

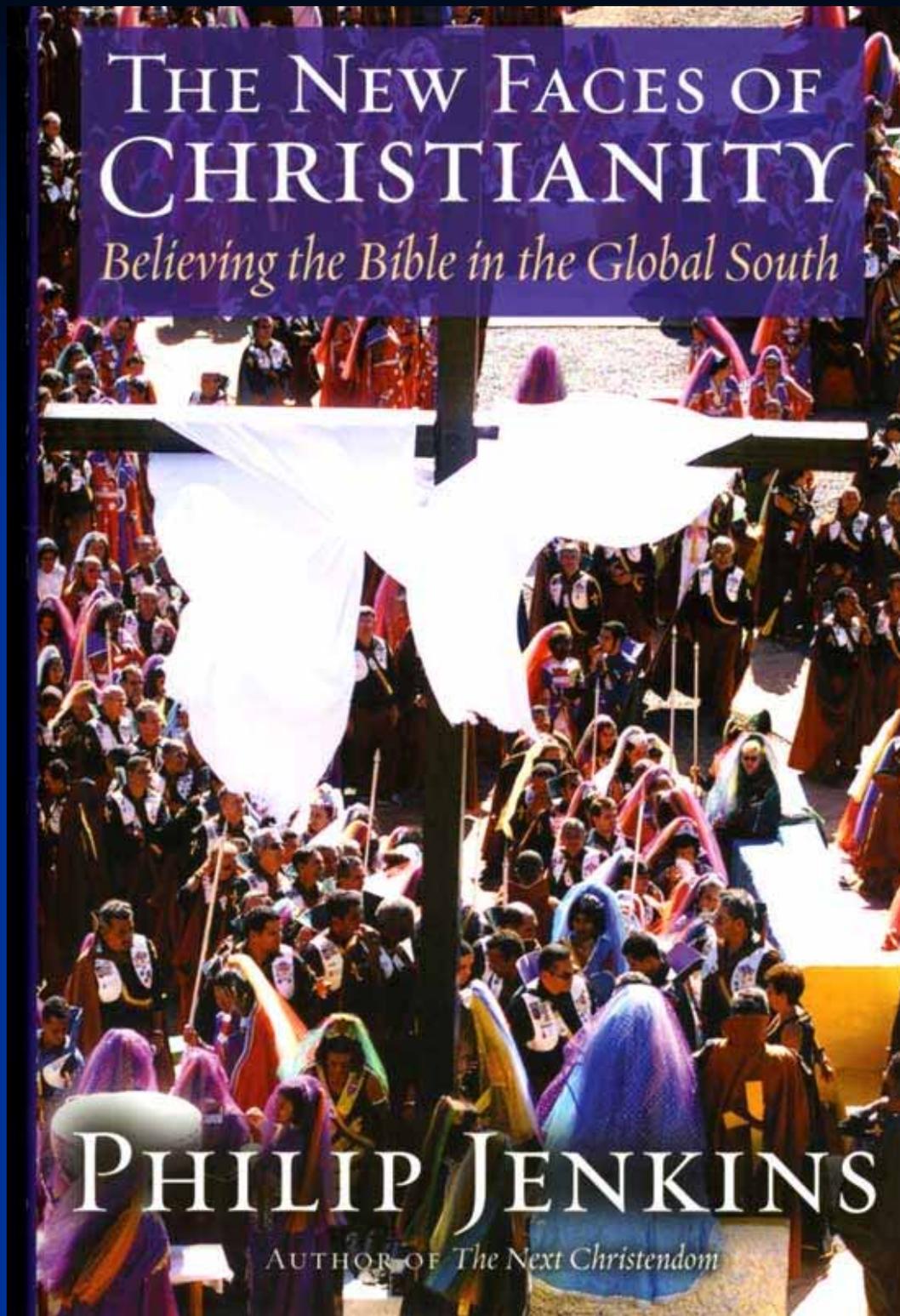
# The New Faces of Christianity in the Global South

## Old and New Testaments

Sunday, August 5, 2007  
9 to 9:50 am, in the Parlor  
*Everyone is welcome!*

March 13, 2005, Cathedral  
Church of the Advent,  
Anglican Church of  
Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria

*St. John in the Wilderness*



# Primary Reference

- **The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South**, Philip Jenkins, Oxford University Press, 2006
- Philip Jenkins is Distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies at Pennsylvania State University

