

The New Faces of Christianity in the Global South

Women and Men

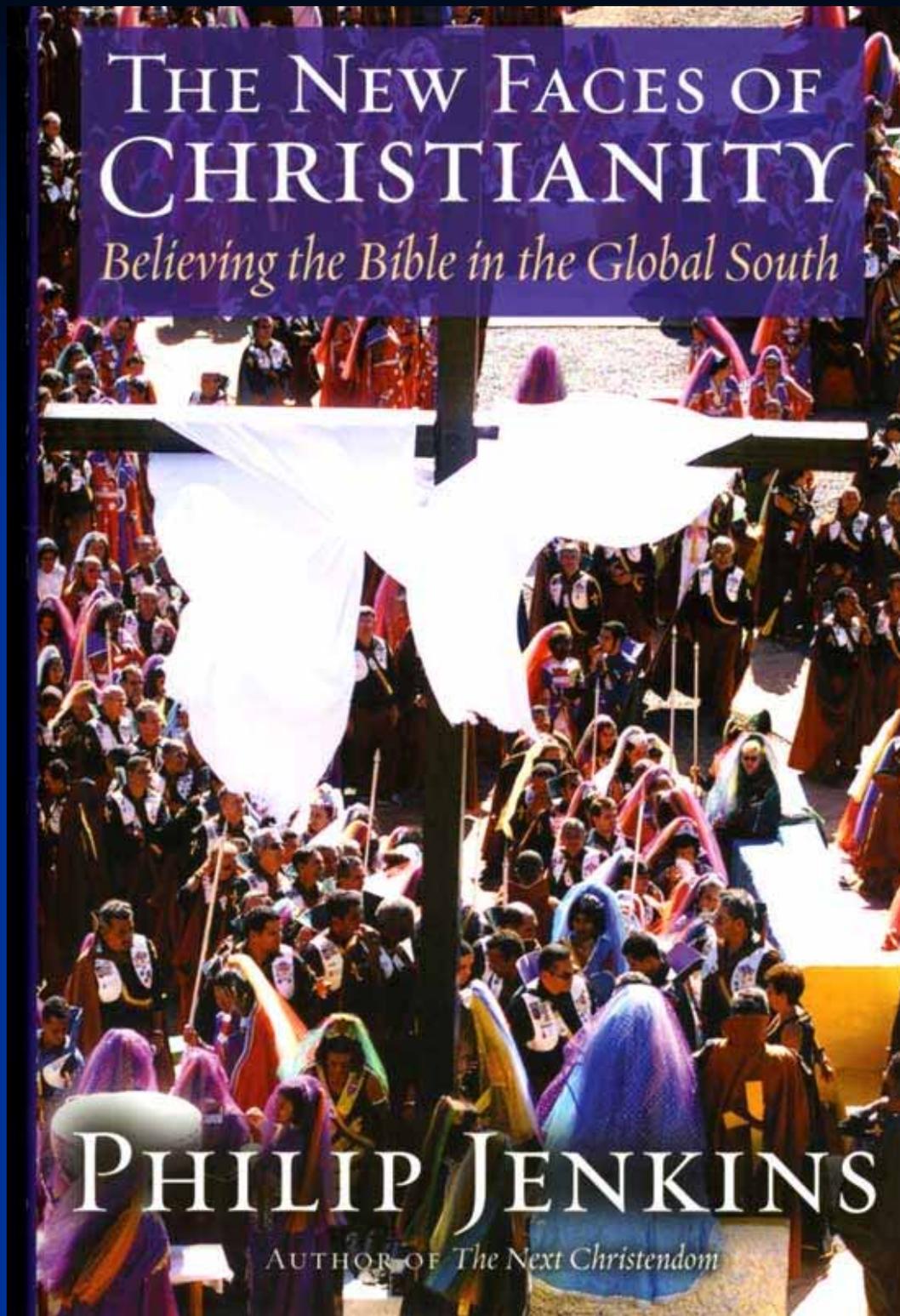
Sunday, September 2, 2007

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, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord..

