

# WHOLISTIC CHRISTIANITY

## ▲ HESITATION ABOUT SECULARITY

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Though most Nigerian Christians entertain little doubt about the virtues of secularity, there are a number of significant thinkers who express hesitation. Adebola registered his early disapproval. Writing about the 1977 Draft Constitution's provision for a secular state, he realized that many Nigerians were happy about it, but, he argued, "There can be nothing further from the truth. This provision is not a normative enactment for institutional atheism nor is it an expression of the State's neutrality towards religion. Secularism is not the ideological option for Nigeria...No government which treats this country as a secular state is going to be popular." He also warned against looking to the West for models, for our "pluralism is not denominational but multi-religious." Neither is there help from countries with similar problems, for "they have not yet solved the problem for themselves." After further discussion, he concluded that the 1977 draft constitution contained "no safeguards for religious freedom."<sup>1</sup>

Habila Istifanus warns that there is need for caution. Though at one point he was dismissive of Western critique, he advises that Nigerians take a look at some negative comments on secularity in the West. There, secularists reject the notion of God altogether and may even be antagonistic to Christianity. There are those who emphasize temporal values at the expense of the spiritual. Istifanus adduces the almost humorous warning of one Berger that “the secular world should not be abandoned to secularism,” while at the same time the Word of God is not “to be imposed on all without exception,” for that would amount to falling “once again into an unbiblical authoritarianism.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, Christians pushing for secularity should keep their eyes on both sides of the issue, for secularity has potential problems of its own.

For the Nigerian situation, of course, the Muslim community’s insistent critique of secularism is of much greater importance than that of Europeans. Please be reminded that Muslims critique secularism as they see it. They seemingly refuse to acknowledge the Christian distinction between “secularism” and “secularity.” You cannot blame them for this refusal, since so many Christians themselves confuse the terminology. Few Christians have wanted to give Muslim reactions any ear at all, but Istifanus once again sounds uniquely irenic. He writes,

*I must admit that I do appreciate some of the arguments of our Muslim brothers and sisters against secularism. This is because some of them are doing it out of a serious sincere religious heart to improve the morality of the society. I don't believe that they are rejecting secularism blindly. I am sure that one of the reasons could be because of the chaos created by secularism they have seen in other countries. I think we Christians should understand the fact that it is not easy for a faithful Muslim to accept secularization of the state he/she lives in, because Islam is a total way of life.*

Istifanus cites another reason for Muslim rejection of secularism, but it is really just an aspect of this last one. That reason “is the rapid adaptation of our society to the Western world” due to all the influences of Western media and related factors amply detailed in Monograph 4—in short, the Western type of immorality so rampant in today’s Nigeria and so vividly described by Muslim writers.

He then reports on a study done on the subject that “reveals that Muslims have good reasons for rejecting secularism.” The study acknowledges that “the impact of secular scientific thought and technology upon traditional ways of understanding and interpreting life, which has been so dehumanizing on people and values in our societies, has been properly attacked or responded correctly to by Muslims.” The Muslims’ response has often been an “attempt to prevent such dehumanization” but “has been wrongly interpreted by some in the West as a rejection of advanced technology.”

The study further indicates that in their “struggle to create modern societies,” Muslims “are not content to accept” the ideologies of Marxism and capitalism “without criticism and alteration.” Both of these are “viewed as extreme, with the Islamic alternative falling somewhere in the middle. The Islamic society addresses the same human needs and aspirations, but seeks to avoid the oppressive excesses.”<sup>3</sup>

But Muslims “seem not to understand that Christians are equally worried about this situation,” according to Istifanus. They appear “to think that such characteristics have the tacit support of most Christians. They also feel that Christian support of secular governments and the concept of separation of church and state contribute to the social ills manifest in Western society today.” Istifanus points out that Christians are as upset about such developments as are Muslims: both oppose the current level of immorality and chaos resulting from secularism.

And this is where Istifanus’ call for listening to each other comes in. Secularism creates problems for both. Hence “the struggle with

secularism...calls for a collective effort. What we need to do now is to come together to understand one another.” He ends his paper with a call “for a real critical evaluation of the positions of the two religions on the issue of secularism.”<sup>4</sup>

We must recognise the courage it took for this church leader to display such an open attitude towards Muslims and to so challenge Christians to self-critique in a situation of intense and bloody rivalry. It probably sounded like music to the foreign sponsors of the event. It was, after all, billed as a dialogue. But we must be aware of the lone position he took, however carefully crafted, with all the potential for negative relations with his local peers and superiors. I salute Istifanus for his insights and his courage.

The conference at which he presented this paper published an unusual communique. This mixed gathering of Christians and Muslims carried Istifanus’ concerns a step farther. He was brave enough to question the propriety of secularism in the Nigerian situation. The communique outrightly dismissed secularism as “not compatible with the background, upbringing and life style of Nigerians, because religion permeates all facets of Nigerian life.” It recommended that “the Government should officially recognise the country as a multi-religious rather than a secular state, where no religion should be favoured at the expense of others.”<sup>5</sup> These statements could almost verbatim be lifted from Monograph 4, the one presenting the Muslim view on secularism, and could thus be interpreted as a Muslim *coup d’état* of the conference. I prefer to see them as the triumph of responsible reason over the chaos of anger and suspicion that characterizes much Nigerian thought on these issues.

At least two of our Christian “fathers,” identified in Monograph 3, also entertained misgivings about secularity. Haruna Dandaura, always gentle but often controversial, is one of the few Christians who definitely rejects the call for secularity. The Christian insistence that “Nigeria is a secular state” is “a dangerous term,” he lectures. “This does not help us Christians at all. The fear Christians are

entertaining, that if Nigeria is not declared a secular state it will give Muslims the power to declare it a Muslim state, does not exist. Muslims know very well that those that are saying this are just making mere impossible speculations.”<sup>6</sup> Ishaya Audu acknowledged privately to me that secularity is unsatisfactory, but it is the lesser of two evils. It “should at least allow for national tolerance, live and let live, and is the lesser of unsatisfactory alternatives.”<sup>7</sup>

A scholar with strong doubts about secularism, Toyin Falola, is far away from the home scene, but he has the advantage of years of experience in secular U.S.A. I use the term “secularism” when describing his opinions, for most of his book is concerned with that rather than secularity. He writes,

*Though a secular model of statehood may be the ideal in a modern multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, many questions have been left unanswered in presenting such a model, in its present form, as a permanent option for Nigeria. Numerous tensions plague a so-called secular Nigeria, some relating to the challenges posed to this very concept by Islam and some related to the management of Nigeria as a country. Why does modern Nigeria aspire to govern itself by secular documents and institutions, while many of its citizens organize their lives by moral and religious codes? Within this contradictory framework, can power be neutral, or, alternatively, can religiously-biased political actors operate a secular system? Are we exaggerating the governmental role of the modern secular state in the face of competing alternatives?*

At a later point in his book, Falola cautions, “while the secular option remains the most important in modern history, it has yet to guarantee long-term peace or ensure the end of religious rivalries and conflicts.” He summarizes how a number of countries have dealt with multi-religion and indicates that experience “shows that the state, and in particular the secular ideologies that underpin it,

is in crisis in several places, and that religious communities want change and a different political or social system.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, he is cautioning Christians not to expect too much from secularism. All that glitters is not gold!

Falola’s compatriot in the U.S.A., Ilesanmi, also has strong reservations about secularism. The concept “is too weak, narrow, and confusing to capture the legal intent of the constitutional provision for the non-adoption of any religion as a state religion,” he affirms. In 1986, a review committee warned that the term’s “ambiguity...might inadvertently project Nigeria as ‘a Godless nation,’”<sup>9</sup> precisely the Muslim objection—and precisely the goal of “pure secularists.” The doctrine of “pure secularism”—and a doctrine it is—stands for “the personal, ideational and public irrelevance of religion...” Its proponents “claim that they endorse the principle of religious freedom, but in reality, religion is for them a temporary nuisance that would eventually wither away.” True, “most Nigerian Christians would hesitate” to accept the terms of pure secularism,<sup>10</sup> but, given its historic and most common meaning, why confuse the situation by using the term? Well spoken, Ilesanmi!

