

# SELECTED PILLARS OF A CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW

While Chapter 5 explains some basic elements of a Kuyperian world view, here you will read about certain political insights that derive from a reading of the Bible and the world based on that world view. That is, a reading shorn of the distortions of secularism and dualism and informed by a more wholistic approach. This means reading through a different set of lenses and on basis of a different set of assumptions.

The above paragraph suggests that the Bible is not the *only* source of the perspectives to be outlined. When we study how God revealed Himself in the Bible, we find that He did not start from scratch. He took into consideration the context into which His revelation entered. He did not outrightly reject all cultural forms, but He began by taking the existing ones and infusing them with a new Spirit that eventually led to cultural transformation. Kuyperianism similarly starts by taking history and cultural development seriously.

So, this chapter suggests some Christian pillars for an approach to a multi-religious society that has room for all, Christians, Muslims, Traditionalists and secularists, to live out their faiths in

co-operation rather than confrontation. I trust that Christians will derive inspiration from this material, in fact, more than inspiration—guidance for giving new shape to Nigerian structures that do at least three things. (1) They replace the inherited secular structures. (2) They are more just and less exploitative. (3) They are more in line with Nigeria's multi-religious situation.

Of course, I do realize that religions will never see eye to eye on many issues. Between Christians and Muslims there are quite a number of theological differences. However, is it too much to hope that determination to preserve the unity of Nigeria will lead to reasonable compromise and goodwill on the part of Christians and Muslims and eventually to structures that conform as much as possible to multi-religion? An added incentive is that such a solution may preserve the prestige of Christianity and Islam. They are currently in danger of contempt and rejection for the chaos and their mutual hostility. Then secularism will really have triumphed.

The topics to be featured are the cultural mandate, the human race as image bearer and vicegerent, sphere sovereignty, religion, church and life, life as religion and the heart as integrating agent. These subjects, it should be understood, are all related to each other and assume one another. Needless to say, our treatment of each of these large subjects will take the form of summary treatment meant to whet your appetite for more study on your own. Finally, remember, there are more parts to this picture, but enough is enough. Absorb these first and see where you go from there.

I wish to warn you readers: Some of the discussions may be difficult to follow at first. I advise you to read through each section and then go back for slow and careful review. If after that you still find it rough going, discuss it with others. If that does not work, cheerfully forget it and move on to the next section. Do not allow yourself to get bogged down. Some of this stuff is not for everyone. I remember my own introduction to this perspective through Professor Evan Runner—it was difficult, but eventually it became

meaningful and precious to me, a Biblical and most sensible alternative to the secularism that threatened to engulf me.

### ▲ THE CULTURAL MANDATE —

This topic relates to the reason for human existence. What is our basic function? There is a significant indicator in the opening chapter of the Bible where you find the first recorded Word of God addressed to mankind. Genesis 1:28-30 has come to be known as the Cultural Mandate. Some refer to it as “Creation Mandate.”<sup>1</sup> For those with no Bible at hand, here’s the passage:

*God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.*

As I myself once wrote, “Man was [made] to have dominion over all the earth.” “The first recorded command for man was not to pray, to build a church or to engage in any other primarily ‘religious’ activity. It was to tend the garden, to rule the earth.” “To carry out this task was man’s inherent and created nature; it was the main task for which God created and equipped man. It was not some secondary task; it was not one merely implied in a grander or more spiritual task. It was his main task. That was the way in which man was to serve his Creator God. *That was his religious service—and is!*”<sup>2</sup>

Something tragic happened: the fall into sin. That event brought major changes in the human constitution and orientation,

but it did not do away with this Mandate. This Mandate was instinctive, natural to man, since it was one of his created components. *Just as salvation does not add anything new to creation but restores it, so sin does not delete anything from creation but distorts it.* Even in its state of rebellion, the human race continues working out this Mandate as a natural expression of its essential nature.

Genesis 4:17-25 shows us how people proceeded. We are told of continued cultural development and inventions, but these were no longer placed in the service of God or mankind. Lamech boasted of violence and of surpassing God in his revenge for a minor offense. The Tower of Babel is a classic example of distorted cultural developments—using the race's created potential for its own glory and selfish benefits.<sup>3</sup> That is largely the story of cultural developments, including science—a natural expression of created human nature through the Cultural Mandate, but much of it for purposes of control and destruction, though I would be far off the mark if I were to deny many of its positives. Like everything else in life, it is always a mixed bag of positives and negatives.

The relationship between Christianity and modern science, a major response to the Cultural Mandate, is a checkered one. As we saw in Monograph 4, Muslims seem to recognise only the negative side, namely hostility between the two. This is then paraded as a major difference between the two religions, with Islam being pro-science and Christianity against science and, thus, obscurantist.

There has indeed been a period when the development of science was retarded by the Church. It had erected false obstacles that were blocking it. The pre-Reformation Church was hamstrung by Greek philosophy and Scholasticism, not by the Bible. The Reformation cut through all of this and restored the Biblical vision of human calling, dignity of labour and cultural mandate. This led to the beginning of modern science by men who based their new interests precisely on the new Reformation insights. *Christianity became the pusher and mover of modern science.* If later a new distance

ensued, this was because the dualistic separation set in again and drove a pseudo-wedge into society between the physical and the spiritual parts of the Western dualistic scheme. Here again, the hostility between religion and science was based on that same dualism, that same straw man, not on the essential nature of the Gospel.<sup>4</sup> The Kuyperian tradition, never having accepted this dualistic base, has always regarded science and technology as natural and necessary expressions of created human nature. It has also become conscious of the negative aspects of a science and technology increasingly driven by raw secular capitalist considerations without religious input. Kuyperians hold them together.

