

# Honour Thy Brother: The Strengthening of Christian-Jewish Relations in Canada 1968 - 1995

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Jews and Christians share a long history of tension and symbiosis in Canada. However, the second half of the twentieth century witnesses a change from tension to compassion and cooperation between these two religious communities. The alliance of these two religions in Canada was made possible due to mutual aspirations of combating Anti-Semitism, the defence of the new Israeli state, and for raising Holocaust awareness and remembrance. This period saw the rise of a new Christian understanding, and a sense, among Christian leaders that repentance for past mistakes towards Judaism was necessary. The high level of cooperation is proven through various documents that show the plans of Christian-Jewish groups, Holocaust education, special events, and responses to public anti-Semitic criticisms. The exchanges of gratitude towards each other's work ultimately legitimize the strengthening of their bond. The work of Christian-Jewish organizations, such as the Canadian Jewish Dialogue of Toronto (CJDT), the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews (CCCJ), and the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), alongside portions of news articles and essays belonging to both religious communities, as well as speeches from key figures shows the relationship strengthening and high level of teamwork between both leaders of two major religions in Canada during the second half of the twentieth century. This cooperation had been accomplished through the shared understanding of a morbid history, taking joint action for mutual goals, and a deep appreciation of each other's efforts in working and solving issues together.

The late sixties and early seventies witnessed a new attitude of compassion and charity between Canadian Christians towards the Jewish communities. The recognition of the Holocaust, its consequences, and what it meant for both religions made mutual understanding possible. Press publications and speeches by Christian priests reveal this change of attitude.

Rev. Gregory Baum, a Roman Catholic theologian from Toronto, can be seen as an example of this change. In 1968, writer Loren Lind suggested that Baum "...opened a way for Jewish-Christian dialogue by asserting – contrary to Catholic teaching for centuries – that Judaism today has salvational [sic] status and that Christians should no longer try to convert Jews."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Baum argued, "The church's mission is to engage in dialogue with Jews, to discover the common patrimony to deepen brotherhood, and to be open to the transformation which God produces in us through true conversation."<sup>2</sup> This example suggests a Christian pursuit of building and strengthening cooperation with the Jewish people. Furthermore, the 1973 publication of the *CCI Notebook* recognized Christianity's past mistakes towards the Jewish faith throughout history. It argued, "Negatively, we have attacked and exposed Anti-Semitism – whether theological or cultural or political, whether witting or unwitting."<sup>3</sup> An understanding of passed flaws committed in history lead certain Christian leaders to encourage other Christians to build relationships with Jews.

This attitude progressed within the Christian community in Canada had continued well throughout the late twentieth century. The 1985 speeches by Rev. Fr. Daniel Donovan of St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto recognized Christianity's wrong-doings towards Jews throughout history. His speech from November 5 recalled various Christian examples of anti-Semitism throughout the ages, such as the blame of Jesus' death to the Jews in the New Testament, the thousands of European Jews slaughtered in the Crusades, and Martin Luther's

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Council of Christians and Jews (CCCJ), 1968, Fonds 17, S. 5-5, file 46, Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region fonds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Christians Concerned for Israel, 1974, Fonds 17, S. 5-4-3, file 38, Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region Fonds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

anti-Semitic document titled *Of the Jews and Their Lies* from 1543.<sup>4</sup> The biggest issue raised by Donovan, and perhaps the biggest anti-Semitic issue ever faced by Christians in recent times, was the lack of acknowledging its role in the Holocaust. In regards to the mass murder of Jews in the early twentieth century, Donovan stated,

It makes us wonder about our most cherished values and institutions when we realize that it took place in the very heartland of modern western civilization and in a country and countries deeply marked by Christian heritage... It is part of our history and our civilization and it raises quite specific issues for us as Christians...<sup>5</sup>

