

COMMENT

“We’ve made great progress (but) ...everyone at BlackBerry understands ... delivering BlackBerry 10 and getting back to a profitable quarter is just our starting line — not the finish line.

BLACKBERRY PRESIDENT AND CEO THORSTEN HEINS AFTER THE COMPANY SURPRISED ANALYSTS BY DELIVERING A \$98 MILLION US QUARTERLY PROFIT.

PM’s UN phobia isolating Canada

Pulling out of drought program hurts our ‘green credentials’



TIM HARPER

OTTAWA Once again Canada stands alone. In 2011, the Conservative government became the first to formally withdraw from the United Nations Kyoto Protocol on the environment.

Now, we have become the first nation to withdraw from the UN’s convention on drought, a program primarily aiming to help East Africa and the Sahel region.

Another 193 nations and the European Union believe this UN program has value in trying to prevent drought and its fallout, which includes malnourishment, child malnutrition and problems with cross-border refugees.

Our government has neither the time, nor the money, nor the interest, in dealing with such issues. “It’s inexplicable,” says Oxfam head Robert Fox.

The move, which apparently was never to be announced, is couched in the disdainful language Stephen Harper and his government use in describing the United Nations, suggesting the Canadian contribution was paying for bureaucratic salaries and meetings, or what Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird called “a talkfest.”

Harper said only 18 per cent of the money Canada gives the convention is for programming. But these high-minded declarations about protecting the taxpayer ring false considering that the Canada’s contribution was a mere \$350,000 per year.

To save some pocket change the government has again embarrassed itself with its latest foray into international isolationism.

And this time there is a direct link to important domestic policy. In making this decision — ferreted out by The Canadian Press — the Conservatives have given the back of their hand to their own base of support in Alberta.

At a time when a parade of federal ministers (including Baird) and provincial premiers, including Alberta Premier Alison Redford, have been invading Washington to tout this country’s supposed “green credentials” in a bid to win presidential approval for the final phase of the Keystone XL pipeline, this decision blows up all that work.

Walking away from a convention that is dealing with a problem that has been at least accelerated by climate change reinforces the world’s view, including a widely-held view in Washington, that Canada is all about resource development and exports, barely paying lip service to climate change.

It is consistent with this government’s view of the UN. Harper snubbed the General Assembly last year, his government has never accepted a single criticism from the international body and has all but chased UN rapporteurs out of the country.

This UN phobia may have all been foreshadowed in a speech Harper gave at the Conservative convention after winning his 2011 majority, but it is an abrupt turnaround from comments Harper made in Africa a mere five months ago.

Then, he committed \$20 million in Canadian aid to the Sahel while visiting a UN centre in Dakar.

“Across the Sahel region of Africa, there are many problems, including millions of men, women and children who are suffering because they do not have enough to eat,” he said.

“I know I speak for all Canadians when I tell you we will not abandon you. The challenges we’re talking about today go well beyond the food shortage, but obviously for many people this is the most critical challenge.”

A day before this news broke, Julian Fantino, the minister responsible for the Canadian International Development Agency, promised, in a Globe and Mail op-ed, that Canada would remain “a compassionate neighbour. We are known to lend a helping hand to those suffering the ill effects of cyclical drought, weak governance or an earthquake.”

Canada’s move comes on the eve of an April 9 UN meeting bringing scientists, governments and NGOs together in Bonn for “the first cost-benefit analysis of desertification, land degradation and drought.”

We’re not going.

This week U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry announced \$51 million more in humanitarian assistance to the people of the Sahel, citing a “complex crisis of drought, flooding, failed harvests and disrupted livelihoods.”

Baird pulled us out of the program trying to prevent it. Wonder how green we look to Kerry now?

Tim Harper is a national affairs writer.

Love beyond our imperfections



PAUL BENEDETTI

A little more than a week ago, the mother of one of our very good friends died.

Her death was unexpected, as much as a death at 85 years of age can be unexpected.

