

## WWW:

### Wholistic World Witness<sup>1</sup>

#### MissionsFest Vancouver 2008

You see the title: “WWW.” Of course, that’s partly to give it a contemporary sound to show you that I am with it! But my guess is that many of you unconsciously are putting an extra “w” into it. That you might be interpreting “World” as “World Wide.” In other words that I am going to address you about World Wide Wholistic Witness—4 w’s. Well, yes, in a sense I am. I intend my subject to be useful worldwide, globally. But the emphasis here on “world” is not primarily on the wide global extent of missions so much as on the world as distinguished from heaven and from the spiritual. It is on the cultures of the world, the economic, political and other aspects of culture. Not on the *worldly* but the *world* of peoples, cultures and religions.

I have enjoyed many years of tertiary education. Of all the professors I’ve had, one stands out in my memory. He’s had tremendous influence on my thinking, on my worldview, on my ministry, on my entire life, including my reason for standing here in front of you and including the fifteen or so books I have published, mostly in Nigeria. His name was Prof. Evan Runner, a German-American, who passed into glory just around five years ago. Because of what he taught me, I have organized conferences and written books inspired by a *missionary* motivation on such unlikely issues as Nigeria’s external debt, Christian involvement in the investment business, politics, science, health care and, currently, Christian-Muslim relations.

There are those who have challenged me, including my own mission board, saying that these are not mission subjects, that I am diverting from the *real* mission of Christ. If I did not have a significant group in my church who supported this mission approach, I would have been fired. It was church politics that saved me!

Well, what did this Prof. Runner teach me? He opened my eyes to a major component of the Western worldview that is or, at least, *was* held by secular people and Christians of all stripes, liberal, Catholic, evangelical, charismatic—practically all of us. This worldview is being challenged today at many fronts. By post-modernists and by Christians, again of every stripe.

By now you may be curious about this worldview stuff that even influences you, whether you are conscious of it or not. It is the kind of stuff that you inherit, mostly unconsciously, from your cultural and religious environment. It’s the stuff that is one of the unconscious motivators of your entire life and thought. Also your religious life and thought. Runner dubbed it “dualism.” It is a dualism that comes from deep within the Christian tradition, way back from the medieval theologian/philosopher Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who founded the school of Christian

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<sup>1</sup>Talk given to a seminar at MissionsFest Vancouver, BC, Jan/2008 (13 pp.).

philosophy called “Scholasticism” or Thomism.” It became the standard for theological and philosophical orthodoxy in the pre-Reformation Church and world and has remained so well into modern times for the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> Allow me to quote both myself and another German-American scholar-friend of mine, the late Gordon Spykman: It was re-affirmed by Vatican I in 1869-1870. “There,” writes Spykman, “in unambiguous terms, the basic structure of... Thomist dualism... was promulgated, backed by the full weight of papal authority. “ “Note the following declaration:

*The Twofold Order of Religious Knowledge:*

The Catholic Church with one consent has... ever held and holds that there is a two-fold order of knowledge, distinct both in principle and also in object; in principle, because our knowledge in the one is by *natural reason*, and in the other by divine *faith*; in object, because, besides those things which natural reason can attain, there are proposed to our belief mysteries hidden in God, which unless *divinely revealed*, cannot be known.<sup>3</sup>

Spykman critiqued this dualistic order in these words:

At bottom... this Thomistic view of society is a dualism.... It presupposes a basic dichotomy between nature and grace [for our purposes: the world and religion]. In this view, the church belongs to the supernatural realm of grace [religion], while the state and other so-called secular institutions in society operate in the lower order of nature. There natural, not supernatural, law is the norm. Upon it the public sector of life is based. While the church directs eternal, spiritual matters, the state is in charge of the temporal affairs of life. Natural law functions there as a relatively independent, autonomous governing principle. Its demands are held to be accessible to and realizable by all reasonable men of good will, apart from divine revelation. This view, when implemented consistently, tends to turn Christianity into “churchianity.” That is, the church is considered the primary or even the sole source of Christian concern and influence in the world.<sup>4</sup>

