated in different contexts, have long been settled in Quebec. Moreover, diversity that is internal to the majority group, finds itself also in each one of the immigrant ethnocultural communities, where, among other things, there are differences of language, religions, socio-economic status, regional origin, acculturation linked to colonialism and to western modernization, of a migratory trajectory, or relating to the context of the host society at the time of their arrival.

The plurality of national identity is accentuated in contact with immigration. This contact invites Quebecers to be perspicacious and to become aware of their national identity as being a pluralistic one. Given the cultural pluralism, past and present, of Quebec, it would be preferable to maintain an intercultural perspective. Thus, the search for modalities of community life could be undertaken in the light of the many world visions that are incarnate in Quebec, which will enrich the western and modern tradition of the French speaking Québécois society.

Despite the appearances of the present debate, it seems to us that this is the horizon towards which Quebec aspires, having recognized the UNESCO universal declaration on cultural diversity adopted in Paris, on November 2nd 2001⁹.

Article I- Cultural diversity, mankind's common patrimony.

Culture takes on different forms through time and space. That diversity embodies an originality and plurality of identities, which characterize the groups and societies that compose humankind. Fountains of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is, for humankind, as necessary, as biodiversity in the realm of life. In that sense, it constitutes the common patrimony of humankind and must be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of the present and future generations.

Within this vision of pluralism, we believe that Quebec is called upon to recognize not only the ethnic groups, but the cultures that compose it, as constitutive dimensions

⁹ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/0012/00127160m.pdf>

of its national identity. It is also invited to develop a national identity based on a relationship to its specific cultural diversity and to develop political, economic and social institutions which reflect this pluralistic constitution.

The Quebec nation is heir to the many civilizations and the many visions that constitute it. Hence it is normal that these cultures enlighten its national vision and nurture its daily life, not only for local colour, but all through to its fundamental aspirations,. It would be fitting that we accept and invite all the citizens of Quebec to found the pluralistic Québécois nation, as being full-fledged Quebecers, and not only considered as manpower and collaborators in a project belonging to another people.

The argument of the majority could not justify that a person be considered a second- class citizen because he/she belongs to a minority group, interesting only in terms of demographic statistics. If we conceive of the Québécois nation as being within a horizon of dynamic pluralism, it is now that it is being founded by all the cultures that compose it. What is important is that we do not repeat the injustices of the past towards the First Nations, the Blacks, the Jews and all those who have since immigrated, and that new immigrants be informed about the aboriginal heritage and the inherent diversity in Quebec.

2.4 The diversity and endurance of religion in Quebec: realities and concepts

2.4.1 Religion in Québécois Culture

Immigration brings Quebecers into contact with newcomers for whom religion is not necessarily isolated from public life. Faced with these new arrivals, it is customary to insist on the secular nature of contemporary Quebec, where religion has shifted from the rank of an unquestioned and constraining social norm, to that of individual choice. This is a common presupposition of citizens who declare themselves opposed to accommodations in religious matters.

Quebec culture has apparently nothing religious left about it, except history and accompanying artefacts: religious buildings, the crucifix in the National Assembly, the Mount Royal Cross, names of localities, etc. Religion is considered a thing of the past, in the process of disappearing as a factor that nurtures the local culture. However, a non-negligible part of the Québécois population of European origins, without necessarily rejecting the project of a lay society, remains attached to their religion, most often Christian, as well as to the fundamental values that it has transmitted. This does not prevent the displacement either of what is religious, or of forms of religious socialization. Two of these displacements are the massive abandonment of regular «religious practice», and the existence of new forms of religiousness that are more or less marginal from a demographic viewpoint, but which mark more and more the Québécois socio-religious imagination: ex. «new religious movements», New Age, «holistic» spiritualities, interest in Buddhism, etc. As a whole, less given to rituals than before, and little drawn to identify with Catholicism, the Québécois continue massively to nurture spiritual interests that affect their behaviour both in private and public life.

