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“Your Hands, Your Feet”: Evangelical Youth Culture and the Rise of Short-Term Missions

The slideshow is on YouTube – images of American young people smiling as they hug brown-skinned children, pray with adults dressed in saris or South American peasant dress, or simply stand with their arms around each other, mugging for the camera. Set to contemporary Christian music, the slides narrate a recent “short-term mission” carried out by a local church. There are uncountable thousands of these. The images and look of the shows are very similar: the Americans are usually young and healthy, often but not always white. The people they are visiting are poor, their poverty signified by their clothes and their living quarters. The environment, whether a megacity of the global South or a rural village, is made beautiful by lighting and love. The music is soaring, sometimes sappy, often up-tempo. If the trip is to India, then perhaps the music will be the song “Share the Well” by Caedmon’s Call. If to Cambodia, it might use Audio Adrenaline’s “Your Hands, Your Feet.” It could be any one of a broad swath of cuts from the worship albums and socially conscious soundings in the Christian music scene.

By the turn of the 21st century, the short-term missions movement that had begun slowly and fitfully in the 1960s had become a major social phenomenon among American Christians, particularly evangelical Christians. Since the 1990s, the missions trips, usually one to four weeks long, have become perhaps *the* paradigmatic activity of socially concerned evangelicals in the United States, especially for young people. A fully reliable count of total participants is almost impossible to come by, but observers estimate that about 1.6 million American Christians a year (including liberal Protestants and Catholics as well as evangelicals) go on some sort of short-term service trip abroad (Wuthnow 170, 126; Priest et al. 432). Most go to Latin America or the Caribbean, but increasingly they

have begun traveling to Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East as well. Participants often pay their own way. But some people, usually young, gather sponsors who make financial donations to support their “mission.” The average trip costs about \$2500 to \$3000. Multiply that by well over a million people a year, and the total financial commitment by American Christians is staggering.

Short-term missions are exemplary of the religious practices of many younger people in the United States. My interest here is in evangelical Christian travelers – theological conservative Protestant Christians who cross national borders in the hope of making or perhaps just tasting a form of evangelical internationalism. Examining the history and current manifestations of short-term missions among evangelicals, I also explore a form of transnationalism that is too often ignored in recent explorations of transnational history – the religious practice and community formation of evangelicals who are frequently presumed to be merely domestic in their orientation.

What short-term participants actually do varies a good bit. By the early 2000s, most people went on trips lasting two weeks or less (Eibner 433).¹ During their visits, short termers might help build a clinic or paint a school; they could work in an orphanage, just holding babies or playing with the children. For many participants, the goal of personal transformation is central: young people in particular go on the trips with the idea that they can and should change as a result, that the experience will involve emotional intensities and spiritual development.

One key to understanding the complexities of short-term missions is realizing just how controversial they are among evangelicals themselves. Promoters, and they are legion, claim that short-term missions are a “God-commanded” opportunity to take parochial Americans and make them into “world Christians” (Slimbach; Peterson). Detractors, and they are fewer but vocal, describe short-term missions as little more than tourism with the veneer of spiritual justification. Although these trips were controversial from their beginning in the late 1950s, the debate intensified starting in the early 1990s after the end of the Cold War and the rise of the United States as the late-century global hyper-power, when American Christians began to travel more and to go further. By the turn of the century, quite a

few evangelical intellectuals began to argue that it was entirely unclear how, or if, short-term missions benefitted anyone, either the North Americans who go abroad or those in the global South who supposedly receive the assistance the North Americans aim to provide.

In order to analyze the politics and stakes of this particular form of transnationalism, I investigate also the intersection between evangelical global visions and the politics of affect, looking particularly at a form of affective politics that I call “enchanted internationalism.” Attending to the work done by feelings of connection and enchantment, I help to unpack the political and spiritual stakes of this form of transnational evangelical engagement.

This engagement is linked to the history of Christian popular culture. Starting in the early 1990s, a rapidly growing evangelical culture industry played a key role in promoting short-term missions and helping to establish their meaning for participants. For the young people who dominate short-term missions, music matters. To understand the meaning of short-term missions, then, requires understanding the ways in which contemporary Christian music has constructed a vision of global outreach for young Americans. The music, like the trips themselves, is a series of performances, rituals of self-fashioning for people who long to engage the world, who aim for profound transformation but also look for the spiritual comforts of home.

