



*Members of the Canadian Council of Churches Governing Board /
Credit: Kaeli Sweigard, Canadian Council of Churches*

CHAPTER XIV

Widening the conversation: Multilateral dialogue

Most of the stories in this volume speak to situations or initiatives in which Roman Catholics and Anglicans are engaged in one to one or bilateral relationships. This narrative is one that speaks at length to the experience of Canadian Anglicans and Roman Catholics working together in the multilateral context, in this case that of the Canadian Council of Churches and its Commission on Faith and Witness.

The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) began in 1944. It was a time when the world was weary of war and violence, and churches in Canada took joy in coming together when so much seemed to be com-

ing apart. The Faith and Order Commission of the CCC began in 1950, to help Canadian churches to rediscover each other theologically, and contribute to and be nourished by the worldwide ecumenical movement. The Anglican Church of Canada was a founding member of the CCC and has been heavily involved in its work from the very start. Following upon the Catholic Church's entrance into the ecumenical movement with the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) was able to appoint an official delegation to the CCC's Commission on Faith and Order in 1971. From that moment to the present day the two churches have been meeting each other not only in their bilateral dialogues but also in fellowship with many other Christian traditions in Canada.

In 1989, the Commission known as Faith and Order took on the new name the Commission on Faith and Witness (CFW) in order to reflect a larger mandate that included concern for mission and interfaith relations in a changing Canada. This multilateral context of CFW presents a different kind of engagement for the two churches, calling them to reflect theologically on subjects broadly relevant to Canadian life; to seek to honestly name and face real differences in how they understand and live out the revealed Word of God.

Over the course of its history CFW has created a common baptismal catechesis reflecting the mutual recognition of baptism which many of the member churches have expressed; wrestled with theological issues underlying sometimes very painful social questions such as the legacy of residential schools; reflected on the ethics of euthanasia and physician-assisted dying; spoken about perspectives on the role of the churches in disaster relief, national and international tragedies, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, etc.; and prepared pastoral resources on suf-

fering and hope, interchurch marriages, human personhood, the meaning of salvation, and the human person.

Whether the churches find difference, or convergence, or both, through this process of multilateral dialogue, they have consistently shown that they are committed to walking together, discerning together, and, wherever possible, witnessing together in varying circumstances and changing times. Though the outcomes of this work are certainly not binding on the churches in any formal way, they do possess a form of authority that is taken seriously and valued by the member churches in their own respective processes of discernment.



This form of multilateral engagement is an example of how the Church and the churches discern and hand on the meaning of our faith (i.e. the Tradition of the Apostles) in each and every age. In *The Gift of Authority*, we read: “The handing on and reception of apostolic Tradition is an act of communion whereby the Spirit unites the local churches of our day with those that preceded them in the one apostolic faith. The process of Tradition entails the constant and perpetual reception and communication of the revealed Word of God in many varied circumstances and continually changing times” (GA, 16).

The story Christianity has carried brings God’s Word to people in all sorts of different times and places. The story of God’s love does not get told just once, or in just one place or to just one person, but is continually being told and retold, heard and re-heard, in different ways, by different people, in different places. Christianity does not need to fear this process,

knowing that the oneness of God and God's truth is not undermined by it but rather discovered in it.

This common understanding encourages our two traditions, along with other Christian communities, to discover ways today, in Canada, that God's love can connect people across time or space; ways we see people saying Yes to God because God has said Yes to us (cf. GA, 8). The delight of discovering these connections is one of the reasons there is a Commission on Faith and Witness as an integral part of an organization like the CCC, and why the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in Canada are committed to it.

How is our understanding of the Word of God both challenged and enriched by hearing in concert with others?

What circumstance or challenge makes it important for your church to listen to the Word of God together with others in this moment?

As Anglicans and Roman Catholics grow together ecumenically, we desire to grow in unity with other Christian communities as well. Do you have any local contexts where Christians of very diverse traditions come together for study, prayer, or common mission?