

## Book Review

**Angélique Keturah Walker-Smith.** *Ahead of Her Time: Pan-African Women of Faith and the Vision of Christian Unity, Mission, and Justice.* Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2023. 113 pp.

Unearthing stories of leadership among pan-African women of faith. This could constitute one of the shortest possible summaries of the book Angélique Walker-Smith shares with the public. Such a summary, however, would not do this publication justice or adequately capture its vision. It is much more than a collection of stories. *Ahead of Her Time* takes the readers on a fascinating voyage, intertwining Walker-Smith's own rich ecumenical biography, starting in the early 1990s, with those of selected pan-African women of faith. At the 7th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Canberra in 1991, Angélique Walker-Smith encountered Dame Nita Barrow from Barbados, then a WCC president, whose role in leadership she admired: "She gracefully moved across the front of the room and stepped onto the stage. I noted the hush in the room that arrested the attention of all present! She approached the podium ... and then firmly called the meeting to order ... the stature of her presence had also captured my ecumenical and evangelical heart and imagination of what a young pan-African woman of faith should know and might become" (3). Walker-Smith frequently evokes this moment as formative for her ecumenical journey.

*Ahead of Her Time* is filled with these kinds of "coming-to-life stories." In the six chapters, readers will discover a plethora of resources for understanding the visionary character Walker-Smith attributes to the often underscored, neglected, and unrecognised leadership roles of pan-African women of faith. This book is so

much more than a mere ecumenical chronicle, even though it provides a chronological structure – beginning with the period prior to the foundation of the WCC in 1948 to its 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022. It allows readers to situate the stories in the ecumenical history and the debates of the time. Most importantly, as Walker-Smith underlines, these women's narratives should not be read as "siloes of the privileged" (3), but rather as an inspirational legacy *for all* and placed at the very heart of the ecumenical movement. The author is cognisant of the danger emerging from conventional classifications of women's contributions as pertaining to a particular version of female history ("her-story") or experience and hence carefully positions her compilation as a proposal to read the ecumenical history (and not only its contemporary version) afresh through the lenses of these pan-African female leaders.

Angélique Walker-Smith convincingly serves the need of such a *relecture* by drawing upon several dimensions. First, she sets the scene by demonstrating how pan-African movements and trends influenced the early modern ecumenical movement and how, in particular, women of African descent played a pivotal role expanding the space for the articulation of until then mostly silenced or marginalised voices, inter alia those of women, formerly enslaved, and Indigenous people within and outside the churches. The early decades of the 20th century were marked by such interesting transversal linkages between national liberation movements, international pan-African networks, and exchanges among these, with women of African descent establishing groundbreaking avenues for intellectual and practical exploration, such as womanist theologies, with an impact much beyond their initial locations of emergence.

Second, *Ahead of Her Time* places the question of identity and belonging at the forefront of an ecumenical quest that does not divorce the unity of the church from the unity of humankind. Belonging to the body of Christ means standing for the indivisible dignity of all creation and of God's presence and future with all humans. Walker-Smith ensures that this layer comes to the fore in all of her portraits. The first, second, and third generations of pan-African female leaders epitomise this sense of belonging to the global ecumenical fellowship, grounded in a lived faith for unity across ethnic and racial boundaries articulated in the public sphere. This commitment gains its poignancy from the unique but not exclusivist experience of women of African descent.

Last but not least, what makes Walker-Smith's portraits worthwhile reading is that they constitute future-oriented vignettes on the importance of ecumenical scholarship and ecumenical learning. These stories model and make visible avenues for present and future generations of ecumenists to embrace "that God's time and mission beckons us to be prepared to be 'ahead of our time' with a critique of that which is confronting us to traditional assumptions and conventions" (89).

Angélique Walker-Smith's collection invites all to revisit individual and collective history and accounts thereof in a perspective of critical introspection and transformation so that in the shared, visible, and unique stories of faith, justice, and mission, the unity of all may shine through.

*Copies of Ahead of Her Time may be purchased or downloaded free of charge at <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/ahead-of-her-time>.*

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**Matthias Ehmann.** *Theologien der Migration: Geschichte und Gegenwart globaler ökumenischer Ansätze (Theologies of migration: The history and present of global ecumenical approaches).* Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 2023. 562 pp.

This book is based on Matthias Ehmann's doctoral dissertation, which he wrote at the University of South Africa. He is currently a professor of missiology and intercultural theology at the Theologische Hochschule Ewersbach, an academic institution of the Federation of Free Evangelical Churches in Germany. His main subjects are missiology, mission, and community development. His perspective is shaped mainly by the free churches, although he also displays an ecumenical openness. Coming from a Roman Catholic background, he decided to become a member of the Federation of Free Evangelical Churches in Germany in his youth (16ff.). He has been involved in Lausanne Movement and World Council of Churches (WCC) events and has acted for several years as a delegate of his church to the Council of Churches in Bavaria.

Migration is a topic of national and international significance in society and politics, not least in Ehmann's German context. Churches and local parishes in Germany and all over the world are shaped to a greater or lesser degree by migration. Ehmann wants to investigate the religious dimension of migration and mission. In his field of study, the topic of migration and mission is increasingly being raised by different scholars.

The central aim of the study is to identify and compare various movements and approaches from different churches and ecumenical contexts in the 20th and 21st centuries. Through this comparison, Ehmann wants to show a theological relationship between mission and migration. To do this, he makes some basic assumptions, including the broad and ambiguous definitions of his terms (5–49) and the use of only the most relevant texts