



41st Christian Commemoration of the Shoah by the Christian Jewish Dialogue of Montreal

Jean Duhaime | 01.05.2020

MONTREAL, May 1, 2020. In spite of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Christian Jewish Dialogue of Montreal (CJDM) has invited Christian communities of Canada to take part in the 41st Christian Commemoration of the Shoah on Sunday, April 26, 2020. But it did it in a special way.

Historical Background

During the Second World War, the Nazis murdered six million Jews and many others. Jews call this disaster the Shoah, “the annihilation” and commemorate it every year since 1951. In Montreal (Canada), an annual Commemoration of the Shoah is arranged by the Montreal Holocaust Museum. Since 1979, a Christian Commemoration also takes place in a church of the larger Montreal area, under the leadership of the Christian Jewish Dialogue of Montreal. In 1999, the National Assembly of Quebec officially recognized “Yom HaShoah” (Holocaust Memorial Day) and encouraged people to join in this commemoration, as did the Government of Canada in 2003.

The 2020 Christian Commemoration

Yom HaShoah 2020 being observed on Tuesday April 21st in the Jewish community, the CJDM has invited Christians to commemorate the Shoah during their religious services on the following Sunday, April 26th. No “physical” religious gathering was possible in this exceptional year marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. But several churches were offering alternative ways to join for prayer through religious services broadcast on television or internet.

To face this unusual situation, the CJDM has prepared a *Commemorative Prayer* which could easily be inserted into most Christian religious liturgies. It was made available both in the form of a video (<https://vimeo.com/406184450>) and a text which could be used in live streamed or prerecorded services. The prayer was included in a larger document, *Resources to commemorate the Shoah in Christian services*, which also contained suggestions of biblical texts, song, prayers and links to survivors’ stories.

To remember in order to commit oneself

In the *Commemorative Prayer*, Christians express their compassion for the immense suffering of both the victims and the survivors of the Holocaust. They also affirm their strong commitment to preventing and combating current anti-Semitism, as well as other forms of racism and intolerance. Christians affirm their commitment to building relationships of respect, esteem and solidarity not only between Christians and Jews, but also between all their fellow citizens, be they believers or not, especially when they are weakened, stigmatized or marginalized.

A large circulation in Churches

The invitation, with links to the related material, was posted in advance on the Facebook pages of the CJDM and of Christian Jewish Dialogue – Canada and was largely circulated to the medias and to CJDM partners, Churches networks and religious organizations, with the help of the Canadian Centre for Ecumenism, the Canadian Religious Conference, the Regional Assemblies of Catholic Bishops in Canada, and the Office de Catéchèse du Québec.

On the eve of the Commemoration, Bruce Myers, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Quebec, wrote: "Thank you very much for passing all of this along. The very fine videos produced by the dialogue in Montreal will be posted (in both languages) on the website of the Anglican Diocese of Quebec tomorrow, and I will include prayers commemorating the Shoah during my weekly online liturgy tomorrow morning as well. I am glad we can find a way to mark this important commemoration this year, even if it has to be virtually."

The Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal has posted the invitation on its website and circulated in its weekly Newsletter, with links to the material. At the invitation of the Archbishop, Mgr Christian Lepine, part of the material was integrated in the masses in French, English and Spanish live streamed by St. Luke's Parish (Dollard-des-Ormeaux) on Sunday, April 26. A summary of the Commemorative prayer was integrated during the Prayer of the Faithful on the television program "Le jour du Seigneur", a broadcast of the Sunday mass on Radio-Canada, the French national television network.

The invitation and related material were also circulated in the United Church of Canada by the Nakonha:ka Regional Council (comprising most of Quebec) and the Eastern-Ontario-Outaouais Regional Council. A number of communities of the UCC used the video for their on-line worship services. The National Board of is also considering to reformat this material for the Holocaust memorial in late January.

Other initiatives

In addition to these, the videos has been viewed on Vimeo a few hundred times and has been reposted on websites and Facebook pages by individuals and groups such as the McGill University Office of Religious and Spiritual Life and the Amitié Judéo-Chrétienne de Lyon (France). The prayer and some additional material were also used in private religious services by congregations of nuns. Pauline Boilard, a Missionary Sister of the Immaculate-Conception (MIC), has arranged a special Commemoration which was broadcasted to all the residents of the Provincial House in Laval (Quebec) through an internal television channel.

From Saint John (New Brunswick), Sister Roma De Robertis reported : "Letting you know that a group of twelve Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception commemorated the Shoah today in our dining room, using the meaningful prayer you provided. Thank you. One of our Sisters displayed her lovely menorah. We included the link to the ritual in our Friday e-newsletter sent to Sisters and Associates in various parts of Canada. (...) Some of us are accustomed to going to the Saint John Jewish centre to hear from survivors and also learn from high school students and their projects about the Shoah. This year, we prayed in our dining room - the only place we're able to gather at this time!"

Even if the Covid-19 pandemic did not allow for a large gathering of people in a Christian church this year, the Christian Jewish Dialogue of Montreal considers that this 41th Christian Commemoration of the Shoah was a success, thanks to all those individuals and groups who have accepted its invitation and contributed to this event.

The text of the Resources to commemorate the Shoah in Christian services, including the Commemorative Prayer, may be [read here](#).

Editorial remarks

Jean DUHAIME is Professor emeritus of Biblical interpretation at the University of Montreal and editor of the French section of Jewish-Christian Relations. He has been involved in interreligious dialogue for many years and is a past president of the Christian Jewish Dialogue of Montreal (CJDM). He is a member of the Christian community of St-Albert-le-Grand (Montreal).