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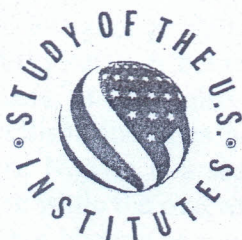
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ONE COUNTRY, MANY RELIGIONS:

Muslim/Christian Relations in Nigeria and the Modern Secular State

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Abstract: Questions such as will Nigeria remain one country and why do Muslims seek to use the *Shari'ah* to divide the country have taken up a sense of urgency with the acts of terrorism coloring Islam and Muslims. To answer these questions, this paper explores the history of Muslim/Christian relations in Nigeria. It also examines the question that divides Nigerians, especially Muslim and Christians most-the relation between religion and politics. The historical approach has been adoption to underscore the historicity of Muslim/Christian relations in Nigeria. For Christians, Nigeria is a secular state while for Muslims; Islam is "the lodestar" of politics. For Nigeria to remain one country, this paper proposes the model of a commonwealth of Religions that eschews the extremes of both the modern secular and classical Islamic states by fusing politics not with Islam, but with *religions*. This is because both states suppress the religious identities, markers and symbols of the *other*. They both make the *other* assimilate either the dominant secular norm of Christianity or the Islamic ethos. Therefore, instead of "oneness amidst the manyness" of religions and "combinations among all religious peoples," this paper calls for the creation of the Commonwealth of all Religions in the country.

Introduction

Nigeria, a highly multicultural and religious colonial creation about a centenary ago is known as "the Giant of Africa." It is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous country in the world. It has more than 250 ethnic groups, with varying languages and customs, the largest ethnic groups are the Fulani/Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo followed by the Edo, Ijaw, Kanuri, Ibibio, Epira, Nupe, Gwari, itsekiri, Jukun, Urhobo, Igala, Idoma, Tiv and other minorities.² Nigeria is made up of 36 federating units. Results of Nigerian most recent 2006 census give a population of 140,003,542. Pew Forum in a recent demographical survey puts the Muslim population at 78,056,000, which was 50.4% of the entire population,³ estimated to be 154,500,000.⁴

Nigeria is therefore roughly divided between Muslims, concentrated mostly in the Hausa/Fulani north and among the Yoruba, who mostly live in the Southwestern parts of the country and Christians, who mostly live in the South and central parts of the country. A minority practice traditional religions, especially the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba religions. Though there are many other religious movements in Nigeria, like the Hare Krishna, Guru Maharaja, Sikhism etc, they account for only a small size of the Nigerian population. The small size of African Religion practitioners probably explains why the question that divides Nigerians most-the relation between religion and politics, occurs mainly among Muslims and Christians. It may also, more importantly, be because African Religion readily accepts pluralism and does not seek conversion like the two Abrahamic faiths. For most Christians, Nigeria is a secular state and therefore religion should figure less in the political sphere while the overwhelming majority of Muslims see Islam as "the lodestar" of politics and see Nigeria as a multicultural and religious country

where religion does figure prominently in politics. What however is clear from the Nigerian constitution is that the country is a Federal Republic modeled after the United States with the president holding executive powers as the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces checked by a bicameral legislature.⁵

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria makes provision for a plural legal system: Common Law, derived from its colonial Christian past; Customary Law which is derived from indigenous traditional norms and practices of the Yoruba, Igbo and Ibibio, and the *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) regarded in the pre-colonial predominantly Muslim north of Nigeria as the customary law and hence its official application is restricted to the area. Recently however, its application was expanded to cover criminal aspects from late 1999 by eleven states in the north. These states are Zamfara, which spearheaded the expansion, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Bauchi, Borno, Kaduna, Gombe, Sokoto, Jigawa, Yobe and Kebbi. The Nigerian constitution, therefore, not only recognizes the rights of the Muslim north to adjudicate according to the *Shari'ah*; but also clearly permits any other state that so wishes providing that nobody shall be made subject to any religious law by force in Nigeria that is not with the person's accord.⁶ It is against this background that I examine in this paper, the history of Islam in Nigeria and its encounter with Christianity. This will be followed by an analysis of the Muslim/Christian relations and the question that divides Muslims and Christians most-the relation between religion and politics. I will also discuss how the Muslim rejection of a secular modern state, to a large extent, represents a global Muslim understanding. This will culminate in my discussion of the definition and nature of the Commonwealth of Religions that I propose and its fusion of religions with politics.