For the Human Family, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 815



Introduction

Parishioner of Sacred Heart Anglican Church in the Diocese of Accra in West Africa. *Anglican Episcopal World*, #111, cover

“Charismatic renewal, conflict with demons, and the liberation of women are other fruits bearing directly on the churches’ mission in Zimbabwe”

Titus Presler

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

Introduction

Women and the Churches of the Global South

- In a society with very conservative notions of gender roles, women have found in the churches of the Global South the power to speak, and often to lead.
- Women play a central role in the churches, whether or not they are formally ordained.
 - They are the most important converts, for they are major forces in converting family and friends

Introduction

Women and the Churches of the Global South

- Women's organizations such as The Mothers' Union allow women to participate in the churches and give them a voice in society at large.
- Women's independent prayer and Bible study groups have given them opportunities to discuss problems and topics previously off-limits.



Far Above Rubies

Scene from the Archbishop of Canterbury's pastoral visit to West Africa. *Anglican-Episcopal World*, #111, p. 8

Far Above Rubies

Reinforcing Traditional Values

- Christianity has not had an exclusively liberating effect on women. Bible passages have often been used to reinforce traditional values.
- Korean Christian feminist Hyan Kyung Chung: **“I want to put a warning sign on a Bible just like the tobacco companies put them on their cigarette packs. The label should say that without guidance, this book can lead to various side effects, such as mental illness, cancer, rape, genocide, murder and a slavery system. And that it’s especially dangerous to the mental health of pregnant women.”**

Far Above Rubies

Reinforcing Traditional Values

- In the Protestant and Pentecostal churches in Korea for example, the Bible is used to support traditional (Confucian) gender roles:
 - View that a good wife is submissive, pious, unquestioning is supported using Paul's "submission" passages: "**Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.**" (Ephesians 5:22 NRSV. Also see I Corinthians 11:3)
 - The proper submission a daughter in law should show her mother-in-law is modeled by Ruth's devoted love of Naomi.

Far Above Rubies

Reinforcing Traditional Values

- In the Protestant and Pentecostal churches in Korea for example, the Bible is used to support traditional (Confucian) gender roles:
 - Limits on women in church leadership is supported in I Timothy 2:12-15 **“I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.”**
(NRSV)

Far Above Rubies

Reinforcing Traditional Values

- In Africa, the “submission” passages also fit well with traditional values, especially in gender roles in marriage.
 - Because of the popularity of the Book of Proverbs, the portrait of the Good Wife in Proverbs 31:10-31 is also often cited in addition to Paul’s “submission” passages: **“Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain.”** (Proverbs 31: 10-11 NKJV)

