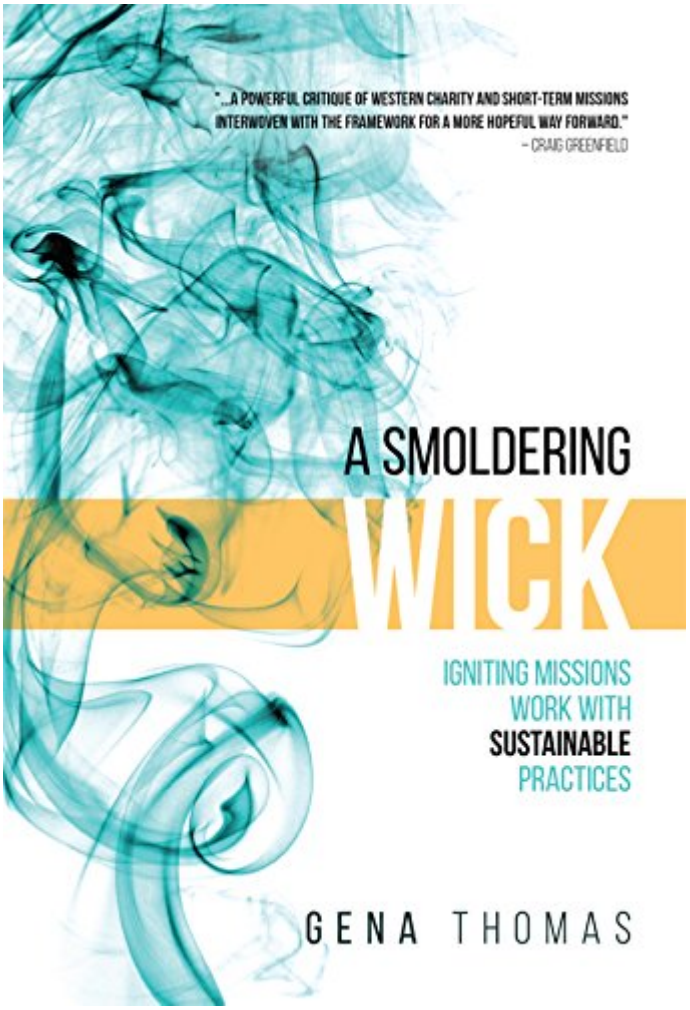
BOOKS I HAVE READ: A SMOULDERING WICK

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If you are involved in short-term mission and you don't read this, then you are not taking your job seriously enough!
Category: Reviews



A Smoldering Wick: Igniting Missions Work with Sustainable PracticesÂ by Gena Thomas is a book that should be read by anyone involved in leading or organising short-term mission teams. Let me be blunt, if you are involved in short-term mission and you don't read book, then you are not taking your job seriously enough!

The print edition is a medium sized paperback with just over 270 pages and will set you back about Â£10, though the Kindle version costs just over half that (guess which one I read). There is a liberal sprinkling of footnotes and a good bibliography.

There is an advertising blurb on the front which reads,

> *... a powerful critique of Western charity and short-term missions interwoven with the framework for a more hopeful way forward.*

This more or less sums the book up and I don't really need to write much more, but I will anyway.

Firstly, the negative. I actually found it hard to follow the thread of the book at times. The content is excellent, but it doesn't always hang together as a whole and could do with some tight editing. The author is writing for an American audience, which means that some of the illustrations and detail don't work too well internationally - but anyone involved in mission should be able to contextualise the text!

The plus points are that the book provides both a thought through critique of some approaches to short-term mission and some solutions to the problems it raises. It isn't just a "short-term is bad" rant. The book is heavily influenced by bothÂ When Helping HurtsÂ andÂ Walking With The PoorÂ both books I regard very highly. There are also quotes from a wide range of authors including Tim Keller, Lesslie Newbiggin and Martin Luther King.

The thrust of the book is that mission (short-term mission in particular) needs to be thought of in terms of justice, not charity.

> *Biblical justice is the act of practicing the rightness of God on earth, therefore making the coming kingdom of heaven a present reality.*

Charity as the term is used in the book is not a term or concept found in the Bible, but it does describe a common attitude to mission.

> *Charity usually signifies a top-down approach to helping those in need.*

The book goes on to unpack these issues and to explore the implications of the concept of justice for short-term mission. These include who we relate to people, how we talk about and publicise mission trips and how short-term mission can (and, indeed, must) be integrated into a long term framework.

The last chapters give an introduction to some planning tools which the author suggests can be used to plan mission trips. These include staples such as log frames, SWAT analysis and stakeholder grids. If you've worked with these you will know what they are, if you haven't then you need to read the appropriate chapters.

The book closes with a number of appendices which give suggested forms for planning and evaluating mission trips (in English and in Spanish). These are useful, but would need some degree of contextualisation outside of the US context.

To close, here are a few quotes to whet your appetite:

> *Charity has an expiration date because hand-outs and self-sustainment contradict each*

> *other. The economically poor father, who cannot provide Christmas gifts for his family, does not simply need relief. He needs development. He needs new opportunities for a sustainable life, so that he can choose and provide those gifts the following Christmas. Most short-term missions trip participants and churches want to see visible results. But hereâ€™s the rub: â€œDevelopment is a lifelong process, not a two-week product,â€ say Corbett and Fikkert. And that might be the conundrum of short-term missions and why many of them do damage. We seek products, not processes, and in the end, we either force those products to produce, or we feel that weâ€™ve failed because thereâ€™s no quantifiable success to bring back to our donors or church community.*

> *We need to encourage our missionaries to be honest. A missionaryâ€™s funding shouldnâ€™t be based on the amount of amazing salvation stories that missionary has. My friend Natalie Raponi says, â€œRedefine the metrics of success in a way that encourages the good, the bad, and the mundane.â€ Half-truths, partial anecdotes, and glory stories potentially give us worldly glitter, while the mundane whole truths may potentially turn people away from our cause. Charity pats us on the back. Justice sometimes kicks us in the knees. In the end, the God of justiceâ€"who bruised His own son for loveâ€™s sakeâ€"may be more interested in bruised knees than in patted backs. Authenticating Emotionalism Emotions were created by God, so why is it so bad if we follow them?*

> *Advertising techniques that merely convey an image may bring in the money, but they are not the means to accomplishing a genuine spiritual work. The churchâ€™s â€œmanner of speaking the truth must not be aligned to the techniques of modern propaganda,â€ writes Newbigin in The Gospel in a Pluralist Society â€œbut must have the modesty, the sobriety, and the realism which are proper to a disciple of Jesus.â€*

By the way, if you are involved in short-term mission and you are not aware of the Short-Term Mission Code of Best Practice, then you should be (follow the link, NOW).