

NOT A BAD SERMON...FOR AN ATHEIST!

An editorial in Times Online (12/27/08) recently caught my attention. The author, Matthew Parris, is a “confirmed atheist” and yet builds one of the strongest cases for world missions and evangelism I have read in a long time. The thrust of the article is Parris’ bold assertion that Africa needs more than “development.” Africa needs God! And Africans need to be converted! Obviously embarrassed by his own conclusions, he tries to explain:

...I used to avoid this truth by applauding... the practical work of mission churches in Africa (hospitals, schools, etc.). It’s a pity, I would say, that salvation is part of the package... I would allow that if faith was needed to motivate missionaries to help, then, fine: but what counted was the help, not the faith.

But this doesn’t fit the facts. Faith does more than support the missionary; it is also transferred to his flock. This is the effect that matters so immensely, and which I cannot help observing...

Having grown up in Africa, Parris discusses some of his own personal experiences on the continent. Over and over again he was forced to recognize the positive impact conversions made, not just on individual morality, but on the community.

...Whenever we entered a territory worked by missionaries, we had to acknowledge that something changed in the faces of the people we passed and spoke to: something in their eyes, the way they approached you direct, man-to-man, without looking down or away....

Christianity...with its teaching of a direct, personal, two-way link between the individual and God, unmediated by the collective, and unsubordinate to any other human being... offers something to hold on to to those anxious to cast off a crushing tribal groupthink. That is why and how it liberates.

Those who want Africa to walk tall amid the 21st-century global competition must not kid themselves that providing the material means or even the knowhow that accompanies what we call development will make the change. A whole belief system must first be supplanted.

And I’m afraid it has to be supplanted by another. Removing Christian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, the mobile phone and the machete.

Before you say “Amen,” recognize that what Parris says about Africa is equally true for the Dark Continent we inhabit! Preach it, brother!

Pastor Stan