

ANALYSING THE CATHOLIC PRESS IN NIGERIA: LESSONS FROM SELECTED BRITISH RELIGIOUS NEWSPAPERS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR 21ST CENTURY JOURNALISM

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Abstract

The health state of the secular press in Nigeria, today, can be said to be healthy. However, the same cannot be said of the health of the Catholic press, despite a century of using the newspaper in Nigeria. The Word of Life newspaper of the Catholic Archdiocese of Jos is the focus of this study. This discourse argued that the newspaper, sadly, is fraught with a myriad of challenges that prevents it from fulfilling its core mandate of propagating the faith in 21st century Nigeria. The study examined possible factors that made the three selected religious newspapers in the United Kingdom (The Scottish Catholic Observer, The Universe and The Scottish Episcopalian) effective and the lessons The Word of Life could learn from. The production and content values of the British religious newspapers specifically analysed.

Keywords: Catholic Press, 21st Century, British Religious Press, Production, Content Values

Introduction

This study analysed three British religious newspapers (the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, *The Universe* and the *Scottish Episcopalian*). The three British religious presses analysed are rich in content evident of their having qualified news media professionals that handled the production of the newspapers. This has therefore accounted for the success of these newspapers in terms of news coverage, production and distribution. Although the press is the oldest medium in the Nigerian media landscape, since its evolution in 1856, the press has had its challenges like other media (radio, television, etc), it has, nonetheless, weathered the storm, and despite the emergence of new media forms (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn) as sources of information, the press has continued to compete in the Nigerian media space. While the state of the secular press in Nigeria is considered healthy, this discourse argued that it has not been exactly so for the Catholic press, despite its history (1900—2022).

The chapter analysed *The Word of Life* newspaper of the Catholic Archdiocese of Jos and averred that it is fraught with a plethora of challenges that prevents the newspaper from fulfilling its role of propagating the Gospel of Christ in 21st century Nigeria.

It further examined possible factors that make the three religious' newspapers in the United Kingdom (UK): *The Scottish Catholic Observer*, the *Catholic Herald*, and *The Scottish Episcopalian* effective and lessons *The Word of Life* could learn from. The production format and content values took the centre stage in this discourse because of their importance in the overall success of a newspaper production.

Method

This study utilised literature available on the subject matter. Based on this, the editors and reporters of *The Word of Life*, the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, *The Universe* and the *Scottish Episcopalian* were interviewed and coded in the text as Interview Respondents' (IR) 1—6. Through these interviewees, this researcher was able to gain insights into the issues involved religious newspaper production.

A Brief History of the Catholic Church in Nigeria

Earlier efforts by both the Spanish and Portuguese Catholic missionaries in the 14th century at planting the faith in Nigeria did not yield significant results. However, things took a positive dimension in the 19th century in Yoruba land. Onwubiko (1985) has detailed how freed African slaves were to play a critical role in the Christian missionary enterprise in the 1830s at Badagry, Lagos and Abeokuta, Nigeria. Most of these returnee slaves, in the views of Onwubiko, had embraced the Christian religion in Sierra-Leone (one of the free states carved out to accommodate the free slaves). Churches like Church Missionary Society (CMS), Methodist, the Baptist Mission, the Church of Scotland had predated the Catholic faith at this period. In other words, the Catholic Church was at this time a late comer to the entity that would later become known as Nigeria.

The reintroduction of the Roman Catholic Mission in Nigeria came about in the second half of the 19th century, spearheaded by Rev Fr Bouche and Brother Martinez, both of the Society for African Missions (SMA) in Lagos, Nigeria in 1868 (Onwubiko, 1985). Those who formed the nucleus of the Catholic faith in Lagos, at the time, were freed slaves from, especially Brazil and Cuba. It was from Lagos that the SMA Catholic missionaries were to launch their missionary enterprises to other parts of Yoruba land, and then to Onitsha in the South-Eastern region. One of the leading figures of the Catholic missionary activities in the South-Eastern Region was Reverend Father Joseph Shanahan of the Holy Ghost Fathers, who later to become the first Catholic Bishop of Eastern Nigeria.

