



Jewish Political Studies Review

[Visit our new website: Institute for Global Jewish Affairs](#)

Jewish Political Studies Review 11:3-4 (Fall 1999)

Good Fences do not Necessarily Make Good Neighbors: Jews and Judaism in Canada's Schools and Universities

Michael Brown

In the post-World War II years, strict separation of church and state, especially with regard to education, has been viewed as an essential ingredient of social comity in the United States. In Canada, however, that has not been so. In fact, there, religion and education have been intimately connected since colonial times, and the role of religion in the schools has constitutional sanction. In the years before World War II, the outsider status of Jews and Judaism in schools and universities was demeaning to them. Ultimately it served to reinforce group loyalty, but Jewish educational institutions did not emerge. The much less parochial and eventually multicultural environment that developed beginning in the 1950s allowed Jews to become part of the mainstream. Ethnic legitimacy, however, fostered the development of a very successful system of all-day Jewish schools and of programs of Jewish Studies at universities across the country. This essay discusses these developments and suggests explanations for the seeming paradox.

The putative "high wall of separation" said to divide religion from state in the United States is usually considered to be one of the important devices that ensure the proper functioning of American democracy. At some historical moments the wall has, in fact, been quite low, but in the post-World War II years, Americans have expended considerable effort in keeping the realms of God and Caesar separated from each other, and nowhere more than in the school system. The melting-pot ethos of America made the public school the flagship institution of the immigrant society. Parochial schools, unless under WASP auspices and disguised by a veneer of wealth and privilege, were believed to have about them a distinctly un-American aroma. In recent decades, some Jews - especially among the Orthodox who maintain a large network of parochial schools and would like tax dollars to pay for them - have questioned the wisdom of rigid separation. Most Jews, however, have maintained that keeping religion out of the American public square, and especially the public schools, benefits them, certainly as individuals, but also as a community which has generally viewed education as the key to integrating into the larger society.

In Canada as in the United States, Jews have relied on education to provide them an entry ticket into the larger society, and their educational achievements as a group have been extraordinary.¹ But there, no wall was ever erected to separate religion and the state, nor have most Canadians thought one to be desirable. Until quite recently, French Canada was ethnically, linguistically, and religiously homogeneous and often hostile to immigrants. The melting pot was most certainly not an ideal there. English Canada was more diverse, but much less so than the United States. In the pre-World War II era, its melting pot was meant to mould British provincials, and Protestant values and sensibilities, if not beliefs, were part of that construct. Until well after World War II, the lack of separation worked largely to Jews' disadvantage in the area of education and in other areas of life, as well. In the postwar era, it has benefited them and other minorities. At the least, it has proved no impediment to full integration into the general society. The cause of religion, in general, however, especially mainstream Christianity, was probably better served in the decades before the war and is less well served today. This essay will survey some of the developments relating to education and religion in Canada and suggest some of the issues that lie behind those developments.

The Prewar Era

Even before Confederation in 1867, Canada was, in effect, a bi-national, bi-cultural, bi-lingual, and bi-religious federation.² In origin, Canadians were either French, which meant French-speaking and Roman Catholic, or British, which meant English-speaking and Protestant, although some Anglo-Canadians were

Irish Catholic. Already by 1841 the dissentient minorities (that is, Protestants in Lower Canada or Quebec and Catholics in Upper Canada or Ontario) had received the right to establish their own tax-supported schools. The schools of the dominant faith were the "public" schools (Catholic in Quebec, Protestant in Ontario); the schools of the minority faith were the legally recognized, publicly supported "separate" schools (Protestant in Quebec, Catholic in Ontario).³ In Quebec, denominational schooling seems now, at the end of the 1990s, to be approaching its end. Recent legislation provides for the reorganization of the province's schools along linguistic lines, although it allows for the retention of the religious connection.⁴ (In Newfoundland, which joined the Canadian federation in 1949, schools have been run on an equal basis by the various denominations until now. There, theoretically, Jews might have established their own government-funded schools, as did other religious groups wherever numbers justified. There was never a large enough Jewish population to warrant a Jewish school, however, and now there, too, denominational schooling has been legislated out of existence.)

The shortcomings for Jews of this denominational structure were most obvious in Quebec. The Quebec Education Act of 1861 set up Protestant and Roman Catholic denominational schools in both Montreal and Quebec City. In 1869, a further refinement was made. In Montreal, the population was divided into four groups for school tax purposes: a Roman Catholic panel, a Protestant panel, a neutral panel consisting of corporations and individuals who were neither Protestant nor Catholic, and a panel comprised of the tax-exempt. Taxes paid into the first two panels went towards the support of the respective denominational schools. Taxes paid into the neutral panel were to be divided between Protestants and Roman Catholics on a per capita basis. In the cities of Montreal and Quebec, parents could choose the school system in which they wished to enroll their children, but they could not choose the system to which they paid their taxes.

