

*Appendix 38:*

**Christians on Secularism**

**Jan H. Boer 2009**

*NOTES: (1) The materials in this file were originally part of an early draft of this volume. Since secularism has been dealt with so exhaustively in Volume 5, I decided to relegate this material to an appendix.*

*(2) This file contains two articles by Boer that are separated by =====xxxx. The two are somewhat overlapping.*

*(3) The material in this file is closely related to the section on secularism in Appendix 35.*

Some participants in the 1989 conference convened by Jacob Olupona represented Christians well in their insistence on secularism as the only solution. Olupona himself stated that “the Nigerian state continuously reaffirms the secular nature of the Republic, *guaranteeing* religious pluralism.”<sup>1</sup> Bala Takaya of UJ, having determined that where two religions with many adherents “get politicised, the very existence of the state is threatened,” asked how then “do we ensure their non-politicisation or depoliticisation in a multi-faith state like Nigeria?” He considered this “the fundamental question for Nigeria.” He insisted that “a secularist national idea system that respects and accommodates internal peculiarities, including differences in religion and ethnic ways of life, is a necessity for a plural society.” The problem is that Nigeria has “no single set of nation-wide coherent principles.” Nigeria has been torn by “higher loyalties to sub-national factors” such as religion and ethnicity, instead of committing themselves to the nation as a whole. This problem can be solved by secularism, defined as the separation of government and religion. “To kick against secularism in Nigeria” would constitute the unraveling of Nigeria into its original components of numerous mini-states. Takaya was

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<sup>1</sup>J.Olupona, p. 8. Italics mine.

quick to explain that this is not an anti-religious policy but simply the refusal to favour one religion over another. As history would have it, according to Takaya, that is exactly the basic principle of the Constitution, even “though unstated.”<sup>2</sup>

Emmanuel Oyelade, another participant at the “Olupona conference,” made the distinction between secularization and secularism I have discussed in Volume 5, where I indicated I do not find it a helpful distinction. Nevertheless, let us hear him out. He suggested that “the solution to religious conflict is the acceptance and dedication of religious secularization.” He realized that Muslims object to the notion, but he insisted that “in secularization all the different spheres of life are autonomous and no aspect undermines religion. In this case, freedom is ensured.” Hence, both religions should “welcome a secularized society and government should give equal rights and privileges to all citizens.

The Catholic scholar Jude Aguwa called for “strong reaffirmation of the need of upholding the secularity of Nigeria.” He insisted “that one of the effective means of realizing religious harmony is through government neutrality in matters of religion. By so doing, the country may eventually learn to separate religion from politics.” “For meaningful national integration to emerge, successive governments should ensure respect for the constitutional provision that ‘the government of a state shall not adopt any religion as state religion’ and that, as a secular state, it ‘has no religion of its own and it refrains from discrimination on grounds of religion.’” However, such separation “does not mean state antagonism to religion.” It allows government and religion to “co-operate in matters of public interest” without the state favouring of one religion or discriminating.<sup>3</sup>

Habila Istifanus urged Nigerian Christians and Muslims not to restrict their thinking on secularism to Nigeria, but also to read European writers, both pro and con. Neither did he want Christians simply to dismiss Muslim opinions. He admitted that he appreciated “some of the arguments of Muslims against secularism.” They are opposing it “out of a serious sincere religious heart to improve the morality of the society. I don’t believe they are rejecting secularism blindly.” They have seen the moral chaos caused by

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<sup>2</sup>B. Takaya, 1992, pp. 119-120. The issue of secularism has been fully discussed from both Christian and Muslim perspectives in vols. 4 and 5. Even though Takaya quoted from my dissertation of 1979, his comments on secularism make it appear he did not read all of its 531 pages, not even crucial pp. 449-460, 478-482 (about sharia and secularism) and the passages indexed under “Dualism.”

