

# JUST FAITH AND ACTION: A BI-MONTHLY THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION FROM THE WASHINGTON OFFICE ON AFRICA

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## *It's just too much*

*It can be pretty overwhelming sometimes, can't it? The statistics on the incidence of HIV/AIDS in Africa, expressed relentlessly in a myriad of ways, can be numbing. Pictures of AIDS orphans seem just too much. And even the fact that in the next five minutes, and every five minutes of every day, another African will die of AIDS-related causes, may be too difficult to think about, and may well drive us away.*

*Those of us who feel called to a ministry associated with a "cause" or "issue" are always encouraging others to "do something," and usually we have an idea of what we want others to do! There's a kind of competitive triage going on, both among issues and strategies. It's not us at our best. And then along comes something as devastating as HIV/AIDS, and it gets our attention, and there are so many ways to contribute, to care, to be related, that everything has the potential of helping, and competition diminishes. It's almost as if the noisiness of our ministries yields to a reverential silence. Not that debate doesn't rage about priorities, but there is a sense that here is something of such seriousness that we cannot look away, or ignore, or use as a political agenda for our own purposes.*

*I like to think that, but in truth I'm not so sure, especially when I consider our government's response. My piece of the picture resides in faith-based advocacy for a US policy that joins us with others to confront the AIDS pandemic in Africa and throughout the globe. And if we are to honor the sixth Millennium Development Goal,*

*To reverse the spread of "killer" diseases, especially HIV/AIDS and malaria,*  
*then I maintain that we need to be attuned to what our government does and doesn't do. I welcomed the pledge of President Bush, in his 2003 State of the Union address, of \$15 billion over five years. I welcomed legislation authorizing \$3 billion each year. It's easy to conclude that we are doing our share, isn't it? But have we?*

*Colleagues and I worked carefully on the figures. What is the real need, we asked? And what is the appropriate US share? For fiscal year 2005 we seek \$5.4 billion. But strikingly, the Bush administration is prepared to declare the HIV/AIDS crisis one of the most pressing the world has seen, and then ask for considerably less than \$3 billion for next year, and they want to go it alone with most of that – only \$200 million for the multilateral Global Fund.*

*Consider, too, that the US endorsed the Doha Declaration late in 2001, affirming that countries could, under trade rules, grant public health priority over pharmaceutical patents. Yet alone in the world, this administration has fought to narrow that right. Out of the almost 30 million Africans living with HIV/AIDS, fewer than 30,000 are receiving antiretroviral drugs. As our friends at Maryknoll remind us, "That's one person who counts for every 999 who do not." We include treatment on the agenda, then work to prevent its realization.*

*Of course access to drugs is not the sole answer. Neither is money. But both are part of the solution. Those of us in faith-based advocacy are trying to find ways to say that it isn't too much. For our nation, it isn't enough at all.*

*Yours faithfully,  
Leon Spencer*

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*This is the sixth in a series of reflections on the Millennium Development Goals originally prepared for the Cambridge Consultation at the 2003 General Convention of the Episcopal Church.*

*If there are others you would like us to send these reflections to, please pass their names and addresses on to us. Alternatively, if these reflections are unhelpful, just let us know and we'll remove you from our list.*

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All of this series, Just Faith and Action, are available on our website, [www.woafrica.org](http://www.woafrica.org)*