

## Rome Among the Bishops: a reflection on David Rome and his contributions to dialogue<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

Born in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 1910, David Rome arrived with his parents in Vancouver, Canada, at the age of 11. He settled in Montréal in the late 1930s. In 1942 he was hired as press officer by the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC). From 1953 to 1972, he was Director of the Jewish Public Library; thereafter he served as archivist at the CJC. David Rome died Montréal in 1996.

Rome was designated Chevalier de l'Ordre national du Québec, the Quebec government's highest honour, in 1987. In 1991 the Quebec ministry of immigration and cultural communities awarded him their Prix d'excellence and in the same year he received a doctorate *honoris causa* from Montreal's Concordia University. Historians of Quebec Jewry including Pierre Anctil, Ira Robinson and others, continue to refer to Rome as an inspiration for their work.<sup>2</sup> And yet, with the exception of one excellent, short article by Robinson that focuses on Rome as historian of Canadian Jewish life, next to nothing has been published about him.<sup>3</sup>

One possible explanation for the paucity of published work on David Rome may be that he is not someone easily categorized. As well, as I argue here, an important part of his impact was felt behind the scenes, in private, through person-to-person dialogue. The material that I present in this article is based on my reading of a part of the voluminous material on Rome preserved at the Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee (CJCCC) archives and at the archives of the Jewish Public Library of Montreal, as well as on archival material at the BAnQ, Centres d'archives de Québec, having to do with Quebec's first Arts Council. Written sources are complemented by two series of audio and audiovisual recordings, which provide additional insights. The first is a fifteen audio-cassette "autobiography" recorded by Rome in conversation with archivist Eiran Harris, from which the title of this article is drawn.<sup>4</sup> Further, I will cite a few of the eleven interviews

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this article was published in French in 2012 in Stanislaw Fiszer, Cylvie Claveau and Didier Francfort, eds. *Cultures Juives: Europe Centrale et Orientale, Amérique du Nord*. Editions Le Manuscrit / [Manuscrit.com](http://Manuscrit.com), 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See for example the recent collaboration Pierre Anctil and Ira Robinson, eds., *Communautés Juives De Montréal (Les): Histoire Et Enjeux Contemporains* (Septentrion, 2011); Denis Vaugeois, *Premiers Juifs d'Amérique* (Septentrion, 2011); in Jean-François Nadeau, *Adrien Arcand Führer Canadien* (Lux Éditeur, 2010), the dedication is to Pierre Anctil, with mention of the "regretté (late lamented) David Rome".

<sup>3</sup> There is no lack of primary and secondary sources. On the contrary, the 10.87 metres of David Rome material preserved at the Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee as well as Rome's own voluminous writings constitute a rich and abundant resource.

<sup>4</sup> David Rome and Eiran Harris, "Autobiography, David Rome", 89 1988, Sound collection, Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives.

that I recorded in 2009-2010 with people who knew Rome, family members as well as colleagues and friends.<sup>5</sup>

In what follows I will first propose a view of David Rome's early life and the formation therein of his values and vulnerabilities. My intention is to offer an intimate view of Rome and what motivated him in his pursuit of dialogical and other activities. Next, I provide a look at Rome in action at the Canadian Jewish Congress. After this I turn from Rome's personal path to the broader context, to give a sense of the political/historical stage onto which this liminal figure walked. The next section tells the story of "Rome Among the Bishops", a story which will illustrate what I have proposed about Rome's character and context; this section will also present new information about Rome's accomplishments on Quebec's first Arts Council. Finally, I will cite examples of Rome's in-person impact, based interviews on with several people who knew and were influenced by him.

#### DAVID ROME, LIMINAL FIGURE IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

In order to appreciate his impact in historical context, I will first trace David Rome's personal history, paying particular attention to his early education and the construction within it of "Us" and "Them". Then I will reflect on the "sacred" as expressed by David Rome, looking there for possible sources of his motivation to dialogue. Having proposed a view of the core values and vulnerabilities that animated David Rome, I offer a view of him in action at the Canadian Jewish Congress, soon after his arrival there.

##### *Early life; core values and vulnerabilities*

In the interview that I carried out in 1999 with David Rome's co-author, dialogue partner and friend, the late Father Jacques Langlais, the latter said of Rome that he was "a man whom Western culture had touched but not transformed".<sup>6</sup> Based on my personal experience of David Rome and on his autobiography, I find that Langlais' phrase rings true, above all in the way that Rome speaks of his childhood. In what he says, and how he says it, Rome shows himself to be someone deeply shaped by his childhood years in a world that he knew to be crumbling, but which he loved almost to the point of veneration.

Vilnius, where David Rome was born, had been the centre of the Jewish universe in Lithuania for centuries. In the period surrounding his birth in 1910, this universe was shaken from top to bottom by the message of the *Haskala* as it arrived from Western Europe, as well as by the revolutionary ideas alive in a Russian Empire on the verge of collapse.

A precious resource for investigating David Rome's own experience in the context just described, are the interviews carried out by Rome's friend Eiran Harris, Archivist Emeritus at the Jewish Public Library.<sup>7</sup> The interviews were conducted and are conserved at the National Archives of the CJCCC. In speaking of his childhood, Rome says that when he was four years old, his father brought him along, travelling East, and chose the peaceful village of Zhlobin as a place to settle. His father bought a store there and the family stayed for seven years, until their departure for Canada.

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<sup>5</sup> These interviews are part of the Sharon Gubbay Helfer dialogue archive at the CJCCC.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Langlais, Interview with the author, August 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Those who do not know Eiran Harris, a unique character in his own right, may get to know something about him on the website of the Jewish Public Library of Montreal, by consulting "The Harris interviews", a series of interviews with archivist Shannon Hodge. <http://www.jewishpubliclibrary.org/en/archives/prologue/>

Speaking of Zhlobin, Rome expresses himself with characteristic rhetorical flourish, in saying that village was *entirely* Jewish.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, a sense of “Us” and “Them” comes through strongly in the way Rome uses the term “Goy”:

Alboin was entirely Jewish. There may have been a few Goyim. [...] Jews were Jews and Goyim were Goyim and never the twain met, except in the store.<sup>9</sup>

In the same vein, in answering Harris’ question about his personal experience with anti-Semitism, Rome answers:

I will give you a strange answer. There were no pogroms where we lived. We didn’t use the term anti-Semitism. We knew there were Goyim, and that by nature they were hostile. So we kept away from them.<sup>10</sup>

Or again in speaking of his experiences in school, experiences he claims to have brought with him as a “heritage” when he came to Canada:

On the way to school [in Vilna?] Jewish students were attacked by Goyim and their dogs. One day I decided to confront them; fortunately, they were not there. I brought that heritage to Canada.<sup>11</sup>

The theme of education emerges as important in listening to Rome’s autobiography. It would seem that his early education took place in the changing circumstances of war and occupation.<sup>12</sup> He does not remember going to primary school but says he learned to write Yiddish on his own, that he learned Russian from a grammar book, and that a German officer taught him how to write his numbers.<sup>13</sup> Rome says that the members of his family were ardent Zionists and that Hebrew and Jewish Studies were the “be all and end all”. Though we cannot confirm these details, and despite some internal contradictions, what emerges from Rome’s stories is the way that he understood himself, or at the very least a way he liked to be seen. That is, as a person largely self-taught, living by his wits in a precarious environment. Among the skills that were important to survival in such a context was a knowledge of languages, as he put it, “The secret of the Jews’ success was knowing many languages.” Another important point is that Rome saw his life and education as “representative of the life and education of a Jewish boy”; thus in a way, Rome saw himself as standing for all of that Jewish universe of Eastern Europe that was on the brink of elimination.