Far Above Rubies

Reinforcing Traditional Values

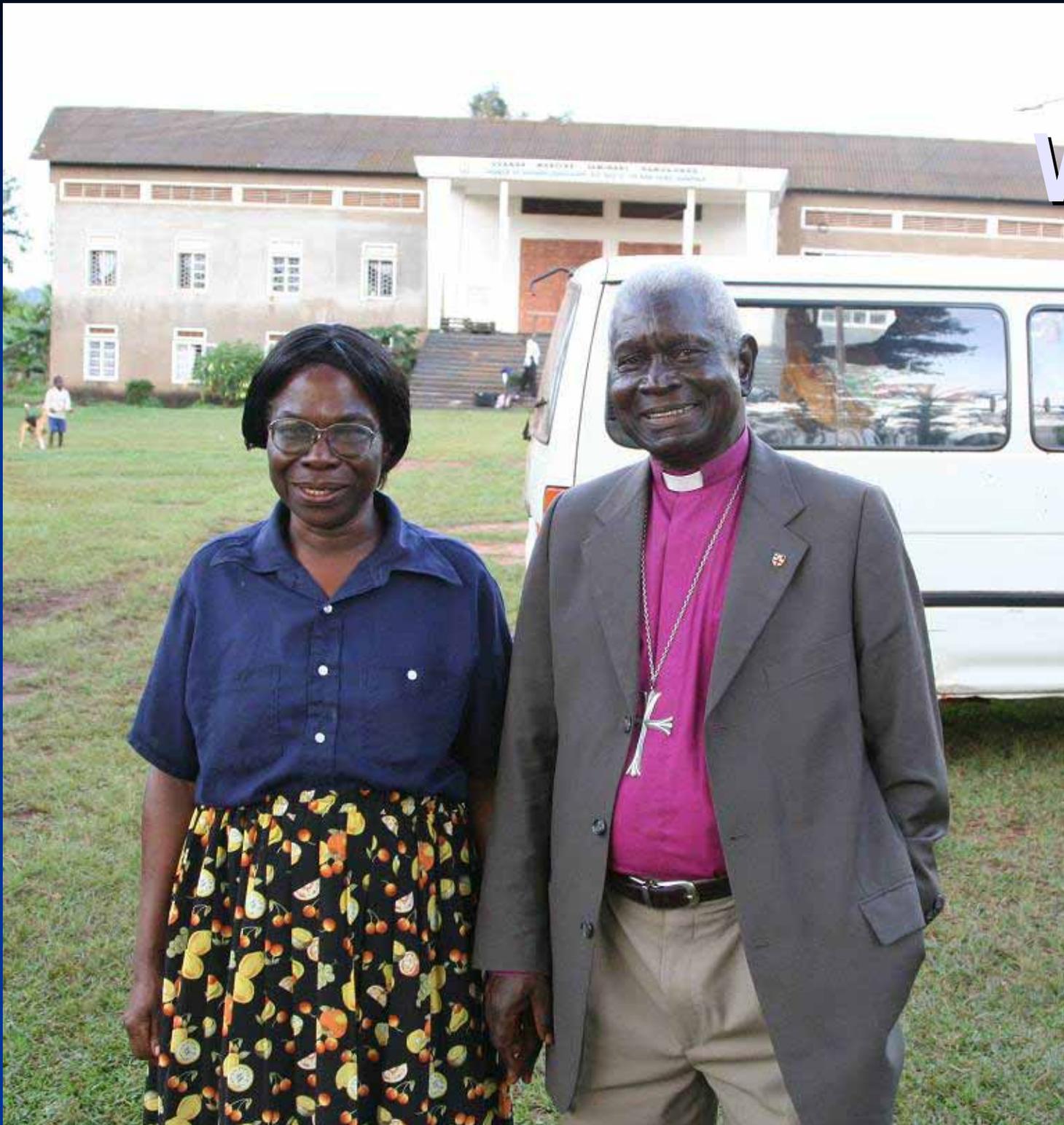
- In traditional African societies, women had religious leadership roles as prophets, mediums, seers, diviners, medicine persons and priests, which they lost as part of the struggle with paganism.
- Biblical examples are sometimes used to justify:
 - Child marriages. Example: marriage between Boaz and Ruth
 - The bearing of male children as a women's highest honor. Example: Abraham and Sarah
 - Polygamy. Example: King Solomon and his wives

Far Above Rubies

Reinforcing Traditional Values

- Hebrew ritual purity laws have been used in some African Independent Churches to exclude menstruating women from church functions, and as the grounds to exclude women from ordination.