Iyortyom Achineku, a leader in the Church of Christ in the Sudan among the Tiv (NKST) and graduate of at least two Reformed theological institutions in the U.S.A., expresses strong dislike of secularism.<sup>11</sup> His rejection comes out clearly in his definition of the term: it

*may be defined as those bold or seemingly innocent but satanic activities or forces in human societies that shape the all-pervasive ethos of human understandings in such a way that human autonomy rather than God’s revelation becomes the center of attention. In all of these activities rebellious humanity fights for the recognition of its selfish rights.*

The ensuing fight, he states, “has penetrated the whole fabric of human history. In modern history it manifested itself on a

massive scale in the minds of Western Enlightenment thinkers. Through human reasoning these thinkers tried to liberate humanity from what they thought were religious and traditional restraints on their freedom.” At this point Achineku proceeds to trace “some of the dynamics which through secularization have ushered Nigeria into secularism.”

Achineku blames both Islam and Christianity for Nigeria’s secularism. However, his discussion of the Muslim factor does not sound authoritative, and so I will skip over to the Christian cause as he explains it. “Christianity has done its share in promoting secularism. Even with their good intentions, the sum total of strategies adopted by early missionaries in Nigeria, as elsewhere on the African continent, contributed to the rise of secularism.” The negative attitude of missionaries towards Nigerian culture led to a “blanket destruction” of that culture and to its “replacement by Western cultures without adequate understanding of the Scriptures. The result was “a near disappearance of religious values. This, in turn, gradually and imperceptibly dichotomized Nigerian life and inescapably set the stage for secularization and secularism.”

A third party contributing to Nigeria’s secularization, according to Achineku, is the government from colonialism right up to time of his writing. “The government introduced into Nigeria has altered the customs and traditions that endorsed respect for religious institutions. This lack of respect has paved the way for secularism in as much as the general underlying policy...has not encouraged respect for God.”

Western education, pushed by both government and missions, “has hastened the tempo of secularization.” This education, it has been widely recognised, also by Muslims as we have seen in Monographs 2 and 4, was based on the same traditional Greek and Western dualism between body and soul that underlay Western culture and that has created secularism. Achineku alleges that the entire educational system from bottom to top has turned into a

“big threat, since the struggle against religion has become an inseparable component of the entire national policy on education.”

In the midst of all these and other factors we have no room to discuss, “secularism succeeded, because Nigerian Christians never developed a theocentric approach to life and society.” Many Nigerians have accepted this prevailing secularized situation and have thereby undermined their fidelity to the Christian stance and the vision of reality which underlies it.

### ▲ PRIVACY OF RELIGION

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An important component of the Christian package is the privacy of religion. This combination of secularism and privacy is no accident, for secularism has always sought to push religion out of the public square into the realm of the private and personal. As Sue Careless put it in the Canadian context, “Modernity [here a synonym for secularism] was thought to lead to a secular state where religion would become so personal and privatized as to be virtually irrelevant to public life. It would have no real influence in the public square.”<sup>12</sup> So, it is not an accident that privacy plays a role in the Christian demand for secularity. It is a term straight out of the language of secularism and thus betrays something about the origin of the cluster of ideas under discussion in this chapter. The two have always gone together.

The concept has become important in the Nigerian context not because of its own significance in the Christian scheme of things so much as a tool to counter the Muslim version of the public nature of religion. Of course, both religions have their private and public sides. The former has to do with the personal faith in God and relationship to Him, while the latter deals with the external side of religion where it touches your neighbour and all of society. In the Nigerian conflict, Christians often emphasize the private aspect; Muslims, the public. In a sense, they are thus comparing mangoes



and avocados and often talk alongside each other. When push comes to shove, Christians will frequently strongly emphasize the public or wholistic aspect of religion as well, as we will see below.

Nevertheless, under the dual influence of the missionary heritage with its undeniable pietistic strain<sup>13</sup> and the Muslim pressure, Christians, even when there is no need for it, frequently resort to the language of privacy, often carelessly, without thinking through the implications. Already during the earliest phase of the struggle for secularism, Babatope suggested that for religion not to become socially divisive, it should “at best be considered a private affair.”<sup>14</sup> Opopu posited a sharp delineation between religion and politics. The former concerns man’s relationship to God and has to do with his conscience. It is personal, whereas politics is a public concern.<sup>15</sup> Aredola, while emphasizing the public function of religion, instinctively throws in the comment “Religion, though private, [is] personal and individual.”<sup>16</sup> Ali Lamido insists that the Christian religion is “personal” as over against a religion imposed by force.<sup>17</sup> Okezie Chukwumerije asserts that “religion is an intimately private matter. A pact with God is usually made in the privacy of one’s heart and soul. A relationship with God is a personal affair.” His view is that “the state ought not to be concerned with it. While the state may regulate individual actions that impinge on vital societal interests, it should not be in the business of superintending the relationship between individuals and their God. This is especially so in a multi-religious and liberal society, where practitioners of different faiths are expected to live peacefully together.”<sup>18</sup>

Many of the people featuring in Tsado’s interviews affirm the importance of the privacy issue. Braithwaite: “Religion to my mind is a private affair.” Helen Gomwalk: religion is more of a personal thing than a political issue. You may remember various earlier statements on the issue in this chapter. CAN asks the government to “ensure that religion remain the private concern of the individual.” Okogie states, in public you “forget about your religion because it is

a private affair between you and your God.”<sup>19</sup> Tanko Yusuf endorsed CAN’s insistence “that religion is indeed a personal affair and cannot be legislated.” He expected that both “moderate Muslims” and Christians “could see that in a multi-tribal, multi-religious Nigeria, the law has to acknowledge that religion is personal.”<sup>20</sup>

One of Tsado’s interviewees, Obadiah Tebu, has a different approach. Almost fusing private and public, he advises that a “leader’s private life should be an important aspect in measuring his sense of responsibility. The true quality of a leader should be mirrored through his private life, because what he says officially may not carry weight, if what he does privately contradicts it.”<sup>21</sup>

Bamigboye, after assuming constitutional secularity and emphasizing its provision for freedom of conscience and religion, then rather strangely jumps over to the privacy issue as if that, too, is implied in that provision. “Thus,” he declares, “religion and beliefs are entirely private matters under the Nigerian constitution, subject entirely to the conscience and discretion of an individual. It establishes a pact between a citizen in his entirely private capacity and God.”<sup>22</sup>

Not all Christians agree on the privacy issue. Of course, all recognise that at the heart of religion is our personal, private relationship to God. The disagreement is about the role privacy plays in the function of religion in society. Wilson Sabiya disliked the privacy concept as applied in the current struggle. He strongly railed against Ibraheem Sulaiman’s<sup>23</sup> description of the Christian religion. He was incensed at his Gumi-like contemptuous dismissal of Christianity: “Anything outside Islam is superfluous and irrelevant.” Even worse was “the most mischievous, spiteful and most insulting” statement of Sulaiman that “The Christian idea of religion is that it is a private affair between man and what he worships, and that it has nothing to do with public life.”<sup>24</sup> Sabiya disliked the privacy concept, because in his mind it would reduce the scope of Christianity. He vigorously supported a more wholistic approach as I will show

in the section on “Wholistic Religion” below. Before moving on, though, I must confess to being puzzled at Sabiya’s strong reaction against Sulaiman’s description of Christianity as private. After all, who are Sulaiman’s teachers, if not Nigerian Christians? Does he not merely echo the mainstream Christian voice?<sup>25</sup>

Simeon Ilesanmi is also strongly opposed to this emphasis on religion as private. To him, the privatization of religion has always gone hand in hand with its domestication. This combination, he alerts us, “is not only inappropriate for the Nigerian context, it is also already being heavily criticized in the Western world, where it originally enjoyed preeminence of place as an outgrowth of the liberal outlook...” The very thesis of his excellent book is that the “fundamental premise” of those who posit “a dichotomy of life in which religion is assigned a private role, while the state is defined co-extensively with the public” is “significantly flawed.” “Although religion and politics are different realms, they nevertheless need each other.” The privacy notion did not arise in a Christian-friendly atmosphere. Many of its advocates have as their “ultimate goal” to “banish religion from society because it represents for them a kind of...irrationality, something that citizens of a modern state would do better to avoid.” Those who bring religion into the public square are considered by them as “extremists, menacing voices of a resurrected past, obstacles to modernity.” Religion in the public square is “seen as flashes of political insanity.”<sup>26</sup> That’s the intention of those who originally started advocating for the privacy of religion—and that often is the intention of governments who emphasize the privacy issue.

