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## The Nexus Between Mass Communication And Religion

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper examines the link between mass communication and religion in society. However, because of the diversity and vastness of religion, it focuses on the Christian religion with emphasis on Nigeria. It adopts the discursive research approach to obtain data that form the basis of the discussion. The discourse explains how Christian missionaries during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century utilized the print media to propagate the gospel in Nigeria. Thereafter, it focuses on how Christian organizations are utilizing the mass media to preach the gospel in contemporary society. It concludes that there are historical, developmental and functional links between the mass media and the Christian religion. Furthermore, it asserts that there is religion in mass communication and mass communication in religion. It recommends among others that researchers from Nigeria and other countries need to critically examine the relationship between the mass media and the Islamic faith.*

**Key words:** Mass communication, religion, televangelism, Internet religion

### **1.Introduction**

There are two institutions that are visible and play prominent roles in virtually all societies of the world. These are religious and mass media institutions. Religion has been with mankind since time immemorial. It is even linked to the creation of human. Although some countries are constitutionally secular, yet freedom of religion is guaranteed. A few countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait among others have gone ahead to adopt state religion.

The term “mass media” used interchangeably with “mass communication” as explained by Mc Quail (2011) was coined in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to describe a new social phenomenon and a key feature of popular democracy. According to him, it was an era of migration into cities and across frontiers and of struggle between the forces of change and expression of conflict as well between the empire and nation states.

Although the term “mass media” or “mass communication” was coined in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they have, nevertheless been in existence since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, the first newspaper. Relation (relating the news) of Strasbung, Germany, was first printed in 1605. The mass media have over the past few centuries shaped cultures, influenced politics and affected the lives of nations. Although some literature exists that establishes a nexus between religion and the mass media, some mass media professionals are of the view that since mainstream mass media and religion have two opposing value systems, there is no little or link between religion and the mass media. The purpose of this paper therefore, is to establish whether there is any historical, developmental and functional relationship between religion and the mass media with some emphasis on Nigeria.

### **2.Conceptual Clarification**

#### *2.1.Mass communication*

In examining the concept of mass communication, two sets of definitions emerge. These are the classical and contemporary definitions of mass communication.

The classical definitions of mass communication postulated before the advent of the Internet are sometimes referred to as traditional paradigms of mass communication. There are several of such definitions. One of them is by Janowitz (1968), who defined mass communications as follows:

*Mass communication comprises the institutions and techniques by which specialized groups employ technological devices (press, radio, television, film etc.) to disseminate symbolic content to large, heterogeneous and widely dispersed audiences (cited in McQuail, 1976:5).*

Another traditional definition by Wright (1969) states that:

*Mass communication is a form of communication that addresses itself to a large, heterogeneous, anonymous audience publicly and rapidly utilizing a complex and expensive formal organization for that purpose.*

Another traditional definition states that mass communication is “communication to a large audience which is mediated by electronic and print media” (www.google.com.ng).

The traditional model also states that the following are some of the characteristics of mass communication

- Mass communication messages are aimed at a large audience without any personal contact between the sender and the receiver.
- The nature of the audience is such that the audience is not individually known to the communicator.
- Messages sent through the mass media channels are financed by large organizations.
- It is controlled by several gatekeepers (editors) who determine what message will be delivered to the audience.
- Messages are public and the distribution is relatively unstructured and informal.
- There is absent of immediate feedback between the communicator and members of the audience except during interactive or phone-in-programmes in the electronic media.
- Mass communication, particularly radio and television can establish simultaneity of contact with large numbers of people at a distance from the source and widely separated from each other.

Since the advent of the Internet, contemporary definitions of mass communication or mass media have emerged. Essentially, these new definitions seek to accommodate this new medium of communication into the mass communication paradigm. They acknowledge the fact that the Internet can no longer be ignored in the present day communication landscape.