It was, like the deaths of many old people, neither a shock nor a tragedy. She had complained of leg pain, gone to the hospital and the next day a blood clot moved through her body to her heart or her head and killed her. Though in a retirement home, she had been up to that point of relatively sound body and mind. And like most of us, my friend and her family saw the quick and uncomplicated death, though sad, as something of a blessing.

On the weekend, there was a small celebration of this woman’s life. There was a simple, private burial of her ashes at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery where my friend and her three siblings stood in the spring sunshine and said their goodbyes.

At the graveside where her father was buried, my friend gave her mother a brief eulogy from neatly typed notes that she later handed me and gave me the privilege of reading.

She did a good job with a difficult task and there was something in her words when I first read them that struck me, but that I could not quite identify.

Her mother’s life had not been easy and my friend was open and honest that their relationship had been a complicated and not always happy one. She acknowledged the complexity of her mother’s sometimes troubled life and then spoke about her in earlier and happier times. About her youthful zest for living and her beauty. She talked about the gifts her mother had given her, gifts that had in central ways, shaped her life.

She spoke about her mother’s love of nature, her appreciation of Canada’s natural beauty and her simple affection for fishing. She talked about the

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All parents fall short; all are flawed. We hope our children will understand and forgive

long afternoons they had spent with their lines in the water, not catching much of anything, but just enjoying the silent reflection that comes when you are calm in yourself and doing something you like. She talked about how she had passed that love of fishing onto her own daughter and sons.

She told the people standing solemnly in the cool, spring air about her mother’s talent for knitting and crocheting, an art she herself had never mastered and now likely never would.

She talked about her mother’s love of food, about her respect and gratitude for the bounty of the earth. She recalled childhood memories of autumn days spent chopping basketfuls of vegetables and of canning tomatoes and beets and peppers until the jars lined the basement shelves.

She spoke of how that love and cooking and baking had stayed with her, a lifelong affair with food and all that it can do to heal and draw people together.

And when she was done, they set down the urn filled with her mother’s ashes and she and her siblings stood by the graveside for a time. Then they filed back to their cars and reconvened at her home for some lunch, drinks and conversation.

There, we joined them and stood around, chatted and watched as old photos filled with smiling faces, scenes of brides and grooms and babies and well, life, clicked along on the TV screen — a looping slideshow of a life lived flickering by on a Saturday afternoon.

I left a few hours later and walked through the waning afternoon light to my home. I slipped off my jacket and loosened my tie and lay down on the couch and my mind filled with all that I had seen and heard.

And I thought about being a parent and I knew that though I have tried to do my best for my children as her mother had, I have made mistakes at times, fallen short. And that, despite my honest efforts and best intentions, I would likely, through circumstance and flaws of character, fall short again. I thought that all of us, our parents and us as parents — all of us — are flawed.

And I hoped that my children would in time come to understand this and, like my friend, have the maturity to accept it and the grace to forgive.

Paul Benedetti lives in Hamilton. He is a former Spectator reporter and now teaches journalism at Western University.

Of grace, forgiveness and tears

Even the most faithless and fallen of us can find something in Christ’s doubts and fears

THOMAS FROESE

KAMPALA, UGANDA I’m the odd man out in a loose circle in the campus home of the university president talking about God’s grace, an unsurprising discussion because, besides being a university and my own family’s home, this is a nearly century-old theological training centre.

The horrible news of late is the roadside murder of a young law student, John Otim, beaten dead with an iron bar for money that he didn’t even have. It creeps into discussion, but it’s awkward and we’re soon back to God’s grace.

Now, words like grace are rather shopworn in some religious circles, and unknown in others, and I’m feeling unsettled about this glib familiarity. So while I’m hardly an expert among these African theologians, I offer a story.



Thomas Froese

If you were to forgive that killer, that would be tremendous grace. If you were to forgive and work for his freedom, that would be dramatically unusual grace.

But what if you freed that killer and formally adopted him? What if you cared for and educated him? Now imagine you’re very rich and you then say, “You’re my heir. Everything I have will be yours. I’ll lavish it all on you.”

