

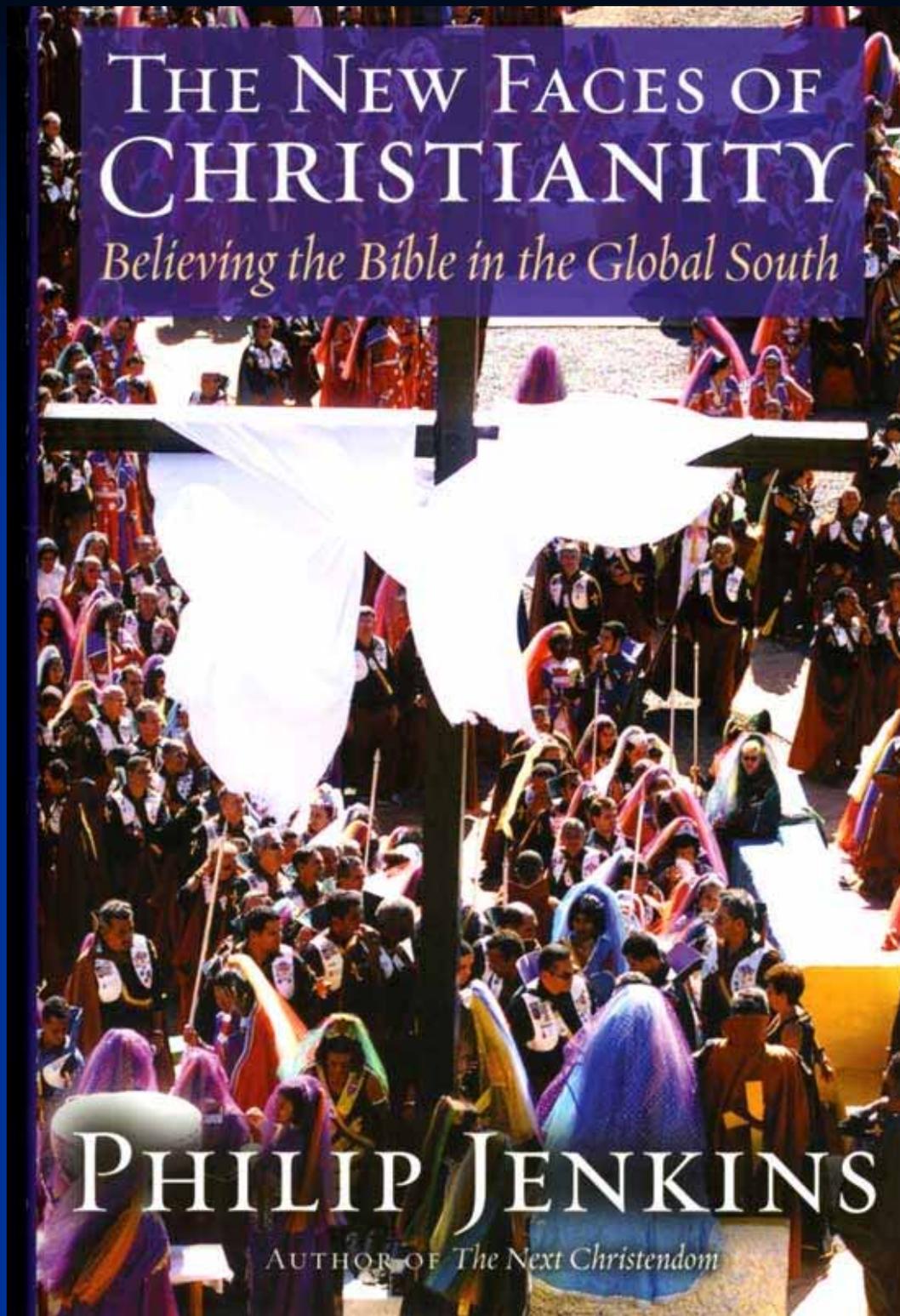
The New Faces of Christianity in the Global South