In line with the above observation, Adler and Rodman (2000), define mass communication as:

*The transmission of messages to large, usually widespread audiences via broadcast means (such as radio and television); print (such as newspapers, magazines, and books) multimedia (such as CD-ROM, DVD); the World Wide Web and other forms of media such as recordings and movies.*

Another contemporary definition offered by Dominick (2012:10), states that,

*“Mass communication refers to the process by which a complex organization with the aid of one or more machines produces and transmits public messages that are directed at a large heterogeneous and scattered audiences”.*

Although this definition retains some features of the traditional definition of mass communication it, however, captures the Internet and other new media of communication by adding the clause, “with the aid of one or more machines”. It further distinguishes between machine assisted interpersonal and mass communication when it adds another clause, “transmits public messages that are directed at large, heterogeneous and scattered audience.”

Similarly, since the terms “mass media” and “mass communication” are usually used interchangeably, the Wikipedia (2013) states that the mass media refer collectively to all media technology including the Internet, television, newspaper, film, and radio, which are used for mass communication and to the organizations which control these technologies.

Biagi (2012:8) explains that mass communication is communication from one person or group of persons through a transmitting device (a medium) to large audiences or markets. She further explains that mass communication today shares three major characteristics as follows:

- A message is sent out on some form of mass communication system (such as the Internet, print or broadcast).
- The message is delivered rapidly
- The message reaches large groups of different kinds of people simultaneously or within a short period of time.

Based on the above characteristics of mass communication, Biagi states that a telephone conversation between two people does not qualify as mass communication but a message from the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria broadcast simultaneously by all television networks would qualify because mass media deliver messages to a large number of people at the same time.

The Happy Fun Communication Land website (www.rdllman.com) aptly observes that from primitive pamphlets, the mass media today have grown to include the print media (books, newspapers, and magazines), the electronic media of television, radio and audio/video recordings, and the new media of computers and computer networks.

Biagi (2012) states that there are eight types of mass media industries or businesses which are as follows:

- Books
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Recordings
- Radio
- Movies
- Television
- Internet

### *2.2.Functions Of Mass Communication*

There are certain functions usually attributed to the mass media. According to Wright (1996:63-64), Harold Lasswell, a pioneer in mass communication research once attributed three major functions to the mass media. These are:

- Surveillance of the environment
- Correlation of the parts of society in responding to the environment
- Transmission of the social heritage from one generation to the next.

Surveillance refers to the collection and dissemination of information (news) concerning events in the environment, both within a particular society and outside it. Coverage of events during a presidential election campaign is an example of the surveillance function. Surveillance of the environment corresponds to what is commonly thought of as the handling (gathering and dissemination) of news in the mass media.

Correlation involves interpretation of the information presented about the environment; prescription about what to do about it, and attempts to influence such interpretation, attitudes and conduct. These operations are usually seen as editorial activity, propaganda or attempts to persuade.

Transmission of social heritage focuses on the assimilation of people in the society. This is the educative function of mass media. It concerns the communication processes by which society's store (or part of its store) of values, social norms, knowledge and other cultural components is made known to and instilled on members and potential members. Transmission is social heritage from one generation to the next includes concern with communication relevant to the assimilation of children and adults into various social roles, immigrations into a new society and related matters.

Wright (1996) modified the three postulated by Lasswell and added the fourth entertainment. This refers to communication activities primarily considered as an amusement, irrespective of any other feature they may seem to have. A television comedy, for example may be regarded as an entertainment function of the mass media can also be described as the diffusion through signs, symbols, and images of drama, art, music among others for personal and collective recreation and enjoyment. These four functions of the mass media as stated by Lasswell and Wright came to be known as the 'classic four functions of the mass media'.

### *2.3.Religion*

Religion is a concept that cannot be defined with any precision. This is primarily due to the diversity of religion and the fact that it is defined from various perspectives.

According to Beyers (2010), any attempt to define religion reveals more about the scholar giving the definition than (about) the concept itself. Thus, a scholar's perspective of religion tends to determine how the concept is defined. For instance, a sociologist would look through a sociological definition of religion while a psychologist would give a definition based on a psychological perspective. Similarly, a Westerner would provide a definition influenced by European thought while a traditional African would formulate a definition according to African philosophy. There is therefore no universally accepted definition of religion among scholars. This lack of consensus regarding the definition of religion made Smith (cited in Cline, 2013) to assert that "religion has no existence apart from the academy."

