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The Place of Christian Missions in the History of Printing Press in Nigeria

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Abstract

Christian Missions have been famous for the introduction of Christianity into Nigeria since 1842. In addition, different Christian domination thought it wise to westernize Nigeria through western education which they brought into the country. This effort perhaps may be perceived as one of the best legacies the Christian missions gave to the generality of Nigerians. Apart from the aforementioned achievements, the Christian missions introduced the printing presses into the country which gave impetus to the printing of reading materials and religious books which improved the literacy and literary standards of Nigerians. It is against this background that this paper intends to examine the place of Christian missions in the history of printing press in Nigeria. This area of study has been neglected by researchers not knowing that the importation of printing technology was necessitated by the Christian missions to further preach Christianity and its doctrines to different Christian disciples in Nigeria. The example of the Reverend Henry Townsend who was reported to have brought the first printing press in Nigeria in 1852 is note worthy. This produced news bulletin to the churches and the whole Nigeria. It has been difficult to separate the history of Nigerian press from the history of Christian religion in Nigeria because the history of press would not be accomplished without a reference to the tremendous contributions of the Christian Missions in Nigeria (Sobowale, 1985: 27).

Introduction

This work traces the introduction of printing press by the Christian missions and its effects in Nigeria. This area of study has often been neglected in previous research. This study examines the historical antecedence of printing press and its benefit and major challenges in Nigeria. Thus, the history of the method of instruction could be mentioned to be as old as human existence but evidence of its genealogy is slender and defies accurate dating. If we may accept that communication started with the evolution of man, we might also accept that the techniques of instruction which are perhaps the same with the techniques of communication can be traced to the period of cave men. In the course of history, man had utilized potentiality of his physical being as a tool to put up messages across and to get messages from his fellow beings.

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Stenberg mentions that Johannes Guttenberg was the first to print, using the movable device, a technological achievement that revolutionized communication in the 15th century. However, Fox punctures the assertion that the Chinese were the first to print books in the 19th century in addition to the Bhuddist being the oldest in AD. 869. The Romans made effort in printing as well as the Asians. The development of printing technology assisted tremendously in the other area of media of mass communication. This technological breakthrough assisted in preserving cultural values from one generation to another.

The first African press emanated in West Africa as Ghana was the first to establish African Herald in 1857. In Nigeria, newspaper printing was championed by Reverend Henry Townsend in Abeokuta in 1859. (Aliagan, 2006: 13-14). This situation can perhaps explain better the dual roles of the Christian mission who were the torchbearer of western education on one hand and pacesetters in planting information technology in Nigeria on the other.

Historical Background of Printing Press in Nigeria

The Presbyterians were the first to arrive into Nigeria with a printer and printing press and started publication immediately. 'By August 1849, the printer stated that he was able to make available eight hundred copies of the primer, in addition to five hundred copies of Bible lessons, 150 involving arithmetical examples, two hundred of multiplication tables, five hundred almanacs in addition to the commandments in Efik, three hundred copies of elementary arithmetic and four hundred of the catechism in Efik and English' (Ade Ajayi, 1965:158).

Through various publications, the printer was able to train some apprentices. However, other missionary bodies for a considerable year relied solely by printing their printing needs in places such as Europe and America. It must be noted that perhaps as one of his major contributions to industrial developments and accelerated of schemes, Henry Townsend was able to bring along with him an old hand-press. This was perhaps got from his brother who was a specialist in printing work. Townsend immediately was able to teach himself the functionality of the printer and also started to teach one of his boys. Henry Townsend remarked that the boy performed very well and by 1860, he thought he would love to send the boy for further apprenticeship training in England for according to Townsend, the boy was a cool – headed boy but said again that he would probably spoil the boy if asked to proceed for training. More boys were later put under the apprenticeship and a regular printing training and work were developed.

Henry Townsend intensified his effort to secure more equipment and by 1859, Robert Campbell, who originated from Jamaica and a visitor to Abeokuta prepared the improved projected movement from the new world and this further improved upon Townsend earlier printing method. Thus, the press started to publish

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and produce pamphlets in hymns, catechisms and prayers. It was therefore in 1859 that marked the beginning of the first publication of Henry Townsend popularly known as *Iwe Iroyin*, a fortnightly journal with special reference to Yoruba, providing various news emanating from the Church and state within and beyond and further educating people on different essays in history and political matters. (Ade Ajayi, 1965:159). By the following year, the English Supplement followed and it was observed by the mission that one major features of the world was to introduce and design advertisement column creating job vacancies in the area of apprenticeship, clerks, houseboys and so on. It has been mentioned that Townsend added significantly to the development of journalism and technical knowhow of numerous newspapers that were published in Lagos later in the succeeding years.

