

What do people mean when they say that Presiding Bishop Schori has denied the resurrection or the divinity of Christ?

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I write this with a sadness which probably few readers will comprehend. Nonetheless, I write it, because I can not find any treatment of this subject that deals with the subject matter in an extensive fashion; what I have found so far are just a few quotes, and a few statements regarding what the authors believe the Presiding Bishop to have said, and to have accomplished with her words. It is important to understand what the Presiding Bishop has said, and what she has not said; what it implies, and what it does not imply. I assume others have neglected to do so simply because this is such an utterly depressing matter, and because the writer of such an article will surely draw a great deal abuse from those who care more about loyalty to The Episcopal Church than about the church's teachings on Christ.

Some in the Communion seem to take it as a “fact” that the Presiding Bishop has denied the resurrection and the divinity of Christ; others passionately assert that she never has. The reality of the matter lies somewhere between the two.

The texts I draw from are very well-known statements of the Presiding Bishop; they have been officially brought to the attention of Archbishop Williams in an open letter from Archbishop Akinola, almost precisely one year ago. It must be presumed that Presiding Bishop Schori has been aware of them for some time, though she has chosen not to respond to them.

My conclusion here in both cases is: Schori most definitely never, at any time, denies these outright, in simple, “literalist” words; however, her words can indeed be reasonably taken to deny the *doctrines* of the Church on both matters. And those who say that she denies the divinity of Christ or the resurrection, assumably, mean to assert that she denies the doctrines of the church on these matters, rather than making “flat” denials.

I. The Resurrection

From an article on the subsite at EpiscopalChurch.org on the Presiding Bishop, “SAN DIEGO: Diocese welcomes Presiding Bishop; mission focus central” -

http://episcopalchurch.org/78695_96294_ENG_HTM.htm

She described etymology of words, shedding new light on familiar topics. "Science is a word that means knowing. Faith and religion ask questions about meaning. Science asks questions about mechanism and connection," she said. "They can be essential important partners in the human endeavor of knowing. Einstein said, 'Religion without science is blind; science without faith limps.'" She spoke about the importance of one informing the other and the enormities that result when they don't.

...Asked about the literal story of Easter and the Resurrection, Jefferts Schori said, "I think Easter is most profoundly about meaning, not mechanism."

What we shall see here is how Presiding Bishop Schori, with an adept rhetorical sleight of hand, brings us to the conclusion that the bodily resurrection of Christ is unimportant (though as a metaphor, and as a sublime thought, most certainly has a rich potential for describing life and motivating action).

Here, Presiding Bishop Schori is asked whether she believes in the Resurrection – the “literal story of Easter and the Resurrection,” i.e., the bodily resurrection of Christ – proclaimed even in the Gospel of Mark if one does not accept 16:9-20 (*contra* Spong).

PB Schori has already framed a context for the question she is asked, supposedly before the question itself was asked. In order to deal with PB Schori's answer, we will also have to look at how she distinguishes science from religion.

Schori associates science with “mechanism” and religion with “meaning.” This is a simplistic and very awkward way of framing the issue. For all her concern with etymology, this is an odd choice, with mechanism's origin in the Greek *makhana* or *mekhane*, “device, means.” The Greek is already quite related to our modern notion of “machine” - a device by which one does something. Science does frequently depict naturally occurring phenomena as “mechanisms” - schematically outlining various stages or processes as if they were interlinked parts of a greater apparatus. In relating science to mechanism, Schori is basically telling us that science is answering the “how” question as in, “how do things work?”

She is not associating science with *being* or the truth or falsity of a given state of affairs as one “traditionally” does with science and knowledge (*scientia*), knowledge commonly being defined philosophically as true justified belief. Rather she associates it primarily with the explanation of how anything's interacting parts or phases contribute to that thing's existence as a whole – whether or not the thing is known to exist, or not.

This awkward way of describing things seems to be reducing the great question of being and truth to one of “mere mechanics.” Nonetheless it is important to remember: when, in this context, Schori refers to “mechanism,” she is speaking of science, knowledge, and thereby also: true, justified belief – i.e., how we as people interact with truth (we do not say we have “truth” in our minds – the human “equivalent” or “correspondent” of truth is *belief* – we do not “true these things to be true,” rather we “believe these things to be true”).

