

# THE CHRISTIAN PUSH FOR SECULARITY

In the Muslim world as a whole there is a long tradition of integration of religion and culture. Though it is intended that this tradition find its practical embodiment in the lives of Muslims, that is often more theoretical than actual—but that is the same for all religions. Positively, that tradition is based on the strong Muslim affirmation that Islam is more than a religion in the Western sense; it is a comprehensive way of life. Negatively, it stands in stark contrast to the Western tradition of the compartmentalization of life into religious and secular zones. Their integration naturally leads Muslims to reject Western secular dualism, including the Western version of Christianity. This comprehensive view of their religion has led the Nigerian Muslim community to insist on a close and supportive relationship between Islam and the state. It has also led them headlong into a bitter and drawn-out conflict with their Christian counterparts that at the time of writing shows no signs of abatement. The previous monograph in this series treats that comprehensive Muslim world view.

In Part 1, I describe and explain the Nigerian Christian understanding of their own position and their reaction to the Muslim world view. It will be shown that the motivation for their rejection is not primarily because of any basic theological or philosophical disagreement, though these are there. Rather, the Christian position is a strong reaction to a perceived Muslim plan to Islamize the country and on their Christian insistence on their own independent place in the Nigerian sun. In this struggle, the different views on the relationship between religion and Church to that of government and politics is a crucial issue. The Christian community in Nigeria, practically without exception, insists on some sort of a secular formula for that relationship.

It may be good to remember that from the beginning the debate—if such it can be called—was “most cumbersome and passionate” and “controversial” from both sides. It was a wake-up call to Christians.<sup>1</sup> Muslims had been discussing the issues for some time before Christians warmed up to the subject. When Christians entered the discussion, they immediately began to advocate for a vague version of secularity, often confusing “secularism” and “secularity.” In those early days, one Osita Okeki felt that Nigeria must be seen “as a secular state.”<sup>2</sup> George Hoomkwap similarly opted for a secular state, which he defined as “one in which no single religion receives official patronage or recognition to the exclusion of or in preference to others.”<sup>3</sup> Opposition to sharia was precisely because it was not secular or neutral.<sup>4</sup> Ever since, the debate has been raging, heating up the religious atmosphere to the point of bringing it to many violent explosions that are described in the earlier volumes.

To understand the Christian insistence on secularity, be sure to read Volumes 1 and 3 of this series. They contain a full description of the major riots as well as the complaints Christians have against government and Islam. The facts and views in those volumes form the backdrop to the Christian insistence on secularity and to the specific content they give the term. Their insistence on

secularity is squarely based on the concrete situation as they see and experience it. This insistence is grounded on a complicated heritage that combines strands of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and the Western version of Christianity. The latter, in turn, includes elements of residual Greek influences and of secularism. Of course, Islam is also part of that mixed heritage, even if only negatively.

### ▲ THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF SECULARITY<sup>5</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

While some Christians, as we will see, provide definitions of secularism or secularity, too many of them regularly use the term “secular” and its derivatives without careful definition. Ilesanmi refers to the “confusion over the appropriate meaning of the concept of the secular state.”<sup>6</sup> This environment of carelessness often creates confusion and sometimes puts Christianity in a bad light. The Fifth National Congress on Evangelization of 1988, for example, published a communique in which it asserted that “this nation is a secular state.”<sup>7</sup> It did not further define the concept. How they thought to evangelize Muslims while publicly waving this hateful flag in front of them is beyond me. They were calling on the members of the Constituent Assembly, a body that included many Muslims who define secular and all its derivatives as “godlessness,” as I have shown clearly in Monograph 4.<sup>8</sup> Muslims have so often explained their understanding of the term that Christian leaders have no excuse for lack of awareness on this score. To remind Muslims of the secular nature of the country without defining the term was hardly doing them or even themselves a favour. In a Muslim context, a simultaneous call for evangelism and secularism or godlessness is about as confusing as one can get. Such Christian statements only increase Muslim confusion about Christian goals and add fuel to the fire that is Nigeria.

Fortunately, not all Christian spokesmen are that vague. Archbishop John Onaiyekan emphasizes the need for careful definition. He finds the popular claim that “Nigeria is a secular state” singularly ambiguous. The bitter debate during the 1978 Constitutional Assembly was “very prolonged” precisely because of lack of careful definition. Onaiyekan’s very helpful discussion on this issue forms Appendix 1. He rejects as irrelevant the famous Caesar statement by Jesus, an issue that Christians frequently bring into the discussion. It addresses “a totally different issue,” he insists. He then proceeds to discuss various types of secular nations and shows there is a great variety, ranging all the way from rejecting God to actively promoting religion, the U.S.A. being an example of the latter arrangement. Given the variety of meanings, he concludes that the term should not be used as long as the main point is remembered, namely “that a Nigerian will always enjoy his full rights, no matter his religion, on every square inch of our national territory.”<sup>9</sup> A lot of grief might have been spared if his advice had been heeded.

Danjuma Byang, at various times pastor, sociologist and journalist, is another of the few trying to give careful definition to the term “secular” and its derivatives. Using dictionaries and a paper by lawyer Leonard Dan Nzadon, Byang draws a sharp distinction between “secularity” and “secularism.”<sup>10</sup> The former “is the attitude of neutrality and indifference to religion and religious considerations.” Quoting from Nzadon, he writes that it “enjoins neutrality in the practice of religion.” It is enshrined in the First Amendment of the American Constitution with its prohibition that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Secularism, on the other hand, “is a philosophy that seeks to eradicate the concept of religion and all religious considerations from public life.” It is a negative, anti-religious stance. Byang continues:

*The confusion between these two concepts has often led many people to make unwarranted statements, thinking that those affirming Nigeria's secular status have the doctrine of secularism in mind. As people that believe in the existence of the Supreme God and His centrality in history and in the day-to-day lives of people, we cannot propagate that Nigeria adopt a philosophy that eliminates the concept of God and gets engrossed with only temporal and worldly affairs. But at the same time, we believe religion should be left to individuals and religious organisations to handle, without an unwarranted interruption by the state.*

*And if government wants to help promote religious ideas because of its positive influence on the citizenry, even then the principle of neutrality must be adopted.*

Further down, Byang asserts,

*Let it be affirmed that Nigeria is a secular country. And it had better remain so. But if, for any reason, we want to desecularize the country, the different religious faiths must be taken into consideration. Equitable treatment must be given them all. That is how we can achieve unity in diversity, which in turn is the idea of a pluralistic society.<sup>11</sup>*

As I compare Byang's definitions with those found in other dictionaries, I find the rather absolute distinction between the two terms somewhat arbitrary.<sup>12</sup> However, his intention is clear and very helpful in setting parameters. Though other Christian writers freely use the term "secularism" as the Christian goal, they largely understand it to refer to Byang's "secularity." This general practice creates a huge communication problem. Muslims, when they hear or read Christians talking about "secularism," assume Christians are calling for what Byang and almost all Christians with him, in fact, reject. This communication gap has outlived all the bloodshed

of the past decades. I wonder what difference it would have made if Christians had been more careful and precise in their language. I am hereby calling on both Christians and Muslims to reread the above quote from Byang. It may help turn the ship around.

A year after the publication of Byang's book, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) published one of its numerous communiqués that contains a list of grievances Christians have with governments, federal and state, that are allegedly in cahoots with Muslims.<sup>13</sup> Item four, dealing with the secularity issue, closely follows Byang's terminology:

*We stand by and vigorously defend the secularity of the Nigerian state as implied in the 1979 Constitution and its Draft Revision going on in the Constituent Assembly. We understand secularity in the Nigerian Constitution to mean that in a multi-religious society, the state and the government must not adopt any religion as state religion, nor favour any one religion through overt or covert acts.*<sup>14</sup>

At a conference on dialogue between the two religions, Habila Istifanus presented one of the best Christian papers I have read in this struggle. It is better than most because of its irenic spirit of humility, a rare commodity in this context. He said he had "one basic concern" in his paper: "What do Christians mean when they are talking of a secular state in a multi-religious state like Nigeria?" Like Byang seven years earlier, he did a dictionary search and then suggested "that to secularize means to remove from the control of religion, be it Church or Islam." This is a sloppy definition that does not seem to distinguish clearly between religion and religious institutions.<sup>15</sup> However, Istifanus later explains he is talking of "institutional secularization of society; that is, replacement of official religious control by a non-ecclesiastical authority."<sup>16</sup> He is definitely not talking about taking religion out of life. Throughout his paper, he freely uses the term "secularism" rejected by Byang.

