

**Highlights of the meeting of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue (Canada),
September 28-30, 2006 (at Villa St. Martin, Pierrefonds, QC)**

Present at this meeting of the Dialogue:

For the Anglican Church of Canada: Most Rev. Bruce Stavert, Archbishop of Quebec (co-chair); Ms. Ann Cruickshank, Montreal; Rev. Kevin Flynn, Saint Paul University, Ottawa; Rev. Dr. David Neelands, Trinity College, Toronto (not present on Friday); Captain, the Rev. Michelle Staples, Canadian Forces chaplain. As secretary on behalf of the ACC: Rev. Canon Alyson Barnett-Cowan, Director, Department of Faith, Worship and Ministry of General Synod.

For the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops: Most Rev. François Lapierre, Bishop of Saint-Hyacinthe (co-chair); Dr. Susan Brown, King's College, University of Western Ontario; Dr. Catherine Clifford, St. Paul University, Ottawa; Rev. Jacques Faucher, Director of Ecumenism, Archdiocese of Ottawa; Rev. Dr. Luis Melo, S.M., Saint Paul's College, University of Manitoba and Director of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Archdiocese of St. Boniface. As secretary on behalf of the CCCB: Ms. Janet Somerville, Toronto.

For full communion to blossom between their two churches, how precisely would Anglicans and Roman Catholics have to agree on the place of Mary, mother of Jesus, in the plan of God?

Would it be sufficient jointly to honour Mary as an exemplary disciple of Jesus, as the greatest among God's saints, and to use in common the awesome title *theotokos* (God-bearer, or Mother of God) which was solemnly proclaimed of her by the fifth-century Council of Ephesus?

Or would the restoration of communion require also the acceptance by Anglicans of later developments, including the two Marian dogmas that were defined by Popes long after the separation of our churches?

These questions, among others, were on the agenda of Canada's Anglican/Roman Catholic dialogue group while it met in Montreal for its second gathering (September 28—30) of the year 2006. The group was continuing its work on a recent statement agreed to at the international level of Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue (ARCIC): *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*.

On the first evening, two theologians from the dialogue group gave a public lecture, hosted by the Montreal (Anglican) Diocesan College, on ARCIC's statement and on the distance each church will need to travel in order to turn this agreement into a stepping-stone towards full communion with each other. The speakers were Dr. Catherine Clifford and Dr. Kevin Flynn. The audience, small and lively, engaged the speakers with questions about the text and about the churches' readiness (or lack of readiness) to "receive", *ecumenically*, specific traditions about Mary in the plan of God.

On Friday, with Bishop François Lapierre of St. Hyacinthe in the chair, and with updates on each others' lives duly shared, the dialogue group began its own prayer and discussion.

How have events in history shaped the understanding of Mary in both churches?

Dr. Susan Brown presented a discussion paper on *Marian Dogmas as Responses to Enlightenment Anthropology*. Was the 1854 papal proclamation of Mary's Immaculate Conception partly a way of presenting a Christian image of grace-made, humble human perfection... to rebuke the proud, self-made "Enlightenment man" who throws off all traditional restraints in his drive to rational self-realization? And was the Assumption, defined in 1950, a symbolic "compendium of Christian humanism" to challenge the resolutely materialistic vision of the human person promoted, in different ways, by Communism and scientism? If these doctrines can be seen as pastoral responses to dominant cultural "heresies", would it be easier for non-Catholic Christians to see them as legitimate?

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has worked hard to re-educate Catholics on the rightful place of Our Lady in Christian life, so that Catholic devotion to Mary can grow in biblical and Christ-centered directions. Father Luis Melo presented a collection of new, official liturgical celebrations of the Mother of God, showing how carefully they follow the words of Scripture and the advice of Pope Paul VI's *Marialis Cultus*. Would these new prayers be equally at home in contemporary Anglican liturgy?

Later, with Archbishop Bruce Stavert chairing, Rev. (Captain) Michelle Staples described how she worked with a group in her own inter-denominational congregation on Canadian Forces Base Greenwood to develop a way for ordinary church-goers to study *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*. The participants had at first found the text distant and abstract. By developing dramas based on events from the Gospel stories of Mary, and by linking the text with well-known scriptural passages, the distance was overcome and people began to see Mary in terms of their own lives and struggles.

A final look at history came when Dr. Neelands presented an analysis of *How the Anglican Divines of the 16th and 17th century dealt with St. Mary the Virgin*.. It took more than a generation of debate for the early Anglican theologians to find a prudent balance between their Catholic traditions and the new strictness of the Reformers. If prayer is to be offered to God alone, and Christian hope is grounded only in Christ, how do we nevertheless honour Mary, whom God so honoured? The details of their struggle are fascinating in the light of today's effort to "re-receive" ecumenically traditions about the Mother of God.

Between these prepared presentations, the dialogue participants wrestled with practical questions. How can the fruits of ecumenical studies, like the ARCIC documents, find a home and a forum in congregations and dioceses? How can ecumenists help bishops to embody ecumenical agreements in practical pastoral policies? How can we help ordinary Anglicans and Catholics to pray, study and serve together? What would be a helpful Canadian response to the questions now being raised at the international level of Anglican-Roman Catholic encounter?

Morning and evening, the participants prayed together, alternating between Anglican and Roman Catholic forms of prayer. Twice they gathered around the altar for the Eucharist, participating according to the current disciplines of each church.

The next meeting of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue will be held in Ottawa, March 1-3, 2007.