

Romans 8:19, as translated in the Philips version, reads, “the whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own. The world...cannot as yet see reality...” By analogy with Paul’s picture, it seems that the whole Anglican world, unable yet to see reality, has been on tiptoe, hoping to behold the wonderful sight of this present crisis coming to a conclusion. In the United States, there was great anticipation and foreboding prior to General Convention 2003; here, the same anxiety obtained leading up to Synod 2004; then Canadian faithful awaited the Essentials convention in early September 2005; most recently, we watched with bated breath for the publication of the Windsor Report; now we await the response of the worldwide Primates to the Windsor Report. We have been on tiptoe a very long time.

At every turn, we have been, perhaps, more in dread than on tiptoe to see what will happen. A friend of mine who gives legal advice to the Bishop of Pittsburgh remarked that, in the U. S., the faithful have been wandering in the desert for about the same time as the Israelites waited to cross the Jordan—when are we going to see the promised land? Perhaps there is more general optimism concerning the Primate’s discussion of the Windsor Report than the other turns in the road that we have seen. This is because the Windsor Report itself has given concrete suggestions, and because the Primates, or at least some of them, seem more and more prepared to speak out prophetically on the issues that are now confronting us. Tonight, I want to give you the good news and the bad news—Windsor has some good points; but it isn’t going to part the Red Sea or the Jordan.

Windsor Report Summarized

Let me, for the purposes of clarity, reiterate that the purpose of the Report was not to adjudicate on the issues connected with homoeroticism, but to provide guidelines concerning what might be done now that discipline and unity in the Church has broken down. However, because the Windsor Report makes no clear declaration concerning the presenting debated issue, it can be read in various ways—for revisionists, the Report holds out hope that, with more patience and discussion, the entire Church may be led to embrace the novel actions of ECUSA and New Westminster; for those committed to the biblical and traditional perspective on sexuality, the Report claims as its foundations the Lambeth prohibitions of same-sex eroticism, and moves on from there. Like many Anglican documents, the Report was written by a divided committee, and may be heard to speak out of both sides of the mouth: it is interpreted variously by different people.

The initial pages of the report concerning Scripture, authority, ecclesiology, and what the Church has said regarding sexuality to date are helpful, and require careful reading. We are then given a description of the events to date—a description that does not obscure the danger in which we find ourselves, and that declares, “the overwhelming response from ...Christians both inside and outside the Anglican family has been to regard these developments [that is the pro-homosex decisions of ECUSA and the ACC] as departures from genuine, apostolic faith.” In particular, Anglicans need to pay attention to the Report’s concern about the ambiguity surrounding our ecclesiology, or doctrine of the Church. One of the major problems has been that we have not always understood ourselves well as a Communion, and that the perspective on the worldwide Anglican communion differs from province to province. Especially critical here, I would add, is the North American attitude of independence and “can-do” which is often perceived (and probably is interpreted rightly from time to time by many who are outside of North America) as a kind of arrogance. This attitude, that excludes the importance of those outside of the American scene, has undercut very firmly the idea that we are one in Christ. There is forgetfulness that in the Anglican understanding, the Church goes back to the very time of the Apostles and embraces a communion across the entire globe.

The Report also gives a description of the instruments of unity in the Anglican Communion—the ABC, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primate’s Meeting. Most of you will understand that Anglican provinces in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury are considered to be in the worldwide Anglican Communion. The ABC is a primary focus of Anglican unity, but he does not have jurisdictional power like the Pope. He does have, however, the important role of calling together bishops for the Lambeth Conference, which meets every 10 years to discuss and deliberate in a collegial fashion. Lambeth makes resolutions in order to advise the worldwide Communion, but it does not legislate—that is left up to synods and bishops themselves. The Anglican Consultative council was set up in 1968 in order to include lay people along with clergy, and is also advisory, not legislative. Finally, there is the Primates’ meeting, that is, the meeting of the key provincial Archbishops who have been, in the current climate, meeting more frequently, and under greater pressure, than ever before. Originally the idea of the Primates' meeting was to give to the primates an opportunity to meet in leisure to be able to deliberate and to discuss, and to sense the temperature of the world-wide Communion. (Unfortunately, they have been responding to fires at the present time. The original dream of them being able to meet in leisure for deliberate prayer and careful council has not been facilitated in our harried age.) This group, too, considers itself to be merely consultative, but

