

PLATEAU STATE AND COCIN CHURCH

Can you imagine that when Dr. Karl Kumm and his contemporaries came to the North of Nigeria in 1904, they were explicitly instructed by Lord Lugard not to evangelize the Muslims but to go to the Pagan tribes down the hills. These same Pagan tribes received the Gospel and brought education, hospitals, rural development and total civilization to the North. Today, they are [considered] enemies enough to be wiped out. How can we accept this?

Alexander Lar, 2004¹

The [Muslim] North appears to have a messiah complex in the nation's political life, always thinking: we alone can salvage Nigeria. Indeed, the Muslim North sees ruling Nigeria as their birth right.

Yiljap Abraham, 2006²

Plateau State is not only geographically central in Nigeria, but also in the ongoing struggle between Christians and Muslims. It is one of the two northern states in which Christians are in undis-

puted majority,³ the other being Benue State. This has become more clearly the case since Nasarawa State was carved out of Plateau to establish a new state that was to be dominated by Muslims, even if their majority has not been established.⁴ In Plateau, that move greatly changed the proportion of Muslims to Christians in favour of the latter. As important as it is, Benue State has for a number of reasons not been involved in the Christian-Muslim struggle as has Plateau, though it undoubtedly is also a target for Islamization. Though Plateau is no sharia state, there has been much turmoil there that most Christians and, certainly, COCIN, insist on closely associating with the struggle for sharia.

Plateau is an important Christian centre, at least partially due to its central location and its favourable Mediterranean climate. It is the headquarters of several denominations, especially COCIN and ECWA, and of other Christian organizations. It has recently become an archbishopric for both the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. It is the base of at least three major seminaries. While these and other denominations have a significant presence in the state, especially in the capital, Jos, none is more closely identified with the state than COCIN.

The relationship of COCIN to the State Government and other authorities is almost a Nigerian form of *Corpus Christianum*. The congratulations that the Gbong Gwom, the Chief of Jos, and *LB* extended to each other almost turned them into a mutual admiration society.⁵ *On behalf of the Plateau State Ministry of Justice*, the Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Barrister Dakas C. Dakas, published a paid ad in *LB*, congratulating her for her first anniversary. His message included the sentence, “Our darling newspaper has done us proud.”⁶

Governor Dariye’s gubernatorial career must surely be the most embattled, attracting international attention and generating international policing, what with British accusations of corruption and with two attempted impeachments in his resume.

TCNN is a theological institution closely related to COCIN, whose first Nigerian principal was Dr. Musa Gotom, later to become COCIN President. It had invited Dariye as their guest of honour at the 2007 graduation ceremonies. They could hardly have chosen a more controversial figure. He himself probably realized the dangerous nature of such exposure: He sent commissioner Daniel Danjang to represent him, according to Ibrahim Abdulsalami, but another reliable informant tells me that Valentina Dariye, the Governor's wife, spoke and sang.⁷ That invitation exposed TCNN to some potentially very ugly associations. Though history has shown that such close relationship of the church to civil authorities is not generally advisable, in the most complicated context of Plateau State with a perceived common enemy there may well be a need for this kind of unusual and close mutual support. I hesitate to criticise at arm's length, but I do have my misgivings. Information from friends⁸ about Governor-Elect Da Jonah David Jang and his demonstrated Christian commitment during and after his tenure as Military Governor give some hope for an improved Plateau future. May he understand how to embrace all of Plateau's people and spend their money on *them!* Him being a COCIN pastor, the stage is all set for a new love affair.

This Church regards itself as the spiritual guardian for the entire state, its major Christian voice and the most vociferous opponent to the process of Islamization. It sees itself as *the* Northern bastion against Muslim plans to take over the state and from there, the nation. Though it is not a sharia state, the threat of sharia is uppermost in its mind.

Other well-known Christian organizations also have a strong presence in Plateau. Though they do receive some attention of their own throughout this book, they are dominated by COCIN. TEKAN has its own independent office next door to that of the COCIN headquarters, while its current President is Musa Gotom,

a retired COCIN General Secretary and President. Its first Nigerian General Secretary, A. W. Machunga, is also a COCIN member. And COCIN was the first and possibly still is the only denomination that is member of both the older Christian Council of Nigeria and the newer Evangelical Fellowship of Nigeria. Many of the shakers and movers in the state featured in this chapter are/were COCIN members, including former governors, the late Joseph Gomwalk (Military), Solomon Lar and Samuel Bitrus Atukum (Military), as well as the recent Joshua Dariye and the incumbent Jonah David Jang. At the 2003 election, all three competing gubernatorial candidates for the state were COCIN members. In the 2007 election campaign, as a friend wrote to me, “The prominent ones are COCIN members.” After the elections, the same friend wrote that Jonah Jang, the new Governor, is a COCIN pastor as well as former military governor of two Northern States. Their common status as brothers in Christ, members of one denomination even, seems not always to have affected the more recent campaigns! It is mostly politics at its rawest. According to friends, Jang has given people reason for hope, apparently playing to a different drummer! *Allah dai ya ba mu nasara—tare!*

Another friend close to the power brokers of the state, tells of the corruption and the role of money in all of this. He wrote, “Some of us bow our heads in shame for Christianity. Huge amounts of money were used.” About Governor Dariye and his impeachments—note the plural—he wrote, “He has returned as governor for the month of April. What a mockery that the person who jumped bail and mishandled many things is still the Number One citizen of the State.” Everyone involved in the impeachment shenanigans was making money. Those who had supported his first return, received huge amounts. So, those who worked on getting a replacement on the throne similarly expected their largesse from the latter!

Money poses as a god, worshipped by a good majority of the people. The Christian conscience is very weak. The bottom line is that the states governed by Muslim governors were on the whole better visibly developed than Plateau, Adamawa, Taraba and Benue, which were headed by so-called Christians, some of whom are known to regularly consult the malams and fortune tellers. We need prayer for repentance.

Obviously, COCIN is faced with an unprecedented and formidable pastoral challenge with her political sons! *It is her time to shine.*

In 2004, Plateau State CAN published a newsletter in which it emphasized the crucial role of Plateau State and its Christians. It is home to 3.2 million Christians, 95 percent of which are said to be indigenous with “well over 100 denominations.” It is regarded as “Nigeria’s Jerusalem.” “Because of the central role the State has played in coordinating Christian activities, locally and internationally, the perceived unity of the North, under the strong influence of the hegemonic Muslim Northern oligarchy, felt threatened by the stand of Christian Plateau in stalling their planned Islamization of the North and, by extension, Nigeria.” So, there is every reason to highlight this state and this church in the sharia imbroglio.

Until COCIN started publishing *The Lightbearer (LB)*, a magazine whose origin and role are explained in a separate section towards the end of this chapter, COCIN did not have an effective mouth-piece to express herself on a regular basis. Neither did many COCIN members write books on the subject of sharia. During the BZ days, there was the lone Bitrus Guwal, who is introduced below. For the AZ or new sharia era there is Justin J. La-Nibetle, Sr., who wrote a small book about the current sharia situation, but in a spirit very similar to that of Guwal—hard hitting, “calling a spade a spade,”⁹ with seemingly considerable anger. Below, I devote a special section to him and describe him as a radical¹⁰ awareness builder.

A few housekeeping comments. First, since this chapter is devoted to Plateau State and COCIN, neither gets much attention in other chapters in this volume. The corollary is also true: The other states and churches have been adequately represented in the earlier general chapters. You will not read much about them here. Thirdly, those earlier chapters as well as earlier volumes in this series have provided more than enough information about the details of the Christian-Muslim struggle, so that in this chapter I can gloss over many details of the struggle as they pertain to Plateau and COCIN. By now the dynamics are well-known to you.

Finally, it must be clearly understood that the COCIN voices in this chapter do not always represent the official voice of COCIN itself. Most of them are COCIN members who have been shaped by their church. They often represent its spirit rather than official position. This holds even for the authors of articles in *LB*. In a heated telephone conversation with Governor Joshua Dariye, Yiljap Abraham assured him that President Yamsat of COCIN “has nothing to do with what I write in the newspaper. What I have written is entirely my own conviction, not the official position of COCIN.” “When COCIN wants to say anything, it will be the COCIN President that will say it, not me. My articles reflect my personal opinions.”¹¹

So, though not a member of COCIN, may I as a critical friend and admirer welcome you to its world. Currently that is a world of courage, determination and exasperation.

▲ COCIN PRESIDENT LAR ON SHARIA —————

Sharia, Muslims plans for Nigeria and associated concepts underlie the Plateau struggle during this first decade of the 21st century. So I begin with a statement by former President Alexander Lar on sharia as he gave it during an interview with Godfrey Banwat:

Sharia, I think that it is abnormal. I cannot see anybody

bringing something like sharia to the Constitution, which takes care of all of us. If I go now as a church to establish the canon law, that will question the authority of the Constitution. So I feel that each of us should abide by the Constitution and law of this country [rather] than the law of religion. [Public law and the Constitution] should be silent in the mosque or in the church, but not in public. That is how I see sharia. It is up to the government whether it will allow anything to supersede the Constitution, because sharia is very hard on its victims. It should be practised quietly within the religious environment, but not in the country. We have suffered, the burning of our churches, the killing of our people and denying our people to learn in educational institutions in Muslim environments.

The FG should act forcefully, because I think it is democracy that is bringing this type of sharia law in some Northern states. It is not a religious sharia. How would a governor establish sharia, not an imam or sheikh, but an elected governor? Do the political parties have that manifesto? If the political party has the manifesto that once you are elected you can then establish sharia.¹²

▲ LATENT HOSTILITY AND POLITICAL CORRECTNESS ON THE PLATEAU —————

Plateau was long upheld as a shining example of peace between the two religions. It boasted a peaceful reputation. Alas, peace was only a veneer. Beneath the surface a lot of scheming and jockeying for position was going on most of the time. Discussions in the Jos-based *Nigeria Standard (NS)* during the CA of the 1970s already showed the underlying cracks. Probably no one described the situation more bluntly than did Bitrus Guwal, who introduced himself as a member of the COCIN, Tudun Wada, Jos. Already in 1988,

in the Hausa language, he invited people to carefully read his brochure “so they understand the deceit to which Muslims are treating the country.”¹³ The main body of his brochure consists of copies of newspaper articles, mostly from 1987 issues of the Hausa newspaper *Amana*. According to Guwal, these articles showed that Muslims had regard for no law, if not sharia, and for no religion, if not Islam. They were not satisfied that the government pays their judges, called Grand *Khadis*, while Christians do not enjoy such a benefit. They were doing all they could to impose sharia on the land, “a sharia that comes from man, not from God, for the law of God is gracious,”¹⁴ something that cannot be said of sharia. The real sharia came to us via Moses from Sinai, according to Deuteronomy 5. In that law all the things that Muslims regularly do are forbidden—“oppression, jealousy, murder, false witness, etc.”¹⁵

Guwal kept telling his readers to wake up from their slumber. If they did not, they would wake up one morning to find that the country has been taken out of the hands of Christians through clever schemes like the Muslims employed during the appointments of members of the 1987 CA. A Christian was appointed chairman so that when the sharia was passed, Muslims could say it was with the agreement of Christians. This would make it difficult for Christians to oppose sharia. Christians must be awake to such maneuvers and resist them.

More than a decade before Governor Sani made his debut, Guwal warned that Muslims were playing all kinds of tricks on Christians. They made sure that Muslims held all the strategic positions in the government. Then, when something was about to happen, their representatives in key places would secretly call to assure them Government would support them. Those who were working on establishing the sharia wanted to impose heavy burdens on Christians without lifting a finger to help them. Guwal declared, “We Christians will not accept the Muslim sharia, for the real

sharia comes from God.” Because of all this, Christians “have undercut the Muslim sharia and cast it aside, for it is totally useless for them.”¹⁶ The first two CAs had done much to alert Christians to the challenge before them. Guwal merely voiced publicly the politically incorrect that constituted the reality of the day beneath the veneer of Plateau peace.

It does not appear Guwal was successful in his attempt to bring things into the open. Plateau stuck to its politically correct policy in its interpretation of Christian-Muslim developments in the country as a whole and within its own borders. Its ploy appeared successful. The violence that racked many other Northern states bypassed it. However, there were the tensions typical of any mixed community of indigenes and settlers and of Christians and Muslims. Everyone was aware of the tension, but political correctness demanded that people pretend peace, while behind the scenes the contending parties were trying to outguess, out-whit and out-manuever each other.

By the time Charles Dah expressed it, the damage was done. “Sometimes we pretend as if everything is alright by suppressing and denying the reality of crises. This poses a great danger to our existence. At other times, we overestimate and overreact to crises, which may lead to fanaticism. Crises are not bad per se, but when they are left unresolved, they become a problem leading to violence.”¹⁷ In other words, ostrich politics usually leads to destruction—as it did with a vengeance in Plateau.

Throughout this series I have drawn attention to the anger that has poisoned the atmosphere between Christians and Muslims for years. That is one of the obstacles to any *serious* attempt to arrive at some solution. This is not just my observation. Apart from the fact that the documents literally scream it out so that no one can deny the fact, Christians admit it. David Panchen of Jos writes, “Truth was scarce in the land. The only commodity available was hate. It has been a conflagration that has kept feeding on itself. What has con-

tinued to ignite it was the fact that we had not heard those involved speak out their minds.” “Thick walls of hatred had been built.”

The prevalence of political correctness prevented uncertain and fearful governments from speaking the truth, from pointing out the real culprits and apprehending them, from announcing the findings of the dozens of white papers that have never been released. Many are the voices calling for their release. Yamsat of COCIN complained, “There have been several recommendations by judicial commissions and committees to safeguard future recurrences of disorder, but governments have come and gone, turning a deaf ear to these recommendations.”¹⁸ CAN has “called on the Plateau Government to release the various reports of commissions of inquiry into the crisis and ensure that those indicted by the reports were punished.”¹⁹ Jeremiah Useni, a retired general, former Minister of the Federal Capital Territory and a Plateau indigene, observed that “the inability and unwillingness of government to release the white papers on the earlier crises had constituted a bane in the search for lasting peace.” He asked, “Why does government set up committee upon committee and their reports are never released and their recommendations never implemented? Government has not done right; there have been so many inquiries and peace committees. Government should release the white papers and make use of the recommendations. These reports must come out before lasting peace would be achieved.”²⁰ Everyone would greet this demand with a loud “Amen,” but is it not astounding that a man of Useni’s standing would not know the reason or that he was helpless?

The call of the “forum of former Plateau State Governors” and other former highly placed functionaries for “the implementation of past reports of commissions of enquiries” is even more astounding. Are not they the ones who, at the state level, appointed these commissions, received their reports and then hid them?²¹ Panchen admitted that from the start of the violence “everyone knew who

the aggressor was. Those who think to the contrary are running away from the obvious. But that has always been the problem, that even though we know the source of the problem, we have shirked away from pointing to those who have continued to escalate the crises." Failure here is serious. According to Panchen, "We cannot pretend to be at peace with one another, if we are not able to tell each other what we have hidden for years."²²

An example of ostrich politics in the Plateau context, of hiding heads in the sand, is a communiqué issued by an Advocacy Workshop for Christian Women in Plateau State, held under the auspices of Inter-Gender on October 14, 2004. The communiqué states that these women believe that the recent conflicts in Plateau "have political and social origin." Again, the history of the conflicts can "be traced to the emergence of the military in politics."²³ No one doubts the roles played by political and social factors or that of the military. But most Christians, when they are free from the pressures of political correctness, will reject the women's exclusion of the religious factor, a major factor that will not go away by sweeping it under the carpet. Of course, the fact that the European Union (EU), with its strong secular mission, funds Inter-Gender, the sponsor of the conference, did not help. Secularism routinely resorts to political correctness in support of its tunnel vision. The overshadowing reality of EU funding would tend to encourage the conference sponsors to steer the event towards such political correctness. You would never want to call a religion to account, certainly not Islam. It could be offended!

