

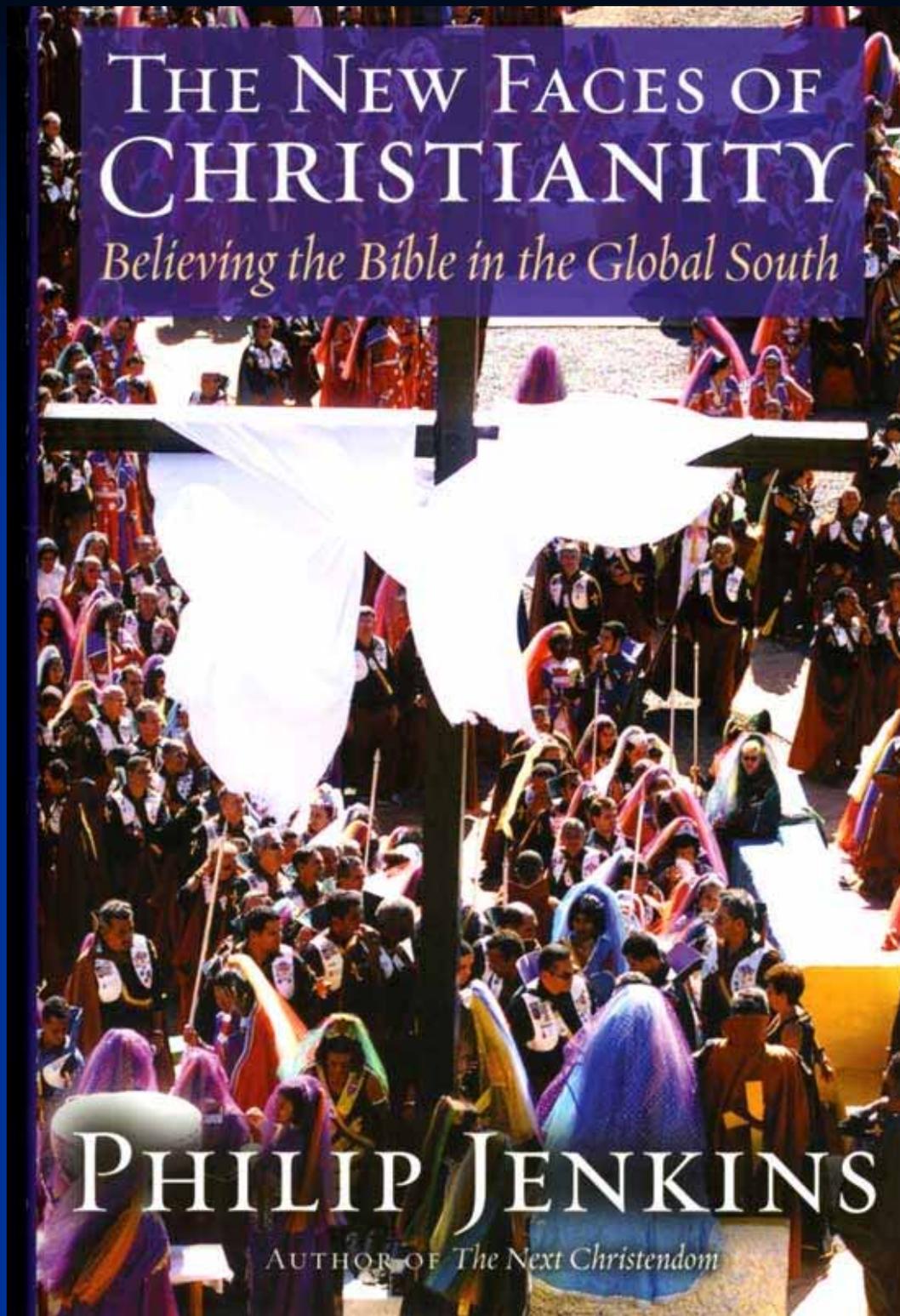
# The New Faces of Christianity in the Global South

