

Lalsangkima Pachuau, *World Christianity: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018). xv + 247 pp. \$34.99 paperback.

In *World Christianity: A Historical and Theological Introduction*, Lalsangkima Pachuau, John Wesley Beeson Professor of Christian Mission at Asbury Theological Seminary, offers a distinguished introduction on the contexts and ramifications of world Christianity. Following Andrew Walls, Pachuau understands the gospel as tensioning between the tendencies to identify with the world and to transform it, but goes further than Walls in advocating that such tension “governs the enterprise of theology” where “all forms of contextual theology are molded out of” (xiv). Therefore, Pachuau’s discussion of world Christianity is anchored within a paradigm of tensions between the West and the majority world, as well as between the gospel’s two tendencies. The project first describes the current state of world Christianity before addressing its implications concerning contextualization and mission. Note that while Pachuau locates world Christianity between western Christianity, Eastern Christianity, and Christianity of the majority world, the focus is on the last group (xiv).

In chapter 1, Pachuau seeks to define world Christianity and identify the historical and theological causes of it. World Christianity is viewed as the phenomenon where Christian faith exhibits a worldwide reach, where it is “owned at heart by people of diverse cultures and societies from every region and every continent, and portrayed in the multiplicity of church traditions, cultural expressions of faith-practices, and doctrinal voices” (2). Globalization is cited as the backdrop that allows Christianity to become a worldwide faith, while the gospel’s nature to incarnate and transform is regarded as the theological factor. Tracing the history of the study on world Christianity, Pachuau identifies Walbert Buhmann and Andrew Walls as the pioneering scholars, while crediting the World Council of Churches (WCC) as the first direct dealing with world Christianity. As Pachuau conducts the study on world Christianity around the framework of “West and the Rest” (24-25), the impact of the Enlightenment on Christianity is examined (chapter 2). The Enlightenment forged western Christianity and the modern missionary movement, which sowed the seeds of world Christianity (31). Here Pachuau argues that the ways Christianity in the majority world differs from western Christianity are evidences of the majority world being oblivious and resistant towards Enlightenment ethos (29-30).

After setting the stage for discussing world Christianity, Pachuau explores emerging Christian movements during the post-colonial period (chapters 3 and 4), evaluating their contributions to the demography of Christianity while assessing the socio-political factors and theological features that shaped them. Latin American Christianity experiences a

revitalization despite a slight decline in the overall Christian population. The predominant Catholicism undergoes a spiritual renewal as laypersons yearn to meet the increasingly challenging sociopolitical environments while the articulation of liberation theology provides the theological framework. Protestantism also plays a more significant role than before, as it is often used to energize social movements. Pentecostalism grows conspicuously, and Latin America becomes the continent with the most Pentecostals.

African Christianity encounters the most dramatic Christian population growth, from 80M in 1970 to 335M in 2000 despite the depressingly deteriorating socio-political climate (54). During this period, all denominations experienced significant growth (Orthodox's growth of 230% was the slowest), with the fastest-growing denomination being Anglican at 844% growth. Crucial observations concerning Pentecostalism are made here, including Pentecostalism as a fluid concept that can refer to denomination, movement, or stream within other traditions as well as many African Pentecostal groups have expanded outside of Africa (58). As for Asian and Pacific Islands Christianity (chapter 4), Pachuau presents succinct summaries of many countries' encounters with Christianity as well as the results of these encounters. It is imperative to note that while there are significant conversions to Christianity in many regions, Asian Christianity looks radically different from one place to another as each nation is facing diverse contexts.

