

WHOLISM: THE MUSLIM HEART

If there is one word that expresses the Muslim antidote to secularism, it is the term “wholism.”¹ And if there is one sentence or slogan that explains it, it is “Islam is a way of life.” It is repeated over and over again. Muslims never tire of emphasizing this wholistic aspect. Mahmoud Turi declared that Muslims “have shown the world that Islam is not exhausted by worshipping God in a mosque. No, it is useful for establishing the rule of justice amongst people.”² Wholism, of course, includes all of life, but in this volume it refers primarily to the relationship of Islam to politics and government. The reason for this emphasis is simply the nature of our subject.

A staff member of *Quality* magazine once interviewed Sheikh Abubukar Gumi. He became almost frustrated by Gumi’s habit of incorporating Islam in every statement. “Gumi,” the anonymous journalist wrote, “would not answer any question without generous reference to Islam. Islam is everything, he would tell you, and there is nothing you do or say that has not been regulated by Islam. Politics, economics, corruption, social relations, law, just mention

any subject under the sun, Gumi has the answer and the answer is in Islam.” Later in the same interview, Gumi explained that wherever a Muslim goes, “he has to follow the rules and regulations of going to that place. Just as he has to follow the rules when he is going to a mosque, even to go to bed you are bound by rules and regulations. When you are going to eat you are bound by rules. Whatever you are doing.”³ That is Islam, at least, Gumi’s Nigerian Islam. But, having received the King Faisal Laureate award, the Muslim equivalent of the Nobel prize, his version does carry authority.

Abdulmalik Mahmoud said it clearly a year later:

*I want it understood that Islam is a religion that lumps politics and sharia together. From the day of his birth or the day he embraces Islam, a Muslim is tied up with Islam. That is to say, Islam arranges everything for him in all he does and in every movement. Islam affects his schooling and his court, the way he conducts his business or profession, his workshop and his home and everything in his heart, the hidden and the open—Islam is in all of it.*⁴

A few more classic statements on the subject are in order. Someone from the Hausa-language magazine *Nasiha* interviewed Sheikh Ibrahim Saleh. The worthy sheikh explained Muslim wholism with a typical list of examples. Whether you eat or drink, sharia has guidance for proper procedure. The way you dress, the way you ease yourself, whether you enter a house or a mosque, there are laws for all these activities. It is by following this comprehensive guidance that a Muslim is close to God.⁵

Sheikh Aminuddeen Abubakar, under the heading, “Islam Covers Everything,” writes in Hausa, “Islam covers every area of life. Sharia, virtuous character, piety—all are included. There is nothing that is left untouched. Human development and economics are all affected. In short, Islam includes our lives in both this world and in the world to come.”⁶ Ibraheem Sulaiman

describes Islam as “a unitive system which advocates unity between physical and spiritual existence, between temporal and secular authorities and between faith and science.”⁷

More recent expressions of wholism are no different in their thrust. Baba Ejiga put it very simply: “Islam is the only religion that encompasses the totality of life. There is sharia in the way you eat, the way you walk, the way you talk, etc.”⁸

In a press statement, the Council of Ulama of Nigeria put it this way: “Islam means unconditional submission to the dictates of sharia in all spheres of life, social, political, economic, legal, etc., because everything from cradle to grave has been provided for, adequately and comprehensively, under the sharia. It may be stressed here that, unlike what may be obtained in other religions, where commandments are only for convenience, commandments in Islam are absolutely obeyed.”⁹

Another statement comes from Hussaini Abdu:

*The Muslims believe there is no separation between the sacred and profane and the legal system that governs them should be Islamic. It is a faith and knowledge, a culture and a world view with a system and political organization. In Islam the concept of faith can never be divorced from reason, life and history. There is no distinction between the idea of faith and deeds, morality and law, will and intellect.*¹⁰

Ahmad Gumbi equates sharia with all of Islam, as others do as well. Though he does not explicitly state it, his article on sharia is really about Islam in general. He is strong on the wholistic nature of the religion. An important feature of Islam, he asserts,

is that it is comprehensive. It comprises the spiritual and the material domains, and the individual and social life. It defines the relationship of the individual to his Creator and his position in the universe. It explains the individual obliga-

tion to himself and to all those around him. Sharia [read: Islam] is thus a creed, worship and a harmonious social order. It is at once law and morality.

