

# Christian Theological and Humanitarian Foundations of BOSCO-Uganda

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## **Introduction**

BOSCO-Uganda began as a desperate attempt to leverage communications technologies to ease the terrible humanitarian burden of the war-afflicted people of Northern Uganda. There were many people involved in the founding of BOSCO, though one Founder. It was Gus Zuehlke's response in love to the need of the Acholi people, a love that observed no boundaries of conventional wisdom, a love enflamed in solidarity with the heroic dedication of Ugandan servant leaders to their own people, that drew together so many others in a common effort. The story of BOSCO's founding is thus a story of love at work in the world through many people. It is many stories, woven together in as tight a unity as love can craft in our complicated world.

From an early participant and friend of Gus, this particular expression of BOSCO's story is but one expression in that weave. It is an expression that seeks to understand both the deeply held faith perspective of Gus and much

of the Acholi people, a faith expressed in core BOSCO leadership as Christian and most often Catholic. Yet it is also an expression that recognizes and values a remarkable synergy and affiliation with many persons of diverse faith perspectives, including with those who don't generally think of themselves as having any faith at all. To really understand BOSCO's origins and progress, we must grasp in some fullness both the particular expression of faith that its central leaders have embodied in their BOSCO efforts, and also another narrative, not especially one of faith, but certainly one of love, service, and solidarity.

This single expression of the BOSCO story will thus attempt to articulate two world views and explain how they work together so well in a unified BOSCO effort. Without presenting both perspectives, the BOSCO story might inspire some—who, would depend on which perspective was left out—but ring hollow to others who are also central actors in the BOSCO story and who thus would know better.

These two perspectives on the BOSCO story are themselves stories, not of BOSCO only but of something larger, of the human condition. The plan of this version of BOSCO's story is to lay out both perspectives, both metanarratives, from the start, so that as BOSCO's story unfolds, central themes from each perspective will stand out more clearly in the telling. The hope is that in

considering BOSCO's story as illumined by these larger narratives, adherents to each may come to better understand both sets of perspectives and the communities embodying them, of which BOSCO is but one.

There is no doubt that the perspective governing the founding of BOSCO is faith-based, particularly Christian and Roman Catholic. This Christian story is embraced in common by Gus, by BOSCO's founding executive director Fr. Joseph Okumu, and by Archbishop John Baptist Odama, whose vision and authority has energized and guided BOSCO from its inception. It is not possible to understand what motivated BOSCO's core leadership without understanding this larger Christian narrative.

That ancient but living narrative is large indeed, but it is possible to assemble its central features into a whole that reveals something of its power, and particularly its guiding role in the establishment of BOSCO. If it weren't possible to assemble these features into a powerful version, that story couldn't have been much of a motivating factor: stories exercise their influence in the telling. From this faith perspective, the telling of the Christian story is the proclamation of the Gospel. Both the telling and the hearing are acts of love, an encounter between two or more, with love present in the midst of them.

## **Love**

The centerpiece of the Christian story is that love is real. “Real” only begins to capture it; love is fundamental, along the lines that physicists use for forces and particles: it’s love, all the way down. Love isn’t made out of something else, it isn’t contingent, it isn’t a maybe; it’s how the world is, why the world is, who the world is. Love is personal. Love is first. Everything else comes from love. Love is what human beings call God. And God is love; they are one and the same.

Love is a bigger deal than we think. In the face of need, it is mercy; to violation, it is justice. It is healing, to illness. Wronged, it is forgiveness. Challenged, love hopes. Facing danger, it is courage. Perplexed, it is inquiry. Filled, it is joy; unseeing, faith. In conflict, love is peacemaking. Striving for words, love sings. Without it, we are nothing. With it, we can do all good things.

The world is shot through with love, the presence of God. The love that is God is precisely the love that we all see...all of it. Every open encounter—“I see you, I understand you, I am with you”—every earnest embrace, every honest word of welcome, all of it, is God. God is hugs. This very real, tangible presence of love in the world—“if you have seen me, Thomas, you have seen the Father”—is the meaning of the Incarnation. Love is here to embrace us, to

save us, to welcome us in. From the beginning, God can be clearly seen in the things that have been made.

