WHO SAYS WHAT AFRICA NEEDS?

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An American author tells us what Africa needs and an African disagrees. Who should we be listening to?
Category: Mission

Last month, The Gospel Coalition published an article entitled "Why Africa Still Needs Western Workers". As someone who writes about mission and tries to get churches more involved in what God is doing across the Globe, you'd think I would have been very happy with the article, but actually it left me feeling more than a little uneasy. The rest of this post will look at some of the issues, so it's probably a good idea to read the original article before going on to the next paragraph.

Did you read the original article?

Actually, I know that most people don't go back to read the original article, so here are a few quotes:

> *There are more thanÂ 340 million people in AfricaÂ living among people groups who have yet to be reached with the gospel. Thatâ€™s nearly 30 percentÂ of the entire population.Â Additionally, much of what is classified as â€œevangelicalÂ Christianityâ€ in Africa is influenced toÂ some degree byÂ prosperity theology.*
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> *The unfinished task of reaching all the peopleÂ in Africa must be seized by those who long for Christ to be magnified among its nations. These must be men and women willing to give their livesâ€"over the long haulâ€"for the cause of Jesus Christ. The remaining workÂ canâ€™t be completedÂ by short-term trips and hit-and-miss evangelistic crusades. Africa needs humble, dedicated,Â plantedÂ servants of Jesus.*
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> *The Great Commission has not been rescinded for the Western church.Â Another wave of pioneer missionaries is needed to advance the good news into regions of Africa where JesusÂ is still unknown, missionaries willing to lay down their lives if necessary to establish a gospel beachhead.*

As you can see, there is some good stuff in this, so why does it leave me feeling uneasy? The simple answer to this is that this is a white American diagnosing what is wrong with Africa and suggesting that the treatment involves more white Americans. Where is the African voice to round out the discussion?

Thankfully, there was a response to the article by an Ethiopian living in the US. This time you must read the full article!

... because you didn't go and read the full article, here are a few quotes.

> *Â I am writing as a by-product of an African Christian mother who raised me to fear God, prayed on her knees day and night for her children and is still a prayer warrior. She made such a deep impression of Jesus on my heart that I knew I could do nothing but follow Him. I am writing as the daughter of my dad, a Coptic Christian who believes we have been scammed by the â€œWhite manâ€™s religionâ€ and Â abandoned our roots of true Christianity. My dad still believes that the gospel as taught by a White man is a means of*

> *taking our land and abusing our people, therefore we need to protect ourselves from â€œthem.â€ Because of the damaging work of some long-term missionaries, our churches have been persecuted.*
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> *I am writing as someone who believes that missionaries are needed but not just Western missionaries.*
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> *Starting from the introduction, the TGC article paints such a dark and desolate picture of Africa that I wondered if I was reading aboutÂ my Africa. I quickly decided that this was a Westernerâ€™sÂ idea of Africa, which was a very offensive, unwelcome and disrespectful portrayal of the continent. The TGC article seems to totally overlook the fact that there are many churches doing good work and making disciples. It does not quote a single African author or pastor; it just talks as if Westerners somehow are a spiritual authority over the ENTIRE CONTINENT.*
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> *This type of thinking of missions is the perfect example of when helping hurts. The TGC article diagnoses Africaâ€™s problem asÂ savages that need civilization..*
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> *The TGC article is written to appeal to the white savior complex and, unfortunately, it works for the majority of Western Christians because it affirms the notion that â€œwe are perfect as Westerners and can go change the world.â€ As an African missionary to the U.S., I would like to challenge that thinking by simply asking American Evangelicals to search their hearts and consider spending a week or two in the redline districts of their cities. I would ask American Evangelicals to first deeply be convicted of their own racially-divisive and man-centered theology and repent; to reconcile with their Black brothers and sisters and reclaim the gospel of Jesus as the good news and not the rich White peopleâ€™s country club.*

Some of these reactions might be overstated, but they are a very helpful reminder that when we talk about "Africa" in abstract, we are actually talking about real people, thinking people with their own views, emotions and concerns. We should give them space to speak, too.

This post has mainly been a cut and paste job, in the next day or two I'll give some of my reflections on this issue.

(The Gospel Coalition has done this sort of thing more than once; read this post by Sri Lankan theologian, Vinoth Ramachandra for another take.)