Ilesanmi goes even further. The privatization of religion is dangerous, for “confining it to...small spaces increases the potential of its explosiveness...” “Private religion” is an oxymoron: “Because religion is about the ultimate good of the whole of human life, it will be untrue to itself if it accepts the private niche...”<sup>27</sup> When Christians use that kind of terminology, they are clearly playing

into the hands of their enemies and confusing Muslims—please notice the distinction I am making here!

In spite of these protestations against the notion of privacy, the majority opinion leans towards the privacy notion. Rotimi Williams, a legal luminary, represents that opinion well: “While as individuals we are not secular in the things we do—we are religious and strive to abide by our respective religious creeds and injunctions—we should as a multi-religious nation have a secular approach to our conflict resolution.”<sup>28</sup> That pretty well sums it all up.

It is a blessed contradiction that, after all this, most Christians in fact do insist on the public nature of their faith. It’s the function of the next section to ferret that out.

## ▲ WHOLISTIC RELIGION

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When you weigh all the materials in this chapter so far, you could get the impression that Christians want their religion totally private and absolutely kept out of the public sphere. That, in fact, Christianity and its adherents have little to contribute to the public square. The logic of the preceding materials in this chapter can easily lead to that conclusion. The main stream attitude of the Nigerian Christian community has actually been along that line. In Monograph 3, I quoted from CAN’s *Leadership in Nigeria* to the effect that missionaries had discouraged Christians from political involvement and considered it a dirty no-go area. Christians “have too often fought shy of conflict...and preferred a quiescent alliance with the existing social order,” an accusation Muslims repeatedly hurl at Christians as noted in Monograph 4. CAN locates the reason for this tendency in the influence of Platonism, “the prevailing philosophy of the early Christians” that has “encouraged Christians to think that only a spiritual dimension of life mattered to God. The material and historic world was of secondary importance.” This perspective led to “the separation of Church and State.” It “is

attractive to Christians today, because it narrows our field of view to the Church and makes life manageable by limiting our duty to secular society.”<sup>29</sup>

Takaya makes the same charge, saying that Christians are divided on this issue because of the missionary teaching “to stay clear of the politics of the day, justifying this by reference” to the Caesar passage.<sup>30</sup> In my own doctoral studies I had discovered the same situation. Politically inclined sons of the early Middle Belt Church, David Lot, Azi Nyako and others all testified to ambivalence on the part of missionaries when the former indicated their political interest.<sup>31</sup> All of this was further corroborated throughout my three decades in Nigeria. Fortunately, most missions let up on their negative attitude later on,<sup>32</sup> but by then a lot of damage had been done and ground lost.

Though various types of secular scholars have over the years attempted to separate religion and politics for their own doctrinaire reasons, Falola is critical of such attempts. “It is improper to assume that religion and politics can easily be divorced in a theoretical framework; such a separation would be exaggerated or even artificial, since in real-world situations religion and politics are inextricably bound up in one another to some degree,” he argues. “This separation has never been total,” he continues and finds that the current consensus is that the relationship “is and will continue to remain important.”<sup>33</sup>

Ilesanmi also resists the separation. He rejects the notion that “the development of public policy is a purely secular or political endeavor, or merely economic or technological in scope.” His book is one determined battle to overcome these secular dichotomies. “My explicit theoretical aim,” he states in his conclusion, “is to challenge the conceptual dichotomy between religion and secular life.” These dichotomies have led religious studies scholars to concentrate on narrow “ritual, missiological, and exotic manifestations of faith systems... while political theorists and scientists continue to

perpetrate the secularizing reductivism of viewing religion as archaic and anachronistic.” He berates this situation as “intellectual sectarianism.”<sup>34</sup>

The above academic recognition of a close relationship between religion and politics is also reflected in the situation on the ground in Nigeria. Though Christians did indeed seek to keep a separation for some time, the flow of events soon squashed that disastrous ideal. Two major events of the 1970s, the government takeover of Christian institutions and the Constituent Assembly, resulted in the positive side effect of increased political awareness and interest among Christians. They were no longer content to just be left behind in the dust. In Monograph 3, there is already a section in which Christians criticize their fellows for not bringing their faith to bear on the public square. Though I am not suggesting complete unanimity, the popular idea has increasingly become that faith should have a bearing on culture in general, including politics and government. The compartmentalization suggested in the earlier materials is not meant to be as stark as it seems at first glance.

Kukah tells the story about how Christian leaders began to take up the political challenge. At a time when people were tired of empty promises and the familiar faces mostly associated with corruption, various Christian leaders answered the new challenge by running for high offices. Though most fell by the wayside, a few made it. Solomon Lar, a lawyer and member of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN), a Plateau-based denomination, became Governor of Plateau State and moved on to become a national politician. In fact, the Langtang community, a COCIN stronghold, produced such an unusual number of Christian military generals who subsequently moved over to politics, that people sometimes talk of the “Langtang Mafia.” Two Middle Belt clergymen ran successfully as governors.<sup>35</sup> Moses Adasu, a Catholic priest, became governor of Benue State. Jolly Nyame of the United Methodist Church, is at the time of writing in his third term as

governor of Taraba State. Unfortunately, some Christian politicians subsequently brought shame to the Church. But the barrier that kept Christians from the fray had vanished. The community became more wholistic in its approach to both politics and government and encouraged its members to get their hands dirty while keeping their consciences clean.

More than a decade later, Kukah, now in his new position as Vicar-General of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kaduna, stood before a gathering of northern governors. He indicted them “for aiding underdevelopment in the area, using religion as a cover-up for injustice,” a charge familiar to readers of earlier volumes in this series. He suggested a positive role for the clergy with a political thrust. They “must see themselves as owing the duty to preach peace where there is injustice.” Both Christian and Muslim leaders must confront “their governors on issues that would retard progress...” He declared he sought to undermine the common but false impression “that the role of religious leaders is merely to exhort their people on blind obedience in the face of injustice, bad governance and irresponsible leadership.” Criticizing both governors and clergy, he asked pointedly, “When a governor prefers to buy a hand-chopping machine first, instead of fertilizer or a tractor for this poor farmer, what should religious leaders say to him? When a governor prefers to shut down his state and carry all his cabinet to Mecca every year, when the classrooms have no textbooks and teachers are not paid, what should religious leaders say?” Many religious leaders are no better than their political counterparts. “Some religious leaders,” Kukah charged, “mask their selfish interests by refusing to tell these public officials what is right, while pretending that they are helping the leaders to uphold righteousness by offering dubious and spurious prayer sessions.”<sup>36</sup>

Stop press for a personal aside directed to my brother and friend Matthew. I always appreciate your speeches and writings. They are always pungent and penetrating. My reaction is invari-

ably, “Well spoken, brother Matthew!” But I do constantly miss some elements in this Christian campaign in which you are such a prominent spokesman. When is it time to go beyond words and speeches? And when is it time for the clergy to move away from centre stage as spokesmen for Christian politics and replace them with the so-called “laymen” or “laywomen” to take action in the name of Christ? What is *their* role? This governors’ forum would have been the perfect occasion to put these governors on notice that there is a whole Christian army out there in the political sector, ready to strike a *political* blow as *Christian politicians*, not merely clergy whose political role by definition is restricted. Christian witness in politics, I intend to show in Part 2, must be carried out primarily by Christian politicians rather than clergy. It is time to give them their rightful place and put the spotlight *and* burden on them. End of aside.

Though Youth CAN insists on secularity and the other components of the perspective we have analyzed so far, it also insists that “religion and politics cannot be sealed into mutually exclusive airtight categories.” Without arguing the point, it affirms that “life is religion, politics is religion, and worship is religion and business, religion.” Religion is “a weapon to prevent economic injustices, political, social and brutal repression, de-humanisation, denial of fundamental human rights.” “Religious people should be creative rather than destructive, by bringing critical responsible judgment to bear upon our body-politic.”<sup>37</sup> Ah, as a current television commercial puts it, “Now we’re get’n somewhere.” Or the King James version of Psalm 8:2—“Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength...” It is amazing how this youthful voice, free from vested interest, cut through the fog by its recognition of this profound integration of religion and culture. This voice finds its echo in Part 2.