Historians have long defined evangelicals by their adherence to a core set of Protestant tenets. First, evangelicals believe the Bible is inerrant truth, the word of God. This is not as simple as it might sound, and the question of just what “inerrant” means is a matter of great debate. Still, there is the centrality of the Bible as final, true, and authoritative.

Second, evangelicals believe in the necessity of personal salvation. In this view, there is no universal salvation for all people; each person must make his or her own choices. The third tenet follows from the second: evangelicals believe passionately in evangelizing others. If one believes that

individuals are responsible for their eternal fate, then he/she must help them know God and realize the stakes of the choices before them.

Finally, evangelicals believe in Jesus' crucifixion as the only path to God. There are no multiple roads, no assertions that "all religions lead to the same thing." Jesus died for our sins, and "no one reaches the Father" except by recognition of that reality. This set of beliefs is one way that evangelicals have traditionally distinguished themselves from religious liberals, including mainline Protestants. Until recently, and with a few notable exceptions, they have seen themselves as distinctly opposed to any ecumenical movement that downplays denominational differences on these fundamental tenets (Noll; Marsden; Worthen).²

Religious studies has in recent years challenged the very notion of defining religious groups by what they believe. The work of Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, and many others has argued that a focus on "belief" is a problematic way of categorizing religion. The idea that belief is central to it is built out of the assumptions of the European Enlightenment, which assumed that religion could be made private, removed from the political sphere, and defined by statements of assent rather than practices of community. "It is preeminently the Christian church that has occupied itself with identifying, cultivating, and testing belief as a verbalizable inner condition of true religion," Asad argues (Asad 48; Mahmood; Maffly-Kipp, Schmidt, and Valeri). And yet "true religion" is far more or perhaps other than this. Even evangelicals, who engage almost obsessively in defining what they believe and who believes differently, *live* their religion as much as they proclaim it. People go to church, feel themselves to be part of a community, pray (or not), and join in rituals, from pot-lucks to faith healing.

This is a compelling argument against defining evangelicals as only those who sign on to certain statements of belief. My own strategy is to say that "evangelical belief" consists of the four components above, but evangelical community is something broader and more amorphous, a set of performances and practices that are simultaneously local and mass mediated. Belief statements are everywhere in evangelical life, and they matter. But only by attending to practices and affects can we see how evangelicalism crosses all sorts of political and theological boundaries (Griffith and McAlister).

The rise of short-term missions occurred in three contexts that shaped US evangelicalism after the 1960s. First was the dramatic expansion of US power during and after the Cold War. Evangelicals could not entirely separate themselves from this power – from the way the US state shaped the terrain on which they operated; or from the wars, hot and cold, that opened spaces for evangelizing or created anti-American sentiment that made evangelizing much more difficult. They were never able to fully escape this reality. Sometimes, they did not want to. After all, being Americans meant that US evangelicals operated as citizens of the world’s wealthiest and most powerful country. American culture was a global cultural force, and American movies, commodities, and business models shaped both material desires and cultural values around the world. It is well known that those on the “receiving end” of US exports – whether those be sewing machines or Nikes or movies – were far from passive receptors of predetermined meanings (Poiger; Rosenberg). But the reality of outsized American political, economic, and cultural presence influenced the ways that US evangelicals were perceived, and how they perceived themselves. They operated so fully as emissaries of a prosperous – they might say “blessed” – nation that by the middle of the century it had become difficult, in sociologist Robert Wuthnow’s understated observation, “to disentangle the Christian message from images of U.S. wealth and power” (94).

The second context was US evangelicals’ increasingly activist role on issues of US foreign policy starting in the 1980s. The rise of the Religious Right is of course key here, as leaders like Jerry Falwell, Francis Schaeffer, and Pat Robertson articulated a political agenda that married anti-abortion, “pro-family,” and anti-feminist politics with an international stance that combined anti-communism with strong support for Israel – a support that sometimes, but not always, was linked to a belief in Israel’s importance to prophecies of the “end-times” (McAlister, 2005 155–97). Then, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, evangelicals all over the world joined in a religious remapping that focused on Islam, rather than communism, as the greatest threat to Christianity. Secular political leaders also engaged in this remapping, although they more likely talked about the “clash of civilizations” or of “radical Islam” as a threat to the West rather than Christianity per se (Huntington). After 1989, evangelicals