Another failure due to political correctness occurred in November 2004. A conference of Christian and Muslim leaders was called in Kaduna. The violence in both Kano and Plateau were important motivations for calling it. Though in mixed conferences of this nature, Christian leaders often resort to political correctness, this time they made no bones about it: The "incessant violence that has claimed over 53,000 lives in the past four years" is

due to “the politics of religious exclusivism.” Of course, Muslims always complain about governmental favouritism in the other direction. So, the accusation could stand as long as no one filled in the details. The bluntness of Christians did not pierce the correctness barrier. Though they met “to explore ways of curtailing religious conflict,” they dispersed “with no major policy statement or political thrust aimed at ending Muslim-Christian religious clashes.”²⁴ These Christian leaders concurred with the Plateau mainstream opinion about religion being the basic cause of all this Plateau violence, but it tragically led nowhere as neither governments nor Muslims were prepared to admit the truth of this interpretation. The same sad old story: the triumph of political correctness, ostrich politics and deceit, leading to the dead end of violence, instead of a solution.

Part of the problem is the history of Jos as briefly outlined by the Catholic priest Cletus Gotan. He shows how colonialists designed the emerging city of Jos to accommodate various communities, including the Muslim Hausa, but deliberately left the indigenous population, then adherents of ATR but now mostly Christian, out of the picture. But the land belonged to those very indigenes! Here we have the seeds of the Jos problem: the struggle between indigene and settler, the fault lines of which coincide with ethnic and religious lines. As the city developed, the indigenous population increasingly developed fears of domination, loss of identity, participation and access, “lack of control of resources or power,” and, of course, rising resentment. The indigenes see themselves dominated by settlers, marginalized in their own land.

The descendants of the settlers are frustrated by the indigenes, who react by seeking to exclude them in turn.²⁵ During a three-day meeting in April 2005, COCIN leaders expressed

concern over the cries of marginalisation by Moslem leaders in the north with their threat of a Jihad if the Federal

Government did not reverse what they perceived as unfair distribution of national offices. According to Yamsat, the cry of marginalisation by the northern Moslem leaders was strange and provocative, especially as it was coming from the same people who are unrelenting in marginalising Christians, including their indigenes in Sokoto, Katsina, Kano, Kebbi, Jigawa, Yobe, Bauchi and Zamfara States. He accused them of treating Christians in those states as second class citizens in the land of their birth, warning that the threat of a Jihad was an uncivilised way of settling disagreements in a democratic setting in the 21st century.²⁶

In a speech on democracy, Pandang Yamsat, President of COCIN, spoke of human rights as God-given to minorities as well as majorities. "It is about giving everyone his or her rightful place." It is possible to "go too far with one's rights" when they are applied "to the detriment of others" or when they "infringe on the rights of others." And that is precisely the problem with sharia. "When Muslims in Christian-dominated states demand for their rights to worship and the same Muslims in Muslim-dominated states deny Christians these same rights, they are engineering disorder." It gets even worse. When "government has taken it upon itself to champion this kind of one-sided rights, it has ceased to be the agent of God and has declared itself a separate country with its own separate laws." Yamsat objects to an "over-emphasis in democracy on majority rights" at the expense of minorities. This practice creates sharia problems.²⁷ If you have read Volume 6, you will remember the Muslim insistence on being in the majority, for this status allegedly would give them the right to impose sharia.

Being Muslims as well, these settlers had even stronger reasons for wanting more control over the situation: They had a *jihad* to fight and a Grand Plan to fulfill. In Nigeria at least, mainstream Islam cannot long tolerate the status of minority, even less when

even that status is declining. Eventually the reality of the situation forced itself into the open. The veneer first cracked in 1994 and then again several times, until in 2001 there was no stopping the violence, destruction and killing.²⁸

The Southern press joined the dichotomy fracas in Plateau. According to Mohammed Haruna, the *Comet* commented that “the Plateau killings, thanks to democracy, merely exposed the contradictions in the region, whereby in years past, the ‘settlers’ got all the privileges, while the ‘aborigines’ got nothing.” This issue “has remained with us, because we have allowed two classes of people to exist, instead of uniting the community *ab initio* [from the beginning]. The settler class has retained all the privileges of the conqueror, while the aborigine class has been its hewers of wood and drawers of water. This contradiction is what democracy has enlarged.”²⁹

▲ JUSTIN LA-NIBETLE—AN AWARENESS BUILDER

La-Nibetle has occupied a variety of posts in the Church, ranging from youth pastor to mid-level denominational administration. He was involved in getting *LB* off the ground, and currently serves at its Managing Editor. At one time he served as Secretary to the Plateau State branch of CAN. I consider him my good friend. He even served as my part-time assistant. He has a tendency towards absolutism and overstatement. One of the things I appreciate about him is his strong passion for Christ and His Church. He also has a passion for people and a strong sense of justice. But the distance from passion to anger is not great when passion meets with opposition and perceived injustice. He was inevitably influenced by the climate of anger in which he grew up. When La-Nibetle recognizes threats to his Church or to his people, his passion turns into anger. Combine anger with his absolutist tendency and you end up with fire, red hot fire.

It is in that spirit that he wrote his book *Sharia: The Hidden Agenda*.³⁰ At the time he published his book in 2000, he was a PhD candidate, a journey he has since completed. 2000, of course, was also the year Governor Sani made his debut. With this book, La-Nibetle was thus on the cutting edge of things. This book betrays a spirit of anger and indignation. He wrote it to alert Christians, especially those from the Middle Belt, to be careful in their association with “core Northerners,” for “they are dining with demonically manipulative people” who are “all out to destroy anyone who is not of their number.” He considers them “as people who will go to any length to get what they want; hence their destructive tendencies.”

La-Nibetle is a faithful son of COCIN who in most aspects supports their main lines of reasoning with respect to Muslims and sharia. The sharia is “one of those bitter pills a nation has to take in order to be healed spiritually, politically, socially and economically. A greater percentage of our population is very much uninformed about this great monster called sharia.”

In contrast to Muslims,

neither Christianity nor adherents of ATR have ever at any given time in Nigeria's history been found wanting. The reason is that their leaders know their work and so their adherents have been and are being taught to adhere strictly to the tenets of their faiths. However, Islam is different as Muslims are all out to impose Arabism on the citizens of this country. We who know their hidden agenda must fight against such imposition. Let the reader read prayerfully and understand its content.

In another paragraph he appropriates the classic politically correct position on religion and politics of much of the church that I have more fully described in Volumes 3 and 5, as his own:

Religion and politics, while fulfilling vital roles in the life of

any community, must nevertheless remain separate. Religion must remain distinctly personal. Politics, while attuned to the highest humanitarian principles, must attend to the ordering of society. Nigeria must maintain her secularity and should not be associated with any religion, but should actively protect the fundamental rights of all citizens to hold and practice religious beliefs of their choice. Governments should therefore hands-off any religion and/or religious programmes, save the protection of the fundamental rights of all citizens to hold and practice such. Pilgrimages are not to be exempted from this.

Muslims repeat time and again the central importance of sharia for Islam. Christians, including La-Nibetle, are fully aware of that, but I am not sure many fully realize the implications of this fact. Writes La-Nibetle, “Sharia is the core of Islamic thought. Without understanding Islamic law, it is impossible to grasp fully the implications of Islam. It is in Islamic law systems that the Muslim attitude towards non-Muslims becomes most clear.”³¹

In the heat of the sharia explosion, La-Nibetle reminded his readers of the way Muslim leaders had been writing and thinking about Christians as well as planning for them all along and it is those Muslims who want to impose sharia on the country. He did this by some extensive quotations from Muslim sources a decade or more old. According to him, the following statement was published by the Muslim Brothers in 1987, after the Kafanchan riot.³²

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE BENEFICENT, THE
MERCIFUL: WHAT IS HAPPENING AT KAFANCHAN?

O you Muslims! This paper is written in order to inform us and to make us aware of what is happening in this country. Some enemies of Allah, who are running an un-Islamic system of government, want to hide things in order to divert the attention of the Muslims from what is incumbent upon them,

that is, the establishment of the sharia of Allah (SWT) and the destruction of kufr from the face of the earth. Therefore, we Muslims of this country, whose aim is the protection of Muslims and upholding of Islam, see it as necessary that we explain to people the true situation of conspiracy and oppression which this un-Islamic government is imposing on the Muslims.

Last week in Kafanchan, Christians slaughtered and killed our Muslim brothers in their mosques, their houses and schools. At the College of Education, Kafanchan, some Christians gathered to abuse the Prophet of Allah (SAW) and used abusive language about Islam, the religion of Allah, the Qur'an and Muslims. They did not stop here, but proceeded and followed the rooms of Muslim students, taking them out and beating them. It then spread into the town, where villagers (Christians) came out with their spears, arrows, swords and other weapons. From there they fell on the Muslims, killing them. La Ilaha Illallah! They burned the Qur'an! They burned mosques! It reached a stage whereby they met a Mallam and students and slaughtered them like sacrificial lambs!

O you Muslims! This is happening to our brothers in Kafanchan, but we show little concern like it does not affect us. This shows that we are weak and that we have enemies. Know that our enemies see us Muslims without any difference. It is necessary at this juncture that we realize this is done in order to divert our attention from our real enemies, that, this un-Islamic system of government, which is leading us into a system contrary to the system of Allah. It is this Kufr system which gave these slaves (Christians) the right to kill Muslims. It put them on the same level and even raised Christians higher than the Muslims. It brought the way of life of Christians and Jews and imposed it on us. Therefore, it is this

system which is our target of destruction, until the law of Allah is established. This oppressive government is using its secret service, the police and armed forces to suppress the religion of Allah and Muslims in this land. Likewise, the mass media are being used to divert the attention of the Muslims by propagating non-issues.

Oh Dear Muslims, it is time we realize that the sharia of Allah has been uprooted in this land a long time ago and that the Muslims are forced to follow a system of life other than that of Allah. Muslim workers and students, male and female, are prevented from appearing in their Islamic outfits. Haraji and other oppressive taxes are imposed on the people. The limits of Allah and His Rasul Muhammad have been transgressed.

Oh Dear Muslims, it is compulsory that we rise and see to the establishment of the religion of Allah. It is also necessary that we rise and destroy oppressors and the Kufr system. It's a must that we see our way of life is based on the religion of Allah in this country and that this is our only salvation in this world and hereafter.

For this, Ulamas should raise up and take the lead for the annihilation of Kufr and the subsequent establishment of the religion of Allah. We are calling on Muslim workers to boycott working until further developments. Muslims should make the Friday of 13th Rajab, 1407 A. H., to be a day for sadness and mourning, for what happened to our brothers at Kafanchan. Oh, we are tired of this Kufr system of government, of Jewish laws and decrees, and the acts of worship of Christianity [imposed] on us. For this.⁶³

Then followed a number of actions the Brotherhood recommended to solve their problem, but those are reserved for Chapter 3 in Volume 8.

For good measure La-Nibetle added another stunner. This one

from Bashir Othman Tofa, a presidential candidate in 1993, whose words La-Nibetle introduced as follows: “The executive powers rest solely with the president. Now it is important that we know the Bashir Tofa that we want as President. Please consider this passage.”

For some years now, and for some sinister reasons certain “Christian” leaders are now openly promoting and preparing for a war with Muslims. We hear that they are accumulating large quantities of various arms and ammunition in some states, mainly in the north. Their statements and actions are certainly very provocative. I am sure that these dangerous devils calling themselves “Christians” do not represent the view of the vast majority of true believers in Jesus’ real teachings. These are the vocation for the devil. Clearly some so-called “Christian” leaders have reached this very dangerous point of insanity, and I fear Muslim retaliation, if they are not put away. We Muslims cannot sacrifice our religion or our self-respect for any type of peaceful coexistence.

But why, we may ask, do these unholy religious businessmen find nothing better to do than to attack Islam and Muslims? There must be some plausible reasons. For starters, Christianity is an idle culture, which leaves its so-called managers with ample idle time, since most believers are usually busy collecting from Caesar what is due to them. Second, since it is a culture very much synonymous with Western civilization, the Islamic revival and its very swift spread into the heart of Christendom, makes it most imperative for the West to rise in support of their dying cultural influence. So, they employ the likes of Mr. Okogie and Jolly,³⁴ clearly frustrated fanatics—to do the job of disturbing Muslim peace with reckless regard. Time is therefore ripe for Muslims to rise and to defend their faith, their blood, their honour and their properties. It is not in Islam

*that Muslims should fear anybody, but Allah or trust anybody but Allah. It is time to begin the offensive. It is time to claim our non-negotiable rights and freedoms. Let us begin by proclaiming Friday as our Sabbath. Let us invent our Great Crescent Society as a medical and humanitarian symbol, and do away with the Christian red-cross symbol. Above all, let us found our own “Islamic Jihad of Nigeria” to counteract the evil machinations of the Christian Association of Nigeria.
Let us act right now!!!!^{B5}*

These quotations may have been triggered by anger, but they are representative of the attitude of a large segment of the Muslim community towards Christians. It was not a new attitude: It was of long standing. Tofa was a prominent mainstream Muslim, manufacturer and publisher, evangelist and politician. These are the sharia folk! That’s how things are!

Sharia developments in other nations, advised La-Nibetle, should serve as a warning against similar developments in Nigeria. In Egypt the Qur’an has been turned into the main source of law. The result is that Christians are now second-class citizens. The religious wars about sharia in Sudan and Lebanon “and a number of others” are examples of what could happen in Nigeria. Those “others” include Iran and Algeria, where events “have served to expose Islam and sharia as regressive.” In those countries, the Qur’an is “the authority for the strict application of primitive laws in the twenty-first century, laws which are inhumane when measured by the standards of any era in human history.” Again, the situation in various modern Muslim states “illustrates the absolute inappropriateness of allowing any religious code to assume the status of common law in any country.” Therefore, Nigeria should not “venture into enshrining sharia in our national Constitution nor allow

any state to do so. The secularity of Nigeria should under no circumstances be compromised.” For what reason should a religious group contravene the Constitution “at the expense of other religious groups,” thus endangering the continued existence of the country?³⁶

La-Nibetle had done his homework. He found a report in the *NS* of 15 April 1987, in which the District Head of Sabon Gari of Zaria had alleged that the Kafanchan crisis of 1987 “was hatched in Zaria.” Some plotters had held meetings “before, during and after the chaos.”³⁷ Then he skipped over to the Plateau violence of 2000 and insisted that it was “masterminded, planned and executed” by the same kind of people. Unfortunately, in all of this no names are mentioned, a recurring weakness in Nigerian reports on these developments.

According to La-Nibetle, sharia as religious law presents various dangers to Christians. He adduces *The Sign of the Sword*, a book by Abdalqadir Al-Murabit, a rabid Islamist. This man declares anyone who denies the foundations of sharia a *kafir*, a grossly insulting term. Those to whom it applies have no rights, at least, in the Islamist frame of reference.