According to the Christian story, Jesus's life, death, resurrection and communion reveal the pattern of love. That love is transforming the world through us in that same pattern. Expressed as it was first in Jesus and now in us, that pattern will frame the presentation of faith in this account of BOSCO as faith-based organization.

### **Jesus's Life**

Love—God—can be clearly seen, but is not seen everywhere with equal clarity. Christian tradition asserts that the clearest expression of love is in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In him, God's welcoming embrace of all else, all created by God to share a life of love, is definitive. This is what love is: to lay down your life for one another, as Jesus has done for all of us. This love has been expressed from the foundation of the world, is now, and will not fail: it is expressed as an unbreakable covenant. God's unshakeable affirmation of us is expressed in the love Jesus showed us to the end, in giving even his life to extend God's invitation to us and empower us to take it up.

Jesus is what God has to say to us; he is love expressed, God's Word. Our Tradition affirms that love freely speaks that Word, begetting a second

fundamental person united in a third personal expression of love with the first: three persons in one God. (How could love exist without a beloved, or without loving? And how could any of these exist and be what we know of love, without being intelligent, personal?)

In the fullness of time—some 13 billion years after the inflationary epoch, at a watershed moment of national historical choice for Israel, a people chosen and prepared to become God’s dwelling place—the Word became flesh in the person of Jesus. He was uniquely selected for this preeminent role, anointed for it: “Christ” makes reference to that anointing. His message to Israel was to love one another, even their oppressors. With others who had come before him, most recently John the Baptist, calling Israel to repentance and speaking the word of love, Jesus affirmed that it was for the sake of these oppressors that Israel had been gathered together and called to be a light to these and indeed all the nations. In Jesus, Israel was presented with a definitive opportunity to repent and reorient itself in service to all nations: notably to go even the extra mile with their Roman oppressors. They were to begin a new way of being the people of God, the law of love now written on their hearts. Many accepted this correction and renewed invitation, although Israel’s leaders generally and decisively did not.

That Jesus is God's chosen means of fully expressing himself to the world is a claim that is crazy of a piece with the claim that Israel is God's chosen people. Many peoples have viewed the world as if they were the center of it. Wouldn't it be remarkable if they all turned out to be right?

### **Jesus's Death**

Jesus was crucified at the hands of Roman oppressors he wanted to love, with the encouragement of the leaders of his own people who wanted to kill the Romans, but Jesus first. The rejection of his message of peace and the choice of rebellion against Rome was a death sentence not only for Jesus, but for the whole people of Israel. In accepting this cup, Jesus was dying in solidarity with them, bearing the consequences of their rebellion against both God and Rome in his own innocent death.

It was a terrible verdict that Jesus had to face: there would be no rescue by legions of angels, no prevention of oppression of the innocent, no way around the terrible consequences of our abuse of the very real freedom we have. There would be many crucifixions, many besieged cities, many unjust judgments, much oppression of the weak. We would be allowed to plunge one another into great suffering, and there would be no rescue...except the way of the cross. For one who so loved the world, the crucifixion for all its personal physical challenge was far more a crushing failure to prevent a

similar impending fate for his own rebellious people. Loving first the brothers and sisters he did see, his grief was for Israel. (“Weep not for me: if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”) But this terrible price for freedom that Israel was about to pay at Roman hands was just the tip of the iceberg, bitter fruit crystalized out of frozen human hearts; Death, the wages of Sin. All this, Jesus knew in accepting this cup, this verdict of crucifixion to which God abandoned him as he suffered on behalf of Israel and all the world whom he so loved.

Love of those afflicted makes their acute suffering nearly unbearable, as so many parents know who would gladly trade places with their suffering children. Imagine that love for many suffering children. Unbearable...except that you wouldn't have it any other way. Far worse it would be, still, not to love your suffering child, not to be present with them in their suffering, not to have your own heart broken with them, accompanying them, loyal to them... with them. In that universal human experience of loving solidarity, the chill of crucifixion begins to thaw. Death does not snuff out love: it germinates it. Suffering occasions decisive love; death, love's complete choice.