This legislation was enacted without any thought of Jews, who were but a tiny minority in Canada in the mid-nineteenth century. The various school acts enshrined a Christian, denominational school system in which there was no legal place for Jews. Generally, during the first hundred years or so of Jewish life in Canada, Jewish children found their way into the Protestant schools, although sometimes they attended Catholic or private schools.

By 1870, the growing number of Jews in Montreal seemed to require a formal place for them in the system. A new law, 34 Victoria, 1870, Chapter 12, section 9, Quebec, gave Montreal and Quebec City Jews the right to pay their taxes into either the Protestant or the Roman Catholic panel and to educate their children in either system. Until 1886, almost all Jewish children went to Protestant schools, and Jewish parents paid taxes to the Protestant panel. In

6/10/2009

Good Fences do not Necessarily M...

that year, however, a split occurred in the Jewish community. The Protestant School Board of Montreal had been paying for Jewish religious instruction. Earlier still it had given financial support to a school run by the local Spanish and Portuguese congregation. Now that congregation insisted that its minister, Meldola De Sola, be engaged by the Protestant board to teach religion to the Jewish children. The board refused and declared an end to all support for Jewish instruction. The congregation reopened its own school and arranged for it to be affiliated with the Roman Catholic board; most Jewish children continued to attend Protestant schools.

Considerable animosity developed between Jews and Protestants and among Jews themselves. Since most of the few wealthy Jewish property owners were members of De Sola's congregation, most direct Jewish tax payments were now being channeled into the Roman Catholic system. Most Jewish children, however, were being educated in the Protestant system, seemingly at the expense of Protestants. (Protestants chose to ignore the fact that landlords obtained the money they paid in taxes from their tenants, and that indirectly Jews were undoubtedly bearing their share of school expenses.) Agitation within the Jewish community mounted, when the Baron de Hirsch School was opened in 1890 for immigrant Jewish children. That school, which was affiliated with the Protestant board, was supported mostly out of Jewish communal funds to which the wealthy members of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue contributed little. Graduates of the de Hirsch school continued their education in the Protestant system like most other Jewish children, allegedly placing an added burden on the Protestants.

After much wrangling and the interference of the provincial government, a compromise was effected. The Spanish and Portuguese congregation closed its school, which had been poorly attended in any case. The Protestant board was now to receive all Jewish tax money. In return, it would offer a subvention to the Baron de Hirsch School and hire Rabbi De Sola as a teacher. Still, there remained no little dissatisfaction all around. For their part, the Jews were accepted into the Protestant schools, but, although they paid their taxes and sent their children, they did not have equal rights. They could not be elected to the school board, nor could they even vote in elections. Jews were not hired as supervisory personnel nor even as teachers. As much as possible Jewish children were segregated in all-Jewish classes in mixed schools or sent to schools where the student body was entirely Jewish. In 1902, Jewish children were denied the right to earn scholarships to high school. For its part, the Protestant School Board was unhappy with the high cost of educating Jewish children relative to the tax intake. Irksome, too, was the challenge to the Christian character of the schools posed by a Jewish presence. Certainly, too, not a few of the Protestant leaders were motivated by anti-Semitism.

6/10/2009

Good Fences do not Necessarily M...

In 1903, suit was brought against the Protestant School Board of Montreal for refusing to grant a high school scholarship to a Jewish boy whose grades would have earned him one, had he been a Protestant. The case was lost, and Jews were deemed to be without legal rights in Quebec schools, to be there only on sufferance. The consequent uproar produced a new school act (Act 3, Edward VII, Chapter 16, Quebec), which was a rather inelegant compromise that declared Jews to be "Protestants for school purposes." Jewish children were now to attend school by right like Protestant children, although they would not be compelled to participate in Christian religious exercises and would be excused on Jewish holy days. Jews were to pay their taxes to the Protestant panel, but they still could neither vote nor to be elected to office. Jewish teachers were not appointed in Montreal until 1913 and then only in schools where most pupils were Jews. (In Toronto, Jews could vote and sit on the school board in the same years, but there, too, no Jewish teachers or supervisory personnel were appointed.)

