

Lalsangkima Pachuau. *World Christianity: A Historical Theological Introduction*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2018. 247 pages. \$25.33. ISBN 9781426753183.

Lalsangkima Pachuau, J.W. Beeson Professor of Christian Mission and Dean of Advanced Research Program at Asbury Theological Seminary, in his exciting book “World Christianity: A Historical and Theological Introduction,” examines the development and growth of world Christianity by tracing its historical shift from Western domination to demographical domination by the majority world. The book is structured in seven chapters which begin by proposing a preliminary definition of the term “world Christianity” and move towards presenting key developments and movements that led to the present shape of world Christianity.

The first chapter gives the reader a glimpse into the enormity of the task at hand in defining and understanding world Christianity. This is done by highlighting the diversity and tensions with previous understandings of Christianity brought about by the growth of localized expressions and understanding of Christianity.

In the second chapter, the author presents the major influences and contributions of the Enlightenment and modern missions leading to world Christianity. He also shows that while these were important, there has been a tendency to overemphasize their influence on world Christianity. The case is made by highlighting the resistance towards the modernizing influence of the Enlightenment characterized by the continuance of belief in the supernatural in the majority world and the resultant proliferation of charismatic movements in these areas. It may be fruitful to further examine this while considering the tension caused by the influence of educational systems and forms of government largely based on Enlightenment frameworks in much of the majority world.

Chapters three and four form a two-part presentation of the major Christian movements in the majority world. These are key to understanding not just the history but also the character of world Christianity. The author highlights the role of enculturation of Catholicism in Latin America and the tension between the tendency to maintain the status quo and liberation oriented theological movements. Additionally, he stresses the impact Pentecostalism has had on the shape of Christianity in Latin America towards the end of the twentieth century. The bottom-up nature and charismatic orientation of African Christianity are also highlighted in this chapter.

Chapter four continues the presentation of world Christian movements by focusing on Asia and the Pacific Islands. Like the previous chapters, the author divides his presentation by regions seeking to highlight commonalities and distinctives within each region. Each section makes note of the historical factors that led to the growth or lack of growth of Christianity in the region and transitions to highlighting the present state of affairs. Additionally, he also emphasizes the role of indigenous missionaries for each region. This is an important addition to the understanding of world Christianity wherein local missionaries are given their due. It may be informative to examine the contribution of early local missionaries in the formation of theology in these regions.

The fifth chapter makes a key contribution by noting key theologians in the field of contextual theology while also pointing to the failure of their approaches in addressing socio-political realities and their prioritizing of the missionaries’ role. He presents “theologizing in context” as an alternative. However, he also critiques approaches within this, like liberation theology for their overemphasis on the socio-political while underemphasizing the role of faith and the present blessings of God. He calls for a recognition of the diversity of voices in contextual theologizing as an indicator of Christianity’s polyvocal nature. This is a helpful

perspective that can allow the theologian to hold disparate voices in tension while holding to the unity of Christianity. However, how this can be realized methodologically remains an area of further study.

The sixth chapter examines contextual theologies in the majority world. He begins by presenting three key issues associated with the experiences of people in the majority world – religiosity of the people, poverty and inequality, and the tensional existence between tradition and change. The contributions of each of the regions – liberation theology from Latin America, Inculturation from Africa, and the theology of religions from Asia – are presented in the rest of the chapter.

The final chapter seeks to distill insights from the previous chapters to present a picture of the present state of mission in the world. He first highlights the changes taking place in the academic understanding of missions. Following this, he shows how the majority world regions have become missionary sending regions both internally and back to the Western world.

The author has undertaken an immense task in trying to present a cogent picture of world Christianity within a single volume. This approach does lead to details being glossed over. However, the limited scope of the book makes it accessible and understandable even to new readers. The structure of the book, presenting a broad strokes picture of world Christianity from a historical theological lens, can be useful for more seasoned readers also, who seek to get a wider perspective on an immensely diverse and complex topic. Finally, the title of the book with its use of the words “World” and “Christianity” provides a key insight into the intention of the author as he tries to highlight the diversity and span of world Christianity while laying emphasis on its unity. This book has the potential to be a helpful text for graduate students who seek to begin delving into world Christianity with all its complexity.

Matthias Phurba Sonam Gergan