

# A MENU OF EXPLANATIONS

This chapter presents a list of factors that irritate Christians about Muslims. That list is a very long one. So, I have to be selective. Since quite a number of irritants also involve discussions about government, I reserve those to whom that applies for the next chapter. One of these, a major irritant indeed, is that of public religious utterances.

As I have indicated elsewhere in this series, Nigerians writing on these subjects have a strong tendency to pile issues and complaints on top of each other without careful logical arrangement. I ascribe that tendency not to lack of logic so much as to the strong emotions that these issues evoke. This is useful for getting the general picture, even if it makes systematic analysis sometimes difficult. While the succeeding sections of this chapter describe the issues under various headings, this opening section presents an example of a general picture in which everything is piled on top of each other.

## ▲ TEKAN’S GENERAL PICTURE

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My example consists of a TEKAN document submitted to the government panel looking into Kafanchan riot series.<sup>1</sup> The submission suggested that the government tacitly supported these riots by “deliberate non-intervention” and delaying tactics. It rejected the MSS allegation that the immediate cause was the quotation from the Qur’an by Abubakar Bako in his sermon to the students at Kafanchan. It pointed out that it is common practice for both Christians and Muslims to quote from each other’s books. No one has exclusive ownership of these books; they are for all people. Furthermore, TEKAN denied that Bako disparaged Islam or its prophet.<sup>2</sup> It is misleading to claim that the Kafanchan riot caused the other riots in the state and thus to blame preacher Bako for the entire sequence.

The submission furthermore claimed that students at higher institutions were being manipulated by some powerful groups to do their dirty work of violence against society. Though the statement did not outrightly say it, between the lines we read the charge that the manipulators used the Kafanchan riot to evoke the others. The government encouraged the continuation of violence by not punishing its perpetrators. The latter thus felt they had a licence to commit violence against Christians without any risks to themselves. In this way, the government and its agencies have become accomplices in these crimes against Christians. In addition, discriminatory government appointments and promotions encouraged the impression that Nigeria belongs to Muslims and thus provided “a psychological booster for crimes against Christians.” Christians have become *persona non grata*, unwanted aliens in their own country. And while TEKAN agreed with President Babangida that the Kaduna 1987 rampage was an attempted coup, a political act, “it is nevertheless based on religion.” This allegation is based on the existence of a national organization that was supposedly out to destroy the secular government and install a “pro-Iranian Islamic

government.” That organization was using young people to threaten the security of the country. Unfortunately, the organization was not further identified.

TEKAN adds the ominous warning that Christians pray “that the day will never come when our turning the other cheek reaches seventy times seven.” If the government ever allows the provocation to reach that number, “she will have only herself to blame.” This document covers almost all the Christian bases and is a must read. It is included as Appendix 2. That is the general emotional climate of accusations without end....

## ▲ RELIGION

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Various themes wind their way through these volumes. One is the traditional blindness of secularism to religion in general, along with a degree of hostility to Christianity in particular. Secularist scholars tend to pull up their noses at the notion that politics and economics might be affected by religion. They prefer to put it the other way around. In this “light,” one can expect that argumentation about these riots being largely religious in nature will not receive much support. Even Nigerian Christian writers, educated in a secular spirit often coloured heavily by Marxist theory, will frequently downplay the religious factor in this sordid history. Though I do not accept such a tendency, I do readily admit that the religious factor is usually intertwined with other issues. Of course, the same holds true for political and economic factors.

In Nigeria especially, the religious aspect is never far below the surface. Paul Ndukwe, a Nigerian living in British Columbia, explained to his Canadian hosts, “One cannot talk about the political situation in Nigeria without relating it to religion. Every political programme or event always has a religious overtone. Passion for religion also affects the economic climate of Nigeria.”<sup>3</sup>

This situation is due primarily to the nature of religion itself as foundational to life, as I have argued in Volume 1. It is also due to two other factors, namely, the open religiosity of Nigerians and the nature of Islam with its (correct) insistence that all of life is religious. All of this clashes with the secular definition of religion.

Major factors in the Bauchi riots are Muslim nervousness at the increasing strength of Christians and the sale of pork to a Muslim. If the latter is not easily recognised as a religious issue, that is only because of the narrowness of the secular definition of religion. Because of the dangerous implications of the religious explanation, there is a strong political hesitancy to identify the riots as religious. Violence by a group of Muslims, “allegedly affiliated with the Taliban movement in Afghanistan,” against eight communities in the northern state of Yobe led to an unknown number of Christians killed in January 2004. Fati Fagbemi, a police spokesman “declined to discuss the number of Christians killed. ‘This is a serious, sensitive, and dangerous issue,’” he said. “We cannot discuss this in the media. Religion is a volatile issue that calls for caution. Please do not report the religious angle of it.”<sup>4</sup> Could it not be more dangerous in the long run to sweep it under the carpet and thus allow the situation to deteriorate even further, instead of facing it head on?