However, Otite and Ogiwo (1979:152) posit that the controversies over the definitions of religion are sometimes non-scientific relating to psychological complexes and to the personal theological commitments and biased attitudes of individual scholars. They further explain that sociologists generally agree that most societies believe in supernatural beings, some kind of supernatural life having effects on the living. It is also generally accepted among sociologists that there can be both sacred and profane phenomena, the former relating to superhuman condition and beings.

### *2.4.Etymology Of Religion*

The etymology of religion is said to be derived from the Latin words- religioem (religio) which means "respect for what is sacred, reverence for the gods" and religare which means "to tie, to bind or obligation, the bond between man and the gods." The latter seems to be more favoured on the assumption that it helps to explain the power of religion. The term "religion" is often used interchangeably with terms such as "faith" "belief system" or "set of duties"

### *2.5.Definitions Of Religion*

In considering some definitions of religion, Beyers (2010) cautions that there are two major traps to avoid. These are definitions that are either too broad (maximum definitions) or too narrow (minimal definitions). While the maximum definitions would include

elements not usually associated with religion, the minimal definitions would exclude those elements that are usually accepted as religion. According to Cline (2013), an example of maximum definition is the tendency to define religion as “world view” while that of a narrow definition is the common attempt to define religion as “belief in God” thereby effectively exclude polytheistic religion. Generally, religion is regarded as the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power especially a personal god or gods. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines religion as “a belief in or the worship of a god or gods.”

One of the foremost scholarly definitions of religion offered by eminent sociologist, Durkheim (1915) in his seminal work stated that religion is a “unified system or beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden-beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all that who adhere to them.” This definition obviously reflects the author’s European or Christian perspective as not all religions practices “unite into one single moral community called a church”.

Another scholarly definition offered by Vergate (1986) states that religion is “the entirety of the linguistic expressions, emotions and actions and signs that refer to a supernatural being or supernatural beings.” Supernatural here means whatever transcends the power of nature or human agency.

Similarly, Spiro (1954) cited in Otite and Ogionwo (1979:152) defines religion as “an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated super human beings. Implied in the definition is that religion is a belief system and may be highly charged emotionally.

Ray (cited in Turaki,1999:70) simply defines religion as “a meaning system” while Turaki states that “religion consists of a theory of being and a theory of meaning.”

Beyers (2010) definition said to be influenced by an African understanding of religion states that it is the continual participation in traditions (myths and rituals) passed from one generation to the next.

A comprehensive definition offered by Cline (2013) which encompasses the features or characteristics common in belief systems generally acknowledged as religion without focusing on specific characteristics unique to just a few states that religion involves:

- Belief in something sacred (for example, gods or other supernatural beings)
- Distinction between sacred and profane objects.
- Ritual acts focused on sacred objects.
- A moral code believed to have a sacred or supernatural basis.
- Characteristic religious feelings (awe, sense of mystery, sense of guilt, adoration) prone to be aroused in the presence of sacred objects and during the practice of ritual.
- Prayer and other forms of communication with the supernatural.
- A world view or a general picture of the world as a whole and the place of the individual therein. This picture contains some specification of an over-all purpose or point of the world and an indication of how the individual fits into it.
- A more or less total organisation of one’s life based on the world view.
- A public process. In the regard, having a personal belief system does not make it a religion.
- A belief system held by a group who publicly share their religion.

Most religions usually rely on narratives or sacred histories and symbols that are utilized to give meaning to life or to explain things like who created the universe and how it was created. Similarly, most religions have an ethical component that teaches adherents how they are expected to live. Most religions have a hierarchical system such as priests and adherents or worshippers. The Wikipedia (2013) adds that most religions have organized behaviours, clergy, a definition of what constitutes adherents or membership and holy places. The practice of religion may also include rituals, sermons, commemoration or veneration of a deity or deities, sacrifices, festivals, feasts, trance, institutions, funeral and matrimonial services, mediation, prayers, music, art, dance, public service or other aspects of human culture.

### *2.6.Functions Of Religion*

Religion performs several functions both to the individual and society. According to Otite and Ogionwo (1979) the major function of religion is to provide an organized picture of the universe; under this condition, man defines his reality and his environment and relates more consciously, confidently and orderly to the supernatural.

