

## The Anglican Synergy North and South

Miranda K. Hassett, *The Anglican Community in Crisis: How Episcopal Dissidents and Their Allies are Reshaping Anglicanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007)

*Reviewed by Stephen Noll*

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Twenty - some years ago, my family discovered a lovely and lively Episcopal parish near our beach cottage: St. Andrew's in Morehead City, North Carolina. The building was modest and traditional, the liturgy was Rite Two BCP, the Rector was charismatic and pastoral, the music blended renewal choruses and standard hymnody. The church was always full and friendly.

Then one summer we noticed it had a new signboard: St. Andrew's Church, The Rev. C. King Cole, Rector (no kidding!), H.C. 8 & 9:30 and 11am, *Province of Rwanda*. You see, in 2000 St. Andrew's joined the Anglican Mission in America (AMiA) under the Archbishop of Rwanda.

Here my story intersects with Miranda Hassett, who begins her book with a story of a pseudonymous "St. Timothy's Episcopal Church," which is — let the truth be known — St. Andrew's.

Except that it is no longer St. Andrews. The Diocese successfully sued for the property and name, and so in 2004 the congregation changed its name to All Saints and moved to a rather tawdry strip mall, where the most notable landmark is a Hooter's. This makes it the first All Saints-by-the-Hooters on record, I'm pretty sure. The good news is they finished a new building and were pub in a better place by summer 2008.

Miranda Hassett's book intersects once again with my story across eight time zones in Uganda. She and her husband spent several months in residence at Uganda Christian University, where I serve as Vice Chancellor (President). From there she conducted interviews with faculty, students and more widely in the Anglican Church of Uganda and the Episcopal Church of Rwanda.

Even more importantly, the story she tells of the intersection of conservative Evangelical and charismatic Episcopalians with African Christians is of great significance for the ongoing life and mission of Anglicanism.

Her basic thesis is that North American Anglicans (as I shall call them, since many are no longer “Episcopalian”) reached out to the churches of the Global South and Africa in particular for help in resisting the drift of The Episcopal Church into the gay-rights culture and that in so doing genuine bonds of affection were forged.

Once again, my path crosses with hers in that I was active in the early stage of this movement, as a founding Board member of the American Anglican Council and a worker at the Lambeth Conference at the notorious Franciscan Centre. (N.B. The planners at the Anglican Communion Office secured the Franciscan Centre against the forces of darkness in 2008.)

In the central section of her book, Hassett gives a reasonably accurate history of the events from the conclusion of the Bishop Righter Trial in 1996 to the events leading up to Lambeth 1998 and its aftermath: the formation of the First Promise movement and AMiA.

Unfortunately, her main research concluded before *l'affaire* Gene Robinson in 2003 and the subsequent development of the Common Cause Partnership (CCP) in North America and the spreading of realignment of bishops, parishes and soon dioceses with the Provinces of Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Ghana and Southern Cone (of South America). This coalition came together at the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) in 2008 and the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA) in 2009.

Let me take you back a dozen years for a bit more of a first-hand look at these events. The acquittal of Episcopal Bishop Walter Righter ended the last attempt at inner discipline within the Episcopal Church. The conservative bishops who presented Righter for trial — known as the “ten evil men” in liberal circles — were demoralized by the outcome but compelled by their conscience and constituents to form a confessing movement.

The American Anglican Council, formed in 1996 just as the Righter Trial ended, gathered up the energies of the “three strands” of Evangelical, Anglo-Catholic and charismatic Episcopalianism. The greatest triumph of the AAC was the help it offered two years later at the Lambeth Conference to Global South bishops to counteract the blatant attempts to manipulate the Conference by the Anglican Communion Office on behalf of the Episcopal Church and its gay-rights lobby. The outcome was passage of Resolution 1.10 on Human Sexuality, one of the clearer statements of doctrine to come from the Communion for a long while.

The big question following Lambeth was, how does one follow up doctrine with discipline? At this point, the AAC coalition began to crumble. The conservative bishops were willing to make strong statements but would not take any canonical or sacramental action to assist beleaguered parishes in hostile dioceses. At that time, I urged them to declare “broken communion” with those “Koinonia bishops” who had promised to ordain practicing homosexuals. No sitting bishop took up the offer.

Subsequently, a round-table of priests, headed by the Rev. Chuck Murphy of Pawleys Island, South Carolina, began deliberating on whether the Episcopal Church was unreformable. Having concluded that such was the case, the First Promise movement met with overseas Primates from Rwanda and Southeast Asia, who consecrated the Rev. Dr. John Rodgers and Chuck Murphy as bishops in February 2000.

One of the AAC Board members most frustrated by these consecrations was the Rev. Canon Bill Atwood, the founder and General Secretary of the Ekklesia Society. Bill Atwood is a figure without whom the coming together of Global South and North American Anglicans would not have happened. Bill had hosted the first international gathering of conservative bishops in Dallas in 1997. He travelled continuously from Province to Province, building relationships.

Bill Atwood thought the Primates’ meeting in Oporto in March 2000 would be the Waterloo for Episcopal Church rebellion — until the Singapore consecrations came along. Archbishop Peter Akinola and

many other bishops were also put off by the unilateral actions. Yet five years later, Bill is himself a bishop in an African coalition headed by Peter Akinola, overseeing American congregations. Last January, Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi of Kenya stated: “I thought the consecrations in Singapore were wrong. I now think they were right and I repent of my former judgement.”

