

INTRODUCTION

The first three volumes of these *Studies in Christian–Muslim Relations* deal with the bloody series of religious riots that have marked recent Nigerian history. While Volume 2 deals with Muslim interpretations of these riots, the volume you now have in hand presents Christian interpretations of the same riots.

As you heard Muslims speak freely in that earlier volume through numerous quotations, so will Christians be given their chance in this one. As I requested Christians to listen to or read Muslim opinions carefully, so I now make the same request to Muslims. For once, listen to the other party. For a few brief moments, put aside your hatred and anger and practise a bit of empathy. Step out of your argumentative mode and try to feel along. When I made the same request of Christians in Volume 2, I know you strongly supported my request. “Yes, Christians,” you thought, “give us your ears just for once.” Well, I now ask the same from you. Is it too much to ask? And be sure not to react to this volume without first reading the earlier volumes.

Since it is Christian opinion that informs this volume, Islam will not come off very positively—as Christianity did not exactly

shine in volume two. I want it well understood that this volume does not constitute a study of Islam. It covers only Christian opinions about Islam and that in a confrontational situation. Naturally, Islam is going to look rather negative in this context, but the same was true of Christianity in Volume 2. I want it understood that this negative picture is not the only way in which Islam can be portrayed. Unfortunately, that positive side is not reflected in the experiences and opinions of their Christian compatriots.

It will be found that Christians present several explanations which run parallel to those of Muslims as described in Volume 2. Both are frustrated. Both allege oppression by the other. Both accuse the government of supporting the other. Both demonise the other. In the past I have been tempted to dismiss both sides as immature, irresponsible and unreasonable. And perhaps that is not an altogether unfair assessment. When an individual or a group is consumed by anger, hatred and mistrust, more positive traits like maturity, responsibility and rationality are sometimes relegated to the backseat.

Of course, such situations are not unique to Nigeria or even to Christian–Muslim situations in general. I presently live in Canada, but have also spent thirteen years in the United States. Many Christians in both countries feel they are heavily under siege by a secular establishment. However, secularists similarly argue that they are under siege by Christians and that they suffer severe disadvantages for their faith,¹ though they do not normally think of theirs as a faith perspective. These two faiths often demonise each other in these countries as well. The secularist often fails to understand the motivation of the Christian and wonders why the latter is so unreasonable—just as Nigerian Muslims and Christians feel towards each other. So, there are some parallels. A major difference is that not much blood is shed in this battle. The battle is fought with other kinds of weapons—but it *is* a struggle, a serious one.

▲ MAJOR ACTORS

Before moving on to the main topic, I will introduce some of the Christians who have played prominent roles in this ongoing drama. I begin with a number of highly-placed and respected Christians who grew up in Muslim surroundings. These men have been achievers all their lives, but they all live(d) in humble circumstances, far below the level Nigerian culture would lead us to expect from them. In the Nigerian culture of flamboyance, such lifestyles speak volumes of the integrity of these men and mark them as unusual. I would like to accord these honourables the status of “Christian fathers,” and in these studies will refer to them as such. No one can claim these “fathers” do not understand the Muslim community, as they have been brought up in Hausa-Fulani culture. These men also have wide government experience, so that no one can pull the wool over their eyes at that front either. Reverend Professor Dr. Ishaya Audu, especially, has been at the highest federal cabinet level. Two of them share the dubious honour of having been political prisoners. These are true insiders.

Professor Ishaya Audu, a medical doctor as well as a clergyman, is a former Vice Chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), the only Christian to have held that position in this Muslim stronghold. He was toppled in the Gowon coup but later rose to become Minister of External Affairs. In addition to these high positions, he has also experienced the worst as a political prisoner. He is soft-spoken and highly revered by Christians. Since his return to private life, he is frequently called upon to assume leadership responsibilities. I personally served under him in his capacity as Chairman of the Christian Health Association. In the Nigerian context of “strong-man culture” and given the prestigious positions he has held, the simplicity of the health clinic he runs in a poor section of Samaru, near Zaria, is nothing short of amazing. A major concern of his is the freedom and welfare of Hausa, Fulani and

Kanuri Christians. His gentle manner of speech sometimes hides the force of what he is really saying so that one has at times to read between the lines.

Like Ishaya Audu, *Dr. Christopher Abashiya* is a Christian with a Muslim-Fulani background and with government and civil service experience as well as a high reputation. His government positions have included university administration, Kaduna State commissioner, and that state's Chairman of Health Management Board, while he also served as special advisor to Governor Lar of Plateau State.²

At one time he presented himself as a presidential aspirant, not so much because he actually aspired to that position but because, as he explained to me, he wanted to experience the inside of politics at that level. He found it sadly wanting and discovered he had no taste for it. In addition he has held various prestigious positions in his church, ECWA. In contrast to Ishaya Audu, he is blunt and direct in his utterances. He openly declares what can only be read between Audu's lines. In this respect he is more like Jolly Tanko Yusuf, whom we will meet in the next paragraph. Abashiya was a member of the Kaduna state government committee investigating the Kaduna 1987 fracas as a representative of Christian interests. Apart from their modes of expression, Audu and Abashiya sound like identical twins. Their background being what it is, a student of the situation cannot afford to ignore their views.