James O’Connell, an acute student of Nigerian religious affairs, observed that one of the problems in the study of religion and politics in Nigeria is precisely that, in this country, “it is often difficult to distinguish religion from ethnicity as a political factor.”<sup>5</sup> Difficult, granted; indistinguishable or impossible, certainly not. Be sure to pay close attention to the NIPSS report’s contribution to this part of the discussion as reported a few pages later.

In the Christian literature under survey in this volume, religion is often castigated as a major culprit. The Muslim religion, of course! Since it is usually associated with religious manipulation, I reserve most of the discussion on this issue for the heading

“Manipulation.” However, there are some issues that need treatment under the current heading.

The first is a memo by the now late Jabanni Mambula, former general secretary of TEKAN. The document as a whole is included in this book as Appendix 3. There is need “to call a spade, a spade,” a comment he repeats in the conclusion to its Hausa version, “*Ranar wanka ba’a boya cibi.*” This is his signal that we should not expect political correctness. He rejects the political explanation and insists that the motivation for the riots “is purely religious.” “Fanatical Muslims wanted to eliminate the more tolerant Muslims or Christians in order to achieve the total Islamisation of Nigeria.”

The Kaduna State branch of CAN held a press conference in the wake of the Zangon-Kataf riots in which it insisted on the religious nature of this and other riots, but religion yoked with ethnicity, the religion being Islam and the ethnic group the Hausa-Fulani. CAN took its gloves off and forsook all political correctness. The issue is not a local one. “The conflict is not only with the minority Hausa-Fulani settlers in Zango but with the entire members of that community spread across the country. They look beyond Zangon-Kataf and see every Christian as a target.” The same was true for the Kafanchan, Tafawa Balewa and Jalingo riots. Invariably it was the Hausa-Fulani Muslims who attacked Christians. “We view all Hausa-Fulani, no matter their state of origin, as coming from one ethnic community who share a common challenge in this ethnic-religious conflict. Naturally, they are all expected to lean up against the Kataf.”<sup>6</sup> CAN maintained this stance in opposition to the Muslim governor, the media and the security agencies who all insisted that it was “mainly communal and not religious.” It was, CAN charged, both “religious and premeditated.”

Another relevant document here is the NIPSS report. During the half decade preceding the report, religious tension in the country increased in “scale and intensity.” “It would be idealistic,” the

report declared, “to assume that there is no religious problem in Nigeria and that conflicts along religious lines are only the result of the ‘manipulation’ of religion by vested interests amongst the...elite.” The report acknowledged the presence of manipulation, but it also insisted that “there have been real problems within the religions” themselves, such as issues of faith, doctrine, about mode of worship and secularism. “It will not do any good to pretend that the religious problem does not exist...and it will amount to both intellectual dishonesty and political irresponsibility not to confront the problem frankly and realistically.”<sup>7</sup>

At the very time I was writing the above paragraphs, May 2, 2002, another riot was raging in Jos with an unofficially estimated death toll ranging from twenty to fifty. Consistent with traditional policy, “police were quick to play down any religious or ethnic links this time, apparently for fear of reprisal attacks. We are treating it for now as a political issue, because so far we having nothing to prove that it was ethnic or religious,” according to Haruna John, the Christian Deputy Police Commissioner of Jos.<sup>8</sup> I include the incident only to show how necessary the authorities find it to deny the involvement of religion immediately to pre-empt religious reprisals.

Another relevant commentator here is the now late Bola Ige. He relativised the Christian–Muslim situation by denying that most participants in the struggle were even genuine Christians or Muslims. The motivation for their struggle does not come from either of these religions but from their predecessor, African Traditional Religion (ATR), with its underlying world view. In spite of the large number of Christians and Muslims, “there are only very few committed Christians and very few committed Moslems. If you scratch the surface, underneath you find either paganism or nothing.”<sup>9</sup>

James O’Connell, whose Nigerian base of operation, like Ige, was Ibadan, recognised that ATR had gone underground as far as its structures were concerned, but that it continued to play an impor-

tant role in Nigerian affairs. It “had little hope of formal survival,” he confirmed. “Yet,” he insisted, “the age-old attitudes engendered in Nigerian peoples by traditional religion...endure in good measure within Muslim and Christian structures and observances.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, C. O. Williams of both CAN and CCN affirmed that both Christians and Muslims “still hold tight to some form of paganism—just in case the Christian...or the Muslim God proves unreliable and disappointing at critical moments.”<sup>11</sup>

In other contexts, I have resorted to a similar explanation of certain African phenomena<sup>12</sup> but, until now, it never occurred to me to apply it to the Christian–Muslim conflict. As sensitive an idea as this may be, it does receive support from some of my Yoruba Christian friends who, in private conversations, without being coached towards this view and without being aware of Ige’s explanation, fully concur with it. However, I have not heard them apply the thought to the current conflict. Ige himself, to the best of my knowledge, did not go beyond simply positing this view to actually exploring its relevance to the current context.

