

Catalytic Issues in Religion Journalism in Nigeria: The Past and the Present

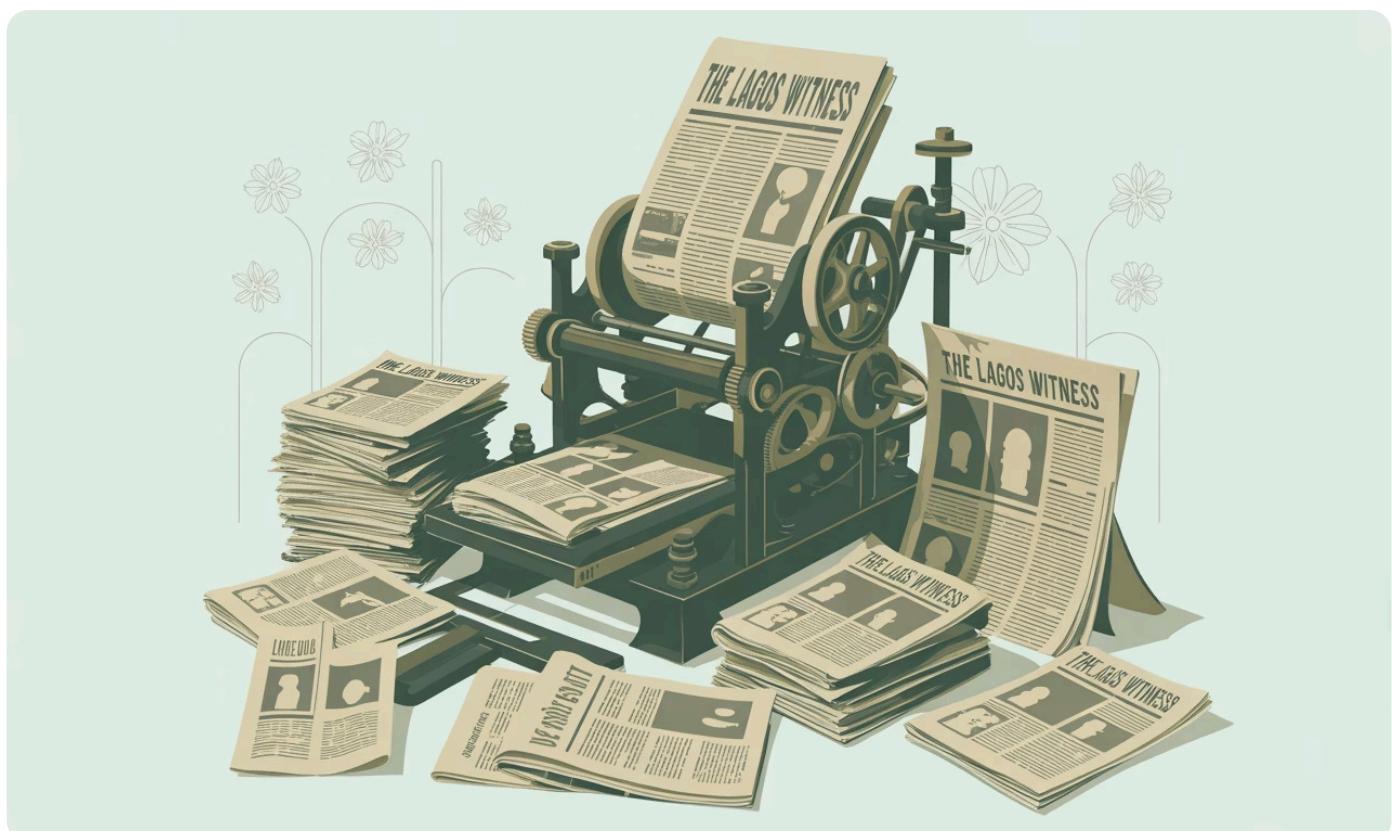
RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

The time line chosen for this study to assess and analyse issues in religion journalism as portrayed in Nigeria print media is the period 1859 to the present. The study begins from the birth year of Rev. Townsend's "Iwe Irohin" the newspaper that pioneered Christian missionary journalism and journalism of general interest in the country. Historical method and archival/documentary research methods were used for gathering data from primary and secondary sources; the study findings reveal that early Christian missionaries depended on printed matters and newspaper to spread evangelical messages, and to achieve total conversion of the people to Christian faith. It was also found that their generational successors in Christian evangelism work copied the early missionaries print media communication models to sustain and improve religion journalism by establishing newspapers, magazines and newsletters. It concludes that Christian missions in Nigeria should invest in quality newspaper and magazines by hiring trained journalists to handle their newspapers for revenue generation from advertisements and to establish newspaper selling posts within and outside their Church locations.

