

Title: From Colonizers to Co-laborers: Changing the Mindset of the American Church as it Engages the Needs of the Developing World.

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Abstract:

Over the last several decades, issues of hunger, poverty, disease, and other vectors of disadvantage across the world have become important areas of emphasis on the world stage. This emphasis has increased since the adoption by the United Nations of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. Economic, political, religious, intergovernmental, and philanthropic institutions have all sought to address and provide viable solutions for these issues. However, with all of this effort brought to bear, many of the poorest across the world remain separated from the benefits of advances made in these areas and continue to experience lives decimated by hunger, poverty, disease, displacement, violence, and more.

In this paper, I argue that the Church across the world has the potential to stand at the forefront of efforts to deal with these issues of disadvantage as they exist in the developing world. The resources available to the Western Church, particularly in America, create vast opportunities to address the needs of the world. These resources, coupled with the ideologies of equality, charity, universality, and mission that are central to the teachings of the Church, uniquely position it as a potential primary actor in the alleviation of much of the suffering that exists in both the developing and developed worlds.

After this discussion, I move to the identification of several shifts in thinking that must occur in the mindset of the American Church if it is going to be successful in engaging and addressing these global issues. The work of all of the institutions listed above demonstrates that macro-level approaches are only moderately successful – if at all – in addressing the needs of all people. Those at the margins still tend to remain there. For the Church to be effective in meeting the needs of “the least of these”, the emphasis must be placed on empowering local church communities in the developing world to develop indigenous, sustainable solutions to the problems faced by the people around them. The American Church must reposition itself as a mentor to and co-laborer with the Church in the developing world – a shift that will require some significant changes in the way the American Church thinks about itself and the developing world.

I conclude the paper with some thoughts about the need to remodel the way in which the poor and marginalized people of the developing world are framed in media directed toward the American Church in order to call people to action on behalf of these needy populations. The way in which members of the American Church respond to the needs of the world is directly related to the way in which they understand both needs and solutions and that understanding is driven in large part by the way these issues are presented. If the American Church is to move away from the paternalistic attitude it has taken in the past toward the developing world, the way in which it views that world must be changed. A framework that focuses more on systemic factors that perpetuate the problems faced in the developing world and that highlights indigenous solutions that are meeting the needs of the poor and

disadvantaged at the local level will serve to encourage the American Church to take its place alongside local congregations that are developing and implementing these solutions.