

The Conflicts of Religion and Secularism: From Europe to Africa

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Abstract

Secularism has not achieved complete sway even in Western Europe where it sprouted in modern times; yet it is making inroads into other parts of the world through its various promises and allurements of freedom. On the other hand, theocratic absolutism and religious fundamentalism may not have come under serious and open questioning in some parts of the world, but there are subterranean currents of discontent even in the most absolute of theocratic states. A while ago, secularism seemed to be sweeping Western Europe clean of all religious tendencies particularly in matters of state and government. Certain religious states of the world have also sustained a façade of immunity from the waves of secularist orientation, pluralist constitution or independent thought. However, recent developments show that neither secularism nor religion has achieved such absolute and exclusive dominance anywhere. Indeed, rather than instance of untrammelled prevalence, the reality is a growing eruption of the religious sentiment in the secular state and of the secular sentiment in the religious state. The relations are also becoming more invasive by the day. This paper is Part One of a two-part study of the relations of secularism and religions in our world today. This first part focuses on the conflicts of secularism and religion that started in Europe and has been transferred to Africa as part of the Euro-African export. Using the methods of analysis and dialogics, the paper examines the modern origins, concept and claims of secularism and raises the questions: How is secularism faring in Africa? what matters are arising therefrom?

Key words: Africa; Europe; secularism; secularization; religion; secular state; religious state; post-secularism; religious politics.

Introduction

The 13th century Sufi poet Melvana Jalaluddin Rumi once wrote a poem which tells a story of the relation between action and speculation. In the poem, Rumi narrated of someone who slapped another. The slap produced a sound. The sound was followed by a question: “The sound that you heard, was it made by my hand or by your cheek?” The one who was slapped replied: “The pain that I feel does not give me room for speculation.” In the relations of religions and secularism in our world today, one finds this situation of pain that incapacitates thought. As I tried to persuade my mind to think on the logic and framework of this paper, my mind kept creeping back to the pain of the rising violence of the confrontation between secularism and religion on the one hand and the inter and intra religious conflicts that dominate the global landscape today. The horrific terror attack of 11th September, 2001 on the World Trade Center in New York shattered many established paradigms of the mind and tore apart the peace of the heart. Of this event, Jürgen said: “...after 11 September, the tension between secular society and religion exploded in an entirely different way.¹ [...] Synagogues, churches and mosques filled up everywhere, as if the blind attacks had struck a religious chord deep within the innermost core of secular society.”

But that was just setting the pace for what was coming upon our world. It signaled the change of the theatre of religious war and terrorism from the pockets of local occurrences to the spectre of global network and impact. The theatre of religious ideological conflicts moved from the local peripheries to the global centre. This movement has grown from Al Qaeda to the Talibans, from the War on Terror to the Arab Spring with its continuing nightmares and the consequent global spread and networking

¹. Jürgen Habermas, “Faith and Knowledge: Acceptance Speech for Peace Prize for the German Book Trade, 2001”. In *Freidenspreis deus DeutschensBuchhandel*. (2001): 1-7.

of the terrorist organizations producing the ravaging gangs of Al Shabab, ISWAP and Boko Haram among others, and ultimately ISIS. In ISIS, religious fundamentalist terrorism emerges from the sideline of rebellion to the high and centre-point of sovereignty or the claim thereof. The result is the incessant bombing and attacks on civil society and civilian populations, establishments and neighborhoods and the devastating war on sovereign states all over the world.

If Hume's irreverent diatribe on metaphysics woke Kant from his dogmatic slumber, the new form of religionism has woken the world, particularly the West from the secularist and Euro-centrist slumber. And just like Kant woke up and sought the prolegomena to any future metaphysics, so have many scholars sought the grounds for any future unity in the tumultuous relationship of religions and secularism.

This paper seeks an understanding of the relations of religion and secularism in the contemporary world, and particularly in Africa. However, the roots of secularism must be sought in the soils of the European Enlightenment. Our study therefore begins with an investigation of the conflicts of religions on the one hand, and of religions and the quest for the secular state in Europe during the Enlightenment movement.

