

RIGHT or WRONG? Helping world Baptists

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Fifty-seven percent of the world's Baptists live in North America. U.S. Baptists say we are mission-minded and concerned about social justice. But are we so self-centered and content that we can't provide major assistance to expand the Baptist movement worldwide?

It's right that most Baptists live in North America and that we give lip service to missions and social justice. It's wrong for us to be so self-centered and content that we aren't providing adequate resources to expand the Baptist movement worldwide.

More than 6.85 billion people live on our planet. More than 1 billion of them subsist on less than \$365 a year. Another 2 billion subsist on less than \$730 a year. Even in the midst of a great recession, the average U.S. citizen remains among the top 1 percent of the world's richest inhabitants—living on around \$15,924 per year. Everything the Bible says about the love of mammon and the perils of wealth is addressed to us. We, young and old, are the rich young rulers of the world.

Baptists need to realize God measures our responsibilities in proportion to our blessings. "To whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48). God already has given us the resources necessary to see the gospel shared with the whole world, but we spend most of it on ourselves. Even some mission trips to foreign lands have been more for the benefit of those making the trip than for the benefit of those being visited. A Baptist missionary tells me of a fence on a mission field that gets a fresh coat of paint more than 10 times a year because our mission groups are not

interested in doing the real work of missions.

In [*The Next Christendom*](#), Phillip Jenkins highlights global trends indicating population centers for church growth already are shifting from Europe and North America. The future of the church undoubtedly will be in the Southern Hemisphere. It is a future that will have little Baptist influence unless North American Baptists reset our priorities and mission strategies. Without strong Baptist influence and our distinctive emphasis on liberty of conscience and separation of church and state, the future of the church in the Southern Hemisphere could repeat some of the most egregious errors of European Christianity. The union of church and state, nominal faith, disdain for democratic forms of governance, religious intolerance and the persecution of dissenters made much of the history of the Western church a trail of blood. Some of that blood was Baptist. History need not repeat itself.

Baptists need to focus on raising up, training and providing resources for the generation of indigenous leaders who have been won to Christ in the Southern Hemisphere. Our most fruitful efforts will be in raising awareness, prayers, funds and resources for the work these native leaders will be doing for the work of God's kingdom.

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Right or Wrong? is sponsored by the T.B. Maston Chair of Christian Ethics at Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon School of Theology. Send your questions about how to apply your faith to btillman@hsutx.edu.