That there should be an underlay of an African Traditional world view in all of this should surprise us no more than that, according to reputable philosophers, there is an underlay of Greek pagan philosophy mixed in with Western thought, both Christian and secular.<sup>13</sup> World views are tenacious and take centuries to develop—or to be fully overcome by more recent rivals. One usually ends up with a unique mixture of old and new that constitutes a new world view, likely plagued by internal tensions and inconsistencies, a feature known as “syncretism.”

Ige’s observation provides some potentially useful building blocks for a complete explanation of the mayhem. When both Christian and Muslim leaders suggest that those who cause the conflict are not faithful adherents of either religion, are they not implying that the perpetrators may not have been (fully) converted from their former religion? The hearts of the unfaithful are not vac-

uums. In many cases, I would argue, there are more than a few traces of African Traditional values at work here.

One feature of African Tradition is a tendency to externalise causes and to blame other agents for personal shortcomings. It does not encourage the development of an awareness of responsibility and guilt, as indicated in the pages referred to in the last footnote. This feature could be the reason that neither Christians nor Muslims easily accept their responsibility and guilt for riots. Christianity especially emphasises human sinfulness and the need to seek forgiveness. Could it be that in some cases this recognition is resisted due to a combination of human nature and residual African Tradition in the souls of some? Such resistance could be a serious obstacle to a solution.

Another feature of African Tradition is that the spirits are expected to support the adherents' prosperity, not vice versa. The spirits serve us; we do not serve the spirits. We may manipulate them with sacrifices to do our bidding. When Christians or Muslims feel they are not achieving their worldly ambitions, the syncretistic ones among them easily resort to elements of the old that are more compatible with their ambitions.

And that, frankly, spells manipulation. Manipulation is part of the core of Traditional Religion. In other words, the unique materialistic perspective of ATR, in which the spiritual is not denied but subservient to material well being, easily leads to materialistic ambitions in a syncretistic elite.<sup>14</sup> Thus it can be argued that manipulation itself, arising from residual ATR values and world view, is also encouraged by the underlay of a third religion.

## ▲ MANIPULATION

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In the above section I suggested a spiritual explanation for manipulation. In this section we will learn how Christians resort to the manipulation theory to at least partially explain the conflicts.

Apart from its spiritual background, what happens when people manipulate? What do manipulators do?

For the benefit of readers who have not read Volume 2, I reproduce the definition of manipulation as given by the Nigerian Muslim-Marxist historian, Yusufu Bala Usman. Manipulation, he wrote, means “controlling the action of a person or group without that person or group knowing the goals, purpose and method of that control and without even being aware that a form of control is being exercised on them at all.”<sup>15</sup> That is the notion of manipulation I would prefer to stay close to in this section. However, the writers consulted on the subject often have a less defined concept of it.

We have already seen that manipulation is a popular explanation for the riots amongst Muslims. We will now see its popularity among Christians as well, especially among journalists and academics. It is here particularly that it becomes difficult to ferret out Christian from secular and Marxist voices, for many Christians have adopted secular and Marxist perspectives. As said before, I will simply do my best in identifying Christians amongst them and apologise for any mistake ahead of time.

Though the term “manipulation” may not always be used, the concept crops up constantly. The TEKAN Study Group in its 1987 submission stated that it was “becoming more and more obvious that students are being used by certain groups of powerful individuals for personal ends.”<sup>16</sup> Alexander Fom was of the view that the violence is usually not caused by religion so much as “some groups of people” for whom there is “no path of sanity except the *jihad*.” Tunji Braithwaite, a Lagos-based Christian socialist politician, feels that the problem is not Islam but, rather, certain Northern fundamentalist and extremist Muslims “who are using religion for very diabolical purposes. They use religion to gain political ascendancy and even steal money and perpetrate the worst imaginable atrocities. They even kill!”<sup>17</sup>

Wadumbiya, a lecturer in Christian Religious Studies at the College of Education, Hong, referred to Northern “crooks” who

engage “in the dirty and sordid politics of divide and rule” and who were more active at the time of his writing than ever before. “They have used tribalism and failed; they used regionalism and it blew up in their face. Now they have come to religion.” They should realise that if they cause a religious war, its “shape would automatically change” from religion to an ethnic battle between “Northern ethnic groups versus the Hausa-Fulani. The tension between the groups in the North is not religious but... political. Religion is only used to divide and conquer or rule and to manipulate the economy of this country.”