Ernest Shonekan, a Christian who headed a brief interim government in 1993, said his government would promote secularity,



but at the same time he sought the input of religious leaders. In fact, Nigeria being an undeniably religious country, he aimed to set up a committee of both Christian and Muslim leaders to advise the government.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Catholic clergyman Aguwa assures us that secularity does not mean antagonism between religion and state. The state and the various religions can co-operate in matters of public interest. Neither religious indifference nor secularism are insinuated, he writes.<sup>39</sup>

Samu'ila Gani, a pious man with a lifetime of experience as a highly-placed civil servant and politician, writes that a government that does not "emulate the standards of the Kingdom of God cannot stand." Christians should "transform dirty politics into a clean and attractive game. To leave politics because it is dirty is to abdicate our responsibility as the light of the world." Ditto to Christians in government. Christians in politics will bring others to Christ and enhance "the work of the Lord." "Believers who work in public offices must be glowing lights for others to see. Christians should not light their lamp and put it under their table."<sup>40</sup>

The Zaria branch of the Nigeria Christian Graduate Fellowship decided to engage in a "search for a new political order." Jerry Gana, leader of the Fellowship, followed his own advice by moving into high political offices like Minister of Information and Presidential Advisor. His contribution to that search at the time was to suggest a broad-based political programme for Christians. It would make interesting research for someone to compare that statement with Gana's actual performance at the top.<sup>41</sup>

All the persons interviewed by Tsado<sup>42</sup> are of the same opinion on this score. Okogie warns that "unless the nation can come back to God, to put Him first, then the future will be bleak, because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and if that fear is not built in us, we are bound to perish." Abashiya comments, "The events of recent years have shown us that it is a big mistake for Christians to stand aloof and allow only non-believers

to participate in politics. Christians have to be interested in politics to the extent that keen and committed Christians will be involved directly.” Themes that keep cropping up in the interviews are those of “integrity in management” of resources, corruption, materialism, the need to move from non-involvement in government and politics to involvement, practicing “authentic” faith, the danger of manipulation of religion. Christians are to move in and practice their faith in all these sensitive areas.

CAN also favours a positive approach to politics and government on the part of Christians. It rejects the traditional heritage that considered involvement in government “blasphemous.” Politics may be dirty, but who will clean it if not Christians? If Christians do not get involved, the vacuum will be filled by demons. “Christians ought to be interested in politics, which is the vehicle used in reaching the position of leadership in this country. Genuine, properly born-again Christians, filled with the Holy Spirit, should come and contest elections.” When this becomes true, then “light will replace darkness.” CAN’s book contains a chapter entitled “Biblical Grounds for Political Involvement” and discusses the issues under the headings of “The Creation Ethic,” “The Kingdom Ethic” and “The Redemption Ethic.” The entire chapter strongly advocates Christian involvement.<sup>43</sup> The section on creation ethic is based on the Cultural Mandate and the image of God in human beings. The entire chapter is reproduced as Appendix 22. The statement is undeniable proof that CAN has made great strides in its struggle to overcome the dualistic missionary heritage that is further described in Part 2. It begins with the statement

*The creation stories present man as given responsibility over the world under God. In Genesis 1, the foundational notion of man as created in the image of God is presented in close association with the command to “have dominion over all the*

*earth...and subdue it." For man to be like God, then, is for him to exercise creative management of the earth.*

From this discussion, CAN concludes that "Politics is integral to the out-working of this mandate. In the broadest sense, politics is simply the way in which man organizes himself corporately so as to preserve order and to exercise responsible development of the world." "The Christian has no choice but to be involved politically—he is involved by belonging to the mankind God created." The question is not whether but how, in what manner. "Non-involvement is a myth." When we do nothing, we support the status quo, which, in fact, is a political action.

CAN realizes that human beings are not merely individuals. We need to act corporately, for the earth is given to the human race, not merely to individuals. We need to "think and act together" as we develop the earth, including our social structures. Who are the agents to do so? "The local church should organize itself actively, as the servant of God and the community, to play a responsible part in local decision-making." However, "at the individual level, a career in politics is one of the most significant callings for a Christian to follow." Evangelism and social involvement "cannot be separated. The Good News is about reorientation of all dimensions of life—and that means politics."

CAN makes short shrift of the argument that Jesus "took no political stance in His work." "That," it argues, "was not how the Jewish and Roman leaders saw it." In fact, "Jesus seriously threatened every option presented as a basis for social organization in his day"—a statement followed up with some examples. One especially noteworthy one is His declaration of the limits of all human power in John 19:11. The upshot is "that political challenge is interwoven with the Kingdom of God and the out-working of man's redemption." Politics and redemption, then, are not two separate concerns or processes. CAN does not say it, but the spirit of

the discussion is such that while CAN relates the two to each other, it would at the same time strenuously resist any attempt to identify them too closely.

The last two sections of the book deal with things Christians should do in the areas of government and politics—and they are all positive. One particular emphasis is worthy of note: “When the Christian passes from the realm of the Church into the political sphere, he is not passing out of Christ’s dominion into the dominion of some other lord.” “Political affairs, no less than the life of the Church, are within the dominion of Christ. The Christian in Nigeria should know that the same Lord who is confessed and acknowledged by the Church is also the Lord of the whole world.”<sup>44</sup>

This perspective about the Cultural Mandate is one I have championed in a number of my publications. It is a major hallmark of Kuyperian thought that is enlarged upon in Part 2. While this perspective serves as a foundational issue in the latter tradition, it is unfortunate that CAN did not allow these concepts to function prominently in its work of nurturing the Christian community or in its interaction with the Muslim community. I am grateful for CAN’s recognition of this perspective but also saddened that it was not given prominence as a platform on which to develop a Christian approach to both society and Islam. CAN thereby missed a great opportunity at both fronts.

The above paragraph is not to deny that CAN vigorously pursues political ends, but its practice is discoloured because this basic foundational perspective has neither been worked out further nor has it served as an important platform from which to launch out into society. It has been overshadowed by too much secular influence. Part 2 of this book may help CAN take this perspective out of hiding into the open. In the meantime, I highly recommend Falola’s summary history of the organization, especially the section on CAN’s aggressive political activities.<sup>45</sup>

In its 1988 communique, CAN challenged all Christians in every sector of life, whether in government, uniformed forces, business, education or professions, “to live their faith and stand up for their values and convictions. They should speak up in defence of their faith without fear, shame or compromise. The era of nominal Christianity is over.”<sup>46</sup>

As it moved towards the end of the 20th century and into the new, CAN never tired of encouraging such Christian involvement. In view of the approaching 2003 elections, CAN’s Executive Committee published a call for its members “to participate in the forthcoming general elections and also to contest elective posts at all levels.” Every Christian is to get involved and drop the earlier notion that politics is a “dirty game.” “It is time for people who have the fear of God at heart to come on board to cleanse the dirtiness in governance and to sanitize the bastardized system.” It also encouraged church leaders to actively support their members who have taken the plunge.<sup>47</sup>

CAN in Ekiti State ran a seminar to enable Christians to get involved in partisan politics. Governor Niyi Adebayo gave a lecture at the occasion in which he complained that Christians had often neglected their civic responsibilities and then “turn round to constitute themselves into the critics of government.” Christians should take an active part, he stated, and “ensure that Christ is the heartbeat of governance.” The local bishop, Michael Olatunji Fagun, advised the participants to “rise up to their political responsibilities by seeking the mandate to rule. He urged religious leaders to commend those rulers who are “truly at the service of the people,” but “condemn or warn” those who “are becoming a disservice to the people they govern.” Another clergyman, Kunle Salami, urged Christians to fight against all the political vices that “make it hazardous for Christians to get involved in politics.”<sup>48</sup>

Cardinal Okogie has long been CAN’s main national mouthpiece, while he also represented the national Catholic voice.

Though he appears as one of Tsado's interviewees, more needs to be said in this context of this very noisy leader.<sup>49</sup> Falola describes him as the Christian answer to Abubakar Gumi. His basic position is that "religion is the vital force behind the development of a nation. When it is neglected, disharmony, destabilization, oppression and collapse result." He describes himself as "engaging in political issues." He is interested in politics because "politics is the only way to understand 'the soul of man.'...One must take both religion and politics seriously in order to maintain the balance between body and soul." His experiences in Nigeria's civil war have "taught him that priests must go beyond their church-based liturgical functions and become politically engaged in order to achieve results. Politics, he believes, cannot be separated from religion. Religion must serve practical ends as well as spiritual ones."<sup>50</sup> Christians must be able to reflect on patterns of injustice and commit themselves to the realization of a just society."