Istifanus raises the question as to whether the Western concept of secularism is “any different from what we have in Nigeria.” In fact, he argues, it is different because of the local context and implies that it is therefore irrelevant to the Nigerian context. Some Westerners regard secularism “as a religion of its own” that is “antagonistic to Christianity.”<sup>17</sup> I suspect he adduced this subject to pre-empt critique by Westerners of the Nigerian Christian call for secularity.<sup>18</sup> It appears that Istifanus forgot momentarily that Muslim critique of Western secularism is very incisive and definitely important in the context of the Nigerian debate.

David Ihenacho published a response to a lecture delivered at Harvard by Professor Auwalu Yadudu of Bayero University, Kano, about the sharia. In this discussion, Ihenacho makes the same distinction between secularism and secularity we have already met above. Allow me the following lengthy quote:

*I think the confusion of the sharia advocates like Yadudu comes from the meaning of the word “secular.” To a certain extent, such a government is indifferent to religious practices in as much as such practices do not undermine the democratic constitution whose essential nature “secular” declares and protects. Webster’s Third New International Dictionary describes “secular” as not formally related to or controlled by a religious body.*

*Yadudu’s confusion in this situation becomes clear when he equates “secular” as in secular state with “secularism.” This is tragic. “Secularism” is a totally different terminology. It is descriptive of an attitude, a way of life and a world view. Secularism is a mindset. It is a philosophy that attaches value only to perceptible things. For secularism, the physical world is the end of all things. It is the really real. Nothing exists, but what we see. So the end of human aspiration should be to improve this world. For this type of philosophy, religion is completely out of place in the affairs of*

*the world. The physical world has its laws and ends which must be explored through science to improve both the world and the conditions of human beings. As one can see, this mindset is totally opposed to religion.*

*But a secular state is not necessarily opposed to religion. It only says that it will not depend on religions for its existence and will not sponsor any religion. But most importantly, it does not say that it will kill off all or any religions as secularism professes. Secularism is the extreme type of the mindset that underlies a religious state. This is because it is only in secular states that the different religions can thrive.*

*No religion thrives in a secularist state. And in the so-called religious states, only one or a few religions can thrive. A religious state usually discriminates against some individual religions and ultimately kills off certain forms of religious practices in order to prop up and support the one(s) it arbitrarily upholds. Religious states have preferences and only their preferred religions thrive. For instance, the religious state of Saudi Arabia does not allow any other religion to thrive besides Islam. But the secular states like Italy and the U.S.A. allow all shades of religions, including Islam, the freedom to expand and blossom.<sup>19</sup>*

James Kantiok, an indigene from Southern Zaria now teaching in California, has little respect for the Council of Ulama, a body of Muslim theologians found in most Muslim countries that often serves as religious consultant to governments. Sometimes they are actually in control of an entire nation. Kantiok describes them as “a bunch of political hoodlums”; they lie; they mislead and misinform. His opinion of them is not much different from that of Muslim scholar Ibraheem Sulaiman.<sup>20</sup> They even “showed a complete ignorance of Islam”! He faults them for the fact that Muslims “do not appear to be educated on the concepts of secu-

larism. They fail to differentiate between secularism as an anti-religious movement and secularity as government neutrality.” In one of their documents the Ulama urged “the government to set up a committee to find the origin of the word secularism in view of its misuse by Christians.”<sup>21</sup> I am puzzled at Kantiok’s disgust with Ulama confusion. Is it not the Christians who constantly interchange these terms?

Mobolaji Aluko wrote about the fiasco of the Miss World Pageant that was scheduled for Nigeria during November 2002 but was at the last moment moved to London, U.K., because of the violence it had caused. He judged that Muslims conspired to have it cancelled from the beginning because the event went against their sensitivities. Nigeria being a multi-religious country, there is great need for people to develop sensitivity towards each others’ religions. However, that can go too far. “No one wants to live perpetually with another person who demands sensitivity all of the time and who wishes to have one learn all of his sensitive points, otherwise he turns violent. I would rather not live next to that person.” In this context, Aluko explained secularity to mean “that no matter what your private views are, before the law, no one religion is better or worse than the other, and so no one religion should be promoted over the other, nor would it be acceptable for their adherents to force their views on others.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, the purpose of secularity is to make legal space for and be sensitive towards each other’s peculiarities, but not to force your way on the other regardless of the cost—which in this case was 200 lives.

Aluko provides titillating background information about the Miss World contest. The resulting religious riot in Abuja, he wrote, means “that capital city has lost its virginity as the central, secular capital city of Nigeria.” The

*former belief of centrality, secularity and insularity from strife of Abuja was what the ambassadors of the U.S., the U.K. and*

*France wanted Mr. Ben Murray Bruce<sup>23</sup> (according to an interview given by Bruce himself) to test. They hauntingly told him on the morning of that fateful day that the Miss World contest was moved to London, [but] if by 2 p.m. after Friday mosque prayers there was no religious riot in Abuja, then the contest could stay in Abuja. Why they said what they knew ahead of time was a puzzle to the hapless Ben Bruce. Within hours, Abuja failed the test: the Miss World contest was moved to London following mayhem and deaths in Abuja—and now we really know Abuja as a Northern Muslim city.*

*Or is it not?*

*No wonder that the distraught Miss Lithuania, when she was departing Nigeria for London, noted apologetically that nobody told her that Nigeria was a Muslim country!*

*Or is it not?<sup>24</sup>*

If, as I have suggested in my articles on the pageant,<sup>25</sup> Muslims rejected the event at least partially because it would undercut their attempt to portray Nigeria as a Muslim country, then they surely succeeded—but at what cost in terms of lives and negative image of Islam! Theirs was at best a Pyrrhic victory. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, the view of Nigeria as a secular nation also took a severe beating in the global city. As to the thin pretense of Western governments not to be interfering in the details of other countries, well, so much for that myth as well! There they stood—in a huddle, like a mother hen protecting her baby chicks.

Various writers favourably associate secularism with American developments. Jacob Takaya regards secularism an American discovery in that country's experiment with a federal constitution in the context of its religious and other forms of pluralism. A central feature is the prohibition of state religion. Britain borrowed the concept and brought it to Nigeria. "Since then, though unstated,

Nigeria's various constitutions have consistently been based on secularist principles."<sup>26</sup> In similar vein, Olisa Adigwe, writing on "Muslim Rage and 9/11," contrasts American society with Muslim societies. America values diversity and tolerance. Freedom is its watchword. People of different religions live harmoniously next to each other. All of these virtues are wrapped up in the concept of secularism, the very opposite of the repressive nature of Muslim societies.<sup>27</sup>

### **▲ SECULARITY: SEPARATION OF RELIGION AND POLITICS**

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In the past, many Nigerian Christians thought of religion as contradictory to government and politics. Most did not reflect seriously on this relationship but instinctively went by the dominant Nigerian missionary heritage that includes a vague, undefined type of dualistic separation. This attitude received little challenge in earlier days, especially since it seemed an effective weapon in their struggle with Muslims. The Christian judge Massoud Oredola begins an article in which he refers to "two irreconcilables—religion and politics" in a context that did not at all require that kind of statement, but he apparently felt the urge to insert it.<sup>28</sup>

However vaguely people tend to use the term "secular," the popular meaning of it is clear. That meaning, as Ilesanmi put it, is "the constitutional provision for a functional separation of religion and state."<sup>29</sup> Or, as Takaya put it succinctly, "Secularism, as a state policy, is the philosophy and practice of separating the affairs of government from religion." It is not to be construed as an "anti-religion policy" so much as "the refusal to recognise or grant more favours to one religion over others."<sup>30</sup> There you have it: the working definition of the Christian community in their struggle with Islam.

