

Fowler, S 1995 — The oppression and liberation of Africa. Examining the powers shaping today's Africa

Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys. 177 pages. Paperback. Price: Unknown

Reviewer: Prof E Engelbrecht (Hervormde Teologiese Opleiding)

Fowler has succeeded in presenting the results of his investigation in a short, well motivated and balanced manner. His book is an excellent introduction to the topic. He frequently discusses the viewpoint of a wide range of scholars. The book has a comprehensive bibliography and a handy index as well as a map of Africa. The introductory nature of this book is closely related to its comprehensive scope. The geographical area investigated is so extensive that relevant detail gets lost. In the discussion of colonial and post-colonial oppression the scope is too extensive. The reader often gets the feeling that he is aquaplaning. Fowler succeeds in presenting a valid critique of colonial as well as post-colonial oppression. This critique is to be listed as the most prominent feature of the book.

As good books often do, Fowler's book stimulates debate. An agenda for debate could include the following issues, amongst others.

- * Epistemology: Western man has always insisted that he knows best what is good for Africa. The epistemological presupposition of Fowler opposes this. He states that Africans know what is best for Africa. I propose an epistemological point of departure in which the subject is extended to include all the role players. The subject should, however, be extended in such a way as to form a partnership in which the partners are sensitive to the opposing views compromising this extended subject.

Boekbesprekings / Book Reviews

- * **Social structure and development:** The scientific, technical and economic facets of a particular culture are closely related to the other elements of the culture. The basic pattern of a culture could prevent development in the western sense of the word. Fowler (p 22) concedes this. He is of the opinion that changes were externally imposed on African cultures. This over-simplifies the whole process of cultural change. Once the African cultures came into contact with the three above mentioned elements of western culture, radical changes were bound to take place. These changes are not so much 'externally imposed' but rather inevitable. It is not denied that externally imposed changes did often occur. Speaking of externally imposed changes, Fowler ignores the radical changes forced upon African culture by Christian missions. These changes did not start in the superstructure of African cultures, but rather in the deep structure. It is this kind of change that has devastating consequences for a culture as a whole. Change now becomes unavoidable, comprehensive and radical.

The theme of this book is that the people of Africa themselves should decide what changes should be made and what development should look like. African cultures have many aspects that can assist and enrich change and development. This emphasis makes it essential that this book should be widely read.