

The Gospel Around the World

SCOTT HOEZEE

For a long time in Church history, few people raised any questions about the need to send missionaries all over the world to spread the Gospel Good News of Jesus Christ. Some of us can even remember when we were children and having visits from missionaries who showed slide shows in the church basement of far-off places where the Bible was being preached and taught; but in more recent times, some people have sensed just as urgent a need to have missionaries work right here at home, as much of Western society has lost touch with the Gospel. Others wonder how we can be respectful of other religions in a pluralistic world and yet still send missionaries to insist on only our own faith. So, how should we think about the need for Gospel witness and mission in the 21st Century? Today on *Groundwork*, we will be joined by a very special guest who will share his insights on this important conversation. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee. Dave, we are very happy to welcome a special guest to this program, and actually to three programs that we are going to do here on *Groundwork*, and I will let you introduce him to our listeners.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right, Scott. We are thrilled to be joined by Bishop Henry Luke Orombi of Uganda. Bishop Henry is the past Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Uganda. For those of you who are not familiar with worldwide Anglicanism, this is one of the largest churches in the Anglican family. It is about twelve million members in the central African country of Uganda; and Bishop Henry took early retirement from that high post because he is, at heart, a preacher of the Gospel and he wants to devote his time and energy to proclaiming the Gospel and teaching the word of God throughout the world. So, Bishop Henry, welcome to *Groundwork*.
Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Thank you so much, Dave. It is so good to be here.

DAVE BAST

We really want to talk today about the biblical basis for missions. There has been more questioning in recent years, especially in the West, about the need for missionaries and the face of missions has changed. Certainly some of the work has changed. What do you see, still, as an African about the need for the Church in the West to be sending missionaries out into the world?

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

I believe that the mission work does not come to an end, no matter how we think about it, because we are obeying the command of the Lord Jesus Christ; and I also believe that when the early missionaries came, they did their work in the context of their time. Today the church is planted and is growing, and we have a lot of growing need in the Church in Africa where we still need help from outside because if we are thinking in terms of harvest, the greater the harvest, the more need for the harvesters. So, I see why people from outside should still come and help in the harvest season, particularly in teaching our believers.

DAVE BAST

So you would not say, as some are saying, the era of missions is over. The need is finished. Stay home. Missionary, stay home. Missionary, go home.
Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: No, no, no. No, no, no.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and certainly we know that some of the dynamics of missions globally have changed, and we will want to get to that in this program and in the next two as well; but maybe to begin, as we do here on *Groundwork*, we want to dig into scripture and return to a couple of texts which really lay the foundation for why we do what we do; and I think Dave is going to read a classic one from Matthew 28, and then I will just read a single verse from the first chapter of Acts.

DAVE BAST

Right; and Bishop Henry mentioned the command of Jesus; and certainly that command is crystallized in the text that most of us know as the Great Commission. Here it is from the end of Matthew 28:

¹⁶The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. (This is after the resurrection, of course.) ¹⁷And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.

I love that statement. They still could not wrap their minds around the fact that Jesus was actually alive; that he had died and he had been raised again.

¹⁸And then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then this verse similarly from Luke as Luke reports it in the beginning of Acts Chapter 1:8, just before Jesus ascends into heaven he says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

So there it is; the beginning of witness and mission, and I think we should just maybe at the outset here acknowledge something that a lot of people today do not really notice, but that was very surprising to the disciples, which is that Jesus was not going to stick around to do this himself. He was going to entrust his Gospel message – the truth of his work – to the disciples, of all people, who so often did not seem to get it while he was here. It was very surprising to the original disciples that they had to do this for him because he was returning to the Father.

DAVE BAST

Just before the verse you read, Scott, the disciples come to Jesus and say, “Lord, are you going at this time to restore the kingdom to Israel?” So they still had that older mindset that Jesus was going to be the Jewish Messiah, Israel was going to rule again as a physical kingdom with Jerusalem as the capitol, and that Jesus would make that all happen; but that was not his agenda, was it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

No, he was going to, as Paul will write later in the New Testament, Jesus was going to pour his treasure into earthen vessels; right? He was going to pour his treasure into jars of clay; and again, we take this for granted two thousand years later, but it certainly was very, very surprising at the time.

