



**Harvey J. Sindima.** *Africa's Agenda: The Legacy of Liberalism and Colonialism in the Crisis of African Values.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995. xvii + 256 pp. \$59.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-313-29479-2.



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**Published on** H-Africa (May, 1996)

Religion in Malawi has been outstandingly well studied. One thinks of the work of Linden, Schoffeleers, McCracken, and, most recently, Kaspin's chapter on the Nyau societies in that remarkable collection, *Modernity and Its Malcontents*. Now we have a large book from a Malawian--internal evidence suggests, from a Chewa Presbyterian. It is sad that instead of writing of what he knows firsthand and from within, he has attempted a continent-wide synthesis in a tradition that was already coming under heavy criticism twenty-five years ago.

Harvey Sindima begins with "Africa's biography"--a race through the continent's history in twenty-five pages, including footnotes. He goes on to an equally compressed introduction to some of the great names of Western philosophy, among them Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Kant, and Hegel. Chapter 3 is an introduction to the thought of Senghor and negritude in general. Chapter 4, on African socialism, concentrates on Senghor, Nyerere, Kaunda, and Nkrumah. The last two chapters are based on wide reading and would be of value to students beginning reading in this

field; they might well have been published separately. Chapter 5 deals with "African concepts of the world," focusing mainly on Tempels and his critics. Chapter 6 surveys the thought of some of Africa's best-known theologians--Boulaga, Dickson, Ela, and Mbiti.

He concludes with an analysis of "Malawian thought" (p.207) in terms of the Chewa word *moyo*, life. To many, this will seem Bantu philosophy revisited. Mbiti and Idowu were pioneers in their day, but they were criticised, justly enough, for inventing a highly generalised African "God"/"prayer"/"religion," which bore little relation to the particularity, variety, and mutability of actual African experience.

This book represents very extensive reading, but the whole enterprise is, I think, essentially misdirected. Sindima refers to traditional "African philosophers and theologians" (p. 125), begging a huge number of questions. He writes at a level of generality that has long since been questioned: "The African universe is one full of life--life transcending through fecundity...The African world is concerned with fullness of life" (p.126).

Those seeking a survey of African theological thought will find an excellent introduction in John Parratt's recent book, *Reinventing Christianity*. But our knowledge of religion in Africa rests almost entirely on the work of historians and anthropologists. I hope that in future work Dr. Sindima will consider exploring his own Chewa/Presbyterian/Malawi heritage.

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**Citation:** Elizabeth Isichei. Review of Sindima, Harvey J. *Africa's Agenda: The Legacy of Liberalism and Colonialism in the Crisis of African Values*. H-Africa, H-Net Reviews. May, 1996.

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