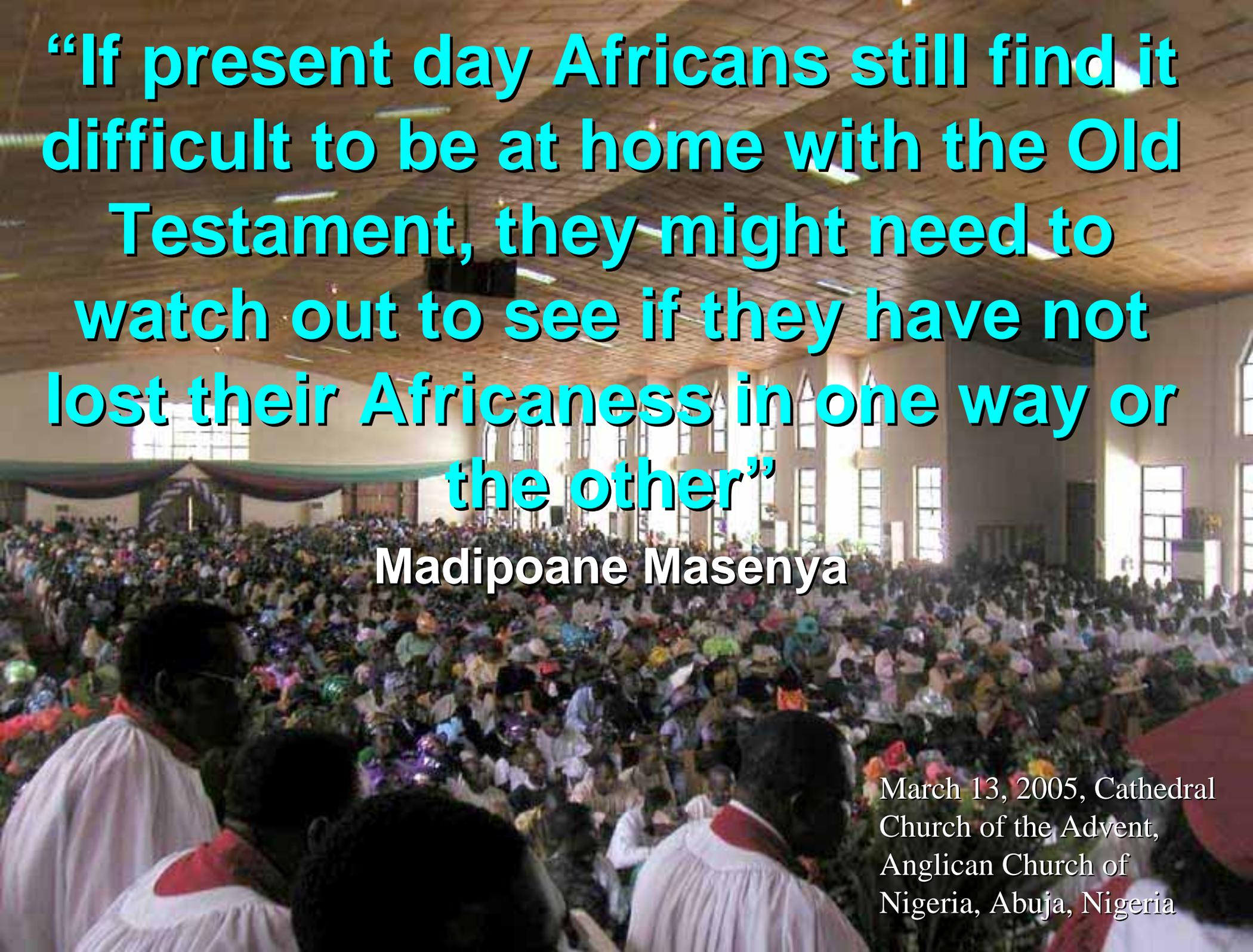
Everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your Son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

For the Mission of the Church, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 816-817



# Introduction

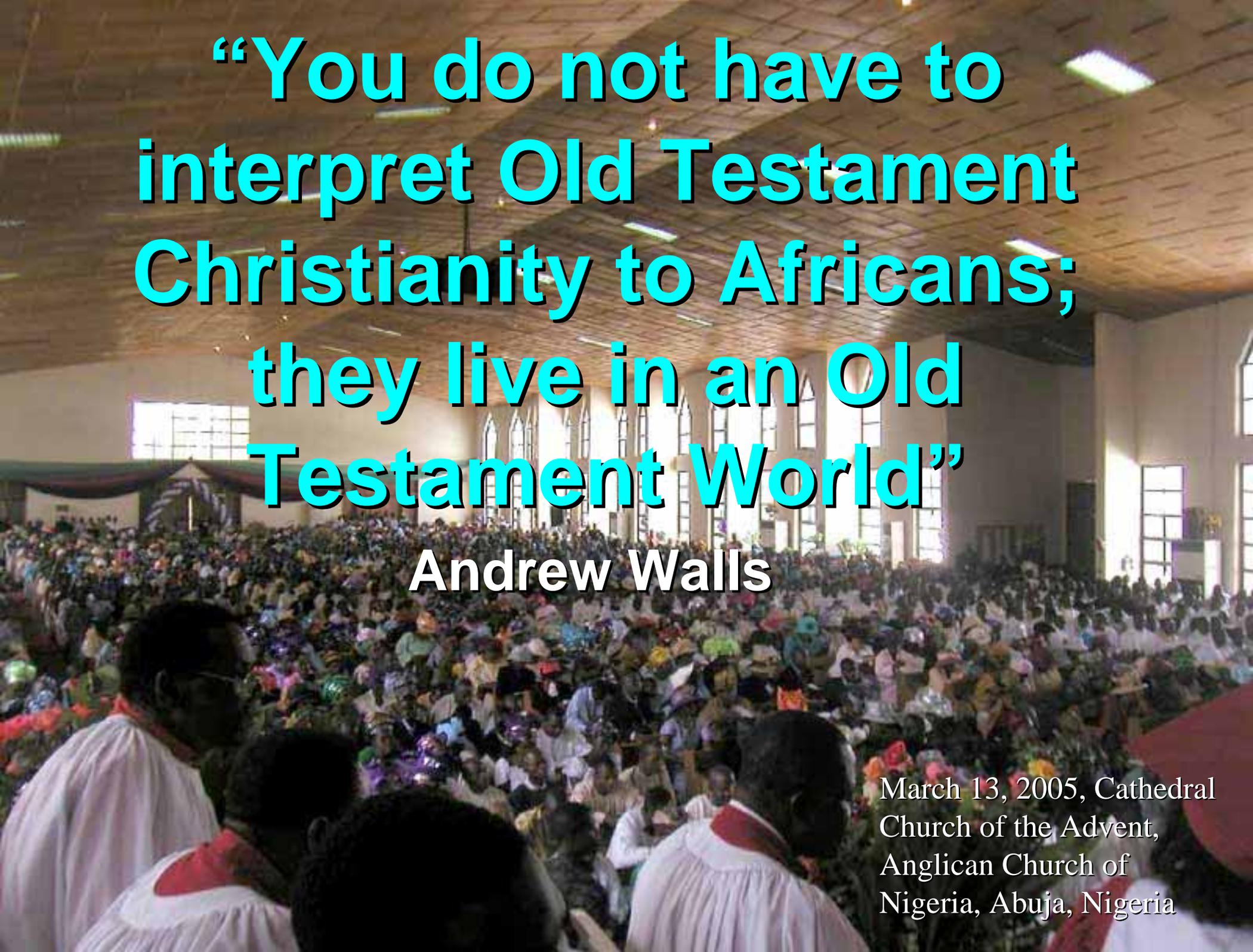
The Anglican Church of South Africa has a custom of blessing children who are not yet confirmed. Here the Archbishop of Canterbury blesses a child in Angola.  
*Anglican-Episcopal World #125, cover*