The advent of the Catholic faith in Northern Nigeria followed a slightly similar trajectory. Various Protestant denominations, notably, the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) led by Dr Roland Bingham and the First Mission at Pategi, Dr Kumm at Wase in Plateau State, and Reverend Henry Miller and the Anglican Hausa Mission in Kano and Zaria (Hickey, 1981). It is imperative to note that early Catholic missionaries in the 17th century tried but failed at different times to introduce Catholicism in Northern Nigeria. The efforts of these Catholic missionaries were often thwarted by the indifference of the British colonial government who claimed that for smooth running of this predominantly vast Muslim territory, the North should be left in Muslim control. This is understandable against the backdrop of the Sultanate/Emirate structures of Sokoto which they (the colonial administrators) had inherited in the aftermath of the conquest of the North (Somerville, 2015). Such policies of the British colonial administration in the North did not encourage nor support Christian missionary activity in the territory. However, the Society of African Missions (SMA), the same Catholic missionary group that had earlier been responsible for the planting of the Catholic faith in Southern-Nigeria (the French Province), according to Walsh (1994) were to venture into the Northern part of Nigeria in 1907. This enormous task of the official introduction of Catholicism in Northern Nigeria was on February 12, 1907 when three Catholic priests: Reverend Fathers Oswald Waller (leader of the team), Joseph Mouren, and Ernest Belin (all of the French SMA) arrived via a boat from Wukari to Shendam, Plateau State (Hickey, 1981; Walsh, 1994). It was from Shendam that the task of evangelising the entire North had its roots.

Within a comparatively short time, the efforts of the early SMA priests stationed at Shendam was to reach Pankshin in 1911. In 1929, the Catholic Church in the North was to witness an important milestone in its history when the jurisdiction was expanded to cover the old provinces of Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, Niger, Northern Benue, Adamawa, Borno and Zaria (Hickey, 1981; Walsh, 1994). Based on this milestone, therefore, it was then renamed *The Prefecture Apostolic of Northern Nigeria* by Rome. The administrative headquarters of the Church, which had been in Jos, the only town of consequence, moved to Kano, an important commercial city, not just in the country but in West Africa. Monsignor O'Rourke SMA was appointed by Rome as the head of the Prefecture.

The period between 1930-1960s was to witness exponential growth and development of the Catholic faith in Northern Nigeria as several Catholic missionary groups like the Order of St Augustine (OSA) took charge of Borno, Adamawa and Taraba; the American Order of Preachers (OP) were appointed to Sokoto in 1954; the Holy Ghost Fathers from the Eastern part of the country pitched their tent in Northern Benue; while the missionary priests from the Archdiocese of St Andrews

and Edinburgh, Scotland were posted to take charge of what was Bauchi Mission (Gambar, Tafawa Balewa, Bauchi, Gombe and Billiri) in 1963; the Ursuline Sisters of Jesus from Edinburgh, Scotland registered their presence in Gambar (Bauchi) also in 1973 (Hickey, 1981; Walsh, 1994; Turnbull, 1994).

By the time the Catholic missionary groups that had either planted the faith or facilitated its growth handed over the administration of the Church to indigenous clergy and religious in the 70s, 80s, 90s, and the 2000s, the Catholic Church was, no doubt, in safe hands. Although, as earlier noted, the Catholic Church was late in arriving in Nigeria, today, it is a force to reckon with because it has spread to almost every nook and corner of the country.