Moreover, Islam does not classify things or actions into spiritual and secular, or as sacred and profane. Islam is a realistic and down-to-earth religion and a sensible way of life. It does not entertain mystical or mysterious concepts. Apart from God, His attitudes and His word, nothing else is sacred. All modes of worship are spiritual, because they elevate the human spirit and do not aim at material gains.

All other human activities, whether they are educational, professional or recreational, are good and blessed with divine rewards when they comply with the divine will or bad and evil and may lead to the wrath of God. They cannot be described as secular even when they deal with materialistic matters, nor as spiritual, although we anticipate Divine rewards for our honest struggle. The dichotomy of secular and spiritual is an alien notion to Muslims.¹¹

In the Muslim mind, the issue of secularism versus wholism is so bound up with Christianity that Muslims can hardly discuss the one without the other. Over against the separations and religious reductions inherent in the secular spirit and espoused in much of Christianity, mainstream and Fundamentalist Muslims do not tire of their insistence that Islam differs from secularism—and Christianity—precisely in that it is not merely a religious, spiritual or cultic movement, but an entire way of life. Making the easy slide from secularism to Christianity so typical of Nigeria, Ibraheem Sulaiman states the ideal—and the contrast—succinctly:

Christianity is content to deal with spiritual matters only, leaving all those matters concerned with politics, economy, state and society to other systems to administer. Islam, on the other hand, encompasses all aspects of life in its fold, and pro-

vides guidance for them. Accordingly, Islam has its legal, economic, political, administrative, social institutions meant to regulate human life in its entirety.

Even Christians, according to Sulaiman, regard “their role as that of absolute and violent opposition to all that is Islamic: their vehement opposition to the Sacred Sharia is a glaring example. It is therefore clear that Islam pursues goals and objectives which are diametrically at variance to those of Christianity: Islam wants to abolish colonialism; Christianity clings to it for survival.”¹² Aliyu Dauda, a lecturer at Bayero University, claimed that “Christianity is the only religion that separates religion from politics and, in fact, from all of life.” On the other hand, “Islam is the only religion that encompasses all of life.”¹³

Tofa asserts that Islam has had to “fight [secularism] tooth and nail to maintain its spiritual character.” Islam “is not just a ritual worship but a complete way of life, which modern Pauline Christianity is clearly not.” Furthermore, “secularisation by its very meaning is an open-ended and continuous process, whose ultimate objective is to culminate into secularism—an ideology with an absolute set of values, having a final significance on man.” Unlike Christians, “Muslims do not rely on secular philosophers, scientists, mathematicians, etc., for their theological and metaphysical support.”¹⁴ Most of these (Christian) secular scholars do not sincerely believe nor practice the religious life; they are filled with doubts and vacillation; they are skeptics, agnostics and may even be atheists.”¹⁵

In contrast to the secular separation of the spiritual and the worldly, Islam, affirms El-Miskin, “maintains an elaborate code of conduct” in the so-called worldly spheres. The world is so important to Islam that “there are elaborate instruments of its control so that comfort does not degenerate to hedonistic pursuits.” These secular separations and divisions of life have no meaning in Islam and are, in fact, incompatible with it.¹⁶

Rasheem Shittu was a young Muslim lawyer who struggled much to develop a responsible Muslim social ideology. At an early stage, he was an ardent advocate of capitalism as representing true Islam, but by the time he wrote *Islamic Ideology*, he had moved over to a form of democratic socialism. Though this could have put him outside the pale of either mainstream or Fundamentalist Islam, no one less than Lateef Adegbite, at the time Legal Adviser for the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and the second most prominent leader among Yoruba Muslims, wrote the Foreword.

In his attempt to establish the legitimacy of democratic socialism, Shittu appealed to the wholistic nature of Islam in such a typical fashion that I simply reproduce the relevant paragraphs.

Unlike Islam, all other world religions and their holy scriptures provided for only the spiritual directives for their adherents. For instance, with Christianity, there is a division between “Caesar” and “God.” The Holy Bible too does not give any hint about the organization and governance of the State.

