Book Reviews


**Reviewer: Andrew PEH**

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Theological reflection is the process by which we discover meaning by connecting it to God’s activity in the world. Beyond just mindlessly adopting and adapting to the “fads” and “norms” of what works in the mission field, there is a need to engage in missiological reflection, because the why of our work has implications for what we do and how we do it. More than just another book that provides a “how-to-do missions,” there is a need to reflect on the “whys.” This volume is an articulation of Lalsangkima (Kima) Pachuau’s missiological ruminations that provides a clear introduction to a theology of mission.

Pachuau is unequivocal in his belief that “theology of mission is an essential part of theology itself, and any theology that does not deal with God’s mission cannot be fully regarded as theology proper” (2). This is understandably the impetus for this effort to crystalize his thinking about God and what God is doing in the world. Pachuau does not outline the aspects of the “what” or the “wherefore” of God’s work in the world; rather, this volume is a presentation of the theological groundings of God’s mission. It is, as he explains, “a theological lens for the church’s missionary calling.” And his goal is “to go back to the most fundamental meaning of theology and identify its missionary dimension” (3). It is “to make good connections between Christian practice and its underlying beliefs.”

Pachuau is candid in asserting that “we may differ in our ideas about how and to what extent God is active in the world, but believing that He is at work is essential for mission theology. At two ends of the spectrum
are God and the world, and there’s a whole lot in between.” Cognizant of the breadth of such an endeavor, Pachuau proposes an understanding of the theology of mission that addresses several key theological themes in the various chapters of the book; these include the Trinity (chapter 1), the incarnation (chapter 1), soteriology (chapters 2 and 3), ecclesiology (chapter 4), and gospel-culture relationships (chapter 5).

In each of these chapters, Pachuau unpacks the historical discussions, grounds them biblically, corroborates the theological arguments, synthesizes them with informed perspectives from non-Western religious thinkers, both Christian (such as Gustavo Gutiérrez and Simon Chan) and those from other religious traditions. A case in point is his drawing upon recent developments in trinitarian theologies and relating the discussions to a theology of mission based on the missio Dei. Another example is his more expansive perspective on salvation. While Evangelicals (trained in the West) tend to focus on salvation essentially as (substitutionary) atonement, Pachuau structures contemporary soteriology to include input from the non-Western world, for which the charismatic and pentecostal perspective of salvation as liberation must be acknowledged; nor does he ignore Eastern Orthodox contributions in explicating God’s salvific work—specifically Irenaeus’s theosis, encapsulated in the Athanasian quote, “God made Himself man, so that man might become God.”

Drawing from these rich traditions, Pachuau develops a more expansive theology of salvation that “encompasses four main themes: redemption, liberation, reconciliation and renewal of life” (74).

In his discussion of the various theological themes, Pachuau carefully and consistently weaves pertinent scriptural texts with the theological developments in the historical context and offers his arguments for his stance. If, as Andrew Kirk puts it, the task of mission “is to validate, correct, and establish on better foundations the entire practice of mission,” then Pachuau has been faithful in validating, correcting, and establishing on solid biblical and theological foundations our understanding of what God continues to do in the world.

1  Athanasius, On the Incarnation. (54:3).
Despite its seeming brevity, Pachuau’s volume provides much fodder for theological rumination and practical application, especially for those who take seriously the study of mission theology. It is undoubtedly his contribution in expressing Martin Kahler’s oft-quoted words that “mission is ‘the mother of theology.’” More importantly, this work is a valuable resource for missiologists and students of mission alike as they navigate the rich traditions and contemporary developments in articulating a theology of mission. As Craig Ott, Stephen Strauss, and Timothy Tennent would say, “If we believe that mission involves the very nature of God, His will for the church, and His plan for the nations…then theology of mission must be the starting point for defining the nature of mission and discerning the practice of mission.”

Pachuau’s volume is certainly an important contribution to meeting that need.

About Reviewer
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