

doi:10.1017/S0009640708001443

Anglican Communion in Crisis: How Episcopal Dissidents and Their African Allies are Reshaping Anglicanism. By **Miranda K. Hassett.** Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007.

xv + 297 pp. \$39.50 cloth.

In *Anglican Communion in Crisis*, anthropologist Miranda K. Hassett conducts fieldwork with local congregations working to bring their understanding of “holiness” to a wider church. Hassett’s questions are driven by developing transatlantic connections in the worldwide Anglican Communion. She specifically profiles a southern U.S. parish of the Episcopal Church of Rwanda and Anglican communities in Uganda to examine the coalition between conservative American Episcopalians and African Anglicans in the formative period between 1997 and 2002.

In the mid-1990s, some conservative American Episcopalians began developing relationships with Anglican leaders from the Southern Hemisphere in order to combat what they interpreted as an increasingly liberal American Episcopal Church, especially concerning issues regarding homosexuality. Upset with the perceived out-of-control liberal policies of their local bishops, many of these conservative congregations worked within a gray area of church polity and regulation to submit to the authority of African bishops. Hassett posits that the growth of these coalitions since the 1990s is more than a one-sided relationship, and she challenges liberal assumptions that the Americans bought the support of Africans. Hassett also refutes global-shift arguments popularized by Philip Jenkins as accurate analyses of the recent shifts in the Anglican Communion. She rejects the myth of “Northern moral collapse.” Instead she argues that both American Episcopalians and African Anglicans have deliberately negotiated reciprocal relationships, and both have been transformed using complicated processes and the language of globalization. In doing so, these forged ties have changed the balance of power in the conflicted Anglican Communion.

This does not mean that Hassett is not critical of the motives, means, and intentions of diverse factions of Anglican and Episcopal communities. Her examination of colonial discourses, the perceptions of African and American Christianity, and the complicated notions of gift giving, material inequality, and exchange in chapters 6 and 7 are particularly insightful. She learns from both Northern and Southern movement members that the trading of Northern material resources for Southern spiritual resources is understood as a worthy exchange. However, the materiality and unevenness of exchange complicates both Northern and Southern expectations and authority.

If the shift of power to the South was motivated by a reaction to liberalized notions of sexuality by conservative Episcopal Americans, Hassett discovers that same-sex expression was not publicly discussed in Uganda until the 1990s or about the same time that Northern church leaders began forging relationships with African church leaders. Ugandans incite the politicized discourse about homosexuality in their culture to Northern outside forces, including activist gay rights groups and the media. While Rwandan church leaders sympathize with conservative Episcopalians on social issues, Rwandan church leaders are not overly concerned about debating the finer points of same-sex expression except to generally reject homosexuality on the “reassertion of the value and purity of indigenous culture and a rejection of continued neocolonial influences” (87). Many Rwandans assert that “homosexuality is not African,” yet Hassett highlights Rwandan Anglicans who do not have a monolithic opinion on homosexuality (89). A small number of Rwandans have partnered with Integrity, the Anglican gay rights group, but not without enduring harassment and accusations of having been bought by Northern pro-gay-rights support.

Hassett’s investigation into Ugandan perspectives on homosexuality raises larger questions about power and cultural influence. After all, she notes, “Christianity itself is criticized in some postcolonial contexts as a negative Northern cultural influence” (87). She extends the examination of ambiguities and ambivalences about Northern cultural influences to Northern and Southern notions of international debt, poverty, and what is considered authentic spirituality. She demonstrates that while many aspects of Northern hegemony are being spread, there are instances when Western hegemony is also challenged, limited, and even reversed by Africans. Because of “decentered networks of accountability and shared doctrinal orthodoxy” with Northern churches, Southern Anglicans now have a global stage on which to bring up their perspectives and concerns (242–243). Hassett exposes the dynamic and often contested newfound position of moral authority.

Hassett’s work appeals to anyone interested in global Christianity and a more complicated evaluation of the partnerships between Northern and Southern churches. Her grasp of a diverse Anglican communion and the many groups inside and outside of Anglican polity is broad. *Anglican Communion in Crisis* traces the development of conservative Anglican groups and parishes but, more important, it situates their missions in larger theoretical questions about postcolonialism, neocolonialism, and globalization.

Howell Williams

Western Kentucky University