The Power of the Book

Sunday, July 29, 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

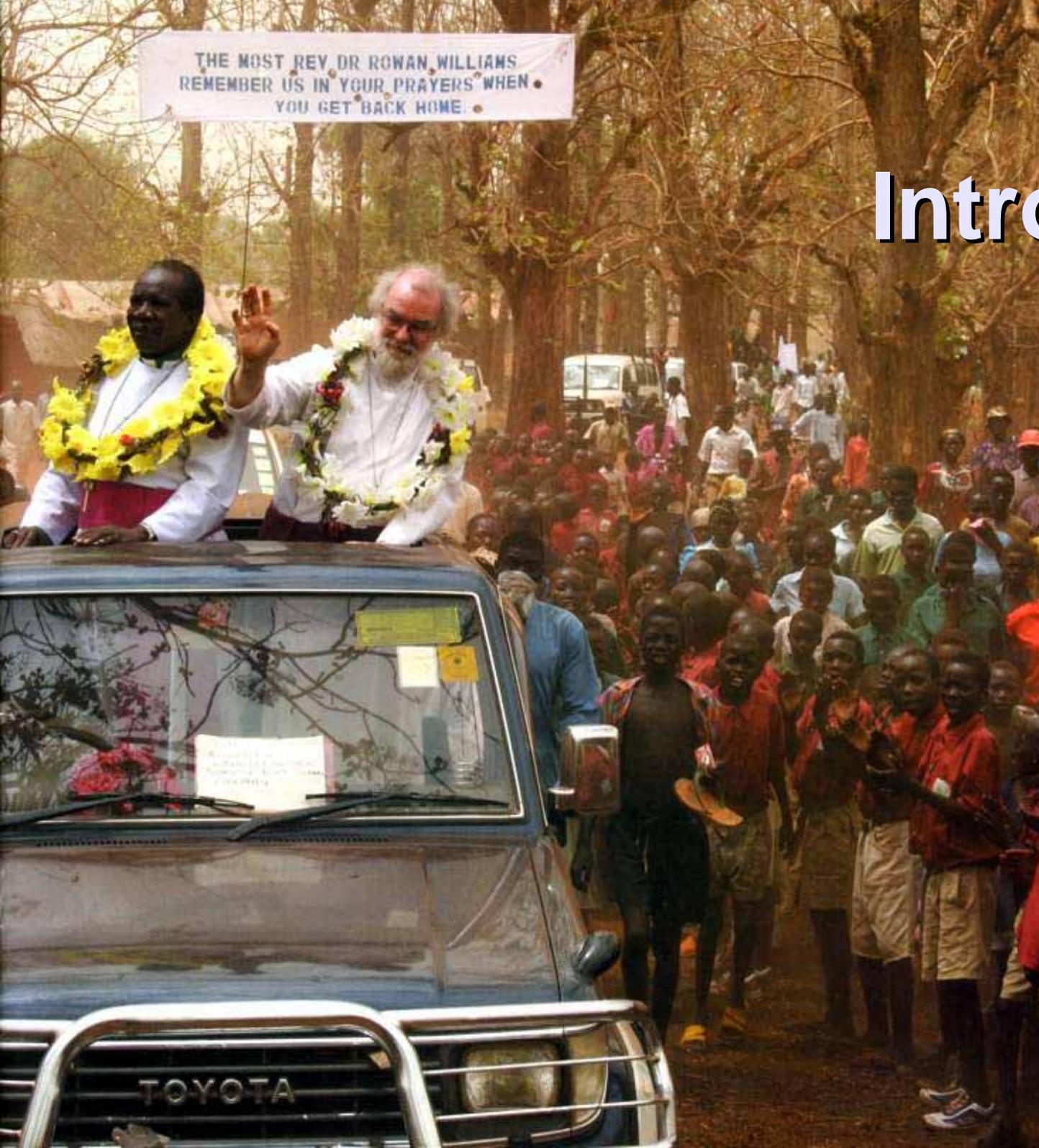


Primary Reference

- **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

Gracious Father, we pray for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son our Savior.

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



Introduction

Image from the
Archbishop of
Canterbury's Visit to the
Sudan, Anglican-
Episcopal World, #121,
cover

