

## **Appendix 46:**

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### **Miscellaneous BZ Christian Proposals to Government**

**Jan H. Boer 2009**

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During the period from the 1978 CA till the Zamfara Declaration, Christians slowly moved over from avoidance of politics to embracing it. However, on the whole they wanted to keep government out of religion, including and especially its ecclesiastical embodiment, the church. Archbishop Jatau wanted “to see government not interfering with religion at all,” except in issues of public safety, such as protection of life and property and ensuring that all practice their religion peacefully. “Beyond that, I would not like to see government interfering with religion at all.”<sup>1</sup>

Wilson Sabiya was, of course, one of the early pioneers in the Christian campaign against sharia and helped set the pattern. As he embodied it, as I have stated repeatedly, it was cast in a Lutheran mode with its built-in dualism of the two kingdoms. Among Sabiya’s key concepts was the well-known adage that not only should the state not adopt any religion, but it should also keep clear of involvement in religion. This view led Sabiya to the “recommendation” that government “has no business establishing, appointing and financing religious institutions. Each religion can establish such institutions at their own expense.”<sup>2</sup> This constituted mainstream Christian orthodoxy for the decades under study, though it was watered down eventually, when Christians became aware of their own inconsistency of demanding government support for their social ministries not only but even for their new programme of pilgrimages. For some, the term “secular” was replaced by “multi-religious;” for others, the terms became synonyms.

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The late 1980s and early 1990s were productive years in terms of reports and recommendations about how to prevent future violence. These proposals originated from both individuals and organizations. See, for example, the proposals from CAN and others in the folder <Appendices>List of Proposals.>. 1987 was a particularly productive year in terms of reports and recommendations about how to prevent future violence. Daniel Gowon, Chief of Wusasa near Zaria and brother to the former Head of State, submitted a list of recommendations to the FG after the Kafanchan mayhem that are reproduced in the file <D. Gowon Recommendation—1987> in

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<sup>1</sup>L. Omokhodion and I. Eguabor, 6 Apr/87, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>W. Sabiya, 25 Feb/78 and 1978. See J. Boer, vol. 7, 2007, pp. 264, 244.

the aforesaid folder. In summary, he recommended continued affirmation of multi-religion, commitment to security and freedom of religion, observance of human rights, hands off religion, control over location of churches and mosques. In addition, he offered a number of solutions that really are just more recommendations. These included emphasis on reason and debate rather than emotion and force, media objectivity, improved security measures, establishment of peace and relief committees at LGA level, on taking responsibility for violence.<sup>3</sup> If you have read Volumes 3 and 5, many of these recommendations will sound familiar. Christians have raised them time and again. Nevertheless, Gowon's document was a worthwhile one at the time. Few of these recommendations have been taken off the table since!

Northern CAN published an extensive release of 33 pages that included a number of appendices from other organizations. Because of CAN's national leadership role, I herewith reproduce them for you in this major file:

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1. *In consonance with Nigeria's secular constitution, Government should desist from any patronage and support of any religion. Government should ensure that religion remains the private concern of the individual to be practiced within the bounds of the regular laws and institutions of the country.*
  2. *Government should not allow the demands of any religious community within the country to override the wider demands of the nation as a whole.*
  3. *Under no condition should government condone the exclusion of other Nigerians from the benefits (be it property rights, residential rights, or consumption pattern etc.) of any area of Nigeria in the name of religion, except where a religious body had been granted legal title to a piece of land in accordance with the land use law and general laws of the country.*
  4. *Government should through the general laws of the land, be the impartial umpire between the religions and religious sects and be seen manifestly not to be more sympathetic to one religion or to act in any way that could lead to inter-religious conflict.*
  5. *Appointments into public office (high and low) should be strictly independent of religious affiliations. It should be prohibited throughout Nigeria for any*
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<sup>3</sup>D. Daniel, 1987, pp. 6-8.

