

Out of Africa

There is no us versus them

Danger, distrust and homosexuality in Africa



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KAMPALA, UGANDA—Two friends. One’s confessing a secret. He’s crying. Blubbing. Hyperventilating. “You’ll be surprised,” he says.

“Don’t worry,” says his friend. “I know about things. Whatever you’ve done, you can tell me.”

“You’ll be surprised,” says the first.

“No, I won’t. Don’t worry. Who is she? What’s happened?”

“You’re making assumptions.”

“It’s okay. Whatever you’ve done to her. Come on. Just tell me.”

“I’m gay.”

Silence. Disbelief. Embarrassment. “I knew I shouldn’t have told you, shouldn’t have told a Christian. You’re the last person . . .”

“I have loved you and I will continue to love you. You haven’t changed in who you are. You’ve shared with me a struggle you have. I struggle with things too. Let’s work together.” And the man, a Canadian pastor, hugged his gay friend.

It’s a poignant scene. But aren’t you uncomfortable? I mean, would you hug a gay man? Or a lesbian? Do you even know one?

I do. After all, I am gay. A gay Ugandan named Pius. I grew up in the church and know enough about too much. I’d trade it all for a small piece of honest love.

Honest love. Unlike what’s on those placards. Maybe they’re where you are too. ‘No tears for queers,’ or ‘God hates fags’ or ‘AIDS is God’s cure for homosexuality.’ Or is this just a caricature of the ugly Christian?

You must have your own caricatures. Of gays. Of Africans. Of gay Africans. You’ve likely heard about Uganda’s infamous bill, the one that originally called for gays here to be executed. Now it’s just jail for life.

It will never become law, I tell myself. This world is not so crazy, so hateful, so afraid. But fear is a strange thing. And Uganda’s gays—about 500,000 of 31 million people—are feared to have an agenda to destroy Uganda’s families.

Uganda’s families. They’re pretty much like yours. Some, sadly, destroy themselves.

“Hang them!” is a recent headline in one Ugandan tabloid exposing “Uganda’s Top 100 Homosexuals.” Names and addresses included. Then, naturally, CNN coverage.

Yes, it’s an international sensation. The bill. The American Christians who, just before its creation, visited to lead a forum on homosexuality. Some spark, they lit. The world now knows Uganda. For better or worse, it knows something, anyway.

I just keep my head down. Keep my secret. Need my job. Don’t want a beating. Don’t want my house burned down. Don’t want the treatment, what some call “rehabilitative rape.”

No, there are no parades for gays over here. In fact, dozens of nations, many in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, already give gays at least some jail time. Thousands are killed annually according to human rights reports. Did you realize it?

So don’t pull out your Bible and tell me about Sodom. Please. Don’t. Just read it all—all of your Bible—thoughtfully. I was nursed on Scripture. I know sin. I know that you sleep with your own brokenness as much as I do.

And I know God allows any of us to be born with dysfunctions of all kinds. That’s why research on gay twins shows homosexuality can have a genetic component. Then the family influences. And culture. It’s complex, this pull on our loins.

So what happened to me? Someone loved me is what happened. Same gender boarding schools are common in Uganda. And frightening. A friend comforted me. More than my mother ever did. Certainly more than my father. This is how it was for many of us.

I’m now left with desires to act on. Or not. Like you. The difference is that you can fulfill yours in marriage. I’ll carry mine, likely, for the rest of my life.

I guess I’m just asking you not to believe the lies of the hypocrites and the fear-mongers. In truth, I want just what you want. To be loved. To be held. To be forgiven.

Because there is no us versus them. There is only us: beings made a little lower than the angels, fallen and stumbling some days like drunkards trying to find home, but walking, walking on.

Pius is a fictitious voice based on Uganda’s current climate on homosexuality. Thomas Froese is a Canadian author and journalist in Uganda. Uganda’s government continues to study its bill.

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Leaving at the top (or bottom) of your game



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In the space of two days in the first week of November, two high profile politicians resigned—one at the top of his game and one decidedly at the bottom. It raises the question of when leaders should quit.

No one was terribly surprised, although no doubt some were relieved, when B.C. premier, Gordon Campbell, resigned. He was polling at nine per cent popularity, even worse than Brian Mulroney who set the federal record at 11 per cent popularity.

