



## THE PRINT MEDIA AND THE PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA: A HISTORICAL VIEW

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper examines the role of the print media in communicating the gospel to indigenous Africans. Through a historical lens, the study identifies several factors that contributed to the effective use of the print media in the propagation of Christianity across Africa. These factors include the development of orthography for various African languages, the establishment of Western education, the rise of African missionaries, the translation of the Bible into local languages, and the emergence of modern journalism, with a particular focus on Nigeria. The findings reveal that the print media significantly promoted the spread of the gospel by facilitating the contextualisation of Christian teachings, fostering a spirit of ecumenism, advancing Western education, and reinforcing the commitment to fulfilling the Christian mission in Africa. The paper concludes by suggesting that the continued production and distribution of Christian literature such as tracts, magazines, handbills, posters, and further Bible translations into African languages would greatly enhance the ongoing propagation of Christianity throughout the continent.*

**KEYWORDS:** Print Media, Christianity, Africans, Africa.



## INTRODUCTION

The propagation of Christianity in Africa has been significantly shaped by various mediums of communication, with the print media standing out as one of the most influential (Ajayi, 1965; Sanneh, 1989; Isichei, 1995; Walls, 1996). The print media, which includes all forms of printed communication such as books, pamphlets, newspapers, and magazines, has played a central role in the dissemination of Christian teachings across the continent (Nwankwo, 2017). The importance of the print media in this context cannot be overstated, as it has facilitated the wide-reaching spread of the gospel, enabled the development of Christian doctrines, and supported the establishment of educational institutions that have contributed to both religious and secular knowledge (Sanneh, 1989, p. 120).

From the earliest days of missionary activity in Africa, the print media has served as a primary tool for communicating religious ideas to diverse and often dispersed populations (Morris, 2018, p. 26). Missionaries quickly recognised that to effectively spread Christianity, they needed to make religious texts accessible to the local population. This led to the translation of the Bible and other Christian literature into African languages, a monumental task that required the development of written forms for many previously unwritten languages. The Bible, as the core text of Christianity, became the cornerstone of this effort, and its translation into local languages allowed for a more profound and personal engagement with Christian teachings (Bediako, 2000, p. 78).

The establishment of the print media in Africa also had far-reaching implications beyond the spread of religious doctrine. The introduction of printing presses by missionaries and colonial powers played a crucial role in the development of literacy and education in many parts of Africa (Cagé & Rueda, 2016). Mission schools, which were often the first institutions to teach reading and writing, used printed materials to educate their students not only in religious matters but also in a broad range of subjects (Hastings, 1996, p. 243). This educational mission was closely linked to the propagation of Christianity, as literacy was seen as essential for understanding the Bible and other religious texts (Ochieng', 1990, p. 54).

In Nigeria, for example, the arrival of the print media marked a significant turning point in the country's religious and cultural history. The introduction of the printing press by missionaries such as Reverend Henry Townsend in the mid-19th century facilitated the production of the first indigenous newspaper, *Iwe Irohin*, which served as a vital tool for spreading Christian teachings and promoting literacy among the Yoruba people (Ajayi, 1965, p. 82). This development was not limited to Nigeria; similar efforts were made across the continent, where print media became a vehicle for both religious instruction and the transmission of broader cultural and educational values (Kalu, 2008, p. 305).

The development of African language orthographies – standardised systems of writing for African languages – was another key outcome of the missionary engagement with the print media. Missionaries worked tirelessly to create written forms of African languages, a process that often involved linguistic research and collaboration with local communities (Prah, 2009). The creation of these orthographies enabled the translation of the Bible and other Christian texts, making the teachings of Christianity accessible to a wider audience and helping to preserve and standardise African languages (Walls, 1996, p. 111).