intensified evangelism to Muslims, Hindus, and others drawing on a map of the 10/40 Window, which described those people living within 10 and 40 degrees longitude in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East as people who, in the words of one leader, were “enslaved” by their religion. This evangelism was not infrequently linked with overt anti-Muslim sentiment, as when Franklin Graham (son to Billy Graham and leader of the evangelical aid organization Samaritan’s Purse) famously called Islam an “evil and wicked religion.” In the mid-1990s, a group of largely conservative evangelicals joined with other activists to push for the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. Evangelicals were also strongly supportive of the Iraq war, although this was far truer of white than black evangelicals (McAlister, 2009; McAlister, 2012). Those who went on short-term missions were not necessarily part of this remapping project per se, and it was rare (though not unheard of) for young groups of evangelicals to proselytize to Muslims, especially given that such proselytizing was often illegal. But no one who traveled to Muslim majority countries or to a place like India or Kenya could remain unaware of a larger context that positioned Christians as engaged in a global conflict with Muslims.

A third global context positioned US evangelicals more positively, as part of a global religious community in which white Americans and Europeans were no longer a majority. The global expansion of Christianity was one of the structuring realities of the postwar period. In the last decades of the twentieth century, Americans became acutely conscious of the emergence of what Philip Jenkins calls the “next Christendom” – the numerical growth and political power of the evangelical churches of the global South. Millions of people in Latin America, Africa, and Asia have converted to some form of Protestantism. In 2010, 61% of the world’s 1.3 billion Christians lived in the global South. The number was higher for evangelicals, almost 70% of whom lived outside the United States and Europe. In sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, Protestant Christianity is growing faster than anywhere else on earth. By the year 2050, only about one-fifth of the world’s Christians will be non-Hispanic white Americans or Europeans (Hackett and Grim; Jenkins). In the latter part of the 20th century, American believers increasingly functioned as part of a transnational community, one that required its own priorities and allegiances.

Through travel, immigration, and the internet, American Christians are increasingly linked to this rapidly expanding Christian population in the global South. Christians in the “majority world” (to use the evangelical term) have made their presence felt. They attend conferences, publish books, take on leadership roles, and send missionaries to the rest of the world, including to the United States. In the process, they have raised the awareness of their more privileged fellow believers about the economic realities, medical crises, and political instabilities that frame the daily lives of Christians outside the West. It was through an interaction with evangelicals in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America that US evangelicals – some of them at least – came to understand themselves as part of a truly global community, in association and sometimes in conflict with evangelicals internationally.

Leading evangelicals around the world were already well aware of the changing demographics of Christianity when the World Congress on Global Evangelization was held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974. During his first speech at the conference, the world’s leading evangelist, Billy Graham, cheered the visibility and energy of “younger churches,” as he stood before a multinational and racially diverse crowd of 4,000 delegates – who themselves spoke forcefully at the meeting as equals, not as missionary objects (Graham).

It was at Lausanne that a group of socially liberal evangelicals made their play on the field of theologically conservative evangelicalism. Led largely by a group of theologians from Latin America, they put forth the argument that “saving the lost” required more than just conversions. Evangelicals, they said, must attend to the daily realities of poverty and oppression faced by people around the world. They criticized US-style evangelicalism in particular as shallow and simplistic. The American focus on counting converts, the Latin Americans and their allies argued, “can only be the basis for unfaithful churches, for strongholds of racial and class discrimination, for religious clubs with a message that has no relevance to practical life in the social, the economic, and the political spheres” (Kivengere 138; McAlister, forthcoming).