The introduction of HST set off a tax revolt in British Columbia. Oddly enough, Ontarians—who are also paying a new HST tax—seem to accept it quite readily even though it is one per cent more than B.C.’s tax. Be that as it may, the HST brought down Gordon Campbell but not Dalton McGuinty.

Campbell was also facing a Cabinet revolt. Some Cabinet members were openly questioning his leadership. There was some suggestion that if Campbell did not go, he would have been pushed.

Jim Prentice, on the other hand, announced only one day later that he was resigning his position as federal Minister of the Environment to take a senior executive position with CIBC. Representing a Calgary riding, it is not surprising that Prentice cited family reasons for his departure. Cabinet ministers must balance

competing demands of riding, and ministerial priorities, leaving little time for family.

Prentice himself said, “I’ve also been of the view that you should leave at the top of your game.”

That is an admirable idea. No doubt many leaders want to leave a leadership position at the top of their games. But it is about as difficult as predicting the top of the stock market.

Think for a moment of some past Canadian leaders and how they left office. Jean Chretien was forced out of the prime minister’s office by his Cabinet. His successor, Paul Martin, lost after one term in a minority Parliament.

Apparently, it is hard to go from the “top of your game” to anonymity.

Once leaders have a taste of the limelight, it seems to be addictive.

Brian Mulroney, left with the lowest approval rating for a federal leader in history. His successor, Kim Campbell, lost her first election after being prime minister for only one summer.

Even in the Christian community, some leaders have left only when pushed out the door.

James Dobson was supposed to be the shining exception, leaving Focus on the Family after grooming his successor. This was so unique that Focus on the Family ran seminars on

how to leave leadership well. That is, until Dobson started a new ministry similar to Focus on the Family, called “Family Forum.”

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I was mentored in leadership through Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, a university ministry. Because university is only a few years, it was drilled into us that one of our leadership requirements was to make sure to replace oneself. In fact, it was considered a leadership failure not to replace oneself.

Clearly, students graduate from university, leading to a critical need to find and nurture replacement leadership. Yet I would argue that this is fundamental to every leadership position.

No doubt there is a fear that nurturing new leaders will lead to the “old guy” getting pushed out before he is ready. Even Christians want to play it safe.

We never know when we will no longer be physically or mentally able to fulfill a leadership position. Cancer and car accidents do not recognize age or importance. I have seen many that I thought were indispensable suddenly gone.

We can’t all leave at the top of our game. But good leaders will leave before they are forced. And good leaders make sure that new leaders have been brought along to replace them.

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Letter From the Editor



ChristianWeek introduces editors’ blog

Logging is not particularly new. We know that. So although ChristianWeek has consulted and referenced a wide variety of web logs over the years, we haven’t maintained one of our own on a regular basis. At least we haven’t until very recently.

Two major catalysts combined to get us more active in this sphere of Internet communication. The first relates to a major grant we were awarded a few months ago to develop our digital media capacity. We are grateful to the Stronger Together 2010 coalition of foundations and major donors (with particular thanks to the Caritate Foundation), whose investments are enabling us to communicate more effectively in the digital age.

ChristianWeek is already doing a lot more online than we were six months ago, and more developments are the offing. Stay tuned.

The second factor in getting this blog going was, quite frankly, my journeys. This fall has been especially rich with travel opportunities for me. In this issue you’re reading about Cape Town 2010, a major gathering of Christians from around the world.

Thanks to the Maranatha Foundation, ChristianWeek was able to be there. Some of the material published in this issue was online several weeks ago on the editors’ blog. This is an ongoing story with big implications for mission in Canada. You can already visit a still-developing archive of stories on our web site, with much more to come in the weeks and months ahead.

My next travel opportunity is a five-day visit to Israel with several other journalists on a press trip. During the first week of December we will be guests of the Israel Government Tourist Organization, seeing many of the important pilgrimage destinations in the land where Jesus was born, raised, lived, died, was buried, rose again and ascended into heaven. We will walk in places He visited, sit in places where He taught and weep in places where He wept.

I am eager to share some of the sights and sounds of these places with ChristianWeek readers. We invite you to participate in these Advent experiences through regularly updated reflections on the editors’ blog.

— Doug Koop