What happens next?

### **Jesus's Resurrection**

Jesus really died, and yet really rose from the dead. Communicating this reality is the unmistakable intention of the gospel writers. Can you imagine deceiving your listeners or readers on such a point? What kind of people would they have had to be to fabricate such a tale, to mislead on life's most pivotal issue, to be so untouched by love? The alternative hypothesis makes better sense. Jesus loved them to the end in an extraordinary way. In their reciprocated love for Jesus, they were chosen to witness the fruit of perfect love. They told us what they saw.

Love conquered Death in a very visible way in Jesus. Every cell in his body must have been reordered, reenergized, in a way that seems intentionally ordered—leaving wounds in his hands and side for the skeptic in Thomas—to convey the message that love conquered death in Jesus' own person.

His resurrection confirmed Jesus' claims to be who he said he was. It was an essential part of a promised transformation of the people of Israel, marking the end of the exile, the advent of a new age where the law was written on hearts, not tablets of stone. God was with them, returning to a new temple, one not made by human hands, returning never to leave, a new king, ushering out the old rulers who asserted an Israel as conqueror of the nations, rather than as their servant. That violent road, Jesus prophesied,

would lead to Israel's own violent destruction that he would prefigure in his own death, a sacrifice offered in solidarity with his oppressors in hope for their salvation from their real enemy, the evil lying coiled in their own and all human hearts, rather than Rome. Jesus prophesied that while he was to die but be vindicated, Israel insofar as unrepentant would be destroyed at Roman hands, unvindicated if still in reach of forgiveness. This warning was veiled both in rhetoric in the service of the timing of Jesus' message, and in the apocalyptic language of their day. The subtlety and symbolism of that language has left the message open to a long history of inadequate interpretation: as if allegiance to a doctrinal formula would rescue a select few for transport to some other world, a heaven unconnected with the place where we live, at the end of both time and this physical world. But the end of the age to which Jesus referred was the destruction of Jerusalem, and Jesus' resurrection ushering in a new way of being Israel. Jesus' life, death and resurrection did not point the way to another time and another place unconnected to the here and now, but to an astonishing renewal of this very world, transforming it to a place where God dwells with us ever more fully.

That resurrected bodily mode of conveying this message seemed designed to be temporary. Jesus' appearance was transformed, still recognizable by friends and even by skeptics, but changed. It was about to change further still.

## **Jesus's Communion**

It is better for you, Jesus told his disciples, that I go. After me, a new advocate, a new comforter will come; on that coming, you will all be one with me, just as the Father and I are one. This is oneness together, communion. Wait for it, his disciples were told. On the Feast of Pentecost, it hit them: baptism in the Holy Spirit; a deep immersion in the love of God; a born-again experience of new life. These signs mark the fulfillment of the end-of-exile promises foretold by the prophets: God dwelling with his people in a new temple, not made by human hands. A new body, in which Jesus is first-born among many brothers and sisters, as if the head of a body with many parts, but all manifesting a new life. This is Jesus's new body, the body of Christ. And not only his; ours.

## **Our Life**

We are that body, that new temple. We are the place where God dwells, where love resides. We remember Jesus' life, death and resurrection in story and sacrament. We participate: we serve as Jesus served, love as Jesus loved. All this is possible because he first loved us. Like the woman who loved much because she had first experienced much love, we are transformed more, love more, serve more insofar as we have experienced love more. This truth has both ordinary and profound expressions. The ordinary, parents know: raise

up a child in love, the way she should go, and when she is older, she will not depart from it. Now, for a moment, enter into the life of that child.

Imagine a world in which everyone loved you. Cared for you. Respected you. Cherished you. Needed you, and were dedicated to help you meet that need. A world we would wish for our children. Imagine further that the very source of that loving order had *you* particularly in mind. Not you as one of the crowd: just you, you primarily, you uniquely, you especially. Imagine living in a world ordered at the most fundamental level to bless you personally, care for you, embrace you, raise you up, empower you, launch you. Imagine that the world were fully for you, your joy, and—should you choose to accept it—your responsibility, and that you would be richly blessed with companions who loved you, respected you, assisted you in this greatest of efforts. Imagine the universe said to you, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” Or, “you are my beloved son, in whom my favor rests. Let the world listen to you.” This is precisely the Love of God for you. You are irreplaceable. Central. Treasured. Desperately needed. Empowered by love, you are equipped for the job.