**“If present day Africans still find it difficult to be at home with the Old Testament, they might need to watch out to see if they have not lost their Africaness in one way or the other”**

**Madipoane Masenya**

March 13, 2005, Cathedral  
Church of the Advent,  
Anglican Church of  
Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria



**“You do not have to  
interpret Old Testament  
Christianity to Africans;  
they live in an Old  
Testament World”**

**Andrew Walls**

March 13, 2005, Cathedral  
Church of the Advent,  
Anglican Church of  
Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria

# Introduction

## King Solomon

- Ugandans initially accepted many of the seeming arbitrary rules laid down by white missionaries – but then they began the subversive act of reading the Bible themselves
- With shock, and then elation, they discovered the story of King Solomon and his many wives – which fitted so well with the ideal of African royalty.
- The chief demanded to know why the white missionary had told them polygamy was a sin. “How is it that King Solomon had all those wives? And he loved them too, the book says.”

# Introduction

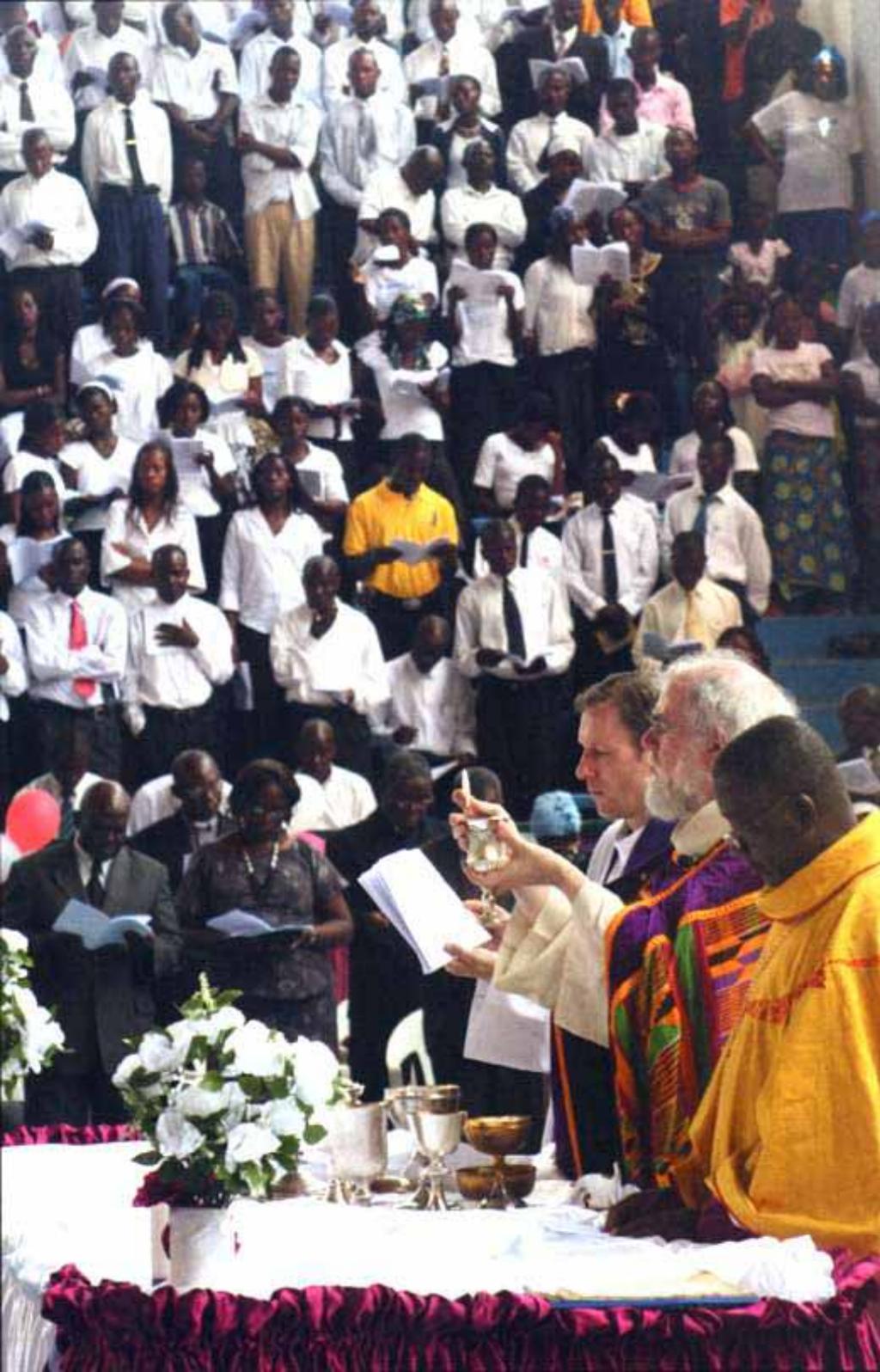
## King Solomon

- The missionary's explanation, that while all words in the Bible are divinely inspired and true, they are true to varying degrees and in different ways – was not very convincing.
  - The general consensus was that the missionary must have lied about polygamy, probably because he was too poor to afford additional wives.

# Introduction

## The Relation Between the Covenants

- In the West, the relation between the Old and New Covenants (or Testaments) seems a settled issue.
- However for the new churches in Asia and Africa, the Old Testament is deeply attractive, and their affection for it reopens the question of how the Old and New Covenants relate.



# The Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible

The Archbishop of Canterbury Celebrates  
the Eucharist in Angola. Anglican-  
Episcopal World #125, p. 7

# Hebrew & Christian Bibles

## Old Testament: Christianity's Foundation

- For most of the history of Christianity, the Old Testament was viewed as the foundation on which Christianity was built.
- The two Testaments spoke to each other:
  - The Hebrew prophets had foretold Jesus many times – so much so that Isaiah was like a fifth gospel in early Christianity.
  - Abraham's preparing to sacrifice his son foreshadowed the crucifixion.
  - Some Christians writers suggested every reference to "wood" in the Old Testament prefigured the crucifixion, and every reference to "water" prefigured Christ's blood.

# Hebrew & Christian Bibles

## Modern Attitudes to the Old Testament

- In modern times, attitudes towards the Old Testament have changed.
- Popular stereotypes, nourished by well-meaning (but wrong) Sunday school teachings, hold:
  - The God depicted in the Old Testament is an angry judge, not a loving parent like in the New.
  - The Old Testament implicitly justifies war, violence, and ethnic cleansing.
  - The Old Testament advocates a rigid, legalistic morality.

# Hebrew & Christian Bibles

## Modern Attitudes to the Old Testament

- More profoundly, and with justification, was the negative modern reaction in the West to **supersessionism**, the idea the Old Covenant and Judaism were no longer valid, and the Jews were at fault in resisting Jesus the Messiah.
- This negative reaction against **supersessionism** was fueled by:
  - the integration and growth of Jewish communities in the Western world (affording more personal knowledge of Jews and their lives), and
  - the revelation of Nazi atrocities against the Jews in a “Christian” Germany.

# Hebrew & Christian Bibles

## Modern Attitudes to the Old Testament

- The increasing acceptance among Western Christians that:
    - the Old Covenant was still a valid Covenant honored by God, and
    - The Jews were no less now, than in the past, God's Chosen People,
- had the “side effect” of “ceding” the Old Testament (the “Hebrew Bible”) to the Jews:
- The New Testament (the “Greek Bible”) became the Bible that belonged to Christianity.
  - The Old Testament (the “Hebrew Bible”) was owned by the Jews and did not really belong to Christianity. It was to be used “only with permission.”

# Hebrew & Christian Bibles

## Modern Attitudes to the Old Testament

- However, the forces behind this ceding of the Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible) to the Jews do not exist in the Christianity of the Global South:
  - Substantial Jewish communities do not exist (with the exception of South Africa and Argentina)
  - The Holocaust (the *Shoah* or Catastrophe) tends to be viewed by Global South Christians not as a structural sin of Christianity, but as one of the structural sins of Western culture, the same flaw that gave rise to two World Wars and Colonial oppression.

# Massive consecration of Bishops for Nigeria

# Our Testament



The consecration of twenty new bishops in the Anglican Church of Nigeria on March 4, 2007, in a glorious celebration attended by more than 7000 people.