Few Evangelicals are familiar with the Cultural Mandate. They are far more aware of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20:

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

That is a major passage that has motivated generations of missionaries to span the globe.

R. Paul Stevens of Vancouver's Regent College writes of "the tragic separation" of these two commandments from each other. "Whole Christian denominations line up," he laments, emphasizing either evangelism *or* working in the world. This "unfortunate debate in the Western world" constitutes a major fault line between Evangelicals and so-called mainline churches.<sup>5</sup> If I may use a very loose characterization, Evangelicals emphasize the Great Commission; mainliners, the Cultural Mandate; Kuyperians, both. One evangelizes and plants churches; the other does development work. It all depends on whether they emphasize the spiritual or the physical side of Western dualism. If you accept a choice between

these two, you are making a false choice, an irresponsible one. You will neglect either evangelism or social responsibility, both of which are necessary, but in relation to each other. Isolating them from each other will make for irresponsible evangelism and irresponsible nation building. Muslims have correctly identified this as a problem amongst Christians. Kuyperians have always rejected this choice and embrace both, precisely because they reject the dualism on which it is based. Their choice for wholism, for both, has turned them into an influential force out of proportion to their numbers wherever they are active, basically because its basic premises are so irrefutable—and Biblical!

The Kuyperian tradition often talks about the Kingdom of God, a Biblical term referring to the full reign of God over His creation as well as in the hearts of Christ followers. In that spirit some years ago I wrote of a dream I have long entertained for Christians and others to recognise the full scope of this Kingdom:

*I dream of a community that...recognises the full width of the Kingdom of God as co-extensive with creation and that is cognizant of the fact that there is no cranny in this universe that is excluded from this Kingdom. This implies that the Church by no means exhausts the Kingdom and that all attempts to so reduce her are not only illegitimate, but fatal, for such limits upon the Kingdom always restrict the scope of man's obedience to the King. A limited sense of the Kingdom results in withdrawing large areas of human concerns from the guiding light of the Gospel. These areas then become autonomous, secular, non-religious in men's minds.*

*On the other hand, full recognition of the extent of the Kingdom prepares the way for viewing all of man's endeavours in relation to it. Then economics and politics become areas as holy as that trodden by churchmen, for people serving in those areas are also working in obedience to the same King. Then*

*those areas will also be seen as areas where people perform their religious service to God and neighbour. Though these areas will be autonomous in relation to the Church, they will not be autonomous in relation to the Kingdom of God and its laws, but they will become as fully the concern of mission as the Church. They will receive a legitimacy of their own in mission and no longer be regarded as preparatory or as hand-maiden to evangelism.*<sup>6</sup>

Or, worse, as a diversion from the real task!

An essential component of the Cultural Mandate is human stewardship of or responsibility for creation. Another word for it is “trustee.” Walsh and Middleton write, “We may not simply rule the earth as we please, because we do not own our kingdom. Our authority is derived from God, and thus it takes on the character of stewardship.” “This strikes at the heart of our humanity. Although we are indeed lords of the earth, we are also servants of God. We are called to exercise our rule in obedient response to Yahweh’s ultimate sovereignty.”<sup>7</sup>

Christians have to admit that this management function has not always been carried out in stewardly manner. It took some time before Christians along with others became aware of the limits and dangers of careless exploitation of creation. The Bible is not an ecology textbook. Mankind learns a lot of things through experience, even through negative experiences that turn into problems, but this does not happen without the involvement of God and His Spirit. According to Isaiah 28:24-29, for example, a farmer learns his farming skills from God Himself—“His God instructs him and teaches him the right way...All this also comes from the LORD Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom.” Learning to manage the world is an ongoing process that is guided by both, the human factors of experience and history on the one hand and divine inspiration that provides

mankind with imagination and creativity on the other. Actually, these are not separate processes but so interwoven that in fact it is one single process, for the creator preferably works in and through His creation, not, usually, apart from it.

### ▲ MANKIND AS IMAGE BEARER AND VICEGERENT

A central Christian belief is that mankind is created in the image of God. We bear His image, His imprint. This concept is directly related to the Cultural Mandate and is based particularly on Genesis 1:26-27:

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

When people see each other, they are supposed to recognise something of God in each other, somewhat analogous to children reminding people of their parents.