Even though both Luther and Calvin rejected his dualism in principle, neither freed himself from it completely. It had become so deeply embedded in Western thought, both Christian and non-Christian, that even though the theory of it was rejected to various degrees, the habits of thought it instilled remained for long in the West and continue with us till today. Furthermore, under the influence of non-Christian philosophical developments in the West, it actually enjoyed revival, even in the Christian church. We have all been influenced by it, also in our missionary theories, policies and methods.

The dualism scheme I am talking about divides reality into two parallel spheres according to this diagramme:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Dagbert D. Runes, *Dictionary of Philosophy* (Ames: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1959), 16-17.

<sup>3</sup>Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 23-24. Jan H. Boer, *Christians: Secularism—Yes and No*, Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations, vol. 5 (Belleville, ON: Essence Publishing, 2006), 151.

<sup>4</sup>G. Spykman, “The Principled Pluralist Position.” In Gary S. Smith, *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1989), 90, footnote 2. J. Boer, 2006, p. 152.

<sup>5</sup>Jan H. Boer, *Missionary Messengers of Liberation in a Colonial Context: A Case Study of the Sudan United Mission*. Amsterdam Studies in Theology, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1979), 453; 2006, p. 153. This is my variation of a diagram by Frances A. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* (London: Intervarsity Press, 1968), p. 9.

Sacred	higher	grace	divine Revelation	spiritual	soul	theology	church	clergy
=====								
=	secular	lower	nature autonomous reason	material	body	philosophy	world	laity

The following material is from earlier writings of mine where I describe the resulting dualism that emerged from Scholasticism and that has become the indigenous “natural” worldview of the Western world, the West’s “common sense.” Until recently, few Christians have seriously questioned this scheme. I begin with the words of the art historian Simon Rookmaker of Amsterdam. According to him, basic to this dualism is the view that

this world is good, but yet has autonomy of its own. The world of faith, of grace, of religion is the higher one, a world for which we have need of God’s revelation. This is where our aims and affections should be set. But the lower world, the world of men, the world of “nature,” can be understood by reason, and here in fact reason reigns. It is as such non-religious, secular. Here there is no difference between the Christian and the non-Christian, as both act according to the natural laws of thought and action.<sup>6</sup>

The Latin American Reuben Alves put it this way: “Traditional ecclesiastical languages have their ultimate concern in eternity, God, and salvation of the soul. Their relation to the world, to life, to history, when it is not negative, is purely tangential. Or it puts the world and life in an inferior hierarchical rank: super/natural; the secular world/the religious world; the material/the spiritual; the temporal/the eternal.”<sup>7</sup>

The economist R. H. Tawney explained that in dualism the religious and secular relate to each other as “parallel and independent provinces, governed by different laws, judged by different standards, and amenable to different authorities.” It is based on “an attitude that forms so fundamental a part of modern thought, that...its precarious philosophical basis...[is] commonly forgotten.”<sup>8</sup>

In this perspective, God is more interested in the spiritual things above the line than those below. Those below are only the natural things; God prefers the spiritual. The natural below the line has little to do with the Bible. It is understood only by means of human reason independent from the Bible. If you really wish to serve God, you work in the things above the line. That is spiritual or religious work. Those below are merely worldly or so-called secular; they are the so-called “laity.”

<sup>6</sup>H. R. Rookmaker, *Art and the Death of a Culture* (London: Intervarsity Press, 1970), 34-35. J. Boer, 2006, pp. 152-153.

<sup>7</sup>Reuben A. Alves, “Theology and the Liberation of Man,” quoted in J. Boer, 1979, p. 453; 2006, p. 153.

<sup>8</sup>R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1962), p. 279. J. Boer, 1979, p. 453; 2006, pp. 152-153.