Jolly Tanko Yusuf, the third personality, was brought up in a grassroots Muslim family in Takum, Taraba State, where his father was among the leading Muslims. Attendance at a school operated by the Sudan United Mission led to his conversion to Christ. In due time he began working with Christian Reformed missionary Ray Browneye, who, when Yusuf showed political interests, encouraged him to follow his inclinations and serve the Lord in that sphere. Yusuf did well there.

As the years went by, he held various prominent positions. During colonial days, he was member of the Northern House of

Assembly and became a Deputy Minister. After independence, he was given various international ambassadorial assignments that took him, among others, to Germany, China, North Vietnam, Korea and Sierra Leone, a career that earned him his life-long title of “Ambassador.” Yusuf’s autobiography, as well as the stories he told me personally, clearly show how he had frequent dealings with Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna or Sultan of Sokoto, the leader of the North. He knew the Sardauna well and was thus in touch with the Muslim nerve centre.

Later in life, upon his return from foreign assignments, Yusuf became prominent in the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). During this period he had frequent access to the Head of State to whom he would interpret the Christian stand on current affairs. As a CAN leader, he also endured the indignity of imprisonment subsequent to a failed coup in which he was accused of having a hand. He succumbed to cancer in the year 2000.

The *Honourable Haruna Dandaura* comes out of the Hausa–Muslim culture of Kano city. There he rose to become the Chief of *Sabon Gari*, the large non-native section of Kano City that is full of Christians, southerners and their churches, schools, hospitals, shops—in short, of cosmopolitan Nigerian culture. He joined the police, reached the rank of Inspector and ended up teaching legal subjects in police colleges. He later was appointed judge in various courts around the North. He was the first judge in all of Nigeria in the Customary Court of Appeal system. Subsequent to his first retirement the federal government appointed him Chief Commissioner of the Federal Public Complaints Commission, an indication of his high reputation. Still later, in spite of his age, he moved on to become Chairman of the Code of Conduct Bureau. In terms of our topic, Dandaura was preoccupied with peace between the two religions and, though often rebuffed by leaders of both, struggled heroically for dialogue. Indeed, he is an apostle for peace even today at his advanced age.

He loves to write on Christian–Muslim issues, but has difficulty financing the publication of his writings—a telling commentary on his unusual integrity as a public servant.³

Then there is the *Reverend Wilson Sabiya* from the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria with its headquarters in Numan. In distinction from the “fathers,” he was neither brought up in a Muslim environment, nor did he serve in government, except indirectly as a university lecturer. He confined himself largely to church positions both denominational and ecumenical, especially in Tarayyar Ekklisiyoyin Kristi a Nijeriya (TEKAN). He was also a leading figure in CAN and did much to arouse the Christian community with respect to the Muslim challenges that arose from the original Constituent Assembly in the 1970s. He provided aggressive leadership for Christians in Gongola/Adamawa State.⁴

Being a decade younger than the fathers and not having served in government, Sabiya is in a class by himself. It is unfortunate that, due to ill health, this hero of faith has had to withdraw from public life.

Along with Wilson, we honour *A. W. Machunga* and the late *Jabanni Mambula*, both former general secretaries of TEKAN, and the other leaders of TEKAN who were/are the administrators and leaders of the various TEKAN denominations. All of these have stood firm at the frontiers.

The above seven warriors are by no means the only ones of interest to us. There is also an interesting “gang” of three younger men, all, like Abashiya, from Southern Zaria. There is *Dr Yusufu Turaki*, former general secretary of Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA), a one-time member of the CAN national Executive Committee, holder of a doctorate in social ethics from the University of Boston. There is a fellow ECWA member, *Yohanna Madaki*, former military governor of Gongola State who dared take on the Muslim establishment personified by the Emir of Mubi. This challenge led to his early retirement. He now runs a law

practice in Kaduna and represents the legal interests of various victims of alleged Muslim oppression, including the Sayawa Christian community. Then we have the indefatigable *Father Dr. Matthew Hassan Kukah*, the famous writer and acknowledged defender of the Christian viewpoint, especially, though not exclusively, that of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. All of these gentlemen, with the exception of Machunga, will crop up during the course of this monograph. Their influence goes far beyond the writings that are adduced in these pages; they are active participants behind the scenes in ways only their own people will fully appreciate.