Over the next few decades, the legacies of Lausanne were many. On the one hand, the “social concern” vision was rather roundly defeated, at least

in the US, by the Religious Right in the 1980s. The founding of the Moral Majority in 1979 was the most visible indication that, when evangelicals moved beyond a focus on saving souls, they were most likely to do so via conservative political activism. This was evident, too, in the conservative take-over of the Southern Baptist Convention, where both moderate theology and moderate politics were marginalized –indeed, almost wiped out – in the country’s largest Protestant denomination (Ammerman; Hankins). But starting in the early 1990s, some evangelicals, particularly younger people, who were politically conservative on some social issues (such as abortion or gender ideology) also began to involve themselves in social justice concerns about global poverty, child soldiers, and sex trafficking. These concerns were not necessarily approached in ways that would make secular liberals happy, so that, for example, the anti-sex trafficking work often carried with it a specific set of ideologies about American benevolence and female victimization (Bernstein). But it was a profound shift, one that combined theological conservatism and social concern in ways that went beyond the old pieties of the Religious Right. (In some ways, it reasserted the kind of social engagement that had been advocated by long-time *Christianity Today* editor Carl Henry in his 1947 book, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.)

By the early 2000s, the evangelical aid organization World Vision and its far more conservative counterpart Samaritan’s Purse both began to advocate for more US funding to fight HIV-AIDS in Africa. Gary Haugen of the International Justice Mission began organizing against sex trafficking, child soldiering, and global poverty. Advocates of “creation care” found ways of enlisting evangelicals in support of environmentalism. Even the SBC has changed, replacing the head of its Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, cultural warrior and right-wing stalwart Richard Land, with Russell Moore, twenty-five years younger, and, while hardly liberal, is known for promoting an agenda for the church that includes fighting global poverty, pursuing “racial reconciliation,” treating gay people with respect, supporting religious freedom for Muslims as well as Christians, and meeting the needs of the “most vulnerable,” including immigrants, all the while opposing gay marriage and abortion, and defending a staunchly conservative theology. In 2015, he called on

the US to welcome Muslim Syrian immigrants. What this means, in practice, is that while the Religious Right is hardly dead in the US – in some ways it has been strengthened via a backlash against gay marriage – conservative evangelicalism now includes a reinvigorated type of “social concern” that shares some agendas with liberals (King; Swartz; Gasaway; Hertzke; Cromartie; Castelli).

But it was perhaps that third context – the recognition that evangelical life was no longer centered only in the global North, and that people in Latin America, Asia, and Africa were shaping the transnational conversation about faith and practice – that influenced evangelical attitudes about the rest of the world in the most profound ways. Rather than posit people in the global South as (only) heathens to be saved, they now saw the dramatically expanding Christian populations of Africa, Latin America, and Asia as indications of a revitalization of the faith. Increasingly, those Global South believers were idealized, seen as embodying an admirable authenticity and zeal. No matter which tradition Americans came from, be it traditionally ascetic Southern Baptists or Mennonites, self-consciously respectable African Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches, or the more expressive Assemblies of God, they increasingly sought to enliven and “re-enchant” their own religious experience. They embraced spiritual practices that nurtured sensuous, emotive intensities in the face of the perception that modern US evangelical life, however committed to faith in “things unseen,” had left behind an abundant sense of the otherworldly (McAlister, 2008).

In the charismatic worship styles of much of the evangelical community in Africa and Latin America – the stories of miracles and faith healings, and a supposed freedom from the shackles of excessive wealth that bound Americans – US evangelicals saw an exemplary faith, one that showed Global South believers to be more passionate, more ideally Christian than most Europeans and Americans. Short-term missions were built on many foundations, but one fundamental one was this: American believers longed to share in the passion that they believed resided elsewhere.

Selling Short-Term Missions

Early short-term missions programs began in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when small cohorts of US evangelicals began to go abroad, some just for the summer, others for one or two-year commitments. By the mid-1980s, short-term opportunities had expanded dramatically. As short-term programs were institutionalized by denominations and parachurch groups like InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, advocates waxed enthusiastic about the ways in which the trips could change social consciousness, promoting the “social concern” visions that had emerged out of Lausanne. Key evangelical leaders signaled that the real goal of the short-term movement was to create, in the words of *World Christian* magazine, “compassionate, committed people who want their whole lives to count for the world that doesn’t know Jesus’ love.”³ The real explosion of short-term missions began in the late 1990s, when the internet and cell phones allowed participants to communicate with their families while on the trips, easing some parental concerns. As the logistics of travel became simpler, more and more churches and parachurch organizations began sending members.