*Anglican-  
Episcopal World*  
#125, p. 37

# Our Testament

## Cultural Affinities with the Old Testament

- African and Asian Christians have a deep affection for the Old Testament because of many cultural affinities they have with the biblical world.
- Modern Africans in particular can easily relate to descriptions of:
  - nomadic societies
  - tribes and clans and sacred places
  - migrations of clans and tribes driven by the threat of famine
  - polygamy
  - animal sacrifice as:
    - part of a celebratory festival
    - a means of atonement
    - a way of sealing a promise
  - taboos against counting and enumeration
  - long genealogies to establish one's ancestry

# Our Testament

## Cultural Affinities with the Old Testament

- *Example:* in the native religions in Nigeria, atonement to the gods was necessary for a community to be saved from epidemics, illness, wars.
  - This atonement was mediated by the shedding of the blood of animals
- *Example:* the Gikuyu tribe easily appreciated why God might be angry with David for taking a census of the people of Israel, because the Gikuyu have taboos against counting and enumeration.

# Our Testament

## Cultural Affinities with the Old Testament

- *Example:* for African and Asian Christians, genealogies and knowledge of one's ancestors are necessary to situate a person and understand their basis for authority
  - Chinese scholar Fook-Kong Wong: **“the genealogical lists in Chronicles bear witness to God’s intimate knowledge and remembrance of his people.”**

# Our Testament

## Cultural Affinities with the Old Testament

- In a commentary on *1 Samuel*, Gerald West lists some thirty “African resonances,” including:
  - dynamics of polygamous families
  - endemic conflict with neighboring tribes
  - the need to visit a seer at times
  - possession by spirits
  - women singing and dancing in recognition of the exploits of their men
  - the desire of men to be buried with their fathers

# Our Story



The Archbishop of Tanzania with the Archbishop of Canterbury and bishops from Tanzania, following a Eucharist at Zanzibar Cathedral in Tanzania. *Anglican-Episcopal World*, #125, p. 10

# Our Story

## Hebrew Roots in Africa

- Asian and African Christians have a deep affection for the Old Testament because of their cultural affinities with the Old Testament.
- Many – especially Africans – go a step further and suggest that **the cultural affinities are not mere chance**, but are present because the Hebrew and African cultures drew from or originated from each other.
- One Cameroonian pastor has remarked: **“We recognize our own history in the Pentateuch. We feel that we possibly stem from the history of the Hebrews, because our customs and those of the Hebrews are so similar.”**

# Our Story

## Hebrew Roots in Africa

- In some African Independent Churches (= African Christian churches not associated with a worldwide denomination), there is speculation Africans derive from some of the ten “lost tribes” of Israel.
- Africa scholar Modupe Oduyoye, in his book *The Sons of Gods and the Daughters of Men*, makes the case that linguistic evidence shows a direct connection between the ancient Semites\* and the people of West Africa
  - \*Semitic languages include Hebrew and Aramaic

# Our Story

## Hebrew Roots in Africa

- African scholars emphasize the biblical references to Africa:
  - Egypt and Ethiopia (certainly)
  - Cush (possibly)
  - Midian (possibly Jethro a black African, maybe even the brains behind his son-in-law Moses)
- Psalm 68:31 (KJV) very popular quote:  
**“Princes shall come out of Egypt;  
Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her  
hands unto God.”**

# Our Story

## Africa's "Old Testament"

- The idea that Hebrew and African cultures drew from or even originated from each other has given rise to the provocative speculation among Africans that the traditional / native African religions may be linked to the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- *That is: native or traditional African religion might not be mere paganism, but might also contain something of the Old Covenant, might embody in some way an "African Old Testament." (more on this in a minute)*



Archbishop of Canterbury visiting the Anglican Church in Sri Lanka (Ceylon). *Anglican-Episcopal World* #126, pp. 18-19



# No Other Gods

# No Other Gods

## Living Pagan Traditions

- The presences of living pagan traditions makes Old Testament Biblical injunctions against idolatry and false gods deeply relevant and *literal* for African and Asian Christians:
  - “You shall have no gods before Me” is not taken metaphorically as an injunction against idolatrous pursuit of wealth, but *literally*.
  - The golden calf is not a symbol for materialism, but *literally* a pagan idol. Don’t make or worship pagan idols.

# No Other Gods

## Living Pagan Traditions

- African preachers frequently draw on texts like Paul's warning to the Athenians not to believe foolishly in images and idols.
- Janani Luwum, the Ugandan Anglican archbishop martyred by Idi Amin, praised foreign missionaries who had "no option" in suppressing the "evil practices" of traditional pagan religions.

# No Other Gods

## Africa's "Old Testament"

- There is however another take on African's traditional / native religions that may seem contradictory with this condemnation of paganism.
- The idea that Hebrew and African cultures drew from or even originated from each other has given rise to the provocative speculation among some Africans that the traditional / native African religions might be linked in some ways to the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
  - That is: native or traditional African religions might not be mere paganism, but might also contain some legacy of the Old Covenant. They might be thought of as partly embodying an "African Old Testament."

# No Other Gods

## Africa's "Old Testament"

- Such ideas have justified movements to try to include aspects of African native / traditional religions in African Christianity.
- This **inculturation movement** is particularly influential in Roman Catholicism.
- The Catholic archbishop of Bloemfontein, South Africa argued in 2000 that the church consider adopting blood sacrifice in some of its rituals:
  - **"Sacrifice to the ancestors continues to be a very common practice among Africans. The slaughtering of an animal – cow or sheep – takes place wherever there is a funeral or marriage feast, or in times of illness, unemployment, family feuds or the birth of a child. Is there a way to integrate this custom with their Christian belief as a step towards meaningful inculturation? ... Even sophisticated black Christians slaughter animals as part of their tradition of communing with their ancestors at important occasions in their lives."**

# No Other Gods

## Africa's "Old Testament"

- There is also a movement to incorporate traditional notions of sacred lands into African Christian practice.