While Scholasticism seeks to synthesize the two “parts” of reality and attributes priority and dominance to the “sacred,” eventually the “secular” took priority with the former slowly receding from view as humanism, rationalism and secularism took over the Western mind.

Copleston, a prominent Catholic historian of philosophy, feels that the synthesis was too precarious to hold and was bound to lead from a *complementary* autonomous secular realm to an *opposing* one that would swallow up much of the “sacred.” It could hardly be otherwise for a system that separates truths known by faith from revelation and those known by natural philosophy that far. *The system makes it “impossible for there to be faith and knowledge concerning the same object, that the same truths should be both known scientifically (philosophically) and at the same time believed (by faith) by the same man.”*<sup>9</sup> Now, to my mind, we come close to a situation legitimately described as bizarre. As we know, eventually the sacred was reduced to a minimum as science expanded the secular.

I offer you a simplified and practical 5-point description of this dualism as it has penetrated its way into the Evangelical mind, including the missionary mind:

- 1) Reality is divided into the spheres of the material and the spiritual
- 2) God is said to be more interested in the spiritual than the material. There is thus a hierarchical relationship between the two, with the spiritual taking priority.
- (3) One needs divine revelation, e.g., the bible, to understand the spiritual world, the world of the church and theology. Here human reasoning is insufficient.
- (4) For the affairs of the world, human reason is a sufficient source of information.
- (5) Working in the spiritual area is often called “the work of God,” while working in the world is not really service to Him. Alternatively, working in the spiritual means one is working “full-time” for God, while working in the world constitutes at best “half-time” service.<sup>10</sup>

It is this dualism that has led to a popular mentality among Christians that tends to divorce religion from artistic, scientific, political and economic activities. According to this scheme, while these enjoy prominence in the “secular” sector, in the “sacred” area these are affairs of secondary importance. Rookmaker has warned that when Christians separate these concerns from their religious life, they are unwittingly giving in to this long Western secular tradition.

### ***Evangelical Confessions***

To make sure you don’t suspect me of rousing liberalism, I want to bring forward some statements of unquestioned Evangelical sources, where Evangelicals themselves confess that they have indeed bought into this dualism and thus shortchanged the peoples that have hosted missionaries. This is important, for the Christianity that has been brought to Nigeria is mostly Evangelical in orientation.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, *Mediaeval Philosophy: Augustine to Scotus* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1960), 424-430, 315, 310. J. Boer, 1979, pp. 449-456; 2006, p. 154.

<sup>10</sup>Jan H. Boer, *Christians and Mobilization* (Jos, Nigeria: Institute of Church & Society, 1989), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup>Of course the Catholic Church has a large presence as well, and its heritage is similarly tainted. In fact, they are the mother of all this. Thomas Aquinas is their hero till today. Recently a Nigerian RC Archbishop, John Onaiyekan, stated that most of his theological training was in the Thomistic tradition, that dualistic tradition from which we

## 1. *Concerned Evangelicals*

A South African group that calls itself “Concerned Evangelicals” wrote the following under the title “Dualism:”

The concept of dualism is more of a Greek philosophical concept than a biblical concept. The Greek philosophers believed in a clear demarcation between the spiritual and material. They believed that all material things were evil, whilst God was a Spirit somehow committed to save the spirit in the bodies of human beings. On the basis of this Greek philosophical concept of dualism, Western theologians saw the gospel as concerned only with the spiritual rather than the social. They dichotomized between the physical and the spiritual and between the sacred and secular. Evangelical theologians have bought wholesale into this model of dualism.

The consequences of this dualistic form of life have been disastrous for evangelical faith. What this dualism has done is that one can live a pietistic “spiritual” life and still continue to oppress, exploit, and dehumanize people. And those who are victims of this oppression...are prohibited from complaining or resisting it, because this would amount to worrying about material things that have nothing to do with one’s spirituality. Actually, trying to engage in a struggle to get rid of this oppression is seen as having ‘fallen’ from grace. In this way, the oppressors of this world are able to maintain their system by conveniently confining the gospel to the spiritual realm alone. It is just like keeping the gospel in captivity to be able to continue in sin without any disturbance to their consciences. Like the Sadducees and Pharisees, we are claiming the authority of the written law, but we refuse to let it address the real issues of our day.