## Poor and Rich

Sunday, August 12, 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

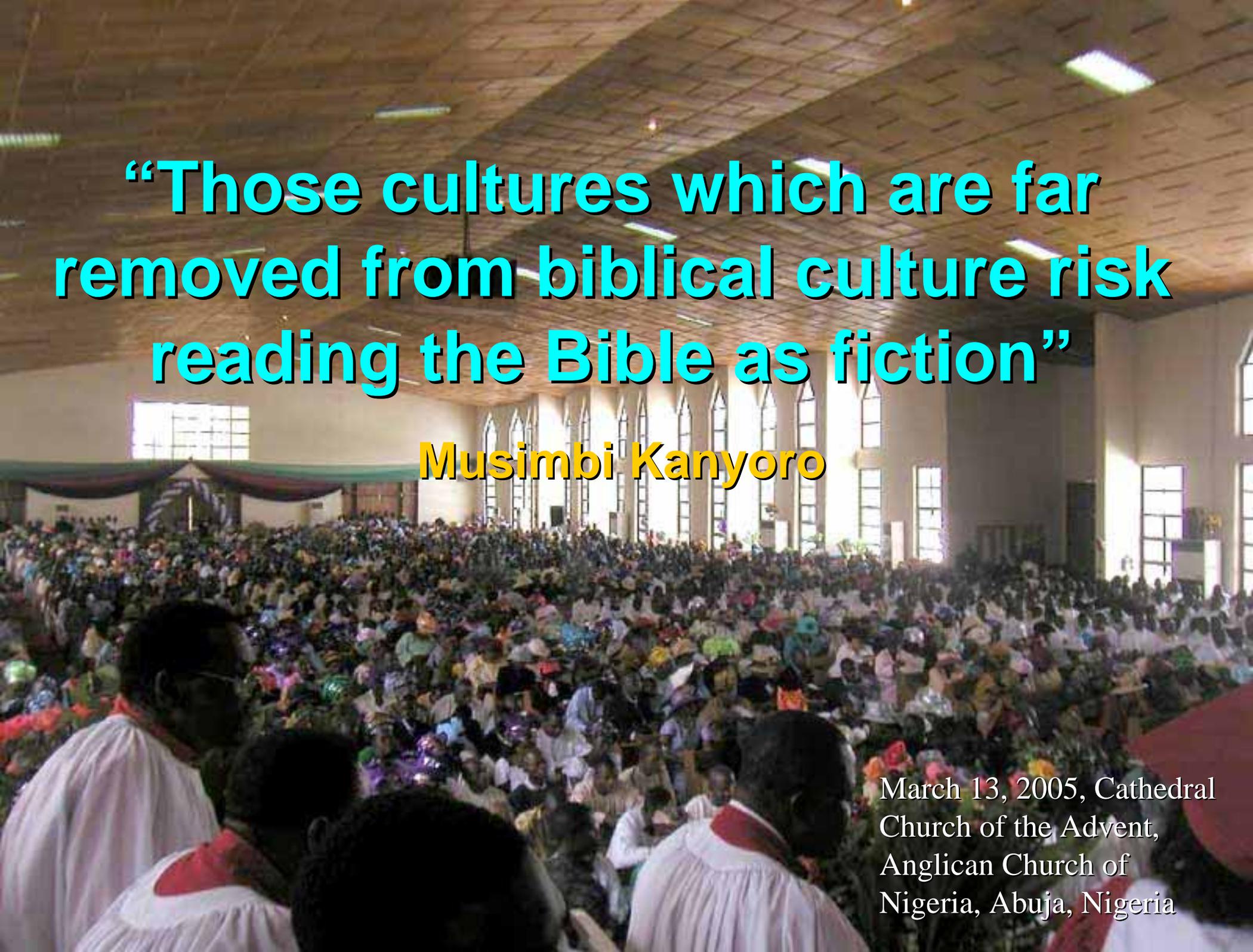
- **The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South**, Philip Jenkins, Oxford University Press, 2006
- Philip Jenkins is Distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies at Pennsylvania State University

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord.



# Introduction

The Archbishop of  
Canterbury is greeted  
during his visit to West  
Africa in July 2003  
(*Anglican Episcopal  
World*, #111, p.11)

A large crowd of people is gathered in a cathedral, filling the pews. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking down the length of the church. The ceiling is high and features a grid of recessed lighting. The walls are light-colored with tall, narrow windows. The text is overlaid in a bright cyan color with a black outline.

