

GROWING Together

ISSN:1481-9465

JOURNEYING WITH GOD

When I shared with my grandmother the news that I was engaged and our wedding date set, her one and only question was: “Is he Protestant?” My grandmother had lived through my aunt’s marriage to a Catholic and the ensuing family split, years of painful silence and the absence of loved family members.

When I attended university, I came to know different expressions of Protestantism and to share friendships with many Roman Catholics. After graduation, I taught in South America while living in a Catholic community of faith. I returned to Canada with a clear sense that my understanding of Christianity included both Catholics and Protestants.



In time an opportunity came to live in Palestine. Muslim neighbours were our friends; in their shops, we bought our bread and meat and clothing. We enjoyed harvesting olives together. And I lingered often in Jerusalem’s Jewish Quarter and by the Western Wall, drawn by the people praying there. When I returned to Canada, I had an understanding of Christianity as one faith among others.

During a sabbatical one year, my studies included attending worship at a Hindu temple. Driving up to that temple was like approaching a humungous wedding cake, the biggest pile of icing I could imagine. As we drew near, the details grew clearer. Statues of dancing gods and goddesses bedecking the eaves. Three towers. No, four. Five. Six! Elephants parading elegantly around the frieze. Overhead, the elephant god greeted us, an orange garland around his thick grey neck. Other gods stood erect as we passed beneath and entered. Inside, there were people everywhere. A sense of new construction, eagerness and faith mingled. A young Hindu graciously welcomed and instructed our class. I lingered on the outer edge, gazing at the people coming to worship.

To me, these seemed strange and wonderful worship practices: priests ringing bells, approaching and awakening, bathing and dressing gods and goddesses; gifts entrusted to the priest, carried to the goddess, blessed and received again with thanksgiving; children observing and learning from their elders. Suddenly and unexpectedly, that quiet Voice of God within me asked: “What if I am like this ... does that matter? I can be this. I can be a whole lot more. And that ‘whole lot more’ would surprise you—a lot.” With growing reverence and awe, I answered “Amen, Holy One.”



Many Christians today are not content simply to say there are other religions. They are exploring new ways of relating to them, not in order to abandon their own faith but to rediscover it in relation to others. A Christian finds Buddhist meditation practices deepen his Christian prayer life. Christians attending a multifaith event come to appreciate the colourful spiritual stories reflected in Hindu dances and ask about Christian liturgical dance. Jewish mourning traditions point to sound practices for Christians in grief. Despite all our bitter conflicts, world religions are meeting one another in a growing atmosphere of trust and understanding.

I reassured my grandmother that my fiancé was Protestant. Today, my children expect their friends to have an open attitude towards the faiths of their classmates and neighbours. They have already experienced that “he who knows one, knows none.” I marvel at what the spiritual journey might be for my grandchildren.

Meanwhile, when I worship in our congregation, my understanding and experience of God is far broader and more deeply rooted than I could ever have imagined. My whole being rejoices to sing “My God how great thou art”!

For discussion:

In this journey, where do you see an exclusive attitude (my faith is right; your faith is wrong)?

Where do you see a pluralist attitude (there are many faiths)?

Do you see different attitudes towards other faiths in the people around you?

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 © 2004



phone: (306)-653-1633
fax: (306) 653-1821
email: pce@ecumenism.net
www.ecumenism.net