Religious Press in Nigeria

Earlier, it was noted how the early Church Missionary Society (CMS) headed by Reverend Henry Townsend was credited with the planting of the faith among the Yoruba people at Abeokuta in South-Western Nigeria in 1859 (Sobowale, 1985). To effectively transmit the faith to the Egba people, Reverend Townsend came up with the idea of a newspaper, the *Iwe Irohin* (which strictly speaking was a newsletter) to facilitate the spread of the Christian religion. *Iwe Irohin* marked the formal introduction of the press in Nigeria. Its activities later were to go beyond the circumference of religion to the murky waters of human rights and politics. This situation set both the newspaper and Reverend Townsend in a collision course in Lagos with the British colonial administrators who considered the newspaper's direction as seditious. The paper did not recover from the measures taken by the colonial government, including the deportation of its founder, Reverend Townsend (Elegalem, 1985). The demise of *Iwe Irohin* was not the end of the story for the press in Nigeria as so many other presses, largely, from the freed slaves from Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Ghana, the West Indies and Europe emerged on the Nigerian scene (*Lagos Observer* (1882), *The Eagle* and *Lagos Critic* (1883), *The Mirror* (1887), *Lagos Echo* (1890), *Lagos Weekly Record* (1890), *The Chronicles* (1908), *The Pioneer* (1914), *The Catholic Herald* (1924), *Lagos Daily News* (1925), and the *Nigerian Daily Times* (1926) (Okidu, 2011; Babalola, 2002; Olayiwola, 1991; Abati, 1988; Traber, Vanhengel & Ohieku, 1978).

Several church groups in Nigeria established newspapers which served as handmaid of evangelisation such as the African church (1917, 1919, and 1939), Baptist church (1923), *Catholic Herald* (1924), Methodist church (1925), and Sudan Interior Mission (1934), and the Nigerian Muslim Society (1947) (Tador, 1996). It is significant to note that a considerable number of the journalists and staff of the newspapers were products of Church-based press (Sobowale, 1985). So, religious presses played pivotal roles in the growth and development of the media system in

Nigeria. Sadly, most of these religious newspapers, indeed, as their secular counterparts, went extinct by the 1960s and 70s due to a range of factors, not least, financial.

The Catholic Press in Nigeria: A History

Regrettably, the Catholic press in Nigeria has not been accorded its proper place in the pantheons of presses in Nigeria. Indeed, not much has been written on the emergence and contributions of the Catholic press in the growth and development of Nigeria. The Society of African Missions Fathers are credited with the introduction of the Catholic Church in Nigeria in the 19th century. It, therefore, does not come as a surprise that they were to spearhead the establishment of the first Catholic newspaper, the *Catholic Herald* in Lagos in 1924 (Vanhengel & Ohieku, 1978; Terrien, 1924). Traber et al (1960) further assert that the SMA went ahead to set up a magazine named *Catholic Life* in Calabar in Southern Nigeria, *The Leader* newspaper, Owerri (1956), and *Catholic Independent*, a weekly newspaper, at Ibadan.

By the 1960s when Nigeria achieved self-rule from Great Britain, more dioceses set up their own Catholic newspapers for the promotion of the faith. These dioceses included (but not limited to) *The Cross*, Kaduna, *The Light*, Lokoja, *Catholic Linklines* (now *The Word of Life*), Jos, *Northern Star*, Kano (Danjuma, 1997). Most of these Catholic newspapers have since fallen apart in the 1980s and 90s, as some new ones have also emerged. There is no detailed study on the health of Catholic newspapers in Nigeria, despite the fact that most of these newspapers like *The Catholic Herald*, *The Catholic Independent* were among the leading newspapers in the Catholic Church in Nigeria.

Challenges of the Catholic Church Press in Nigeria: An Analysis of *The Word of Life*

In discussing the Nigeria media history, it was noted that several newspapers were established, but along the way most went extinct for a range of reasons: the difficult economic climate of 1927 as well as the outbreak of the World War II (1945); the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970); the Catholic missionaries did not lay down structures for an eventual takeover by those who took over from them (Akodu, 2022). A few of these newspapers have managed to survive, to date. The newspapers were beset with a plethora of challenges. The Church newspapers have not fared any better as evidenced from the discussion above. Although, *The Word of Life* newspaper of the Catholic Archdiocese of Jos could be said to be a 21st century newspaper, it has not been well-positioned to effectively facilitate this role. Among some of the problems confronting *The Word of Life* includes funding, distribution, professionalism, and advertisement/marketing.