there has been an increasing call for the Primates to take on more responsibility in our difficult times. In particular, the document, *To Mend the Net*, has recommended that the Primates join with the ABC in giving extraordinary guidance to extraordinary situations that are threatening the communion as a whole. [I should add that there has been an increasing move towards considering “shared principles of canon law” as a fifth instrument of unity, though this is not yet practicable.]

So, then, as a lesson in Anglican foundations, based on Scripture as interpreted by Church tradition, and as a window to how we run things in the Communion, the Report is most helpful. It then goes on to make its recommendations, both long-term and short-term:

First of all, Long-term concrete suggestions.

Here they are. The report advises:

First to strengthen the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury as a focal point and an initiator in the church.

Secondly: to give him an advisory council that he has not yet had, that is not unwieldy - something small enough that it can meet and deliberate and help him in particular matters.

Thirdly: to strengthen the Primates as a group.

Fourthly: to accept the Anglican Consultative Council and how it functions (and there has been a lot of criticism of this body as of late).

Fifthly: to make the Lambeth Council of the Primates more effective, or the bishops more effective, classifying as they deliberate some issues as central, and giving them power to have some adjudication over these central issues.

Sixthly: to strengthen common law as a means of joining the provinces together in unity.

And seventhly, to have the provinces adopt a common covenant, perhaps by the signing of each Primate of the provinces in accordance with something suggested to them by the Canon Law.

Short-term recommendations respond to the crisis at hand in four different directions:

I With regards to the issue of Gene Robinson, the Report

- “Invites” the revisionist consecrating bishops and others involved “to express regret that the constraints of the bonds of affection were breached” by their consecration of Gene Robinson.
- Asks them to step away from representative functions for now, until they express that regret.
- Urges the ABC to be cautious in inviting Robinson to Communion councils.
- Ask them to desist from any more consecrations.

II Similarly, with regards to the authorizing of same-sex rites, the report

- “Invites” bishops who have authorized same-sex rites” to express regret that the bonds of affection were breached when they authorized these,”
- Invites them to consider if they should step down until from representative functions,
- And asks them to stop the practice of these rites.

III The third direction is with regard to those who are unhappy with the revisionist moves, those who are called in the document, unhappily, "the dissenters" (that would include me!) On behalf of these, the Report asks that revisionist bishops accept Delegated Pastoral Oversight along the lines of the recommendations made by ECUSA’s House of Bishops.

(You will perhaps know that the ECUSA house of bishops met and came up with a resolution asking bishops to make limited alternate arrangements of care for parishes in their diocese which had repudiated the same-sex decisions made at ECUSA’s 2003 Convention. Under this plan, visiting orthodox bishops in the diocese of revisionist bishops are to minister solely at the discretion of the diocesan bishop, and are to have an honorary, but not a regulatory function).

IV With regards to those bishops and primates who have intervened in other territories, the Report: “calls upon” them:

- to express regret for the consequences of their actions.
- to affirm their loyalty to the Communion—**this is very significant!**
- not to take on any *more* outside charges—though they are not asked to relinquish the responsibilities they have taken on to this point.

In this hotch-potch there are, to my view, considerable strengths and weaknesses.

I Strengths include:

- The clear emphasis on Scripture.
- The insightful description of the weaknesses of our ecclesiology. (As the Windsor Report points out, Anglicans consider themselves “episcopally-led, but synodically governed.” But what does this mean in actuality? Who makes the decisions, especially, in times of conflict?)
- The admission of the urgency of the situation.
- The suggestion to strengthen the Primates’ power, and classifying of issues.