This was the story. Of course, you don’t need to be a theologian or even religious to get the drift. This is supernatural grace. It’s divine — i.e. God’s — grace. It’s more than we can understand. It’s also more than we can even sensibly tolerate.

Africa, by the way, despite good news you may hear about pockets of change and economic growth and hope, remains the most violent region on earth with one-third of the world’s murders.

In fact, deaths from any variety of causes are never far away around here, as common as a bicycle ride on a warm day. But there’s something that’s even more troubling. It relates to Easter.

There’s Christ, according to the biblical account,

having his own doubts. He knows what’s coming and he’s deeply afraid, humanly afraid, sweating great drops like blood. Then his friends leave him. Then the all-night kangaroo trial. Then that rugged and bloody cross, that horribly violent, state-sanctioned murder.

Finally, bleeding out, convulsing and breathless, what are Jesus’ last pained words? “Daddy, why have you left me?”

This is the real trouble of it. If a good person, a person as good as Jesus, can be left by everyone, even his own Father, where does that leave the rest of us? And how does this square with that Father who wants to lavish his riches on even the worst of us criminals?

Not very long before Jesus was killed, something else happened. The account says his good friend, Lazarus, was lying nearby, dead and cold. Jesus, in fact, could have saved him, but took his time arriving at the scene. He had made himself scarce. Then the account gives two simple words: “Jesus wept.”

There they are, the tears running down his dusty cheeks. Why? Surely he knew how it would end, that he would raise Lazarus, a foreshadow of Jesus’ own resurrection now being celebrated in Hamilton and by millions around the world.

But maybe it’s in Christ’s tears, just like in Christ’s doubts, where even in a skeptical age, the most faithless and fallen of us can find something.

Because maybe Jesus didn’t weep only for his dead friend. Maybe he also wept for other things: maybe for the murdered John Otim, or maybe for Uganda, or maybe for all of Africa. Maybe Jesus really wept for our violent and broken world.

Maybe he wept for when God is silent, or for our deafness when God is not. Or maybe Jesus just wept for the hope that, for now, is only that, but somehow has to be enough.

Author and journalist Thomas Froese is a Hamiltonian in Africa. Follow him at www.thomasfroese.com and www.dailydad.net

“If a person as good as Jesus can be left by everyone, even his own Father, where does that leave the rest of us?



BRIEFLY

Short and excerpted comments sent to letters@thespec.com

The sad removal of a bald eagle’s nest

It was wonderful to see a front-page story concerning the successful bald eagle’s nest in our slowly recovering Cootes Paradise. This, along with the area’s successful peregrine falcon nests, points toward a somewhat brighter future for wildlife in our area despite the effects of urban sprawl. I was dismayed, however, that no front-page coverage was given to the recent disheartening removal of a similar bald eagle’s nest. This one was in the Fisherville area on Lake Erie. This nest was cut down, reportedly with Dalton McGuinty’s signed Ministry of Natural Resources permission, to make way for construction of an access road to a newly erected wind turbine. No such happy story here! It would be nice to have all good news stories but our Cootes success doesn’t represent the entire wildlife picture in this area.

MIKE KIRCHIN, HAMILTON

No passes for Kachkar ... please!

I do not have a problem with where Richard Kachkar is detained after being found not criminally responsible for killing a Toronto police officer. But do not come back in two or three years and tell us that he has been taking his medication and that some psychiatrist has reassessed him and found him no longer a danger to the public and is now out on weekend passes to Wonderland and the African Lion Safari park. JOHN SIMPSON, HAMILTON

Our reputation is less-than-stellar

I am deeply saddened by the notice of a public information centre, which was left at my door recently. The carelessness in the preparation of this missive, unfortunately seen by out-of-town guests, makes it very difficult to be a proud Hamiltonian. Surely in this electronic age someone could have used spellcheck if there was doubt of accuracy. Hamilton is gaining enough of a less-than-stellar reputation due to its difficulties with staff and this type of incident just emphasizes the lack of efficient personnel. LOUISE PIOTROWICZ, HAMILTON

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