DAVE BAST

Let’s talk about the Great Commission a little bit, Bishop Henry. Jesus introduces it with a very striking claim.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Yes, that is to me very amazing because here is Jesus, they had him for three years, and now here he is, the resurrected king of the universe; he has all the power, and how would Peter, John, James, all these other

guys, think in terms of having the same authority that he had now that he is sending them? I can imagine them feeling like, “Can we ever go walk, do things the way Jesus did?” And here is Jesus is saying, “You are the guys to go. I am going to go away and you are going to continue with my ministry;” but also, I feel that even if they think of him in terms of authority, all along he said these are his friends; these are his friends, now; and a friend is mandating a friend to go and work for him and also promising, “I will be with you,” then there is comfort there.

DAVE BAST

Yes, so that his authority becomes their authority, in a sense.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Absolutely.

DAVE BAST

I mean, it is borrowed; it is not personal; none of us has authority in our own person; but we represent him, and therefore share his authority. He has the right to give this commandment, is what he is saying.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And he knows he is going to be sending them the Spirit, because they could not do it without that. Again, what we sometimes forget is that Jesus was around on earth before his ascension for only forty days. So, really, at the time when Jesus says these words at the end of Matthew and in Acts 1:8, you could say: You know, just last month all eleven of you guys abandoned me and you ran away; and Peter denied me,” and so now Jesus has given them the whole mission enterprise. You would think: Well, are you sure you want to do that, Jesus? They were not very nice last month. But he knows the Spirit is going to come, and that is going to make all the difference.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

I find that extremely exciting because he is the only employer who will always be with the employee. To feel like he is going to be with you is an encouragement, and I believe that in the mission of the Gospel is our encouragement. We are not on our own. The One who mandates us with this responsibility is there with us; and to know he is with us is a great asset.

DAVE BAST

Yes; “I am with you always.” When I was in high school I remember I had a job as a janitor in a store, and they used to send me off by myself and I would fumble around and nobody paid any attention to me; but it is more like a father saying to his child, “I will go with you and I will help you; I will be there with you as you do this task.”

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

And that is an encouragement; and I feel that encouragement should not be lost because we know we are not doing his work on our own; and to feel that his presence is with us should encourage us. That does not make it any easier. We have to be very faithful to him so that we are able to know that he who has sent us is with us, but we are also having our share of the work to do.

DAVE BAST

There are a number of verbs in this verse. He talks about going and teaching and baptizing. What do you see as the central command? Do you think one of those stands out in the tasks that we are given?

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

I see the relationship between going, baptizing, and teaching; because you go, you proclaim, people come, you baptize them; and there is this great work of teaching. I see in my own understanding that the people who come, if they are not taught and rooted, they can never be disciples. The people can be converted, but converted people are not necessarily disciples. You must teach them to root them in the faith. Now to me that is the greatest task; the greatest task that should be done.

Put it this way: A woman will deliver a baby; that is one aspect of bringing up a child; but then she has to, with the help of her husband, bring up that child to maturity. Now, that is the greatest work. Nine months in the womb is just a little phase, but the next twenty-one years is the greatest task that any parent can have. So, bringing up somebody to maturity in the faith to me is one thing which I feel is very important.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So that, indeed, is the great task of the Church, as you say...

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Absolutely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is the task we have been doing from the beginning. So, we have seen now the origin of mission, and it is in Jesus himself. He told us to do this. When we come back, we will talk a little bit about how that has gone in the subsequent history of the Church up to more recent times; so stay tuned.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and today we are joined by Bishop Henry Orombi of Uganda. In our conversation surrounding the biblical mandate for missions, the Great Commission, we have been talking about Matthew 28; and we also mentioned another great verse: Acts 1:8, where Jesus says to his disciples, "Wait until the Holy Spirit has come, and then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth," and in a sense, as I like to point out with that verse, that is the outline of the book of Acts as you follow it through; but it is also the story of the spread of the Gospel throughout world history.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For a long time, mission would center on Jerusalem. That was still sort of the headquarters. Paul would go out from there eventually, of course; even farther afield into Asia Minor – today what we call Turkey – to Greece, to the islands. Eventually Paul set his sights on Italy and Rome – he hoped – we think maybe he never made it, but he had even thought of going as far as the world was known to go back then, which was all the way west to Spain; but that is how it went. The mission kept spreading out and out and out from Jerusalem, which was the headquarters of the early Church.

