

WORLDVIEW ISSUES

We have read the Bible for its spiritual truth and neglected the material dimensions of its message. We have not emphasized that the Spirit...first gave life to our mortal bodies. Neglect of the cosmic dimension does harm. It minimizes the divine indwelling of the whole world, it reduces salvation half size by attending to disembodied souls, it forces forgetfulness about God's concern for ecology, etc. Neglect of the cosmic functions of the Spirit has consequences—let us recover them.

Clark Pinnock¹

Islamic teachings are situated in the middle way; between divine and temporal; between what is material and what is spiritual; between individualism and personal liberty and responsibility and accountability toward the Creator and the society. Islam is also a practical religion because it is the religion of the collectivity which means that what is good in the eyes of the consensual (or unanimous community) is also good in the eyes of the divine.

Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu²

▲ KUYPERIAN WORLDVIEW RECOMMENDED ———

I have emphasized the need for and the content of a Christian worldview in Volume 5. Evangelical leaders have publicly confessed that they have exported a truncated Gospel.³ The question of an incomplete or defective Gospel continues to be asked.⁴ Therefore much of this chapter will consist of a review of that material by means of questions, as well as some additional materials. However, I first want to emphasize for you the deep importance for an African worldview in general and for the specific one on which this series is based, as explained by Yusufu Turaki in his Preface to Professor Bennie van der Walt's *The Liberating Message*. At the time of his writing, Turaki was the General Secretary of ECWA and since then he has developed into the most prolific Nigerian Christian writer of scholarly books and lectures and is sought after frequently for international conferences. He speaks for Christian Nigeria and Africa.

Van der Walt's book presents a Kuyperian worldview for the development of African Christianity.⁵ Turaki highly recommends this book and its perspective as exactly what the doctor ordered for Africa and Nigeria. There is, writes Turaki, a "crisis of values and worldviews in Africa" that "affects [Nigerian] Christianity deeply. This crisis requires that a comprehensive Christian worldview be developed...for Africa." In this book the author explains "the pitfalls of Western dualistic theology" and "secular philosophy." Turaki considers that this book "has a substantial contribution to make in this area" that "serves as an introduction towards understanding the Christian worldview within the African context."⁶ The importance of Turaki's Preface is that he, a prominent national Christian leader, strongly recommends to Nigerians the worldview that infuses this series and underlies all the recommendations I offer you in these chapters. That, I should caution as a disclaimer, does not mean that he would also necessarily subscribe to all the parameters and recommendations themselves.

Van der Walt's and Turaki's recommendations of the Kuyperian perspective for Africa and Nigeria are not unique. Kuyper, a man who straddled the 19th and 20th centuries and did his work in a very small country, The Netherlands,⁷ is considered an important figure for the 21st century by Christians in many countries. Throughout this series you have come across the writings of his followers. Even during the last decade or so numerous books have been written in English by non-Dutchmen, especially by Americans. It has not all been without serious critique as James Skillen shows in his essay about Kuyper in 2000.⁸ Even some of his most avid disciples such as H. Evan Runner have seriously criticized him.⁹ But how many people deliver lectures that are celebrated at international conferences a century later,¹⁰ lectures, moreover, that have continued to serve as the basis for university courses for an entire century? How many people have lecture series and colleges named after them in countries other than their own eight decades after their demise? In the year 2000, the very year the sharia debacle started in Nigeria, Skillen, an American based in Washington, D. C., answered his own question, "Why Kuyper Now?" What is this about this man? Skillen began his answer as follows: "In a day when Christianity was...either privatized or secularized, Kuyper was championing the forward movement of public Christianity—an antiseccularizing..., antireductionist, world-transforming Christianity." Another Skillen quote: "Because Kuyper understood Christianity to be a way of life rather than chiefly an ecclesiastical affair or simply a matter of personal piety, he was driven to look more intently at the meaning and value of everything in God's creation." Kuyper was an activist as well as theorist and writer. He organized the first Christian democratic party in Europe and, having founded a Christian university [from which I graduated], a daily newspaper, a labour union and a housing cooperative, Kuyper "was, on a Christian basis, seeking to shape a modern, pluralistic social order." A few more from Skillen:

Kuyper urged Christians to recognize the...[church] as a transnational community with responsibility to shape history and society in keeping with God's ordinances. Christianity is not a private, household faith...nor simply one institution among others, but a testimony to the movement of God through history.... Yet the allegiance to Christ...should not fuel military crusades against infidels but, instead, should inspire Christian service in the cause of justice for all.

*[Christianity] is not exclusive but inclusive. It is not an idea which closes the door and shuts the windows, but, throwing doors and windows wide open, it walks through the four corners of the earth....*¹¹

A British Kuyperian scholar, Elaine Storkey, wrote, "...it seems a bit perverse to argue that one overweight Dutchman's coming to Princeton in 1898 could be a pearl of great price for...society today. But that is precisely what I am going to suggest." Among other things, "He helps us identify so many of the underlying assumptions that have dominated social theorizing and policy."¹² That is precisely the nature of his unseen presence throughout this series! He has helped me and hopefully you, my readers, to recognize many of the assumptions both Christians and Muslims work with in Nigeria. Having recognized them, we can correct them, especially those that obstruct a better understanding of religion in general and of specific religions, and take new directions towards the peace of Nigeria.¹³

We have here an earlier Christian version of the challenges Ibrahim Sulaiman hurls at his fellow Muslims today in Nigeria. Is this not exactly the need of the hour for Nigeria? A Christian community that takes the bull of history by the horns and, instead of resting on the laurels of European colonialists and dualistic missionaries, remakes its history not only but reshapes the contours of its future, but now in co-operation with its Muslim neighbours

who also need to reshape their contours. A joint challenge—and Kuyper provides Christians with an arsenal of wholistic and pluralistic tools that should drop the scales from Christian eyes and have them look straight into Muslim eyes as equals. Is that not what Muslims have been missing and looking for in Christianity? Like Ibrahim Sulaiman, Kuyper had one “ruling passion of... [his] life,” namely, “that in spite of all worldly opposition, God’s holy ordinances shall be established again in the throne, in the school and in the state for the good of the people; to carve, as it were, into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord...until the nation pays homage again to God.”¹⁴ That, I believe, is the kind of leadership real Christians and serious Muslims all want. John Bolt confesses that his treatment of Kuyper is less objective and more engaged than he had originally expected or planned. He commented that he did not think it possible to do otherwise with Kuyper. He “cannot be presented dispassionately; his spirit forbids it!”¹⁵ How true.

There is need for a clarification. Though I occasionally refer to and quote from Kuyper himself, my main point of reference is that of Kuyperianism, of the school of thought that originated with him but that has moved beyond Kuyper. Some of his ideas were further developed and refined; others were corrected and a few were rejected outright, especially those that mark him as a child of his time. Hence, I do not quote Kuyper on concepts that have been rejected or corrected. It is the ongoing tradition that I recommend to you, not Kuyper himself, lock, stock and barrel, even though I do not hide my admiration of his person.

Now, if still interested, re-read all the Kuyperian materials in Volumes 1, 5¹⁶ and *this* chapter about Kuyperian perspectives and perhaps you will begin to sense the relevance of this man even in the Nigerian struggle between a wholistic religion and a secularized dualistic one.¹⁷ And then, as you proceed with the issues in this Part 2, pay close attention to how all these Kuyperian perspectives

may contribute to the healing of religious and other relationships in the country.

PROCEDURE

The major aim of this chapter is to ensure that you understand some of the basic perspectives on basis of which I will develop some parameters for peace that I offer in subsequent chapters. Most of the materials in this chapter are of a “worldviewish” or philosophical nature. These, along with Biblical, Qur’anic and other religious issues treated in the next chapter, are the ideas underlying those parameters. Without some understanding of these underlying ideas, you may have a hard time appreciating the parameters I offer.

