

BOOK REVIEW

William L. Sachs and Wanjiru M. Gitau, *Becoming Cosmopolitan: Unfolding Two Centuries of Mission at Virginia Theological Seminary* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2023), pp. 242. ISBN 978-1725283541

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Thomas Schmidt graduated from Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS) in 1955. His first call was in Colombia, ministering for several years among the nascent Episcopal Church presence there. In the mid-1960s, inspired by the 'Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence' manifesto, he took a year-long leave from his role as rector of a church in Massachusetts to work in the Diocese of Zululand.

Schmidt isn't mentioned in *Becoming Cosmopolitan* by William Sachs and Wanjiru Gitau, but he is an instance of the pattern that is the subject of this book: graduates of Virginia Seminary who are called to serve the church overseas. Sachs and Gitau have many examples, dating almost to the seminary's founding in 1823 and covering diverse geographic locales, including Greece, Liberia, China, Japan and Brazil.

As the title indicates, the frame for this investigation is the word 'cosmopolitan', which the authors define at the outset as becoming 'familiar with and at ease in many different countries and cultures' and referring to people who 'move toward allegiance to a sense of global community'. The book is really in two parts. The first covers the waxing and waning of the missionary spirit at the seminary from its founding until the years after World War II. Many seminary histories have been written (including of VTS) but the thematic focus on mission history is an innovative way to structure the story. The reader is introduced in some depth to key faculty and graduates like future presiding bishop Henry St. George Tucker who embody the missionary impulse and ensure it lives on from generation to generation.

The last three chapters represent a shift in focus. Rather than look primarily at the activity of graduates overseas, the focus shifts almost exclusively to VTS itself and its development from about the 1970s to the present against the backdrop of a changing Anglican Communion. The reader learns a lot about the foundation of the Centre for Anglican Communion Studies and VTS's role in various church controversies. But in contrast to the first part of the book, there is almost no attention to what VTS graduates are doing overseas. This may be because, in common with much of the Western missionary movement in this period, mission

was changing. Amid calls for a moratorium, a shift to shorter periods of service, and a move to understand the ‘mission field’ as being at home as well as abroad, the nature of Christian mission changed significantly. I would have liked to have seen the experience of VTS in this period situated more clearly against these broader trends as the authors do so well in the first part of the book. In these last chapters, Sachs and Gitau do mention students from overseas who studied at VTS as an indication of the more cosmopolitan nature of the institution. Unlike the first part of the book where individuals are profiled, however, these international students are treated mostly as an agglomeration. I found this regrettable as many of these international students went on to significant roles in the Anglican Communion. The future Archbishop of Rwanda, Emmanuel Kolini, for instance, studied at VTS before returning to Rwanda and playing a key role in the Communion’s disputes over sexuality. Is this evidence of a cosmopolitan outlook? How did his time at VTS shape his future ministry?

I finished this book wondering what analytic benefit the idea of ‘cosmopolitan’ offers the study of mission and theological education. Thomas Schmidt’s story may again be instructive. After returning from Zululand, Schmidt realized he was no longer called to parish ministry or indeed to Christian ministry. He embarked on a career that included stints as Commissioner of Education in Rhode Island and World Bank staff member responsible for Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, before retiring to Maine where he pursued carpentry, organic gardening and Buddhist spiritual practice. He was certainly cosmopolitan in the way Sachs and Gitau define the term but he had replaced Christian mission and ministry with a commitment to social service and development. Another way to say this is in the 200-year period described by this book, Western society as a whole became much more open and connected to global community. Christian mission may be an example of that cosmopolitanism but it is not clear that it is its cause.

Does Schmidt count as a ‘successful’ VTS graduate in the way he became cosmopolitan? It is a question with which I finished the book.

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