Specifically, if sharia were enshrined in the Constitution, it would result in numerous important human rights violations affecting Christians and others. These will include:

1. *A non-Muslim cannot be in any leadership position over a Muslim.*
2. *No non-Muslim would have the right to own land or any other property.*
3. *The death penalty should be prescribed for Muslims who convert to any other religion. Evidence for prosecution can be obtained by the testimony of two adult Muslims.*
4. *The children of anyone who adopts Islam should be Muslim or face the death penalty.*

5. *Anyone who persuades a Muslim to convert to another religion, gets the death penalty.*
6. *Non-Muslim children cannot inherit from their Muslim parents or relatives.*
7. *A non-Muslim cannot testify against a Muslim in a Sharia Court.*
8. *Non-Muslims are dhimmi, who do not have equal rights with Muslims.*
9. *Sharia law in an ideal Muslim situation should totally control the whole society.*³⁸

I do not vouch for the accuracy of all these statements, but they do represent the understanding of most Nigerian Christians.

Religious persecution is a major human rights violation. La-Nibetle predicts that any “state administered by any religious code of whatever religion, is bound to be restrictive and repressive. Reactionary pressures will inevitably prevail. Tribal rules will be resurrected to establish and maintain the authority of the religion in government. Minorities will at best be ignored, and, at worst, savagely persecuted and abolished.”

Not only does Islam deny religious freedom, as per La-Nibetle, but “recognizing other religions as legitimate is unthinkable for Muslims. Islam holds that it alone possesses the Truth, because it is the recipient of ‘the final revelation of Allah to man.’ Consequently, Muslims believe they are the enforcers of God’s law on earth.” This has certain significant implications. It means, for example, that “no Muslim should be answerable to a non-Muslim.” Or, as Abubakar Gumi put it in 1987, “No Christian will ever rule over Muslims in Nigeria.”³⁹

Given all those facts and tendencies in Islam, La-Nibetle is keenly aware of the low position of Christians in a Muslim society. While Muslims are said to belong to the House of Peace (*Dar al-Salam*), others belong to the House of War (*Dar al-Harb*) and are considered enemies. Sharia has only three ways of

dealing with them: Convert them, subjugate them or eliminate them, with the exception of women, children and slaves.⁶²⁶ This is a sore point with Christians that they bring up repeatedly.

Sharia is not to be seen in isolation: It is regarded as part of the Muslim campaign to Islamise Nigeria. I have shown the Christian insistence on this plan sufficiently in Volume 3.⁴⁰ Let me summarise the established opinion in the words of La-Nibetle:

The moves to Islamise Nigeria date back to 1804, when Usman Danfodio launched his jihad. Religious politics, however, are traced back to Sir Ahmadu Bello, when in 1963 he became less interested in partisan politics and more in religion. The Nigerian Citizen of September 10, 1965, declared the Sardauna the "Messenger of God." John Paden quoted Sir Kashim Ibrahim as saying, "In the old days in Islam, if you see Pagans, you ask them to convert; if they do not, then you tax them to promote Islam elsewhere. If they resist to pay tax, then you fight them."

Actually, in between these two key figures, Danfodio and Bello, the Christian fear of Islamisation had already been established. According to La-Nibetle, in 1956, the now defunct Northern Regional Government "tricked" the colonial FG into appointing public officers to the annual Muslim pilgrimage undertaking. This development "created fear in some of the opposition parties, who began to allege the Northern People's Congress, the party of the Sardauna, was trying to set up a theocratic state with the hope of joining the Arab block."⁴¹

La-Nibetle managed to get hold of a letter written on February 5, 1990, by an unnamed author to the Military Head of State, Ibrahim Babangida. That letter, he comments, contained statements that were "quite unequivocal on the systematic and unrelenting efforts of Muslims in Islamizing Nigeria."

The authors wrote, “We are too pleased that you have partially commenced the Islamization of Nigeria.” They urged the Head of State “as a matter of utmost urgency to initiate moves to implement the following OIC policies and programmes.” Apparently, that letter was a follow-up to a conference held in Abuja in November 1989, under the name “Islam in Africa Conference.” It was a conference featuring quite a number of Nigerian lectures on sharia-related topics and that published a communiqué urging all kinds of measures to be taken by the Muslim community to expand their reach. No one can deny that it amounts to a takeover attempt.⁴² It amounts to a prescription for an international programme of *da’wa* or mission. But it is *Muslim* mission, a *total* mission, not the domesticated garden variety of mission that most Christians practise, one that restricts itself largely to church and personal affairs. Hence, Christians have a hard time recognizing it as mission and tend to see it as “mere” politics. The proposed programme included:

- Place total ban on all forms of worship by Christians, Ahmadiyas and other tribal religions.
- Impose sharia law on Nigeria. Islamize all industries, colleges, schools and courts of law in the Federal Islamic Sultanate of Nigeria.
- Implement OIC Economic Formula, which must urgently replace the ineffective and most inefficient Structural Adjustment Programme.

La-Nibetle also refers to the agenda to win the world for Islam that was created by a conference of the World Islamic Organisation, also called by some “World Muslim Council,” held in Mecca in 1974. It contains features similar to that of the Islam in Africa Conference and seems definitely designed as a programme to win the world.⁴³ Certainly, that’s how La-Nibetle and his Christian compatriots view it. The Zamfara sharia move was just another step in that programme.

La-Nibetle, along with many others, likes to talk about a “hidden agenda” that Muslims ostensibly have. “It is evident that Governor Ahmed Sani of Zamfara State and his cohorts have a hidden agenda.” The above international organisations definitely have an agenda, but it is hardly hidden. It was published as a communiqué! There it is, right in your face, with no attempt to hide it or keep it a secret. I fail to see the rationale for calling it “hidden.” It is a public expression of a revived, aggressive, robust and wholistic Islam that instinctively reaches out to all social structures as tools for mission not only but also creates structures more in line with Islam. Sharia is a central part of that programme. This agenda demands that “sharia must be pursued no matter its cost or consequences.” It had been kicked off at Independence by no one less than Sir Ahmadu Bello, a man greatly revered by the Muslim community as a hero of the faith. This Sardauna is alleged to have declared that “the next phase of the struggle in Nigeria would feature a full implementation of sharia as a means of solidifying unity among Muslims, transformation of the educational system to reflect Islamic ideas and a vigorous fight against secularism in political and daily life.”⁴⁴ Again, there is nothing hidden about that agenda. It has been there all along, openly defined in reports, minutes and declarations. It just surprises me that it took *me* so long to accept its reality, when it was there in my face, blatantly. Blame it to political correctness, if you like. I did not *want* to come to that conclusion.

All of this does not mean Christians oppose Islam or its adherents, La-Nibetle assures Muslims. Christians do not even object to sharia—but under a condition. He writes, “To our Muslim brothers and sisters, we want to make it abundantly clear to you that we as Christians are not in anyway opposed to your practicing the tenets of Islam.” The problem is that “what you are agitating for will certainly infringe on the fundamental human rights of non-Muslims.” It is necessary for us to “guard

against any individual or group, be it religious or political, to destabilize the desired peace and unity of Nigeria.⁴⁵

The above sounds quite amicable, but La-Nibetle does not usually sound that way. In his conclusion he sounds downright angry and hardly amenable to discussion: “We may conclude that the advocates of sharia, namely, the Hausa-Fulani, have a hidden agenda for this nation. Hence their manipulation of religion. It is an indisputable fact that this set of people see themselves as born to rule.” And then a classic closing: “Nigeria is a secular state and must continue to remain that way, one united and indivisible nation. The secularity of Nigeria should be non-negotiable. Let us all say ‘*No to sharia.*’ We will not take one step forward and nine backward. Away with sharia and the nation will be taken to greater heights by God.”⁴⁶

See here the great contrast in expectations. Muslims expect great things from the full-scale installation of sharia; it is the solution to all of Nigeria’s problems and will revive the glories of Muslim culture. Continuation of the status quo will spell the death of Nigeria.⁴⁷ Christians expect the same from the secular setup. Is greater contrast possible? Is there any way to bridge this chasm? That, of course, is *the* issue for the country.

▲ THE EXPLOSION OF REALITY

The new century was ushered in on the Plateau by gruesome and unbelievable violence. I have sufficiently described the details and dynamics of this type of violence in other volumes. Here I will only provide a few sketchy details and concentrate further on effects, reactions and on how Christians interpret it with reference to sharia. During mid-2002, over 1,000 people were killed in over 80 villages, according to reports from Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW). This was accomplished by “local Hausa-Fulani Muslims, helped by extremists from [neighbouring coun-

tries] Niger and Chad.” The victims were mostly indigenous Tarok Christians. “The Hausa-Fulani Muslims have migrated here from the North. The attacks were thought to be part of a concerted attempt to create a Muslim majority in Plateau State before the elections” of 2003.

The claim that these attacks involved mercenaries is a common one. It was corroborated by Solomon Lar, a former governor of Plateau State and a politician of national stature, who reported that some soldiers entered the state from Taraba State and “confessed that they were hired by some prominent Hausa/Fulani indigenes, who allegedly paid them a deposit of N25,000 to do the dirty job. The balance was to be paid afterwards.”⁴⁸ The story would be more believable if some names were given. The claim was also made by Dinfa Mamshal and Sunday Lakong, both COCIN spokesmen, who reported that, after 1500 Christians were killed within the span of a few weeks in Plateau, Muslims had imported “over 10,000 Muslim mercenaries” from neighbouring countries “to invade Christian towns and villages. Fundamentalist Muslim bands have gone on a rampage of killing and maiming Christians and burning down their churches.” In addition to these deaths, 25,000 people were turned into internal refugees, according to Nigeria’s National Emergency Management Agency.⁴⁹

By no means was all the violence caused by outside forces. For one, there was the terrible tragedy of revenge slaughtering of over 600 Muslims by a combined force of Christians and Traditionalists. I have not heard of foreign involvement there, but there was considerable foreign news coverage, which, strangely, was muted when it came to Muslim violence in the state. Then there is the example of violence between the Tarok and Bogghom people that led to the razing of the communities of Kafel, Gobro, Bankilong and Namaran. Some trace this violence to the killing of a former chairman of Kanam LGA, a Muslim, by the Tarok,

mostly Christians. Abdulsalami reports that the attack was an act of revenge on the part of the Muslim Bogghoms for the murder of their Muslim chairman. A state government delegation to investigate the unrest, consisting of two Muslims, Yusufu Doma and Aliyu Maigari, ended up getting beheaded “after inspecting the extent of damage at Namaran.” Abdulsalami does not tell us who murdered the two government representatives, but I have my suspicions.⁵⁰

A friend made the following observations: The Bogghom-Taroh conflict is more of an ethnic conflict which is common all over the country. Bogghom tribal ties are usually stronger than religious ties and it is difficult at times to know the motives for their actions. One would say the same about most tribal conflicts in the Middle Belt. Most people who engage Muslims in open fights are not always motivated by their Christian faith as much as their territorial and ethnic ties.”

Governor Dariye drew the brunt of the chaos. Allegedly because of his weakness and corruption⁵¹ combined with hesitation of the FG in the face of sharia, Muslims seemingly judged the time ripe for an all-out attack. The year 2002 was a literal hell in the state with all the stops pulled out by both parties. The veneer of superficial peace could no longer hold. The bitter truth exploded before the face of the entire world with the whole state turning into a cauldron of long-suppressed overheated anger and resentment, resulting in unprecedented violence. Things especially got out of hand in Yelwa where hundreds of people, both Christians and Muslims, ended up dead, not to speak of destruction of churches, mosques and other properties.⁵² It was not only COCIN that suffered these attacks; the Anglicans did as well. Bishop Benjamin Kwashi of Jos stated that the Muslims had “brought his church to her knees. The Anglican Church lost 60 congregations in 2001” and indeed the “entire archdeaconry of Yelwa.”⁵³ It cannot be denied that Christians, having reached

their limits, contributed seriously to the violence in Yelwa.

The violence came to a halt, temporarily at least. President Obasanjo took some serious political measures that were appreciated by the Muslim community but greatly resented by Christians. Governor Dariye was suspended along with his entire state government. General Alli, a former military administrator of the state, was appointed administrator. To top it all, the president declared a state-wide “state of emergency.” One could describe this as a Federal civilian coup of a state government, since, according to many, this unusual action had no constitutional justification.

Christians strongly resented the “coup,” for it was done only after Muslims were killed, while nothing was done after Christians were killed earlier in both Plateau and Kano States. The fact that Muslims were happy with the new situation gave Christians cause for suspicion. What was in it for Muslims? COCIN President Alexander Lar formally announced his own retirement to Governor Dariye after the latter was re-instated, in a speech including these words about the state of emergency:

COCIN was not part of it. We were not consulted. As you are well aware, COCIN spoke out clearly, loudly and publicly against any attempt to derail democracy in this state. We were guided by the facts at hand, the history of the church and the desire of our people to remain free in Christ.

How could we have supported the state of emergency when the whole agenda was suspect? Were we not insulted as “idiots?” Were we not written off as religious leaders who never did anything to bring peace to the land? And to imagine that we had carried no arms against anyone, neither had we trained for warfare. We did not keep any militia, neither did we retaliate when attacked.⁵⁴

When the time came to restore the elected state government,

Muslims lobbied for an extension of the state of emergency, something that further angered the Christians.⁵⁵ COCIN was apparently desperate. She even wrote a letter to the Queen of England asking her to intervene!⁵⁶ All in all, this series of events caused a serious collapse of Christian support for the Christian President, for they interpreted it as the president capitulating to Muslim designs for the state.

What was the suspect agenda? Why, the Muslim plan, of course. For better or for worse, COCIN preferred to deal with an ineffective and allegedly corrupt Governor than with a state of emergency they saw as playing into the hands of the Muslim agenda. Remember, in a cold war issues take on a different colouration; they are not considered in their own right. The USA for years supported corrupt regimes vis a vis their Communist enemies. COCIN did something similar.

▲ PLATEAU CHRISTIANS AGAINST PRESIDENT OBASANJO

Throughout much of this turmoil the relationship of Plateau Christians, particularly COCIN and CAN, with President Obasanjo deteriorated. For one, they were unhappy about his reactions to sharia. One day the President preached in a COCIN thanksgiving service in Jos on sowing the seed and listed the conditions for a good harvest. The context was, of course, excellent for some political admonition. My interest here is the reaction of COCIN President Alexander Lar, a man of uncommon graciousness who knows how to express strong, sharp and controversial opinions publicly in a polite, wise and fatherly way. After politely thanking the national President for having saved Nigeria from disintegration, this denominational President continued, “If the Lord had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they

would have swallowed us alive, the flood would have engulfed us.” He then advised the President “not to handle any threats to security with levity.” With his eye to sharia, Lar went on, “Mr. President, you will do well not to take certain oppositions too lightly as in saying some knotty issues will fizzle out or that some people issuing threats may be jokers.” “We urge you to carry all players along in the political team of governance. Brief them. Explain to them. Consult them. Hold them all together. He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.” After these words of advice, Lar summarized various incidents of violence in which the church lost members, personnel or facilities.⁵⁷ These words of Lar clearly showed the concerns of the church not only, but also indirectly accused the President of not supporting the Christian struggle for survival, without actually stating that he was supporting the Muslim *jihad*. But the hint was hard to miss.

