

Review: A Just Mission: Laying Down Power and Embracing Mutuality

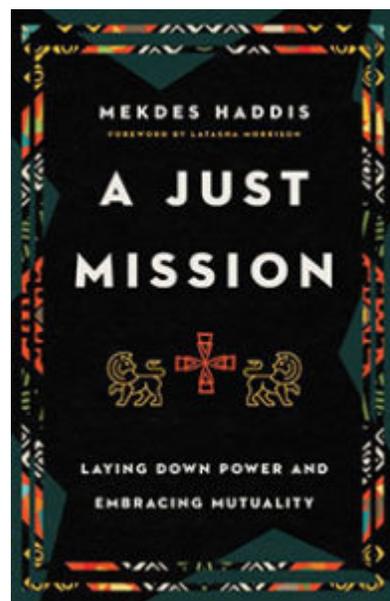
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A Just Mission: Laying Down Power and Embracing Mutuality

By Mekdes Haddis (IVP)

Almost 20 years ago, a man from West Africa told me African Christians pray for American Christians because they consider us weak. I was surprised but couldn't argue with his justification of the opinion. Mekdes Haddis describes in greater detail what that man told me.

Haddis grew up in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and immigrated to the United States to attend college and pursue ministry. Alongside her Ethiopian and African roots, she was introduced to Western culture and Western Christianity at a young age. Short-term and paternalistic missions are a key feature of that Christianity.



Western mission efforts are grounded in the assumption that the purest

form of Christianity resides in the West. Therefore, Western and predominantly white missionaries must take this pure form of Christianity elsewhere and conform other cultures to it, Haddis argues.

She also sees Western mission as centered on personal self-actualization and pursuing personal fulfilment, however well-intentioned, through using the poor and the least. Having participated in the kind of trips she critiques, it's hard to argue against her point.

Western Christianity prioritizes dogmatic theology over the work and involvement of the Holy Spirit, even to excluding it or being suspicious of it, she contends. Meanwhile, charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity—with its emphasis on the Holy Spirit—is exploding throughout Africa, Asia and South America as Christianity continues to decline in Europe and North America.

Haddis loves spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and is passionate about how that is done. Specifically, she calls for the end of transactional mission trips from the West. In their place, she advocates for the West taking a listening posture, and only engaging relationally with others through mutuality.

Missions is about character and discipleship, not institution building, avoiding guilt and feeling good, Haddis asserts. Those sent on mission should have at least the same depth of Christian character we expect of ministry leaders in the United States, but most short-term mission trip participants are not vetted for Christian character.

In *A Just Mission*, Haddis delivers an unsparing and searing indictment of Western missions. She pulls no punches. Every chapter lands at least one punch, each one true. She's not trying to make friends; she's telling the truth.

Despite her harsh critique, she also outlines a constructive and beautifully

positive approach to mission that recognizes the work of God's Spirit around the globe and the spiritual gifting of Christian leaders throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin and South America. She also praises what Western Christianity has contributed to world Christianity—such as translating the Bible into multiple languages and promoting biblical literacy.

Haddis' perspective on Nehemiah is worth close study, especially for white evangelicals who use Nehemiah as a paradigm for leadership. Her discussion of diaspora communities, often overlooked by American Christians, will enlarge evangelical missions. Her counsel to American Christians to start missions at home in their own communities before going abroad is prophetic.

A Just Mission is must-reading for any church engaged in mission work outside the United States or with cultures other than their own within the United States. Mission committees and teams will gain immeasurably from Haddis' experience, wisdom and spiritual gifts.

*Eric Black, executive director/publisher/editor
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