Secularism and Religion in Europe

Like many movements in history, secularism came gradually, stealthily and humbly, seeking some space and recognition. And when it got some space, it sought some authority. And when it got some authority, it sought sovereignty. And having secured sovereignty in Europe, it sought to globalize its sovereignty. However, in the search for absolute and global power, secularism generated crisis within and opposition without. The thematic discourse on secularism has focused on its main propositions,

which have been generally classified into three as follows: 1) there is a decreasing influence of religion; 2) there is institutional differentiation of religion from the public sphere and the state; 3) there is an absence or lack of predominance of the supernatural or higher power in human affairs.²

While secularism and secularization may not denote exactly the same semantic geography, the discourses have generally used them interchangeably. Jürgen distinguishes two meanings of secularization that are often conflated in the literature: “1) juridical meaning: Here, secularization refers to the forcible appropriation of church property by the secular state; an act of appropriation that is clearly unlawful except in its amoral justification as an act of the sovereign state. 2) The juridical meaning gives rise to another meaning of secularization as the emergence of cultural and societal modernism.³ In this usage, secularization refers to the successful taming of ecclesiastical authority by worldly power. In this understanding, it is claimed that religious ways of thinking and living have been replaced by reason-based ways of thinking. In essence, secularization refers to the erosion or arresting of the tenacious powers of religion by the secular powers of capitalism.

In the spirit of the later conception of secularization, Cox declared, “gods of traditional religions may live on [but they] play no role whatever in the public life of the secular metropolis”.⁴ Taylor outlines three goals of secularization: 1) Maximum freedom of conscience regardless of religion, ideology, culture and so on; 2) Equality of all persons and

². Habermas, “Faith and Knowledge”, 2.

³. Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, E. Medieta (ed.). (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

⁴. Harvey Cox, *The Secular City Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*. (Macmillan, 1966).

peoples regardless of religious or non-religious persuasion; 3) Freedom of exercise of conscience. A relational analysis of these goals exposes problems and possible contradictions that may lead to conflicts in practice among these goals or principles. The practice of maximum freedom of conscience may lead to infringements and conflicts among the various persons and groups in society. Taylor noted this and called for free discussions among the different religious groups.⁵ For this free discussion to hold, he explains that parties to the discussion must agree on three core propositions of secularization: 1) A common agreement among different religious groups; 2) No fetishized principle of “Laicite” or the separation of Church and state; 3) An official language for law, which does not favor or disfavor one religion over another. Both the goals and the proposal of free discussion seem to conflate the conflicts between religions and/or religious denominations and the conflicts between religion and secularism. If the goals and discussion are postulated for the resolution of the conflicts between different religions/denominations, the postulations and entronement of the principles and instruments of secularism may be justified. If, however, the postulations are for the resolution of the conflicts between secularism and religion, it is obviously skewed in favour of secularism. Indeed, the postulation seems to operate on a presupposition of the objective goodwill and acceptance of secularism as judge and arbiter.

Secularism begins from creating the space where people can imagine or think of their lives in religious, anti-religious or non-religious terms and framework; it then grows into the domineering stance of expelling religion from the public sphere. This can be likened to Taylor's history of the transformation of secularism which transits from the “ancien regime”, the 18th century age of “elite unbelief” through the age of

⁵. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2007).

mobilization which was both a continuation and a discontinuation of the “ancien regime” and finally arriving at the age of authenticity where the individualism of the age of mobilization crystalizes into individualistic expressionism.⁶ Authenticity here means “that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority”.⁷ It is in this sense that secularism may be seen as a form of humanism, a self-sufficing humanism.⁸

That religion or the practice thereof contributed to this development must be noted for it is the disagreement and conflicts in the hallowed chambers of religion and the inability of religion to practice the peace and harmonious co-existence it preaches that called upon the secular to judgment. This is actually a source of the arrogance and domineering stance of secularism. Habermas calls attention to this regard that secularization of the state was a response to the interdenominational wars in post-Reformation Europe.⁹ “After the Reformation, the state initially faced the elementary task of having to pacify a society divided along confessional lines....” The united Christendom of Europe was shattered by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation and the emergence of divided Christianity along confessional lines. Each denomination sought to cleanse its area of political domination of the “dirt” posed by the “false Christianity” of the minority group. It was a

⁶. M. G. N Mozumder, “Interrogating Post-Secularism: Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Talal Asad”: A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of School of Arts and Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, University of Pittsburgh, 2011.