**“Those cultures which are far removed from biblical culture risk reading the Bible as fiction”**

**Musimbi Kanyoro**

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

# Introduction

## The Average Christian

- The burgeoning growth of Christianity in the Global South (Africa, Asian, Latin America) means the average Christian today is poor – *very poor* by the standards of the white worlds of North America and Western Europe.

# Introduction

## A Familiar Biblical World

- For such Christians, the Bible describes a world very familiar to them, a world marked by:
  - famine and plague
  - poverty and exile
  - clientelism and corruption
- The Bible teaches ways to cope and survive in such a harsh environment, and even holds out the hope of prosperity



Scene from the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to West Africa in July 2003 (*Anglican Episcopal World*, #111, p.8)

**Blessed Are the Poor**

# Blessed Are the Poor

## The Attraction of Parables

- Jesus' parables are particularly attractive to Christians of the Global South
- Novelist Francisco Goldman:  
**“Guatemala certainly feels biblical. Sheep, swine, donkeys, serpents – these are everywhere, as are centurions, all manner of wandering prophets, pharisees, lepers and whores. The poor, rural, mainly Mayan landscape has an aura of the miraculous ... [It] is the perfect backdrop for religious parables about fields both barren and fertile, fruits and harvests, hunger and plenty.”**

# Blessed Are the Poor

## The Parable of the Lost Coin

- Poor Global South Christians would understand first hand the frantic search of a poor woman for the tiny bit of money she has lost, money that could feed her children that night, in the Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-9)

# Blessed Are the Poor

## The Parable of the Prodigal Son

- Modern African villagers understand very well – as did the villagers of ancient Galilee – the temptation of migrating to the city in the Parable of the Lost (or Prodigal) Son (Luke 15:11-24)
- And they find it mind boggling – as Jesus surely intended for his audience – that the father was willing to take back a son who had so atrociously ignored his family obligations

# Blessed Are the Poor

## The Parable of the Dishonest Manager

- The Global South includes many societies making the transition from a traditional peasant agricultural economy to a money economy.
- Farmers must borrow money to survive, which is often lent at exorbitant interest, 50 to 100% annually.
- When a group of such farmers were asked to interpret the Parable of the Dishonest (or Shrewd) Manager (Luke 16:1-16), they saw the actions of the dishonest manager as an act of social justice, an act that provided desperately needed debt reduction.



# A Grain of Wheat

A child sitting outside Gulu Hospital in Uganda, her baby brother strapped to her back. Children like her are part of the ministry of the Street Children Project of the Anglican Church of Uganda (*Anglican Episcopal World*, #124, p.27)

# A Grain of Wheat

## The Attraction of Agricultural Imagery

- Jesus lived in an agricultural society familiar with planting and harvest, a world of grain, grape and olive. Metaphors from this life pervade his teachings.
- Many South Christians are only a generation away from an agricultural economy. They still know the poetry of an agricultural life, know the earthly reality of ideas such as “death is required to produce life.”

# A Grain of Wheat

## The Attraction of Agricultural Imagery

- Tamil hymn:

**We are the wilted kanai plant;**

**O divine one, gracious Lord**

**You are the farmer who makes it sprout**

**O divine one, gracious Lord**

**We are the cotton fields that do not yield,**

**O divine one, gracious Lord**

**You are the farmer who makes them grow**

**O divine one, gracious Lord**

# A Grain of Wheat

## The Attraction of Agricultural Imagery

- This passage from John 12:24-25 is much quotes in services blessing fields or seeds:  
**“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”** (NRSV)

# A Grain of Wheat

## Psalm 126

- Their background often allows Global South Christians to see dimensions of a text that are lost upon us.
- In Psalm 126:5-6, we read **“May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.”**  
(NRSV)
- Why are the sowers weeping?

# A Grain of Wheat

## Psalm 126

- To Christians in the Global South, it is obvious: in planting the seed corn, the sower weeps because he is taking food from the mouths of his children, knowing that otherwise there will be nothing to eat the following year.