By 1914, Jewish children constituted almost half of the "Protestant" school population of Montreal, and Jews were growing restive. They were unwelcome in the Catholic system and would not, in any case, have chosen to send their children there. The Catholic schools, where the goal was not to prepare pupils for careers, but "to build...character, will and spirit of sacrifice, so that...[Catholics] could perform their duties toward God" in adult life, were unsuitable for non-Catholics.⁵ Protestant schools were more appropriate for Jews. They were imbued with the "Protestant Ethic" and aimed to prepare pupils for worldly success by imparting a body of "objective" knowledge. Their pupils were drawn from several Protestant denominations, and they were thus less homogeneous than the Catholic schools. But those schools, too, were "permeated by religion."⁶ The unofficial agreement between the Protestant School Board of Montreal and the Jewish community in effect even before 1903 stipulated that Montreal schools "shall as heretofore be distinctly Protestant, and therefore Christian." Most members of the Board were ministers who zealously guarded the schools' unmistakably "Christian character." Many Protestant parents objected to their children having to study with Jews, and in 1910 a number of ministers demanded the expulsion of Jewish children from the Protestant schools. If the Christian character of Protestant education was less oppressive and all-encompassing than that of Catholic education, its constituents took it no less seriously. (In Ontario, the situation was better only in degree. There was no question there that Jews had a right to attend the public [Protestant] schools, but those schools were also overtly Christian in character.) In the period before World War I, then, it was understood by all that Jews in Ontario and Quebec could not expect neutral, secular education. In effect, Jews had no place in Quebec schools.⁷¹

Accordingly, by World War I sentiment was growing among Jews for

establishing their own schools, an idea favored most by recently arrived eastern European immigrants. Canadianized Jews, however, seemed to prefer non-denominational schooling similar to that of the United States, out of a belief that only such a system could pave the way to full Jewish citizenship in Canada. To further that end the board of the Baron de Hirsch Institute voluntarily downgraded its own school to an after-hours religious school. But secularization was generally opposed by both Catholics and Protestants in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada. In the early years of the twentieth century, a few gentiles, mostly freethinkers or anticlericals, advocated a unified, secular school system organized along language lines, rather like that accepted in 1997 in Quebec. Majority opinion inclined towards religious education on bi-national lines, the status quo. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the prime minister, and others spoke out publicly and often in favor of retaining the confessional system.

Jews, moreover, were not free to go their own way. Had they tried to establish their own school panel, they would have encountered opposition from both Catholics and Protestants. The latter feared further fragmentation of the nation as well as a diminution of their power in Montreal, were Jewish children to be removed from their schools. Catholics were opposed to separate Jewish schools even though they would have benefited from the establishment of a Jewish panel, since a reduction in Protestant power would have augmented their own. But most did not wish to grant legitimacy to Judaism by giving it equal status with Christianity. Some Protestants agreed.⁸

The arrangements just described remained in force in broad outline until after World War II. As the century progressed, however, the Protestant schools in both Quebec and Ontario became increasingly secularized, so that Jews felt more at home, even if they remained legally disabled and experienced considerable anti-Semitism. A further change in the situation occurred with the emergence of all-day Jewish schools in the 1940s. Only a small number of children was enrolled in Jewish schools until well after World War II, but a process had begun that would have a major impact on Jewish life in Canada in subsequent years.

The situation at universities in these years bore some similarities to that in elementary and secondary schools. Until well after World War II, prejudiced administrators and faculty members expressed open hostility towards Jews as students and certainly as faculty. At King's College (later the University of Toronto) a religious test was in place until 1850, at Queen's University until the twentieth century. At the latter institution a major battle was fought in 1912 over whether the university could be chartered by Parliament as a "national" university, receive Ontario government subsidies, and enroll its faculty in the Carnegie Pension Fund, while retaining its ties to the Presbyterian Church. Broadly speaking, the university succeeded in having it both ways, when the

dust settled.⁹

In these years "tolerant" university people might welcome Jewish students and perhaps the occasional faculty member. But even they, or most of them, were antagonistic towards, if not contemptuous of, Jewish Studies, which they did not consider part of the "high culture" appropriate to the university curriculum. That culture was overwhelmingly white, male, European, and Christian. Consequently, as in the United States and Europe, Jewish Studies, where it was found in the Canadian curriculum at all, appeared almost exclusively as the study of Christianity's chief antecedent. And almost invariably it was taught by Christians, often ministers or, as at Bishop's College in Quebec or King's College in Toronto, converted Jews. The University of Western Ontario was founded by a converted Jew, Isaac Hellmuth, the Anglican bishop of Huron.

