

POLITICS AND RELIGION

In keeping with the nature of this entire series, this chapter is neither a primer nor a full textbook on the weighty subject of politics and religion. I am a theologian and a missionary, but hardly a politician or political scientist. I primarily write about politics and government from the point of view of religion. More narrowly, from the point of view of religion in so far as it is relevant to the Nigerian context. I have selected a number of issues that fit under the general title of this chapter and that, based on my experience, I expect to be of interest to my Nigerian readers. It could easily be greatly expanded. Some subjects discussed in other chapters would fit here very neatly.

The concern in this section is again about shifting parameters for both religions. *For Muslims, it is about doing away with underlying absolutist attitudes. Unless these attitudes are replaced by a more pliable approach, no progress will be made. For Christians, it is about changing perspectives from secularism to wholism. Failure on the part of either will ensure that the interplay between religion and politics will continue to be “mis-sed”—misunderstood, mishandled and mis-*

guided. Christians and Muslims will not be able to engage in meaningful dialogue, let alone devise viable solutions. Though it would earn my applause, I hardly expect secularists to adopt a more wholistic perspective on the relation between the two, for the separation of religion from politics and government along with the underlying dualism, is central to their worldview. But for Christians it is a different matter. Their Holy Book strongly militates against such separations.

This is a good place to remind you that we are not discussing some arcane African subject of no relevance to others. Lamin Sanneh submits that the present discussion “provides a useful context for re-examining standard Western presuppositions on the principle of separation of church and state.” It is time to re-assess what the West has exported abroad.¹ That, of course, is what both Muslims and yours truly have been doing throughout this series.

The bottom line for this series, this book and this chapter is that religion “be held in honour.” According to Kuyper, “If the government does not honour religion, which benefits the general populace, human nature will regress rather than move forward. Kuyper feared the worst for the nation if religion were ignored and replaced by a strict materialism, for then ‘a raging fury will turn against the life of our whole society and from...despair will arise the triumph of unbridled insanity.’”² Kuyper had a prophetic mind that recognized existing social and religious dynamics while they were still in their incubator state, long before they became obvious to others. Muslims might say that his prophecy has already come true! I would say, that these dynamics are indeed active and well on their way to fulfillment in the West. If Nigerians continue to flirt with secularism and religions continue to foster violence, that prophecy could also become true for Nigeria in due time. Yes, governments must honour religion, but only *honourable* religion!

▲ SHARIA: RELIGION OR POLITICS?

The relation between politics and religion is often problematic and arouses heated controversy. Mainstream Muslims are generally comfortable with what amounts to a merger of the two, even though some prefer the separatist option. The separatists often insist that sharia is purely political and that religion is subservient to politics in this saga. I ask them: Are both religion and politics not an integral part of the Muslim *da'wah* and of their Grand Plan? As to Christians, it seems that most cannot imagine a coalescence of serious religion and genuine politics. According to these Christians, where the two coalesce, generally religion becomes subservient to politics. They cannot co-operate legitimately with each other, with both contributing according to their respective nature. I am of the opinion that Nigeria's religious conflicts will not be resolved unless we have a more viable formula for the relationship between the two.

For various reasons, people have avoided pointing to religion itself as the basic cause for much of Nigeria's violence. There is the tradition of secular scholarship that favours the Marxist approach of absolutising or elevating the economic aspects of the struggle as primary and relegating the religious to secondary status. This perspective has become so standard that deviating from it amounts to being considered regressive and politically incorrect. Many writers on the Nigerian struggle, including religious leaders on both sides, Nigerians and others, have bought into economic and political causation theories, rejecting religion as the basic factor.³ Many Christians have bought into this approach, probably without realizing its origin. For example, in a discussion in which he draws from a 1987 issue of *TC*, Caleb Ahima, now of TEKAN, wrote, "...some Islamic fundamentalist actions appear to be nothing more than religious events. But underlying them is the burning ambition of certain individuals or

groups that use religion as a vehicle to convey their political or economic ambitions.”⁴

Many Christians have turned this issue of religion-politics into a pseudo problem. According to them, religion *cannot* be genuine in the neighbourhood of politics. It is then considered “politicized,” that is, religion no longer plays its legitimate role but becomes a servant of politics. Now both become putrid; neither is allowed to play its legitimate role. John Onaiyekan affirmed that a politicised sharia is the main bone of contention in Nigeria at the moment. During these initial years, “it has become very clear to most Nigerians that most of these conflicts are politically manipulated. The promoters of sharia are not motivated by the love of Allah, but because it is one way of getting an edge over non-Muslims. In other words, it is a selfish political agenda.” The issues may be expressed in religious terms, but they “have social, economic and political implications. If you control the law, you control the people.”⁵ His fellow Catholic, Matthew Kukah, has the same problem. “If people’s mobility in the bureaucracy, politics and economics are dependent on their religious or ethnic persuasion, then they must defend that religious platform.”⁶ Even my friend Joseph Idowu Fearon, Anglican Archbishop of Kaduna, is to have said, “But we all know that, scratch the surface and it’s got nothing to do with religion. It’s power.”⁷

The FG, along with the lower tiers of government, have followed the same path. They do so out of political consideration and because of plain fear for the reaction of the faithful of both religions if they were to name not just religion in general, but a specific religion.⁸ Now former President Obasanjo, under whose watch all this developed, described the new sharia as “political, not religious.” Paul Marshall interprets that to mean that sharia governors have acted “not out of genuine religious piety but as a cynical strategy to divert attention from their failure to address concrete economic problems and undermine Obasanjo.”⁹ The problem with

this thesis is that *most of the sharia governors were too new on the throne to need such a screen. Some of them were political virgins.* At least one hesitant governor had sharia forced on him. Then there has been the attempt by governments to hide the cause by refusing to publish the reports of commissions they themselves established. Again, they fear popular reaction as well as other powerful forces and individuals.¹⁰ Of course, religious leaders who play a part in all this would hardly volunteer to accept responsibility. In short, religion is absolved from the primary blame and is at best—or worst?—regarded as a secondary or contributing cause.

Christians give mixed signals in this respect. That is not surprising. When you insist that the motive is *primarily* political or, perhaps, both political and economic, then you run into the wholistic nature of Islam where politics is meant to serve religious ends. Of course, some Muslims only play with Islam and are not serious Muslims. But when a writer insists that it is all or predominantly politics, you will soon find him contradicting himself.¹¹ Yusuf Yariyok insists that “over 60% of the crises in the north, especially the Middle Belt, have been socio-political rather than religious.” But then he proceeds to describe the debacle in Yelwa, Plateau state, in 2004 in almost purely religious terms. The same with its overflow into Kano, where he quotes the Governor encouraging his people with the words, “Fight for your lives and defend your religion.”¹²

But how about turning that around? What if there are political and economic ambitions that have a burning *religious* ambition underlying them? The magazine *This Week*, in the aftermath of the 1987 Kafanchan riots, featured a cartoon showing military dictator Babangida denying their religious nature. It pictures a group of Hausa, and thus Muslims, doubling over with laughter while pointing to the foolish speaker—the President himself.¹³

On a global level, closely identifying sharia issues with terrorism, Yossef Bodansky wrote, “To comprehend Islamist terrorism

one must address its theological-ideological roots.” The West having so much influence in the Muslim world, Islamists are convinced that its separation of church and state “is the root cause of its social malaise.” He approvingly quoted a Dutch expert on Islamism, Johannes Jansen: “Many Muslims have narrowed Islam down to the demand for the introduction of the application of Islamic law. It is both political and religious at the same time, and it is the dual nature of this demand that gives Islamic fundamentalism its distinctive character. Muslims have thus reduced Islam to the single demand for the implementation of Islamic law....”¹⁴