Women's Voices



Instructor in Biblical
Studies at Ugandan
Martyr's Seminary with
Bishop George. St.
John's Mission Trip to
Uganda, Nov. 1, 2006

Women's Voices

Women Scholars in the Global South

- However there are biblically-based counter arguments against such patriarchal readings, and African and Asian women scholars have been at the forefront in pointing them out.
- Women scholars in fact have been the most visible figures in biblical interpretation the Global South, including:
 - Mercy Oduyoye
 - Musimbi Kanyoro
 - Teresa Okure (Nigerian Catholic sister)
 - Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike

Women's Voices

Women Scholars in the Global South

- At the end of the 1980's, African women scholars and activists had formed the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT), seeking to build a new African feminism.
- Favorite biblical texts used to support women's voice in society include:
 - Book of Esther
 - story of Deborah in Judges (Judges chapters 4 & 5)
 - Magnificat (Luke 1: 46-55)

Women's Voices

Activism and Political Consciousness

- In Asia, the Christianity has a distinguished record of supporting women's activism and political consciousness:
 - 1970's and forward: in South Korea, Christian-inspired feminists groups agitated for reform during the years of military dictatorship.
 - One such reformer, Christian scholar Myung Sook Han, was imprisoned in the late 1970's for her protests, and became the South Korea's first minister of gender equality when democracy was established
 - Asia's only largely Christian nation is the Philippines – which has had two women presidents since 1986, both of whom worked closely with the Catholic hierarchy.



Scene from the Archbishop of Canterbury's pastoral visit to West Africa. *Anglican-Episcopal World*, #111, p. 10

Women's Reformation

Women's Reformation

Feminism and the Ordinary Woman

- The achievements of educated women from often prosperous families working within a global academic community are fine, but what about the attitudes and lives of ordinary women?

Women's Reformation

Changes in Gender Attitudes

- Among the poor and barely educated, Christianity and Bible Reading has had an explosive impact in gender attitudes. Of greatest import have been:
 - a new emphasis on monogamous marriage
 - new concepts of masculinity, the “reformation of machismo”

Women's Reformation

The Power of Bible Reading

- In addition, in the neoliterate culture that is replacing the traditional oral culture, the ability to read the Bible confers prestige and power, whether the reader is male or female.
- American author Eliza Kent describes a Protestant worship service in south India: **“At each reference to a Biblical verse [during the sermon], there is a pregnant pause and a flurry of hands passing over the pages of Bibles until one voice shouts out the content of the verse – demonstrating in one stroke her (or less frequently, his) facility with the Bible, level of literacy, and command of the formal written Tamil ...”**
 - Conversely, the inability to find a verse demonstrated you were not a regular Churchgoer, or not serious about Christian commitment.



Pastors

Scene from the
Archbishop of
Canterbury's pastoral
visit to West Africa.
*Anglican-Episcopal
World*, #111, p. 11

Pastors

The Spirit Alights Where It Wills

- The spread of charismatic forms of prayer and worship have assured that these changes are not restricted to just the socially liberally churches.
- Charismatic worship places great weight on the inspiration of the Spirit, and the Spirit alights where it wills, women and men, young and old.

Pastors

The Spirit Alights Where It Wills

- A male pastor at a charismatic church in China describes a parishioner who was terrified by a monstrous ghostly presence or demon in her house. After she became a believer, two sisters in the Lord went to her house, and through prayer and exorcism, they cast out the demon and restored the women's confidence and well-being.
 - The role of the male pastor had been reduced to simply reporting approvingly what his parishioners had done.

Pastors

The Spirit Alights Where It Wills

- Africa has a vibrant tradition of women prophets.
 - For example, Margaret Wanjiru, founder of Kenya's "Jesus is Alive!" ministries describes how she felt herself filled with a prophetic gift and was inspired by Nehemiah and the Virgin Mary
 - In a vision lasting several hours, God spoke to her: **"I chose Mary because she was God-fearing and humble. Because you are obedient and humble I will send you to restore my church ... Africa shall be saved!"**

Pastors

Justification to Lead

- Justifications for a vibrant role for women in the church are described by Sister Nasimiyu-Wasike:
- **“In the New Testament, Jesus broke the male-dominated attitudes of his day and reached out to women. The Christian story in the four Gospels asserts that a group of women were the first people to receive the news of the Easter announcement of the Resurrection. Women seem to have been the financial supporters of the apostolic band, and were the primary leaders in Paul’s embryonic church.”**

