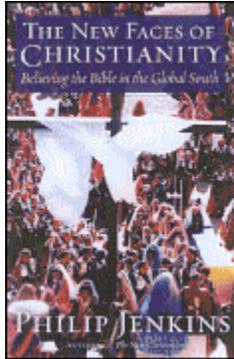


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The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South

Philip Jenkins , Joanne J. Myers

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The New Faces of
 Christianity

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Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I would like to welcome our members and guests and to thank you for joining us this morning.

We are delighted to have as our guest Philip Jenkins, who will be discussing [The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South](#), and this book will be available for you to purchase at the end of the hour.

Today's program is part of the Carnegie Council's ongoing series on religion and politics. Although the Carnegie Council has a long tradition of examining religious issues, we officially began this series about a year ago. Since that time, we have been looking at various religious developments as they unfold around the world, emphasizing different religions and their impact on social, cultural, economic, and political realities of the 21st century. Today's session will focus on new developments in Christianity.

If you read the paper or listen to the news, you can't help but be aware of the fact that religious fervor is gaining momentum, reshaping the identities and actions of an increasingly large number of people on many continents. Although we so often hear about the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, it is Christianity, with more than 2 billion adherents worldwide, that is both the world's largest—and in some regions the fastest-growing—religion. And most of that expansion is taking place in the developing world. In parts of Africa and Asia, the flowering of Pentecostal, evangelical, and indigenous forms of Christianity is bringing believers into contact—and often into conflict—with Muslims. This latest development has far-reaching consequences for world politics, especially in Africa, and particularly in the Sudan, Somalia, and Nigeria.

In *The New Faces of Christianity*, Professor Jenkins talks about these subjects and also raises several other interesting points. For example, he notes that with the translation of the Scriptures into provincial dialects, the local people often find ideas in their newly translated Bibles that the missionaries did not want them to see. Although some of their conclusions are distinctly fundamentalist, Professor Jenkins finds that some of their observations are paradoxically intriguing, for as they read the Bible with fresh eyes, these new believers are coming away with sometimes startling interpretations, especially with respect to women's rights. And he finds that across Africa, Asia, and Latin America such Christians are becoming social activists in the forefront of a wide range of liberation movements.

Professor Jenkins writes that "As these beliefs take hold, recent converts will push theologians to address issues, such as faith and poverty, social injustice, political violence and corruption, and the meltdown of law and order, with far-reaching moral and social implications. Accordingly, we might ask: What does this

portend for global politics?"

Philips Jenkins is Distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies at Pennsylvania State University. He has published widely on contemporary religious phenomena, but is best known for the highly acclaimed *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, which he discussed earlier here at the Carnegie Council, and the transcript can be found on our website.

In this work, which was named one of the Top Religion Books of 2002 by *USA Today*, Professor Jenkins called the world's attention to the fact that Christianity's center of gravity was moving inexorably southward, and noted that Africa may soon be home to the world's largest Christian population. Now, in this sequel, he attempts to explain this development.

Our speaker was born in Wales and educated in England, where he received a Ph.D. from Cambridge. He has written over fifteen books and many articles on contemporary religious issues and controversies.

Please join me in giving a very warm welcome to our speaker today, Philip Jenkins.

Remarks

PHILIP JENKINS: Since we are dealing with a religious theme, I thought I would begin by a prophecy, and a prophecy of the sort that is empirically verifiable. Back in the year 1640, a great Catholic saint, [Saint Vincent de Paul](#), made a prophecy. He was writing at one of the worst times in European history. 1640 was probably the worst year in Europe before 1940; it was the year in which Protestants were killing Catholics, Catholics were killing Protestants, Christians were killing Jews, and so on. Many wondered if Europe could survive.

What Saint Vincent remarked was, "Jesus said his church would last until the end of time, but he never mentioned the word Europe." "The church of the future," he said in 1640, "will be the church of Africa, of South America, of China and Japan."

We can argue about Japan, though one of the greatest Christian writers of the 20th century was the Japanese Catholic novelist [Shusaku Endo](#), but otherwise I suggest to you that that is an example of an empirically verifiable prophecy, because that is exactly what is happening. Today, if you look around the world, there are about 2 billion Christians. The largest contingent of those is still in Europe, with around 510 million, and Latin America second.

As we move towards the year 2025, Africa and Latin America should be in competition for the title of the continent with the largest number of Christians. But in the long run, as we move towards 2050, Africa wins; Christianity becomes predominantly a religion of Africa and the African Diaspora in North and South America and the Caribbean.

In fact, if you want to project the countries in the world that will have the largest numbers of Christians by 2050, here's one projection. At the head of the list would still be the United States, followed, in no particular order, by Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria, the Congo, Ethiopia, the Philippines, and China. Let me give you a list of the countries that were not included in that list: Britain, France, Spain, Italy. Is anyone here old enough to remember something called "Western Christianity?"