I submit that calling the Islamist demand for sharia a reduction of Islam fails to recognize that sharia is the foundation, the core of the religion. During a course at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver that spanned the wide compass of Islam, Mohamad Rachid subsumed it all under the course title of “Sharia.” The sharia campaign is rather an attempt to *re-assert* its deepest wholistic core, not a reduction. The problem is not sharia itself so much as the literalist and, according to many Muslim scholars, their ahistorical interpretation of sharia. But at least, Jansen does not subsume religion under other causes. With most mainstream Nigerian Muslims, not only Islamists, usually equating religion and politics,¹⁵ I can live with his formulization, though I probably see their relationship more closely than he does and would certainly not use his dualistic terminology. I am, of course, aware of the complex situation with its interplay of causes, but I do insist on singling out religion as the *basic* cause, with all the others as contributing factors that are themselves influenced by human choices and decisions based on belief systems. Lamin Sanneh insists that we must take Bin Ladin and the militant Muslim community at their own word. They describe their struggle as basically religious in cause and nature. They never play that factor down.¹⁶ Eliza Griswold acknowledged in her Nigeria article that Northern Muslims constitute “one of Africa’s most devout and oldest Islamic communities.” In their context, she

affirmed that “religion is the X factor” in Nigeria’s conflict. It cannot “be reduced just to economics. It means something.” Quoting Barbara Cooper, she declared, “Faith matters.”¹⁷ *This is a major point in this entire series. Religion is not the result of economics, but gives it its shape*, though I readily acknowledge also the reciprocal interplay between the two. As Evan Runner expressed it in the sub-heading of one of his lectures, “Politics, an aspect of our religion.” In a fuller sentence, “Of course, *all* political action is religion, though we may not overlook the difference between true (real) or false (imagined), ...all political life must express the *belief* of those who are engaged in it.”¹⁸

Yes, many Muslim *critics* of the new sharia also argued that Governor Sani’s sharia campaign was mere politics and not religion. These are mostly of the secular Muslim stripe. *But again, I insist that this need for political power is, according to mainstream Nigerian Muslim writers at least, essential to a full blossoming of the Islamic religion.* It cannot without solid indications simply be dismissed as mere secular politics of power that uses and abuses religion. Throughout these volumes that issue has repeatedly come up even from Muslims themselves. R. D. Abubakre, at the time a senior lecturer at the University of Ilorin, in delineating a few basic “differences between Islam and other religions,” referred to this power issue. In the context of the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions, a forum where no one can fool anyone, Abubakre lectured that all Muslims “should be convinced that the people of God [Muslims] should control the helm of secular affairs.” They “do not wish to suffer humiliation in this life. Therefore, they prepare themselves as a state, even militarily when the need arises.” There it is, bluntly put, without any sense of embarrassment or attempt to make it sound politically correct.¹⁹ Ibrahim Sulaiman stated, “Allegiance to God is expressed by doing one’s best to make Islam prevail over all other systems, and not to relent in the endeavour.”²⁰ That Muslim power complex is, at least

in Nigeria, part of their *religious* complex. They have an inherent desire to spread Islam not only, but to have it gain control. Their ambition to dip the Qur'an in the Atlantic Ocean has been well publicised. The need for Islam to control has repeatedly been stated openly by Nigerian Muslims themselves.²¹ Muslim statements to that effect are scattered throughout this series.

This religious power complex is not confined to Nigerians. I also find it reflected in the British Muslim Institute's statement that "political and cultural subservience goes against their [Muslim] grain." That is also, I believe, the reason for the Institute's lament about the British people that "any assertion of the superiority of Islam or Islamic culture or civilization on British soil is not to be tolerated."²² In his Preface to Abul Mawdudi's *Human Rights in Islam*, Khurshid Ahmad wrote that a Muslim is committed "to strive in order to make [Islam] prevail in the world." Mawdudi was said to be "engaged in a grim struggle for the implementation" of this vision.²³

Many Nigerian Muslims, ex-Muslims and Christians emphasize the *religious* purposes and goals of sharia, including the play for power, as previous volumes amply show. Muslims themselves insist that all their politics and economics are about the advance of their wholistic religion. When they discuss the Muslim religion and its mission, it is clear that this includes goals that others normally associate with politics. When the Christians and Muslims in Yelwa in Nigeria's Plateau State were about to attack each other, Muslim lawyer and community leader Abdullahi Abdullahi commented, "That was the day ethnicity disappeared entirely and the conflict became just about religion."²⁴ At least some ordinary Muslims not associated with politics also felt the Yelwa debacle was due to religion. *Hamamatu Danladi explained to Griswold, "The Christians don't want us here because they don't like our religion." She was right on, except that she failed to explain the reason: Christians are defending their turf that is being threatened by a Muslim jihad. It is not because Christians cannot live with another religion, but when*

that religion comes packaged in jihad and with plans to take over the state and the country, then it is another question.

Many Christians, including ex-Muslims, at least those not secularized at universities, insist on the religious basis of it all. Lamin Sanneh refers to the Muslim “imperialistic urge.”²⁵ Ambassador Tanko Yusuf was strongly aware of it and warned the world.²⁶ In the 2004 Yelwa context Pastor Sunday Wuyep declared, “This is about religious intolerance.”²⁷ Few have been involved in as many fronts of the struggle as has former Governor Yohanna Madaki. In his capacity as lawyer to the Sayawa people, Madaki wrote a lengthy letter to Rasheed Raji, Military Administrator of Bauchi State, in which he insisted that, based on facts he enumerated, a 1995 ruckus was primarily religious in nature.²⁸

*I fully concur that a combination of religion and politics **can** be lethal and, in fact, often is, but that does not **have** to be the case and, in fact, is **not supposed** to be the case.* Often sharia promotion appears on the surface to be purely political, but below the surface it is often deeply religious as part of *da’wah* and the Plan. A pious Muslim politician will use the insights of his religion in his politics to promote Islam, and by that he means a quiver of positives such as peace and tolerance—understood, of course, in his own Islamic way. That is, according to Islam, a proper relationship in which the political and religious have merged and work towards the same goals; it is not a matter of the one using the other. Many Christians view such a relationship between religion and politics as illegitimate and unhealthy. In Islam it is of the essence—as it is in the Kuyperian tradition. A person’s politics is an expression of his religion, his *real de facto* religion that resides in his heart, of his worldview.

My response to those Christian brothers of mine who deny the religious angle or are mixed up about it, is that the ambition of “getting an edge over non-Muslims” may be defined politically, but, in the case of Muslims, it is at bottom a *religious* duty, part of the *jihad* or the Grand Plan. Lateef Adegbite, by any standard a

moderate Muslim leader, observed that the streets of Oxford in the UK are full of women clad in *hijab*. He said it felt as if “Islam has taken over England.” Then he added, “That is what we want in Nigeria.”²⁹ The meaning and the desire are clear. Remember Ibrahim Sulaiman’s statement about Muslim minority status: “This involvement is essentially tentative in the sense that as long as Islam is yet to attain a clear-cut supremacy over every other way of life, no process of any kind can assume the stamp of finality.”³⁰ Why can Christians not understand this Muslim coalescence of the two, this merger or, better, this unity—or refuse to understand? Of course, the secret lies in their dualism explained in Volume 5, Chapter 5. I never tire of this contention that at bottom we are dealing with religious motivations that find their expression in the political realm.³¹ A perfectly straight-forward constellation. In fact, politics, like the rest of life, is *always* undergirded by religious belief, worldview or value systems. This is true not only for Muslims but for everyone, including secularists.