Kantiok is a strong advocate for separation of "Government and Religion." "The religious question," he declares, "has become

a thorn in the flesh of government in the last twenty years.” Those in power manipulate religion to retain power. For years, the government “has messed around with religion” to distract people from their socio-economic woes. The time has come for government to take “a firm stand on the religious affairs of the nation” in order to end “the flagrant abuse of our constitution that provides for the secularity of the country and a separation of Church and state. Government has no business interfering with religious questions and should therefore take its hands off and leave religious questions to the religious leaders.” It must drop both membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the sharia, both of them being religious entities. Kantiok calls for an end to government support of Islam in all its forms. But while he calls for government hands-off, he also challenges the government to “check the religious excesses of individuals and organizations that promote violence.” This can be done through “relevant laws and agencies of government.” So, hands-off, but at the same time...<sup>31</sup>

People insist on separating religion from politics for various reasons. Jacob Takaya argues that the “politicisation of religion [is] the greatest possible threat to the very survival of any multi-faith country, like Nigeria...” With “religious creeds [making] bad political bed-fellows,” he asks, “how do we ensure their non-politicisation or, where it is already, their depoliticisation, in a multi-faith state like Nigeria?” He identifies this as “the fundamental question to be answered” if Nigeria is not to turn into another Lebanon. His answer is that “a secularist national idea system that respects and accommodates internal peculiarities, including differences in religious and ethical ways of life, is a necessity.” The alternative is “to impose one’s belief system on other citizens.”<sup>32</sup>

Architect Dauda Ibrahim, a Christian Hausa/Fulani, was voted into political office by his almost totally Muslim constituency of Zaria. At one time, he served as state chairman of the Kaduna State opposition party. For a Christian, this was a rather sensitive chal-

lence in a state where Muslims hold most of the political power. He was chosen by his Muslim constituency because of the reputation he had developed in other positions as a fair-minded and unbiased person. Ibrahim explained that the situation had not always been that open. Under Governor Balarabe Musa all high positions were given to Muslims. The same held true under Governor Lawal Kaita, with one major exception. Ibrahim explained his success as follows: "One of the things I have achieved in my politics is that there is no politics of religion. Everyone knows that Dauda Ibrahim is a Christian and does not discriminate on basis of religion." He added, "We have been operating here as a party and we have never brought religious consideration to any of our deliberations. We are fair to everybody."<sup>33</sup> So, for Ibrahim, religion in politics spells partiality. It is the opposite to being neutral. Hence, in his sensitive Muslim-majority situation, there is no place for religion in politics.

The campaign period before the 2003 elections once again heightened interest in the subject. Sunday Mbang, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church and successor to Okogie as President of CAN, allegedly openly promoted President Obasanjo in his campaign for re-election. Daniel Chonto Mang of Shendam, Plateau State, was offended that such a prominent church leader put his weight behind one candidate and thus seemed to commit "his flock" to a candidate Mang and many others would not support. This act was all the more offensive because Mbang allegedly had publicly reprimanded another Christian, Daniel Kanu, for campaigning on behalf of the former military dictator Abacha some years earlier. Mang concluded his letter as follows: "When men of God like Sunday Mbang begin to campaign openly for politicians and incumbent presidents, then the suspicion that they may have been compromised becomes very high. At this juncture, it may thus be imperative to canvass that religion and politics be separated."<sup>34</sup> I find it interesting that during the heat of the 2003 elec-

tions, the same Mbang counseled that people should not vote exclusively on basis of the candidate's religion. Being Christian is no guarantee of good leadership from a politician, he averred. "A non-Christian may be more qualified."<sup>35</sup>

The line between legitimate support for government on the part of a religious authority and illegitimate politics can be razor thin. By the end of 2004, Mbang had not relented giving outright support for President Obasanjo. He defended Obasanjo's policies and predicted the latter will be appreciated more after he has left office. "President Obasanjo is my very good friend. Although people may have called me various names in the past about this, that does not matter."<sup>36</sup>

An ugly political row developed in Enugu between Governor Chimaroke Nnamani and a Catholic priest, Ejike Mbaka, that had already cost fourteen lives. Enugu is a state, it should be realized, with few Muslims and a very dominant Catholic Church. Some blamed the Catholic Church, particularly Mbaka, for the political violence. M. O. Ene, the author of the report I am summarizing here, concluded from the incident that "politics and religion are a dangerous concoction. Religion is not logic; it is about blind faith in the paranormal. Church and state should not mix." Further down in the article, Ene suggests that "the best way forward is to remove the church from the centre stage. Let the adoration be, and let the Church cut itself free of any semblance of partisan politics. That way, there would be pure partisan political opposition. Politics is good on its own. When mired in ethnocentrism or religious bigotry, everyone loses. This is why Nigeria is not working."<sup>37</sup>

President Obasanjo has a reputation as a deeply religious man. However, even he wants to keep religion and politics separate. In his 2003 inaugural speech, he noted "with apprehension that there is the tragic appearance of religion in our national politics. It is imperative that we nip this in the bud, because religion mixed with politics in a multi-faith country like ours portends destruction and devastation."<sup>38</sup>

The Christian Governor Dariye of Plateau State, a good four years prior to his suspension by the President due to steadily worsening religious violence in his state, described his state as a secular one and immediately added the explanation “that the people had the right to practice their religion without fear of molestation.”<sup>39</sup>

Ola Makinde, Methodist Archbishop of Lagos and member of NIREC, in an interview with unnamed editors of *Newswatch*, similarly objects to the mixing of politics and religion. Those who do so, he affirmed, are politicians. “Some are military stooges who want the army to come back so that it will be business as usual.” “People are now using religion...” That is why they “introduced political sharia.” In answer to the question whether it is “possible to separate religion from politics,” he responded, “It is very easy, especially for politicians. When Chief Obafemi Awolowo was premier in the West here, he never mixed politics with religion. He was the first premier to establish a Muslim pilgrims welfare board. That’s a man with a large heart. We must understand each other. I am warning politicians to avoid mixing religion with politics. We must vote for leaders with a large heart.”<sup>40</sup> But is this really an example of separation?

If the meaning of mixing or avoiding the mix is not always clear from positive statements, it becomes clearer when you pay attention to what is rejected. For the above archbishop, mixing the two is an indication of a small heart that cannot embrace everyone, that is selective and discriminatory. One who does not mix them has a large heart and will help religions and communities of which he is not a member. His government will serve all the people and all religions. It is not partisan but neutral.

The above demands for the separation of religion and politics are the result of a perceived wrong mixing of the two that has led to friction and violence. Some recognise a legitimate political role for the Church. The Catholic Bishop of Awka in Anambra State, Simon Okafor, stated the Catholic position. The Church’s role is

“to only preach and give the principles of a just society.” In other words, the Church’s political role is that of teaching the basic underpinnings of politics. After that, it expects “people to vote according to their choice and convictions.” He said that “the only thing that would attract the interest and sympathy of the Church for any of the candidates was humility. Christians would look out for one who will not use power to emasculate the people, but one who will bear the interest of the people at heart.” A person will not be a “good leader because he is a Muslim or Christian, but a good leader acceptable to Christians would take care of the common good of the people, religion notwithstanding.” As to the major Muslim presidential challenger, Muhammadu Buhari, “the important thing is whether he is equipped and ready, in collaboration with the Church, to find solutions to the problems of Nigeria.” Okafor warned “against making religion an issue” in the election. Christians should “not consider religion as a yardstick for voting any presidential candidate. It is condemnable for the Church to use religion as electoral yardstick.”<sup>41</sup>

Adeolu Adegbola, a Methodist Bishop but at the time Director of the ICS, Ibadan—and my boss for some years—warned at the inception of the discussion that whatever the relationship between Church and state Nigeria eventually adopts, “the conclusion we draw for one religion...must equally apply to the other...We cannot afford to apply to the Church the principle of separation of Church and State while we cede to Muslims the identification of Islam and governmental administration.”<sup>42</sup>

