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OF
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The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity

09/30/07

New Orleans and Savannah

NEW ORLEANS & SAVANNAH

It was hardly a surprise but a cause for sorrow nonetheless: the House of Bishops, meeting in New Orleans, made a response to the requests of the Primates at Dar Es Salaam that offered little to repair the "tear in the fabric of the communion" caused by the consecration of Gene Robinson. They did pledge compliance in the election of bishops (no more Gene Robinsons) – but then demanded that Gene Robinson be invited to Lambeth Conference in 2008. Their convoluted pledge not to authorize same-sex blessings is surely designed to permit local option (as is already happening). They demanded that the Global South Primates stop their pastoral interventions, but they had nothing serious to offer the conservative dissenters the Primates are trying to care for: the Pastoral Council proposed by the Primates was refused in favour of window-dressing; and the destructive policy of aggressive litigation against conservative dissent was not even addressed, let alone restrained.

Some will adjudge the result the best that could be hoped for under the circumstances. Others will even eagerly claim to find it satisfactory. But who really believes that is true? These are grudging assurances in words that inspire no trust, weasel words with built-in wiggle-room, a tactical maneuver, not a change of heart. The House has not renounced the imagined right of the Episcopal Church to do as it pleases, unconstrained by the teaching of the Bible, the historic Faith, or the Communion's "bonds of affection". They have not healed the breach their arrogance opened up, and that means it will only get worse.

The breach has now come to Savannah, in the decision by the Vestry of Christ Church to secure its future in the Faith, in the Anglican Communion, by placing the parish under the pastoral care of John Guernsey, a Virginia priest recently made bishop of the Anglican Church of Uganda in North America. This decision, made in conscience, cannot have been easy to make, and it deserves respect even from those who disagree with it. St. John's Vestry has made no such decision, but I can testify to our respect for theirs; and also our continuing fellowship with them in the historic faith, and in "the bonds of affection".

In response Bishop Louttit has asserted the Episcopal Church's claim to Christ Church's real property, on the grounds that parishes are

"integral and constituent parts of a diocese and of the larger church."
But the obligations of "constituent" membership in the "larger church" run both ways. The constitutional obligations of the Episcopal Church - to uphold the Bible's teaching, the Church's historic Faith and Order, and membership in the Communion - are the covenantal basis of its canonical claims to parochial real property. If it cannot fulfil the former, then the moral basis for the latter disappears

The Rev'd GAVIN G. Dunbar

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