I am aware that this language can strike Muslims as offensive, but I ask them to pay close attention here. This is not another Christian *shirkh* or heresy. This has nothing to do with physical resemblance. We do not *look* like God physically. The meaning of this image is that we become something like co-creators with Him or, rather, under Him. We become His vicegerents or, as Islam puts it, His *khalifa*, which is translated by H. Gibb and J. Kramers as "successor, vicegerent." At one time in Muslim history it was also interpreted as "shadow of God upon earth."<sup>8</sup> There is an entire Muslim theology based on this term that reminds one of the Christian concepts of "image," "trustee," "steward" and "vicegerent." Abdullahi Bego, a Nigerian, writes from Tehran, "As

a religion revealed for mankind, Islam aims to guide humanity to all imaginable levels of progress and perfection and to make man a true vicegerent of God on earth.”<sup>9</sup> Ibrahim Ayagi of Kano, wrote, “Man is on the earth to be the vicegerent of the Creator and to operate within the Divine Code prescribed for him.” The office of vicegerency is related to justice. Ayagi, in fact, almost makes the two synonymous. The “vicegerency” of the government refers to its just rule. Injustice, on the other hand, stands for its opposite. Ayagi describes capitalism as a system of unjust exploitation on behalf of the few and thus calls it “a perversion of the vicegerency.”<sup>10</sup> Shu’aibu Gimi wrote, “Muslims are God’s vicegerents, representatives on earth. They are expected to work for the actualization of all the...commandments, the most fundamental of which is sharia.”<sup>11</sup> Khalid Abubakar described man as “a vicegerent of Allah on earth.” He “should live...according to His will. He should stop being in competition with God and should not put his wisdom above the wisdom of God, the creator, nourisher and sustainer of the world, if he wants to live in peace and harmony in his micro and macro communities.”<sup>12</sup>

All of these statements sound very similar to the Christian notion of vicegerent and related concepts. We are given responsibility for this creation to develop it as His stewards. We are supposed to do that in a just and responsible way so that others will see the justice and care of God for His creation through His *khalifa* or vicegerent. Many times one comes across this concept in Islam. It gives mankind a high status. When people, especially religious people, act unjustly or irresponsibly in or with the world, they obscure their reason for existence and no one sees any glimpse of God in them. The image is dimmed, not to say erased. And that is exactly what Muslims miss in the behaviour and attitudes of Western people towards them. The West’s major cover story is indeed a cover: it covers up the image of God. Muslims have seen little or nothing that reminds them of God and His jus-

tice in Western policies and history—or in Nigerian heirs of Western Christianity.

Well, be it understood that the Kuyperian tradition has stood strong and tall in its insistence on both concepts: the image and the Cultural Mandate. These constitute our basic being and are the very reason for human existence. That's our task and our being, not merely in the Church but in the world, both the physical and the social world. The location of these principles in the very first chapter of the Bible makes it all the more amazing that so many Christians seem totally unaware of them, let alone of their importance. This tragic situation, I submit, is due to the Christian schizophrenia that is caused by the disconnect between the Western Christian scholastic world view and the testimony of the Bible itself.

Spykman insists that this divine image is “integral to our very way of being human.” It is not something added to our human nature, but it defines human nature. To be human is to be this image. It is “our very makeup, our constitution, our glory, and at the same time our high and holy calling in God's world.” It pertains “to the whole man, nothing excluded.” It “covers our human nature in its total extent and in all its part. It embraces everything we are and have and do.”<sup>13</sup> And since the image expresses the way in which we fulfill the cultural mandate, that mandate similarly expresses the identity, definition and calling of the whole man, not merely some (religious or spiritual) part of him.

### ▲ SOVEREIGNTY OF THE SPHERES —————

The term “sphere(s)” in Reformational jargon refers to the various sectors of life—the biological, the economic, the political, etc. A Kuyperian sociology has been developed that recognises various spheres in society that exist alongside each other. Each sphere has its own internal norms by which all activity within the sphere is

guided. Furthermore, all spheres are of equal standing. In other words, no hierarchy of spheres. No government or church that is higher than any other sphere.

This view of society, often referred to as “sphere sovereignty,” derives from the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, from Whom every sphere derives its own norms and functions and to Whom each is directly responsible. This view, it should be noted, is the Kuyperian answer to the Catholic hierarchical sociological principle known as “subsidiarity,”<sup>14</sup> where state and Church are seen as higher spheres than the others and thus have the right to dominate them. This Kuyperian sociology plays a dominant role throughout the system. Below follow some further explanations.

Chris Gousmett writes:

*The principle of sphere sovereignty is simply the recognition that in society there is a diversity of structures, each having their own internal structure and authority, which arise from their own special tasks. The spheres of society receive their sovereignty from God and not from the state. That means that no one sphere or bearer of authority is the highest from which all the others derive their power and right to exist. Rather, society is comprised of all the spheres together, coordinated with each other, not subordinated to any one... in a hierarchical fashion... Instead, these structures are all coordinated with each other. That is, they are jointly and individually subject to the ordering Word of God, which is immediately directing each and every structure in society. Each structure must respond in its own way to the Word of God, which is not mediated by another structure [not even the Church!], nor may it be hindered from doing so by another structure.*

*While each sphere is sovereign in its own field, and has its own norms to follow, that does not mean that it is isolated or*

*independent of the other spheres, since the norms for the sphere are norms for human life...life which is intrinsically of one piece and is subject to the one Law of God for life. While we can distinguish proper areas of responsibility and authority in life, discerning a variety of sovereign spheres which has been disclosed by human cultural formation, human beings live in all these spheres as whole beings, not as fragmented beings.*<sup>15</sup>

