

If the Pope can go to Turkey, Can the ABC go to Texas?
A Motion from the Rustbelt as our Meeting Approaches
Being sure the obvious is said
By Bishop Paul V. Marshall, Diocese of Bethlehem

In anticipation of the House of Bishops meeting in Texas, Bishop Paul Marshall of the Diocese of Bethlehem wrote a discussion starter and sent it by email on January 12, 2007, to his colleagues in the House of Bishops. Upon receiving requests from colleagues to share more widely the note initially intended for limited circulation, he expanded and revised it, as below. Primarily about the Archbishop of Canterbury's relationship to our House of Bishops, the note assumes a great deal of context. As always, we continue to pray for the ministry of Rowan, Archbishop of Canterbury, who, as Bishop Paul notes below, "needs no witness from me to his reputation as a pious and good man, great in so many ways, and someone whom I overall admire as writer, teacher and moral voice in the UK."

For more background:

(1) See A Note on the Role of North America in the Evolution of Anglicanism by Paul V. Marshall, Anglican Theological Review, [Fall 2005](#). Download the complete ATR article below. In her introduction to this special ATR issue on the Windsor Report, Ellen Wondra writes the following about this article: The challenges set by the Windsor Report are not new. Nor do they seem susceptible to any permanent resolution. Paul Marshall notes "the curious vocation of the churches in Canada and the United States to forge paths for the evolution of the Anglican heritage." From North America have come the beginnings of Anglicanism's synodical structure with its strong lay voice; the missionary focus of episcopacy; the first efforts for formal establishment of full communion among Anglicans; and the first experience of church as separate from state. Such precedents cast a different light on the current Anglican crisis than does the Windsor Report. Losing sight of these contributions, as Marshall suggests the Report does, can cost the Communion dearly in times that creativity is needed--times such as these.

*(2) See [Ten Years with Bishop Paul](#), published in the July/August 2006 edition of *Diocesan Life*, the monthly newspaper of the Diocese of Bethlehem.*

I have always been captivated by the realism about human interaction found in the seven undoubtedly Pauline Epistles, our earliest testimony to Christianity: for Paul, the living out of the gospel is always a matter of imperfect personalities and events, redeemed and being redeemed, giving and embracing comment and correction on the way. Spirits are to be tested, and behavior in the Body addressed. Compare Paul's own report of his conflict with Peter over the latter's suspension of eating with Gentiles, and his report of what went on at the Jerusalem summit with Luke's much smoother and curial account of relations at a "council," and we begin to see more clearly the apostle's consistency behavior and his point of view about leadership. For good or ill, most people acknowledge that Paul led the formation of the Christianity we know. It is wise to consider on the meta level his operational principles of directness in truth-telling. Let us also consider his directness in truth-acting: circumcision decisions on Timothy and Titus are radically different because of how those decisions related to Gospel truth at certain places in certain times.

With St. Paul, we must dare to look at and respond to the vessels and the circumstances,

all of which struggle to bear the Gospel. Being more modestly gifted than my apostolic namesake, I will limit my theological observations while trying not to avoid naming the issue and person that concerns me in the Church as much as President George Bush does in the *orbis terrarum*, and I assure you that I do write to him often.

The most un-biblical part of traditional Anglicanism is its politeness, its charm, its unwillingness to confront and hold accountable those who have sought and accepted positions of supreme leadership. We in the Episcopal Church often brag about our Church's failure to address slavery as though that were a virtue and not a disgrace. The Church held together while humans died in chains and even bishops (both north and south in the beginning) traded in human flesh. We now have put the British emancipator William Wilberforce in our calendar but do not make his commemoration one of fasting and lament for our heritage of cowardice in the name of togetherness. The words and deeds of Paul and even more certainly of our utterly tactless Lord Jesus suggest that charm is less important than candor or provocative questioning, that real love in times of disagreement is often something quite uncomfortable. It seems no accident that historically we are enthralled by John, whom we cannot understand, rather than Paul, whom we can but would prefer not to.

