

Book reviews

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Emmanuel Katongole, *Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2017), pp. xx + 294. \$30.00

The question that propels this book is, how can the Christian church talk of hope when faced with widespread, systemic violence? Katongole's answer is found in the midst of widespread suffering. Emmanuel Katongole, associate professor of theology and peace studies at the university of Notre Dame and Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Kampala, examines the theological and social dimensions of lament in biblical texts and as practised in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Building on his previous book, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, he explores the nature of hope in the midst of violence, poverty and displacement. He concludes that hope lies in the agency that lament affords because, through lament, those who suffer wrestle with God are drawn into God's redemption for the world, and are carried into new knowledge of God and their suffering. Through this knowledge they are freed to participate in the Kingdom of God and they develop a social vision with political ramifications as they critique the injustices of the present situation and strive for better. In such a distilled form these conclusions may be challenging but unsurprising. It is the theological route that Katongole takes to reach this conclusion that is particularly novel and insightful. By taking us into the lives of Christian activists working for change in Burundi, Congo and Uganda and weaving their laments with those of the Bible he intertwines theological resources in a way that not only contributes to a practical theology of hope but which also provides a thoughtful approach to doing theology.

Articles in a recent special edition of *Theology Today* called for western theologians to engage with the 'World-Christian turn' rather than judging emerging theologies as 'chaotic, syncretistic and superficial',¹ and they outlined the theological benefit of examining the polycentric, worldwide nature of Christianity for interrogating the concept of 'tradition' by rendering it 'a more fluid, heterogeneous, and politically inflected category

¹ Paul Kollman, 'Understanding the World-Christian Turn in the History of Christianity and Theology', *Theology Today* 71/2 (2014), pp. 174–5.

for constructive theological work'.² Katongole turns theology towards the cycles of insecurity and human suffering in the Great Lakes and finds a wide variety of theological resources within them. He does not expect his readers to be interested in tracing theological thought from the academy or situating themselves within Catholic teaching. He does not excavate a particular theological tradition in order to place himself within it, although references to Bonhoeffer, Gutierrez, Kä Mana, Kobia, Milbank, Moltmann, Solle, Yoder and so on provide clear indications of his position.

Biblical texts and people are the resources he plumbs at depth, exploring the living traditions of Christians engaging with the Bible, the community of faith and their context. Lamentations, Psalms, Jeremiah, 1 Peter 3:15, Matthew 2:15 are all discussed in some detail. By quoting and discussing at some length songs and poems and a piece of sculpture from Uganda and Congo he establishes that the biblical book of Lamentations and the laments of the African Great Lakes have similar theological resonances. They speak of intense pain and suffering, and public, brutally honest, anguished turning to God. The lives of Christian activists (lay, ordained, Protestant and Catholic) like the archbishops of Bukavu, religious sisters in Gulu, the founder and president of the Bilingual University in Beni and the founder of an orphanage in Burundi are narrated. Katongole uses a method called 'portraiture' that combines ethnographic research with aesthetic description to describe the struggles and actions for change of these activists. He sees in their stories a creative agency which emerged when the ability to act seemed extinguished. In such suffering God is seen as vulnerable but God's continual presence is non-negotiable. The book moves from lamentation to hope but in such a way as to explain these conditions as ones which live within each other. The portraits often show resolution and improvement of a situation – as in the story of university president, David Kasali. They also acknowledge despair and lack of resolution – in 2015 the orphanage Maggy Barankitse founded was closed after twenty years and she had to flee. This is not a book of hopeful platitudes but a book which sees theological insight in hope-filled lives from the African continent who are agents of hope because Christ's death and resurrection is patterned in them.

Katongole is bold in shedding more esoteric theological methods for ones that are not 'chaotic' and 'superficial' but are, nevertheless, varied and complex. Observations which would add further complexities may appear unnecessary. However, in Katongole's desire to move from a social-science examination of problems to an appreciation of lived theological

² Joy Ann McDougall, 'Contemporary Landscapes and New Horizons: The Changing Maps of World Christianity', *Theology Today* 71/2 (2014), p. 162.

solutions, his analysis of the Great Lakes context relies too heavily on one source. Although Katongole recognises that Jason Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of Congo and the Great War in Africa*, has been critiqued, he is steered by the book's emotional pull to make simplified summaries of the situation in Congo, even whilst questioning Stearns' conclusions. Another observation is really the subject of another book. Whilst Katongole's own theological thinking is resourced ecumenically and globally the Christian activists he mentions are shown to be firmly rooted in an African context. His laudable objective to demonstrate that Christians in Africa have their own resources for pursuing Christ's hope in lament and do not require the interventions of international aid glosses over those parts of their lives which are resourced by being part of a worldwide Christian church. There is a story of hope in lament in those kingdom of God relationships too. For now, this lively, moving and theological thoughtful book about Africa will also speak to the world.

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Simon Francis Gainé, *Did the Saviour See the Father? Christ, Salvation and the Vision of God* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), pp. viii + 221. £89.99.

This book is a christological grenade which should be pondered and savoured: it constitutes a deceptively instructive theological workout. Deceptively instructive because its vast learning is worn lightly in lucid and accessible prose, and because it addresses a *theologoumenon* long since thought defunct, showing it to be of considerable merit. Gainé has begun to deliver handsomely on the christological *lacuna* carved out by his last exceptional book, *Will There Be Free Will in Heaven?* (2003) and made the best case possible for a renewed consideration of Christ's beatific vision. Both books show Gainé to be a theologian – historical, philosophical, systematic and pastoral – of the highest order.

The book's structure is as clear as its prose: two parts, each containing four chapters. The first part addresses general theological objections to the idea of Christ's beatific vision on earth. To the charge that 'no one thinks that anymore', Gainé points out that while indeed the beatific vision has fallen into theological desuetude since the 1950s, the idea was in fact key in the condemnation of Jon Sobrino's christological texts in 2006 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *contra* Sobrino, Jesus was not (just) a man of faith, but had vision of God in his earthly life. To those