I could deluge you with statistics, and I don't want to do that, but some of them do really call out for citation.

One of my favorites is the figure for Christians in Africa. Back in 1900, there were 10 million Christians in Africa, representing about 10 percent of the population. By 2000, that had grown to 360 million, a little under half the population, which is quantitatively the largest religious change of any kind that has ever occurred anywhere. [John Allen](#), the well-known Catholic journalist, has argued that the number of

Catholics in Africa grows in the 20th century by 6,700 percent—which, as I tell my students, "For those of you with a humanities background, that's more than double." It's a substantial increase.

Last year, there were more Catholic baptisms in the Philippines than in France, Spain, Italy, and Poland combined. When you look at those demographics, you begin to understand why if you go to Ireland these days you will see African priests in Ireland.

Well, if this was just a change of geography, a change of ethnicity, then it would be interesting. But I'm suggesting that it is rather more than that, because the kinds of Christianity that are growing in the Global South—a term by which I mean Africa, Asia, Latin America—are different from what we are used to in the Global North. They are much more enthusiastic; they are much more supernatural-oriented; they have much more of a belief in trans-stream vision, prophecy.

Now, you may say at this point, "But we could go not more than a mile from where we are right now and find churches like that," and you are absolutely right. But I'm talking about what is the mainstream. Whatever denomination you look at in the Global South—whether it's Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran—it has this kind of character.

If you go to Tanzania, for example, one of the leading religious figures in that nation is a man who is famous as a prophet and a healer. He is also a Lutheran bishop. This is not the Lutheranism of Garrison Keillor. This is a different kind of religious tradition.

In fact, in many ways—and I'll come back to this in a second—the kind of Christianity we are seeing looks a great deal like the Islam of the Global South. By Islam, I do not mean the terrorist extremism of popular nightmare; I mean the ordinary, lived religion of hundreds of millions of Muslims.

There are actually quite close analogies there, but in Africa and Asia the two religions tend to influence each other. Christians in Africa, for example, are aware of the very high veneration that Muslims hold for the Qur'an, and they can have no less a veneration for their own sacred text.

There are also analogies. The Bible in the Global South is a book which often is not read; it is heard and recited, which actually takes us back to the oldest days of Christianity. Look at the New Testament and look how often you read the word "hear": "blessed is he who hears," not "he who reads." Many people would argue that when you hear a message, as opposed to reading it, it appeals to different parts of the brain, it registers more, it carries more conviction.

Well, we've seen some very striking conflicts emerging between northern and southern Christianity, most tellingly in the Anglican Communion. As I'm sure you are aware, a couple of years ago the U.S. Episcopal Church ordained a gay bishop, much to the horror of the rest of the Anglican world in Africa and Asia, with its very rapidly growing numbers.

The language of that debate has since become quite venomous. As of a week or so ago, the latest statement of the Nigerian church on the subject of the American Episcopal Church said—and I quote loosely—"when a cancerous lump in the body has defied all treatment, the time has come for it to become excised immediately." Some have suggested this is slightly lacking in Christian charity, but we can discuss this.

Why do the views of Nigeria matter? Because the Nigerian Anglican Church is now the center of the Anglican world. The U.S. Episcopal Church has about 2 million members. The Nigerian Catholic Church had 5 million back in 1975, it's up to 20 million today, and they are forecasting 35 million by 2025. How long that graph goes up is anybody's guess. It is growing very fast.

Of course, Nigeria is not the only great center of the Anglican world. There is Uganda, there is Kenya, there are all the other great Christian nations, a phrase I use without the slightest irony at all.

For many American liberals looking at, for example, the statements from Nigeria, the assumption must be that African Christianity, Asian Christianity, must represent some kind of primitive, uneducated, superstitious thing, maybe some kind of hangover from paganism. In fact, I want to suggest a very different interpretation. The Bible carries so much weight partly because it describes a world which is immediately recognizable for millions of residents of, certainly, Africa and Asia, which is what I will be talking about today.

If you read the Bible in such a way that you think you are getting almost a documentary description, that makes the moral messages much more credible and appealing. I think for many Americans, for example, reading the Old Testament, even if seen as a believing Christian, you cannot avoid the sense that this is a different, strange world; it is a world of nomads and polygamy and blood sacrifice. Why should moral strictures formed in such a world be applicable to a modern society?

If you are reading the Bible in Africa, however, it is exactly those features that give the Old Testament much of its appeal. I don't know how many of you have seen some of the things that go around the Internet on this subject. One person, for example, will say, "The Book of Leviticus says that homosexuality is a dreadful crime." Someone else will say, "Well yes, but Leviticus says many other things. Leviticus says that you can own slaves from neighboring nations. Why can't I own Canadians?"