We live in that world, and you are at the center of it. This vision is just a glimpse of the love of God for you. It is a glimpse even of *my* love for you. If it were not so, I would not have told you. Believe my word...this is the role of

faith in salvation. This is the word you would like to speak, if you dared, to those you love, to your own children. When they can receive it and you do speak it, you are loving them more, helping them grow brighter, fuller. It is a bold word, as if too good to be true. Do not be afraid. Let yourself be surprised by joy. This is the nature of love: it is real, it is powerful, it is utterly transformative. It is not yet often enough expressed, nor fully enough.

Go fix that, Jesus said. Make disciples of all nations, inviting them into a community of persons with love in common, supporting one another, dreaming the greatest things together and making them real. Help them become immersed in the power of love and be united by it. This is salvation: inclusion in the people of God. All are loved, all are invited. Love is your life, and mine. Ours together.

You already love. Come further in. Take your place: exercise authority over this people, this world, insofar as it seems right to you. Come in freedom. Drop your former perspective, and put on this one: in this sense, it is “no longer you who lives, but Christ who lives in you”: Christ, very God, love brightly kindled, love as person, is you. You—personally—are the solution to the world’s problems. And so is your sister, your brother, God’s precious gifts to you. Listen to them. “Submit yourself to one another, as to the Lord.”

Together, you are many parts of one body, united in love, one body of Christ.  
Each part is fully what the whole is more brightly.

Acceptance of this role is transformational: “be transformed, by the renewal of your mind.” Faith brightens love. We need a network of encouragement, a network of hearing, a craft that grows over time in its ability to stir up faith to produce love. This need not be just a single craft. It should grow up in multiple communities: this recognition of diverse kernels of insight and craft is ecumenical respect, exercised in hope that we can learn from one another and grow toward unity as these crafts mature.

As faith is effectively encouraged and love inflamed, we need community and craft also for its intelligent, effective exercise. We need science, engineering, health care, commerce, social service, civic life, communal worship...all this is the kingdom of God. The blind see, the lame walk, the hungry are satisfied, those who mourn are comforted. Whether working through medicine or acupuncture or healing prayer, what emerges from this productive, loving network is a place where love lives, manifest ever more clearly, choosing ever more freely, doing ever more effectively what it wants to do. This is free, productive, peaceful humanity. We shall beat our swords, so to speak, into plowshares. In this place, formed among us sometimes

more faintly, at other times more brightly, God dwells, even now, but more clearly as our work unfolds.

## **Our Death**

This vision appeals, but it can seem to exclude us, both personally and corporately, and the more so as we reflect on how far short of a life of love we fall. The world seems not to be humming that tune, but instead is full of discord, rumor, foolishness, selfishness, pride and wrath. Globally we are woven into networks that are balkanized, imperial, maniacal, despotic, genocidal. Individually, we are self-centered, grasping, desperate, hostile, cruel, sadistic, irrationally and stubbornly misinformed, superstitious and suspicious, networked together for temporary misperceived advantage and deep ultimate destruction. Without love, we labor perilously close to joining such networks, working with an air of superiority in close proximity to them, in stubborn confidence that we could never become like them, part of them. In spite of the chilling frequency with which our wickedness comes to a head across the landscape of history, we live in denial, in desperate need of self-awareness and powerful rescue.

It is from these disordered networks that love calls us quietly to step out, to be loved, and to spend our days loving, resisting and dying to our tendency to be pulled right back into the fray on its own terms. Instead, love invites us to

serve, to invest freely, to take ownership by faith of a transformed future, a wise and loving order that many generations will fashion ever more fully. This is the kingdom of God, the inheritance of those who die to themselves and live for Christ. If you will believe it, this future is yours to build, to govern, to enjoy. It is a future fashioned by love, love abiding with you as you welcome it, love loving you and the source of your love returned.