A final theme that Rome returns to is that of the need to leave Eastern Europe. This departure is presented by Rome as being as essential to survival as it was tragic. Rome explains to Harris how much the Jews were preoccupied by the necessity of doing something to ensure their survival, as their situation was tenuous. The threats came not only from outside, but also from within. According to Rome, the Torah and all of Jewish religion, were being eclipsed by modernity. A whole array of alternative sources of salvation had been suggested, says Rome: urbanization, professionalism, the Hebrew language, the Yiddish language, socialism, communism, science, education.... In the end, however, immigration proved to be the winning solution. Too bad, says

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<sup>8</sup> Rome is likely talking about his neighborhood.

<sup>9</sup> David Rome and Eiran Harris, *Autobiography, David Rome*, 1988, tape No. 2, Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives, Sound collection.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> During the First World War, starting in 1915, the Germans occupied Lithuania. With typical theatrical flourish, Rome says that, by comparison with the horrors of Russian anti-Semitism, the years under German occupation were “golden”.

<sup>13</sup> Rome says he went to Yiddish school in Vilnius; if this is true, he must have returned there while his father (and mother?) stayed in Zlobin and ran the store.

Rome to Harris, with something of the sadness and bitterness of the survivor, for those who did nothing. You and I are here because we were smart.

At age 11, David Rome arrived in Vancouver, where he managed to do his public school studies in English. After that, he went to university at the University of British Columbia and the University of Seattle, Washington.<sup>14</sup> He also worked as a journalist for the *Jewish Western Bulletin*. In addition to his formal studies, in characteristic form, Rome pursued other studies on his own, notably with the Zionist leader and orthodox rabbi J.H. Zlotnick (1888-1962). In Zlotnick Rome found an admirable figure, orthodox in his religious practice but also modern and westernized. In describing Zlotnick as an “infinite scholar”, Rome expressed his sense of the limitless riches of Jewish tradition.<sup>15</sup> While still in Vancouver, Rome also attended a series of meetings and conferences organized by the left-wing Zionist group, the Labor Zionists. It was here, says Rome, that he conceived his “mission”, of devoting his life to the service of the Jewish community.<sup>16</sup> Rome continued his association with the Labor Zionists upon arriving in Montreal; from 1939 to 1940, he acted as National Director for the group, an unpaid position. After this, David Rome spent two years in Toronto as editor of the *Daily Hebrew Journal*, before returning to settle definitively in Montreal.

### *The “sacred” in the world of David Rome*

Like any pioneer, Rome was not driven primarily by orders received from elsewhere but rather by his own intuitions and convictions. In order to get a sense of these intangible elements, I offer the following reflection on the subject of the “sacred” in Rome’s world of meaning. In this, I will suggest that the values that Rome held at his core and that influenced his actions through life, were acquired in his early years.

David Rome spoke to Eiran Harris of his “mission” to devote himself to the Jewish community. His jobs and the different roles he took on, were all in some way opportunities for him to fulfill this personal mission. In different situations, including at the Jewish Public Library, Rome acted according to his own lights rather than complying with orders from his bosses. Why? What motivated David Rome in his dialogical and other endeavors? Was his motivation purely strategic and political? For whose benefit? I think that for Rome, it was a question of protecting the vital interests of the Jewish people, to ensure their survival. In this he focused his energies in two main directions. As archivist, he documented the lives lived by Jews, so that their experience should never be negated, erased or forgotten.<sup>17</sup> The other path was that of “dialogue”. In both cases, I would argue, David Rome was carrying out sacred duties.

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<sup>14</sup> Further, in 1939 Rome obtained a diploma in library science from McGill University and a Masters in English studies from the Université de Montréal in 1962. See Janice Rosen, “Rome, David,” in Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, eds. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), p. 417.

<sup>15</sup> In the 1930s, Rabbi J.L. Zlotnick [1888-1962], originally from Poland, led the Zionist movement in Vancouver. He served as the Orthodox rabbi for the Jewish community of Vancouver between 1934 and 1938 before leaving to settle in Israel.

<sup>16</sup> “Through these cultural lectures I knew that my mission in life was dedication to Jewish community service.” Rome and Harris, “Autobiography, David Rome.” *op. cit.*, cassette 1.

<sup>17</sup> In his lovely appreciation of David Rome’s contribution as historian of Canadian Jewry, Ira Robinson situates Rome’s greatness in the way in which he developed and exploited the “Geniza” of Canadian Jewry, the archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress. Robinson is making reference to the Geniza, the room set aside by a Jewish community for storing all

David Rome was not an observant Jew. Ira Robinson affirms that, along with many others, Rome lost his faith in the transition to modernity. Robinson characterizes Rome's rejection of Torah as "firm but sorrowful". Robinson argues that on the other hand, like some others, Rome treated Jewish history as a sacred text, that he approached it "with the awe and reverence with which one would approach a religious text".<sup>18</sup>

An amusing vignette may serve to illustrate Rome's approach to Jewish life and Jewish history. This story was told by John Margolis, weight-lifter and multi-media artist with whom I spoke about David Rome. Margolis took a course at McGill University with Rome in the mid-1960s, before the Jewish Studies program at that university was established. Margolis explained that Rome's way of lecturing was in no way traditional. One idea led him to another, relating perhaps to an entirely different place, time or even topic within the Jewish world. Rome would continue noting these different ideas on the blackboard in front of the class, drawing looping lines and arrows to connect different elements as he went along. The students quickly gave up on the idea of standard note-taking. Margolis says that he came up with the innovative solution of taping a whole series of sheets together, in order to be able to copy down exactly the complex intertwined set of ideas and facts as they unfolded on the blackboard.