<sup>3</sup>J. Aguwa, 1993, pp. 5, 7, 30.

secularism in other countries. If Christians want to come to an agreement with Muslims, “we must first listen and study very carefully what Muslims are saying about the issue.” But Muslims do not seem to understand the Christian arguments either. “The struggle with secularism therefore calls for a collective effort. We should come together to understand one another. If this is done, we will be able to come to a point of agreement.” He concluded his paper “by calling for a real critical evaluation of the positions of the two religion on secularism.” The two religions “should join hands to iron out this difficult and complicated issue, so that we can come to an acceptable agreement on the issue of secularity.”<sup>4</sup>

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### **Secularism xxxx**

Readers of Volume 5 know that the major solution to religious discord offered by the Christian community is that of secularism. Having devoted an entire volume to that subject, there is no need to spend much time on it here. For the benefit of those who have no access to that volume, I will present a short run of pro-secular opinions in this section, while some others can be found in Appendix 37 xxxx? I also include here some opinions more hesitant towards secularism, especially that of US-based Nigerian scholar, Simeon Ilesanmi, to help prepare you for my own “onslaught” in the following chapter.

Secularism, it is important to remember, in the Nigerian Christian mind stands for objectivity, neutrality and equality. You have hopefully read Chapter 6 on Wilson Sabiya in Volume 7, who did much to set the pattern for the Christian response. He showed how the major Nigerian structures favoured Islam at the time of the first CA in 1977 and how Christians were forced to support Muslim causes via taxation. He then emphatically stated, “The secular state is the only answer to our ills.” Again, “We reaffirm our belief in the fact that the only hope for unity in this great country lies in a strictly secular state. The right to this belief constitutes for us the *sine qua non* of any meaningful life in this polity, just as the sharia is the *sine qua non* for its ardent protagonists. The only difference is that while some people advocate diversity and thinly-disguised apartheid, we emphasise unity at the federal level.”<sup>5</sup> This point was central to Sabiya’s

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<sup>4</sup>H. Istifanus, 1995, pp. 53-54.

<sup>5</sup>W. Sabiya, 25 Feb/78. See J. Boer, 2008, vol. 7, pp. 264, 276-277.

campaign against sharia; he re-iterated it repeatedly. It set the tone for Christians for years to come. Secularism *uber alles* became *the* solution—while for most Muslims, secularism represented *the* problem. The reason for Sabiya’s insistence was that his “understanding of a secular state... allows all forms of religion to co-exist without any of them being the religion of the entire country.”<sup>6</sup> This had profound implications for his view of government and legal system that will be examined below.

A decade later, TEKAN submitted a memorandum to the Constitutional Review Committee of the day in which TEKAN proposed a “very specific amendment to the Constitution, with the express aim of strengthening the secularity of the Nigerian state and opposing the impulse of religious discrimination at work in Nigeria.” In the mind of Nigerian Christians, these two go together, secularism and neutrality. TEKAN recommended a constitutional amendment that was to read: “The state shall not, by action or inaction, enact a law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting its free exercise.”<sup>7</sup> Sabiya was the chairman of the committee that produced the memo.

Osa Director of *TELL* magazine referred to a movement he detected in the Near Eastern Muslim world, where, beginning with Turkey, the trend is towards secularisation, development and “protection of the minority Christians.” Turkey has “shed its toga of primitivity and inward looking approach,” and “is fast being integrated into mainland Europe and becoming a modern state.” Countries like Egypt, Lebanon and Indonesia “have over the years, embraced secularity as a state principle of a multi-religious and plural society.” Continuing, Director wrote, “There are probably no more than two countries in the world where strict Islamic laws are the directive principle of the state. These are Afghanistan under the Taliban Movement and Saudi Arabia.” Neither of the two is multi-religious. He then asked, “Can any state within Nigeria absorb the extremism of the Taliban?”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>W. Sabiya, 25 Feb/78. Quoted from M. N. Elechi, Hansard. See J. Boer, 2008, vol. 7, p. 264. In keeping with many Nigerian Christians, Sabiya is confusing “secular” with “neutral.” I try to unravel that confusion in my vol. 5, 2006, pp. 125-176.

<sup>7</sup>TEKAN, 1987, pp. 1, 47.

