

He's No Ordinary Missionary, This Kuperian Evangelist¹

Bert Witvoet

I hadn't seen John since 25 years ago when he and his wife, Fran, and son, Kevin, visited our family in Woodbridge, Ont. Here he was again, this time alone, back from Nigeria, where he has been serving Christian Reformed World Missions for all these years.

He is *Doctor of Philosophy* John (Jan) H. Boer now. But he looks and acts just as unpretentious as he always has.

John and Fran have lived and worked in Nigeria since 1966. They have a son and daughter besides Kevin.

Originally from Port Alberni, B.C., John initially worked for World Missions as a pastor and evangelist trainer. His sending church is Second CRC in Highland, Indiana. He is a Dutch-Groninger-born, Canadian-raised, American-sent evangelist to Nigeria.

It didn't take long before John's interest in social issues led to his being loaned to the Institute of Church and Society, an interdenominational social action organization in Jos, Nigeria.

A Nigerian Abraham

John was and is a missionary with a Kuyperian vision. He strongly believes that the church should try to reach out to urban as well as rural Nigeria, and that it should help develop ways of integrating faith and life, faith and culture, faith and healing.

He betrays his Kuyperian focus in books like *Missions: Heralds of Capitalism or Christ?*; *Caught in the Middle* (which deals with investments and corporations); and *The Church and the External Debt*.

¹ CC, 1995. Witvoet was Editor of CC. Information about the actual date of the CC edition has gotten lost in the shuffle of international moves.

In addition he has translated a work by Abraham Kuyper, entitled *You Can Do Greater Things Than Christ* (based on John 14:12), and has published material on holistic health care and a book of daily meditations called *The Prophet Moses For Today* which contains 366 “social meditations.”

Muslims talk Reformed

Boer left the Institute in 1994 and has since that time been teaching part time at the Theological College of Northern Nigeria, a school of which Dr. Harry R. Boer (no relation) was the founding principal. John also works with the department of education of the Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria.

At the moment, too, he’s writing on Christian/Muslim relations from a holistic perspective.

“Muslims are seen by Christians as wanting to Islamize all of Nigeria, ‘to dip the Koran into the Atlantic Ocean,’ as the saying goes,” says Boer. “But Christians are seen by Muslims as trying to Christianize Nigeria.”

The situation is volatile. Boer sees these “two huge blocks of 40 to 45 million poised to explode any time.”²

The Christian response to the pressure is to say that Nigeria needs a secular government. But Muslims reject that, says Boer, because “they talk just like Reformed people, saying that all of life is religion.”

In his current book Boer is trying to show that Christianity is equally an all-encompassing way of life and that secularism does not provide a neutral place where Christians and Muslims can meet.

A holistic solution

Boer has been in North America since May for what World Missions calls “home service.” While John is staying in Grand Rapids for a few more months, Fran has returned to Nigeria to continue teaching at Hillcrest School in Jos. Their son Kevin

² In 2015, the year this document is republished on this website, the numbers are more like 80 million each!

works in Botswana; their daughter Cynthia is married and lives in Michigan; their son Wiebe is finishing his education at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

During John's visit to St. Catharines, I showed him the two ways in which Lake Erie and Lake Ontario are linked by the Welland Canal system and its locks, and Niagara Falls. We watched a 222-meter laker enter Lock 3 and be lowered about 10 meters. Since ocean-going ships had a hard time negotiating the Falls, the Welland Canal with its eight water stairs (locks) had to be built, I told him.

He understood. Missionaries understand things like nature not co-operating all the time, especially human nature. But being a true Kuyperian, Boer believes that the only way to solve nature's resistance is to co-operate with it in another way. I'm sure he saw the Welland Canal as a holistic operation in which the force of water combines with the ingenuity of humans to bring prosperity to North America and honour to God.