RELIGION AND MEDIA IN A PLURAL SOCIETY: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Religion and media are two vital and indispensable institutions in society. This paper attempts a critical exploration of the relationship between religion and media in plural societies, with concrete illustrations from the Nigerian experience. Generally, plural societies are often confronted with the challenges of nation-building, which have proved difficult especially in developing countries. This is particularly the case in Nigeria, a country with one of the most complex ethnic and religious configurations, where ethnic and religious boundaries delicately overlap. In such societies, the media have important roles to play in promoting unity in diversity on both the ethnic and religious fronts through ethical journalism. Otherwise, the media can become a liability rather than an asset in the management of religious pluralism. Nigeria has experienced both possibilities. The paper concludes with recommendations on how to reposition the media for the promotion and consolidation of religious tolerance and harmony in plural societies.

Key words: Religion, Media, Plural Society, Religious Tolerance, Ethical Journalism.

Introduction. Religion and media are two vital and indispensable institutions in society. These two institutions pervade human life. They are both, in varying degrees, involved in regulating social behaviour, and are part of the most important sources of socialisation for humanity. Religion especially owns a large chunk of other important agents of socialisation like schools, medical facilities, and financial institutions. It is unthinkable at the present age to conceive a society without the media – a specialized subsystem which disseminates information internally within a society and externally among societies in the world as a whole. Likewise, it is also almost inconceivable to think of a world without religion on account of its pervasive moral influence. It is common knowledge that most 'high–level' criminals are actually intelligent people. There is nothing so calamitous or tragic either for individuals, groups or nations as to combine high intelligence and low morality.

This paper attempts a critical exploration of the relationship between religion and media in plural societies, with concrete illustrations from the Nigerian expe-

rience. In addressing its theme, it provides some conceptual definitions of religion, media and plural society, examines the (ideal) relationship between religion and media in plural societies and how the relationship has played out in Nigeria. It concludes with recommendations on how to reposition the media for the promotion and consolidation of religious tolerance and harmony in plural societies.

Religion, Media and Plural Society: Some Conceptual Definitions. Religion. Perhaps because of its ubiquity and pervasiveness, religion has very many definitions and interpretations "but not one that can be said to be the most accurate" (www.allaboutreligion.org). Definitions of religion, it has been observed, tend to suffer from one or two problems. "They are either too narrow and exclude many belief systems which most agree are religions, or they are too vague or ambiguous, suggesting that just about anything and everything is a religion" (Cline, 2010). For instance, religion has been defined as "… any practice that someone or some group is seriously devoted to, any ongoing practice one engages in, in order to shape one's character or improve traits of one's personality…" (www.en.wiktionary.org/wiki/religion).

In view of this, Cline has suggested that "a better way to explain the nature of religion is to identify the basic characteristics common to religions." These characteristics he puts at eight, viz:

(i) belief in supernatural beings,

(ii) sacred v. profane objects, places and times,

(iii) ritual acts focused on sacred objects, places and times,

(iv) moral codes with supernatural origins,

(v) characteristically religious feelings,

(vi) prayer and other forms of communication,

(vii) a world view and organisation of one's life based on the world view, and

(viii) a social group bound together by the above seven listed characteristics.

He submits that most commonly recognised religions like Christianity or Hinduism – will have all of these characteristics while a few manifestations of common religions will have five or six of them.

Given this scenario, we can then make do with a few conceptual definitions of religion. Religion can be taken to be "the belief in and worship of a god or gods, or a set of beliefs concerning the origin and purpose of the universe" (http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/religion). It is "a belief system concerning one or more deities and incorporating rituals, ceremonies, ethical guidelines and life philosophies" (www.typesofreligion.com). It can be conceived of as "a set of beliefs concerning the course, nature and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of supernatural agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs" (www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/religion).

The Media. In contradistinction to religion, 'media' globally have definite and straight forward meanings. Media refer to formats used to convey informa-

tion, the mass media refer to those that are designed to reach large numbers of people disparately located. The media are the communication channels through which news, entertainment, education, data and promotional messages are disseminated.

