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# Challenges Facing the Gospel Today

## DAVE BAST

One of the things I think we all realize is that Christians, both here in North America and throughout the world, are facing some very big challenges; whether it is the persecuted church in the Middle East and other places or the growth of aggressively secularist societies and governments in the West, Christians today are being confronted with a great deal of opposition. How should we think about these challenges? Perhaps more importantly, how should we respond to them? Once again, today on *Groundwork* we welcome a very special guest to join us in digging into what scripture has to say to us. Stay tuned.

## SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

## DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and we are joined once more today in this third program – a series of three – with Bishop Henry Luke Orombi of Uganda. He is the past Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Uganda; a very large church in the Anglican Communion or the Anglican family of churches throughout the world; and Bishop Henry took early retirement to devote himself to the ministry of the word; to preaching and teaching and doing the work of an evangelist. So, once more, Bishop Henry, we are so grateful that you have joined us on *Groundwork*.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Thank you, David; thank you, Scott. It is good to be here.

## SCOTT HOEZEE

We have done two programs with Bishop Henry earlier, talking about the origins of mission to the Great Commission, the history of missions; and then in the last program we talked specifically about Africa and how the Gospel came, especially to your country, Bishop Henry, to Uganda and into your own life; and now, on this program, we want to have a conversation with you about a number of issues facing the Church today, both northern hemisphere, southern hemisphere, western world, African world, Asia, and the like; and so, we are just going to talk about some of the challenges that are facing the Church – some of the challenges ultimately, too, that will come from the fact that we are going to have – most of the world's Christians now are south of the equator. The entire locus of Christianity has shifted in the last one hundred, two hundred years, so that most people who believe in Jesus Christ now are in Asia, Africa, and South America; not in Europe or North America, and we are going to have increasing contact between these churches; and so, there are some areas where we want to think about how can we accent what we have in common? How can we avoid some conflicts; and we will be talking about all of that in this program.

## DAVE BAST

One of the great things that I think has emerged in these few programs we have been doing together is the theme of relationship. I love the way you have stressed that, really, as people from different cultures and different races, we are in relationship in the Body of Christ; and so, we have a right and a duty almost to listen to each other; both to listen and to speak.

I am reminded of a couple of the proverbs – a couple of verses from Proverbs 27, which can guide us. One of them is Proverbs 27:17:

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. Here is another good one, verse 6: Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. Sometimes people will flatter, but a true friend – a true brother in Christ – can wound you with the truth and it is helpful, it is beneficial. So, we are going to give you permission even to wound us if need be. Because you are an outsider, you can see our culture, you can see our churches, and maybe see some of the things we are blind to. What do you see as some of the great challenges, let's just say, facing the Church in North America?

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Let me just point one quick one I have experienced during this time. I find that the Western culture is very time conscious, which is a good thing, because to be a steward of time is excellent; that is actually doing things which God would like because time is a gift; but when people are so busy and carried about by schedules and they squeeze God out of their lives because they are going for this, going for that, going for the other and going for that. I was speaking to college students in Covenant College and I said, "What time do you give to God?" It turned out that they are too busy – they are students – they are working hard – they have to be at assignments and things like that. Now, that is college life, but even ordinary life, people are so, so busy that by the time the day is gone, they are exhausted. So, I asked, "What time do you give to God? Is God your priority, or is something else your priority?" So, business – you can be so busy – even as a church leader, you can be so busy doing business and not having time with God. I find that to be one way that we lose touch with God, because if you are in a human relationship, if you have fallen in love with somebody, honestly, you are going to give time built into your schedule to just spend time with each other. Now how much time would you give to God and spend time with God?

Now, the second thing that I also notice along that line is how much of his word would you like to take? I have been to restaurants with friends and we will spend time for eating – two hours, three hours – but, when I go to church I am asked to speak for ten minutes, fifteen minutes, or at most, twenty minutes, and I say to myself, "If you physically feed yourself for two hours, how much time, then, do you allocate for listening to the word of God to help you to build up your fellowship with each other in church?" Now, to me, that is a bit difficult because for me back home I am given a pulpit and I preach for one hour, one hour and a half, and people are there and they are listening and they are willing to listen, and we find that is so important for us because somehow people can walk ten miles to come and listen to the word. It is the importance they attach to the word of God that prioritizes their time. So for me, I feel that is another thing.