Another function of religion according to Beyers (2010) is to explain to the adherents in that society their primal origins, the nature of life, the functions and aims of life and the reasons for living. In short it is to answer the question, “why am I here?”

Religion also serves as an agent of socialization and social control. It plays a significant role in organizing and directing social life. It helps in preserving social norms and strengthening social control. It socializes the individual and exercises control over both the individual and groups in various ways. Furthermore, religion is a useful control mechanism, a way of achieving order; of delegating roles and responsibilities. For example, the “Ten commandments” given to Moses have been described by sociologists as a set of behavioural rules designed to bring order and harmony to the society and also to allow the society to function in an organized and systematic manner.

Religion also promotes social solidarity. This means that it gives rise to the spirit of brotherhood. It has the supremacy integrating and verifying forces in human society. It has also been established that common belief, common sentiments, common worship are significant factors which bring about unity and solidarity in a society.

Religion also promotes major societal virtues like truth, honesty, non-violence, love, chastity, discipline among others. A follower of a religion that emphasizes these virtues internalizes them and becomes a disciplined adherent of that religion.

A number of religions also satisfy for many the need of being linked with the ultimate and eternal life. Death is not regarded as a permanent defeat and disappearance; man has a second chance. He is not lost in the abyss of endless time; he has endless life. In short, religion prepares an individual for some future life.

### 2.7.Types Of Religions

There are several types of religions around the world and sociologists have classified them. According to Hinnels (2005) some religions are either universal or ethnic religions. Universal religions seek worldwide acceptance and actively seek for new converts while ethnic religions are identified with particular ethnic groups and do not actively seek converts. However, Graham (2000) has divided religions into three broad categories as follows:

- World religions which refer to transcultural, international faiths
- Indigenous religions which refer to smaller, culture-specific or nation-specific religions
- New religious movements which refer to recently developed faiths.

There are five world religions; these are Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Chinese folk religion. The five world religions account for about five billion of the world's six billion population. Out of this data, adherents of Christianity are in excess of two billion; Islam 1.2 billion, Hinduism 811 million, Chinese folk religion 385 million and Buddhism 360 million (Wikipedia, 2013).

### 3.Scope Of Study

In view of the diversity and vastness of religion around the world, this study is limited to Christianity which is essentially faith in Jesus as the Christ, Messiah, Son of God, Saviour and Lord. It is the religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ as presented in the New Testament of the Bible. Although Christianity is one of the global religions, there are about 22,000 different sects within it. (Messina, 2013) Thus, this study will examine the meeting or convergence point between the Christian religion and the mass media with some emphasis on Nigeria.

### 4.Method

This study adopted the discursive research approach which involves obtaining data or information from secondary sources. According to Berger (2000) this qualitative research technique involves the examination of studies that other researchers have made on a subject as the basis for analysis or evaluation of the current issue.

### 5.Discussion

#### 5.1.Christianity And The Mass Media

There were no mass media as they are now known in Biblical times. As already pointed out, the term "mass media" or "mass communication" was coined in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to describe what was then a new social phenomenon and a key feature of the emerging modern world built on the foundations of industrialization and popular democracy. Thus, there were no newspapers, magazines, radio, television, cinema, the Internet in Biblical times.

However, there were books (although not in modern day formats) in Biblical times. In the Bible, the word "book" is mentioned 148 times and the literal meaning of the "Bible" means "a collection of books". Accordingly, the Bible is a collection of 66 books-39 in the Old and 27 in the New Testaments written by 40 authors

However, the specific reference to the book medium as a tool for propagating the Christian message or gospel is found in Revelation 1:11

*"...What thou seest, write in a book and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus and unto Smyrna and unto Sardis and unto Pergamos and unto Thyatira and unto Philadelphia and Laodicea (King James Version).*

The epistles or letters of the Apostle Paul addressed to different churches at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, Thessalonica among others are also regarded as forms of mass communication since there were directed at large and heterogeneous audiences. Indeed, the Apostle Peter makes the point clearer which he stated that his letter was directed at "the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocea, Asia and Bithynia." (I Peter 1:1).

