



## “You shall be holy...”

01.06.2022 | Jean Duhaime

### 43rd Christian Commemoration of the Shoah in Montreal.

*The Christian Jewish Dialogue of Montreal (CJDM) held its 43<sup>rd</sup> annual Christian Commemoration of the Shoah on Sunday, May 1, 2022. This special Vesper service, hosted by the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul, was the first “in person” commemoration since 2019. It brought together Jews, Christians, and others to commemorate the six million Jews and one million other victims of the Holocaust, also known as the Shoah during World War II.*

The service was co-presided by Rev. Glenn Chestnutt, minister of the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul, and Rabbi Sherril Gilbert, president of the Christian Jewish dialogue of Montreal. During the introduction Rev. Chestnutt read a message from Rev. Daniel Scott, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Canada. Referring to the six millions Jews murdered under the Nazi regime, he commented that “if we were to hold a moment of silence for every life lost in the Holocaust, we would be silent for eleven and a half years”. He also announced the imminent approval by the Church of Scotland’s General Assembly of a new Jewish-Christian glossary “intended to benefit its users through learning about their own and the other faith, by discovering key similarities and differences between the faiths and by offering a new way to approach and express hopes and prayers for peace and justice”.

The theme of the commemoration “You shall be holy...” was inspired by chapter 19 of Leviticus, a passage in which is found the golden rule “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18), reiterated by Jesus in the Gospels (Matthew 22:39). In her reflection Rabbi Gilbert commented that this commandment “is not actually addressing our *feelings* or the *emotion* that we call *love*. I think, rather, that it is targeting our *behaviours* – how we act toward one another and whether we act with compassion, and treat each other well.” She added that “when we follow this commandment, we are manifesting God’s qualities of love and concern in the human realm. And in this process, we transform ourselves, becoming holy vessels for the Divine”. And she concluded that “a life of holiness is achieved through concerted individual efforts to care, to heal, to listen, and to repair.”

A Survivor testimony was given by guest speaker Rachel Gropper. Her parents, Abraham and Franja Kruger, married in Warsaw in 1938. They left Poland during the bombing of the city in 1939 and took refuge in Russia. They were sent as forced workers in the Jegorshino coal mine (Siberia), where Rachel was born in 1941. A few years later (1943), the family was shipped to Samarkand (Uzbekistan) to forced work in a flour mill, where her mother gave birth to her second child, Joseph. “I used to ask my mother how she could even think of having children in these conditions. And she always replied it was hope for the future and it was important”.

The family managed to survive until the end of the war, and lived for three years in a camp for displaced persons in Austria (1946-1949), until Rachel’s mother was recruited to work as a designer in a factory in Montreal. The family immigrated to Canada in July 1949. Rachel grew up as Canadian and made a successful career as an educator. She married to Aaron Gropper in 1961; they had two children and a wonderful family. Rachel’s mother was proven right at the end!

The lighting of six candles followed, honouring the memory of the victims of the Shoah, the survivors, the other victims of Nazism and the victims of other genocides; righteous, liberators and

peace makers, “yesterday and today”, were also remembered. The assembly was invited to join in a responsive prayer expressing a determination to fulfill the call to be holy by perpetuating the memory of the victims of the Shoah, honouring life, respecting diversity, showing compassion and care, being righteous and peace makers.

Songs and music were performed by a vocal Quartet composed of cantorial soloist Rona Nadler, Alexandra Asher, Kerry Bursey, and Dave Benson, led by Dr. Jonathan Oldengarm, Director of Music and Organist. In addition to the prelude (J. Sulzer’s *Four preludes, op. 10*) and postlude (from F. Mendelssohn’s *Sonata III*), the musical program included excerpts of *Lamentations of Jeremiah* (Palestrina), *Metrical Psalm 9: The Lord’s my Shepherd* (Crimond), *Eli Eli* (H. Senesh – P. Amidon), and the traditional Jewish healing prayer *Mi shebeirach* (D. Friedman – M. Feinsinger).

In the closing part of the commemoration, Rabbi Gilbert recited the Mourner’s Kaddish, a praise that “suffuses both the most profane and the most mundane places with the holiness of God’s name”. Rabbi Gilbert and Rev. Chestnutt blessed the congregation with the words of Numbers 6,24-26 (the “Priestly benediction”), wishing everyone to feel God’s light, grace, and presence, and to find peace.

Some 80 people attended the commemoration in person at the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul. The event, live streamed on the [YouTube channel of the Church](#), has been viewed more than 250 times (the recording is still available). Other Christian communities in Quebec and elsewhere were invited to commemorate the Shoah during their own religious services on May 1st. The CJDM had prepared for them resources made available on the websites of the Canadian Centre for Ecumenism and circulated in Churches networks.

Founded in 1971, the Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal is composed of representatives of various sponsoring organizations, who come together on a regular basis in order to build and strengthen mutual understanding and support between Christian and Jewish communities.

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