

The Gospel in Africa

DAVE BAST

One of the things we like to say on every *Groundwork* program is that *Groundwork* is a joint production by Words of Hope and ReFrame Media; but even if you are a regular listener, you may not know much about those two organizations. For example, you might not know that both of them are part of a larger media effort to share the Gospel in different languages in other parts of the world. So, in this program and the next one, we are going to think about the growth and impact of Christianity throughout the world; and to do that, we welcome a very special guest to join 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 today once again we are joined by Bishop Henry Luke Orombi of Uganda. He is the past archbishop of the Church of Uganda, the Anglican Church, a church of about 12 million members; and he took early retirement from that post to devote himself fulltime to preaching the Gospel and teaching and evangelism – proclaiming Christ. So, Bishop Henry, welcome once more to *Groundwork*.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Thank you very much, Dave. It is so good to be here. Thank you, Scott; it is great to be here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In our previous program with you, Bishop Henry, we talked about the history of missions. We tracked it back to the great commission and to Jesus' last words in Acts 1, just before he ascended into heaven, where it was clear that this was going to be a Spirit-driven enterprise, and we know that in Acts 1:8 Jesus said: You are going to start in Jerusalem, then you are going to spread out to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth; and as you pointed out, Dave, in the previous program, that is like the table of contents of the book of Acts; and indeed, you do not have to go too much farther in Acts – just to the eighth chapter – just seven chapters after the story of Jesus' ascension – just six chapters after the Pentecost story of the Spirit being poured out – and we find the story which basically represents the Church coming to Africa for the first time.

DAVE BAST

Right. It is the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, and maybe we can make that the scriptural foundation for this program:

Acts 8:26: Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road, the desert road, that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." ²⁷So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the *Kandake*, which means queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." ³⁰Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. ³¹"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

³²This is the passage of scripture the eunuch was reading: He was led like a sheep to the slaughter and as a lamb before its shearer is silent. So he did not open his mouth. ³³In his humiliation, he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth. ³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the Good News about Jesus. ³⁶And as they traveled along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” ³⁸He gave orders to stop the chariot and then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

DAVE BAST

So, here is a great story; one of the classic stories from the book of Acts, and it is the Gospel now beginning to spread out beyond – actually Chapter 8 also tells about Samaria, how the Gospel came there – but here is the first African, we could say, who has converted, and notice the role of the Holy Spirit in this story. Jesus had said to them: You will receive power when the Spirit comes. And now, here is Philip filled with the power of the Spirit. The Spirit actually moves him from one place to another; snatches him away – how did that happen? I do not know – and gives him wisdom and speaks to him and says: Go talk to that man.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Amazing; I just find God’s way of doing things are very mysterious. You try to think and figure it out; you cannot. Philip comes and talks with this man, but was listening to the man as he was reading, and the man asks him a question. The prophet, is he talking about himself or somebody else? And that was a very, very good starting point for a conversation. To me, this man was hungry. This man wanted to know; and for me, in my experience, what I see is a hunger for the knowing of God. Today in Africa, many people are hungry; many people want to know; many people want to seek God; and this Ethiopian eunuch was hungry, too; and Philip was able to explain: Listen, it is easier for a chef to cook for somebody who is hungry. He will appreciate that much more than anything else. So, I just find that very encouraging.

DAVE BAST

I love this verse, too, from the story: Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture, which was Isaiah 53 – I just slipped into the British pronunciation for your sake – I said Isaiah – Isaiah 53. You are influencing me.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Now I understand better.

DAVE BAST

Philip began with that very scripture, and told him the Good News about Jesus. It is all about Jesus; the whole Bible.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Oh, yes; oh, yes. I just find Isaiah 53 such a revelation – right from the Old Testament – talking about Jesus; talking about his suffering; talking his self-giving; and again, you look at timing. At the right moment, Philip is at the right place for the right person for a point where he can make. The guy could have been at a loss if he had not had someone like Philip around. Now, doesn’t that tell us that God does need somebody somewhere at the right time? He does not work in a vacuum. Philip was a man right in time to help this African understand what he was reading.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What is interesting – and we did a series, Dave, on *Groundwork* a while back on some of the stories from Acts – and one of the things we noted at that time is the Holy Spirit is everywhere, and you never knew where the Spirit was going to pop up next. There was no predicting what would be – Philip could not have imagined meeting an Ethiopian eunuch in a chariot – a very wealthy person, apparently, right? He could not have imagined; but the Spirit was already there. The Spirit was incessantly moving the Gospel out into the world.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Yes; yes.