Jesus Christ also envisaged the adoption of the mass media in propagating the gospel in His "great commission" to the church. This is evident in several biblical passages which include the following:

*"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19. King James Version).*

*"...and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47 King James Version).*

*"And he said unto them, God ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. (Mark 16:15. King James Version)*



According to Armstrong (2006) with the above Bible passages, Jesus Christ initiated what has become a worldwide proselytizing process. Subsequently, most manifestations of Christianity have been missionary minded resulting in over two billion people or about 34 percent of the world population estimated to be Christians.

The early church set out to accomplish the above task of world evangelization mainly through interpersonal and group communication. Accordingly, early Christian missionaries undertook trips around various parts of the world to propagate the message of Jesus Christ. Most of such trips were through ships, horsebacks and on foot. However, it is obvious from the Bible passages referred to that the task of world evangelization as commanded by Jesus Christ could be accomplished alone through interpersonal and group communication. The mass media have to be utilized in the propagation of the gospel or realization of the great commission. With the advancement in technology the church embraced the use of the mass media in propagating its message. The first step was the printed Bible following the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The first printed Bible, the Gutenberg Bible (also known as the 42-line Bible, the Mazarin Bible or the B42) was the first major book printed with movable type in Western Europe. It marked the start of the "Gutenberg Revolution" and the age of the printed book in Western Europe. Written in Latin, the Gutenberg Bible was an edition of the Vulgate printed by Johannes Gutenberg in Mainz, Germany in the 1450s (The Wikipedia, 2013).

Thus, the emergence of the Gutenberg Bible marked the beginning of the adoption of mass media in Christianity. The Bible has some been translated into other languages and is today regarded as the largest circulating book in the world both in printed and digital formats. In addition to the printed Bible various Christian organizations have utilized other forms the printed word (pamphlets, tracts, posters, books among others) to propagate the gospel. Thus, the book medium has been a major channel utilized in transmitting the Christian heritage from one generation to the next.

### *5.2. Early Religious Publications In Nigeria*

Early Christian missionaries were the first to establish printing presses in Nigeria as part of the evangelization or proselytizing process. Most religious activities then needed some form of mass communication to assist in the propagation of the gospel. Since the missionaries came from societies with dominant newspaper culture, it was convenient for them to think of setting up religious publications that would publish information affecting their missions, converts and immediate environment.

Of the early missionaries in Nigeria, the Rev Henry Townsend of the CMS Mission and Rev Hope Masterton Waddel, of the Presbyterian Mission were the most prominent in terms of propagation of the faith through the printed word. The Presbyterian mission was the first to establish a printing press in Calabar in 1846 while the CMS did a similar thing in Abeokuta in 1854.

Rev Townsend established Nigeria's first newspaper, the *Iwe Irohin fun awon ara Egba ati Yoruba* (newspaper for the Yoruba's and the Egbas) in Abeokuta in 1859. Although Rev Waddel did not start a newspaper immediately after he arrived in Calabar, he nevertheless produced religious pamphlets as well as other printed materials to stimulate the reading culture among the natives.

Townsend had set up a small printing press in Abeokuta for the printing of religious and educational materials for the church and for the mission school he had earlier established (Ajibade, 2003:2). It was from this printing press in Abeokuta that the first Bible in Yoruba language was printed in 1862. According to Akinfeleye (cited in Alabi, 2003:19), Townsend intended to spread his Christian message by mass communication all over Badagry and most of Egbaland.

*Iwe Irohin* was first and foremost a religious newspaper. According to Ajibade (2003:2), the *Iwe Irohin* carried essentially stories on religious matters. In his analysis of *Iwe Irohin*, Alabi (2003:19), states that the paper carried mainly religious and social news from the onset. Such news items included the movement of church officials to and from district or parish, news of ordinations, baptisms, confirmations, deaths and births.

After the collapse of *Iwe Irohin* in 1867, the CMS Mission in 1887 began to publish a local edition (in Lagos) of its London-based monthly publication, the *Gleaner*. Its place was, however taken in 1891 when the Anglican mission established the *Iwe Eko*. Described as a 'purely vernacular bi-weekly organ, it was inaugurated on 31 March 1891, by Rev J. Vernal.