Most of the materials below have already been treated in Volume 5, Part 2. So, I will not treat the subjects exhaustively. I will only summarize some issues and then expect you, by means of the Study Guides, to return to the pages of Volume 5, where the issues are dealt with at greater length. The Study Guides are located in Appendix 105, where you will be advised how to proceed. I suggest you work these Study Guides in groups so that they will be discussed adequately with everyone bringing in their own perceptions. *Be sure to keep asking to what extent the issues raised in the Study Guides could or should affect us here in Nigeria.*

▲ WORLDVIEWS

The subject of worldview has been discussed at some length in Chapter 6 of Volume 5. I re-introduce it here with the words of Robert Sweetman from the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Canada’s Kuyperian post-graduate school:

Worldview is about the things that move people and make them do things even before they think about doing them— reflex responses. Worldview has been used to look at recogniz-

*able communities which have personalities and act in patterned ways. What is the shared sense of the world that lies behind these patterns? What are the deeply shared hunches? Worldview study offers tools to allow you to identify these deep impulses and should also allow you to engage in self-reflection and self-knowledge.*¹⁸

I want Nigerian Christians to understand the worldview they have inherited and thus to understand themselves. Why in Nigeria do Christians argue as they do against Muslims? *The* major reason, of course, is practical experience of the intolerance and oppression meted out to them as shown in earlier volumes. But apart from that major reason of experience, many of their other arguments are based on their dualistic inheritance that seem to make it almost impossible for them to understand the Muslim point of view not only, but even their own! It is their dualism that makes them make false secular demands of neutrality and objectivity. It is their dualism that blinds them to the religious background of their own laws and the legitimacy for Muslim demands for recognition of their religious law. By having exposed all this, I hope that my fellow Christians will be better equipped to negotiate with Muslims for a better future.

Of course, Muslims also need to be aware of the worldview of Christians. Much of what they have heard in Nigeria does not represent the full version. My discussions are also intended to help *them* understand the worldview issues Christians are struggling with. I want Muslims to know how much richer Christianity really is than they have seen so far. In addition, Muslims need to know themselves. These volumes have also attempted to help Muslims recognize their pride, their intolerance, their need for power, their grabbing of unilateral rights they deny Christians, their blindness to their own faults, and so on. I have tried to be open, respectful and honest with both. I do not know of any Christian, let alone Christian missionary, who has argued as strongly in favour of

important Muslim issues as I have, sometimes at the considerable cost of Christian anger towards me. And all of that with worldview issues as my major tool.

1. Universality

Everyone operates on basis of a worldview. It may be a religious worldview that includes faith in God and in a universe that is open to Him, or it may be a closed worldview that allows only for an empirical reality. You may be a Christian, a Muslim or an atheist, but you have a worldview. Most people unconsciously hold a worldview they share with their community and culture. It is something they grow up with, do not usually question and is their local “common sense.” It is usually only academics—and then only those with some feeling for philosophical issues—who are more conscious of their own worldview in particular as well as of worldview issues in general.

2. Race of believers

Worldview is a matter of belief and unproven assumptions that may be held consciously or unconsciously. Generally, the content of your worldview is not subject to rational or demonstrable proof. It is assumed, believed; it is a matter of faith in the sense that its adherent spends his life according to its parameters. *This, then, turns everyone into a believer.* You don’t prove your worldview; you believe it, often entirely unconsciously. We all base our lives and our cultures, including our scientific endeavours, on those beliefs, even secularists and atheists who claim they go only by reason. Theirs is faith, *belief* in reason; they depend on something they *assume* to be reliable without being able to prove it by reason. The human race is, first of all, a race of believers.¹⁹

3. Wholistic nature

Worldview governs an individual’s entire life, while culture is driven by communally held worldviews. It underlies everything we

do as individuals, communities and cultures. When a person exchanges his worldview for another, all his opinions and priorities change along with them, some suddenly, others over time. Even his reasoning changes since his assumptions are different. He becomes another person. The religious name of such a change is “conversion.” There are several reasons people from different cultures think differently, react differently and hold different opinions, but a major one is the difference in worldviews. In this chapter and indeed entire series, we are really talking about the interplay between two peoples and four major worldviews. The people you know; the worldviews, Christianity, Islam, secularism, with ATR in the background.

Under the influence of secularism, Christians often argue that religion, including Christianity, is private and personal, while the public domain is reserved for the objectivity and neutrality of secularism. Muslims and Kuyperians insist that all worldviews, including religions, are wholistic in their reach. They are private, personal and public. They govern all of life, including economics, politics and government. Your behaviour in these and other areas is largely determined by and expressive not of your official religious affiliation so much as your basic, actual worldview or beliefs in your core being.

The contents of the following propositions have been stated before, but I highlight them here because of their special importance. They should therefore be remembered not only, but also thought through in the Nigerian context and be a prominent part of the perspective that serves as a basis for solutions between the two religions.

- Everyone has a worldview or a set of beliefs, even secularists, though they tend to deny it.
- Our religion/worldview underlies everything we do as individuals and as communities.

- That means no person or worldview is neutral, not even secularism.
- There is no *neutral* or *objective* platform on which Christians and Muslims can unite, not even on secularism. We *must* cooperate with each other, but not on a basis that does not exist.
- *That means, Christians and Muslims have to get together as Christians and Muslims. We must find a way of working together in terms of our two religions, not on basis of this third religion/worldview called “secularism.” Christians should quit resorting to secularism over against Islam.*

***Study Guide 1—Worldviews*²⁰ (Appendix 105)**

▲ SECULARISM _____

Africa is often thought of as peripheral to the direction of global affairs. When I talk about this study of Nigerian Islam to Canadian Muslims, many of whom are of Asian origin, they mostly shrug their shoulders in disinterest. Racism rather than religion seems to determine their reaction. Nevertheless, the Yale scholar Lamin Sanneh considers these West African discussions about secularism very significant. “Africa offers the promise, and attendant hazards, of formulating and resolving this most crucial of debates....”²¹ I concur. The debate is crucial for both Christians and Muslims wherever they face the need to establish a *modus operandi*, a way of working together. This series does not deal with issues that are peripheral in today’s world.

It would not surprise me if readers who have read the entire series are getting tired of my frequent charge that missionaries have introduced a secularized gospel to Nigeria. Of course, I never stood alone; Muslims make the same accusation. Even CAN did so implicitly when it complained that missionaries had taught Christians to avoid politics. Even the highly reputable and independent-minded Catholic scholar, Lamin Sanneh, not only agrees

with the charge but regards it as a very significant cause for weakness of the African church. "It was a scholasticized faith that came to Africa." Coming from this Catholic scholar, this is an extremely strong statement, for the source of "scholasticized faith" is none other than Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the main architect of the Catholic worldview and the main source of both Christian and secular dualism.²² "Encountering such a religion, Africans soon discovered its inadequacies for the flesh-and-blood issues of their very different societies." This gospel version disabled people from deciding "what religious foundations to put in place for constructing a new society in new times." He commented, "Thus, Muslims may be justified in thinking that Christians have abdicated from the religious center, confining themselves to the sidelines on the great issues of state and society."²³ Ibrahim Sulaiman has said it time and again with respect to Nigerian Christianity: "Christianity is content to deal with spiritual matters only, leaving all those matters concerned with politics, economy, state and society to other systems to administer," the reference being to secularism.²⁴

While it cannot be said that Nigerian Christians are marginalized, since they are in the thick of things, for the most part they themselves marginalized their religion in dualistic fashion. *That must be overcome.* Sanneh puts it very strongly when he writes of the "utter inadequacy of the sterile utilitarian ethic of the secular national state in meeting" the Muslim challenge.²⁵ A semi-secular church cannot expect to be properly equipped for its mission. I am very happy that there is a growing awareness of this weakness, *but its residue continues to weaken the Christian stance and confuse the issues.* The questions below are serious questions that require not simply answers, but *serious changes of mind and perspective that are needed to guide you in negotiations with Muslims.*

I have earlier stated and quoted authorities in support of the allegation that the "most dangerous enemy of Christianity" is not

Islam but secularism.²⁶ This may not always have been the case, at least not to the extent it is today. Neither has that always been sufficiently realized. Henry Farrant, a long-time SUM British Branch General Secretary, years ago wrote, “The greatest problem which confronts the Church is Islam.”²⁷ While it is true that Islam presents us with a very serious religious and political challenge, secularism has handicapped us in our response to it. It has weakened the nature of our resistance and led to a trivialization of the Christian religion. While Islam confronts us openly without disguise and wakes us up, secularism is more like a wolf in sheepskin. It puts us to sleep. Most Christians recognize it only partially or not at all. Many of our responses to Islam, as we will see in these chapters, are weak; secularism has robbed us of the robust response Islam calls for. In contrast, the Kuyperian perspective was hammered out on the anvil of secularism that was undermining the faith itself, not merely oppressing it.