If all of this sounds as if Okogie comes close to contravening the classic Roman Catholic policy that priests not take political office, he emphasizes carefully that he "engages in political issues and not in political leadership." He wants his parishioners "to respect priests as religious leaders," not political. As to the details of his politics, those are scattered throughout this chapter among the various sections.<sup>51</sup>

Sometimes, I confess, I am surprised at the vigorous attacks from Okogie and some other Catholics on the Muslim position. Ilesanmi reminds us that the stand the Catholics have taken is a recent innovation representing a radical change, dating only from Vatican Council II. Their traditional preference has been for a confessional state with Catholics in control, a stand not all that different from what Christians consider that of Muslims. It was a matter of "tolerance whenever necessary and intolerance whenever possible!"<sup>52</sup> Even now I continue hearing reports of harassment of Protestants in some Catholic strongholds of the world like Latin America and Poland.

The news agency *Compass Direct* features an article, dated January 2005, about the harassment of Protestants by Spanish authorities, a member of the European Union.<sup>53</sup> One would think this Catholic background should make for some humility on the part of Okogie and some sympathetic understanding on his part for Muslims. Something like, “Yes, I understand where you come from. I was there just forty years ago, and some of my people are still there!” More than that, the switch still being in living memory, Catholics might consider turning their own experience of “conversion” to greater tolerance into a challenge to help Muslims make the same painful transition. In fact, the ongoing Catholic harassment of Protestants forces the question on us whether, given a majority status, Catholics would really be as pluralistic and tolerant as they currently seem in Nigeria. My own ecumenical experiences in Nigeria also give some justification to this question.

Onaiyekan, another prominent but less noisy Catholic clergyman, disagrees with the alleged distinction between Christians and Muslims, namely, that Christians separate religion and politics while Muslims do not. He comments, “I want to state here in this forum quite categorically that we agree completely with the Muslims in this regard. For us, too, even politics must be under God’s injunctions.” Christians “are guided by our religious norms.” From that point of view there is no reason for quarreling between the two religions. “We both agree and I think we should thank God that we live in a nation where all the citizens want to be ruled by God’s will.”<sup>54</sup> That is an attitude that could serve as platform for new forms of co-operation between the two religions!

Jolly Tanko Yusuf, the former doyen of northern Christian politicians, explained that he understood those Christians who see no need to be involved in politics, for he at one time shared that opinion. However, he changed “after reviewing and personally experiencing...calamitous” events in the political sphere.<sup>55</sup> Not only did he have a successful career as politician and diplomat, but

he tried to found a new political party. In addition, he was frequently consulted at the highest levels of government, including the Head of State. “Christians must think honestly about their abilities to serve in politics and government,” he asserted. “Of course, they will make errors. Errors happen. Some are unavoidable. This should not...hinder Christians from becoming active. Christians must seize the day!”

*Churches may never stand in the way. But they do. They fail to challenge their members to political action and leadership. Sometimes they even discourage intelligent, dedicated Christians who might otherwise enter politics. I have listened to many pastors and bishops preach against Christian participation in politics—because “politics is sin,” they say. False. False. This critical misunderstanding of politics has kept too many Christians from becoming involved. How sad! By so doing we abandon our fate to unjust, unscrupulous leaders.*

*One has only to look at the many models of honest Christians and politicians. Many have contributed much to Nigeria and have not fallen from their faith or high standards of servanthood to the people. Quite the contrary, many have grown.*

*When we use phrases such as “Church and society” we do not mean individual churches and denominations but the Church as an integral part of the society. Its founder, our Lord and Saviour, calls her members “the light of the world,” “the salt of the earth,” “a city set upon a hill that cannot be hidden,” “a chosen generation,” “a royal priesthood, a holy nation.” It cannot be that when it is hunched timidly behind political roadblocks! God calls His people to serve in His Kingdom...using the talents and abilities He has entrusted to them.*

*Applying Christian principles and living a Christian life are difficult even in the best circumstances. In politics it is*



*even more so. Christians are not immune to the temptations of pride, greed for personal ill-gotten wealth, corruption, falsehood and worldliness. But we must fight them. Valuing each human being as the image of God and valuing the principles of honesty, justice, and mercy are the basic ingredients needed for leaders in power and government. Speaking out against government is hazardous in Nigeria, but remaining silent is hazardous to the country.*<sup>56</sup>

Sabiya was a strong advocate for wholistic Christianity, though occasionally the dualistic language of Lutheran two-kingdom theology shines through. Many Christians tend to give a dualistic interpretation to the Caesar parable that separates God and king. Sabiya did not accept that interpretation. Jesus, he wrote, “was referring to a colonial situation. He was answering a question about obedience and not defining Christian living,” a distinction I find difficult to grasp. “He did not declare the separation of the secular and the sacred, but a declaration of the unity of the two in one person. His answer shows the unity of the secular and the religious in an individual Christian.” From here he goes on to argue the obligation for Christians to obey governing authorities, whether Christian or not, for they are ordained by God. If you have read Monograph 3, you will know that this attitude did not keep Sabiya from aggressive action against the authorities when he considered them oppressive.

He went on to insist that Christianity is not only “a way of life”—a term reminiscent of Muslim claims for Islam—but also “a declaration of war against injustices, oppressions and all forms of inhumanity of man to man.” Adducing the famous liberation passage of Luke 4:18-19 and others, Sabiya asked, “Where is the idea of the separation of the secular and the sacred? A Christian is the expression of the unity of God’s government through spiritual institutions [like] the Church and the secular institutions.

Christianity is out to teach, heal and reform society. Thus there is no conflict, because both the secular and the spiritual are established by God for the government of the world.” The constitution is a gift from God. It is an instrument to “curb evil and administer justice.” And then we come to a crucial point about the relationships of church and mosque to government and of believers to both. “What cannot be mixed is the Church as an institution with government as an institution. For the Christian, both government and Church are like father and mother, each has a specific role for the upbringing of the child under God.” A problem develops when the government supports one religion, as it does, and thus mixes two institutions that ought to remain within their own spheres.<sup>57</sup>

Sometimes the Christian community enters politics in ways that do it no credit. While the first generation of Christians in Plateau State told me of their church’s hesitation towards politics, the 2003 election witnessed the spectacle of COCIN producing all three contesting gubernatorial candidates for Plateau State!<sup>58</sup> News reports indicate that the Christian religion still does not seem to have made much difference for some of these COCIN members. If Jonah Jang and many other writers, including those on the Web site Gamji, were telling the truth, then the victorious incumbent, Joshua Dariye, practiced all the usual trickery and fraud to ensure victory.<sup>59</sup> If Jang and all the others were lying, as politicians have been known to do occasionally, well, then...If ever a church was faced with a political pastoral challenge, this surely was it! John Samci, a retired businessman and one-time Plateau State commissioner, tells me of the time he and some other senior Plateau Christian elders sought to reconcile two prominent Plateau politicians by calling them together, but one refused to participate. Indeed, he says, the Church should do more in this area. “If we cannot speak now, is it in the grave that we will talk?” he asks.<sup>60</sup> But these developments are a clear indication that Christians have

fully accepted politics as a legitimate area of service—or plunder! The days of negativity are history, but the fallout of the perspective that nurtured it is still with us. The participation is there with the blessing of the church, but the cleansing remains a hope rather than an accomplished fact.

This unfortunate situation has long been noted. I made a point of it in Monograph 3. People from different persuasions have commented on it. Ilesanmi adduces the complaint of one Olukunle, an alleged Marxist from the University of Ibadan, about “the disjunction between [Nigeria’s] high religiosity and a very arid moral life of the people.” From the other end of the spectrum, Adebajo Edema, a Pentecostal pastor, asserted that “the greatest malady that has infested the country is not really the absence of religious people in public service, but the failure of those who have served to mediate the ethical meaning of their respective traditions.” This situation, he averred, has brought the country to its knees.<sup>61</sup>

Edema’s is one Christian tradition that has really made a turnaround on the issue. Two Pentecostal clergymen—Herbert Eze, a personal friend of mine now on the faculty of the West African Theological Seminary in Lagos, and another whom I supervised during his master’s-level studies—both strongly decry their tradition’s political quietism. It is based, according to them, on a strong disjunction between religion and the world. However, no condition is permanent. At the beginning of President Obasanjo’s current term of office, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) called upon him and state governors not to overlook the PFN community for appointments to the highest offices. This call became necessary, according to a PFN official, “in view of the association’s contributions to the socio-political and spiritual needs of the nation.” It further argued that “with membership running into millions, it behooves it to have a say in the running of national affairs.” After all, “the PFN is the live-wire of all Christian bodies

in the country with more articulate, sincere and selfless members whose desire is good governance.” The Fellowship had done its homework by “the screening of credible, reliable and competent professionals in its midst.” It had sent the names of “shortlisted candidates” to the governor of Lagos State and was preparing the same for the Federal Government.<sup>62</sup> Now *that* is a turnaround almost equivalent to conversion. When the pressure is on in Nigeria, the artificial separation of religion from politics is shoved aside in favour of a wholistic approach that is more natural to Nigeria’s major religions.