Study Period

Historical analysis from 1859 to the present, beginning with Rev. Townsend's "Iwe Irohin"

Methodology

Historical method and archival/documentary research methods using primary and secondary sources

Key Finding

Early missionaries established print media models that continue to influence contemporary religious journalism

Keywords: Religion journalism, Christian faith, Newspapers, Magazines, Propagation.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

When Christian missionaries began their evangelical work to convert Nigerians from traditional beliefs to Christianity, they utilised print media among their communication instruments. Their printing presses produced religious booklets, tracts, and hymnal books, and they also translated the Holy Bible into local languages, assisted by Native Catechists and ordained Nigerian Priests, for the educational and religious benefit of converts and others.

European missionaries were posted to Nigeria in the 18th and 19th centuries for numerous reasons, chiefly to civilise the people through Christian religion, provide access to European civilisation and literacy development. Their objectives also included ending rampant slavery and human sacrifices in some rural communities, establishing schools and vocational centres for training Nigerians, and promoting legitimate trades for the country's economic development.

01

18th-19th Century Missions

European missionaries arrived with goals of civilisation through Christian religion, literacy development, and ending slavery practices.

02

Print Media Introduction

Missionaries established printing presses to produce religious booklets, tracts, hymnal books, and local language Bible translations.

03

Educational Infrastructure

Schools and vocational centres were established for training purposes and promoting legitimate trades for economic development.

This study assesses religious journalism practices introduced by legendary missionaries, tracing their development from that period to date. It is a historical account of Nigeria's Christian religion journalism, detailing how newspapers were used for Christian propagation from the 19th century and remain relevant today. While early religious journalism was limited to Abeokuta, Lagos, and Calabar in the 19th century, today's Christian denominations have modernised it, dedicating religious publications to publicising Christian faith, church issues, and other religion-related matters.

Many scholars and press historians agree that the press, as the fourth estate of the realm, plays an important role in nation-building's political, social, and cultural processes. Beyond its traditional roles of informing society about occurrences, educating members on societal issues for informed decisions, and entertaining, the press also acts as a societal watchdog. Through news dissemination, features, comments on public interest issues, and editorials, the press influences governments to be accountable to the populace.

Be that as it may, the press in Nigeria has been playing these roles since it made its first appearance in Nigeria through the efforts of Christian missionaries in 1859, 1885, and 1886 respectively. In its involvement in religious propagation and religious reportage, particularly beginning from these periods, the newspaper press has distinguished itself as an influential social institution and a powerful one for that matter in the process of civilisation, socio-cultural, socio-political, and religious development of Nigeria.

The arrival of Christian missionaries planting their doctrines in some parts of Nigeria, especially in Southern parts of the country from the 1840s, was calculated and assumed to be responsible for changing the native cultural civilisation to Western cultural civilisation, a development which brought with it the introduction of Christian religious journalism through the establishments of their newspapers. The phenomena of the introduction of Christian faith and the establishment of newspapers with emphasis on religious propagation has been acclaimed by some historians as the catalyst of newspaper journalism which led to the promotion and development of Christian religious journalism among contemporary Christian missions to date.

Adesoji (2007) observes that as the fourth estate of the realm, the newspaper press has played important roles in the task of nation-building, especially during colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. One cannot but share this view when one considers the role that the press played and continues to play in the promotion of religious doctrines from that British, colonial period to date. The emergence of the first newspaper in Abeokuta, South Western Nigeria in 1859, and subsequent publications of religious-inclined vernacular newspapers in Calabar, then Eastern Nigeria, in 1885 and 1886, marked the commencement of publishing religious news and other church activities in the pages of the early Christian mission newspapers.

Two reverend gentlemen, Rev. Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and Rev. Masterton Hope Waddell of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland (later Presbyterian Church of Nigeria), have been credited with pioneering efforts which produced the first set of newspapers that subtly emphasised religion and its deliberate propagation. These newspaper publications of the 1850s and 1890s established by the two missionaries opened the vista in the history of the press in Nigeria. Their religious journalism initiatives are therefore worth the while to ascertain whether those efforts could be assumed to have influenced subsequent continuity of religious journalism in Nigeria since that historic period.