In Africa, that sort of question does not arise because, even if people do not live in a community that practices nomadism or polygamy or blood sacrifice, they know places very nearby that do.

I would quote, for example, a South African theologian by the name of [Madipoane Masenya](#), who I emphasize is very much a liberal activist and feminist thinker. She makes a remark: "If any African finds it difficult to be at home with the Old Testament, they really need to examine themselves to see if they might not have lost their Africanness in some way." Could such a statement possibly be made of Europeans or Americans or Canadians? I don't think so.

Once again, there are any number of examples of this. But one I would focus on is the idea of sacrifice. Christianity is based on the idea of atonement, which is a sacrificial doctrine; it is the shedding of blood for sin. Often, in the European society and in the American context, we tend to lose that idea. People may know about the idea of atonement, but we tend not to think of it in concrete terms.

Now imagine reading about those ideas in a society that is deeply familiar with blood sacrifice, where sacrifice occurs at any major social event. The most senior archbishop in the South African Catholic Church suggested a couple of years ago, to great controversy, that "If we really want to talk about inculturation in Africa, we should think about including some form of animal sacrifice as a prelude to the mass." Europe being Europe, there was an enormous wave of protest about this—not in terms of the fact that the ideas represented paganism or syncretism, but of course because of the possibility of cruelty to animals.

The books that carry weight in, again Africa especially, are the books that speak of very familiar sacrificial images. Very often, African writers, for instance, turn to books like the Book of Revelation and say, "This reads like it was written for a specifically African audience because it uses so many African concepts and images." The idea of the throne, the altar, the lamb, the idea that the dead still exist in another world crying out for justice—these are all very African ideas.

There is a Ghanaian theologian, called [Kwame Bediako](#), who says that "The book of the Bible that we Africans should turn to most is the Epistle to the Hebrews." You think: Why the Epistle to the Hebrews, because the Epistle to the Hebrews describes the Jewish sacrificial system of the temple and describes how Jesus is the culmination of this and supercedes it? "Aha!" he says, "This is what Africans need to understand, that all the blood sacrifices are now extinct, obsolete, and we have to think of Jesus as the absolute sacrifice."

I have a very bad habit. Whenever I meet American evangelicals who use concepts like "power in the

blood" and atonement, I tend to ask them, "So have you ever seen a blood sacrifice? Have you ever smelled a blood sacrifice?" The answer is very rarely yes. This is not a question that you need to ask in much of Africa.

And, by the way, those ideas run through the hymns. Let me just say a quick word about hymns. We are today living in the greatest ever age of Christian hymn writing, in terms of the volume of hymns and by many standards the artistic quality of the hymns. Most of them, however, are in languages that the great majority of us do not have access to: they are in Zulu, they are in Ugandan, they are Swahili, they are in Yoruba, they are in a great many different languages. These hymns are as central to African Christianity as, for example, "Amazing Grace" is to American Christianity and Christian culture.

One, for example, is an East African hymn called "Tukutendereza Jesu" ["We praise you, Jesus"], which tends to attract the most amazing stories about it. You know, you read stories where you have Christians who are about to be martyred by the soldiers of a dictatorship and they begin to sing; then the soldiers surrounding them begin to sing and put down their guns and go home. These things actually do happen. It is a very powerful thing.

Let me stress one word. When we look at the emerging Christianity which will be such a force in the 21st century, there is one word I stress: poverty. The average Christian in the world today is a very poor person, inconceivably poor by American or European standards.

If you look at the world's poorest today, then I suggest a rather surprising observation. The largest single religion among the poorest is not Islam, it is not Hinduism. It is Christianity. The problem of extreme poverty in the world is, above all, a Christian issue. This radically affects the way in which people read the Bible, a book which was written by and for a very poor community.

The Bible was, of course, written for agricultural communities. So many of the analogies, so many of the metaphors, make great sense for a modern audience in Africa or Africa, who understand the agricultural metaphors, for example, in a way in which most of us cannot.

I had an interesting example of this not long ago. I was talking to some West Africans and saying, "What are the parts of the Bible that really resonate with you?" They mentioned a couple of the obvious ones—the sower of the seed, the grain of wheat—yes, yes, yes—and, of course, the one which is most telling, Psalm 126. Now, of course, as an academic my life depends on deceit, and so of course I made the obvious comment, "Oh yes, Psalm 126." Eventually, I gave up and said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, it's obvious. Psalm 126 is a psalm which includes the line, 'He who goes out into the fields sowing the seed in tears will come back the following year carrying the sheaves with joy.'" If you hear these lines— and they are quite widely quoted—but they are lines associated with a funeral, obviously, because they carry the idea of resurrection: you sow in tears, you reap in joy.