Ola Makindede, like so many other Christian spokesmen, strongly resists mixing religion and politics, as we saw in Chapter 2, but he also insists on a positive role for Christians in the political realm. He reacted to the *Newswatch* accusation that church leaders simply support “any government in power which even violates the rights of people,” by pointing out that of all those who resisted the annulment of the presidential election a few years ago, 80 percent were Christians, including church leaders. The same when Dele Giwa, a popular national journalist, was murdered by means of a bomb delivered to his house. As to politicians, “those who are doing the right thing must be supported, because we believe politics is a dirty game and Christians should not be a part to it”—the dirty game, that is. “Who should go there to clean the place? Where they are doing right, we must credit them, and when they are doing wrong, we must tell them that.”<sup>63</sup>

To some degree the jury is still out among Christians, even among veterans in politics. Ibrahim Usman Sangari of Wukari, Taraba State, has held various important government posts, both elective and appointive, but after many years of political experience, he developed second thoughts. He was no longer so sure of Christian involvement. He began to doubt the possibility of being a Christian in politics, for it is simply too corrupt.<sup>64</sup> However,

Tanko Yusuf reserved high praise for Usman's achievements as representative of Wukari Division. Moses Adasu, a Catholic priest, became governor of Benue State. He subsequently "quit politics to return to the church." He explained, "I was shocked to find men and women so insincere. I went into politics to serve my people, but I found out that politics is all deceit and cheating."<sup>65</sup> In contrast, Jolly Nyame, a United Methodist of Taraba, has flourished as governor. Apparently he has had more positive experiences, and he is currently one of the senior governors in the country. Is it possible that his church's emphasis on perfectionism, holiness and justice has provided him with the strength to carry on? Samu'ila Gani, also from Wukari, Taraba State, is not blind to the problems, but he praises God for the wonders He has performed in Nigeria through "the participation of devout Christians in governance and public administration."<sup>66</sup> The experienced Ishaya Audu testified to me personally, "I know quite a number of Christians who have gone into government deciding to maintain their integrity and have done so right through." Obviously there is some disagreement on this score.

### ▲ GOVERNMENT-RELIGION PARTNERSHIP —————

Not only do many Christians call for Christian involvement in politics and government, but there are also frequent calls for government involvement in religious institutions. Earlier in this chapter we overheard demands for radical separation of church and state, but in Monograph 3 I recorded several forms of government involvement. This is not a matter of differences of opinion with some advocating separation and others partnership and co-operation. It is often the same organizations and individuals calling for separation at one time and for partnership at another. It remains a touchy subject. The line between healthy and unhealthy partnership can be razor-thin.

A typical occasion for partnership is that of political inaugurations. For example, Michael Ojo, Methodist Archbishop of Enugu, delivered the admonition at the pre-inaugural church service for Governor Nnamani.<sup>67</sup> Upon his re-election in 2003, CAN paid a visit to Ondo State Governor Olusegun Agagu. CAN promised to support his regime in prayer “to ensure a hitch-free tenure” and advised the Governor to seek God’s guidance “to move the state forward.” It also urged him not to deal with individual groups but with CAN as a whole “to avoid confusion.” Apart from asking for their continued prayers and advice, Agagu “assured that the welfare of the church and its officials will be of utmost concern to his administration as members of the church would be integrated into relevant government programmes.” CAN was invited to provide both a chaplain and an assistant for the chapel at the Government House. The Christian Pilgrims Welfare Board would be renamed Christian Welfare Board to reflect government interest in welfare of Christians beyond that of pilgrimage. Finally, he “urged CAN to feel free to meet him anytime on any issue, while he would also consult with them on regular basis.” This is a pretty cozy arrangement between church and government. Whether or not this lasted beyond a short honeymoon I cannot tell.

No one can accuse Agagu of partiality, for on the same day, he met with “the League of Imams and Alfas.” The report is silent on what Muslims said to the Governor, but he assured them that he would not be able to do his job without the help of God and their prayers. As with Christians, he planned to change the name of the Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board to “Muslim Welfare Board” to reflect his interest in their general welfare. Finally, he assured them that his is “not a government for any religion but for all religions.”<sup>68</sup>

Another inaugural situation arose in the southern Osun State. I can do no better than simply reproduce Ademola Adeyemo’s report:

*The incoming Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) government in Osun State has decided to employ the services of spiritual leaders to “clean” the Government House and the Governor’s Office of “evil spirits” before the new governor, Prince Olagunsoye Oyinlola, assumes office tomorrow. According to the Chairman of the PDP Transition Committee in the state, Dr. Olu Alabi, “the need for the spiritual cleansing of the Government House follows rumour emanating from the government seat in the state.” Said he: “We don’t want to take chances, so we have consulted the religious leaders in this state to help us clean the Government House and office with prayers in order not to fall into the jinx associated with the former administration in the state. Besides, you know the outgoing governor refused to be sworn in with either the Holy Qur’an or Bible, although he claimed to be a Muslim. The man only raised his hand for affirmation. So we don’t know what is happening. We want to start on a clean slate,” Alabi said. To achieve this, he said that Muslim and Christian leaders have been contacted to pray at the Government House and office tomorrow in the afternoon. Besides, he said that there will be a prayer vigil also at the Government House in the night of tomorrow. “We want to clean the government seat of all evils associated with the last administration,” he said.<sup>69</sup>*

At least the governor invited both Christians and Muslims!

A good example of mixed reactions to church-government cooperation emerged from the visit of Anglican and Catholic bishops to the Anambra State House of Assembly “to demand a way out of the state’s financial quagmire.” Some government officials approved and called for even “closer co-operation between the churches and the state.” Others objected. Governor Chinwoke Mbadinuju registered a sharp negative reaction and insisted “that the clergymen were being partisan and too meddlesome.” The

governor's press secretary, Ody Chukwube, thought the visit "unfortunate, unfair and ill-timed." The problem was nationwide, not state specific. Furthermore, the government was close to a solution.<sup>70</sup>

But the same governor also showed another face. He *ordered* that all staff at the state secretariat at Awka attend daily Christian prayer services.<sup>71</sup> On the face of it, this looks similar to an attempt to organize a Christian prayer movement among the civil servants in Jos.

In 1987, a group of civil servants in Plateau State wanted to organize prayer groups at their offices. Their intentions were positive. Yes, that is possible in Nigeria! Politics or discrimination were far from their minds. The organizers felt that the civil service would benefit greatly from enhanced Christian devotion. It was misunderstood or, perhaps, consciously misinterpreted by the authorities. They identified it as an attempt on the part of Christians to impose their way at the expense of others. In short, they regarded it as a power plot. It became the stuff for a few headlines in the local newspaper, *Nigeria Standard*, and created enough of a stir to lead to the transfer of some civil servants to outlying areas. Even "Christians" participated in squashing a genuine spiritual movement that had the potential for a positive force. But then, perhaps, for reasons of their own, those who squashed it did not want such a positive force around!<sup>72</sup>

The difference between those two incidents is that in the case of Anambra, it was not voluntary but on orders of the government. Possibly the motivation may have been different as well, since government encouragement of religion is often for purposes of self-preservation and legitimization. At any rate, I have heard of no Christian objection to such favouritism. But— was it favouritism? In a state with very few Muslims, perhaps there were no Muslim civil servants to hold prayer meetings.