This is then contrasted with: *meaning*.

This is again awkward. Presumably she does not intend with this the sense of “meaning” as – the definition or connotation of a word, or the linguistic referent of a sentence; nor does she mean intention in the sense of meaning to do a particular thing. She is in the more murky area of something like “existential meaning” - or rather, the whole group of things which we do, or should, associate with that thing, or possibly those things which we should draw as consequences and significations from the particular thing referenced.

To her credit, these are things which strike at the very base of our use of language, and are thus difficult

to articulate; philosophers and linguists have written untold numbers of books attempting to better pad out these types of distinctions in order to better clarify what we “mean” when we “mean” something. In a certain sense, *all* human speech and cognition is metaphorical, in the sense of referring one thing (a word or image) to another. But we nonetheless do understand sentences, and can grasp which things are being referred to, when people communicate with us. It remains nonetheless problematic that the Presiding Bishop has chosen to deal with such weighty issues in such naïve and thus potentially misleading categories.

So what do we have, then, when she tells us, when asked whether the Resurrection occurred or not, she answers: “I think Easter is most profoundly about meaning, not mechanism”?

She is telling us that the bodily resurrection is not important. This is indeed part of the “is” question – the question, “did it really happen?” - the question “is the state of affairs which we describe as the bodily resurrection of Christ true or false?” She does so by implying that the appropriate way of approaching this question is with the meaning / mechanism distinction which she first articulated and which we describe above. In doing so, she is encouraging to see the “meaning” as distinct from the “mechanism,” and separate this “meaning” from the question: “did it really happen?” - and inviting us to choose “meaning” over the truth of its occurrence. Furthermore, she is inviting us to consider the actual occurrence of the bodily resurrection of Christ as a matter of mere “mechanism” - something which can be ignored in the same way that we don't need a thorough knowledge of the inner workings of a watch, in order to be able to tell what time it is. Also, the truth value of the occurrence of the resurrection, as “mechanism,” seems to be something which could only be grasped by a specialist with intimate knowledge of the complicated inner parts of such a mechanism, and thus not for appreciation by average laypeople and clergymen who are not scholars in the relevant details. The actual occurrence – like some obtuse mechanism, or diagram of a complicated chemical reaction – need not be of importance to our faith, and indeed, is not of importance to those who practice “religion,” but is rather a matter of consideration for “science.” The bodily resurrection of Christ, itself, is not of importance to religious faith; however, the Resurrection resonates with meaning of new life, irrespective of the petty concerns of dogmatic biblical literalists regarding something which might or might not have happened nearly two thousand years ago.

With this sweeping gesture, she is able to make peace between the parties in her church who believe that it did happen, and those who believe it didn't: it simply doesn't matter, we can all just focus on what we agree on – that there is a very deep meaning to be found in the “Easter event,” whatever it was which may have actually taken place.

It is not in the scope of this paper to describe why this is not acceptable to Trinitarian Christianity, and why the bodily resurrection itself cannot be divorced from supposed meanings derived from a possible bodily resurrection, or a resurrection as metaphor. If you are reading this paper and you are asking yourself what this could be, please ask your pastor – and if your pastor tells you “it's complicated,” or himself does not quite understand why the resurrection of Christ itself cannot be meaningfully

separated from the significations ascribed to the resurrection – I would urge you to find a different pastor, and to do so immediately.

What Presiding Bishop Schori has done here can reasonably be said to amount to a denial of the church's doctrine of the resurrection. Trinitarian Christians believe not only that Christ rose from the dead, but also that this fact is tremendously important – even central – to our faith in Christ. This does not mean that anyone in the church wishes to consign you to eternal damnation if you do *not* believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ. But it most certainly means that this is something which we *commend to belief* and which we lovingly encourage – in whichever way we can – be it through incarnational ministry of love in demonstrating the power of Christ, through moving aside intellectual obstacles to the understanding and acceptance of this teaching by reasoned engagement, or through prayer – we most certainly do commend this to belief, as a faith in Christ without a faith in His resurrection is tantamount to denying one of the essential aspects of who He is. This is, then, an area in which your faith can grow.