Wadumbiya asserted that “most of the religious problems” Nigeria has experienced “are out of place, because they do not belong to religion but to two major issues, politics and ethnic differences.” Most of the “religious uprisings,” he explained, took place where the “Fulani or Hausa people are many.” However,

*where the ethnic minorities are more, though most of them might be Muslims, you hardly find any religious problem erupting among them. And this shows that the main causes for the riots is not religion but politics, ethnicity, vandalistic nature and desire to loot. The tools used are the poor illiterates who have nothing to live for. They are the ones who can easily be instigated to violent action, since they would lose nothing, but release their tensions of misfortune conditions.<sup>18</sup>*

Though I will not dispute Wadumbiya’s assertions about the reality of the manipulation factor, some of the riots took place where Christians and Traditionalists formed the majority, as in Zangon-Kataf and Tafawa Balewa. Furthermore, I have earlier asserted that religious manipulation in Nigeria is often religiously motivated.

An “interfaith dialogue” conference in Jos issued a communiqué in which Christian and Muslim leaders joined to condemn the manipulation of “religion for selfish and political motives.” The

destruction and killings, it was agreed, “could not have been carried out by true, informed and sincere adherents of the two religions.” They called on their adherents “not to allow themselves to be manipulated by unpatriotic politicians.” They asserted that “conflicts that are usually labelled as religious crises, have political, ethnic and other non-religious motives.” The organiser of the conference, David Belin, explained that “some unpatriotic elements are using religion as a front to diabolically ferment civil disturbance.”<sup>19</sup>

Obed B. Minchakpu presented a paper at the above conference in which he spoke about the “forces behind the manipulation of religion in Nigeria and its subsequent use as a potent weapon of intimidation, harassment and political machinations,” which can be understood only by “examining the respective views of Christians and Muslims on the relationship between the state and religion.” Only via such an examination will it be possible to unmask “the satanic forces behind the manipulation of religion” that have led to such conflicts. Minchakpu provided some illustrations of how this manipulation was the cause of some of the riots. The Zangon-Kataf debacle of 1992 was caused, he asserted, purely by ethnic matters. However, “because of selfishness, Muslims manipulated it and gave it religious colouration. As a result, people who were hundreds of kilometres from the scene of the crisis were affected. This was not because they belong to any of the ethnic groups in the case, but simply because they were Christians.”

The Kano riot of 1991 about Bonnke was also the result of manipulation on the part of Muslims, but the explanation is not very clear. A clearer example is the 1994 riots in Potiskum which were said to be the result of political shifts which threatened the Bolewa people. They then aligned themselves with the local Hausa-Fulani Muslims “to whip up religious sentiments.” “And without shame, they are attempting to cover up such satanic acts with a frame up story of an alleged conversion of a Christian girl as the cause of the crisis. This is a shame and a disgrace!”<sup>20</sup>

Minchakpu feels that manipulation is a “sad aspect of [Nigeria’s] national life” which “has brought untold hardship” to many people. The government that is supposed to defend and implement the constitution without favouring one religion above another, “has got itself neck-deep into this manipulation of religion. All because of the selfishness of some political desperadoes who are desperately looking for ways to sustain their political strongholds and power bases.”

Governments at both federal and state levels have all failed to live up to the constitution when it comes to religion. They have favoured Islam time and again while suppressing Christianity.<sup>21</sup>

Binta Faruk Jalingo lived much of her life in Nigeria’s overlapping cultures of Islam and the military. Her father and five brothers served in the military. She was the wife of a Northern Muslim army officer who divorced her because she became Christian. In the midst of such an environment, she experienced and overheard a lot of behind-the-scenes things which made her an authority on Muslim behaviour and ambition. She wrote a book that came straight from her experience of many years in Muslim strongholds. She wrote with a heart full of compassion for the wretched common people who have been betrayed by their leaders.

She begins her discussion with the statement that “religion...has become the backbone of political intrigues in northern Nigeria.” People, she affirms, “are...going to the extreme to achieve their greedy ambitions, even in the name of religion.”

*I want the common man to know that their leaders want to use them for their selfish interests in the cover of religion. A lot of these leaders are only using religion to make money and to enrich themselves. Most of these leaders are power drunk who will always like to see the common man come to beg from them.*

Northern Muslim leaders, she alleges,

*have blinded the eyes of the common man that they know not that they are lost. They have passed the road to their father's house unknown, yet they want to go home. Their leaders care not about what happens to them, for they have been abandoned to the middle of the road without a compass.*

Muslims claim their religion to be one of peace, “yet they are bent on killing in the name of religion. Is that what we call peace?” They “are killing in the name of religion. Their hearts are hardened, that is why ungodly things are being committed in the North, such things like murder, intimidation, ritual killings, slavery and so on. Are all these things of peace? The Northern leaders should stop fooling themselves in the cover of religion.”<sup>22</sup>