Nigerian Christians are not the only ones struggling with this dualistic worldview. Many of today’s Kuyperian writers come from the same background. Once they make the break and deepen themselves into the Kuyperian perspective, they feel liberated and better prepared to face the world. Vincent Bacote, an American scholar, was troubled by the “lack of theological argumentation for Christian public engagement” during his involvement with “the Navigators and the subculture of American evangelicalism.” In that environment there was a strong emphasis on the separation of Christians from the world. When he became acquainted with Kuyper, it “was like breathing some much needed oxygen,” he confided.²⁸ In his 2007 Kuyper Lecture at Princeton Seminary, Richard Mouw said, “I discovered Kuyper in the 1960s when I was struggling with fundamental tensions between my evangelical pietism and what I had come to see as the non-negotiable biblical mandate actively to work for justice and peace in the larger human community. Kuyper helped me, more than any other thinker....”²⁹

I personally had a similar liberating experience during my student days—and it has affected my ministry and writing ever since. Over two decades ago, Paul Marshall pointed out that though British Evangelicals have produced their heroes like Lord Shaftesbury and William Wilberforce, “it is clear that the political understanding and record of Evangelicalism [the orientation of most Protestant missionaries in Nigeria] has been severely deficient.” Then he encouraged his readers to learn from Kuyperian party politics in The Netherlands.³⁰ *I encourage both Nigerian Christians and Muslims to take a serious look at the spirit of that political style without necessarily trying to copy its format.*

But it is not only Christians who have to shed themselves of this scourge. Muslims do as well, as they themselves frequently insist. They, too, need to recover the wholism that characterizes Islam.³¹ They need to clean house as well and become themselves once again. *As a Christian missionary I have deep interest in a healthy Islam, not in the militant or violent version—at least if the moderate claim that Islam stands for peace and toleration is true, a reputation they still need to earn by demonstrating it in Nigeria and elsewhere.*

And not only Nigerian Muslims. The British Muslim Institute published a 41-page *Muslim Manifesto* in which it re-iterates this need repeatedly and makes many suggestions as to how to proceed.³² There have, for example, long been “Islamic Societies” at institutions of higher learning, but they have not affected education for “secular careers and lifestyle.” They have limited themselves to prayers and “mixing a little Islamic culture with their secular education.” These societies need to equip members with understanding Muslim philosophy, science and epistemology—away from the secularly-reduced version towards the full Islam. Beyond the campus, there is need for “institutions capable of serving the Muslim community in such specialized fields as... health, research, publishing, the arts, trade and investment” and for the major professions such as “medicine, engineering, law, accoun-

tancy, teaching”—in short, “in all departments of life.” Muslims must resist all British attempts to reduce Islam to their secular definition of religion that seeks to ban it from the marketplace and restricts it to the private. Muslims should have none of it, since Western “unmitigated secularism” has directly led to “disorders of the mind, body and soul.”³³ All of this sounds very much like the proposals offered by Ibrahim Sulaiman in Appendix 6.

There are Christians in the West who have experienced secularism’s rejection of *wholistic* religion. Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, USA, who could be described as a “Kuyperian Baptist,” wrote an article under the all-telling title, “A Radical Antagonism—the Bible and Secular Worldviews.”³⁴ In one of its documents, the Canadian Centre for Cultural Renewal posited the question, “Secularism *or* the inclusive society?” After a brief summary of the regnant secularism and “atheistic unbelief” in Western Europe during the 19th century, Bacote wrote, “Kuyper sought another way in which one could see the effects of the Reformed [Calvinistic] faith in all areas of life.”³⁵ These writers all follow Kuyper who saw the two—the Bible and the pluralistic inclusive society on the one hand and secularism on the other—as mutually exclusive. But so do secularists, if you insist on the right and liberty to live out wholistic Christianity.³⁶

Muslims recognize the situation described in the above end-note and are puzzled why we Christians want to align ourselves with a cultural movement that is brutalizing the West. Muslims all over the world, including Canadian Muslim Shedun Wasti³⁷ and Nigerian Muslims like Muhammad Sadiu and M. Tawfiq Ladan,³⁸ call for the withdrawal of the West with its secularism from the Muslim lands. It is time Nigerian Christians understand these Muslim cries, whether it is for withdrawal of the West from the Muslim world or for the replacement of colonial secularism in Nigeria with a system that allows both Christians and Muslims to

flourish. The problem is, of course, that we Christians for some very good reasons are not so convinced that Muslims are genuinely interested in the “multi-arrangements” so loudly called for today or whether those arrangements are only a strategic step for them in their march towards Islamization. *Muslims need to work hard at convincing us!*

A dominant secular doctrine or belief is the *myth* of neutrality and objectivity, that secularism is objective, rational and neutral, while religion is in essence subjective, irrational and anything but neutral. Go to Part 2 of Volume 5, where I explain that secularism is as subjective, (ir)rational and non-neutral as any other worldview or set of beliefs. All are based on assumptions. In his American context, Mohler advises us to “listen carefully to those who... seek to advocate purely secular arguments. On questions of meaning and morality, their arguments are themselves just as essentially religious as the religious arguments they reject. They may believe their claims are not religious, but they end up being religious.... They attempt to set up their own version of God—their own idea of what is the ultimate good—in order to determine value.” Mohler also states that if moral arguments are forbidden in the public space, as is the case in some secular countries, then “we have actually privileged one form of...discourse over another. That is, we have privileged irreligious...discourse over self-consciously religious discourse.”³⁹ Well, not quite “*irreligious*.” It is more like one belief or value system is allowed to dominate over all others and we end up with a state or establishment value or belief system, that is, an established religion or worldview without temple, mosque or cathedral and without the trappings usually associated with religion. Secularists tend to be (willingly?) blind to this situation, but if you were to stick around Canada for a while, you would soon recognize it everywhere. At least, if you’re not a secularist! Establishment status gives birth to vested interest, something that tends to blind the favoured party to the injustice of the arrangement.⁴⁰

I do not believe Nigerian Christians are clamouring for that kind of situation. Secularism will eventually become your Trojan horse. You think you are bringing in a friend or have captured a trophy; but you have actually brought in a spirit-eating monster that will devour your soul and heart. It will turn you into a stone-cold community of rationalists and individualists by whom religion along with its morals are considered nonsense and banned from public consideration. Once in its grasp, the community falls apart into individualists who, in an ethical vacuum of despair, turns to addictions and sexual aberrations of every kind and ends up filling your streets with the homeless who have lost all ties to family and community. And all of that supported by a secular attitude of entitlement and protected by a secular version of human rights shorn of any sense of personal responsibility. Just come to my city, Vancouver, Canada, and see it for yourself. The Muslim berating of Western culture is one-sided, but only somewhat! They just fail to recognize the residual remnants of positive cultural developments.

So, Christians, you will have to re-think your flirtation with secularism and develop an alternative with which Muslims can also live. I hold before you consideration of a Kuyperian alternative that I have already spelled out both above and in Volume 5. It offers wholistic perspectives that many Nigerian Christians have appreciated in my 30-year ministry. Rather than for me to summarize them all over again, I will lead you back into that volume by means of the study guide below.

Muslims will recognize there that my Kuyperian frame of mind rejects the imposition of secularism on the country for reasons similar to theirs. One dominant feature of Western secularists and their international offspring is their insistence on its universal validity⁴¹ and on the objectivity and neutrality of their creed. Just like Islam, the West, probably because of the power and glitter it has produced, simply assumes that its worldview is the only one valid.

While Western postmodernism is now challenging that position, Kuyperean thought has challenged it since the late 19th century. A very important feature, unique in its early days, is that from the beginning Kuypereans, in their bid for neutrality and pluralism, invited and continue to invite till this day every major worldview, friend and “foe,” including secularism, to the table as equal partners. At that table no one enjoys privileged status— not Muslims, not secularists, not Christians. Secularists, provided they have a minimum number of adherents, would be just one of the worldviews represented. This is not an arrangement of *religious* equality so much as of *political* equality. The arrangement was/is not based on an assumed religious relativity or equality.