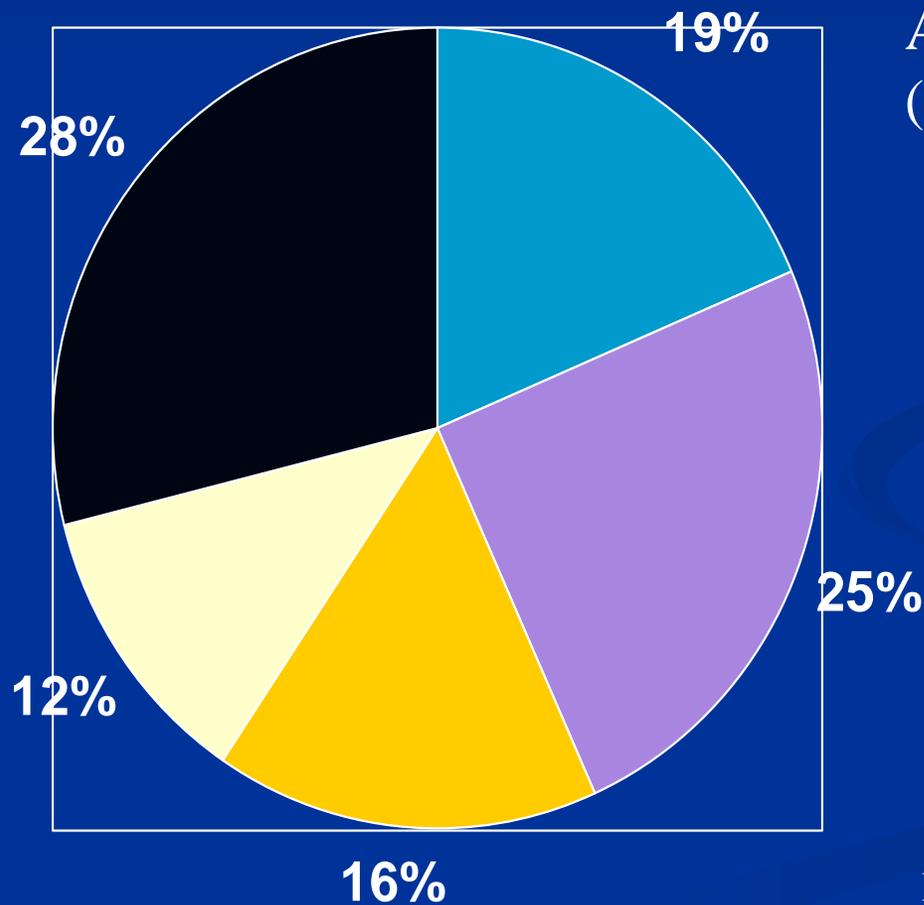
Introduction

Demographics

- Today, the most vibrant centers of Christian growth are in Africa and the Pacific Rim (“The Christian Arc”)
- In Africa, the magnitude of the growth of Christianity has no parallel in human history. Between 1900 and 1970, the number of Christians grew from:
 - 10% to 46% of the population
 - 10 million to 360 million people

Percentage of Christians by Region

2000



60% of all Christians lived in Africa, Asia or Latin America (“The Global South”)



From: **The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity.** Philip Jenkins. Oxford University Press, 2002 p. 2-3

Introduction

Demographics

- Simply because of their sheer numbers, we cannot afford to ignore the voices of Christians in the Global South
- However, there are other, perhaps more important reasons why we should be interested in the faith and biblical insights of those in the Global South

Introduction

Parallels With the Biblical World

- There are many parallels between life in the Global South and the biblical world. Both:
 - are largely agricultural economies
 - are worlds where:
 - famine
 - illness and plague
 - exile
 - crushing poverty
 - premature death
- are relatively commonplace

Introduction

Parallels With the Biblical World

- There are many parallels between life in the Global South and the biblical world. Both:
 - believe supernatural dramas are at play in this world
 - Evil and the demonic are envisioned as living personified forces in battle with the forces of good
 - Possession, exorcism, spiritual healing widely accepted
 - are worlds where pagan sacrifice and worship rituals are fresh in the memory of converts

Introduction

Parallels With the Biblical World

- There are many parallels between life in the Global South and the biblical world. Both:
 - are worlds where persecution and martyrdom are real possibilities in every Christian's life
 - Martyrs are not line drawings of figures enshrouded in myth who lived in distant times, but real people of living memory



Archbishop Janani Luwum (1922 to 1977), Primate of the Anglican Church of Uganda

Introduction

Parallels With the Biblical World

- These parallels with the biblical world afford Christians in the Global South unique insights into the Bible
- Passages that seem “dead” and irrelevant to us are often alive and rich with meaning to them

Introduction

A High View of Biblical Origins and Authority

- One of the characteristics of churches in the Global South is a high view of biblical origins and authority
- We must be cautious however before applying labels like “literalists,” “fundamentalists,” or “conservative”

Introduction

A High View of Biblical Origins and Authority

- While “conservative” in their deep respect for the authority of the biblical text, churches in the Global South find in the Bible’s prophetic and apocalyptic texts justification for radical views on social justice
 - They are well to the “left” of the U.S. Democratic Party in their views on the responsibility of the state and world community to intervene in fighting poverty and economic injustice