Pioneer Publications

- Rev. Henry Townsend's "Iwe Irohin" (1859) - Abeokuta
- Rev. Hope Waddell's newspapers (1885-1886) - Calabar
- First religious journalism initiatives in Nigeria

Geographic Coverage

- Initially limited to Abeokuta, Lagos, and Calabar
- Southern Nigeria focus during 19th century
- Gradual expansion across the country

Some religious newspapers as being published, presently, dwell heavily on partisan politics of the polity, rather than being made the powerful instrument for propagation of religious tolerance and promoting unity in a country that is rife with religious crises. Though some scholars, historians, researchers, and journalists have previously done some marvelous works in articles, book chapters and lectures on the Nigerian press, Christian, and on the role played by missionaries in the establishments of the pioneer newspapers in the country, those aspects of religious journalism, how it was used by the pioneers to achieve their religious doctrinal objectives, and how it is now being applied in contemporary society to promote religious tolerance, unity, and social development, demand a new thinking.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Though many studies have been conducted by many scholars on the history of the Nigerian Press, some aspects of the history have not been fully treated, historiographically. Sunday (2008) did an extensive study on the "Historical context of media development," though he treated many phases in the history of the Nigeria Press, his work did not focus on religion journalism throughout the period of his study. Abayomi (2003) studied the Nigerian Media; past, present and the future, but focused mainly on women and their role in the Nigerian media. Ajibade (2012) examined the Nigerian Media and Democracy but directed his attention mainly to the role of the Nigerian media and the survival of democracy.

Many Nigerian authors have written many chapters and published some books on the history of the Nigerian Press, for example: Omu (1978), Coker (1968), Uche (1989), Akinfeleye and Okoye (2003), and Ciboh (2007). These works include *Press and Politics in Nigeria* (Omu, 1978), *Landmarks of the Nigerian Press* (Coker, 1968), *Mass Media and Politics in Nigeria* (Uche, 1989), *Issues in Nigeria Media history* (Akinfeleye & Okoye, 2003), and *Mass Media in Nigeria: Perspectives on growth and development* (Ciboh, 2007). However, none of these books has focused on the development and growth of religion journalism and religious publications in Nigeria. Therefore, the need arises to revisit the issues of journalism and religion and to create a niche, a suitable position, specifically, for the history of religious journalism in the annals of Nigerian Press history.

Research Gap

Limited focus on religion journalism in existing Nigerian press history studies, despite its foundational role.

Historical Neglect

Previous scholars concentrated on political and general media aspects, overlooking religious journalism development.

Contemporary Relevance

Need to examine how religious journalism can promote tolerance and unity in religiously diverse Nigeria.

Therefore, there still exists certain areas and issues in religion journalism that are of scholarly interest which are yet to be explored that have not been treated fully in previous studies, such as the current position of contemporary religious journalism; its transference from thence to the present, its transfiguration i.e. its change in appearance compared with the old style of journalism and whether it has changed in its character and functions. All these factors are significant issues worthy of the study inquiring into generational transference of journalism of religion from the old to the present.

Objectives of the study

This study seeks the following objectives:

1. to understand the trends in religion journalism beginning from 1859 to date.
2. to ascertain the influence that which early missionaries' religious press exerted on religion journalism of old and modern times.
3. to establish why modern religious newspapers and magazines should embrace commercial, product and public service advertisements for revenue generation and learn from post experience of early religious press.
4. to compare the production techniques of the old and modern religious newspapers and magazine publications and to recommend improvements,
5. To analyse the failures of the old missionary newspapers in terms of circulation and financial gains with a view to highlight available opportunities making modern religious newspapers profitable in digital age.

Scope of the study

The study covers 1859 to date which marks the period during which religion journalism was initiated by missionaries and had since continued as a part of the multiple modes of mass communication of Christian Missions to date Churches to date. It is also a long period marked by many changes in journalism techniques and development of new churches with different Christian doctrines.

Significance of the study

The findings of the study could assist religious organisations to improve on the existing forms of Christian journalism practice in their missions and also help them to improve on their internally generated revenues to support the growth of evangelical work. It will also give historians and researchers new knowledge about religion journalism while filling some existing gaps in historical knowledge on the subject.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Five questions were formulated to guide in gathering data for the study. These are:

01

Historical Influence

Did early Christian missionaries' newspapers set the pace for developmental growth of religion journalism in subsequent existence?