The role of the print media in the planting and growth of Christianity in Africa is therefore multifaceted. It encompasses the translation and dissemination of religious texts, the establishment of educational institutions, the development of African languages, and the broader cultural and social transformations that accompanied the spread of literacy. The print media has not only been a tool for communicating Christian faith, it has also been instrumental in shaping the religious, educational, and cultural landscape of Africa (Isichei, 1995, p. 234). This paper, through a historical analysis, seeks to explore these various dimensions of the print media's impact on the growth of Christianity in Africa. By examining the origins and development of the print media in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, and its role in linguistic education, the development of African language orthographies, and the communication of Christian faith, the paper aims to highlight the enduring relevance of the print media in the religious and cultural history of the continent. Through this exploration, the paper will demonstrate that the spread of Christianity in Africa is inextricably linked to the rise and proliferation of the print media, a relationship that has had lasting implications for both the Church and African societies (Mbiti, 1990, p. 159).

### **The Concept of Print Media in the Planting of Christianity**

The concept of print media in the planting of Christianity in Africa has manifested in various impactful ways. A significant early effort was the translation of the Bible and Christian messages into local languages to resonate more effectively with African audiences. For instance, the Yoruba Bible was translated from the King James Version (1611) by Bishop Ajayi Crowther in 1848, aiming to make the Bible accessible to people in a language they could understand, beyond the traditional Greek and Latin (Moruwawon, 2011, p. 45). Similarly, between 1893 and 1896, the Bible was translated into the Luganda language of Uganda, greatly enhancing the comprehension of Christian doctrine in indigenous languages. Mojola (2010) notes that Bible translation has consistently been at the forefront of mission work, opening up dialogue with local cultures and creating the linguistic foundation for Christian worship, liturgy, evangelism, and theological discourse (Mojola, 2010, p. 12). Translation has thus been essential for the genuine and creative appropriation of Christian faith in Africa, as it allowed for the expression of Christian doctrines in familiar syntax, symbols, and concepts (Akintunde, 2019, p. 113).

To promote Christianity through the print media, various African countries have established Bible Societies dedicated to making the Bible available and understandable to all. For instance, the British and Foreign Bible Society facilitated the founding of the Bible Society of Ghana in 1967, the Bible Society of Cameroon in 1964, and, following the agreement of the churches in Nigeria, the Bible Society of Nigeria in 1966 (Falk, 1997, pp. 331-360).

The print media also played a crucial role in the indigenisation of Christianity in Africa. Africans, who are profoundly religious, often view their faith as an integral part of their culture and daily life, providing moral guidance (Mbiti, 1969; 1975; Thorpe, 1992). Consequently, missionary and African Christian efforts in evangelisation have often focused on the domestication of Christianity. In West Africa, hymns, catechisms, sermons, and other religious texts were rendered in native languages, an effort made possible by the missionaries who developed orthographies and reduced several West African languages to writing (Roy-Campbell, 2019). Oduyoye (1969) and Gaiya (2002) document that before the arrival of missionaries in Yorubaland, the translation of the Bible into Yoruba had already begun. Notably, much of this translation work, along with editing and revision, was conducted by



Africans themselves, with expatriate missionaries providing expert services in editing, revision, and proofreading (Oduyoye, 1969, p. 245; Gaiya, 2002, pp. 100-101).

Sierra Leone played a pivotal role in the Christianisation and indigenisation of Christianity in Africa, pioneering the study and translation of the Bible into African languages. In 1812, Gustav Nylander translated St. Matthew's Gospel into the Bulom Sherbro language, while figures like Samuel Crowther, Thomas Bowen, and David Hinderer worked on the Yoruba translation, and Scheon on the Hausa translation. Significantly, Simund W. Koelle, a Basel-trained CMS missionary, published *Polyglotta Africana* in 1854, a comparative vocabulary of nearly 300 words and phrases in more than a hundred distinct African languages (Hastings, 1996, p. 280; Gaiya, 2002, p. 95).

The influence of the print media extends beyond Bible translations to the creation of various confessional works of literature, which have also played a significant role in the propagation of Christianity. Adegboyega (1978) and Fatokun *et al.* (2017) note that the print media was instrumental in introducing the classical Pentecostal church to Nigeria. Notably, between 1920 and 1921, Pastor D. O. Odubanjo, a member of the Diamond Society, received the *Sword of the Spirit*, a religious magazine from Pastor Clarke of the Faith Tabernacle Congregation in Philadelphia. The study of this and other confessional kinds of literature eventually led to the inception of Nigeria's foremost classical Pentecostal church (Adegboyega, 1978, p. 213; Fatokun *et al.*, 2017, p. 92).

