

*Appendix 48:*

**BZ National Unity Concerns**

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At the launching ceremony of CAN in 1987, Professor Adamu Baikie delivered a speech in which he pleaded for the unity of a fragmented church where everyone pursues his own local church interest or his denominational loyalty. He challenged his audience to “put an end to disunity; we must resolve to work together towards the restitution of this nation.” He did not mention Islam or sharia, but no one could fail to catch the drift.<sup>1</sup> Adebajo Edema agreed that “perhaps the greatest problem of the church is disunity, which has been exploited greatly. It has greatly undone both the Church and the State. It has made it extremely difficult for the church to have one voice in state affairs or in decisions even when they touch on our religion.” To overcome this weakness, the church should adopt as its hallmark the setting of good example. Alas, the guilty ones here are the bishops and their ilk. They need to repent, intoned Edema. “The personality clashes among our bishops, interdenominational feuds and intra-denominational schisms engendered by self and pride, should be buried.” Unity and all its positive fallouts “should be pursued with such vehemence that it will make the foe to run.”<sup>2</sup> The Fifth National Congress on Evangelization held at Port Harcourt in September, 1988, stated in its Communique, “Christians must put aside all sectarian and denominational differences, diligently preach the message of the Kingdom of God and promote social justice.” As to national unity, it encouraged members of the on-going CA that “Our goal should be one nation, one destiny, one legal system.”<sup>3</sup> So many calls for unity during the BZ era from everywhere.

Few there have been amongst Christian leaders who emphasized Christian unity more than Ambassador Tanko Yusuf. In fact, I take the liberty of calling him the “Apostle of Unity.” Dirk VanderSteen, the author of the Foreword to Yusuf’s “autobiography” and friend of both Yusuf and myself, wrote that the Ambassador saw himself as a person whom God has chosen for a special purpose: to live and preach unity among Christians.” He was the personification of the

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<sup>1</sup>A. Baikie, 1989, pp. 39, 45.

<sup>2</sup>A. Edema, 1988, pp. v, 38-41.

<sup>3</sup>Fifth National Congress on Evangelisation, *TC*, 6/88, p. 27.

prayer of John 17:20, “that all of them may be one,” which was also the theme of his book.<sup>4</sup> Yusuf saw Nigeria in great danger of Muslims gaining full control. His primary solution to that danger was that we need to be united in Christ. Christians must overcome “their own narrow interests.” Too often they place “individual or tribal goals above our communal mission to rectify the wrongs in our country. We Christians must work together.” He promised to continue to struggle for the necessary unity, for that was the ministry to which God called him. In his last chapter, he placed two challenges before Christians, but really only one. The first was to be united in Christ and then as one body become “active in Nigerian government and politics. The real hope of any nation is people living together in harmony, particularly in Christian harmony.” It is, he conceded, hard work, for it leads to bitter opposition. The second challenge is for all Nigerians to become fluent in English for the unity of the church and nation as well as—and here a global ambassador was speaking—for participating citizens of the world.<sup>5</sup>

Christians have long realised that their disunity is a major reason for their weakness. Hence the frequent calls for unity. Jabbani Mambula, General Secretary of TEKAN, once called and recorded the proceedings of an interdenominational meeting that strongly emphasized the need for Christian unity. A. O. Oyeniran, President of the United Gospel Churches Association of Nigeria, spoke about this need. There were several reasons for this need, a major one being “the danger of the effort of the Muslims to Islamize Nigeria. Unless Christians are vigilant, this would be a matter of time. Christians must care now or it would be too late.” He informed the members of a Lagos meeting at which over 2000 pastors attended. Members responded by affirming the need to start immediately to hold joint meetings. They also recognized the need “to create powerful means of communication among the various groups.” Mambula was appointed to co-ordinate the Northern groups. It was further decided “that the basis would start with pastors, who have the grass roots. Then other groups like CAN Youth Wing, Army, Politicians, etc., will join. Educating members was seen as paramount.”<sup>6</sup>

Census issues have continued to crop up in this series, with both parties using it as a basis for their respective claims. Of course, both claim majority status. During the above meeting, a participant claimed 45% for Christians, 42% for Muslims and 13% for “others.” If Christians

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<sup>4</sup>L. Grissen, 1995, p. vii.

<sup>5</sup>L. Grissen, 1995, pp. 9-10, 112-113.

<sup>6</sup>J. Mambula, 29 June/87. It is not indicated just who sponsored this meeting. TEKAN? CAN?

work together, it was suggested, they would have clout in the next election. That's the force of unity.<sup>7</sup>

The heading for this section is “*National Unity*,” not merely “*Christian Unity*.” The above paragraphs emphasize Christian unity, but from the start, Sabiya emphasized the need for national unity. The sharia issue at the time of the 1977 CA threatened that unity, he felt, and so he insisted, “One thing is certain, there is no alternative to Nigerian unity. Nothing can replace the unity of this country.”<sup>8</sup>

Tanko Yusuf, in spite of his strong push for Christian unity, recognized that this unity would have to embrace sympathetic and moderate Muslims if Nigeria was to develop positively. Yamsat was particularly emphatic here. He warned that “Christians and Muslims cannot afford to let Nigeria down.” More positively, they “can be the hope of this country.” After all,

*there are many things that unite us and as such, we should walk the road of fellow-citizens and companions and ward off neo-colonialism in its different facets, so that we may enjoy this God-given land that is 'full of milk and honey,' for it has been given to us to share. To do that, we must work as a team, as one man, to produce a document [Constitution] that will serve our unique national and multi-religious needs. Only then shall we be said to have come of age in the faith we profess and in our political career.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>J. Mambula, 29 June/87.

<sup>8</sup>W. Sabiya, 1978. See J. Boer, vol. 7, 2007, p. 238.

<sup>9</sup>P. Yamsat. n.d., p. 11.