The third one, which I also find very, very challenging here in this culture is the consumerism; the spirit of going out and shopping. Now, I am not a shopper myself. When I go to shop I would rather take a man, and we go, I pick my stuff, if I can pay, I pay for it and I go away. Now, my wife and I, when we come, we do not go shopping together. She needs all the time to look at this and to look at that, and the choices are multiple, and there is so much that you go in there. Now, my question is: Where is the center of your love? Is it for the things that you have and acquire, or is it for God? I noticed that the more people have, the more people go for material things, the less of their love for God will become because Jesus Christ said, "You cannot serve two masters." You will go for one and you will go for one and you will not go for the other. You either love one or you hate the other; and once things come into people's lives, they force the love for God out, and I noticed this not necessarily because of things for the sake of things, but the love of those things definitely can send God out of you.

## **DAVE BAST**

It strikes me that some of those things you are talking about are related. The hunger for food – I think in our culture a lot of people buy things because they are hungry in a spiritual sense, and they think that that will somehow satisfy, and it does maybe for a little while.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: And then they want more.

## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

I think, Bishop Henry, when I listen to you talk and we reflect on our own churches, and I think you have given us and all of our listeners a lot to think about. I know when I went to your country a little over a year ago for the first time and I preached there, and they said, "You must preach for one hour." I had to take two sermons and sew them together and I still had to add stuff because in a lot of churches here, twenty or twenty five minutes – but, you talk about falling in love, and you have used that metaphor – I wonder sometimes – because, indeed, when I was in Uganda, when I preached, but also when I had the privilege of teaching

preachers there, I saw so much more hunger to learn than I often see, unfortunately, even among my own students here in the United States, and I wonder if the idea of falling in love with Jesus is fresher for Africans now than it is for a lot of North Americans. Here, we have been married for a really long time to Jesus and it is not quite as exciting anymore.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Well, Scott, I am married to my wife for 42 years, and the last time I took her for a honeymoon was this year when we were celebrating our 42<sup>nd</sup> wedding anniversary. I would believe very strongly if it is a good relationship with your wife, the longer you are with your wife, the sweeter the relationship because you know her more than when you first met her. If you are looking at Christ and the Church, he is the bridegroom, we are the bride. I do not even understand why the bride should love the bridegroom less; particularly when she knows how much the bridegroom loves her; and I believe that as a Church we need to begin to be single-heartedly committed to the One who loved us and gave everything for us.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

It reminds me, too, Bishop Henry, what you were saying – you are right, of course – if the marriage is good, it is going to always be good. Where that intensity of love is not there, something has gone wrong in the relationship; but it reminds me of what Paul wrote to Timothy, just these verses as well, which I think are relevant to this conversation, 2 Timothy 3:

But understand this (Paul writes), in the last days there will come times of difficulty. <sup>2</sup>For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy – and then he goes on: <sup>4b</sup> They will be lovers of pleasure instead of lovers of God; and that is the description of consumerism...

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Absolutely.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

That indeed we are willing to spend three hours at the mall shopping for things we do not need, but in church it had better be done in an hour so I can get home quickly. Something has gone wrong with the relationship when that happens.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Now, Scott, that is what I find really amazing because Paul is writing this centuries ago as if he were here last year; and the Holy Spirit has made him see what we are now going through; which means that God is very concerned; God is very concerned about what we do now that he even made it to be put in black and white in the scriptures so that it can help us to know that even then when people walked away from God, things never remain the same. Maybe today, this can help us to begin to reconsider our priorities, and our priorities literally would be where our eternity is going to be; and to me, that will matter quite a lot because even if I buy a new car today, after a year or so my passion for that car is gone. Another one has come on the market; a new model has come in, and that is why we move from one thing to another and there is always a hunger that can never be satisfied. I think the word *contentment* can only come when God is in the center of our lives.

### **DAVE BAST**

Let's talk a little bit about persecution throughout the world. You, in an earlier program, told the story of the Ugandan martyrs...

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Yes.

### **DAVE BAST**

And how these 42 young men stood up, even unto death, rather than deny the Lord. We know that there are Christians today being persecuted physically in many places. We wonder, could something like this be coming, or there is a form of it increasingly in secular cultures that are more and more hostile, not just to the Christian Church, but even to the idea of God.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Well, I must not put Satan out of the picture when we are talking about persecution. We must remember that the faith that Christians have will always be attacked and challenged because there is a person behind it that

does not want believers to be who they are. I believe very strongly...