Islam in Nigeria

While the chronology of the advent of Islam in Nigeria remains debatable, there is a consensus that it came centuries before the coming of Christianity.⁷ In fact, the advent of Islam in the Kanuri Kingdoms of Kanem and Bornu went as far back as the Seventh century when one Muhammad Mani introduced Islam into Kanem during the reign of Mai Bulu.⁸ Muhammad Mani and other traders from Fezzan introduced Islam into the Kingdoms through the trade routes between Tripoli and the Lake Chad Basin.⁹ However, Islam came to other areas of northern and western Nigeria around the fourteenth century. Scholars from the old Mali Empire during the decline of the Mali Empire came to Kano, Katsina and Zaria, to settle. Even the Yoruba in South-western Nigeria still refer to Islam as "*esin Imale*" meaning the religion of Mali.¹⁰ This is also supported by the "Kano Chronicle" that documents the presence of Muslims in Kano by the middle of the 14th century.¹¹ It is necessary to note that Islam was strengthened in all these areas by the Sokoto reform movement. But contrary to some historical reports, this reform was not targeted mainly at non-Muslims. Non-Muslims who were found on the boundaries between the major emirates were in fact referred to by the Sokoto Jihadists as *Maguzawa* or people with whom it was justifiable for Muslims to live in peace. Quoting Murray last, the British scholar of religion and founding editor journal of contemporary religion, Peter Clarke, explains that the *Maguzawa* "were not really the targets for jihad in the early 19th century... the jihad of 1804 was primarily a reform movement, reforming lax Muslims,

not converting pagans. It was ideologically probably less concerned with the *Kufr* (unbelief) of pagans than with the *Kufr* of those Muslims who opposed the jihad."¹²

Nonetheless, Christianity preceded Islam in southern and eastern Nigeria. It was not until 1890 that the establishment of a military base in Calabar, an important Efik town facilitated the arrival of Muslim traders and the building of a mosque. Natives were impressed by the dress and devotions of these Muslims and began to imitate them.¹³ From 1896 there were also reports of Muslim elephant hunters from Kano in Elele, Port Harcourt.¹⁴ By 1903, Muslims in eastern Nigeria were also mainly traders that settled there before indigenous leaders such as Alhaji Sufiyan Agwasim, a Roman Catholic converted to Islam.¹⁵ Yet, despite the presence of migrant Hausa Muslims in Igbo land, from that time, Islam was mostly seen as the religion of the Hausas.¹⁶ So that by 1984 when Abdurrahman Doi, the Bangladesh Islamic scholar collected the statistics of Igbo Muslims, he merely put their figures at 3,450 persons.¹⁷ In 1991 the figures were 10, 000 persons.¹⁸ Recently, Egodi Uchendu puts the figures today at 16, 000 from an Igbo population of over sixteen Million.¹⁹

Muslim/Christian Relations in Nigeria

Muslim/Christian relations in Nigeria today takes on a very visible and disturbing image in the global media, thanks to *Boko Haram*. Though conflicts have characterized Muslim/Christian relations in Nigeria since their early encounter, yet there was nothing like *Boko Haram*. How did Nigeria get to these darkest days in its history of Muslim/Christian relations and what do Muslims want, to break Nigeria? I set out to answer this question and other crucial questions by turning to the history of colonial education and Christianity. The British government's use of the Christian Church to provide education in Nigeria could be said to be the remote cause of the emergence of *Boko Haram* not only in Nigeria but in most parts of the Muslim world, even if the name *Boko Haram* is not used. The Christian missionaries used Western education to Christianize non-Christians or as an instrument of conversion. Through this educational evangelism, Christian missionaries, indeed the Christian Church, succeeded beautifully in Yoruba land. Many Muslims in order to go to school had to be converted to Christianity and became Christians and many others had their Muslim names either dropped or changed from Yusuf became Joseph, Lawal to Lawalson and Ibrahim to Abraham among others.²⁰ It is therefore not true as opined by Assistant Comptroller General, Nigeria Immigration Service Rose Uzoma that "indeed, Western culture was so well propagated through Christianity that evangelists changed the names of their converts to "Christian names."²¹ For amongst those whose names were changed to Christian names in Southern Nigerian included many Muslims who never converted to Christianity.