# Forgive Us Our Debts



Children at a creche attached to home-based care, Diocese of Highweld, Anglican Church of South Africa (*Anglican Episcopal World*, #124, p.25)

# Forgive Us Our Debts

## Debt and Debt Forgiveness

- In Churches of the Global South, the biblical theme of debt and debt forgiveness is a vital issue.
- *Locally*: in some societies, forms of debt slavery still exist, and moneylenders threaten terrible physical sanctions against nonpayers.
  - Repayment often involves providing a relative as a sex worker in a neighboring city
- *Nationally*: development in many societies is thwarted by unthinkably vast debts owed to the Affluent West – debt often incurred by larcenous past dictatorships

# Forgive Us Our Debts

## Gospel

- In the Gospels, Jesus frequently speaks about creditors and debtors.
  - As in the Gospels, in many societies of the Global South the creditor is still a human being with a face, not a faceless bureaucratic institution.
- For example, themes of debt and debt forgiveness are found in:
  - The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:23-34)
  - The Lord's Prayer ("forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors")

# Forgive Us Our Debts

## Jubilee

- The biblical concept of **Jubilee** in *Leviticus* chapter 25 presents a sweeping vision of social and economic liberation, a year of unshackling in which all debts are to be forgiven, and captives freed
  - This text is the foundation for activist asking for global debt forgiveness
  - The text was once famous enough to be inscribed on America's Liberty Bell: **“Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.”** (Leviticus 25:10)

# Forgive Us Our Debts

## Jubilee

- Calls for debt forgiveness can also be found in Nehemiah.
- That fact that the liberating concept of **Jubilee** is in *Leviticus* is another reason why Christians in the Global South are not impressed by arguments that the teachings on sexual morality also found in *Leviticus* are ancient cultural encrustations that need not be taken seriously

# Four Horsemen



Claudette, a survivor of the genocide in Rwanda with scars visible on her head, visiting a memorial to the victims  
(*Anglican Episcopal World*, #122, p.34)

# Four Horseman

## The Transience and Fragility of Life

- Christians in the Global South must live within a profound sense of the transience and fragility of life.
- One of the most used passages in African sermons is James 4:14: “... **you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.**” (NRSV)
- In the Sudan, a hymn cries “**You are here today but tomorrow you’ll be here no more. Our only hope is Jesus Christ, so receive him now.**”

# Four Horseman

## The Suffering of Children

- Faced with child soldiers, child prostitutes, obscene infant mortality rates, Churches in the Global South also find much in the Bible that addresses the plight of the innocent young:
  - the despairing cry of Ishmael on the verge of death
  - the massacre of the innocents
  - Elijah's and Jesus' healing miracles on children

# Four Horseman

## The Transience of Nations

- A sense of the transience of whole nations is also felt in the Global South.
- The disintegration of nations as poverty, hunger, scarce resources inflame ethnic and political tensions, causing failed states, has been experienced by many.
  - In the Congo for example, some 4 millions people have died in the last 10 years because of the continuing civil war

# Four Horseman

## The Transience of Nations

- The experience of the transience of whole nations makes it easy for Christians in the Global South to understand the Old Testament idea that a nation's existence depends upon God's favor.
- The Hebrew prophets have a contemporary feel when they warn of doom for the nation if the people forsake God.
  - The best known Old Testament passage in the Sudan is Isaiah's prophecies of annihilation and hope in Isaiah chapter 18 (addressed to "lands ... beyond Ethiopia")

# Four Horseman

## Lamentation

- Lamentation was a well-known genre in antiquity, a literature of mourning and grief.
  - The **Lamentations of Jeremiah** is the biblical example of this genre
- In the affluent West, lament has lost its centrality, and we are largely ignorant of the book of Lamentations

# Four Horseman

## Lamentation

- In the Global South however:  
“The voice of the exiled and desperate community must be released in this current time of sorrow and loss so that grief-stricken and wretched people can make their own voices heard with all their power ... For them, the book of Lamentations has survived and, in its role as literature of survival, will continue to provide the means for survival for suffering humanity.” (Archie Chi Chung Lee)



# Being Filled

The Archbishop of Canterbury serving food to some of the 700 children at a school in the Sudan  
(*Anglican Episcopal World*, #121, p.4)

