DOING MORE HARM THAN GOOD

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Category: Observations

Today's Guardian has a fascinating article about the way in which short term volunteers working in orphanages in the developing world can end up doing more harm than good.

> *In recent years, a disturbing form of slum tourism has taken off, with rich visitors sold a glimpse into the lives of the very poor. In Asia, unbelievably, tourists pay for trips to hand out food to impoverished rural families. In Africa, tour firms throw in a visit to an orphanage alongside a few days on the beach or watching wild animals. Critics argue that dropping in to take photographs of orphaned children, who may have seen parents recently waste to death, reduces them to the status of lions and zebras on the veld.*
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> *Many orphanages let tourists work with children. But what would we say if unchecked foreigners went into our children's homes to cuddle and care for the kids? We would be shocked, so why should standards be lowered in the developing world? Yes, resources might be in short supply, but just as here, experts want children in the family environment or fostered in loving homes, not in the exploding number of substandard institutions.*

The whole article is fascinating and should force us to ask some hard questions about the way in which Westerners take it for granted that we should intervene in the rest of the world. Similar criticisms could, no doubt, be raised about much that falls under the banner of Christian mission.