

## BOOK REVIEW

Michael Battle (ed), *Faith*. Conversations in Anglican Global Theology. New York, NY: Seabury, 2024. \$26.95. pp. xxxv + 216

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Michael Battle's collection of essays, *Faith*, is the first in a series of entitled *Conversations in Global Anglican Theology*. The series aims to bring neglected voices from the Global South into mainstream Anglican discourse. It is a book of two halves: the first three chapters explore issues around Anglican Identity and Faith, the last four focus on those matters in South Africa. An introduction sets out the aims of the volume and series.

Rose Hudson-Wilkin starts by offering a reflection on the day to day realities of Anglican faith and identity in her context, as a Black female bishop of Jamaican origin. Deeply pastoral and personal, it offers reflections on her experience of these in a variety of ministry settings. This chapter is published without the constraints of academic convention – no footnoting or bibliography. Hopefully, this freedom will be extended to other writers from non-Western environments or with limited access to library resources allowing them to be heard. Such a dismantling of the conventional apparatus of northern or western scholarship is part of a decolonizing process. Her choice as an author may reveal an issue about identity which the editors need to address: the point at which affiliations between culture of origin and separation within diaspora raise questions about representation. As a diaspora Scot since 1992, I have lost some of my edge in speaking about matters Scottish – but not all.

Stephen Spencer's chapter has two interesting gaps. At the beginning, he cites legislation of 1841 as allowing for the consecration by the Church of England of missionary bishops in extra-colonial territories: an important mission step. One of these would be Samuel Ajay Crowther in West Africa. But, why not also mention the consecration of Samuel Seabury as bishop for the newly independent American ex-colonies by the non-juring bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church in 1784? Their actions provoked the Church of England, perhaps fearful of a Jacobite renaissance overseas, to make changes allowing similar consecrations. This may be a small point, but it does challenge the sometimes assumed view point that Anglicanism was wholly an English phenomenon, a view which may quickly be challenged by a more nuanced reading of circumstances of the glibly, but wrongly, named English Civil War. A spurious Anglocentricity in our mythos always needs to be challenged. The

second comes in his description of Anglican polity and ecumenism in the twentieth century. Here there is no mention of the Kikuyu controversy (1914), in which the opprobrium of Bishop Frank Weston of Zanzibar to what he perceived as the rejection of episcopal orders would eventually result in the shelving of plans for intercommunion and arguably mean that later plans for church unity such as those in North and South India would build in an episcopal structure.

Interestingly, Weston resonates with the third chapter by Simon Ro Chul Lai, who notes John Broadhurst's comments about the Anglican experiment being over, and addressing primarily the current state of the Anglican communion. In this regard, Weston remains a figure of interest, for his views on Anglican tolerance of liberalism could prompt Bishop Gore to comment:

The Bishop of Zanzibar has certainly succeeded in raising in an acute form the question of the coherence of the Church of England and of the Anglican Communion generally. I cannot but think that, at least in this general sense, he has done us a great service. We Church people have of recent years shown ourselves unmistakably anxious to avoid questions of principle. We have let ourselves drift.<sup>1</sup>

*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* Rumours of the death of the Anglican Communion have long been exaggerated, but the fundamental question remains one about how far the Communion is perceived to be drifting from what might variously be perceived as its core values, faith and/or tradition.

The essays in the second section deal with issues that have arisen in Anglican South African contexts. The focus here is on the Anglican Church of South Africa. The ecclesial thorn that is the Church of England in South Africa is not mentioned. There could have been useful lessons to learn here about the negotiation of Anglican identity in South African contexts. Much is rightly made of the role of the ACSA in the struggle against apartheid and how this has come to shape subsequent discourse on issues such as human sexuality, and the essays here are valuable in putting those perspectives in front of a global audience. However, the issues raised here beg a number of fundamental questions, not so much about the issues described as such, but in the methodological points they raise and their wider significance.

One comes in Thandi Gamedze's chapter on 'White Institutional Space' (WIS). One of the concerns of this series is to challenge the hegemony of Northern academic models of discourse. This chapter starts with the adoption of a study of white privilege and power in US settings and explores its use in a new South African context, showing the complexities of fine-tuning and realigning even a sympathetic theory for a different context. It also shows that theology should not be restricted to the academic, with its focus on the Meeting Point. Her work aligns with the demotic focus of Gerald West's transformative theological style. East African experience also provides a reminder of the need for studies of popular movements: the *Uamsho* (Revival Movement of East Africa) was, in part, a reaction to Western Anglican

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<sup>1</sup>A.G. Blood, *The History of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa, Vol. 2: 1907-1932* (London: The Universities' Mission to Central Africa, 1957), 70.

modalities, and its consequences manifest themselves in issues of alignment with GAFCON or Canterbury.

These remarks prompt a second concern related to the series title, *Conversations in Global Anglican Theology*. The essays in the second part all come from a South African context. If the comments on WIS show the problems of engagement between African experience in Africa and the Diaspora, there needs to be recognition that not all African experience equates with South African experience. South African experience could not but be shaped by the struggle against apartheid, and this has had a trickle-down effect into other African contexts. The historical experience of a “front-line state” such as Tanzania is a case in point. But the political contours are not identical: the visions of thinkers like Nkrumah and Nyerere for PanAfricanism (whose details were disputed) indicate diversity. Indeed, much theological work in East Africa has lacked the single political focus which emerged in South Africa: Tanzanian Anglicanism shaped amidst the *Ujamaa* (African Socialism) of Nyerere’s Tanzania has very different contours to its Kenyan counterparts. And, at the risk of a gross oversimplification, culture as much as, if not more than, specific political engagement has provided the foil for theological discourse in those contexts. Studies of Nigerian Anglicanism would also yield very different data.

