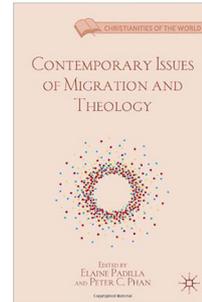


Book Review

Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan, eds. .
Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology.
Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
ISBN 978-1137032881. 276 pp. USD 80.

Reviewed by Laura E. Alexander.
Ph.D. Candidate in Religious Ethics, University of Virginia.



In the past two decades, there has been an explosion of interest in contemporary questions of human migration from theologians, philosophers, and religious ethicists in multiple religious traditions. Scholars have begun to recognize that the phenomenon of migration gives rise to complex spiritual and ethical questions that merit attention, and the study of migration has begun to influence both the content and the methodology of religious thought in the academy. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan's edited volume, *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology*, shows how Christian theological and ethical thought both reflects and benefits from this increased activity in religious thinking about migration. This rich and fascinating volume focuses on the Christian tradition but showcases a wide variety of perspectives and methodologies, from authors (the editors included) whose work in the field has already been and promises to be influential. The wide-ranging set of arguments found in the book mirrors the openness both of the questions religious thinkers have been asking about migration and of the methods they use to seek answers to those questions. They also encourage further theological reflection, some of which scholars may look forward to in the second and third volumes of a promised trilogy, of which this is the first installment.

The eclectic approach in this volume has its upsides and its downsides. By placing a diverse array of methodological perspectives side by side, Padilla and Phan show how wide and open theological thinking about migration is. They also argue implicitly that thinkers in the field are well able to engage scholarship in a number of disciplines. For instance, representative chapters include a sociological discussion of migration and the rise of cities; thought about migration from Asian perspectives; Scriptural, philosophical, and phenomenological hermeneutics; possibilities for intercultural theological thought about migration; and even a discussion of graduate theological education in light of contemporary realities of migration. The work may likewise stimulate dialogue between scholars undertaking diverse projects in theology and migration: one who is interested in questions of how the experiences of migrants may reshape traditional theological categories may also find herself asking how she conducts graduate seminars, while one who studies migration to cities may begin asking new questions about the concept of “space” itself in an analysis of migration. However, the shape such dialogue might take is not clearly laid out in the volume, as the chapters at times appear simply to be set side by side, without much connecting them together thematically. Padilla and Phan recognize that they are “crafting not so much a new doctrinal system as a multifocal theology” (5), but even readers who are simply

looking for shared themes will find they must make what is implicit, explicit – or simply accept that each chapter is quite different from the one before. Nevertheless, even collecting such diverse studies in one volume highlights global perspectives and intercultural methodologies which future work in theology of migration would do well to imitate, or at least to engage.

This particular work, as noted, focuses on Christian theology. Thus, it will provide insights for Christian scholars, as well as a window into Christian thought for those who hope to work comparatively or promote interreligious dialogue around theological and religious analysis of contemporary migration. It must be said that within the North American academy, theology of migration has not yet seen a critical mass of scholarly works outside of the Christian tradition. More and more scholars of religion and theologians from the world's largest religious traditions are working on questions of migration, however, and indeed the second volume in Padilla and Phan's trilogy is titled *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), promising to feature reflections from Jewish, Christian, and Islamic perspectives. Still, those who are interested in the field may hope to hear more from scholars of other major world religions as well as indigenous religious traditions, and we may also hope that these scholars will find material for reflection and dialogue in *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology*.

This work is a step forward in scholarly studies of migration and theology. It does justice to the increased interest and diversity within an area of study whose borders are far from defined, and it sets the stage for future work. Future scholarship in theological and ethical thought on migration will benefit from

the intercultural and interreligious dialogue the authors and editors of the volume are clearly pursuing, and while *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology* is itself far from systematic, it draws together important themes which Christian thinkers in particular will find useful as they work to deepen scholarly thought about theology and ethics of migration while remaining attentive to diverse perspectives.