The real entrepreneurs of short-term missions – the engines for expansion and the source of a great deal of innovation – were the scores of private groups who in the 1990s began to operate as missions “outfitters.” With names like Real Impact Missions and Adventures in Missions, these operated as essentially not-for-profit businesses. Some required adherence to a particular set of doctrines; others took pretty much anyone who wanted to go. The groups advertised broadly, with ads often focusing on the chance to serve in an atmosphere of adventure. The groups were successful if they were able to deliver specific experiences through a consumer-driven model, complete with well-designed logos that could decorate wall calendars or t-shirts. Wycliffe Bible Translators, for example, placed an ad in the early 2000s that featured an all-terrain vehicle traveling through the early morning light in an exotic-looking landscape that vaguely suggested Africa. The tag line – “Get Outta Town ... with short-term missions” – drew on wild-west language, a suitably faux-aggressive message, and the associations of Jeep adventure to make its appeal. This was a group generally known for its scholarly specialists who translated the Bible

into local languages. But they wanted volunteers, and, as one evangelical commentator pointed out, “Mission organizations have had to adapt to a competitive market”(Maclure i).

Perhaps nothing was so important to developing the vision of the short-term traveler as Christian popular music. Although the “contemporary Christian” genre started out in the 1960s as a combination of gospel and folk music, it has evolved to include subgenres like Christian heavy metal and Christian hip hop. Before the 1990s, Christian music had been largely apolitical; with a few exceptions, it was a jumble of “worship” music, love songs to Jesus, and/or stories of struggle to find or keep faith. At the turn of the century, however, Christian rock more generally began to take up international social justice themes (Luhr).

One early example of “global” Christian music was Audio Adrenaline’s 1999 song “Your Hands, Your Feet.” An upbeat rock anthem, the song distilled much of the logic of the short-term movement, especially in its call to young people. The song was built around the idea of promising God that “I’ll go where you send me.” (The reference is to Isaiah 6:8, where the Lord asks “who will I send?” and David replies, “Here am I, send me”). The accompanying video was essentially a three-minute ad for short-term mission. It amplified the call of the song, locating a general statement about the willingness to serve God into a specific story of the band’s trip to a remote village. The particular destination is not entirely clear, though it is likely set in Latin America or Asia.

The video opens with the band traveling in a canoe down a river surrounded by jungle. It moves to a close-up on a bandana-wearing David Haseldorff, the lead singer, as he sings of his desire to serve God: “I wanna be your hands; I wanna be your feet.” He will go where God sends. The band arrives in the village, where beautiful children are filmed in village settings. The children, and some of the band members, hold up signs that are handwritten on regular typing paper. The signs have a vaguely postmodern air: “Go,” one says. Other imperatives include “Serve,” and “Abandon self.” Interspersed with these are shots of the band playing with the children, throwing them into the water from an overhang as the children squeal in delight. At the close, the band members are shown in prayer with the villagers; the film highlights the damaged or diseased bodies, and the

prayer service seems to be one of a Pentecostal-style healing – a laying on of hands, as the song itself speaks of being the hands of God.

It is a vibrant, gorgeous video, and it was one of Audio Adrenaline's most popular. The political valence of the song's internationalism is complex. At one level, the video engages a traditional missionary narrative, with the young children providing local color to a vision of white people doing God's will. There is also more than a bit of the self-serving fantasy of the "benevolent imperialist" who is "saving the Third World." At the same time, there is another register, something gentler if still quite problematic. The place they visit is beautiful, the people are dignified. The band members (and, by association, their audience) are pouring their hearts out to the children, who presumably did not mind that the visitors didn't speak the language or know the history of this unnamed place. There is a Romantic vision here, which sees the Global South as exotic and admirable – or perhaps admirable only as long as it remains exotic. It is an anthropological register that has been long critiqued by scholars, and rightfully so. It is a form of evangelical internationalism built on enchantment, with all the dangers that suggests.

At the same time, "Your Hands, Your Feet" is also an important internal critique in the Evangelical world. Obviously influenced by secular music and a good bit of postmodern ironic style, the band represents itself as engaged with the world. They were influenced by grunge, 60s rock, and a bit of hip-hop, as well as pop. In that mode, as representatives of a younger, hipper kind of evangelical identity, they spoke to their audiences about commitment, engagement, a reach for something beyond the comfort of their limited and limiting home churches. It is the rock-radical anti-bourgeois stance of a great deal of popular music, but within evangelical culture it represented something distinct: a self-conscious refusal of what the musicians implied were the smug certainties of the televangelist generation. It was time to look beyond our borders, they said, and not just by sending other people (old-style missionaries) to do the work. It isn't enough, *they* aren't enough, because they don't have the worldly reach and global South affiliations of Christian youth culture (Hendershot; Clark).