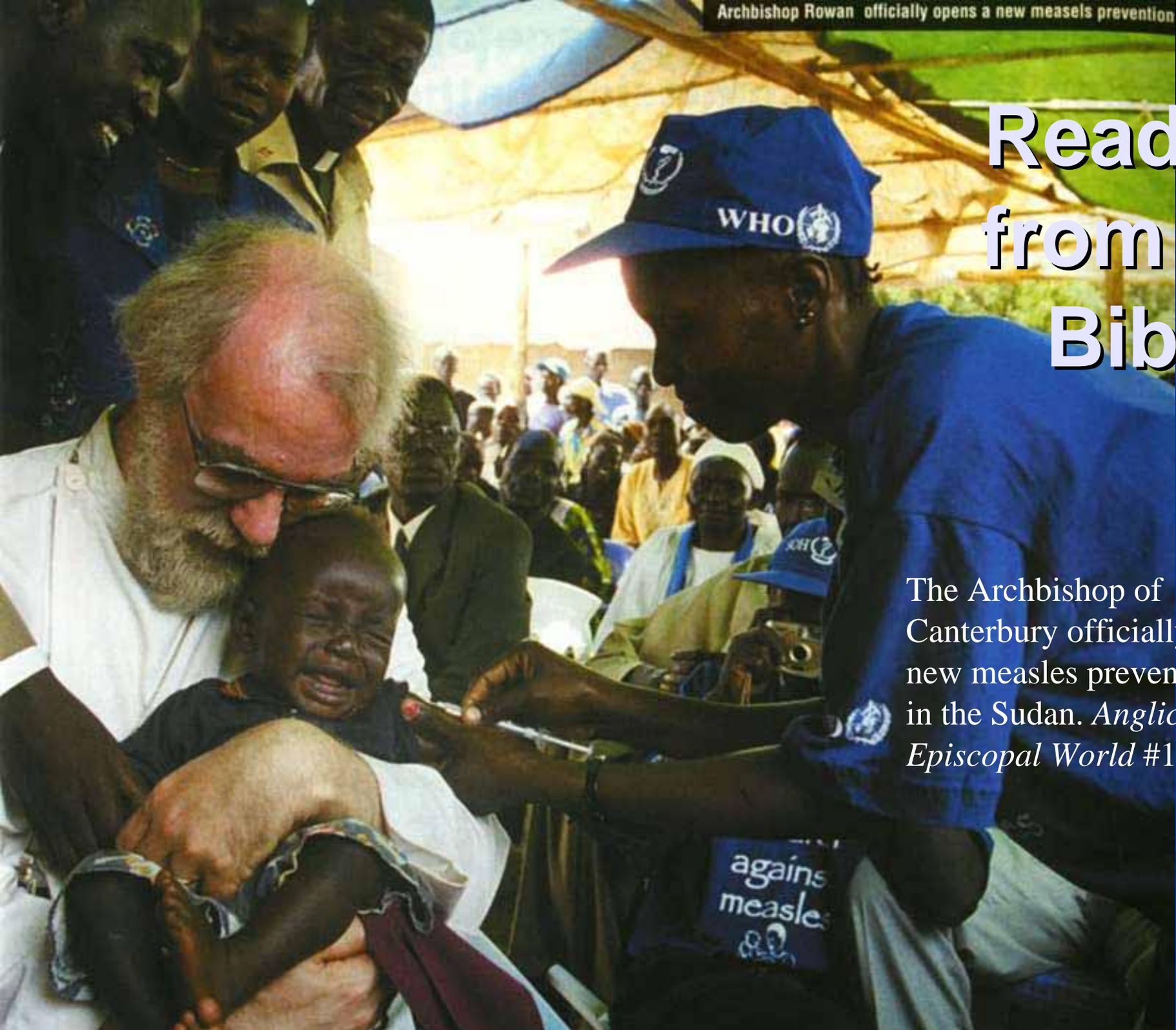
# No Other Gods

## Charges of Syncretism

- The **inculturation movement** has however alarmed other African Christians, who charge it is an unhealthy syncretism and a deviation from true Christianity.

# Reading from the Bible

The Archbishop of  
Canterbury officially opens a  
new measles prevention clinic  
in the Sudan. *Anglican-  
Episcopal World* #121, p. 11



# Reading from the Bible

## Veneration for the Old Testament

- For a variety of reasons then, Global South Christians – and Africans above all – venerate the Old Testament as a living source of authority for Christians
  - So when western Christians talk about moral laws that are “only” found in *Leviticus*, their underlying assumption that *Leviticus* does not count as much rings hollow to Africans.

# Reading from the Bible

## Favorite Bible Books

- Sermon texts reveal several “favorite” Bible books among African preachers. These include:
  - *Genesis* (most cited)
  - *Exodus* and *Isaiah*
  - *Ecclesiastes* and *Proverbs*
  - *Matthew* is the favorite gospel (= the “Jewish” gospel), followed by *John*
  - *Acts*

# Reading from the Bible

## Favorite Bible Books

- In *Acts*, Africans find arguments that they don't have to renounce their culture for Christianity:
  - Just as Greeks and Romans did not have to renounce their culture and become "Judaized," so too the Igbo do not have to be "Europeanized" or "Americanized" to be fully Christian.