In Monograph 3, you may recall, I reported that CAN was planning to sue the government when the latter established a pil-



grims board for Muslims. This was seen as flagrant impartiality: government supporting one religion. Then CAN turned around and supported the establishment of Christian pilgrim boards! Of course, there has long been a partnership in health care and education, including Christian Religious Knowledge and, occasionally, theological education. Recently President Obasanjo presented the opening address at the National General Assembly of CAN.<sup>73</sup>

One extended story of institutional mixing of church and state is the saga of the ill-fated National Ecumenical Centre in Abuja. I started that story in Monograph 3. In 2004, CAN organized a fundraising event that was attended by a host of high government dignitaries, both Christian and Muslim. President Obasanjo, though embroiled in a dispute with CAN over developments in Plateau State, served as chief launcher and delivered the main speech. His contribution of N400 million came through a group called “Friends of President Olusegun Obasanjo.” Various state governments and quite a number of government functionaries made considerable donations—without anyone asking how they obtained such large amounts!<sup>74</sup> Neither did anyone raise the question about mixing state and church.

In discussing the much-debated paragraph 10 in the constitution, Onaiyekan asks what it really means in the context of many forms of government involvement in religious institutions. He cites various examples: “Our leaders often call on the name of God and religious services are held on many state occasions. We also have chaplaincies not only within the Armed Forces but also in our government institutions of higher learning.” He goes on to enumerate others, such as pilgrim boards, national mosque and ecumenical centre. “All these are issues where government has become, *justifiably in my opinion*, involved in religion. The question is how far can government go” before it declares itself an Islamic or Christian state?<sup>75</sup>

Elsewhere in the same paper, Onaiyekan insists that government needs to have a positive policy towards religion on basis of the fact that “religion has an irreplaceable role to play in ensuring public morality.” He argues,

*It is true that some nations have managed to achieve an appreciable level of discipline in public life without religion. But history shows that such is possible only at the great price of curtailing basic freedoms. It is only religion that can truly mold the mind and the heart to behave well. This is why any nation that is interested in a disciplined society within the context of freedom and respect of human rights must do everything to encourage the contribution of religion in this matter. It is therefore good when the government makes it possible for religious organizations to play their roles not only in terms of worship in public and private, but also in terms of such key areas as the education of the youth and the mobilisation of citizens for good purpose in the society.<sup>76</sup>*

Onaiyekan’s observations run parallel to Muslim insistence, as shown in Monograph 4, that there is no effective morality without religion and that governments should encourage religions for the public good.

Matthew Kukah, as I already reported in Monograph 3, recognised a serious inconsistency here on the part of Christians and warns they cannot have it both ways: a principial separation mixed with a pragmatic partnership. That there is a contradiction between the two demands leaves no doubt. This situation has led to serious confusion not only among Christians but also among Muslims, who cannot be blamed for scratching their heads in wonderment.

## ▲ MUTUAL CONFUSION

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If you have read Monograph 4, you will remember the Muslim accusation that Christians are inconsistent and pragmatic. Muslims

hear Christians demand separation of church and state on the one hand and government subsidies for their programmes on the other. They scratch their heads in confusion. What are Christians about? Will the real Christian please stand up? From the same volume, you will remember that Muslims consider all of life a religious act, with nothing considered secular or outside of the range of religion.

If you have read Monograph 2, you will remember that during the row about Nigerian membership in the OIC, Muslims denied that its intentions and programmes were religious in nature. This time Christians recognised the Muslim discrepancy. They rejected both the Muslim denial and, with it, Nigeria's membership. They were to believe that suddenly an overtly Muslim organization was secular without any religious overtones? Kantiok objected, "The very designation of the organization 'Islamic' makes its activities, no matter how secular they may seem to outsiders, simply religious. All these so-called secular activities...are meant to promote Islam." The OIC's Islamic Solidarity Fund is to support mosques, Islamic centres, Muslim hospitals, schools and universities. It has established Muslim universities in a number of countries. Those and many others give a lie to the Muslim claim. Kantiok quotes Habib Chatty of Tunisia, a former OIC General Secretary, as saying, "The organization seeks to propagate Islam and acquaint the rest of the world with Islam, its issues and aspirations." All of this makes it clear to Kantiok that "the non-Islamic nature of the OIC as proposed by the Nigerian Muslims is not only a hoax but also a ruse." Nations that join, commit themselves to an Islamizing policy, he declares, an opinion he shares with the entire Christian community.<sup>77</sup> If Christians confuse Muslims, the reverse is equally true.

### ▲ CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM CO-OPERATION \_\_\_\_\_

The intention of this series of monographs is to help Christians and Muslims to cooperate with each other to make

Nigeria viable without compromises that would lead to suppressing the essence of either religion. However, foreign readers of this series so far will almost certainly have gained the impression that Christians and Muslims are far removed from each other with a high wall between them.

Actually, it is not so. Christians nowadays not only participate actively in politics, but they have joined political parties in which they work together with Muslims, apparently intimately and amiably. Inter-religious co-operation is going full steam among political Christians. The ANPP, the main challenger to the incumbent party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), during the 2003 elections, is an interesting mix. Answering accusations that ANPP is a Muslim party, Chief Don Etiebet, the Christian Chairman, explained that most people managing the party are non-Muslims. The trustees have a Christian Chairman, no one less than retired Admiral Augustus Aikhomu, a former Vice President of the country. The Deputy National Chairman is Bode Abdullahi, a Muslim, while the second Deputy National Chairman is the Christian Jeremiah Useni, another high-powered politician. The flag bearer of the party was former President Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim who unsuccessfully challenged Obasanjo, the incumbent Christian. His vice-presidential running mate was the Christian Chuba Okadigbo. The surprise to the uninitiated here will be to learn that such mixes have been the dominant pattern for some decades at Federal level as well as in some states with a balance of Christians and Muslims. Whatever mistrust and hatred may exist, practical politicians knew all along that such co-operation was a *sine qua non* for Nigerian politics.

While these people are politicians conscious of their respective religions, the secret of their co-operation is keeping religion out of the party's affairs. Etiebet warned, "Please don't try to bring religious garb into Nigerian politics. We are a secular society and the dominant ones are Christianity and Islam. We do not want any-

body to bring these two religions into conflict.”<sup>78</sup> There is no need to repeat what I wrote on the subject in Monograph 4.<sup>79</sup> So, religious *people* in; religious *groups* with their vested interests out. That is the standard Christian recipe for peace and co-operation between Christians and Muslims.

There may be yet an additional reason for members of these hostile religions to work together. It has occasionally been cynically argued that Nigeria’s elite, though separated by these religions, have common economic class interests that bind them together, a typically Marxist view, but, for many people, not far off the mark. Christianity or Islam are their formal or, more accurately, *pretend* religions; their real religion is the worship of Mammon, the god of money. In such situations, people will piously talk about protecting religion by keeping it out of the fray as a private, personal affair, while they co-operate at other fronts. Relegating religion to privacy is not such an innocent act: It “frees” people to do their thing without religious scruples standing in the way. Co-operation and tolerance become the perfect smoke-screens. But in whose interests?

There are, I am afraid, some grounds for such cynicism. One of the grounds is the unrelenting insistence of so many Nigerians, both Muslims and Christians, that all political interest in religion is just that: political, manipulative. I try to steel myself against such cynicism, for I realize that it emerges at least partially from the prevailing doctrinaire secular minimizing the role of religion. However, the barrage of it throughout my research, frequently supported by facts, cannot but impact me. So, I need to be exceedingly wary of myself, whichever position I take on various issues along the way. When is it genuine religion and when mere politics?

There is the example of the Christian governor of Ogun State, Gbenga Daniel, who, at the end of Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month, organized a celebration for Muslims in the

Government House, Abeokuta, to mark the end of the fast. Muslims leaders jumped all over each other, heaping praise on the Governor. One Muslim Oba or chief, Dr. Sikiru Adetona, congratulated the Governor “for setting such a record, despite being a Christian, and urged all and sundry to emulate him.” He further “charged all Muslims in the state to support Daniel’s administration to deliver democratic dividends to the citizenry.” The event gave Daniel the opportunity to highlight “some of the achievements of his administration in Islam to include renovation of the Government House mosque and improvement of the comfort of Ogun pilgrims in Saudi Arabia, as well as unprecedented sponsorship of indigenes for the holy pilgrimage.”<sup>80</sup> The majority reaction of the common people would be to accept this as a genuine gesture of generosity and pluralism. The favourite interpretation of writers and other elite would be more cynical. It is my opinion that such acts often incorporate both genuine interest in the welfare of religion as well as more political motivations. Does that always have to be interpreted cynically as manipulation? When private business supports a community effort, we know multiple motivations are at work, but that does not necessarily have to degenerate into cynicism. Why cannot the same be true in politics? Unless the facts indicate the contrary, why not accept the Governor’s gesture as a legitimate combination of both religion and politics? We will never get away from mixed motivation in any area of life, not even in religion. If you dig around in my heart long enough, you will probably find at least traces of it in my motivations for this writing project. It is the human condition. The trick is to keep them in check without the unrealistic expectation they will disappear altogether.