Things became uglier between the churches and the President. Yakubu Pam, Chairman of CAN Plateau State, in the presence of President Obasanjo himself during his visit to the State, publicly accused him after the massacre of Plateau Christians. Obasanjo struck back ferociously with his famous reply, “CAN, my foot!” Subsequently, Solomon Naanmiyap also accused him of siding with Muslims. When he embarked on his visit to Plateau, the President first went to the Muslim community, “where he literally bemoaned their plight,” but when he was with the Christians, “he rained abuses on the Plateau State CAN Chairman.” All this was because of the President’s alleged dependence on political support from the North, the *Muslim* North. That dependence was also thought to be the reason for his weak reaction to sharia. “It has meant nothing to him.”⁵⁸

Sylvester Dombin and Adamu Bala, leaders in COCIN Youths Worldwide, severely criticised the President in an open letter to him. They produced a list of violent riots that have occurred in

Kano over the years, including one that was said to be a Kano Muslim reaction to the killing of Muslims in Plateau in 2004. “Why,” they asked, “did you isolate only Plateau for this emergency rule, when a state like Kano has over the years constituted itself into an abattoir, where Christians are continuously slaughtered?” When Christians were killed in Kano during the latest scuffle, he only sent a letter of warning to Governor Shekarau. When “77 Christians were killed in Yelwa (45 of them in a COCIN Church) by Muslim terrorists, the unity of the country was not threatened, but when some Muslims were killed in reprisal attack, you had to... declare a state of emergency in Plateau State.” The writers claimed to know the reason for the difference:

All this was done to satisfy the whims and caprices of the Council of Ulamas who had given you a seven-day ultimatum! Where was Section 305 of the 1999 Constitution when thousands of Christians were killed in Kaduna, Bauchi and other sharia-practising states? There is more to this than meets the eye. That declaration is a furtherance of a common intention of your friends, the Council of Ulamas, to wage a jihad on Nigeria with Plateau State as the target and you are unfortunately playing into their hands. What a pity! Governors of sharia states who made unguarded and inflammatory statements on sharia to the chagrin of the nation and the international community were ignored by you, but one other governor who says terrorists are causing problems in Plateau State and were given quit notice, was tagged as making statements capable of breaking the unity of the country. How ironic!

Under the heading “The Sharia Question” in another section of their letter, Dombin and Bala continued their accusation against the President:

Your Excellency, when Sani Yerima, the Governor of Zamfara State, declared and began the full implementation of sharia criminal law regardless of its obvious unconstitutionality, it brought about attendant killings of Christians in Kaduna, Kano and Bauchi States. This immediately polarised our nascent democracy along religious lines. You were evasive of that constitutional breach. You dismissed it as a matter that would die a natural death! It will interest you that the killings in Plateau and Kano are direct and indirect reactions to what you said would die a natural death. In fact, you declared confidently that "Sharia will fizzle out."

We are concerned that as a Christian you are in complicity, knowingly or unknowingly, with the very persecutors of the Church, because you have refused to exhaust all the constitutional avenues that would have stemmed this bloodletting, [which is] a result of the controversial sharia issue.

In your broadcast of May 18, 2004, you said that the situation in Plateau is "clearly a great threat to the security and unity of Nigeria." Far from it. Everyone knows that the greatest threat is the day you ran away from the sharia mischief.

No one has the right to foist his beliefs on our faithful as was happening in Yelwa-Shendam, where Christians were massacred and the place was renamed "Yelwa-Zamfara" and "New Zamfara." Pictures of the notorious Osama bin Laden were pasted all over the village together with banners of Al-Qaeda. The plan is to keep killing Christians in towns of Plateau and gradually to implement sharia. Killings also took place in Wase in 2002, where all the churches were pulled down and dead Christians exhumed for desecration by the terrorists. Note also happenings in Angwan Rogo in Jos. All of these happened, because you have failed to address the sharia issue

and some Muslims in Plateau are acting out a script to gradually and forcefully enforce it.⁵⁹

The President was properly incensed, especially at Pam. Since his reaction has become so famous and referred to so frequently, I reproduce it here:

Well, Mr. Chairman of CAN, you are talking absolute nonsense and don't provoke me, please. When did I invite people to Abuja? When? Governor, (turning to Dariye), when? April 6. If something you said happened two months ago and I invited people to Abuja on April 6th, which is 5 weeks ago, I wonder, do you think I invited them for a picnic? You are talking absolute rubbish. We will not accept that. I invited all stakeholders, including the Governor. I was even saying, after we set up the committee to look at every aspect under the Emir of Zaria as Chairman. Then what I read in the paper was that some of you CAN said you do not accept the Emir as Chairman. And you have the audacity to say you did not hear anything from me! Did I hear anything from you? What meaningful thing have you contributed to make peace in this state, other than you are Chairman of CAN. CAN, my foot! I have people who came to see me and I said as a Christian, what does the Bible teach? Revenge? Assuming that you said I did not do anything, what did you do? What did the leaders in this state do? Christian leaders. Don't tell me that!

So what you are saying to me is that people died and I don't care, because they are Christians and I now care, because they are Muslims. You are an idiot to say that, to even impugn that to me. As a leader, I have always been fair and I will remain fair, but I wouldn't care whether you are a Christian or a Muslim. If you do what is condemnable, I

*will condemn it. If you do what is actionable, action will be taken.*⁶⁰

The ripples of this heated argument reached the ears of Peter Akinola, the National President of CAN in Lagos and led to correspondence between the two Presidents. It would lead us too far astray to go into the details, except to say that President Obasanjo defended his chastisement of Pam and assured Akinola that it was a personal rebuke that did not reflect on his high esteem for CAN.⁶¹ “Unconfirmed reports” have it that during a second visit not long afterwards, Obasanjo privately apologised to Yakubu Pam, but he offered no public retraction of any kind.⁶²

The question must also be asked whether sharia was the major factor in the violence between the Wase Muslims and their neighbours. Or whether Obasanjo’s hesitant handling of sharia had anything to do with it. Retired General Domkat Bali, a former Minister for Internal Affairs and a Christian Plateau indigene, blamed Governor Dariye for his “divide and rule strategy through tension, fear, suspicion, dissatisfaction and violence.” Bali said “that the cordial relationship between the Hausa-Fulani of Wase and the Tarok people had been shattered by Dariye’s political calculations, maladministration and incompetence.”⁶³ The problem is whether we can believe a general with political interests. Certainly his church, COCIN, interpreted it in the context of Muslim ambitions, intolerance and sharia. But newspaper reports support the claim that the fallout of Dariye politics also created violence, some of it by youths under the leadership of prominent citizens, such as Rev. Alfred Dishu Kibiwa and Honourable Rwang Danjuma.

Nanven Gambo submitted a memo to the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into various communal conflicts, including those between the Tarok and their Hausa-Fulani neighbours—yes, yet another commission of inquiry!—in which he pointed “to long term plans to unleash wanton destruction of the lives and

property of the Tarok people.” The memo also singled out another familiar culprit, namely “the non-implementation of recommendations made by commissions of inquiry into clashes in the past.” This has led to a sense of insecurity among the Tarok people and a sense of marginalization in their own land.⁶⁴ Haven’t we heard all these kinds of things before somewhere?

It was not the first time the President was disappointed with religious leaders. After the sharia riot of early 2000 in Kaduna, he blamed religious leaders for the violence, saying, “They have failed the nation.” Noting that both religions preach peace, he “wondered why people who claimed to be adherents of these two faiths, do the direct opposite of what their religions teach them.” According to the reporters, he “put the blame squarely on the leaders.” He then called on them, together with political and community leaders, “to put their heads together to find a permanent solution to religious crises in Kaduna State.”⁶⁵ That was the exact course of action he initiated with the Plateau Peace Conference. It would appear that the President’s Plateau outburst was the result of frustration with and resentment of religious leaders that built up over the years. This time it reached its boiling point and exploded in the face of Victor Pam and his colleagues.

Things just did not go well between the President and Plateau CAN for a while. In his speech above, the President referred to a Presidential Peace Committee he appointed to help resolve the Plateau crisis. Unfortunately, it began with a serious blunder. The Chairman was, believe it or not, a Muslim emir, namely, Shehu Idris, the Emir of Zaria, sometimes referred to as the Emir of Zazzau. We have met him before in Volume 3. CAN passed a vote of no confidence in the Emir. Yakubu Pam, the CAN Chairman, reported to newsmen “that the collective resolve of the body was to seek peace and pursue it wholeheartedly, but the choice of the Emir was not going to represent the

interest of the group.” “His leadership style is totally unacceptable to us.” He then explained that the Emir “has direct relationships with the Emir of Wase, who has already been linked to the crises in the state.” He went on to say, “We believe he who comes to equity must come with a clean hand.” The National Secretary of CAN, Samuel Salifu, speaking on behalf of the national President, agreed “that it was unfair to make a Muslim the Chairman of a committee over a 90 per cent Christian population.”⁶⁶

Of course, as we learn in other places, the President was not the only CAN detractor amongst Christians.⁶⁷

▲ PLATEAU PEACE CONFERENCE 2004 —————

In order to put an end to the violence in Plateau State, probably under instructions of Obasanjo, State Administrator M. C. Alli then organized the Plateau Peace Conference a month or so later, where all the stakeholders in the State were present. The aim was “to provide the opportunity... for each ethnic nationality represented in Plateau State, including other stakeholders, to present and discuss contending issues.” It was hoped to lead to “lasting solutions for peace and to establish the yardstick for peaceful coexistence between the diverse ethnic and religious groups in the State.”⁶⁸

Though in September 2004, the Conference officially declared it had come to an agreement that would put an end to the violence, Muslim militants soon renewed their attacks on Christians. On December 29, 2004, they attacked the village of Gana-Ropp in Barakin Ladi LGA. This was regarded by Christians as a continuation of the battle, not just an isolated incident. The peace was apparently only a paper peace. Minchakpu and others saw the attack as the fulfillment of a threat by the Ulamas that, if the state of emergency were lifted,

they would make the state ungovernable. On December 6, three weeks prior to this attack, Yakubu Pam had alerted the public of “plans by Muslim militants to renew attacks.” Two days later, the police confirmed they had indeed uncovered such plans. Armed groups, “in concert with local Muslim leaders” had made plans “to destabilize Plateau State.” They evidently did not take effective measures to prevent it.⁶⁹

But, really, did the Conference accomplish anything at all? Only a few weeks before the 2007 elections—note well, a whole two and a half years later—Rakiya Muhammad published a hard-hitting article on Plateau politics. Not much apparently had changed. Christians were still in control of all the significant positions. The major political parties in the state featured gubernatorial tickets that included no Muslim. Muslims, claiming 42 percent of the population, realized they would not have a chance at the governor’s position, but they certainly should be allowed to run as Deputy Governor. Consequently, Muslim leaders threatened to support one or two minor parties that did feature Christian-Muslim tickets. They were quite certain they could thus swing the vote away from the two defaulting major parties. In addition, they demanded “at least 40 per cent of all state and federal appointments on the basis of the proportional equity as enshrined in the Constitution.”

As in all such Nigerian arguments, Muslims adduced population statistics to indicate that Plateau was falling behind the Muslim states that had significant Christian populations. “The current statistics of about 42 percent Muslims in Plateau is very much higher than that of Christians in the following Northern states; i.e., Kaduna with about 22 percent, Niger about 8 percent, Gombe with 11 percent, Kogi with 13 percent, Nassarawa with 22 percent and even Borno with 3 percent Christians. Yet they [Christians] are adequately represented in the governance of their states.”⁷⁰

Bulus Gambo asked Emmanuel Danboyi, a member of the Plateau State House of Assembly, what is happening to the recommendations of the Peace Conference. “The fear now is that these recommendations may not be implemented.” Danboyi explained that since the House has taken the FG to court on Peace Conference issues, “we are waiting for the case to be concluded before we can see what we can do about the resolutions.”⁷¹ Well, politicians can always cook up some reason!

The Christian response was couched in the classic Christian dualistic framework as described in Volume 5, that reduces the Christian religion to the personal and private relationship between you and God. According to Rakiya Muhammad, the gubernatorial candidate of the Action Congress, Pam Dung Gyang, argued that “bringing religion into politics was taking issues too far.” “We should be cautious about approaching political issues through a religious angle.” “Religion is seen more as personal, between you and God, and you are working for your own salvation.” If we “concentrate on this one, then we lose track of what governance is all about. It is about infrastructure; we will provide roads; but there is no road for Muslims, no road for Christians. If we provide a school, it is for everybody; if we provide a hospital, it is for everybody.”⁷² The roots of the Plateau discord have not yet been uprooted. Christians still counter wholistic Islam with a dualistic reduced version of the Christian Gospel. No wonder there has been apparently no follow-up to the Peace Conference, til now.

▲ INTERPRETATION OF PLATEAU VIOLENCE ———

The question of causes and interpretation of violence in Nigeria is a big one to which entire conferences and publications have been devoted. The question has been treated in various vol-

umes of this series as well, particularly violence between Christians and Muslims. In this section we will concern ourselves with the interpretation offered by Plateau Christians, their writers and leaders. Though readers of Volume 3 will recognize much of the material offered here, there are some differences. For one, this is a majority Christian state, while most of the violence between members of the two religions has taken place in Muslim-dominated states. Secondly, Plateau is not a sharia state. Thirdly, Plateau, in partnership with COCIN, sees itself as a state with a mission: Its central role is to stop the further encroachment of Islam, exactly as the early missionaries, including the SUM, also saw their basic task.⁷³ The mango did not fall far from its tree.

According to its proponents, the design of Islam, and particularly of sharia, is to usher in peace and order. In earlier volumes we have frequently run into emphatic statements that the cause of the various riots between Christians and Muslims over the years, whatever it is, is by definition *not* religious, for religion stands for peace. Muslims often blame it on poverty, unemployment, hoodlums or political manipulation to deflect blame on their religion. Governments reject religious interpretations because they are too hot a potato to handle.⁷⁴ It is all part of the denials that come from political correctness.

