

Aimee Allison Hein. *Theology in Motion: Migration, History, and Responsibility*. Fortress Press, 2024. 291 pages. \$39.00.

In *Theology in Motion: Migration, History, and Responsibility*, Aimee Allison Hein argues that Christian reflection on migration must move beyond the familiar debate between humanitarian concern and national sovereignty toward an ethic grounded in historical relationships and moral responsibility. Rather than treating migration primarily as a contemporary policy problem, Hein situates it within the longer history of colonial expansion, imperial policy, and economic domination that has shaped global patterns of displacement. Written primarily for scholars and students of Christian ethics and migration studies, the book also addresses church leaders seeking theological resources for responding to migration in ecclesial contexts.

Hein begins by examining the historical narratives that structure contemporary immigration debates. Chapter 1 challenges the foundational myth of the “discovery” of the Americas, arguing that the continent was not discovered but invaded and that the doctrine of discovery provided “legal cover for theft” (5). By foregrounding Indigenous histories and the violence of settler colonialism, Hein contends that remembering history accurately is a moral prerequisite for ethical decision-making. Distorted narratives about the nation’s origins obscure structural conditions that continue to shape migration today. As Hein observes, before migrants began crossing the southern border, “the border moved across people” (36). Contemporary claims about the nation’s right to exclude, therefore, cannot be separated from the earlier history of territorial expansion that produced those borders.

Chapter 2 traces the continuing legacy of these myths in US political and legal structures. Drawing on Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Hein argues that early US policies toward Indigenous nations established a template for later imperial projects. The United States, she suggests, developed as a fiscal-military state oriented toward territorial expansion. This pattern continues to shape immigration policy and foreign intervention. Migration from Central America cannot be understood apart from the economic and military policies through which the United States helped create conditions that forced people to migrate. For Hein, this relationship implies a continuing moral obligation: the United States “remains responsible for creating paths of migration” (51).

Against this historical backdrop, Chapter 3 develops the book’s central ethical framework. Hein critiques both communitarian approaches that prioritize state sovereignty and cosmopolitan approaches emphasizing universal human rights. While each offers important insights, she argues that neither adequately addresses the relational and historical dynamics that generate migration. Drawing on the responsibility ethics of H. Richard Niebuhr and Charles Curran, Hein proposes a framework in which moral action is understood as a response within an ongoing web of relationships shaped by past actions and future consequences. Justice, she insists, requires “accurate narratives” that attend to the voices left out, silenced, and harmed by historical processes (82).

Chapter 4 extends this framework through a theological exploration of reparative justice. Hein argues that Christian repentance must involve concrete action to repair broken relationships rather than merely acknowledging wrongdoing. Distinguishing between compensation and reparations, she contends that justice requires publicly recognizing injustice and working toward relational restoration. Truth-telling, therefore, becomes a central practice, since it is “both a reparation measure in itself and a precondition to all other reparations” (144).

The final chapters turn toward ecclesiology and praxis. Chapter 5 reimagines Christian discipleship as solidarity with those harmed by systems of empire, drawing on the work of Indigenous and Latine theologians to challenge Euro-American theological dominance. The church, Hein argues, must become a community that tells difficult historical truths and aligns itself with those marginalized by national and global power structures. Chapter 6 concludes with case studies illustrating how Christian communities can embody this vision through practices of hospitality, sanctuary, and cross-cultural friendship. Such practices demonstrate that ethical responsibility requires active resistance to social sin. As Hein observes, neutrality becomes a form of complicity, since “either we work to actively dismantle social sin ... or we contribute to its normalization” (249).

One of the book’s most significant contributions lies in its insistence that migration ethics must take history seriously. By situating migration within the longer story of colonialism and imperial power, Hein challenges theological approaches that treat migration solely as a humanitarian or legal problem. Her interdisciplinary engagement with history, Christian ethics, and ecclesiology provides a compelling framework for understanding migration as a matter of relational responsibility.

At times, readers seeking detailed policy proposals may find Hein’s analysis more theological than practical. Nevertheless, this emphasis is consistent with the book’s aim of reshaping the conceptual framework through which Christians interpret migration. *Theology in Motion* will be particularly valuable for scholars of Christian ethics and for clergy seeking to engage migration as a central challenge for contemporary Christian witness.

Jae Jun “Daniel” Cho, Ph.D. Student in Homiletics and Liturgics, Graduate Department of Religion, Vanderbilt University.