There are at least three conditions necessary for Christians to understand and affirm this unity. (1) They are to reject their own semi-secular dualism that forces them to divide it. (2) Christian leaders are to pick up the courage to distance themselves from the reigning spirit of academia, where it is politically incorrect to attribute anything more than a subsidiary role to religion. (3) Christian leaders are to reject ostrich politics that refuses to call a spade a spade.³² Once these conditions have been met, Christians will be in a good position to start more serious negotiations with Muslims. Christians will then understand better what drives Muslims and are better equipped to meet them. It is quite likely that Muslims, recognizing that the old pussy-footing has been replaced with this new robust perspective and determination, will negotiate with more respect. They’ve been found out.

Even if one were to grant that religion is not the primary motivation of sharia politicians, they could not have gotten anywhere without deep religiosity on the part of the people. As Marshall put it, "...sharia could be manipulated this way only if it is *already* popular among northerners and draws on the religious commitments of the population. Politicians can manipulate religious belief only if real...belief actually exists. An expanded sharia can be used politically only if it is already religiously grounded."³³

And when you weigh all the factors honestly, then, deep down, the religious explanation is the only one that can account for all the factors involved. *That* is the spade that must be named—and *that* is the spade that must be tackled. It is the factor that trumps everything else—the pride and the glory, the blood and the gory, the unilateral attitude that motivates Nigerian Muslims to claim rights and freedoms they deny Christians, their refusal to acknowledge their own oppressive policies in their recent history. It is all driven by their version of Islam, that most glorious truth of Allah that is their duty to impose on the country and the world—for the militants, by hook or by crook. Nothing may stand in its way. Depending on the situation and on the Muslim group involved, the methods used may vary from peaceful democratic infiltration to outright violence, from the irenic Mohamad Rachid of Vancouver to Bin Laden, the icon and personification of terrorism, but spread it they must. In the face of this, for some, everything is fair game; every consideration that could delay or divert, whether ethical, political or material, is to be overridden. After all, when you have something as precious as Islam, you are doing everyone a favour by spreading it, even by force and violence.

The above does not mean that every Muslim is pushing and possessed by a heart burning to have it happen. Millions are only nominal and cultural Muslims who want peace and order to make their living and raise their families. Others are deeply pious and spiritual Muslims who are personally too busy to be concerned

with strategy and politics. However, everywhere there are leaders and strategists full of zeal for *da'wah* who will push relentlessly and usually enjoy the often unspoken support and respect of the *ummah* on whom they can count when the chips are down—or when either the West or Nigerian Christians act up.³⁴ Whether or not this attitude represents classical Islam, it is found among Muslim communities everywhere.

I am not absolving Christians from all blame for Nigeria's fracas. At times tribalism has overpowered their hearts or the settler-nomad struggle has trumped their Christian graces. Tiredness, fatigue and anger over Muslim abuse has dimmed their better judgement. The human urge for revenge is never far below our veneer and has more than once been triggered in the form of "Christian" militia or just plain wild rampage. Defending their own turf to prevent it from slipping into Muslims hands is the major trigger for occasional violence. And then you have the moneyed manipulators who can easily tempt poverty-stricken unemployed youth to serve as their shock troops. There are so many factors, not the least of which is religious persecution and harassment, that have led to Christian violence. The fact that Christian leaders are giving the green light by their re-interpretation of the famous Jesus quote about turning the other cheek reduces the resistance to revengeful violence.³⁵ But I firmly insist that none of these reactions have their roots in the Christian religion. These are responses in *spite* of Christianity; they are not the result of Christianity. And though most of it can be understood even sympathetically, often it cannot be approved.

I have said earlier in this chapter that the Nigerian Muslim resort to violence is due to their religious orientation, which, according to their own testimony, includes a need for power and control. They have that relentless *da'wah* pushing them on and that *jihad* complex, however mildly you interpret that or spiritualize or personalize it. Then you have that pride in their religion and in that

beautiful sharia along with their awareness that they have the obligation and right to widen their circles. No man has the right to resist the encroachment of all of that. Of course, in addition there are the Muslim reactions to colonialism, secularism and the undercutting of their sharia that brought anger in their hearts as well and all of its consequences. Much of that can be sympathetically understood. But

▲ INTRODUCING NEW CHURCH-GOVERNMENT FORMULA

To begin with, I need to explain some terminology. I am writing about both Christianity and Islam, about both church and mosque. However, when talking about the relationship between religious institutions and government, I have succumbed to the simplified phrase of “church-government” or some variety of it, rather than the more clumsy “church/mosque-government.” I feel justified doing this because I have noticed that Muslims also use that term, even when talking only about mosque and government. This terminology has become shorthand for the relationship of any religion to government.

I want to draw to the attention of Muslims, especially to the militant amongst them, that they cannot claim that all of Islam has always insisted on the close relationship of religion to politics. There are, of course, the much-berated “secular Muslims” in Nigeria.³⁶ As Mohamad Rachid expressed it: “Since Islam is a way of life, it is very difficult to separate politics from religion. But this is theory. In practice the two have separated a long time ago. However, the two influence each other profoundly.”³⁷

Though not prevalent in Nigeria and certainly not enjoying mainstream status, there are deep currents within Islam that *favour* such separation *in principle*. Lamin Sanneh discusses the views of a classic “hard-nosed student of political science,” al-Fakhri, in a

book he published in 1302 A.D. Al-Fakhri “emphasizes the complex and unpredictable nature of human affairs...that requires compromises, prudence, wisdom, and above all flexibility.” There is a “complex relationship between Islam and the state” that defies the easy definitions and ready formulas with which especially the militants operate. Sanneh often appeals also to Ibn Khaldun, who, summarizing the views of his predecessors, “cautioned against the uncritical mixing of religion and worldly affairs, lest we ‘patch our worldly affairs by tearing our religion to pieces. Thus, neither our religion lasts nor [the worldly affairs] we have been patching.’” Khaldun considered “theocratic claims...simplistic and lacking in historical realism.”

In our own day, Indian scholar Asghar Ali Engineer casts some doubt on the need for a close relation between Islam and politics. He writes, “Popularly it is believed that in Islam, state and religion cannot be separated. It is more of a theological and historical construct rather than a scriptural injunction. It is true in the sense of Islamic values, which must be associated with the state.”³⁸ Akbar Sallahudin Ahmed, a Pakistani scholar described by BBC as “the world’s leading authority on contemporary Islam,”³⁹ writes about Tablighi Jamaat, a Delhi-based missionary organization said to be “the most popular reform movement in the Muslim world.” It is a mission organization that is “spreading Islam and working in mutual love and harmony. They scrupulously avoid politics.”⁴⁰ Entries on the internet also strongly emphasize its apolitical nature. The British Muslim Institute warns against too close dependence on government. “Experience tells us that financial freedom, indeed strength, must be an essential part of our strategy. Some Muslim organizations in receipt of grants from public funds have had them stopped” and then find themselves in a crisis. The Institute concluded from this experience that “we must mobilize resources and raise funds within the Muslim community on a large scale” in order to carry out all the projects discussed in their Manifesto.⁴¹ Note the

role of experience here. Though Islam generally envisions very close financial ties to government, when experience leads to second thoughts, when they do not control government, experience may trump tradition. That same experience also has led some Christian organizations in North America to reject government funds, for experience has taught that government money brings government interference, creates dependence and reduces freedom of movement. Both religions have to be continually on their toes to prevent such a relationship.