McGill University in Montreal was an exception to this rule. When it opened in 1821, the Anglican bishop of Montreal, Jacob Mountain, declared that all offices were to be "open either to Protestants or Roman Catholics, and [that] students of all denominations would be permitted to attend." Most unusual was the appointment of Rabbi Abraham De Sola in 1849 as professor of Hebrew and Oriental languages and later as professor of Spanish, as well. (In 1858, McGill awarded De Sola an honorary LL.D., probably the first honorary degree awarded to a professing Jew in the English-speaking world.) Unlike most other "enlightened" European and American rabbis, De Sola was staunchly Orthodox in his theology and behavior, reflecting the then prevailing conservative ethos of Canada. He exemplified certain aspects of the nineteenth-century approach to scholarship: a commitment to "scientific" methodology and familiarity with secular and Christian writings about Jewish topics, and an intellectual life grounded in two scholarly worlds. The rabbi's presence on campus, together with the institution's openness to Jewish students, seemed to signal a degree of acceptance of Jews at McGill - and perhaps in Canada - unique in the Western world. In American and European universities at the time, few professing Jews were hired, and none of those few to teach Jewish Studies. But after De Sola's death in 1882, Jewish Studies at McGill followed the pattern established elsewhere; only Christians were trusted to teach it. In the end, De Sola's career proved to be only an anomaly and not a precedent, even in his own university. By the 1920s, McGill had instituted a rigid quota system designed to limit the number of Jewish students.¹⁰

The Postwar Era

As suggested earlier, the post-World War II years in Canada have been very different from the earlier era, at least with regard to the issue at hand. Perhaps

6/10/2009

Good Fences do not Necessarily M...

the major background difference has been a shift from the former two-nations (French-British) conception to a new notion of Canada as a nation of nations, a multicultural polity. To some extent, the shift is related to the rise of the "new ethnicity" and of black power in the United States. To a degree, it represents the presence in the country of an increasing number of people of non-French, non-British origin reflecting a loosening of long standing immigration policies. (One reason for the relaxation of the old rules was a sense of shame regarding Canada's role during the Holocaust.)¹¹ More importantly, the change represents a conscious, late-60s attempt to defuse the potentially explosive character of Quebec separatism. Quebec was granted greatly augmented autonomy balanced by additional rights and powers for the country's other ethnic groups. The new understanding received official sanction and definition in a 1971 policy statement on multiculturalism by the federal government. That statement swept away the "special status" of the British and French cultural traditions - at least in theory - "in favor of ethnic diversity and cultural pluralism, as more authentic reflections of Canadian identity."¹² According to this new definition of "who is a Canadian," Jews became one of the country's many legitimately distinct ethnocultural groups.

With regard to schools - and universities - two parallel developments have marked the years since the 1950s. A more open and diverse Canadian society has become much more hospitable to Jews - and others - who began to integrate into the country's political and social institutions. At the same time, various groups - but Jews rather more successfully than most others - began to fortify old communal institutions and to build new ones.

During these years, public schools in major centres around the country became "public" in the accepted North American sense of the word, that is, secular and non-denominational. In Quebec, the same, with some qualifications, may be said of the "Protestant" schools of Montreal and, to a lesser degree, of Catholic schools in metropolitan areas. In 1965, Jews finally gained the right to sit on Montreal Protestant school boards, although that right was contested throughout the 1980s. Jews now found themselves welcome in the public schools. In the universities, by the mid-1960s not only were Jews being accepted as students and faculty on an equal basis with gentiles, Jewish Studies was beginning to make its way into the curriculum.¹⁴

At the same time, the period saw the rapid growth of all-day, Jewish parochial schools to a degree unknown south of the border. By the mid-1980s, Montreal and Toronto each had about 7000 children enrolled in day schools which ranged from secular Zionist to ultra-Orthodox. By 1998, enrollment in Toronto had risen to 10,287 children including preschool and high school, with only 6,314 children in supplementary schools. Growth in Montreal, where the Jewish population has declined considerably in recent years, was less marked. The

Toronto Jewish community, the country's largest with a population of more than 160,000, boasted in 1998 nine mainstream day elementary schools (secular Zionist, Reform, Conservative, community Orthodox, Orthodox Zionist, Orthodox, Sephardic, non-denominational downtown, and arts-oriented) with a total of 16 branches. There was also a number of ultra-Orthodox schools of which several were of considerable size. In addition, there were five day high schools ranging from community inclusive to ultra-Orthodox yeshiva, two small day schools for children with special needs, and supplementary schools, most of which are sponsored by synagogues of the various denominations, although some are for-profit private enterprises.