Immersed in that love, we speak of Baptism. Turning away from the pull into disorder, we speak of Repentance. Called and anointed to lead, we speak of Christ. Open-hearted to include all those, like us, in need of rescue, we speak of Salvation. Humbly speaking truth to power, we speak of Prophecy. Rejected for a time by humanity still caught in this disorder, we speak of Crucifixion. Awakening to a freely chosen future where death is overcome, we speak of Resurrection.

### **Our Resurrection**

Jesus' resurrected presence with us was short-lived, intended to be a sign of our future, but not a future we would enter in precisely the same way that Jesus did.

That Jesus died in love for us and then rose from the dead we affirm as historical fact and as central to Christian faith. Lots of people saw him alive,

after he died, after he rose. That's uncommon. We live that same life, death and resurrection, but in some way differently. How, the same? How, differently?

How the same, we've just sketched: we serve, we live in solidarity with all men and women, suffering with them, loving them right through to the end of life in one kind of body and into another, the body of Christ. We live, we die, we rise in Christ, as Christ.

Then how differently? In a word, dimmer. Dimmer faith. Dimmer love.

Dimmer resurrection...for now. But this description, "dimmer", sheds too little light. Let's look at the image magnified in Christian celebration of these matters to see a little more clearly.

We celebrate Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and our own. In celebration, we capture the meaning of the incarnation: how love came to be, continues to be, and will always be expressed in the person of Jesus, in the founding of Christian community, and in the telling—proclaiming—of the story, both orally and in writing, some of which (as Scripture) the community has recognized as authoritative. Proclamation of this coming into being of love, of this good news, is a retelling of the story of love and a reissuing of the welcoming embrace of God. This celebration is expressed as liturgy. The

sharing of broken bread and wine poured out is a sign of the sacrificial love of God for us that gathers us in and thus brings into being a unity in Christ, the very reality to which it points: this is the meaning of sacrament. Here the incarnation is reenacted and reapplied; the people of God are nourished again through participation in Jesus' life-giving sacrifice, and are renewed as the body of Christ.

Included prominently in this celebration is remembrance of those who have gone before us, "marked with the sign of faith": those who have loved and died, both the more powerfully through the hearing of God's word of love through Jesus. These marked faithful are simply those who have loved: with love they are bearers of Christ; without love, they'd be just noise. Love is the only reliable sign of faith, as learning is the only reliable sign of study.

Those whose lives especially exhibit the pattern of love shown in the life of Jesus, giving their lives in some public offering in solidarity with God's Word of love—these witnesses, these martyrs—are accorded special honor. Their lives and our celebrations of them are particularly bright testimonies of the power of love extending even across death, uniting us now in some measure and, in accord with the desire of every heart, someday more fully. The foundation for this hope is the mystery of the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection makes sense of love: it encourages us to embrace one another

with whole life abandon, not to be finally torn apart in death but to remain united in living hope.

So where are they, the loving dead? Like love, like God, they are unseen in one sense, but seen clearly in another, right in front of us, wherever love acts. Insofar as we inherit and advance their projects, they are acting through us. Their love for us is love, is God, and yet it is their love, their act: it is them. Their love for us is not the sort of thing that death can take. It remains true for them as it is for us: we are, all of us, where we act. Their love remains, and acts, here with us; they remain, they act, here with us. All their love exercised and its particular effects remain, play out, have ongoing impact. That love as expressed in their lives, their causality, their expressed personhood plays out in diverse ways but is one, united in Christ, in God, as Christ, as God. We live, wrapped in their love. As we are Jesus's resurrected body, we are also theirs.

### **Our Communion**

Thus we can live in communion with one another, including with those who have gone before us. Plainly enough, we can interact with them across the barrier of death, both by remembering them and by following through on their projects. But we can go further. Since they loved us, they exist; they remain agents in ways we do not fully understand. So we interact with them as agents; we intercede. And they intercede for us, we believe, and this

belief colors our experience of the world in profound ways. Where are the dead? They are right here, intertwined with us, in a living tapestry of love (or, as St. Paul says, as “living stones” in a temple not made by human hands) whose impact is not yet fully revealed. We labor alongside them to reveal and magnify their efforts ever more fully. Jesus said “Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of time.” In this as in all good things, he was the firstborn of many sisters and brothers.