As the importance of the bodily resurrection and its necessity in a complete faith is a part and parcel of the church's doctrine of the resurrection, Schori is indeed denying the church's doctrine of the resurrection by denying its importance, even though she most definitely never, to my knowledge, has ever denied that Christ rose from the dead, or explicitly denied the fact of the bodily resurrection of Christ.

So: when people say - “She has denied the resurrection” - what they mean is, that she has denied the church's teaching of the resurrection; if they mean that she explicitly ever says that Christ did not, bodily, rise from the dead – then I believe that they are wrong, and should be corrected with a more nuanced indication of what it is which she does, and does not, deny, and in how she does it. It is important for people to have a proper understanding, since this is such a weighty issue, and it can be damaging indeed when people are led to believe one thing, only to find out later that it was wrong.

II. The Divinity of Christ

From “A Wing and a Prayer: An Interview with Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori,” *Parabola Magazine*, Spring 2007 issue

(http://anglicanecumenicalsociety.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/perabola_bishop.pdf – downloaded originally from episcopalchurch.org, though no longer available there):

P: What does someone do when they believe that Jesus is divine but that some things that are defined as creeds – that Mary was a virgin, for example – don't seem right? Can one still be a faithful Christian?

BK: I hope that's an invitation to a deeper encounter ...

... Again, those creeds are not about checking off a bunch of propositions. They are about giving our heart to a sense that Jesus shows us what it looks like to be a divine human being ...

... If you begin to explore the literary context of the first century and the couple of hundred years on

either side, the way that someone told a story about a great figure was to say “this one was born of the gods.” That is what we're saying. This carpenter from Nazareth or Bethlehem – and there are different stories about where he comes from – shows us what a godly human being looks like, shows us God come among us. We have affirmed ever since then in this tradition that each one of us is the image of God. We are all the sons and daughters of God. I think there is an invitation to look below a superficial minimization to what the story is really about. It makes some people very uncomfortable to do that, I recognize.

In this case, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori is *not* asked about the divinity of Christ, this is assumed by the interviewer – the question rather concerns the virgin birth, which the Presiding Bishop answers in the spaces between the ellipses which I have left out, as I'm not dealing with this particular issue in this paper.

As in the case of the resurrection, the Presiding Bishop does not say “Jesus is not divine” - I highly doubt she would ever do that. However, what she does here essentially “redefines” divinity to the point that when she says, “Jesus is divine,” she means something entirely different – in some senses, perhaps even diametrically opposed – to what the church teaches about the divinity of Christ. So she does not deny that Jesus is God in so many words. Instead she is re-defining the meaning of “God” into something which means: a superbly good man. So when she says, “Jesus is God,” what she means is: Jesus was a man, albeit a superbly good one.

The Presiding Bishop is referencing the issue of divinity when she says: 'the way that someone told a story about a great figure was to say “this one was born of the gods.” That is what we're saying.' First off, note that it is in the context of a story – a fictitious one, a myth or fable. Does she mean that when we speak of God, we are engaging in fable? This is implied but not stated so we will move on. She also asserts that this is “what we are saying” - “we” perhaps being the first person singular for herself, or perhaps she means The Episcopal Church. The trope she is using to reference divinity is identified with “a great figure” - divinity is equivalent to being one who is “great” or exceedingly good.

This by itself is still not denying that Jesus is God in the Trinitarian sense, as we believe that Jesus was fully human, and this is in no contradiction with Jesus being God. What it does, however, in re-defining the word God to mean, basically, “a superbly good person,” is to shift the meaning of God into something which is entirely human (albeit superbly good, like e.g. Martin Luther King Jr. or Ghandi). This denies the church's teaching regarding the divinity of Christ, since the church teaches that to be God is something very different from what it means to be a man – and that this is not simply a difference in ethical superiority or moral achievement, or even a state of higher consciousness.