<sup>8</sup>O. Director, 15 Nov/99, p. 15-18. Director’s almost naïve recommendation of the secular models of these countries gives the appearance as if he were totally unaware of the Nigerian Muslim strong resistance to secularism. I know he is familiar with it. Whence then this naïve-sounding recommendation? In addition, he seems to be unaware of the persecution and harassment of Christians in most of his secular “model countries.” If it is not the government or the legal system, it is the people themselves. The Barnabas Fund prayer request for *today* reads as follows: “Christians in Turkey are often made to feel socially inferior at work, in the neighbourhood and when doing their obligatory military service. Even in educated Turkish society, it is common to hear extremely racist comments about...Christian peoples. The Christian minorities are not allowed to use their historical facilities to train future leadership. Although there is no law against missionary work amongst Muslims or against leaving Islam, police still arrest and

Director's colleague, Dele Agekameh, also held up Turkey, Tunisia, Syria and Iraq as countries showing the way to a secular solution.<sup>9</sup>

Turkey is the favourite example for many opponents to sharia. The conference of women NGOs pointed to that country as one with laws worthy of emulation. Turkey allegedly protects women from domestic violence. Or take the laws of Iran, Tunisia, India or Egypt, all of which are said to have a better deal for women than that provided by Zamfara's sharia.<sup>10</sup> For me the question about all of these countries is about the place of both women *and* Christians, whether women or men. And in the case of India, what of her caste system? The reality is often shaped by the law of the people rather than the law of the land. Remember Governor Sani's comments about apostasy. Remember the story of Pastor Zacheous Habu Bu Ngwenche in Chapter 4 in Volume 7, that took place in non-sharia Nasarawa State under Nigeria's secular common law. *In Muslim-dominated societies neither secular nor sharia law protect Christians, women or minorities effectively.* Recommending these countries can only be done on basis of ignorance or outright denial.

Emmanuel Oyelade, participant in the Olupona Conference of Appendix xxxx?, was shown there to favour secularization, but secularism was to him another kettle of fish. He advocated that both religions "should fight secularism," for it "is an ideology, an attitude to life that rejects spiritual values and religious outlook. This naturally leads to a humanistic programming, which sets man at the centre of all affairs and undermines or even neglects and rejects the centrality of the Deity and His spiritual values. This is dangerous to peace."<sup>11</sup>

Oyelade's rejection of secularism may be rare among Nigerian Christians, but he was not the only one. Apart from those who play around with various derivatives of the term as discussed in Volume 5, and who accept some forms of it and reject others, the LCCN conference of 1995, probably under the prodding influence of Habila Istifanus as discussed in Appendix 42 xxxx(Chr. BZ Secularism), ended up rejecting secularism as "not compatible with the

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charge many who engage in evangelism" (Barnabas Prayer Bulletin, 22 Aug/2006). I recommend the following websites to Director and all others who either do not know or refuse to acknowledge the harassment of Christians in many Muslim countries, including these "model countries:" < [www.righttojustice.org](http://www.righttojustice.org) >, < [www.barnabasfund.org](http://www.barnabasfund.org) >, <[www.compassdirect.org](http://www.compassdirect.org)> < [www.persecution.net](http://www.persecution.net) > and < [www.opendoorsusa.org](http://www.opendoorsusa.org) >. For harassment of Muslims I refer you to the books of the Indian Muslim author Asghar Ali Engineer on< [www.gyanbooks.com](http://www.gyanbooks.com) >and his own website < [www.sccc-islam.com](http://www.sccc-islam.com) >.

<sup>9</sup>D. Agekameh, 15 Nov/99.

<sup>10</sup>NN, 31 Oct/99.

<sup>11</sup>E. Oyelade, 1992, pp. 188-189.

background, upbringing and life style of Nigerians, because religion permeates all facets of Nigerian life.”<sup>12</sup> It is hard to fathom the seriousness of the majority of Christians at the conference on the issue. Nigerian Christians often express agreement on issues in multi-religious conferences that they reject in other contexts. I suspect the Nigerian penchant for politeness and communalism may have played a part here.