These concerns persist in the chapter by Henry and Thokozile Mbaya on human sexuality and Ubuntu. The core elements need no rehearsal: the debate about human sexuality, particularly in the wake of the 1998 Lambeth Conference and events thereafter. The article rightly focusses on the environmental specifics of the CPSA’s explorations of these matters. Two factors come to the fore. The first is Bishop Desmond Tutu, and is it appropriate that such an elder spoke with gravitas and authority. His importance is further described in the chapters by Wilhelm Verwoerd and Thabo Makgoba. It is a striking reminder of the importance of person and relationship within theology, and that it is never simply an abstract discipline of text and keyboard. The second issue is apartheid. The framing of the debate about human sexuality as a manifestation of apartheid tendencies remains a stroke of rhetorical genius, even if others would question whether the identification is a category mistake. This becomes more visible when the concept of *Ubuntu* (that humanity is created in the image of God) is explored. The term is often associated with South African theology, but that region does not hold sole property rights over the concept. Others might add that, given Genesis 1:26, the definition just cited need not even be restricted to African contexts. That said, it is arguably a Panafrican concept: an ‘integral part of African ethics’, as the writers note (p.136 – with no geographical qualification). Then comes its identification with the isiZulu proverb (*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* – I am because we are, since we are, therefore I am – p.136), which finds a succinct and close parallel in KiSwahili (*mtu ni watu* – a person is people). Issues of context continue. In East Africa, the history provided by the first martyrs in Uganda (killed because of their refusal to engage in same-sex behaviours in the court of the Kabaka, the king of the Baganda) starts a very different journey from the identification with apartheid. Here it needs to be recognized that there is a difference in the behaviours being addressed by the CPSA and those of nineteenth century Uganda, not least around coercion. There is also a deep irony in the fact that many who oppose endorsement of same-sex behaviours

based on this East African experience will also decry these practices as European imports: Mwanga II, the Kabaka and his court, as far as can be discerned, were not *wazungu* (white Europeans). History and myth are fickle. Nevertheless, the histories, the myths and the conclusions reached vary. So, there is an issue with Global Anglican Theology being represented by a single African context, in this case, South Africa.

All this may seem a distraction from the book under review, but they do provoke a serious question that hopefully the series will reveal as spurious: whether the voices being heard from contemporary Anglicanism are heard because they mirror preferences in the publisher's constituency. If the only voices heard are those palatable to the spirit of the age in the global North, the series title is a misleading misnomer. Done thus, so-called global theology will only repeat the errors of early modern biblical scholarship: seeing its reflection in the murky waters at the bottom of a well. Global theologians will simply become (un)paid, as they are unlikely to even receive publishing royalties, mercenaries in other people's wars. Indeed, we might go further and ask why it is appropriate that the issue that provides such a focus is that which preoccupies northern audiences, rather than issues which press equally, if not more, upon the global south. Why not a focus on corruption in government, restorative justice, and reparations: issues very much to the fore in South African political life and not absent from northern 'democracies'?

Lastly, the book prompts reflection on the place of language. Part of the Northern and Western hegemony remains the default adoption of English as the language of much Anglican thought. However, if Western modes of discourse and analysis are part of the problem, so is the language in which such discourse is conducted. Questioning the default assumption of English contributed to the emergence of indigenous and native hierarchies in the early to mid-twentieth century. The production of a national Kiswahili prayer book in Tanzania in the 1990s was reckoned significant by no less a commentator than the Kenyan theologian Esther Mombo: 'unlike liturgies translated from the original English, it was developed in the local language throughout'.<sup>2</sup> Stephen Spencer and his team at the Anglican Communion Office are driving the preparation of materials in French, Spanish, Portuguese and Kiswahili. This is all good, but until the Anglican Communion can engage with the production of theological materials treated as equally significant in non-English languages, the privileging of English will remain problematic.

After all, language is power. Full decolonization cannot avoid the issue of language. Tanzanian educationalists have debated long and hard and continue to debate, whether secondary and tertiary education should be conducted in English or Kiswahili, trying to balance to compromise between loss of their specific voice and a global presence in an academic world which does not rate Kiswahili highly. One of the finest Kenyan novelists of the twentieth century, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, made the decision never to deny his heritage, to preserve his integrity, to write in his mother tongue, Kikuyu, and only then to translate. But this is not just an academic issue about the medium of discourse – it has profoundly relational consequences.

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<sup>2</sup>Esther Mombo, "Anglican Liturgies in Eastern Africa." in *The Oxford Guide to The Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey*, ed. Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 277–286, here at 280

Tanzanian Christians used to identify three kinds of missionary: those who learned Kiswahili well (and were thanked for this), those who learned Kiswahili badly (thanked and respected for trying) and those who did not bother (and provoked the question – how can you say you love us if you cannot even bother to learn our language?). The conclusions need no further explanation except for the tone-deaf.

*Fergus J. King*

*Trinity College Theological School, University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia*

*Email: [fergusk@trinity.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:fergusk@trinity.unimelb.edu.au)*