Introduction

A High View of Biblical Origins and Authority

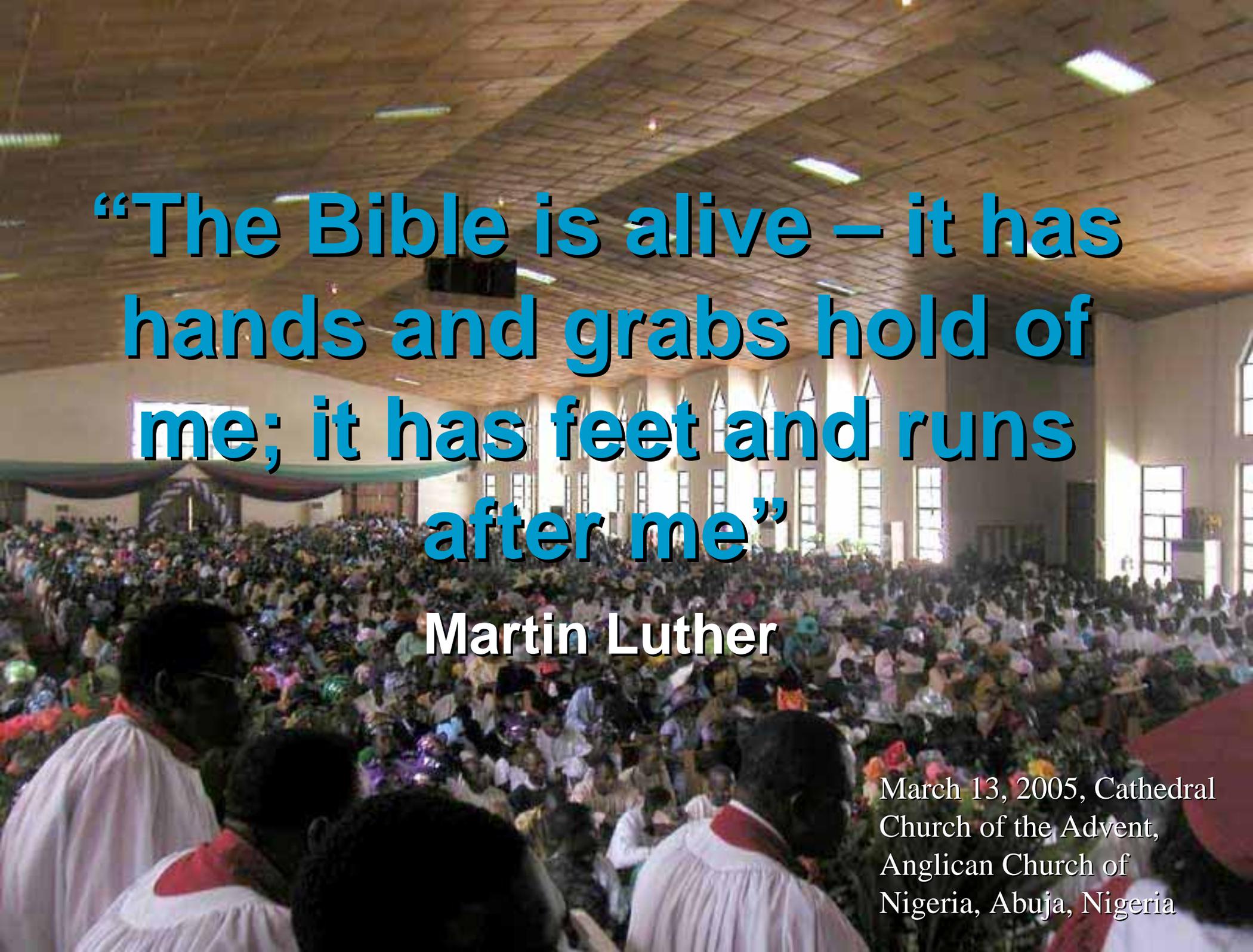
- This “mixture” of “conservative” and “liberal” is analogous to African-American religious styles:
 - “conservative” in their evangelical emphasis on biblical authority
 - yet “progressive” in social justice issues
- From the perspective of World Christianity, African-American religious styles – long regarded as “marginal” by U.S. “mainstream” denominations – are in fact “mainstream Christianity,” and the practices of U.S. “mainstream” denominations the exception

Introduction

A High View of Biblical Origins and Authority

- *Our topic today:* What is the position of the Bible in the churches of the Global South? Why do they tend to be so “conservative” in their views on biblical authority?
- *Note:* this series will focus on the churches of the Global South in Africa and Asia, which have a great deal in common, in particular:
 - In the “novelty” of Christianity in their societies
 - In their recent emergence from non-Christian backgrounds

We will touch on Latin America only in passing



“The Bible is alive – it has hands and grabs hold of me; it has feet and runs after me”

Martin Luther

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

Missionary Memories



Visit to a displaced person's camp during the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to the Sudan, Anglican-Episcopal World, #121, p. 8

Missionary Memories

Conservative Missionaries

- One popular explanation for the biblical conservatism of the Global South is that they are just parroting what the missionaries of the 18th and 19th centuries told them
- Indeed, missionaries from the West did tend to come from more evangelical, traditional circles
 - The Anglican Churches most fervently opposed to the Episcopal Church USA action's on homosexuality – Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda – are those founded by the more evangelical **Church Mission Society**
 - In contrast, the more liberal South African church reflects the influence of its Anglo-Catholic founders, who were more open to critical biblical scholarship

Missionary Memories

Conservative Missionaries

- This explanation however must not be run with for too long
- Missionaries might introduce ideas, but those ideas had to appeal to the local audience and make sense in local terms to gain adherents
 - Some ideas never took hold – such as the injunction to be faithful subjects of the European colonial empires
 - Others were quickly absorbed into local societies and acquired a life of their own – often taking forms that appalled the Western missionaries
- The local communities were by no means a cultural blank slate on which foreign notions could be inscribed at will



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

Reading the Word

Reading the Word

The Bible and the Newly Literate

- For most of the communities of the Global South, Christianity advanced hand in hand with literacy, and:
 - the Bible
 - the awe at the power of the written word
 - the miracle of literacy, the great panoply of ideas and worlds it opens the doors to
- became deeply intertwined in the imagination of the people
- For many of the newly literate, the Bible was the first book they read, and the only book they owe