The question may arise as to whence these structures or spheres. Where do they come from? Are they not mere human constructs? Kuyperians answer the last question in the negative. “The various structures of society are not human constructs,” as secularism contends. “If that were the case, then they could be changed and altered or abandoned without consequences, should we so choose. Instead, we find that these structures are enduring and rooted in the indestructible order of creation.” These structures are

*established by God in the creation order. Humankind shapes and moulds these structures according to their desire (whether in sin or in obedience). The possibility of the structures of society is therefore a given, and while some of them are sometimes left latent in any particular society, we cannot create structures which are not based on the potential God has created, nor can we simply abolish such structures since they are rooted in the enduring creation order established and upheld by God.*<sup>16</sup>

Evan Runner attributes “surpassing importance” to the notion of sphere sovereignty, for it answers “the question about the nature and limits of authority; it is undoubtedly the most urgent question facing our democracies.” It sets parameters for the relationships between the different sectors of society, including the relation of these sectors to religion and including the relation of church and mosque to religion. Sphere sovereignty means both *delegated* and *limited authority*. All sovereignty is delegated by God directly to

each sphere. All human authority is restricted to each individual sphere and thus limited in scope. These are *coordinate* sovereignties. That is, they are equal to each other without any subordination or hierarchical relationship existing between them. Authority in the family is not derived from the state but from God Himself. The state therefore has no business in the family, unless the family exceeds the bounds of its sphere and interferes in another family or another sphere. Then the government steps in to restore the proper relationships. That is one of government's functions—to protect the relationships between the spheres, to ensure they do not impose themselves on each other.<sup>17</sup>

Albert Wolters says that the principle of sphere sovereignty is also known as “the principle of differentiated responsibility.” Here is his explanation of it:

*The upshot of this principle... is that no societal institution is subordinate to any other. Persons in positions of societal authority are called to implement God's ordinances directly in their own specific sphere. Their authority is delegated to them by God, not by any human authority. Consequently, they are also directly responsible to God. Church, marriage, family, corporation, state and school all stand alongside each other before the face of God. If one institution raises itself to a position of authority over the others, inserting its authority between that of God and the others, a form of totalitarianism emerges that violates the limited nature of each societal sphere. Such is the case in totalitarian states, in which political authority overrides all other authority. There the state runs the economic institutions, appoints church officials, and dictates child-rearing practices. Totalitarianism also characterized medieval Christendom; the institutional church spread its wings over the whole of European society, extending its ecclesiastical authority over education, family, business, and the state. Moreover, total-*

*itarianism threatens to become the mark of contemporary society, in which the economic authority of certain vast transnational companies has become so extensive that in certain cases it interferes with the political sovereignty of states and with the spheres of many less powerful societal institutions.<sup>18</sup>*

The principle of sphere sovereignty is of interest not merely because it is Biblically sound and helps make concrete the impact of relevant Biblical social teachings, but also because it is a strong weapon in the struggle against every form of totalitarianism, whether by the state or Church or corporation. Remember that the foundations for the Kuyperian perspective were laid in just such a struggle against liberal totalitarian government and Church. As Wolters puts it:

*Totalitarianism of whatever form is the directional perversion of the creational structures of society. The Christian is called to oppose all totalitarianism, whether of the state, Church, or corporation, because it always signifies a transgression of God's mandated societal boundaries and an invasion into alien spheres. Perversion of God's creational design for society can occur in two ways: either through perversion of the norms within a given sphere (as in case of injustice in the state, child abuse in the family, exploitative wages in the business enterprise) or through the extension of the authority of one sphere over another.*

*In both cases Christians must oppose these distortions of God's handiwork. But that opposition should always affirm the proper and right exercise of responsibility. Political totalitarianism, for example, should be opposed not by rejecting the state as such (the error of anarchism) but by calling the state back to its God-ordained task of administering public justice. Christians should not simply lament the erosion of the family, but should advocate measures enabling it to play its vital role once again.*

*Not only must they confront exploitative corporations with the challenge of a normative view of the enterprise, but they must also enact legislation that both outlaws glaring cases of corporate abuse (against the environment, for example) and offer incentives for reassuming genuine corporate responsibility.*

*Christians should actively engage in efforts to make every societal institution assume its own responsibility, warding off the interference of others. That, too, is participation in the restoration of creation and the coming of the kingdom of God.<sup>19</sup>*

Van der Walt nicely summarizes this issue of “structural pluralism” for us: It is

*rooted in the orderliness of God’s creation. A societal relationship... is not simply a human invention or contract. God, in his creational revelation, also sets norms for human society in all its diversity. Knowingly or unknowingly, the way in which man structures his society is a response to these transcendent norms.*

*Creation is a unity. The rich diversity of societal relationships which has come into being in the course of history should not, therefore, mean fragmentation. The different societal structures have to co-operate in a relation of partnership—otherwise the individual’s life disintegrates.*

*At the same time, society is not a seamless fabric. There is a rich diversity of cultural callings and fields of social activity. These possibilities were given in creation and were deployed in the course of history. In each of these societal institutions God calls us to a very specific task. Each one has its own sphere of authority. Each is equal in value to the other. Each has its own, inalienable, non-transferable...rights and duties. No societal structure may dominate another and/or use its authority or power to the detriment of another.<sup>20</sup>*

Well summarized, van der Walt. Thank you.