As a result of this policy of conversion, Muslim education became retarded, especially in northern Nigeria because colonial education was irretrievably tied to Christianization.²² This view is supported by the Christian historian of the Ibadan School, Ayandele, who shows that the British government's use of the Christian Church to provide education in Nigeria explains why the Muslim North revolted against it.²³ As a result of this revolt, "one of the consequences was that in places like Bauchi Emirate there were by 1952 only

18,000 people literate in English out of a population of over one million, and in Kano the figure was 23,000 out of a population of almost three and half million.”²⁴

However, beyond the problem of retarding Muslim education, the use of education to convert Muslims by the Christian Church and the subsequent boycott of education by the Muslim North is one explanation of the phenomenon of *Boko Haram* in Nigeria. As Andrew Walker, a freelance journalist who has conducted research on the group has written, “a range of conflicting narratives has grown up around Boko Haram when one looks deeper, however, one finds that politics—more precisely, control of government patronage—is the primary cause of many of these conflicts.”²⁵ For example, one of such narratives, which have not been employed before is that the term, *Boko Haram* has a long historical root. *Boko* which, in classical Hausa language literally means deception or deceit is used in Hausa to describe a “fake bride” or “bride of deception” known “*amayyar boko*.” Thus, the term combined with *Haram*, was originally used during the Fulani/Hausa Muslim north contact with Christian education to mean that Muslims saw Christian use of education for evangelism as prohibited and unacceptable in Islam. This explains the preponderance of illiteracy in Western style education and lack of economic mobility for the teeming masses of the Northern states. This untoward consequence of Muslim rejection of “Christian education,” is not untrue of other Muslim areas and societies in Africa, Asia and the Arab world. In fact, it is in order to address this anomaly that some Muslims conceived of the Islamization project.²⁶ I will return later to advance a new thesis about the group and its terrorist activities.

Muslims, Christians and the relation between Religion and Politics

Despite numerous conflicts between Muslims and Christianity such as the Maitatsine crisis of the 1980s and the riots over hosting Miss World beauty pageant in Nigeria, nothing appears to have polarized Muslims and Christians more than the operation of the *Sharī'ah* or the Islamic Law, which in fact sparked off debates on the relation between religion and politics. The British government, while upholding the application of the *Sharī'ah*, abolished penalties they considered repugnant to natural justice such as amputation, death penalty, and non-inheritance of an heir that differs from the religion of the deceased. In 1943, the West African court of appeal overturned the decision of a *Sharī'ah* court that Mary, a Christian could not inherit from her Muslim father. Again in 1948, the West African court of appeal set a death sentence passed on a murderer aside because it was contrary to the British common law. Naturally in independent Nigeria, Christians rejected the entire *Sharī'ah* criminal codes, hence, their expulsion from the *Sharī'ah* legal system at independence. The debates over the *Sharī'ah* however came to a head when Christians rejected the demand by Muslims during 1977/78 Constituent Assembly for a federal *Sharī'ah* court to sit over appeals from state *Sharī'ah* courts. This resulted in Muslims from the North walking out of the conference until a compromise was reached and the provision of a special committee of the Supreme Court in place of a federal *Sharī'ah* court to sit over appeals from state *Sharī'ah* courts was approved.²⁷

The division in the Constituent Assembly was not merely over the federal *Sharī'ah* but primarily to borrow the words of Noah Feldman “over the role that belief should play in the business of politics and government.”²⁸ To Clarke, this debate over the relation

between religion and politics has been a live issue between Muslims and Christians since the colonial period and it came to a head during the above Constitution Drafting when it was suggested that the country be described as “one and indivisible sovereign Republic, secular democratic and social.” This divided Christians and Muslims into two opposing camps, Christians who supported the inclusion of the term “secular” to imply state neutrality in matters of religion and Muslims who opposed the inclusion, because in certain circumstances, a ruler hostile to religion may make use of the term to impose restrictions on the practice of religion.²⁹ So, contrary to the claim of Uzoma, the Nigerian 1979, which she incorrectly calls, 1978 Constitution did not declare Nigerian as a secular state.³⁰ Thus the greatest threat to Islam, as far as most Muslim in Nigeria are concerned, in the words of the political historian, Ali Mazrui “is not the Church with a European face but capitalism in Western robes,”³¹ a culture that is secular, exploitative and killing. This is manifested in the global influence of secular economy in Nigeria that throws up the culture of poverty in the midst of plenty, sickness in the midst of death clinics called hospitals, terrorism in the midst of ethnic and tribal dislocation. As the gap between the rich and the poor widens and with 70% of Nigerians living below the poverty line,³² the Nigerian state has become an arena where the citizens engage in political struggle for the resources of the state, a political struggle rooted in “universal socio-biological human needs” that possibly push people to compete for scarce resources.³³

