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THE THING THAT IS NOT

Does saying that something is so make it so, when in fact it is not? A question so absurd answers itself: its appeal to establishment churchmen at this point in autumn 2007 is a sign of how desperate their predicament has become. "If only we say that the Episcopal Church is in compliance with the requests of the Primates, if only we say that the Episcopal Church is a member in good standing with the Anglican Communion, if only we say that the Episcopal Church honours the Scriptures and the Creeds, maybe it will be so, and then everything will be all right again." No one actually believes that the Episcopal Church is in full compliance with the requests made of it by the Primates: in various ways, they all betray their knowledge that it is not. But they just cannot resist the appeal of this seductive fantasy: if only we say all is well, then maybe the mess that is in the Church will go away.

The fantasy breaks out like disease in various forms: there are those who invent and peddle it, willing to deceive; and there are those who clutch at it in their desperation, willing to be deceived. The latest outbreak started in the fantasy factory known as the House of Bishops (HOB) of the Episcopal Church (TEC). It then broke out in an obscure bureau-cratic organ called the Joint Standing Committee (JSC) to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Finally, it has infected churchmen in the diocese of Georgia.

When the HOB declared that "the majority of bishops do not make allowance for" the blessing of same-sex unions, they betrayed their knowledge that some of their members do, and that none of them is intends to stop them from doing so. They then went home to their dioceses, where, as all the members knew, some of them would go on permitting same-sex blessings, and carrying on litigation against conservative dissenters, in defiance of the requests of the Primates. Mme. Schori tactfully went to San Francisco on September 30th (the primates' deadline) to announce to Episcopalians in the cathedral that the moratorium on gay bishops was just a pause and not a retreat. Is this compliance, or defiance?

A scant three days later the JSC rushed into print with a report declaring the Episcopal Church to be in full compliance with the requests of the Primates: this despite the fact that not all its members had been consulted (one subsequently penned a blistering dissent), despite the failure of Mme. Schori to recuse herself from the committee assessing her own province's compliance, and despite the

report's own admission that the Episcopal Church was not in compliance with at least one of the primates' requests ("the continuing use of law courts" by TEC.)

The JSC report stinks to highest heaven of back-room machinations and power politics. Yet its transparent coverup is being eagerly quoted by desperate clergymen, who know perfectly well that it is false, as if the JSC had suddenly become a fifth "instrument of unity".

One could go on in more detail, but it is all folly, and it is all futile. Saying that a thing is so when it is not, cannot make it so, and never will. Until these clergymen – the deceiving and the deceived - begin by acknowledging the truth, they will only make things worse. And that, perhaps, is just what is going to happen.

The Rev'd Gavin G. Dunbar

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