

# SHARING A COMMON FUTURE OR NONE AT ALL

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*Le pluralisme religieux au Canada est un défi; qu'est-ce qu'une "communauté"? Après avoir examiné ces sujets, l'auteure nous avoue que sa propre foi a mûri et a été approfondie par le dialogue entre religions.*

Recent waves of immigration to Canada, and history itself, is forcing us to face up to the challenge of religious pluralism in Canada. Every major city in our country now contains authentic religious communities and faiths distinct from the Christian faith. None of us live in isolation. Questions arise, then, as to our relationships. Shall we keep ourselves apart in fearful isolation? Shall we relate as superior to inferior? The Christian's search and pilgrimage for salvation is very much linked, in my understanding, to the search for a holistic human community. Indeed, William Sloane Coffin, Jr., has said that "the religious question" is phrased today in terms of "where can I find authentic community?"

It seems to me that the challenge

of religious pluralism in Canada poses two questions to our Christian community: a) what kind of community are we jointly (and separately) committed to seek? What are our new understandings of the nature of the community? It used to be that we rather naïvely assumed that community meant "join us." We now question this and have further questions as to the supposed exclusiveness and superiority of our community over all others. b) how can human and religious values be sustained, or expressed in a fresh way, in an industrialized and technological world that increasingly places economic benefits as a primary value?

I believe, then, that faith communities should relate to each other with a developing climate of trust and openness, where people of various faiths may speak freely, from within their own religious perspective, about our common search for community and human and religious values. Faith communities should relate to each other on an open basis — that is, facing a past estrangement, a present responsibility to formulate provisional community, and a sense of sharing a common future.

My experience in interfaith dialogue has been to deepen my understanding of my own faith. It *has not* been to diminish the Christian community or the Christian faith. As one engages in exchange with those of other religious traditions and participates in their experiences and celebrations, one is forced to grapple with the Christian understanding that "God so loved the world that he sent his only Son." It raises the question as to the meaning of Jesus Christ for those of other faiths. How are we able to hold in creative tension the *exclusiveness* of Jesus Christ, in terms of his demands on our lives, together with his *inclusiveness* — the fact that he was able to be open and accepting of all sorts and varieties of peoples. Perhaps the "exclusiveness/inclusiveness" of Jesus Christ in terms of people is one of those paradoxes of Christian faith that we ought not to try to reduce to a neat, rational formula.

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