

MISSIONARY DUALISM VERSUS THE WHOLISTIC WORLDVIEW OF THE BIBLE:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MISSION AND COLONIALISM IN NORTHERN
NIGERIA (BASED ON A RECENT CASE STUDY OF THE SUM-BRITISH BRANCH

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In my recent study of the relationship between the SUM (Sudan United Mission – British Branch) and colonialism in Northern Nigeria,¹ my basic concern was the question as to how one can account for the strong dualism present in the Nigerian Christian Community.

1. Dualism in Church History

The dualism with which we are concerned has two aspects:

First, it holds that the spiritual is more important than the material. God, it is thought, is more interested in spiritual things than in the material world and man serves God more truly when he engages in spiritual (church) work than when he is in business or politics. This idea has a long tradition in the church, but it is not derived from the Bible. It is the heritage of *pagan* Greek philosophy adopted by the church in its early post-biblical history. It is an idea that goes contrary to the doctrine of creation, which, the Bible tells us is very good.

Secondly, dualism holds that there are two basic sources of authority for the Christian. The Bible has authority in the realm of the spiritual, but in the rest of human affairs one is to be guided primarily by human reason. In politics, economics, culture in general we do not need the Bible. Here all men, irrespective of their religion, share a common reason that is sufficient a guide, though the Bible may be used as a corrective when that common reason *obviously* leads man away from Scriptural paths. This notion of dual authority is a form of semi-pelagianism that does not do justice to the radical Biblical notion of the total fall of man, a fall that also had profound effect on human reason. Dualism thus refers to a hierarchy of the spiritual over the material and to a reduced sense of Biblical authority in human affairs.

¹ John H. Boer, *Missionary Messengers of Liberation in a Colonial Context: A Case Study of the Sudan United Mission*. Amsterdam: Rodopi Editions, 1979. Distributors in Nigeria: Daystar Press, Ibadan. 630 pp. Price N25.

This dualism expresses itself in various ways. It says that business is business. It claims that the Bible has little or nothing to teach us about economic concerns such as property, profits and income, the purpose of business and labour. The Bible has little or nothing to say to us in politics – take the sharia debate, for example. Religion must be kept out of politics at all costs, for that is a secular realm.

2. African Traditional Religion and the Bible are not dualistic.

Traditionally, we are told, *Africa is “wholistic.”* i.e. religion and culture were so intertwined that one could not separate them into neat compartments. Though Muslims may not always be true to their religion, basically *Islam is also “wholistic.”* This came out especially in the newspaper discussions about the Sharia. Similarly, *the Bible is “wholistic”* (i.e. body and soul belong together as a “whole” unit. With all these “wholistic “ forces surrounding us, how can one explain the strong strain of dualism in the Nigerian Christian community? It was felt that a key to this problem was to be found in the attitude Western missionaries took with respect to colonialism.