According to Omu (1978:256-258), the most important Anglican, and indeed religious newspaper between 1880 and 1937, was *In Leisure Hours*, established in 1910. It earned the attention of the people for its occasional sober incursions into Lagos politics. This monthly bilingual journal was started at Ibadan in May 1910 by two female missionaries in the CMS Girls' institute.

The African Church Movement also founded and edited several newspapers. These include *The Standard*, *Chronicle*, *Eko Akete*, *Eko Igbehin*, *Eletife*, *African Hope*, *Daily Telegraph*, among others. *The Standard* was owned by G.A Williams, a foundation member of the U.N.A church that fully covered the activities of the African Church Movement. *The African Hope* was founded by G.A Oke, a young priest of the Jehovah Shalom branch of the African Church in Lagos in 1918.

Similarly, the Methodist mission established the *Nigerian Methodist* in 1925. While it served the immediate needs of the church organization, the paper provided some coverage of world news and biographies of great men in history.

The Roman Catholic mission established the *Nigerian Catholic Herald* in July 1924. Described as the "voice of the Catholic Church in Nigeria", it propagated the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. Like its protestant counterpart, *In Leisure Hours*, it occasionally dabbled into local politics ventilating pro-Government views. The Salvation Army founded the *War Cry* in 1925 which according to Omu (1978:257) was completely given to devotional propaganda. It continued into the 1950s until it was given up. The foregoing has established that historically there has been a clear link between religion and the mass in Nigeria

### 5.3. Christianity And Mass Communication In Contemporary Society

The advent of the electronic media has further broadened the scope of the channels of mass communication available to Christian organizations to propagate the gospel. Radio was first introduced in the Western world in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During its infancy, radio was seen as an oracle of sorts-teaching listeners how to live, what to be afraid of, what to be proud of, how to be beautiful, how to be loved, how to be envied, and how to be successful.

According to a document accessed at the website ([www.myuch.arbor.edu](http://www.myuch.arbor.edu)), the invention of radio broadcasting allowed more individuals than ever before to hear the gospel, that is, to be exposed to the basic trends of the Christian faith. It further explains that many believed then that radio would almost deterministically assert Christian values in America. This was consistent with the powerful effects theory (tradition) in communication research that was prevalent during that period. People in rural America previously cut off from religious services such as the farmer or the handicapped could now "almost imagine being in church." Thus, what was lost as a result of the perils of World War 1 and growing post-war industrialization could now be found through religion via radio.

Religious broadcasts or "religion by radio" played a significant role during radio's infancy both in the USA and other countries. In the USA, given the relative ease of obtaining a radio license, Christian religious organizations became the earliest pioneers to be licensed by the US government.

The first religious radio broadcast in the USA was a special programme from the Trinity Church, Washington DC on August 24, 1919. Similarly, the first regular religious broadcast in the USA was aired on January 2, 1921 from Calgary Episcopal Church on KDKA, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. This has been referred to as the "birth of religious radio in the United States." However, the first radio station completely devoted to religious programming was KQW which started transmission on December 1921. The station was owned by the First Baptist Church, Church of San Jose, California.

In 1931, the Roman Catholic Church set up an international radio station, the Vatican Radio during the reign of Pope Pius XI. It was maintained by the Jesuit Order of the church and broadcast on short wave to several countries.

In Nigeria, some Christian organizations also took to the airwaves by sponsoring programmes on radio. However, none of them has been allowed to set up a full-fledged radio station because of Nigeria's broadcasting policy which does not permit religious institutions establishing or owning radio or television stations.

In addition to radio, Christian organizations have also taken to television to propagate the gospel thereby leading to the phenomenon or construct now known as televangelism. According to Armstrong (2006) any religionist with a message for a television viewer no matter his or her religious background or the format of the programme can be said to be engaging in televangelism. He further cites another definition from the Pearson custom website which states that televangelism is the use of broadcast airwaves as an alternative way to preach a ministry/religion.