Study Guide 2 — Secularism (Appendix 105)

Before we move on to the next section I draw your attention to the words of Bryant Myers, at the time editor of *MARC Newsletter*. He had recently read John Esposito’s *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*, in which the latter

*...describes the world against which the Islamic renewal movement believe it must resist and overcome for Islam to survive as a viable faith. After reading the chapter, I was struck by the fact that I have heard his words before. **What shocked me was that almost all of what he described were the very same elements of contemporary Western culture that we evangelicals have been concerned about for years.***

Those concerns include secularism in public policy and the legal system, God being read out of every academic discipline as being irrelevant and unscientific, tolerance becoming a justification for immorality, abortion, and pornography. The West is shot through with rampant materialism and an individualism so extreme that it overrides the idea of a common good. It was all there.

...Islam sees a religion that has abandoned the public square, a religion that has become private, personal, interior and socially irrelevant. This religion has little to say to the society or culture in which it lives. It has agreed to sit on the sidelines and let others shape the decisions and values of the public arena. For a Muslim, this is the clear evidence of the bankruptcy of any religion.

And...they are right. We Christians have been co-opted by the Enlightenment frame, we have become a part of Western liberalism. We have agreed that religion should be a personal thing, interior and private. We have voluntarily withdrawn from the public square and left it to others to shape the culture and society within which we live.

...we need to repent of our fear of Islam and turn around to face our own shortcomings....⁴²

When I encourage Christians to turn their backs to secularism, I am not asking them to travel a lonely road occupied only by a few weird Kuyperians. In fact, I am inviting them to join the crowd, to take the road most traveled these days. The world as a whole is desecularizing according to various scholars. Peter Berger, an American sociologist and Lutheran theologian as a Wikipedia article describes him, edited a book entitled *The Desecularization of the World* that is devoted to that proposition. The recommendations on the back cover say it all: The secular expectation that religion would fizzle out and be replaced by a regime of reason has fallen flat on its face to the chagrin of academics “who consider themselves too enlightened to be bothered with religion.”⁴³ Samuel Huntington describes the resurgence of religion everywhere at the expense of secularism. It “manifests itself in the affirmation of religious values” everywhere, not only in its fundamentalistic forms by any means. It shows up “in society after society...in the daily lives and work of people and the concerns and projects of governments.” He quotes George Weigel as saying

that the “unsecularization of the world is one of the dominant social facts in the late twentieth century.”⁴⁴ You are on a road well traveled. People have had enough of secularism. May this series contribute to our opening up and listening to each other, change the parameters of our worldview and apply the changes through the entire range of our inter-religious relationships. *We should not be able to repeat these charges after another fifteen years!*⁴⁵

▲ RELIGION/WORLDVIEW AND CULTURE —————

Even though in practice it may not always be easy to distinguish precisely between religion and worldview on the one hand and culture on the other, it is useful to be aware of the following features of that relationship:—

- They mutually influence each other, often in ways that the average person does not easily recognize. People often participate in both without discrimination or distinction. Secular academics are often blind to their own worldview and can be deeply entrenched to the point of intolerance, a situation inherent in secularism itself. Outsiders can often recognize the dynamics between them more objectively than adherents of the worldview under review.⁴⁶
- People often confuse them. Some Northern Muslims, for example, identify certain customs and traditions with Islam, while other Muslims claim that these customs and traditions have nothing to do with Islam but are merely local ways of doing things. When people reject such a custom, others may accuse them of rejecting Islam. This is an issue that especially affects the place and rights of women in Muslim societies.⁴⁷
- An important method of making proper distinctions is to search into official historical Islamic documents that explain the classical institutions and traditions and the reasons for them. This method

also helps to distinguish between divine and human inputs, another controversial approach usually resisted by militants.

I advise Muslims in Northern Nigeria to become aware of these distinctions and accept them so that they are less uptight when particular customs, traditions or attitudes are challenged. Volumes 4 and 6 of this series feature serious discussions on this subject that I advise you to re-read and ponder seriously. There are quite a number of Nigerian Muslim scholars who want to move in this direction, because this can help them develop a more dynamic version of sharia that is more in keeping with Islamic orthodoxy and that, according to them, can face its secular competitor head-on.

▲ RELATIONS BETWEEN CULTURAL SECTORS⁴⁸ —

There are many theories afloat about the relationship between cultural sectors. Probably among those discussed more frequently than most are government relations to these other sectors, especially government/church relations. Probably most common in the world is the view that places the government on top of the entire pile and considers it the most important. In such settings, governments tend to be dominant, all-intrusive and involved everywhere.

This is the case with Nigeria. It is the case here not because some philosopher or political scientist has written books on the subject and convinced Nigerians that this is the way it *should* be or naturally *is*. It is simply part of the national worldview that is hierarchical and places the government at the top of the pile without very much reflection, even though the Constitution and legal system may try to guard against an intrusive government. That's what worldviews do: You act on them kind of instinctively, for they are so deeply ingrained in your heart and mind that it represents unquestioned common sense, just like secularism in the West. It is

“natural” that things should be that way. Where the worldview tends towards the hierarchical as in Nigeria, people expect that governments solve all their problems.

For many Christians the church as institute with its clerical class of bishops and their superiors is another hierarchical authority that dominates their lives. The Catholic Church is the prime example, while many of Nigeria’s “indigenous” churches share the same tendency. If a Christian wants to do anything in society in the Name of Christ, she will often feel that she needs the nod of approval from ecclesiastical superiors, without which success would be doubtful.

*Kuyperians try to counter hierarchical and intrusive relationships of authority with a theory called “**sphere sovereignty**” or “**sovereignty of the spheres,**” meaning that each cultural sector is independent from the others.* I have explained this sociological theory in some detail in Volume 5, but here offer a few comments to refresh your memory and expand your grasp. Over against those who see “the state as possessing unlimited rule,” Kuyper insisted that only God has “such ultimate sovereignty.” Every sphere or cultural sector has an in-built sovereignty of its own into which neither government nor church may intrude. No earthly authority can ever “nullify the authority with which others are clothed in their own spheres. The state cannot legitimately assert its authority over against the father, nor a prince over against the rights of other governing bodies and the people within their spheres of competence” in other sectors. Only God is sovereign over all the spheres or sectors; all other authorities are restricted to their own sphere. God is above them all, but the various spheres are on the same level with each other without any hierarchy tying them together.⁴⁹ The role of the government in this regard is two-fold: (1) to supervise relationships *between* the spheres, to make sure no sphere dominates the others; (2) to restore relationships *within* a sphere when it has collapsed or distorted to the point where the sphere no longer functions properly.

The benefit of this social theory is its protection of freedom of the spheres from government and church intrusion. It prevents dictatorial powers from developing. The spheres are free to develop naturally according to their own genius without interference from any hierarchy. Only God is over all of them with His authority and His authority comes directly to people within each sphere. They do not need to consult government, church or mosque authorities to discover God's will within them or to have their permission. Herman Dooyeweerd, the major philosopher within the movement, explained that the significance of the theory is that "sphere sovereignty guarantees each societal sphere an intrinsic nature and law of life. And with this guarantee it provides the basis for an original sphere of authority and competence derived not from the authority of any other sphere but directly from the sovereign authority of God."⁵⁰

We need such buffers. Our governments at all levels *instinctively* assume that all power and authority belongs to them, directly contrary to Jesus' declaration, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" [Matthew 28:18]. All other authorities and powers are to be in submission to Him [1 Peter 3:22]. Our worldview is shaped very much by our traditional ethnocentric social organization with its natural tendency towards central authority. Our *governments* themselves instinctively reach out to "embrace the entire range of human existence," to extend to all the spheres of life. They even claim for themselves "absolute authority over them, without inquiring at all whether there...[are] intrinsic limitations to their authority." *Citizens* take it for granted that the central government naturally has the authority to make final decisions in all the spheres of life "as the major coordinator of society. To it is ascribed clear supremacy over all other basically non-political groups." Jan Dengerink states that "no single unit [read "sphere"] of society can lay claim to having a monopoly in establishing justice in the world—not even the state" and warns that "the result is

always a heavy handed bureaucracy, which in practice reduces the individual citizen to a nullity...”⁵¹—something which the ordinary Nigerian experiences daily. This is part of our Nigerian worldview that leads us straight to a totalitarian conception of the state. In addition, Nigerian Islam has looked upon the government as a major instrument for *da’wah*.