I now return to the *Boko Haram*. As noted by Walker, “...when one looks deeper, however, one finds that politics—more precisely, control of government patronage—is the primary cause of many of these conflicts.”³⁴ I argue therefore that the preponderance of illiteracy in Western style education and lack of economic mobility for the teeming masses for Northern youth strongly account for the emergence of the *Boko Haram*. Economic deprivation which today pervades the middle and lower classes of the Nigerian society explain the grouse of the group with a large segment of the Nigerian society, especially, the elites. Members of the group consist mainly of school dropouts and unemployed higher institutions graduates.³⁵ This line of thinking becomes strengthened when it is observed that there are other militant movements similar to the *Boko Haram* in Nigeria, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Odua People’s Congress (OPC) and Movement for the Actualization of State of Biafra (MASSOB).³⁶ These different militant groups in the Niger-Delta and Southeastern Nigeria carry out kidnappings, killings and robberies and destruction of oil pipelines and installations in the name of struggling for the emancipation of their communities while in the Southwest, it is armed robberies, especially of banks that are rampant. Success of this rebellion can be linked to the massive corruption and diversion of public funds responsible for the institutional rot in Nigeria, including the police and the entire Nigerian Armed forces making these institutions “professionally ill prepared, poorly trained, poorly equipped and grossly undisciplined” to police and protect Nigerians from organized militias, militants and criminals.³⁷

All these acts of rebellion against the Nigerian state show that *Boko Haram* does reflect the anger and resentment of a deprived people who refuse to follow neither the path of dialogue nor seek legal remedies. As a matter of fact, Nigeria’s adoption of the Western economic model in the form of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980s

and 1990s impacted middle and low-income households. This failure of SAP, which was born out of the liberalization programme of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, was a result of terms and conditions attached to loans received from the above neo-colonial bodies. Hence, as noted by Wade Clark Roof and Nathalie Caron, it is not only “that America and global capitalism are increasingly perceived as one and the same,” they are also perceived as the catalyst for the global secular neo-liberal economy.³⁸ This perception probably contributes to Muslim rejection of the secular modern state.

The role of the politics of economics in the coloring of Muslim/Christian relations could also be seen in the Major Gideon Orkar led coup of 1990. Major Gideon Orkar, the leader of the coup mentioned the excision of the five core Muslim states in the north from the Nigerian federation. Interestingly, the leader of the coup came from the middle belt area that may be regarded as the Christian/Bible belt region of Nigeria. He accused those states of domination over the other parts of the country. More so, it came on the heels of Christian allegations against the Babaginda regime, first over the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) issue. Though the regime’s attempt to join the OIC was purely to obtain economic assistance from the Islamic Development Bank, the Christian Association of Nigeria accused the regime, in an open letter, of being a principal agency of Islamization in Nigeria barely two months before the above mentioned coup. The open letter of the Christian Association of Nigeria shows that its problem was with over perceived lopsided political appointments.³⁹

Another angle to the *Boko Haram* is the political. Here, I do not mean political Islam, as popularly argued by most commentators on Islam. I, instead, argue that when one looks deeper, one finds that *Boko Haram* may in fact, be a political creation orchestrated to dismember northern Nigeria. Obviously, some powerful people in the Nigerian government have ties with the *Boko Haram*. This first came to the fore when there was bomb blast during Nigerian Independence day celebrations in 2010. Immediately, President Goodluck Jonathan declared that he knew those behind it and their sponsor. Nigerians today are still confused why this “sponsor” has not been arrested and prosecuted. This claim of the President was, however, contrary to the claim of MEND that it was responsible for the act. In fact, a leader of the group in South Africa, Henry Okah has since being found guilty and sentenced over the bombing. Interesting, during his trial, Okah told the al Jazeera that he was arrested by the South African Police on the instigation of the Nigerian government because the government wanted him to influence MEND to retract its statement in order to implicate the *Boko Haram* and he refused.⁴⁰