These strengths are considerable, but do not meet the urgency of our situation. In the words of the document “To Repair the Tear,” (to be found on the Anglican Mainstream website, <http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/repair.asp>) this is “under-prescription for a partial diagnosis.”

II Weaknesses

A. First, the Report does not consider the foundational disturbance, only the presenting issue of our conflicts.

For those of you who haven’t considered this, let me alert you to an important fact—sexuality is only the tip of the iceberg in this crisis! Because of the fuss in the Canadian political scene, we may be tempted to zero in on this as THE issue itself, when it is really a symptom of an underlying condition. Connected with the issue of same-sex eroticism are numerous very significant questions. To answer the questions being asked, we need to think about

- creation and the human body;
- marriage and the inter-relationship of male and female;
- the place of male and female relations and same-sex relations in society;
- the way that the human gendered condition is an icon of Christ’s relationship with the Church;
- how we interpret Scripture in its various forms of narrative, law, gospel and epistle;
- revelation and authority, and how we understand the different roles of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience in hearing God’s word;
- the contemporary problem of individualism in the Church, and the existence of multiple denominations, which divided for various theological and ecclesial reasons;
- what we mean, in the Church, when we enact a rite, bless a relationship, enter into a “holy mystery” or participate in liturgy;
- what it means to be part of the holy, catholic and apostolic Church, that new creation of the Holy Spirit that spans time and geographical space.

One of the major changes that has occurred in the contemporary Church is that its theologians have started to heed *four* sources of authority, rather than Scripture, or Scripture as interpreted by

Tradition, or even Scripture as interpreted by Tradition through human Reason. Theologians, appealing wrongly to Charles Wesley, are now speaking about EXPERIENCE as though this could be a trump card in any debate, including the current one. When the debate gets down to brass tacks, the revisionist will at some point say, “Well that may be the way that the first century thought about sexuality, but we know better now—we need to listen to contemporary voices, and change our thinking.”

So, then, we will find that this is only the most obvious of the revisions being urged upon us by experientially-oriented thinkers. Michael Ingham is on record as saying that the next, more fundamental fight, has to do with the uniqueness of Jesus as Saviour—read his book *Mansions of the Spirit*. So, then, the issue that we have before us is important, because sexuality is connected with our human condition, our bodies, which are to be the temple of God. And it is important because one part of the Church is going out on a limb, uncaring of what the rest of the body says. But the debate is also crucial because it depends on a new approach to the gospel—one that stresses contemporary experience over the past experience of Christians—and in fact is telling a new version of the gospel—the gospel of “inclusivity” rather than the gospel of “redemption and transformation.” The Windsor Report, though rightly stressing the authority of Scripture, does not deeply diagnose the maladies of today’s North American forms of Christianity—

1. individualism over against a deep notion of the Church past, and worldwide
2. The distortion of the gospel, so that it is no longer centred upon the redeeming work of Christ, repentance and obedience, and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, but upon a vague notion of “welcome” and “acceptance.”

(This has been mirrored in our practices—the marginalization of confession, the removal of the creed from our liturgies, the practice of an absolutely open table! What are we, as the church, the *ecclesia*, being “called out” *from*, if there are no boundaries, no distinctives? How can we offer anything to those who don’t know Christ if we don’t know who we are ourselves?)

B. *Some historical inaccuracies:*

1. The Report suggests that the debate over women’s ordination issue was pursued in an orderly way, and specifically cites the orderly way in which female priesting was pursued in Hong Kong. However, those of us on this side of the Atlantic know well that in the ECUSA, women were ordained illegally, then this was acclaimed as a prophetic act. *Note that I am not here speaking against women’s ordination:* I am simply saying that the WAY in which it was introduced in America is another example of the independent streak of this province.

2. It also makes the suggestion that border-crossing by bishops has been a no-no in the Church since time immemorial. They cite canon 8 of Nicaea, which is completely inappropriate. (This canon deals with the problem of how to normalize bishops who have been in heretical communions, and want to return to the catholic church. It asks, should they retain their episcopate, if there is a catholic bishop resident in the area.) In fact, we would be Roman Catholics and not Anglicans if we believed that communion had nothing to do with doctrine, and if we thought that there should never be two bishops in one geographic area.

