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## *Theocracy Alert*

### **When religion becomes a weapon of mass destruction AIDS in Africa and sex education in America**

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April 5, 2005—We never met face-to-face, but we communicated daily. “Joshua” was an accomplished dancer, musician, painter and sculptor living in Kampala. He was a lead dancer in several companies. His sculptures and paintings had been purchased by the president of Uganda. He was finishing his studies in Organizational Studies at the university. The future looked bright, until his evangelical Christian parents discovered he was gay. His father informed the police and had his 25-year-old son arrested.

Ugandan law punishes same-sex love with life imprisonment. Under this harsh law, even individuals who elude imprisonment face constant fear, stigmatization, and the threat of extortion by the police.—Kamal Fizazi, Regional Program Coordinator for Africa and Southwest Asia, [International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission](#)

Upon release—pending further legal action—frightened straight friends abandoned him, he was dismissed by dance companies and barred from art exhibits that received public funds, which was virtually all of them. His family disowned him and his unfinished art was destroyed. Homeless, broke and alone, naturally he considered suicide but, as a practicing Christian, he felt “God” had something planned for him.

Finally, after months of harassment, re-arrests and releases pending further legal action, the police appeared at the home of the woman where he’d been hiding. Since he couldn’t pay the officers the 1.5 million Ugandan shillings (about \$756 US) they required to “lose” his file, he was told to leave the country or be arrested. But because of his previous arrest record he could not leave the country. Two days later I lost touch with him. Some time later I learned his fate: arrested, convicted, sentenced to life without parole. But his life sentence lasted only 10 days. He was beaten to death in prison by a group claiming to be doing “God’s work.”

One of the last e-mails I received from him before his final arrest ended with . . .

PS: there is no hope to find help/refugee from churches here. They are very much against us [homosexuals] and since the church in America embraced a gay bishop it has become almost the main topic of condemnation in the churches all over here. It’s all very terrible and disgusting and I believe they are all just selfish and with hatred hearts—yet claiming to be of God!! I don’t go to churches here any more.

Uganda now leads the way in the “final solution” to the homosexual problem. From [365Gay.com](#), November 30, 2004:

(Kampala) The government of Uganda has issued a warning to the UN joint program on HIV/AIDS that it risks being thrown out of the country if it offers AIDS education to gays.

Homosexuality is illegal in the country and [Information Minister James Nsaba] Buturo said that contacts with gays in which UNAIDS gave sexual advice would be a crime.

The government has recently called on police to crack down on homosexual activity.

Ugandan President Museveni was quoted in the state-owned newspaper *New Vision* as saying, "I have told the CID [Criminal Investigations Department] to look for homosexuals, lock them up, and charge them." The directive followed press reports, apparently false, of a marriage ceremony between two gay men in a suburb of Kampala. Following Museveni's statements, Daniel Arap Moi, then president of Kenya, declared he would also vigorously combat the "scourge" of homosexuality, and Kenya's Anglican archbishop Abp Benjamin Nzimbi vowed to increase his and his Church's efforts to deal with the "plague" of homosexuality.

Uganda's war of purification seems to have two basic components. First, imprison as many homosexuals as possible. Then, kill off as many more as possible by barring UN-sponsored education, prevention and treatment programs and refusing humanitarian AIDS funds from Western, Christian [churches](#) that try to help Ugandans afflicted with HIV/AIDS: "Jackson Nzerebende Tembo, the Bishop of South Rwenzori in Uganda, has rejected the money, worth almost £185,000 [US \$350,000], from the US diocese of Central Pennsylvania, saying its clergy and bishop, Michael Creighton, endorsed the election of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003."

Like any war against a specific group of people, this one will inevitably destroy much more than intended: "collateral damage" as it's euphemistically called. A December 10, 2004, Reuters' story by Daniel Wallis entitled "Virgins Rally to Promote Abstinence" reported on the "hundreds" of virgins, most in their teens, who gathered in Kampala to proclaim their virginity. The event was sponsored by several church and youth groups, including the U.S.-based [True Love Waits](#) program.

Rally leader Pastor Martin Sempa said "We are promoting abstinence because Uganda is under attack from an agenda driven by homosexuals and Western experts." (A common myth propagated in Africa by evangelical Christian clergy and their political brethren is that homosexuality was brought to Africa by white westerners. The prehistoric rock paintings left by the [San people](#) in what are now Botswana and Zimbabwe *clearly* demonstrate otherwise.)

The collateral damage is already widespread . . . and spreading.