This portrait of Rome, wandering from one end to the other of the blackboard, making links among elements quite heterogeneous as to time and place, recalls a description given us by the historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi. Of the rabbis of the Talmud, Yerushalmi said that, unlike the Biblical writers, they would "play with Time as though with an accordion, expanding and collapsing it at will".<sup>19</sup>

In addition to holding something like a Talmudic conception of the Jewish universe as sacred space, one might say that Rome also held a sacralised sense of the Jewish People. Robinson cites Rome, where he uses mystical terms to speak of the *survival* of Judaism in the 20th century. In the passage cited, Rome writes that this survival "sheds a light on the mystery of Jewish eternity". Rome goes on to emphasize the miraculous nature of this survival, given the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup>

Another noteworthy statement by David Rome expresses a quasi-mystical appreciation of the value of a Jewish soul. This was in the context of a memo addressed to Samuel David Cohen, who chaired the CJC committee on relations with French Canadians. In the memo, dated November 20, 1952, Rome describes the activities of the Fathers of Notre Dame de Sion in Paris and in Aix-en-Provence in fighting anti-Semitism. Even as he praises their work, Rome warns Cohen against public recognition of their efforts, because the founders of the order were converted Jews.<sup>21</sup> Rome continues, using the Yiddish word *meshumed*, in Hebrew *meshumad*, meaning apostate, or more literally, a destroyed person; later Rome chooses the more familiar Yiddish short form, *schmed*.

There is nothing cynical or Machiavellian about this. I justify this on practical grounds as not wishing to give any color of encouragement to *schmed* and on theoretical grounds that no amount of good public relations of infinite

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written documents that might potentially contain one of the names of God, documents that cannot be thrown away but that must be buried. In fact a Geniza may contain all sorts of documents, thus constituting a precious resource for learning about community life. ROBINSON, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (University of Washington Press, 1996), 17.

<sup>20</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> The orders of Notre Dame de Sion were founded by the Ratisbonne brothers, Jews from Strasbourg who converted to Catholicism. Thereafter they were determined to see other Jews follow in their footsteps and convert, all the while nonetheless fighting against anti-Semitism.

humanitarian and political effect, even to the extent of life-saving, is worth a Jewish soul and the souls of his unborn children.<sup>22</sup>

Yet another perspective on David Rome as a Jew comes from Father Jacques Langlais, who spoke to me about his dialogue-partnership with Rome. In reflecting on the religious dimension, Langlais stated first that Rome was not necessarily an observant Jew. Nonetheless, Langlais affirmed how much he appreciated David Rome's sensibilities and behavior, including his way of treating his wife:

David Rome as far as I know was not the most pious Jew. But even in his way of expressing himself, one senses something going on, a kind of faithfulness ... He communicates many things that are characteristic. I learned an enormous amount about Jews just because ... for example: He was married to a woman, let us say she was a religious woman. He treated her as though she was *le bon Dieu*, God himself. It is in Jewish tradition, this way of treating the woman. [...] Yes, there was a faithfulness, maybe even more than in others. Perhaps he couldn't say it, perhaps he didn't have the way to say it but I felt it, that he was very Jewish.<sup>23</sup>

To use the Yiddish term, David Rome was a *mentsch*, a good man. Perhaps his immigrant experience sensitized him to people in trouble, or perhaps there were other reasons. However it may be, David Rome liked helping people and he did so frequently, certainly more frequently than we are able today to document. I spoke with two of these people: Dr. Morad Kimia, a Jewish Iranian doctor who arrived as an immigrant in Montreal and John Margolis, cited above. Both of these men have fascinating personal stories of their own. John Margolis was very young when he met David Rome. Margolis was one of the Jewish refugee passengers on the rescue ship the *Serpa Pinto*, in 1944. As Press Officer at the CJC, Rome was sent to Philadelphia to meet the boat. Rome thus became the public face of rescue for a good number of Jews. In a *Globe and Mail* article on the subject, Margolis says that Rome confessed to him that he never understood why the Canadian government softened its exclusionary policy towards Jewish refugees at that specific moment during the war.<sup>24</sup> Rome also counseled Margolis not to focus too much on the small number of Jews who were rescued, saying, "The miracle under these conditions is that one person manages to get away. That you had a cup of coffee this morning is a very great, historical, meaningful event".<sup>25</sup>

A final vignette suggests that Rome's interest for the vulnerable and the immigrants was not focused exclusively on Jews or on Francophone Quebecers. I was in conversation recently with an Arab Palestinian, born in the Gaza Strip, a man with whom I have been involved in dialogue activities. To my great surprise, this man told me of an incident that took place soon after his arrival in Montreal. He talked of having met David Rome in the street, on Côte des Neiges, across from the Bronfman building where Rome had his office in the CJC Archives. This man remembered well the warmth and authenticity with which Rome invited him to have a coffee in the cafeteria across the street.

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<sup>22</sup>David Rome, Memorandum to Mr. S.D. Cohen, November 20, 1952, Canadian Jewish Congress Fonds, Series ZB (Personalia), David Rome, Box 1, Folder 15, National Archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee.

<sup>23</sup>Langlais, interview with the author, 1999.

<sup>24</sup>For a presentation of the Canadian government's anti-Semitism before, during and immediately after the Second World War, see Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is too Many: Canada And The Jews Of Europe 1933-1948*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Key Porter Books, 2002).

<sup>25</sup>Les Perreux, "Serpa Pinto: Voyages of Life and Death," *The Globe and Mail*, n.d., <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/article1138213.ece>.

*Rome in action at the Canadian Jewish Congress*

In 1942, Rome was hired as Press Officer at the CJC. The first priority at that time was to fight anti-Semitism in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada and to do whatever possible to help the Jews of Europe.<sup>26</sup> It was believed that the media would have an important role to play in this campaign. This is the context within which David Rome was taken on as Press Officer and instructed among other things to engage in dialogue. The job was to find ways to open minds and hearts in order to shift entrenched views and avoid activities that could damage the vital interests of the Jewish people. It was important as well to remain alert in order to detect new dangers.

From the time he arrived, Rome devoted himself to the job by mounting a public relations campaign on a number of levels. In this, he worked with his mentor H.M. Caiserman, until the latter's death in 1950. He also worked with Congress president Samuel Bronfman, and closely with Executive Director Saul Hayes.

A long memo dated April 9, 1948, addressed to the National Joint Public Relations Committee of B'nai Brith and signed by Saul Hayes is entitled "Work Among the Roman Catholics". The memo gives an overview of the campaigns then underway and thus affords us a view of David Rome at work.

The memo reports with pride on CJC work "among French Canadians and among Roman Catholics" over the preceding years and says that this work has borne fruit.<sup>27</sup> It emphasizes the role of the special committee on Relations with French Canadians, under the chairmanship of Samuel D. Cohen, and says that it was David Rome who carried out the executive work there. The memo details Rome's efforts to contact clergy, including the archbishops of Montreal and Quebec City. It also mentions the permission given by the archbishop of Montreal to create a chapter of the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews.<sup>28</sup> In the political arena, the memo cites the condemnation of the Conservative Minister of Agriculture, Laurent Barré, by Mgr. Henri Jeannotte, for having made anti-Semitic remarks in the Quebec legislature, and the approval of this condemnation reported in the French press.<sup>29</sup> Another success reported in the memo is the publication in the Catholic press across Canada of A.M. Klein's poems, with their sympathetic treatment of French Canadians. The positive reception of these poems in clerical and literary circles is emphasized. Finally, the note mentions the founding of the *Cercle juif de langue française*, a group designed to

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<sup>26</sup>Stephen J. Scheinberg, "From Self-

Help to National Advocacy: The Emergence of Community Activism", in *From Immigration to Integration*, eds. Ruth Klein and Frank Dimant (Toronto, Ont: Institute for International Affairs, B'nai Brith Canada, 2001), 58.