One might hold out the hope that elsewhere, the Presiding Bishop would make statements regarding the divinity of Christ which unequivocally state that Jesus is God – with all those attributes of God which Trinitarian theology ascribe to God. However, this is highly problematic, as I show in the *Appendix* about the hermeneutic necessary in dealing with the Presiding Bishop's statements. The Presiding Bishop is capable of using metaphorical language masking as “ordinary” language meaning

things highly different from what we expect them to mean, even in the most mundane and “normal” of circumstances where all contexts seem to signify that “literal,” non-metaphorical language is to be expected, as outlined in the *Appendix* to this paper.

It is further difficult since God here is being associated with ethical performance, ethos (a social situation promoting an ethic, including aspirations, stimulation to good works, community cooperation, self-affirmation and other such things which might not strictly fall into the category of “ethics”) and other such characteristics of a “great figure” - she mentions later in the article, e.g., a “higher consciousness” characteristic of such a “great figure.” All of these are things which can be abundantly and richly described with lofty metaphors and superlatives.

Inspiring as they are, ++Schori's Dallas talks on Christ of December 2009 can also be fit firmly into this reductionism, in particular her words about the “divinization” of men - though this would be a matter for another paper. But to sum things up – we “become divine” by corporately following the ethical code - “divine” here is simply a replacement term for the word “good” or “morally virtuous.” The word “God” and “Christ” are simply terms that we can use in the place of “good” or “just,” with no clear delineation separating this theology from agnosticism or atheism. “God wants us to ...” becomes a replacement term for: “our church wants you to ...”.

A little over a century ago, it was not necessary to ask if someone believed in the “bodily resurrection” - it was assumed that with the word “resurrection,” one referred to Christ's body. We now enter the difficult scenario where one needs to append all sorts of new words and qualifications in order to understand what someone believes. Today “bodily resurrection” might also mean, à la Spong, the resurrection of a “spiritual body,” which itself leads to the notion that Jesus was “raised into the meaning of God” - i.e., the “meaning” of the word “God” changed since many people began associating this word “God” with the teachings and actions of the man Jesus – nothing more than a change in semantics or popular associations.

Throughout the years I have read many of the Presiding Bishop's statements on Christ. I have not found any which can not be reducible to human ethics and ethos – no statement which makes abundantly clear that she dissociates herself from the view that the divinity of Christ has no reality outside of mankind alone (or possibly, mankind and physical nature together). If she indeed does believe Christ to be more than simply an alternative word for a human ethic and ethos – she has had every opportunity to do so, and to clarify this statement which has provoked so much grief amongst Trinitarian Christians who have had to deal with these words coming from a church head. This statement has been widely quoted in complaints regarding her Christology published by Anglican and Episcopal churches, and was also listed in the remarks of the Presiding Bishop in the report prepared for Archbishop Williams distributed in the open letter by Archbishop Akinola of February 10 last year (page 5), so Presiding Bishop Schori has had about a year to respond to it. Though she claimed in a radio interview that the Christology of The Episcopal Church is fully orthodox in October 2008

(<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=95429960>) in order to counter claims that

reasons other than the sexuality debate were causing parishes and dioceses to leave TEC, she has never, to my knowledge, made a statement about Christ which is not consistent with reducing the meaning of “divinity” to an ethics and ethos, nor has she offered to clarify the intent of this particular statement. The Presiding Bishop should know the great anguish her apparent denials of the divinity of Christ and the resurrection are bringing to Christians both within and without her church; and she most certainly knows also that it is a reason cited by some dioceses and parishes for leaving The Episcopal Church. If she indeed does not deny the church teachings on these matters, she could bring a great deal of peace by making clear statements.

So: when people say, “she has denied the divinity of Christ,” they do not mean: she has said “Jesus is not the Son of God,” or “Christ is not divine.” What they mean is: she has denied the church's doctrine of the divinity of Christ, by re-defining “divinity” as to mean a quality of “a great figure,” something which references an ethic and an ethos, rather than those things which the church teaches us about God.

III. An historic situation for world Christianity

It should be noted: whatever moral value one attaches to this state of affairs – one needn't necessarily then point a finger of blame primarily at Presiding Bishop Schori herself. A great deal of the responsibility here is held by the first diocesan committee which recommended her for ordination, by the diocese of Nevada for consecrating her, by General Assembly for having elected her as Presiding Bishop, and for The Episcopal Church at large, for not having called her to further accountability in exploring her own faith, or at least in further explaining, or possibly even retracting, her statements. And of course, the entire Anglican Communion is also mutually responsible for this state of affairs, as Presiding Bishop Schori is one of our Primates, and we hold that bishops are bishops for the whole Church.