Jalingo reserves strong feelings against the Arewa<sup>23</sup> Consultative Forum (ACF), especially regarding the way they lured the Christian Yakubu Gowon into their scheming. She announces,

*I want to bring to the notice of the Christians...that the...ACF is another way of fooling the innocent and the common man of the North.... Don't allow yourself to be cheated. Moslems are cunning people. They know what they are doing as they gave the chairmanship of the ACF to a Christian. Is that not a way to blindfold the Christians and get them hooked-up?*

*...Moslems are anti-Christians who do not want Christians to rule. Those Christians supporting the...ACF should know that they are the Judas that betrayed the Christians. Let them know that the...politicians and leaders of the North are only using them to get what they want.*

She warns against having anything to do with people such as those of the ACF. “There is an adage that says, ‘when eating with the devil, use a long spoon,’ but I am telling you that if you are not careful, he will draw the spoon and get to you. So, don’t even eat with him. For darkness and light cannot be together.”

How can it be that Gowon has been appointed chairman of ACF, when Muslims have all along been rejecting the notion of a Christian head of state and many were unhappy with Gowon in that position precisely because he was a Christian? ACF exists “for selfish interests and for destabilizing the North. Don’t get fooled, for all that glitters is not gold.”<sup>24</sup> Jalingo has overheard it all and knows how manipulation works first hand. Jalingo was probably not far off the mark on the Gowon issue. Years earlier, Minchakpu claimed that “Muslim bureaucrats succeeded in manipulating [his] administration into taking over all Christian mission schools.”<sup>25</sup>

Many journalists in Nigeria’s so-called secular media prefer manipulation as the main explanation of the violence. The editor of *NS*, writing about the 1994 Jos riot, rejected the religious interpretation in favour of manipulation.<sup>26</sup> The argument had it that since many families in Jos are comprised of both Christians and Muslims, religion could not possibly be the cause, a logical jump I cannot follow. Manipulation was the only explanation that made sense—at least as long as you don’t define it too closely or identify its perpetrators.

The above argument is not surprising, since *NS* is a government-owned medium and Nigerian governments prefer this explanation, again especially if the manipulators are not too clearly identified. Clear identification might demand concrete government action against the perpetrators, something these governments have long hesitated doing.

Dele Omotunde, an editor with *TELL* magazine,<sup>27</sup> after listing most of Nigeria’s riots since 1980, referred to them as a “vicious cycle of madness and stupidity” and concluded that the “common denominator is intolerance, which, in turn, breeds violence.” He called the perpetrators “sharpshooters of religious fanaticism.” Religion is like an H-bomb. “All it requires is a demented brain on the pulpit or mat to detonate it and unleash terror... through diabolical manipulation of an unwary congregation.”<sup>28</sup> Here you have

many of the ingredients that have been leading Nigeria to destruction: madness and stupidity, intolerance leading to violence, fanaticism and manipulation.

Among academics, religious manipulation for non-religious purposes as the main cause for these riots is a popular theme. The press statement of an ABU inter-religious group is a good example and I have therefore included it as Appendix 4. It points out how various Nigerian foreign affairs that have religious aspects associated with them, such as the country's relationships to OIC, Israel and the Vatican, "were being used by sinister and reactionary forces to undermine the unity of our people and the sovereignty... of our Nation." It identified a "campaign of systematic manipulation of religious sentiments" meant to divert attention away from the task of nation building. The idea is to "entrench religious conflicts in all facets of our national life," in order to retain the status quo of harsh conditions.

Turning to the Kafanchan debacle, the statement declares,

*Our experience of the current events and all evidence available to us,<sup>29</sup> have convinced us that the violence of the last seven days was not the brain work of hooligans. It is believed to be the latest stage of a campaign which started about ten years ago, in the so-called 'Shari'a Debate,' in 1976 to '77.<sup>30</sup>*

There are "some organisations and individuals" that "with arrogance and impunity, incite and threaten people of other religious beliefs." Behind this campaign hides a "tiny oligarchy determined to maintain its power, wealth and privileges at all costs...." By that "tiny oligarchy," though not explicitly identified, I understand these lecturers to be referring to a small, very powerful and rich inner clique of the Muslim Hausa-Fulani establishment.