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Mr. S. Hayes, "Memorandum to The National Joint Public Relations Committee" April 1948, Canadian Jewish Congress Fonds, Series ZB (Personalia), David Rome, Box 1, Folder 15, National Archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee.

<sup>28</sup> This was Monsignor Joseph Charbonneau, Archbishop of Montréal from 1940 to 1950. Representing a progressive current within the Church, he gave his support to the Catholic unions during the Asbestos strike. His stance probably displeased the Church, since Charbonneau was subsequently sent to a parish in Victoria, British Columbia. As for the CCCJ, it was the young priest Stéphane Valiquette, cited below in this article, who pushed for its establishment and who was at first successful. However the CCCJ was subsequently forbidden by the Vatican to Catholics the world over for a while, and then reestablished.

<sup>29</sup> See Gerald Tulchinsky, *Canada's Jews: A People's Journey* (University of Toronto Press, 2008), 409.

introduce French Canadians to French-speaking Jews through publications and public gatherings focused on cultural, political and other lively topics of mutual interest.<sup>30</sup>

In 1953, David Rome left the CJC for the Jewish Public Library, where he would pursue with intensity his project of documenting the Jewish communities of Montreal, Quebec, Canada and beyond. While at the Library, Rome also pursued the paths of outreach and dialogue, not always with the support or even the knowledge of the Board to whom he reported.

Throughout the period that began with his arrival at Congress, Montreal's Jewish community continued to evolve. The network of community organizations that had been built with determination, passion and creativity by the immigrant generation, passed into the hands of the second generation, born in Canada.

#### THE POLITICAL/HISTORICAL MISE-EN-SCÈNE

##### *Montreal's Jewish community evolves*

Caiserman and Hayes, the two men Rome admired so much at Congress, and who were among the architects of Montreal's Jewish community, would be replaced by a new order in the decades following the death Caiserman in 1950.<sup>31</sup> Montreal's Jewish community would restructure itself to meet the needs of the second generation, the children of the immigrants whose arrival en masse starting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was itself transformative of the community and its institutions.

The passing of Caiserman marked the beginning of a passage from the era of the individualists who founded the community's institutions, to the generation of their children, professionals who would run these institutions and help them evolve to meet their own needs. In the long run, the CJC would be eclipsed, its central role taken over little by little by the Federation system, Allied Jewish Community Services and its successors, until the official dissolution of Congress in 2011, when the community's top priority had become the defense of Israel.

David Rome occupies a position at the threshold, between two eras in the development of Montreal's immigrant Jewish community, between immigration and integration, between the old community leadership at the CJC and the new leaders, many of them businessmen associated with the Federation of Jewish agencies. The vulnerabilities, preoccupations and aspirations on either side of this divide were different. Rome arrived as an immigrant from Eastern Europe. He was filled with its culture, which he carried as a treasure. He felt the duty to ensure that its memory be perpetuated, even as the Jewish universe from which it came was obliterated on the ground. Rome's other great preoccupation, shared with others of his generation, was to ensure that Jews could live in safety and security in their new home in Montreal, Quebec, and in Canada. For Rome, whose instincts had been forged in the old Jewish contexts of Eastern Europe, the thing to do was to establish good relationships with the powers in place ... the bishops and also the new Quebec nationalists, the journalists and opinion-makers. His sensitivity to his environment included sensitivity to the

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<sup>30</sup> This initiative, started by Rome and his colleagues, was subsequently taken up by Naïm Kattan, who made of it a remarkable venue for showcasing the new generation of Quebec artists, intellectuals and politicians. For an analysis of the Bulletin published by the Cercle under Kattan, see the excellent thesis on the subject by Jean-Philippe Croteau *Les Relations Entre Les Juifs De Langue Française Et Les Canadiens Français* (Montréal: Université de Montréal, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> In conversation with Harris, Rome described himself as a protégé of Caiserman and a disciple of Hayes. See Rome and Harris, "Autobiography, David Rome".



importance of the French language for French Canadians. Neither had he forgotten one of the lessons of his childhood, that “the secret of the Jews’ success was knowing many languages.”

For the next generation, born in Montreal to immigrant parents, the situation was altogether different. Where an organic Jewish community had been taken for granted by those formed in the *shtetls* and ghettos of the Old Country, life in the open society of Canada soon led to religious and cultural assimilation. The Jewish community in evolution began to see the threat to its survival coming not from the outside in the form of pogroms, but from within, from assimilation and the dissolution of Jewish identity. The new leadership decided to take the energy and resources previously devoted to cultivating relationships with the “Other”, and to invest instead in Jewish schools and other activities designed to strengthen Jewish identity and pride, so that Jews could interact with confidence with their non-Jewish fellow citizens.

Manuel, “Manny” Batshaw, one of the people with whom I spoke on about David Rome, explained the situation just described. Born in Montreal in 1915, Batshaw at age 95, was still focused on and active in community affairs at the time of our interview.<sup>32</sup>

During this interview, Batshaw shared his perspective on the shift in power in Jewish life in Canada from the CJC to the Federation of Jewish agencies. This was probably the most significant transformation in the identity and integration of this community since it first established itself in Montreal and in Canada. Batshaw spoke of the era of the great founders of community, men such as HM Caiserman, Saul Hayes, and David Rome. These men were individualists, devoted to Jewish life; often acting alone; they were pioneers, who marked the community in profound ways. Batshaw spoke of a kind of competition between himself, then head of Federation, and Saul Hayes, Executive Director of the CJC, to see who would be Montreal’s most important Jewish professional. Batshaw won, thus marking the beginning of a time when community workers would show a new kind of community solidarity. Batshaw gave his analysis of the two different approaches to Jewish identity and continuity adopted by Rome on one hand, and by the Federation on the other:

... [David Rome thought that it was] more important to have the bishops acknowledge the Jews *through him*, rather than for us to hold our own, through approaching the non-Jew with confidence ... Being political, producing politicians ... But generally, it was to stand up and be counted as Jews. And to do that, you had to feel proud of being Jewish, you had to be educated in being Jewish. That’s the way we wanted to present ourselves. Rome would say, we have to do this on the bishop level .... I think that’s two very different approaches ....

