

Canadian ecumenists promote new joint study of Mary in God's plan

Twelve members of Canada's **Anglican/Roman Catholic Dialogue** met in Montreal's *Centre 7400* for their semi-annual gathering, **January 31—February 2, 2008**. Together they added a layer to the slow, patient work of the international dialogue between their two churches; and together they looked at new and pressing developments arising now in the life of each church. They also, as always, prayed together morning and evening, and (within the limits of the discipline of each Church) celebrated the Eucharist together.

One new question that has arisen is the proposal for an Anglican Covenant now being considered by all the Provinces in the global Anglican Communion. In 2003, The Lambeth Commission on Communion was established by the Archbishop of Canterbury "to seek a way forward which would encourage communion...when serious differences threaten the life of a diverse worldwide Church". *The Windsor Report*, published in 2004 by the Lambeth Commission, began a search for forms of communion-wide authority that could sustain unity in faith when believers seriously disagree, as they disagree at present on some matters of sexual ethics, homosexuality in particular. A Covenant to which all Anglican provinces could subscribe is one proposed means of expressing, defining and sustaining ecclesial unity. Drafts of such a Covenant are now under study world-wide.

The Canadian dialogue members looked carefully at the text of *The Windsor Report*. Their discussion was led by Rev. Dr. Gilles Routhier of Laval University in Quebec. Another member of the dialogue, Dr. Catherine Clifford of St. Paul University in Ottawa, had recently contributed a paper on the proposed Covenant to a conference at Wycliffe College in Toronto organized by SEAD (Scholarly Engagement in Anglican Doctrine). Those two theologians acknowledged that the issues being debated within Anglicanism are profoundly difficult also within their own Church, but not handled there so openly and not in a synodal setting. Both churches, they affirmed, are struggling to learn how to be truly world-wide churches. Both sets of believers find that issues at the interface between faith and culture(s) often take them to the limits of their human wisdom. By what means—traditional and/or newly designed—will God's Providence sustain today's churches in revealed truth and in mutual peace? What principles and events in the life of each Church might help the other Church to handle these humanly difficult questions, and apply the Gospel prudently and truthfully in our own time? Ecumenical conversations have opened an emerging consensus on the importance of the role of bishops in the history and in the future of the church; will that ecumenical insight add weight to the Lambeth Conference, and the Archbishop of Canterbury who presides over it, within Anglicanism? And: why do sexual questions cause such dissension within our churches, when burning issues—like war with its waste of lives and resources—are carried through the generations as if it were somehow not the business of the Church to face such bitter questions?

A lively conversation about Pope Benedict XVI's new encyclical *Spe Salvi* offered a different way to consider the challenge of becoming churches truly open to the whole human family, animated by Gospel hope even when contemporary intellectual trends proclaim technical or ideological routes to happiness.

Turning to the long-range, ongoing work of ecumenical dialogue, the group returned to its study of the 2004 international Anglican-Roman Catholic (ARCIC) agreed statement *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*. Dr. Joseph Mangina of Wycliffe College in Toronto led a discussion of the ways in which ARCIC has used Scripture—in particular, Paul's Epistle to the Romans—to reconsider and reframe Marian doctrines that were promulgated in the Roman Catholic Church in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dr. Mangina affirmed ARCIC's hermeneutical method,

calling it “a creative retrieval of the ancient practice of figural reading”. In earlier generations this was a common way of meditating on the meaning of Scripture. The typological method, Dr. Mangina noted, was as important for the early Reformers as it had been for the Fathers of the Church. We can welcome its recovery by today’s theologians and ecumenists.

Over the course of several meetings the Canadian group has studied different aspects of ARCIC’s statement on Mary, which was released in 2004. Now they are ready to assemble a final short text, which they hope will help Canadian Anglican and Catholic leaders and parishes to study the international statement and to explore new and shared ways of learning from Mary, the mother of our Saviour. When the Canadian text is complete, it will be published in English and French in the Montreal-based journal *Ecumenism*.

Members of the dialogue were glad to hear that the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops is finalizing an agreement with the Canadian Centre for Ecumenism, in Montreal. Through this partnership, the CCCB plans to make available on the Centre’s bilingual web site many of the documents and news items from ongoing bilateral ecumenical dialogues.

The next meeting of Canada’s Anglican/Roman Catholic dialogue will be held in Toronto October 23—25, 2008.

Present at this meeting of the Dialogue:

For the Anglican Church of Canada: Rt. Rev. Anthony Burton, Bishop of Saskatchewan (co-chair); Ms. Ann Cruickshank, Montreal; Rev. Kevin Flynn, Saint Paul University, Ottawa; Dr. Joseph Mangina, Wycliffe College, Toronto; Captain, The Rev. Michelle Staples, chaplain, Canadian Forces.

Absent due to illness: Rev. Dr. David Neelands, Trinity College, Toronto; 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 University College at the University of Western Ontario; Dr. Catherine Clifford, Saint Paul University, Ottawa; Rev. Jacques Faucher, Director of Ecumenism, Archdiocese of Ottawa; Rev. Luis Melo, S.M., St. Paul College, University of Manitoba; Rev. Dr. Gilles Routhier, Faculté de Théologie, Université Laval, Québec. As secretary on behalf of the CCCB: Ms. Janet Somerville, Toronto.