The theory of sphere sovereignty does not tolerate that arrangement. We need it as a buffer to break all domineering relationships. It will prevent any religious denomination from spilling over into government as well as government into religious denominations, not to speak of the other spheres. Same with church/mosque organizations. If an issue has an overtly religious smell to it, church or mosque, but especially church, has historically always been ready to jump in and take over. If we are going to have genuine pluralism, that is equal rights and freedom for every community and all the other goodies that come with the formula that I develop in the course of these chapters, we need principles that firmly establish the boundaries of each sphere, especially those of governments and denominations.⁵²

And even in other spheres there is need for clear borders. What is the relationship between them? Between government, industry, business and technology? What of trade unions to a political party? It is really all about “the nature and limits of authority” and thus an important issue facing our country.⁵³ Muslims and Christians need to dialogue about their future relationships. *In such an environment it is good to have some firm principles and boundaries based on that which we hold most dear, namely our religions.*

When critics hear about comprehensive or wholistic religion, they often accuse its adherents or leaders of theocracy—the rule of God—“as a means of silencing any and all religiously framed discourse in the public square,” according to John Bolt of Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. However, if theocracy refers to the church or mosque dictating to the govern-

ment regarding policies, it clearly follows logically from the sphere sovereignty theory that Kuyper would not favour anything like theocracy. In fact, he “explicitly repudiated all theocracies.” In Kuyper’s discussion of the original 1879 platform of his party we read, “...not only do we not desire such a theocracy but rather we oppose it with all our might.” *Church and, by extension, mosque have the right to persuade but not to dictate.*⁵⁴

But theocracy can also refer to attempts by Christians or Muslims in society, that is the church/mosque as organism,⁵⁵ to apply their religious principles to politics. Kuyperians reject the term theocracy even here. As Bolt interprets Kuyper, “...our human insight into God’s ordinances as they must be applied to specific, concrete people and political situations can never measure up to the level of certainty required to say that a specific public policy or law is indisputably God’s will.”⁵⁶ We presume too much when we equate *our human* rule with God’s. We may be inspired and guided by God’s Word as faithfully as we can, but to claim our policy to be God’s crosses the boundary. Christian rule, Muslim rule, religious rule—yes to all of them, as legitimate as any version of secular rule, but *God’s* rule...? So, even here no theocracy. Even when led by Him, we are not Him! We remain fallible.

Religions are complicated; comparisons and contrasts between them even more so. In keeping with Calvinism in general, Kuyperians believe in original sin and hence do not trust autonomous reason. Nevertheless, as we can see from the above, they have a relatively—definitely not absolute—high respect for human reason guided by divine revelation in its various forms. They trust that, with that revelational guidance, they can produce reasonably good legislation in a given situation.

Muslims reject original sin and have high regard for human reason. Nevertheless, at least some Muslims, especially the literalist type, have little or no faith in the ability of humans to promote justice. Aisha Isma’ila, a Muslim member of the Federal

Cabinet in 2000, argued that less attention should be paid to the new sharia developments and more to social problems. Fellow Muslim, Sa'adatu Ahmad from Zaria was aghast. Why, the sharia is the very instrument needed to achieve Isma'ila's purposes! Our man-made laws have let us down and created our present crisis.⁵⁷ Man-made laws lead to failure; only divine sharia will do the trick. It was not that Ahmad rejected the Muslim doctrine of faith in reason or that she believed in original sin, but the *de facto* situation in Nigeria of gross injustice and chaos was created by human beings. It was not doctrine, but *experience* that drove him and fellow fundamentalists to that conclusion. Only God's, not man's, not even man's infused with divine guidance. Sharia *as is*, not as interpreted by man.

But is that possible? Do we not always filter everything we observe through our particular grid? Interpretation is unavoidable; it is the only way for us to see or understand anything. They *think* they now have God's law pure and simple. Actually, of course, it is *human* understanding equated with God's. And now read BBC's Isaacs' interview with the Sokoto State Attorney General about his attitude towards such a sharia-based execution and you will sense the pride, the cruelty, callousness and injustice that such identification can produce.⁵⁸

Please note an interesting parallel in simultaneous similarity and contrast. Both Christians and Muslims experience injustice—the similarity. The injustice drives Christians *away* from sharia, while it drives Ahmad c.s. *towards* sharia—the contrast. As Yusufu Turaki once wrote, in this Nigerian situation it is not good ideas that count so much as experience, bitter and prolonged experience on both sides. That is a major reason they do not hear each other, in spite of the fact that many of their complaints are very similar—but opposite at the same time. *The solution of the one is the problem of the other.* You will see this dictum come true more and more as you proceed with these chapters.

The Study Guide below will help you work through these issues. Again, go through it with a group, preferably an interfaith group, and keep asking just how this could or should affect Christian-Muslim relations and the country as a whole.

Study Guide 3 — Sovereignty of the Spheres (Appendix 105)

▲ INDIVIDUALISM VS COLLECTIVISM / COMMUNALISM AND ETHNOCENTRISM⁵⁹ _____

Over against the individualistic secular worldview, Nigerians are traditionally inclined towards collectivism or communalism, of which ethnic groups and ethnicity are major components in that everyone identifies him/herself with their natural ethnic group. The demands of the community usually have precedence over that of the individual. Islam also “gives priority to the community over the individual.”⁶⁰ The problem is that secular education encourages the development of individualism, where the single person stands at the centre of things. For the most part, the Gospel has been brought by missionaries heavily influenced by this secular individualism that has so deeply penetrated their sponsoring Christian constituencies.⁶¹ Bennie van der Walt discusses it at some length in such a helpful way that I really want you to re-read it.⁶² You will find that, according to van der Walt, Scripture rejects both poles as one-sided and presents the human person as an individual in community.

In a world and in a Nigeria torn between the individual and communal approaches, I believe there is need to supplement my coverage of van der Walt’s discussion and give it more flesh. I begin with Kuyper himself, who often pointed out the radically divisive effects individualism had on the organic structure of society. He “contrasted the Christian desire to seek personal human dignity in the social relations of an organically associated society” with the stark individualism promulgated by the French Revolution and dis-

persed throughout much of the Western world in the form of liberalism. It had “destroyed...social relationships” and was left with only “the monotonous self-seeking individual, asserting his own self-sufficiency.” This individualism “destroyed the spiritual and moral make-up of human beings as well as their social relationships [and] was central to the social crisis...facing Europe.⁶³ Moving on to Gordon Spykman, under the heading “Man in Community,” he argues that the Bible “pictures mankind as a peoplehood. We live as communities in community. By virtue of creation we find the meaning of our lives in a plurality of associations. We participate in a divinely ordained network of life relationships.” Then he describes the essence and the result of both individualism and communalism:

Individualist anthropologies proceed on the assumption that human beings are essentially discreet, atomistic, independent personal entities. Individuals are the basic units and building blocks of society. Such a view cannot do justice to the solidarity of the human race, nor to the idea of an organized peoplehood. Societal structures such as marriage, family, nationhood, church, and school are then reduced to secondary and artificial environments which free and sovereign individuals...[take the liberty] to create by means of social contracts. Collectivist [communalist] anthropologies, on the other hand, reduce people to mere cogs in a larger societal mechanism. Human life then has meaning only insofar as it is subsumed under some societal megastructure, such as...the...church or the modern absolutist state.

In the case of Nigeria we should add “tribe” to the list as the primary megastructure to which most people feel their deepest allegiance.

Further explaining his objection to both individualism and communalism, Spykman asserted that the Biblical alternative to both is a “pluralist view of communal living.” “No man is an island” or stands by himself unrelated to the world around him.

But neither are people mere components in a totalitarian societal system. By virtue of God's good order for creation, human life is integrated into a coherent web of familial, social, political, economic, academic, cultic and other relationships. We belong to each other in myriads of ways. For man cannot be truly human apart from others. In a plurality of 'associations in consociation' (Johannes Althusius) we are called to be our 'brother's keeper' through neighbourly love and service. Our commonly created identity ...lays an abiding foundation for that human solidarity which undergirds even the brokenness arising from the spiritual antitheses among men.

