

# INTRODUCTION

The decades of religious bloodbaths in Nigeria are well-known. They have received wide publicity in the international media. Locally, these events have almost become the bread and butter for Nigerian journalists by providing them with a long list of sensational cover stories.

The riots themselves are the subject of Monograph One, *Nigeria's Decades of Blood*, where they are described in lurid detail. The monograph you now have at hand, Volume Two of the series *Studies in Christian–Muslim Relations*, assumes familiarity with these events and does not repeat or even summarize them. An adequate appreciation of this present volume therefore requires familiarity with the flow of events as recorded in Monograph One.

What are the causes of the violent flare-ups in Nigeria? That is the question for this monograph. In Monograph One, the emphasis is primarily on the flow of the events themselves, the “facts,” if you will. In this monograph, the primary focus is on opinion and interpretation—so you are asked to listen; to take it all in. Absorb the major opinions, including the strong emotions in which they are often wrapped. Leave your critical faculties in abeyance during

your initial reading. Try to feel along with these opinions and views. Sometimes their relationship to the facts on the ground is not immediately clear. More specifically, Monograph Two describes major Muslim views; Monograph Three is going to be devoted to Christian opinions.

It is risky to peg everyone. Where, for example, do I put reporters and journalists associated with the government-owned *New Nigerian*; or the private newsmagazine *National Concord*, founded by the late Moshood Abiola, in life one of Nigeria's most prominent and wealthy Muslim businessmen and politicians? Who is Christian or Muslim? I am reduced to picking and choosing my way on basis of names, since these can be telling in Nigeria, but not in a foolproof way. So, in the process, I fully expect to displease some by placing them in the wrong category. I am sorry about that. I will try my best. Sometimes, you have only a choice between doing nothing and taking risks. I choose the risk and apologize ahead of time for some inevitable mistakes.

Familiarity with Volume One is also helpful for some other reasons. For one, it contains the Introduction to the entire series. It is there that I explain that I do not always follow strict academic convention in this study, though it is based on responsible research and thirty years' experience. In addition, I explain my footnote policy and some other issues there. In the meantime, my footnotes have changed somewhat. Apart from those that contain text, I now provide just enough information so that you can identify the author and publication by checking the Bibliography.

An important part of the Introduction in Volume One is the explanation of the perspective with which I operate, namely that of Kuyperianism, a wholistic version of Christianity that has closer parallels to the wholism of Islam than any other Christian school of thought of which I am aware.

Then there is the promise of a companion CD-Rom. In addition to the text of these volumes, that disk will eventually include

some rare official documents and other writings from both Christian and Muslim sources for which there is no room in these volumes. That companion volume may well become an important resource on Christian–Muslim relations for Sub-Saharan Africa. Having both Volume One and the CD-Rom at hand will enhance your reading of the paper volume.<sup>1</sup>

The parties whose opinions and views are reflected in these pages cover a wide range. I cover religious, academic, journalistic, and political opinions, but also include the opinions of “ordinary” people who write letters to editors. These are opinions that emerge from the hearts of their authors. They represent the heart-felt hurts of the common people, less spoiled by the corrupt motivations of most politicians and other elite. I consider them to contain the most honest expressions of Christian and Muslim piety—even if they have been deceived by elite manipulators.

It should be understood, of course, that neither Muslims nor Christians always agree with their fellow adherents. The opinions of some Muslim academics, for example, can differ markedly from those of Muslim Activists, my term for Fundamentalists. Like their Christian counterparts in Nigeria, Muslim academics are sometimes influenced by Marxism. Even Muslim Activists sometimes disagree with each other as in the case of the Governor of Zamfara State, who launched the current sharia<sup>2</sup> campaign, and El-Zakzaky,<sup>3</sup> both prominent Nigerian Muslim activists about whom we will hear more. The post-September 11—or as it is now commonly dubbed, “9/11”—situation has demonstrated clearly that, like Christianity, Islam presents many faces, not infrequently contradictory ones. This situation is not a negative complaint; it is a challenge that arises from the complexity of both religions and, in fact, all of reality, none of which can be captured in clearly-defined boxes.

This monograph summarizes major Muslim opinions about Nigeria’s religious violence. I quote so many Muslims that the reader could occasionally forget that I am a Christian. However, I

cannot deny myself. My Christian self, including my religion and personality, will occasionally assert itself. I promise to keep that to a minimum to such an extent that some Christian readers may well consider me a traitor. I challenge such Christians. I want you to hear the Muslim voice. Consider it sympathetically. Put yourself in their shoes. Feel along with them. Listening is not a well-developed Nigerian skill; screaming is more highly developed. But I demand from Christians: Listen—listen carefully! In the next monograph, I will make the same demand on Muslims. Without people carefully listening to each other, Nigeria's religious problem will not be solved; screaming and violence will only make it worse.

I repeat my invitation to Muslims to pay close attention to this series of monographs as it develops. I promise that I will not offer you the usual diet offered by Christian apologists that you often regard as diatribe. You will find surprising Christian–Muslim parallels. To be sure, I will not hesitate to criticize you where you deserve it or advise you to compromise where rigidity could lead to disaster. At the same time, you will find in these pages unaccustomed appreciation for your stand on issues like sharia, religion as a total way of life, the human calling and secularism. Come, let us walk it together.

**▲ NOTES** 

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the current version of the CD contains Vol. 2 as well as a penultimate and longer version of Vol. 3 long before the paper edition appears. It also contains my article on the aborted 2002 Miss World pageant in Nigeria along with quite a number of articles by Nigerians on the subject. It will continue to expand well beyond this paper version. Updated versions will be made available at discount prices. Though much is being published about Islam these days, very little is available about the contemporary situation in Black Africa, where both Christianity and Islam are on the march and in vigorous competition with each other.

<sup>2</sup> “Sharia” is an Arabic term used in this book to refer to Muslim law. In this series, it is such a household word that I will treat it as an English word. The concept will be defined and explained in depth in a later monograph.

<sup>3</sup> This is to put you on notice that Nigerian names often have variant spellings. That of El-Zakzaky is no exception.