**▲ RELIGION IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY** —————

In Nigeria, and, indeed, almost everywhere, Christianity is identified with ecclesiastical institutions that are dominated by clerical hierarchies as if these were the sum total of the religion. It seems as if the clergy, with the Pope or some Archbishop or Patriarch at the top, own the Christian religion and are the only spokesmen for God in this world. If there is to be any Christian influence in society, to make it legitimate, it has to come via these authorities, which have to give their stamp of approval. That is God's avenue for dispensing His grace to the world, according to this scheme. John Gangwari, a lecturer at St. Augustine's Major Seminary, Jos, states, for example, "The custody and regulation of religious affairs rightly belongs to the clergy."<sup>21</sup> This is the official position of some hierarchical denominations and the undeclared, but *de facto*, policy of many Protestant churches.

That is also how popular Christian opinion would have it. Few seem to realize that Gangwari's prescription flies directly in the face of Islam and much of Protestantism with its emphasis of the priesthood of all believers. Residual elements of pre-Reformational Scholastic Christianity and of ATR have conspired to effectively cover this up in Nigeria.

The Kuyperian tradition rejects this ecclesiastical and clerical monopoly over the Christian religion. It sees these as the root of many problems. It was precisely such a monopoly that called up Kuyperian resistance to begin with. According to Goussmett, "There have been many problems caused by the concept that the Church is the institution *par excellence* where the grace of God is operative, while other institutions can experience God's grace only through the mediation of the Church."<sup>22</sup> This view hails from before the Reformation but is the implicit prevailing view today among Nigerian Christians, Protestants and Catholics alike. It receives no challenge in Nigeria because of its affinity

with the African traditional world view. It also has deep roots in the dualistic Scholasticism of the Roman Catholic Church. Though the Reformation sought to overturn this world view, it soon crept back into the Protestant Church and variations of it are now characteristic of many of them. Unfortunately, most Protestant missionaries unconsciously imbibed it.

The Kuyperian tradition distinguishes the church institution from the Body of Christ in society, that is, the community of believers that are out there in the world. "The church institution is seen [by Kuyperians] not as the primary or sole means of expression of the life of discipleship, but only as one sphere in which that discipleship is expressed."<sup>23</sup> So-called "lay Christians" out there in the world have to work out God's creational norms within the spheres in which they happen to be operative. Though the official Church may help them explore and develop these norms, the responsibility for them and the authority within them belong to the believers in each sphere, not to the Church.

The most effective way for them to do so is to create "bodies of Christ" or Christian associations within each sphere where they can pray, struggle and develop together in one Spirit. Walsh and Middleton correctly state that "we cannot image God alone." "Human culture-forming is a communal task. The Biblical motif of the 'body of Christ' also leads us in this direction." Christians need to act in unity<sup>24</sup> to overcome the terrible situation that Blamires described for us. Kuyperians, Catholics and Muslims have all responded to this need by forming various organizations at different fronts.

Here we again meet up with the consequences of sphere sovereignty. Gousmett continues:

*Because all spheres are rooted in the creation, coming from the hand of God, and because God's redemptive grace in Christ comes to human beings in the wholeness of their being, that*

*grace is worked out in everything they do. It can come to concrete expression in any kind of institution whatsoever. In the church institution, we see that grace expressed in explicitly articulated form, in worship, in proclamation of the Scriptures and discipling and teaching, in creedal affirmation, in the sacraments and in the fellowship of the saints. But that redeemed life of grace can also come to valid and full expression in politics, in the arts, in education, in leisure activities, in banking, in building construction, in short: in any conceivable human activity whatsoever. By that I mean that the new life given by Christ to the covenant people of God shapes the direction in which they mould and unfold their lives and the institutions and activities in which they are involved.<sup>25</sup>*

Kuyperians, Catholics and Muslims have long recognised that their religion must find embodiment in social structures, while Evangelicals have come aboard more recently. All these traditions have produced a lot of literature<sup>26</sup> exploring the meaning of their respective religions in various cultural sectors and have founded various institutions to embody those insights and theories. While Kuyperian structures are independent from the Church, most Catholic ones are under the Church's supervision, an arrangement Kuyperians would consider a transgression of sphere sovereignty, expanding ecclesiastical authority beyond its legitimate bounds.

## ▲ LIFE IS RELIGION

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The subject of this section often provokes resistance, especially from secularists, for whom it represents an attack on their basic definition of religion. However, the concept of life as a whole being a religious enterprise is so basic to Kuyperian thought that almost all of its writers explain it at length and will often refer to it as a key to their interpretation of the world around them.

One of these is the German-Irish American Evan Runner, to whom I have co-dedicated Monograph 1. Runner was a pioneer in the development of a Canadian Kuyperian community. His background was Evangelical, and he had every intention to serve as missionary to China. However, he ran into Kuyperians, and this changed his entire life. He moved over to become a veritable missionary for Christian philosophy, which has turned him into the most influential personality in the entire Christian Reformed Church. All around the globe you find colleges and other institutions infused with the Kuyperian spirit mediated initially through Runner. His shadow is recognizable in all the volumes of this series.

