

Episcopal presiding bishop revisits 'salvation' speech: Jefferts Schori on the "great Western heresy"

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In her talk to open the Episcopal Church's triennial convention in July, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori denounced the "great Western heresy" of individual salvation and contrasted it with the convention's theme of spiritual journey in community. Seven weeks later, noting public criticism from evangelical figures, she elaborated.

"Apparently I wasn't clear," Jefferts Schori said in a statement released August 27 by church headquarters in New York. She said that individualism—the view that one's interests and independence trump principles of interdependence—"is basically unbiblical and unchristian."

"If salvation is understood only as 'getting right with God' without considering 'getting right with (all) our neighbors,'" Jefferts Schori wrote, "then we've got a heresy . . . on our hands."

In her speech at the Anaheim, California, convention, Jefferts Schori disparaged the belief that "we can be saved as individuals, that any of us alone can be in right relationship with God." A number of critics, including Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, noted that evangelicals work against the notion that being a Christian stops at one's profession of faith.

Jefferts Schori acknowledged that "there have been varied reactions" from people who weren't at the General Convention "who heard or read an isolated comment without the context."

In her statement posted online, Jefferts Schori put her remarks in a biblical context, saying that both Jesus and the Hebrew prophets criticized believers who claim to be worshipping correctly, but "ignore injustice done to their neighbors."

“Salvation depends on love of God and our relationship with Jesus, and we give evidence of our relationship with God in how we treat our neighbors, nearby and far away,” she said. “Salvation is a gift from God, not something we can earn by our own works, but neither is salvation assured by words alone.” -*Religion News Service*