# Being Filled

## Food and Water

- Throughout the Bible, the prospect of being filled with food was for most an unusual prospect – just as it is today in the Global South.
- Perhaps only those with hungry eyes can appreciate the images of food and feasting, eating and starving that permeate the Bible:
  - In Luke's Magnificat, we celebrate the radical vision of a society in which God will fill the hungry
  - The prodigal son comes home driven by famine, and is given a banquet of food, completed with fatted calf
  - The messianic age in Second Temple Judaism is symbolized by the splendor of a great banquet in which all have enough to eat
  - This same banquet theme underlies the ancient Christian symbolism of the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist

# Being Filled

## Food and Water

- A reliable source of safe drinking water is also a dream for many in the Global South
  - Readers in the Global South can share the amazed expectation of the Samaritan woman at the well when Jesus promises her a reliable source of living water.

# Being Filled

## Famine

- The threat of famine is also familiar to many Christians in the Global South, who can thus appreciate how famine drives many stories in the Bible:
  - the careers of Elijah and Elisha (9<sup>th</sup> century BC prophets) were set in times of drought and famine
  - the book of Ruth, a tale of a society devastated by famine

# Being Filled

## Famine

- Food shortages are the subject of modern Christian hymns. For example in Ghana, we find the hymn verses:

**The famine has become severe.**

**Let us go and tell Jesus!**

**He is the one who**

**When he raises his hands**

**Gives even our enemies their share**

**And our brothers bring head pans**

**To carry the food away**



# Plague

Project worker in the Amigos Project in Uganda with an AIDS orphan holding baby chicks (*Anglican Episcopal World*, #114, p.32)