That said, my subject, with both regret and trembling, is the Archbishop of Canterbury, but only in the very limited sense of his functioning toward our house and to some extent our Church. That is a tiny and limited subject and I do not intend it for a discussion of the content of the myriad ministries in which he is engaged. As one too old to have anything to gain or lose, I will try to say what may be obvious to others but risky for them to voice. I hasten to add that this is not a matter of condemnation: he needs no witness from me to his reputation as a pious and good man, great in so many ways, and someone whom I overall admire as writer, teacher, and moral voice in the UK. I believe with all my heart that his intentions are at least as good as any of ours. I write of a perceived chain of mistakes in policy and deed, mistakes, not evil. I have made perhaps more than my share of system mistakes, so I know one when I see one.

It will, however, not do to say, as one persistent soul on HOBID [the House of Bishops/Deputies email discussion list] frequently does, that because Rowan is so smart and knows things we do not, he must be right in his approach to us. I stopped believing that about leaders during Vietnam, which this is not, of course.

A Gestalt bouquet: I am sadly impressed that my friend and neighbor Bob Duncan, peace be to him, and a few of his supporters, have had more time with Rowan Williams than has our entire House, or even our Church gathered in Convention. The long-distance intervention in our process during the last moments of the Columbus convention has made us a laughing-stock. (Katharine wonderfully rolled with that without losing her integrity, a marvelous first inning.) The public words of welcome he gave to our new primate would have made a Laodicean proud for their restrained enthusiasm. The widely-publicized Lambeth Palace photograph of Rowan, Frank, and Katharine all standing as far away from each other as the camera lens would allow has not been without its effect on many among us. A dismal icon of formal communion without a hint of affection or

connection has been sent to the entire inhabited world.

The perceived distancing did not begin with Gene Robinson. My neuralgia on the question of the ABC's witness and function has been growing since his disastrously insensitive comments on 9/11 – made in New York! – which were alone nearly communion-breaking for lay people in grief, and which have never been effectually mended. People in my own diocese who lost loved ones in that attack have never recovered from the insensitive academic speculation of their galactic leader asking those covered in blood, ashes, and strewn body parts to reflect on the bombers and “why they hate” the US. It is an important question, but one painfully misplaced in time and space. It would have been pastorally wise, if the relationship in Christ were really valued, for Lambeth to work endlessly to overcome that perfectly valid but tragically inept *obiter dictum*, but no. Curates know that moments of grief are to be ministered to for what they are and save the dazzle for much later in the process.

This situation of alienation was regrettably worsened by his remarkable distancing of himself from a church that has followed his own carefully thought-through teachings on sexuality, teachings that he only last year suddenly dismissed as a sin of his academic youth. The appointment to the Windsor drafters of North American representatives wonderfully devout but historically disinclined to advocate vigorously for the position of their church was not his sole responsibility, but the buck sure stops there. Like many of you, I have submitted to all, not some, of the demands of the Windsor Report as a reluctant gesture of good will to the Communion and sacrifice of principle for the sake of those who may be weaker brethren. Cannot that be reciprocated? And so on and so on. By Rowan's subsequent actions and inactions the situation has for me now reached a proportion manageable only by the combination of prayer and surrender to the belief that God will work this out through the usual means – crucifixion and resurrection. But before we get ready for life alone, we deserve to hear from him, in the room with us, an explanation of his distance and intentions. We are all busy, and we show up where we believe it is important to go. Let's hope we become important.

[An oddly parallel situation on the other side: just recently the Bishop of Durham has roundly attacked evangelical bishops in the UK for acting on doctrinal points of view he has abundantly fueled for years. If we dare to teach, we must accept the possibility that we will be heard and believed by those for whom the life of the church is more concrete and less speculative than academics ever imagine.]

The situation of the shunning of North American bishops would be painful under any circumstances. The pain is more intense here because it comes from the withdrawal of a human who was friend, teacher, and colleague to many in this church – with no notice that either his opinions or commitments were in flux. The archbishop has appeared to my knowledge only once in the US since 2003, and that was the briefest of visits to raise money for a function of the Communion. He cancelled a date for a joint meeting with Canadian and US bishops with no real excuse, and has made no effort to reschedule what could have been a fellowship-redeeming encounter.

Our relationship to the one who is expected to be first in a world-wide college of bishops is distant, confused, and multiply-triangulated. We are ceaselessly told by those who would destroy our church that the ABC endorses this or that crudely divisive action or position. Questions to Lambeth on these occasions are sometimes met with silence and sometimes with stunning equivocation. This distance, confusion, and triangulation ought not to be. One of the basics of Episcopal – or parish – pastoral care is that one gets with and stays as close as possible to those who may be seen to be problematic. The Pope went to Turkey. Can the Archbishop of Canterbury not come to meet us just once at a regular or special meeting in any city he would care to name?