If Batshaw’s comments on the different approaches adopted by Rome as compared with the new leadership are correct, this does not mean that one was better than the other. There certainly was and is a need for the Jewish collective to combat assimilation by strengthening the community, its identity and its self-confidence. Nonetheless, Rome stuck to his own approach, which was to turn towards the Other in order to cultivate personal relationships, with the bishops or with others. The examples given in this final section demonstrate ways in which this approach has continued to bear fruit. Further, Rome’s conviction that Jews had to be encouraged to speak French was prophetic, well ahead of his times; it would take several decades and major demographic and political changes before the community caught up.

The transition from pre-modernity to modernity that took place within the life and person of David Rome, and in his Jewish community, also took place in the Quebec society to which Rome

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<sup>32</sup> Manny Batshaw was a social worker, defender of children and founder of the Batshaw Youth and Family Centres, before becoming head of the Federation of Jewish Agencies.

immigrated. This evolution, this “Quiet Revolution” would change the priorities and actors in the dialogue arena for the Jewish community.

### *A new deal, secular nationalism*

Slowly to begin with in the 1930s and then increasing in strength in the decades up to 1960 and the “Quiet Revolution”, Quebec transformed itself from a rural society dominated by the Catholic Church into a modern, secular, nationalist state.<sup>33</sup> Jack Jedwab analyses this transition and notes its effects on Jewish-French Canadian relations.<sup>34</sup> Jedwab argues that after the Second World War, the perception developed, on both sides, that there were good reasons to dialogue. Among Quebec nationalists, there was a view that their argument in favor of a distinct, French-speaking society in Quebec would be strengthened if the Jewish minority would join them, speak French and generally lend their support. This was an approach already promoted by Rome. Naïm Kattan, who took over from Rome as public relations officer and editor of the *Bulletin du Cercle* at the CJC, did everything in his considerable powers to realize this vision.<sup>35</sup>

Jedwab cites an interesting study carried out on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Yiddish newspaper, the *Keneder Odler*. Naïm Kattan asked two questions to a series of Quebec intellectuals and politicians and published the results in the paper. Kattan wanted to gage their opinion on how Jews could help defend the French language and culture and how to improve relationships between French Canadians and Jews. Jedwab cites Conrad Langlois, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *La Patrie*, who said that the worst possible path for the Jews would be to remain entirely English-speaking and to be identified with the Anglophone community.<sup>36</sup> Jedwab also cites the nationalist historian Michel Brunet, co-founder in the 1950s of the *École de Montréal*.<sup>37</sup> Brunet thought that the timing of the Jewish leadership’s interest in French language and culture was propitious. His community was in the process of creating a distinct, modern, Francophone society. The Jewish community’s involvement could help to gain acceptance for their efforts by showing that others besides French Canadians were interested in preserving the French fact in North America. Then, feeling more confident, the French Canadians would be in a better position to cultivate interethnic relations.<sup>38</sup>

For the Jewish community, the main reason to support the Francophone cause was to help secure Quebec’s place within Canada. For Rome, as sympathetic as he was to the national aspirations of Quebecers, the only viable future for the Jews of Montreal and Quebec was as part of a united Canada, a point of view unanimously shared by the Jewish leadership. But if Rome,

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<sup>33</sup> Pierre Anciault eloquently draws a parallel between the Jews who had left their Torah-dominated *shtetls* for the life of modern, urban Montreal, and the French Canadians whom they met around the Boulevard Saint-Laurent, having experienced an analogous journey.

<sup>34</sup> JEDWAB, *op. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> Writer and literary critic, former head of the writing and publishing division of the Canada Council for the Arts, Kattan took over as press officer from Rome and edited the *Bulletin du Cercle Juif de langue française* at the Canadian Jewish Congress. While both Rome and Kattan worked hard to bring Jews and French Canadians together, their roots and ethnic origins as well as their personal styles and backgrounds were very different.

<sup>36</sup> Jedwab, *op. cit.*, 65-6.

<sup>37</sup> Founded by Brunet together with Guy Frégault and Maurice Séguin, this was an historical school that focused on the British conquest of the French colony of New France as pivotal event in the history of Quebec.

<sup>38</sup> Jack Jedwab, “The Politics of Dialogue: Rapprochement Efforts Between Jews and French Canadians, 1939-1960”, in *Renewing Our Days: Montreal Jews in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Ira Robinson and Mervin Butovsky (Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1995), 65.

Kattan, Hayes and other leaders believed in this strategy, their view was not shared by the grassroots in the Jewish community. On the contrary, despite the efforts of Congress, the polarizing effects of the separatist “menace” meant that English-speaking Jews retreated further into the Anglophone community, where they chose to make common cause.

It is important to add that the linguistic situation in Montreal’s Jewish community has continued to evolve by degrees until today.<sup>39</sup> Anglophone Jews who were afraid of the possible separation of Quebec left for English-speaking Canada or elsewhere. At the same time, the Francophone Sephardic community increased, both in absolute numbers and proportionally with respect to the English-speaking Jewish community in place. If to begin with, the latter sought to control the Sephardic immigrants and assimilate them, with the passage of time they came to appreciate the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of the Sephardim. The Anglophone Jews who remained in Quebec, and even more so their children, became bilingual. All of these changes, together both with the worsening of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and with the growth of the Hasidic community in Montreal, meant that the divisions between Jewish and non-Jewish Quebecers shifted away from language and into other areas.

Nonetheless, the linguistic issue was central during Rome’s active years. A pioneer in his understanding of this question, Rome insisted, for example, on displaying the name of the Jewish Public Library in four languages: French, English, Yiddish and Hebrew, well before the passage of Law 101 would politicize the issue.

#### ROME AMONG THE BISHOPS

The title of this article is inspired by a passage in the series of interviews that Rome’s friend Eiran Harris conducted with him.

To summarize, Rome told Harris that in 1947 he saw a newspaper announcement that attracted his attention. This was the installation of Guy Frégault as first Chair of the new *Institut d’histoire* created by Abbé Lionel Groulx at the Université de Montréal. Telling the story, Rome describes with flourish the huge room and the important people present, “all the bishops in all their robes” as well as “all the nationalists” a category to which Rome seems to ascribe equal weight.

The incident in question and its implications are emblematic of a turning point in Quebec history and of David Rome’s method of operating at this period. Present were the new generation of nationalists together with the old guard. The person being honored, the man who would head the new history institute, was Guy Frégault, who would go on to found the “Montreal school” of historiography, together with Michel Brunet and Maurice Séguin (see footnote 37 above). This school would be both scientific and nationalist in its approach, something akin to the scientific studies of Judaism that marked the transition in Germany from a Jewish life centered on religion, to modernity in an open society. The incident also shows us David Rome, having decided on his own to attend this event, without asking permission from anyone, and being the only Jew in the room. Further, the sequels to this incident were remarkable, placing Rome on the Board of Quebec’s first Arts Council. Here is how Rome described the proceedings:

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<sup>39</sup> For an appreciation of the evolution of Montreal’s Jewish community until today, see Pierre Anctil, “A Community in Transition: The Jews of Montréal”, *Contemporary Jewry* 31, N° 3 (June 25, 2011): 225-245.