This attempt by the presidency to implicate the *Boko Haram* must be viewed in its wider dimensions as the *Boko Haram* has been involved in the destruction of not only churches and Christians but mostly mosques and killing of Islamic scholars, Muslim leaders and other prominent individuals.⁴¹ That the *Boko Haram* maybe an orchestration by the government to destabilize the north is further strengthened by the apparent unwillingness of the government to prosecute members of the group who have been apprehended. Does this not show clearly that the Police and indeed the Nigerian government have something to hide in respect of *Boko Haram*?⁴² Maybe, it is because of the fear of the police and

government that the group could uncover the names of its sponsors, financiers and patrons if judicial process was followed?

Furthermore, in January 2012, as if President Jonathan was not done with playing politics with *Boko Haram*, he claimed that members of the group had infiltrated the highest levels of his government and the military. In the words of Walker,

President Jonathan's remarks have been condemned by some observers as political opportunism. In Nigerian politics it is a standard maneuver to blame problems on one's political enemies, even if the situation has nothing to do with them. The president's announcement may have had more to do with distracting Nigerians away from painful increases he was about to make in the price of fuel than to actual truth.⁴³

I have gone to this length, to explain the *Boko Haram* because it has several implications for not only Muslim/Christian relations in Nigeria, but also for the unity of the country. It must be remembered that "the legitimacy of Jonathan's presidency is still not recognized by many in the north," and dismembering the area maybe a master stroke in eliminating the northern opposition if the president eventually announce its intention to run for a second term in office come 2015. So *Boko Haram*, in my view is neither an Islamist agenda to impose the so-called Islamic state on Nigeria, at least, northern Nigeria nor to divide country. It may actually be meant to destroy the Muslim north, in preparation for a "do or die" electioneering come 2015. A way the United States can help in keeping Nigeria one, ending the *Boko Haram* and indeed all other secessionist rebellions in Nigeria is to as, a matter of urgency, pressurize the government of Jonathan to arrest the "sponsor" of the 2010 bombing of the Independence day celebrations, whom he claimed to know and prosecute him and all members of the group who have been apprehended so far. The government should also deliver to Nigerians, the so far elusive dividends of democracy, by immediately halting corrupt practices, especially in the oil and gas sector, pension schemes and cost of governance as well as in the swift prosecution and resolution of all outstanding corrupt cases and the confiscation of the corrupt proceeds that have been invested or hidden within the United States. I will now turn to the Commonwealth of Religions that I propose as alternative to the modern secular state and its neo-liberal capitalist economic system. But first, I want to explain, at the risk of being labeled essentialist, that the Nigerian Muslim rejection of the modern secular state, despite the existence of differing Muslim groups with differing and at times competing views, reflects a global unified Muslim view, to a very large extent.

Politics and Religion: Global Muslim Response to the Modern Secular State and the Commonwealth of Religions Model

There is no doubt that a global side to the Muslim rejection of the legal secularist separation of religion and politics. Globalization has brought about greater understanding of modernity and its secular paradigm in the Muslim world. Modernity and its secular paradigm undermining religion remains a dominant narrative among Muslims. This forces Muslims generally to reject the secular modern state. To demonstrate this, I will begin by giving a definition of modernity and its postulates, especially secularism. Scores

of scholars have defined modernity. For example, Max Weber views modernity as a form of liberation from a supreme scheme of values, leading to a free culture. In the same vein, Alain Touraine views modernity as the diffusion of rationality in all spectrums of human life. It is the consideration of human intellect and reason as the sole sources of epistemology, morality and politics.⁴⁴

One common theme that runs through these definitions is the free reigns given to human reason in acting and decision-making to the neglect of religion, tradition and authority. This refers to the intellectual component of modernity. A major postulate of the intellectual component of modernity is legal secularism, which erects a barrier between the Church and the state. This secularism intends the establishment of a state that is "wholly detached from religious teaching or practice," a state that is irreligious.⁴⁵ It is this brand of secularism that has been described as "the most powerful philosophy of secularization in the nineteenth century" that was put into practice by Marxism in the then Soviet Union.⁴⁶ This was the case in Ataturk's Turkey, and to some extent, in China. The case of Turkey is particularly interesting. Kemal Ataturk's Turkey is the first Muslim country to embrace the path of comprehensive secularism through liberalization of the Muslim mind from Islamic fundamentals and total secularization of all Islamic institutions in the Old Ottoman Empire. To Ataturk, progress and development was not possible for Turkey without westernization and social and cultural transformation "embracing internalizing all the cultural dimensions that made Europe modern."⁴⁷