A very highly-placed CoE figure told me personally last September that he thinks Rowan has been “badly advised” in what this person admitted was callous treatment of the US and Canadian churches. I rejoice in the hint that Rowan may wish to have an authentic connection with us, but I cannot accept that report of bad advice as sufficient mitigation: as a bishop I alone am responsible for my actions. I connect with my churches not with my words as much as by being among them. Leaders are leaders because they show up when it is not pleasant to do so.

All of this said, it seems necessary to report my perception that the nadir in Rowan’s overall relationship to the US, Canada and perhaps South Africa has been the appointment of a virtual lynch mob to draft the Covenant that will by all reports attempt to turn a fellowship into a curial bureaucracy in which the worst elements of the great and oppressive Colonizer and of the Resentful Colonized will meet as a scissors to the denigration of a significant number of God’s people who were almost equal in Christ for one brief shining moment. Are North America, South Africa and many other parts of the Communion (not to mention “much cattle”) of such little value in the grand scheme? Does anyone think that the CoE itself will not split if a continent and a half are among those permitted to be set adrift?

So we must always talk about him, not to or with him. Like so many of you, I have been disheartened by the succession of “second gentlemen” from the CoE who have addressed our House in Rowan’s stead while over-insisting that that they were not at all doing so. No bishop of the left, right, or center, was taken in, and our colleague from Missouri pointed this out on one occasion with deft words that the Sage of Hannibal, MO, himself would envy. Even our steadfastly bucolic local papers here in rustic Pennsylvania would not be deceived by such over-wrought protestations of mere coincidence or fortuitous invitation. By these speakers, one of whom just happened to have a specific list of a dozen or so things we had to do, all but the most anxious of us have been inevitably alienated. How can it help bonds of affection for Communion leadership to so overtly and maladroitly play us for chumps? There is a kind of contempt for our intellect there whose sting almost matches the pain of the overall strategy of isolation.

Having now had three successive messages delivered to us by what some UK friends describe as “fully accredited members of the British Olympic Patronizing Team,” I take this (perhaps not entirely welcome to her) opportunity to thank Katharine for her outstanding integrity and clarity of focus since her election, and accordingly to urge her

that no foreign bishop whatsoever be given the privilege of addressing the House of Bishops of this Church until the ABC can personally enter this country and speak to the House himself and deign to entertain the level of frank questioning that his counterpart the Prime Minister might have to endure among those he leads and serves. We all do get cable news and know what the wonderful British tradition of questioning in the House can helpfully add to common life.

As I began, I end. My text is Paul's reminder to Peter that he *used* to eat with Gentiles until he found it unhelpful to his plan for the church. After decades of close fellowship, Rowan has steadfastly chosen the comfortable path of being Peter when we need Paul, and unless he can make an overwhelming Gospel case for it, I cannot help but anticipate that he will be remembered as having chosen a path that was not courageous or well-defined and actually fostered schism. I cannot now imagine what it will take for him in the long run to re-create good relations with the US and Canadian houses, but hope that the effort will be made should we somehow be allowed to remain in communion.

For now, I call on our own amazingly composed and delightful Leader to require heightened integrity on ABC's part and to remind him that without *pares* there is no *primus inter* which he may by any significant sense claim to preside.

I do not, cannot, ask the ABC to agree with us: we are a body of bishops who hold many views and we could be wrong about any number of our positions and actions. I do not ask that he endorse the actions of this Church, even if they can claim that they were to some extent his idea. He doesn't have to receive communion. He doesn't have to eat or hang out with us. He certainly ought to meet us face to face and accept accountability for his breath-taking words and actions us-wards. He needs above all to square what he has said and done in terms of congruence with what we can know of the ministry of the fleshly Messiah.

No more messengers; no more cell phone calls to defeat the integrity of this Church's polity. If Rowan really believes what the Lambeth press office says he believes about us, it is past time for him to say it to our faces, and have the goodness to listen to the response of those who have to live with the results of his choices. This would be, I believe, fair play and look very much more like the New Testament.

Reluctantly yours,

Paul Marshall