*application form to demand information on the applicant's religion or state of origin.*

6. *Government should stop its special sponsorship and subsidy of pilgrimages by religious bodies. Nigeria's embassies abroad should instead be strengthened to enhance their welfare services to all Nigerians visiting or residing abroad.*
  7. *On no account should government (Federal, State and Local) own, sponsor or fund (wholly or partly) a purely religious school or college (such as Koranic schools, Islamic colleges, Theological Seminaries, etc.). Such institutions (both existing and proposed) should be left strictly to private, religious organizations. The question of government recognition of the curricula of and certificates awarded by such institutions should also not arise.*
  8. *The insulation of politics from religion should be vigorously pursued through appropriate structural changes in the governmental decision-making process.<sup>4</sup>*
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Appendix E attached to the above CAN document is one by the "Christian Community," of ABU. Beause of their appropriation by CAN, I reproduce them here as well:

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*The Christian Community at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and environs hereby resolve that:*

1. *In order to guarantee the continued existence of Nigeria as a united nation, every citizen of the country must be guaranteed freedom of religion and religious expression.*
2. *Since the Christians have never been known to start any religious riots, the Government should check the excesses of the Muslim rioters.*
3. *If the University Authorities and the State and Federal Governments are serious about protecting the lives and property of the individual citizens of this country, they must immediately provide effective security measures on the A.B.U. campuses and in their environs.*
4. *The Probe Panel set up to investigate the crisis is not adequate and, therefore, a Judicial Commission of Inquiry should be set up immediately to identify the culprits and bring them promptly to book.*

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<sup>4</sup>CAN, 1987, p. 11.

5. *The Federal Government, if it is serious about getting to the roots of the religious disturbances in the country, should publish immediately the Reports of all the Commissions of Inquiry on previous religious crises, and the views of Government thereon.*

6. *The News Media have not been allowed to adequately report the events. Therefore, the Government should allow the press to carry out responsible and accurate reporting of the crisis.*

7. *The Government should make deliberate efforts to restore the confidence of the Christians of Nigeria, especially those in the Northern States, on its ability and willingness to protect, in accordance with its constitutional duties, all citizens of this country.*

8. *For the continued existence of the peoples of this country as a united nation, the Federal Government must hold the Muslim community of Nigeria, whose members carefully planned and executed this beastly act, wholly responsible for the disaster, and must compel them to pay whatever it costs to adequately compensate individuals and institutions for all the losses sustained.*

9. *Since it is apparent that Christian staff and students are no longer wanted at the campuses of the Ahmadu Bello University, the government should provide a guarded return of the Christians to their states of origin.*

10. *Christians everywhere should continue to live according to the tenets of their faith by loving their god and loving their neighbours including their enemies.<sup>5</sup>*

Appendix F to the CAN document was a press statement by a group of ABU lecturers that included both Christians and Muslims. In addition to calling on the FG to be faithful to the secular nature of Nigeria, the group, along with CAN, who appropriated the statement by attaching it to its own report, made several other demands on the Government. The entire document, including the recommendations, constitutes Appendix 1 in Volume 1 and, by oversight, Appendix 4 in Volume 3.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Christian Community, ABU, 1987, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup>Ahmadu Bello University Lecturers, 1987. See endnote 9. The last point indicates the influence of Aminu Kano's Muslim socialist ideology as embodied in his NEPU party.

Four faculty and administrative staff of TCNN published a stenciled statement on behalf of their Nigerian colleagues in reaction to the 1987 uprisings in Kaduna State. They were Danu Wonosikou, Pandang Yamsat, Ayuba Ulea and Ezekiel S. Makama. I have discussed the document elsewhere; here I am concerned with the eight recommendations offered in the report,<sup>7</sup> all of them directed to the FG. They are *introduced* with these words, “We would therefore like to offer the following suggestions, if the present administration is now prepared to take the bull by the horns. For we are aware that the administration is ‘able and willing to deal with all agents of disruption in the society.’” The authors *concluded* their statement as follows: “We strongly hold to the view that Nigeria must survive as a nation and as one united people, but not at the expense of some groups of Nigerians and to the glory and enhancement of a few. The Islamic theology that Nigeria is divided into *Dar al Islam* and *Dar al Harb*, both of which should be under the sole control of Muslims, is unacceptable and unimaginable to the people of modern Nigeria.”

