

Many Christians and certainly all secularists see religion as one department or segment of life and culture alongside all the others. There is an economic segment of life, a political one and then there is religion. Some people work in the economic segment of culture; others, in the religious segment and they are known as clergy. In fact, there are Christians who by definition reject a wholistic religion as genuine religion. Sam Solomon, a former Arabian imam who converted to Christianity and for whom I have the highest respect, learned his Christian lesson very well. At a conference organized by ECP Centre in 2008, Solomon urged attendees to understand that Islam is not exclusively a religion. Rather, he said, it is an “all-encompassing system.” “It is a political system. It is an economic system. It is a sociological system. It is a comprehensive way of looking at things that includes all aspects of life.”² So, according to this brother, only part of Islam is religion, while there is a large slice of life, most of life in fact, that can be carved out as politics, economics, sociology, etc., but that is not religion. It is something else. Solomon’s view is the very opposite of the perspective that shapes this series. It is all these components together that make the Islamic religion what it is. With all of his fiery devotion to God, Solomon has been taken in by the rawest form of dualism one finds among Christians, the very thing this series is trying to help Christians overcome.

The Kuyperian perspective places religion not alongside other segments as just another department of life, but regards it as underlying all other aspects or departments of life. To be sure, there is a religious sector to life that we associate with churches, mosques and temples and that is a very important aspect of religion. Those are often the mechanisms that keep the fires of religion burning. But the essence of religion is not found in ecclesiastical or mosque organizations that stand alongside other cultural institutions; the essence is a heart-based commitment underlying and shaping everything else.

Egbert Schuurman, a retired Dutch professor of Kuyperian philosophy, put it this way:
Let me be clear about what I mean by the term “religion.” When the media pay

¹ Worldview Collaborative was a small multi-worldview association of Christians, Humanists/Atheists, Muslim, Buddhist and an occasional adherent of Hinduism. Its aim was to re-insert the teaching about religion in the Public Schools of BC to help citizens understand each other. The society fizzled out due to the death of some members and its inability to interest the wider community.

²ECP Centre, 20 Oct/2008. Vol. 8-2. The footnotes of this article depend on the bibliography of the volume of the series referenced in footnote 1. You will have to go there for the complete data.

attention to “religion” they usually treat it as one of many factors or variables in human life, distinct from, say, sports, politics or science. However, if we look carefully at religious communities and various types of societies around the world we can see that religion is not just a typical function among others but is, rather, the root from which the different branches of life sprout and grow and from which they are continually nourished. Religion is of radical and integral importance : it concerns the deepest root of human existence and integrates human life into a coherent whole.³

According to Kuyperian philosopher, Evan Runner, with the heart at the centre of our existence and the seat of our faith and commitments, “our whole life is religion.”⁴ In fact an entire *Festschrift* dedicated to him has that as its title: *Life is Religion*.⁵ The educational creed of the predecessor of the Toronto-based ICS begins or began with the assertion that “Human life in its entirety is religion.”⁶

Because this is such a foreign notion to some and calls up resistance in others, let me devote another paragraph or two to the same subject. [Repetition, I am told, is of the essence of education.] We speak of different areas or aspects of life and usually consider religion to be one of them. If you think of religion as an institution like church, mosque or temple, then religion is indeed one segment among others. Some describe the church or mosque as “*institute*,” while there is also the church or mosque as “*organism*,” a subject on which I expand under another heading within this chapter. This refers to the living, pulsating community holding a religion, worldview or belief system that constitutes the essence of religion by which they are guided throughout their lives. The essence is that worldview and faith underlying all of life. The institute may be in the hands of some clergy or imam, but not the social aspect of this worldview/religion that is part of everyone’s deepest being, in fact, the core, and gives shape to society. The same distinction can also be expressed as the “central ecclesiastical *institute*” over against the “social *organism*.”

This perspective is similar to that of classic Islam. As Mohamad Rachid, a Vancouver area imam and university lecturer, recently put it, in Islam all activities constitute worship of

³E. Schuurman, 20 Sep/2007.

⁴H. E. Runner, 1962, p. 148. For information about Runner himself, see J. Boer, 2006, vol. 5, pp. 195-198.

⁵H. Vander Goot (ed.), 1981.

⁶P. Schrottenboer, 1964, p. 9.

God. Our sole purpose is to worship God in all we do--a classic Kuyperian line.⁷ Failure to worship God in and through the marketplace and all other cultural sectors hollows out the meaning of our ecclesiastical liturgies, except in so far as these aim at reviving our marketplace worship.⁸

Paul Marshall wrote succinctly on this foundational view of religion. Allow me a few quotations:

Religion refers to the deepest commitment and deepest identify of a person or group.

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.

...religion is particularly concerned with the roots of our lives.

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 cultures expresses what lies in our heart.

Under the caption “Life is Religion,” Marshall re-affirmed the basic Christian assertion that

All [human] action in God’s world can be and should be 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.

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.

