

## **O Canada! The Year in Review (1974)**

A poll of Canadians from coast to coast reported that an overwhelming 97% of the population would rather live in Canada than any other place in the world. Yet Canadians are not sure whether Canada will survive as a nation.

The Parti Quebecois scored an electoral victory. Quebec's premier, Jacques Parizeau, and his cabinet are determined to become "Maitres chez nous" Masters in their own home. Next year, a referendum will be held to give Quebecers the opportunity to decide their future. The PQ's victory showed again the unfairness of Canada's electoral system. The PQ had only 44.7% of the votes but was given 77 seats, or 63% of 125 seats in Quebec's National Assembly. The Liberal Party won 44.3% of the votes but won only 47 (38%) of the seats. The election clearly highlighted the need for proportional representation. Canadians have become weary of the separation debate. Many believe that the nation is being held at ransom. Some even assert that no efforts should be made nor any more money spent to keep Quebec within the confederation. The entire Canadian society has moved away from its Christian roots. Quebec, the province once so tightly bound to the Roman Catholic Church, moved the fastest. The forces of change began with the Quiet Revolution in 1960. Secularism has become the predominant "faith" of many Quebecers. Yet there is greater opportunity for the spread of the Gospel than ever before. Evangelical congregations are growing. The small Eglise Chretienne Reformee is also seeing a gradual numerical increase.

The federal Liberal Party enjoyed unprecedented popularity. Its high rating was attributed to the popularity of Jean Chretien, the prime minister, who asked Canadians to support his party so that "the right policies" can continue to be devised. These "right policies" have not been defined. The nation has not been given a road map to follow. Liberals promise salvation through technology and joining the "information highway." Nothing was said about the negative impact technology can have upon society; the people whose jobs may become redundant because of it, and the possible consequences for the environment.

At the Vancouver convention the Christian Heritage Party tried to put to rest the internal party conflict, which had led to decline in membership and financial support. Jean Blaquiére, a retired RCMP staff sergeant from Montreal, was elected party leader. The party also named Carol Speelman, of Strathroy, Ontario, as president. So far the party has suffered from a lack of exposure in both the Christian and secular press.

Political correctness contributed to a worsening of an adversarial mentality, which made open public debate extremely difficult, and a public consensus nearly impossible to achieve. It has become a growth industry, with little or no grassroots support. Our governments have also been busy enforcing politically correct morality. The new affirmative action program, affecting the hiring, promotion, and compensation of women, aboriginal people, the handicapped, and visible minority groups, and pay equity were in the news. Ontario's NDP government led the way in social engineering. Many are now afraid to speak out on anything lest they are branded racist or sexist. Even Christian

institutions were affected by it. Toronto based Ontario Bible College adopted a new policy requiring the use of inclusive language in all college communication, including lectures, published writings, chapel services. Students are required to use such language in written or oral submissions.

Canadians were told that the economy is on the upswing, but the unemployment rate especially among young people, is still appallingly high. The federal and provincial debt levels are immoral. Canada's escalating \$700 billion debt can no longer be ignored. Our nation cannot morally justify spending beyond its means as though money grows on trees. Our governments need to learn stewardship and have the courage to make cutbacks in social spending. Our future generations should not be saddled with debts accumulated since the Trudeau years.

Canada continued to experience a decline in church attendance. Cultural, economic and educational leaders led the way. Canadians no longer share a moral consensus. Moral standards have become matters of personal choice. Ethical questions are decided through public opinion surveys, briefs to bodies like the Royal Commission on Reproductive Technology, and through going to the courts to demand rights. The pro-life movement has lost the battle. Wayne Norman, who teaches ethics at the University of Ottawa, says that students are now interested in questions like animal rights, free speech, political correctness and the environment, but abortion is no longer an issue. Yet, since 1968, according to government statistics, with recent-year figures projected, the total number of abortion deaths has been calculated to be 1,598,906. Abortion is still Canada's number one killer. The biggest ethical debate Parliament will have to handle in the near future will be the controversial topic of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. NDP Svend Robinson, parliament's first openly gay member, is a strong euthanasia advocate. In the absence of a moral consensus, the prospects are frightening.

The relaxing of sexual standards has been a feature of public life since the 1960s. Sales of pornography of every description, including child pornography, have raked in millions of dollars. Because of a lack of moral consensus and a hue and cry for individual rights and choice, any form of censorship has become extremely difficult. Prominent author Pierre Berton and the feminist June Callwood declared that Canada doesn't need any kind of child pornography law at all.

The gay and lesbian agenda continued to stir controversy. Roman Catholic Liberal MP Roseanne Skoke from Nova Scotia made headlines when she declared homosexuality to be "immoral" and "unnatural." Skoke took exception to the inclusion of the wording of "sexual orientation" in the proposed amendments to the Criminal Code dealing with hate-motivated crimes. She was taken to task by MP Svend Robinson, who called her remarks "hateful." Skoke replied that under no circumstances would she ever retract her statements. Many Christian organizations encouraged their membership to write Skoke a letter of support.

Gambling became a rich source of revenue for provincial government. The Windsor, Ontario casino opened its doors in the beginning of the year at its temporary quarters in a building which had housed the city's art gallery. It proved an instant hit with gamblers, primarily from neighboring Detroit. Despite the negative moral impact of gambling, the cost of addiction in human and financial terms, the false lure of economic development, provincial governments are bound and determined to build more casinos to fill their cash-starved treasuries.

Another sign of our post-Christian times was the demise of the People for Sunday Association (formerly the Lord's Day Alliance) after having been in existence for 106 years. The Christian school movement also suffered setbacks. The Newfoundland government proposed to rid the province of its denominational school system and replace it with a non-denominational model. The decisive fact was funding. Parental rights and choice were shoved aside. Roman Catholics and Pentecostals, who still operate their own school systems, were "very much alarmed and upset" by the proposals. Roman Catholic Archbishop James MacDonald called them "unacceptable." And the Ontario Court of Appeal dismissed an appeal by the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools which argued that the government's refusal to fund other religious schools than Roman Catholics is unconstitutional. The decision will be appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada. Toward the end of the year the first Christian school in Canada (in Brampton Ontario) associated with the Reformed community saw its teachers join a union – the Christian Labour Association of Canada. Another Christian school in St. Catharines recently followed suit.

The Christian church witnessed the "holy laughter" spectacle during revival meetings at Toronto's airport Vineyard church. People from all over the world came to observe and to participate in it. An ambitious, expensive, nation-wide prayer rally, sponsored by Why Encounter, was held in October. The purpose of the event was to enlist 100,000 "prayer warriors" to pray daily for two years for every family listed in Canada's telephone directories.

For the first time in 70 years "Christian" radio stations are now on the air. In early January, AM 600 CHRX in Vancouver went off the air and a day later became "Radio CKBD-The Bridge," a Christian contemporary music station, which has excellent response according to its marketing director Mark Wilson. The CRTC authorized Radio Villemaire in Montreal and Foundation Humanite in Quebec City to offer religious French language programming on FM radio.

As secularism became more predominant in our nation, it became increasingly intolerant toward Christians who take a stance for their faith in the "naked public square." The reaction to Roseanne Skoke's view on homosexuality was one such glaring example. Canada's Christian traditions are rapidly becoming a memory.

As heirs of God's Kingdom, living between the Ascension and the Parousia, we don't despair. There is no reason for pessimism. Standing at the threshold of a new year, we

pledge to continue on with proclaiming, in word and deed, the Biblical norms for man and society. But the Kingdom of righteousness and peace will not come in the here and now. May our year end prayer be "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 2:20).

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