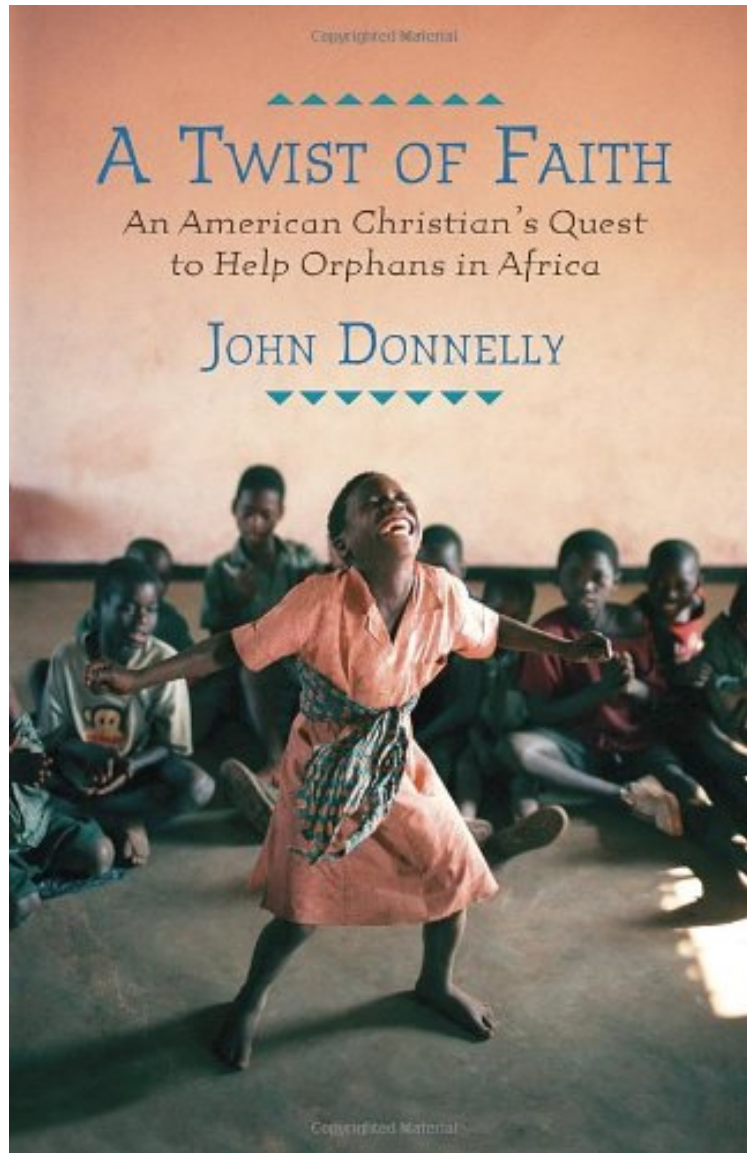


[Free download] A Twist of Faith: An American Christian's Quest to Help Orphans in Africa

A Twist of Faith: An American Christian's Quest to Help Orphans in Africa

John Donnelly

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John Donnelly : A Twist of Faith: An American Christian's Quest to Help Orphans in Africa before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Twist of Faith: An American Christian's Quest to Help Orphans in Africa:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Recommended if you are a Christian and researching the issue of