Spykman quoted from Acts 17:26—God “made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth.” This “universally shared humanity, rooted in creation, constitutes the basis for God's abiding claim on us all. From the beginning we are all His.” “The meaning of personal identity is inextricably linked to the communal relationships which bind us to others.”⁶⁴

I continue the discussion with some additional quotations from Kuyper himself and from Herman Dooyeweerd. Kuyper asked “whether our human society is an aggregate of individuals or an organic body.” His answer: “God's Word teaches that we have all been created from one blood and joined in a single covenant through God. Both the solidarity of our guilt and the mystery of the reconciliation...are absolutely incompatible with individualism and point instead to a struggle within the interconnected wholeness of our human society.” The history of the Dutch nation has far deeper roots than the colonial creation of Nigeria. Nevertheless, with almost a century behind us, we in Nigeria can claim as did Kuyper that, quoting from Dutch literature, “Our national society is...‘not a heap of souls on a piece of ground,’ but rather a God-willed community, a living, human organism.” Nigerians, in spite of their profound differences, are so deeply integrated as a nation

that we are no longer in Kuyper's words "a mechanism put together from separate parts; not a mosaic...inlaid with pieces like a floor, but a *body* with limbs, subject to the law of life. We are members of each other, and thus—[using New Testament language]—the eye cannot get along without the foot, nor the foot without the eye."⁶⁵

In closing, a couple of quotations Spykman borrowed from Herman Dooyeweerd:⁶⁶ (1) "According to the divine creation ordinances, our...social order is not built up from atomistically constructed autonomous individuals. The very birth of every child from the union of a set of parents is incompatible with an individualistic theory." (2) "I cannot know myself without taking into account that my ego is related to the ego of my fellowmen. And I cannot really have a personal meeting with another ego without love. It is only by such a meeting in love that I can arrive at true self-knowledge and knowledge of my fellowmen."⁶⁷

What I am describing is, of course, nothing new; it only has become something new again in the West where the roots of individualism have been digging deeper and deeper over the centuries since the Renaissance. Long before anyone heard of Renaissance or of Kuyper there was the Traditional African worldview that has been stated succinctly in the famous sentence by John Mbiti, a Kenyan philosopher-theologian, that has virtually become an African proverb: "I am because we are and, since we are, therefore I am."⁶⁸ Or, as Yusufu Turaki put it: "People are not individuals, living in a state of independence, but part of a community, living in relationships and interdependence."⁶⁹ However, the issue is whether in many cases this sense of African community has turned into communalism. Van der Walt judges it has.

During the month of this writing, the Dutch Association for Reformational Philosophy, a major school of Kuyperian thought, is to publish a Dutch-language book by scholar Roel Kuyper, the title of which translated into English would be *Moral Capital: The*

Binding Powers of Society.⁷⁰ The publishers published the following description of the book:

This book explores a new concept in its actual meaning for today's world. In this book an analysis is given of western society's intoxication with utopian images of prosperity. The processes of globalisation have strengthened this and given birth to new levels of individualisation that weaken society. By the replacement and neglect of 'moral capital,' the world has become increasingly unstable. What is forgotten is that the world is also a moral commonwealth, not just based on contracts, and aimed towards economic goals and the realisation of individual freedoms, but also a unity in which people are 'co-workers' with each other. In this book 'moral capital' is the human power to care for each other and the world. The call is there again today to realize moral responsibility and to colour moral leadership for the world. This book is a thorough exploration of practices that are needed for a binding and stable society.

On their Dutch website, they conclude another description of the book with these words: "This book is a fundamental socio-philosophical contribution to current discussions about society. The author analyzes the development of modern thought and demonstrates what a Christian philosophical approach has to offer for the pressing problems of today."⁷¹

I could go on and on, but you get the picture. No individualism and no collectivism or communalism. Kuyperians emphasize community without communalism; they affirm the individual, but in relationship to the community without being totally submerged by it. This means, among other things, no ethnocentrism or tribalism that stymies a person and prevents him from developing and from following the call of God, but yes by all means to the tribe itself. This means also that communities themselves have their

rights that we cannot surrender on the altar of individualism, but for that we go to Chapter 7.

Study Guide 4 — Individualism and Communalism/Collectivism (Appendix 105)

▲ **PLURALISM**⁷² _____

Like other major subjects in this chapter, I have already discussed pluralism from a Kuypertian perspective in Volume 5. This discussion here builds on that. It is a kind of a review and reminder but also takes us a bit farther. Hans-Martien ten Napel, Professor of Constitutional and Administrative Law at the University of Leiden, The Netherlands, begins the first major section of a paper with a statement from the UN about there being widespread global agreement that

*cultural diversity is here to stay—and to grow. States need to find ways of forging national unity amid this diversity. The world...cannot function unless people respect diversity and build unity through common bonds of humanity. In this age of globalization, the demands for cultural recognition can no longer be ignored by any state or by the international community. The way states manage this cultural diversity matters, because cultural liberty...can be regarded as a human right.*⁷³

Though Muslims are sometimes skeptical about UN utterances, they and the rest of us can hardly ignore that new reality of diversity. In fact, it is the very challenge we all face. It is the issue of this series. How to deal with pluralism. It is forced on all of us. We all *must* deal with it.

Pluralism is a concept that embraces competing worldviews, multi-culturalism, multi-religion, multi-worldview everywhere. It covers all areas of life—economics and business, politics and gov-

ernment, religion and its primary institutions of church and mosque, etc. Religious pluralism does not erase the core differences among competing worldviews and is not meant to lead to either relativism or syncretism. Mouw and Griffioen assure us that “not everyone who defends pluralism is in fact espousing a thoroughgoing relativism.”⁷⁴ Pluralism means we allow space for all worldviews with a significant following to express and embody themselves in the marketplace according to their own insights. *Under pluralism, no worldview has a privileged position, whether religious or secular. They all have an equal place at the table.* No secular, Muslim or Christian perspective will try to dominate and define the nature and limits of the others. As soon as one worldview tries to gain the upper hand by grabbing control, the pluralist compact will either fight back or collapse.

*Pluralism is thus subject to abuse in that it makes it possible to entertain secret aims to overthrow the existing pluralistic balance by clever manipulation of the normal democratic protocols. Muslims in the West are often accused of doing just that. **Nigerian Christians, suspecting the same, will have to watch for that.***

Pluralism demands a high degree of tolerance on the part of everyone. It does not require agreement with other points of view nor, strictly speaking, respect, though these will make tolerance easier to practice. Pluralism is simply the recognition that everyone has a right to her opinion, that every worldview has a right to a place at the table.

The need for a pluralistic perspective can easily be traced directly to our respective holy books, but a literal interpretation of both could lead to its rejection. It is the dynamic, contextual reading that will allow pluralism. God is not pragmatic, but He *is* realistic. He allows every kind of people with every kind of religion

and worldview in His realm, even though He may not like most of these worldviews. So what about us in our realms? If God allows, how can we disallow? And how can we disregard the composition of our multicultural society? God allows Christians and Muslims in *His* world; we should allow them in *our* world, for “our” world is part of His. Muslims have long recognized this when they say that God has created many different peoples and religions. But now, in the case of Nigeria, these peoples and religions live in one country and they constitute *equal* blocks that will no longer allow one-sided domination. So, like it or not, pluralism is in. We advocate it not necessarily because it is a desirable policy that we would create if it were not a reality. We advocate it because we recognize it as a reality that we must deal with. And that means not merely tolerating the other as second-class citizens but according each other equal rights without anyone dominating anyone else.