Pastors

Justification to Lead

- Nyambura Njoroge (first woman ordained by Presbyterian Church of East Africa) urges women: **“Like the women at the empty tomb, we must discover the risen Christ, worship him, talk with him and take his command seriously: ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee ...’”**

Pastors

Justification to Lead

- In South Asia, Christians cite the passage in Luke 10:39: **“She [Martha] had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying”** as showing Mary was in the role of pupil of a teacher or guru – the role of a disciple receiving privileged teaching.

Pastors

Justification to Lead

- Musimbi Kanyoro counters the argument that women should not lead at worship because of the ritual impurity caused by menstruation or pregnancy:
“Mary, the mother of Jesus, out of joy in her pregnancy praised the Lord, her spirit was rejoicing in God her savior. And what is more beautiful than the sight of a pregnant woman? ... How can the sight of a pregnant woman at the altar be shameful before God? If I were a pastor, that would be the moment I would be at my best.”

Woman, Arise



Scene from the
Archbishop of
Canterbury's pastoral
visit to Swaziland.
*Anglican-Episcopal
World*, #114, p. 4

Woman, Arise

Women in Luke Chapter 8

- The miracle stories in Luke chapter 8 and its determined women characters have also helped raise the status of women.
- For Africans, the women suffering from twelve years of hemorrhages in Luke 8:43-48 is tarnished by ritual contamination, making her boldness in seeking Jesus remarkable and inspiring.

Woman, Arise

Women in Luke Chapter 8

- The story of Jesus' raising of Jairus's daughter follows: **They were all weeping and wailing for her [Jairus's daughter]; but he [Jesus] said, "Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and called out, "Child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. (Luke 8:52-55 NRSV)**
 - "Arise, daughter" became the rallying cry at the initial meeting of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians" (CCAWT)



Reading Critically

Scene from the
Archbishop of
Canterbury's pastoral
visit to Swaziland.
*Anglican-Episcopal
World*, #114, p. 5

Reading Critically

Ephesians 5

- Women of the Global South reading and studying the Bible read critically, and when they encounter Ephesians 5:22: **“Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.”** (NRSV), they read further to 5:28-31 and expect its message of love, honor and care:
- **In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”** (NRSV)

Reading Critically

Talking About Unmentionable Topics

- The mere fact that a topic appears in the Bible has allowed topics previously unmentionable to be talked about:
 - Gikuyu women in Kenya of the 1920's discovered that God had commanded Abraham and other men to be circumcised, but not women, and formed a guild, the Council of the Shield, to protect their daughters against circumcision – previously an important initiation rite for femininity, sexual morality and adulthood.

Reading Critically

Talking About Unmentionable Topics

- The mere fact that a topic appears in the Bible has allowed topics previously unmentionable to be talked about:
 - John's text about the woman taken in adultery (John 8:3 ...) shows Jesus condemning the condemners, allowing women to protest the common practice of condemning women for sexual immorality as if no men were involved.
 - The Song of Songs has promoted discussion of sexuality, particularly women's sexuality.
 - The story of Tamar raped by her own brother Amnon (2 Samuel chapter 13) has allowed problems of rape, incest, and abuse to be discussed openly.



Women studying the Bible in Malaysia. *Anglican-Episcopal World*, #114, p. 27

Women and the Plague

Women and the Plague

HIV and AIDS

- Biblical stories of chronic diseases like leprosy, of people like the woman with hemorrhages who “had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her” (Luke 8:43 NRSV) has allowed discussion of:
 - AIDS and its threat
 - the cultural taboos affecting women with AIDS

Women and the Plague

HIV and AIDS

- South African scholar Beverly Haddad reports the response of a group of poor African women reading Mark's version of the story of the woman with hemorrhages:
- “AIDS is comparable to this because it is incurable. That means doctors fail to cure it, it eats you till you die.”
- The group concluded: “in situations of blood diseases, it is the power of God that also runs in their veins which enables them to have life in the face of these diseases that bring death.”