Interestingly, although the total Jewish day school population in Toronto rose by some seven percent between 1992 and 1998, there was a considerable drop in the number of children enrolled in Jewish preschools in those same years. This may augur a decline in upper grades in years to come. It may, however, merely reflect parental reluctance to pay private school fees for preschool, which they may consider to be of less crucial importance to a child's development than the later grades, especially when acceptable, low-cost alternatives are available.¹⁴

About two-thirds of all Jewish children receiving any Jewish education in Canada in 1997 were enrolled in day schools, a proportion vastly larger than in the United States. Of American Jewish communities, only New York, with more than ten times the Jewish population of Toronto, and Los Angeles, with about three times as many Jews, have more children enrolled in day schools. In general, Canadian Jewish children are much more likely than American to receive some Jewish education (65 percent versus 45 percent), although less likely than Australian (70 percent) or Mexican Jewish children (85 percent). These figures may be inflated, but the overall picture would seem to be correct.¹⁵

Morton Weinfeld and Phyllis Zerkowitz have noted that the Jewish schools in Montreal have become, in effect, the public schools of the Jewish community. (The same may be said of Toronto and Winnipeg.) Unlike the communities in the United States, Canadian Jewish communities readily extend considerable financial support to their day schools.¹⁶ In 1998-99, the UJA/ Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto spent more than half of its locally allocated funds on formal Jewish education, roughly twice as much as the average for federations across the United States.¹⁷ Although technically private, the Canadian schools do not - as a group - cater to the elite of the community. Scholarships are available to parents who cannot afford the fees, although some schools are more welcoming to low income families than others. Similarly the day schools do not serve the cultural or religious elite of the community. While the Orthodox sector of the community is much more active in the day school movement than any

6/10/2009

Good Fences do not Necessarily M...

other, the school population, overall, ranges widely over the denominational, commitment, and observance spectrums. The schools also do not serve the intellectual elite of the community. Most endeavor to reach all children appropriate to their setting, those with special needs no less than the gifted. Attitudes to day school education among members of the Jewish community tend to parallel those of non-Jewish citizens towards the public schools. Funds spent on schools are viewed as an investment in the future well-being of the community.¹⁸

In the province of Quebec, the Jewish schools have enjoyed "associate" status with regard to the public schools since 1970 and receive public funding for more than half their costs. (The formula has varied over the years and is tied to the amount of instruction given in French.) In Alberta, Manitoba, and British Columbia, various adaptations of the pupil coupon system have made government funding available for children in Jewish day schools. Only in Ontario, is there no public support for day schools; in fact, there has been considerable resistance in Ontario to funding the Jewish schools, where tuition in 1997-98 ranged from \$7,100/year to \$12,625/year.¹⁹ In the 1990s, Jewish and other private schools appealed to the courts on the grounds of discrimination, since Catholic schools are still funded. The appeals were unsuccessful.

No scientific study of the attitudes of non-Jews towards Jewish schools has been undertaken. Antagonism seems to stem more from an unwillingness to pay the bill than from ideological opposition to parochial schooling. Some Canadians do now ape American attitudes towards public education. The ethos of multiculturalism and the conception of Canada as a cultural and ethnic mosaic, however, make it awkward to raise objections to religiously or ethnically oriented schools in principle.

Developments in the universities illustrate the point. When the broadening of the university curriculum to include ethnic studies was first broached in the 1950s and beyond, sceptics feared that scarce funds would be diverted from other, more essential, areas of scholarly enquiry and that enhanced ethnic power might contribute to the further fragmentation of Canadian society. Most of all, they were afraid that ethnic communities would subvert academic standards and "objectivity" by insisting that ethnic studies actively seek to reinforce communal identity. The Government of Canada, however, had no such qualms, and actively pursued its goal of promoting and reinforcing the multicultural character of the country. By mid-1993, the Ministry of Multiculturalism (sub-sequently downgraded by the government of Prime Minister Jean Chr?tien and renamed the Department of Canadian Heritage) had established 26 chairs of Ethnic Studies across the country, including a split chair in Jewish Studies at York and Concordia. No ill effects have been

perceived, and objections to ethnic studies have all but disappeared.