This means, among other things, that Nigerian Muslims should relax their insistence on close government ties and reduce their dogmatic demands from it. There are times and places where such ties and funds are not recommended, in fact, dangerous. It is clearly not Islamic to ignore experience and not un-Islamic to insist on looser ties with government. Awareness of these historical factors may help create a more relaxed atmosphere in Christian-Muslim negotiations.

Sanneh provides us with a number of pithy questions and aphoristic statements that, while they may not constitute solutions, do suggest some limitations and parameters that should prove useful in the quest for solutions. I ask that you think through each one of them carefully. Sanneh will prod you and challenge your thinking. If some prove too difficult or too vague, simply move on. Here we go:

- *Is the secular case for the separation of “church” and “state” adequate as a response to the public appeal of religion in Nigeria, and, conversely, is not the Islamist case for sharia law too sweeping a remedy for a pluralist society?*
- *The moralization or absolutization of the state as sacred and immutable produces political despotism in the public realm, but it also causes harm in the religious realm, where it encourages and*

rewards opportunism and silence—in effect where it achieves the relativization of religion. On the other hand, holding the state to the universal moral standards of human rights, human dignity, the rule of law, respect for the family, social security..., will make for state effectiveness.

- *The state may not disallow religion for the same reason that it may not prescribe it: In Africa, religion is too fundamental to life for the state to banish it from the public realm just as it is too important for the state to co-opt it merely.*
- *Between politics and religion we need, not a barrier of separation, but a safety net of their common interest.*
- *The...challenge of the separation of church and state demands that we allow a degree of interdependence between them. Too much is at stake in the importance of the state...to allow it to fall victim to Enlightenment [secular] scruples about a rigid, immutable distinction between religion and politics....”*
- *A church-state integration is a threat to civil society, so that in one move of state capture of religion, the brakes are removed from political excess....*
- *Church and state are involved in a common endeavour for the reason that religion is too enmeshed in life for us to privatize it, and politics is too involved in questions of justice and morality for us to leave it exclusively secular [non-religious], though historical experience suggests that integrating the two damages both of them.*
- *Governments that take a short-term view and anoint themselves with religious warrants subvert themselves, and religion that bests its claims in the state instrument damages its long-term authority.*
- *We need the safety wall of separation to tame the state and to create public space for religion and for a culture of pluralism and minority rights.⁴²*
- *Religion may be too important for the state to ignore, but it is too much so for the state to enjoin it. Similarly, the state is too central*

to human interests for it not to overlap with the religious domain, but it is too contingent for it to behave as revealed truth.

And here is a real gem that Northern Muslims and Middle Belt Christians need to ponder for themselves without immediately pointing at each other:

- *Under the right conditions, including when religion has been thoroughly domesticated as cultural identity, the ethnic state can become the opiate of the people, an intoxicating infusion of sentiments of national transcendence in defiance of logic and history.*
- *Politics as religion redeems no more than religion as politics.⁴³*
- *The results are all the same whether religion is a state idea or the state is a religious idea. However church and state may be combined, an identical fate awaits them....*
- *Actions of political expedience must be qualified by moral norms, but moral norms must not be qualified by political expedience.*
- *If means and end are...interchanged, then expediency and moral truth would fuse and result in tyranny. Therefore church and state should be separated...for practical mundane reasons but also for exalted religious ones.*
- *Referring to Thomas Jefferson, one of the pioneers of the American state, Jefferson fervently supported separation of church and state ("divided we stand, united we fall") not because he opposed religion..., but because he feared that government would use religion to bolster its despotic powers. Religion was at its best, he argued, when it did not feel the necessity to compel compliance....⁴⁴*

The total impact of these assorted quotes should alert Muslims against the tendency of some, especially militants, to insist on too close an identification of any religion with the state. After extensive historical and theoretical discussion, Sanneh predicts that failure to maintain a distance will end up in the demoralization, if not demise, of both.

Though I propose an alternative below, I want his formula to

be well understood and considered during the negotiations. It is really a “soft,” adjusted but not clearly defined version of the classic Western formula of separation of church and state. That formula has been too successful to be ignored or rejected offhand; it even has been practised for different reasons by Muslims, some noble and some ignoble, namely to avoid religious accountability. Where it is skewed towards the establishment of one particular worldview such as secularism as in contemporary Canada or Anglicanism in an earlier Canada, it creates serious problems and dissatisfaction. When you contrast the various ways in which it is applied in different countries, it becomes obvious that even within this separatist formula there is room for variation.

Nevertheless, all that said, I ask whether this formula is appropriate for the Nigerian context. “Separation of church and state” became an important formula in the context of American constitutional development, where the concern was competition for establishment status among *Christian* denominations, that is, in a mono-religious situation. Some wanted to have establishment status as they did in Europe. To bring equity into the situation, that formula provided the solution. No established denomination with special privileges at the expense of others. All held at equal arm’s length; all equally separated.

*It must be noted clearly that this separation does not necessarily arise from secularism as many Muslims seem to think.*⁴⁵ Even the anti-secular Kuyperian tradition insists on it. The movement arose in protest *against* the secularism of an oppressive state church dominated by a secular government. It needed the separation for space to breathe and to respond freely to the Scriptures without the oppressive limits imposed on them by the church-government coalition. The Muslim argument that church-government separation is due to secularism is patently wrong.

Do understand that this is a discussion about the church as *institute* and its relationship to the government, not about the

church as *organism*, that is, religion as a whole and its relation to both government and politics. If you go back to Sanneh's statements above, you will find considerable confusion there about what to separate from the state. Ignoring the distinction always causes confusion. The sum total of his statements seems to be an identification of institute and organism. We have seen in Chapter 4 that this leads to clerical and ecclesiastical domination of Christian life in the world. Though Sanneh has become Catholic, I am not sure he intends to promote such domination.

Philip Ostien and his co-authors of *Comparative Perspectives on Sharia in Nigeria* correctly observe that Nigerian Christians tend to favour the separatist view. However, the main reason for this tendency is not, as they suggest, *first of all* their false impression that it is the dominant pattern of the "Christian" West.⁴⁶ There are two other main reasons. The first, in contrast to Kuyperians, is their secular dualistic heritage. Thus Muslims are partially right. The second is the Christian experience with Muslim pressure and plans to take over the country. This experience has led them to conclude that separation will give them the necessary breathing space and reduce the pressure.⁴⁷

In Nigeria it is an issue between two religions with almost opposite ideas about their relationship to the state: most Christians preferring separation, at least, theoretically, and Muslims preferring near merger. The issue between them is really equality of access and status rather than separation. This Nigerian situation leads me to the question whether we should replace the prefabricated historical and foreign formula "separation" with that of "equality of status, access and rights." I am suggesting a change of formula that would allow more space for negotiation and compromise. "Separation" is too stark a formula, especially for Muslims, but also for the de facto practice of Christians, even if applied equally. If the Constitution were to insist on equality of status, access and rights,

*then governments would have room to determine the exact shape of these three elements in response to different and changing circumstances. I so move to have this considered seriously as an alternative parameter formula.*⁴⁸

Actually, that is essentially the recommendation of several Christians and Muslims. Back in the days of the first CA, Adeolu Adegbola of the ICS recommended a similar formula offered by the Muslim Justice Sambo as “the most plausible interpretation.” Ibrahim Gambari argued that the state “should treat all religions equally.” Danjuma Byang preferred the two extremities of this formula. Either both religions have their institutions funded by governments, provided it is done evenhandedly, or the umbilical cord is cut and religions are completely and equally on their own.⁴⁹ At the Second International Conference on Christian–Muslim Mutual Relations held in 1995, both Christians and Muslims agreed that “the Government should officially recognize the country as a multi-religious rather than a secular state, where no religion should be favoured at the expense of others.”⁵⁰

It should be understood that my proposed formula is not what currently obtains. Most Christians advocate secularism and that means, according to Wilson Sabiya for one, that “the state should keep clear of involvement in religion.”⁵¹ However, *in reality*—and please note this well—quite a number of Christians, even among those who favour the Sabiya formula in theory, would feel uncomfortable and restricted with the straight separation formula. It is only when they argue about sharia and other Muslim issues that they insist on separation. Once they get away from that into other concerns, they want very much to have church-government co-operation, especially when it comes to funding, including that of church buildings. The new formula would take the tension out of a contradictory situation and allow for a wider range of options.