To sum up, religion does not disappear from public life but the modalities of its presence may transform themselves. Even in the context of a State laicism, its effects are felt collectively. Thus, it appears to us necessary to acknowledge the positive effects of religions on the lives of the population, even in a lay State, without denying the risks linked to

fundamentalism and sectarianism. Religions are generally factors of cultural and ethical enrichment. In the name of their religion, innumerable people live under a code of ethics: of hope, respect, integrity, community and extra-communal solidarity, and they transmit these values to the young under their care. It is important to welcome this luminous and constructive side of religions, and also the enduring character of their presence in Quebec, which strongly invites to us to cultivate tolerance and dialogue. Furthermore, it is one of the postulates of the program of Ethics and Religious Culture, which will be operational in Quebec schools, starting in September 2008. In our view, these postulates merit clear affirmation, counter to a perception of religion as a mere cultural vestige of the past and/or as an individual choice.

2.4.2 Religion in the «public arena»

Given the tendency which appears through the hearings at the present Commission, we can anticipate massive support for laicism by the people and organizations consulted. It is a modern concept, whose adoption by broad segments of Québécois society, results from a history of the secularization of thought, and from a gradual disfranchisement with regard to religious powers. Thus, laicism appears in keeping with the specific evolution of Quebec society.

Furthermore, immigration brings other visions of the world, where the cultural is not always asserted independently from the religious, which is often rooted in its original, mythological and philosophical foundation. The intercultural practice of IIM, has accustomed us to living with the coexistence of different, and sometimes antagonistic, founding myths. It has convinced us of the impossibility of reaching a hermeneutic horizon overhanging all particular world visions, and in which every one could feel completely at ease. We must insist on this point, contrary to a lay pretension to be equally hospitable to all citizens, as long as they rally to common values, not taking into consideration the practical consequences of sidelining their religious allegiances to the limits of the intimate, the familial or to their place of worship. For some, coming from other cultures, religion cannot but overflow these frontiers, as it always has done, which to them is culturally meaningful and socially structuring.

In the present situation, the debate is about «religion in the public arena» and about modalities of Québécois laicism. These terms may seem self-explicit, but they must be put into perspective. First of all, the notion of public space seems to us to be rather vague. Isn't the place of worship public? And what about the facade of a place of worship, with its symbols, inscriptions, bells, affluence at the time of worship? What becomes of community space in that public space? On the other hand, does a private enterprise belong or not to a public space? A recent episode has sparked reactions which equated a commercial sugar shack with a public space, requiring the same insistence on laicism as if it were a civic space, for example, a public school or a CLSC. As one can see, the notion of «public space» calls for differences, which are sometimes not mentioned in the social debate which has been going on for some years in Quebec.

As for «religion» in the public space, to what point is it reasonable to expect a person who spends his life at work, at school, at the hospital, in public transportation or in any other public place, to detach one's religious allegiance, devotion, morality, or rules of modesty, all of which permeate that person's fibre and identity, as much as the norms of sexual equality, personal enhancement, or freedom of opinion would be crucial to French or English Quebecers.

Don't the private and the public correspond to each other? Is it realistic to imagine an impermeable wall between them?

Is it possible to ask an immigrant to renounce part of his/her anthropological constitution in order to meld into a majority? We know of some groups of immigrants or ethnocultural communities that find it difficult to live according to such expectations, and this with the utmost effort to adapt. It is important to be aware of this. In short, nothing should impede a religious person to continue to be so in a public space, primarily of course, within his/her own profound convictions, but also in manifesting it publicly.

3. An alternative vision of pluralism and interculturality

3.1 The statist and institutional perspective on interculturality

Generally, the vision of the cultural diversity of institutions is associated with the problem of immigration and integration of immigrants. For more than 20 years, the different levels of government and institutions have set up concerted policies and plans of action with regard to the growing diversity of Quebec. In order to deal with the problem of integrating immigrants, we have had the varied perspectives of Canadian multiculturalism, Québécois interculturalism, and the anti-racist approach. Society has undoubtedly improved ways to welcome immigrants, thanks to intervention on the part of government institutions to provide more appropriate instruments to public organizations and institutions, to facilitate their integration.

Today, people are talking about interculturality in terms of «managing diversity», and of «reasonable accommodation» as a tool or mechanism to manage and integrate immigrants, which is the object of the present consultation. However, the notion of integration remains rather ambiguous and oftentimes takes on, in social practices, the meaning of normalization or homogenisation of minority cultures, in conformity with the norms and normative values of the culture of the majority. This results in a feeling of insecurity both within the majority, and the minority, groups. The first feels invaded by the growing diversity and the second fears assimilation to the precepts of the dominant cultural group.