Readers of earlier volumes of this series are familiar with the manipulation theme.⁷⁵ Dah revived the theme in reference to Plateau. That is the same Dah whom we overheard at the end of Chapter 1 on the subject of the demonic underlay of these events. That insight did not prevent him from recognizing natural causes, since these are just two sides of the one coin. “Religion,” he stated, “has been systematically manipulated and given the wrong posture by some forces for specific reasons. These reasons are selfish and are clearly opposed to the unity of our beloved state, Plateau.” It is for this reason that, though Christ is the

“Prince of Peace” and “Islam is said to be a religion of peace,” Christians and Muslims are living “in pieces” instead of in peace. Both religious communities harbour extremists who harness the energies of unemployed and illiterate youths to disturb the peace with violence.⁷⁶

Manipulation in this context is basically a synonym for bad politics. Dah is not far from Elias Lamle, a COCIN member currently doing post-graduate study in Belgium. Lamle thinks of the struggle between the core North and the Middle Belt as a political one in which religions, including sharia, are reduced to tools. He writes, “This ethno-political conflict manifests itself in religious undertones.” Again, the introduction of the new sharia is a “political card,” he insists.⁷⁷

Gotan agrees that the Kaduna crisis of 2000 was religiously based on sharia, but not that of Plateau. He does admit that it is often “difficult to clearly distinguish between religious and ethnic conflicts.” They often begin as one and then turn into the other, the reason being the coincidence of religious and ethnic lines. This is the case in Jos between indigenous Christians and Muslim Hausa known as “Jasawa.” It is an ethnic conflict, Gotan insists, that in essence “has nothing to do with religion,” but did turn into a religious one.⁷⁸

La-Nibetle is no stranger among that crowd. In his Introduction he wrote,

*This monster [sharia] is a masquerade that has masked itself with a religious attire, whereas the bottom line of its activities is one hundred percent political. Since the Jihad of Shehu Uthman Danfodio of 1804, and the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, there has never been any religious uprising other than Islam's. All the wars Islam has been waging have always been political, but using religion as a vehicle to achieve its political ambition.*⁷⁹

Here he follows the now late Yusufu Bala Usman in his book,

The Manipulation of Religion in Nigeria 1977–1987, a book I have discussed at some length in Volume 2.⁸⁰ Commenting on the Kafanchan riots, Usman wrote and La-Nibetle quoted:

Our experience of the current events and all the evidence available to us, have convinced us that the violence and arson of the last seven days was not the brain of the hooligans. It is, however, believed to be the latest stage of a campaign which started about ten years ago, in the so-called “Sharia Debate,” in the CA in 1976–77. At that time it [the sharia debate] was aimed at creating political constituencies for political leaderships, whose records showed that they had nothing to offer our people. This strategy failed and therefore they now turn again to the manipulation of religious sentiments and religious symbols to cover up their complete bankruptcy and failures.

The letter of February 5, 1990, referred to earlier,⁸¹ displays glaringly the plans sharia advocates have. They have “deceived the masses to vote them into political office in order to champion sharia.” La-Nibetle quotes the same paragraph about manipulation from Yusufu Bala Usman I have quoted in Volume 6⁸² and comments:

The above quotation is indeed a graphic painting of political leaders like Governor Ahmed Sani and a host of others who are being manipulated by some selfish, wicked, godless, self-acclaimed messiahs of Islamic religion. There is no doubt that such politicians are totally incompetent and do not have anything to offer. It is no wonder then that these disgruntled political drums and idle-brains have resorted to whipping up religious sentiments and fanning the embers of disunity. Their mentors and financiers are those who have amassed great wealth at the expense of the entire citizenry.

La-Nibetle concludes his book with rather strong words. Sharia advocates are “demonically manipulative people.” “Sharia is a political creature that has masked itself with religion so as to make it very difficult for the Obasanjo government to succeed.”⁸³ At this front, he distanced himself from the standard COCIN religious interpretation of the violence that I describe below. However, in his case this is hardly the result of political correctness. Not La-Nibetle! I believe it is due basically to a residue of the heritage of dualism that has confused him on this score. He knows that Muslims intend to turn Plateau into a Muslim state and that is at bottom a religious motive. But somehow, it seems, he cannot get himself to recognize that politics can serve religious ends.

The opinions in the last few paragraphs are not typical for Plateau indigenes. They certainly are not typical for COCIN. As to myself, though, together with most Plateau Christians, I insist that at bottom of the Plateau violence you will find the alleged Muslim *jihad* in the state, I do recognize a multiplicity of factors. Take the violence between the Tarok and Bogghom people. The Bogghoms believed “that the crisis had a religious colouration.” In other words, after all is said and done and proper recognition has been accorded the social, economic and political factors, even this one had a religious background. But, true to government tradition, Ezekiel Gomos, Secretary to the State Government, insisted that “the incident was an isolated case.”⁸⁴ Only a few days later, the two communities attended a reconciliation meeting where the killings were described as “senseless, merciless and unnatural kinds of killings” that left dozens dead and “thousands homeless.” At a subsequent press conference, representatives of the parties involved described the same violence as “baseless, rootless and without sense of direction.” The genesis of the horror was now traced to the “mysterious disappearance of a herd of cows” and “vandalised rice farms”⁸⁵—exactly the main dividing line between the cow-herding Muslim

Bogghoms and the farming Christian Tarok. All the distinctions followed the same fault lines—ethnic, “indigene” versus “settler,” occupational and religious. That, for Plateau, is the typical pattern, with religion at the bottom.

Mainstream opinion among Plateau Christians is that the underlying cause for all this violence is religion. Call it *jihad*, Grand Plan, sharia—whichever of these you choose, it is religion, though mixed with other issues that make it more complicated. Violence, sharia, politics and Islamization plans are one package. People see the specifics of Plateau struggles not as so many isolated incidents but as part of the larger context of struggle between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. Evangelist Kephaz Gumap describes the traditional hospitality of the Plateau people that has enabled non-indigenes to acquire properties and practice their religions and cultures. However, “some of our visitors have seen our hospitality as foolishness, and have paid us back with massive hatred and caused division within us, just to pave the way for their selfish end, which is to destroy Plateau State.”⁸⁶ The issue in Jos may not always be expressed overtly in terms of religion, but most Christians recognize underneath it that Muslim plan.⁸⁷ The struggle for control of Jos and Plateau as a whole is part of that struggle. Once having established their power, the next step, it is feared, will be the Muslim imposition of sharia. Christians are only too aware of that powerful Nigerian Muslim instinct that drives them to dominate and that cannot tolerate subservience, minority status or even equality. Muslims themselves occasionally acknowledge it, as you may have noticed in the previous volumes.⁸⁸

Minchakpu put it this way:

Christian and Muslim leaders may agree that political aims are central in the violence, but they differ sharply on how. Christians are more apt to frame the violence as a by-product

of Muslim fundamentalists bent on the Islamization of Nigeria through otherwise subtle manipulation of the political process. Muslims say the infringement of their fundamental rights has led to political struggles.

Plateau State's Committee of Rehabilitation and Reconciliation of Internally Displaced People has described the violence as rooted in land disputes between mostly Christian farmers and predominantly Muslim traders and livestock herders from northern Nigeria. If control over land is seen not only as economic but as part of the political struggle, and if the Muslim mind sees religion and politics as one, then even this component reflects a jumbled mix of motives. The Rt. Rev. Benjamin Kwashi of the Anglican Communion and the Rev. Alexander Lar of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN), both based in the state capital of Jos, assert that Muslims have fanned the flames of religious conflict with the sole aim of destroying the church in Plateau state, enslaving Christians politically, and working towards the Islamization of Nigeria.

Minchakpu presses Kwashi further:

The rise in attacks on the church in Plateau state, as well as in northern Nigeria, is based in the desire to oppress Christians politically.

"We are trying to understand why the Muslims are bent on hitting the church hard on the Plateau, because if you talk with some of them honestly, you find the reasons for the crisis have nothing to do with the church," he said. "They will tell you the problems are equality in political sharing of offices." That is, Muslims who feel their tribal or religio-cultural interests are not recognized have misdirected their frustration at the church. "When they want to fight for political recognition, they attack the church, so the church has become a scape-

goat,” Rev. Kwashi said. “You can go through all the reasons they give, and not one is a concrete reason that the church has offended the mosque. Not one!”

Minchakpu then brought in the interpretations of some other clerical leaders:

Pastor Dan Manjang, director of church relations at the Nigerian Bible Translation Trust (NBTT) in Jos, is one of many Christians who believe Muslims have targeted Plateau state because it is the only state near northern Nigeria that serves as a hub for Christian missions to the Islamic north.

Rev. Alexander Lar noted that the crisis in Plateau state is based on “a political agenda that found itself in religion, because the easy way to achieve that aim is to insulate it in religion.” Translating political aims into religious terms helped to secure the support and popularity that sparked the 2001 crisis, he said.

“If somebody were not seeking any power, and if power had not been in the hand of somebody else, the crisis on the Plateau would not have arisen at all,” Rev. Lar said. “If someone wants to take back his power, then he’ll say, ‘How am I going to do it? Let me generate something religiously.’ Then religion came in—that was how it started.”⁸⁹

The extreme violence to which the state has been subjected since 2000 is allegedly because Muslims are determined to break the back of this Christian headquarters in the North. It is just an intensified phase of the long-standing battle that was being waged while the state enjoyed its reputation for “peacefulness.” Military Governor Joseph Gomwalk fought it in the 70s; civilian Governor Solomon Lar fought it in the 80s and is continuing his fight. In its first Newsletter in 2004, CAN asserted that from 1979–1983, the civilian State Government of Solomon Lar was

a “thorn in the flesh” of the Shagari Muslim FG. The focal point of much of Lar’s challenge was the issue of Christian Pilgrims Welfare Boards that he forced on the government as a parallel to the Muslim boards that had existed for years and that attracted large government funds.⁹⁰ These people were able to keep the wolves at bay. It is alleged that the weakness and corruption of incumbent Governor Dariye created the climate favourable to unleashing the full anger that had long gripped the hearts of the Plateau peoples.

Owing to this and “many other” actions not further described in that CAN newsletter referred to earlier, “the seat of satan was planted in the State.” The sad flow of events in the form of

organised terror attacks in the past four years with Christians and their places of worship becoming major targets, is part of the clandestine plans to disorganise the entire Christian community in Nigeria, to weaken their faith and thereby enthroning the role of “satanism” in Nigeria. If not, how do we explain the introduction of the sharia legal code in almost all the Muslim states?

How do we answer the call by the Muslims that Plateau State must practice sharia? I ask, how do we account for the various terrorist cells that are spread in Plateau State in areas like Jos North, Wase, Kanam and Yelwa? I mean, how can one explain the rationale behind the bomb destruction of the Jos Ultra Modern Main Market in 2001? I mean, how can one explain that a State of Emergency was declared in the State simply because terrorism was being fought? Should one accept that Yelwa is not a strong zone of the terrorists, where all their attacks were planned and executed? Was it not Yelwa that was nicknamed “New Zamfara” and “Afghanistan” and the portrait of Osama bin Laden hoisted? Was it not in the same Yelwa that these terrorists murdered 48 Christians in a

*church and destroyed eight Christian sanctuaries on the 24th of February, 2004? Where are the displaced in Kano following a “reprisal” that took place on 5th May 2004? Where are the over 1,000 Christians killed there, who were given a mass burial in May? Doesn’t Kano State, noted for its notoriety in terror-gangsterism, deserve a more punitive measure as against the State of Emergency in Plateau State?*⁹¹

COCIN folk at every level talk the same way. Musa Gotom, another retired President of COCIN, referred to the sad events of 2004 and wrote, “I have the impression that the whole event past, present and the yet to come are the unfolding of a master plan to cause unrest in the country. The unrest continues. Yesterday Bauchi University was closed down because of student riots—Christians against Muslim students.”⁹²

In an interview by *LB* staff, Sargwak Wazhi of Wase was hesitant to choose between the ethnic and religious explanation for the Plateau violence. But when the interviewer reminded him that people of Wazhi’s ethnic group, the Tarok, were fighting alongside Muslims against other Tarok, Wazhi realized that this could not be ethnic in origin, for Taroks do not fight each other. This could only be religious in nature, with Muslim Taroks choosing the sides of their fellow Muslims. According to him, “If it thus happens, the only clear conclusion is most likely religious. Otherwise, I don’t see myself taking any weapon against my brother.”⁹³

One Abrose Gapsuk, described as a “Christian community leader” in Shendam, insisted, “The invasion of Christian towns and villages by Muslim fanatics clearly demonstrates that the attack is a war against Christians.” According to him, “1500 Christians were killed and their churches and properties were destroyed.”⁹⁴ After the Christian reprisal against Yelwa, Muslims were “chanting religious slogans and vowing revenge.” One man

was overheard to say, “The Pagans have killed our people,” “Pagans” here referring to every type of non-Muslim, including Christians. “There will be religious war in this country,” predicted another Muslim.⁹⁵

One COCIN woman who survived the Yelwa massacre of 2004 and observed much of it, firmly rejected the explanations of tribalism and of nomad versus settler. She argued, “If it were not a religious war, what brought them to the church, to surround the church?” “It was a war against the Christians.” The interviewer asked what Muslims were saying. “They would say, ‘Ring the morning bell, if you can.’”⁹⁶

Bulus Kaze, a COCIN writer, insisted that theirs “is a spiritual battle” and suggested that it “does not require the might of arms.”⁹⁷ Most of his people agree with the premise, but not with the conclusion. Killing over 600 Muslims in a fit of rage hardly squares with that one. Another COCIN writer, Yiljap Abraham, wrote, “I have always had the conviction that the long-running Plateau bloody crisis has a strong spiritual dimension to it.”⁹⁸ Alexander Lar affirmed the same. “What has happened on the Plateau is nothing near ethnicity, because the various ethnic groups have always lived in peace with each other. It is all religious—an attempt by one religious group to drive everyone into the grave so that they can have the whole land to themselves, land that has never been theirs!”⁹⁹ The above religious interpretation is standard among Plateau Christians.

Plateau Christians, especially COCIN and its members, not only insist that the violence in the state is primarily religious violence, but also that there exists a direct link between the violence and sharia. Sharia may not always be mentioned in reports about Plateau violence, but it is just about always in the foreground of Christian thinking. And though Muslims deny any connection with sharia in Plateau, since it is no sharia state, even the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs,

without spelling it out, recognized a connection between sharia and the Plateau struggle. It reported, “That outbreak of violence followed growing tension between Christians and Muslims over the adoption of sharia by 12 states....”¹⁰⁰ The violence of the past few years in Plateau is regarded by them as desperate attempts by Muslims to gain control over this recalcitrant “Northern” state and is part of the larger Muslim ambition to turn Nigeria into an Islamic country. Similarly, the imposition of sharia in other states and the subsequent denial of human rights for Christians—all these are part and parcel of the one grand plan. The only difference between sharia and non-sharia states is that Muslims have made greater strides in the former. It is only a matter of time—unless Plateau and COCIN stop it in its track.

There is another more indirect effect of sharia on Plateau’s turmoil. Quite a number of *Muslims* have moved from the sharia states to Plateau State precisely to avoid sharia. These new arrivals placed new pressures on land, which was already one of the points of contention between the parties. So, sharia in other states indirectly creates conditions in Plateau that further increase the tension and, thus, the resultant violence.¹⁰¹

Plateau Christians are convinced they are the Muslims’ next target, sharia and all. So, COCIN and other Christians get upset when they observe the denial of Christian rights in sharia states. In a communiqué, COCIN “condemns attempts in Zamfara, Jigawa and Kano to relocate churches from cities to their outskirts, refusal to approve building plans for Christian places of worship as well as discriminatory school fees, which are meant to deny Christian children of their rights as citizens of Nigeria.” The COCIN communiqué also expressed solidarity with Christians who lost their lives and properties in Kano during May 2004, when Muslims revenged the killings of Muslims in Yelwa, Plateau State. The article closes with the following sentence: “Council notes that Kano is notorious for shedding the blood of Christians

at the slightest excuse and their cup will soon be full—then the divine invitation.”¹⁰²

In view of the Yelwa slaughter of Muslims, the above sounds a bit hypocritical, but no more so than the usual Muslim reaction to their violence. Minchakpu wrote, “Certainly Christians have mounted counter-attacks on Muslims in Nigeria.” Lar acknowledged the Plateau carnage in a disclaimer sort of way: Within COCIN, “there has never been on our side an open attack on anybody, except a reprisal on our attackers, because not all of us are people who will run away. There are people who want to defend themselves, and they embark on reprisal.”¹⁰³ So, Christians have not always been victims in these conflicts. “Church leaders readily admit young Christian men also have destroyed property and killed Muslims, although they generally contend the violence is in self-defence rather than initiated by them.”¹⁰⁴

But, having emphasized the basically religious nature of Plateau’s turmoil, at other times the advocates of this perspective turn around and claim that the bottom line is political after all! In an article by Minchakpu, some of the same people suddenly hold politics responsible. As we saw on page 380, Alexander Lar did just that. Religion came in to justify political policies. We are back at the famous manipulation theory.

