

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Secularism is regarded as dangerous by Islam. It has long constituted a sedative for Islam and put it to sleep. Secular education has caused a high degree of syncretism among Muslim intellectuals, though the term itself is not used much by them. Nevertheless, by the mid-90s it was possible to declare that Islam as a whole has revived and not succumbed. Islam has “no need for secularization as preached by the West,” declared Ado-Kurawa. “The Islamic world has remained adamant in its resistance.” The secular expectation that religion would just fizzle out has not come true for Islam. Quoting E. Gellner, Ado-Kurawa writes, “Islam is as strong now as it was a century ago. In some ways, it is probably much stronger.”¹

Muslims *totally* reject the perceived Christian position on secularism. They recognize no saving features of any kind. It is all wrong, all evil. A century of secular suppression of Muslim sensitivities has resulted in almost unmitigated anger in the hearts of a revived Muslim *umma*. At this point in time they vehemently reject the entire Christian position without one single faint nod of recog-

dition. That anger, we will see in the next monograph, has its counterpart in the bosom of the Christian community.

Despite the antithesis between Islam and secularism, the two have certain characteristics in common, but commonalities with a difference. Both of them are wholistic in their thrust. That is, both call for a complete restructuring of society to conform to their respective visions. The corollary is also true: Neither one can tolerate alternative systems in their homelands, except under conditions determined by them.

As Abraham Kuyper² challenged the structures of Western secularism in the 19th and early 20th centuries with Christian alternatives, so Muslims are trying to do that a century later in Nigeria. They have begun to do that also in the West since the late 20th century. Kuyper identified the secularism of his day with the French Revolution. Today's Muslims in France face exactly the same challenge with the *hijab* or head scarf controversy. While it appears from the outside that French Christians have long ago developed a *modus vivendi* with secularism and a relative peace with it, today Muslims are picking up the cudgel and reviving the battle. These two wholistic systems cannot, it appears, tolerate rivals. The current push for a limited form of sharia in Canada is part of the same effort. There they are taking advantage of the national ideology—or religion?—of multiculturalism.

This monograph deals mostly with principal arguments. At this level, Muslims have a lot going for them. Their principal objections to secularism are basically well taken. However, there are also practical issues that are no less important and at that front we run into difficulties. We *hear* one thing from Muslims living with perceived threats to their religion as in Nigeria and in the West. In this monograph we meet the theoretical Islam that emphasizes peace, tolerance, pluralism, human rights and everything else desirable in a religion. We *see* the opposite within majority Muslim communities, whether in northern Nigeria or in Muslim-majority countries.

That's where the complaints of Muslim intolerance and persecution come from. I have enough information to fill an entire CD-ROM with stories about persecution and intolerance from throughout the Muslim world. That is one thing Muslims who consider themselves threatened, as in Nigeria, hide or ignore in their arguments. This fact makes their generally sound principial arguments about secularism, freedom and tolerance seem hypocritical or contradictory. Like Christian theology and philosophy, Muslim theology and world-view issues are often detached from the facts on the ground. Christian theology and ethics do not have room for imperialism and colonialism, but "Christian" nations practised them anyway. Similarly, Muslim perspectives are often contrary to Muslim practice. Muslim violence is often waved aside with the comment that it cannot be, for that would be against Islam. But what if Muslims *do* practice violence anyhow? Is this simply a matter of contradiction between principle and practice, a disjunction found in all religions? Or might there be inherent contradictions within those principles, with some choosing the way of peace and others the way of violence?³ Of course, Christian history is equally full of such contradictions and seems equally hypocritical and contradictory.

The maverick Muslim writer, Irshad Manji, may well have done Muslims a great favour with her chastisement of the community. She wrote, "Through our screaming self-pity and our conspicuous silences, we Muslims are conspiring against ourselves." "If ever there was a moment for an Islamic reformation, it's now. For the love of God, what are we doing about it?"⁴ Muslims, I advise you to accept her challenge to come clean and tell the whole story. By so doing you can declassify Islam from the category of the "most misunderstood religion." The combination of persecution with your emphasis on peace, tolerance and justice just does not cut it. *That* is what makes yours the most misunderstood religion—and the most suspect. You are giving us two incompatible messages: peace and intolerance, not to say "violence." The ball is in your court.

Nigerian Muslims must ask themselves why their reasonable objections to secularism are rejected by Christians. Christians do not even seem to hear them. Muslims can angrily dismiss this Christian rejection as unreasonable or perverse or as an indication of secular blindness to the nature of wholistic religion. There is definitely an element of truth to that reaction, but it is not the entire truth. The Muslim claim to noble and pious motives is not heard because actions speak louder than words. If Muslims can point to oppression by Christians, Christians can do the same. And when you weigh the complaints of the one over against the other, it is not so easy to determine who is oppressed the most in the Nigerian situation or who creates the most violence.

Muslim complaints are mostly systemic in nature. They object to the entire range of Nigeria's culture as totally distorted by colonialism and its aftermath. Since Christians are identified as supporters of that order, they are held responsible for this systemic oppression and distortion. Muslims feel pushed into a corner and naturally respond with anger. The violent explosions resulting from that anger and frustration not infrequently obscure their reasonable and legitimate systemic complaints. Their anger also causes them to distort the Christian perspective. When Christians experience the results of that emotional package, they find it difficult to give an honest hearing to Muslim complaints and accusations.

A final question to Muslims: Are you sure you have listened carefully and sympathetically to the Christian definition of secularism? Be sure to read Monograph Five, where I ask you to listen to them carefully, as I asked Christians to listen to you in *this* book. Are you sure you have not applied your own definition, or, perhaps, the European definition, that may not apply to Nigerian Christians? Are you sure they do not reject what you reject? In other words, might you have set up a straw man? I believe this is partially the case—*partially*, but not fully.

As to my fellow Christians, are you satisfied with your image among Muslims? Do you like the way they portray you? Do you think they have the correct image? If not, why and where do you think they have gone wrong? And what needs to be done to correct their image of you and your fellow Christians? Remember, if they have the wrong image of you, the same will hold for their image of Christ—and that is a serious matter, for then there is an unnecessary blockage between Him and them.

Secondly, I ask you to sift the chaff from the kernel in these Muslim arguments and carefully consider the kernels of their objections to secularism and its ally colonialism and to their insistence on the wholistic nature of religion—of *all* religions, including Christianity. It is my contention that Muslims are serving Nigerians, including Christians, well in their exposure of secularism. Consider it carefully and prayerfully. I believe we need to seriously reconsider our position on basis of our Scripture and in the face of Muslim arguments.

The same invitation holds to all my secular and Christo-secular friends. These Muslim arguments reach far beyond Nigeria. They have very direct implications for current relations between the Muslim world and the West. It is almost inconceivable that anyone who has carefully thought through this perspective would even consider secularism as the solution to the so-called “Muslim problem” in the world. How the US government could even *think* of imposing a secular government on Iraq is totally beyond me. That is ideology gone wild. At this point I do not even want to talk about US reaction to 9/11. I invite you to draw your own conclusions.

The last word has not been said. See you in Monograph Five.

▲ NOTES

¹ Ado-Kurawa, *Sharia and the Press*, p. 143.

² See Monograph One, pp. 16-23. Also the Kuyperiana page on www.SocialTheology.com.

³ This issue is a major concern in S. Schwartz, *The Two Faces of Islam*, New York: Doubleday, 2002.

⁴ I. Manji, p. 3.