

Comprehensive Identity Theft

Misrepresenting The Rt. Rev. William Alexander Guerry

January 16, 2013

An Open Letter to Faithful Anglicans and Episcopalians in South Carolina

Dear Anglican and Episcopal Brothers and Sisters in South Carolina,

I am a priest in the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina and I am blessed to serve with eleven other duly elected members on the Standing Committee of the diocese. A few months ago (November 11, 2012) a small (the media has used that word for us so I suggest we go with) group from the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina who opted to join with the Episcopal Church (TEC) took out a half-page advertisement in the Post and Courier that was spurious and misleading. They have continued to use this same misleading information on the homepage of their website (www.episcopaldioceseofsc.org). They also persist in sullyng the good name of a one-time Bishop of South Carolina, misrepresenting his thought and his legacy, and attempting to re-write history.

First of all, this ~~disaffected~~ (again used in media for us, I find it too defamatory for us to use and would just delete the word as it isn't necessary. Here is where I would use breakaway if you want to use a descriptive word) breakaway group has used both the name and the seal of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina without its consent, and indeed in an attempt to mislead faithful members of the diocese. This is "identity theft" pure and simple. And they do this so that they may lure faithful members into this minority (use different word) or delete as it really isn't needed) group that supports a national leadership who believe neither in the ultimate authority of the Bible nor in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. The very salvation of the good people of South Carolina is at stake here. As a member of the Standing Committee of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina, I am humbled to represent over 25,000 faithful members, whereas this splinter group represents but a small fraction (even at their count only 19 of the 72 parishes and missions of this diocese).

Secondly, this same group has engaged in another kind of "identity theft": that of misrepresenting the thought of an historical figure - the 8th Bishop of South Carolina, The Rt. Rev. William Alexander Guerry. Bishop Guerry would not have recognized the "faith" of the national leadership of The Episcopal Church; a false faith which we in The Protestant Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina are fighting strongly against. How can I say this? One need only read the words of Bishop

Guerry, his stands on marriage and divorce, his firm belief in the historic Creeds, the virgin birth, the incarnation, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that there is salvation only in Him (see articles in A 20th Century Prophet, 1976), to know that the faith of the good bishop is equivalent with the faith “handed down by the apostles” and not that of the national Episcopal Church leadership nor evidently the leadership of this splinter group.

Thirdly, the quote attributed to Bishop Guerry and used in their advertisement and on the home page of their website is, again, misleading, and out of context. It is akin to the “proof-texting” from Holy Scripture (i.e., using a single verse from the Bible to prove a point) which liberal Christians often accuse conservative Christians of employing. The quote comes toward the end of a long paragraph from a book published by Bishop Guerry’s son, The Rev. Canon Edward B. Guerry (of whom I am a proud successor as Rector of St. John’s Parish Church, Johns Island). The book, entitled A 20th Century Prophet, (1976) is a collection of articles and sermons of Bishop Guerry.

The very long paragraph which contains the quoted material attends to many things, but mostly to ecumenical dialogue between different denominations of “Western Christendom” (p. 145) and vision of a re-united Christendom. The sentence just prior to the quoted material (p. 145) discusses the use of diverse liturgies in different churches where Bishop Guerry suggests there should be “the widest possible divergence of opinion and practice” in order to unite the various denominations of Christendom.

Read the lead-up sentences to this statement and judge for yourself:

“But in the use of liturgy – in all matters of ritual and worship not essential to the existence of the Church or of Christianity in the world, there would be in that reunited Church the widest possible divergence of opinion and practice. *We should strive for unity, not uniformity. Uniformity is mechanical, barren, unfruitful and unprofitable. Unity is organic, living, and capable of endless growth....*” (italics is part used out of context on the website of the break-away group)

So, it is most likely that the “unity, not uniformity” which Bishop Guerry is referring to in the quote on their website references liturgy (worship style and order), not the basic apostolic faith or even the ecclesiology of The Episcopal Church. Bishop Guerry prayed for and worked for unity among all Christians, but not at the expense of the truth and the faith found in Holy Scripture. Brothers and sisters, please read the whole paragraph! Please read the whole book!

It is also instructive to note that just two sentences before the material so carelessly ripped out of context for use on the homepage of their website, and within the same paragraph quoted from above, that Bishop Guerry says,

“We value the episcopate [the bishop] most of all [boldening added] not as an order of Church government, but as a centre of unity, and as a principle

of continuity, which was from the beginning its chief and greatest function.”
(p. 145)

If these breakaway Episcopalians wish to follow the words and legacy of Bishop Guerry then they should return to the “centre of unity” of this Church, the Bishop of South Carolina. Bishop Guerry was the duly elected and consecrated 8th Bishop of South Carolina. Bishop Mark Lawrence is the duly elected and consecrated 14th Bishop of South Carolina, successor of Bishop Guerry, in continuity with Bishop Guerry both in order and in faith, and the “centre of unity” for the diocese. By their breaking away from his leadership, this small disaffected (use another word) band is attempting to break the unity of this diocese, mislead faithful Episcopalians, and subvert the government and legacy of this Church. They are also breaking South Carolina law in attempting to steal the identity of this great diocese and even to grossly misrepresent the history of this diocese and the historical integrity of her bishops and their intellectual property. This is identity theft of a determinedly comprehensive nature. For a full disclosure of truth in all matters Episcopal and Anglican, please browse the website of the real Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina: www.dioceseofsc.org. God bless you all!

Faithfully submitted,
Fr. Gregory A. Snyder, Rector
St. John’s Parish Church
Johns Island, SC