Among the aims of this series is the encouragement of Christian-Muslim co-operation in nation building and to live at peace with each other. Experience constantly shows that people cooperate for different reasons. The co-operation needed is not one

based on skewed elite vested interests but on the interests of everyone. It is often difficult, if not impossible, to ferret out just which is when. Often it is both simultaneously. In this life, that's probably the best you're going to get. Go for it. Build on the positive side.

## ▲ NOTES

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- 1 E. A. Adegbola, 1977. Appendix 6.
- 2 H. Istifanus, 1995, pp. 53-54.
- 3 H. Istifanus, 1995, pp. 53-54. The report to which he refers is in Byron L. Haines and Frank L. Cooley, *Christians and Muslims Together: An Exploration by Presbyterians*. Philadelphia: Geneva Press, 1987, pp. 106-109. I doubt that Nigerian Muslims would view themselves in the middle of these two systems. Monograph 4 indicates that they think of theirs as a unique third alternative different from both.
- 4 H. Istifanus, 1995, p. 54.
- 5 The Second International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations, 1995, pp. 137-138.
- 6 M. Gaiya, 2003, p. 91.
- 7 I. Audu, 23 Aug/2000. L. Sanneh regards this assessment as the most popular interpretation (1997, p. 222).
- 8 T. Falola, pp. 9, 21-22, 292-293.
- 9 S. Ilesanmi, pp. 186-187.
- 10 S. Ilesanmi, pp. 210-211.
- 11 Achineku's article constitutes Appendix 11.
- 12 S. Careless, 4 Nov/2002.
- 13 J. Boer, 1979, pp. 446-449; 1984, p. 126; 1989, throughout, but especially pp. 12-13.
- 14 NS, 19 Sep/77. J. Boer, 1979, p. 479.
- 15 NS, 2 Jan/78. J. Boer, 1979, p. 479.
- 16 M. Oredola, 25 Dec/99.
- 17 Kolawole, 5 Jan/2000.
- 18 O. Chukwumerije, [www.gamji.com/NEWS1654.htm](http://www.gamji.com/NEWS1654.htm), p. 1.
- 19 J. Tsado, *TC*, 5/87. Appendix 3.
- 20 L. Grissen, p. 98.
- 21 J. Tsado, *TC*, 5/87. Appendix 3.
- 22 J. Bamigboye, 2000, p. 2.



<sup>23</sup> Ibraheem Sulaiman, a Muslim scholar, features prominently in Monographs 2 and 4.

<sup>24</sup> I. Sulaiman, 1986, p. 53. The passage is referred to in Monograph 4, Chapter 2.

<sup>25</sup> W. Sabiya, "The Draft Constitution," p. 2. Appendix 4.

<sup>26</sup> S. Ilesanmi, pp. xxiii-xxiv, 14-15, 85, 211, 243. Though I support Ilesanmi's main concern here, I disagree that "religion and politics are different realms." This is an issue that will come up in Part 2.

<sup>27</sup> S. Ilesanmi, p. 187.

<sup>28</sup> R. Williams, p. 50.

<sup>29</sup> CAN, *Leadership*, pp. viii, 4. Pauline Lere confirms and adds to my earlier discussions on the subject with respect to David Lot (1996, pp. 96-117). In his book on the Nigerian church, Rubingh, referring to the cosmic scope of the Gospel, states that there is "considerable latitude for criticism of the church" on this score. "It is evident that the church has not sought to carry out her mandate with sufficient appreciation of the scope of the challenge before her" (1969, p. 31).

<sup>30</sup> J. Takaya, 1992, p. 116.

<sup>31</sup> J. Boer, 1979, pp. 460, 477; 1984, pp. 137, 142.

<sup>32</sup> J. Boer, 1984, pp. 93-96.

<sup>33</sup> T. Falola, pp. 10-11.

<sup>34</sup> S. Ilesanmi, pp. 235, 253-254.

<sup>35</sup> M. Kukah, *NS*, 15 Nov/93.

<sup>36</sup> S. Akhaine, 6 Dec/2004.

<sup>37</sup> National Youth CAN, pp. 12, 18.

<sup>38</sup> *NS* and *NN*, both of 5 Oct/93.

<sup>39</sup> J. Aguwa, pp. 30, 27.

<sup>40</sup> S. Gani, pp. 6, 18, 12.

<sup>41</sup> J. Gana, 1984, pp. 18-21. This article constitutes Appendix 10. This suggestion does not imply that there *is* a disjunction between Gana's earlier article and later practice, but it would make an interesting study for some student's masters thesis.

<sup>42</sup> Appendix 3.

<sup>43</sup> Appendix 22.

<sup>44</sup> CAN, 1987, pp. viii, 2-4, 70-73. Appendix 2.

<sup>45</sup> T. Falola, pp. 107-114.

<sup>46</sup> CAN, *TC*, 1/89, p. 22.

<sup>47</sup> I. Sotunde and S. Osanyintuyi, 15 Nov/2002.

<sup>48</sup> D. Okunmuyide, 17 July/2002.

<sup>49</sup> J. Kantiok claims that the latter's public statements "attract ridicule and criticism of Christianity by Muslim critics." The Muslim magazine *Hotline* published an article about him under the title "Okogie: Fury of an Archbishop" in which they describe him as one with a fragile temper that "breaks at the slightest provocation—and sometimes without provocation." Check also Volume 4, Chapter 5 and Appendix 10. The *Hotline* writer advised him to "Think, Okogie, think" (Kantiok, pp. 195-197).

<sup>50</sup> I find it strange for a clergyman to posit a distinction between spiritual and practical ends! What can be more practical than wholesome spirituality?

<sup>51</sup> T. Falola, pp. 116, 130-131.

<sup>52</sup> S. Olesanmi, pp. 82-84.

<sup>53</sup> 3 Jan/2005.

<sup>54</sup> J. Onaiyekan, June/2000, p. 3. Italics mine.

<sup>55</sup> T. Yusuf, "Foreword," pp. i-ii, in Edema.

<sup>56</sup> L. Grissen, pp. 114-115.

<sup>57</sup> W. Sabiya, "The Draft Constitution," pp. 2-5. Appendix 4.

<sup>58</sup> E. Pam, 6 Mar/2003.

<sup>59</sup> TD, 1 May/2003.

<sup>60</sup> J. Samci, 26 and 27 May/2004.

<sup>61</sup> S. Ilesanmi, p. 223.

<sup>62</sup> T. Alao, 30 May/2003.

<sup>63</sup> *Newswatch*, 26 Apr/2004.

<sup>64</sup> During the course of conversations over the years.

<sup>65</sup> M. Kukah, 1999, pp. 24-25.

<sup>66</sup> S. Gani, p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> V. Onyeka-Ben, 30 May/2003.

<sup>68</sup> J. Alabi, 4 June/2003.

<sup>69</sup> A. Adeyemo, 28 May/2003.

<sup>70</sup> C. Collins, 20 July/2002, 21 July/2002.

<sup>71</sup> K. Muhammad, 17 Nov/99.

<sup>72</sup> Information from ICS files and from personal involvement in the project.

<sup>73</sup> R. Okhiria, 12 Nov/99.

<sup>74</sup> R. Yunana, 28 May/2004. M. Onuorah, 28 May/2004.

<sup>75</sup> J. Onaiyekan, June/2000, p. 6. Italics mine.

<sup>76</sup> J. Onaiyekan, June/2000, p. 11.

<sup>77</sup> J. Kantiok, pp. 288-290.

<sup>78</sup> *Vanguard*, 27 Jan/2003, 28 Jan/2003.

<sup>79</sup> Monograph 4, Chapter 2, especially under the heading "Separation of Religion from Politics."

<sup>80</sup> *TD*, 11 Nov/2004.