Recently, five Anglican Primates who have intervened in the States and British Columbia had this to say: “it is abundantly clear that attempts to maintain the unity of our church on the foundation of ‘bonds of affection’ without placing primary priority upon the essentials of the Faith is both unscriptural and unworkable. If the church were to choose now to allow humanly devised provincial and diocesan boundaries to serve as barriers to the proclamation of the Gospel, it would be tragic... ‘The early church was never in doubt that unity in doctrine is a prerequisite of altar fellowship.’” (Last citation from Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church fellowship in the first Four Centuries*).

3. Finally, there is no reference to the Prayer Book and the Thirty Nine Articles as an instrument of unity. At first, I thought that this might be because the Report focuses upon persons as unifying, rather than documents. But this is not the case, since it is considering the unifying aspect of canon-law. It is quite incredible to me that our practice of Common Prayer, and the theological tradition that we have shared are not appealed to in this time of crisis.

C. This leads us to the third weakness:

There is far too much concentration on polity rather than principle

Because of this concentration on polity, the Report does not give an adequate examination of the rhetoric used in the debate, nor of the substance of the debate itself. The debate over homo-eroticism is, of course, outside the purview of the report, but this omission means that the Report sounds as if it is only concerned for harmony, and can be read as casting blame equally, or perhaps even lopsidedly, without clarity of wording or intent.

For example, a burning question has been, among those who read the Report, Is regret the same as an apology? Also, what exactly is required of the “sides?”

This has been the scene of great debate. Some have argued that only individuals can repent, and that groups can regret—this doesn't seem borne out by Scripture. Others have said that the revisionist clergy have been more directly challenged than the faithful boundary-crossing leaders, because of the wording:

Revisionists are “to express regret that the bonds of affection were breached” by their actions
Boundary-crossers are to express regret “for the consequences of their actions.”

But the language is not as forceful in the first case: revisionists are “invited” while the boundary crossers are “called upon.” And, **the boundary crossing bishops are asked if they intend to remain within the communion!** What kind of a question is that? In conscience, they have acted because they believe that other leaders have indicated that by their revisionist actions they are no longer in the historic communion. (On the other hand, they are not told to give up the dioceses or parishes that they have adopted, and it is admitted that they have acted according to conscience—so have they done what is right after all, and only need to regret that this has caused tension in the Church.) The report is not clear, probably because different members of the Commission couldn't agree on the issues of ecclesiology and sexuality!

Ambiguity is not helpful here. The report is being read by different bishops in different ways. I was in South Carolina last weekend, and there, a bishop declared that the House of Bishops had indeed repented, and thoroughly, too, of what it had done. Do these sound like words of repentance to you?

Moreover, we as the House of Bishops express our sincere regret for the pain, the hurt, and the damage caused to our Anglican bonds of affection by certain actions of our church. We note here that our decision-making structures differ from those in many parts of the Anglican Communion and that our actions require conciliar involvement by all the baptized of our church, lay and ordained. Therefore we as bishops, in offering our regrets, do not intend to preempt the canonical authority of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3577_56787_ENG_HTML.htm

This does *not* sound like a full apology to me. It seems to combine two points: “sorry that your feelings were hurt;” and, “it's not our fault, but the fault of the whole Province, of all who voted.” Surely the bishops, if truly regretful, could have made an apology for their own role in the vote, while acknowledging that General Convention was attended by other priests and laity.

D. Finally, the Report exhibits an unfortunate naivety with regards to the situation, in at least 7 respects:

1. It asks Primates to stop intervening in endangered parishes/dioceses when no adequate provision yet made for them – what is the order that is envisaged for the turn around? This is a little like the “cold war,” when one side is worried that it cannot trust the other to disarm. My own bishop in Pittsburgh, Robert Duncan, has made adequate preparation for those in his diocese who are revisionist, and cannot agree with his traditional stand. But that is not true of all bishops on the other side, some of whom have systematically persecuted priests and parishes that will not fall in line. Look at appendix to the document “Repair the Tear” which documents cases where bishops have injured those under their care. As “Repair the Tear” remarks, “when the shepherd acts like a wolf, it is not reasonable to expect the sheep to welcome him.”