I know of no church claiming to be Trinitarian since the Ecumenical Councils of the first millennium whose leader has gone to such an extent in denying the church doctrines of the resurrection and the divinity of Christ as The Episcopal Church, nor of any world group claiming to be Trinitarian Christians like the Anglican Communion, to seat a church leader who as done so amongst its highest level of leaders as we have done in our Primates' Meeting. It seems to be that we have brought about a situation which is truly unique in world history.

APPENDIX I:

A problematic hermeneutical situation with the current Presiding Bishop and The Episcopal Church today

Shortly after the election of the Presiding Bishop at the 2006 General Convention of The Episcopal Church, Terry A. Ward did some research into the list of her credentials in the booklet published by the

Joint Nominating Committee for the Election of the Presiding Bishop, which was distributed in order to introduce General Convention members to the candidates for the position and to help them make informed choices in casting their votes –

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/PB.Booklet.EnglishFinal.pdf> . Terry Ward discovered that the credentials listed for Bishop Schori included six years, from 1994-2000, as “Dean” of the “Good Samaritan School of Theology Corvallis, OR” - but could find no mention of this school on the webpages of ECUSA, the Oregon or Nevada Dioceses, The Church of the Good Samaritan of Corvallis, the Episcopal Church Annual, or the city directory of Corvallis. He contacted her with some questions, and later published his questions and her responses, all unedited. The questions revealed that there was no “Good Samaritan School of Theology” as one might expect in the sense of an academic institution, but this was rather, as she answered, “the then-rector's term for all adult education programs, both internally and externally focused,” at the Church of the Good Samaritan. Episcopal Church records (http://www.episcopalchurch.org/growth_60791_ENG_HTM.htm?menupage=50929) show this to be a parish with worship attendance varying from about 250 people in 1998 (earliest year records available to public) to about 210 in 2000. She nowhere justifies the use of the title of “Dean” to describe her role, which most certainly adds to the deception here - her position was apparently as coordinator or organizer of such activities. The article was also picked up by WorldNetDaily, a web news source with a very large circulation. The Presiding Bishop was not asked where the information came from – whether she provided it herself, or someone else was responsible for the information in the booklet – she does not provide the information on her own accord either, so we do not know.

Though this became well-known amongst some Episcopalians, never was an inquest made known, nor any clarification offered by The Episcopal Church of which I am aware, in addition to this clarification offered by the Presiding Bishop herself. One would think that in any corporation where a board elected someone for a position, if the elected candidate was found to have been elected on the basis of highly misleading (in this case, with a strong appearance of deliberately misleading) curriculum vitae information and this fact made known to the public, that corporation would at least commission an inquest into the source of the error in the information to provide transparency and accountability, and to assure concerned parties that such deceit – be it purposeful or perhaps unintended – was not dealt with lightly. In absence of such a commission, one would expect members or stake holders to demand such an inquest, and perhaps even a new vote with improved information.

Neither of these took place to any noticeable extent in The Episcopal Church. It seems that the Church remained entirely happy with this little deception (albeit, possibly unintentional) and saw no reason to present to its constituency or the wider world an indication of earnestness and honesty – or at least, a respect of the bounds of the metaphorical when it comes to plain speech - when it comes to the presentation of information. The sad consequence of a lack of action on this front is that we have no assurances that the Presiding Bishop will not, with slight justification (such as the rather cute term used by her rector for this program), embroider reality by using terms like “dean of a school of theology” for such things as “adult education coordinator at a church which has about 250 in worship attendance.”

And sadly, if she is willing to use such bold metaphors for such pedestrian, “concrete” things as a curriculum vitae, where the general expectation is straight-forward language, when this comes to the arena of theology, how much more might she likely to do so, if she was unapologetic for the disinformation provided, and not called to accountability by her own church? Furthermore, if The Episcopal Church corporately lets slide such a blunder in the very election of its Presiding Bishop, in misinforming General Convention, how much more likely will it take liberties with embroidering commonly-understood words when dealing with those less intimately connected to the church than its own General Convention – especially parties with whom it is in tension or even vehement disagreement?