But with Islam, there is no division between the spiritual and the mundane matters. The Qur’an gives a comprehensive and lucid guidance about the various departments of human life. In the words of Sayyid Abuyl A’la Maududi, “Their directives reveal what is injurious and harmful; what are the virtues which we have to cultivate and encourage and what are the evils which we have to suppress and guard against; what is the sphere of our voluntary, untrammled, personal and social action and what are its limits; and finally, what ways and means we can adopt in establishing such a dynamic order of society and what methods we should avoid.”

Islam adopts the above philosophy, because it considers human life as an organic whole that can be likened to a human body. The ill health of the one part affects the whole...¹⁷ Therefore Islam distinguishes itself among the reli-

gions of universal application, by the feature that it does not exact the renunciation of the world, but insists on the body and soul growing together and operating simultaneously.

This is more so when “we all realize that God’s injunctions are not arbitrary, whimsical, despotic or impossible to act upon. On the contrary, God in His infinite wisdom and mercy, has outlined certain moral laws in order to meet the needs of man, physical as well as spiritual, and these laws are constant and immutable, just as are the ‘natural laws’ of God which govern the rest of His creation.”¹⁸

Among others, the demand of secularists is that the state be neutral with respect to religion and adopt no state religion. Religion and state are to be kept separate from each other. But can we consider this a neutral position in the face of Islam that rejects such a separation? Lateef Adegbite, speaking at NIREC to Christians who “no longer recognize the fusion of religion and state,” declared that “Muslims can never endorse this approach. Sharia is a religious law and the state must enforce it. Therefore religion is the responsibility of the state in this regard.”¹⁹ “Non-adoption of a state religion is a notion which does not feature in the Islamic vocabulary,” insists A. Yadudu. The imposition of “notions unique to a particular religion or world view” that are opposed by another religion cannot be squared with secular neutralism.²⁰

On the one hand, Muslims point with pride at the wholistic impact of Islam on Africa. Bidmos gratefully observes,

A cursory look at the life of Africa presents a pleasant picture of the impact of Islam in the continent. For instance, Arabic, apart from being the mother tongue of millions of Africans, has provided many African languages with loan words. Hausa, Swahili, and Yoruba are good examples of African languages that benefited tremendously in terms of borrowings from Arabic. Culturally, the impact of Islam is notice-

able in the African modes of dressing,²¹ names of persons, places, festivals as well as architectural designs. Furthermore, Islam provided Africa with a legal system that was unprecedented. Formal education with its systematic approach was introduced. This was highly patronized in Africa for its remarkable values.

That is indeed a rosy picture. Alas, there is that “on the other hand,” so typical of religions. Bidmos admits that this rosy picture turns out to be “false.” He laments, “A critical examination reveals that the impact is cosmetic. This is because Islam has been restricted to the periphery of African life. Political structures and economic systems in Africa are walled off [from] Islamic influence. Islam is kept out of the thinking process of an African Muslim.” People may seem religious, when they observe all the Muslim pillars, but most have

persistently refused to carry Islam into their normal daily routines like education, economy, politics, etc. Their practice of Islam is at variance with the injunction of Allah which says [Arabic quotation], meaning enter into Islam completely. It is designed to rule and govern the entire life of the believer. It is only then that its efficacy can be experienced. Theoretically, the African Muslim proclaims kalimatush-shahadah—the words of testimony—while in practice he is brainwashed to reserve a very limited proportion of his life for the operation of the kalimah. The result is that he is neither a kafir (for he has proclaimed kalimah) nor a Muslim (for his entire life is not governed by the tenets of Islam). The attitude to his religion was exhibited by the response to a questionnaire administered on 250 subjects who were randomly selected from different parts of Nigeria. The main items of the questionnaire include:

(a) What is the position of Islam in your economic life?

(b) Is there any role that Islam can play in structuring your political system?

(c) What is your understanding of secular life?

242 of the subjects (i.e., 96.8%) gave the same responses to the items. To the first item, the 242 respondents asserted that "Islam has nothing to do with their economic life and that their business is run in accordance with the prevailing circumstances." To the second question they responded that "the design of the political structure of any country is beyond religious doctrines." And to the third question, the respondents affirmed that "secular life means conducting one's socio-economic life without reference to religion." These findings indicate that a line of demarcation is clearly drawn between religious doctrines and the life style of the African Muslim.