Printing press was further established in Nigeria in 1846 by Reverend Hope Waddell of the Church of Scotland Mission (Usman, 2002:19). More importantly, the paper disseminated news in religious matter, but its contents was not confined to religious issues only because commercial news and political matters were also carried in the paper. While sending a letter to the headquarters of Church Missionary Society in Britain, Townsend said:

> *My object is to get people to read, that is, to beget the habit of seeking information by reading.*

In a similar manner, Robert Campbell, who was of West Indian and Scottish background floated a Weekly Anglo-African Journal (Dare, 1985:41-42). Talking also about circumstances which led to the foundation of newspapers, Reverend Townsend stated further thus:

> *On 17th December 1842, he arrived Badagry and worked with many Sierra Leonean Freed slaves and the natives of Badagry... Rev. Townsend left for Abeokuta where he lived the rest of his missionary life, and there in 1854 he established a small printing press.* Five years after he set up an African newspaper the *'Iwe irohin' (Dayo, 1987:6).*

Rebert Campbell paid a visit to Henry Townsend in Abeokuta and assisted him in his missionary press. By 1862 Campbell came back to Lagos and founded the *Anglo African* which emerged as the first newspaper in Lagos. Black all Benjamin established the *Observer*. Owen Emerick Macauley established the *Eagles and Lagos Critic* in 1887. *The Lagos Weekly Record* was built in 1891 by John Payne Jackson. George Autus Williams published *Lagos Standard* while Joseph Johnson and Emmanuel set up the *Nigerian Chronicle*. *The Daily Times* started its publication in 1926. Earnest Ikoli brought out the *African Messenger*. *The Eko Akete* was built by Adeoye Adeniga. Herbert Macaulay brought up the *Lagos Daily* in 1927 (Dare. 1985:41-42).

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The *Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo*, a vernacular mouth piece in Hausa was established in 1939. This was as a result of an edict issued under the support of the Northern Literature Agency in Zaria in 1944. As a matter of fact, Dr. Rupert M. East was appointed by the then regional government to look at the possibility of setting up the Gaskiya Corporation so as to promote both the printing and publication of vernacular reading materials in all its ramifications. (Usman, 2002:31). The existence of *Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo*, a weekly newspaper, contributed immensely to producing secular Hausa. Reading through the content of the newspaper, Hausa language became popularized for both story writing and as language of instruction at schools (Dare, 1985:81).

By 1937 Azikiwe found himself amongst the galaxy of journalists as he set up the *West African Pilot*. In 1949, Obafemi Awolowo deemed it necessary to build the *Nigerian Tribune*. In 1961, the *Morning Post* started through the initiative of the Federal Government. The government of Western Region established the *Daily Sketch* in 1964. *The New Nigerian* was founded by the Northern Nigerian Government in 1966. The *Guardian Newspaper* was built in 1982 (Okoye, 2003:15).

Characteristics of Newspaper

In 1903, a German Scholar, Otto Groth propounded a set of five requirements which scholar used as criteria for determining a true newspaper. His first standard was that a newspaper must be published at least periodically or at intervals not less than once a week, second mechanical reproduction must be used. Third, anybody who can afford the price of admission must have access to the publication. In other words, it must be made available to everybody. Fourth, publication must be timely with some continuity in terms of organization amongst others. (Shehu, 2003:3-4).

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Table 1: The Growth of Newspapers in Nigeria, 1846-1982

Name of Founder	Year Founded	Name of Newspapers
Reverend Hope Wadell	1846	Commercial Press
Reverend Henry Townsend	1959	Newspaper for People
Robber Campbell	1862	Anglo African
Richerd Deale Blaize	1880	Gold Coast
Richard Deale Blaize	1880	Colony Advertiser
Owen Emerick Macauley	1887	The Eagle and Lagos Critic
John Payne Jackson	1891	Lagos Weekly
Herbert Macauley	1927	Lagos Daily
Nnamdi Azikiwe	1937	West African Pilot
Colonial Administration	1939	Gaskiya Tafi Kwobo
Colonial Administration	1948	The Citizen
Obafemi Awolowo	1949	Nigerian Tribune
Nnamdi Azikiwe	1960	Nigerian Outlook
Federal Government of Nigeria	1961	Morning Post
Federal Government of Nigeria	1961	Sunday Post
Government of Western Region	1964	Daily Post
Northern Nigerian Government	1966	New Nigerian
Alex Ibru	1982	Guardian Newspaper