02

Message Spread

Did the early Christian missionary newspapers influence the spread of Christian messages in their geographic areas of operation?

03

Generational Lessons

What lessons did old missionaries and their newspapers portend for the succeeding generations? How?

04

Contemporary Improvements

Have contemporary Christian newspapers improved the quality, production style, content and financial gains from their religious newspaper publications?

05

Modern Opportunities

Compared to the benefits which the old missionaries derived from their newspaper publications, what opportunities are available to modern churches making their newspapers more profitable in the age of social media?

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted Historical method and Archival/Documentary Research methods for the purpose of data gathering, presentation and analysis.

Study population

The study population are all Christian Churches and Missions in South West Nigeria and selected Church newspapers and magazines which are published currently in many Nigerian Churches. The Church newspapers were purposively selected considering that all Christian newspapers published in Nigeria could not be accessed.

Method of data analysis

The study used discourse analysis to describe, **analyse** and discuss the data collected for the study. Discourse analysis is a method that examines how we use language to explain issues, relationships and the world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of Christendom in Nigeria unfolded in several phases. Key periods include debates in Europe and America concerning the fate of African slaves, the Christian missions' role in abolishing slavery, their establishment and evangelism efforts to convert natives, and the founding of Schools, Churches, and Printing Presses. This led to the creation of Religious newspapers, fostering reading habits and civilisation among the populace. This sequence of events is well-documented in literature on the subject.

Pakenham (1991), in "The Scramble for Africa," notes extensive historical materials on Christian missions' scramble for Nigeria beginning in the 1840s. Following the 1841 Niger Expedition, and influenced by Fowell Buxton's 1840 book, "The African Slave Trade and its Remedy" – which advocated for Africa's redemption through the Bible and Plough – a significant rush to Nigeria for religious emancipation by Christian missionaries ensued.

Dike (1960) identifies the 1841 Niger Expedition as the genesis of Protestant Missionary enterprise on the Niger and across Nigeria. David Livingstone, a celebrated missionary and explorer of the Niger Expedition, later corroborated Buxton's 1841 assessment in the 1870s, recommending to the British government that introducing Christianity, Commerce, and Civilisation was the solution to European scramble for Africa and the slave trade.

Historical Context

European debates over African slavery led to missionary activities focused on religious emancipation and civilisation.

Niger Expedition (1841)

Marked the beginning of Protestant missionary enterprise, emphasising Bible and Plough approach to African redemption.

Three C's Strategy

Christianity, Commerce, and Civilisation became the recommended solution to end slave trade and develop Africa.

Christian Missionary activities in Western Nigeria began in 1842 with the arrival of churches in Britain. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) London dispatched Rev. Henry Townsend on an evangelical mission to Abeokuta, Nigeria. Townsend arrived in Badagry in 1842, visited Abeokuta in January 1843, and commenced his evangelism in 1844. He was accompanied by an Anglican mission team, including Rev. C.A. Gollmer and his wife, the first Anglican African Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, and other clergy and church workers from the Church of England.

According to an account by Omoyajowo (1995), the Methodists sent Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman to open its missions in Nigeria; the Baptist Mission sent Rev. Thomas Bowen of the Southern Baptist Convention of America in 1850 to establish a mission in Nigeria; the Roman Catholic resumed their operations in Nigeria in 1850. "The Portuguese adventures who were Catholic Priests in 15th century (1516 to 1668) introduced Catholic faith to Benin Kingdom and Warri, Nigerian Delta State but it gradually died away, only to return to Nigeria in 1850" (Joseph, 1983).

The United Succession Church of Scotland and the Scottish Missionary Society sent Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell and his co-missionaries to start the Presbyterian Church mission in Nigeria in 1846. The pioneers later established the Presbytery of Biafra and a printing press in Duke Town, Calabar. The Qua Ibo Mission was started by Samuel Bill; he came from the Inter-Denominational Council of Northern Ireland. This was followed by other missionaries from Seven Day Adventist (1914), the Salvation Army (1920), and Jehovah's Witness, and the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) now EKWA, which began its missions under Rev. Bingham from 1911.