Muslims, of course, though not unanimous, have generally preferred closer relations between mosque and government than most Christians. Nigerian new sharia proponents favour a very close relationship in which government almost serves as a Muslim tool. But whereas most Nigerian Christians and Muslims are ready to hold out their hands for government dole outs, remember that the British Muslim Institute warned of their experience that dependence on government reduces both strength and freedom. Hence, they decided to mobilize their own resources to carry out their plans.⁵² I believe that my proposed formula can accommodate most Muslim demands.

▲ CHURCH-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS: PRACTICAL PROBLEMS _____

George Ehusani, at the time Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, wrote strong words about poor governments and fat office holders. He demanded that “peace-seeking Nigerians and civil society...take the elected representatives of the people to task.” All officials from President through governors down to LG chairmen must be challenged by “the saner elements in our society.” He bravely declared that he held President Obasanjo and others in power responsible for the country’s problems.⁵³

Well and good. But in a country where people take their religious leaders very seriously, these leaders must do more than write articles and publish communiqués full of *dogon Turanci* [fancy English]. The perpetrators of violence, riots and corruption are members of church and mosque. Some decades ago, COCIN dared to place a polygamous governor under discipline. It was a start, but that courage should have been extended to include the gubernatorial perpetrators of injustice and corruption.⁵⁴ COCIN and Ehusani, you sound brave, but more needs to be done by

leaders of both religions without fear or favour. Remember, it is often said that barking dogs don't bite! Neither do communiqués and other token gestures clean up corruption or erase oppression. The question must be asked: Are religious leaders too close to the Government? This could be more of a problem at state level than at federal, especially in Northern Muslim states. Might governors of Northern states be too involved in *da'wa* or *jihad*? Might religious leaders in some states be so close to some governors that they do not feel free to challenge them? Or, vice versa, might some governors be too timid to call religious leaders to order? Might religious leaders sometimes be bought over by grants or gifts from government or governor? With reference to Christians, might the relationship between them and government in Plateau State especially be too cosy to be healthy, so cosy that the church does not feel free to be publicly straightforward with member-governors known to be corrupt? The arrival of the German evangelist Reinhold Bonnke and his subsequent revival ministry in Plateau State had all the marks of an extremely cosy and comfortable relationship between Governor, the Gbong Gwom—the Chief of Jos—and the churches.⁵⁵ Are church and mosque distant enough from politicians to rebuke them when necessary or even publicly oppose them?

COCIN found itself in a special pickle when three major Plateau gubernatorial contenders were COCIN members, but they fought with each other like everyone else, berated each other, accused each other, lied to and about each other. In such a case, how should a church minister? Though COCIN may have acted behind the scenes and, I fully suspect, must have had vigorous discussions among its leaders, I am not aware of any *public* action on her part vis a vis the *public* misbehaviour of her powerful and elite sons. And what of the local congregations to which these politicians belonged? Did they dare to discipline their prominent sons of whom they were probably and rightly proud? The situation was not

helped by the dualistic mission heritage. So much friction between the demands of the traditional worldview and the new. So much new ground to be explored. Where but in Nigeria does one run into such complexities and challenges?

But COCIN is not the only church with church-government challenges. Taraba State had a United Methodist pastor as the longest-serving governor in the country. At the close of his last term he was apprehended for corrupt practices. Did his church not know? What did they do about it? One prominent church leader from Taraba confessed to me that the Tarabian church as a whole did nothing to challenge their colleague on the throne. Instead, they acted like “sycophants” and thus became accomplices to an oppressive regime.

During the BZ days, Gaiya Musa, an ECWA pastor and academic, suggested that pastors should get involved in actual partisan politics if they feel led to do so. He based his assertion on the OT stories of Nehemiah and Ezra. Without going into detail, I find his reason to be based on a weak, literalistic and ahistorical reading of the Scriptures. In addition, most denominations, including his own, disapprove of their pastors entering politics, not because politics is evil but because it is not the job of a pastor. Besides, a political pastor tends to bring political division into the church. The church should support its members in politics but not its pastors. Musa’s other proposals are fine as far as they go,⁵⁶ but they do not go far enough. His recipe may be typically Evangelical, but is too thin. I urge the brother to develop a broader and more mature worldview along the lines of these chapters.

Apart from the above paragraph, I hardly dare to go beyond highlighting problems and asking questions for people to consider. This is a place where it would be easy to enter as a bull in a china shop.

The COCIN experience probably was unique in its intensity and could serve as a good case study as to what was done, what might have been done and what were the obstacles to effective ministry. I would highly recommend that such a study be done, not to criticize so much as to develop a new model for future church–government relationships. There is definitely a need for a more radical approach, that is, one that goes to the root of the issues.

Though I do not discuss the same kind of detailed issues with respect to the Muslim community here, all the previous volumes, whether Muslim or Christian oriented, scream aloud about the close relationships between sharia governments and the Muslim religious establishment. It makes things very comfortable for most Muslims, but for Christians it is an opposite story.

*In the Nigerian multi-religious context, there is an acute need for greater distance between government and mosque. Or, in terms of my formula of equality, should I propose equal distance between government–mosque and government–church? Or even equal nearness of both to government? **The point here is equality of relationship, whether that be distant or near.** Christian and Muslim historical experience, however, both seem to favour a distance to preserve the quality of both religion and government, at least if the issue is equal justice for all.*

Europe is widely recognized to have lost its Christian soul through secularization. Yes, that phenomenon pushed it along, but, in terms of church–government relationships, we must not forget that in many Western countries that relationship was closer than that of any Nigerian church. James McGoldrick summarized Kuyper’s analysis of Western history in this regard. The status of the church as the teacher and advocate of morality began to decline with the conversion of Emperor Constantine in 311 AD and the

subsequent use of the state to shore up the church. "Soon vast numbers of pagans were baptized but remained pagans at heart."⁵⁷ Various forms of state churches arose, with the government in some cases collecting taxes on its behalf and paying for most of the expenses involved in running a church, including clerical salaries. Alan Wolfe reminds us how such relationships of "religious monopolies or near-monopolies...generally throttle religious practice over time, especially as a country becomes wealthier." "Lacking any incentive to innovate, churches atrophy and their congregations dwindle." The Kuyperian revival was a struggle against just such a state church that had really sold its soul to humanistic rationalism and had become a powerful institution that sought to govern the soul of its members by worldly means. Aided by a strong dose of secular rationalistic belief, this situation led to disaster and then—it was bound to come—to revival.⁵⁸ Nor should we forget that initially much of conversion in Western Europe was under imperial force that required little or no personal conviction. So, the reasons for current European religious degeneration can easily be understood—partially due to its imposition by force without much faith and much of it the fruit of church-state relations that were too close, aided by a generous dose of secularism.