It was a very spectacular event. Every Bishop of Québec was there, all in their robes, and all the dignitaries of the university and all the nationalists ... it was the élite of Canada and Québec. And there was a stranger there and someone said you know, “He’s Jewish ...” and the word spreads like that ...

and it became known that there was a Jew in the room and his name was Rome ... And I heard the word “*juif*” “*un juif*” ... Then years went by, until 1962, when by this time it was the Lesage government, ... and Guy Frégault was the Deputy Minister (of Cultural Affairs)...So he remembered in making up the list for the Arts Council, he remembered this “Jew boy” who’d been there at his installation, so he nominated me.

The point of this story was to explain to Harris why and how Rome had been named to Quebec’s first Arts Council, the only Jew to be so honored. The vocation of this council, established by the government of Jean Lesage, was to foster the development of the secular nationalist identity that was driving the then nascent Quiet Revolution. The *White Paper on Culture* (*Livre blanc sur la culture*), produced in 1965 by the Arts Council was an innovative document that anticipated future language legislation and other cultural policies. David Rome sat on the Arts Council alongside important builders of the new Quebec, including Guy Frégault himself; journalist, author, politician and senator Solange Chaput-Rolland; polyglot pioneer of international relations in Quebec, the professor and diplomat André Patry; pianist, radio commentator, administrator and educator Helmut Blume; music critic, historian and pianist Eric McLean; pioneering journalist Judith Jasmin; journalist, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Le Devoir* and politician André Laurendeau and others.<sup>40</sup> Rome chaired the libraries committee on the Council. In that role, he made a series of recommendations, including about Quebec’s national library. He also succeeded in obtaining funds in support of Hebrew and Yiddish-language writers.

One of the consequences of the relationship between Rome and Frégault was the sale to the Quebec government, in 1966, of the modern building constructed with great pride by the Jewish Public Library on the corner of Esplanade and Mount Royal. This building was renamed the Bibliothèque Aegidius-Fauteux and remained part of the national library of Quebec network until its conversion, in 2007, to a studio and performance space for Marie Chouinard, a pioneer of contemporary dance in Quebec. Despite the impressive \$300,000 selling price, the less than perfectly transparent negotiation process undertaken by Rome, acting alone, put him once again in a bad light with his Board of Directors.<sup>41</sup>

Archival documents confirm David Rome’s membership on the Arts Council, his chairing of the libraries committee and the recommendations he made there, the fact that funds were allocated to Jewish writers; the sale of the building on Esplanade to the government of Quebec is also

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<sup>40</sup> For the establishment of the Council and nomination of its first members see Paul Comtois, “Arrêt en conseil, Chambre du Conseil exécutif, Concernant la nomination des membres du Conseil Provincial des Arts”, November 22, 1961, E5 Conseil Exécutif, A.C. 2278/1961, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec. This document is signed by Paul Comtois, Lieutenant-Governor et Jean Lesage, Prime Minister of Québec.

<sup>41</sup> The then Quebec Minister of Cultural Affairs, spoke about the purchase of this building by his government in the Legislative Assembly, see Pierre Laporte (Imprimeur de la reine, 1966), Assemblée législative, Comité des crédits des Affaires culturelles,, Vol. 4 (1 et 2 mars 1966) pp. 1-67, Débats de l’Assemblée législative du Québec. For further details about the sale of the library building and the tensions surrounding it, see the Jewish Public Library Archives, “Jewish Public Library Fonds, History – Library Homes (Group III, Box G)”.

With respect to the tensions Rome experienced at the Jewish Public Library, see Harvey Golden, *Report of the Consultant to the Jewish Public Library of Montreal*, février 1970, JIAS collection, Director Joseph Kage records, series QE, boîte 013, chemise 7, Archives nationales du Congrès juif canadien, comité des charités. The author of the report moved into the Jewish Public Library for a period of six months to observe its functioning. The report recommends the firing of David Rome as director of the library, a recommendation that was implemented.

documented. Rome's manner of speaking of these things to Harris tells us much about his character, suggesting a self-image vacillating between grandeur and self-deprecation, an immigrant's vulnerability and certain grandiloquence. In speaking of his being named to the Arts Council, Rome says, "I bought my nomination!" The suggestion of cunning and craftiness tends to eclipse the real merit of the nomination or even the reality of the political dimension and the government's new interest in minorities. Confirmation that an immigrant mentality persisted comes at the end of the passage cited, when Rome talks of himself as a "Jew-boy" seeing himself through the eyes of a hostile "Other".

The complexity, the humanity and the accomplishments of this man, acting alone to protect the vital interests of his people, make of David Rome an intriguing person. A more detailed analysis of the impact of Rome's work on the Arts Council would be useful. In the mean time, I would like to turn to an area where Rome's impact was certain: in person, engaging all sorts of individuals in conversation.

#### BEHIND THE SCENES, ROME IN DIALOGUE

In the wake of the spirit of secular nationalism brought on by the Quiet Revolution, French Canada's interest in the Jews changed. For a secularizing, nationalist Quebec, the issue of "minorities" became an important one. The question to be answered in the case of Jews, the Greeks, the Portuguese and other groups had to do with their integration in Quebec society: what language would they speak? How would they educate their children? For some, the question was purely political: what can we do to get them to vote for us? For others, the interest became broader, the desire to get to know the Other. If David Rome went out alone to walk among the bishops, to visit the Other, it is also true that a number of Others left home to find their way to Rome's door. This last section will present three of these people: journalist Luc Chartrand, father Stéphane Valiquette and historian Pierre Anctil. Their examples will illustrate David Rome's way of engaging in dialogue and show some of its fruits.

Today a respected journalist and international correspondent, Luc Chartrand met David Rome for the first time around 1977, at the beginning of his journalistic career. At the time, together with a colleague, Chartrand had proposed to a government publication a series of articles on the education of minorities. The proposal was accepted, and Chartrand chose to study the Jewish minority. Someone told him that the Jews were the People of the Book and that it was David Rome, archivist at the Canadian Jewish Congress, who was guardian of the books for the Jewish community. So it was that Chartrand found himself at David Rome's door.

During my interview with him, Chartrand identified himself as a "pure laine" or old-stock Quebecker, and as such the Other for someone like David Rome. Chartrand then described the welcome offered him by Rome, both at the CJC archives and also at home, in his kitchen.