Hence, Ataturk's post caliphate era was characterized by total commitment to effecting the eradication of all Islamic mores and traces in the public life as a prelude to Kemalism. The wholesale adoption of comprehensive secularism for the modernizing project which began in post World-War Turkey was implemented with fascist and arbitrary tactics. With the aid of the military, Ataturk pushed through his secularization and westernization project in Turkey. Western style dress and other European innovations were imposed on the people.⁴⁸ However this use of the military to enforce the modernizing project in Ataturk's Turkey for over half a century remains unacceptable to most Turkish people. The majority of the population, despite their embracing of democracy, progress and development, has continued to express their support for the cultural values of Islam. Consequently today, Ataturk's secular Turkey is gradually re-embracing the same Islamic values that were banned for over half a century. The re-adoption of Islamic values is being championed by the Justice and Development Party (JDP), which came into power, for the first time in 2002. Its vision consists of the retention of Islamic religious and cultural values in the political, especially democratic project of modernity. This alternative model of progress and development is termed 'conservative democracy' by the party.⁴⁹

For this, it is pertinent to mention at this juncture that Stuart Hall's most defining component of modernity, secularism so that the more, people are exposed to modernization; the more they are expected to abandon religion, tradition and revelation as observed by Kathleen Moore, has not happened. In fact, according to her, "religion not only survived, it has prospered, to the extent that taking religious as basis for civil legal relations is commonplace."⁵⁰ To the social Anthropologist, Ernest Gellner, Islam is

exceptional in the rejection of secularism because "To say that secularization prevails in Islam is not contentious. It is simply false."⁵¹ Why Islam is resistant to secularism? Gellner argues that out of the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Islam is most resistant to secularism because it is closest to modernity due to its universalism. To him, the Islamic principle of 'the community will not agree on error' gives the Muslim community a political authority of communal consensus. This combined with the theoretical absence of clergy makes Muslim theology egalitarian and Islam a universal worldview that allows Muslims to construct their values and practices.⁵² This is also the view of Moore when she explains what she terms "the exceptionalism of the Muslim American experience. To her, "the Muslim encounter with pluralism in American is of an exceptional nature because as an ideology, Islam represents, like modernity, a universalistic world view."⁵³

For this reason, in my view, Muslims tend to reject a separation between religion and state, whether in form of "legal separation" or "civil religion." This commitment of Muslim to the fusion of Islamic teachings, values and practices with politics does explain in part, the complexity playing out in Egypt, today. With the ousted government of Muhammad Mursi, committed Egyptian educated Muslim women had the opportunity to reclaim the Islamic dress, without hindrance for example, in public space. This re-adoption of *hijāb* that was discarded in Husni Mubarak's secular Egypt is demonstrated by the launching of the first TV station exclusively run by veiled Muslim women.⁵⁴ This Muslim rejection of the modern secular state is understandable within the global context of the debates over the extent of the Judeo-Christian basis of Euro-American secular nations. While secular nations such as the United States establish "a wall of separation between religion and politics," Judeo-Christian practices and symbols still express themselves in the public arena like prayers observed on July 4th, Thanksgiving and at presidential inaugurations, official observance of Christmas and Easter Holidays and the use of the Gregorian Calendar. Thus, "legal secularism" or what some term "civil religion" in the US has led to what, to borrow the idea of Alexis de Tocqueville, may be termed the "tyranny of the dominant secular Judeo-Christian culture" in the US.⁵⁵ That "as a nation, American celebrate Christmas, not the Buddha's Birthday," and that "whatever religious diversity they enjoy is always being negotiated in what can only be described as a Christian context," shows according to Stephen Prothero that Buddhists or Muslims etc must invariably "yank their traditions around to Christian norms and organization forms."⁵⁶