⁷. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 475

⁸. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 19-20

⁹. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, C. Cronin (trans.). (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 22

period of enormous crisis resulting in the forced consciousness that cleansing my domain of the hated other was not as easy as assumed. And further, that adherents of my own denomination who were in the minority in the political territory of the hated other would also be subjected to the same persecution. And so “governments had to assume a neutral stand even where they remained bound up with the religion prevailing in the country”.¹⁰ This neutrality or “*non-religiosity*” was the movement, at the state level, towards secularization. The separation of church and state was therefore a consequence of the unresolvable hatred and wars between the churches, i.e. the crisis within religion contributed to the emergence of secularism.

A summary understanding of secularism may be distilled into three streams as follows:

1. Institutional Secularization: This is the institutional arrangement of separation or structural differentiation of church and state or religion and politics. This is the meaning of secularism that refers to the removal of religion from the public sphere. It refers to the secular state. However, what is meant by the public sphere is increasingly coming under review.¹¹ Again, scholars have recently proposed that the institutional differentiation of the church and the state does not necessarily mean complete separation of the two.¹² These scholars have argued that religion continues to exert influence on discourses in the public sphere even as the state also

^{10.} Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 22

^{11.} Habermas, “*Faith and Knowledge*”; Charles, *A Secular Age*; Abbink, Jon, “Religion and Politics in Africa: The Future of the Secular”. *African Spectrum*, 49, no.3, (2014): 89-106

^{12.} José Casanova, “Secularization, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship”, in: Wolfram Weisse, Katajun Amirpur, Anna Körs, and Doerthe Vieregge (eds), *Religions and Dialogue: International Approaches*, (Münster: Waxmann. 2014), 21-32; Charles, *A Secular Age*; Habermas, “*Faith and Knowledge*”

influences a number of religious actions and formulations. However, Talal Asad disagrees that there is any separation of religion and state as he argues that what has happened is that in the secular state, the state determines the place and role of religion.¹³ It is a new form of relationship.

2. Individual Secularization: The individual stream of secularism refers to the declining presence of the spiritual or the divine in the self-conceptions of individuals in society. A society of such individuals is “marked by an unheard-of pluralism of outlooks, religious, and non and anti-religious, in which the number of possible positions seems to be increasing without end”.¹⁴ Simply stated, individual secularism refers to this new environment of thought and living where an individual can complete his or her entire life imagination and conception without reference to the sacred, the spiritual, the divine or the supernatural order. Another meaning of this stream of secularism is emphasized by Taylor when he argues that the change brought by secularism “does not mean the complete evaporation of religion from the society; rather a new form of religion has emerged, which is individualistic, a matter of choice, and not based on collective denominational ties”¹⁵.

This individual stream is clearly apprehended in the question of Taylor: “Why is it so hard to believe in God (in many milieux) of the West, while in 1500 [AD] it was virtually impossible not to?”¹⁶

¹³. Talal Asad, “Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religious Traditions”, *Stanford Humanities Review*, 5, no.1 (1996).

¹⁴. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 437

¹⁵. Mozumder, “*Interrogating Post-Secularism*”, 27

¹⁶. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 437

3. Social Secularization: the individual stream ultimately dovetails into another stream, the social stream of secularism. The individualistic expressiveness of choice in the modern society and the freedom of religious choice result in the plurality of religions as well as the proliferation of both non-religious and anti-religious alternatives in the society. Social secularism therefore refers to the presence of plural alternatives as well as the need to recognize these plural alternatives of choice and self-definition or identity. “A great deal of multiplicity of belief and practice characterizes the contemporary secular age. A need for a higher being or power seems inevitable for many people for their wellbeing or betterment; as well, many people see no scope for any higher being or power because it is entirely these worldly calculations which is need[sic] to ensure their wellbeing. And there are lots of varieties in between these two frontiers.”¹⁷ The challenge of secular society therefore is to manage the diversity among the citizens without enforcing any particular religion or non-religion or limiting their right to choose their own religion.¹⁸

4. These three streams are closely related and yet distinguishable streams of the secularization process. Habermas adverts to this when he states: “What is true is that in the course of the differentiation of functional social systems, churches and religious communities increasingly confined themselves to their own core function of pastoral care and had to renounce their competencies in other areas of society. At the same time, the practice of faith also withdrew into more a personal or subjective domain. There is a correlation between the functional specification of the religious