They include every broadcasting or narrowcasting medium such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, bill boards, direct mail and the internet (www.businessdictionary.com). They also embrace books, drama, cinema or theatre, etc. In Nigeria, by legal interpretation, they embody schools (Okogie & Ors. v. Attorney General of Lagos State (1981) 1 NCLR 218-235) (1). They traverse the print, electronic, new age and social media. It is important however to distinguish between the *media* and the *mass media*. While the media can be used to refer to communication channels generally, the term – mass media – is reserved for those media with the capacity to transmit or convey messages to heterogeneously large audiences. Quite often too, the mass media and the press are erroneously equated. Only the mass media with the distinctive capacity of conveying messages to audiences *simultaneously* or *almost simultaneously* belong to the press. Thus, the term 'press' collectively refers to the newspaper, the magazine, the radio, the television and the Internet rather than to all mass media.

By implication therefore, our use of *media* in this paper to refer to the press is for operational purposes.

Plural Society. A plural society is commonly held to be one whose component units are divided by forces of identity, most notably ethnicity, language, culture and religion, although all these outlined characteristics need not be present in one pluralistic society. One perspective however holds a plural or pluralistic society as "any society in which citizens can legally and publicly hold multiple competing ethical views and are allowed to choose for themselves what ethical beliefs, if any, they wish to hold." This view submits that a pluralistic society "is often mistaken for a society which tolerates different ethical beliefs or groups of people and holds that all are equal." It posits the latter to be "moral relativism" as opposed to the "logically invalid position (of regarding moral relativism as pluralism) held by much of the world today" (www.wiki.answers.com).

Because of the diverse nature of plural societies, they are usually hard and complicated and more difficult to manage than mono-ethnic, mono-religious, mono-cultural or mono-linguistic societies. It must be pointed out however, that the existence of diverse characteristics in a society may not, by itself, constitute a problem or an issue with political consequences. In many cases, rivals for power in such a society make use of the diversities as a political resource (Turton, 1997, Ahmadu, 2007).

Relationship between Religion and Media in Society. The relationship between religion and media in society, especially plural societies, is usually governed by law (or norm) and ethics. Because such polities are commonly inhabited by

diverse religious groups, efforts are usually and constantly made to ensure religious balance between the apparatuses of the state and the various religions and religious groups in the state. Hence, laws – constitutional, statutory, etc – are usually made to conceptually separate religion from politics. The state is therefore separated from religion while freedom of religion is guaranteed the citizens. The concept of separation of religion and state, otherwise known as secularism, does not mean that religion should not have influence in public affairs. Rather, it means that the government of a state should not favour one particular religion over other belief systems. The (mass) media, being the mirror or reflector of society, are lawfully and ethically required to uphold this principle in their coverage and reportage of society.

Although religion has always been associated with politics and government since time immemorial, the concept of religious freedom belongs to the modern world. This began with the adoption in 1948, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nation's General Assembly and continues with the nearly global ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Today, most nations of the world subscribe to the principle and practice of the protection of the fundamental freedom of religion by government.

With the exception of several Islamic countries, most notably, Iran and Saudi-Arabia, there is little institutional interconnection between religion and civil authority. Only a distinct minority of countries have an officially designated "state religion" and in many of these countries, the concept only has historical and traditional relevance (www.newbatch.com).

In addition to law, ethics also plays a major role in regulating the relationship between religion and media in society – plural or non plural – as it does in the relationship between the media and the entire society. For example, principle IX of The International Principle of Professional Ethics in Journalism enjoins all journalists to "…ensure respect for the rights and dignity of all nations, all peoples and all individuals without distinction of race, sex, language, nationality, *religion* or philosophical conviction." Ethics refers to 'moral beliefs and rules about right and wrong' (BBC English Dictionary, 1992). Omole (2000) describes it as "the shared normative values which any society holds dear and are used to judge the behaviour or performance of any member of that society." As he puts it, ethics "sets out the minimum of acceptable behaviour which any member should attain to be regarded as a good ambassador (of that society)."

The imperative of ethics is underscored by the fact of the impossibility of law to solely and effectively regulate society as there are several dangerous and inimical human conducts which cannot be objectively measured and, therefore, cannot be effectively regulated by law. For instance, while society finds it relatively easy to measure and punish stealing or theft, covetousness and similar misbehaviour cannot be easily, objectively measured and must therefore be left under the control of ethics. Likewise, while murder is easy to punish under law, suicide is not.