1. Funding

In the printing business, such as the newspaper, there are two principal means of funding, namely, sales and advertising. It is a fact that sales alone cannot sustain a newspaper publication. What sustains a newspaper publication is advertising, which is a major source of revenue of establishing communication between organisations providing services, on the one hand, and buyers and potential buyers, on the other (Mohan, 2006). Producers have their products advertised in the media. This is necessary because consumers need such information about newly produced goods and services. For produced goods and services to be brought to the attention of the public, the organisation must have to pay the media to advertise their products. The revenues generated from such adverts help in sustaining the media in general, and the newspaper industry in particular.

Most of the newspapers that surfaced right from the 1900s to the 1980s and 1990s, irrespective of whether they were secular or religious, went extinct, such as the *West African Pilot*, the *Daily Express*, *The Catholic Herald*, *The Catholic Independent*, etc, because of inadequate funding, lack of printing materials, World War 11 and the Nigerian civil war (Akodu, 2022). Lack of financing has been one of the major problems facing *The Word of Life* newspaper of the Catholic Archdiocese of Jos. The financial challenges being experienced by *The Word of Life* arises from the fact that it is not profit-oriented. Essentially, what sustains a newspaper production are adverts and sales. Advertising is an important connection in the mutually-sustained global expansion of consumer goods and services, and the media which convey commercial messages.

Another key challenge that confronts *The Word of Life* newspaper is its marketing, which has not gone beyond the confines of the Archdiocese of Jos. Fifteen years ago, the Archdiocese of Jos covered the whole of Plateau State, however, as at 2022, the Archdiocese comprised Plateau North Senatorial Zone. Therefore, from the perspective of marketing, the size of its market has shrunk, especially for a newspaper publication that targets largely Catholics.

2. Distribution

The Nigerian Catholic presses, generally, lack good distribution strategy (Akodu, 2022). This view was corroborated by IR1 when he argued that the lack of a good distribution network was largely responsible for the *Newslink* of the then Jos Diocese going extinct. The Catholic Church is instituted as a

charitable organisation. In other words, the activities of the Catholic Church are not geared towards profit, but humanitarian relief. This may, therefore, explain why the Archdiocese of Jos had relied on its structures (parishes), for example, for the distribution of the newspaper. However, even when the newspapers were delivered to parishes, altar servers and members of the Catholic Youth Organisation of the parishes were entrusted with the sales of these papers (Gowok, 1996). Clearly, this is not an effective marketing strategy for a 21st century newspaper. Most of the altar servers have little or no experience or even the basic skills for the sale of the newspapers.

Since December 2001 when *The Word of Life* newspaper was established, not very much has changed with regards to the distribution of the newspaper. Distribution is, no doubt, is an important aspect in the production and consumption of *The Word of Life*. Although with the creation of Shendam and Pankshin Dioceses in 2007 and 2014 respectively, the Archdiocese of Jos, as it is currently, is within a manageable size. However, there is need for *The Word of Life* to sort out the issue of transport and driver that would ensure prompt delivery of copies when produced.

3. Professionalism

At the heart of any news organisation (secular or religious) is the team of news media professionals it has. These news media professionals (reporters and editors) determine the quality of a news production. It is important to note that news reporting and writing fall within the domain of journalism (Sunday & Oloruntola, 2006). *The Word of Life* can be said to have made much progress since its establishment in December, 2001. Its news content has improved so much since then. However, the newspaper can do with more news media professionals to upscale the status of the paper. In an interview with a staff of *The Word of Life*, the staff opined that on the team of *The Word of Life* editorial board, only a person, strictly speaking, is a news media professional, and that is the editor. The sub-editor and the rest of the members of the board, although have gained experiences from years of working with the newspaper are not professionals (IR2). This is a major challenge, which is not being helped due to the paucity of funds the newspaper has continued to experience.

4. Advertorial/Marketing

Advertising/marketing constitute very important factors in the sustenance of any news medium like the newspaper. The world over, the media are being sustained by the number of adverts they source from their clients. For *The*

Word of Life, sourcing for adverts has been a major challenge. Over the years, efforts at ensuring a steady flow of adverts, even by trying to incentivise those charged with the sourcing of the adverts, by giving them some per cent from the adverts sourced has not been successful. This situation is so bad that sometimes the newspaper's production is without a single advert. What this means is that without the occasional cash injection that does come from the Archdiocese, the paper cannot sustain itself from sales alone. This has also explained why sometimes in a month the paper is unable to produce (Ir2).