Thus we have Christians in this volume and Muslims in Volume 2 agreeing with each other about the prevalence of manipulation as a major cause of the riots. Of course, the identity of the manipulators is another matter! It is no surprise, therefore, that the

government's Political Bureau reported that "religious conflicts have occurred as a result of manipulation of religion for political reasons: 'organised religions tend to go into alliance with political power structures in society. They sometimes also go into alliance with, and are used by, the moneyed classes for their own ends.'"<sup>31</sup>

Federal politicians also place blame on manipulative politicians. Senate President Chuba Okadigbo made some revealing statements about the forces behind the Kaduna 2000 conflagration. There were "a few political up-starts posing as governors" that "have tried to create confusion...by creating openings through ethnic cleavages and religious bigotry." He added that "religion could be abused if allowed to go wild." He also promised that measures would soon be taken "against *agents provocateurs* who carry arms under their gowns." "They have to be identified and brought to public view in terms of the dangers they pose to the republic and the people based on their sentiments."<sup>32</sup>

President Obasanjo was equally aware of such motivation behind Kaduna 2000. Through his representative, he explained that the mayhem "was politically motivated to bring down the present administration."<sup>33</sup>

The report of NIPSS, another government agency, presents a different angle. It admits that manipulation of religion "to serve partisan and electoral interests" does indeed take place. However, it rejects the popular notion that religious violence is "only the result of... manipulation... by vested interests amongst the ruling class and the elite." Earlier in this chapter we read how the report insists on the effect of "real problems within the religious sphere" that cannot be ignored.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, NIPSS is rejecting the popular escapist attitude that is so prevalent in government quarters and amongst Muslim leaders who want to avoid accusing one or both religions. Blaming the violence *exclusively* on manipulation by vested interests or, another related excuse, on hoodlums and foreigners, leaves the religions themselves and their leaders too easily off the hook.

## ▲ STRUCTURAL FACTORS

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According to the NIPSS report, Islam in Nigeria has a stronger disposition to violence and intolerance than do Christians. The reason is a sociological one, namely, the fact that in the traditional Muslim parts of the North, religion and social structures are so intertwined that a change in one is bound to bring about change in the other. In the North, the social structures are shaped by religion more than in other parts of the country. “Social roles, mores and values at home and in public affairs are based on the religion” as well as the religion’s original culture, namely that of Arabs.<sup>35</sup>

In such a context, a challenge to the religion is simultaneously a challenge to the social structures. Such challenges are usually accompanied with a lot of upheaval, not infrequently including irrational behaviour inspired by fear and anger. This gives content to the oft-repeated slogan that “Islam is a way of life.” A challenge to Islam in northern Nigeria is simultaneously an attack on existing socio-economic relationships and structures. No wonder the issues are as fused as they are and difficult to isolate. The very presence of countless southern Christians in the northern cities constitutes a challenge to traditional Northern Muslim ways. The development of a strong Christian community out of the bosom of Middle Belt Traditional Religions has indeed led to radical structural challenges. Vested interests do have reasons to resist change, while Christians, especially in the Middle Belt, have reasons to demand change. This mix of demand and resistance has contributed greatly to the general volatility in that area.

## ▲ THE GUMI FACTOR

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We have met Sheik Abubakar Gumi in various places already, including a special section devoted to him in the second monograph of this series. Christians have frequently singled him out as an especially powerful factor in the Muslim–Christian mix. Tanko

Yusuf and Gumi both spent their final years in Kaduna. I have the impression that, in spite of their stark opposition to each other's goals, they had a certain respect for each other. That should not surprise anyone who surveys their common personality traits such as directness, bluntness, honesty, interest in root causes and in a positive role of religion in society. Yusuf paid a condolence visit upon Gumi's death. Still, ultimately they regarded each other as foes representing opposite interests. Gumi, Yusuf realised, stood for the subjugation, if not destruction, of Nigerian Christianity. Below, I summarise the short chapter in Yusuf's autobiography that is devoted to Gumi and features a picture of Yusuf and Gumi standing next to each other.

According to Yusuf, as leader of the Izala group, Gumi has influenced Muslim youth more than almost anyone. The aim of the Izala was to destroy two concepts that were the most precious to Yusuf, namely, Nigeria's secular status and her "western and Christian values"—really two sides of the single Nigerian Christian coin—in order to replace them with Islam. Gumi worked hard to establish a political system based on Islam. To achieve this he fought to control federal radio and television in Kaduna, channels he used aggressively to advance his gospel, and "continually preached the gospel of violence." In his sermons, this "self-styled ayatollah" advised Muslims to join the armed forces "not particularly to serve the nation but to learn war tactics" in order to "take over the country." He openly sought to incite the people against the government and secularists [read: Christians]. Gumi also followed the Christian example by establishing a kind of Muslim Red Cross in the country and began plans for separate Muslim hospitals and schools.