## ▲ REASONS FOR THE CALL FOR SECULARITY ———

Habila Istifanus raises the question, “Why are Christians in Nigeria advocating for keeping Nigeria a secular state?” Falola answers the question in the context of the 1977 Constituent Assembly: “Christians on the Constitutional Drafting Committee

felt *secular* implied state neutrality in religious affairs; the secular state would not be describable as Islamic or religious. To the Christians, while a secular state was the status quo inherited from the British, the term had to be put unequivocally in the constitution in order to prevent the Islamic elite from making Nigeria an Islamic state.”<sup>43</sup>

The person who raised the “why” question, Habila Istifanus, is himself somewhat hesitant. “I am not able to say categorically whether we should opt for secularism or not,” he cautioned. He “would prefer we all look at this issue together with objectivity.” This Christian call “has much to do with justice and human rights,” he explained. “Imposing religious laws on all people only creates provocation and tension.” Both Christians and Muslims complain that the government favours the other. “Whether the complaints are genuine, I feel incapable to go into alone.” But the Christian call is in order to have the government give “equal treatment to the two major religions.” It is also a call for the government to “leave religious business to religious people.” In addition, if instead of a secular state a Muslim state would develop, Christians fear they would be relegated to the status of *dhimmi* or “protected people,” the status the sharia reserves for non-Muslim minorities living among Muslim people. Christians would become “second-class citizens.”<sup>44</sup>

The Anglican Bishop of Wusasa, Kaduna State, Kolawole, thinks of secularism as a prerequisite for Nigeria’s continuing unity. He spoke of “one indivisible secular and democratic entity” and wants to preserve that at all costs.<sup>45</sup>

Mike Ikhariale explains that “most of the enlightened world established secular laws” to avoid the kinds of conflicts that exist in Nigeria. It means in effect “leaving the spiritual realm largely within the personal domain.” People will resist this secular restraint on religion, he predicted, as long as they profit from commingling the spiritual and the material. They will blur these realms “quite deliberately.” At one time, Christians also practiced intolerance and

burnt, stoned, drowned, decapitated those with whom they disagreed. It is secularism that stopped it. That is why at independence “the constitutional understanding was that the nation would be a secular republic, and not a theocracy as some of our Taliban brothers are now imposing on us.”<sup>46</sup>

### ▲ GOVERNMENT IMPARTIALITY, NEUTRALITY —

When we peruse this Christian discussion on secularity, one concept that emerges frequently is the need for an impartial or neutral government. Most Christian statements on secularity are liberally punctuated with these terms and their synonyms. The National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) is a government agency and should therefore be impartial. However, its report, *Religious Disturbances in Nigeria*, opts for a position that unashamedly embodies the Nigerian Christian perspective. One key passage summarizes it all. The report recommends a situation

*in which the state guarantees religious diversity and ensures an equilibrium between the religious communities within the context of common and universally defined aspirations. This is the most desirable option for a pluralist society like Nigeria. This option calls for the highest qualities in statesmanship, requiring dispassionate objectivity from possibly religiously-biased wielders of public authority. Under this framework, the state will regard the various religions and cultures as equal and equally valuable. It will not discriminate or render favours in accordance with narrowly-defined sectarian prejudices. Above all, it will ensure that none of the religions dominates the others through the use of force or manipulation of governmental apparatus and operations. In order to do this, the state must manifestly remain secular with respect to the religious sphere. The National Institute regards this secular*

*approach as the best option for Nigeria, because it is the best guarantee of individual liberties and national peace and stability in the context of prevailing pluralities. It is necessary to emphasize that only such a secular order can guarantee the unity of the Nigerian state and ensure peaceful coexistence. The secular order constitutes the point of departure in the Institute's study.*<sup>47</sup>

This is a classic statement of both secularism and the Christian stance in Nigeria. “Religious diversity and...equilibrium” between religions “within the context of common and universally defined aspirations”! Muslims, Reformed Christians and postmodernists all reject the existence of such “common and universal...aspirations.” They don’t exist. The statement is so one-sided that it amounts to a virtual declaration of war on the Muslim position outlined in Monograph 4—and that by an advisory government institution. It is the very embodiment of what it condemns! In its strong insistence on the secular option it clearly adopts the Christian point of view by identifying secularity with neutrality.<sup>48</sup> Really, have the authors of the report read any Muslim literature on the subject at all or any serious discussions on secularism? It flies directly in the face of the major concerns of mainstream Nigerian Islam. Even though a government agency, it shows no signs of attempting to find a formula more acceptable to both. This stance is the direct product of the blindness that afflicts most secularists. They genuinely believe that secularism represents neutrality. It is a bedrock conviction without which secularism will collapse. It is very hard for them to think outside of this box—but a box it is.

In the wake of the Kafanchan riots,<sup>49</sup> CAN published a statement that includes a set of recommendations reproduced as Appendix 2. Like most of such statements, Muslim as well as Christian, they tend to be carelessly worded, often leaving one with many questions and not infrequently saying or implying things

CAN does not really mean. For example, the document demands that “government should desist from any patronage and support of any religion.” CAN does not mean that. In Monograph 3 I have shown that it favours all kinds of government support, especially for school and health care facilities. Instead, it means that government should desist from supporting one religion (read: Islam) more than others (read: Christianity). CAN does not object to government support of religion as long as it is done impartially, i.e., does not favour Islam. To the best of my knowledge, neither has it ever objected to unilateral support of Christian endeavours, except in declarations of principle.

The CAN document is replete with the language of impartiality and neutrality. Its recommendations begin with “In consonance with Nigeria’s secular constitution...” On basis of that secularity, governments should not “condone the exclusion of other Nigerians from the benefits of any area of Nigeria in the name of religion.” Governments should “be the impartial umpire between the religions and be seen not to be more sympathetic to one religion.” Appointments to public office “should be strictly independent of religious affiliation.” Applications should give no indications as to religion and state of origin.<sup>50</sup> As to politics, its insulation “from religion should be vigorously pursued through appropriate structural changes in governmental decision-making processes.” All of this is to ensure an impartial and neutral government.

A Press Statement by a group of ABU lecturers that constitutes Appendix 1 in Volume 1 has been appropriated by CAN by attaching it as an appendix to the above CAN Release of 1987. It, too, talks in the same breath of “the secular nature of the Nigerian state and its duty to protect the right of every one to practice his own religion without any hindrance.” In the context of the Kafanchan fracas, the lecturers call upon the government “to shed all ambiguities and hesitation, and to declare and reaffirm that the Nigerian

State is secular and one of its most fundamental responsibilities is to protect the right of every citizen and resident to practice the religion of their choice.”

Elsewhere, CAN warns in a similar vein: “Nobody should think or attempt to Islamise or Christianise Nigeria. Nigeria must remain a secular state where there is freedom of worship for every one (no matter his faith) and where the Government must not do anything to favour any religion. The Government must be neutral.”<sup>51</sup> After the 1992 Zangon-Kataf riots,<sup>52</sup> CAN repeated its stand: “Nigeria should restate its resolve as a true secular state where religion does not rear its ugly head and no ethnic group is dominated to the point of being crushed to death.” A secular setup would mean, among other things, that no government agency would be dominated by one religion or ethnic group. As it was, CAN declared, meetings of government security agencies may as well be held in mosques!<sup>53</sup>

CAN has many state and local branches as well as women and youth groups. Frequently branches at various levels enter the fray. In the early '90s, Jabanni Mambula, in his capacity as chairman of the Plateau State chapter, wrote in a letter to the Plateau State Government during the transition to civilian rule that was in process at the time, that Christians “shall continue to practice our religion as guaranteed in the constitution. The secularity of this nation must be maintained as there is no provision for a state religion.”<sup>54</sup>

CAN has a youth wing known as “National Youth CAN.” It similarly affirmed that Nigeria’s secular status is all about religious freedom. According to the youth wing, the constitution states that “Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in a community with others and in public or in private), to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, preaching, practice and observance.”

