Religion As A Repository Of Nigeria National Communication Policy

Israel Udomisor *   S.P E. Akoje

I.W. Udomisor Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in the Department of Mass Communication,
University of Maiduguri, Borno State.Nigeria.
S.P.E. Akoje is a graduate fellow in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

Religion and communication are pervasive globally. In Nigeria, efforts to accommodate religious plurality in the face of Modern Mass Communication have led to the formation of policies to guide the conduct of Mass Communication. This is with the view of minimizing conflict or clash of interest of people, especially those with different religious conviction.

An explorative study of these policies, both written and unwritten, reveals that they are religiously derived. This paper identified a number of ways in which religious actions and inactions; religious leaders' statements as news sources; religious believes derived from holy books serve as sources of communication policies, guiding the behavior of Mass Communications in their business of communication in Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion, Communication, Policy, National.

INTRODUCTION

There is no gainsaying that, what Charles Caleb Colton said regarding religion is true. In today's world, religion is a big issue. For ages, peoples have written, read and invested unquantifiable amount of resources that is beyond measure in terms of Dollars and Cent for religious endeavours. Peoples have equally disputed, fought and died on the altar of religious faith. Infact, sentiment always takes over reasons when religious matter becomes an issue in any society.

Jonathan Swift left us in no doubt at all when he stated that religion is now more of a divisive force in the world than a uniting force among people living in the same place, but professing different religious affiliations.

As social animals, humans undergo a process of socialization starting from cradle to grave. Through this process, the individual human being learns, accepts and internalizes the norms, values and mores of the particular religion in the society he happen to belongs. Thus, in most cases, a child has no choice of religious conviction at birth. The same can be the case with the parents. As an aspect of culture, religion is very pervasive in human society. One recent survey shows that there are about 19 major faiths and up to 10,000 smaller religions worldwide. (Watchtower, August 1, 2009:3) In Nigeria, there are three major religion — Islam, Christianity and Traditional religion.

Communication is another pervasive aspect of human cultural heritage. Infact, the socialization process through which a person gets acquainted with the norms, values and mores of a given society is a communication process. Within any society, there are principles that define how this process works. These principles are often traceable to the religious norms, values and mores of that society — traditional or modern.

The business of communication is very crucial, if left without a set of guiding principles even at individual level, the consequences can be disastrous. Also, the plurality in modern societies calls for policies to guide interpersonal, group and mass communication to minimize clash of interest and ultimately, societal conflict. Today, conflicts of various kinds abound in Nigeria, especially in religious circle.

OBJECTIVE

Given the pervasiveness of religion and communication in human society, this paper is aimed at examining the ways in which the two dominant religious faiths in Nigeria (Islam and Christianity) serves as a specific source or fountain of Nigeria mass communication policy.

SCOPE OR LIMITATION

Communication is such a wide area that it would be near impossibility, to examine the various ways in which it is influenced by religion. Hence, in this paper, communication will refer specifically to mass communication — communication through Newspaper, Magazine, Radio and Television. This   excludes: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group communications, telephony, and fax.

Also, religion in this paper does not refer to religion in general — Paganism, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Islam Christianity, etc. Rather, the paper examines the two dominant religions in Nigeria — Islam and Christianity.

In social analysis, it will be a misrepresentation of reality and academic arrogance to claim to have answer to all social questions with regard to a given problem. Thus, this paper does not in any way claim to present an exhaustive instances and analysis of religious influence in the development and operation of mass communication policy in Nigeria.

Religion: Religion is a worldwide phenomenon that has played a part in all human culture and so, is a much broader, more complex category than the set of beliefs or practices found in any single religious tradition. An adequate understanding of religion must take into account its distinctive qualities and patterns as a form of human experience, as well as the similarities and differences in religions across human cultures.

In all cultures, human beings make a practice of interacting with what are taken to be spiritual powers. These powers may be in the form of gods, spirits, ancestors, or any kind of sacred reality with which humans believe themselves to be connected. Sometimes a spiritual power is understood broadly as an all- embracing reality; and sometimes it is approached through its manifestation in special symbols. It may be regarded as external to the self, internal, or both. People interact with such a presence in a sacred manner—that is, with reverence and care. Religion is the term most commonly used to designate this complex and diverse realm of human experience.

According to Paden (2009), the word religion is derived from the Latin noun religion, which denotes both earnest observance of ritual obligations and an inward spirit of reverence. In modern usage, religion covers a wide spectrum of meanings that reflect the enormous variety of ways the term can be interpreted. At one extreme, many committed believers recognize only their own tradition as a religion, understanding expressions such as worship and prayer to refer exclusively to the practices of their tradition. Although many believers stop short of claiming an exclusive status for their tradition, they may nevertheless use vague or idealizing terms in defining religion—for example, "true love of God," or "the path of enlightenment." At the other extreme, religion may be equated with ignorance, fanaticism, or wishful thinking.