Danjuma Byang recommended that “Government should not be partisan in religious issues. It must adopt a neutral attitude. Government should only play the role of overseer to ensure fairness, justice and check subversive tendencies under the cover of religion.”<sup>8</sup> In a statement that emerged from a meeting of the Catholic Lawyers Association, Olubemni Okogie, Archbishop of Lagos, together with his colleague Caridan Ekandem of Ikot Ekpene, advised the FG, “in the interest of peace, unity and progress,” to “stop direct involvement in the administration and funding of any religious legal system.” They considered even the “retention of the Islamic legal system a regrettable anomaly which our nation can no longer allow to continue.”<sup>9</sup>

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The FG sponsored an inter-religious meeting of “distinguished Elders and Religious Leaders” back in 1991. Jabanni Mambula of TEKAN wrote a memo after the meeting that he described as “my personal view after serious consultation” with TEKAN member churches in which he wrote from the Christian perspective. The memo lists the various complaints that Christians have against both the Muslim community and the FG. Each of these complaints contains an implicit recommendation. The memo contains also

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<sup>7</sup>TCNN, 1987. For earlier discussion of the paper see J. Boer, vol. 3, 2004, pp. 184-186. The paper itself constitutes Appendix XXXX of this present volume.

<sup>8</sup> D. Byang, 1988, p. 103.

<sup>9</sup>O. Awogbemila, 24 Oct/88, p. 17.

a list of 20 recommendations to the FG along with a conclusion that contained a few more recommendations. Since the entire memo constitutes Appendix 2 in Volume 3, there is no need to repeat all the recommendations here. But, since they are representative of the general Christian approach, I seriously recommend your reading that appendix.

This meeting was convened by the FG. Mambula, General Secretary of TEKAN, judged such meetings very useful.

*I was very much encouraged.... I still remember the word from one of our elders that “Ranar wanka ba a buya cibi” and the startling revelations followed, which made both the Christians and Muslims alike speak frankly and honestly with each other and the genuine truth prevailed over the devilish suspicion which had been dominating similar meetings in the past. Similar meetings...should be immediately held whenever there are rumour or happenings... and the blame appropriately directed to the culprits with corresponding punishments.<sup>10</sup>*

Mambula was appreciative of such FG initiatives. Around the turn of the century, the FG helped initiate NIREC, an attempt we will hear more about in this chapter.

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Jacob Olupona gave a stiff warning to Nigerian governments to take religion into serious consideration in their policies and planning. There is hardly a government programme that is not affected by religious factors, he observed. “Yet, religious elements were not taken into consideration when the schemes were conceived.” He then cited the true but hard-to-believe example of population policy planning, in which authorities totally ignored religious attitudes and their potential effects! With such unbelievable ineptness in the halls of government secretariats, Olupona’s warning was no luxury: “Religious factors are an important variable in all aspects of our national life.” “It will be mere wishful thinking to assume that we can run away from this significant variable.”<sup>11</sup>

Simeon Ilesanmi gave a prophetic assignment to the Government. Over against the rigidity with which some religious adherents confronted each other, he wanted it to

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<sup>10</sup>J. Mambula, 25 July/91. Appendix 2, vol. 3, pp. 238-244. Meaning of the Hausa proverb literally: On wash day, you don’t hide the navel. In other words, do not sweep the central issues under the carpet when it is time to discuss.

<sup>11</sup>J. Olupona, 1992, p. 1.

“encourage accommodationist behaviour,” but to do so it would need to be aware “of the implications of its decisions for communal relations and with the intention of promoting reconciliation among groups. It must always demonstrate the foresight to anticipate religious issues so as to be able to study and resolve them in advance. Politicians and administrators must go beyond being managers of the present to be more imaginative moulders of the future.”<sup>12</sup> Most Nigerians would shout a loud “Amin” to that!

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So, asked an anonymous *TC* writer in 1990, “what is the solution” as far as governments are concerned? His answer is as appropriate today as it was then and it was very similar to the demands of John Akume from AZ days recorded earlier in this section. “No short cuts.”

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*No wishing away of the problem, sermonising, enacting decrees, expressing good intentions in public, intimidating citizens and such other cosmetics. The solution lies purely in government not only playing it fair in its actions and policies, but being seen to be so. As long as government is biased, as long as a few Islamic hawks pull the strings, as long as some sacred cows can do anything and get away with it, then it is a matter of time: the religion time bomb will one day explode—and all those nurturing it will not escape the devastation. May God forbid.*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>S. Ilesanmi, 1997, p. 255.

<sup>13</sup>*TC*, 1/90, p. 15.