



New Stories to Tell: Living Ecumenism Today

A project of the
Anglican-Roman Catholic
Dialogue of Canada

Conclusion

According to the standard count, the ecumenical movement is just over one hundred years old. Anglicans and Roman Catholics have been engaged in their uniquely close and productive relationship of ecumenical dialogue for about fifty of those years. In that time a great deal of progress has been made on many of the most divisive points of divergence that have separated us since the 16th century.

In this volume we have alluded to many of the international statements which the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches have arrived at through their dialogue, particularly those of ARCIC II. Without question they represent significant breakthroughs that are the spiritual and intellectual fruit of a lot of hard and patient work. Roman Catholics and Anglicans today have much to be thankful for, and to celebrate, in this regard.

However, it is also the case that many of these agreed statements and joint declarations have not always been as widely known as they deserve to be. With many of the ARCIC II documents now between 20–30 years old, there is a generation that, for the most part, is only minimally aware of their contents, and may not feel the gravity of their tremendous progress as those who lived through what was really a golden age of ecumenical progress. Nor, indeed, have these theological treatises always had the kind of concrete impact on the actual structures and interactions of our churches on the ground. As beautiful and brilliant

as some of their discoveries are, they can easily stay sitting comfortably on the bookshelves of specialists, never seeing much of the light of day.

One reason for these challenges is that the rifts between our churches are not only the result of theological differences and disagreements. In many cases, the separations also developed or were deepened because of failures of relationship and corresponding lack of desire to find authentic yet generous and creative ways through doctrinal and practical tensions. Things like political and cultural isolation, a loss of shared history and common goals, linguistic differences, even geographic distance, enhanced the feeling of how far apart Anglicans and Roman Catholics were.

If this was true of how we grew apart, we should not be surprised that our growing back into greater unity as churches will require much more than texts that speak to doctrinal convergence. Christian unity is something that must be carried out in and through the lives and choices and actions of actual Christian people re-establishing bonds of love, shared history, and common cause; Christian unity can never exist only on a page or in the mind, it must be made in the flesh. In fact, it is through the very sorts of friendships and common prayer and shared witness that we have seen in this collection of stories that the spiritual and emotional conditions necessary for intellectual breakthroughs are created.

It is for this very reason that we have undertaken this project. These stories we have collected and retold help to bring the many formal expressions of a growing ecumenical consensus to life, and to illustrate how

others might give them life in similar ways where they live.

Of course, the stories we have heard are all about people living in the land commonly called Canada. Because of this, they are shaped by the particular characteristics of history, politics, language, culture, and geography which make this place what it uniquely is. We saw in the Introduction how there is a deeply embedded need for healing and reconciliation at the heart of this country, and one which draws together the healing of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples with the healing of schism between Christian communities. In fact, settler Anglicans and settler Roman Catholics have the opportunity to receive a gift of grace from this Indigenous expression of Christianity that resists being tied to the inherited divisions of the Church of the colonial age.

Our communion as Anglicans and Roman Catholics may be as yet still “imperfect” or “incomplete.” Nevertheless, new stories show that, thanks be to God, it is very much also “real.” Now is the time to make that communion more and more complete, ever more perfect, into the future. As followers of Jesus, each one of us has a vocation to be artisans of reconciliation. There are many different ways by which we can contribute to this task. We hope you will find your ways, and that as you do you will also share the story.