Another negative opinion was that of Pandang Yamsat, who at least during his earlier days as TCNN lecturer, rejected secularism outright. He had three reasons for this rejection. First, the question of unity that will be discussed under its proper heading further down, where he argued that religions should not insist on things that divide the nation, not even if they are important to them. Secondly, “the idea of ‘secularism’ enshrined in our Constitution is alien to the teachings” of both religions. Few Nigerian Christians agree to that one and I am not sure just how serious Yamsat was about it. I have seen no further discussion of this point from him, not even after he became COCIN President during 2004, the year of turmoil in COCIN and Plateau State. Thirdly, as it has been argued with reference to Muslim opponents to sharia, so he did not trust the Christian “pro-secular state advocates.” “It would appear that those who are comfortable with this position” are not so much interested in “freedom of religion as such, but they do not want the high ethical and moral standard of the Holy Scriptures to interfere with their mischievous and exploitative political activities.”<sup>13</sup>

Not all AZ Christians were enamoured with secularism either. Ishaya Audu was not fond of it, but, he wondered, “what is the alternative?” “At least it allows for mutual tolerance, live and let live and is the lesser of unsatisfactory alternatives.”<sup>14</sup> Haruna Dandaura warned that secularism is dangerous. The Christian fear that “if Nigeria is not declared a secular state,” Muslims will declare it a Muslim state is without foundation. He discounted this fear as “mere impossible speculation.” He also declared opposing sharia dangerous, since it is such an integral part of Islam, though he was opposed to it.<sup>15</sup> In other words, Dandaura was quite out of sync with mainstream Christian thought on this score. The Hausa/Fulani Muslim background of these gentlemen, both “fathers” in this project, had no doubt an influence on their desire for something more wholistic. Oyelade has, I believe, also a Muslim background.

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<sup>12</sup>Second International Conference, 1995, “Communique,” p. 137. For its Recommendations see Appendix xxxx (Misc Short Proposals) section A.

<sup>13</sup>P. Yamsat, n.d., p. 10.

<sup>14</sup>I. Audu, personal correspondence, 23 Aug/2000.

<sup>15</sup>M. Gaiya, 2003, p. 90-91, 74, 83, 85.

Simeon Ilesanmi also rejected secularism as a solution.<sup>16</sup> He argued that Nigeria needs “to develop a public ethic capable of serving as a common standard of political judgement for Nigeria’s citizens and its varied groups.” He insisted on this requirement, for, quoting from Jacob Olupona, “any coherent society must rest on a set of moral beliefs which ground the political order on a transcendent basis.” Contrary to the opinion of most Nigerian Christians and of secularists everywhere, secularism is too weak for that purpose. I refer you to Ilesanmi’s discussion as reproduced in Volume 5 of this series. For one thing, the mythical secular platform of religious neutrality does not exist in Nigeria. And thus “there cannot be a religiously neutral political life.” He resolutely debunked

*the myth of a...state that prescribes political norms that are alien to its citizens’... experiences. Not only would such a state be antithetical to the real experience of the Nigerian people, it would ultimately be found to be based on its own narrowly defined value of life, thus revealing the hypocrisy of any attempt to establish a value-neutral state. Writing about a different society, Subrata Mitra argues that “no concept of the state is value free; the values inherent in the prevailing concept of the state determine the parameters of political, social and cultural engagement within a society. Religions often have a great deal to say about what values are incorporated into such a concept of the state.”*

Though he rejected secularism, Ilesanmi did accept pluralism and diversity. “The unity of religion is not a prerequisite for political unity.” The multi-religious composition of the country “need not be a hindrance to ... this goal. What might be an impediment is the refusal... to come to terms with this diversity. Having said that, he proceeded with an entire chapter to explore “the positive contributions of diverse religions” to the country.<sup>17</sup>

Ilesanmi wanted “the references to religious idioms in the...Constitution” regarded “as an indicator of the desire to create...’an institutional structure...that enough of its citizens would find sufficiently congenial to allow it to function.”<sup>18</sup> He rejected the idea of civil religion as it tends to reduce religions to their lowest common denominator and because it tends to uncritically support the *status quo*.

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<sup>16</sup>This section about Ilesanmi may be difficult reading for some. If so, simply skip it.

<sup>17</sup>S. Ilesanmi, 1997, pp. 197, 214

<sup>18</sup>Quotation from Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973, p. 315.

