

## WHY I ADMIRE ROWAN WILLIAMS

Especially after reading the very sad article in the current issue of *America* (August 4-11, 2008, pp. 1921), I have admiration for Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, desperately trying to hold together the Anglican Communion. I want to share my reflections with you since surely some at least have been following the events leading up to the Anglicans' Lambeth Conference (their cross between a Catholic ecumenical Council and Synod of Bishops, held every 10 years).

Archbishop Williams and I were at Oxford at the same time, though doing different theological degrees. No, we didn't know each other. But that makes us roughly contemporaries. Perhaps it also gives us a shared outlook on the "Church of Jesus Christ," badly fractured in our world today.

The desire of some members of the Anglican Communion (notably in our hemisphere) to want to move ahead, unilaterally if necessary, toward blessing of gay unions and ordaining of actively gay bishops is causing a rift of major proportions. This is true especially because the overwhelming majority of Anglicans world-wide is from the southern hemisphere, and they are strongly conservative in their doctrinal and moral outlooks (though perhaps not always in their practice). It is here that "never the twain shall meet" is working itself out.

The result is a centrifugal effect—things spinning out of control and away from the center of the Anglican Communion. It may well be true, soon, to say that there is no such thing, any more, as an Anglican "communion"—there will be schism and self-imposed breaches of communion. Is this inevitable? It seems as though it is...

I don't pretend to understand the entirety of the notion of "church" that Archbishop Williams embraces. But his stance now is one of begging people to allow themselves to be drawn in by the centripetal principle of being held together at the center, to remain in fellowship, in communion, while issues are (hopefully) worked out rather like at an ecumenical council. Of course, the Council of Nicaea (and others) was happy to make judgments and declare standards of belief and behavior; Archbishop Williams expressly chose to eliminate such voting from the current Lambeth Conference in the hopes of not further alienating the differing factions. It must seem to him that he is living in the world of St. Paul's Corinthians (read I Corinthians 1 and 11 to see what the implications are). And even if I believe that, sooner or later, he must make a stand, I admire him now for the desire he has to hold things together in the face of Don Quixote's "impossible dream." He is holding on (perhaps waiting for the Holy Spirit's intervention), hoping against hope that understanding and agreement can finally triumph.

This is my own hope, ecumenically speaking: even when things seem to be flying alarmingly away from center, I want to embrace a position that will continue to hope, to work, to long for the day when divisions are a distant past and love truly conquers all.