Though many Muslim scholars objected to his interpretation of the Qur'an, many elite "lay" members of the Muslim community sought guidance from Gumi. His organization caused much disturbance, has been involved in various riots and is responsible

for the loss of many lives and properties. The authorities, according to Yusuf, “have the full facts concerning Izala’s criminal activities,” but have remained silent and taken no action against them or their leader. He was one of the “sacred cows” we heard about earlier that the government feared to touch. The violence which attended his return from Saudi Arabia after receiving the King Faisal Laureate award, confirmed Christians in their fears that Muslim countries, “especially the OIC and their Nigerian collaborators,” wanted to Islamise Nigeria at all cost. The silence of the government did not help alleviate this fear. Yusuf’s judgement was that “the flagrant abuse of power by Gumi ... does not permit neutrality in government.”<sup>36</sup>

Ibrahim Yaro reproduced extracts from an article in the magazine *This Week* entitled “The Upsurge of Islamic Fundamentalism.”<sup>37</sup> The article placed Gumi in the context of a Muslim resurgence in Nigeria under the influence of Ayatollah Khomeini, whose cassettes blared throughout northern city streets. This led to mounting tension that was allegedly further encouraged by Gumi. He preached militancy and did not accept “a religion that says: ‘Turn the other cheek.’ His doctrine is an eye for an eye.” He used three avenues to preach this doctrine: the Kaduna Central Mosque, his four-hectare residential compound and Radio Kaduna. The article further stated that Gumi was leader of the “Izala sect, which has a rigid and uncompromising attitude to the interpretation of the Qur’an. The Izalas are said to draw inspiration from dying for the cause of Islam.” They have contempt for Muslims belonging to other sects, while they “abhor Christians.”

Gumi’s attitude to Christianity was not entirely flattering. He did not think that “it is a religion worth anything.” Drawing upon another magazine, Yaro alleged that Gumi and other Muslim leaders “have made it very clear that they do not accept the rest of us. We do not belong.” Asked whether Muslims could be under a political party with Christian leadership, “Gumi, a

typical...Muslim, answered, 'I don't think we can accept a Christian to be our leader unless we are forced.' 'What if Christians do not accept Muslims as their leader?' He replied, 'Then we have to divide the country.'"

Yaro commented,

*This frontline Muslim gentleman has unequivocally pointed out that the mission of Islam in Nigeria and the world at large is not to bring peace and promote social justice, as he...thoughtfully said that, "The two-party system of government will not be south against north but Islam against Christianity. Once you are a Muslim, you cannot accept a non-Muslim to be your leader."*

"Note," suggested Yaro, "Gumi had rightly pointed out that it is always 'Islam against Christianity.'"<sup>38</sup>

Gumi dashed any hopes of a unified pluralistic Nigeria. Yaro asked what plan Islam had "for the progress and unity of the human race" and concluded that Islam "has nothing to offer" in this area. When Gumi was asked what Islam could contribute to Nigerian unity, he answered that it would require the conversion of all to Islam. "Muslims could continue to suppress other religions until they become [a] minority. It will be only then that Nigeria can talk about unity and progress."<sup>39</sup>

Yaro saw Gumi as "an outstanding enemy of Nigeria as a nation. He has made many treasonable and insinuating statements capable of plunging the entire nation into a blood war." Yet, Gumi "is left to move and enjoy much more freedom than those Nigerians who need freedom most—and that while the government insists that there are no sacred cows!" On the outside back cover of his monograph, Yaro features a number of Muslim quotations, one of them is attributed to Gumi and reads "Progress and unity of the human race means converting Christians and non-Muslims to Mohammedanism."

It was not only Gumi's statements that increased the tensions but his actions as well. He was among the foremost lobbyists to have Nigeria join the OIC, an issue that has caused great unrest among Christians. He is also credited with promoting militancy among Muslim youths. The last two actions "contributed to unprecedented harvests of religious riots" in Kaduna (Kafanchan and Zangon-Kataf) and in Bauchi. Christians are convinced that Gumi was out to turn Nigeria into a Muslim country "by all possible means." Large sections of the Muslim community saw him as the fire that relit "the torch of Islam which has flickered under... colonialism, westernization and secularism."<sup>40</sup>

Readers of Volume 2 in this series may recall that Gumi had a hand in marrying the daughter of Christopher Abashiya, one of our "fathers," to a Muslim. This was not the only time he was involved in such arrangements. Jabani Mambula, the late former general secretary of TEKAN, sent a Hausa-language circular to all TEKAN members in which he informed them that the National Executive Committee of CAN had investigated how Gumi was collecting Christian girls under eighteen to marry them off to Muslims. "All Christians of Kaduna"<sup>41</sup> had staged a protest at the premises of the Commissioner of Police,<sup>42</sup> but no explanation was provided them.

Indeed, Gumi was a powerful player, one who provoked Christians more than any other Muslim individual, except, perhaps, President Babangida. Even the leaders of the Islamic Movement did not arouse their ire and concern as much as did Gumi.

## ▲ CLOSING REMARKS \_\_\_\_\_

As closure to this chapter, I include an anonymous article from *TC* as Appendix 10. It reflects the tone of this chapter so well. This appendix is appropriate also as a closing document for this entire volume.<sup>43</sup>

## ▲ NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> *Towards the Right Path*, pp. 57ff.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, arguing the superiority of Christ over Muhammad, though not provocative to Christians, would be very provocative to a hot-tempered group of young MSS students.