Analyses of Three British Religious Newspapers Production Format:

The Scottish Catholic Observer

The Scottish Catholic Observer is tabloid in its layout. It is a weekly newspaper. The newspaper has approximately 16 pages, depending on the number of adverts there are for the week. The newspaper has approximately 18, 000 readers worldwide with the majority from the United Kingdom. The paper, according to IR5, is financed through advertisement and sales and costs an issue. It has the following sections: News, Advertisement feature, Children's liturgy, Editorial and Bishops' diaries.

The Universe

The Universe, like the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, is a weekly newspaper produced in Manchester. It is also tabloid in its layout with approximately 48 pages. Just like the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, the newspaper, as explained by IR3, is financed mainly through advertising and sales. As at 2020, it had approximately 250, 000 readers, most of them in the United Kingdom. *The Universe* had a wide range of sections such as: News, Letters to the editor, Questions of faith, TV/Radio highlights, Health/Food, Advertisements, Travels, Bishops' diaries, Education, Sports.

The Scottish Episcopalian

The *Scottish Episcopalian*, is a monthly newspaper produced by the church of Scotland. Like the *Scottish Catholic Observer* and *The Universe*, it is tabloid in its layout. The paper has only 8 pages. According to IR4, the *Scottish Episcopalian* is financed directly by the Episcopalian church. It also receives financial support through donations from people, advertisement and sales. The paper has approximately 7, 500 readers. Most of the readers are within the UK, however, there are some members of the Episcopal church abroad, such as Africa and Asia. The *Scottish Episcopalian* has the following sections: News, Letters to the editor, Advertisement, and Reviews.

Content Values:

The Scottish Catholic Observer

Most of the news and features covered in the *Scottish Catholic Observer* are directly related to the Catholic Church. For example, children's liturgy is a permanent feature in the paper. Based on the review of the editorial content of the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, the paper focused a large portion of its coverage on children. News and features on children account for more than half of the paper content.

In terms of ownership and control of the paper, the *Scottish Catholic Observer* is independent of the Catholic Church in Scotland. The paper is owned and run by some lay people. However, it works hand in hand with the Catholic Church. News and features in the *Scottish Catholic Observer* are not only contributed by the staff, but by freelance and other interested people as well (Ir5).

The Universe

The Universe, unlike the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, is owned exclusively by the Catholic Church. The newspaper is especially designed for the Catholic community in England. Based on this, the paper covers events to do with the Catholic Church. However, like the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, to appeal to readers within the Church, the paper also gets some news and features from freelance writers (Ir3).

The Scottish Episcopalian

The *Scottish Episcopalian*, unlike the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, is not independent of its own church, it depends on the Episcopalian church for operating funds/subsidies. Despite the paper's dependence on the Episcopal church for funding and other things, it still enjoys editorial independence. The *Scottish Episcopalian*, very much like the *Scottish Catholic Observer* and *The Universe*, has church news as its priority. Over all, the *Scottish Episcopalian* values mission in its news coverage. The newspaper welcomes contributions from its staff as well as freelance writers (Ir4).

Advertising in British Religious Newspapers

Advertisements are very important in the budget of a newspaper. Adverts in a newspaper are cost graded. For example, the advert on the front page is more expensive than the one on a back page. In the same way, the nearer an advert is to the front page, the more expensive it is.

In the analyses of the three religious' newspapers (the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, *The Universe*, and the *Scottish Episcopalian*) showed that they all relied on varying degrees of advertisements for each of their editions. The *Scottish Catholic Observer* had approximately 24 pages of advertisements over the period of three weeks; *The*

Universe had 28 pages of over the same period, while the *Scottish Episcopalian* had 2 over the same period.