*Ma généalogie québécoise remonte au 17<sup>e</sup> siècle ... Donc je suis vraiment ce qu'on appelle un « pure laine ». J'avais le background canadien-français typique pour rencontrer quelqu'un comme David Rome, à titre de personne qui fait parti de l'Autre [...].*

*[Rome était] un homme très souriant, très sympathique, très chaleureux, qui avait envie de parler ...et donc c'est quelqu'un qu'on avait envie ... on avait de parler avec lui, quoi ... Donc, je suis retourné le voir souvent, aux*

archives, et chez lui, dans sa cuisine, prendre un café... Combien de fois est-ce que j'ai rencontré David Rome dans ma vie ... ? Je dirais une vingtaine de fois ...<sup>42</sup>

Apart from his friendliness and the information he imparted about Jewish history and Jewish life, David Rome connected with Chartrand, he told me, as a young nationalist. Rome apparently showed Chartrand aspects of his own history that he himself did not know. One example was the role played by the clergy generally and by Abbé Groulx more specifically, in articulating French Canadian pride and identity. As a young secularist, Chartrand told me he never would have believed that the new Quebec nationalism owed anything whatsoever to the clergy, which was considered *passé* by his generation. Chartrand added that Rome was fully aware of the anti-Semitic side of Groulx, but that he knew how to make distinctions and evaluate the different dimensions on their own merits. Chartrand said that Rome gave a balanced appreciation of Groulx and his contribution. Chartrand summarizes by stating what for me is at the heart of dialogue, the fact of being brought to see a well-known landscape from a different perspective:

C'est la personne qui me faisait à moi comprendre des choses d'un point de vu autre que le mien. C'est-à-dire que c'était quelqu'un qui avait une vision sur la société québécoise qui était différente, une autre vision, puis qui me faisait comprendre que tout ne pouvait pas être vu du même point de vu, donc, c'est pour ça que c'était intéressant.<sup>43</sup>

Luc Chartrand told me that his interest in David Rome stimulated him to seek other perspectives on the man. In order to do this, in 1999 Chartrand went to talk with Father Stéphane Valiquette about Rome. Chartrand lent me his recording of this conversation, a precious document from which the following quotations are taken.

Father Stéphane Valiquette was one of the pioneers of Jewish-Christian dialogue in Quebec. Valiquette met Jews for the first time in the Saint-Jean-Baptiste neighborhood where he was born, in Montreal, and where he was in the habit of helping his Jewish neighbors with different jobs on the Sabbath.<sup>44</sup>

At the time of the conversation in question, Valiquette was close to 87 years old and Chartrand, close to 45. Through the conversation between them, the preoccupations of the two generations are expressed. As a young secular Quebecker, Chartrand wanted to see whether Valiquette could confirm that Rome was really a cultural rather than a religious Jew, and that he was interested in politics ... Valiquette answered that in his opinion, Rome's influence was more in the social than the political arena, that Rome wanted to encourage dialogue among the different elements of society, so that they could come to know each other ... Valiquette also states his own motivations for contacting the Canadian Jewish Congress at the end of the 1930s:

Chartrand : L'intérêt de David Rome dans le dialogue avec les chrétiens, est-ce que vous diriez qu'il se situe [...] d'abord sur le plan politique?

<sup>42</sup> My Quebec genealogy goes back to the 17th century ... So I am truly what they call "pure laine". I had the typical French Canadian background to meet someone like David Rome, as a person who belonged to the Other [...]. [Rome was] a man who smiled a lot, who was very friendly, very warm, who liked to talk ...and so one just ... one just felt like talking to him ... So I went back to see him often, at the Archives, and at his place, in his kitchen, to have a coffee ... How many times did I meet David Rome in my life ... ? I would say about twenty times ...

<sup>43</sup> Chartrand, interview *op.cit.* He is the person who helped me to see things from another point of view than my own. That is, that he had a vision of Quebec society that was different, another vision, that then helped me understand that everything could not always be seen from the same point of view, which is what was interesting.

<sup>44</sup> To locate this parish see "La Paroisse Saint-Jean-Baptiste De Montréal - Histoire Du Plateau Mont-Royal", n.d., <http://histoireplateau.canalblog.com/archives/2008/06/29/9750618.html>.

Valiquette : Je dirais sur le plan social. C'était le fait qu'on avait une population juive ici, qu'on accueillait. Donc l'idée de société se pose, que les différents éléments de la société se connaissent et se parlent ... le dialogue entre les composantes de la population .... Il faut mettre ça dans les années 37, 38 39, tous les antisémites ... Alors moi, ça m'a frappé ça ... Et moi qui a connu les Juifs tout jeune, je n'acceptais pas cette idée de haine, pour moi c'était inacceptable. J'ai eu l'idée de demander la permission d'aller visiter le Congrès juif canadien ... <sup>45</sup>

It was at the Canadian Jewish Congress that that Valiquette met H.M. Caiserman and after that David Rome. Thus began Valiquette's long career as a pioneer in his own right of the dialogue between Jews and Christians. <sup>46</sup>

### *The Case of Pierre Anctil*

The relationship between David Rome and Pierre Anctil merits a separate chapter, if not more. Their meeting was akin in some ways to that between Rome and Chartrand, since both involved the same generation of young nationalists. But the circumstances, due to character or other factors, were such that the Rome/Anctil relationship stands out as unique.

Pierre Anctil was born in 1952 in Québec City, the third generation of urban Quebeckers in his family. His high school and Cégep studies were at the Petit Séminaire, a private, Catholic institution founded in 1668 by Mgr François de Laval. Anctil continued at Université Laval up to the Masters level. His Masters thesis focused on the Quebec rural context that he had not known personally, but that was an essential part of the then current narrative of Quebec identity.

When it came time to decide where to go for further studies, Anctil considered his options carefully. The Ivy League universities, and the Anglo-Protestant privilege that characterized them, did not interest him. Neither did he want to follow his colleagues who were leaving to study in French, where Anctil considered the system too rigid and formalized. He therefore chose New York, and the New School for Social Research, as the place to pursue his doctorate in anthropology. Nonetheless, according to Anctil, his arrival in Manhattan, was "the shock of my life", so different was this urban environment from what he had known until then.

It was in New York, studying at the New School for Social Research and living on the Lower East Side, that Pierre Anctil really met Jews for the first time. These years were also critical ones for his intellectual development. Anctil came from Université Laval, where the burning questions of the hour had to do with Quebec nationalism. At the New School, he found an environment where he could think seriously about such issues together with fellow students and professors, many of them Jewish, who also cared deeply about such things. At the New School, Anctil could debate the pros and cons of nationalism with anthropologist Stanley Diamond; he also learned to be attentive to language and its importance to an understanding of culture.

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<sup>45</sup> Stéphane Valiquette, "Entrevue de Stéphane Valiquette faite par Luc Chartrand, au sujet de David Rome,"

Enregistrement audio, 1999, Collection privé de Luc Chartrand.

Chartrand : The importance of David Rome for dialogue with the Christians... Would you say it was mostly political?

Valiquette : I would say it was societal... the fact that we had a Jewish population here, who we were welcoming ... the idea of a society comes up; that the different elements of a society should know and speak to each other ... dialogue ... among the different elements of the society. You have to put this in the context of 1937, 38, 39 ... all the anti-Semites ... That struck me, I who had known the Jews from my youth ... I couldn't take this idea of hatred, it was unacceptable ... So I had the idea of asking permission to go and visit the Canadian Jewish Congress.