Religion is not an object with a single, fixed meaning, or even a zone with clear boundaries, It is an aspect of human experience that may intersect, incorporate, or transcend other aspects of life and society. Such a definition avoids the drawbacks of limiting the investigation of religion to Western or biblical categories such as monotheism (belief in one god only) or to church structure, which are not universal. For example, in tribal societies, religion—unlike the Christian church—usually is not a separate institution but pervades the whole of public and private life. In Buddhism, gods are not as central as the idea of a Buddha (fully enlightened human being). In many traditional cultures the idea of a sacred cosmic order is the most prominent religious belief. Because of this variety, some scholars prefer to use a general term such as the sacred to designate the common foundation of religious life.

Religion in this understanding includes a complex of activities that cannot be reduced to any single aspect of human experience, It is a part of individual life but also of group dynamics. Religion includes not only patterns of behavior but also patterns of language and thought. It is sometimes a highly organized institution that sets itself apart from a culture, and it is sometimes an integral part of a culture. Religious experience may be expressed in visual symbols, dance and performance, elaborate philosophical systems, legendary and imaginative stories, formal ceremonies, meditative techniques, and detailed rules of ethical conduct and law. Each of these elements assumes innumerable cultural forms. In some ways there are as many forms of religious expression as there are human cultural environments. (Paden, 2009; Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2006)

COMMUNICATION

Communication involves the sharing of messages, ideas, or attitudes resulting in a degree of understanding between the sender and the receiver. In fact, the term 'communication' is an all embracing process by which people share information, ideas, and feelings. It involves the deliberate use of either spoken, written words and other non-verbal kinesics behavior such as body language, gesture, personal mannerism, style and the immediate physical environment which add meaning to a particular message or information (Ndidi, 2005; Lewis, 1975).

POLICY

A policy is a plan or course of action designed to define issues, influence decision-making, and promote broad objective of an individual, groups, or government. Put differently, it is a deliberate plan of action to guide decision and achieve rational outcome(s) (Paquette, 2002; Althan et al, 2007).

The term 'policy' is not normally used to denote what is actually done. This is referred to as 'procedure' or 'protocol'. A policy contains: the "what and why", procedures or protocols; "the what, the how, the where, and the when" about the phenomenon upon which the formulation of the policy is based. Policy may refer to governments, private sector organization, groups, and individuals. Hence, presidential executive orders, corporate privacy policies and parliamentary rules or order are examples of specific policies (Paquette, 2002).

Broadly speaking, policies are instituted to avoid some negative effects that has been noticed in an organization or in a particular society or to seek some positive benefits. Thus, policies can be understood as; a political, a management, a financial or an administrative mechanism arranged to reach explicit goals (Howard, 2005; Jenkins, 1975).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Laws, orders, commandments, policies are meant to guide humans. Whether these are divinely, politically, administratively or otherwise made, the ultimate objective is to ensure that human behaviors in all his endeavors are regulated. The question as to who makes the rules or policies and to whose ultimate benefit, as indicated by his quote at the outset of this paper (a statement made in 1844 in his contribution to The Critique of He gel's Philosophy of Rights.

Therefore, this paper adopts the Marxian critical political economy approach in the explication of the subject matter. This approach, deals with the complex societal issues of superstructure: the mass media; politics; laws; order etc as being determined by the substructure- the economy. (Onoja, 2009)

According to Marx, the ideological effect of the superstructure — media, laws, politics, religion and other social structure is ultimately in the interest of the ruling class in 'reproducing' essentially the exploitative relationships and manipulation and in legitimating the dominance of capitalism and the subordination of the working class. This process, according neo-Marxist scholars, works by way of what they call 'ideological state apparatuses — all means of socialization — religion, schools, family, mass media. (Mc Quail, 2005; Nikitin, 1983)

In this context, tenets of religious believes, actions or inaction, laws, ideas, and principles that are adopted as policies to guide the behavior and operation of mass communication in any social setup are conceived as in the furtherance of the interest of the ruling class and promoting the dominance of the capitalist system.

RELIGION IN NIGERIA
Religion is a global phenomenon. According to New Encyclopedia Britannica, there have never existed any people any where at any time who were not in some sense religious. In fact, Anthropologists and Archeologists are unanimous on one fact about the history of religion: Religion is as old as man himself (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1990).

