

Book Reviews

Religion and Politics in Africa

Religion and Politics in Africa

By Jeff Haynes

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Turbulent, volatile, chaotic, corrupt and complex might all qualify as more or less appropriate adjectives to describe the African dilemma in the face of modernisation. Complex or varied more accurately, though, are words that come to mind in trying to understand the intricate relationship between religion and politics on the African continent. This does not deter Jeff Haynes from attempting an enormous and near impossible task of examining the religious impact on modern African politics. This is done in a highly readable and skillfully lucid text that provides examples of such interaction from literally Cape Town to Cairo.

The first part is devoted to the advent of colonialism while the second is illustrative of the interplay between state and religious institutions after colonialism. Part three is an updated analysis of the contemporary scene where popular religiosity finds expression in new movements and fundamentalism. Haynes' bibliography is an interesting collection of only secondary sources (on which his work is entirely based) which will prove useful to college and university students of African politics. That seems to be the intended audience in any case as Haynes is primarily interested in drawing comparisons and teasing arguments among established scholars. Haynes' attempt would therefore be best described as a survey of the religious impact on modern Africa, with a plethora of examples to demonstrate the complexity of issues raised.

Haynes must be complimented for paying particular attention to Islam and its particular nuances, expressive forms and sectorial manifestations in different African contexts. Far too often have we been treated to texts that conveniently

assume a Christian character for the entire continent. Yet Haynes does little to show how indigenous and traditional African religions might be playing a more pronounced role in shifting the balance of political power.

It is actually quite difficult to fit African experiences of religious and political interaction into any preconceived framework because no two countries are alike tribally, ethnically, religiously, and politically. Whatever generalisations are made will be subject to a series of qualifications and exceptions. The Islamic impact in Southern Africa, for example, is completely ignored and the South African experience is worthy of mention in only two pages. This will disturb proponents of the view that religion has played a central role in the dismantling of apartheid.

Historians, and theologians belatedly, have clearly demonstrated the critical contribution made by women in the total experience of religion. Haynes has a page on women in Islam, where such a contribution is less critical, but little to offer on their significance in Christian leadership roles.

Due to the relative instability and rapid pace of political change, one should expect Haynes' book to be in need of revision shortly. In its present form, though, it is still an important study tool for the uninitiated student of African politics seeking a short overview of how religion continues to exercise a steady and growing influence in shaping political reality.

Conflict in Africa

Conflict in Africa.

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The political conflicts, economic disparities, and social disharmony in Africa have remained a major cause for concern for many. Extensive discussion regarding the causes and effects have produced a myriad works, both within and outside the region.