2. The Report is naïve in assuming that “dialogue” will help the situation:

There seems to be little awareness of how much talking has gone on already, and there is an assumption that this issue is difficult for the church to decide upon. My own experience has been that so-called dialogues end up being more exercises in persuasion of those who are resisting the novelties, and are not always fairly conducted.

3. The Report naively accepts ECUSA’s recommendation for DEPO uncritically, without recognizing that many revisionist bishops have refused to allow DEPO, and are persecuting the faithful. Here is a great irony. Many of those bishops who voted in favour of the changing our stance on sexuality in the States are “antinomians” abroad—ignoring the pleas of the worldwide Church—but legalists at home, using canon law on their own priests and parishes as a club. Though they want to do their own thing in the Communion, they stress “collegiality” and “obedience” within their own diocese.

4. The wording is somewhat naïve, and plays into the hands of revisionists by calling the faithful, the biblically minded “dissenters.” Who are the dissenters, really? Surely these are those in ECUSA and ACC who are not listening to the historic or worldwide Church, and pursuing novelty in sexuality? Wording is very important, as those who are involved in, for example, the Abortion debate, are aware. Groups want to be called “pro-choice” and “pro-life” not “pro-abortion” and “anti-abortion.” The same applies here.

5. There is an excessive generosity in regards to those bishops who consented to the consecration of Gene Robinson. The Report wonders if they truly understood the consequences of their

actions, and blames mainly the consecrators. How could any literate bishop not have heard the pleas of the rest of the Communion prior to the decision taken at General Convention 2003?

6. There are no consequences suggested if the recommendations are not followed. What if there are no apologies or retractions forthcoming? The leaders are “invited to consider” withdrawing representative functions—what about their normal functions? What would be their status? Strong consequences should have been given for those who don't respond to the report. I think this is a grave problem because there is no point in making suggestions for change if you are not going to say what should happen if these calls are not heeded.

7. Finally, it seems they missed a great opportunity, an issue that is intimated and set up beautifully in the biblical and ecclesial passages at the beginning of the Windsor Report. This is the very serious question as to whether the consecration of Gene Robinson is valid, since they could never have consecrated him with the understanding that he would be acceptable in a catholic way to the entire Communion. And that's what it means when you consecrate a bishop. The three who lay hands on are there in representation of all the other bishops. Those who consecrated Gene Robinson knew well that the rest of the Communion would not have consented; therefore there is a very strong question as to whether there was indeed an intent there to consecrate a *catholic* bishop. This is an extremely very important question that the Report suggests in its first pages of ecclesiology, but never quite gets round articulating in its actual statements.

III *Uncertain prospects*

Will the creation of an Advisory Council really help us in our uncertainty? What will be the make-up of this council, and will it just add to the different bodies of advice that we now have? We already have a problem with the Anglican Consultative Council. The African and Southern Global bishops say that this is a kind of white boys' club, that it's not well represented, and that it is far too heavily weighted on the side of those who are from the west and have a certain theological perspective. How do we know that the advisory council would be any different? Who selects its members, and on what basis?

What about Canon Law? I worry some about the new emphasis on this. Already we have folks who are not paying any attention to the 39 articles, and not paying any attention to their own constitutions. Some of them are not even paying attention to the Creeds. How do we know that Canon Law really will be paid any attention? And if it *is* heeded better, how do we avoid

developing a Roman kind of Curia, that brings a rigidity into our Communion and that it could be used in the wrong way at the wrong time? I worry a little bit, but perhaps I can be persuaded - I need to hear a little bit more from our Canon Lawyers about this!

Finally, what about this idea of a Covenant, to be signed by each Province? This is extremely problematic to me as an ex-Salvationist in the Methodist tradition. That tradition was very keen on covenants, but I am not sure that a written document serve us any better than a spoken creed! What of those many revisionists who say we are not creedal, but liturgical in our identity? Will they buy it? If they did, would it change anything, really?