This network of those living and those who have gone before us, all united in love, is a network of persons. We can collaborate with them: make requests, suggest ideas, develop strategy. Indeed, the intelligent love that unites us all is personal. We can collaborate with that love, with God, in these same ways. It is by reaching out with collaborative intent that faith is stirred and love grows. The reach is an investment, an act of trust: if you didn't think there were any capability and good will in the person, there would be no point in connecting, whether initiating or responding. Each investment and reciprocation strengthens ties between the one who initiates and the one who responds. Collaboration builds the network, the kingdom of God, one connection at a time. When we understand all persons as knit together through collaboration into one body of Christ, we view that collaboration as sacred.

Collaborating with those living in our same state—in our families, with our friends, on the job—is not trivial. It requires humility; it can be done better, or worse. Making requests from those who have gone before us, and from God—as if they were one—is no different. It requires, in the first place, noticing that they are present, remembering them, seeing them in our shared projects. It requires some quietness, some reflection, some contemplation. It requires a different perspective on the network of causes in which we operate than we often adopt.

When we make a request of a coworker—to code a new feature into a piece of software, say—we understand that our colleague has some unspecified degree of mastery of a host of details that we do not ourselves see: a network of peers making similar sorts of requests; reporting channels which can unexpectedly and radically alter the execution of our request; a host of non-work-related challenges tugging on the sleeve of attentiveness. In spite of all these unseen factors, we operate with confidence in this network, trusting in an intelligent ordering that is sometimes admirably more, sometimes comically less present. We grow to maturity and efficacy as agents in such networks, contributing harmoniously to some, in opposition to others, less consciously involved in most.

Aware, now, of our participation in a network with all human beings, those

whom we easily think of as living, and those who have gone before us, knit together in the living and active love that works with us and through us, we adopt a broader perspective, which we might call one of trust in Providence. We interact in this wise and loving network with an ever-widening expanse of gratitude, confidence, expectation, and intercession. All this activity grows as we gain experience with this network, and become a more effective part of it ourselves.

This network of Providence is vastly larger and in many of its ways more mysterious than our close and accustomed networks. Conscious participation in it has certain advantages. Though its purposes are broader, its resources for accomplishing them are richer. While there are tensions internal to and between various subnetworks in its domain, reconciling these for the good of the whole is everyone's job from the perspective of Providence. Providence is essentially a peace-building network. Its universal good will and comprehensive perspective are grounds for hope...as if someone trustworthy were in charge.

There is such a person in charge: you. And your sister, and your brother. And you must trust one another. How can you trust the God you don't see, if you don't trust the sister you do see? And how do you trust another—probably a lot like you—if you don't trust yourself? And why, in spite of (in many of our

cases) so much evidence to the contrary, should you do that? Because God trusts you. Just as you hoped. You will be ever more surprised by how much God trusts you.

Trust is love, collaborating. More than prediction of positive outcome, which can be secured through application of force, trust is a decision to obtain a good in question by means of the efficacious good will of another. Trust magnifies both the one who trusts and the trustee: it increases the capacity of each to do work, to secure goods. Trust forms networks of productive good will. These are networks of productive love. It is not possible to trust another without both respecting and including their good in the outcome one hopes to achieve through their good will. The need for respect for a person's capacity is evident; the need for mutual good will may be less so. But it is not possible to trust except on the basis of good will; trust is an application of good will; trust is love. It may be love dimly present, because trust can be dimly present. But if mutual good will is absent entirely in a transaction, it is an act of simple use, not of trust. ("He's just using you.") The act may be overtly hostile, in which case the use is transparent, or it may be accidentally harmonious, in which case a façade of friendliness is often the chosen means. But there is no friendliness without exchange of good will, no trust, no genuine collaboration: just moments when expressed indifference or hostility is inconvenient. Each genuine act of collaboration is an exchange of

good will, an act of love. Each is an occasion where God, who is love, is present and acting, building a world governed by wise and loving choice, the Kingdom of God.