Given the above analyses on adverts, it is clear that adverts are sources of revenue to the three religious newspapers, and they are dependent, to a large extent, on advertising for their revenues, much as sales also account for a certain fraction of their incomes. The success of a newspaper depends on its ability to attract advertising. The *Scottish Catholic Observer*, with approximately 16—20 pages of adverts have relatively more chance of making more profit from its adverts than, say, *The Universe* with 28 pages of advertisements and with 48 pages of paper, all other things being equal. Unfortunately, *The Word of Life* newspaper hardly have adverts in all its editions. As has already been explained, efforts by *The Word of Life* at getting steady supply of adverts in its production (however few) have not been successful. This is part of the reason the newspaper has continued to struggle financially.

There is another factor in the financial success of a newspaper, that is, sales. It is possible that *The Universe* would realise more profit from sales. As regards the *Scottish Episcopalian*, it has already been noted that it depends heavily on the Episcopal church and donations from people for its production. As such, the 2 pages of advertisements it had, would add to its financial success. The nature of advertisement is, largely, for Religious Societies and meetings, books, consumer goods, employment, vocations, education, birthdays, anniversaries, marriages and obituaries. *The Word of Life* could borrow a leaf from the three British religious newspapers, especially the *Scottish Episcopalian* that operates on a very low budget. *The Word of Life* needs to aggressively embark on advertisement drive, including soliciting for donations from groups and individuals.

Visuals in the Newspapers:

The Scottish Catholic Observer

In the three British religious newspapers studied, the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, for example, had two photos on the front page (one colour and the other black and white). The rest of the photos in the inside pages are black and white. According to IR5, colours are very expensive. That explains why colours are used in the front page for visual appeal. For the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, colours do not have any special significance other than to attract sales. IR5 further explained that the size of a photo in the paper is usually determined by the size of its clarity. However, there are black and white photos on every page on the inside pages. Generally, there are two to three group photos on a page, except in pages where there are full page advertisements.

The Universe

The Universe, among the *Scottish Catholic Observer* and the *Scottish Episcopalian*, uses more visuals than the other two newspapers. The paper has colour photos after every ten pages. The reason for this, according to the newspaper, is to attract readership; give variety to readers, and to make the newspaper interesting and less boring to read. The rest of the photos are in black and white. *The Universe*, like the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, usually has up to two photos on the front page, one of which makes reference to the full story on the inside page. They are usually between one and two photos on a page, except in a special edition where there will be profile on the middle page that have more photos. Both *The Universe* and the *Scottish Catholic Observer* use colour for visual appeal.

The Scottish Episcopalian

The *Scottish Episcopalian*, unlike the *Scottish Catholic Observer* and *The Universe*, is plain, no colour. The paper's reason for this is to save cost since they operate a low-budget newspaper. Financial resources, according to the editor, usually determine the kind of photos used in a newspaper. The newspaper prefers the use of passport size photos to group photos, because the group photos occupy a lot of space and make it more expensive. However, colour photos could be used when the paper has the necessary financial resources.

The Word of Life

The Word of Life uses visuals in its editions. But, for a low budget, as well as a Church interest paper, as opposed to a general interest publication (Dewan, 2022), *The Word of Life* would be better off towing the line of the *Scottish Episcopalian*, which operates within the limits of its budgetary provisions. Visual appeals, no doubt, are important in attracting sales, as has been evident by the *Scottish Catholic Observer* and *The Universe* reports. But this can only happen if a paper enjoys good financial health, something which *The Word of Life* does not enjoy currently. Therefore, *The Word of Life* would need to cut down on most of those things that contribute to its production cost (especially, the excessive use of colour photos).

Discussions

The analyses of the three British religious newspapers, namely, the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, *The Universe* and the *Scottish Episcopalian*, showed how all of them, except the *Scottish Episcopalian*, relied heavily on adverts as sources of funding. The *Scottish Episcopalian* relied heavily on the church, sales and donations from groups and individuals to fund its production. The *Scottish Catholic Observer* and *The Universe*, on their parts, had a policy of aggressive marketing drive, in addition to sales. While the *Scottish Episcopalian*'s reliance on donations, on the surface, does not create much problem, but it portends grave danger to the newspaper because

donations may not come regularly or may sometime not come at all, sometimes. This situation could leave the paper in very serious financial difficulty. Therefore, sourcing for adverts as means towards the sustenance of a news medium of any kind is an important lifeline. Advert drive will not only improve the health status of *The Word of Life*, but helps it to stay afloat in the 21st century.