⁷M. Rachid, 10 Sep/2008. He repeated it on 24 Sep/2008. For a Kuyperian version see J. Boer, 1992, ch. 15, “Towards an Alternative Christian Style of Investment.”

⁸Of course, not everyone is in the marketplace. Some are too young, too handicapped or too old to be there. For such as cannot go beyond these liturgies they are meaningful, for as John Milton (1608-1674) put it in his sonnet “On His Blindness,” “They also serve who only stand and wait.”

*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.”*⁹

By repeating some materials from Volume 5, I intend to lure you to get hold of that volume and read further on the subject of the nature of religion and related issues. I cannot repeat all of that here. But I do refer you in the same book to the Kuyperian perspective on the centrality of the heart in human life and religion. “Heart” here does not mean “the [physical] organ of feeling, but that [mysterious] place in a man where God works, and from out of which He exercises an influence also upon the head and the brain.”¹⁰ As the King James version of Proverbs 23: 7 says of man, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”

Here again that all-pervasive Kuyperian parallel to Islam. Lumbard summarized the anti-Fundamentalist views of the late Indian Muslim scholar Maulana A. A. Thanvi, who posited that the root of all problems is to be found in “the illness of the heart.” Commented Lumbard, “From the perspective of traditional Islam, which Thanvi represents, it is only when the heart has been treated that political transformation can occur.” Musa Ibrahim, a law student at BUK, advised Muslims to “strive hard to Islamize our hearts....”¹¹ It is a sound we have heard before from both sides.¹² It is a core component of both perspectives.

Continued discussion along this line in Volume 5, leads to the following surprising insight. It “dethrones reason from its central place....” Though reason plays such a central place in Kuyperian thought that some accuse it of intellectualism, the heart has taken over the throne with reason sitting at its right as its servant. Emmanuel Kant wrote his famous book, Religion within the Bounds of Reason. Nicholas Wolterstorff, a retired Kuyperian professor from Yale, countered it humorously with his own book under the title Reason within the Bounds of Religion. Right on! Beneath Wolterstorff’s title and in his book is his Kuyperian contention that secularism is not a matter of reason over religion or faith. Secularism itself is a belief in human autonomy and our ability to solve our problems rationally on our own. It is a belief system that is not subject to proof or verification anymore than are the tenets of Christianity and Islam. Kuyperianism along with Islam concludes from the above and some other features of secularism

⁹P. Marshall, 1992, pp. 5-6; 1984, p. 77. J. Boer, 2006, vol. 5, pp. 199-200.

¹⁰H. Runner, 1970, p. 144. J. Boer, 2006, vol. 5, pp.200-203.

¹¹M. I. Umar, 7 Oct/2005.

¹²J. Lumbard, 2004, p. xvii. For more details about Thanvi, see Fuad S. Naeem, pp, 94-112. J. Boer, 2006, vol. 5, pp. 196-203. See also Appendix 1, pp. 18-19 xxxx.

*that it does indeed have all the trappings of religion, but for that you need to return to Volume 5.*¹³

Religion has its seat in the deepest core of a human being. You cannot escape it. We all believe. We all base our lives on our deepest values, often hidden to ourselves. Hence, both Islam and Kuypers define the human race as *homum religionum*. Allow me a revision of a revered historical declaration: “I believe; therefore I am.” Some define our race primarily in terms of rationality, the biological, sexual or economic. As important as these features are to human life, as already explained in Part 2 of Volume 5 and other places, in this series I define the human race at its core as a race of believers.

The importance of these perspectives in terms of Christian-Muslim relations is that Christians along with secular Muslims cannot get away with resorting to secularism as a neutral platform where the two religions can meet in peace. When you try that, you have merely jumped from one boat into another.

Secularism is as subjective and faith-based as all the other worldviews or religions.

The other worldviews are as rational as is secularism. In all cases it is reason motivated by the deeper loyalties, commitments and beliefs way down deep in the “heart.”

Under the influence of secularism, many Christians have lost this comprehensive view of religion and have reduced it to a mere slice of life that concentrates on the church as institute and on private life. This makes it difficult for them to understand the more Kuypersian and Islamic wholistic views of religion as spanning all of life. However, this wholistic perspective is not as exotic as you may think; it is actually held by a wide range of people. Though Animists may not be well represented among writers and scholars, the entire global range of Animism has this wholism at its very core. Sub-Saharan Africans and North American Aboriginals, known variously as “Indians” or as “First Nations” in Canada, may never have heard of each other before the days of “exploration” and colonialism, but both have this wholism at the core of their religio-cultures. It is true not only of these ancient cultures but even of some people in the midst of Western secular academia share it. Canadian ethicist Mark Wexler of Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, writing about spirituality in the modern workplace, asserted that

¹³J. Boer, 2006, vol. 5, p. 149

“whether workers and managers know it, they’re always living out spiritual principles.” Wexler pointed out the subconscious beliefs underpinning what we do. He defined “spirituality broadly as those values that give all of us, including atheists, a sense of meaning and purpose.”¹⁴

Welcome to a very large crowd of billions of people!

¹⁴D. Todd, 11 Aug/2007.