African orphans

By Heather Hall

Read this book but don't make it the only book on African children's issues you read. What I thought was valuable is that this book tells a truthful story about the efforts of one man, a man with no prior training in ministry, flying only on faith, trying to do something to help at risk kids in Malawi. The story does not turn out completely well. This man founds a school which starts with good local cooperation, high hopes and immediate success. The US founder places a Malawian pastor in charge of the school, then spends his time raising funds in the US while trying to manage a business he owns plus travel back and forth to Africa to oversee the school. Eventually, this single man also has to act as guardian for his pre-school grandson due the parent's drug use. The 2008 economic crash in the US dries up donor funding, the man's business struggles because his time and devotion is split, the Malawian pastor is found to be misappropriating the school's bank account, and the founder is increasingly emotionally torn between the demands of the children in Africa and the need to provide a stable home for his grandson. The book should help us to understand that ministry that is a one man show is weak ministry and that it's very hard for an individual to live in the US and carry out a strategic ministry on another continent, even if his intentions are pure and his inspiration is from God. Contrary to other reviewers, I was not impressed by the author. One great flaw of the book is that it is a story of faith written by an author with a secular mindset. That author tends to interject his own views into the story. I thought it really very telling that this author is willing to glibly criticize a Uganda charity called Watoto (I have no relationship with this ministry and am not their advocate) which has constructed orphanages for 1000's of kids in that country. He criticizes them because the standard of living and education of the children in the orphanage is higher than that of the surrounding villagers and because some children who grew up in some orphanages in Ethiopia (not Watoto's) expressed the feeling that they were not well prepared for integrating into society or life after the orphanage. Watoto explains that their goal is to prepare the children for leadership positions in the nation. The author thinks this is a waste of money. Instead he promotes the idea that aid organizations should provide funds that allow African orphans to remain in their extended families where they will receive love plus maybe provide village-wide aid such as better community schools. In a way derogatory of some Christians, he interjects his opinion that orphans will thus be surrounded by the love of their grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, while still being helped. They may receive an education not as good as in an orphanage, but they will be more loved and more "socialized" into society. Later in the book, the author goes on to tell the story of one of the orphans in the founder's school, Sousto. Sousto becomes very ill and dies in the hospital. While there, it is the American Christian founder who spends long hours at his bedside nursing him, and pesters doctors and nurses to do everything they can for him. When he dies, David Nixon buys new clothes for his burial and a new toy and slips it into the casket. We find out later in the book that his boy lived with a grandmother who more or less just tolerated his presence in her home, did very little for him and showed her so-called love for him by removing the new clothes and toy from the dead boy's casket and selling them. Thus contradicting the author's bold assertion that placing children with extended family members is better because they will be more loved. So I urge you to be prayerful when you read the book, in order to divide what's from Christ from what is not.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Informative but Misleading

By l.k.

First of all, this book has lots of information when it comes to the missionary work with orphans in Africa. Being someone who'd like to work as missionary, it was quite helpful for sharing the conditions of that work. But I also found the book quite misleading, being written about a christian missionary (Nixon) and involving a christian pastor (Jackson). Near the beginning, Donnelly speaks of how many missionaries come to other countries trying to help but end up causing more harm because they don't understand the culture. While I think this is a very important idea in missionary, I believe the book takes it too far. It comes across to me as they believe that a missionary needs to experience the culture and they need to base their actions on the ways of the culture, which I believe to be wrong. A christian is to follow the calling of God; not to base everything on culture. In one incident, the book speaks of when a man was being beaten for thievery while Nixon and Jackson watched. Nixon wanted to help the man while Jackson told him he couldn't because the mob would just attack them instead. Donnelly then agrees with Jackson, saying that it was admirable for Nixon to want to help, but he would have gotten hurt so it wasn't a good idea. Based on what the bible says, I believe that it is not okay to go along with the ways of any country just because it's what they do or just because you may get hurt by intervening. Romans 12:2 specifically says "Do not conform to the patterns of this world" and Hebrews 13:6 states "So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'" Nixon knew he could trust in The Lord if he stopped the mob, but Jackson and Donnelly both say it's much better to be safe than to stand up for what's right. The book says to christian readers that we are to conform to the culture of the country we serve rather than trusting in The Lord for safety and guidance.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

a much needed book in the christian "orphan care" world

By Mary C. Hoyt

I've been immersed in personal research about Africa's orphan crisis for two plus years trying to learn from what others have done and praying through what role I can play in serving the children and their communities in Kinshasa, DR Congo. I've been searching for a book like John Donnelly's and am thrilled to have found it. I've read many articles and websites about the principles Donnelly is advocating and how various groups are implementing them to varying degrees across Africa, but there's just something about a book -the heft of it, the cover to cover feel of it, the ability to go more in depth and present a broad range of data and stories in a comprehensive manner. Donnelly is an excellent

writer, a true journalist, and he has given this book to us, the American Christian orphan care community, as a gift of self-reflection. I plan to promote it at the 2013 May Orphan Summit and online until then!