# Plague

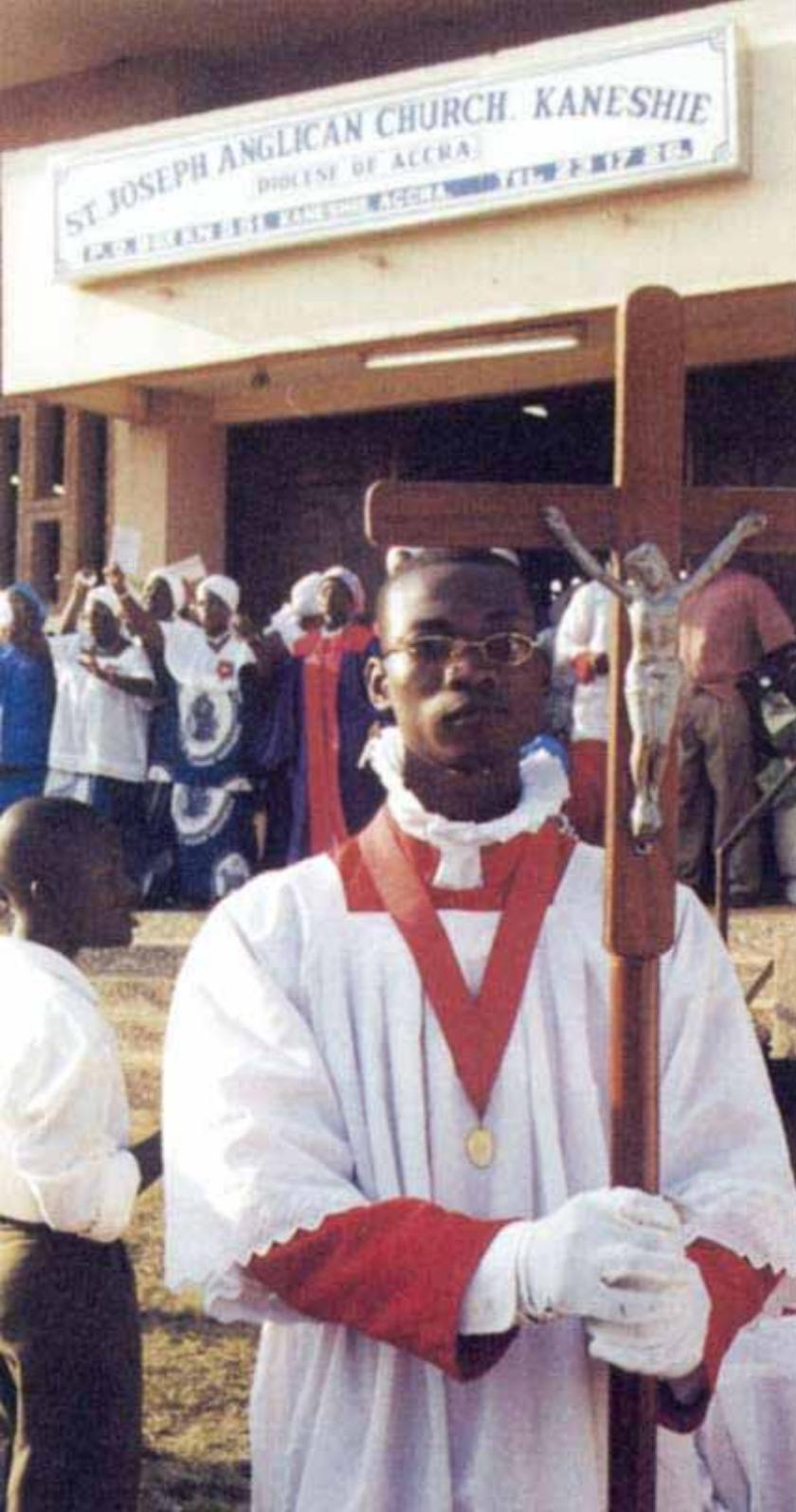
## Epidemic Disease in the Global South

- The Bible's language of plague thrives in the world of the Global South, a world beset by epidemic diseases:
  - malaria kills two million children a year
  - 30 million Africans are HIV-positive
    - AIDS kills 2.5 million a year in sub-Saharan Africa
    - there are one million AIDS orphans, far beyond the capacity of traditional communities to absorb
- As a consequence of disease and lack of access to modern medical care, the life expectancy in the sub-Saharan African is in the 40's

# Plague

## AIDS as a Biblical Plague

- Since the areas most hit by AIDS are the centers of growing Christian Churches, we might say the Church in the Global South has AIDS.
- African Christians frequently imagine the horror of AIDS as a biblical plague, and sometimes as a punishment for the people's sins:
  - Numbers 14:11-13 is a common sermon reference. **“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long will this people despise me? And how long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them ...’”** (NRSV Numbers 14:11-12)



# By the Rivers of Babylon

Scenes from the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to West Africa in July 2003 (*Anglican Episcopal World*, #111, pp. 9 & 10)



# By the Rivers of Babylon

## The Church of the Uprooted

- Exile and displacement are constant realities for Christians in the Global South, and this experience gives special meaning to biblical passages on:
  - the threat of exile
  - deportation and its aftermath
  - the problems of ethnic and cultural identity that result from exile

# By the Rivers of Babylon

## The Church of the Uprooted

- Ugandan evangelical leader Kefa Sempangi fled Idi Amin's regime in the late 70's, and wrote: **“Since our escape from Uganda we had felt a deep kinship with David, the fugitive king.”**
- Namibian writer Zephania Kameeta updated Psalm 137 as follows:

**By the rivers of foreign countries we sat down as refugees  
there we wept when we remembered the land of our birth  
We stopped singing our beloved songs of liberation ...  
Remember Lord what the oppressors did  
The day they turned us into refugees  
Remember how they kept saying “Let us destroy them  
completely.”**

# By the Rivers of Babylon

## Problems of Cultural Identity

- Exile and migration causes problems of ethnic / cultural identity and assimilation.
- In trying to understand these problems, Christians in the Global South frequently turn to Bible stories of Jews and Christians trying to survive in the shadow of a dominant empire and culture:
  - Israel's exile and return from exile in Babylon
  - The *Book of Esther*, a beautiful Jewish exile in the Persian court
  - The *Book of Acts*, with its cosmopolitan Mediterranean world



# Health and Wealth

Children greet the party of the Archbishop of Canterbury during his visit to the Anglican Church of Burundi (*Anglican Episcopal World*, #119, p.13)

# Health and Wealth

## The Prosperity Gospel

- Most inhabitants of the Global South are truly the wretched of the earth, often poor and persecuted.
- In this setting, many highly successful churches have taught a variant of the “Gospel of Prosperity,” the idea that Christians have the right and duty to seek prosperity in this world, to obtain health and wealth here and now