What has caused this gradual shift toward overseas alliances and “interventions”? The main cause is the steadfast stubbornness and petty meanness of the Episcopal leadership (illiberal liberals marching in lockstep). The secondary cause has been the collaboration between the national Episcopal Church in New York and Anglican Communion Office in London, with the consent of the current Archbishop of Canterbury. Meeting has stretched on to meeting, the Windsor “process” dragged on.

The final nail in the coffin of Canterbury-led Anglicanism has come as Rowan Williams set about to overturn the February 2007 decision of the Primates at Dar es Salaam. Rather than calling the Episcopal bishops to a final account as that meeting intended, he invited them all (minus Gene) to an “ndaba” at Canterbury (*ndaba* is Kwazulu for “sensitivity group”).

It is by now not at all uncommon to find North American Anglican churches with affiliations, if not sign-boards, of various African and South American jurisdictions. Some people are distressed by the centrifugal force of this movement: “I am of Nigeria,” “I am of Uganda,” “I am of Southern Cone.”

Before despairing, however, one should note a centripetal movement as well: these churches now have American bishops who are meeting and working toward a common realignment. The key figure in this movement is my bishop, Robert Duncan of Pittsburgh. Bob Duncan headed the Anglican Communion Network, which it seems was a transitional coalition of dioceses, some of which are moving out of The Episcopal Church and some of which are staying.

Many skeptics believe the Common Cause confederation is doomed to fragment like the early American confederation of states. The dynamics of dissent may well win the day, but I believe the leaders of the various groups, who have fought together in the trenches these past dozen years, will mold a coherent and viable Anglican body to replace the asset-rich but moribund Episcopal Church.

If they succeed, it will be to the great credit of Global South Anglicans with whom they have worked and prayed. This brings us back to Miranda Hassett's book. Hassett shows the various ways in which, on both sides of the ocean, Anglican Christians came to know and appreciate each other better.

Both share a basic Evangelical theology, although their churchmanship may be quite different. For instance, Eucharist comes once a month or less in Uganda, and charismatic praise services have replaced the vernacular use of the 1662 BCP and *Hymns Ancient and Modern* among youthful English-speaking Ugandans.

The Revival movement has brought with it a kind of methodism — no drinking, no smoking, conservative dressing — which might shock many Westerners who prefer their Protestantism with a nice cigar or stein of lager. But the common deference to Scripture (Ugandans bring their own Bibles with them to church), the emphasis on personal conversion and holiness and the warmth of Christian hospitality overcome the difference for most visitors to this continent.

Miranda Hassett asks whether North American Anglicans have thrust their sexual agenda on the Africans. I agree with her that the answer to this is Yes and No. Yes, many African church leaders a decade ago thought homosexuality was an odd Western custom which was irrelevant to them.

The influence of Western media and NGOs has made them think again. Ironically, the devious politics of the New York-London axis has made them suspicious of Episcopalians bearing gifts (Uganda has cut off all Episcopal donations and missionaries since 2003). The advent of the internet has also made a difference. I receive messages daily on the

Church of Uganda listserv and the “Global South Anglican” website updating me on the latest outrages, like the Muslim-Episcopal priestess in Washington State and the Buddhist - Episcopal Bishop candidate in Michigan.

But no, it is true that for most African Anglicans homosexuality is not front and center on their church agenda. Hassett faults the North American conservatives for not backing debt relief (the mantra of the late 90s, now replaced by the Millennium Development Goals).

Living closer to the scene, I would comment that education is the highest priority for most African families. Much as they grieve for the victims of AIDS and lament the poverty and corruption all around, they have hope for their future through the education of their children. Sometimes this hope may be rather rosy. I have been known to quip that if desiring a Ph.D. is all it takes, Uganda would have 29 million of them. But it is encouraging to know that equipping the mind is the highest single development goal.

Lurking just below the radar screen is Uganda’s baby boom. When I came to Uganda in 2000, the population was 21 million. Today it is 29 million, and is projected to be 56 million in 2025 and 117 in 2050! What will the Government do to feed and clothe and educate all these people? What role should the Church play in affirming the African family while teaching responsible family planning? These are major challenges for the future, and the Church and a Christian University like ours is well placed to address them.

Miranda Hassett writes as a sociologist of religion and globalization. Her main contention is that the liberal paradigm of globalization, according to which nations inevitably become more liberal culturally as they develop economically, does not fit Global Anglicanism. In fact, African Anglicans may find in the conservative culture of the Anglican tradition some ballast against rampant westernization and in support of traditional mores. In this sense, the North American conservatives may be offering Africans a genuine choice for their future.

Many sociologists thought that after independence, Africa would cast off Christianity as so much colonial baggage. Just the opposite has happened: now Africa represents what Philip Jenkins calls “The Next Christendom” (Hassett has a quibble with Jenkins’ thesis, but it seems to me to be quite secondary to the overall argument). However, what kind of Christianity will it be?

Once again, it appears in the providence of God, African Anglicans met up with a congenial body of Western Christians who appreciate their African culture and Evangelical heritage and who bring certain of the modern gifts — funds, expertise, technology — without the Trojan horse of cultural liberalism.

It appears from Miranda Hassett’s comments and her present location (Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts) that she does not agree with her fellows at St. Andrew’s Morehead City or at Uganda Christian University on the issues that divide us. Given this perspective, she displays an unusual amount of fairness and sympathy in her description of these conservatives, a liberality one seldom finds in liberal circles today. If her book can soften some of the hard stereotypes on the ecclesiastical left and challenge many on the right to deeper involvement with our global partners, it will have served a good purpose indeed.