There is a confusion here that comes, I firmly believe, from the failure of most Christians to have developed a viable theory of the relationship between religion and politics, especially within Islam. Christians instinctively separate them and find it difficult to unite them. This, I have argued especially in Volume 5, is due to the dualistic heritage Christians have imbibed from their founding missions. Though Nigerian churches are struggling hard to overcome this dualism, they have not yet emerged and so find themselves facing situations they interpret in confusing ways. Of course, I am not suggesting that better or more wholistic insights will eliminate all confusion, when the situations facing them are in themselves most confusing.

In spite of his earlier statements, Alexander Lar, along with Anglican Bishop Benjamin Kwashi of Jos, asserted “that Muslims have fanned the flames of religious conflict with the sole aim of destroying the church in Plateau State, enslaving Christians politically and working towards the Islamization of Nigeria.” That conviction stands. The attacks on the church are “based on the desire to oppress Christians politically,” Kwashi asserts. When you ask Muslims why they attack the church, “they will tell you the problems are equality in political sharing of offices.” “When they want to fight for political recognition, they attack the church, so the church has become a scapegoat. You can go through all the reasons they give, and not one is a concrete reason that the church has offended the mosque. Not one!”¹⁰⁵ Other volumes and chapters tell us that many Muslims, rightly or wrongly, are deeply offended at the Christian community.

▲ UNILATERAL MUSLIM DEMANDS

Plateau Christians are only too aware of the suffering of Christians in sharia states that we have observed especially in Chapter 4. Bulus Kaze charges that Northern leaders deprive non-Muslims of their rights. Zamfara’s sharia “is an attempt to stop others from practicing their religion.” Kaze points to various indications. He alleges that the Zamfara Development Control Committee “targeted 13 churches and not a single mosque.” He asks, “Is that not an attempt to write off Christians in the state.” CAN is never given recognition at or for any function in the state, not even for Federal occasions. The media never air messages or announcements from Christians. Where are the rights of minorities in Zamfara defended? Even indigenous Christians are deprived of their rights in Zamfara. It is this *experience* of rights deprivation that has turned most Christians against sharia, even though history and ideas also play a part.¹⁰⁶ It is mostly about negative *experiences*.

In the light of this suppression of Christians in sharia states, the demand by the Jasawa to have a representative in the traditional power structures of Jos annoys Christians immensely, apart from the fact that they also see it as part of the “Grand Plan.”¹⁰⁷ It aggravates the Christians whose brothers and sisters demand their rightful place in the sharia states but continue to be excluded. How dare Muslims demand for themselves what they refuse to grant to others?

As Gotan put it:

*In some places they advocate for the appointment of Islamic Traditional rulers specifically for them [Muslims] instead of subordinating themselves to the existing traditional authority. This is demanded by them in Plateau State, whereas in places like Katsina, Kano and Jigawa State, for instance, the indigenous non-Muslim descendants of those who have settled for up to one hundred years are constantly regarded as strangers, excluded from government appointment..., objects of attacks and killings at the slightest provocation. In spite of the substantial indigenous Christian population in Borno, Yobe and Bauchi, they are hardly represented in the decision-making bodies of those states. It is also known that Christian religious programmes are not easily allowed on the public media in some states that are predominantly Muslim, yet in a state that is predominantly Christian, it is expected that Islamic religious programmes be aired freely. Where this is not done, there is allegation of persecution.*¹⁰⁸

Dan Manjang, a COCIN pastor and an officer at the Nigerian Bible Translation Trust, Jos, reacted against the charge of anti-Muslim discrimination on the Plateau, as claimed by Sheikh Zakariya Dawud, chairman of the Council of Ulama in Plateau State. “Muslims in Plateau State enjoy all rights and face no opposition to practicing their faith.” Then he began to enumerate all the

blessings Muslims enjoy in the State. They “are appointed into political positions of power. They have commissioners in the cabinet; they have permanent secretaries; their children get scholarship grants like Christian children; Muslim schools are grant-aided by the Plateau Government; and they have contested elections and won. So what are they complaining about?”

Then Manjang turned the argument around. Christians in Muslim states, he asserted, “are denied these privileges. While Muslims in Plateau State get land to build mosques, build houses, etc., Christians in Islamic states are denied land to build churches.” In the realm of broadcasting, while Muslims receive equal airtime in Plateau on radio and TV, “in Islamic states, Christians are denied broadcast of even paid programmes.” In these states “you can never find a single Christian programme. Yet in Plateau State, Muslims have enjoyed all these privileges.” He concluded with annoyance, “The claim of Muslims in Plateau State that they are being discriminated against is a farce.”¹⁰⁹

Interesting. That is the same question people in some other countries, including Canada, ask of Muslims in their midst! How do Muslims dare make demands in Canada and other countries, their newly chosen homelands—or should I say “mission fields?”—that they refuse to non-Muslims in the countries of their original citizenship? As Turaki has pointed out, the question of fairness does not arise with such issues.¹¹⁰

▲ THE SYMBOL OF WASE _____

The beginning of COCIN was under the flag of the SUM, British Branch in 1904.¹¹¹ With the approval of Governor Lugard, the first colonial Lieutenant Governor of Northern Nigeria, the SUM started its original work in Wase, Plateau State. The area was and continues to be under the political domination of Fulani Muslims, who at some time in the past invaded the area and settled

it much as they had done in places like Zangon-Kataf in Kaduna State¹¹² and just as Turaki describes the process in Chapter 7. It did not take long for Lugard to withdraw his approval and require missionaries to abandon the place because of the dominance of Muslims, whom he did not wish to disturb.¹¹³ In due time, COCIN, now a Nigerian denomination, planted churches there, including many buildings. Somewhere along the line, arsonists burnt the churches to the ground.

However, when COCIN started to prepare her centennial celebration in 2004, she decided to hold it at Wase, right next to the scarred ruins of the central burnt church. Alexander Lar, at the time still President of COCIN, made the announcement that the celebration would be held in Wase. After the two attempts at evangelism there, he said, "There is no church in Wase, but Wase is still Wase and we are still Nigerians. Nobody will deny us holding that centennial in Wase. We are going to hold it there."¹¹⁴ And they did with well over 10,000 people singing, dancing and worshipping next to the ruined church in this Muslim stronghold.

A leading COCIN personality reported the following in private correspondence with me. It was attended by Christians from many denominations. The decision to hold it at Wase was "to show the world" that even though Wase is a Muslim emirate, Christians are in the majority. The occasion was chaired by retired General Theophilus Danjuma, an indigene from Takum, Taraba State in the Middle Belt. David Carling, a leader of Action Partners, the former SUM, British Branch, the founding mission of COCIN, preached. "Strong messages of both Christian and Military flavour were used, making one wonder. Two messages were spoken, the Gospel of Peace, praising God for 100 years of grace, and one of ethnic interest, stating that the area should never be overrun again without stiffer resistance." The church will not give up on Wase; it has become an aggressive church that will not take "Yes to sharia" for an answer.

Indeed, no one tried to stop the celebration in Wase. To the contrary, Muslims attended the event, led by no one less than Haruna Abdullahi, the Emir of Wase! He even took the opportunity to “preach love and tolerance among the various tribes and religions.”¹¹⁵

In a communiqué, the Church “recalls with nostalgia the faith, vision and sacrifices of the founding fathers of the Church.” The reference is to the first missionaries. The Church was compelled to move out by the colonialists and now again, but this time by the local Muslims. COCIN had doggedly worked in the Wase area and eventually had 173 local churches there—only to have them all destroyed during the various crises of 2002 and beyond.¹¹⁶

In spite of her brave words, COCIN decided on a temporary retreat from Wase. The violence that led to church burning had spread over a number of villages and produced refugees, who later sought to return to their homes and farms. Minchakpu reported, “Devastation caused by religious conflict and the hostile attitude of Muslims toward Christian refugees returning to their villages, forced COCIN to relocate its regional headquarters from Wase to Kadarko.” Pandang Yamsat, the recently-appointed replacement of Lar as President, announced the decision during a church service in Langtang on April 24, 2005, in these words: “The decision to relocate our regional office and the church in Wase town was made by our Church Council following the complete destruction of all our churches in Wase town and the killing and displacement of the church members in the area.” The measure, however, did not constitute capitulation on the part of COCIN. It was a temporary strategy. Yamsat explained that it would “give the church time to strategize on how best to carry on evangelism in Wase amidst the hostile attitude of local Muslims.”

It was not mere paranoia on the part of COCIN. The Plateau

State Government was similarly concerned “that although Christians displaced from Wase town and surrounding villages were willing to return to their towns and villages, they are being prevented by Muslims in the area, who had illegally taken over their houses and farmlands as spoils of war.” The Government sent a blue-ribbon delegation to Wase to correct the situation. Michael Botmang, Deputy Governor, told local Muslim leaders that those who have taken over those properties “should vacate them immediately or face the wrath of the law. ”

In view of the heavy-weight and threatening posture of the government delegation—it included members of the army, the police, state security, customs, immigration and prison services—even the bravado of a Muslim emir, Haruna Abdullahi, and a Muslim LGC chairman, Saidu Musa, was seemingly reined in. The two local Muslim authorities in an apparent humble posture promised “to work towards educating Muslims on the need to allow the displaced Christians to return to their homes.”¹¹⁷ Note well: “educating,” not “ordering” as he had just been instructed. Was this a serious nuance on their part or merely careless language on the part of Minchakpu? And what is lacking in the mind of Muslims that they do not recognize property ownership? That they need to be educated? Is property ownership not an important part of the Muslim perspective? What was so different about this situation? I doubt that they needed education. In a sense, they knew; they needed authorities to order them, to force them to return the properties. However, there is also an aspect to the Muslim concept of property to which Turaki draws our attention in Chapter 7. But that is an issue these Muslim leaders would not want to bring to the table!

Saidu Musa was subsequently interviewed by an anonymous *LB* staff, but it was, in my opinion, an interview marked by a high degree of political correctness. Here was this Muslim leader of an area and a people who had inflicted great damage and violence upon

the local COCIN constituency, but neither party to the interview referred to that sad history, except by unfeeling references such as “the crisis” without further defining it. While four months earlier state authorities had to intervene by forcing the local authorities to pave the way for the refugees to return home, this time Chairman Musa gushed forth about his attempts at reconciliation via interfaith groups moving throughout the LGA to educate the people to form peace committees. He emphasized that the first interfaith chairperson was the local CAN leader. They had to assuage the hurts caused by *allegations* of religious victimization. The peace committees were to “create understanding between the two religions.” And, oh, yes, the local government listened to the people’s demand for new chiefdoms as a way towards “absolute peace.” Musa claimed that it was now possible for people to travel anywhere without fear of molestation. He was also encouraging Christians who had left the employment of the LG to return, but some have so far refused. “It is high time,” he averred, “that they throw away such ideas and come back to work. We have given them time and we are going to discuss with them, because I believe in dialogue.” In the meantime, the feeling of insecurity remains high and “there is still that feeling of not wanting to go back.”¹¹⁸ It is just too bad that it took all this bloodshed, destruction and subsequently the force of state government to kick start this move towards reconciliation.

Wase had become an important psychological symbol in the heart of COCIN. There was too much history there for COCIN to relent. One Pastor Iliya Nji wrote,

There is no way anyone who wants to write or reflect on the history of COCIN [can do so] without considering the name “Wase.” God in His infinite wisdom chose Wase to be the beginning, birth and nucleus of this Church. No doubt, God did not make a mistake in His choice of Wase from all the other villages and towns then. We must remain committed to

*this cause. Wase is synonymous with COCIN, just as Jerusalem is synonymous with Christianity. The fact that Wase is now the domain of some people just at the time of celebrating the centenary is quite challenging and calls for reflection.*¹¹⁹

That, as we saw above, was precisely the intention of COCIN leaders.

▲ **THE LIGHTBEARER (LB)** _____

An important COCIN centennial project was the resurrection of *The Lightbearer* and its appropriation by the Church. You have already read a few quotations and other materials lifted from its pages. The magazine had its origin with the SUM ever since its beginning in 1904. In my 1979 dissertation on the SUM, I quoted liberally from the magazine during its British stage. It was a nice touch of the Church to resurrect and take over that magazine, including its title, for Nigerian purposes. I appreciate that the editors saw fit to quote several pages from my 1979 dissertation in their maiden edition of February 2004, precisely on the subject of sharia as I wrote about it at the time. I am proud to now be able to borrow from the Nigerian version. COCIN uses this magazine powerfully as a tool in the struggle with Muslims.

The Church seems poised to use the magazine as one of its major vehicles to defend itself and Plateau State as it develops, perhaps unconsciously, what could be the seeds of a new Nigerian version of a *Corpus Christianum*. The Church clearly regards Plateau as its province and strongly identifies with its aspirations. Several issues of *LB* are largely devoted to the violence that rocked Plateau State. The death and destruction are graphically depicted in both article and photograph. Quite a number of articles present

explanations of all the violence as well as of the alleged intentions of Muslims to conquer Plateau at any cost. And after all the graphic descriptions of the tragedies of 2004 and powerful articles about Muslim atrocities and designs, the edition of January 2005, features a series of stories about the pre-colonial Muslim slave trade with all of its attendant horrors and suffering. They were copied from early British *LB* editions of 1907. Concrete stories that make one shiver with cold horror at the unimaginable cruelty of these Muslims towards the ancestors of the Plateau Christians.¹²⁰ And then, reaching even further back into history, we read about the exploits of Usman Dan Fodio with his alleged intolerant Wahabi orientation and the force he employed to establish the Sokoto empire. In addition there are stories about the violent expansion of Islam in certain parts of West Africa. All of this serves to remind the reader of the nature and history of the Muslims whose advance COCIN is seeking to halt. It is a grim history with dark foreboding that people need to understand. “In the face of this story, what becomes of the contention that Islam has humanised, civilized and improved in every way the native races of West Africa?”¹²¹

Both the early and the revived *LB* are heavily politicised, the one with the politics of colonialism as seen through Evangelical missionary eyes; the other with the politics of the contemporary Christian-Muslim struggle in Nigeria through COCIN eyes. The early SUM missionaries used these stories to generate interest in and support for their mission. COCIN is now re-issuing those old slavery stories to remind their members that the destruction Plateau has recently suffered at the hands of Muslims is nothing new; it has pre-colonial roots. It disappeared only under the pressure of colonialism and is now once again rearing its ugly head. The leopard has not changed its skin. It is nothing but the revival of earlier practices and attitudes. The magazine reprinted a letter that originally appeared in a 1907 edition, written “by a Muslim sheikh

of Baghdad” that could have been published by Al-Qaida today. I attach it as Appendix 21.¹²² The attitudes of some Zaria emirs towards their non-Muslim subjects even in more recent times as described by Matthew Kukah are shocking indications that not much has changed.¹²³

The new *LB* features stories also of contemporary violence visited upon the churches. Sometimes it features abrasive front pages that graphically introduce current Muslim violence inflicted on Christians: “My Muslim In-Laws Murdered Him;” “As Persecution of Christians Persists in Kano;” “More than 50 Christian Children and Women Lured into Islam;” “Hell in Maiduguri: 12 Children Roasted; 52 Christians killed; 37 Churches Burnt;” “Namu’s ‘Operation No Mercy’—How Gamai Women and Children Were Massacred.”¹²⁴

Within the magazine are many stories of horror and violence Christians keep suffering at the hands of Muslims. They are similar to those already told in previous volumes, especially Volume 1. Liya Usaman, a Muslim from Jigawa State, reacted to a story about “Abduction Syndicate in Bauchi” by denying that Islam allows such behaviour and therefore it could not have happened. *LB* should check up on its facts before publishing. Furthermore, it seemed to him that the magazine was trying to “generate tension” with such stories. Bulus Wakili, the Editor-in-Chief, responded by insisting on the facts and explaining that “the main purpose of this newspaper is to bring into the limelight the persecutions suffered by Christians.”¹²⁵ Of course, any publication with that purpose is bound to emphasize negative violent events, though that by no means characterizes the paper as a whole. By the time Plateau had returned to the normal mode, in the opinion of Yakubu Datti, State Commissioner for Information, *LB* had been particularly helpful “in the restoration of democracy” in the state.¹²⁶

I herewith treat you to three articles from the pages of *LB* that

touch upon many of the issues and that give you a good impression of the spirit of COCIN vis a vis the Muslim *jihad* for Plateau. The issues in Plateau and throughout Nigeria are more blatant than they are in the Western world. There they are covered by layers of legality, democracy, human rights, political correctness—and, not to ignore, the ingenious Muslim campaign to utilize all of these in the West for their own purposes, to gain for themselves what they deny minorities in their countries of origin.