The *Scottish Catholic Observer*, *The Universe* and the *Scottish Episcopalian* religious newspapers had a groundswell of experienced journalists who are full time staff of their respective newspaper organisations. This is evident from the quality of their news productions. *The Word of Life* newspaper must end the culture of volunteerism if it must compete with other religious newspapers in the country in the 21st century (IR6). Most of the staff of the newspaper are volunteers with other paid jobs and attend to *The Word of Life* at their convenience. The newspaper needs to employ qualified staff on a permanent basis. Well strained staff are crucial to the growth and development of any press in the 21st century, regardless of whether it is secular or religious (Asuzu, 1987).

Strategic marketing structure has accounted for the successful distribution network of the three religious' newspapers in the UK studied. Their newspapers are distributed across the UK and beyond. Due to their wide marketing distribution networks, the sales of their newspapers are boosted. *The Word of Life* newspaper could borrow a leaf from these newspapers, especially their marketing strategies. Currently, *The Word of Life* newspaper is only sold within the Jos Archdiocese. The paper could strive to forge partnerships with neighbouring dioceses (Pankshin, Shendam, Bauchi, Lafia, and Kafanchan) for the sales of its production. This partnership, if forged, could enrich its news content as well as boost its sales also.

Although newspapers, globally, have been affected badly by the emergence of the new media, what has accounted for newspapers still being in business is their ability to be creative. The *Scottish Catholic Observer*, *The Universe* and the *Scottish Episcopalian* newspapers had news contents that were target-specific. For example, children's liturgy is very important. This helps give parents or guardians ideas on how to prepare their children for Mass. It also gives simplified versions of the Sunday readings for children. *The Word of Life* needs to include sections like this as well. *The Word of Life* needs to specifically target the young who are thought to be the leaders of tomorrow. One of the greatest tasks of the Church is to communicate the Gospel effectively to each successive generation of young people and help them towards greater commitment and Christian maturity. Another column, especially in *The Universe* is 'The Question of Faith.' Column like this would help young people, and, indeed, people experiencing crises in their faith ask questions on matters of faith and the Church, which *The Word of Life* would very much profit from.

Furthermore, a key finding from the analyses of the three religious' newspapers in the UK was the significance of the position photographs/visuals and illustration in their papers. Visuals are very important in the production of a newspaper, because visuals do not only give credibility to the stories reported, they also help support facts. Identifying visuals, particularly those used as accurate and trustworthy accounts of an important event by prestigious publications are the best hedge against the threat of devious editors and special interest groups who are keen to change the truth or history (Lester, 1988). For the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, a visual makes a page. That is why a very good visual in the *Scottish Catholic Observer* might appear on the front page even when it has nothing to do with the front-page story. *The Universe* had more visuals in its paper than any of the three. It had black and white visuals, and coloured visuals after every ten pages. Considering the importance of visuals in these British religious newspapers, it will be necessary for *The Word of Life* to consider doing something similar, especially in Plateau State where a significant percentage of the Church population cannot read English. Visuals in *The Word of Life*, therefore, could help such people understand published reports. However, since *The Word of Life* is in a cash crunch, it may adopt a simpler style of visuals like the black and white of the *Scottish Episcopalian* or the *Scottish Catholic Observer*.

Even though *The Word of Life*, like other Catholic diocesan newspapers in Nigeria, is designed for Catholics to report Church and Church-related news and features, *The Word of Life* can, nonetheless, endeavour to cover news and features that concern people across faiths or religions. By this, non-Catholics would be attracted to buy *The Word of Life*, especially when there are news and features that concern them. Thus, *The Word of life*, for it to live up to its biddings in the 21st century, needs to reinvent itself by operating beyond the narrow confines of the Archdiocese of Jos to reaching out to other dioceses and faith traditions.

