



Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience

Brian M. Howell

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Over the past few decades, short-term mission trips have exploded in popularity. With easy access to affordable air travel, millions of American Christians have journeyed internationally for ministry, service and evangelism. Short-term trips are praised for involving many in global mission but also critiqued for their limitations. Despite the diversity of destinations, certain universal commonalities emerge in how mission trip participants describe their experiences: "My eyes were opened to the world's needs." "They ministered to us more than we ministered to them." "It changed my life." Anthropologist Brian Howell explores the narrative shape of short-term mission (STM). Drawing on the anthropology of tourism and pilgrimage, he shows how STM combines these elements with Christian purposes of mission to create its own distinct narrative. He provides a careful historical survey of the development of STM and then offers an in-depth ethnographic study of a particular mission trip to the Dominican Republic. He explores how participants remember and interpret their experiences, and he unpacks the implications for how North American churches understand mission, grapple with poverty and relate to the larger global church. A groundbreaking book for all who want to understand how and why American Christians undertake short-term mission.

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