COCIN SHAPES PLATEAU POLITICS¹²⁷

BY SOLOMON NAANMIYAP, PAM ZANG, PETER TITLE,
JENNIFER YARIMA, GODFREY BANWAT, EZEKIEL CHOLLOM

COCIN, an offshoot of the SUM, has come a long way in this country as one of the dominant Christian denominations north of the Niger. Indeed, Karl Kumm and others did a marvellous job out of sheer humanity to plant Christianity among the hitherto “Pagan tribes” here, most of whom had successfully resisted the aggression of the ferocious jihadists for their proselytisation [on behalf] of Islam.

This particular denomination, alongside its sister body, SIM, which gave birth to ECWA, became acceptable to the so-called Pagans on the Plateau and other parts of the Middle-Belt. This was due to the fact that the new-found faith as preached by the missionaries was devoid of coercion, unlike the Islamic effort for the same purpose of conversion. What is more, the “Pagan tribes” readily accepted Christianity because of the concept of the “Bible and the plough” as the basis of human salvation and existence while serving the Lord.

Incidentally, just as Jerusalem was to the Jews, so is Plateau to Christians north of the Niger in Nigeria. It came to be used as the radius to reach the unreached in other parts of the Middle-Belt and the North with the message of salva-

tion. This in essence means that Plateau became the headquarters of COCIN and ECWA, among other Christian denominations in Nigeria today. This development was to the chagrin of Islam which had initially wanted the area subdued both for political and religious reasons. Had the Plateau been vanquished during the aggressive days of the Shehu Usman Danfodio Jihad [early 1800s], it would have facilitated their southward thrust for the planned Islamisation of the entire country. However, since the stout resistance by Plateau groups impeded the realisation of this tall dream, the Islamic forces had to look for other options. Some of them were carefully hatched and cocooned in sharia law that was introduced in most parts of the north. The same was advised to be imposed on the Middle-Belt with special emphasis on Plateau State. The sole objective was to destroy Christianity here.

Having mentioned that jihad was to be prosecuted in phases in Nigeria until results were achieved, special focus was to be on Plateau State which could not be conquered by the forces of Islam in the 1800s. And as part of a new strategy, the Hausa/Fulani were encouraged to infiltrate the area in their numbers, especially when it was opened up for tin mining by the colonial government, and that, having settled down, they should begin to agitate for both political and traditional leadership in their host communities. Besides that, they should place themselves above other settler groups on the Plateau, even if the latter first arrived in the area.

Since the mission was defined and the role assigned to their willing agents on the Plateau, they were expected to craftily arrogate to themselves the status of indigenes like other bona fide Plateau groups and then implement the jihadist agenda. Unfortunately, the indigenes of Plateau State and the church

were conscious enough to decipher this shrewd scheme. They wasted no time in opposing it until the agents of the jihad exhausted their patience and decided to risk a direct confrontation with all the indigenous groups on the Plateau, beginning with the northern zones, on September 7, 2001 and terminating at the southern zone.

However, having acknowledged the enormity of the task before them, they had to demand for reinforcement from their faceless sponsors from the North, who added mercenaries from Niger, Chad and Cameroon. As they transformed Plateau into a battlefield for about three years, sophisticated arms were freely used against the helpless indigenes until the imposition of a state of emergency by the FG on May 18, 2004.

Even though Muslims were alleged to have masterminded the declaration of a state of emergency in Plateau, believing that it was going to favour them, it turned out to be a blessing to the indigenes after all. The resolutions of the defunct Plateau Peace Conference which are being implemented today, speak volumes in this regard.

Despite the fact that COCIN is celebrating its centenary, it has been a target of attacks by those claiming to be prosecuting a jihad in Plateau State. During their invasions they levelled down many churches belonging to COCIN and mowed down many of its clerics and members. This action has been deliberate, because COCIN is the largest Christian denomination in Plateau State and it is fast making inroads into barrier states in the North dominated by Islam.

As COCIN celebrates this centenary, it would lament the persecution of its members by the jihadists and the destruction of its churches. Worthy of note was the destruction of the first church in Plateau State at Wase, which was built

by the erstwhile SUM before the COCIN metamorphosis. COCIN would continue to reminisce with grief the inhuman massacre of its clerics alongside other worshipers in the church by the jihadists in Yelwa-Shendam when they came prowling to cleanse the area of Christians and other indigenous groups.

Being the dominant Christian group in Plateau, COCIN should take up the gauntlet of defeating anti-Christian forces in this part of the country and must not compromise its position for fear of intimidation.

PLATEAU ULAMA COUNCIL SCRIBE MUST HEAR THIS!
BY BULUS GAMBO¹²⁸

It is sad, disheartening, unpleasant and unfortunate that some people appear not impressed with the efforts by both the federal and state governments to reinstate and subsequently sustain lasting peace on the Plateau. One of them goes by the name Barrister Lawal Ishaq. His recent unguarded utterances in the media have portrayed him as one who does not have the best of wishes for the state and have clearly portrayed him as intolerant and narrow minded in a society that is fast learning moral accommodation.

The issues are contained in one of the interviews Barrister Lawal, the Secretary General of the Ulama Elders Council in Plateau State, granted the Weekly Trust Newspaper.¹²⁹ The interview was intended to “highlight the flash points of the Plateau crisis and reveal the behind-the-scene activities that led to the eventual restoration of democratic structures, against the backdrop of various protests by groups and individuals opposed to Dariye’s return.” It featured misrepresentation of facts and insults to the prestige of the Plateau people.

In the interview, Barrister Ishaq alleged that “when sharia as a judicial system was introduced in Zamfara and other northern states, the Christians in Plateau felt it was time to also establish a 100 percent Christian state.¹³⁰ A sort of answer to the Zamfara model, or even an improvement on it” adding that “it was probably a northern Christian project.” Barrister Ishaq further asserted that the alleged move to declare Canon law in Plateau State “led to a situation where the over 40 percent Muslim population became agitated. Because when this starts, you know that we as a group were targeted for hate and discrimination. Then it so happened that the lopsidedness, even in appointments, was beginning to show. The ratio figures were strikingly discriminatory. Out of 17 commissioners, 16 were Christians.” Continuing, Barrister Ishaq presented a distorted history by saying “that from 1912–1946, a Hausa chief was in charge of affairs here for the Native Authority during the colonial times.” That was several years before the office of the Gbong Gwom was instituted.¹³¹ He added that by this historical misrepresentation, the Hausa/Fulanis deserve a district. Another issue that the barrister was quick to add in order to generate unnecessary public sympathy, was the rumour peddled around that the Northern Christian Elders Forum, comprising of people like General Gowon, General Theophilus Danjuma, former Governor Solomon Lar and other notable northern Christians, went to Aso Rock to lobby for Dariye’s return. He also stressed that the recently concluded Plateau Peace Conference was lopsided in representation and left many issues untouched.

After reading the interview, I planned not to join issues with the Secretary General. However, I subsequently reversed my decision because of the fact that, while the scribe is busy campaigning for cheap publicity, certain facts must be told

for the sake of the future generation. Let me ask Barrister Ishaq: What is wrong in the quest by the Christian majority to agitate for the adoption of a Canon Law in Plateau State? Why would the Muslims in Plateau State be agitated by the introduction of Canon Law? Since Plateau State indigenes in states that declared sharia legal system are not agitated in these states, why is he afraid of the introduction of Canon Law on the Plateau?

It is quite interesting that, instead of totally rejecting the introduction of a state religion in any part of this country, this learned man has derailed from his professional responsibilities and is presently championing sentimental issues. Perhaps, he needs to be reminded that in terms of tolerance, Plateau State is by far better than [the sharia] states like Zamfara, Kano, Jigawa, Sokoto or even Katsina. Plateau State has remained the only state in the north that has embraced everybody irrespective of tribal or religious inclinations.¹³²

Is Barrister Ishaq not aware of the fact that in Zamfara State, churches have been earmarked for possible demolition? Has he not heard of the torture of human beings and innocent Nigerians by the notorious members of the Hisbah Commission in Zamfara State? For Barrister Ishaq's information, leaders of CAN in that state are never recognized during any state or national programmes. Many Christian organizations and churches pay through their nose for their programmes to be aired on either the state television or radio stations.

Fortunately, the reverse was the case on the Plateau where every Muslim is given equal right to worship without molestation. I don't even know whether Barrister Ishaq has the right to comment on the issue of lopsidedness in appointment, unless he is an indigene of the state. For the sake of clarification, however, no indigene of Plateau State is against

the appointment of an indigenous Muslim as a commissioner, deputy governor or even a governor in the state. In any case, no Plateau man has been appointed commissioner in other states in the core north.¹³³ Maybe the barrister has forgotten the favour enjoyed by the Nasiru Goshis, Sama'ila Mohammads, Sale Hassans amongst others.

No Plateau man or woman has disputed the fact that the Hausa/Fulanis came up to Jos for trading. If our historical antecedent is anything to go by, the White man recognized the Hausa/Fulani as head of native authorities, because the indigenes then were not interested in trading. But if facts must be revealed and respected, when the Hausa/Fulani came, were there no people on the land? Did the Beroms, Anagutas and Afizeres agree that the Hausa/Fulani should be their native authority leaders or was the Hausa emir appointed by the White man? To the best of my knowledge, a chief is nominated only by his own people, not by a foreigner. Barrister Ishaq should restrict himself to the truth, and not be carried away by sentiments. In any case, all is now history, since the resolutions of the Plateau Peace Conference have given respect and honour to whom they are due. If Barrister Ishaq or any of his cohorts think that there are yet issues to be addressed, the answer to their quest is simple: Please kindly wait for another Plateau Peace Conference, where your views may be heard. For now, it will be better for you to please shut up and allow us to put our dear state on the path to glory. Again Ishaq should be aware of the fact that "Mutanen Philato sun gyara zamansu, sun kuma sasanta da juna. Wannan labari ne mai dadi."¹³⁴

How could in the first instance Barrister Lawal Ishaq throw decency to the wind and out of his wildest imagination and unwarranted exaggeration afford to create an impression that many groups and individuals protested against the

return of the suspended governor? The first question to ask Ishaq is: Was he in Jos when the governor was received by a mammoth crowd and subsequently accompanied to Rayfield? Though most of the civil servants and his political opponents were undecided about possible reconciliation, none of them took to the streets to distort the proceedings. It was only the Council of Ulama through their spokesman, one Dr. Bawa Abdullahi Wase, and some members of the Amalgamated Union of the Motor Cycle Association, Plateau State chapter, who objected to the reinstatement of the suspended governor.

To help refresh Barrister Ishaq's memory, while Dr. Abdullahi Wase on behalf of the council officials read the resolution objecting to the return of Governor Dariye, the members of the Motorcycle Association protested just for an hour before they were dispersed by security agents. If this development is anything to go by, are these two incidences enough to thwart the collective destiny of the Plateau people? Haba, my learned colleague!

In any case, if the governor deliberately hurt his people as their leader, it is only his people who have the right to discipline him. As far as the Plateau people are concerned, Dariye as a person is a human being like any other and was unfortunate to have been caught up in the web of the intrigues of contemporary politics.

It is true that Dariye hurt the civil servants who went for months without pay. It is equally true that he did not live up to his expected obligations in terms of providing the necessary facilities needed to create an enabling environment for the socio-economic emancipation of his people. Yes, he did little or nothing to stand up to his responsibilities when needed most. Today, he has sounded out that he is a brand new person. The one who hurt his people so much has begged in tears for forgiveness from God and humanity.

[MUSLIMS] KILLING ISLAM

YILJAP ABRAHAM¹³⁵

The story is told that a few days after Muslims in Bauchi decided to descend on their unsuspecting Christian neighbours, killing some, looting their property, setting their churches, houses and shops on fire, a group of young people was walking down a street with the air of arrogance of conquerors who had the whole town to themselves. A young man in the group was said to have pursed his lips, pushed his chest out, with arms spread out and proclaimed aloud: “Jesus is stupid. Jesus, stupid. Stupid.”

Christian passers-by who heard him were reported to have simply walked on, not bothering to take a second look at the boy or respond to his captive mind.

It is not difficult at all to understand why those Christians behaved the way they did. Any true believer, when confronted by a similar scenario will act the same. General Secretary of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN), Rev. Seth Usman Nden, explained the reasoning when he visited and consoled believers in Maiduguri who were traumatized by their Muslim neighbours last February, “After all, the church is not a building that can be burnt as some people think; it is wherever God’s people are gathered for worship. Besides, you have a God who does not need humans to fight for His protection. The church is still intact.”

If Christians had reacted like these jihadists, there would have been perpetual war launched by Christians against Muslims because of that Islamic writer, Ahmed Deedat, who had proved himself as one of the worst critics of the Christian faith. Deedat, not even an Arab, had such an insatiable obsession hating Christ and Christianity, that he devoted his lifetime to writing books in which he wanted to prove that Jesus, the Christ, was never crucified; was never

the Son of God; was never the Messiah and all that his depraved mind could cook up. It was quite my privilege as a very young Christian to read a great deal of what this man had to write. He even got into a debate in South Africa with a Christian, John Gilchrist. But I didn't hate Deedat at all. No Christian ever organized a rally against this anti-Christ. We read his books and prayed for him. Unfortunately, he spent the later part of his life on a life-supporting machine and passed on. I still feel it; because he has left behind quite a heap of religious nonsense. Now, Deedat will certainly meet the same Christ he had so ferociously maligned. Now he will bow the knee and make the confession that Jesus is indeed Lord.