<sup>46</sup> For an appreciation of Stéphane Valiquette, see the website of Jewish Christian relations at [http://www.jcrelations.net/Un\\_pionnier\\_canadien\\_du\\_dialogue\\_entre\\_juifs\\_et\\_chr\\_tiens.2872.0.html?L=6](http://www.jcrelations.net/Un_pionnier_canadien_du_dialogue_entre_juifs_et_chr_tiens.2872.0.html?L=6)

When Ancil returned to his native country, it was to move from his birthplace of Quebec City to Montreal. There he was hired in 1980, to work at the *Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture* (IQRC) under the leadership of Fernand Dumont. In the wake of the first accession to power of the Parti québécois, questions about how to envision, construct and maintain a Francophone society were top of the agenda.

One big challenge was how to deal with the “allophone” minorities, immigrant groups whose mother tongue was neither French nor English<sup>47</sup>. The support of these groups was considered very important by the Parti québécois. Thus relations with the Greek, Portuguese, Jewish and other communities became an important political issue.

This was the context in which Fernand Dumont sent the young Pierre Ancil to meet and get to know the Jews. An initial challenge was to take over a manuscript that had been begun by David Rome and Gary Caldwell and to see it through to publication.<sup>48</sup>

Meeting David Rome was a pivotal point in Pierre Ancil’s path. Rome was an eloquent spokesman for the Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants.<sup>49</sup> He insisted on highlighting the cultural richness and human depth of these people, most of them poor, but determined, and their institutional and cultural contributions to Canada. Ancil listened well. Further, he likely remembered the emphasis placed by Dale Fitzgerald, his professor of sociolinguistics at the New School, on the importance of language to understanding a culture. In 1984, Ancil signed up for a first course at McGill, determined to learn Yiddish in order to continue his exploration of the immigrant Jewish community.

In 1988, Fernand Dumont decided that Ancil was taking things too far. Going to take a look at what the Jews were up to was one thing, but to get so deeply involved was going too far, even risking a betrayal of the Quebec nationalist identity. Dumont placed the options on the table very clearly: either Ancil would agree to drop the Jewish file, or else he was free to go elsewhere to continue his explorations. For Ancil, the choice was a difficult as it was clear. He had to leave the IQRC, but in doing so, he would be distancing himself from the nationalist intellectual milieu that he had been part of and where he in so many ways belonged.

Pierre Ancil explained in an interview with me, the reasons why he remained intent on pursuing his Jewish studies. All that he had read and thought about nationalism, the issues that had occupied him for the past decade, had brought him to the conclusion that the quality of openness and inclusiveness of a nation would depend on how it treated its minorities. And an open, inclusive, nationalism was the only kind that interested Ancil. For him, this question turned first of all around the Yiddish-speaking Jews: neither Catholic nor Protestant, speaking neither English nor French, they were the first Other in linguistic, cultural and religious terms to arrive in Quebec:

J’ai réalisé que la clef de la question, l’élément pivot de cette question, c’était la communauté juive. La question de la diversité, du nationalisme, de l’ouverture à l’autre ... tout tourne autour de la communauté juive. [...] À partir des années 1980, j’ai réalisé que c’est la question juive qui est la question fondamentale. C’est les Juifs qui posent

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<sup>47</sup> Note that this issue was raised more than 15 year earlier by the avant-garde White Paper on Culture produced by the Arts Council on which David Rome sat.

<sup>48</sup> This manuscript was published as Gary Caldwell and Pierre Ancil, *Juifs Et Réalités Juives Au Québec* (P.U.L. Diffusion, 1984).

<sup>49</sup> Rome explains the complexity of his personal situation to Harris, saying that the Yiddish-speaking elite of Montreal did not accept him because he had done his schooling in English, while at the Canadian Jewish Congress he was excluded because of his support for the Yiddish language and culture.



la question la plus difficile : [...] Est-ce qu'on peut rester Juif et être Québécois? Apprendre le français, avoir des rapports intenses avec le Canada français, le Québec français, le Montréal français, mais rester Juif ...<sup>50</sup>

The intensity of this question and the need to answer it has taken Pierre Anctil deep into the study of the Yiddish-speaking immigrant community in Montréal. He has become an authority on this community and its history. As professor, he has introduced these Jews to a new generation of francophone Quebecers, a number of whom have produced masters and doctoral theses in the area, some of whom have followed in his footsteps and studied Yiddish. As a translator, Anctil has made a series of Yiddish books accessible to French Québec, in at least one case, even before English translations were available.

### CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing reflection has presented the work of David Rome as the expression of the man and his deeply-held values, values formed in an intensely Jewish world, itself in transformation, in the period before its elimination during the Second World War. I have sketched the evolving politico-religious context, both in the Jewish community and among the Francophone Quebecers, that Rome encountered upon his arrival in Montreal.

The story of "Rome Among the Bishops" offered an opportunity to reflect on the changing scene in Quebec as well as a chance to observe Rome's independent way of being in the world. This story has also presented new information about Rome's participation in Quebec's first Arts Council, information that is worthy of further study.

Finally, I provided extracts from interviews with three people who knew David Rome, in order to indicate the kind of impact he had in person, and to underline his contribution in this area.

One of the things that I was looking for during the interviews I carried out with people who knew David Rome was an answer to the following question: were David Rome's dialogical activities motivated purely by a kind of survival instinct, the desire to protect the vital interests of the Jewish people; or on the contrary, did he truly want to approach the Others out of friendliness and a desire to know them? As I come to the end of the present reflection, I find that my question was poorly formulated. Both poles existed for Rome, as well as the whole range of variations that lies between them. At certain moments, and undoubtedly for particular reasons, Rome was the little "Jew boy", the product of a world where "We knew there were Goyim, and that by nature they were hostile". But in the absence of imminent threats, Rome was a very curious man, who loved getting to know people of all kinds, as a way to inform himself about the world and also simply for the pleasure of human interaction. As Luc Chartrand put it, he was "a man who smiled a lot, who was very friendly, very warm, who liked to talk ...". With respect to his longer-term dialogical relationships, with Father Jacques Langlais or with Pierre Anctil, these cannot be reduced to simplistic dualisms. So, for

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<sup>50</sup> I realized that the key to the question, its pivotal point, was the Jewish community. The whole question of diversity, of nationalism, openness to the other ... Everything turned on the on the Jewish community. [...] At the beginning of the 1980s, I realized that the Jewish question was the fundamental one. The Jews posed the most difficult question: [...] Can we remain Jews and be Québécois? Can we learn French and have intense relationships with French Canada, but stay Jewish?

those interested in dialogue and its complexities, myself among them, Rome's entire body of work is a rich territory to be explored.