Why are people sowing in tears? Once again, my West African friend said, "Well, it's obvious. When the Psalm was composed, there was obviously a famine. As in modern times, there is a limited amount of corn, there is a limited amount of seed, and you have a choice. Your children are hungry, your children are crying, and you can give them the food to eat, but if you do that you've got nothing to sow the following year. So what you have to do is literally take it away from your hungry children and take it into the fields to sow, in the hope that it will come up next year."

There are parts of the world where at particular times of the year the normal standard greeting is: "How are you?" "My children are hungry." That is the normal conventional exchange and expectation. Well, as my friend said, "It's obvious." It wasn't obvious to me.

As you look at the Bible from poor eyes, from hungry eyes, you begin to see just how much of the Bible is about food. You begin to see, for example, that when people want to describe the reign of God, the coming of God, the miraculous end times, you imagine a banquet at which the poor will have enough to eat. Can you imagine such a thing? And, even better, the rich will be sent empty away.

This is a prayer, a grace for before meals, from a contemporary Chinese house church: "Today's food is not easy to come by. God gives it to us. After we eat it, we will not be sick. God protects us so we can have the next meal. He protects us so everything is prosperous and we have peace. All our family members, from young to old, need the protection from God."

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The idea there, which I think would have made very good sense in the Biblical world, is that you cannot really rely on the next meal—it's a subjective, conditional thing—any more than you can rely on water. When you look at a major force in international affairs like migration, look at the importance of the number of countries that are, as the phrase goes, water-stressed, that are dealing with polluted water, shortages of water, and then with those eyes read passages in the Bible which promise streams of living water. What an amazing idea!

Most of us do not know at first hand the experience of famine, which is such a constant theme throughout the Bible. One of the figures who traditionally appeals in so much of global Christianity is Elijah. Elijah is the figure who all of his stories concern a time of the most dreadful famine caused by a water shortage. Elijah negotiates with God.

I suppose I come around to a remark by a theologian called [Musimbi Kanyoro](#). She makes a remark, and you can imagine the disbelief in her voice: "Those cultures which find it hard to identify with Biblical cultures run the risk of reading the Bible as fiction. Can you imagine such a thing? Could anybody do that?" Before you think, "Well, Musimbi Kanyoro must be a fundamentalist," no. Again, she is a very liberal, feminist theologian, a great activist. She expresses awe at the idea that anyone could possibly read the Bible as fiction; obviously, the world it is describing is so familiar.

I just want to talk about one book, in particular, which I think illustrates all these ideas. That is a short epistle called [the Epistle of James](#). If ever a book had unsuspected depths, it is the Epistle of James.

Oh by the way, I give you a golden rule for trying to understand the Christianity of Africa or Asia. Look at what [Martin Luther](#) thought, back 500 years ago, about the good and the bad bits of the Bible. Any book that Martin Luther wanted to throw out of the Bible is at the core of African Christianity. If Luther didn't like it, it goes down great in Africa. It's a simple rule for you.

Luther hated James. Why? Because it seemed to him to be a simple, moralistic kind of text. It is also a book which speaks so absolutely to African and Asian churches that it has probably given rise to more sermon texts than any other, and particularly one verse, in which James says basically: "You say that tomorrow you are going to go to the city, you're going to do some business, you're going to do these things. You fool. You don't know that you're going to be able to do that. You could be dead tomorrow. Your life is a vapor, your life is a mist." If I had a penny for every sermon preached on that verse in Africa in the last few years, I'd be a very rich man.

"What you should say," says James, "is 'if the Lord wills, I will do this.'" James preaches a basic Christian doctrine, which is also basic to other religions, that I think most Westerners have lost, which is the idea of transience, the idea that individuals and societies and states are here today but nobody exactly can be sure whether they will be here tomorrow. In the aftermath of the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004, once again that text came back again and again, particularly "your life is a mist, your life is a vapor."

James also speaks to other religions. Interestingly, Christians use it to try and evangelize Muslims and Muslims use it to try and evangelize Christians. Why? Because it speaks a common language of poor societies that know conscience, that know that people come and go, states come and go; God remains.

It looks like a Muslim text. Why? It describes God as compassionate and merciful. I think we've heard

that before. It says that you should accompany every action by the phrase "if God wills." Any exposure at all to a Muslim world soon brings the phrase *inshallah* ("if it is God's will")—a particularly disturbing moment when you are about to take off on an airliner from a Muslim nation and the pilot says, "We will be reaching 30,000 feet, *inshallah*."