DAVE BAST

I also love the way this passage shows the wideness of God's mercy; you know, we sing about that sometimes: There is a wideness in God's mercy; and God's heart for the nations is already evident here; it is already evident in Isaiah. There is a wonderful little verse in Isaiah that says, in Isaiah 56:

³Let no foreigners who have bound themselves to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely exclude me from his people," and let no eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree," ⁴for this is what the Lord says, "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me, who hold fast to my covenant, ⁵to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters."

What a wonderful promise. See, in the Old Testament, those who were less than physically whole were excluded. Foreigners were excluded. They could not come into the temple; they could not come into the sanctuary.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: True.

DAVE BAST

And God says: This has never been my eternal purpose and will. This was only for a time. My purpose and will is that all will come – whether they are broken, whether they are whole, whether they are foreign – that the nations will come through Jesus and enter my sanctuary and belong to me again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What I love is the end of that passage from Acts 8 that we read earlier, Dave. The last word is rejoicing, which is in Luke – and Luke, of course, wrote Acts, as well as the Gospel of Luke – that is always code for someone who is saved. So when we come back in just a moment we are going to think about how that Ethiopian man went back into Africa – back to Ethiopia – bringing joy with him, and we will talk about the spread of the Church in Africa when we come back.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and we are glad on this program – one of three programs – to have Bishop Henry Luke Orombi from Uganda with us. So, we are talking with him in this little three-part series about the mission of God and the mission of the Church. As we closed out the last sequence, we saw this Ethiopian person returning with the joy of the Gospel in his heart, and he went back to Africa, and the Gospel has continued to flow into Africa ever since.

DAVE BAST

Right; but as perhaps all of us know or understand or realize, it really did not penetrate the interior of Africa, or the heart of Africa, for many, many centuries; and that is a story that really only opened up in the 19th Century as Western missionaries came. I wonder if you could share a little bit of that story – maybe a little bit of your own story, Bishop Henry. In our previous program, for those who managed to listen to it, you said something about the missionaries coming to Uganda in the wake of the early explorers. Tell us a little bit more about that story.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Well, in 1875 the explorer, Stanley, came to find the source of the river Nile.

DAVE BAST

This is the same Stanley who said, "Dr. Livingston, I presume," right? We know that story.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: There you go; but then when he came to the central part of Uganda he met a king there of the Buganda; now, the Buganda kingdom is a very strong kingdom in my country; hence, the name

Uganda. You just delete B, you get Uganda. So Uganda, Buganda are connected. The king wrote a message; actually, not wrote, but sent a message through Stanley, because at that time he did not write, but sent a message through Stanley to Queen Victoria so that Queen Victoria should send missionaries to us. Now, two years after that, in 1877, the missionaries from England came to us and they brought the Gospel. Now, from that time on – 1877 – the word of God was planted; the Gospel was translated in Luganda, which is the language spoken by Buganda, who are around Kampala, the capitol city, and the word written was easy to teach people to know Jesus Christ and to become Christians; and that, of course, went on until the Church was established. Nominalism came in, and then in 1935 the revival, which now is called East African Revival, came into my country through Ruanda. It started in Ruanda and came west in part of Uganda into the center, went up north, went into Tanzania, and over to Kenya on the eastern part of east Africa. The revival was a lay movement when, where many people who were convicted repented of their sins and did restitution. They paid back what they had stolen from their friends. They confessed adultery to people who they had wronged, and they came in fellowship together. They sang and the theme song in Luganda is *T ukutendereza*; this is glory to Jesus Christ. It is a beautiful song still sung up to today by the people caught in this revival wave; and that made the Church rise up again. It was a lay movement; the lay people were involved. The clergy were a bit uncomfortable. Eventually the same flood swept them, and that went on and on.