Ilesanmi sadly ended up on a negative note. He called into serious question “Nigerians’ preparedness to become a people...united by a common agreement about laws and rights and a common desire for mutual, not just selfish, advantage.”<sup>19</sup> Basing his arguments on various sources, he recognized that Christian and Muslim demands are “diametrically” opposite, with Christians demanding a secular separation of church/religion and state, however inconsistently argued and applied, and Muslims insisting that such separation is impossible and undesirable. To steer the way through this morass, he suggested a need for a “theoretical framework” about “religion and civil life.”

Ilesanmi still managed to squeeze a measure of hope out of the situation. “The contending factions have more common ground than they realize,” he argued. The framework he suggested above is given a name: “dialogic politics.” He proposed that the 1989 constitutional guidelines on religion and state “be construed as complementary co-guarantors of a single end, which is ‘to promote and assure the fullest possible scope of religious liberty and tolerance for all and to nurture the conditions which secure the best hope of attainment of that end.’”<sup>20</sup> The chief objective of this approach “is to discern a common political ground among religious people with major perspectival differences by encouraging each side to cultivate a sufficient level of trust as the basis for enjoying the good faith of the others.” I take this to constitute a plea for a certain degree of pragmatism and compromise—fullest *possible* scope and *best* hope of attainment—not so much *away from* religious principle but *enrichment* of application that takes into consideration local circumstances and the limitations it imposes. As Nigerian lorry owners know only too well, no circumstances are permanent. So, this in effect is a plea for patiently accepting the present condition and its limitations with the understanding that legitimate means may be used to change both circumstance and limitations to conditions more favourable to your perspective and goals. Of course, Muslims have in the past practised compromise. The sharia arrangement of independence itself is a compromise that was acceptable to the Nigerian population at the time, but this trade off eventually gave birth to dissatisfaction. Ilesanmi wanted this compromise continued, since it avoids the extreme positions of both Christians and Muslims. On the basis of this long-standing compromise, he wanted both sides “to become agents of mature dialogue by subordinating their narrow interests to the civil well-being of all.”

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<sup>19</sup>S. Ilesanmi, 1997, pp. 157, 159, 162-163, 172.

<sup>20</sup>S. Ilesanmi, 1997, pp. 176-177. Quotation from Arlin Adams and Charles Emmerich, *A Nation Dedicated to Religious Liberty: The Constitutional Heritage of the Religion Clauses*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990, p. 37.

Such dialogue requires at least two “contingencies.” The state needs to “be alert to its duty and responsibility by providing creative space for dialogue in order that a climate of tolerance might grow.” Whatever the level of commitment on the part of the people, it needs the “appropriate political context” to grow, something that has been missing in Nigeria. Secondly, *especially Christians have to abandon the secular idea that “morality is merely a personal matter, and that the development of public policy is a purely secular or political endeavour.”* Both religions have the common task of reminding society that all national problems have these moral and religious dimensions so that they “be taken into consideration in the development of public policy.”

The principle of institutional separation of church/mosque from state, Ilesanmi insisted, “must be considered an unbreachable contract by the state.” Absolutely necessary. The separation principle means to avoid an unholy alliance of ecclesiastical and state institutions to avoid partiality on the part of the latter and undue influence on the part of the former. It was never meant as “an evacuation of religious symbols and values” from politics and marketplace. Ilesanmi acknowledged that Muslims have good reasons for being suspicious of the secularist arguments. However, he reasoned, this separation neither requires a secular society as Christians have argued, nor does it demand “exclusion of religion from political discourse—in other words, separation of religion from politics.” Though aware of its weakness, he did concur with certain writers who recognize in modern secularism “a higher realization of the Christian spirit.”<sup>21</sup>

Ilesanmi referred to the 1977 government takeover of Christian hospitals and secondary schools. Christians, of course, interpreted the move as another step towards the Islamizing of the country. It led to an almost complete collapse of medical and educational services. Ilesanmi still saw some hope. He suggested that “the nation can still benefit immensely from a reconsidered policy that allows the participation of religious institutions in the supervision of these hospitals.” In education, both religions lacked clear definitions of their goals. So, it is now “vitally important” for the two religions “to articulate their roles and objectives in a pluralistic setting.”