Therefore, the geographical territory now known as Nigeria equally has different forms of religious orientations as many as there are tribes. Even today, there are many tribal religious convictions in Nigeria although they are no longer as prominent as they use to be.

Today, two foreign religions — Christianity and Islam are dominant in Nigeria. These two religions came to Nigeria separately. While Islam came from the north or west through Sokoto in the 17th century, Christianity came from the southern coast through Lagos. However, Christianity eventually got to the north through Bishop Ajayi Crowther. On the other hand, Usman Danfodio's jihad conquered various section of the north up to Illorin (Dogo, 2002).

It has been the experience in this country under different regimes to involve religious leaders and personalities in the formulation of policies affecting the social life of the country. Hence, Imams, Pastors and Bishops have.in one way or the other influenced or made some in puts to decisions that are made in sphere of politics, economy, defense, diplomacy, media and laws, It is this influence of religion in the sphere of media policy formulation either directly or indirectly that this paper sets out to examine.

COMMUNICATION POLICY
Communication policy is the conjugation of two concepts — communication and policy. By communication policy, reference is made to a set of principles and norms established to guide the behavior of communication system. They are shaped over time in the context of society's general approach to communication and the media; emanating from ideology, social and economic conditions of the country and the values on which they based (Udomisor, 2009).

Policy formulation is not peculiar to communication or mass communication alone, rather it is a global socio — political and economic phenomenon. In fact, in any social polity like ours, there are different types of policies in operation. These may include: communication and information policy; defense policy; domestic policy; economic policy; education policy; energy policy; environmental policy; foreign policy; health policy; housing policy; human resource policy; microeconomic policy; monetary policy; population policy; privacy policy; public policy in law; transportation policy; water policy; etc.

The ultimate source of the aforementioned social policies in Nigeria is the constitution. With reference to communication, chapter two, "Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy" of the 1999

Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in section 22 provides that: "The press, radio, television, and any other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and highlight the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people".

From this constitutional provision, the national mass communication policy is generally granted a foot hold and formalized. It is now left in the hand of the Federal Ministry of Information to formulate and concretize the policy in a

document, providing specific directives to the different Television and Public Relations organisations.

In the international arena, global communication policies are traditionally made in such intergovernmental forum such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). These organizations are relatively open to the sociocultural dimension in information communication technologies (Hamelink, 2002). Moreover, the New World Information and Communication Order's (NWICO) debate in the 1970s and 1980s, among other things demanded for the establishment of national communication policy in each nation of the developing nations (Pate,2007).

In Nigeria under the present democratic dispensation, there is no single communication policy document that spells out the functions and operation of the different mass communication typologies. A document of such nature which was inherited from the military era has its provisions overtaken by time and events (Udeajah, 2004; Udomisor, 2009). So, with the restoration of democracy in Nigeria since 1999, the nation is due to have a well documented mass communication policy to guide specific mass media operation with goals that are development oriented and based on democratic ideals. Yet, it has been our experience that after ten years of democracy, such a document has not yet materialized. This situation continues to persist despite all the cries about development, digitization of the broadcast media and the rebranding of Nigeria image abroad. The federal ministry of information has not been able to formulate a concise mass communication policy for the nation.

Therefore, this situation of unwritten mass communication policy makes it possible for other government agencies, departments and ministries to usurp and have some inputs in dictating the compass of operation of the mass media in Nigeria.

CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM: SOURCES OF NIGERIA COMMUNICATION POLICY

As indicated above, the ultimate sources of Nigeria communication policy is the constitution of Nigeria. But, an examination of religious laws, principles, actions and at times, inactions indicates some sorts of policies for the operation of the media of communication in the country. This section of the paper identifies and discusses the various instances in which Christian and an Islamic activity in the country sets some sorts of communication policies for Nigeria mass media.

The first instance of religious action that set a policy for the media was when a religious organization — the Presbyterian Church — established the first printing press in Calabar in 1846. According to Ajibade (2003), Reverend Hope

Waddell's — a missionary of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland effort was the first attempt to introduce commercial press in Nigeria". "Commercial press", that was a policy. A communication policy emanating from a religious organization that sees the press (the reproduction of communication in print) as a business venture. From that beginning, commercial press has grown in Nigeria (Ayu, 1997).

Following closely to the above religious inspired communication policy of commercialization is another policy, that of using the mass media as an avenue through which people can be educated. This communication policy was conceived and implemented when another religious organization established the first newspaper in Nigeria, the Iwe Irohin (1859-1867). This paper was established by Revernd Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). According to Coker (1968: 1), Townsends explained his motive in establishing the paper in this words: "My objective is to get people to read, that is, to the habit of seeking information by reading". Today, the fact of this policy, (that of "seeking information" by reading newspapers and magazines) is not in doubt at all among Nigerians. Today every Nigerian, males, females, old, young; in the north and south do seek for information by reading newspapers and magazines.