Reading the Word

The Bible and the Newly Literate

- The newly literate are often not immediately at ease with the written word:
 - Paul Bunyan's 17th century book *The Pilgrim's Progress* – written for a European society in which literacy was beginning to spread – has been immensely popular among the newly literate in Christian Africa
 - In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, expressing the unease of the newly literate with the written word, documents appear as flying scrolls or cryptic engravings on a throne. Texts “are held in awe, but not entirely trusted.” Authenticity must be confirmed by a dream or vision

Reading the Word

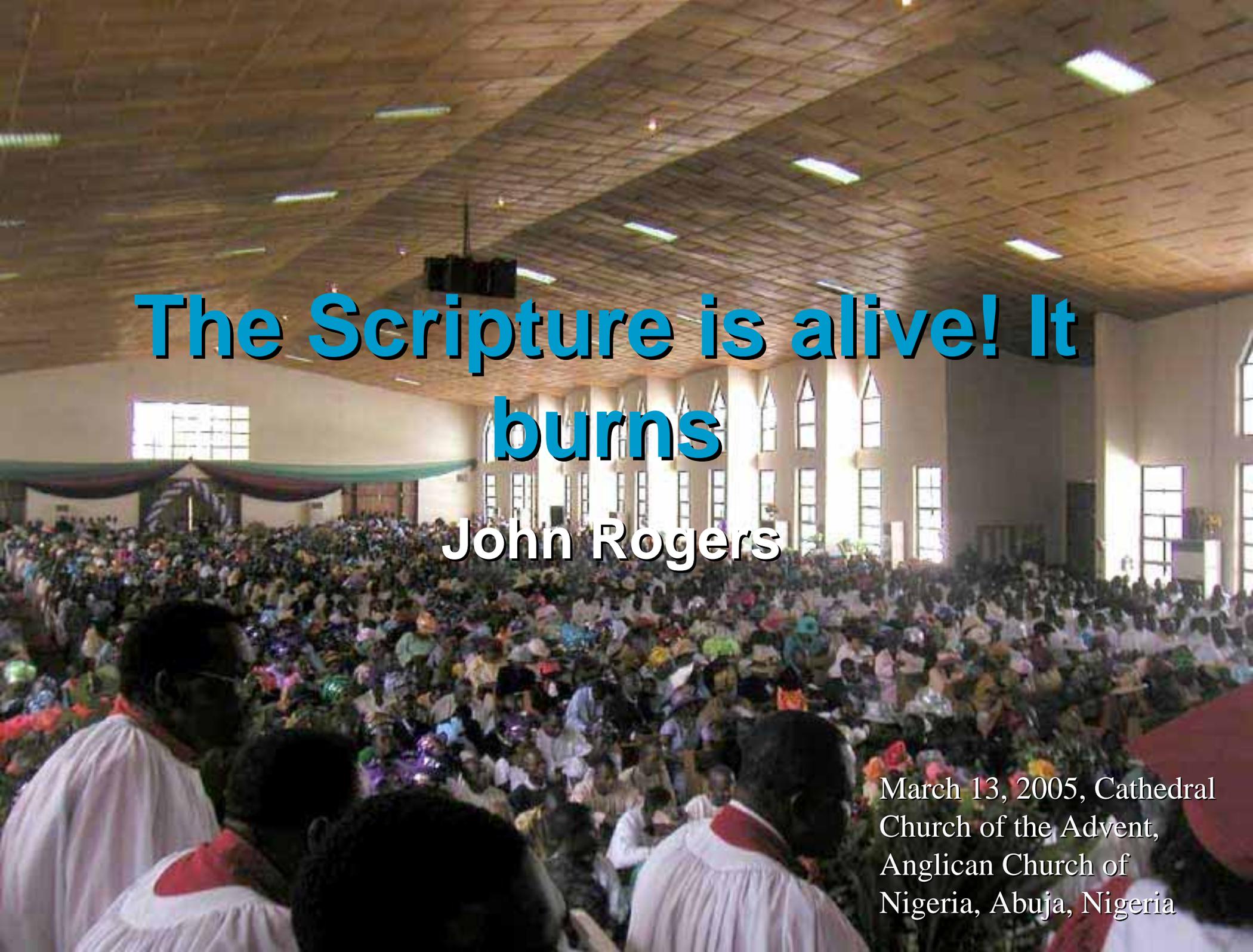
The Bible and the Newly Literate

- The Christian churches in the Global South have grown on a foundation of awe and profound veneration of the written word – above all, the Bible – by the newly literate