<sup>3</sup> Ndukwe, Feb/2003.

<sup>4</sup> O. Minchakpu, 19 Jan/2004. For additional information about this “Taliban” development, see also *REC News Exchange*, Jan/2004; BBC, 5 Jan/2004; N. Musa, *Guardian*, 6 Jan/2004, 7 Jan/2004; BBC, 7 Jan/2004; *Vanguard*, 7 Jan/2004, 9 Jan/2004; A. Bego, *Daily Trust*, 13 Jan/2004; A. Borzello, BBC, 14 Jan/2004; J. Lohor, *TD*, 15 Jan/2004; S. Awofadeji, *TD*, 20 Jan/2004; Onuorah, *Guardian*, 29 Jan/2004.

<sup>5</sup> J. O’Connell, p. 196.

<sup>6</sup> CAN, Kaduna Branch, 17 June/92.

<sup>7</sup> NIPSS, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Unidentified news report from London forwarded by a friend, 3 May/2002. Also L. Achi.

<sup>9</sup> P. Clarke, p. 175.

<sup>10</sup> J. O’Connell, p. 200, endnote 1.

<sup>11</sup> C. O. Williams, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> It is generally agreed by many philosophers, especially those of the Kuyperian stripe, that Western Christianity has absorbed elements of the Pagan Greek world view. Western missionaries have inherited that characteristic and exported it as part of their gospel. A basic element of the struggle between Christians and Muslims is precisely that mixed syncretism that keeps bedeviling the entire scenario. J. Boer, 1979, pp. 449-456; 1984, pp.132-137.

<sup>13</sup> In the appropriate volume, I will, in fact, argue that a basic problem in our conflict is precisely the element of pagan Greek world view mixed in with the missionary presentation of Christianity in Nigeria that is one of the factors bedeviling the entire scenario.

<sup>14</sup> J. Boer. CC, 5 June/98. See Appendix 3 of forthcoming Volume 5 for full text.

<sup>15</sup> Y. B. Usman, 1987, pp. 11-12.

<sup>16</sup> TEKAN Study Group, 1987.

<sup>17</sup> J. Tsado, *TC*, 5/87, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Wadumbiya, 1991.

<sup>19</sup> O. Minchakpu, *TC*, 1/95, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> O. Minchakpu, *TC*, 1/95, pp. 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> O. Minchakpu, *TC*, 1/95, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> B. Jalingo, pp. 9, 33-34, 40-42.

<sup>23</sup> “*Arewa*” is Hausa for “North.” It is an embattled term. For many Muslims it means the entire former northern region, including the Middle Belt with its many Christians. Many Middle Belt Christians, however, want to disassociate themselves from that North they regard as feudal and oppressive, and insist on their own separate identity. By having aligned himself with this Forum, some feel that Yakubu Gowon, a Christian of Middle Belt origin, is betraying his own people.

<sup>24</sup> B. Jalingo, pp. 44-46. Similar warnings about Gowon’s role in ACF have been circulated by Remi Yesufu, Secretary of the Christian Social Movement of Nigeria, in which Gowon is portrayed as a hardcore Northerner and traitor to the Middle Belt. Having met the gentle Gowon a number of times, I have difficulty seeing him in such a role, though without such an interpretation his alliance with ACF is also difficult to understand.

<sup>25</sup> O. Minchakpu, “Manifesto?” *CT*, 3/95, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> *NS*, 20 Apr/94.

<sup>27</sup> D. Omotunde, 28 Oct/91.

<sup>28</sup> *Tell*, 28 Oct/91.

<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, the evidence is not produced.

<sup>30</sup> For details of this “debate” see Boer, 1979, pp. 478ff; 1984, pp. 142ff.

<sup>31</sup> O. Minchakpu, *TC*, 1/95, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> *NN*, 25 Feb/2000, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> *NN*, 26 Feb/2000, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> I find it interesting that the secular issue here is included in the list of *religious* challenges. Usually secular thinkers—and the writers of this

report definitely think secularly—do not place the secular under the banner of religion. Given the spirit of the report as a whole, I judge this inclusion the result of carelessness rather than a signal of fresh thinking.

<sup>35</sup> NIPSS, pp. 11-14.

<sup>36</sup> Grissen, pp. 104-107.

<sup>37</sup> 6 Apr/87, p. 21. Quoted by Yaro, pp. 16-17.

<sup>38</sup> I. Yaro, p. 19. Source: *Quality*, Oct/87, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> I. Yaro, p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> *TSM*, 27 Sep/92. Kukah, pp. 216ff.

<sup>41</sup> Original Hausa: “*Kiristan Kaduna Duka.*”

<sup>42</sup> TEKAN, 1 June/89.

<sup>43</sup> Anonymous, *TC*, 1/90, pp. 13-15. Appendix 12.