THE CHURCH NEWSPAPERS ARRIVE

The period between 1917 and 1920 saw the activities of some Christian Missions in active religion journalism efforts. It was the prelude to the outburst of religion journalism activities by the Christian Churches. Preceding the outburst of Christian journalism was the enactment of the first newspaper law of 1903 and the seditious offences ordinance of 1909. The two laws were consolidated in the criminal code by the colonial government, who was constantly criticized by Nigerian newspaper columnists and editors on their resentful styles of administration. As Coker (1968) reveals, that period marked significant stages in the progress of newspaper legislation in the country later known as Nigeria. Ironically, this was the period in which churches propagated their views through their newspapers. The Church Missionaries Society (C.M.S) had the "In Leisure Hours" (1917), African Church had the "Gleaner" (1917) (see Figure 1), and The Methodist Mission had the "Nigerian Methodist" (Nwabueze, 2024).



THE GLEANER.

CARO, MICHIGAN,

"PRUDENS FUTURI."

NO. 1-VOL. 1



BRAVEST BATTLE EVER FOUGHT.

The bravest battle that was ever fought!
Shall I tell you where and when?
On the maps of the world you will find it not:
'T was fought by the mothers of men.
Nay, not with cannon or battle shot.
With sword, or nobler pen.

has been decided to leave the contest open until December 1st, when the names of contestants must be filed.

As many questions have been asked concerning the scholarship, we have thought it best to repeat a portion of the plan as outlined in the October Gleaner. In the first place it should be remembered that the scholarship is absolutely free, so that no member is so poor financially that they can not take advantage of it. Books are provided, room and board secured, tuition paid and in fact everything but the transportation from the lucky ones home to Fenton has been provided for.

titied to the prize. It is hoped that the Order may be able to assist at least one member each year to an education, and we believe that the membership is hartilly with the State Officers in carrying out this plan, which has never been attempted by a Fraternal Society before.

Encourage your faithful young members to enter the contest. To be sure only one can win but all stand an equal chance and the contest will only make them better known to the members of the Order throughout the state. Take hold of the matter as an Arbor, vote to have a majority of your

Figure 1: An example of a gleaner newspaper

Source: Gleaner Life Insurance Society (2021).

Journalism, religion and press freedom

A free press fosters societal growth by contributing to its political, social, and economic development (Duyile, 2011). Religious media ownership refers to outfits controlled by religious bodies, which typically align with their owners' philosophies (Akinfeleye, 2011). Defending press freedom, Owonikoko (2022) notes that while governments are primary interferers, other stakeholders like media owners, politicians, and private media entities are also involved. He further references Rev. Townsend's "Iwe Irohin," founded in 1859, as a historical example of a publication promoting Christianity and reading culture.

The church as disseminator of information and change agency

Nigeria's 1999 constitution (Chapter II, section 22) guarantees freedom of expression, including the right to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference. This freedom extends to corporate bodies and associations, leading to many Nigerian press organisations being privately owned.

The churches as well as individuals are not exempted from establishing newspapers, radio or television. The churches as disseminators of religious information have taken it upon themselves to own and publish newspapers, magazines and use radio and television broadcasts to propagate Christian religion, to preach good moral and also to impact knowledge on their congregations on matters relating to issues of political interest, religion and society. Journalism, religion, and information dissemination have their meeting points of benefits, especially when journalism is used as a tool to disseminate religious messages to heterogeneous audiences of various cultures and communities. In their sermons, teachings, preachings, and evangelical activities, the churches are agencies of change, turning their subjects away from evil acts to improve society and the lifestyles of the people.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

In the course of data gathering, some of the archival documents, such as the diaries of the early missionary, Rev. Henry Townsend, recorded that the reason for establishing the mission's newspaper was to provide an alternative communication channel with the converts and others who had accepted Christianity as a way of life. In a message to the Headquarter of the church in England on the advent of religious newspaper, he wrote: "I have set in motion a Yoruba language newspaper. The objectives to get the people into the habit of reading...." (Townsend, 1859). The message, according to the archival record, was well received in London by the Bishops of the Church Missionary Society of Britain; The maiden edition of "Iwe Irohin" became an object of celebration in the King's palace at Ake Quarters, in the Church, and in Abeokuta Township in Badagry and Lagos.

For the eight years during which the newspaper made regular appearances, archival record shows that from 1859-1867, Townsend's newspaper dominated the Sunday worships and became a significant communication tool publishing all issues that pertain to the church such as news about baptisms, movement of Priests, doctrinal messages as well as public views on politics and commercial issues. The same scenario was recorded in the case of Rev. Hope Waddell of Presbyterian Scottish Mission in Calabar. The two newspapers published in Efik language by Presbyterian Mission between 1885 and 1886 made religious preachings the dominant content of "Unwana Efik" and "Obukpong Efik." Records show that though the two religious organs existed for one year each, they played an appreciable role in spreading evangelical messages all over the old Calabar and its Environment.