The Debate

Most advocates for short-term missions argue that they have two purposes. The first is to help where help is needed; Americans should be able to give of their time and their financial resources to help in situations of poverty, natural disaster, or the aftermath of violence. The other is that the mission trips give lay people the chance to see the realities outside their home churches and presumably comfortable lives. Working in situations of crisis, they can expect to have their consciousness changed, and to return newly committed to both missions work and to helping change the lives of the poor. In the words of Robert Priest, professor of missions at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, the trips are like pilgrimages, “rituals of intensification” where participants leave their ordinary daily routines for “an extraordinary, voluntary sacred experience ‘away from home’ in a liminal space where sacred goals are pursued, physical and spiritual tests are faced, normal structures are dissolved, *communitas* is experienced, and personal transformation occurs” (Priest 433-434). In fact, it is the promise of participants’ transformation that is most compelling for advocates. They know that a week or two of work will not substantively impact the lives of people who are receiving short-term missionaries. Rather, advocates hope that the travel will lead to increased support for missionary work or perhaps the participants’ more general commitment to global social justice (Trinitapoli and Vaisey).

As STMs grew exponentially in the 1990s, however, so did the criticism leveled at them from within the evangelical community. Evangelical leaders were often apoplectic at the ignorance they saw short-term missions participants display, and they were unrelenting in their critiques of the “neo-colonial” attitudes that they believed were hindering, not helping, the spread of God’s word. Commentators first outlined the condescending or merely ignorant behavior exhibited by some Americans. One commentator argued that evangelicals had begun to see short-term trips as “spiritual tourism,” something closer to a package holiday in which “no real engagement occurs nor are emotional ties forged...the exercise simply reinforces worn stereotypes and old power relations” (Maclure ii). Although evangelical participants believed they were having their perspectives changed, it was

too often the case that very short trips only encouraged Americans to see other people as object, in desperate need, and necessarily quite grateful for their presence.

Educator Terence Linhart described this dynamic in detail after working with a group of high-school students traveling to Ecuador. The members of the group started out with a heightened expectation of spiritual experience. And, almost uniformly, they went on to describe their mission trip as an opportunity to connect with more fundamental realities than those offered by their privileged lives at home. Yet the students' insights about their own relative wealth and consumer-oriented lifestyles, however valuable, were often based on their misreading, or at least over-reading, of the behavior of the people they visited. As Linhart explained, the young Americans interacted with the Ecuadorians as if they were in a museum exhibit:

The students gawked at the 'living artifacts' from Ecuador without really encountering them. The Americans worshipped alongside the Ecuadorians, performed for them, and poured out their affection on their children. However, with limited ability to cross the chasm of language, the students were unable to make accurate perceptions about Latins.

For example, the students described the Ecuadorians as "so alive" and "joyful." Delighted with this apparent reality, the students contrasted their own experience, noting (many for the first time) that they came from a consumerist society, that their own culture seemed shallow and sterile by contrast to the loving extended communities that they saw around them. Their hosts, they believed, were "living with enviable vitality," operating joyfully without all the "stuff" that cluttered their own lives at home. This was enchanted internationalism doing its work. In the face of ambiguous evidence, it made particular kinds of interpretations *feel* right. In reality, the hosts were often simply being polite, smiling at visitors but not particularly happy to be so admirably free of "stuff."

Another objection centered on resources. Hundreds of millions of dollars every year were going to support the missions, and many times the "work" was of relatively little significance. American visitors often liked to perform specific and concrete undertakings during their trips; they wanted

to paint walls or build houses. This was fine when it was needed, but sometimes it was simply a way of making sure the short-termers felt good about themselves. One minister who coordinated the visits of STMers to an orphanage in Mexico described what he did when a group demanded to have a specific task to complete.

I've got this wall. When a group comes that can't handle what's required to build relationships with Mexican kids, or insists on completing a task so they can 'accomplish' something, I put them to work on The Wall. They feel like they're a big help, and it keeps them out of everyone's hair so the ministry isn't compromised.

When the team left, the locals tore down the wall (Becchetti).