Moreover, theological institutions were established to produce indigenous preachers, leading to the development of African literary prowess as a direct result of the application of the print media in the planting of Christianity in Africa. The production of periodicals, including various magazines and official church organs, has also significantly contributed to the spread of the Christian faith in Africa. These periodicals have played a crucial role in developing doctrines and upholding Christian faith. Institutions like theological schools and university departments of Christian religious studies have used magazines and bulletins such as *Riches of Grace*, *Sword of the Spirit*, *Orita*, *Thelma*, *Bibliosacratheca*, *Pastoral Care*, *African Times*, *Polyglotta Africana*, *Ado Journal of Religious Studies*, *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology*, and *African Journal of Biblical Studies* to expound Christian teachings (Hastings, 1996, pp. 282-283). These publications serve dual purposes – spiritual and academic – in the planting of Christianity in Africa.

### **Linguistics Education and Establishment of Schools**

The establishment of linguistic education and schools in Africa by Christian missionaries was not just a religious endeavour but a significant cultural and intellectual project. With the settlement of freed slaves in the colony of Sierra Leone, Christian missionaries saw an opportunity to establish a strong Christian presence in the region. However, their efforts were initially met with resistance from local chiefs who were still heavily invested in the slave trade – a practice that Christianity sought to abolish. Despite this resistance, the freed slaves, or Nova Scotians, who had embraced Christianity and Western education, became vital allies in the spread of the faith.

As Falk (1997) observes, early missionary efforts included translating Christian texts into local languages, which was critical for the spread of Christianity. For instance, Nylander, an early missionary, began working on the Bulom shore across the estuary north of Freetown, producing



a grammar and vocabulary, and translating the Gospel of Matthew into the local language. Unfortunately, the continued disruptions caused by the slave trade forced the society to withdraw from the region and concentrate its efforts on the Sierra Leone colony (Falk, 1997, p. 106). This withdrawal led to a strategic shift in missionary activities, culminating in the founding of Fourah Bay College in 1827, the first higher educational institution in West Africa. The college was established primarily to train catechists and teachers who could spread Christianity throughout the continent. This institution became a beacon of Christian education and linguistic scholarship, producing notable graduates such as Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who played a pivotal role in translating the Bible into Yoruba and other African languages.

The role of Fourah Bay College and other missionary institutions in linguistic education cannot be overstated. These institutions were instrumental in the study and documentation of African languages, which was essential for producing religious literature that could be used in evangelism. Falk (1997) highlights the contributions of missionaries like J.F. Schoen, who studied the Ibo and Hausa languages, and Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who prepared grammar and translations of the Gospels into Yoruba (Falk, 1997, pp. 108-109). The creation of such linguistic resources was a monumental task, requiring a deep understanding of the local cultures and languages, which in turn facilitated the spread of Christianity.

One of the most significant linguistic achievements of this era was Dr. S.W. Koelle's *Polyglotta Africana*, a comparative vocabulary of 100 words and phrases in 150 African languages and dialects (Falk, 1997, p. 110). This work was not merely a linguistic curiosity but a foundational text that provided future missionaries with the tools they needed to communicate effectively with diverse African communities. Koelle's work symbolised the broader effort to adapt Christianity to the African context, making it accessible and relevant to the local population. The linguistic education provided by these missionary institutions also laid the groundwork for the training of African church leaders. Henry Venn, a prominent figure in missionary circles, advocated for the training of indigenous leaders who could take over the leadership of African churches once they were established. This approach was rooted in the belief that Christianity in Africa could only thrive if it was led by Africans who understood the cultural and linguistic nuances of their communities (Falk, 1997). As a result, African languages were systematically reduced to written forms, enabling the translation of scriptures and providing a medium for instruction in missionary schools.