It could be argued that this European history is irrelevant to Nigeria. We have no state churches. True, but we do have very cozy relationships between some churches and governments. We have equally cozy relationships between Islam and various state governments, possibly even closer. Nigerian Islam prefers a state religion and expects governments to support it in every way. Christians need to have their eyes open to that aspect of Islam when dialoguing with their compatriots about the future. I remind you of my formula of "equal status, access and rights" as a potential key to solving this problem.

Some years ago, Michael FitzGerald, President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Vatican, flew into

Nigeria for a dialogue programme involving both Christians and Muslims. In this context, he urged that Christians keep reminding government of ethical principles it is to uphold. He reminded his audience, “It is your government. You are not fighting against the government but are in critical solidarity, and because you are critical, you should do this when things are going wrong.” He also warned church leaders that they should “*maintain their distance from government* and are therefore able to discern and criticise their misdeeds.”⁵⁹ It is precisely that distance, not this cosy, warm and fuzzy relationship, that enables religious leaders to fulfill their obligation. I would like to add the term “critical solidarity” to my proposed formula so that it now reads, “*equality of status, access and rights; critical solidarity.*”

But what if the government leader is member of your religion or even congregation? At this point the church/mosque must tread carefully. It must minister to this member. It must pray for him, encourage him where he needs it, praise him where he deserves it, critique him where necessary. There *must* be a close relationship with this member so surrounded by the forces of temptation. Without it you cannot minister effectively. But this church/mosque faces a very dangerous temptation of complicity in oppression and should be very careful about its response to this member’s financial contributions.

There is need for both pastoral intimacy and distance, the appropriate formula for which can probably be hammered out best in loco. There is a dire need for a set of principles here that churches can look to for guidance in such situations. Perhaps national, state and local CAN chapters should help churches with different politics and structures and in different circumstances develop sensitive guidelines. There may be need for a serious study commission to develop principial guidance to all the churches. Either CAN or

*this commission should probably have serious discussions on this subject with Muslim leaders as well. **How do you minister best to your political sons and daughters in power and how to you simultaneously maintain a critical distance?***

Now, having struggled long with two models, both conflicting and mixed, namely that of the Nigerian Christian half-hearted separation of church and state and that of the Muslim subsuming government under religion, how should we move forward into the future? Obviously we have to come to agree on some model. This is a tough nut to crack! Remember and take historical experience seriously. Remember also my proposed formula. No doubt some serious compromise will be called for on the part of both.

*I recommend that an interim compromise be devised for up to a decade. At that point it will be fine-tuned on basis of the experience gained and, perhaps, even have some radical changes inserted. Eventually, the final arrangement will have arrived at equal treatment of these institutions. That solution will have to take account of the danger of stifling churches and mosques through too close association with governments. These institutions must remain free and independent in spirit vis a vis government. That is one bottom line, but that does not necessarily spell full separation. I suggest a way be devised that is based on the parameters of my formula and independence of spirit so that the formula now reads: **"equality of status, access and rights; critical solidarity; independence."***

I will let you in on a secret. While I was writing the above paragraphs, my proposed formula kept intruding into my thoughts. Does the principle of distance between church and government discussed in the previous paragraphs belong in the sphere of my

proposed formula or is it perhaps more at home with the separation model? Is the “distance formula” perhaps part and parcel of the Western adversarial mentality that leads to tensions and distortions throughout its culture? Would my equality proposal perhaps naturally lead to a closer relationship of cooperation? Perhaps it would if allowed to work itself out. But the “distance formula” under scrutiny in this section of the chapter is the result of bitter historical experience that we should not flippantly cast aside as foreign. If we move away from it, we better have some solid reasons. On the other hand, we should give the equality formula some time to percolate through the system and see where it leads at different fronts. I originally warned you I am not coming with clear-cut solutions so much as parameters for solutions. We may have here a true-to-life situation where things do not always immediately come together. They take time. We should, therefore, take that time. If more light appears on this subject before going to print, this paragraph will be heavily edited—and maybe disappear! If it stands, I recommend it for serious consideration.

In all of this remember that we are *not* discussing here the relationship of *church/mosque as organism* to government, but of the *institute* of church/mosque, including denominations, congregations and their umbrella organizations to government. We are talking about the appropriate distance between these institutions and government. This is something very different from government relations to non-ecclesiastical religious groups or individuals. *Christians and Muslims have every right to establish social organizations on religious basis and they have the duty to utilize the insights of their religions in their political lives, just as much as secularists.* Various proposals and suggestions about this relationship are scattered throughout these chapters.

Study Guide 8 — Politics and Religion (Appendix 105)

At the conclusion of this section, I reproduce the closing words of an article by an unnamed writer in a 1990 edition of *TC*. I know, this paragraph really belongs in the BZ portion of the subject, not here, but it expresses something significant, even if discouraging. It evokes this comment from me, “Nothing *new* under the sun!” And also the question, “But nothing *repaired* under the sun either?” It was written almost two decades ago, but Nigeria’s blood has kept flowing.

So what is the solution? “No short cuts,” informed analysts maintain. Wishing away the problem, sermonising, enacting decrees, expressing good intentions in public, intimidating citizens and such other cosmetics won’t help. The solution lies purely in government not only playing it fair in its actions and policies, but being seen to be so. As long as government is biased, as long as a few Islamic hawks pull the strings, as long as some sacred cows can do anything and get away with it, then it’s a matter of time: The religious time bomb will one day explode—and all those nurturing it now will not escape the devastation. May God forbid.⁶⁰

This quotation is not an intellectualistic critique of some derailed theory or misleading worldview. It is a warning that has come true many times over. It is also a cry from a heart weary of bitter experience. It is the cry of an unnamed Nigerian, but it is mine as well, including the solution. As important as all the theoretical and worldview stuff I feed you is, virtues like honesty and evenhandedness come first.

*At least in the Nigerian situation, for Christians, **experience** with Muslims counts more than any theories about it all. That is the point of Yusufu Turaki.⁶¹ But, with apologies to my friend Yusufu, you can't do without the theory either if you're going to get out of the traps created by **wrong** theories and misleading alien and distorted world-views all based on dualism and all held subconsciously.*

▲ CHURCH AS ORGANISM IN SOCIETY —————

You should recall from Chapter 4 that the church as organism refers to the community of believers in society. In Chapter 3, I emphasize the Kuyperian and Muslim views of religion as wholistic and central to all of life.⁶² Based on that, Muslih Yahya of Unijos, you may recall from Appendix 6, wanted to take religion out of the sphere of the private by creating an atmosphere in which the practice of religion is normal and legitimate *at all fronts*. Even public officers should not be forced to act contrary to their religion as some forms of secularism dictate. Public arrangements should be inclusive religiously as well. But this development “unavoidably necessitated an overdue rethinking of the role of religion in this regard,” one that should avoid the “emergence of ‘new forms of separationism and demonisation of religious others.’”⁶³ I fully support Yahya’s opinion here, both as to the need for giving space to religion at all fronts and for rethinking the role of religion. I once again offer the Kuyperian perspective on wholism and pluralism as a fitting parameter to accomplish this,⁶⁴ beginning with a quotation from one of the foundational documents of the Kuyperian movement, namely Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer’s *Ongeloof en Revolutie*. Van Prinsterer (1801-1876), at one time Secretary to the Cabinet of the Dutch government and a major influence on Kuyper, quoted the following from Frederick De la Mennais (1782-1854), a French priest and writer on philosophical and political subjects: “*There are*

truths and falsehoods that are simultaneously religious and political, since religion and society have the same origin, namely God, and the same goal, namely humanity. Therefore, a basic falsehood in religion is also a basic falsehood in politics, as well as the converse."⁶⁵

Hebden Taylor interprets Dooyeweerd as follows:

Dooyeweerd points out that no earthly state can avoid functioning in the modality of faith. He says, "Never can the state...struggle free from the grasp of...faith.... This is the astounding truth which must... arouse every wavering mind from his dreams of political neutrality with respect to...faith. The state can no more be neutral in this respect than science. The political slogan of neutrality is as much...an attitude of faith and as certainly originates from a basic religious commitment as any other political conviction."