The Judeo-Christian faith as found in the Bible is different from Greek dualism. It does not differentiate between the spiritual and the social, because Jews live their spiritual in their social life. For the Israelites being oppressed was a concern of their God. When they went to war, their God was to be involved or they would be doomed. Their cultural life was a spiritual life. Their economic life was a spiritual life (the Jubilee, the question of loans, etc.). Their political life was a spiritual life (appointment of kings and deposing of kings, how they ruled, etc.). There was nothing for the Jews that was not spiritual in their whole lives. There was no reserved room in their lives which was not spiritual which could keep their sins. It was all spiritual.

The concept of dualism is therefore a foreign concept to...the Judeo-Christian tradition. This is not a Biblical concept. It is but a Greek and Western concept.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. *World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF)*

Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden edited a collection of documents that traces the development and meaning of the concept of mission as transformation within the constituency of WEF.<sup>13</sup> On the back cover, Peter Kuzmic of Croatia, Chairman of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians, writes: This compilation “documents an evangelical journey

Evangelicals have not freed ourselves.

<sup>12</sup>Concerned Evangelicals, *Evangelical Witness in South Africa: A Critique of Evangelical Theology and Practice by South African Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co.), pp. 24-25.

<sup>13</sup>Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, eds., *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1999).

from unbiblical dichotomies, cultural and ecclesiastical provincialism and fragmented understandings of God's purposes for his church and its mission in the world towards a more balanced globally sensitive and biblically fully fledged wholistic ministry."

On the same back cover, Bryant Myers, at the time Vice-President of World Vision International, confesses, "Mission as transformation has been a struggle for evangelicals." "This volume helps anyone understand how evangelicals, struggling to unite evangelism and social action, found their way to the biblical view of mission in which God calls all human beings to love God and their neighbour, never creating a separation between the two."

In the same book we find a report of an international group of 85 Christian leaders who held a conference in March, 1995, to discuss the issues at hand. They were all part of this same Evangelical march towards wholism. Among other things, they composed a confession that included the following statements:

*We confess that all too often--*

We have *obscured* our witness to the Kingdom by tearing apart the interrelated tasks of proclamation of the Word and social transformation....

We have *ignored* the centrality of the Good News of the Kingdom of God....

We have *distorted...*, *failed to recognise...*

We have *diluted* Jesus' gospel, by neglecting to proclaim and live its radical challenge to the evil in every culture, society and socio-economic system.

We have *disgraced* the Gospel..., *mocked...* Jesus' prayer....

Some have one-sidedly emphasised the individual and personal aspects of the Kingdom of God to the neglect of the corporate and communal....

We have *failed* to serve our neighbours and witness to the Kingdom in the affairs of government, education, business, economics, trade unions, science, welfare, medicine, the media and the arts.

We have prayed Your Kingdom come and *ignored* the command to seek it first in our personal and societal lifestyles.

Therefore we *repent* of our failure to let Christ be King in these areas. We will redress these failures with biblical teaching,...robust theological debate and wholistic congregations and ministries that integrate proclamation, social transformation and renewal in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In its "Final Summation," the group affirmed:

that Jesus' Good News of the Kingdom requires that we observe his Kingly rule:

- *In all things.* Therefore there is no human activity, no region of human endeavour which is beyond God's reign"--[or, I wish to add, interest].
- *At all times.* Therefore we repudiate any distinction between the sacred and the secular which obscures that biblical truth that God is King of all times and places.
- *In all situations.* Therefore we urge all Christians to seek first the Kingdom of God in the home, in the Church, at work, in study, in their local community, during recreation and in all other activities of their lives as our highest priority in our lives.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>V. Samuel, pp. xiv, 12-13, 23. Italics mine.