Well, our Communion is indeed in need of a refurbishing of its mechanisms: the Windsor report is quite right about that. It is time that we had a revision of the instruments of unity and discipline, but I don't think our hope is in any one of these things. I believe it is in the Person of Christ, and in persons who seek the mind of Christ. I pray that there will be charismatic leaders of the church who emerge at this time and that the Spirit will move in them, and so we will be healed. We may not all agree as how best to work in this ambiguous situation, but it's important for those of us who agree on major principles to be charitable to each other, as we disagree about method. That's really important or we're going to fragment. That will be it. If we continue to squabble during this emergency, we will crumble into a million pieces. Many people will be lost as we decide how best to get the boat off into the water, during this time of crisis.

In Conclusion

We may not all agree as to how best to work in this ambiguous situation, but let us be charitable to each other, even as we reason together. From my perspective, the work of the Anglican Communion Network <http://anglicancommunionnetwork.org/home/>

and those who are in conversation with the Network, is our best hope for a continuing vibrant Anglican witness here. It looks as though the global Primates believe this, too, because they robed Bishop Duncan, the present leader of the Anglican Communion Network, as an acting "Primate" among them at their most recent meeting together. Whatever we think about the routes that should be taken, our prayers should be directed to the faithful leaders, that God will give them boldness and wisdom in these next years. Let us pray, then, for the Archbishop of Canterbury, that God will speak to him clearly concerning the issue of sexuality and not just the issue of unity. Let us pray for the faithful in England, those who surround and nurture him, that they will see things clearly, and be brave. God is the God of miracles—he can still speak and shake the world! But most of all, I think that it's important for us to do what we gather to do here

tonight: let us pray for the faithful Primates of the global south, whose people have been tried by persecution and by suffering, and who still care for those of us who think we are at ease in Zion. This is the life of the Church today, and it may be that God will choose to build up a New Canterbury in Africa, should the present leadership not listen to him any more. Who knows? This is well within the range of possibility.

Well what could happen when the Primates meet in two weeks' time? What should we pray for?

First of all we need to pray that we will not simply fragment, because that is a very real possibility and that would be a tragedy.

There could be a new understanding of our ecclesiology where no longer do we see ourselves as a Communion, but as a loose federation of churches who worship in a similar way but have different doctrines. This could be seen as an agreement to disagree, and this would also mean a change in the nature of the church. I think for those who are concerned for the catholicity of the church, it would mean a grand scale defection. There are many of us who are Anglicans because we are *not* Protestants, and this is something we need to think about and be concerned for.

Secondly the Windsor Report could be taken as is. If that happens, there is a great possibility that its recommendations could be lost in the process. We should pray that if ratified *as is*, that the best parts of it will be implemented, and swiftly.

Thirdly, the Windsor Report could be strengthened especially with regard to the disciplinary powers of the Primates, and with sanctions being brought to bear against ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada. One wonders if the major leaders of ECUSA and the ACC would care: but if *they* don't, those of us who want to be in communion with the rest of the Anglican Church should care and should respond accordingly. We will need to express our solidarity with the worldwide communion.

Fourthly, and this is within the realm of possibility, there could be a sharp disagreement in the next two weeks, with some of the primates deciding we really are two churches and we need to walk apart.

Whatever happens, let us watch and see if God will rescue our Anglican Communion. That's for Him to decide. We need to wait, pray and see what happens when the dust settles.

It may not be that God will rescue our worldwide Anglican communion—that is for him to decide. It may be that he will rescue a poor, but grateful remnant, and that we will end up serving in a situation that we hardly can imagine. Some of us may have to be sacrificial, helping out those who are in physical distress because of the legal battles that seem inevitable. We may be called to help those who will be most hurt as we learn to “let goods and kindred go!” But this is an opportunity for us to pray, to be active, and to be watchful for what will emerge when the dust settles. God is building his Church, and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it!