Runner was forthright and used language that sometimes offended his colleagues as well as the secular scientific community. He let them know in no uncertain terms that the vaunted neutrality and objectivity of science was a mere myth, a hoax, a ruse. It is the result of the failure of the secular school—dare I dub it “denomination?”—within the scientific community to analyze and recognize their own presuppositions, the unproven ideas they merely *believe* but think of as established, proven and needing no corroboration. Of course, postmodernism has since made its debut and provides strong support for this Kuyperian resistance. Runner presented a number of annual lectures in which he slowly unfolded Kuyperian insights to a young student audience during the formative years of the Canadian Kuyperian movement. Runner was a fiery, classic Kuyperian. Muslims would have been fascinated by him. It is telling that students involved in the protest movements of the 1960s were especially drawn to him. He was one focus of meaning and significance to them in a world of sham and emptiness.

One of Kuyper’s favourite ideas, in fact a favourite among Kuyperians in general, including Runner, is that *all of life is religion*. Though this idea is not unique to Kuyperians—remember the statement in Chapter 3 from Youth CAN: “Life is religion, politics is religion, and worship is religion and business, religion”—it is suf-

ficiently startling to both Christian dualists and the average secularist that I am going to do a bit of overkill on this one. I want to make sure readers get this important point. Muslims, I would expect, will immediately recognise the concept.

First some negative comments from Runner to clear the bushes nurtured so long by Christian dualism and modern secularism. Religion, Runner declared, is not to be confined to theology; it goes far beyond theology and takes in all sectors of life. It “is not mysticism. It is not world-flight.” It “is not a matter of God and something called the ‘individual soul.’” Neither is it “a matter of God and individuals. It is not asceticism; it is not monasticism. It is not individualistic pietism”<sup>27</sup> that talks of some “inner or personal thing or place.” There is no such special place inside of us into which we “withdraw...to abide in quiet rest, removed from the great wrestling of spirits.” In the Bible “soul or heart is not a ‘place apart’; it is the religious point of concentration of my life, where I face God, hear His Word, and from out of which I am driven...” or directed in all my relationships and associations with my neighbours “to work in the world.”<sup>28</sup>

Turning to more affirmative explanations, Runner wrote,

*Our whole life is religion. And that not only for Christian believers...but also for unbelievers. For unbelief is not described in Scripture as absence of belief, but as misdirected belief. Religion...is man's ineradicable situation: he has been created “before God” and must render an account of his doings and ways. It is the role of the Word that comes from God to illumine our hearts and direct our goings. But, likewise, men who lack this Light and Direction are prompted, by reason of their (now perverted) religious nature, to do for themselves what that Word of God ought to do for them. Man acts in this religious way of demanding the full sense of things because of his having been cre-*

*ated by God a religious being. He cannot escape his nature. Man wants to know the Truth, and the Truth is not a lot of separate pieces of knowledge that can be arrived at analytically. As religious being, man does not just analyze limited states of affairs that are immediately presented to him. He orders or places or locates them, gives them a meaningful setting... Fallen man, being a religious being... never just "accepts the facts," but rather invents, finds a way to put the facts so that he will be safe without God. In this way, apostate man appropriates to his own heathen pistical fantasy the role that the Word of God really has, and thus from the beginning places himself in a world where the relations are (imagined) other than they really are. He lives in the Lie. Human analysis always takes place within the context of the Lie or of the Truth.*

Runner further stated, "Human life, if it is to have a firm direction, always requires a living faith, and the fundamental debate of our time is one about which faith—whether faith is recognised as such or not makes no difference here—is to direct our goings by taking possession of the 'beginnings' of our lives, *viz.* our hearts." Again, "I made an effort to elucidate the peculiar faith of modern times that is known as scientism, the belief in science as the avenue of revelation of the Truth..."<sup>29</sup>

Modern man kids himself when he pretends that all he does is to recognise facts around him and then objectively studies how to order them in a rational way and thus arrive at the truth of things. This, contested Runner, is not the way things really go: "Man is a *religious* being." From the beginning he seeks to understand the world and its coherence. He does so either on basis of true religion or on basis of a "religious distorting suppression of it." Man responds either in obedience or in disobedience. He does this in his sensual life as well as in his logical life of reason. In this and all else

“he does and thinks, he betrays that he is a *religious* being. That is what we mean when we speak of ‘heart’ in the Scriptural sense. *All* of the issues of life are from out of his heart.”<sup>30</sup> But I am already anticipating the next section.

Paul Marshall, in the context of the Canadian constitutional struggle, warned that the occasion called for taking stock of Canada’s religious inheritance because of its central place.