These findings indicate a serious discrepancy between the classical Muslim wholistic world view and the practice of adherents in the marketplace. Bidmos asserts, "It is therefore imperative to identify possible factors that may be responsible for this attitude." He observes that one factor is the "militant competition to which the African Muslim is subjected. He is torn between diabolically opposing cultures," namely those of Islam and African Tradition which "makes frantic efforts to rule the life of the African Muslim." A third factor is the method with which Islam is propagated. The responsibility is relegated to the "jobless" or unemployed who "cannot relate Islam to life" and in general have an inadequate understanding of Islam. A message that ignores the world or treats it as vanity is not going to be effective.²² The rejected message he refers to is, of course, that of dualistic secularism that separates religion from the marketplace. I find it interesting that Bidmos this time did not include the colonial heritage in the lineup of culprits.

In spite of that somber picture, the dominant landscape is one of intimate intertwining of both church and state and of religion and state. That, for much of northern Nigeria, is the norm. Examples abound in earlier volumes. On the day of this writing TD features an article about the involvement of Garko local government in Kano State with new converts to Islam. Too short for an appendix, I simply reproduce the article as a typical example of such intertwining:

Garko local government of Kano State has expressed its willingness to the construction of a mosque and Islamiyyah schools for the 32 individuals who recently embraced Islam in Makaman Kudu village.

The council chairman, Albaji Yahaya Adamu, who gave the indication while receiving the new converts in his office, averred that such move is timely with a view to educating them on the principles and guidelines governing the practice of Islam.

He maintained that as a religion which involves political as well as socio-economic activities of its followers, Islam always encourages everyone to seek for education in order to facilitate daily affairs based on the laid down rules and regulations.

Albaji Adamu stated that the council will not succumb its mandate of boosting the teachings and education of Islam to reach a greater position. According to him, Islam does not condone illiteracy, pointing out that the construction of the schools will in no small amount assist the converts in learning the moral and social responsibility bestowed on each Muslim.

The council chairman, however, implored them to be law abiding and imbibe the justice and fear of Almighty Allah, stressing that “you should not relent in your efforts towards obedience to the teaching of Islam and the council is ready to render any assistance to overhaul your living conditions.” Also

*speaking, the district head of the local government congratulated the converts and urged them to accord appropriate attention in acquiring the knowledge of Islam. He called on the people of the area to consider the converts as their brothers in Islam and offer meaningful assistance to them.*²³

When they had not been paid for a long time, the staff of the National Population Commission in the highly Muslim state of Borno “resorted to fasting and praying in a bid to get the backlog of their salaries paid to them.” One Victor Kulani announced this strategy in an interview with the media. “He said fasting and praying were only some of the strategies which the staff of the commission have adopted to resolve the issue.”²⁴

Then there is the “three-day fasting and prayer session” of a programme called “Divine Call on IBB for 2007.” This is going to become a national effort to pray and fast the former military Head of State, Ibrahim Babangida, into making himself available for president in 2007. Said one of the coordinators, Alhaji Nma Kolo, “We adopted the three-day prayer and fasting to drive home our request. We decided to go spiritual in order to appeal to God to make General Babangida heed our call.” It is interesting that this is a multi-religious programme in that it involves both Muslims and Christians.²⁵

An important aspect of Islam’s wholism is its general rejection of the privacy of religion. A discussion on Islam per se would not need to include the privacy issue, since for most Muslims it would not arise. However, since Muslims find themselves surrounded by Christians who, as I show in Monograph Five, often insist on the private nature of religion, we find Muslims raising the issue as well, though mostly negatively. At a sharia workshop, Ibraheem Sulaiman stated that “the very basis of secularism” is that religion, including Islam, “should only be allowed to influence private life of the people and should not be allowed to have any direct role or influence on the public life of the people.”²⁶ Bashir Sambo considers this an

important difference between the two religions. In the context of a discussion on Christian ignorance about Islam, he states, “While Christians say religion is a private and personal affair, the Muslims believe that religion is not a private and personal affair.”²⁷