Iwe Irohin (1859-1867)

Eight years of publication dominating Sunday worship, covering baptisms, priest movements, doctrinal messages, and public affairs.

Calabar Publications

"Unwana Efik" and "Obukpong Efik" (1885-1886) spread evangelical messages throughout old Calabar region in Efik language.

Distribution Methods

Church members sold newspapers on Sundays while many copies were hand-delivered to recipient-subscribers directly.

But unlike "Iwe Irohin" of the CMS, which lived eight years of existence, the two religious Efik newspapers had limited circulation during their period. However, their regular portrayals of the Christian religion were never in doubt. One recorded account explains: "All religious activities of the period needed some vehicles of communication to assist the growth of the new phenomena that were spreading at same speed with educational activities and initiatives." Though newspaper vending was not yet developed, the religious newspaper publications were sold on Sundays by appointed church members; while many copies were hand-delivered to recipient-subscribers, directly, according to a church record.

Historical data gathered also show that all the early Christian denominations made frantic efforts to gain foothold in Nigeria of the period and made deliberate contributions to develop religious publications, some of them published in newspaper format, some in newsletter format, and some in bulletin publication format. All the publications were directed towards communicating religious preachings to the subjects for their "salvation." Following the footsteps of the early Christian missions and the missionaries, the Home grown churches and religious associations took after them by establishing religious newspapers with the same objectives as the early missionaries, according to a retired Anglican Bishop.

The historical background of the Home grown churches marked another phase of religious newspapers. Coker (1968) reveals that a lecture delivered in Lagos by Dr. Edward Blyden in 1890 led to a national religious controversy, which resulted in the formation of African churches. The emergence of the home grown Christian churches was a result of the revolt by some leading Nigerians and religious ministers against what they called 'contemptuous treatment of African religious ministers by Europeans.' To repulse such discriminatory treatments, the African Church set up its own religious newspaper "African Church Gleaner," which published the church's activities and Christian news; and had "African Hope" in 1919 and "African Christian" in 1936.

The CMS mission came up with "African Church Chronicle" in 1934 and its own newspaper, "In Leisure Hours," which followed the news coverage model of Rev. Townsend's "Iwe Irohin" but devoted all its pages to religion and educational issues. And "The Nigerian Methodist," a typical religious newspaper with modern quality printing and catchy pictorial illustrations, was founded in 1925 by the Methodist Mission. Its main objective was to give adequate publicity to the Methodical mode of worship in Methodist Churches and to publish news of the church activities.

As Coker (1968) further reveals, there was a lull in religious journalism practice in the 1930s; however, in the 1940s many religious newspaper publications were added to the existing number of religious newspapers started before and during the twenties. The Catholic Mission started "Catholic Herald", which was founded and printed by St. Paul's Press, Lagos under the direction of the Headquarters of the Roman Catholic Mission, Lagos. It was reported that the newspaper sold its editions impressively throughout Nigeria before it went out of print in 1955. The Catholic Mission authorities, however, replaced it with another publication titled "Independent" in the late fifties. The replacement of "Catholic Herald" brought great relief to Catholic faithful as the newspaper improved its printing quality and content. Its news reportage was said to be comparable with the non-religious newspapers of the 1950s. In 1936, another publication, "Catholic Life", was added to the mission's religious publication list.

A new form of Christian newspaper

A new style of religious journalism was pioneered by Sudan Interior Mission in 1951 with the publication of a new monthly magazine "African Challenge". It marked the beginning of a new form of religious journalism since all the earliest religious publications were in tabloid format. "African Challenge" was a bumper religious news magazine appearing monthly. It published well-researched feature articles on Christian religion as well as profiles of leading African religious ministers. It is said of the magazine that it occasionally published political features that were not too critical of government. The "African Challenge" Magazine was attractive in its typography and its editorial make-up. It started operating as an interdenominational religious paper by accommodating news and features on other Christian missions. It is said of the "Challenge Magazine" that it displayed good use of English language in its treatment of religious news analyses, holding its readers to unavoidable regular subscription. It was also rated as the best-produced religious news magazine in Nigeria, which also had a circulation figure in 1951 of 5000 copies monthly. It also had a Yoruba version which sold in thousands in the Yoruba region. The magazine circulated in Ghana, Sierra Leone, East Africa, West Indies, the United Kingdom, Europe and America.