Sunday in Southern Africa. Anglican-Episcopal World, #114, p. 54

Speaking in Our Tongues



The Scripture is alive! It burns

John Rogers

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

Speaking in Our Tongues

A Bible in the People's Language

- John Rogers (~1500-1555), English cleric and Protestant reformer, produced the first English Bible in 1537 under the pseudonym Thomas Matthew (“Matthew’s Bible”)
- When lectured by the bishop on the foolhardiness of putting the Bible – just dead words until properly interpreted – in the local vernacular, he cried “**No! the Scripture is alive! It burns.**”
- That was some 500 years ago
- Today it can be questioned if the English-speaking Christians can comprehend the Bible as something fully alive in the current vernacular of the people – or if we think of it as something old and formal, associated with the Elizabethan English of Shakespeare’s day (even if we do keep a “modern” translation)

Speaking in Our Tongues

A Bible in the People's Language

- The foundation of Christian growth in the Global South has been the availability of Bible translations in the vernacular of the people
- Today of Africa's 2,000 languages:
 - Complete Bibles are available in 150 languages
 - At least one book of the Bible is available in 650 languages
- Once in the language of the people, the Bible becomes the property of that people. It becomes the Yoruba Bible, the Zulu Bible
- In 2004, the United Bible Societies distributed in the Global South:
 - 25 million complete Bibles
 - 390 million portions or selections of Scripture

Speaking in Our Tongues

A Bible in the People's Language

- When missionaries brought local peoples the Bible in their own vernacular – the local people's Bible – the missionaries were not viewed as emissaries from a distant or superior empire, but rather as “from heaven:”
 - The missionaries were viewed as a means to help the people establish their own link through the Bible with the divine, a link that was shared by all, English and French, Yoruba and Zulu alike
- All places are equidistant from eternity, and so are all places (Cardinal Newman)
 - The Bible in the vernacular provided local peoples their own “link” with the divine. With people everywhere so linked to the divine, all Christendoms may be said to be “equidistant from eternity” – whether third century Rome, or 21th century Los Angeles or Lagos



Image from the Archbishop of Canterbury's Visit to the Sudan,
Anglican-Episcopal World, #121, p. 9

Hearing the Word Together

Hearing the Word Together

Hearing the Bible in an Oral Culture

- Although literacy is growing rapidly in the Global South, the cultures have not yet lost their oral traditions
- Audiences in an oral culture have sophisticated expectations for oral presentations, and a physical stamina for long orations and recitations
- *Jean-Marc Ela on the best mode of presenting the Bible to Africans:* churches should present “a festival of language shared by the whole community, which includes grasping the Word, searching for its meaning, questions and answers, prayers and chants.” Readings should have an incantatory quality, and presenters should make full use of body language and vocal tones

Hearing the Word Together

Hearing the Bible in an Oral Culture

- Much of the knowledge of the Bible for Christians in the Global South still comes from communal hearings of the scripture
 - Public readings of scripture, and group Bible studies with recitations and explications of scripture, usually in a sacred setting, are common
- The experience of hearing the Word in community:
 - Exults the group hearing the sacred words
 - Empowers the community by giving them a sense that they are a vehicle for the divine message

Hearing the Word Together

Hearing the Bible in an Oral Culture

- The immediacy of hearing the Word in an oral culture is suggested in a vignette by Musimbi Kanyoro:
 - She read to the Turkana community in northern Kenya a portion of Paul's first letter to the Church in Corinth
 - The letter ended with Paul's good wishes **"My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus"** (1 Cor. 16:24)
 - The Kenyan community, hitherto silent, responded in unison, **"Thank you, Paul!"**
 - Of course they knew that Paul had not walked on earth for two thousand years, but they must have felt the words were alive, burned for them, and believed that Paul was truly alive among the community of saints

Hearing the Word Together

Dramatizing the Bible in An Oral Culture

- Dramas and storytelling are common means used by the Global South churches to instruct the faithful in the Bible, especially those who are still illiterate
- In the Philippines and Catholic Latin America, the medieval tradition of public re-enactment of the biblical scenes flourishes
- Bible stories and parables, hymns and wisdom literature, psalms and proverbs are particularly suited to storytelling and dramatization
 - – perhaps because they themselves begin as oral traditions before becoming canonized in writing

Hearing the Word Together

Dramatizing the Bible in An Oral Culture

- Stories told from the Bible have proved deeply seductive to many in the oral cultures of the Global South
 - Scholars studying Kenya's isolated and illiterate up-country people found that within decades of first hearing biblical stories, the narratives had permeated their oral culture, becoming a storehouse of folktales through which the people interpreted their lives and their society



Sacred Music

Image from the Archbishop of
Canterbury's Visit to the Sudan,
Anglican-Episcopal World, #121, p. 13

Sacred Music

The Bible and the Hymnbook

- Music has also been a key method of teaching the Bible in the Global South
 - Just as it has been a key method of teaching the Bible in European Protestantism
 - Indeed, it can be argued that European Protestantism, while claiming to be a religion of the Bible, is more accurately viewed as a religion of the Bible and the hymnbook
- Music is central to African culture:
 - Among African Christians, musical talent often viewed as a true charisma, a gift of the Holy Spirit
 - If a Christian family in Africa owns two books, it is likely one is the Bible, and the second a hymnal