In the same book, Graham Cray admitted, “Our vision of the Kingdom has been impaired by our tendency to compartmentalize and argue about the priority of evangelism, signs and wonders, social action and spiritual warfare.”<sup>15</sup>

The same kind of confessions are heard time and again during the past couple of decades. Brian Stiller, a recognized Evangelical leader in Canada, had as a major goal of his “to help Evangelicals understand the role they could have in engaging the public and government. ‘ We had so long vacated that role,’ he says.”<sup>16</sup>

It was heartening to read that, according to the unidentified writer on the back cover of Samuel and Sugden, this more wholistic approach “has been adopted... by most evangelical agencies,” including the Pentecostal churches. I rejoice at this development but cannot forget that Nigerian Christians have in the meantime been cheated significantly from a more healthy approach to their nation and to their neighbours, the Muslims. Muslims have similarly been cheated and been saddled with a seriously distorted impression of the Christian religion. *I am still waiting for an apology to all Nigerians from the missions operating in the country.*<sup>17</sup>



From here on I will be talking to the Nigerian Christian-Muslim situation, but a situation that has ramifications for Christian-Muslim relations everywhere, especially for missions in an Islamic context. A case study with global significance.

I mentioned Islam. In Nigeria we have a unique situation of two large equal blocks of some 65 million Christians and 65 million Muslims. Another unusual part of the scene is that, while Muslims used to have strong political control, Christians have increased to the point where they now can challenge Muslims. In most countries with a long Muslim tradition, it is a Muslim majority that rules the roost. There are few cases, probably none in recent history, where Christians are poised to either be their equals or even surpass them in political power. Such a situation makes Nigerian Muslims very nervous, for their worldview and their theology really has no room for minority status. Theirs tends to be triumphalistic, a religion of the strong and powerful. This makes them nervous and creates an explosive atmosphere between them and their challengers.

Now why should Christians want to challenge Muslims and aim for political power? Why not just live next to each other in a multi-religious way as we try to do in Canada? Why not just leave each religion do its own thing? Well, that is a Western idea that is based on the dualism I have described. It is based on a narrow view of religion that sees it as private, personal, but not to be seen or heard in the marketplace or in government.

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<sup>15</sup>V. Samuel, p. 40.

<sup>16</sup>Deborah Fieguth, “Evangelical Fellowship of Canada Holds True to Its Roots.” *Faith Today*, Sep/2004, p. 32.

<sup>17</sup>This treatment of Evangelicals here is summarized in and copied from J. Boer, 2006, pp. 157-164.

The reason is that Islam does not accept that dualistic view of religion. It is wholistic. It does not operate with the dualism Christians in Nigeria have inherited. Business, economics, politics, government—everything has to be run according to Muslim ideas—at least, theoretically. Islamic banking, for example, is rapidly gaining recognition so that London, UK, is now aiming to become the Islamic banking centre of the world. A total Islamization of life is envisioned. In that context, government exists to advance Islam. Government funds are used to support Islam, but not other religions. Government organizes the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and spends billions on that project. It funds the training of imams and Muslim school teachers. It funds all kinds of Muslim projects—building of mosques, schools, hospitals. It has imposed sharia, the Muslim legal system, in various states within Nigeria.

So, here we have a wholistic Islam with a powerful urge to dominate and a Christian community afflicted with a dualistic inheritance that tends to concentrate on church and spiritual things, while it tends to look at the rest of human life in a secular way. Not only in a secular way, but until recently, they tended to think that working in the world was of secondary importance to God and to their Christian way of life. Consequently, they used to give little *Christian* attention to the things of the world. They did not take the trouble of studying these affairs from a Christian perspective. It has nothing to do with the Christian faith. Well, Evangelical leaders have repented from that anemic view of Christianity, but now Nigerians and other new churches throughout most of the world, are stuck with an inheritance of weakness that they are struggling to overcome.