DAVE BAST

You know, one of the important points that we often overlook, but there is a wonderful book by a scholar named Robert Louis Wilkin called *The First Thousand Years*. The Gospel also spread eastward, and our focus is so Eurocentric, so Western-centric; you know, we think about the English-speaking world. We forget that there were missionaries who went as far as India, and eventually to China, and there were ancient churches planted in those areas, too; some of which still exist today. It was like a pebble dropped in a pond and the rings spread out and out and out.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Eventually the center of the Church shifted from Jerusalem more to Rome, and after Constantine it became the official religion of the Empire, and that set up something – and I wonder if you want to reflect on this a little bit as well – for a long time missions in the Church – and this is what Dave was saying – very Europe-centered, eventually very North American centered – and it was often called – missions were from the West to the rest; and that was the movement of missions for a long time.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Yes; well, for me, I find that very good in the picture that I look at because Europe, America, had the spirit of exploration. They always wanted to find a new place, a new land; and the Gospel going on that vehicle is understandable. So, when the Gospel came from Europe to my continent of Africa, it came because they were working. For instance, in my own country, the explorers who came to look for the source of the River Nile came to my country, and our local king then asked them to take a letter to Queen Victoria to send missionaries to us. Now, if these guys never came to Uganda, I do not know how else it was going to happen. So, this exploration spirit that Europe had was a vehicle on which God used to bring the Gospel to us in Africa, and particularly in my country, and I find that God never makes mistakes at all.

DAVE BAST

Part of it was not even just missionaries going out, it was the intrepid explorers; Dr. Livingston – well, he was a missionary, but, Stanley, going into the heart of the continent...

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Just to find the source of the River Nile, which happened to come from my own country, in Lake Victoria. In God's timing, he happened to be the mission yet to Queen Victoria of England to bring the request. Now, the missionaries did come to us. In 1877 they came to us, and when they came to us they found a welcoming king who was able to host them in his own palace, which is amazing. It looks like we are one of the only countries in Africa who invited missionaries to come to our country; and then, once they established themselves, they began to teach, they began to help people, and people began to be Christians. Now, that beginning was very good, although later on it became volatile; it became bloody; because the son was not in favor of Christianity and so people died; but as you know, the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Gospel; still in God's timing it has worked.

DAVE BAST

So, really, the 19th Century we often think of as the great century of Protestant missionary activity. The Roman Catholic story is older and is fascinating in its own right. Another thing that many of us do not know much about, but they sent missionaries to China and to Japan in the 16th Century and in the 17th Century; but for many of us in our churches, it is the story of reaching out to Africa, to the interior of Africa, to the Middle East – our church in particular has a history of missions to Arabia beginning in the 19th Century; to China. So, this is the classic era of pioneer evangelists going, learning a language, living – career missionaries – some of whom would travel out with their coffins because they were determined they would never go home, and many missionary graves in many of these countries.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But what is interesting, Dave, as you were saying, that the 19th Century in so many ways was a great century for missions and sending out missionaries, but of course, late 18th and 19th Centuries in Europe in particular was also a time when Christianity there was starting to die off a little bit. Modernism was coming; there were philosophical influences from the Enlightenment; and that continued, of course, into the 20th Century, particularly in Europe, and now increasingly in Canada and the United States; such that now, mission work is not primarily from the West to the rest, it is now from the southern hemisphere – from Africa – from Asia – from South America – sending missionaries north; so, things have shifted quite dramatically in the last one hundred years.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

I agree; I mean, God has such an amazing, farmer-like mentality; when he planted seeds in Africa, for instance, the planters from Europe took the seeds, and there it germinated, it grew; now the harvest is big there. So, while there are no seeds out in Europe or America, there is abundance in Africa; and they will pick the same seeds from Africa and bring it back to Europe and to America. It never loses.