American Christians, veteran reporter John Donnelly has discovered, are an ever-increasing source of aid in Africa, with some experts estimating that U.S. churches supply more resources to Africa than USAID. In *A Twist of Faith*, he tells the unlikely story of how faith and determination compelled one such American Christian to travel to Africa and open a school for children orphaned by the AIDS epidemic. David Nixon, a carpenter from North Carolina who had lived through his share of trouble, knew nothing about the small, land-locked African country of Malawi. But after having a religious awakening and hearing about a preacher's efforts to aid its impoverished and beleaguered citizens, he raises money from his church and sets off to do what so many well-intentioned Americans of faith do in Africa: build an orphanage. But as his plans are beset with difficulties, Nixon slowly comes to realize that helping others requires listening to and learning from them. And that means changing his preconceived ideas of what the Malawians need and how he can best serve them. *A Twist of Faith* is the story of one man who, despite personal struggles, a profound cultural gap, the corruption of local officials, and the heartbreak of losing an orphan he comes to love, saves himself by saving others in a place nothing like home. Nixon's story is representative of a growing trend: the thousands of American Christians who are impassioned donors of time, money, and personal energy, devoted to helping African children.

Through the story of David Nixon's faith-driven journey to save the destitute in Malawi, John Donnelly explores the tenets of true service to underserved communities and accompaniment of the poor, while focusing a shrewd reporter's gaze on the efforts of various American aid organizations in Africa. He offers a compelling account of the great joy, frustration, and personal sacrifice inherent in addressing the urgent moral claim of the poor on a Christian conscience. Paul Farmer, author of *Haiti After the Earthquake* Donnelly sheds light on the faith-inspired armies of compassion who have responded to a call to serve in Africa. By telling the personal story of the founder of one organization, we learn the fundamental truth that regardless of the sums of money involved, service requires human interaction, humility, and an openness to otherness. Ambassador Mark R. Dybul, co-director, O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law, Georgetown University In *A Twist of Faith*, John Donnelly documents the twisting road traveled by many from a faith-motivated righteous commitment to Africa's AIDS orphans to the far more difficult destination of doing the right thing. His protagonist David Nixon is an archetype for dozens of well-intentioned Americans I have met who triumphed or failed miserably in direct proportion to the degree that they were able to acquire humility, embrace African family and community values, and overcome the perception that they knew best what African children needed to thrive. An instructive and compelling read. Warren Buckingham, first recipient of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief Lifetime Achievement Award *A Twist of Faith* beautifully tells the story of an American Christian whose commitment to Africa's orphans moves him from confidence, passion and determination to humility, wisdom and dependence. Along the way he slowly learns the best practices that can truly honor a culture and its children. An important book for anyone who wants to be God's hands and feet in our broken world. Lynne Hybels, author of *Nice Girls Don't Change the World* "A rousing good read and cautionary tale of one man's mission to help AIDS orphans in Africa and how good intentions can pave the road to hell..." *Humanosphere*, KPLU's blog "Mr. Donnelly does a masterful job of slowly unraveling the troubled, complex, multilayered Mr. Dixon." *United Methodist Reporter* About the Author For more than thirty years, John Donnelly has reported in regions far from the United States, starting with the civil wars of Central America, delving into the political violence in Haiti, drawing out tales of conflict and peace in the Middle East and Asia, and then landing in Africa, where he feels most at home. In Africa, where he traveled as a staff reporter for the *Boston Globe* and later as a Kaiser Family Foundation fellow, he became intrigued by the steady stream of Americans with big hearts and big ambitions whose adventures are told in this book. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. From Chapter 1 A Moment in an African Field This was all new. The country, the people, the big sky, the red-clay road that was so narrow it seemed to have been built for bicycles. Just being in Africa made him want to praise the Lord, which he did frequently and with great feeling. David Nixon Jr., an evangelical Christian and a do-it-all carpenter from a suburb of Charlotte, North Carolina, couldn't have been more excited, or more on edge, as he rode in the back seat of a long white Toyota Hiace van into the African bush. He was traveling deep into the backcountry of a nation he had first heard about only months before and landlocked Malawi in southeastern Africa. He was in the middle of nowhere as far as he was concerned, about an hour's drive west of Lilongwe, the country's quiet capital. And he was with five fellow American missionaries, including two friends who, like him, were on their first trip to Africa. They had all come in the middle of the summer in 2002 with a loose plan to find local churches and work with them to help orphans. The six of them weren't sure if that meant contributing money and whatever expertise each of them had to offer, or if it meant diving in and doing it all themselves. Nixon was of average height and weight: five foot eight, 165 pounds. He shaved his head every day so close that his scalp shone, a habit he had begun a decade earlier when he'd spent months living in a tent, studying the Bible, and trying to figure out how he would follow God's word. He had strong arms, a broad chest, a linebacker's