Keeping these facts in mind, shouldn't there be a critical revision of the fallout from these institutional approaches in matters of diversity? To what point can the state, in a perspective of management of the population, and of social relations based on political and economic interests, be the lone insurer of social cohesion and harmony? Will such a framework help to develop conditions and measures favourable to a dialogue between the different cultural components of the Québécois society?

3.2 An alternative perspective of interculturality

The alternative perspective proposed by this memorandum, rests on the premise that citizens are knowledgeable subjects, and that they themselves construct their knowledge. Hence, we encourage an effort to deviate from the statist vision of cultural pluralism and to situate oneself at the more existential level of the daily life of the citizens. Instead of proposing a pre-determined model of conviviality, we suggest a start from what is actually being lived and elaborating a model of conviviality, by engaging ourselves in a dialogue on the lives of people and the diverse communities that compose our society. We are of the opinion that the

transformation of societies necessitates a synergy which starts at the level of people, cuts across communities and reaches society and its institutions.

The vision of pluralism that is put forward in this brief rests on the acknowledgment of the reality of a diversity that has always existed in Quebec. That acknowledgement also means the acceptance of the historical precedence of the nations, peoples, and cultures that have been present at different eras of history. Our view of pluralism is based on a perspective of the horizontality of the relationships between diverse group in their life-milieu or community. This framework encourages a dialogue, between equals, itself an important way of strengthening community living.

How can we come to understand to understand the notion of interculturality, beyond assertions of respect or tolerance of the other? «Interculturality means an interaction between two or many cultural universes in a very complex process of closeness and of distancing, or exchange and questioning at the personal, community, and structural levels (society and its institutions), and at the deeper level of our world vision». (Das, 1990)¹⁰, Claude Clanet¹¹, professor of psychology at l'Université de Mirail, Toulouse, adds: «this interaction presupposes a reciprocal exchange, and an assurance of maintaining a continuity through the identity (however transformed) of the partners».

Moreover, interculturality implies a process of continuous dialogue, sustained both by intra and intercultural dynamics, i.e. alternately centring on the realities of the Self and a dialogue with the community to which one belongs, and a decentration from the Self in order to access the universe of the other. It is the dynamics of this process which brings us a rediscovery of «ourselves» and at the same time begins our understanding of the other. Our view on interculturality goes beyond defending socio-political and economic rights of immigrants: it seeks to include the psychosocial dimensions implicated in the meeting of Others, which allows persons and communities from diverse origins to build a life together. Fear of the unknown, the feeling of being threatened by the Other, and withdrawal, all human mechanisms of self-defence, are at the same time real obstacles in intercultural relations. These dimensions, however, go beyond management through legalistic measures.

Whether in civic society, or in situations of daily life, people continuously develop knowledge and know-how in all areas of human activity. By not focussing on the purely managerial and governance perspective, and by trying to listen to other ways of approaching the issue of pluralism and of living together, we hope that the Commission will encourage the different levels, namely the political, civic societies and communities, to engage in a labour of collaboration and partnership within a framework based on the horizontality of their mutual relationships.

4. Guidelines towards community living

In the preceding text, we have questioned some of the terms of the ongoing debate about the «public arena». From an anthropological viewpoint, these terms seem to us to

¹⁰ Kalpana Das (1994) : «The intercultural challenge in the non institutional and informal sector» in Interculture, issue 123, pp. 13-21

¹¹ Clanet, Claude (1990) : L'Interculturel—Introduction aux approches interculturelles en Éducation et en Sciences humaines. Collection interculturelle, Presses Universitaires de Mirail : Toulouse.

be maladjusted to world visions that are other than Western and modern. But we have also stated that we do not believe in the possibility of a single conceptual horizon which could do justice to all world visions.

We have also wanted to contribute to the reflection of the present Commission, from a horizon which is other than political and legalistic: that of the living reality of intercultural and interreligious relations in Quebec, such as we have observed for the last 40 years. However, given the origin and the state of the Commission's work, we must take into account the political and legal issues, within the framework of the debate now taking place, i.e. being Québécois, Canadian, modern and Western. In order to favour a pluralistic Quebec, respectful of the present-day culture, we must acknowledge a certain discomfort and try to respond to the conceptual context in which this debate occurs.