He argued that Christians were accomplices of the Holocaust. Moreover, his address, titled *40 Years Later: Why Remember the Holocaust*, argued that a wide-spread and deep rooted political anti-Semitism was the reason for Canada's rejection of Jewish refugees during the thirties and forties.<sup>6</sup> Aimed at Christians for enlightening and cooperating with Jews, Donovan provided several reasons why remembering the Holocaust would be significant to Christianity. He expressed that it would allow one "...to remember the broader context of prejudice... that helped to bring it about..., to open ourselves humbly to it as to hear a call to self-examination and to moral conversion."<sup>7</sup> Holocaust remembrance could strengthen Christian moral character in his eyes. Additionally, He mentioned the necessity in understanding the pain of the Jewish people caused by the Holocaust. To understand more than that," he wrote, "we [Christians] have to listen to them [Jews] as they struggle to put their experience into words. As we do so, we can and we must manifest our solidarity and support especially when their memories are abused and

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<sup>4</sup> Theology after the Holocaust Colloquium, 1985, Fonds 67, S. 28-11, file 20, United Jewish Welfare Fund fonds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

denied.”<sup>8</sup> Donovan’s objective was to encourage Christians to show compassion towards the Jewish community in order to aid in their suffering.

An enlightened Christian attitude of combating anti-Semitism and the desire to work with the Jewish community in Canada was also driven by the conflicts that engulfed Israel during this time period. Aimed towards other Christian leaders in 1973 and in regards to the threats faced by the Israeli State, the *CCI Notebook* powerfully wrote,

...whatever our differing interpretations and understandings of the Holocaust and the Restoration, we of the churches cannot remain inactive and neutral when the lives of a remaining third of the Jewish people are under assault.<sup>9</sup>

This shows a sense of duty in protecting Jewish communities in which Canada had failed to do three decades prior. Rev. Fr. Donovan also argued a need for Christian redemption because of its long history of anti-Semitism. He stated, “If we remember the Holocaust it is above all to ensure that it or anything like it will never happen again... to look honestly at our history and at our attitudes and to eliminate from these what in any way would make us apathetic... before such an event.”<sup>10</sup> Donovan believed that a bond with the Canadian Jewish community would ensure peace in the future. The *CCI Notebook* showed that their readers suggested Christians to “join with your Jewish neighbors in rallies and public demonstrations of support for Israel.”<sup>11</sup> The recollection of previous faults and a new found sense of reclamation were being promoted by and for Canadian Christians to strengthen their relation to with the Jews during the post-Holocaust era.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Arab Anti-Israel Propoganda, 1972, Fonds 17, S. 5-4-3, file 28, Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region fonds, Ontario Jewish Archives, ON, Canada.

<sup>10</sup> Fonds 67, S 28-11, file 20.

<sup>11</sup> Fonds 17, S. 5-4-3, file 38.

The Canadian Jewish community had also seen value in working together with Canadian Christians and is seen through articles posted by the CJDT. Their official newsletter, entitled *New Dimensions*, released a statement in 1980 regarding the significance of teamwork. It stated that a dialogue of trust, which would allow both parties to accept their religious differences, is necessary in order for their common interests of world peace to gain a stronger voice.<sup>12</sup> This example shows the mutual desire for working together and can be viewed as the basis of this new partnership. The protection of Israel, Holocaust remembrance, and human tolerance, as previously mentioned, were the mutual goals of both Christians and Jews in Canada. Additionally, the *Directions* newsletter of 1978, which is also published by the CJDT, gave its insight on this topic more symbolically. It read,

Our relationship to one another has over the centuries been one of darkness rather than light. It is only in the last few years that a change in a new direction towards the light has been made. Let us go forward together in this struggle, using the light from our own new relationship as a means of solving also the problems of the world around us.<sup>13</sup>

With this passage in mind, the desire for team work and the acknowledgment of its importance for Canadian Jews and Christians is evident through the open offer of facing future issues together.