1917-1925: Early Church Newspapers

"In Leisure Hours" (CMS), "African Church Gleaner" (1917), "Nigerian Methodist" (1925) established the foundation.

1

1930s-1940s: Catholic Publications

"Catholic Herald" achieved impressive nationwide circulation before being replaced by "Independent" in late 1950s.

In 1959, shortly before Nigerian independence, African Challenge partnered with Niger Press, relocating its publication to Jos, Plateau State, the Sudan Interior Mission's West African Headquarters (Coker, 1968). The magazine, now titled "Today's Challenge" with the rider "Nigeria's Foremost Christian Magazine," continues to be sold in Nigeria and internationally. While predominantly religious, "Today's Challenge" frequently addresses national politics. For instance, its May-June 2015 edition featured "Something Buhari must do to Succeed" as its lead story, alongside other religious and political articles like "Why next Senate President should be Christian" and "Six million Muslims convert to Christianity." Although past issues might suggest a political focus, a comprehensive reading of its columns confirms its identity as a fully religious publication.

Other notable religious newspapers include "Christian Comment," founded in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria. Published fortnightly in English by the Gospel Publishing Society, it began on September 1, 1950 (Duyile, 2019) and has consistently advocated Christian beliefs in the region. The African Church Organisation launched its third newspaper, the "African Church Chronicle," in 1934, also dedicated to propagating Christian religion. In 1936, "The African Christian" and "Catholic Life" also emerged. According to Coker (1968), Niger Press, printer of African Challenge, produced 81 of 91 Christian literature titles, including the Hausa religious magazine "Labarin Ekklesiya," demonstrating active religious journalism across various denominations.

Jehovah Witness Magazine

Established in 1870 in Pittsburgh, USA, the Jehovah's Witness Mission founded its Nigerian Chapter in 1921. It publishes two international monthly religious magazines: "Watchtower" and "Awake," both highly illustrated and published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, USA.

"Awake," considered the companion to "Watchtower," began as "The Golden Age" before its title change. "Watchtower" has been published continuously since 1879, initially as "Zion's Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence," focusing on Bible teaching according to Jehovah's Witnesses doctrine. With a print run exceeding 42 million copies in 190 languages (Google account, 2025), "Watchtower" teaches the Gospel and explains Bible teachings centred on God's Kingdom. "Awake," conversely, focuses on Christian life, culture, and understanding the Bible.



Watchtower Magazine

Founded 1879, over 42 million copies in 190 languages, focuses on Bible teaching and Jehovah's Witnesses doctrine.



Awake Magazine

Companion publication focusing on Christian life, culture, and Bible understanding with colorful illustrations.



Regional Publications

Various denominational magazines like "Christian Women Mirror," "Glory News," and "Today's Challenge" serve specific audiences.

The Christian Women Mirror, another Christian magazine, has a religious philosophy to build Godly women. It also focuses on youths for Christ. It publishes Bible Quiz, health tips, comics, along with religious teachings. The Redeemed Christian Church of God, founded in Nigeria in 1952, publishes "Glory News," a colorful Christian news magazine. It circulates throughout Nigeria and some overseas countries. There have been scores of religious newspapers in the country following the upsurge of Christian Church denominations. However, mention should be made of the following religious magazines and religious newspapers which, although publishing regularly, in some cases lack professional journalistic editing: Redemption Light, The Winner's World, The Highway, etc. Though this study focuses on religious media (newspapers and magazines), there is also a positive use of religious broadcasting on radio and television networks in Nigeria. However, the proliferation of new Christian Churches in the country predicts a new type of development and emergence of more Christian religion newspapers in the future.

As dependable tools of communication, religious newspapers serve as an alternative medium to interpersonal communication, conveying religious teachings to the audience. Apart from religious harmony and the faith-sharing environment which it offers, the Church also provides opportunities for social relationships among church adherents. Hence, in a sense, the formal and informal relationships among church members, irrespective of their social and economic status, play a significant role in the way members will react to church newspapers' content and the religious messages contained in the publication. All the religious newspapers and magazines examined in this study have religious news dominantly displayed in their editions. This is so because their philosophies are religion-based. It is religion that provided the motivation to publish the newspapers and magazines.