According to the 2004 annual [report](#) from the Joint United Nations Program on H.I.V./AIDS and the World Health Organization, in Uganda (an epicenter in Africa's epidemic) AIDS is fast becoming a disease that disproportionately strikes young women. Why? The report suggests the soaring infection rates among young women are fueled by religious teachings that require women to remain ignorant of sex and sexuality until they marry. And once they marry, the religious prime directive is procreation, which means unprotected sex. Confirmation of the trend came from *New York Times* writer Nicholas D. Kristof in the March 30, 2005, [story](#), "When Marriage Kills," he filed from Zambia and Zimbabwe: "The stark reality is that what kills young women here is often not promiscuity, but marriage. Indeed, just about the deadliest thing a woman in southern Africa can do is get married."

Nevertheless, the [Traditional Values Coalition](#) (TVC) advocates the African and specifically the "[Uganda model](#)" be adopted here. The figures they use in their arguments contradict those of the U.N. and W.H.O. But then again, TVC considers the sex education programs those organization sponsor to be advocates of the "culture of death." But it is TVC's own religious fanaticism and faith-based political agenda that are sowing the seeds of widespread disease and death, here.

"Abstinence-only sex education": the designation seems an oxymoron. Nevertheless, these are the faith-based programs receiving federal funding (almost \$900 million since George W. Bush took office), despite the accumulating evidence that they don't work and are, in fact, counterproductive and dangerous. Most recently, evidence of that came from Yale and Columbia University researchers in an article entitled "After the promise: The STD consequences of adolescent virginity pledges" in the April 2005 issue of the [Journal of Adolescent Health](#). The research of Dr. Hannah Brückner and Dr. Peter Bearman was also the subject of an Associated Press [story](#): "Teens who pledge to remain virgins until

marriage are more likely to take chances with other kinds of sex that increase the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, a study of 12,000 adolescents suggests.”

In December 2004, the office of Representative [Henry Waxman](#) (D-CA) issued a scathing report on the failure and dangers of “abstinence-only” sex education programs. From Doreen Brandt’s 365Gay.com report on the report:

The Waxman staff report found that two-thirds of the abstinence programs in use in schools distort the facts on the use of condoms.

It also found that the program is teaching teens that *abortion can lead to sterility and suicide, that half of the gay male teenagers in the U.S. have tested positive for HIV, and that touching a person’s genitals can result in pregnancy.* . . . (italics mine)

The evangelical Christian Right [responded](#) with the usual childish name-calling and predictable political propaganda, but consider what is being passed off as “education” in the public schools.

“Abortion *can* lead to sterility and suicide” (italics mine). Like all OB/GYN surgically invasive procedure an abortion “can” lead to complications that “can” sometimes lead to sterility. But when performed by a physician in an appropriate medical setting, such cases are extremely rare. Simply saying abortions “can”—without the necessary qualifications and supporting information—seems little more than a scare tactic. Similarly, any life-altering decision “can” lead to suicide in emotionally unstable people. But again, without providing truthful qualifications, explanations, and supporting evidence, the abstinence-only assertions are not “education.” They are misrepresentations intended as scare tactics.

“Half of the gay male teenagers in the U.S. have tested positive for HIV.” When were *all* the gay teenagers (in and out of the closet) in America tested? Was this a national event that was completely missed by the liberal, mainstream, conservative, and evangelical media? How does one respond to such a ludicrous assertion? It would seem intentionally misleading generalizations, scare tactics and outright lies are all the “education” abstinence-only programs have to offer.

“Touching a person’s genitals can result in pregnancy.” The Bush administration’s faith-based caricaturing of science reached a new low with this one. But not quite the lowest. That distinction fell to the evangelical Christian Right. In a “Crossfire” program broadcast on CNN in December 2004, Genevieve Wood of the [Family Research Council](#) repeatedly refused—five times, according to the transcript—to disown, qualify, explain, or document her claim that masturbation can cause pregnancy.

*Philadelphia Inquirer* science writer Faye Flam’s November 30, 2003, article, “Spinning Science as a Political Tool,” listed several recent books that document “how scientific results are being contorted to fit faith-based political agendas”:

In recent months, editors of major science journals have complained that the Bush administration is distorting science to push an agenda influenced by religion and by industry wishes. The journal *Science* published editorials accusing the [Bush] administration of stacking panels on lead poisoning and pollution with people with ties to the lead and petroleum industries, and loading panels on HIV/AIDS prevention with Christian pro-abstinence groups.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have consistently obscured the *fact* that condoms are 86-93 percent effective in preventing sexually transmitted diseases. But in true “moral fashion,” when a nonprofit organization supporting comprehensive sex education, [Advocates for Youth](#), publicized this subterfuge, they were rewarded with three government audits of their finances, all within an eight-month period.