*The widest and most basic dimension of our place and task in the world is a religious one. This is true even for people not conventionally called religious. In the past few hundred years within the secular-rationalized world of the West, religion has often been assumed to be the domain only of certain types of people—religious people. Only certain types of activities, like prayer or worship, are considered religious activities.*

*Though this notion of religion is common in the West, it is by no means universal. It is in fact quite sectarian and bound up with Western culture. It is often used to ghettoize religion. Religion should properly be understood in a much broader way.*

*In seeking to expand our understanding of religion, we cannot restrict it to questions about God. Indeed, very few of the traditional world religions are monotheistic. Some varieties of Buddhism are in fact atheistic...*

*Sociologists of religion have frequently pointed out that political movements like fascism or communism, which attempt to articulate an ordered understanding of the whole world, bear all the marks of religion. Indeed, nearly all states and societies seek to understand and express themselves in terms of ultimate meaning. Words like “freedom,” “democracy” and “human rights,” when considered in any depth, reflect a particular understanding of the nature of human beings and their place in the world. Their meaning, most basically, is religious.*

*Religion refers to the deepest commitment and deepest identity of a person or group. Hence, the opinion that one may discuss constitutions, politics, education, or sex without any reference to God is as much a religious view as the opinion that we are responsible to God in all we do. An expanded concept of religion allows us to take account of the fact that our lives reflect and are rooted in a particular view of the meaning of life: of the nature of society; of what human beings really are; and of their essential responsibilities, whether to self, society, or another source.*

*If religion is particularly concerned with the roots of our lives, then we need to pay special attention to its influence on our culture. Indeed, the root of culture is religion, in the sense that the basic patterns of our society are shaped by our basic commitment and belief in life, which is, in turn, our religion. Our "god" is that in which we place our faith and trust, and our culture expresses what lies in our heart.<sup>31</sup>*

Marshall wrote a particularly clear explanation of this point under the heading "Life is Religion" that I reproduce here:

*All [human] action in God's world can be and should be a service to God and our neighbours. There is therefore no specific area of life which we can call "religious" as though other areas of life were not "religious." To put it briefly, we may say that "life is religion," that our religion is what we believe, think, say and do each...moment of our lives. As...[someone] remarked, "I can tell more about your faith from reading your cheque book than your prayer book." Everything we do is religious in that it is done in faithfulness or in unfaithfulness to God.*

*We all, all of humankind, are made in the image of God. That image, though stained and twisted by sin, still distinguishes each human person. All people participate in the cultural man-*

*date, either in obedience or disobedience to God...human life is itself the imaging of God within the creation.*

*This means that we should never consider a person, a corporation, a book or a government as “non-religious.” They are always religious in that they reflect either a turning toward God or a turning away from God in their activities. Of course, they may not know and they may even deny it—they usually do, in fact—but it still remains true. Everybody serves somebody. If people do not serve God, then they will serve something else. The “something else” that people serve is what the Bible calls “idols.”<sup>32</sup>*

When people reject God and use alternative theories to explain reality, they have not turned non-religious or become unbelievers. They now will turn to something within creation, a thing or a theory, and elevate that to the status of key to knowledge. Since ancient times this practice has been known as idolatry. Idolatry is defined by Bob Goudzwaard, a renowned European economist, as “an ideology which treats something of *some* value as if it were of *ultimate* value.” Idolatry is the practice or world view that regards one aspect of creation as the central key to wisdom or power and elevates or absolutizes that aspect above all others.<sup>33</sup> Most “-isms” are expressions of such idolatry.

## ▲ THE HEART: THE INTEGRATING AGENT —————

The subject of religion is closely tied up with that of the heart in the Kuyperian tradition. In fact, one can hardly talk of the one without the other. Kuyper himself wrote that “not the head but the heart is the means to knowledge.” By “heart” he meant “not the [physical] organ of feeling, but that place in a man where God works, and from out of which He exercises an influence also upon the head and the brain. This recovery of the scriptural meaning of

‘heart’ is one element that simply cannot be missed if we are to understand...what the Bible means by religion.”<sup>34</sup>

N. S. McPetridge was a Calvinist influenced by the American theologian Charles Hodge, and thus a Calvinist of a different stripe. He began his book as follows:

*There is nothing which so constantly controls the mind of a man, and so intensely affects his character, as the views which he entertains of the Deity. These take up their abode in the inmost sanctuary of the heart, and give tone to all its powers and colouring to all its actions. Whatever the forms and activities of the outward life, as a man “thinks in his heart, so is he.”<sup>35</sup> In the words of Old Testament Proverbs 4:20-23, “My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man’s whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the well-spring of life.”*

As I wrote elsewhere:

*The heart is an aspect of Biblical truth that militates against the compartmentalization of faith and reason and of religion and life. The Bible posits a basic unity to a person that has its concentration point in what is frequently called “heart.” The Bible especially uses the term to refer to man in his “concentrated unity.” The Bible says, “Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23). The Lord looks first of all at a man’s heart (I Samuel 16:7), because that is the centre of a person where all other issues are basically decided, both good and evil. “My heart instructs me” and that instruction comes from God, according to Psalm 16:17. God tries men’s “mind and heart” (Acts 1:24; 15:89; Luke 16:15; Romans 8:27; Revelations 2:23). No wonder*

*then that the speaker in Proverbs 23:26 asks his son to give him his heart, for once that heart has been captured, all else will follow, unless a person decides to compartmentalize himself and live in dualistic fashion. In the last situation, the heart is divided. What a man is in his heart will influence all his works, including his political and economic works. If that heart is fully committed to God, all his works will thus be committed. If some other loyalty has captured the heart, one's works will take him into a different direction. That heart is the seat of religion and drives one's mind and reason.<sup>36</sup>*

This insight dethrones reason from its central place as in Rationalism and secularism. Though reason continues to play a central role in the Kuyperian tradition to such an extent that some other Christians accuse it of intellectualism, the heart has taken over the throne with reason sitting at its right hand as its servant. It is now no longer the case as Emmanuel Kant would have it in the title of his book, *Religion within the Bounds of Reason*. Rather, it is as Nicholas Wolterstorff from Yale humorously countered Kant with the reverse title, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion!* For even our reason is guided and empowered by the positions we have taken in our hearts, according to the loyalty to which our hearts commit us.

