TOXIC MISSION

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Category: Mission

Onesimus has come up with an extremely controversial post which should be read by anyone involved in Christian mission from the West to the majority world. Here are some extracts to give you an idea of what he is saying, but you really do need to read the whole post:

> *During these nearly four decades of my missions involvement, missions has been â€˜soldâ€™ to individuals and to churches in my home (US and UK) contexts as Godâ€™s call for us as Christians to supply what is lacking, Christianly-speaking, in other parts of the world. So off we go to â€˜preach the gospel,â€™ to â€˜plant churchesâ€™, to translate the Scriptures, to train leaders, to â€˜build capacityâ€™, to build and staff clinics, hospitals and schools, to care for orphans, and generally to reach the (fill in the blank) for Christ..*
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> *The other big change is that, while I was in my country of origin, we very much thought we were at the center of the world and at the center of what God is doing. When I travel back to my â€˜peopleâ€™, I find this still the assumption, whether in local churches or theological colleges/seminaries. But Iâ€™ve also observed that, increasingly, Americans are almost the only people left who think this way about Americans anymore. The Christian world has moved along, and our multi-billion dollar â€˜Christianâ€™ music and publishing and conference and education industries, um, ministries are all busy generating the sorts of things that they have always generated, but with less and less relevance to the rest of the world...*
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> *Now that Iâ€™ve been here (on the â€˜fieldâ€™) for a while, I am realizing that we Western missionaries are not the wonderful blessing from heaven to all these poor and lost people that we like to think of ourselves as. While we have been certainly busy â€˜preaching the gospelâ€™ all these years, weâ€™ve actually succeeded in reproducing some of our less savory attributes much more than anybody is admitting. Most people who come here as missionaries only know what they know and do not know what they donâ€™t know. While this is endearing in children, itâ€™s been disastrous on the mission field...*
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> *I would like to suggest that there are very few places left in the world where a Western Christian presence is advisable, at least the way it has been practiced in the recent past. I have several reasons motivating me to make this suggestion.*
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> *First, our continuing presence as mission organizations actively facilitates a church-killing dependence among the Christians we are supposedly trying to help. In the churches of sub-Saharan Africa that I am most familiar with, many if not most Christians have never learned to give in a way that enables them to support a local church that is actually sustainable. We in the West never let them...*
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> *There are too many Western mission organizations and NGOs who, except for spiritualized lingo, have become little more than giant corporations, with layers of management, following every leadership and management trend, focused on the bottom line and becoming ever*

> *more efficient in connecting donors with the product as well as expanding the market for the product.*

After twenty-five years in mission work, I recognise all of the issues that Onesimus points to. These things happen and I could give examples of all of the excesses he mentions. However, the more crucial question is whether or not my own organisation is guilty of some of the things that he mentions. There is a challenge for Wycliffe and all other mission organisations in this piece and we need to take some time to examine ourselves and see how we match up.