^{17.} Mozumder, “*Interrogating Post-Secularism*”, 27

^{18.} Habermas, “*Faith and Knowledge*”, 22

system and the individualization of religious practice.”¹⁹

Secularism and Religion in Africa

As the various European nations sailed out to take possession of the African territories, they had apportioned to themselves, they took with them the various problems that constituted their lives and relations in the Europe of the day. The religious war among the various denominations of divided Christendom was among their possessions as they sailed to Africa. And the secularist state was another of their possessions. The off-loading of these possessions on the African continent has had tremendous effects on peaceful religio-social relations ever since. A number of studies have shown the emergence and evolution of secular attitudes in a number of African societies. Toren draws attention to the declining attention to religion within the class of the educated and wealthy urban population of a number of African cities.²⁰ Masondo discusses the attack on African traditional religion by the secular provisions of the modern state.²¹ Herman Paul draws attention to how the experience of African churches in handling declining religious involvement can be appropriated by Western church leaders in order to confront the challenges of secularization.²² Most of the studies however indicate high level of religious commitment across the continent. Many see the tendency to consumerism rather than secularism as the major

^{19.} Habermas, “*Faith and Knowledge*”, 19

^{20.} Benno van den Toren, “Secularisation in Africa: A Challenge for the Churches”. *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 22, no.1 (2003): 3-30.

^{21.} Masondo, S, “The Practice of African Traditional Religion in Contemporary South Africa”. In Bennett T. W. (ed.), *Traditional African Religions in South African Law*, (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2011), 19–36.

^{22.} Herman Paul, “Secularization in Africa: A Research Desideratum”, *Cairo Journal of Theology*, 2, (2015): 67-75.

challenge to religiosity in Africa.²³

Constitutionally, many African states are secular states. Many profess not to have state religion. Considering the deep attachment to religion of many Africans, one would have expected that at the independence of African states, a number of the Nationalists would have shaken off the garb of the secular state as one of the vestiges of European colonialism. However, the secular model was upheld by the postcolonial political leaders. It has been postulated that one reason for this was their belief that “it would facilitate religious freedom and dampen religious conflict.” This, it was hoped, would “spare the public sphere the aggressive competition and monopolizing discourse of religion.” It would seem however that both belief and hope were misplaced because “African governments today grapple with this more and more because religious pressures are increasing due to religion's growth as the primary identity of [the] people”.²⁴

Indeed, a major feature of the presence of religion in Africa is the deep mingling with politics. Agbibo decries that in Nigeria, “religion and politics are closely related.”²⁵ The encroachment of religion into the political realm in Nigeria portends grave danger....” Assuming the secularist perspective, Abigboa perceives religious encroachment in the relations of religion and politics in a number of African states. This

^{23.} Jon, Religion and Politics in Africa, 89-106; Igwe Leo, The Untold Story of Africa's Secular Tradition, 2014: 25-28; Diagne, Souleymane B., Religion and the Public Sphere in Senegal: The Evolution of a Project of Modernity”, Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA) Working Paper Series, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 2009; Shorter, A. & Onyancha E. Secularism in Africa: A Case Study: Nairobi City, Paulines Publications Nairobi, 1997.

^{24.} Leo, “The Untold Story of Africa's Secular Tradition”, 25-28; Jon, “Religion and Politics in Africa”, 89-106; Souleymane, “Religion and the Public Sphere”.

^{25.} D.E. Agbibo, “The Nigerian Burden: Boko Haram and Religious Terrorism in Nigeria.” *Conflict, Security and Development* 13, no. 1 (2013): 1-29

secularist assumption recognizes the existence of pluralism of religions which therefore calls for the neutrality of the state for orderly and peaceful coexistence in the society. Abubakre perceives the matter from the fundamentalist religious perspective and states that “Islam is a way of life which dictates the political ideology and practice in any society.”²⁶ And so, he argues that “earthly governments are mere agents of God’s theocratic governance of the physical and spiritual world”. In this context, the perception of the presence of religion in politics as an encroachment would be inconsistent. Unfortunately, Abubakre’s perception of the relations of religion and politics is widespread and has been on the increase in Africa.²⁷ In 1986, the military government of Ibrahim Babangida surreptitiously registered Nigeria in the Organization of Islamic Countries;²⁸ an organization “underpinned with a commitment to the advancement of Islam.”²⁹ Despite his denials and the tension this act generated, the country has remained a member of OIC. And so the average Nigerian Muslim regards it as his duty to further the spread of Islam in the country. In such a situation, the state is subordinated to the interests of the religious group. And this is not restricted to Nigeria. “Many Senegalese recall with irritation the moment when the then President Abdoulaye Wade prostrated himself before the leader of the Muslim Mouride Brotherhood back in December 2007, a highly symbolic act.”³⁰

