

Shattering Expectations:

Christianity Abounds in Global South, Europe

According to Philip Jenkins, professor of history and religious studies at Pennsylvania State University, Christianity is becoming a “thoroughly globalized international phenomenon that tramples all of the boundaries and distinctions that we’re used to.”

Jenkins lectured at Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School March 11 and 12, covering a variety of topics related to global Christianity, including “Reading the Bible in the Global South,” “The Future of Christianity,” “Is Christianity Dead in Europe?” and “The Lost History of Global Christianity.”

Well-known for books like *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, *God’s Continent: Christianity, Islam and Europe’s Religious Crisis* and *The Lost History of Christianity*, Jenkins assured listeners that Christianity is far from dead; in fact, it is thriving in unexpected places among unexpected people. Christianity and the message of the Bible resonates with people in the Global South, the nations of Africa, Latin and Central America, and most of Asia.

“Part of the reason Christianity is growing so rapidly is that it describes a world they recognize,” Jenkins said. “They don’t have to go very far in their country or very far in their ancestries to see those things [events in the Old Testament] going on: blood sacrifices, polygamy, tribalism and nomadic life.”

The culture and social setting of the Global South closely resembles that of the Bible and early Christianity, allowing many people to readily accept Christianity. “Ninety percent of the argument [for Christianity] is made,” Jenkins said.

According to Jenkins, when people in the Global South read the parable of the lost coin in Luke 15, they identify with the widow who has lost her money. “Of course a woman with a lost coin will look for it, because otherwise, she can’t feed her children,” Jenkins said.

Further, famine regularly strikes the Global South, and the Bible delivers a message of hope for the hungry. “Have you ever stopped to consider how much of the Bible is about food?” Jenkins asked. “Imagine reading the Magnificat [Luke 1:47-55]. It will be an amazing time when everyone will have enough food.”

The use of wisdom literature in the Bible also ties in with African and Asian cultures. Both cultures rely heavily on proverbs, and when they read biblical books like James or Proverbs, they are on familiar ground.

The same things that enliven the Bible in the Global South can kill it in other areas. “Cultures that are far removed from the biblical culture run the risk of reading the Bible as fiction,”



▲ Philip Jenkins is professor of history and religious studies at Pennsylvania State University.



[Christianity] is thriving in unexpected places among unexpected people.

Jenkins said. But reading the Bible through the eyes of the impoverished and famine-stricken people in the Global South “provides a way to see whole new ways of reading, whole new styles of reading, and whole new books to be read in a new way.”✝



▲ **About the Writer:** Leslie Ann Jones graduated from Mississippi State in 2004 with degrees in journalism and religion and completed her M.Div. at Beeson in December 2008. She and her husband, Dennis, live in Iuka, Miss., where they are active members of Iuka Baptist Church. She is pursuing a ministry of writing and teaching following her recent graduation and wrote this piece for The Global Center.