Source: Dr. Eliasu Yahaya, 2014

The Contributions of the Christian Missions to Development of Nigerian Press

One of the major outstanding contributions of the Christian missions to Nigerians was the introduction of books. It must be stated that the first divine books that arrived Nigerian were the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Bible. These books remain the major books in Nigeria up till the present time. In their efforts to spread their tentacles, literacy started and what followed this development was the dire need for books and indeed book industry in Nigeria. More importantly, following the coming of the Qur'an and Holy Bible, the Nigeria's point of reference moved gradually away from oral or verbal tradition to the development of alphabetism. (Omotosho, 1985:80). The study of the Holy Bible by Nigerians through the Christian missions efforts did not only teach how to read and write but also produced first set of clergymen, interpreters, and noblemen who later in life contributed to the development of Nigeria. For instance, Henry Townsend used his popular *Iwe Irohin* to accomplish not only his evangelical activities but also for the promotion and establishment of schools scholarship. Thus education became a veritable leveler amongst the indigenous peoples of Nigeria since the missionary era (Ajibade, 2003:4).

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Furthermore, the missionaries introduced into Nigeria the English language which up till today remains the official Lingua Franca. The study of the language was possible through the printing and supply of many English books as well as English literature books highlighting interesting stories. The missionaries also took it as duty upon themselves to promote the existing languages in Nigeria (Ayandele, 1980:152). This was true of the Yoruba vocabulary authored in 1964 by Bishop Ajayi Crowther, a Nigerian who received his religious training in one of the missionary schools. In a similar manner, the Igbira language was authored by Williams and the Hausa language written by Schon. Other languages included *Igbo* and *Kanuri*.

Historically, the European efforts to study Hausa language started in 1812. It was Dr. S. F. Schon, one time close associate of Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther that made record because of his academic approach to the understanding of this important language. He has been credited by linguists for this achievement. But Reverend C P. Bergery, a CMS missionary has been placed in an eminent position because of his research in linguistics. He arrived Nigeria in 1902. His study proved that Hausa was a tonal language, since it was all embracing. The study of *Nupe* was popularized by Reverend A.W. Banfield of the Mennorite Mission. This achievement earned him a name often referred to as Zabokun *Nupe* (White *Nupe*).

More importantly, all the missions possessed language policy because vernacular must be studied before English language. The Church Missionary Society got Nupe, Yoruba, Igbo and indeed Hausa language boards which dictated the policies, examinations and methods in line with these local languages and also translated the work. For instance, Miller was an authority in the study of Hausa, Banfield in *Nupe*, A. S. Judd in *Tiv* and Low in *Gwari (Ibid: 153)*.

The Reverend Samuel Johnson published his monumental book entitled the *History of the Yoruba* in 1921 which remains a valuable document of Yoruba oral tradition for contemporary academic scholars. The book takes a look at Yorubas History from the very earliest period to the introduction of British protectorate (Johnson, 1978:250). This book was a clergy man's contribution to book industry in Nigeria because it has remained a monumental success in the archival records of Nigerians.

Of particular reference in Johnson book was the focus on oral sources as a useful method for the study of non-literate societies in Nigeria. Professor J.F.A. Ajayi, the author of Christian Missions in Nigeria, praised the effort of Johnson's field work and says that he had no formal training in history, but possessed a superbly good sense of history in respect to the biblical epic style of drama episodes and heroic characters. The literature ministry activities of Sudan Interior Mission (now ECWA Mission) started since 1924 which complimented the effort of the Christians through the sales of books and this was done by the Sudan Interior

Mission (SIM) to the Christians. This idea of literature sales culminated into Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) production limited in 1968 (Minchakpu, 1993:9).

The Effects of the Christian Missionaries activities in Nigeria on the Acquisition of Printing Press

Educational Development

Western education remains the best legacy left behind by the Christian missions in Nigeria. Although the motive of the Christian missions on their arrival into the Nigerian scene was to Christianize Nigerians. This has been corroborated clearly by William Boyd thus:

> *...it must be kept in mind that the church undertook the business of education not because it regarded education as good in itself, but because it found that it could not do its own proper work without giving its adherents, and especially its clergy, as much of the formal learning as was required for the study of the sacred writings and for the performance of their religious duties* (Boyd, 1961:99-101).

