

AlbertMohler.com

## Two Strands of Faith? No, Two Different Religions

Thursday, February 8, 2007



Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori of the Episcopal Church USA is no stranger to controversy. To the contrary, she seems to seek it out. Just consider her comments published in the February 5, 2007 edition of *USA Today*.

In an [article](#) by reporter Cathy Lynn Grossman, Bishop Schori is described as wearing priestly vestments that portray a “new dawn” for her church, complete with orange glow, green hem, and “a dawn-blue band below purple heavens.” Presumably, she means all this to be taken seriously.

Yet, as Grossman explains, the Episcopal Church’s first female Presiding Bishop is a divisive figure. In Grossman’s words, she is “[t]he leader who faces a costly fracture among the faithful, a crack radiating across the Anglican world.” Some of her churches have bolted the flock, and others are expected to follow soon.

As USA Today reports:

What about her denomination’s declining numbers?

*Statistics don’t scare her, she says. Yes, membership is down from 3.2 million in 1960 to 2.2 million today, a downward trend similar to all the mainline churches.*

*A new Gallup survey shows that the number of Americans who say they “consider themselves part of a Christian tradition” fell 6 percentage points, from 80% to 74%, from 1999 to 2006, while the number of people who say they are not part of any religious tradition rose from 13% to 18% in the same period.*

*“It’s no longer the social norm to be a Christian,” Jefferts Schori says. Her answer isn’t to ramp up on orthodoxy but to reach out to all ages and cultures with Christlike social action.*

No one now expects Bishop Schori to “ramp up on orthodoxy.” Instead, she seems intent on redefining Christianity as a mechanism for self-actualization and social action. It would seem that she sees theological orthodoxy as a problem, rather than a solution. Consider these words from the *USA Today* article:

*Critics say she equivocates on essential doctrine — the necessity for atonement and the exclusivity of salvation through Christ. They cite interviews in which she has said living like Jesus in this world was a more urgent task than worrying about the next world.*

*“It’s not my job to pick” who is saved. “It’s God’s job,” she tells USA TODAY.*

*Yes, sin “is pervasive, part of human nature,” but “it’s not the centerpiece of the Christian message. If we spend our time talking about sin and depravity, it is all we see in the world,” she says.*

There is simply no discernible reference to anything like the Christian Gospel here, except in her dismissal of references to sin and depravity. Her response to the question of the exclusivity of salvation through Jesus Christ is a clumsy non-answer. She may wear priestly vestments designed to depict a “new dawn,” but no one expects Bishop

Schori to “pick” who is saved. But is it too much to ask that she should affirm what Jesus Christ said of Himself? [See John 14:6]

Here is the most revealing section of the article:

*She sees two strands of faith: One is “most concerned with atonement, that Jesus died for our sins and our most important task is to repent.” But the other is “the more gracious strand,” says the bishop who dresses like a sunrise.*

*It “is to talk about life, to claim the joy and the blessings for good that it offers, to look forward.*

*“God became human in order that we may become divine. That’s our task.”*

So the bishop sees “two strands of faith” within Christianity. The major problem with this is the fact that her “more gracious strand” simply bears no resemblance to biblical Christianity. The problem is that she rejects the very heart of the Gospel, “that Jesus died for our sins.”

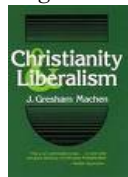
What Bishop Schori identifies as “two strands of faith” are actually two different religions. The first, centering in the fact that “Jesus died for our sins,” is Christianity. The second “strand” is another religion altogether.

J. Gresham Machen, one of the great defenders of the faith of modern times, saw this clearly in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversies of the early twentieth century. He made the argument with great force in his classic, *Christianity and Liberalism*.



Consider this excerpt:

*In the sphere of religion, in particular, the present time is a time of conflict; the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called “modernism” or “liberalism.” Both names are unsatisfactory; the latter, in particular, is question-begging. The movement designated as “liberalism” is regarded as “liberal” only by its friends; to its opponents it seems to involve a narrow ignoring of many relevant facts. And indeed the movement is so various in its manifestations that one may almost despair of finding any common name which will apply to all its forms. But manifold as are the forms in which the movement appears, the root of the movement is one; the many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism—that is, in the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity. The word “naturalism” is here used in a sense somewhat different from its philosophical meaning. In this non-philosophical sense it describes with fair accuracy the real root of what is called, by what may turn out to be a degradation of an originally noble word, “liberal” religion.*



This is what we now witness — a new religion posing as Christianity, just in a “more gracious strand.” Can the Church now discern the difference?