Providence includes and works with every set of collaborative resources held in smaller networks, but sees beyond them and appeals to resources that create synergies, work around tensions and heal inefficiencies. Opponents become respected allies. Transgressors are forgiven. Love is patient and kind, and covers a great many missteps. Intercessory prayer applies love as a healing balm in specific and targeted ways. Collaboration becomes sacred, an intentional embrace of Christ in your brother and sister. With eyes wide open and a heart willing to try, the world becomes a very good place to live and work.

Aware of this world of opportunity as a gift of invited participation in the very creative action of God, our life and work become energized in determination, precious gifts received in gratitude, at once ordinary and sublime acts of worship.

### **Sharing Faith in Love**

It is for reasons like these that people get a little religious....sometimes a lot. Even too much.

There should be a craft of the telling of this story of faith, one that is maximally productive of its end. That end, it should be plainer now from the telling, is to enlist and empower people to build a wise, loving, peaceful, inclusive humanity, a place where God dwells, where love reigns. And who wouldn't want that? But why suppose we need religion for that? Imagine no religion...it's easy if you try, as the song goes.

There is a kind of humanitarianism that plays nicely with certain forms of religion, but stands fairly independently of religious thought. What really matters to these humanitarians—activists—is the way we treat one another here and now, not what happens in some hereafter. They are dedicated to working hard and getting better at the really important things: science, engineering, economic development, health care, upholding human rights; they think that humanity is in fact getting generally better at all these things. Admittedly, our very real progress in defining and upholding moral standards—against slavery, say, and for gender equality—is irregular, marked by a stubborn bent toward unthinkable behavior which is admittedly difficult to understand, all the more so when we glimpse it in ourselves. But even the worst expression of inhumanity, even evil, can be and has been overcome by the best expressions of humanity, a kind of heroism that we like to believe is possible for all of us in some measure.

Humanitarians of this stripe are dedicated to clarifying and hitting this mark as well as each of us can: they see that treating people with unconditional respect, even love, is the right way forward. They know that every time people interact, there is the possibility of good and often truly remarkable things happening. Sometimes even otherwise ordinary human beings rise to profound moral heights that leave a deep impression in us through our encounters with them. Even more remarkably, sometimes in our encounters with ordinary people in need, we recognize that same richness of response in ourselves. We should live so as not to forget the heroes in our experience, even the ordinary heroes in our neighbors and that we ourselves can be. And we should continually uphold the very best expressions of this remarkable human solidarity: encountering these best expressions of humanity—a Mother Teresa, a Gandhi, a Nelson Mandela, or maybe even an advocate for the homeless in our own home town—is profoundly transformative in the best of ways. So one might believe, without any appeal to Christian or perhaps any other religious faith.

On the Christian worldview as articulated here, this humanitarian perspective as so far articulated has got a lot right, and nothing wrong. Is there something more in this Christian view, such a humanitarian might wonder? The Christian response ought to be: come and see, if you wish. But come and see on these terms: loving (i.e., real) collaboration is the right

measure of speech and indeed of all action. Except to love more, to make the world a better place, don't come. And this is a standard that applies to ourselves as well as to you: unless we ourselves or you, visiting, live more, act more, make the world a better place, we shouldn't stay. And unless to help one another love more, we shouldn't speak. The only words worth speaking are those we speak in Christ, as Christ.

Under these conditions, Christians and humanitarians of these persuasions ought to be able to work together well. In BOSCO, they have. Christians ought to be committed to working alongside any person without pointing out their differences, except insofar as their experience indicates that it is useful for their collaboration, something only both persons can judge together. One might become very good at loving collaboration without thinking of it as kingdom building: why on earth would we want to insist, or perhaps even suggest, that this good work should be reconceived in our own terms? Unless those who imagine no religion see Christians who are better kingdom builders and want to know why and how they can be, too, it's not at all clear why it helps to tell them that faith makes any difference. Perhaps often it makes no important difference. Unless we love more, it never does.