# Health and Wealth

## The Prosperity Gospel

- You can find the Gospel of Prosperity in America also. Atlanta evangelists Creflo A. Dollar argues:  
**“The Bible makes it so very clear: Preach the Gospel to the poor. What’s the Gospel to the poor? You don’t have to be poor anymore! ... Poverty is a curse. We have tried to equate humility and poverty, but it’s just not sound. It’s a curse. Jesus came to set us free from the curse of the law. Sin, death, sickness, and poverty are parts of the curse.”**

# Health and Wealth

## The Prosperity Gospel

- The largest church in the world is a church that preaches the Prosperity Gospel: the Central Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, which claims half a million members.
  - Church teaches the “three-fold blessings of Christ, health, prosperity, and salvation”
  - The Beatitudes are read as literal promises. For example: “**Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth,**” means the meek will gain land ownership.

# Health and Wealth

## The Prosperity Gospel

- In the Prosperity Gospel:
  - The story of Abraham is a story of how material rewards follow faithful observance of a covenant
  - Joseph lives a classic rags to riches story (or rather rags to palace story)
  - David rose from shepherd boy to king
- The most commonly quoted Bible verse is perhaps John 10:10: **“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”** (NKJV)

# Health and Wealth

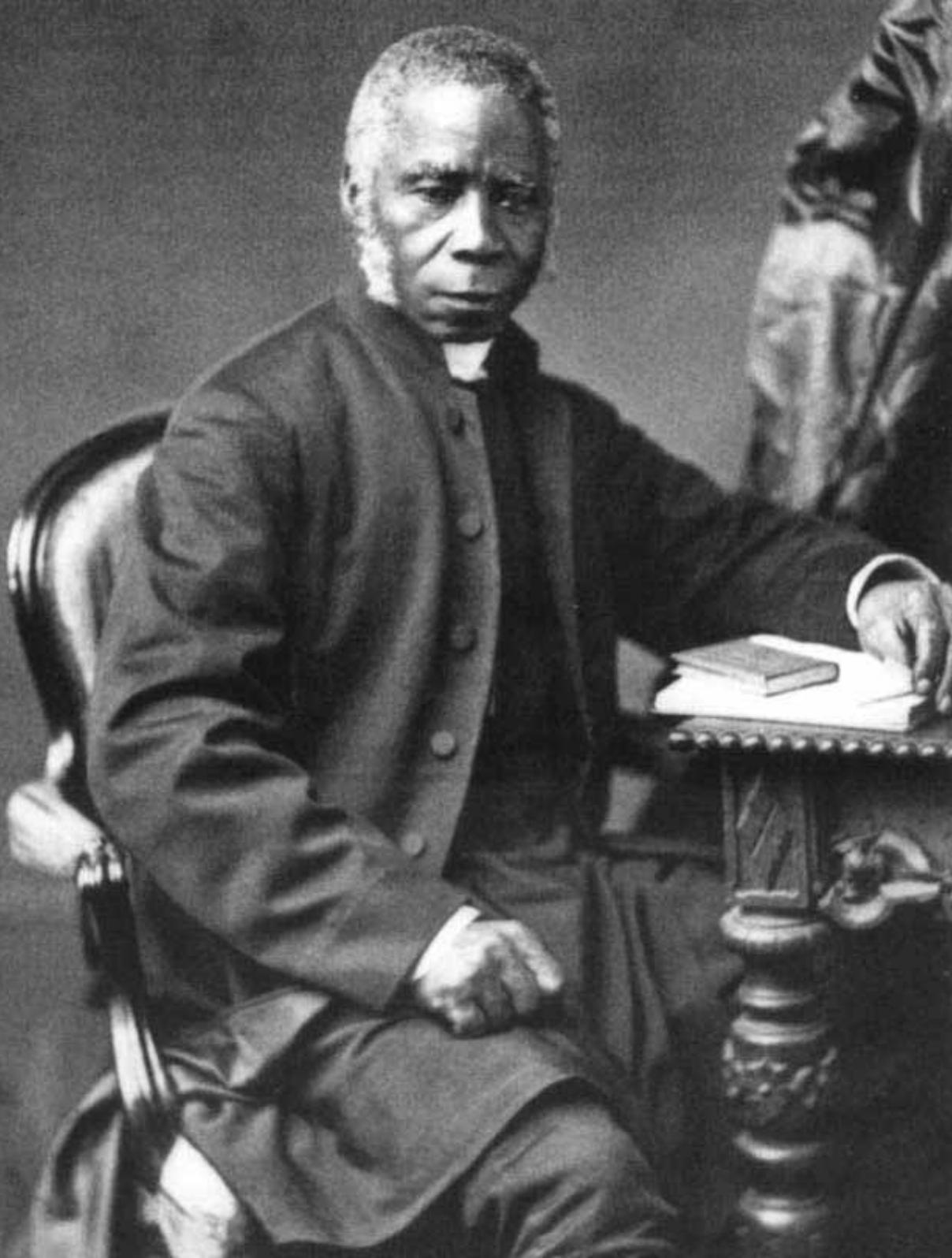
## The Tithe

- To achieve prosperity, a Christian must first give God what is rightfully God's, including tithes and offerings.
- Early Christians put the book of *Malachi*, one of the minor Jewish prophets, at the end of the Old Testament because of what seemed like explicit messianic prophecies in the book.
  - Thus it took on a special status as the “bridge” between the Old and the New Covenant.
- Preachers of the Prosperity Gospel are quick to remind that *Malachi* also warns (see 3:7-10) that not paying one's tithe and offerings to God is to rob God, and will bring down God's punishment on individuals and communities.

# Health and Wealth

## Problems with Prosperity

- The materialism promoted by the Prosperity Gospel troubles many African and Asian leaders as well as their North American counterparts.
- Nigerian journalist Chris Ngwodo editorialized:  