shoulders, a booming baritone voice, and eyes that could be as playful as a child's or as stern as a drill sergeant's. He was not good at hiding his emotions. When he was having a good day, he was full of energy and vim, ready to attack life. When troubles got him down, his shoulders slumped as if he were Atlas carrying the weight of the world. Those dark moods would come and go, but they didn't stay as long as they had when he was a young man hounded by trouble. He attributed the elevation of his mood to his trust in God. God was his Father, and when Nixon said grace, he praised God so thoroughly that the food would often get cold. On this day in a field in Malawi, he felt vaguely like one of those explorers from a distant era. But he and his partners weren't looking for gold or diamonds, or for tribes that had had little contact with the outside world; they were hunting for a community in dire need of help. These men knew every community could use some assistance, so they needed to find a local organization they could feel comfortable with to act as their on-the-ground contact. They believed fervently they had to do all the good they could do for poor Africans, the polar opposite of the goal of most of those who'd come before them, decades and centuries earlier, people who wanted to pillage the continent's riches or enslave its inhabitants. Their mission couldn't have come at a more urgent time. According to estimates put forth by the United Nations, in recent years the number of orphans in Africa had grown to 34 million, a huge jump from a decade before, due to the AIDS pandemic, which had hit sub-Saharan Africa with greater force than anywhere in the world. In 2002, AIDS treatment was available to people in wealthier countries but to only a tiny percentage of HIV-positive people in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Just fifty thousand out of the millions of HIV-positive people in developing countries were receiving life-extending treatment. As a result, mothers and fathers in Malawi and throughout Africa were dying at alarming rates. Every day across Africa, relatives carried thousands of their near-to-death loved ones to hospitals that had no supplies or medications to save them. Hospital morgues stacked bodies in refrigerated and unrefrigerated rooms. The international community was just beginning to mount a response to this humanitarian emergency, forming the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria in 2002; in 2003, the Bush administration committed billions of dollars to an ambitious program called the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR. But government programs and the continued work of well-established charities and nongovernmental groups that had labored for decades to deliver aid on behalf of wealthy nations weren't the only responses. Mostly hidden from public view and rarely recorded or tracked by government or independent evaluators, thousands of private American groups, the vast majority of them faith-based, were stirred to action. According to academics who studied development assistance, those faith-based groups gave several billion dollars a year to African causes, a stunning amount that likely surpassed the contribution of the U.S. Agency for International Development's funding of African projects. Over the past decade, I've often crossed paths with this underground movement of mostly untrained aid workers who arrived in countries across Africa. Five years ago, I decided to take a much closer look. In the fall of 2007, supported by a global-health reporting fellowship from the Kaiser Family Foundation, photographer Dominic Chavez and I started to document what exactly was going on with the torrent of American do-gooders traveling around Africa to help children. I wanted to determine if these disparate efforts were making any difference, either positive or negative. I decided to go to Malawi first, a country I knew well from previous visits for my newspaper, the Boston Globe. And from the moment I started my journey, I saw American do-gooders everywhere. They were on every plane trip I took. In African countries, I ran into them at shopping malls, in government offices, in bars and restaurants at the end of long days. Usually within the first ten minutes of conversation, they brought up their deep Christian faith. More often than not, they extended an invitation for me to come see their work firsthand. I also spent hours with the U.S. embassy employees who were the architects of the massive American response to fight AIDS. These were some of the most dedicated government workers I have ever met. In the early days of the PEPFAR initiative, they all seemed to work sixty or seventy or eighty hours a week. They were so dedicated because they knew the better the job they did, the more lives they'd save. There was no doubt in their minds. How could there be? If you lived in sub-Saharan Africa in 2003, all you had to do was go to a morgue or a coffin maker's shack or the adult wing of a city hospital to be confronted by the inescapable truth: AIDS was destroying the population of young adults in Africa. The PEPFAR workers were fascinated by, and sometimes more than slightly uneasy about, all the private Americans from faith-based groups who were requesting information or showing up at embassies asking how they could help African children. Several longtime U.S. foreign-service officers estimated that the number of private do-gooders was two to three times higher than it had been in the 1990s. As the members of these faith-based groups boarded planes for faraway destinations like Lilongwe, Addis Ababa, Nairobi, and Dar es Salaam, they imagined themselves building orphanages. Some of them anxiously awaited the culmination of months of planning to be allowed to adopt parentless children. David Nixon's group from Monroe, North Carolina, was, in many respects, not so different from thousands of others. They were people with big hearts and big ideas. But like many of the others, they came without much else: without knowledge and, perhaps, without enough humility. Inside the van in the Malawi bush, Nixon videotaped the scene of their arrival: the road ending, groups of barefoot children chasing them, smiling and laughing and jumping and waving in the dust of the van's wake. The driver slowed the van to a stop, and Nixon hopped out. Trailed by children, he started to walk toward a clearing. From the far side of the field, a group of Malawians appeared, walking and singing contentedly and beautifully. They were singing in Chichewa, the local language, and their harmonies were so pleasing that the visitors stopped and let the group walk to them. Nixon began