Samuel Ajayi Crowther's contributions to the development of Yoruba orthography exemplify the intersection of linguistic education and evangelism. Crowther's work on Yoruba grammar, a Yoruba-English dictionary, and his translations of biblical texts were groundbreaking (Falk, 1997, p. 126). These linguistic tools were essential for spreading Christianity in Yorubaland and beyond, as they allowed the message of the Gospel to be communicated in a language that was familiar and accessible to the local population (Hastings, 1996, p. 278). Crowther's journal of his Niger expedition further enriched the understanding of the region and provided valuable insights into the cultures and languages of the Niger River communities (Ney, 2015).

The impact of these linguistic efforts extended beyond Yoruba-speaking regions. For instance, Thomas Bowen, the first representative of the Southern Baptist Convention in Yorubaland, also had to learn Yoruba at the Church Missionary Society's station in Abeokuta to effectively carry out his missionary work (Hastings, 1996, p. 279). Bowen's linguistic preparation enabled him to engage with the local population on a deeper level, facilitating the spread of Christianity in the hinterlands of Yorubaland.



In southeastern Nigeria, the United Presbyterian Church made significant contributions to both evangelism and linguistic education. Hope Masterton Waddell, a pioneering missionary in the region, confronted local practices such as witchcraft and the killing of twins, which were deeply entrenched in the culture (Waddell, 1863). The success of the mission in eradicating these practices was due in part to the development of written materials in the local Efik language (Waddell, 1863; Carr, 2022). Hugh Goldie, who arrived in 1847, compiled a dictionary of the Efik language, and along with William Anderson and Alexander Robb, translated the New Testament and *The Pilgrim's Progress* into Efik (Gaiya, 2002, pp. 101-102). These translations were not only tools for religious instruction but also marked the beginning of a literary tradition in Efik, contributing to the cultural and intellectual development of the community.

Hastings (1996) reflects on the broader significance of these linguistic achievements for the growth of Christianity in Africa. He argues that while the number of conversions might have been limited in the early stages, the development of vernacular literature had a profound and lasting impact. The availability of Christian texts in local languages, such as hymn books, prayer books, and translations of the Bible, created a new cultural landscape where literacy and Christianity were closely intertwined. This “linguistic edge,” as Hastings describes it, became a powerful tool for both evangelisation and modernisation. It provided African communities with access to Christian ideas and practices in a way that was both culturally resonant and intellectually engaging (Hastings, 1996, p. 243).

The development of vernacular languages was thus a critical factor in the success of Christian missions in Africa. The use of Creole in Sierra Leone, for instance, facilitated communication among the returned expatriate Africans and played a crucial role in the spread of Christianity in the region. Samuel Ajayi Crowther's ministry to his Yoruba kinsmen in Sierra Leone, conducted in Yoruba, represents one of the earliest instances of Christian worship in the African language (Oduyoye, 1969, p. 251). This precedent set the stage for the widespread use of local languages in Christian worship and education across the continent (Falk, 1997, p. 115).

There is no doubt that the establishment of linguistic education and schools by Christian missionaries in Africa was a multifaceted endeavour that went beyond mere religious instruction. It involved a deep engagement with local cultures and languages, resulting in the creation of a rich body of literature that continues to influence African Christianity today. The translation of the Bible and other Christian texts into local languages, the development of grammar and dictionaries, and the training of indigenous leaders were all crucial components of this process. These efforts not only facilitated the spread of Christianity but also contributed to the intellectual and cultural development of African societies, leaving a legacy that endures to this day.

### **Origin of Print Media in Nigeria**

The roots of print media in Nigeria, including newspapers, journals, gospel tracts, posters, and active journalism, can be traced back to the pioneering efforts of missionaries who arrived in West Africa in the 19th century. The likes of Hope Masterton Waddell of the Presbyterian Church of Scottish Mission and Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) were at the forefront of this media. These missionaries played a crucial role in laying the foundations for what would become a vibrant and influential print culture in Nigeria. Waddell established a printing press in 1846, while Townsend established his in 1854 (Odorume, 2012, p. 3). The preservation of their voyage journals and diaries, which meticulously chronicled



their daily activities, became invaluable sources of historical information and laid the groundwork for the development of print media in the region.