It must be mentioned that the church produced the first set of educated elite for educational and other developmental challenges in Nigeria. Thus, men of the church emerged as foremost politicians which has been described by Ayandele as Ethiopianism. It must be stated that the Christian Missions were path finders to the British administration because it has been mentioned that these missions paved way for the British overrule in Nigerian. In addition, the Church was destined to be the origin of Nigerian nationalism, the only megaphone of nationalist feelings and expressions before Nigeria had its press immediately after 1879 and this went on beyond 1914. This area has not been given due attention by scholars who have verified the constitutionality and development of nationalist activities in Nigeria. Thus, Ethiopianism within the Nigerian sense and various documents on the history of African nationalism 'Ethiopianism is seen as one of the concepts used to evaluate African nationalism discussed through the Church. This term was derived from Psalm 68:31 which mentioned that 'Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands to God' (Ayandele, 1991:177). It should be stated that in Nigeria and West Africa. Ethiopianism signified different meanings within the South and Central Africa which has been made clear by intellectuals such as Sundkler, Shepperson and Price. Within these areas, the connotation of Ethipianism has been perceived as discriminatory emanating from racial prejudice of the white overlords. The Christian Missions in these areas have not been fortunate enough to bring up an African agency that could produce African leadership within the Church. This delayed the Africans in terms of expression, freedom as per their personality. Therefore, they were balkanized and

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consequently established their own Churches. As a matter of fact, balkanization was a major yardstick of Ethiopianism in these areas which later sparked off nationalists feelings as championed by the Church.

Thus, the church started the literary aspect of education in Nigeria which later produced the first set of nationalists. As a result of the first school that was established in Nigeria which has been credited to the Methodists. But Fafunwa, stated that the Church Missionary Society made the most important impact to the development of education in Nigeria. (Fafunwa, 1974:79).

Nationalist Agitations:

Some scholars have argued perhaps that the church did not contribute to Nigerian nationalism. J. S. Coleman belonged to these critics. He commented thus:

> *Propositions regarding causal relationships between Christian Missionary activity and the rise of nationalism can be advanced only with the greatest tentativeness and caution, and then only of the highest level of generalization. Certainly they cannot be quantitatively stated* (Coleman, 1958:96).

But there were evidences to support immense contributions of the Christian missions to nationalism in Nigeria. For instance, the missionary newspapers gave impetus to the needed nationalists inspiration in Nigeria, particularly towards the end of the 19th century. Richard Deale Blaize who arrived Lagos in 1862 founded both the Lagos Times and Gold Coast Colony Advertiser. Both newspapers were very vehement in expressing nationalist feelings in Nigeria thus:

> *We are not clamouring for immediate independence, but it should always be borne in mind that the present order of things will not last forever. A time will come when the colonies on the West coast will be left to regulate their own internal and external affairs.* (Coker, : 9)

Manpower Development:

The importation of printing machine by Townsend created an opportunity for the training and development of the first generation of printing apprenticeship in Nigeria. Thus, the commercial press established by him led to the training of first indigenous trainees and printers in this country. Thus, when newspapers emerged later in Nigeria, they searched for competent hands to man their machines. Apparently, it would be ark some without the experts in printing press founded by the Church Missionary Society Henry Townsend (Lawal, 2003: 36-37).

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Development of Books in Nigeria:

The first major groups of publishers in Africa were the Christian missions who had by the nineteenth century founded presses in different parts of Africa for the purpose of producing printed religious literature. This in turn increased the level of educational development of Nigerians. For instance, the famous Fagunwa's work *Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irunmale* was later translated by Professor Wole Soyinka into English language as 'Forest of a thousand Demons' (Lawal, 2003:37). This achievement increased the reading habits of Nigerians generally. In addition, Christian presses embarked on published works which further improved the general education and enriched cultural history of Nigerians.

Conclusion

The study has shown that the coming of the Christian Missions into Nigeria had many benefits. Apart from the fact that they were the first to introduce Christian Christianity and Western education, they also brought the knowledge of the printing press simultaneously into the country. This singular act pushed people to imbibe the culture of reading, writing or seeking for information. In addition, the introduction of printing technology by both Reverend Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society and Reverend Hope Waddell of Presbyterian Church of Scotland led to the growth and development of Nigerian press. Realizing the role the press could play in evangelizing the indigenous people, they set up newspapers to supplement pulpit preaching of the words of God to the local communities. This produced men of the church who contributed immensely to the growth and development of Nigeria. They built newspaper industries to press home their economic, social and political demands in line with the Christian doctrines. In addition, the Christian Missions laid good foundation for the development of journalism in Nigeria. This effort has been consistently by journalists in the development of Nigeria as a nation.

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