# Reading from the Bible

## Favorite Bible Books

- Native African missionaries readily identify with Paul's methods for presenting the Christian message:
  - Paul's speech at Lystra: (Acts 14:16-17 NRSV): **"... In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good – giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy."**
  - Paul's speech to the Athenians: (Acts 17:22-24 NRSV) **"Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands ..."**



# Hebrews and Revelation

Choir from the Anglican Church in Juba, Sudan, greets the Archbishop of Canterbury and his delegates during his pastoral visit to the Sudan. *Anglican-Episcopal World*, #121, p. 12

# Hebrews and Revelation

## The Blood of the Lamb

- Also popular among African Christians are those books that especially resonate with African religious symbolism (and Old Testament themes) of sacrifice and sacrificial blood, sacrificial animals – most commonly a lamb – as well as priestly mediation:
  - The *Letter to the Hebrews*
  - *Revelation*

# Hebrews and Revelation

## Hebrews

- *Hebrews*, written by an unknown author (although long attributed to Paul), has some of the shrewdest arguments (and perhaps the best Greek writing) in the New Testament
- It assumes a deep knowledge of Jewish temple ritual, and describes how the temple sacrifice has been superseded by the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus dying on the cross.

# Hebrews and Revelation

## Hebrews as Africa's Letter

- Kwame Bediako, African theologian, in “The *Epistle to the Hebrews* as OUR Epistle,” writes:

**“the value for us of the presentation of Jesus in *Hebrews* stems from its relevance to a society like ours with its deep tradition of sacrifice, priestly mediation, and ancestral function ... the traditional purificatory rituals of Odwira, repeated year after year [in Ghana], have in fact been fulfilled and transcended by the one, perfect Odwira that Jesus Christ has performed once for all ... The Odwira to end all Odwiras has taken place through the death of Jesus Christ.”**