Let me make myself very clear. I am advocating pluralism and those accompanying “multis” for Nigeria not *primarily* because these are the buzzwords of our generation or because those situations are desirable for this world in themselves in principle. And definitely not because of a hidden relativism in my soul. To my mind, the jury is still out on whether those situations should be consciously created by government immigration policies as they do in Canada. It is a highly dangerous social engineering project that we may come to regret, much of it based on secularist assumptions that secularists refuse to examine. It already has created a lot of tension in Canada, but that could simply be natural growing pains. I am advocating it for Nigeria simply because it is our reality and we have to learn to make the best of it. So far, it seems we have only managed to make the worst of it. I am not *advocating* so much as *observing* the facts of pluralism. We, Christians and Muslims, *are* here with our deep spiritual cleavages. We have not chosen this arrangement; it was imposed on us by foreigners. But it is too late to unravel Nigeria without a lot

more of the same bloodshed we are trying to stop. *So, we have to learn to be pluralistic. The facts demand it. Failure or refusal to recognize it has led to bloodshed that we must overcome. It is one thing to recognize a pluralistic situation and deal with it constructively; it is quite another to actually create and advocate pluralism.*

Pluralism includes tolerating practices you dislike and perhaps even defending the right to practise them. For example, mainline Nigerian churches reject polygamy. Most have traditionally disciplined polygamous members, but they have not tried to make the practice illegal, since there are millions of Muslims and Traditionalists who practise it. The *de facto* practice on a large scale of what one religion considers sin makes it impractical to criminalize it and hence it becomes a tolerated right. But while it is such a right, any one also has the right to campaign and strategize against it in the hope of criminalizing it in the future.

Sander Griffioen of the Free University of Amsterdam, the world's original Kuyperian university, delivered a lecture in Toronto some years ago under the title "Can We Tolerate Pluralism?" Bruce Cleminger summarized it as follows:

Griffioen says it is in public that we meet others with different convictions than our own and it is when we become conscious of our differences that we have a basis for unity. In our disagreements, we seek to persuade the other of our perspective and by so doing...we are recognizing that the other is worth persuading. If we had nothing in common, there would be no conflict. That we have conflict implies that there is a basis of commonality and that we have recognized the worth of the other. Griffioen says we are called to be peacemakers, to discover the deeper unity among us and others. When asked whether there are norms which guide this process, Griffioen said that there are, but that understanding them requires further reflection,

*a task which he will continue to undertake and one in which we all must share.*⁷⁵

Two years later, Griffioen fulfilled his promise by publishing a book on the subject, co-authored with Richard Mouw, President of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, with the title *Pluralisms & Horizons*.⁷⁶ Both of them are Kuyperian scholars. Below follow some quotations and re-worded quotations from their book to help us along in our quest for viable parameters for pluralism. I will also insert some comments of my own in between.

Here is their rationale for pluralism:

- *Disagreement about fundamental human issues is an inescapable fact of life under present conditions. If there were no other reason for... Christians to endorse some version of pluralism, this alone would be sufficient to cause us to do so.*
- *Whenever possible, people should be permitted to live out the implications of their chosen... visions.*
- *It is important to be very conscious of... differences rather than disguise them. A society that promotes... diversity will not only be acknowledging the minimal demands of justice; it will also be fostering a spiritual climate in which it is... possible for human beings to live with a self-awareness of the visions that shape and guide their thoughts and actions.*⁷⁷

The above points are well expressed on a preliminary page of Mouw and Sanders' book, which features a passage from the poem "New Year Letter" by Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-1993), an Anglo-American poet. Using Auden's poem, the authors suggest the attitude necessary for effective democracy, including pluralism: one of humility and recognition of shared weakness and shared past sins—like imperialism, intolerance, impositions.

... true democracy begins with free confession of our sins.

In this alone we are all the same, all are so weak that none dare claim

“I have the right to govern,” or “Behold in me the Moral Law,”

And all real unity commences in consciousness of differences....

Please re-read this carefully and ask what change of attitude is needed on the part of all of us—and then work at developing it. Discuss this in your group. It may be difficult to do so in a mixed group for you will easily be challenged, but it is probably the only way to do it honestly.

- *...not everyone who defends pluralism is... espousing a thorough-going relativism....(a)⁷⁸*
- *It is...a fact of modern political life...that there is no longer a consensus regarding the meaning and purpose of human existence. And there is no political test available to us for deciding between better or worse conceptions of the good.(c)⁷⁹*

Though there are significant differences on these subjects between Christians and Muslims that we must accommodate in our search for solutions, there are also many commonalities. We are all Nigerians and share a broad underlay of our traditional worldview that we must selectively capitalize on. Our religions share many social ideals. We have our Nigerian context with all of its aspects in common. And then there is our common humanity along with our reasoning capacity. So, we have a lot to start off with, even though our core religious convictions differ profoundly. There is enough there to give us hope, provided we go about it with goodwill and determination to have our country succeed.

- *Rawls imagines a case where citizens embrace the same principles of public justice but for...different reasons.(d)*

Indeed, that is what should and does happen. Though Christians and Muslims go to different sources and do not always share the same motivations, we do share many social ideals that we should capitalize on. We may quote different texts, but we all want to work towards the one goal of justice. We may define peace differently, but we all want it.

Quoting from one Harlan Beckley:

- *The only possibility for moral agreement...is to abstract from differing...conceptions of the good and morality. This process of abstraction is an attempt to discover general beliefs, ends, and principles which persons with diverse particular beliefs and values can embrace. (e)*

For Christians and Muslims that should not be so hard to do, except for their core beliefs. I am confident that, provided we share in goodwill and trust, we have enough in common to put Nigeria back on track.

Our authors quote from the Roman Catholic scholar Michael Novak but with disapproval:

- *Christian [and Muslim] symbols ought not to be placed in the center of a pluralist society. They must not be, out of reverence for the transcendent which others approach in other ways.(f) ⁸⁰*

I adduce this quotation because it is representative of a model of pluralism we should avoid. It is a Western version where pluralist “neutrality,” in reaction to the omnipresence of establishment symbols such as those in countries dominated by Catholic, Anglican or secular worldviews, rejects everyone’s symbols and seeks to create a naked public square without any symbols. To be neutral and fair, we eliminate all! Yea, right! My proposed formula, as you will see

in Chapter 7, is not one of elimination or separation but of equality of access. *This formula does not call for removal of establishment symbols but for removal of establishment itself and displaying everyone's symbols—for a full public square, not an empty one.*⁸¹ You may remember that Christians have complained that Nigeria's new capital is surrounded with unilateral Muslim symbols and that its flag has been hijacked by Muslims.⁸² That is the establishment model. The pluralist model would add at least Christian symbols and, possibly, those of ATR, so that *everyone* be represented.⁸³ Be sure to read endnote 81 for another example of how these different models work and how we can replace the establishment-of-one model with one of pluralism for all.

Pluralism and public life are not confined to the political; they comprise all cultural sectors and civil organizations and must therefore be applied across the board:

- *Public life...cannot be contained within the boundaries of politics. The larger public realm comprises all that pertains to the common good, from public services...by the government to many of the activities associated with universities, corporations, churches, charitable foundations....*

Our authors emphasize the importance of societal

- *“mediating structures” such as families, churches, [mosques], ethnic alliances and a variety of community and service organizations for providing people with a sense of...identity. [These] diverse associations provide a buffer zone that can help us to avoid...the false choice between individualism and statism.... An alternative is to promote and strengthen societal structures...that will provide a non-statist sense of communal identity.*⁸⁴

Nigeria is blest with countless mediating structures in which people create communal bonds. Fortunately, they are not reduced to the barren choices of statism [depending on government] and

rank individualism. Many of the voluntary ones are associated with religion and are largely independent from governments and government funds. But the jury is still out with respect to many others such as schools and universities, clinics and hospitals, radio and TV stations and the like. Genuine pluralism would mean that the relative privileged position of a mild form of Nigerian secularism prevailing in those owned by government would end. Government would do away with its secular standard, soft as it is, and own or support Christian and Muslim institutions as well as secular ones. In fact, probably more Christian and Muslim ones than secular, since the latter has little more than a smattering of adherents. Christians and Muslims would not have to choose between public and religious schools, since all would be treated alike. Here my formula—to be explained in Chapter 7—of “equal access” would kick in. Christian and Muslim institutions would be owned or supported just like the others. They could actually be part of a mixed pluralistic public system or privately owned but all equally supported by government with the same access to government funds and all equally inspected to ensure national or state standards. This does not mean government must necessarily foot all the bills completely, but it would require a formula fitting for each type of endeavour that would ensure equal government treatment for all. That is, in fact, close to the very system Kuyperians organized in their country of origin, The Netherlands, an unparalleled type of pluralism for which the country is justly famous.