Furthermore, “The Government of the Federal or State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion.” It “guarantees the rights and freedom of individuals to practise and to observe their religious obligations without hindrance from citizens holding other views.” “Therefore, direct or indirect promotion of one religion by the state is a breach of the constitution and a plot against the country.” It is also a breach of secularity.<sup>55</sup>

The CAN position is shared by almost all Christian bodies. The Fellowship of the Churches of Christ, another ecumenical body, better known by its Hausa acronym TEKAN, and an active member of CAN, had a Political Commission that submitted a memorandum to the Federal Constitution Review Committee. The Commission summarized its intention thus: “Our contribution is to support and emphasize that only strict adherence to the secular structure of the constitution can save this country from disaster.” It offers an answer to the question, “Why keep Nigeria secular?” Its answer comes in the form of a wide-ranging discussion about restrictions on government that are based on the fact that God has created us with free minds. This leads logically to abhorrence of “any restriction on religious freedom.” Hence the Church “throughout the ages” has rejected all attempts on the part of rulers to control the faith of their citizens.<sup>56</sup> The practice of reserving government appointments for adherents of only one religion deprives followers of other religions of their rights and “tends only to corrupt the practice of the religion it is meant to promote.” Referring to the Caesar story in Matthew 22:21 and parallel passages, the report restricts government authority to “the temporal” and denies it authority “on matters spiritual,” thus resorting to the classic dualistic interpretation of the passage. The positive functions of government are to promote justice, liberty and the general welfare as well as guaranteeing equal opportunity in the various sectors and free access to public services. It is with all this in mind that “we wholeheartedly agree with President Babangida that the

secularity of the state must be maintained. It is therefore necessary that we develop a clear definition of the secular state.” The memo then suggests that Section 10 of the constitution be revised to promote a secular state by reading, “The state shall not, by action or inaction, enact a law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting its free exercise.” It then supports this recommendation with a statement from a body known as the Aniagolu Tribunal: “Above all, governments must refrain totally from exhibiting any attitude of special patronage or show of preference or favour to any particular religious group or leader. We are of the opinion that in so doing, one of the proclaimed sources of bitterness would be removed.”<sup>57</sup> I am not so sure that the above constitutes “a clear definition,” but that is how TEKAN presents it.

Another part of the constitution needing editing was the provision that made government responsible for ensuring that “there are adequate facilities for leisure and for social, religious and cultural life.” The word “religious” should be deleted, for this provision “has encouraged governments to support the building of mosques with public money.” It is urged that it be made “unconstitutional for anyone to build a place of worship in a government institution. No public money should be used for the furtherance of any particular religion. The government must stay out of religious matters.”<sup>58</sup>

We have met Mambula in his capacity as the chair of Plateau State CAN. His main position was actually that of General Secretary of TEKAN. In that capacity he once addressed a “meeting of distinguished elders and religious leaders.” After reciting a long litany of Christian complaints against the government and Muslims, he recommended that “The Government should strictly administer this nation as in the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion, secularity of the State, quota system in the appointment of top posts in the Government by merit.” Furthermore, the government “should stay clear from indulging in religious affairs.”<sup>59</sup>

More recently, TEKAN is still making the same demands for what has generally been considered secularity, but is no longer using the term as freely. In the annual communique issued in 2001, it refers to Nigeria as “pluralistic” and calls upon the government “to take measures to ensure that the freedom of conscience and religion as well as the non-adoption of state religion by any component of the country guaranteed by the 1999 Constitution is strictly adhered to.”<sup>60</sup>

The Roman Catholics blow the same trumpet. The former Archbishop but now Cardinal Okogie, president of both the Nigerian Catholic Bishops Conference as well as former long-time president of the national CAN, expressed himself frequently on the subject. “Religion is not the business of government,” he declared. It is not a political matter that should be of interest to the government. Any reasonable government should and, in fact, must keep completely away from religion. They should stay clear.”<sup>61</sup> At another time, he explained that a secular arrangement means that if you are in government authority, you “forget about your religion because it is a private affair between you and your God. If you want to bring religion in, let it be after office hours.”<sup>62</sup> In another context, he suggests that “If we can forget and sink our religious differences, this nation will be a better place.”<sup>63</sup> Here secularity is equated with the privacy of religion that makes it inappropriate for applying it in government service.

Then Bishop, but now Archbishop, John Onaiyekan suggested that prior to the debate on secularity, Nigerian Christians had “taken for granted that the state was ruled according to God’s will, and that religious authorities were the authentic interpreters of this will which the temporal rulers had to obey.” The secular approach was to move the state over to a situation where “the temporal, secular ruler, enjoyed full autonomy as a ruler with no control from religious or spiritual authorities.”<sup>64</sup> Secularity here appears to mean a state independent from religious authorities or structures, not from religion itself or from God Himself.

Kukah has concluded that the entire debate over secularity is a “very mundane exercise.” Above everything else, it is a “debate over the size of crumbs from the master’s table.” That is to say, its concern is mainly over the allocation of government resources. I am not sure just who the potential recipients in Kukah’s scheme would be—religious bodies or people who manipulate those bodies?<sup>65</sup> Elsewhere, Kukah insists that this debate about secularity is “not a debate about religion, faith or morals. It is about power...” We deceive ourselves if we think “that those who reject the secularity of the state are doing so because they love their faith and wish to defend it. No. It is the privileges that accrue to them that are being protected. If people’s mobility in the bureaucracy, politics and economics are dependent on their religious or ethnic persuasion, then they must defend that religious platform.”<sup>66</sup> Kukah realizes that secular compartmentalization is very popular amongst Nigerian Christians, but he is doubtful whether this compartmentalization is realistic in the Nigerian context.<sup>67</sup>

Aguwa, another Catholic theologian, traces the beginning of state secularity to European humanism. Europe rejected “the tradition of blending religion with other social institutions.” It resulted in “diminished religious dogmatism and intolerance.” Aguwa finds it a useful concept for Nigeria and other countries with frequent religious conflicts, intolerance, pluralism and “dichotomy based on politicization of religion.” He wrote his monograph precisely to strongly affirm “the need of upholding secularity” in Nigeria. He insists that “one of the effective means of realizing religious harmony and checking increasing dichotomy is through government’s neutrality in matters of religion. By so doing the country may eventually learn to separate religion from politics.” This “secularity forbids the state to adopt any religion or show official favour to any.”<sup>68</sup> The famous statement in Section 10 of the constitution that “the Government of the federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as State Religion,” is in effect a proclamation of Nigeria as

*a secular state and means that it has no religion of its own and it refrains from discrimination on ground of religion. Neither religious indifferentism nor secularisation is insinuated. It would need anything but political tact and wisdom to sweep such provisions underfoot, flagrantly tilt government interest in favour of one religion and subject the existing fragile north-south or Muslim-Christian balance to risk, the very thing the constitution intended to avert. Government support and assistance in the fulfillment of religious duties, such as pilgrimages or building of churches or mosques, must always reckon with the risk of compromising the constitution as well as putting into doubt government neutrality.*<sup>69</sup>

Aguwa's perspective is summarized by U. D. Anyanwu, author of the foreword in Aguwa's monograph. For Nigeria to be viable, governments "should ensure respect for the constitutional provision that the government of a state shall not adopt any religion as state religion and that, as a secular state, it has no religion of its own and it refrains from discrimination on grounds of religion." Aguwa "advocates the neutrality of government in religious matters [and] draws attention to [the] disintegrative and destructive influences of government's support for religious dichotomy." The government will "have to make the necessary option in favour of state secularity."<sup>70</sup>

With the co-operation of colleagues, Jacob Tsado wrote an article in 1987 comprised of interviews with a number of Christian leaders that is found in Appendix 3.<sup>71</sup> A number of common themes run through the article, some of which will be mentioned under different headings in this chapter. They are basically all expressions of the concept "secularity" as Christians advocate it. Though there is little in the way of clear definition, the totality of the interviews presents a pretty clear picture of it. The basic components of the largely unspoken definition include:

- (1) The need for clear religious neutrality on the part of the government. Other terms used here include “referee” and “impartiality.”
- (2) No imposition of any religion by government, but complete freedom to choose, practice and convert to any religion.
- (3) No mixing of religion with government. Need for clear demarcation.
- (4) No mixing of religion with politics and vice versa.
- (5) A kind of compartmentalization or dualism between religion and the areas of government and politics.
- (6) The Caesar-God formula of Matthew 22:21 and parallel passages.
- (7) Promotion of religious harmony and mutual respect, justice, equality, etc., by the government.
- (8) Religion as a private affair.