It is the definitive text, perhaps, for the poor and for religions formed in poor societies. The best example of this, oddly, is Buddhism. You think about this. You think of Christians going to Asia and trying to find parts of the Bible that they can use to communicate with local cultures. What would you use: the exalted mysticism of the Gospel of John; the moral instruction of the Beatitudes? The one that works in practice is James, because it teaches a very familiar set of ideas.

I can verify this in one way. Not long ago, a British publisher had an interesting scheme. They took books of the Bible and published them with introductions by famous actors and thinkers and so on. Who do you think they chose to introduce the Epistle of James? [The Dalai Lama](#), in one of his Christian commentaries.

The Dalai Lama begins by saying basically, "I know very little about Christianity"—come now, your Holiness, a little modest—"but I do know about Buddhism, and this is fine Buddhism, this is great Buddhism." He actually says, "What this actually is, is it represents a wonderful example of a well-known Tibetan form of literature, called *lojong*, which is mind training"—which, if you think about it, is a very fine description for what Christians and Jews would call "wisdom literature." It trains the mind. Here is a basic fact: Your life is transient, your life is temporary; how does that affect the way you look at the world?

So I'm suggesting a number of ways in which the world of the Bible makes sense.

I want to talk about one rather more controversial area, and that is the notion of supernatural evil. If there is a fundamental difference between the world of the New Testament and the world of the modern West, it is the whole idea of demons and healings and exorcisms.

[Jim Wallace](#) made the remark a couple of years ago that if you take references to the poor out of the Bible, you're not left with much. He's absolutely right. If you take references to demons, healings, and exorcisms out of the Bible, you're left with a pretty thin pamphlet.

In Global South churches, these ideas of demons and healings are absolutely central to Christianity. Any kind of Christianity which does not teach and preach these lessons is suspect.

There is a story which illustrate this. I have a friend who is a pastor of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, a sort of white, middle-class individual, who was visiting South Africa. He wandered into a very large, densely packed church in an area where people did not really expect to see white faces because of the experience of the apartheid years. People were very hospitable and asked him why he was there. They said, "Oh, wonderful news! You're a pastor, you're an ordained pastor. What a wonderful thing!"

The word goes up to the platform, where the minister in charge of the congregation said, "Oh, my friends, I have wonderful news for you. Pastor Smith has come to visit us all the way from the United States. I'm going to invite him to conduct tonight's exorcism."

I sometimes tell that story in seminaries, and you can see people blanch. In case you're wondering, Pastor Smith had no experience of exorcism beyond what he had seen in the movies, but he did well.

This is not a weird, fringe, Pentecostal thing. I'll give you another story which I think illustrates this, a true story. Imagine a great service in a Ugandan church where a woman reports being healed of a spinal complaint and wants to testify. Then everyone else starts to testify—"I've been healed of this," "I've been healed of this." Finally, the deacon in the church, wanting to get out before next Sunday if he possibly can, says, "All right, never mind individual testimony. A show of hands. How many people have been healed of this sort of disease?"—fifteen, sixteen. "How many of this sort of disease?"—seventeen,

eighteen. Oh, what sort of church was this? It was, of course, a Roman Catholic church, and the miracle occurred during the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. These ideas that I am talking about run across denominations, across all denominations—Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran, whatever.

I just want to read one example from a hymn, by the way. I will draw this to an end shortly. One example I cannot resist.

I know many people in this country in the churches are very conscious about the survival of sexist, militarist, patriarchal language in hymns and liturgy and they try to get a much more representative selection of hymns that avoid these problems. Here's an example of a contemporary West African hymn by a woman, Afua Kuma, and I think you can hear the gentle woman's touch: "If Satan troubles us, Jesus Christ, you are the lion of the grasslands. Your claws are sharp. You will tear out his entrails and leave them on the ground for the flies to eat."

This is a tough Christianity, this is a serious Christianity that takes spiritual warfare very seriously. But—I cannot emphasize this sufficiently—it is a Christianity that believes in deliverance from evil, but that also believes in liberation, and that knows that those two words are the same word. There is not the division that you familiarly find in Western Christianity between on the left you have liberation theology, on the right you have deliverance. They are two concepts representing one word. It is deliverance from the evil spirits that bring sickness and poverty, disease and pollution, and substance abuse. They try to teach and practice healing of all those complaints.

What I'm suggesting, in short, is that the Christianity that we see in the Global South is a rounded sort of religion, in the sense that it brings together concepts that in the Global North perhaps we see as incompatible. I would argue that, particularly for the traditionally excluded, marginalized groups, which in many African and Asian societies means women, it represents a significant opportunity of a leap forward.