There are various formats of televangelism. Typically it involves the televangelist preaching a sermon based on a Biblical references accompanied by uplifting music, offers of services or products often available for a specific cash gift and perhaps a testimony or two. Other variations include discussion formats sometimes interspersed with news and accompanying Christian-oriented commentary, interview with celebrities and others having conversion stories to tell, reports on aid programmes sponsored by the ministry among others. In other formats actual worship services with a display of the supernatural (miracles) is aired. This format has since been banned on terrestrial television stations in Nigeria by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC).

Televangelism was pioneered by American preachers and the very prominent ones include Billy Graham, Morris Cerullo, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn. In Nigeria, it was popularized by the late Archbishop Benson Idahosa in the 1970s. With the advent of satellite television several Christian channels have emerged. The very prominent ones include the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), God TV and Inspirational Network.

Apart from radio and television, the Internet has further revolutionized the propagation of the gospel to the extent that new concepts such as Internet, online, electronic or cyber church have emerged. These terms refer to the various ways that Christian organizations or groups use the Internet to facilitate their religious activities particularly worship services. The Internet platform now provides alternative to the traditional brick and mortar meetings in the form of live streaming of services, video and audio podcasts, blogs, online tithing and offering among other religious activities.

. Indeed, the utilization of the Internet in religious communication is now referred to as religion online. According to Campbell (2006) religious use of the Internet can be traced back to the early 1980s when religious computer enthusiasts began to explore ways the Internet could be used to communicate issues of faith. He explains that the first religious-orientated online group was the Usenet 'net religion' discussion list a forum dedicated to dialogue on religious ethics and the 'moral' implication of human actions. Throughout the 1990s other religious computer hobbyists and programmers formed various online groups dedicated to their specific religions. Now, virtually every prominent Christian group or denomination has online presence.

Although some scholars have commended this new mode of evangelism it has nevertheless been lampooned by critics for lacking in face-to-face worship, mutual help and edification. Furthermore, it has been criticized as a platform where individualism thrives, personality cults flourish and uncritical audience members submit to the authority of a charismatic preacher rather than to the scriptures. This new church phenomenon has also been criticized as a place where entertainment takes the place of worship, presenting Christ and His gospel as consumer products and for constant appeals for funds. These criticisms notwithstanding, religion online has come to stay

## 6. Conclusion

It is obvious from the foregoing that there are historical, developmental and functional relationships between mass communication and the Christian religion in Nigeria and elsewhere. Historically, Christian missionaries were the first to establish printing presses and newspaper in Nigeria. While the Presbyterians established the first printing press in Calabar, the Anglicans established Nigeria's first newspaper in Abeokuta.

Developmentally, with the advancement in technology, the church embraced the utilization of the mass media in propagating the gospel beginning with the printed Bible following the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Following the

advent of the electronic media in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Christian missionaries embraced the use of radio and television in evangelism leading to the concept of televangelism. In the current digital age, the Internet has further revolutionized the face of media evangelism to the extent that a new concept, Internet or electronic church has emerged.

Functionally, the mass media have been utilized by Christian organizations to propagate the gospel. In this case, the media have been used to inform, persuade, educate and entertain adherents of the religion. It can therefore be safely asserted that religion is in mass communication and mass communication is in religion. In other words, there are religious contents in the mass media and the mass media are utilized in propagating religious messages.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the discussion and conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations are made:

- There is the need for scholars from Nigeria or other African countries to critically examine other types of relationships other than those already established in this paper that may exist between the church and the mass media in their countries
- In view of the limited scope of this study, there is the need for more studies that will examine the relationship between the mass media and the Islamic religion in Nigeria as well as other countries.
- Since it has been established that religion plays some crucial roles in society, the present policy of the Nigerian government as well as those of other developing countries which exclude religious institutions from the ownership of broadcast media should be reviewed. We live in a globalized world and a decentralized media environment through the Internet and satellite television broadcasting. Several religious organizations in Nigeria and elsewhere now own channels on satellite television platforms through which they broadcast directly to their target audiences. With the switchover date from analogue to digital broadcasting around the corner, that policy will become totally obsolete or irrelevant. What is required now is for broadcast regulatory authorities like the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) of Nigeria to come up with a regulatory framework that will guide the operation of broadcast stations that are owned by religious institutions.

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