After describing each region in broad strokes, Pachuau moves from presenting the contexts of world Christianity to presenting its theological implications. Chapter 5 focuses on contextual theology, the contextualization of Christianity, and their relationships with global Christianity. Pachuau defines contextualization as disclosing "the crucial role played by contexts in any genuine theological construction, communication, and reception" (94) and sketches its developments, mainly how evangelicals turned from reluctance to participation. The discussion on the variety of approaches to contextual theology at the end of this chapter naturally leads to a survey of contextual theologies from the majority world (chapter 6). Out of the common contexts of religiosity, poverty, and existential tensions, liberation theology, inculturation, and theology of religions are essential showcases of the implications of world Christianity, in light of the tensions between contextualization and contextual theology as well as between western Christianity and Christianity in the Majority World. Interestingly, Pachuau views the Charismatic movement as contextual theology. Last but not least, Pachuau shows three examples of missions from the majority world (chapter 7), showing how contexts have tremendous implications for missiology.

Perhaps the most crucial contribution this work makes to the study of world Christianity is its deconstruction of the delusion that western Christianity (and its theology) ought to be the only dominant form and understanding of Christianity. Throughout the book, Pachuau makes a convincing case that Christianity as a world religion is more comprehensive and sophisticated than many in the West have expected. He aptly shows that the diverse Christianity in the Majority World is neither more primitive nor immature than the western form but comprises valid contextual responses to realities. Besides deconstruction, this work also provides a comprehensive introduction to world Christianity in at least two ways. First, there is extensive coverage of all regions that have significant Christian growth in the post-colonial period. Though these are inevitably in “broad strokes” (21), they are meticulous enough for readers to form a general impression regarding the state of Christianity in a particular region. Second, succinct introductions on critical subjects related to world Christianity, such as globalization (1-2), Enlightenment (24-29), Pentecostalism (49-51), and contextualization (92-94), are given when appropriate, which are vital in enabling amateur readers to grasp the subjects.

Outside of the study of world Christianity, this work advances the study of other theological disciplines and confessions. For example, Pachuau’s keen observation of the tension between contextualization and contextual theology may open a new direction for intercultural study. Likewise, his depiction of Pentecostalism in other regions has given the Pentecostal community much to contemplate, including this reviewer on his own confessional body, neo-Charismatic Chinese immigrants in North America.

This work has much to commend, but the following strengths stand out in particular. Its high readability will ensure its wide readership, including being used as a textbook for world Christianity courses. Pachuau writes in a highly structured manner, often taking the readers through his rationale and always giving broad overviews before assessing chronologically the sociopolitical and theological factors that constitute the unique form of Christianity found in each region. This structured manner allows his readers to follow his presentation seamlessly. Besides its high readability, Pachuau’s exhaustive research and comprehensive documentation of his sources will make this book a useful reference for many. His inclusion of Catholic thought and careful documentation of Catholic change show the broadness of his research, and may yield ecumenical fruits. As a Mizo itinerant evangelist turned missiologist who was trained at Princeton, Pachuau notices things rarely articulated, including the general more positive view towards colonialism in Asia and Africa as well as the nature of Pentecostalism. These make Pachuau’s work one of a kind.

The only disappointing feature of this work lies with its occasional overt brevity that leads to the exclusion of crucial developments. For instance, Pachuau almost never mentions the Orthodox tradition apart from listing it alongside of other confessions. While this may be explicable with its presumably smaller role in global Christianity, the lack of treatment on western Asia is perplexing. Though one may reasonably expect a comprehensive treatment on this region, the book describes western Asia Christianity in only six sentences (64). Besides these omissions, several foundational assumptions and arguments are left unexplained. For instance, Pachuau acknowledges that his interpretation of the Charismatic movement as contextual theologies is “surprising, if not unacceptable” (20), but he neither defends nor proves that his view is preferable. Likewise, he does not expound his underlying assumption of the tension between western Christianity and Christianity in the Majority World enough to allow readers to approach topics like reverse mission and return mission. If Pachuau had done slightly more to include neglected areas and explain his interpretations, the book would be even more valuable.

In conclusion, Lalsangkima Pachuau’s *World Christianity: A Historical and Theological Introduction* is an outstanding work that should be widely celebrated, as one would find in it a concise description with careful analysis of world Christianity in a highly readable form. Pachuau has definitely accomplished his quest to present a balanced and holistic picture of Christianity (19).

Reviewed by Stephen Yeem