Now that the reasons for cooperation have been assessed, the proof of actual cooperation can be examined. The planning and proposals for an International Conference in 1968 by The CCCJ is a noteworthy example of strengthening ties and collaboration. An outline of the conference, written by Rev. Roland de Corneille, the director of Christian-Jewish Dialogue of the

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<sup>12</sup> Christian Jewish Dialogue, 1980, Fonds 67, S.28-11, file 10, United Jewish Welfare fonds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

<sup>13</sup> Christian Jewish Dialogue, 1978, Fonds 67, S.28-11, file 10, United Jewish Welfare fonds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

Anglican Diocese of Toronto, and Bernhard E. Olson of the CCCJ, highlighted important issues of the time that were in need of discussion and suggestions for resolving them. The central issues included the relationship between Jews and Christians and the lack of communication needed in order to achieve mutual understanding.<sup>14</sup> The preparation of this conference to help improve the relationship between them displays a great deal of cooperative efforts. The conference's National Program Director Frazer Earle showed that it met or exceeded that 88.8% of respondents had either met or exceeded their expectations, 87.4% found the conference overall as either good or excellent, along with 82.9% for the choice of delegates, and 95.3% for the staff performance.<sup>15</sup> The collaboration of Canadian Christians and Jews was well received as a valuable asset from respondents of both religious communities.

Specific Christian denominations had also shown their own efforts in working with Jewish communities. The Catholic denomination in Canada reached out to the CJC in 1974. A minutes document of the meeting shows that both organizations acknowledged a necessity for a stronger Roman Catholic-Jewish dialogue, a much needed discussion regarding the Vatican's refusal of recognizing Israel as a sovereign state, a collaboration along with the Canadian Council of Churches for improving the religious enlightenment efforts in Canada, and a requirement for all religious groups to help combat anti-Semitism.<sup>16</sup> This shows the effort of a Christian denomination in working with a Jewish organization in order to review and solve mutual concerns.

The CCCJ took the available opportunities to promote issues of both Christian and Jews through other outlets. In 1971, a letter to the CJC was sent by the joint organization to invite him

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<sup>14</sup> Fonds 17, S. 5-5, file 46.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Canadian Catholic - Israel Relations, 1974, Fonds 17, S. 5-4-3, file 39, Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region fonds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

to an international workshop to combat racism. The letter details that the conference was co-created with the National Commissions of UNESCO of Canada and the U.S., and with the National Conference of Christians and Jews to promote the U.N.'s International Year for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination.<sup>17</sup> The initiative to work with other peace keeping organizations with similar interests was present.

Additional effort for further collaboration in Canada is shown through other sponsored events by joint Christian-Jewish groups. One of the earliest was created by the CCCJ and is known as Brotherhood Week. In its 1968 pamphlet, it stated the purposes of this week as a time to,

...give people an opportunity to re-dedicate themselves as individuals to the basic ideals of respect for people and human rights which are essential to our way of life... to dramatize the practical things which people can do to promote an understanding and realization of these ideals.<sup>18</sup>

This shows the common goal of Canadian Jewish and Christian leaders expressed through a cooperative event which was sponsored and worked on by both institutions.

A main theme in which various organizations worked together with is Holocaust remembrance. As argued above, the awareness of this tragic time in history has become a significant factor in the cooperation of both Christians and Jews in Canada. Its meaning and importance to both religious institutions is evidently mutual. An article titled *Holocaust Survivors Speak with Christians in Synagogue*, which was written by Edith Land in 1982 for the *Catholic Newspaper of the Diocese of Toronto*, shows the combined efforts in Holocaust remembrance. The draft details an event sponsored by numerous Canadian Jewish-Christian

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<sup>17</sup> Canadian Council of Christians and Jews (CCCJ), 1971, Fonds 17, S. 5-5, file 63, Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region fonds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

<sup>18</sup> Fonds 17, S. 5.5-5, file 46.



groups where over 160 people have gathered at the Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto to learn about the Holocaust through its survivors. It also saw the opportunity of special guest Rabbi Schild to preach his teachings in a Protestant church and a Roman Catholic church.<sup>19</sup> The sponsored groups included the Christian Sub-Committee of the Holocaust Remembrance Committee of Toronto Jewish Congress, the CJDT, and the CCCJ.<sup>20</sup> The number of organizations involved in this significant event as well as a chance for Christians to learn directly through a Jewish outlook shows an effort of collaboration to achieve their mutual goals.

