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Review of Cantelon's "When God Stood Up: A Christian Response to AIDS in Africa"

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Most Canadians have no idea what to do about the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa. The numbers are too staggering, the factors too complex. James Cantelon has responded to those numbers and that complexity by working to realize a vision he had while speaking in South Africa in 1999. (See www.visionled.com.)

The essence of his vision is simple: throughout southern Africa the Christian Church must respond to AIDS because no one else seems adequately equipped or disposed to do so.

Some readers may think Cantelon too blunt at points, but his topic demands honesty. AIDS in Africa did not happen by itself, and he writes forthrightly about sexual practices there, including the frequent failures of Christians.

But Cantelon does not want western Christians to become too comfortable simply because AIDS spreads largely through sexual promiscuity. He describes us as champions of conditional love and, to his credit, takes on his own share of the guilt for our failure to care for widows and orphans.

When God Stood Up can ramble a bit. Cantelon, a born storyteller, sometimes includes anecdotes, Bible studies and sermon excerpts though the connection to AIDS remains unclear. But he also includes a worthwhile theological discussion of suffering. And his readers will not quickly forget his image of God rising up angry because of the economic exploitation of Africa by multinational corporations with the complicity of African politicians and with western consumers as the beneficiaries and Africa’s poorest as its biggest victims.

Cantelon invokes some of the oldest biblical language – that of the widow and orphan – to call on Christian churches there, and here, to respond in the name of Christ. Ramble or not, When God Stood Up is required reading.

–KEN BADLEY