This explains, in my view, for instance, the non official recognition of other religious practices in the United States such as work free hours to observe the Friday prayers and the adoption of the Islamic Calendar. For this reason also, the use of the *hijāb* in government offices, secondary schools and even higher institutions in many secular countries, including some parts of Nigeria is almost outlawed. What is unfolding on the *hijāb* in Nigeria is replica of debates revolving round the veil in modern society. Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan's collection of articles have shown that the western and European approach of disallowing Islamic religious symbols and individual identities within the overarching framework of secular society is sustaining the polarization between two opposites, the Muslim world and the West.⁵⁷ Hence as observed by Malika

Ghamidi, the prohibition of the veil in France and elsewhere in Europe is a challenge to modern conceptions of democracy, liberty and human rights etc.⁵⁸ However, the Muslim multicultural and religious alternative of a classical Islamic state is to my mind, either the direct opposite of the Judeo-Christian modern state or even more dangerous.

For this Islamic state tend to replace the “tyranny of the dominant Judeo-Christian modern secular state” with the “tyranny of the dominant Islamic secular state” as is the case in Malaysia or with a worst and more dangerous form of “tyranny of a classical Islamic state” that refuses to recognize religious pluralism and the “manyness” of religious traditions. This is the case in Saudi Arabia and to a very large extent, Iran, two competing poles in Islamic religiosity. In my view, the Saudi rejection of “manyness” in whatever form accounts for its support for the return of the military in Egyptian politics, following the ouster of the first democratically elected President, Muhammad Mursi. For this reason, the classical Islamic understanding of an Islamic state is also not the way forward in today’s global village. My contention here is that the alternative to both the modern secular and classical Islamic states is the culture of multiple religions and peaceful coexistence that can best be realized in a truly Commonwealth of religions.

This Commonwealth of religions is my answer to Moore’s question: how can modernity, with its moral imperatives of liberty and tolerance, accommodate an essentially “illiberal” (hostile to liberty) world view.⁵⁹ It is simply by embracing the Commonwealth of religions, which as conceived in this paper refers to the state that fuses politics with its plural religions. The Commonwealth of Religions, I propose differs from the current multicultural and religious America where “bridges are the lifelines of a society on the move” in many ways as it fails to answer the question, after realizing “energetic bridge builders” and create a truly pluralistic society” what next?⁶⁰ Though Diana Eck writes about both Muslim increasing recognition “in American public discourse” and participation “in American public life” as “two-way traffic” of pluralism, she shows nowhere in her *New Religious America*, whether this is an Active Pluralism traffic (ATM) or a Passive Pluralism Traffic (PPT).⁶¹ The question here is: is it enough to accept Muslim participation in American public life without accepting Islamic teachings, practices and symbols/icons in the same public arena? It is also different from Catherine Albanese’s “oneness amidst the manyness” of religions and “combinations among all religious peoples. I am not comfortable with her “postpluralism (the new combinations that occur as people borrow religious ideas and practices from one another).⁶²

My own discomfort with the use of these terms is because they confirm, in reality the “tyranny of the dominant secular Judeo-Christian culture” in the US. The “oneness” that is created from the “manyness” (religious pluralism meaning free existence of many faiths) is truly religions that of PPT where all other religions must invariably “yank their traditions around to” the dominant Judeo-Christian norms and ethics. This is true today of Buddhism, Native American Religion as it is true of African American Religion, and Latino-Chicano Native Religions in the United States. All these faiths share one thing in come in United States; they exist as “Judeo-Christian Buddhism, Native American Religion, African American Religion, Native American religion and Latino-Chicano Native Religion.” Similarly, “postpluralism” and “combinations” among all religious