Jesus knows how to take care of Himself, and does not need "another saviour." Yet in Nigeria, we have people who believe in the superiority of their faith, and unless they shed the blood of Christians, they do not see their "service" to the divine as complete. It is no big deal for them to turn peaceful neighbourhoods into abattoirs. In the hands of the intemperate, the ready sword of Islam has proved relentlessly bloody, merciless and unfeeling and the next moment, they proclaim: Islam is a religion of peace.

Nobody who saw what happened in Maiduguri will not bury his head in shame and shock, wondering whether it was humans who committed these heinous murders or they were "some things" that came from some place. It is too painful to recount here. Yet, it was done in the name of Islam!

In the last fifty years, Nigerian Christians have lived literally under the sword of Islam. There have been at least 44 attacks on Christians in towns, cities and university campuses. The reasons have ranged from a solar eclipse, to the use of slaughter slabs, celebration of Easter, a girl passing by a place of prayer, a Christian female student taking her

bath in her hostel or the cartoon of the Muslim prophet in a town Nigerian Christians had nothing to do with. Expectedly, many reasonable Muslims have come out to condemn what the Maiduguri butchers have done. I was particularly touched by the opinion of my very senior colleague, Adamu Adamu, in the Daily Trust newspaper of Friday, February 24, 2006. In his Friday Column, under the title “Mayhem in the name of God,” Adamu wrote very strongly on the Maiduguri killing of Christians, “The happenings in Maiduguri are symptomatic of the failure of the Muslim Collective and its leadership in this country, or more correctly, at least in the North and it requires an urgent solution.” Reading through that write-up, I truly experienced the pain that Adamu felt at just being a Muslim. “Isn’t it heart-rending for Muslims that their compatriots who live in their midst cannot expect plain good neighbourliness, justice and the doing of good for which this religion is so famous? I bow my head in shame and put up my hands in penitence and condolence to Ndigbo and those non-Muslims who have had to suffer loss as a result of the stupid acts of those who, without knowing Islam, have become its vanguard.”

All the same, the damage can’t be undone. And how many Nigerians, no, Northern, Muslims are as true, bold, balanced and Islamised as Adamu Adamu? In almost all attacks on Christians, Muslim leaders in such states have branded the actions as politically motivated, even when it was glaring to the blindest of the blind that Muslims attacked Christians! In other words, such politicians in government are claiming that their political opponents instigated the killing of Christians so that they would make the state ungovernable for them. That was the epitaph from the Borno State Governor, Ali Modu Sheriff,

who appeared to have felt no qualms about the roasting of 12 innocent children in their parents' houses by religiously intoxicated killers.

As if that was not enough, General Mohamradu Buhari, a Fulani from Katsina who wants to rule Nigeria under a democracy, has accused the government of President Obasanjo, a Christian, of complicity in the killings that took place in Maiduguri, his home Katsina and Kontagora, in Central Nigeria. In a press statement released in Kaduna on Friday, February 24, 2006, Buhari said the violent crises were part of the strategies undertaken by President Obasanjo's government aimed at achieving the third term agenda! Kai! Kai!! Kai!!! Such a stance and statement show Buhari painfully lacking in political decency.

This is the same man who had asked Muslims to vote in only fellow Muslims in the 2003 elections. This man had ruled Nigeria as a military general. It doesn't bother Buhari that since Obasanjo came to power in 1999 Muslims have attacked Christians some 19 times! Is Buhari's mind so taken captive by his lust for power, his hatred for Obasanjo as a Christian in the presidency that he can only seek to make capital out of a tragedy? Has Buhari no human sensibility to rebuke people who have deprived parents their children and children their parents and other law-abiding citizens their businesses, homes and worship places? Doesn't he have any sympathy for the Catholic mission whose Reverend Father was butchered and his body set ablaze? Or Joseph Tukwa whose seven children were roasted in their home? He could not visit the victims; but he went to Maiduguri to attend the National Executive Council meeting of his faction of the ANPP. He did not send any condolence message to Christian leaders either. All he wants to do is to make Obasanjo look very bad so that he can look politically, irresistibly good. Come on, Buhari.

Again, the likes of Buhari are many. Governor Abdulkadir Kure of Niger State in North Central Nigeria has engaged officials of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in his state in a war of words over the killing of three Christians and burning of 16 churches in Kontagora last February. He told the CAN leaders who visited him that, “You people voted for People’s Redemption Party (PRP) and the thugs the party you voted for trained are the ones destroying your buildings and wreaking havoc in the town.”

He was apparently referring to the 2003 gubernatorial election in which he won anyway. Kure is from the same state with, and an ardent campaigner for another retired general and former military ruler, Ibrahim Babangida, who recently signified intention to contest the presidency in 2007. With politicians like these very much in positions of influence, who can stop the attacks against Christians in this nation? What have been the cumulative effects of these jihads on the Christian population especially in Northern Nigeria and in other parts of the nation?

The most recent is the reprisal in Onitsha, South Eastern Nigeria. There, the Igbo descended on the Hausa-Muslim population in a move that showed that they were tired of burying their people who were always killed in the North by Muslims and their bodies brought home in the South for burial.

In Nshar (formerly Yelwa), Plateau State, the native population displayed the fact that the Muslims who had killed Christians in a church and chased every Christian out of town in February 2004, did not have monopoly of violence. In Langtang and Jos, Christians have stood on firm ground, always on the alert to confront and contain any attacks by Muslims. In Bauchi, the indigenous Christians know what modern religious warfare is or else the damage would have

been more than what was witnessed on February 20 in which 27 Christians were killed by Muslims.

All over Christendom, the determination is: Enough is enough! These people of Jesus who did not know how to get into physical combat now know techniques of defence and offence. Those who had forgotten the art of self-defence because there was peace have now firmed up their muscles and got themselves ready for battle. For the very first time, I have observed in my travels to cover areas of conflicts that Christians have learned the art of warfare and they are truly ready to fight. It is sad. But that is what modern Islam in Nigeria has taught non-adherents.

Vice President, Abuja zone of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Bishop John Praise, got the mood right when he told a national news magazine last month, "Enough is enough to destructions. We, the Christians will not just sit down and see what we have laboured for years destroyed in a matter of hours." Faced with endless crises the church never bargained for, Christians appear to be working on a theology that will enable them to be pro-active and responsive at the same time as indicated by Bishop Praise, "I believe with all my heart that the Bible says we should resist the devil, but it didn't tell us how to resist him. We have to have an understanding that I am not going to sit down and you will kill me for what I have not done."

I have also observed the deep level of distrust, even among neighbours and friends. Christians know that no matter how friendly they get with Muslims, when doomsday arrives, there will be no mercy. President of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) Rev. Dr. Pandang Yamsat spoke on this when he addressed a world press conference in March, "Are we truly to believe the Hausa slogan which says, Sabuwa da kaza ba ya hana yanka?" This too, is what Islam in Nigeria has earned for

itself. It is so bad that the Niger-Delta crisis is being blamed on the world terror organization, Al-Qaeda, and the group has taken credit for it by commending the act in its website.

Painfully too, our children are growing up to see international terrorism, mostly blamed on Muslims, and all the blood-letting in Nigeria against Christians. All these children are learning is that they are being hated by Muslims just because they are Christians.

Add to these the fact that perpetrators of these crimes usually escape with their loot and are shielded from justice. Then, spice it up with the remarks of people like Buhari, Governor Kure and Governor Sheriff, what do you have?

*They imagine that they are depleting the population of Nigerian Christians so that they can take over power and rule them with an iron hand. But do they know that they are instead hardening Christians and teaching them warfare? Someday, they will encounter the results face-to-face, when perhaps, it is all too late. Because the reality is that: **It is Muslims that are killing Islam!***

May these write-ups from the trenches and, in fact, this entire series, serve to tear away the blinders with which many Westerners regard their current situation. We need to see both the virtues of Muslims and their vices, their strong and their weak points—as well as our own. This series tries to help develop that sensitivity on both sides.

▲ WHO WINS? _____

In his outgoing speech as President of COCIN during 2004, Alexander Lar threw a serious challenge to the Church's leaders: "Never must we allow Plateau State to be humiliated again for whatever reason. This state is the cradle of enlightenment in the North of Nigeria and we must showcase this in the way we support and respect one another."¹³⁵

COCIN seems to feel that she, together with Plateau State, achieved an important victory at the Plateau Peace Conference. Well, the Main Report of the Conference did state the following: “The Conference further noted that Plateau State is a predominantly Christian state with a considerable Muslim population.”¹³⁶ Over the years, there have always been Muslims disputing that observation, so that the statement does represent official closure on that issue. The statement drove up La-Nibetle’s adrenalin. In the context of the 2005 Bonnke crusade in Jos, he jubilantly boasted, “The Muslim Hausa/Fulani were put in their place. This is not their territory. They have lost their power and no longer dare to object to Bonnke Crusades!”¹³⁷

Another Christian who attended the crusade reported to me that Muslims attended it and actually enjoyed the occasion, even though it was held on a special long weekend celebrating the end of the pilgrimage, when they should have been involved in Muslim celebrations! Perhaps that was the result of the catharsis of the Peace Conference?¹³⁸ It may also indicate a disconnect between many grass-root Muslims and their aggressive leaders. The very timing of the event almost seemed like a pre-meditated Christian challenge to Muslims: Try if you dare! And then there was that huge billboard advertising a “crusade” of all things at a major junction into the city. How Muslims must have grated their teeth! Wow, what a gamble—but it worked! Perhaps it proved that the above boast was not far off the mark.

But the Bonnke visit *was* a demonstration of Christian power in the state that left no one in doubt. Upon his arrival at the Jos Airport and after the proper protocol with respect to the Christian leaders that had gathered to welcome him, Bonnke immediately proceeded to Government House to meet with the Governor and his associates. CAN’s report contains many pictures of Bonnke in the company of the Plateau elite—the Gbong Gwom Jos, Da Victor Pam; the Governor, Joshua Dariye; his Deputy, Michael

Botmang; Speaker of the House, Simon Lalong; the Chairman of CAN, Yakubu Pam and various bishops. The Gbong Gwom or Chief of Jos declared Bonnke his “spiritual father.” The Governor is pictured entranced in a prayer by the evangelist.¹³⁹ This was a complete coalescence of church and state. *That* would have taken some stamina and courage on the part of the Muslim community to resist.

Did Christians really win the battle as La-Nibetle boasted with such glee? *Did anyone win?* It remains to be seen. Will those evicted from their land actually return? Who will pay for the destroyed churches, mosques and other properties? *Or did everyone win some and lose some?*

There is at least one battle that the Muslims won. The riots of 1991 and 2001 were about having Muslim participation in the power structures of Jos. The indigenes won those two events.¹⁴⁰ But after four years of the most bitter fighting, Governor Dariye announced on January 2005, that a Hausa man had been appointed member to the newly-established governing council of Jos—“*Majalisar Masarautar Jos*,” a body that includes representatives of all the ethnic groups living in Jos. The Governor explained that now that all ethnic groups were represented, the bitterness of the past should be forgotten in the interest of peace. The leader of the Hausa/Fulani living in Jos, Baban Iya Muhammad, praised Dariye for this move. This move alone would, according to Muhammad, wipe away all the shenanigans of the Governor in the past.¹⁴¹ No wonder Muhammad was pleased. The Muslims finally achieved one of their intermediate aims for which they had struggled long.

I would rather consider it a victory for everyone. No political system that excludes a large segment of the population can succeed in the long run. Even if various groups are hostile to each other, it is better to have a place to discuss than to pursue a policy of exclusion. The whole world breathed a sigh of relief when some years

ago the USA finally recognized China after a long period of denial. All of Plateau will gain from having all parties at the table. Christians and Muslims cannot live together with any semblance of order, let alone peace, unless they sit at one table to discuss. They cannot simply wish each other away anymore than China could be wished away.

At this stage of the game, it looks like both parties both won some and lost some. The real battle rages on still. Minchakpu's article about "The Roots of Persecution in Plateau State," written a year after the Peace Conference, leaves me with the impression that all the issues, anger and bitterness are still there, that nothing has been settled. In November 2005, Bulus Wakili, referring to a new political crisis in the state's People's Democratic Party that is threatening to upset the peace once again, asked, "Why is the state moving from one crisis to another? Is it that the people have refused to learn from the bitter devastating consequences of the past?" After the emergency of 2004, "the people resolved to let go their differences to move the state to the next level. Today, there is panic in the land. The hand writing on the wall [shows] that all is indeed not well with the 'Home of Peace and Tourism.'"¹⁴² A forceful reminder is the "bloody crisis" that included death of humans and destruction of properties in Namu, Qua'an Pan LGA, another post-Peace Conference battle that apparently was again that volatile Plateau mix of religion with issues of politics, indigene/settler and ownership.¹⁴³ The old issues still burn; the same arguments are still aired. It gives me the impression that it was only an official peace on paper that had been achieved. I sincerely hope that this is a false impression.¹⁴⁴ But, when apparently there has been no serious follow up to the Peace Conference, what can you expect? The report seems to have gone the way of all such enquiries.

Empirically speaking and keeping in mind post-Conference developments, it is difficult to predict the eventual final outcome.

Plateau Christians and indigenes have the determination; Muslims, the patience, political acumen and a degree of ruthlessness. If Church leadership can retain a true spiritual posture of faith and service,¹⁴⁵ Plateau will not likely succumb to Islam. They have the Lord's guarantee of protection. La-Nibetle is positive that God will protect and keep His Church and even the current Government of President Obasanjo, for "prayers are being offered from every quarter for this great nation." "God loves Nigeria and Nigerians and He must surely put to shame all enemies of progress."¹⁴⁶ However, those promises are conditional; they are based on the faithfulness of His people. Both the Bible¹⁴⁷ and history are full of this warning. If the leadership becomes self-serving and corrupt, that promise automatically becomes dormant and the Church will lose out to Islam, as has happened in many places throughout the history of the expansion of Islam.¹⁴⁸ In fact, the people, because of their being tired of their leaders, could eventually *invite* Islam. This, too, has happened more than once....¹⁴⁹ COCIN should not imagine itself beyond this law of life. I have in my files more than one comment of disappointment about corruption within the denomination. One member, whose anonymity I need to protect, wrote that, though COCIN condemns corruption, some of its leaders "are after sordid gain at the expense of the well-being of the Christian community and the entire state. Some ministers are characterised by fear and greed, so they won't speak out even if their members are manhandled or tortured by the powers that be." Yiljap Abraham warned, "Where leaders who profess Christ do not take Him serious enough, they are denying Him—and He will leave them to their vulgarities. Biblical narratives have shown that when godly leaders become too self-centered, they soon part company with God."¹⁵⁰ Abraham's remarks may have been directed to Plateau's "Christian" politicians, but they are mostly COCIN members. He hit pretty close to home. Enlarging the circle, Matthew Kukah,

right in front of the Northern Governors, admitted that “some religious leaders mask their selfish interests by refusing to tell public officials what is right, while pretending that they are helping the leaders to uphold righteousness by offering dubious and spurious prayer sessions.”¹⁵¹ Ado Noma’s question is a good one: “How can your religiosity help in determining and improving acceptable moral values and standards amongst the people of Plateau State?”¹⁵²

COCIN, the challenge is yours! You have set yourself up as the spiritual guardian of Plateau. You have a Herculean task, what with all the 24 members of your state House of Assembly, most of whom are COCIN members, in custody at the time of writing!¹⁵³ *If Plateau succumbs, it will be primarily your responsibility. The Lord does not fail His people, unless His people fail Him.* The secret: Focus on Him. That is where your guarantee lies.