Sacred Music

The Bible and the Hymnbook

- The equivalent of “Amazing Grace” in East Africa is the “Tukutendereza Yesu,” a Lugandan hymn from the East African Revival of the 1930’s, which can still reduce a crowd to tears:

Tukutendereza Yesu (We praise you Jesus)

Yesu Omwana gw’endiga (Jesus, Lamb of God)

Omusaigwo gunaziza (Your blood cleanses me)

Nkwebaza, Omulokozi (I praise you, Savior)

Sacred Music

The Bible and the Hymnbook

- A popular Nigerian hymn paraphrases the Christological hymn in Philippians (2:5-11):
 - He is Lord, He is Lord, amen**
 - He has risen from the dead, he is Lord**
 - Every knee shall bow**
 - Every tongue confess that**
 - Jesus Christ is Lord**

Sacred Music

The Bible and the Hymnbook

- The Dinka people of the Sudan – victims of that nation's bloody wars and persecutions – have a rich tradition of hymns focused on the cross. One hymn calls on God to accept his people:

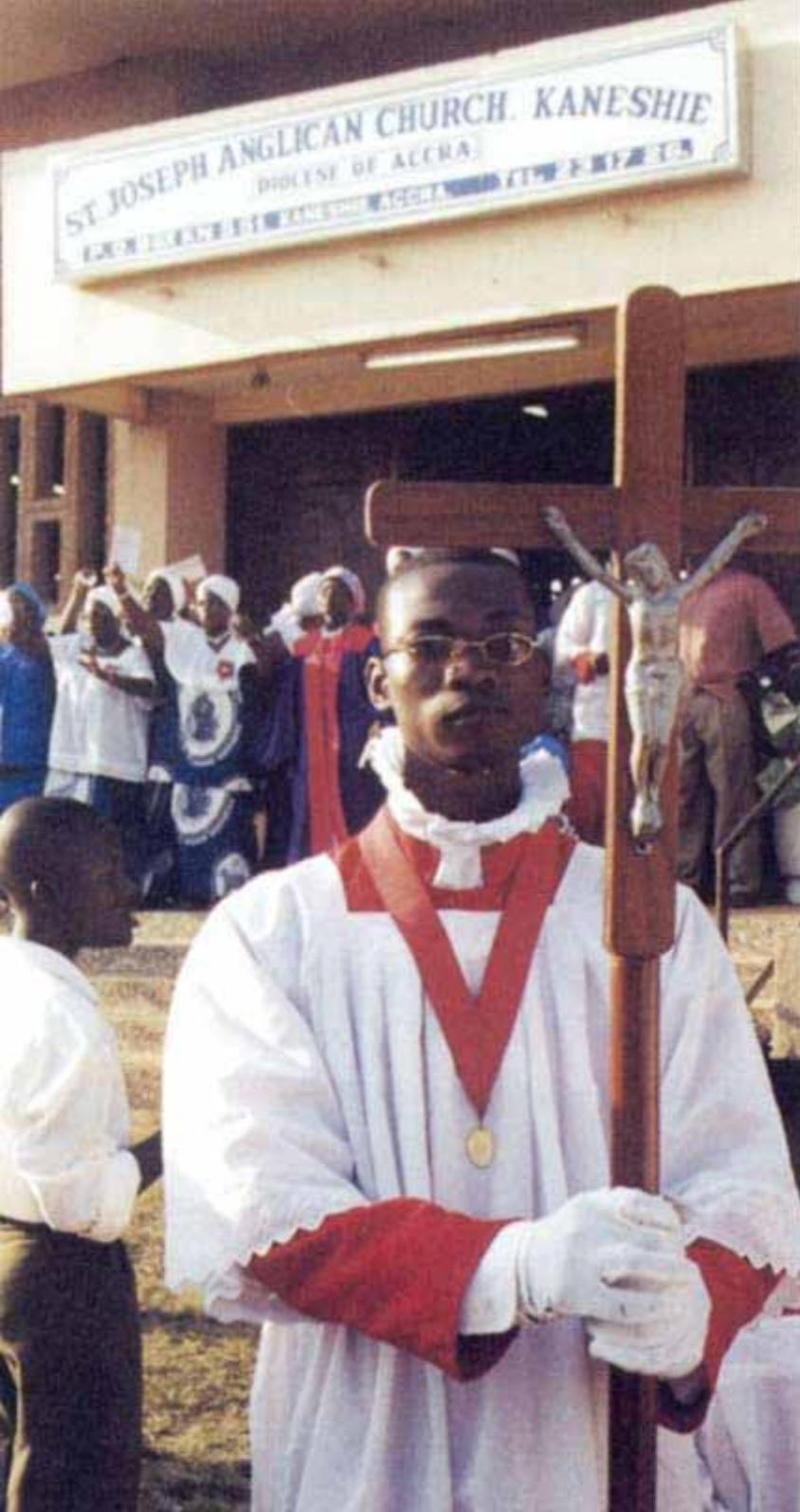
For we are your children

And let us carry your cross and follow after you

**Let us be like Simon, the man of Cyrene,* who
went with you to**

The place of the skull

*Cyrene: a region in Libya in North Africa (Acts 2:10).
Simon is one of the few New Testament figures
undisputedly from Africa