The sad result is when dealing with information disseminated by The Episcopal Church and its leading authorities, it becomes very difficult to know how one should interpret the words before one. Are they rather ambitious metaphors describing something considerably different from what the text leads one to expect? Do they contain purposefully misleading vocabulary? One hopes for the best. The situation is all the more exasperating when dealing with issues of theology, where a generous use of metaphor is already expected, though even in theology, norms, albeit unwritten, exist to assure that the communicating parties actually understand one another, but are very easily transgressed when a prominent motive for persuasion or advocacy is present.

I myself am inclined to believe that in some sense, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori herself is a kind of victim – albeit one who should have known better, given her great intelligence – of the crisis in meaning brought about by the popularity of Bishop Spong's deliberate re-defining so many terms of Christian belief. This is a habit with far-reaching consequences – one which ultimately, in this case, is perhaps erasing sensitivity when it comes to the bounds of propriety of metaphor in speech, to the point that language which was once “common” and clearly understandable, becomes so confabulated with accessory meanings and willful skewings that the bounds of clarity and trust are pushed to their outer limits. The Presiding Bishop seems to have had a liking for Spong's method, as her diocese invited him to be the facilitator of a clergy conference when she was diocesan bishop of Nevada in 2003 (<http://web.archive.org/web/20040717062941/http://www.nvdiocese.org/FISHTALES/ARCHIVES/Tales03.04.html>).

APPENDIX II: Expected Rebuttals

1. Unfair use of quotes

You can not conclude that PB Schori denies the resurrection or the divinity of Christ without reviewing all of her writings and statements; simply selecting two as you do here is not enough.

As you note here, a goodly number of pages was required for each of these statements to unravel what, exactly, it is which they are saying, and what they imply. Presiding Bishop Schori is not known for

speaking in clear terms when she is talking about Christ, or God. I have read many of her statements, and from them, selected two which seem to me the most indicative of what she believes about the resurrection and of the divinity of Christ. Others trying to summarize the situation in TEC have collected a large number of different quotes; I found it better to deal with just two which I found more clear than the others, with some analysis. It is indeed possible that she has roundly affirmed what the church teaches about either of these without lapsing into denyability or metaphors which could be construed to mean something other than what the church teaches. However, I doubt this, as I would have expected a loyal Episcopalian who cares about Trinitarian theology to have brought this to our general attention on the web.

The statements here have also been “around” for a long time, some of the “favorites” in demonstrating the problems of Christology within TEC; however, they have never been explicated, and since they both are rather odd constructions, it is easy to miss their significance. At any rate, given the fact that they are quoted in the context of churches leaving TEC, and were part of official, public communication between a primate of the Communion and Archbishop Williams, it is exceedingly odd that Presiding Bishop Schori has not returned to these statements specifically and either explicated her intentions, or provided us with statements which are exceedingly clear about her intentions.

If you happen to know of a statement of PB Schori which clearly states her belief in the resurrection or the divinity of Christ, please do let me know. However, simple affirmations: “we believe in the divinity of Christ” do not suffice – she makes clear here that she views the divinity of Christ as subject to re-interpretation into something which is not divine at all, and she has made clear that she can refer to the resurrection without affirming whether Christ rose bodily from the dead or not.

People are alleging that PB Schori denies the divinity of Christ; they allege that she denies the resurrection; and others vehemently deny that she denies these things. What I am trying to do here is set out the case of those that allege denial, and show that though she does not deny these things as such (and I am *very* clear about that), that what she is saying *can reasonably be taken to be a denial of the church doctrines of these things*. This already is enough. A bishop should not make statements which are so easily susceptible to a reasonable claim of a denial of church doctrine. This in itself is already a great tragedy, even if the Presiding Bishop does indeed believe in the bodily resurrection, and in the divinity of Christ.