We believe that focussing the debate around reasonable accommodation presents major difficulties because diversity is thereby perceived and approached as a problem linked to immigration. But if we displace our view on the reality of Québécois society, we discover that it has been founded on this diversity, and we can recognize certain facts:

1. Québécois society is not homogenous and its diversity is, above all, a reality of daily life, which is not in itself an object of management.
2. The Québécois history and identity have been shaped by diversity and it will continue to be so in the future, probably in an even more radical way. The population in general is not sensitized to certain dimensions of this diversity, due among others things, to the indigenous heritage, to the internal diversity of the francophone majority «de souche», and to the visible differences of the present sources of immigration.
3. The contribution of different communities in the construction of identities, and their knowledge of community living, has marked Québécois pluralism. The community sectors need to be recognized as places that create links, knowledge and living conditions, and also as equal partners in the relationship between the different levels of society. Respecting differences is a right for which the responsibility must be assumed by all Québécois.
4. Horizontal partnership is indispensable between the different political, civic and community levels (in the sense of social life) in order to build a pluralistic society. But, we must face the fact, that, since 1994, successive Québécois governments have significantly reduced their financial assistance to organizations who work towards welcoming the newcomers, for example to the French-language program, and helping the integration of immigrants to Quebec society in general. Some of these organizations also dedicate their lifework to training the staff of different institutional and community networks that do the work of reception and aid towards immigrants. Constantly in the field, they are a precious support to the different communities, in spite of the quasi-permanent precariousness of their situation.
5. Spirituality, in the broader transcendent sense, is part of the identity of the Québécois «de souche». This prompts us to welcome the project of an «open laicism»¹² for all civic

¹² According to the consultative government organisations, such as the Council for the Status of Women, the Council for intercultural relations, the Committee on religious affairs and the Commission for Human Rights, a Québécois laicism aims at a religiously neutral management of civic institutions, which authorizes, however, individual

institutions as a point of departure towards a dialogue between the culture of laicism, the different religious traditions, and the diverse expressions of spirituality. A form of laicism which would hinder religious expression, whether individual or communitarian, in the public place, would risk producing an inverse effect to the one sought out, i.e. the full and total participation of all persons in society. It seems to us, that such a form of laicism would risk sending to many people the message that, due to their religion – in many cases inseparable from the cultural – they could not find an acknowledged place in Québécois society; and to others, that those who adhere to their religious particularities, are not worthy citizens, with all the risks of isolation, even of discrimination that this entails.

6. Among the other problematic aspects that are most often brought up in the public debate on cultural and religious diversity, is the issue of reasonable accommodation. Intercultural negotiation has proven to be a delicate exercise, sometimes destabilizing, and which calls for special competence: at the level of the knowledge of cultures and of the evolution particular to each one of them; on the level of affectivity; on the level of management of differences and of communication in general; finally, the level of the judicial guidelines that limit the frontiers of a «reasonable» accommodation. In order to move beyond the mere mediation of conflicts, we hope in this regard for the implementation of resources in intercultural dialogue and mediation, in the schools, in health and social services, in private enterprise, in community organizations, among others. Cultural diversity is an enduring fact and calls for instituting lasting measures to compose with it competently.

Conclusion

The recognition of the diversity within us, intra and intercultural, since the arrival of the French in North America, can also be a source of inspiration of these people who, from the outset, have manifested great powers of adaptation. All of the Québécois are called upon to assume their responsibilities in order to compose with diversity and to build a society together.

It is basically a matter of outlining the spirit belonging to this land of Quebec, as a living spirit which nurtures us and which allows us to share a past (our roots), a present (of living daily together) and a future (our dreams). The search for a horizon of convergence between the different cultures of Quebec is in itself a transformative process which could facilitate continuous adjustments to reality, always pluralist, and contribute to the development of a Québécois society founded on its unique relationship to diversity.

religious expression, the public space included; and this can be done verbally, ritually, or by the wearing of a religious symbol (and as long as the person concerned is not exercising a civic function, according to some). This laicism would be in conformity with Québécois civic values: equality of citizens irrespective of their religious particularities, acknowledgment of the diversity of cultures and religions, and awareness about living together. With regard to the public education, this laicism is qualified in recent years, as “open” laicism.