This package of ideas is the common inheritance of most Nigerian Christians.

One of the architects of the standard Christian view is the late Wilson Sabiya, whom you may remember as the Lutheran Christian crusader from Monograph 3.<sup>72</sup> Falola describes him as “one of the heroes of the anti-sharia controversy,”<sup>73</sup> while I have dedicated this monograph to him as a “hero of the faith.” Sabiya “recommends”—actually, demands—

*that since Nigeria has declared herself a secular state, she has no business establishing, appointing and financing religious institutions to enforce sectarian morals. Each religion, under the provision of Freedom of Religion, can establish such institutions at their own expense. If the government involves herself, how can she intervene when such institutions use religion to perpetrate injustice? It is a gross injustice to burden a tax-*

*payer with the expense of an institution from which he does not benefit*

and which “also is inimical and spiteful to him.” Sabiya then goes on to indicate ways in which Islam, through the court system, has been oppressing non-Muslims. “It is criminal,” he declares, to “be forced to pay tribute for the protection, application, promotion and enforcement of Islam. We have had enough of this crime. We want to be free and we will go to any extent to gain that freedom.” That freedom must take the shape of secular separation of Church and state.<sup>74</sup>

Sabiya was a prolific writer and conference speaker during the period of the Constituent Assembly of the 1970s. In another 1978 lecture,<sup>75</sup> he quoted M. N. Elechi, a member of the Assembly: “A secular state is one which allows all forms of religion to coexist without any of them being the religion of the entire country.” Sabiya continues, “What the secularists are saying is that the state should not adopt any religion. There should only be freedom of religion. The state should keep clear of involvement in religion.” “The key doctrine of democracy is that laws are impartial and impersonal. A democratic state cannot be expected to enforce rules based on personal religious scruples.”<sup>76</sup> This, Sabiya comments, is “the very thing sharia refuses to admit.” “In other words, the idea of the secular state means all religions are entitled to equality of treatment.”

## ▲ SECULARITY AND THE CONSTITUTION —————

Christians often argue for secularity on basis of the constitution. Many are aware that the term or its derivatives are not found explicitly in the document, but find it implied. As Ilesanmi put it, “Although in none of the Federal Constitutions has this concept ever been explicitly used,” it has generally been understood to mean “the constitutional provision for a functional separation of

religion and state.”<sup>77</sup> From there Christians go on to argue as if the notion were clearly affirmed. CAN, for example, declared, “We stand by and vigorously defend the secularity of the Nigerian state as implied in the 1979 constitution and its Draft Revision going on in the Constituent Assembly.”<sup>78</sup> The foreign Christian press, not always aware of local nuances and listening to only one side of the “debate,” simply assumes that Nigeria’s constitution has declared “a secular system of government.”<sup>79</sup>

Ever since 1977, there have been various versions of constitutions and draft constitutions so that it is difficult to keep them straight. Adeolu Adegbola, one of the early southern participants in the discussion, was not so sure about the clarity of the crucial 1977 draft constitution. The statement in the draft about religion, he pointed out, “has so many meanings and therefore can be said to be meaningless for our situation. It would have been accurate to describe it as the most contradicted statement up and down the draft. Lawyers can have a field day contending what it is supposed to mean...” Besides, he warned, a constitution is not all that crucial, for any totalitarian President can overrule it.<sup>80</sup>

Matthew Kukah is also hesitant on the constitutional score. He wrote, “We have been building a so-called secular state on the sands of self-deception. How did we ever come to the belief that Nigeria is a secular state? Anyone who would dare legislate against religion in Nigeria is not likely to live.” The nation can only rely on the constitution, but its provision for religion is “extremely vague.” Section 10 simply states, “The government of the federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as the State religion.” And “even assuming that secularity of the Nigerian state has constitutional backing, what really does this mean?” Christians may interpret this statement to mean “secular,” but Muslims have raised objections to this term. To them it means a godless state. The term “secular” or any derivatives are not found in the constitution.<sup>81</sup> Kukah passes on to us Bola Ige’s explanation for the reason of this absence.

The late Bola Ige, a Christian Yoruba, was a born leader. He was leader in the Student Christian Movement and was internationally active through the World Council of Churches. He was at one time Governor of Oyo State and ended his journey as the nation's Attorney General and Minister of Justice. He was murdered in his house while occupying that position, a case that, for some mysterious reason, has gotten stuck in the courts. Along the way, he served on the Constituent Assembly of the 1970s. In the latter capacity he explained what happened at the Assembly: "It was suggested that Nigeria should be a secular state. Immediately our Muslim colleagues heard this, they raised objections, saying a secular state is a godless state. In the course of the hot debate the members had on this, the word *secular* had to be deleted."<sup>82</sup>

As to the major 1978 draft constitution, according to Onaiyekan, it did indeed state that "Nigeria shall be a secular state." The authors of that draft explained that the term meant "Nigeria shall not be ruled by its government in terms of any religion." However, many members of the Assembly—mostly Muslims, according to reports—objected that the term can also mean "the government of Nigeria will be godless." The compromise reached was to replace the term with "the famous statement in...the 1979 constitution which says, 'The government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion.'" While the statement "contains the spirit of what was meant by a secular state...it excludes any interpretation of secularism in any godless direction." It left open the question that became important later: "When does a particular action of government constitute adopting a religion as a 'state religion?'"<sup>83</sup>

David Ihenacho agrees with Auwalu Yadudu that, in distinction from the 1979 constitution, the 1999 version

*does not specifically use the word "secular state" to describe the Nigerian polity. It only says that Nigeria shall not adopt a state*

*religion. In other words, the constitution states that Nigeria shall be independent of all religions. It seems very clear and unambiguous in sociology and political science that a state that is independent of religions is a secular state. There is hardly any other way to describe such a state than to call it a secular state.*<sup>84</sup>

Joseph Bamigboye, in an address to theological students, disregards the fact that the constitution does not use the term. He simply assumes it intends secularity. “In emphasising Nigeria’s secularity, Section 10 of the Constitution provides: ‘Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief.’” In view of strong Muslim denial of the constitution’s provision for secularism, that is sloppy work for a lawyer.<sup>85</sup>

### ▲ MULTI-RELIGION, SECULARITY, PLURALISM —

Muslims, as explained in Monograph 4, strongly prefer the idea of Nigeria as a multi-religious country rather than secular. For them it is an important difference. In fact, the two are seen as opposites. It is matter of either/or. Various Christian spokesmen favour the concept of “multi-religion” as well, though not in opposition so much as synonymous. In one of her communiqués, CAN embraces both terms: “We understand secularity in the Nigerian Constitution to mean that in a multi-religious society, the state and the government must not adopt any religion as state religion, nor favour any one religion through overt or covert acts.”<sup>86</sup> Obviously, the concept is acceptable to CAN and can be used in tandem with secularity. Similarly, Mike Ikhariale describes Nigerian society as “multi-religious,” while simultaneously advocating secularity with respect to the constitution.<sup>87</sup>

For Habila Istifanus there is no contradiction either. He easily moves from the one to the other. Generalizing the Nigerian

Christian stance, he states, “The position of Christians is that, because of our multi-religious nature, there is a need to call for a secular state.” In fact, for Istifanus, religious pluralism, which to him is synonymous with multi-religion, is a basic given for the country.