The evidence of continuing teamwork had worked its way to the nineties. At this time, the remembrance of the Holocaust can still be shown as their biggest factor for cooperation. In 1990, a minutes document from the Holocaust Remembrance Sub-Committee of the CJDT showed the group's satisfaction towards a number of significant events. Such events included the Anne Frank Exhibit, which saw the attendance of over 23,000 visitors, the Holocaust Education Week attended by 75 to 85 people at St. Margaret's Church, and the service held on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May at St. Michael's and All Angels Church for its tenth anniversary.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the growth of the Holocaust Education week is seen through a minutes document from 1995, which stated that 640 guests from a variety of religious backgrounds had attended.<sup>22</sup> In addition, a 1986 article from the *New Dimensions* newsletter praises the Sixth Annual Christian Memorial Service for the Holocaust. It was described that Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and United Christians gathered in St. Gabriel's Roman Catholic Parish to light the Memorial Candles, and witnessed the recital of the Mourner's Kaddish by Rabbi Michael Stroh of the Temple Har

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<sup>19</sup> Christian Education sub-committee, 1982, Fonds 67, S. 28-11, file 1, United Jewish Welfare funds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Holocaust Remembrance sub-committee, 1990, Fonds 67, S. 28-11, file 5, United Jewish Welfare funds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

<sup>22</sup> Holocaust Remembrance sub-committee, 1995, Fonds 67, S. 28-11, file 5, United Jewish Welfare funds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

Zion.<sup>23</sup> This intimate religious ceremony shows a profound respect between the Jewish community and the Christian communities that participated in remembering the Holocaust.

An endeavour for the CJDT during the mid eighties was adding Holocaust education to the curriculum of education systems. The Toronto Board of Education had asked the Holocaust Remembrance Sub-Committee of the CJDT for materials and supplied it alongside a passage by Elie Wiesel that argued for the importance of teaching the Holocaust and its consequences to young students. “For the sake of our children and yours,” ran the Wiesel quote, “we invoke the past so as to save the future. We recall ultimate violence in order to prevent its reoccurrence. Ours then is a twofold commitment: to life and truth.”<sup>24</sup> The aspiration of the CJDT to spread their teachings among the youth of Toronto solidifies the length of work and their determination. Furthermore, a CJDT minutes document of the same year stated that the reason for this request was due to the difficulties of teachers answering questions by students regarding the Holocaust, in which a package of material created by the Holocaust Remembrance Sub-Committee was handed out in order to assist this issue.<sup>25</sup> Another minutes document from the same group also suggests its rising influence regarding education and the labours they faced. The written text from May 15<sup>th</sup> saw the process of finalizing kits on teaching the Holocaust in Anglican Sunday schools, as well as the proposal of the Holocaust Remembrance Sub-Committee to prepare additional kits for Sunday schools of other Christian denominations.<sup>26</sup> The identification of an issue and the reports which detailed the efforts for finding solutions indicate the hard work

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<sup>23</sup> Christian Jewish Dialogue, 1986, Fonds 67, S.28-11, file 10, United Jewish Welfare fonds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

<sup>24</sup> Christian Jewish Dialogue, 1985, Fonds 67, S.28-11, file 10, United Jewish Welfare fonds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

towards initiating mutual goals. This is clearly depicted through the CJDT contributions to the education system.