Even more unusual than these publicly financed ethnic studies chairs, if one compares Canada to the United States, is the emergence at four universities of programs designed to train professional personnel for the Jewish community. Jewish teacher education programs were developed at York, McGill, and Manitoba (the last no longer functions), and an individualized social work program (also no longer functioning) in cooperation with the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds of North America at the University of Toronto. Although unabashedly particularistic in their goals and aimed at one religious/ethnic group, these professional programs are not seen as problematic in the Canadian context. They are comfortably housed in secular, public universities, which location undoubtedly serves to broaden their scope. In any case, parallel programs to prepare teachers for the Catholic (Separate) school boards can be found in several universities.²⁰

Paradoxes and their Resolution

In comparing developments during the two periods sketched above, one cannot but note the paradoxes alluded to in the introduction. In the earlier period of Canadian Jewish history, certainly before World War I but even as late as World War II, religion was a major force in Canadian life. During those years church and state were intimately connected in some crucial areas of Canadian life. There was no officially established church, although the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec often behaved as if it were and was treated accordingly. Schools, however, those that were ostensibly "public" no less than those that were by definition "separate" and confessional, were heavily influenced by the Christian churches and assumed the task of communicating Christian values. In the universities, the atmosphere was similar. Jewish Studies, except where they served the purpose of providing a foil for the study of Christianity, were unwelcome. In general, in this period, the strong connection between religion and the state buttressed the Christian churches. It was not, however, helpful to Jews or to Judaism.

Integration into French Canadian society at that time was a possibility only if one converted to Catholicism, and even then it was very difficult. Integration into Anglo-Canada was somewhat easier for a variety of reasons. But there, too, the price was conformity to WASP norms and values. The lack of a wall of separation between church and state seemed to reinforce Jews' outsider status in this period. Especially during the long periods when French and English Canadians were at loggerheads, Jews found themselves rebuffed by both groups.

Jews reacted to this situation in a variety of ways. Most turned inward and worked at fostering an independent cultural and religious life of their own. The Zionist movement and Jewish religious practice present cases in point. Before World War I, Canada, along with South Africa and Belgium which are also bi-national countries, had the highest per capita Zionist membership of any country in the world. Jews could not be part of the French Canadian nation, and they could not really be part of English Canada either. Therefore, they turned to Jewish nationalism.²¹ In the realm of religion, they remained significantly more loyal to traditional Judaism than did their cousins in the United States, partly as a reflection of the conservative religious atmosphere of Canada itself, but also because little was to be gained in terms of integration into the larger society by watering Judaism down.²²

One area of Jewish life which went undeveloped in this period was education. Except for the two short-lived experiments in Montreal mentioned above, all-day Jewish schools did not emerge until the mid-forties and then very gradually. Their development belongs to the later period. Although Canadian education in the prewar period had an overtly religious character, and although Jews were considered interlopers even in the "public" schools, Jewish schools were not opened.

In the postwar period, on the other hand, Canadian society opened up to an unprecedented degree. Increasingly, all Canadians enjoyed the same life style, and there was little to distinguish one from the other. Legally, at least, no high wall of separation between church and state was built even then. Society, however, became increasingly secular, and the mainline churches lost some of their power - most dramatically the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec.

By the 1970s, Jews were participating in many areas of public and institutional life formerly closed to them, and Judaism took its rightful place as an insider religion. As schools became more secular, in the cities at least, they welcomed Jews. And Jewish Studies became an accepted part of the university curriculum, almost a canonical subject. The new openness and secularity of Canadian society seemed to benefit Jews, but much less, the cause of religion in general. The growing strength of Reform and Conservative Judaism mirrored the waning strength of Roman Catholicism in Quebec and of the Anglican and United churches there and elsewhere.

What was less to be expected was that while opportunities for integration increased, the drive towards communal autonomy, at least in the field of education, also gained force. The number of day schools multiplied, and more and more children were enrolled.

How can one understand these paradoxical developments? In fact, the

6/10/2009

Good Fences do not Necessarily M...

explanations are relatively straightforward. In the earlier period, there was no critical mass of Jews, and the immigrant population did not have the resources to support separate Jewish schools. The Jewish community was too small, too new, too insecure, and too divided to acquire and exercise political clout. Squeezed between the two founding nations which were hostile to each other and even more hostile towards them, Jews lacked any positive reinforcement which would have encouraged them to invest in their own schools. Although they had the cultural space to develop a school system, they did not have the means, and the space was largely negative space.