The evangelical Christian Right—and especially the Traditional Values Coalition (TVC)—is not satisfied with the Bush administration’s twisting of science to fit their faith-based political agenda. TVC wants to

stop scientific research and [funding](#) for [programs](#) (at home [and](#) abroad) that may help people and bring truth and knowledge to those most in need.

A November 2004 [article](#) by Dale Keiger in *Johns Hopkins Magazine* attests to TVC's efforts. The article explained how "In October 2003, conservative members of the U.S. House of Representatives prompted a hearing on 10 research grants funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH)." But when an "NIH staff member contacted the House Energy and Commerce Committee, co-sponsor of the hearing, and requested a list of the grants in question":

That staff member got back more than expected: not summaries of 10 projects, but page after page of NIH grants, dozens of them, all seemingly listed because the research involved prostitution, substance abuse, homosexuality, or sexually transmitted diseases. By mistake, someone on Energy and Commerce had revealed a list that was making the rounds of Republican members of Congress, a list of 181 NIH-funded researchers whose studies had been targeted by a conservative religious lobbying group, the Traditional Values Coalition.

TVC's executive director Andrea Lafferty—notorious for her dogmatic [illogic](#)—defended the hit list by saying, "The list was a draft. It wasn't even finished. We've been compiling this information through various means, and also through the Internet. A lot of it is public information. The accusation has been that I was put up to this by the administration. I had this information long before Bush was even a candidate for president, and had been tracking it and tracking it."

Lafferty's [response](#) simply confirmed that TVC's assault on medical research and scientific knowledge that could help people—especially those American citizens she and TVC object to (and [profit](#) from damning in the name of religion)—has been a well planned, long standing campaign of the most sinister kind: a classic example of religion as a weapon of mass destruction . . . with significant human, cultural, social, political and religious [collateral damage](#).

During the Terri Schiavo fiasco, TVC [claimed](#) those who [favored](#) allowing her to die were like Hitler because he "targeted the handicapped." What the rabidly homophobic TVC conveniently forgot to mention was that Hitler also targeted homosexuals, which is why the [Yad Vashem Museum](#) in Jerusalem recently opened a special exhibit dedicated to gay and lesbian victims of the Nazis. The Führer knew—as do America's evangelical "Christian" leaders—the value of brainwashing the [youth](#) and having them swear blind obedience and allegiance to [Him](#) . . . to become willing slaves.

In late 2004, senior editor at the *New Republic* Michael Crowley dubbed James Dobson "the religious right's new kingmaker" and "America's most influential evangelical leader, with a following reportedly greater than that of either Falwell or Robertson at [their] peak." On January 27, 2005 the official website of Dobson's Focus on the Family featured an article that had been resurrected from Focus on the Family's *Breakaway* magazine (which is aimed at male teens) and other FOF [venues](#). On the family.org website, the piece appeared in the "Teen" section with the title "Bought, Branded, Bonded." The author was Susie Shellenberger. The website promo read: "Slavery is a bad thing, unless you're enslaved to Jesus. But what does it mean to be a slave to Jesus?"

What it means is that since Yeshua of Nazareth long ago departed this mortal plane, what Susie advocates is becoming a slave to the *dogma* of the *perversion* of "Christianity" espoused by politically motivated "religious leaders."

Think about it. "Jesus" is definitely *not* a name that comes to mind with "slavery," even metaphorically. A "slave to Jesus" seems the quintessential oxymoron and a distortion of what his philosophy taught before "religious leaders" perverted it to create their weapon of mass destruction. The Crusades. The Holy Inquisition. The genocide perpetrated by "Christians" against the peoples of the New World. The Salem witch hunts. The horrors of slavery. How many millions of human beings have suffered and died as a result of what politically-motivated so-called "Christian" leaders claimed was "[God's Will](#)"?

You'd think we'd have learned by now . . .

NB: *The fate of "Joshua" in Uganda was first published in "Out of Focus on the Family: A Response to Arguments Against Same-Sex Marriage," Popular Culture Review, 16:1 (February 2005), 45-75. The article responded to James Dobson's "eleven arguments against same-sex marriage" in his book Marriage Under Fire: Why We Must Win This Battle (Multnomah, 2004).*

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