I'd just like to end with the words of David Martin, a well-known British sociologist, when he looks at Pentecostalism in Latin America and Africa. He says that what new Christianity means is that people who previously did not have the right or the ability to speak out, who are expected to defer to traditional authority, suddenly acquire the license to do so—or, as he says, "They acquire tongues of fire." That is what that is about.

I can go on at great length about the evils and horrors which might be associated with this kind of Christianity potentially, but at the moment let me end with basically a very optimistic portrait. I will draw to a close right there and throw it open for questions.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: Thank you very much for this very informative talk. Actually, when I saw the title, I thought it was the Global South here in the United States, because when I listen to your description of the church in Africa and Asia, I have the feeling you find the same trend here in the United States. When you look at the statistics about the believers in creationism, in intelligent design, or you listen on Sunday morning to the evangelists, I really have the feeling I am in Africa—which is not bad.

A second question is that I'm missing your point. I think it is very informative, but what are the conclusions? What is going to happen?

PHILIP JENKINS: Well, I did try to make that comment about you would not have to go far, even in New York, to find churches where that is commonplace. But there is a great distinction between what you might call the established, more mainline denominations and ideas that exist more on the fringe.

I'd suggest a couple of things. I'd suggest we are still at the very early stages of a process. During the 20th century, one of the key events in African history was that approximately 40 percent of the

population of Africa moved from animism to Christianity. So we are still dealing with a religion which is of the second generation in most cases. This is new.

I think what we are seeing is the potential for the transformation of attitudes to gender, to economics, to debt and thrift, and that the churches have a potential for acting as organs of development in a way that no secular agencies have yet done.

For example, if you look at the very successful prosperity churches in Nigeria or West Africa, the churches that preach health and wealth—you pray to God and great things will come to you—this looks like a very cynical, exploitative kind of Christianity. However, what these churches also do is they try to teach and train their members, especially young male members, in new ways of living, ways of coping without debt, the belief that debt is a kind of bodily sin.

Organizing a society around families in which there is a family responsibility. The phrase that I always like from Latin America—and I wish I had invented this, but I did not—Elizabeth Brusco says that the great change wrought by Pentecostalism in Latin America is "the reformation of machismo." [See her book, [The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia](#)]. What you are seeing, and what I believe you are seeing the very early stages of, is something like the creation of a Victorian attitude to family and community.

I would also add one thing, which is more concrete and more immediate. In most of Africa, the established churches—especially the Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and others—have played a key role in promoting democracy and human rights. In the 1980s, for example, where you have, if you like, the second wave of African revolutions, very often it is the churches that supervise those.

We are all familiar with people like [Desmond Tutu](#) in South Africa, but there are many other examples. In Zimbabwe, for example, the only effective opposition is the Roman Catholic Church, led by [Pius Ncube](#). It's a miracle the man is still alive. In Kenya, under the Moi dictatorship, the opposition was [David Gitari](#), the Anglican archbishop.

And churches represent potential foci of opposition, organization around human rights. So I think we are seeing a short-term development in that way, but also a long-term consequence. I believe the consequences are very important.

QUESTION: How do you reconcile the clergy, whether Christian or Muslim, with poverty, natural resources, and especially the increased birth rate, to uplift the standard of living in these countries?

PHILIP JENKINS: Well, as I said, I was trying to address that in that question, which is any chance of a sustained increase in the standard of living surely means a change of attitudes to concepts like thrift, work, community organization, and so on. We are starting to see that.

If I can use, if you like, a Latin American example, when liberation theology, the base communities, faded and failed in the 1980s, there was an enormous upsurge of Pentecostal churches, very sort of fundamentalist and enthusiastic and so on. People originally saw that as a withdrawal from or rejection of the world. In fact, if you look at what those churches are doing, they are actually doing a great job of community organization, providing social services for their people, and trying to encourage and train people to go out and work and find jobs. So that would seem to me to be a significant contribution to that.

QUESTIONER: The greatest increase in standard of living has been in China, which has a limited family policy and birth control. Is there any projection of trying to do something like that to emulate China—not their dictatorship, but family and birth control?

PHILIP JENKINS: As I'm sure you know, one of the most important changes around much of the world in the last decade or so has been the spread of sub-replacement fertility. Just to give you an

example—this is not from global Christianity—in the last twenty years, the birth rate in Iran, for example, has fallen from six children per woman to two. So the United States now has a higher fertility rate than Iran.

Most Muslim countries in the Near East and North Africa are now rapidly approaching European birth rates—Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco. All these countries are now heading basically for Spanish and Italian rates—not just without government encouragement, but despite government encouragement in many cases to do the opposite. The places that still have the very high rates in the Muslim world are places like—well, you can guess—Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, the Gaza Strip. So that is spreading as a global factor right now.

