

## Book reviews

Ingleby, J. San, TK., Ling, TL. (eds.). 2013. *Contextualisation and Mission Training. Engaging Asia's Religious Worlds*. Oxford: Regnum Books International. 109 pages. ISBN 978-1-908355-40-9. Price: £5.99

In this concise book, the eight contributors reflect on the various facets of the contextual missiological training in Asian religious frameworks. Their shared conviction which underlies the whole study is that holistic theological-cultural formation should enable Christian theology students as well as mission workers and practitioners to explore critically and engage skilfully with the multiple religious contexts of Asia, including Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Hinduism. Lack of such a formation is blamed for the often minimal success that Christian missions from the West have had hitherto in impacting the religious worlds of Asia.

Issues discussed in the volume range from the theory of contextualisation through cross-cultural hermeneutics to proposals of the context specific training models. The book is arranged in two major sections: Contextual Frameworks and Engaging the Multiple Religious Contexts of Asia, each of which contains four articles. The first three papers are worth particular attention as they accurately set the theoretical background for further considerations.

In the first article, Tan Kang San looks at missiology through the lens of the fragmentation of theological education at large as well as the local and global challenges that Asian contexts pose to both formal and non-formal mission training programmes. He describes the task of missiology in terms of investigating biblically and critically the motives and methods of mission to see if it fits the criteria of God's reign in a particular cultural-religious context. Jonathan Ingleby's focus is on the hermeneutical principle in relation to contextual mission training. In his provocative text, he accuses the Western approach to mission of domesticating the gospel in order to accommodate and enhance regnant modes of knowledge, wherein the postulated normativity of theological claims is used *de facto* to exercise power. Ingleby's take on contextualisation as primarily a matter of power structures brings a fresh and thought-provoking perspective on Christian self-awareness. According to the author, theology ought to understand itself as navigation which responds to, but does not produce or control, the weather. Consequently, those who engage in Christian proclamation must invite and enable the hearers to imagine, i.e., to construct a new world. The following paper by David Miller in a way qualifies Ingleby's call for 'radical contextualisation' by exploring the inevitable tension between 'contextual mission' and 'faithful mission'. While

the former resists importing an alien form of Christianity which would not flourish in its new setting, the latter avoids the traps of syncretism and heresy. The last contribution in that section comes from David Harley and concerns the content and the cultural factors of Asian missionary training programme. In terms of situating Christian mission within a contextual framework however, it is far less useful than the three previous articles.

Carol Walker whose text opens the second section of the book examines issues concerning Christian missionary formation relative to witness to Muslims, and she points out that alongside generic theological and cultural principles the optimal introductory training should also include the use of (preferably region specific) case studies. In his 'Lessons from the life of Karl Reichelt' Rory Mackenzie does precisely that: he integrates the particular missiological 'case' with more universal christological questions, which underlie the endeavours of all cross cultural missionaries. Mackenzie's insightful analysis provides us not only with a comprehensive account of Reichelt's mission in China and his interactions with Mahayana Buddhism, but also with a balanced evaluation of his missiological approach in the context of the contemporary challenges. Tan Loun Ling offers the 'middle way' model of missionary training in China which stems from the Confucian spirit of moderation and harmony. Finally, the Eastern pattern of thinking, which goes beyond all binary conceptions of 'either-or' for the sake of a 'both-and' approach to reality, is elaborated in terms of mission training in the Indian context. In this last contribution, Christina Manohar rightly notices that mission starts with listening and therefore particular mission methods cannot be forced from outside, but need to emerge from the context.

The reason why I find the first three articles of the volume particularly stimulating is that their authors make us realize the extent to which deliberations on mission training are mutually correlated with and dependent on more primordial questions in philosophy and theology of religions, notably questions regarding the dialectical tension between the universal and the particular, which is so critical for our understanding of contextualisation. Unless it is grounded in a critical reflection on 'missiological essentials' no training of mission workers will be capable of enhancing deeper and longer term engagements within the complexity of Asian social, cultural, and religious systems.

In this sense, the volume in question certainly contributes to the ongoing conversation about conditions and implications, opportunities and threats of contextual mission. On the negative side, it is somewhat disappointing that none of the contributors mentions ecumenical issues as a factor in contextual theology of mission. Furthermore, minor mistakes can be found in the Bibliography. However, all in all, this selection is to be recommended to everyone who resonates with Brian Stanley's conviction that 'Christianity is

most true to itself when engaged in the risky business of mission'. Without doubt the book will leave its readers with much to ponder.

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