In other places, Presiding Bishop Schori articulates herself differently with regards to Christ. For example, at the recent Dallas discussions on Christ, she has some very inspiring words to offer her audience, which would not have prompted me to wonder if she is simply reducing everything to an ethic and an ethos. However, her talks also did not include any material which definitively signal a break with the view that God can be reduced to ethics / ethos. During the questioning session at the end, a question regarding the bodily resurrection prompted from her an answer which is a great improvement upon the text presented here: she affirmed that Christ's disciples believed that He rose from the dead. However, the question asked was whether *she* believes this. In affirming that the disciples believed this,

she is at least not following in the footsteps of Spong. But knowing the great anxiety her words regarding the resurrection have brought the church, if she truly believes in the bodily resurrection, should have been less evasive and simply replied: “Yes.”

I must admit that this paper presents a rather “one-sided” view of the Presiding Bishop's view of Christ. It does not acknowledge her glowing words (albeit, nonetheless subject to reductivism) as in the Dallas discussions. This is not, however, the intent of this paper.

2. She says the creed

PB Schori affirms the resurrection and the divinity of Christ each time she says the creed.

For considerable time now, some clergy people, when speaking of “the resurrection,” are speaking of something other than the bodily resurrection of Christ – cf. Bishop Spong on the resurrection. The same applies for “the divinity of Christ.” These are simply different things, different referents – when the church refers to “the resurrection,” the church refers to Christ's being bodily raised from the dead. If Presiding Bishop Schori, in referring to “the resurrection,” refers to “the transformative power we all have when we work together,” she and I are not referring to the same thing, even though what I refer to may in some way imply that to which she refers. Thus – though the Presiding Bishop may say, “on the third day He rose again,” she is not affirming the resurrection – she is affirming a social goal (a very noble one, but one which is not the same as the resurrection).

I may be wrong here – she may truly believe in, and affirm, the resurrection – and I hope that I am wrong. But I have never heard her speak to the contrary. It is not normally our place to “go prying” into what people “really believe” – but as a bishop, her faith needs to be public, and I think her words which I have outlined here speak for themselves.

3. It couldn't have been a physical body

The resurrection couldn't have been “the recussitation of a physical body” because Jesus was able to walk through walls after the resurrection; this must be some kind of spirit or spiritual body.

Our contemporary distinction between the “spiritual” and the “physical” is not what New Testament writers had in mind when speaking of “the spirit.” For this reason when I speak of “bodily resurrection,” I do not stipulate either a “physical” or a “spiritual” body – with “body” I mean, that which is absent when the young man tells Mary Magdalene, “He is not here.” We do not know much about Christ's body after the resurrection; neither do we need to know, but a bodily resurrection is important for incarnational theology and for how we consider Christ being both God and man. See also I Cor. 15.

4. Other churches have the same problem.

Clergy members of other churches have also been known to deny the resurrection or the divinity of Christ.

They have. Churches deal with a lack of faith in their clergy members in different ways; however, all

Trinitarian churches consider a falling away from faith of their clergy from the tenets of the creeds to be a tragedy – and I suppose, “officially,” TEC would as well. However, none have this problem to a degree which even approximates it as it is present in TEC, and never has the leader of a significant Trinitarian church, to my knowledge, done this to the extent that PB Schori has.

5. You want us to stop thinking.

We are a thinking people, and this requires a freedom of thought which we can't have if we are required to ascribe to dogmas.

I am a great fan of thought. If your mind tells you that it is most definitely unacceptable for you to believe in the divinity of Christ or the resurrection, it's probably not time for you to believe in these things, and you should find a thinking person who does believe in them to discuss your intellectual qualms and obstacles to faith. And keep on thinking, *and* fellowshipping with others who can help you grow in faith, as faith is not cognition alone. You do not *have* to believe these things, and your church should not take away your intellectual freedom. But if you do not believe these things or can not teach them, you should not be teaching in Trinitarian churches – these are things which the church decided a long time ago, in a process which itself involved a great deal of thinking, and is no less noble or astute than our own thinking processes. If we discover by rational means that there is adequate ground for revising the decisions of the ecumenical councils, we come together as churches, and in a dialogical and intersubjective process, come to a new consensus in a new ecumenical council. This has not occurred, however, in the last millenium; and a great deal of ecumenical dialog and joint ministry will need to take place before this takes place again (if our Lord does not come first).