The more recent period has been characterized by a very different atmosphere. In terms of population and financial resources the community could now undertake the building of a school network. Less insecure about their place in Canada and able now to exert some political leverage, partly as a result of Canadians' guilt about their behavior during the Holocaust, Jews could assert themselves. But the main difference between the periods had to do with the political and social environment. In a Canada which viewed itself as multicultural, a nation of nations, religion became less important and ethnicity more important. Religion, in general, suffered, but Jews had a rightful place equal to that of all the other ethnic communities. They now had positive space in which to build their institutions - including schools - and felt free to do so. Now, to be a good Canadian one had to play one's ethnic card, and that could be done most effectively by supporting communal education. And so one sees the proliferation of day schools and of Jewish Studies on university campuses.

One final word on fences and neighbors. As noted earlier, in both periods under discussion here, there were no secure fences separating religion and state in Canada. That absence, however, does not much seem to have influenced the relationship of Jews and gentiles. In fact, the intertwining of church and state has had little to do with making Jews and Christians good or bad neighbors with regard to Canadian education. Factors such as population and available resources have played a significant role. But the most important determinant of the quality of the relationship has been the way in which the connection between church and state has played out against core conceptions of Canadian identity. Robert Frost had it right: It is not necessarily "good fences [that] make good neighbors."²³

* * *

Notes

* Much of the material presented here appeared in somewhat different form in "Do Good Fences Make Good Neighbors? Jews and Judaism in Canadian

Schools and Universities," *Jerusalem Letter*, 391 (11 Tishrei 5759/1 October 1998):1-7.

1. Shmuel Shamai, "Ethnicity and Educational Achievement in Canada, 1941-1981," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 24 (1992):47.

2. See Michael Brown, *Jew or Juif? Jews, French Canadians, and Anglo-Canadians, 1759-1914* (Philadelphia, 1987), passim.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 239-43 and the sources cited there.

4. For a cursory review of agitation favoring the end of all church involvement in Quebec education and advocating that school "doors be thrown open to teaching about all sorts of religious beliefs," see "Lay Schools are a Fundamental Right," *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 8 April 1999.

5. Joseph Levitt, *Henri Bourassa and the Golden Calf* (Ottawa, 1969), p. 86.

6. Andre Siegfried, *The Race Question in Canada*, tr. Eveleigh Nash (New York, 1907), p. 79.

7. Brown, *Jew or Juif?*, pp. 239-43.

8. See David Rome, "Inventory of Documents on the Jewish School Question, Montreal, 1925-1933," *Canadian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, 1 (1977):3-15.

9. Brown, *Jew or Juif?*, pp. 189, 245-46.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 188-90, 235, 245-46; idem, "The Canadian Context for Jewish Studies," in *A Guide to the Study of Jewish Civilization in Canadian Universities*, ed. and comp. Michael Brown (Jerusalem and Toronto, 1998), p. 4; Richard Menkis, "A Threefold Transformation: Jewish Studies, Canadian Universities, and the Canadian Jewish Community," in Brown, *Guide*, pp. 44-45. See also the sources cited in all three works.

11. Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1982), pp. ix, 285; Bruce Elman, "The Constitutionalization of Multiculturalism in Canada: The Jewish Legal Role," in *Multiculturalism, Jews, and Identities in Canada*, eds. Howard Adelman and John H. Simpson (Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 69-94; Lorraine E. Weinrib, "'Do Justice to Us!' Jews and the Constitution of Canada," in *Not Written in Stone: Jews, Constitutions, and Constitutionalism in Canada*, eds.

Michael Brown, Daniel Elazar, and Ira Robinson (forthcoming).

12. Harold Troper, "Ethnic Studies and the Classroom Discussion of Antisemitism: Personal Observations," in *Approaches to Antisemitism: Context and Curriculum*, ed. Michael Brown (New York: American Jewish Committee, and Jerusalem: International Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization, 1994), p. 194.

13. See Menkis, "A Threefold Transformation," in Brown, *Guide*, pp. 43-69.

14. "Jewish School Population Survey - Summary Statistics," Metro Toronto Board of Jewish Education, 23 November 1997; Dr. Jeremiah Unterman, director, Toronto Board of Jewish Education, interview with the author, 23 June 1998.

15. Seth Gitell, "Hebrew Schools Losing Students, Latest Study on Education Shows," *Forward*, 24 October 1997. See also Alice Goldstein and Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Teach Your Children When They Are Young: Contemporary Jewish Education in the United States*, Research Report 10 (New York: JESNA, 1993), *passim*.

In "Jewish Education: Success or Failure?" in *The Canadian Jewish Mosaic*, eds. Morton Weinfeld, William Shaffir, and Irwin Cotler (Toronto, 1981), pp. 122-23, Yaacov Glickman suggests that many fewer Canadian Jewish children are enrolled in day schools than is claimed by the supervisory bodies. No substantiation for this claim is offered.