The fastest changes are actually in Latin America. The oldest country in the Western Hemisphere, in terms of the largest number of its people over sixty-five, is Uruguay. It is not the United States.

So sub-replacement fertility is a very important change which is happening. It will have enormous consequences politically.

Africa at the moment, Christian and Muslim, is the area that is resisting these tendencies. It will probably do so for another ten or twenty years.

QUESTION: Thank you for being so enlightening. I would like us to look at the perspective of the descendants of Abraham.

Number one, I want to point out that in Jewish synagogues today the oral law, the Torah, the Old Testament, is read in chapters. We also read sections from the prophets. So this continuation of an oral tradition combined with the written word is still going on. And, just recently, we celebrated the Day of Atonement, which is certainly in the Bible, and therefore is open to everybody, the descendants of Abraham.

Now the question. Both Christians and Muslims consider themselves descendants of Abraham. The real question is: Why would somebody choose Christianity above Islam or Islam above Christianity?

PHILIP JENKINS: That's a very good question.

QUESTIONER: Also, the sociology, the history of the spread of religions—you mentioned the Victorians. The original source for Christianity came from missionaries from Europe or America. How did the transformation take place to have an indigenous set of churches? The same way in Islam, the original impetus came from crusading Muslims often converting people by the sword, and they would start from the north, from north Africa, the northern part of Sudan and Uganda and so forth. Tell us more about the competition and the evolution of the religions.

PHILIP JENKINS: I'll try to confine myself to three hours. As I'm sure you appreciate, those are substantial questions. Let me try to just address a couple of things.

First of all, the transition from missionaries. Actually, the spread of Islam across most of what is now the Muslim world—certainly into East Asia, South Asia, North Africa—comes through [the Sufis](#), who are both the mystics and the knights of Islam. That is a complex story.

It does not take long historically for those religions to establish local roots, usually in forms which the established churches maybe don't like. So Christianity, for instance, arrives in a particular area, and twenty years later there are people saying, "Well, you know, not only is Christ a fine thing, but I myself am Christ." You get movements like this.

If you want to read an account of these sort of movements, the best account is probably the greatest Brazilian novel, [The Revolt in the Backlands](#) by Euclides de Cunha, which is a stunning novel about a

messiah in the Brazilian backwoods.

But the transition happens quite rapidly. For example, in Africa the missionaries spent a long time making a few converts and establishing centers.

But it is when the empires die that Christianity begins exploding. Two things happen. It is almost as if people are sitting around saying, "Well, thank heaven they're gone. Now we can concentrate on doing what we really want to do." It is rather like the fall of the Roman Empire; it's only after the fall of the Roman Empire that you get the great conversions. It is only after the fall of the British and the Belgian and the French and the Portuguese empires that you get the spread of the new churches.

The other thing is that the end of colonialism coincides with the spread of systems of modernity, forms of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. You think of people moving into cities, where there are no facilities for welfare, health, and education, beyond what people provide themselves and what they provide through, depending on the kind of area, their mosques or their churches. Usually, the people providing those services tend to be very indigenous groups, and also people who follow quite fundamentalist, orthodox, traditional kinds of belief.

If you want to look at the history of Hamas, for example, in the Muslim world, do not look at it primarily through its military or violent activities. Look at it through its incredible networks of social services.

I'd add one other thing. We often tend to neglect this. Churches and religious institutions in Africa and Asia often carry the reputation—sometimes undeserved—of being the only people who avoid corruption. Political corruption at every level tends to be associated with states. It was Nigeria under its military governments that gave us the word kleptocracy. In a system like that, in the Muslim areas people turn to the mosques, and in the Christian areas people of any talent or ability moved into the churches.

That is a very quick summary of an answer. But it happens very quickly.

I'll just give you one figure, which I rather like, for Nigeria. Back in 1900, the area that would become Nigeria was 33 percent Muslim, 1 percent Christian—Muslims outnumbered Christians 33:1. By 1970, it was Muslims 45 percent, Christians 45 percent. Christians went from 1 percent to 45 percent in basically two generations. That's an incredible growth.

If you want to understand tension, hostility, between the two religions, you can see both sides. But think of it from a Muslim point of view, people who have always believed "Well, we'll take over this country eventually," and who suddenly face the menace that "my son, my grandson, could be a Christian."

What I often call the most feared "weapon of mass instruction" in the Muslim world is the "Jesus" video. I don't know how many of you have ever seen or heard of the "Jesus" video. It was made in the 1970s originally. It is basically a fairly bad film, the story of the life of Jesus. Around the Muslim world today, people claim that it has been responsible for 300 million conversions worldwide. I do not know.