Another communication policy emanating from Reverend Henry Townsend's action is that; the Nigerian press started as private media in the country, unlike its broadcast counterpart. This policy has limited the government's laws with respect to the ownership of the press in Nigeria. Hence, private individuals, organizations and governments both in the federal and state levels now own, print and distribute newspapers and magazines in Nigeria.

As a consequence of the above communication policy, religious publications abound in the country, though not prominently. During the formative years of Nigeria media, Reverend Waddell sets up a paper called Calabar Observer. Later, he also established two newspapers in vernacular that goes with the names: Unwam Efik in 1885 and Obupong Efik in 1886 (Ajibade, 2003).

At present, the following religious publications are in circulation in Nigeria:

African Challenge and Yoruba Challenge published by the Sudan Interior

Mission; Today's Challenge published by the Evangelical Church of West Africa

(ECWA); Nigeria Catholic Herald, a weekly published by the Catholic church in

Lagos. Awake! is regularly circulated by Jehovah's Witnesses. The Apostolic

Faith Church also circulates its United State based Highway magazine in Nigeria. In addition to this, there are: Good News newspaper published by the

Foursquare Gospel church; Christian Women Mirror published by the Deeper Life Christian Ministry; Redemption Light magazine published by the Redeemed Christian Church of God and The Winners World published by the Living Faith Ministries (Edeani, 1985:52; Ajibade, 2003:6).

Apart from the above communication policies, there are the-silent modes through which religious organizations within Nigeria influence the operation of the mass media. The influence of religious leaders in Nigeria communication policy is great. Imams, Bishops, General Overseers of Pentecostal churches exert greater influence on Nigeria communication policy. These individuals, because of their religious status, wield considerable power over the people and their actions. Therefore, they constitute a substantial percentage of news sources. By the statements they make, they shape the behavior of communication; thereby setting standard that becomes communication policy.

Closely related to the above is the media coverage of religious activities. It is not a new thing in Nigeria to expect in Jumat prayers session a highlights of preaching in Mosques on Fridays being featured in the media. On Sundays too, Christian worship and highlights of preaching from different churches are aired in the broadcast media. Also, pages of newsprints are devoted to news and features about such services. These trends did not just start by chance, they evolved as a product of our collective experiences with religious dispositions and perceptions which is to avoid triggering feelings of religious favoritism and marginalization.

In this direction, it is not out of place for religious organizations and associations to call for press conferences/briefing. In Nigeria, there are several religious associations in both Christianity and Islam. In Islam, there are associations such as: Jama'atul lzalatul-Bidi'a Wa Iqamatus-Sunnah (JIBWIS); Jama'atul Nasril Islam (JNI); Fityanul Islam (Fl); NASFAT; etc. According to Doi (1997), these associations are necessary to provide forums for consultations among Muslims. Thus he said that: "to do any collective work without prior mutual consultation is not only a way of the ignorant, but also a clear defiance of the regulation laid down by Allah".

In Christianity, there are: Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN); Christian Students Union (CSU); Christian Group Fellowship (CGF); Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN) and a host of other associations in Christendom (Kukah, 2009). These associations in both Christianity and Islam are part of Nigeria social realities which media professionals can't but consider when, disseminating information to ensure that their reception of the information will not create tension in the polity. As such, their dispositions shape the behavior of communication through some sorts of 'given', rather than written or clearly spelt out policies.

In the broadcasting sphere of the media, ownership of either radio or television is regulated by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). Because of the religious experience in Nigeria, the NBC Act No 38 of 1992 specifically stipulated that broadcasting licenses will not be granted to religious organizations. This policy statement would not have been made if not for the existence and nature of religion in Nigeria. Hence, by virtue of their existence communication policy emerged.