*Religious pluralism [remember now: it is the same as multi-religion] is the principle that people of different religious groups could live together in harmony. It implies tolerating other religious confessions. It boils down to our situation in Nigeria to state that our issue in Nigeria is not trying to get rid of one religious group, but to find ways how we can live together, work and develop our country together despite the diverse religious confessions. We are not able to turn away our face from the fact that there are many religious groups in our society.*

For Istifanus, the two terms go together. Considering secularism is necessary because of the multi-religious situation. Multi-religion is an unquestionable fact; secularism is the questionable concept for him, as we have already seen in an earlier discussion. He asks, “Secularism: an option for the religious pluralistic nature of our society?” And again, “What do Christians mean when they are talking of a secular state in a multi-religious state like Nigeria?”<sup>88</sup>

“Multi-religion” and “pluralism” are frequently thought of as synonyms. The Christian judge Massoud Oredola, in an article with many references to the two religions, constantly uses the term “pluralism” and its derivatives to describe Nigerian society, while using “multi-religion” only occasionally. It is interesting that, though he discusses the constitution and religious freedom, he never once uses “secularism” or related terms. That, for a Nigerian Christian, is unusual.<sup>89</sup>

Onaiyekan rejects the idea of multi-religion, at least as far as the constitution is concerned. The call by some to scrap paragraph

10 in the constitution and to declare Nigeria a multi-religious state “would only compound the problem,” he advised. His reasons?

*The example and experience of other nations that have tried to practice the multi-religious model is not encouraging at all. You would have to determine which religions are to be given official status and what amount of support would each have to enjoy. Within the Nigerian context, you can imagine what a great confusion and controversy that will lead to. It is my strong conviction that the formulation of paragraph ten is still the right one, even though we may need to specify a bit more what it exactly entails.<sup>90</sup>*

## ▲ THEOCRACY REJECTED

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Christians sometimes accuse Muslims of wanting to establish a theocracy. Caleb Ahima, the current TEKAN General Secretary, asserts it plainly without any attempt to defend the charge: “Recent fundamentalist movements in northern Nigeria seek to bring about a revival of the theocratic state.”<sup>91</sup> Tsado, in his interview with Christian leaders that constitutes Appendix 3, raised the question, “How realistic is it for us to attempt a theocracy in Nigeria, whether Islamic or Christian?” Ishaya Audu suggested that it would be the quickest way to destroy the country. He expressed surprise to find “supposedly responsible Muslim leaders advocating theocracy.” Experience in various Muslim countries is that “no amount of theocracy would make for peace in any country.” Audu pretty well represented the entire group. Theocracy is the opposite of the separation of “religion and government” and of secularity. All the interviewees found it unrealistic. It has never been successful anywhere. Yet, “this is where the Muslims are pushing us to!” It will mean splitting the country. In fact, Obadiah Tebu asserts, this is the point of antithesis between the two religions, the point where they

are at loggerheads with each other. Christopher Abashiya warns that toying with theocracy amounts to playing with fire. Besides, according to Engineer Salifu, “there isn’t such a thing as a Christian [or Muslim] nation anyway.” “The Muslims might as well forget the idea. We should learn to stay and grow together.”

Mike Ikhariale recalls, as already stated earlier, that the expectation at the time of independence was that Nigeria “would be a secular republic and not a theocracy as some of our Taliban brothers are now imposing on us.”<sup>92</sup> U. D. Anyanwu, in his foreword to *Aguwa’s Religious Dichotomy in Nigerian Politics*, identifies this issue as Aguwa’s central concern. Both agree with Tebu: “The fundamental issue” is that of “secularity versus theocracy.” This is where the rubber hits the road. “It is an issue that deserves careful handling by scholars and others who value the ultimate emergence of a just and united Nigeria.”<sup>93</sup>

Ilesanmi declares “the logic of theocracy frighteningly simple.” Among his objections is his understanding that it leaves “little or no realm of common grace by which the affairs of everyday life may be ordered by people of different convictions.” While there is good reason to allow public space for religion, it should not be at the cost of a “dogmatic...authoritarian approach.”<sup>94</sup>

Chief Rotimi Williams, one of Nigeria’s legal luminaries and a member of the Constituent Assembly of the 1970s, explained that the object of the Assembly “was to work out a formula whereby all the peoples of Nigeria can live together in harmony.” Failure to maintain that solution, he insisted, will only lead to national frustration. “The way forward,” he added, “is to stick to that solution.” That solution is “a secular state in accordance with the provisions of our constitution. It cannot be otherwise, unless there is a forcible imposition of Islam on this country.” “The only way to build a united Nigeria is to explore ways of living together in one country with the liberty of every individual to practice and propagate the religion of his choice.”<sup>95</sup>

The big question is, of course, who is preventing that? Why does that have to be explored? With all parties talking democracy, such liberty should be natural. Where then is the roadblock and who is manning it?

### ▲ POSTSCRIPT QUOTES

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I end this chapter with a few random but relevant closing quotes.

*One principle is certainly operative: Muslims will not work out their destiny alone and in isolation. In no place in the country can they avoid interaction with non-Muslims, for the most part Christians, and that in a society which is not regulated by Christian principles but by secular cultural and market forces (Joseph Kenny, a Catholic scholar who spent most of his active years in Nigeria).<sup>96</sup>*

*Make no mistake about it: This is a secular country. When we say Nigeria is a secular state, it is the human beings that make it secular. We can all agree today to say Nigeria should no longer be a secular state. Nobody should force anybody to worship anything in a secular state (Fred Okoror and Clifford Ndujibe).<sup>97</sup>*

*Nigeria really needs to distinctly separate Islam and Christianity from the affairs of government. Matters of religion are very individually private matters. Religion has no place in governance... These [riots] are just distractions from the urgent work of fighting poverty... which is... the urgent work at hand. Spirituality, which is a personal and private matter, has become the camouflage and cover for political leadership that is bereft of useful and productive ideas. Nigeria's political class must stop covering their complete inep-*

*titude and volcanic capriciousness that is so frequently displayed by these vacuously depraved charlatans currently at the helm (P. Adujie).<sup>98</sup>*

*The notion of a secular state is not only a positive cultural value, but precisely the best remedy against secularism. For it allows religion to do its job properly, the job of ensuring that men and women never lose sight of their eternal destiny. It also allows religion to exercise that very positive role where necessary in restraining the state if it is tempted to overstep its proper limits and become a tyrant (J. J. White).<sup>99</sup>*

## ▲ NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> M. Kukah, *NS*, 10 Nov/93.

<sup>2</sup> *NN*, 6 Jul/78.

<sup>3</sup> *SS*, 27 Nov/77.

<sup>4</sup> Abari, *NS*, 15 Sep/77. P. Okpabi, *NS*, 7 Nov/77. *NS*, 16 Sep/77. J. Boer, 1979, p. 480; 1984, p. 143.

<sup>5</sup> It can be argued that this section amounts to overkill and without apparent direction. Remember that this information is also for the benefit of Muslims. I want to give them a complete picture of the range and intensity of Christian ideas on this score.

<sup>6</sup> S. Ilesanmi, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> *TC*, 6/88.

<sup>8</sup> M. Kukah, *NS*, 10 Nov/93.

<sup>9</sup> J. Onaiyekan, 21 June/2000, pp. 3, 6.

<sup>10</sup> J. Trimmingham, a famous Western scholar of Islam, makes a somewhat similar distinction (1980, p. 125).

<sup>11</sup> D. Byang, 1988, pp. 27-29.

<sup>12</sup> I concur with Lamin Sanneh's opinion that "it does not change very much to tinker with the notion and break it up into 'secularity,' 'secularism,' and 'the secular.'" L. Sanneh, 1997, p. 222.

<sup>13</sup> This material is treated in Monograph 3, Chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup> *TC*, 1/89, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> In Monograph 4 I indicate that throughout all these discussions most participants fail to distinguish these two, a failure that often results in lack of clarity.

<sup>16</sup> H. Istifanus, 1995, pp. 48-51.