to talk as he shot video. He mustered all the composure he could to describe the obvious: We just drove up and they started singing. That was it. He could say nothing else. As the singers came closer, their voices rising, he tried to speak, but he couldn't. Ordinarily, he had the confidence and natural charisma to talk with anyone. He would look everyone straight in the eye and squeeze his or her hand firmly as his own belief in God. He was earnest and evangelical, deadly serious and deeply committed, and he had the unshakable conviction that he was a crusading knight in a foreign land. But as he stood listening to the singing villagers, his knees weakened, tears rolled down his cheeks, and a chill crawled down his spine. He believed at that moment he was in the presence of God. The thought overwhelmed him: God stood with him. Why? Why now? Why here? What was it about that moment about the group of Malawians, the elder, and the children who had gathered all around him as he kept shooting video? He didn't know. All he knew was that he had to do something on this ground. He had to do something to help these children. He felt that God was commanding him to do so. As he wept, he silently made a vow. He was going to work in Africa, in this sliver of a country called Malawi that he knew nothing about, and he was going to help these beautiful children who had no parents. He was going to do good. The path before him would never seem as simple and clear as it did at that moment. He was headed straight for trouble, and even though he had dealt with plenty of trouble in his life, this would test him and teach him like nothing had before. A twist of faith had brought him here. But to weather the trials to come, he would need strength, perseverance, and, most of all, an open heart and an open mind.