Then Taylor asks, "What faith does motivate the state? Is it an apostate faith in man's sovereign reason or is it a faith in the sovereign God...?" Once again quoting from Dooyeweerd, "The political confession of faith in God's sovereignty over the life of the body-politic has from the start been typical of a Christian view of the state." "...the government of a people consisting largely of Christian citizens must in the political sphere as in all other spheres adopt a Christian motivation for its policy and conduct of the affairs of state. All...societal relationships ought to be earthly manifestations of the Body of Christ. A Christian state is a...manifestation of God's Kingdom, just as much as a Christian...church institution, and it too must engage in struggle against the powers of darkness."

The above is a *Christian* view of these matters. Is Dooyeweerd—or, for that matter, I myself—suggesting that we Christians in Nigeria impose this view on the country? But then we would be doing what many of us accuse the Muslims of doing. That is not my goal here. My goal is to help free our community from our semi-secular heritage of dualism by providing an alterna-

tive Christian view on all matters political and social. I want to help us think *Christianly*, to more fully understand the Bible and the Kingdom of God. Secondly, I want you, my Muslim neighbours, to understand that the Christian religion is not the anemic dualistic version that you berate so much and that has misled you into a deep maze of misunderstanding. We cannot dialogue and negotiate on basis of misunderstandings and distorted worldviews. And we ought not to impose anything on anyone, but we *should* offer the best insights we can muster to the nation, our Christian and Muslim insights, and let the people decide by their vote.

But Kuyperians are very strong on pluralism, way before it became politically correct. In fact, as we have seen in Chapter 3, the movement was founded on pluralism during the late 19th century. Its pluralism was opposed as an attack on an existing non-pluralistic order. That being the case, the above Taylor-Dooyeweerd material is not to encourage Christians to impose our views on the country as we Christians *have* been doing with our semi-secular and mythical neutrality. According to Dooyeweerd, the Christian perspectives outlined so far can be given political embodiment only to the extent that “the Christian conception of the state has been able to secure [a place] in the national conscience.” “The ‘Christian State’ is certainly not a system of external formulas. If there is no Christian political community of faith uniting government and people, it is impossible...to impart a Christian character to the state. But the Christian character of public life in the body politic does not depend on the individual attitude of faith of each of the subjects. Everything in the state depends...on the spirit pervading all its communal activities.”⁶⁶ And that holds for Islam and Muslims as well.

In effect, it means that in the pluralistic situation of Nigeria we should not aim at either a Christian or Muslim government, but for a government that embodies the best insights of both with compromises to take care of conflicting viewpoints.

Neither should we aim at a secular government, for the spirit of Nigeria is not secular, even though proponents of secularism should also have the right to throw their proposals and solutions into the hopper for consideration.

So, there we have it: some seeds for Christian reflection on politics, government and faith. As you can see, quite a few parallels with the wholism of Islam. Now we have two wholistic religions side by side that divide our nation in two, with a third secularist mix in both. The trick for us is now to both work with our perspectives to bridge as much of the gap between us in terms of political and social goals. We offer each other our best, especially our parallels, and see to what extent we can fuse a unified policy for the nation out of them. And where we run into basic disagreements, we need to compromise with as much sympathy as we can muster for each other, to meet at the threshold of the possible. But remember: only on basis of goodwill, respect and honesty. Without that, forget it. We will all be politically and economically doomed. We will be occupied once again by our own army. If it gets worse, international bodies may intervene in their own interest rather than ours. Allah ya sawwake. God forbid.

Though Nigerians are openly religious, governments, Christians, Muslims and Nigerian culture in general have been confused by the heritage of colonial and missionary secularism. Officially, governments, politics and public schools in many states operate on a secular basis; religion is excluded from those premises, except perhaps for CRK or IRK courses. So, as suggested in the above paragraphs, if we are now going to openly recognize that religion cannot be avoided and is implicit in everything, the need has arisen for a new recognition of and new role for religion. *If we continue to pretend its absence, it will remain underground in debased forms and continue to work its distortions. If it is used as a*

party or ethnic group, if it is manipulated or used as a power base, it will play havoc and cause destruction. I described the situation in previous volumes and urge you to re-read those materials⁶⁷ so that we can move on.

The difficult parameters of the relationship between religion in its various forms and politics is, I believe, amply discussed for our purposes in this chapter. It is further illustrated by all the paradoxical “ands and buts” so typical of Lamin Sanneh’s discussions. The subject is challenging and, it seems, almost impossible to define exactly. It is always a matter of “on the one hand” and “on the other hand.” There are several reasons for this ambiguity, the first of which is that life itself is ambiguous. The second, I suggest, is that almost everyone operates at least partially with a dualistic framework of faith and religion vs reason. As long as the essence of religion is seen as a distinctly separate cultural area instead of the foundational power beneath all life and culture, the issue will be beclouded. The recognition of the essence of religion as a power underlying and under-girding everything else, can bring much clarity into the situation. It will help identify problems currently separating Christians and Muslims in Nigeria more accurately and guide us towards parameters for solutions.⁶⁸ These chapters aim to help us in that direction.

Religion can only play a healthy role if its true nature is recognized and allowed to express itself. Give it its legitimate role and it should constitute a blessing to the nation. It *should*. Unfortunately, as human corruption takes its toll in politics, economics and, in fact, everywhere, even religion is not free from that human affliction. However, we do not “close down” religion anymore than we do our political institutions or economic efforts when corruption has taken over. In fact, we cannot “close it down.” We renew, we cleanse, sometimes we “bail out,” sometimes we reform through legislation. Religion is no exception, for human corruption is prone to distort even the most noble of human impulses. In religion we

call such cleansing “reformation” or “revival.” Nigeria is in great need of such revival, but one that goes beyond the bounds of personal spirituality and church or mosque as institute but, like the original Danfodio and Kuyperian revivals, cleanses and renews culture at every front. I have sought to apply these insights to questions of religion, church and public life. The next chapter will deal with their application at other political fronts.

▲ INSET: AFRICAN FORUM ON RELIGION AND GOVERNANCE

Though the Nigerian Christian community has often berated itself and often been berated by others for avoiding politics and not recognizing it as an arena for serious Christian involvement, this is not the complete picture. Over the decades both TEKAN and CAN have been actively involved in politics in ways that have received extensive attention in this series. They themselves have all along been engaged in interchanges with governments at every level. They have been strongly encouraging Christians to engage in politics in every way and lamented that missionaries were largely silent, if not negative, on this score. Their member denominations such as COCIN and ECWA have published magazines for years that covered political developments.⁶⁹ They have also published significant documents and statements on the subject that are there for all to read. I am glad *and* gratefully proud that in this series I have helped make much of this information and some of these documents available for all to read today. Except for the earliest missionary years, the major problem has not been lack of political interest and involvement, but the dualism and sometimes unprincipled pragmatism that marked Christian politics. These characteristics distorted the Christian stance especially in the struggle with Muslims, with their negative effects made even worse by the combination of general anger, fear and hatred.