My Bible and I

Image from the Archbishop of Canterbury's Visit to the West Africa, *Anglican-Episcopal World*, #111, p. 9

My Bible and I

The Power and Authority of the Word

- Believers in the Global South often have a deeply proprietorial attitude to the Bible, grounded in their belief in its absolute authority and the power of the Word
- For many African Christians, the Bible has taken the place of the traditional ancestor whose authority cannot be questioned
- In one African chorus, the believer sings:

My Bible and I

My Bible and I

Oh what a wonderful treasure

The gift of God without measure

We will travel together

My Bible and I

My Bible and I

The Power and Authority of the Word

- A Zulu song teaches:
 - Satan has no power**
 - We will clobber him with a [biblical] verse**
- For some, the physical object of the Bible can become a locus of spiritual power, at times approaching the superstitious or even magical
 - (Even in the enlightened West, some countries still require witnesses in court to swear on a physical Bible, or members of a legislature to take an oath on a physical Bible)

My Bible and I

The Power and Authority of the Word

- The Bible is often viewed as effective in combating evil and sickness. A vignette:
 - In a Christian Dalit community in India, a missionary was asked to grant a sick Hindu woman the healing power of the Bible. When he began to read an appropriate text, they told him not to bother, for she did not know Christian Scripture. Instead, he should simply put the Bible on her head as he prayed.

“I could not resist slightly opening my eyes at some point of the prayer to catch a glimpse of the intense and expectant posture of trust that was expressed by all those in the room, Christian and Hindu Dalit alike. Truly, it was a picture of reverence, awe, and mystery...”

My Bible and I

The Power and Authority of the Word

- A study of ordinary Nigerian Christians found that the “Bible is used to ward off evil spirits, witchcraft and sorcery, it is placed under the pillow at night to ensure God’s protection against the devil, it is put in handbags and cars when traveling to ensure a safe journey, it is used in swearing to bring God’s wrath upon culprits...”



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

Outsiders

Outsiders

Outside Fascination with the Word

- In our own Euro-American culture, bible stories and images are part of the air we breathe, an ambient cultural noise we are scarcely aware of
 - Consider biblical phrases that are part of our secular culture: “a thorn in the flesh,” “sour grapes,” “through a glass darkly,” “skin of my teeth,” “pour out my heart.”
- In the cultures of the Africa and Asia, there is no such cultural Christian ambience
- Christianity is a cultural novelty, and often Non-Christians are intellectually or aesthetically attracted to the religion and its scripture even if they remain unbelievers

Outsiders

Conversions

- There are also many examples of rapid and emotional conversions to Christianity by non-believers. Arguably, the more novel and unexpected Christian ideas are in a society, the more likely the Bible's "hands and feet" may grab the uninitiated listener or reader
 - One of China's leading avant-garde writers Bei Cun, who surprised his followers by converting to Christianity in 1992, described in his Kafkaesque short story "The Marriage of Zhang Sheng," how a single passage in (Romans 1:18) drove its troubled scholar hero to accept Christianity

Outsiders

Conversions

- In his 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*, Nigerian author Chinua Achebe (winner of the 2007 Man Booker International Prize for Fiction) describes the impact of a missionary's teachings and biblical hymn on a young Igbo man:
 - **“It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow... He felt relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth.”**



Confirming the Word

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

Confirming the Word

The Closing Section of Mark

- A very popular passage in African Christianity is the closing of the Gospel of Mark, 16:14-20, the last verse being **“And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.”** (NRSV)
 - This passage (and the similar Matthew 28:18-20) is the foundation text of African missionary practice, and is widely quoted. The proclamation of the Good News of Jesus is to be confirmed by signs and deeds.
- But you won't find Mark 16:14-20 in many Bibles in the West, and if you do find it, it is a footnote.
 - This is because the consensus of almost all scholars is that this ending is not part of the original gospel of Mark, but was added by second-century editor

Confirming the Word

The Closing Section of Mark

- So are African Christians unaware of the solid consensus of scholars that this ending to Mark is a second century add-on?
- In fact, they know all about it. They simply reject the Western assumption you can assess the value of the biblical text based on historical criticism.
- In their biblical interpretation, African Christians instead stress the role of the community that receives and uses the text. If the text says it, and if, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is received by the reading community as authoritative, then it is true. Whether it was written by Mark or his second-century editor is only of academic interest.

Summary

The churches of the Global South see the Bible as a dependable and comprehensive source of authority

Next Session: this respect extends to the whole Bible, both New and Old Testament

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