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<sup>21</sup>S. Ilesanmi, 1997, pp. 182-183, 214, 234-235, 256. See J. Boer, 2006, vol. 5, pp. 220-223 for further explanation of this principle. Let it be understood that we are talking about the separation of institutions, namely of church/mosque from state or government. This is distinctly different from the separation of religion from state and politics. While I support the first, I reject the second. The distinction, in turn, is based on the distinction between church/mosque and religion. Religion is much wider than its central institutions.

Ilesanmi realized full well that Nigerians will not wake up one fine morning and suddenly smell the aroma of peace in the air. It needs hard work to succeed. He quoted from the Indian Wesley Ariarajah:

*The time has come to “institutionalize” the reconciling potential of religion.... Inter-religious councils, multi-religious fellowships of religious leaders, peace education, studies in peaceful methods of conflict-resolution, education for justice and peace, exposure to each other’s prayer and spiritual practices, etc., may have to be the new “institutions” that supplement the institutions that brought education, healing and service to communities. Peace does not come about by wishing it; we have to be peace-makers. One has to work for and build peace, and strive to preserve it.*

Ilesanmi knew that “religious groups are [not] always going to...agree on all issues perceived to be in the interest of everybody. Conflict of views is a fact that history will not let us deny.” Even if they were to agree on rejecting “a secularist domestication of their religions, they may still disagree on the mode and the extent to which religion should shape public policy.” The remaining questions are still very problematic, but despite them, “dialogic politics offers one promising way of achieving peaceful conflict resolution, political tolerance and cultural negotiation.... Only then can people learn to substitute fear and paranoia for hope and trust....”<sup>22</sup> Ilesanmi’s final word was to acknowledge “that there is no single solution of the problem of Nigeria’s religions and the public life.” Adherents “must recognize that they cannot escape the inevitable ambiguity...of life.”<sup>23</sup>

A few comments are in order as I close this section on Ilesanmi. He provides a number of important parameters for peace, some of which I have not heard before from a Nigerian Christian. I will use them in “my own” chapter with appreciation. *I refer especially to his “explicit theoretical aim” which was “to challenge the conceptual dichotomy between religion and secular life, or between private and public life.” That, in fact, is a major point of my entire series as well and I am more than grateful for this “mother of all coincidences!”*<sup>24</sup>

He also suggested a number of tools and methods available to Nigeria that, I am grateful to report, are already in use. It is good to have a stamp of approval on them from a reputable scholar like Ilesanmi. But at the end of the day, it appears to me that he has not brought us far

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<sup>22</sup>S. Ilesanmi, 1997, pp. 237-244. S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Current Dialogue*, 3, 1987, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup>S. Ilesanmi, 1997, p. 257.

<sup>24</sup>S. Ilesanmi, 1997, p. 253 It is not a totally unexpected coincidence, for he refers to at least one American scholar with Kuyperian connections.

beyond where home-based Nigerian Christians and Muslims have already taken us, except that he has provided other parameters which, if adopted, have the potential to open the door to renewal, reconciliation and cooperation. That is exactly the purpose of this series as well.

Also a final question to Ilesanmi. In your final paragraph you speak of “national integration” as if that were your real goal. That is where your book ends. But what if that is *not* the goal of some religionists, especially radical Muslims who have no respect for the Constitution, the nation, its laws or its people? You have been silent about that possibility—or reality? If you had taken that into consideration, where would your theories and opinions have taken you? Ignoring them is not possible, but that, as far as I can see, is what you did. Whether I will do any better in “my own” chapter, remains to be seen!

Sam A. Aluko, a professor of economics at different times serving the WCC as well as the government of Babangida as consultant, offered Muslims rich advice on sharia. He revealed that during his WCC dialogue work he had close contacts with Muslims and retained friendship with “important Muslims” across the globe. Hence, he explained that “few Christians are as sympathetic to the Muslim religion as I am.” This relationship has not prevented him from warning Muslims that the current revival of sharia in economic affairs will “do more damage to the Muslim faith and to the Muslims than ever before.” For him it was a matter of historical differentiation of Muslim society. As it expanded and increasingly interacted with the world, functions initially handled by religious leaders had to be distributed to experts in such fields as administration, military, religious, judicial and more. The application of sharia has become an “impractical notion. Ataturk’s switching Turkey over to secularism led to it becoming both a modern state and the most developed in the Islamic world.” Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Tunisia, Iran and Indonesia have all “embraced the virtues of secularity as a principle of governing a multi-religious and plural society.” Only Afghanistan under the Taliban and Saudi Arabia have embraced sharia, but they were/are not multi-religious. Sudan is the only multi-religious country that has tried, and we all know the resulting misery. “There is the vital need to avoid social and political crises in a multi-religious society where Muslims predominate. Rather, there should be an adaptation to the modern secular demands of the state and its citizens.” One of the hopes of sharia was that it would eliminate social vices and corruption. Aluko was equally interested in their elimination but thought sharia was not needed to accomplish it. It is the responsibility of modern [secular] governments and religious citizens,