One of the earliest examples of this is the work of Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who published his voyage journal after accompanying the British naval vessel *Pleiad* on an exploratory mission along the Niger River. Crowther's journal not only provided detailed accounts of the expedition but also served as a powerful tool for encouraging the CMS and other religious bodies to pursue further missionary endeavours along the river. This journal is one of the earliest recorded instances of the print media being used in Nigeria to document and promote religious and exploratory activities.

The formal introduction of the print media in Nigeria is marked by the publication of the first newspaper, *Iwe Irohin Yoruba*, in 1859 (Elebute, 2014, p. 63). This newspaper was established by Townsend in Abeokuta and printed through the printing press he had earlier established in 1854. Townsend's motivation for founding the newspaper was twofold: to provide the Yoruba people with a medium of communication in their language and to encourage literacy among the local population. At the time of its publication, approximately 3,000 Yoruba people were literate in their language, a testament to the impact of missionary education efforts (Maringues, 2001). *Iwe Irohin* became a vital platform for disseminating news and information, including marriage announcements, church news, advertisements, post office notices, and articles on various topics such as tile making, trade reports, and cotton statistics (Omoyajowo, 1995, p. 24). Townsend's initiative had a profound effect on the local population, prompting many parents to send their children to CMS schools to learn to read and write. The success of *Iwe Irohin* encouraged the CMS to further invest in educational and printing infrastructure, leading to the establishment of more schools and the widespread adoption of print media as a tool for both religious and secular communication (Duyile, 1987).

In a broader historical context, Oduyoye (1969) attributes the establishment of the printing press in Nigeria to the CMS's efforts, which led to the beginning of written literature in the Yoruba language. One of the first significant publications in Yoruba was the *Yoruba Primer*, published in 1848 for use in mission schools (Oduntan, 2005). However, it is worth noting that Samuel Ajayi Crowther had already made substantial contributions to Yoruba literature five years earlier, with the publication of his *Grammar and Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* in 1843 (Ney, 2015). Crowther's work was instrumental in standardising the Yoruba language and making it accessible in written form, thereby facilitating the spread of both education and Christianity in the region (Ojalere & Jimoh, 2022, p. 82).

The production of Christian literature has always been seen as a crucial aspect of the proclamation of the gospel in West Africa. Various missionary organisations sought to send Christian literature to the region to support the planting and establishment of churches. For example, the inception of The Apostolic Church in Nigeria is partly attributed to Pastor David Osmond Odubanjo's direct contact with *Riches of Grace*, a magazine published by The Apostolic Church in Great Britain. These played a significant role in inspiring Odubanjo and other early Nigerian Christians to embrace and spread the Apostolic faith (Adeleye, 2011; 2022).

The print media also became a powerful tool for advocacy and the promotion of social justice among Black Christians. In the United States, the first Black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, edited by J.B. Russwurm in New York, was used to propagate anti-colonisation views and



advocate for the emancipation of Black people. The emigration of Black Americans to the West Coast of Africa, motivated in part by discussions in publications like *Christian Intelligence*, a publication of the Dutch Reformed Church, facilitated the spread of Christianity in Africa. These publications were instrumental in linking the African diaspora with missionary activities in West Africa, further strengthening the Christian presence in the region (Sanneh, 1983, p. 97).

The introduction of tracts as a medium for evangelism, though a later development, became a vital tool in the dissemination of religious information in West Africa. Tracts were typically distributed free of charge, making them accessible to a wide audience and increasing their impact (Nwankwo & Emeahara, 2024). One notable example is the distribution of the tract known as *Sword of the Spirit* among members of the Faith Tabernacle Congregation during the formative years of The Apostolic Church Nigeria (TACN) and, subsequently, the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC). As earlier mentioned, it was the same Pastor David Osmond Odubanjo, a key figure in the Nigerian Christian community who was credited with corresponding with Pastor Ambrose Clarke of the Faith Tabernacle in Philadelphia, USA, having come across the *Sword of the Spirit*. This correspondence, facilitated by print media, helped to strengthen the connection between Nigerian Christians and their counterparts in the United States, contributing to the growth and development of the church in Nigeria (Adegboyega, 1978).