The concept expressed in Wolterstorff's title hits the average secularist right on the nose, or, in terms of this discussion, right in the heart. Only a few days ago, I participated in a discussion about our place in this universe. *The discussion was billed as open-ended.* My co-discussants, all secularists, came up with widely different answers each one had concocted for himself. I identified myself as a Christian and suggested we all had something in common, namely that we all based our answers to the question at hand on belief, with them basing their response on belief in reason, while my belief was based on revelation. One participant immediately lost his temper

and asked me what business I had even being in this group. From that point on, the atmosphere was charged with hostility, on the edge of rudeness, with the leader now focussing on making me see the folly of my unreasonableness. So much for openness. My questioning their faith in reason was equivalent to challenging a Muslim about Muhammad or a Christian about Jesus.

### ▲ CLOSING REMARKS

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This is not the time or place for conclusions. The discussion continues in the next chapter. My concern in this chapter has been to introduce a number of components of the Kuyperian perspective that are based on the world view described in Chapter 5 and that form the foundation for certain political insights that are summarized in Chapter 7. Most Nigerian Christians will not be familiar with them, at least not in any depth. Muslim readers will likely have been caught by surprise at the parallels between Islam and this perspective. Both parties would do well to explore them as a possible improved platform from which to launch into more cordial and co-operative relationships.

This emphasis on surprising parallels does not erase other differences that are even more basic such as the respective religions' views on the Trinity, on Christ and Muhammad or on the human condition or the way of salvation. These differences are profound and will remain. They will prevent the two from giving each other full recognition, let alone become one. Nevertheless, as long as Nigeria remains one country with so many adherents of both religions, some way has to be found to enable them to live and work together. I believe these Kuyperian perspectives will make it easier to do so than the current bifurcation and hostility that marks their relationships. It is in that spirit that I introduce this perspective to both Christians and Muslims.

## ▲ NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> R. Stevens, 9/2001, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> J. Boer, 1984, pp. 150-151.

<sup>3</sup> J. Boer, 1984, p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> J. Boer, "Science without Faith..." pp. 85-89. This essay will be available on the *Companion CD* as well as on the Web site [www.SocialTheology.com](http://www.SocialTheology.com). It provides a succinct history of the relationship of science to Christianity.

<sup>5</sup> R. Stevens, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> J. Boer, 1979, pp. 486, 432ff.

<sup>7</sup> Walsh and Middleton, p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> H. Gibb and J. Kramers, 1961, pp. 236-240.

<sup>9</sup> A. Bego, "The Sharia Debate..."

<sup>10</sup> I. Ayagi, 22 Dec/95.

<sup>11</sup> S. Gimi, 1 Dec/99.

<sup>12</sup> K. Abubakar, 1995, p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> G. Spykman, 1992, pp. 223-224.

<sup>14</sup> M. Kukah, 1999, pp. 236-237. Kukah's discussion is the only one I have found in the Nigerian context, though the concept plays a dominant role in Catholic social thought. Kuyperians and Catholics are the only two Western Christian traditions that have given the world ordered sociological perspectives. The first is egalitarian; the second, hierarchical. The first is based on the direct sovereignty of God; the second, on the tradition of Scholasticism that is associated with Thomas Aquinas. They represent two radically different visions for society. In the English-speaking world, they came together at a conference in 1998 at Princeton Theological Seminary, where the two traditions were celebrated together, without glossing over the differences.

<sup>15</sup> C. Gousmett, 1999, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> C. Gousmett, 1999, pp. 34, 52.

<sup>17</sup> H. E. Runner, 1970, pp. 134, 148.

<sup>18</sup> A. Wolters, 1985, pp. 82-83.

<sup>19</sup> A. Wolters, 1985, pp. 83-84.

<sup>20</sup> B. van der Walt, 1994, pp. 280-281.

<sup>21</sup> J. Gangwari, p. 50.

<sup>22</sup> C. Gousmett, 1999, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> C. Gousmett, 1999, p. 34.

<sup>24</sup> B. Walsh and J. Middleton, 1984, p. 87.

<sup>25</sup> C. Gousmett, 1999, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Some of that literature will be found in the bibliographies of the volumes in this series.

<sup>27</sup> For pietism, see J. Boer, 1979, pp. 446-449; 1984, p. 126.

<sup>28</sup> H. Runner, 1962, pp. 165-166.

<sup>29</sup> H. Runner, 1962, pp. 148-150.

<sup>30</sup> H. Runner, 1962, p. 180.

<sup>31</sup> P. Marshall, 1992, pp. 5-6.

<sup>32</sup> P. Marshall, 1984, p. 77.

<sup>33</sup> C. Gousmett, 1999, p. 18.

<sup>34</sup> H. Runner, 1970, p. 144.

<sup>35</sup> N. McFetridge, 1882, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> J. Boer, 1984, p. 157.