26. R. D. Abubakre, “Islam Nostrum for Religious Tolerance in Polity of a Multi-Religious State: The Nigerian Experience”. In: J.O Onaiyekan (ed.), *Religion, Peace and Unity in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: NACS, 1984)

27. Abubakre, “Islam Nostrum for Religious” 1984

28. Andrew Ubaka [Iwobi](#), “Tiptoeing Through a Constitutional Minefield: The Great Sharia Controversy in Nigeria”, *Journal of African Law*, 48, no. 2(2004): 111-164

29. [Kenny](#) Joseph, “Sharia and Christianity in Nigeria: Islam and a 'Secular'”. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 26,(2006): 33-364

30. Camara Fatou K. and Seck, Abdourahmane. “Secularity and Freedom of Religion in Senegal: Between a Constitutional Rock and a Hard Reality”. *BYU*, 2010 L. Rev. 859 (2010). <https://digitalcommons.law.byu.edu/lawreview/vol2010/iss3/9>

The public sphere in Africa is mostly suffused with religious discourse, or rather, more precisely, virtually every discourse is soon shrouded and charged in religious tones. The involvement of government officials in religious affairs incapacitates them from maintaining the secular status of the state. They respond selectively to religious pressure in order to divide and rule. “In Ethiopia, where a notably increased number of violent incidents between believers of Muslim, Evangelical and Orthodox backgrounds was registered, it has been shown that the government often does not intervene in time or effectively sanction culprits.”³¹ And in Nigeria, where the Muslim Fulani herdsmen have been ravaging farmlands and attacking and killing other citizens across the country, the government has not shown much commitment to addressing the problem. Consequently, there has been widespread allegation of government inaction or selective action or even collusion that emboldens the herdsmen. This may actually be traced to religious fundamentalism on the part of government officials which makes them unable to distinguish between official responsibility to the state and religious commitment. It may also be explained by the fact that these religious groups constitute major agents of mobilization for political campaigns and electoral victories as well as instruments of intimidation of political opponents.

Generally, what is noticeable is that where a religious group is dominant, it would seek to maximize its dominance to the detriment of the secular state and the minority religious groups whereas the minority groups will demand for the observance of the principles of secularity in the governance of the state. And this is not exclusive to the relation between different religious groups as it affects also the denominational relations of same religions. The case of Nigeria is interesting in this regard. At the

³¹. Jon, “Religion and Politics in Africa”, 89-106

return to democratic rule in the twilight of the 20th century, many of the states in Northern Nigeria, starting with Zamfara state adopted the Islamic Sharia law. This caused so much upheaval in the country that many predicted the dissolution of the country by the year 2015. While many northern Muslims applauded this move, those Muslims who reside in the other parts of the country where Islam is in the minority advocate for sustenance of the secular status of the Nigerian state in those parts of the country. While the rivalry at the national level is mainly between Christians and Muslims, the battle ground shifts in the various states to interdenominational struggles and intrigues. In a number of the Southern states, the line is usually drawn between the Catholics and the other Christian denominations as each group battles to install and or control the government of the state. And since 2015, the federal government and the governments of Kaduna, Plateau, Borno and Kano states have employed military might and other apparatus of the state to crush the Shi'a Muslim sect in the North particularly in Kaduna state where they are seen as challenging the orthodoxy in their way of practice.³²

This operation only calls to mind the recent Boko Haram terrorist assault on the Nigerian state. The insurgency has claimed more than 20,000 lives and ravaged the economy of North Eastern Nigeria, and generally destroyed the peace and social life of the people. A number of studies have indicated that the upsurge of the group depicts a number of things including the rising tide of religious fundamentalism and its impact on the secularity of the modern state, the effect of defective state response to issues of security, the international nature of contemporary religious and