# Hebrews and Revelation

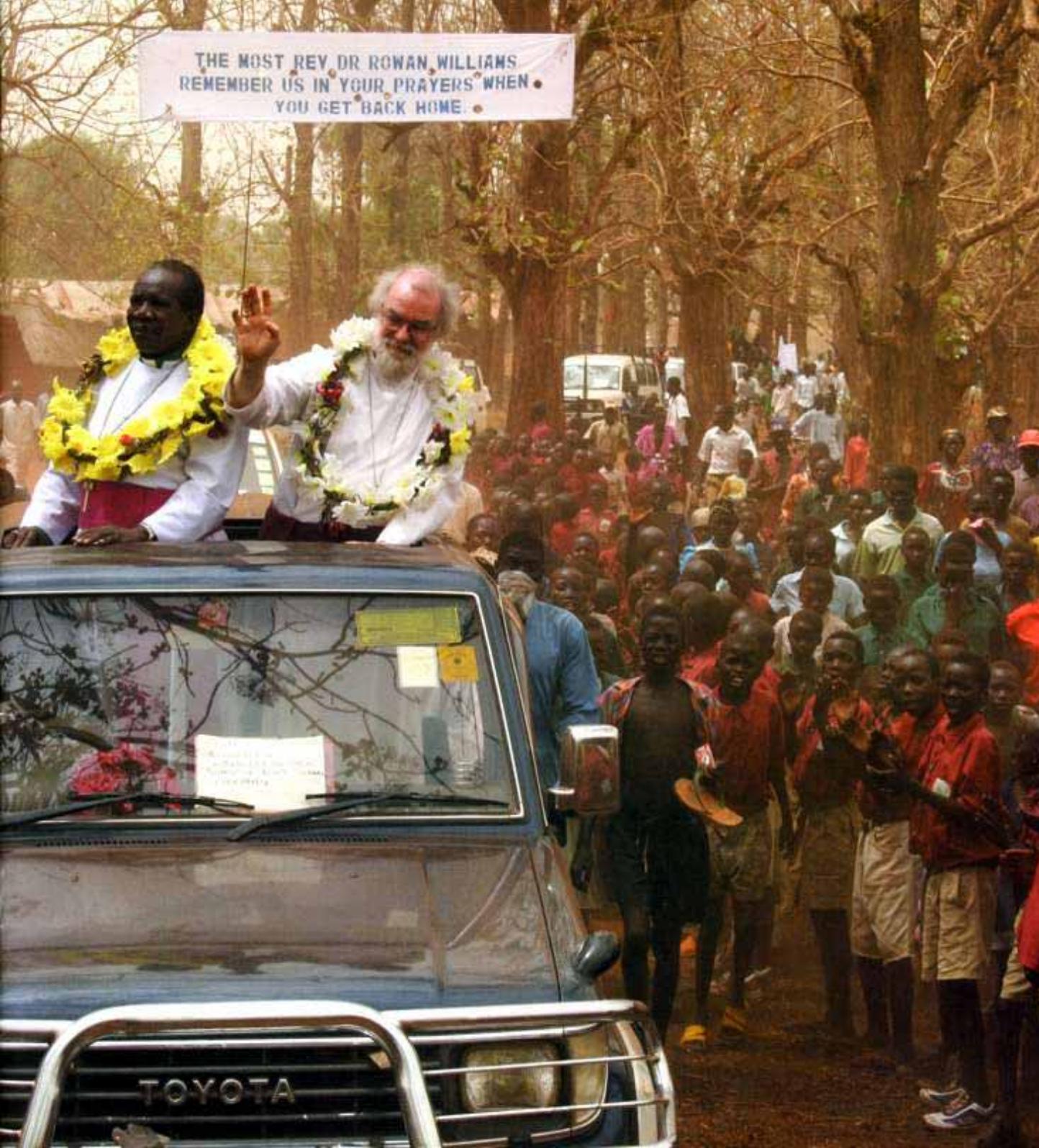
## Revelation

- *Revelation* is also a book very appealing to Africans:
  - Its dominant symbols of the lamb, the throne, the blood, and the animals are common in African religious symbolism.
  - The dead are still alive in another world, and influence the life of those in this world.
  - The future can be seen through dreams and visionary revelations.

# Hebrews and Revelation

## Revelation

- Africans have a fascination for prophetic utterances, and treat visionary texts with great respect.
- Dismissing the book of *Revelation* as “only dreams” is a puzzling and nonsensical statement in the African context.



# Wisdom Books

The Archbishop of  
Canterbury in the  
Sudan. *Anglican-  
Episcopal World*,  
#121, cover

# Wisdom Books

## Ways to Live

- The Wisdom books of the Bible offer practical ways of living in the world, and are also very popular among African and Asian Christians
- Old Testament:
  - *Proverbs*
  - *Ecclesiastes*
- Deuterocanonical / Apocrypha works:
  - *Wisdom of Solomon*
  - *Sirach* (= *Ecclesiasticus*)
- New Testament:
  - *The Letter of James*

# Wisdom Books

## Proverbs

- *Proverbs* is very popular and carries great authority in Africa:
  - The genre is an old friend. The people are used to speaking in symbols, proverbs, and riddles.
  - Has supplanted many traditional proverbs and popular wisdom central in the old oral culture.
  - Revered as the collective wisdom of ancestors, handed down to instruct the living.
- We in the affluent north on the other hand, have little respect for the “wisdom of elders,” and instead place greater value on novelty in ideas and expression.

# Wisdom Books

## Proverbs

- “For the African the proverb is the spice by which Africans chew kola.” (Chinua Achebe)
- “If the [Old Testament] Wisdom appears like a thick forest to those from the West, to Africans, it is more like a plain” (Madipoane Masenya)

# Wisdom Books

## The Letter of James

- *The Letter of James* is also relished by African Christians for its practical day-to-day advice.
- *James*:
  - Is the only entire work of Wisdom literature in the New Testament.
  - Not really a letter, but rather a sermon or exhortation
  - Uses and comments on traditional Wisdom texts, including *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*.
  - Cites Old Testament figures like Abraham and Job as models for living.
  - Quotes the words of Jesus more extensively than any other Letter, and does so in very ancient forms.

# Wisdom Books

## The Letter of James

### ■ *James:*

- Strongly practical, defines religion as care for the pure and powerless