<sup>17</sup> H. Istifanus, 1995, pp. 50-51.

<sup>18</sup> He may also have had me in mind. We had several discussions during which I critiqued the secular solution.

<sup>19</sup> D. Ihenacho, [www.gamji.com/NEWS1310.htm](http://www.gamji.com/NEWS1310.htm), pp. 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> Sulaiman features prominently in both vols. 2 and 4. See Appendix 5, vol. 4.

- <sup>21</sup> J. Kantiok, p. 298.
- <sup>22</sup> M. Aluko, 25 Dec/2002, p. 2. J. Boer, 3 Mar/2003.
- <sup>23</sup> Ben Murray-Bruce was CEO of Silverbird Production, the enterprise that hosted the event in Nigeria. He was at the same time the Director-General of the government-owned Nigerian Television Authority, allegedly “heavily promoting his private event ‘gratis’” (M. Aluko, 25 Dec/2002, p. 1).
- <sup>24</sup> M. Aluko, 25 Dec/2002, p. 6.
- <sup>25</sup> J. Boer, see entries in Bibliography and *Companion CD*.
- <sup>26</sup> J. Takaya, p. 120.
- <sup>27</sup> O. Adigwe, 2003.
- <sup>28</sup> M. Oredola, 25 Dec/99.
- <sup>29</sup> S. Olesanmi, pp. 25-26.
- <sup>30</sup> J. Takaya, p. 120.
- <sup>31</sup> J. Kantiok, pp. 408-410.
- <sup>32</sup> J. Takaya, pp. 118-120.
- <sup>33</sup> I. Musa, 22 Feb/2000.
- <sup>34</sup> D. Mang, 27 June/2001.
- <sup>35</sup> O. Onabu, 24 Jan/2003.
- <sup>36</sup> C. Coffie-Gyamfi, 17 Nov/2004.
- <sup>37</sup> M. Ene, [www.gamji.com/NEWS1247.htm](http://www.gamji.com/NEWS1247.htm).
- <sup>38</sup> President Obasanjo, 30 May/2003.
- <sup>39</sup> J. Adama, 18 Jan/2000.
- <sup>40</sup> *Newswatch*, 26 Apr/2004. Awolowo was one of Nigeria’s architects, a Christian and Premier of the former Western Region in Nigeria.
- <sup>41</sup> C. Onyekamuo, 27 Feb/2003.
- <sup>42</sup> E. A. Adegbola, 1977, p. 3. Appendix 6.
- <sup>43</sup> T. Falola, p. 76.
- <sup>44</sup> H. Istifanus, 1995, pp. 50-51, 54.
- <sup>45</sup> Kolawole, 5 Jan/2000.
- <sup>46</sup> M. Ikhariale, [www.gamji.com/NEWS1651.htm](http://www.gamji.com/NEWS1651.htm). Monograms 6 and 7 will examine whether or not these laws were or are as secular or free of religion as is often claimed. Some may be in for a surprise.

<sup>47</sup> NIPSS, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> That, of course, has always been secularism's classic affliction: blindness to its own faith-based partiality and to its own proud assumptions of the myths of neutrality, objectivity and universality.

<sup>49</sup> J. Boer, 2003, pp. 50-55.

<sup>50</sup> Such precautions are not very useful where names are often strong indications of both factors, as are body build, dress and even the English accent. Not all CAN members adhere to this policy. We will see below that the Pentecostals aggressively sought appointments for its shortlisted members.

<sup>51</sup> *Leadership*, p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> See J. Boer, 2003, pp. 55-63.

<sup>53</sup> CAN, 17 June/92. The suggestion is somewhat akin to the popular American saying that the Episcopalian (Anglican) Church is the Republican Party at prayer!

<sup>54</sup> Letter, 18 Nov/92.

<sup>55</sup> National Youth CAN, 1987, p. 16.

<sup>56</sup> Is it really necessary to point out the embarrassing inaccuracy of this claim?

<sup>57</sup> *Towards the Right Path*, pp. 45-47. For "the sources of bitterness" I refer you to Monograph 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Towards the Right Path*, p. 54.

<sup>59</sup> J. Mambula, 27 July/1991.

<sup>60</sup> TEKAN, Communique, 2001.

<sup>61</sup> *Guardian*, 20 Nov/88.

<sup>62</sup> M. Kukah, *Religion*, pp. 228, 249. He borrowed from an interview in *This Week*, Apr/87, p. 20.

<sup>63</sup> J. Tsado, *TC*, 5/87, p. 10.

<sup>64</sup> J. Onaiyekan, 1988, p.3. Quoted in M. Kukah, 1994, pp. 228, 249, endnote 82.

<sup>65</sup> M. Kukah, 1994, pp. 227-228, 243.

<sup>66</sup> M. Kukah, *NC*, 7 Jun/94; *NS*, 27 Nov/95.

<sup>67</sup> M. Kukah, *Religion*, p. 228.

<sup>68</sup> J. Aguwa, pp. 4-5, 23.

<sup>69</sup> J. Aguwa, p. 27. Quotation within the quote is from D. D. Basu, *Commentary on the Constitution of India*, vol. 2. Calcutta: Sarken, 1965, 5th ed., p. 155.

<sup>70</sup> J. Aguwa, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> J. Tsado, *TC*, 5/87.

<sup>72</sup> After a prolonged illness, Sabiya passed away in April, 2004, at the very time I was working on this chapter. I have dedicated this volume to his memory.

<sup>73</sup> T. Falola, p. 82.

<sup>74</sup> W. Sabiya, "The Draft Constitution," pp. 5-6. Appendix 4.

<sup>75</sup> W. Sabiya, "The Constituent Assembly," p. 6. Appendix Monograph 6.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted from G. C. Kozlouski, *The Islamic Quarterly*, Jul-Dec/74, pp. 36-37.

<sup>77</sup> S. Ilesanmi, pp. 25-26.

<sup>78</sup> CAN, *TC*, 1/89, p. 22.

<sup>79</sup> *CC*, 14 Jan/2001.

<sup>80</sup> E. A. Adegbola, 1977, p. 5. Appendix 6.

<sup>81</sup> M. Kukah, NS, 10 Nov/93; NC, 7 June/94. The Muslims' own side of this story is explained in Monograph 4.

<sup>82</sup> M. Kukah, NS, 10 Nov/93; 1993, p. 228. Quoted from Bola Ige, "Religious Freedom and the Nigerian Constitution," in P. Clarke and I. Linden, *Islam in Modern Nigeria* (Kaiser: Grunewald, 1984), p. 177. For another summary see Falola, pp. 75-76.

<sup>83</sup> J. Onaiyekan, 21 June/2000, p. 4. Appendix 1.

<sup>84</sup> D. Ihenacho, pp. 5-6.

<sup>85</sup> J. Bamigboye, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> *TC*, 1/89, p. 22.

<sup>87</sup> M. Ikhariale, p. 4.

<sup>88</sup> H. Istifanus, 1995, p. 50. Appendix 5.

<sup>89</sup> M. Oredola, 25 Dec/99.

<sup>90</sup> J. Onaiyekan, 21 June/2000, p. 6. Appendix 1. It is regrettable that he does not name the countries whose experiences discourage him. Is he aware of the unique pluralistic Dutch situation that has recently been upheld as a possible example for secular Canada? See D. Todd, 2 Aug/2003.

<sup>91</sup> C. Ahima, p. 15.

<sup>92</sup> M. Ikhariale, p. 4.

<sup>93</sup> J. Aguwa, p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> S. Ilesanmi, p. 120.

<sup>95</sup> R. Williams, 2000, p. 29.

<sup>96</sup> J. Kenny, p. 10.

<sup>97</sup> F. Okoror and C. Ndujibe, 9 Jan/2004.

<sup>98</sup> P. Adujie, [www.gamji.com/amviews316.htm](http://www.gamji.com/amviews316.htm).

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in M. Kukah, 1993, p. 243, from J. J. White, "Secularity, Secularism and the Modern State." CATHAN Seminar in Jos, p. 7.