peoples, in my view presupposes the superiority of some distinctive teachings and practices in a religious tradition, such that other religious traditions would want to borrow and imitate such teachings and practices. A question this poses is whether humans as the proverbial “blind people trying to feel an elephant” in the dark can ever know if what they seek to borrow or emulate is truly the best strand in a religious tradition? For these reasons, the Commonwealth of religion that I am comfortable with and therefore propose, rather than combining and borrow the ideas and practices of others because of religious pluralism embrace officially both in theory and practice the “manyness” of all religious teachings, practices and symbols and icons, whether in the private, political, economic or public arenas. Such a state while upholding such pillars of the modern state like human rights, empowerment of women, elections, voting, mass education and urbanization, it also officially embraces its plural religious practices, traditions and values which include the application of *Shari’ah*/Christian Cannon Law/African Customary Law, financial institutions such as Islamic Banking/Christian Banking/African Customary Banking, and the adoption of Cultural symbols such as the Islamic dress, especially *hijab*/Catholic Nun’s habit or veil/Yoruba *iborun*. This Commonwealth of Religions becomes more necessary in Nigeria, when it is realized that the existence of some forms of Muslim/Christian interfaith collaborations in the country such as Islam in Africa Project which later became in 1987 the Project for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA),⁶³ has not succeeded in stamping out the mutual suspicion that exists between adherents of Islam and Christianity.⁶⁴ Similarly, the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) also founded by the government of Olusegun Obasanjo in its apparent determination to promote the ideals of peaceful coexistence, especially among the various religions in Nigeria,⁶⁵ has also not succeeded in addressing the serious contention on the role of religion in politics, which divide the Muslims and Christians in Nigeria.

In closing, I would like to address the question of how would this Commonwealth of Religions look like in practice in Nigeria? To this, my answer is Commonwealth of Religions is already taking shape in Osun State, Southwestern Nigeria where the incumbent governor, “Ogbeni” Rauf Aregbeshola now gives expression to the traditional religion of the people in all his official engagements as well ensuring that it is taught in schools. This differs from what happened in the past where only Muslim and Christian prayers are observed in the public arena during official ceremonies, such as Independence celebrations. This is just the beginning, as the Commonwealth of Religions will in addition embrace all religious teachings, values and emblems; all religious practices and institutions will be officially allowed and observed as long as they are not imposed on the *other*. My Commonwealth of Religions seeks, in the words of the Christian conservative leader, Ralph Reed “a place at the table” for all religions.⁶⁶ I give instances from Islam and Christianity. The punishment for *al-Riddah* (apostasy) and other penalties in Islamic Criminal Law are offered “a place at the table” of the Commonwealth of Religions. If a Muslim who believes in the punishment for *al-Riddah*, for example turns round to commit the crime, such a person in my view should suffer the punishment. This is despite my personal view that *al-Riddah* is not a punishable crime in Islamic Law. Rather, it is rebellion or treason that is punishable, in line with the *Hanafi* School’s justification for the killing of the apostate. According to the School, the apostate is killed under the Islamic law because of “averting his aggression and not because of his apostasy.”⁶⁷ The

second example consists of two opposing religious practices in Islam and Christianity and both that should be offered "a place at the table" of the Commonwealth of Religions. I refer to both the permission of polygamy in Islamic Law and prohibition of bigamy in Christian Law, from where Euro-American modern secular states derive the crime, where even the consent of a prior spouse makes no difference to the nullity of a plural marriage. This prohibition of bigamy, especially polygyny, in my own view violates the right of those women who feel they can get happiness and fulfillment in multiple marriages. It is interesting to note that the feminist historian Sarah McDougall argues that the Christian Euro-American insistence on monogamy and its enforcement till today may be attributed to the 16th Century Muslim incursions into Central Europe and the subsequent exposure of European Christians to cultures that practiced polygamy. For this reason Christian male polygamists were subjected to harsher punishments, such as death penalty, exile and imprisonment with hard labor than female bigamists.⁶⁸ Yet if a Christian subscribe to this law, then such a Christian should be punished when s/he commits bigamy, while a Muslim man commits no crime when he does same based on the permission of polygyny in Islamic law.

Conclusion

The advent and spread of Islam in Nigeria, to a very large extent, belie the claim that military force is responsible for its growth. Conflicts that have characterized Muslim/Christian relations in Nigeria are rooted in the missionaries' use of education for evangelism. The unwillingness of Muslims to be Christianized accounts for the long history of Muslim retarded education in Northern Nigeria. Subsequently, Muslims constitute majority of the illiterate in western style education, the poor and the unemployed. These are the major factors fuelling the discontents of *Boko Haram* and other secessionist groups in Nigeria. The manifestation of unbridled capitalism and the democratization of poverty in the country also contribute to the rejection of the neo-liberal secular economic system. For this reason, this paper calls for a Commonwealth of Religion that can support religious pluralism without the "tyranny of the dominant Judeo-Christian culture" in the "oneness" of "manyness" that emphasizes the PPT model of pluralism whether in the guise of "civil religion" or an Islamic state.

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