  - It was written for an unpopular Christian minority living within a hostile non-Christian culture. Such Christians were assumed to need practical lessons for living amidst a society that lacked any Christian values.
- Flatly denies the theory of justification by faith alone, affirming the value of good works over faith.
  - Martin Luther: “St. James’ Epistle is really an epistle of straw compared to [St. Paul’s letters] ...”



# A Holy People

African women welcome the Archbishop of Canterbury to Angola wearing their Archbishop t-shirts. *Anglican-Episcopal World*, #125, p. 8

# A Holy People

## Ideas of a Godly Nation

- Exodus 19:5-6 NRSV: “... if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation”
- Leviticus 11:45 NRSV: “I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy”
- Proverbs 14:34 NRSV: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”
- Psalm 33:12 NRSV: “Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.”

# A Holy People

## Ideas of a Godly Nation

- Such Old Testament passages support a view that nations and peoples, no less than individuals, will be judged on how they enact and enforce God's laws.
- Religion is not merely a matter for individuals, but is communal. Nations will be punished for their collective sins.
- In the affluent North, we frequently use such ideas:
  - to argue that the nation has a responsibility:
    - to use its power to fight oppression,
    - to use its wealth to aid the poor and helpless.
  - to argue that any war must satisfy the criteria of a “just war theory” to be justified before the eyes of God

# A Holy People

## Ideas of a Godly Nation

- The Churches of the Global South go even further than the affluent North with their belief that the collective sins of a nation includes the individual moral sins of its members.
  - That is: personal immorality is also part of the national burden, part of a peoples' collective offense against God.
- Divine retribution might extend for generations:  
Exodus 20:5-6 NRSV: “...for I the LORD your God am a **jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.**”

# A Holy People

## Ideas of a Godly Nation

- 2 Chronicles 7:14 NRSV: “...if **my people** who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and **heal their land.**”
- Healing then is an issue for both the land and community.
- Many African preachers thus blame the region's underdevelopment on its past enslavement to heathenism.

# *Next Week*

## **Poor and Rich**

For many Southern readers, the Bible is congenial because the world it describes is marked by contemporary problems such as famine and plague, poverty and exile, clientelism and corruption. The excruciating poverty of a Lazarus eating the crumbs beneath the rich man's table is not just a archaeological curiosity

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