Women and the Plague

HIV and AIDS

- The story of the “woman in the city” (commonly assumed to be a prostitute) in Luke 7:37-50 who anoints Jesus’ feet with ointment and dries them with her hair, shows Jesus associated with sexual sinners, and loved and accepted them.
 - This story is cited as a template in the African Churches for dealing with AIDS sufferers.



Honoring Widows

Scene from the Archbishop of
Canterbury's pastoral visit to the
Anglican Church of Burundi.
Anglican-Episcopal World, #119, p. 6

Honoring Widows

The Plight of Widows

- In southern Africa, the traditional assumption was that family and property belonged to the husband and beyond him, his family.
- When a man dies, his relatives would descend on the home, stripping all moveable goods, leaving the widow and children in penury.
 - The rationalization used was that she would soon get a new home by marrying someone else.

Honoring Widows

The Plight of Widows

- In some traditional African societies, widowhood required special rituals, including a “sexual cleansing” that involved intercourse with the dead man’s brother and the widow in order to exorcise the dead man’s spirit and prevent curses on the community.
- In India, the poor widow is often treated as a member of the living dead.
- Dalit activist Udit Raj: “For a Hindu priest, a leper, a beggar, and a widow are hateful objects who need to be punished because of the ‘curse of their past life.’”

Honoring Widows

The Bible on Widows

- In such societies, the Bible's passages protecting widows have literally been matters of life and death.
- Paul's simple note in Roman 7:2: "**... a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband.**" (NRSV) is potentially revolutionary.
- The story of Elijah sent to Zarephath (1 Kings 17:9ff), where he finds a widow about to be reduced to debt slavery, and saves them by providing endless supplies of meal and oil, has inspired guilds and fellowships in East Africa to support women.

Honoring Widows

The Bible on Widows

- In James 1:27 we find: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” (NRSV) has spurred ministries to widows.
- Nigerian scholar Daisy Nwachuku, writing on 1 Timothy 5:9-14, concludes: “**the African Christian widow is a ‘person’ whole and worthy of dignity despite her grief stricken situation.**”



Outsiders

Scene from the Archbishop of
Canterbury's pastoral visit to the Sudan.
Anglican-Episcopal World, #121, p. 6

Outsiders

Trampling Traditional Restrictions

- Few themes are more powerful in the Bible than its passages on the “outsider”, those rejected by the world, excluded from society, or reduced to subordinate roles – such as women.
- The broader story of the New Testament is that God expands the idea of chosenness beyond its popularly accepted limits. God chooses whom God wills, and God often goes outside of conventional social and religious hierarchies.

Outsiders

Trampling Traditional Restrictions

- Biblical stories cited about outsiders that God has chosen include:
 - Rahab the prostitute (beginning in Joshua 2)
 - Cornelius the centurion (Acts 10)
- The genealogy of Matthew traces Jesus' ancestry through women whose record does not correspond to the "standard good wife:"
 - Tamar (pretended to be a prostitute and slept with her father-in-law)
 - Rahab (a prostitute)
 - wife of Uriah the Hittite (Bathsheba, seduced by / seducer of King David)
 - Ruth (a foreigner, a Moabite, despised by the Israelites)
- It is a genealogy that African and Asian writers stress, tramples traditional restrictions.

Outsiders

Trampling Traditional Restrictions

- As one contemporary African woman author notes:
“Jesus responded to all who came to him. He commended the woman with the alabaster box of ointment. He praised the faith of the woman who touched the hem of his garment as he praised the faith of the Roman centurion. He spoke to the woman of Samaria. I have no doubt but that he commends every African woman who humbly turns to him for help.”