So, a wholistic Islam with a proud and assured wholistic worldview over all of life trying to not only retain their traditional dominance in Nigeria but even to expand it, especially in the legal system. That versus an anemic inherited Christianity that in the past had not given any serious Christian thought to that world. They were churchified and privatized in their religion. They cannot understand the Muslim thrust and they can counter it only with anemic arguments based on dualism and secularism.

Muslims look at the Christian church and shake their heads. What kind of religion is that? Nothing to say about the important things of this world. No idea of Christian government and politics or Christian business or Christian anything. Muslims look down on this kind of religion with scorn. And who can blame them, when even Evangelical leaders deeply regret that dualistic heritage and condemn it. A dualistic Christianity cannot possibly face an aggressive, wholistic Islam with understanding and intelligence.<sup>18</sup>

Much Christian argumentation is of very low quality; often historically dead wrong; some of it pitiful. Nothing new to offer. No exciting Christian insights for the marketplace. Just a churchified and personalised worship of the God who created and runs the entire universe, *who is intensely interested in His world and long ago declared it "very good."*

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<sup>18</sup>To counter this skewed Nigerian situation, I have written *Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations*, a series of eight volumes-- <http://www.lulu.com/shop/jan-h-boer/studies-in-christian-muslim-relations-nigerias-decades-of-blood-1980-2002/ebook/product-6520035.html>, where the entire series is available free of charge.

Today, we are facing Islam everywhere, also here in Canada. We meet them more and more. In the context of the entire globe, we have to be prepared to meet them, to dialogue with them, to present Jesus as an attractive, powerful, viable and wholistic alternative if we wish to be taken seriously and Jesus to be considered seriously.

WWW—a wholistic world witness. Nothing else was ever acceptable in the past and nothing else will be acceptable in our future. Our success is guaranteed to be minimal if we do not free ourselves from that inheritance and make the confession of our Evangelical leaders our own.

Yusufu Turaki is probably Nigeria's foremost Evangelical theologian. He is a leader in ECWA, the church founded by SIM. He calls on Christians to copy the Muslim style of expansion by developing a more wholistic form of the religion that will reconstitute the entire culture.

As Islam re-asserts its dominant position in the region, Christianity must find ways of responding to such dominance without jeopardizing its apostolic and New Testament witness. We must take a fresh look at the historical model of our Lord Jesus Christ and apostolic Christianity as means of finding a relevant model of Christian witness. Christianity has a lot to learn from the missiological factor of Islam that helped entrench it in West Africa. Christianity should not simply copy the methods of Islam, but do what will make Christianity become a way of life and a culture of the people. This is not to turn Christianity into a culture or adapt it in such a way that it fits into African culture, but rather, the way people see, understand, interpret and apply life be fundamentally biblical and Christian. The challenge of Islam is not a call for a peaceful dialogue between Christianity and Islam or for a mutual understanding of each other, even though these should be desired, but it is a call for a better Christian witness which characterizes the entire life of a Christian in an African society that is increasingly becoming Islamic in nature and potentially dangerous to live in.<sup>19</sup>

In closing, I challenge you to a new and broader view of the Kingdom of God, of law, of worship, of business, of government, of service, of working in this world. Jesus Himself promised us that He would lead us into the truth through His Spirit. Challenge Him by stretching yourself. Your life and your mission will take on new colour, a new breadth and new vigour. It is the Biblical way to bring Christ. It is the *only* way to bring the Gospel to Muslims. “Triple W—Wholistic World Witness.”

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<sup>19</sup>Y. Turaki, “Historical and Religious Experience of Islam in West Africa: Christianity and Religious Plurality in Historical and Global Perspective.” Lecture presented on April 25-27, 2003, at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, USA. *Companion CD* <Misc Arts/Turaki Arts/History of Islam in West Africa>.