Another broad area in this discussion is the influence of religious laws derived from the holy books (Bible and Qur'an) on the ethical codes guiding Nigerian media professional in their operations. Compared to religious laws, these journalistic ethical codes are new. Hence, the principles on which some of these codes are based are derived from the spirit of the laws and principles found in either the Bible or Qur'an or both. Some examples of these will help to clarify this point further. In 1978, the first ethical code for professional journalists in Nigeria was formulated and adopted under the umbrella of Nigeria Press Organization (NPO) which was made up of; Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN), Nigeria Guild of Editors(NGE) and Nigeria Union of Journalists(NUJ). The code contains eight (8) ethical tenets. But the inability of NPAN, NGE and NUJ to fully enforce the code gave rise to a reformation and adoption of a new code of ethic in 1996 to guide the practice of journalists. This new code contains 15 tenets, namely:

1. Editorial independence

2. Accuracy and Fairness

3. Privacy
4. Privilege/nondisclosure
5. Decency
6. Discrimination
7. Reward /Gratification
8. Violence
9. Children and Minors
10. Access to information
11 . Public Interest
12. Social Responsibility
13. Plagiarism
14. Copy right
15. Press Freedom (Qkunna,1995; Momoh, 1998; 2000; Galadima and Embu,2000)

A closer examination of the above tenets of the code of ethic of journalistic practice will reveal that, some of them, though not directly, are derived from religious principles, based on the collective spiritual consciousness of Nigerian journalists. This consciousness is in turn based on the knowledge of the holy Books, Bible and Qur'an.

With respect to the principle of "Accuracy and Fairness", the Qur'an is seen as the embodiment of fairness and accurate statements (Qur'an, 54:5; 2:1-2). Hadith 15 of An-nawawi stipulated that one should speak the truth, otherwise one should keep silent. In the Bible too, at Ephesians 4:25, all Christians were urged to keep speaking the truth with his or her neighbor. It is obvious that the principles of these portions in religious holy Books are reflected in the tenet of accuracy and fairness in journalistic code of ethics.
Decency in dressing and grooming as found in the code was also derived from the holy Books (Qur'an 33:59; 1 Timothy 2:9). The ethical tenet on discrimination equally stemmed from such religious injunctions such as Hadith 13 of An-nawawi which says that, "none of you is really a believer until he likes to his brother what he likes to himself". The same sentiment is found in the Bible at the book of Acts of the Apostles 10:34, 35 which says that, " God is not partial, but in every nation, the man that fears Him and works righteousness is acceptable to Him".
The same applies to the ethical tenet on reward and gratification. The Bible at Exodus 23: 8 puts the effect of bribe on a person succinctly when it said: "you are not to accept a bribe, for the bribe blinds clear-sighted men and can distort the words of righteous men".
From the foregoing, it is clear that some of the tenets of journalistic ethical code of conduct in Nigeria are derived from the religious consciousness of stakeholders who sat and formulated the code. Since the code is a guide to the practice of journalism, it forms part of the several policies formulated to guide the behavior of communication carried out through the mass media in Nigeria.
Again, this paper examines another way through which communication policy in Nigeria springs from religious sources. Issues regarding religion are volatile in Nigeria. The way they are handled in the media always leads to actions that in effect sets policies on how such issues will be treated subsequently in the media. The country has witnessed several religious crises. Some of which are: Kano (1980, 1991, 1994,1997); Kaduna (1982, 1992, 1996, 2000); Maiduguri (2006,2009); Gombe (1985); Katsina (1991); Yola (1984), etc (Dogo, 2002; Kukah, 2009). Also, in January and March 2010, Nigeria witnessed another violent religious upheaval in Jos, Plateau state. The way it was treated in the state media led to further escalation of the crisis.
The Plateau State Commissioner of Po lice granted an interview to the Plateau Radio and Television (PRTV) where he explained that the crisis started when Christians were in Church when they were attacked by Muslims. Later, the station ran a commentary on the interview and the result was more violence in the State. If the interview was handled differently, the result migth have been
different. This event has set a sort of communication policy on how to treat subsequent religious matters in Plateau State in particular and Nigeria at large.
Closely related to this is the series of violent crises in Maiduguri, Bauchi, Gombe, Katsina, Onitsha, Aba and other places in 2006 as a result of a Danish cartoon. This was an example of a media professional's insensitivity to religious code of conduct in a far away Europe, resulting in violent crisis in Nigeria. There is no doubt in the mind of Nigerian journalists that such an act can't be tolerated here in Nigeria. That is a communication policy, an unwritten one set through the response of religious faithful.

Hence, media men through self-censorship, code of ethics and gate keeping strategies do consider the potential response of religious organizations to their publication before going to press or going on air.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, it has been made clear that religion is a universal phenomenon which is born out of societal experience as well as contacts with other societies. In Nigeria, the two main religious organizations, especially in recent times have been Christianity and Islam and they are foreign. These religious organizations have a lot of inputs into what is done in this country in the sphere of, politics, economy, foreign affair and the media of mass communication.

The paper identified several ways in which each religious actions or inaction through their leaders statement action; their leader's statements as news sources; their believes, derived from their Holy Books serves as the bases for communication policies to guide the behavior of professional communicators in their daily business of communication.

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