### **DAVE BAST**

I heard somebody say once that the fact that there is such a thing as Satan means evil is organized, Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Very much so.

### **DAVE BAST**

And there is an intelligence behind it. It is not just accidental.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Well, in the West what I find very difficult for me to understand, and it is in Africa; there is a subtle way Satan works. In my own country, it is very obvious. We see the black and white of his activities. Here it is so subtle, in areas of pleasure, of media, everywhere it is there; but, we need to understand that if God cannot woo us with silent love, he will shout, and part of the shouting may be pain; and he is going to bring us back to himself ultimately because whatever it takes to bring us back, God will use that as a measure of his love. If it is pain, it will be pain; if it is persecution, it will be persecution; but we must also know that the truth is never liked by everybody. If you have a bright light and somebody cannot contain it, they are going to shout you back. So, if we are going to live a life which is true, in the context of untruth, people are not going to be comfortable, and somehow we are persecuted because people are not comfortable with our confession, with our way of life, because we do not join them to do what they are doing; we are taking a different direction; and sometimes like walking against the current and it is hard going, but if it is the truth, then we need to stick to the truth that God has revealed to us in Christ. So, persecution is in the package. I am sure that is going to be something we will have to contend with in the future.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

We want to continue this conversation; and I think one of the things we want to talk about is a concern for the unity of the Church, and I think our listeners will want to know, as our churches from Africa and Europe and America mix and mingle and come together more, what can we do to minimize conflict and maximize our unity in Christ? We will talk about that in just a moment.

*Segment 2*

### **DAVE BAST**

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. Along with Scott Hoezee and Bishop Henry Orombi of Uganda, I am Dave Bast, and today we are talking with Bishop Henry about challenges facing the Church in our time. He has given us a little prophetic word about our obsession with time and with consumerism.

I noticed as Americans, when we go to Uganda or any African context, time is a very fluid concept. One of the things that tends to bother us is things do not start on time when they are said, and they do not end when they are said; but, coming back, Africa is so much more relational – African Christians – Africans in general – and it is a rebuke to us that we do not make more time for people, and, as you pointed out, for God in our lives. So, that was a good word; thank you for that.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Thank you.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

And I think one thing that some of our listeners are probably aware of, and there has been increasing writing about this. Some names some people may know: Philip Jenkins; also a friend of ours in the Reformed community, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, has recently written a book: *From Time Square to Timbuktu*, where he is talking about – there are a lot of challenges as the southern hemisphere churches: Africa, Asia, South America move north with missionaries. Just through immigration a lot of – as that happens, we are going to start noticing some differences between south and north. The southern churches tend to be more charismatic, more theologically conservative, have different views of science than where some of us in the West are. So, there are a lot of potential flashpoints and things we are going to have to work through in humility, but what should we focus on that we have in common and maybe start there for the unity of the Church?

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Personally, I come from a country where we have worked together with the Roman Catholic Church and the Uganda Joint Christian Council and the Greek Orthodox Church. The three main denominations in my country – the major ones – we work together; we plan together. Area of education, we work together; area of medical facilities and services, there we work together because we want to educate our people, we want to treat our people; and then when it comes to liturgy, of course, we vary; but to me, I believe very strongly that as for differences, we cannot avoid that. Personalities, even in the same church, are varied. It is so important for us to accept each other with the differences that we have, because I need you, Scott; I need you, David; you need me; and if we know we need one another, and where we need each other, it is so important. But, let me talk about spirituality for instance. When I went to England in 1980, I came with my exuberant African approach to life; and then I found in this college that English spirituality, where on Wednesday from about breakfast time to 11:00 there is silence. Now, I do not understand silence. I did not understand silence. And everybody is quiet there, so I came from my breakfast, I came to the pigeonhole to pick my mail. I found an English student there trying to pick his also, and I whispered, “Good morning,” I just whispered, I did not even make noise. He totally ignored me. Now, to me that is an insult because I am quiet and I did not understand. Now, look, after a year I began to appreciate silence, which I was not aware of because I found it is a way of inward reflection to understand and how to listen to God; so much so that much later when I went to northern Wales into a Jesuit retreat center where we spent a whole week in silent retreat. Now, silent retreat was: My wife was booked in one room, I was booked in the other room, and we were supposed to be quiet. Now, that to an African like me, a Ugandan, that...

#### **DAVE BAST**

That was a challenge.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: That was a challenge, but we learned.

