

Appendix 50:

Syncretism and Trichotomy

Jan H. Boer

2009

Many people formally adhere to a religion and actively participate in it. They think of themselves as Christian, Muslim, Anglican, etc. However, in their daily lives they are inspired by motivations that spring from other worldviews, often secularism. These people usually are unconscious of the *split or dichotomy* in their own lives. Their official religion is a façade; it is their unconscious worldview that governs their lives and motivates their decisions. Although this can lead to *hypocrisy*, for most people it is *ignorance*. It is the way they have grown up, especially in the West; they do not know better.

Two examples. (1) Many Western Christians hold to a worldview heavily influenced by ancient Greek thinking that has continued to percolate through the centuries of Western history. Through the funnel of Thomas Aquinas' Scholasticism, it has led to a dichotomy that allows them to worship God in their church setting, while they leave God out of their business and politics. That is the kind of missionary that supported colonialism while bringing Christianity to Nigeria.¹ (2) Many Nigerian Christians and Muslims still hold to major components of ATR² that influences the way they experience and practice their official religion. To make it more complicated, secularism has also influenced Nigerian Christians and Muslims, so that we now have three different layers in their religious life, a situation I describe as "trichotomy." In such a situation syncretism and confusion are almost unavoidable. This trichotomy underlies much of the religious struggle in the country. It is an inheritance against which Nigerian Christians and Muslims are struggling within themselves and which complicates their struggle with each other.

¹ It is the main thesis of my 1979 and 1984 publications.

²J. Boer, 1992, pp. 119-120; 2004, vol. 3, pp. 66-68; 2006, vol. 5, p. 115.