Now my story, I come in because my father went to a mission school. His father never knew God and died an unbeliever; and then my father became a believer. He was baptized; he was confirmed in the faith; but then he backslid. By the time I was born my father had another wife; he was practicing polygamy, just like his father was. His father had six wives; my father had two wives. So, he was not a practicing Christian; but, he knew the power of the word of God; he allowed us to read the scripture. As soon as we learned to read he put the Bible in our hands. That, he knew, would be the way of disciplining us; but, as I grew up and I became an adolescent, I rebelled, just like any young person in his teens rebels; but, at 18 I was in college and an evangelist came to our college, preached, and I made a commitment to Jesus. I asked him into my life; I was young, I was tender, it was hard for me because my peers never made a commitment; but then I attached myself to the saved people of the revival. In Uganda we call them *balokole*, meaning the saved one. Now, these were older people, but as a young person I attached myself to them. They disciplined me, they helped me to walk with the Lord. I had peer pressures, but they encouraged me to walk on until I qualified as a teacher. I taught for four years. After four years' teaching, God called me to come into ordained ministry; so in 1979, having been trained, I became a pastor.

Now, when I look back, I see that the church life literally was given a lot of momentum when the revival movement came into my country. There were some other problems the country went through; like in 1971 we had a dictator, Idi Amin, who came into power. A lot of the Christians were killed, between three to four hundred thousand people were killed; but even so, that fanned the fire of the faith; especially in 1977, February, when the archbishop of our church, the Anglican Church, was killed by Amin. That to us was like a signal to come back and give ourselves again to God, because if he can kill the archbishop, every other person said: Let him go and kill and all of us. The Church was again filled up with people who now saw the value of their faith.

DAVE BAST

So, it was suffering, really, that recalled many Christians to a vital engagement with their faith?

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: This is very interesting because just go back to the first century. When the believers in Jerusalem were having really fun and a great time and breaking the bread and listening to the Gospel, they were not very keen to go out until persecution came; and God seemed to use persecution to give us not only the finding of our faith, but also the cost and the value of our faith that we would begin to understand that if you are being persecuted for your faith, there should be something worth believing there. To me, it looks like persecution may be painful, but is a good way of God getting people back to himself, and we have seen that happen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is interesting, and I think probably for most, if not all of our listeners here on *Groundwork*, like everybody else, we struggle with the place of pain in our lives; we struggle with suffering; some of us do not know that kind of active persecution, but we all wonder about that, and it is a testament to God's grace that he is able to

use those to further his kingdom.

I had the privilege, Bishop Henry, of being in Uganda a year ago, and I know there is a shrine there – it is a Roman Catholic shrine – where one particular martyr who had been burned to death, but he took a week to die, and the authorities were hoping this man’s death would stamp out the faith, but of course, it had, as you said, quite the opposite effect; and now that shrine has – I do not know – a million pilgrims who come every year from all over Africa.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

No, Scott, actually, there were 42 people who were killed in the same area of Namugongo – that is the place – we have two shrines; you have the Anglican one and you have the Catholic one; but you see, the Catholics made their martyrs saints, and because of the veneration of saints, they have a big thing about it. Now, we Anglicans do not quite take it that far; but we recognize the sacrifice they have made and the fact that they stood firm. These were young people who were serving in the palace of the then king who was the son of the king that invited the missionaries. Now, for him, he was not in sympathy with what his father did, and he killed these young men because he was a bit frightened that these young men were paying allegiance to Jesus and not to him. Now that, in his time, could not be heard of; and so, these guys were ordered to be killed and they were killed, and today definitely a million-plus people every 3rd of June will go to commemorate the sacrifice these young people made for the Gospel’s sake; and it reminds us that there is such a great value attached to the Gospel. If God were to send his Son, Jesus, to die for us; now, that cost God everything, and today the fact that we love the one who died for us and rose again for us, we also ought to give ourselves to him. Now, if it meant death, these young men said: To death we shall go, but we shall face it and meet him.

DAVE BAST

Well, let’s talk a little bit more about, not only how the Gospel came to Africa, but how today the Gospel is coming from Africa to other places in the world, and we will address that in just a moment.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast and our special guest, Bishop Henry Luke Orombi from Uganda, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today in this program we have been thinking about the Church coming to Africa, starting already in Acts 8, and Philip is meeting the man from Ethiopia. We have talked, in the last segment, Bishop Henry and Dave, about how it came to Uganda and into your own life, Bishop Henry, and so that brings us up to today, and we have talked a little bit about the what the Church in Africa – and you probably know the one in Uganda best – but maybe some of the challenges that you are facing, and also your own missionary efforts now as you now have – the Gospel seed flourished in Uganda.