³². Hakeem Onapajo, "Has Nigeria Defeated Boko Haram? An Appraisal of the Counter-Terrorism Approach under the Buhari Administration". *Strategic Analysis*, 41, no.1 (2017):61-73.

terrorist operations, but ultimately, the failure of the Nigerian state.³³

Concerning the social stream of secularization therefore, the dimension of religious pluralism is very obvious in many African states. However, the concomitant recognition of the right of every citizen to positive freedom of religious worship as well as the negative freedom of the citizen from intrusion of privacy seems either not known or clearly disregarded by the majority of religious groups in Africa. Indeed, the public sphere is dominated by religious discourses. These seem even more freely expressed notwithstanding the secular provisions of the constitutions of many African states. The tension and acrimony that characterized the sharia debate in Nigeria demonstrate the prevailing relations among the religious groups and the state in a number of African states. The state seems intimidated by the pressure of religious groups. This tends to grow stronger in the case of groups that promise more violent tendencies.³⁴ Many religious practitioners are oblivious of the “secular challenge” posed by the summon of:³⁵ “The parties concerned must themselves reach agreement on the precarious delimitations between a positive liberty to practice one's own religion and the negative liberty to remain spared of the religious practices of the others.”

The mix of religion and politics, and especially the display of religious zest in the willingness to use political means for religious ends can be

³³. Onapajo Hakeem andUfo Okeke Uzodike, “Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria, Man, the state, and the International System,*Review*,21, no.3 (2012): 24-39; Zenn, Jacob, “Boko Haram's International Connections.” CTC (Combating Terrorism Center) *Sentinel*, 6, no.1 (2013): 7-12; Hakeem,*State Repression and Religious Conflict: The Peril of State Clampdown on the Shia Minority in Nigeria, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, (2017): 1-4

³⁴. Agbibo, “The Nigerian Burden”, 1-29;Jon; “Religion and Politics in Africa”

³⁵. Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere.” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14, no.1 (2006): 1-25

deceptive. It may actually be a guise for mobilizing the members of the religious group for the political ends of the concerned politicians. In such circumstance, the politician is actually deviously secular in the desacralization of religious values. Having said that, it must still be stated that notwithstanding the religious secularism of the politician, and even conceding to understand the people so, that such mobilization is possible tells something about the power of religion among the people.

With a few exceptions therefore, it would seem that the African situation generally faults the secularist projection of declining religiosity and increasing secularization of the population. The separation of religion and state predominantly in the constitutions of the various African states has also not been realized except probably on the papers of the constitutions. This may be accounted for by the fact that a constitution should be, or is usually a codification of the fundamental laws by which a people have agreed to rule their lives as a society. Where a phenomenon prevails at the individual and social levels, it will be difficult to see how a different and opposing phenomenon will effectively prevail at the political or institutional level in the society.

Conclusion

The resurgence of religious fervor, especially in the forms of fundamentalism and terrorism motivated the study of the conflictual relations of religions as well as the conflicts between secularism and religion. The background of the emergence of secularism in Europe may be multifaceted but the unrelenting bitter wars between the various Christian denominations resulting from the Reformation and Counter-reformation wetted the ground for its flourishing. On this background, secularism emerged initially with the promise of providing equal playing grounds for multi-religious and multicultural expressions in society, it gradually developed into an anti-religious orientation. Its consequent

boast of annihilating religion from the European society may not have been realized but the European invasion of Africa brought with it also the baggage of religious conflicts and of the consequent secularism.

The expressions of secularism in Africa would seem however to be of a different version. The Constitutions of many states in Africa claim secularism as policy of state. The conduct and practices of government in virtually all African states are however a far cry from any semblance of secularism. From the study of the relations of secularism and religion in contemporary Africa therefore, a number of conclusions may be drawn: It is obvious that the religious sentiment is prevailing in its relation to the secular society in many African states. This is creating tension and crisis at the institutional level considering the secular status of the constitutions of many African states. The situation is not helped by the increasing mingling of religion and politics that adversely affects the neutrality of the state in relation to religious matters. There is also prevalence of religion at the individual and social levels so much so that religion has become the major platform for individual and group identities. Virtually all African states are multi-religious. The juxtaposition of this fact with the admixture of religion and politics where religious interests influence political decisions and the operations of the state is a recipe for crisis and violence which have not been in short supply in the continent in the recent past.

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