In essence, we can boldly say that the origin of the print media in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with the efforts of early Christian missionaries who recognised the power of the printed word as a tool for education, evangelism, and social change. From the publication of voyage journals and the first Yoruba newspaper to the distribution of Christian tracts and magazines, the print media played a crucial role in shaping the cultural and religious landscape of Nigeria. The legacy of these early publications continues to influence Nigerian society, underscoring the enduring importance of the print media in the country's history.

### **Development of African Language Orthography and the Print Media**

The development of African language orthography and the print media represents one of the most significant achievements in the history of Christian missions in Africa (Tembo, 2020). This process began with the concerted efforts of missionary-educated Africans, particularly graduates of Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, who were trained specifically for the task of translating religious texts and developing written forms of African languages (Paracka, Jr., 2002). Among these pioneering figures, Samuel Ajayi Crowther stands out for his extraordinary contributions to the development of Yoruba orthography and the translation of Christian scriptures into African languages (Ney, 2015).

Crowther's academic achievements are widely recognised as exemplary. In 1852, he published and revised an enlarged version of his *Yoruba Grammar and Vocabulary*, which became a cornerstone in the study and teaching of the Yoruba language. His translation work was equally significant; Crowther translated four books of the New Testament – Luke, Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of James, and the Epistles of Peter – into Yoruba (Oyeniya, 2020). These translations, along with his collaboration with Thomas King on the translation of the Bible and the prayer book, have been lauded for their high literary quality and they remain valuable works in the study of African Christian literature (Owadayo, 1995).





The development of African language orthography was essential for enabling Africans to take their place alongside Western missionaries in the work of evangelisation (Welmers, 1953). The creation of written forms for these languages allowed for the effective translation of scriptures and other religious texts, providing an accessible medium for teaching in mission schools. This work was seen as crucial for the future of the Church in Africa; without scriptures in local languages, the spread of Christianity would have faced significant challenges (Paustian, 2014). Sanneh (1989) highlights this point, stating that "the future of the Church in Africa would be bleak without Christian scriptures in local languages," which underscores the importance of the early translation efforts and the development of indigenous languages for the sustainability of Christianity on the continent.

The linguistic achievements of early missionaries were not limited to translation alone. Figures such as Sigismund Koelle in Freetown and Johannes Christaller in the Gold Coast made substantial contributions to our understanding of African languages, providing valuable linguistic, historical, and ethnographic materials that continue to inform the study of these languages today. Their work laid the foundation for the adaptation of Christianity to the African context, making it possible for Africans to practise their faith in their native tongues, thereby fostering a deeper cultural and spiritual connection to the religion (see Koelle, 1854a, 1854b; Christaller, 1875, 1879).

Moreover, while the initial linguistic data collection and transcription efforts were led by foreign missionaries, it was the Africans themselves who later played a crucial role in the ongoing development and refinement of their languages. Sanneh (1989) points out that Africans have a unique advantage in appreciating the deeper nuances of their mother tongues, which allowed them to enhance and expand upon the linguistic foundations laid by the missionaries. However, this does not diminish the importance of the missionaries' role in collecting the raw data and creating the initial frameworks for African linguistic education.

The pioneering efforts of early missionaries in the development of African linguistic education cannot be overstated. Their work in producing grammar and vocabulary texts for African languages was instrumental in establishing written forms of these languages, which in turn facilitated the translation of the Bible and other religious texts. For instance, Samuel Ajayi Crowther's *Yoruba Grammar and Vocabulary* and his contributions to the translation of the Bible into Yoruba were pivotal in the standardisation and dissemination of the Yoruba language in written form.