Of course, there are many more heroes who have resisted Muslim aggression. There is a host of CAN personalities at every level from local to national chairman. We will meet them throughout these volumes. Some of them have worked hard as leaders, while others are members “on the ground.” A prime example of the first is Victor Musa, an ECWA warrior—former general secretary of ECWA, pastor of the main ECWA church in Kano and active member of CAN at every level. During his Kano days, he was one of the two Christians who were appointed to the state’s commission to report on the 1982 riot and produced the minority Christian report. Unfortunately, we will not meet him much in these pages for the simple reason that he has not published much and, for some unexplainable reason, is not quoted much, either.

One voice that is conspicuous by its silence is that of the former Head of State Yakubu Gowon from Wusasa, son of an Anglican evangelist. While his brother Daniel, a village chief, features in these pages and even rates an appendix, the name of this retired general and head of state hardly appears except in the negative in connection with the confiscation of Christian institutions by his administration.⁵ He is also said to be the one to have taken Nigeria into the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) as observer.⁶

Some are calling into question his puzzling chairmanship of the Northern Elders’ Forum, a largely Muslim body that some

regard as representing feudal Northern Muslim interests. Though I have met this man and appreciate his gentle ambience and humility, what he says or does behind the scenes is not accessible to me. Thus, he hardly features in these pages—a strange silence for the most prominent Christian son of the northern soil, if not soul.⁷

▲ **FORMAT DETAILS**

As to the characteristics and aims of both this series and this particular volume, I encourage you strongly to read the Introduction to the entire series in Volume 1 as well as its shorter equivalent in Volume 2. This volume stands in the tradition established there and assumes you have read its predecessors.

I do want to repeat a promise I made of a Companion CD volume.⁸ In addition to these monographs, that companion volume will include hard-to-locate materials such as Nigerian Muslim poetry and communiqués from both sides. Some of these are already published but difficult to get your hands on. Others will be unpublished documents such as conference papers, reports, memoranda, declarations and letters from both Christian and Muslim sources, mostly in English, but some in the Hausa language. As I get hold of other interesting materials on Islam and Muslims, these will be added as well. This CD should greatly enhance the research value of this entire project and perhaps raise it to the level of a reader in Christian–Muslim relations.

As in the previous monograph, I again remind you that, while English is Nigeria's official language, some of the quotations are from people for whom English is their third language. I will take the liberty to smoothe out the roughest spots to protect the reputation the authors enjoy with readers who have never been challenged to write in a language other than their own. Unusual as some of the English may be, these quotations come from a people among whom even so-called "illiterates" often know half a dozen

languages and who readily switch between them throughout the day. That is an accomplishment of which few native English speakers can boast.

My method of documentation is slightly unusual. While most references in the text will have their endnotes, often they will be very minimal, since complete information can always be found in the bibliography. In some cases there is no need for an endnote at all, since, again, you can find the relevant information in the bibliography.

There are some organizational tensions I have not been able to solve to my own satisfaction. You will notice that I discuss some issues under headings of personal names and sometimes the same issues re-appear under topical headings. This tension results from my desire to acquaint you with both personalities and issues, but I have not found a way of joining these two in a fully satisfactory logical arrangement.

In addition, Christian writings, like those of their Muslim counterparts, often are not carefully organised so that they freely mix topics and pile up accusations and problems without end or logical arrangement. Emotion often replaces logic, at least, Western logic. As a result, it sometimes becomes almost impossible to systematically use quotes from them, according to the specific topic at hand, without chopping them up into bits and pieces that then lose some of their coherence. Here we have yet another reason that the same issues sometimes appear under different headings. One can argue that these organizational problems reflect the organizational problems of Nigeria itself. Messiness begets messiness. The purpose of most of this series is not first of all to argue so much as to acquaint you with the issues at hand. If I accomplish this, I will be satisfied, even if the logic of the arrangement leaves something to be desired.

Welcome to the near-chaos that is Nigeria.

▲ NOTES

¹ Monsma & Soper. See especially the chapter by the self-consciously secular liberal Rogers M. Smith.

² Tsado, *TC*, 5/87, p. 5.

³ M. Gaiya, throughout.

⁴ He started in Gongola State. States were reorganised and renamed, with Sabiya ending up in the new Adamawa State.

⁵ For example, T. Yusuf in Grissen, p. 83.

⁶ Ado-Kurawa, 2000, p. 197.

⁷ These comments do not call into doubt Gowon's Christian dedication. Statements and actions attributed to him in the media about the need for Nigeria to pray (Y. Gowon) and to "embrace Christ" (C. Oditta, *TD*, 13 Aug/2003) are indicative of his devotion. However, he does seem to channel this devotion into a different direction from that of his co-religionists. For one thing, it has not prevented him from cooperation with the northern establishment, as this volume will show.

⁸ For availability of the CD contact author at boerj@hotmail.com or at www.SocialTheology.com.