I think a lot of people – I know before I went to Uganda a little over a year ago – I think a lot of people think: Most African countries are Muslim now, but Uganda certainly is not. It is majority Christian, so maybe just talk a little bit about how the Church is doing in your country and about your own mission efforts now.

Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:

Well, the Church has taken root in my country and that is true. We have schools that were planted by missionaries, raised up leadership. We have medical facilities treating people, dealing with their body needs. We have good people who are willing to go out and reach people and help people. The Church has a presence. The Church has influence. Now, we need to also consider the fact that we think about Uganda as eighty-five percent Christian. You must also realize that so many of these would be nominal Christians who are willing to die for their church without even knowing the Head of the Church, Christ himself. So, it is so important to understand that these are people who will stand firm and say, “No, this is our church. We will stand for the church; we will work as much as possible.” So, our mission thrust is literally within the Church for those who need to come to have a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ; and then out there for people who are either animist or they do not know what to do with themselves, so we release them out within the country. But for those who are passionate for the Gospel, the like of me, we also see that the Church is not a local community, not even a national community; the Church is bigger than the national boundaries. So, when we are called out by God to go, we go to places where we have contacts with people, where we have a relationship with people. I have just been to Singapore in March, and I was helping the leadership of the Church in Singapore in a retreat, because now I have a message. The bishop invited me. I went out there and I went to help them – the Church from Africa – we came over to Chattanooga to Covenant College; the third

trip we have made ever since because we have a friend who was a professor there of mission, Dr. Krabbendam, who linked us way back; and now we have come to meet with the students, to bring the Gospel to the students and faculty. Again, that relationship brings us from Africa to America because we do believe that we have something to deliver. We have the word, we have the joy, we have the enthusiasm, we have the freshness of the Gospel that we need to share with our brethren; and I feel there is a great need for the Church in Africa now, who are bubbling with the fire of the Gospel, to not just contain it within Africa because they will bust, and it is not easy for us to contain that fire. We need to go as far as we can, and where people have invited us, we have gone. We have never pushed our way through. We try to build relationship, and the Bible says: Freely you receive, freely give out; and so, we are in the business of giving out, and I feel we are so enthusiastic about this faith. Just like we have fallen in love, and if somebody has fallen in love, you just cannot bury your head in the sand, you want everybody to know it, and this is the Gospel to us.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I think I have read somewhere that the largest congregations in both London and Paris are African...
Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: I would agree.

DAVE BAST

Are black...
Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: I would agree.

DAVE BAST

And in some of these European centers where Christianity has waned, really, among the local population – I have also read that on any given Sunday in the Netherlands the majority of people in church will be immigrants.
Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Thank God!

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly! I think about that in our own country, as there is a big debate going on about immigration, and it is a complex issue, but many of the immigrants who are coming in love Jesus...
Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: They do.

DAVE BAST

And they are going to revive and revitalize American churches as well.
Bp. Henry Luke Orombi:
They are bringing Jesus with them because you cannot leave him behind. You have to come as you and have to come and share what you have. The Gospel is amazing in a sense that because it is good news, it is very hard to muffle it. You just cannot help – whether it is in a normal conversation you are going to share who you are with people, or people watch your joy, they watch your celebration, and they say, “What is the matter with you?” That is an opening already. So, I believe that as people come across from Africa to Europe to America, they are coming with only one purpose when they come; just like us, share the Gospel; and then when you are done, go back; and then invite your brethren who are in America or Europe, come check on us. Come and see what you are doing in our own church, and when they come, they are infected as well because they are going to be within a range of a people who are really celebrating their faith.

DAVE BAST

It is all about relationships, as you say.
Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Absolutely.

DAVE BAST

Back and forth, give and take, give and receive.
Bp. Henry Luke Orombi: Listen; God is a relational God. God seeks relationship with his people, and how else are we going to meet people’s needs unless we build those bridges?

DAVE BAST

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

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