Despite the great variety of day schools in Toronto and Montreal in comparison to American communities, complaints are sometimes heard from those who feel their interests are not represented adequately. An example of such discontent is Sarah Taieb-Carlen's "Monocultural Education in a Pluralist Environment: Ashkenazi Curricula in Toronto Jewish Educational Institutions," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 24 (1992):75-86. Taieb-Carlen claims that the predominantly Ashkenazi schools of Toronto fail to nurture the identity of their Sephardi students. Curiously, she omits mention of the Sephardi day school in Toronto and does not compare Toronto to Montreal, where Sephardim are more numerous and have well developed schools. In both cities, the Sephardi schools are supported by the whole community. Further, Taieb-Carlen misreads the attitude towards Jewish cultural concerns on the part of the Montreal Protestant School Board in the 1930s, imputing to the board a sensitivity which it did not have.

16. See, for example, "Education Funding Dips, Study Shows," *Forward*, 2

August 1996; Jeffrey Goldberg, "Births of a Nation," *Forward*, 7 November 1997.

17. Dr. Jeremiah Unterman, director, Toronto Board of Jewish Education, interview with the author, 13 April 1999.

18. Morton Weinfeld and Phyllis Zelkowitz, "Reflections on the Jewish Polity and Jewish Education," in *The Jews in Canada*, eds. Robert J. Brym, William Shaffir, and Morton Weinfeld (Toronto, 1993), pp. 142-52. On the positive attitude of Jews towards Jewish schooling, see also Glickman, "Success or Failure?" pp. 120-21.

19. Compare, for example, the statements of David Johnson, Minister of Education for the Province of Ontario, quoted in "Independent Schools Seek Funds," *Toronto Star*, 17 February 1999, and editorials over the years, especially at election time, in the *Toronto Star*, the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, and other newspapers. See also "Day School Fees Up an Average of Two Percent," *Canadian Jewish News*, 17 September 1998; and Stuart Schoenfeld, "Public Funding for Religious Education in Ontario: A Dilemma for Canadian Jewry," *Jerusalem Letter*, 396 (26 Kislev 5759/15 December 1998).

20. Brown, "Canadian Context," pp. 6-7.

21. Among other sources, see *idem*, "Canada and the Holy Land: Some North American Similarities and Differences," in *With Eyes Toward Zion*, 3, eds. Moshe Davis and Yehoshua Ben-Arieh (New York, 1991), pp. 77-91; *idem*, "The Americanization of Canadian Zionism, 1917-1982," in *Contemporary Jewry: Studies in Honor of Moshe Davis*, ed. Geoffrey Wigoder (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 129-158; and *idem*, "Divergent Paths: Early Zionism in Canada and the United States," *Jewish Social Studies*, 44 (Spring 1982):149-68.

22. Among other sources, see *idem*, "The Beginnings of Reform Judaism in Canada," *Jewish Social Studies*, 34 (October 1972):322-42.

23. Robert Frost, "The Mending Wall," in *Complete Poems* (New York, 1949), pp. 47-48.

* * *

MICHAEL BROWN is a Fellow of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, and Professor of Humanities and Hebrew and Director of the Centre for Jewish Studies at York University in Toronto. His most recent book is *Creating the Jewish Future*, co-edited with Bernard Lightman (Walnut Creek, CA, 1999).

The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Board of Fellows of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

The above essay appears in the Spring 1999 issue of the *Jewish Political Studies Review*, the first and only journal dedicated to the study of Jewish political institutions and behavior, Jewish political thought, and Jewish public affairs.

Published by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (<http://www.jcpa.org/>), the *JPSR* appears twice a year in the form of two double issues, either of a general nature or thematic, with contributors including outstanding scholars from the United States, Israel, and abroad.

Jewish Political Studies Review

ORDER FORM

Invoice No. _____

Date _____

Annual Subscription Rates:

	Individual	Institutions & Libraries	Students
Outside Israel:	\$26	\$40	\$20
In Israel:	NIS 70	NIS 110	NIS 40

Back Issues or Single issues - \$12 each

Enclosed is my check for US\$/NIS: _____

Name:

Address:

6/10/2009

Good Fences do not Necessarily M...

All checks should be made payable and mailed to:

IN THE US:

Center for Jewish Community Studies
Baltimore Hebrew University
5800 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21215

IN ISRAEL:

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs
13 Tel Hai Street
Jerusalem 92107 ISRAEL