6. She is simply, and legitimately, emphasizing the humanity of Jesus

We believe that Jesus is fully human, and there are ancient traditions which emphasize this.

We must continue to emphasize the full humanity of Christ. However, this does not entail asserting that Christ's divinity is reducible to His humanity, nor does it mean that we should reduce our notion of God to a human ethos and ethic, or that to “be God” simply means, to be “a great figure.” This could well be a beginning point of a person on the way to understanding God and embracing faith; and such a person should not be dissuaded with threats of hellfire or damnation for his lack of belief. But simply teaching such, in the absence of what Christ told us about Himself, is not befitting the ministry of a bishop. Bishops must at the very least make clear that there is more to the story, and there is more to Christ which we must learn to embrace in faith; one of their primary tasks is defending the faith, and this is not the same as evangelism, or “planting” faith. Bishops need to learn how to articulate the full faith of the church; though they may feel they are more compelling if they merely articulate a part of it, this is not an option, and they do better in unconvincingly articulating a full faith, then they do compellingly articulating only a part of it.

7. Only a flat denial should concern us

If she never says, “The resurrection never happened,” or “Jesus is not the Son of God,” why is there

all this concern? She doesn't exclude these things outright.

In a way, “deconstructing” or “redefining” the resurrection or the divinity of Christ can be *much worse* than simply denying either of these. Suppose I am a government minister tasked with ensuring freedom of speech. I begin my term of office by writing how freedom of speech is underappreciated – how simply walking through the park, going to a movie, or choosing my wardrobe communicates things to other people, and are also things which should be celebrated as a part of freedom of speech. And that *mere words* are a very trivial, impoverished way of looking at free speech. But I never mention the importance of protecting *words*, verbal or printed forms of communication, from censorship, in my expansive praise of freedom of speech. Then, at a time when the government begins censoring newspapers and public speech, I am silent, but continue in my flowery orations about our great freedoms to walk through parks, style our hair the way we want to, wear unique clothing combinations, etc. etc.. I've set a precedent, and other government officials are effusive in their praise of the wonderful freedom of speech we all have, while continuing blatant censorship – and *never* saying, “we are against free speech.” Eventually, the notion of “free speech” would be lost, and identified purely with non-verbal self expression such as fashion statements, even though the notion of “free speech” seems to have been expanded, rather than reduced. Government ministers would be able to sign on freely to “endorsing free speech,” and at some point the public's very notion of the importance of the freedom of verbal communication would be eroded.

Had I simply announced that I was “against free speech,” the public would patiently wait out the period of time I was in office, thinking I had a rather unique and odd view of things given my job, and hope that the next minister tasked with ensuring freedom of speech actually *did* believe in free speech. But as I have undermined the very concept of freedom of speech, my influence reaches far beyond my office, to all persons using the word “free speech.” People complaining about censorship would be countered the objection: “but we have free speech here!” - and if they continued, would be reprimanded for insisting on an outdated, irrelevant, moralizing and “literalist” notion of free speech which pales in comparison to the more expansive, not exclusively verbal notion of free speech which also allows us to wear our hair any way we want it, and dress in creative, deeply communicative ways, and that verbal expression isn't important since they're just words anyways. And that furthermore we have no right to try to “define” such a lofty ideal as free speech to “fit our particular agenda.”

When I told people, that I was a great supporter of free speech, their best reply would be: no, you deny free speech, since you do nothing about censorship, which it is your job to prevent; and the freedom to dress as one wishes, though laudable, is not itself the same as “free speech.”

This tactic is thus even more effective in removing the phenomenon of free speech from society than simply, and honestly, coming out against it. Likewise, replacing the meaning of “the resurrection” with an ethic or social program is more dangerous and dreadful for a bishop, than simply flatly denying it. Indeed, it probably fits better with Paul's warning in Galatians 1 than a simple denial, since the one thing is brought in under the cloak of the other thing to replace it – thus bringing “another gospel” into

the church.

Orwell's book 1984 is the text people usually refer to, when discussing this phenomenon.