**“The now prevalent free market capitalist brand of Christianity has as its purveyors, the *nouveau riche* smooth talking prophets of profit peddling a feel good gospel of greed. The competition for the hearts and minds of the poor and gullible is so intense that self-promotion and marketing is being taken to outrageous heights. With each TV and radio jingle, each banner, poster and handbill, the next anointed man of God struggles to outdo the last by making even more brazen claims. The damage done to the Christian witness is incalculable.”**



# A Gospel of Poverty

Samuel Ajayi Crowther, first African Anglican Bishop, 1807-1891 (*Anglican Episcopal World*, #118, p.18)

# A Gospel of Poverty

## A Context of Extreme Poverty

- Before condemning the health and wealth tradition of some churches of the Global South as pure materialism however, we should take into account its context of extreme poverty.
- **“It is perilously easy for us in the affluent West to despise believers who associate divine favor with full stomachs or access to the most meager forms of schooling or health care; who seek miracles in order to flourish, or even survive.” (p. 97)**

# A Gospel of Poverty

## A Context of Extreme Poverty

- One activist describes life in the slums of Lagos, Nigeria, a city of 15 million people:

**“Everyone here wakes up in anger ... The frustration of being alive in a society like this is excruciating. People find it very hard and it is getting worse. Day in, day out, poor people from all over Africa arrive in this place, still seeing Lagos as the land of opportunity ... There is extortion at every point. One in ten people have regular work.” “The main growth businesses” are “gangs, and evangelical churches which promise a better life.”**

# A Gospel of Poverty

## Material Blessings and Well-Being

- The “health and wealth tradition” also raises theological challenges to the affluent Western Churches:
  - Are not health and material security desirable goals? And do we not pray for our well-being in our services and liturgies?
  - If so, why shouldn't prayer be a means to try to change a suppliant's health or wealth?

# A Gospel of Poverty

## Material Blessings and Well-Being

- Ugandan evangelical leader Kefa Sempangi argues that for Africans:

**“A religion is true if it *works*, if it meets *all* the needs of the people. A religion that speaks only to man’s soul and not to his body is not true. Africans make no distinction between the spiritual and the physical ... If the gospel you are preaching does not speak to human needs, it is useless. It cannot compete with the witch doctor and the gods.”**

# ***Next Week***

## **Good and Evil**

**Much of global South Christianity today is a healing religion, with a strong belief in the objective existence of evil, and often a willingness to accept the reality of demons and the diabolical**

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