Very often, in an African city, someone will go up to a Muslim and say, "Would you like to see a film I've got about the prophet Jesus?" "Oh certainly, yes, I'd love to see this." It is an incredibly evangelistic tool and very, very powerful. Very often, if you want to map riots, just trace the distribution of the "Jesus" video.

QUESTION: I'd like to ask for your assessment on a thought that I had. In the beginning of your talk, you talked about the impact of the African churches on the Anglican community with respect to the ordination of a gay minister. I would like to close the loop here and focus on the end of your remarks, where you talked about the importance of deliverance in the Southern churches, the importance of poverty and health and so on, and ask you for your assessment on what the impact of that particular form of Christianity might have on some of our more conservative American churches and their political viewpoints, which have so far, at least in an organized way, seemed to have focused on these other aspects of Christian worship, largely Christian belief, largely matters of sex and marriage and abortion.

PHILIP JENKINS: Just to take an example, not an African example, but if you look at, say, Pentecostal churches, evangelical churches, in Brazil, they are very conservative on moral, doctrinal issues and they are actually very radical, very liberal, on economic issues. It was the Pentecostals who represented the left of the [Lula](#) government when that was elected. I think that is already having quite an impact.

I look at the National Association of Evangelicals, which is this large umbrella organization in this country. I know the leader of that is a man called [Ted Haggard](#). He is based in Colorado Springs. He is currently in the process of building a new church facility which is based on a church in Lagos. So you look to the centers of the Christian world and you draw on those.

But much more seriously, American evangelicals I think are being affected by the more holistic political attitude of African churches. Where you see that most tellingly is in the activism of American evangelicals recently over environmental issues, the sense that, "Obviously, global warming is a threat to everyone. If we are just focused on sexual issues, that is only a very small part of the story."

Over the last decade or so, there have been a number of global issues. One was global debt, of course, in the late 1990s; and more recently, issues of sex trafficking. The most direct result of this global concern was something which I think has rather dropped off the radar. In I forget the exact year—I think it was 2003—President Bush made a very large financial commitment to fighting AIDS. That was, I think, a direct response to evangelical pressures and contacts. So there is definitely this influence, the idea that, "Okay, we're very concerned about the sexual issues, but there is also the other thing."

The other issue, of course, would be religious freedom. I sometimes think that over the next couple of election cycles in this country, religious freedom issues could come ever more to the fore, particularly, as I'm sure you know, in 2007, which is the year in which there is to be a new federal election in Nigeria, in which probably a Muslim military officer will be elected. The consequences could be "may you live in interesting times."

QUESTION: Your mention of exorcism led me to think about, not only the way in which these religions of the Global South are reviving an earlier form of Christianity, but they are also incorporating traditional aspects of religion. So I'm wondering to what extent does this raise, not only policy issues around topics like homosexuality, but also doctrinal issues in terms of theology? In other words, how Christian are these Christians? To what extent, given the decentralization of the way these groups seem to be organized, are they a new religion, something different, and does this present a real theological dilemma?

PHILIP JENKINS: I can give you a couple of examples which would confirm that.

On Easter Day, a couple of million people turned out in St. Peter's Square in Rome and 5 million people turned out at the headquarters of the Zion Christian Church in South Africa. In other words, it's a much bigger event there. The Zion Christian Church certainly does things which seem to hang over from Zulu traditional religion that give problems to some people.

Generally speaking, though, that is unrepresentative. First of all, if you go to an African city, most of the churches you will see will be ones that you could see around here—they're Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran. A lot of the old, independent churches have given way to global Pentecostal denominations, like the Assemblies of God, and a lot of the older African independent denominations—in West Africa, you have these things called the [Aladura churches](#)—have become much more mainstream American and Pentecostal.

A great example is the [Redeemed Christian Church of God](#), RCCG, which incidentally is now building a North American headquarters in Texas, in a town that used to have as its official town motto "The Blackest Land, the Whitest People"—ha, ha. The RCCG has turned into a global missionary church, reaching out. It has parishes within a mile of here.

So the older, if you like, more eccentric—let's use a technical sociological word, kookiest—churches really are receding. There are some which are weird, which do things like make their prophets equal to the Messiah, and so on and so on. They are fading and they are really marginal. The overwhelming majority belong to that weird, esoteric, mystical sect called the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, that sort of religion. So I am not so focused on that.

There is also a sort of rhetorical need. When there are North/South debates, people always want to make the African churches look as alien as possible. This gives rise to very unfortunate incidents, like when liberals in the Episcopal Church at one great meeting tried to tell conservative Africans that they should—and I quote—"go back to the jungle you came from and stop monkeying around with the church." Both sides tend to say a lot of unwise things, and stereotypes can run rampant.

JOANNE MYERS: Thank you very much. Nothing unwise about your presentation this morning. Thank you very much for being with us.

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