### **The Contributions of the Print Media to the Planting of Christianity in Africa**

The contributions of the print media to the planting of Christianity in Africa were profound and multifaceted, playing a pivotal role in shaping the region's religious, linguistic, and cultural landscape. The print media facilitated enlightenment, pioneered linguistic heritage, promoted ecumenism, aided the indigenisation of Christianity, and contributed to the rise of modern journalism and Western education.

#### **Enlightenment**

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the print media played a pivotal role in enlightening African communities. The literature produced and disseminated by missionaries and Christian organisations significantly contributed to the spread of Western education and civilisation among local populations. The availability of printed materials in local languages – such as



books, pamphlets, and religious tracts – empowered newly converted Christians and liberated African slaves to engage deeply with Christian teachings and Western knowledge. These printed materials were instrumental in the successful propagation of the gospel, as they were widely utilised in schools, churches, and communities to educate and evangelise the populace. Ryder (1960) provides a poignant example of this enlightenment through a letter written by the Olu of Warri to the Pope in 1652, which underscores the early introduction of Christianity to the Warri-Benin Kingdom through the print media. The Olu's plea for assistance in spreading the faith reflects the profound impact of written communication in fostering religious and cultural transformation in West Africa.

### **Pioneering Linguistic Heritage**

The print media played a crucial role in pioneering today's linguistic heritage in Africa. Missionaries were among the first to reduce many African languages to writing, producing dictionaries, grammar books, and translations of the Bible and other religious texts. These efforts laid the foundation for the development of orthography in local languages, which not only facilitated the spread of Christianity but also contributed to the broader linguistic and cultural development of the region. The grammar and vocabulary books created for teaching the scriptures have become essential tools in the study and teaching of these languages in schools, ensuring the preservation and continued development of indigenous languages (Pawlikova-Vilhanova, 2011).

### **Ecumenical Promotion**

The print media also contributed significantly to ecumenical promotion among Christian denominations in Africa. The Bible, as a printed text, became the unifying factor among various Christian groups, transcending denominational differences. The translation and distribution of the Bible into different African languages by Bible societies and Christian councils fostered collaboration among Protestant missionaries and even led to cooperation with the Catholic Church in the latter half of the 20th century (Ojalere & Jimoh, 2022). This cooperation facilitated mass evangelisation efforts and strengthened the bonds between different Christian communities, making the Bible a central tool for church planting and religious unity in the region.

### **Indigenisation of Christianity in Africa**

The print media greatly aided the indigenisation of Christianity in Africa, particularly by translating the Bible and other religious texts into local languages (Masoga & Nicolaides, 2021). This process allowed Christianity to take root in the African cultural context, as the scriptures and religious teachings were made accessible and relevant to the local populations. The efforts of biblical scholars and missionaries to contextualise Christian teachings in African idioms and cultural practices have led to a uniquely African expression of Christianity, one that is both deeply rooted in local traditions and faithful to the core tenets of the Christian faith (Asamoah & Kpalam, 2022).



## Rise of Modern Journalism

The rise of modern journalism in Africa has its roots in the print media efforts of the Church, which aimed at planting Christianity in the region. Early missionaries recognised the power of the print media not only for evangelisation but also for education and enlightenment. For instance, Henry Townsend's "Iwe Irohin Yoruba," founded in 1859, was the first Nigerian newspaper, initially intended to print religious materials that would ease the teaching of Christianity (Oduntan, 2005). This initiative laid the groundwork for the development of modern journalism in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. The Christians who were tutored through the available print media often became influential figures in various sectors, including journalism. Notable examples include Pram J. Bright Davies, who edited the *Gold Coast Independent* and the *Nigerian Times*, and G.A. Williams, who owned and edited the *Lagos Standard*, making it a mouthpiece for African causes (Enemugwem, 2009). The following table shows some of the key Christian publications that played a significant role in evangelising through print media:

| Name of Publication      | Founding Date | Ownership  | Language of Publication       |
|--------------------------|---------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Iwe-Irohin Yoruba        | 1859          | C.M.S Church Mission Society (Anglican) or Church of England | Yoruba & English Language     |
| Christian Messenger      | 1883          | Methodist Church Ghana                                       | English                       |
| Sierra Leone Weekly News | 1884          | African Methodist Episcopal Church, Sierra Leone             | English                       |
| Unwana Efik              | 1885          | Presbyterian Church of Scotland                              | Efik                          |
| Christian Express        | 1888          | Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, South Africa          | English & Xhosa               |
| Les Missions Catholiques | 1895          | Roman Catholic Church, Senegal                               | French                        |
| Old Calabar Observer     | 1902          | Presbyterian Church of Scotland                              | English                       |
| African Church Gleamer   | 1917          | African Church Organisation of Nigeria (ACON)                | English                       |
| Leisure Hours            | 1918          | CMS Church Mission Society of Nigeria (Anglican)             | English                       |
| African Hope             | 1919          | African Church Organisation (ACON)                           | English                       |
| Le Semeur Africain       | 1921          | Roman Catholic Mission, Democratic Republic of Congo         | French                        |
| Nigerian Baptist         | 1923          | Nigerian Baptist Convention                                  | Bi-lingual (English & Yoruba) |
| Nigerian Methodist       | 1925          | Methodist  | English                       |



|                       |      |  |                 |
|-----------------------|------|--|-----------------|
| African Christian     | 1930 | African Church Organisation                | English         |
| African Chronicle     | 1930 | African Church Organisation                | English         |
| Le Messager du Christ | 1932 | Protestant Missionary Society, Ivory Coast | French          |
| African Challenge     | 1934 | Sudan Interior Mission (SIM)               | English         |
| Catholic Life         | 1936 | Roman Catholic Church, Nigeria             | English & Latin |
| Ethiopian Herald      | 1943 | Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Ethiopia        | Amharic         |

**Source:** Adapted from Akinfeleye (1985)

These publications were instrumental in shaping the literacy, religious education, and cultural identity of West Africans. They not only propagated Christian teachings but also contributed to the broader socio-political discourse, laying the foundation for the rise of modern journalism in the region.

### Foundation of Western Education in Africa

The foundation of Western education in Africa is closely tied to the initiatives of Christian missionaries, who established schools to train teachers, catechists, and interpreters. These schools were instrumental in the spread of literacy and the adoption of Western educational models in the region. Many of the first-generation Christian publications in Nigeria were produced by mission-based schools and churches, which played a significant role in the intellectual and spiritual development of African societies (Baur, 1994; Oni, Oloyede & Ifeduba, 2013). The legacy of these early educational efforts can still be seen today in the numerous mission-based schools and religious studies departments across the region.

### CONCLUSION

The legacy of Christianity in the West African sub-region today is a testament to the crucial role played by the print media. As one of the primary tools for the spread of the Church in Africa, the print media has left an indelible mark not only on the religious landscape but also on the social and educational development of the continent. The printed materials produced by early missionaries were pivotal in advancing Christian teachings, even though their focus was primarily on planting the faith and raising leaders to further the Christian mission. Despite the "Bible and Plough" policy, which aimed to integrate farming with religious instruction, agriculture remained largely at the subsistence level. Nevertheless, the influence of the print media in the propagation of Christianity has extended beyond religious instruction, contributing to other facets of life in Africa. The efforts of figures like Henry Townsend, Ajayi Crowther, and Johannes Christaller in developing the print media cannot be easily forgotten, as they played a foundational role in the orthography of many African languages. Their work, aimed at making the gospel accessible to all Africans, also provided a legacy of printed materials that have advanced human development on the continent.



Given these contributions, contemporary church administrators must continue encouraging the production of articles, books, magazines, tracts, handbills, and posters that focus on spreading the Christian message rather than self-promotion. The distribution of gospel tracts, in particular, has the potential to inspire positive change within the broader community and strengthen the Christian faith. Historical examples, such as "Riches of Grace" and "The Apostolic Herald," both publications of The Apostolic Church in Great Britain, have significantly contributed to the planting and growth of The Apostolic Church in Nigeria. In this regard, the Church in 21st-century Africa should continue to leverage the print media for the effective propagation of the gospel.

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