
Book Review

Reviewed by Michael Wilkinson

Email: Michael.Wilkinson@twu.ca

Christianities in Migration: The Global Perspective

by: Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan (Eds.)

Published 2016

by Palgrave Macmillan

One New York Plaza, Suite 4500,

New York, NY, 10004-1562, USA, VII, 348pp

ISBN: 978-1-137-03287-4 (Hardcover)

Christianities in Migration is the third book in a series about theology and migration in world Christianity. The book consists of 15 chapters written primarily by theologians and religion scholars covering a wide range of geographical regions and historical periods. The purpose of the book is to offer a theological account of the migration of Christians. The material is shaped historically, sociologically, geographically, demographically, economically, and politically. However, while various aspects of these migration experiences are offered, it is the theological explanation that is paramount. Each author focuses on developing or contributing to a range of theologies of migration and how the theology offers an interpretation of the migrant experience.

Overall, the book does have a general coherence and shape to its construction. It begins with a general Christian history of migration from Jesus through to the movement of ancient Christianity, covering a broad and sweeping history to the current period. The chapter intends to orient the reader to the general themes in Christian migration and offers a theological explanation that focuses on the metaphor of the Church as migrant as it develops an ecclesiological framework for how churches ought to accept strangers and foreigners with an ethic of hospitality. The remainder of the book focuses with more detail on the migrant experience and theological reflection with more specific case studies like migration in the biblical context, Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania, Canada, the USA, and Europe, while reflecting on particular issues like contextualisation, diaspora communities, intercultural churches, pastoral work, racism, refugees, immigration laws, health care, employment, globalisation, human rights, multiculturalism, war, gender, and networks. Each chapter begins with a general overview of the area and several issues and concludes with constructing a theological framework to account for migration.

For example, Jehu Hanciles examines the crucial role of migration for the expansion of Christianity. Whether by choice or displacement, Christians have moved from various geographical locations and cultural spaces where the religion was transformed and with many examples brought about social change in its new location. Hanciles employs a view of globalisation that takes a longer historical view and requires researchers to understand the particular conditions of globalisation across time and space. By doing so, Hanciles

explores the notions of foreigner and stranger in biblical contexts, migration and its impact on the ancient Roman Empire, transnationalism, missionaries, refugees, exiles, and merchants for the expansion of Christianity. Hanciles discusses ongoing contemporary migration and its impact on the transformation of Christianity from its more recent European cultural identity to one that is now predominately represented by those who live in the so-called global south.

Another example is Jione Havea's chapter on Oceania that reflects on the metaphor of voyage and navigation for the many Polynesian communities who long ago travelled the seas from island to island. Havea's telling of the story is very interesting and his layering of image and metaphor is effective as a means for conveying the challenges of shifting, rolling, and tossing waves. Throughout the chapter, there is a critique of colonial Christianity that subverts while at the same time providing space for the recognition of local expressions. This chapter effectively juxtaposes the particular and the universal of global Christianity revealing through the migration process its diversity.

Finally, the chapter on Canada by Thomas E. Reynolds examines the various ways in which migrants have negotiated identity and diversity in a country that has officially adopted multiculturalism as a government policy. Reynolds discusses the changing face of Christianity in Canada and recognises that it is increasingly de-Europeanised with Christians migrating more so from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The main implication is the transformation of Christianity in Canada. This contemporary transformation is placed in historical context with previous waves of migration, changes in immigration policy, and the challenges of diversity, especially as it has played out in Quebec with the recent debates about reasonable accommodation.

Overall, the book is framed by its commitment to theologise about migration. It relies upon secondary research for its historical, cultural, and sociological background. For readers looking for new empirical work on migration, for example, you will not find that here. However, for readers wanting to explore a volume that offers theological reflection on the meaning of migration that is informed by historical, cultural, and sociological themes, and this book will offer what it promises.