As these critiques about usefulness, resources, and strained relationships grew more insistent in the early 2000s, proponents of short-term missions argued that the primary goal was to help young people change. If they arrived ignorant or insensitive, they might leave less so (Ver Beek). Many evangelicals worked hard to devise trips that encouraged self-knowledge. Intersarsity Christian Fellowship, for example, developed its "Global Urban Trek" into a six-week program that required students to learn something about the country they were staying in, to live in conditions close to those of the people they were serving, and to travel with very little of the spending money that might provide a "tourist" experience. But this remained the exception. Most trips were shorter, less politicized, and more comfortable.

Sometimes, it was the very claim that short-term trips were enriching that sent commentators into near despair. After detailing the expense of the trips, the ethnocentrism of many participants and their demands for creature comforts, one professor at Azusa Pacific University described missions trips as "staged tourist spaces" where each side engaged in a performance. Part of the problem was the insistence of Americans that their trips be intense and "life-changing." Locals were supposed to provide that opportunity. "While we may cite the example of Jesus as the basis for our short-term projects," the professor commented dryly, "his sending [of missionaries] was expressly not about providing the messengers an

unforgettable experience”(Slimbach). In other words, this was not supposed to be about you.

With this level of critique, even outrage, it might seem a wonder that any short-term missions continued at all. But the train had left the station. In 2002, a number of programs announced a set of “Standards of Excellence” for short-term missions that were designed specifically to respond to the critiques of the 1990s. Short-term trips should be ‘God-Centered,’” using “culturally appropriate methods.” Groups would offer “Biblical” and “timely” training to participants, along with comprehensive follow up. The standards were vague about what any of these terms meant, but they clearly were designed to make a statement: no more fly-by night, in-and-out mission trips. Just as clearly, they could barely stem the tide (Walker 2003).

In all of these aspects – the exoticization, the solipsism, the casual arrogance of those who designated others as abject – evangelicals were not so different than other Americans who traveled to the Global South, whether on alternative spring breaks or for study abroad. Scholars have assiduously unpacked the ways in which study abroad, and the concept of the “global citizen” it was built upon, has moved away from being a potentially radical vision to become a marketing phrase, something that makes students more employable (Caton and Santos; Bolen).

Ultimately, perhaps the most important aspect of the evangelical short-term missions movement was that it happened in the context of a self-selecting community, one involved in a consistent, insistent conversation about the value of what they were doing. The popularity of the movement was evident both in the mass migration of Americans each summer and in the requisitioning of resources from US churches to fund the travel. A generation of believers has gone where they thought God sent them, and they did so in ways that were often deeply problematic. But unlike most college students or those happily participating in alternative breaks, the short-term participants often came home to parents, youth ministers, or

friends who may well have heard about the debate and who were asking themselves and others about US evangelical privilege.

Since the 1990s, there has been an upsurge in US evangelical attention to issues of global poverty, HIV-AIDS, child soldiers, and environmental degradation. It is all but impossible to prove causality, but it is clear that as evangelical leaders listened to the stories of those who had to receive arrogant Americans into their churches, they developed a multifaceted critique of neocolonial attitudes, structural inequality, and racism. US evangelicals remain a very conservative community overall, but millennial evangelicals are distinctly more liberal than older generations, particularly on issues of global poverty and the environment (Cox). There are surely many reasons for this, not least that the evangelical community itself is changing, like the United States overall, through immigration – “evangelical” can no longer be taken to mean “white” (Pew Forum 2008). But these intersecting global realities have mattered a great deal, too. The demographic changes that have made Global South evangelicals a more powerful force; the increased travel and communication that forge new connections between distant places; and the affective longings that have structured US evangelical border crossings – all of these have constructed new forms of transnationalism, and new forms of evangelical worldliness.

Notes

¹ Two-thirds of all trips are for two weeks or less, according to the results of Eibner’s survey of seminary and college students, as well as adult Sunday school classes.

² Marsden’s elegant formulation is that evangelicals are “people professing complete confidence in the Bible and preoccupied with the message of God’s salvation of sinners through the death of Jesus Christ.” (3).

³ This description is from a flyer attached to a letter from David Bryant to Bonnie Coleman, dated May 1, 1986. Coll 300: 236-16, BGCA.

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