#### **DAVE BAST**

So, we can learn from each other, yes.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Absolutely. That aspect of learning from each other should help us on both sides to be humble, to learn that God has put something in Scott which I do not have something; God has put something in Henry which David has not got. If it is all for us, it is a wonderful thing.

The next example I want to bring is the mainline church of the Anglican Church in my country and Pentecostals never see eye to eye, but throughout the culture a point where there are things now we are learning. When I became the archbishop in 2004, the Pentecostal Church in Kampala – a very big one – invited me to go and preach in their church. Now, no archbishop, a top level in my church, has ever gone to a pulpit in the Pentecostal Church; but here I am with my brothers in the Pentecostal Church and my sisters. I went and preached. That broke the bondage that was between the mainline church and the Pentecostal Church. So, so much that as I was closing, the same church invited me to go and say good-bye to them. That has never happened before. And now we are beginning to work together because until we take away the suspicion and the fear and the preconceived ideas about some people, we will never know the truth God has revealed to them.

#### **DAVE BAST**

It is also true, and I know you will agree, that relationship has to be two way...

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Absolutely.

#### **DAVE BAST**

And I know also that one of the things you have been personally involved in is, as a leader in the World Anglican Communion, and there have been serious theological and moral issues that have divided that communion...

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Absolutely.

#### **DAVE BAST**

And some of the churches in the West have not always listened to you.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: No.

### **DAVE BAST**

About matters involving the authority of scripture and the sanctity of marriage. So, what do you do in that situation?

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

In that situation where you cannot understand each other, then you can be sure that the only thing that will cover you up and put a big umbrella of cover over you is love. You will know that you can give people up, but if people have chosen to walk away from one another, the longer it takes, the farther away they go from one another, and with the western churches that have walked away from us, we have tried to say, "We love you," but you know, even when you are talking to somebody, and you are shouting, "I love you," but he is walking away from you, the farther he goes, the fainter your voice will become. Try and think about singing to somebody whose ears are already blocked. Even if you are a professional singer, you are not going to make it. We need to give room that there will come a time when we will not give in to what God cannot do for people. So, that should be understandable, but where there is still a possibility for relationship and fellowship, we want to seize the opportunity and work on it. Now look, you are a denomination unlike mine, and we are working together. We have come now to find that certain denominations we have never known about, now God has introduced for us Baptists, you guys here, and other people; we are working with them because we believe the same thing, and that is the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

And that is a beautiful word, and it brings me back to 2 Timothy 3, where Paul predicts a lot of bad things that would happen, but then in the very next chapter, in 2 Timothy 4, Paul reminds us of what our unity can be where he writes:

<sup>1</sup>I charge you in the presence of God and of Jesus Christ who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup>Preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching – and I like that with patience.

You have dedicated yourself, Bishop Henry, since taking early retirement, to preaching; and you went into the Pentecostal Church and what was the unity? It was the word preached.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Absolutely.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

And I think we need to – we have all these differences and different denominations sometimes we do not even get along with each other here in the United States, much less with Christians from other nations; but, that I think is where we want to come back again, and again, and again. It is the Gospel

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: The Gospel.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

The Good News.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: It is the Good News.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

And that is our shared joy.

### **DAVE BAST**

I wonder if, in closing – we only have a minute or so left – if you would just say a word or two about the importance of prayer – in Christian unity, in our own walk with the Lord, in our own living in love with neighbor, and even with our enemies.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Well, let's go back to Jesus, because Jesus was a man of prayer. So much so that the disciples saw him pray; he was praying privately; he was praying publicly; and they asked him, "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples." Now if in Jesus' life during the time he lived on earth he took prayer as a priority, how less

can we do that? We, too, need to know that in order to be able to conquer quite a lot of issues that we deal with in our relationship, not only with God, but with each other, that we make prayer a very important part of our discipline, so that when we spend time with God in prayer, he teaches us, he gives us wisdom, he opens our eyes and he inspires us. I just find that prayer is so necessary for us to begin to be in tune with God as we relate with each other because the relationship literally has been introduced to us by the Lord Jesus Christ; and so, when we go back to him, he teaches us how to relate with each other.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Amen.

### **DAVE BAST**

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. We are your hosts, Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee, and our guest this week, Bishop Henry Luke Orombi of Uganda. We would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit [groundworkonline.com](https://groundworkonline.com) to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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