

GROWING Together

ISSN: 1481-9465



ARE YOUNG PEOPLE ECUMENICAL?

An Experience

I gaze around the room. Everyone seems to be older than me - *much older*. We are at a meeting to talk about how much we share in common as Roman Catholics and Anglicans, and to see where we differ. “Maybe the younger people are too busy?” I think to myself. Anyway, I am the only person here under 30. In fact, I am the only one under 40. I wonder if I’d be here, if not for the fact that I am facilitating the dialogue.

It gets me thinking. Are young people interested in ecumenism? I believe they are, but more in exploring new ways of being church than in discussing doctrinal questions. Young people *practise* ecumenism today before they sit down to *talk* about it.

Thinking it Through

Assumptions about one another as Christians have shifted. In the past, Christians generally thought that their church had the “whole truth and nothing but the truth.” Only recently have we come to an awareness of the value of other denominations. Many young people today, by contrast, *start* with the assumption that each of the denominations has a place in the Church. We witness joint action among the churches on issues of social justice, see our leaders praying together, and often visit and pray in churches other than our own.

Ecumenism is something not so much fought for as assumed. The ecumenical practice of young people today is like the feminism of many young women. They take for granted rights and freedoms at home and in

the workplace, rights and freedoms that are the results of the labours of their mothers and grandmothers. Likewise, many young Christians enjoy the religious freedoms their parents and grandparents struggled for. In both cases one senses less urgency and activism, perhaps, but a practical living out of the goals of feminism and ecumenism.

The way young Christians marry is a case in point. Pastors find that young people readily accept inter-denominational and inter-faith marriages, that is, marriages involving a couple coming from different denominations, or religions. Can this be seen as ecumenism in practice? Or should churches be concerned that their young people are too individualistic or indifferent, and show too much of a “whatever” attitude to their faith traditions?

The Canadian sociologist, Reginald Bibby, reported in 1992 that 65% of Canada’s teenagers maintained that “what is right or wrong is a matter of personal opinion”¹. Yet Bibby also points to the fact that young people, whatever their religious practice, continue to identify themselves by the denomination they were raised in. For example, if Jodie, a Lutheran, marries Geoffrey, an Anglican, in an Anglican Church, and proceeds to worship there with her husband, Jodie is still likely to consider herself a Lutheran. Denominations are still relevant for young people then, but not in that “do or die” way it was for their grandparents and great-grandparents.

A Vision

I have a dream. I see young people from different Christian denominations. They are together socializing and enjoying the company of Muslims, Buddhists and Jews. They have gathered to respond, as people of faith, to the pressing challenges of poverty and environmental destruction in their community. And they are convinced that God wouldn’t have it any other way!

¹ Bibby, R. *Unknown Gods*. Stoddart: Toronto, 1993. p. 67-68.

GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five monthly Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ’s faithful.

Prairie Centre for Ecumenism
250-B Second Avenue South
Saskatoon, SK S7K 1K9
CANADA © 2001



phone: (306)-653-1633