Nigerian Christians often support secularism for its supposed neutrality. I believe I have shown conclusively in Volume 5 that its neutrality is a myth,⁸⁵ if not a cruel and deceitful joke. True neutrality is not negative like the secular model that would kick everyone out of the public square—except, of course, secularism itself!—but it is positive in that it gives everyone the same opportunities, the same access and the same equality. We could call it “neutral pluralism” or “pluralistic neutrality.” Secularism may be a

member of the team, but only as one member among the others, as equal among equals, without any privileged status or access.

But before moving on, we must carefully weigh the UN admonition that pluralism can also go too far. The 2004 *Human Development Report* favours “a limited kind of multi-culturalism. Thus, in addition to a great respect for diversity, it also stresses the need for a stronger commitment to unity.” It suggests that “the boundary is to be found in a common commitment to a universal ethics based on universal human rights and respect for the freedom, equality and dignity of all individuals.” Ten Napel sums it up as “diversity within unity.”⁸⁶

I want us all, both Christians and Muslims, to become aware of the Kuyperian contribution to pluralism. Various writers claim that the Kuyperian tradition as it has worked itself out in its land of origin, “may do a better job at securing religious rights than almost any other country.”⁸⁷ Without favouring any religion or culture within its borders, it treats them all alike and all have equal access to state resources, at least in principle. The theories described in Volume 5, Part 2 form the underlying foundation for their polity. That is the reason I so often refer to this school and why I adhere to it—and that is why

I recommend that Nigeria consider its approach, all the more so because it is based on a wholistic version of Christianity and recognizes the nature and power of religion. It is a decidedly neutral, non-secular philosophy in that it accords space to everyone without distinction.⁸⁸ I recommend this pluralistic system be tried for all qualified schools, healthcare institutions, media, community development organizations, housing co-operatives and other not-for-profit institutions and organizations. No more privileges for anyone, not even for those owned by government. Complete equality of status and access to government funds and equally subject to

government supervision, but with the sponsoring agent free to develop it according to its recognized worldview, barring of course all forms of militancy and extremism from all quarters.⁸⁹

- *The appropriate response for the present time...is the kind of interim public ethic that...encourages us to limit ourselves politically to the given opportunities for co-operation, accepting the limitations and imperfections of the here-and-now. Such toleration does not issue from indifference; rather, it is founded on the...certainty that only God can bring about the perfect community.*
- *The contest between diverse visions of life cannot be decided by political means; politics does not provide us with the resources necessary for adjudicating the conflicting claims that give rise to many of our differences.... The outcome of such contests can only be awaited. In the meantime, opportunities for political co-operation should be employed as much as possible.⁹⁰*

Before leaving pluralism, there is need for a bit of “political incorrectness.” Muslims frequently claim that Islam is pluralistic.⁹¹ That claim is especially made with respect to the traditional Muslim treatment of minorities, the *dhimmi*s. For its time, that may have been an advanced sort of pluralism. However, history marches on. Designating certain people as second-class citizens or *dhimmi*s is no longer acceptable and is now considered oppressive. In fact, no Muslim government follows such a policy anymore. Today’s Christians demand a more inclusive pluralism, equality and human rights for all, that at the moment exists in neither Nigeria’s Muslim regions nor in most Muslim majority countries. Instead, we see persecution of Christians so widespread and so well documented on a daily basis⁹² that it becomes difficult to accept the Muslim self-image as pluralistic.

That self-image also becomes difficult to accept, as apologists like Mohamed Rachid expect from us, when we are repeatedly told

that all of this is a distortion of true Islam. Every religion struggles with the disconnect between faith and practice. However, when it comes to Muslim intolerance, the disconnect is so severe that I cannot help but suspect that, beneath a veneer of tolerance, there is a basic intolerance that will not be satisfied till the entire world is subjected to Islam either by conversion or by agreeing to some form of *dhimmi* status. I am not talking militants only; I include mainstream “moderates.” The main difference is that militants are open and blunt about their ambition, while moderates, like patient sheep, follow their strategists as they slowly snake their way into every nook and cranny of the target culture.

A question continues to haunt me: Does Islam have any influence at all on Muslims when it comes to relationships with others? Why does its hold over its militant adherents seem so weak? Is there something inherent that no one wants to admit? *Or does Islam need a punitive correction similar to what was inflicted on Christians for their intolerance? Does the Muslim world need the chastening of a counter-worldview to cleanse it from un-Islamic accretions and practices? A shaking up from outside of Islam but indigenous to its own Muslim culture as Western Christianity experienced with secularism and its predecessors all the way back to the Renaissance?*

*Nigerian Muslims need to examine themselves at this front. Nigerian Christians need answers. What can they expect from Muslims in terms of tolerance and pluralism once negotiations for the new Nigeria have started? **Or is militancy merely the rough-and-tumble side of legitimate da'wah?** Muslims, is pluralism merely a temporary tactic on your part till you have accomplished the Muslim da'wah or do you regard it as a permanent desideratum?*

One does not know what to make of the words of Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of OIC, at Columbia University. He said, “Though the OIC is not a religious organiza-

tion, we feel compelled on many occasions to clarify that Islam is the religion of moderation and compassion, a religion that celebrates diversity, pluralism, and recognition of the other.”⁹³ That hardly describes Saudi Arabia, the centre of it all and custodian of Islam’s holiest shrine, not to speak of Nigeria’s Northern regimes.⁹⁴ *All of that Muslim distortions?* It would be nice to be convinced of that. After 30 years of living amongst you, 40 years of research and 10 years of writing, all concurrently, I am still puzzled! Throughout this series I find myself arguing this way, then that way. I enjoy the company of some Muslims friends and have helped organize church friendship events between them and Christians. But it will not go away. I still ask, “Will the real Muslim please stand up—and not all at the same time, please!” In the meantime, I do genuinely enjoy my Muslim friends and acquaintances and want to continue our friendships.⁹⁵

Study Guide 5 — Pluralism (Appendix 105)

▲ CLOSING QUOTATIONS _____

A secular public school in Beamsville, Ontario, Canada, sported a sign with the caption, “The Highest Result of Education is Tolerance.” Here are some typical Kuyperian responses to the sign:⁹⁶

*As a Christian I believe we do not have to tolerate everything.
I do not think we should absolutize tolerance.*

Rick Jongejan

The highest result of education is to prepare young men and women intellectually to take their place in God’s world, to love God and neighbour, to tolerate no evil and to learn to be lovingly intolerant.

Stan de Jong

While I think that...tolerance is an important aspect...[of education], I don't think it should be the highest result. As far as I am concerned, schools are still academic institutions and that implies much more than tolerance. ... How tolerant are the public schools when it comes to Christian perspectives? At times I have encountered some quite intolerant teachers who rabidly opposed Christian schools. How can intolerant teachers teach tolerance? As far as I can determine, tolerance is a by-product and how can a by-product be the highest result?

Bert den Boggende

Multiculturalism, that is, relativism, has now become the guiding principle of public policy in Canada. The irony now is that in the name of tolerance a new kind of intolerance is adopted so that it is considered wrong, if not illegal, to express negative views about abortion, same-sex marriage, radical Islam, and a host of other politically incorrect topics.

Harry Antonides

Finally a quotation from the Canadian Kuyparian social justice organization, Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ). Under the heading “Pluralism” we read the following:

Faith commitments – each person's deepest commitments, whether formally religious in nature or not – shape how we interact with our neighbours. CPJ believes that differing faith communities and convictions should be acknowledged as key elements of how individuals and communities can best contribute to the common good and live together as neighbours. This inclusive view of pluralism acknowledges the reality that Canada is a unique community of diverse faith and value communities, communities which have equal rights and

responsibilities in the public sphere. Learning how to live out this pluralism is crucial to the common good.

www.cpj.ca

The intolerance of the above spokesmen is intolerance of intolerance. The secular establishment in Canada is intolerant of religious thinking applied to the market place and to public expressions of disagreement with certain sexual lifestyles. That is the intolerance of which these spokesmen are intolerant. Nigerian Christians, are you sure you want to associate with secularism that, given enough leeway for a few years, will lead to that kind of intolerance?

Think on these things.