Occasionally the term “secular” and its derivatives are used in the dualistic sense in which secularists use the term. Secularists tend to divide the world into two fronts, the spiritual or religious and the secular, the latter covering everything else. Wholistic Muslims generally reject that distinction. Nevertheless, occasionally this language pops up. Governor Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso of Kano used the term this way in a speech pleading for transforming Qur'anic schools. They must be turned into “comprehensive community schools, where religion as well as secular subjects could be taught.”²⁸ When you occasionally find this type of language, it is difficult to know how seriously to take it. It should probably be understood as a shorthand method of expressing an intention without attaching a dualistic meaning to it. But it is an indication that the language of secularism has a far reach, even into sharia land.

Two famous last words on the integration of religion and politics. The first by Senator Hassan S. Kantagora: “My mission is informed by the dictates of my all-encompassing religion Islam. It is my foremost religious duty to end evil, indolence and injustice by fighting, denouncing or merely repulsing them....”²⁹

The “final last” word in this chapter comes from one Iqbal, a Muslim poet. This poem reminds us that Nigerian Islam is in tune with much of global Islam.

*On monastic order was laid the foundation of Church.
How could mendicity contain royalty in its confines?
The conflict was deep between hermit and king:
One was triumphant; the other subdued.
Politics got rid of religion,
Helpless was the high priest.*

*When the world and religion parted ways,
Avarice was Ruler, King and Vizier.
Dualism was the doom of mind and matter,
Dualism made civilization blind.
This is the miracle of the dweller of the desert,
Whose warnings reflected the tidings glad;
That humanity's only refuge was this—
That the mystic Junaid united with Ardsber the King.³⁰*

▲ SELECTED QUOTES

Islam is a complete way of life. Our politics, economy, social and cultural affairs, as well as external relations as Muslims must be conducted in accordance with Qur'anic provisions—Ibrahim M. Umar.³¹

Commenting on whether or not the Maulud celebration [in Kaduna] was politicised, Ustaz Idris said "Islam is an embodiment of every facet of human life, politics inclusive." He recalled that at the local level, the famous motto of the late Sardauna was work and worship, arguing that the late premier had severally noted that it would be hard to divorce religion from politics—Ustaz Idris.³²

▲ NOTES

¹ Note the spelling I employ for this term. It is to ensure you understand that neither Muslims nor I buy into some of the popular meanings associated with the term “holism.”

² *Alkalami*, 15 Jul/88. “*Kuma sun nuna wa duniya cewa musulunci bai tsaya ga bautar Allah a masallatai ba, a’a, ana iya amfani da shi wurin shimfiye mulkin adalci a tsakanin mutane.*” In this particular context, the reference is to a reign of justice upon the overthrow of Western imperialism. That, in common with Muslims in general, is Turi’s great hope. Turi is/was the right hand man of Ibrahim El-Zak-zaky, the founder of the Muslim Movement, who is featured in Monograph 2.

³ *Quality*, Oct/87, pp. 34, 38.

⁴ A. B. Mahmoud, original Hausa: “*Ina kuma son a fahimta cewa shi addinin Musulunci addini ne wanda yake dunkule da siyasa da sharia. Dukkan rayuwar da Musulmi zai yi daga ranar da aka haife shi ko daga ranar da ya shiga Musulunci, to tana sarke ne da Musulunci, wato Musulunci ya tanada masa dukkan abin da zai yi, kowane motsinsa kuma akwai Musulunci a cikinsa. Akwai Musulunci a makarantarsa da dakunan shariarsa, hanyoyin da yake bi da kasuwa, da wurin sana’a, da wurin aikinsa da gidansa, da abin da ya boye a ransa da abinda zai bayana duka, akwai Musulunci a ciki.*” 9 Dec/88.