DAVE BAST

I remember reading a line from Philip Yancey, the well-known Christian journalist and writer who said one of the things he has learned from going around and observing many places in the world is that God goes where he is wanted, and he is still wanted in Africa. Less so, maybe, in some of our cultures and societies – so, we will see what happens – what God has up his sleeve for the future and the 21st Century. We will talk about that a little bit when we return.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and joining us today is Bishop Henry Orombi of Uganda, and we are talking about a couple of passages in particular, Matthew 28: The Great Commission; and Acts 1:8, where Jesus says that you will be my witnesses from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth. And we tend to think of that – especially with an African guest, we think of Grand Rapids, here where we are sitting today, that is Jerusalem – and it is for us – Africa is the ends of the earth; but you can flip that. The beautiful thing about that is wherever Christians are living, that is their Jerusalem.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Absolutely.

DAVE BAST

So for you, the ends of the earth may be North America.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Yes, I feel that the church that I come from has such a passion for the Gospel; there is such a love for God; there is such a freshness with us about the Gospel. Our love for Jesus Christ is still raw and like a honeymoon love for him. Now, then, I need to come back to the people who took the Gospel to us to come and share the enthusiasm, the love for Jesus Christ, and to come and tell them: Look here, Jesus is still alive; Jesus is still Lord; Jesus is still doing the things that he is doing that he promised he can do; and they need to hear this because this is still the Good News, and Good News is Good News.

DAVE BAST

That pattern of taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth – as long as we are all doing that, we are going to have this wonderful cross-fertilization...

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Oh yes, I love it.

DAVE BAST

Of people and voices. It is when we stop short or ignore – sure, we start with our own community; with our own Jerusalem...

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Correct.

DAVE BAST

But we do not stop there. We all need to be reaching out, cross-culturally and internationally, and in that way we get this exchange, which is wonderfully healthy and beneficial for the Church.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think that is right, and I think in the next program that we will do with Bishop Henry, we will talk about some specific things about areas of convergence, where we really want to affirm our mutual work, what we share in common; and we will mention some areas of some potential conflict and things we are going to have to work through as South meets North – but I think one thing we should note before this particular program is out, where we started with the Great Commission of Jesus to send the disciples as missionaries all over. We looked a little bit at how that went in history, and now up to the present moment. I think that for us in the West, Dave, we – and those of us in the northern hemisphere – Europe, North America – America, Canada – we, I think, are going to need increasing amounts of humility because I think we do – it is not a nice thing to admit, but I think we do still have a paternalistic attitude toward Africa or other nations. We call it the Third World sometimes; and there can be a superiority complex there where: Well, we do not need their missionaries. When you are so used to being the sending one, to be the receiving one requires a lot of humility from the Church, and I think that is something we are going to have to work on in coming years, and probably all throughout the 21st Century.

DAVE BAST

Bishop Henry, there was something that struck me that you mentioned earlier, not on the program, but when we were speaking, you talked about how Africa used to be known as the Dark Continent. Originally, I think that simply meant people did not know what was there; especially in the interior. The map was just blank so

they called it “dark,” but it came to be used metaphorically: Well, it is the continent of poverty and ignorance, and it is backward, and all that; and in many ways spiritually speaking Africa today is the continent of light...

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: I agree.

DAVE BAST

And our countries are increasingly covered with darkness – spiritual darkness.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

The darkness has shifted, absolutely. I believe that the way the Africans are so passionate about God, about the Gospel, does show to us that our concept of this Gospel and of this Christ, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is clear, is fresh. We can see it much better than ever before; and yet, now here in the western world, other things have taken over the passion for the Lord Jesus Christ, and I believe very strongly that we come to remind, and we come in the context of a relationship; and when we work in the relationship mode, it does make a difference. We do not come with a judgmental attitude. When we come to you, we come to you as brothers and sisters in the Lord and we want to see that we belong to him who is our Father, and that should be something that we should address perhaps much more at a level of relationship, just like God is a relational God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Amen; that is a wonderful note on which to conclude this episode. So, thank you for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and our guest this week, Bishop Henry Luke Orombi from Uganda. We would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture, so visit our website. It is groundworkonline.com; and tell us topics and passages you would like us to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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