The Word of Life does not have to produce monthly since it does not have the financial capacity like the *Scottish Catholic Observer* and *The Universe*. Newspapers with low budget may consider operating in the way the *Scottish Episcopalian*, which is a monthly newspaper. Production is a matter of choice. For example, the use of colour photos, although appealing and boosts sales, is expensive. Unless the newspaper organisation has the financial strength, starting simple, with creative content, and then grow may be the way to go.

Another important feature of the three British religious newspapers is the quality of staff writers and the management of the organisation. The staff were experienced journalists, not only in secular newspaper production, but crucially, in religious newspaper of the type of the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, *The Universe* and the *Scottish Episcopalian*. The quality of staff writers of a newspaper determines the

quality of the newspaper production, that too, could invariably have bearing on the marketability of the paper. Thus, this is a very important consideration in the establishment of a religious or secular newspaper. For *The Word of Life*, it has relied on volunteers for the management of the paper. This situation is made worst by the fact that most of these volunteers are not trained journalists, hence, their capacity to be effective is severely limited (Ir6).

Visuals featured prominently, especially in *The Universe* and the *Scottish Catholic Observer*. The reason for this, according to the newspaper, is to attract buyers. The use of colourful visuals come with cost implications. However, the cost implications can be rewarded by the adverts and sales of the paper. Adverts do not drop from the sky, no, they have to be sourced for the staff of the newspaper organisation. Within the Catholic Church alone, there are several sources of adverts. For example, *ordinations, religious professions, weddings, birthdays, memorials*, and so on, could be published in the newspaper at rates determined by the newspaper. Other sources of adverts are *obituaries, felicitations on promotion at jobs, Church members with businesses* could advertise job vacancies/opportunities, products, and so on. Although *The Word of Life* readers love the colour photo album section, which is why the paper includes them in most its editions. This, perhaps, is what adds to the heavy financial burden that the paper has had to shoulder. For this section, and indeed, the overall production of the paper to be sustained, the important issue of adverts must have to be revisited by *The Word of Life*.

Conclusion

This chapter established why the press is the oldest medium in the history of the media in Nigeria. The early Christian missionaries were credited with the introduction of the press as an important catalyst in the work of evangelisation. The Catholic Church is part of this phenomenal development of the press in Nigeria since when the priests of the Society of the African Missions (SMA) established the first printing press in Nigeria in 1900 (Sobowale, 1985; Traber, Ohieku & Vanhengel, 1978). However, the first newspaper, the *Catholic Herald*, was published in Lagos in 1924. Within the span of fifty years, Catholic religious newspapers were established right across the length and breadth of the country. Unfortunately, despite the long historical association of the Catholic Church with the press in Nigeria, the Church has not creatively utilised the press to advance its core mandate of teaching and propagating the Gospel of Christ.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Jos has had several unsuccessful attempts at starting a newspaper (*The Communicator*, the *Disciple*, the *Vision*, and the *Catholic Linklines*). The establishment of *The Word of Life* is seen as a worthy replacement of those newspapers that went extinct in the 80s and 90s. Despite the challenges highlighted,

The Word of Life has been in circulation since its establishment in 2001. The paper was 20 years in 2021, but was only out of circulation during the COVID-19 lockdowns when churches were shut from worshippers. Although the newspaper, just like the ones before it, is beset by a plethora of problems, it has the potentiality to reorganise and restructure itself for a greater service delivery. The analyses of the three British religious newspapers (the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, *The Universe* and the *Scottish Episcopalian*) and their findings, if studied and implemented, would position *The World of Life* for the 21st century.

Recommendations

Findings in the analyses of the three key British religious newspaper has led to the following recommendations:

- *The Word of Life* needs, conscious of the competition it faces from the new media, needs to engage creative minds so as to create unique contents to boost its sales in the 21st century.
- The paper needs to come up with a robust marketing strategy beyond what it currently has.
- The paper cannot continue to rely on volunteers, it needs to engage news media professional for maximum results.
- *The Word of Life* must embark on an aggressive advert drive to sustain its production.
- Although the use of colourful visuals is good, the paper may, because of its financial constraints, need to consider plain newspaper production instead of using colours.

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