Through its Political Commission, TEKAN has contributed significantly, but especially in 1987, when the nation was undergoing serious soul searching. TEKAN participated with a major submission to the President about future political arrangements. It submitted a document to the national Constitutional Review Committee. And then there was their analysis of religious riots that are described in Volume 1 of this series. All this can be found within the covers of its *Towards the Right Path for Nigeria*.⁷⁰

CAN is virtually a political volcano in the country for both good and ill, but mostly good. Pay attention to them as you read vols. 3, 5 and 7. They are all over the map. They published “Biblical Perspective on Politics” that presents “Biblical Grounds for Political Involvement.”⁷¹

During 2006, CAN, together with the Africa Forum on Religion and Governance (AFREG), sponsored a conference in Abuja that dealt with issues of Christians in government and politics. It was a conference of movers and shakers, including President Obasanjo and Zambian President Nkurunziza. Others were “government ministers, parliamentarians, judges, church leaders, traditional rulers and other community leaders.” The resulting Abuja Declaration expressed an exceedingly lofty and ambitious purpose, namely, “To build a movement of African leaders of integrity who are committed to transforming Africa into a First World continent (a continent characterized by excellence) shaped by God-centred values.”⁷² Wow! Now *that’s* thinking big! Far removed from the popular but sad Nigerian defeatist attitude, “It’s in our blood.” There was a brutal but realistic list of the negative components of the African mindset, each item of which was to be replaced by its positive correlative. Courageously self-critical before the entire world!

Another document that emerged from the above conference is the one-page “Nigeria Christian Creed on Governance.” As Danny McCain of Unijos reports, “Four Bible studies have also been prepared to help the church teach this document. CAN has sponsored

training workshops in how to use this material for pastors in several of Nigeria's states."⁷³ To ensure that all readers have access to the document itself, I herewith copy it in full. The Bible studies can be found in Appendix 100, while other founding and planning documents of AFREG are located in Appendix 101.

NIGERIA CHRISTIAN CREED ON GOVERNANCE

AFRICA FORUM ON RELIGION AND GOVERNANCE AND
CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA

We, the Christians of Nigeria, believe that government is ordained by God to provide justice and security for its people, encourage and facilitate development, and protect and manage its resources. Since government is an agent of God, it must always be respected, supported and obeyed, unless it conflicts with the Law of God. We believe, therefore, that Christians must actively participate in the political process to ensure that government is just, transparent and efficient.

We recognize that governance is an honourable service to humanity. Thus, we believe Christians should actively seek public office and reflect the beliefs of their faith in their public service as much as in their private lives. We insist that our politicians should be completely honest and fair in the fulfilment of their duties. This means that:

- *They must not make promises that they know they cannot fulfil.*
- *They must take nothing from the government for their personal use other than what has been legitimately approved.*
- *They must not use their offices to give unfair favours to relatives, friends or others.*
- *They must not give or accept bribes, favours, positions,*

honours or any other benefit that would compromise fairness in fulfilling their duties.

- *They must seek the prayers and advice of the Body of Christ and regularly report to its leaders their roles in government.*

We insist that only those persons with records of excellence in their private lives should be selected for public service and that integrity, efficiency, and good management characterize all public servants.

We, the governed, acknowledge our responsibilities in governance as well. It is our duty to register and vote in all elections. We can have even greater influence in government by joining and actively participating in political parties.

- *We must support and encourage our most honourable and competent leaders to seek public office.*
- *We must provide our elected representatives with our opinions about public issues.*
- *We must pray for and submit ourselves to the authority of our rulers.*
- *We must pay taxes so that government can fulfil its rightful responsibilities.*
- *We must refuse to allow ourselves to develop improper expectations from those government employees close to us. This means that we must reject the commonly held view that when “our people” occupy key positions, it is time for us to “get our slice of the national cake.”*

We, the Christians of Nigeria recognize that in the past, we have not always played our expected roles as “salt and light” in governance. We admit that many Christian public servants have joined in corruption and added to inefficiency in government. We collectively repent of these failures and ask God to forgive us. We commit ourselves to promote the most honest, just and efficient government possible. We will respect, support

and defend all honourable people who occupy public offices, regardless of religion, gender, place of origin, or political affiliation. We will demand accountability and transparency of all public office holders, especially those who are part of the Christian faith. We will seek to have a government that glorifies God. In the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the context of this book, I can only make a few brief numbered comments on these developments and documents.

1. I begin with thanks to God. If Nigeria's Christians would accept this Creed as a personal and communal assignment, we would see the country turn around. Muslims might be challenged to adopt a similar programme and we could end up with a national competition to clean up the nation's politics.
2. I am disappointed with the introduction to the Study Guide and not a little surprised. The claim—or is it an excuse?—that civilian government was thrust upon us suddenly is remarkable, in view of the fact that pressure towards it had been building up for a long time. There was plenty of time to prepare for it and to reflect on all the issues listed there. This is a weak paragraph that could undermine one's confidence in the document. A future revision should either delete it or turn it into a confession. I recommend the former.
3. The Creed itself contains little that is new. It has all been said before, both in official church statements and in the myriad of books and articles Christians have produced over the years.⁷⁴ What is said is good. It needed contemporary restatement. But the document fails to reflect the much deeper insights found in the other AFREG documents and may fail to ignite the excitement of readers who have access only to the Creed.
4. Though the Creed may not be breaking new ground in terms

of its concepts, I rejoice that it addresses not just the responsibilities of the church institute and its clerical leaders but the church organism: all Christians of all walks of life and occupations. This is an address to the entire Body of Christ that veers away from the “churchification” of the faith that is all too common. This is the real and more significant mission of the church in the world. At this level the Creed is in keeping with the orientation of all the documents.

5. The other AFREG documents go far beyond the Creed and do much more justice to the tremendous challenges ahead. The Study Guide gives a list of governmental responsibilities and discusses each one. Lesson 2 discusses the responsibilities and other aspects of civil service. It is a great gain over the past that this area is now regarded as an area and opportunity for service to God and the nation. The role and responsibilities of “the governed” also is extensively discussed. And then we come to a “Confession and Commitment,” that is, a look at the past with some of its failings and a commitment to active and responsible involvement in community and nation. This Guide is definitely a great step ahead that is not properly reflected in the Creed. Organize a group and discuss it. You will be blessed, enriched and changed, individually and as a group.
6. The Action Plan states: “It will be necessary to develop and utilize a critically examined theology of politics and the state as a theoretical framework for good political leadership. Such a theology of politics and theology of the state is needed to provide the theoretical framework which informs good political leadership.”⁷⁵ This is indeed a great need for the long-term Christian development in Nigeria and constitutes one of the major ideas in these documents. I remind you of the Kuyperian sections throughout this series⁷⁶ and this volume, since they are an example of the kind of theoretical framework that AFREG may want to consider.

I suggest that CAN sponsor two doctoral level students to study the entire issue of Christianity and politics cum government. One should study the Roman Catholic tradition on the subject; the other, the Kuyperian. These are the only Christian traditions that have long studied these topics professionally and published extensively. Upon graduation, or even during their writing stage, both would be charged with leading the churches in reflecting on the aforementioned subjects.⁷⁷

7. The Political Candidate Interview Project foresees the possibility of turning this project into a joint effort together with Muslims. It decided that this might be for the future, but for now it is best to proceed as Christians.

I propose that such joint efforts be attempted at local grassroots level before we proceed with macro-cooperation. A macro joint effort could weigh things down and likely reduce it all to a snail's pace. Oversize can kill. It leads to sluggishness and domination. Perhaps the competition previously mentioned might do more to get the nation moving.