Another area portraying collaboration efforts was responding to anti-Semitic or anti-religion criticisms, particularly Holocaust denial in the late twentieth century. Canadian Christian-Jewish organizations responded to at least one occurrence. After the conclusion of the 1985 trials of Ernest Zuendel in Toronto, who charged with Holocaust denial, Rev. Ronald L. Scott of the CJDT expressed,

Our society is founded on freedom of expression... That freedom cannot be absolute, however, and if people can be grievously wounded by the use of it, it must in some reasonable way be restrained. We ask our Federal and Provincial Legislatures to review the laws in the light of the widespread anguish caused by this case.<sup>27</sup>

This was a noteworthy effort by Canadian Jewish-Christians relations to call out the injustice that disparaged the Holocaust. Moreover, the CCCJ shared similar views with their affiliated group. They wrote,

Freedom of speech is a principle of democracy. It is, however, not an absolute right. There is a delicate balance between freedom of one's own expression and the hurt one can cause to others. We call upon our legislatures to review the law in the light of the trail which has just concluded.<sup>28</sup>

An aspect that further solidified the relationship between the Christians and Jews in Canada during this era was the moments of showing gratitude and praise for their each other's contributions. These thankful remarks also highlight the amount of work in which Canadian Jews and Christians accomplished together. A letter by Rev. Dr. James Parkes from Britain addressed to the presidents of The Canadian Jewish Congress and the CCCJ in 1968 assists in supporting

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<sup>27</sup> Christian Jewish Dialogue, 1985, Fonds 68, S.28-11, file 10, United Jewish Welfare funds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

this claim. After his visit of the Toronto conference of the same year, he gave many thanks to both organizations for supporting his goal to strengthen the Jewish ties with Christianity in Britain.<sup>29</sup> This letter shows an effort of international cooperation between Canadian Christians and Jews along with possible religious ties to Europe.

An annual report from executive secretary Edith Land of the CJDT in 1984, which expressed her deepest appreciation towards numerous Christian and Jewish colleagues for their year's contributions, further portrays the extensive amount of collaboration and work that was performed. She recognized a number of individuals from Christian and Jewish organizations, such as the CCCJ, the Interfaith Dialogue of the World Outreach of the United Church of Canada, the Catholic Education Centre, the Holocaust Remembrance Committee of the Toronto Jewish Congress, etc.<sup>30</sup> This list of praise shows the numerous religious organizations that contributed to joint efforts. In addition, Land's annual report recalled every sponsored event of the CJDT from the past year. This included the newly gained dialogue with the Islington United Church with the help of David Hart and the Holy Blossom Temple, the Toronto School of Theology, a supper held at Adath Israel Synagogue in which 185 guests attended, a joint statement with the Lutherans to celebrate the anniversary of Luther's birth and to promote a dialogue with the Jewish community, etc.<sup>31</sup> While considering these moments of gratefulness, the amount of groups and individuals who were to be appreciated for their contributions towards Christian and Jewish relations proves the strengthened ties of both religions and the amount of dedication for teamwork.

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<sup>29</sup> Fonds 17, S. 5-5, file 46.

<sup>30</sup> Christian Jewish Dialogue, 1984, Fonds 67, S.28-11, file 10, United Jewish Welfare fonds, Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, ON, Canada.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

The tension between the Christians and Jews that existed in Canada before World War Two saw an overall change during the late sixties to late nineties through much collaboration. The opportunity for cooperative growth was made possible due to the Christian evaluation of their past errors and the agreement of the Jewish groups in working with Christian institutions. Recognizing the Holocaust and its magnitude as well as the significance of safeguarding Israel were the mutual ideals inspired both religions to work in unison. The variety of events concerning religious tolerance, Holocaust remembrance, and responses to criticisms which occurred at this time shows the passionate dedication and exceeding efforts of cooperation from both Canadian Jews and Christians. The many expressions of gratitude for the contributions of individuals from other religious organizations served to further solidify their bond.

Religious tolerance, despite a long history of tension and violence, would solidify peace if individuals can recollect the infliction of suffering as immoral actions and strive for mutual goals that will benefit themselves amongst others. Though not completely flawless, the Christians and Jews of Canada in the late twentieth century were able to set aside their differences and work together in strengthening their bond through ideals of redemption and compassion, creating events to satisfy their mutual goals, and showing appreciation for each other's efforts.

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