⁵ *Nasiha*, p. 24. Original Hausa: “*...watau ya zamo yana bin ka’idar Musulunci; abinci za ka ci ko ruwa zaka sha, dukkansu akwai tsarin da addinin ya nuna a bi. Tufa za ka sa ko bayan gida za ka shiga, ko gida ne ko masallaci, dukkansu akwai ka’idojin da addinin ya ce a bi yayin yinsu A ko da yaushe dai, ana so Musulmi ya kasance yana tunawa da Allah, yana kusa da shi ta hanyar bin dokokinsa.*”

⁶ A. Abubakar, original Hausa: “*Musulunci Ya Mamaye Komai: Musulunci kuwa ya mamaye dukkanin fagen rayuwa; sharia ce, halaye ne da ta’adu nagari, da ibada, duk Musulunci ya hade. Sannan babu irin tsarin da addinin Musulunci ba ya da shi. Sannan babu irin tsarin da kyautatuwar zaman jama’a da tsarin tattalin arziki, wanda addinin Musulunci ba ya da shi. A takaice dai, addinin Musulunci ya kunshi rayuwa a duniya da Labira.*” 16 Nov/88, p. 11.

⁷ I. Sulaiman in Rashid, p. 53.

⁸ B. Ejiga, 17 Nov/99, p. 12.

⁹ Council of Ulama of Nigeria, 7 Nov/99.

¹⁰ H. Abdu, 7 Mar/2003. Appendix 23 on *Companion CD*.

¹¹ A. Gumbi, 12 Nov/99, p. 20.

¹² I. Sulaiman, 1986, pp. 2, 6.

¹³ A. Ahmad, 9 Dec/88. “*Addinin Kirista shi ne kawai ya bada kafar raba addini da siyasa da kuma sauran fannonin rayuwa.*” “*Musulunci shi ne kawai ya kunshi dukkanin fannonin rayuwa.*”

¹⁴ It appears that Tofa is not familiar with the relationship of Greek Pagan and Muslim philosophers.

¹⁵ B. Tofa, 10 Mar/89.

¹⁶ T. El-Miskin, “*Dawah.*”

¹⁷ I omit the details of the integration of the body parts. This argument is similar to that of Paul in the New Testament, where he compares the Christian *umma* or community to the wholeness of the human body and the integration of all its parts—I Corinthians 12.

¹⁸ R. Shittu, pp. 33-34. Quotation from Hadja A. Lemu, *An Introduction to Islam*, p. 4.

¹⁹ L. Adegbite, 2000, p. 17.

²⁰ A. Yadudu, 18 Nov/88.

²¹ Participants in these discussions do not always keep in mind the distinction between culture and religion. Though I do not accept their easy separation as found in secularism, neither can they be totally identified. The issue of fashion is surely one that calls for a more careful nuance than Bidmos brings to the table here.

²² Bidmos, “*Da’wah,*” pp. 2-4, 7.

²³ M. Kwaru, 1 June/2004.

²⁴ “NPC Staff Fast over Unpaid Salaries,” *Daily Trust*, 18 Jul/2001.

²⁵ J. Orintunsin, 8 Dec/2003. I was tempted to insert a sentence like, “Where else, such mixture of religion, but Nigeria?” But Adam Nicolson reminds us that such mixture is standard fare in most cultures. Nigeria is by no means unique in this. He asks why this mixing of prayer with the mundane affairs of life “strikes us as a little absurd?” “In the long historical perspective, of course, it is the radically secularized societies of the West that are the anomaly,” not those who do the mixing. “Most societies

at most times have been happy enough to bind together the idea of prayer with the most mundane, business-like realities of life. And most of them still are” [A. Nicolson, 13 Dec/2003]. Muslims with their insistence on wholism are the rule; secularists, the exceptions. Of course, the terminology of “mixing” and “binding” already assumes a dichotomy. For most, these naturally belong together in one reality.

²⁶ I. Sulaiman in S. K. Rashid, p. 53. This statement greatly incensed Christian crusader, Wilson Sabiya. See Monograph 5.

²⁷ B. Sambo, 2000, p. 26.

²⁸ R. Kwankwaso, *NN*, 13 Feb/2000, p. 20.

²⁹ H. Kontagora, 24 Feb/2003.

³⁰ Quoted in Nadwi, p. 104.

³¹ *NN*, 19 Dec/99.

³² N. Dambatta, 8 May/2004. It is again striking that the Sardauna’s motto of “work and pray” was exactly the same motto popular in the Kuyperian movement, though they preferred the Latin version, “*Ora et labora*”—and put prayer first.