As one of the Bishops interviewed pointed out, referring the researcher to a section of the Holy Bible (Exodus 35:30-35), the section emphasizes the acquisition of new skills to create new promotional devices to propagate Christian religion. He says by setting up religious newspapers, religious magazines, printing presses, radio and television religious programs, and in-church electronic media outfits, the Christian missions are fulfilling the dictates of that part of the Holy Bible to arouse members' and non-members' interest in Christianity and to sustain faith in Christ. By so doing, he further stated, the missions are creating aesthetics for the church because, as he puts it, "Media support is the cornerstone and image-making device for every church organization."

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Findings show that access to religious information is very crucial to development and growth is very crucial to development and growth of Christianity among Christians hence all Christian denominations lay emphasis on religious magazines and religious newspapers publications. This is evident in Table 1 of the selected Christian Missions. Apart from the respondents' responses, the 2019 Operational Handbook of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, Duke Town, Calabar Cathedral stated:

"Where there is no effective communication of the church programmes and activities it will be difficult to promote the church. The church must also be acquainted with what is going on outside the Church which will be of immense benefit to her and her members, where adequate inflow and outflow of information is lacking, the church will remain in obscurity and souls will be unreached."

Findings further show, from church records examined during this study, that many denominations of Christian Missions have set up Media and Publicity Departments which edit and run the Missions' newspapers, magazines and print other media outfits for effective communication of the gospel. It is also evident that from historical records and responses gotten from Bishops and other eminent church ministers the culture of publishing religious newspapers grew from the efforts of earliest Christian Missionaries, copied by their successors and sustained till today. The objectives, as it was then, creating the habit of reading and receiving religious teachings through religious publications, remains so till the present.

All the respondents and the primary sources (documents) attested to the fact that Christian journalism which began in 1859 in Abeokuta, South Western Nigeria by Rev Townsend and which spread to Calabar then part of Eastern Region of the country is the causal factors of present day religious journalism. Findings shows that there was a lull in the production and printing of religious newspapers between 1867-1880 when Iwe Irohin went defunct but religious newspapers activities bounced back from 1885 and has remained the practice in many churches till present time. However, the creation of in-house electronic media for purposes of gospel diffusion is something new in Christian missions operations in Nigeria. The growth of Christian journalism practice will increase and will have an impactful future when one consider the growth and emergence of new churches and new media technologies.

Table 1: List of some selected religious newspapers in Nigeria, the founders and year of publications

Denomination	Title of the Publication	Year Established	Categories of Specialisation
Jehovah's witnesses	Awake Watchtower	1919 1879	Religious magazine
Church Missionary (CMS) Society	Iwe Irohin In Leisure Hours	1859 1852	Religious publication
Deeper Christian Life Ministry	Christian Women Magazine	Not Known	Religious publication
Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA)	Today's Challenge	Year of publication in Nigeria not known	Religious publication
Redeemed Christian Church Of God, Nigeria	Glory News	Year of publication not known	Religious publication
Presbyterian Scottish Mission, Calabar, Nigeria	Umwana Efik Obukpong Efik	1885 1886	Religious newspapers
Presbyterian Church Of Nigeria Duke Town, Calabar Nigeria	Christ Kingdom Priest Comprehensive Handbook	Year of publication not known	Religious newspapers and magazines

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that Christian journalism in Christian Church denominations began in 1859 in Abeokuta, and in Calabar 1885 respectively and the practising of religious journalism and printing of Christian newspapers has been emulated and sustained by succeeding generations of Christian Missions over the years. The latterday religious bodies build their religious media concepts on the legacy of earliest Christian missionaries. All the respondents interviewed agreed that religious newspapers are providing additional strength for propagation and promotion of Christianity to "Win souls for Christ". The study found that establishment of religious newspapers in their parishes by setting up electronic media devices to support evangelical activities have assisted and is assisting communicating the Gospel directly to worshippers and church adherents. However, it is important to point out that inspite of the constitutional guaranteed for freedom of press ownership, many religious **organisations** have not established newspapers, magazines and broadcast media because the cost of doing so is prohibitive.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the researcher proffers the following recommendations.

First, there is the need for all Christian denominations which have religious newspapers and magazines to employ the professional service of trained journalists for the purpose of quality production of their publications, many of which lack journalistic excellence.

Second, the frequencies of such publications need to be improved and made weekly instead of publishing periodically. The regular weekly appearance of such religious newspapers would not only increase readership but will appeal to many readers outside the particular denomination.

Third, all stakeholders in Church journalism practice and ownership of religious newspapers should set up modern printing press using new printing technology to produce their newspapers in order to attract new subscribers to their fold.

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