both adherents and leaders, “to put in place policies and programmes that will reduce the vices that are plaguing our country. Otherwise we will be deceiving ourselves by using any legal system to fight the consequences rather than the causes of the social and economic vices in our country.”<sup>25</sup>

Aluko also wrote political essays. In one lengthy document, he suggested Nigeria had five political options, but going beyond a few comments, I would digress too far. One would be to “continue the current fake federation,” but “in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious Nigeria, that is too much power at the centre if we are to survive.” He preferred a confederate system, but saw some dangers there as well. He proposed a “structural ethos” that would have the following features: (1) Commitment to universal democracy and personal freedoms; (2) An inclusive constitution understood by all along with a simple bill of rights; (3) Commitment to rule of law, free judiciary and free press; (4) Participatory governance as close and as accountable to the people as possible.<sup>26</sup> Most of these, it seems to me, are available to the people right now and depend only on their determination.

I use the words of the Anglican Bishop of Kano, Zakka Lalleh Nyam, to represent the mainline Christian *ecclesiastical* opinion of AZ days with respect to secularism. It is basically the same as that of the BZ period. He poured all the concepts and hopes that Christians had into the secularist formula. He called on the FG to “come out openly and explain what the secular state is.” The Christian position, he declared, is “clear:” “We are in a secular country and we must remain the same through accommodating Christians, Muslims and African Religion believers.”<sup>27</sup> Enough said. If you need more, please turn to Volume 5.

I closed Volume 3 with these words of the Catholic clergyman George Ehusani:

*In the midst of the madness of today, those who still have their heads in place must reflect together and rise up in defence of the secular nature of our national constitution, or else Nigeria may soon become another Algeria. A stitch in time saves nine they say. This latest event in the tragic drama of the Nigerian state is one more reason why it is necessary to hold a round table or a national conference to discuss the terms of our*

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<sup>25</sup>S. Aluko, 28 Nov/99.

<sup>26</sup>A. Aluko, 12 Mar/2000.

<sup>27</sup>K. Dada, 3 Nov/99.

*social contract as a nation... We must salvage our country for once from the hands of bandits, hooligans and fanatics. The time to act is now!*<sup>28</sup>

Since then, that National Political Reforms Conference (NPRC) has come and gone, but has it saved the country “from the hands of bandits” and their like? Since Ehusani wrote his article, we have gone through two elections, but, if truth be told, not much has changed. Neither the NPRC nor the sharia, two events that raised hopes high for different constituencies, have fulfilled the promises with which people stuffed them--nor has secularism, the hope of Sabiya, Ehusani and of most Nigerian Christians.

I close this section with the hopeful words of a student of the Nigerian scene who wants to remain anonymous at this point:

*There is a growing contingent of Muslims who recognize that as a religiously plural state, Nigerians of all faiths must learn to get along with one another. A few have begun to call for an end to the “silent majority syndrome” so that extremist Muslims do not represent the public face of Islam to the world, whether in Nigeria or elsewhere. Even within Nigeria, there have been moderate and progressive Muslim voices urging acceptance of a secular state for the sake of peace. Isn't this what Nigerian Christians are seeking?*

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<sup>28</sup>G. Ehusani, 10 Dec/2002. J. Boer. 2004, vol. 3, Appendix 13, p. 299. “The latest event” referred to is the Miss World riot in Kaduna. See “Miss World” entries in indices of J. Boer, vols. 2, 3, 5, 6; *Companion CD* <Misc Arts/Miss World>.