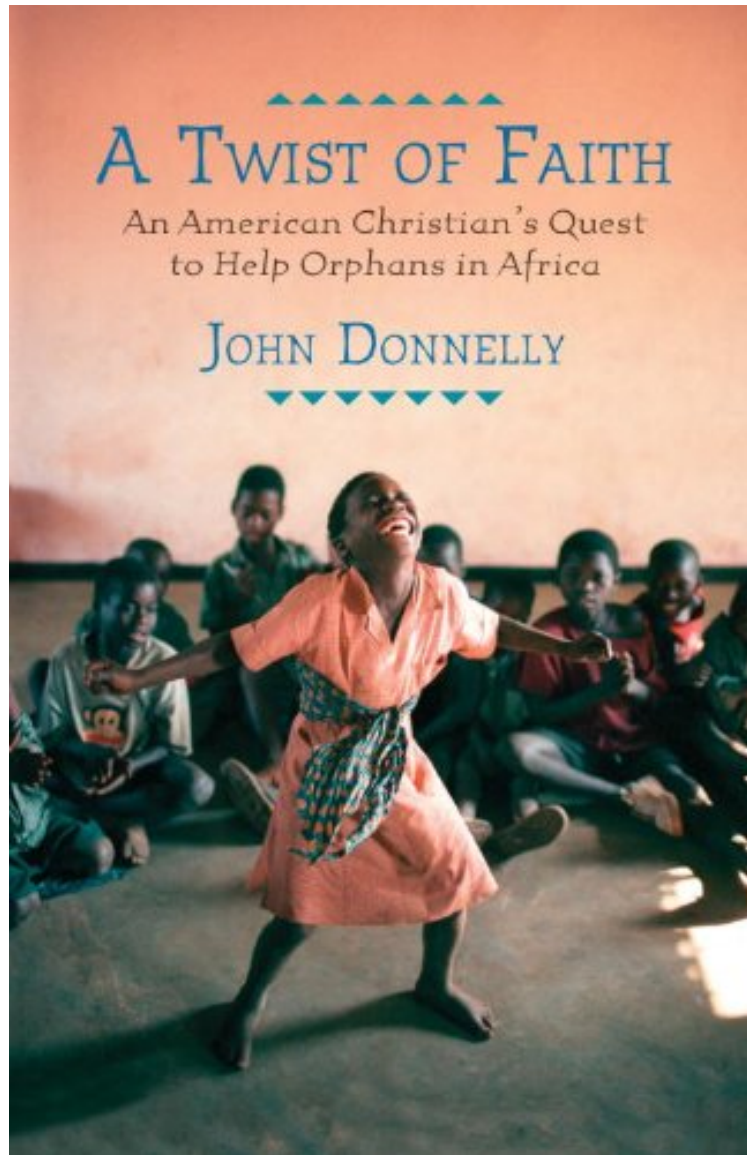


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## A Twist of Faith: An American Christian's Quest to Help Orphans in Africa

*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 orphansBy Heather HallRead 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 to 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 a 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 work, I believe the book takes it too far. It comes across to me as if 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.