Beyond their legal and ethical relationship, in the context of politics, religion and media intimately connect in a number of ways. The media serve as communicating instrument for religion. Religion uses the media as vehicles for religious propagation and proselytization. In addition to patronising the media owned by others, many religious organisations with the wherewithal, today, own various types of media outlets. Arising from extensive media patronage, religion contributes significantly to the sustenance of the media, especially the private media. A lot of money is spent by religious organisations throughout the world on communication through the media. The larger or more established a religious organisation is, the more it tends to spend on media communication to reach out to its large membership and to win more converts. Even a religious organisation like the Nigerian based Deeper Life Bible Church, which was originally averse to the television medium because of its perceived 'sinful' contents, for which it was described as *apoti esu* (satan's box), now airs its programme on television and even has its own satellite television station.

Perhaps the most important link between religion and media is the latter's role in sustaining the dominant view of religion, the media being agents of legitimation. In spite of constant complaints by religious organisations about negative portrayal of religion in the media, the media do not generally question the assumed positive role and influence of religion and religious institutions and are somewhat reticent in exposing misdeeds within religious circles. Majedi (2008) notes, for instance, that the world heard much more about the child abuse case against Michael Jackson, a case which was disproved in the court of law, than the Catholic Church's hundreds of cases of child abuse which cost the church millions of dollars. This he describes as "a macro agenda behind religious portrayal." He rightly observes that religion is political:

We [human beings] are made to believe that religion is merely about faith, spirituality and morality, without which humanity will lack any sense of ethics, goodness and humanity. This is the dominant and official view of religion, espoused by the state and education system. A lot of work and money is used to make this image of religion the accepted dominant view. Religion is one of the main ingredients of dominant ideology… Moreover, there is a great deal of money involved. Religious institutions have a great deal of wealth at their disposal and constantly struggle to get their hands on more... [Religion] is still an inseparable part of the political system, except in France. Religion plays a major part in the education system. *Therefore, any presentation of religion in the media… is a political act with a political agenda.*

Ideal Role of Religion in Society. Whatever short-comings religion may have – partly why Karl Marx describes it as "the opium of the masses" – it, no doubt, possesses a lot of strengths for the society. These strengths clearly explain its continuity and continuous expansion. As noted at a 1994 UNESCO – organised

meeting on the contribution, by religions, to the culture of peace, "for some cultures, religion is a way of life permeating every human activity. For others, it represents the highest aspirations of human existence. In still others, religions are institutions that claim to carry a message of salvation."

Religion appears to have two basic goals – to make the individual a 'good' person and the world a 'good' place to live in. These goals involve salvation, absolution from sins and unity with God with a promise of good health, long life and wealth.

The world's religions have also been observed to have similar traits:

They all provide their believers with a spiritual life purpose. Religions generally include a concept of life after death, the nature of which will be governed by the believer's adherence to religious dictates in the current life. These "life rules'' are remarkably consistent in various religions and usually reinforce the prevailing cultural/social expectations regarding personal behaviour. Most prominent is an emphasis on marriage and family and the individual's adherence to the family duties and responsibilities (www.newbatch.com/religion.html).

The specific positive roles of 'real' religions include instilling moral rectitude and holiness in adherents, giving meaning to social experience and man's fate, serving as a platform for fellowship, solidarity and help for adherents as well as for society and providing psychological succour for man in times of uncertainties. Chittister (1991) notes that:

real religion is not about building temples and keeping shrines. Real religion is about healing hurts, speaking for and being with the poor, the helpless, the voiceless and the forgotten who are at the silent bottom of every pinnacle, every hierarchy and every system in both state and church, church and state.

Religion also serves as a source and agent of mobilisation and provides a lot of social amenities like schools (2), hospitals, etc for society.

Moreover, religion contributes to the peace of the world. All religions preach peace and have specific admonitions for adherents to live in peace with others. The imperative for religion to promote peace in plural societies cannot be overemphasised (3).

Role of Media in Relation to Religion. The media occupy a unique position in every society and in the world at large. In the various democracies of the world, they are duly regarded as 'the fourth estate of the realm.' "They shape our opinions on most issues, [partly] decide what is important in the world, and also [partly] determine our own sense of values" (Scrampickal, 2008). This is because of the indispensable roles they perform in society. These roles can be generally classified into four – information, education, entertainment and correlation of the environment.

In performing these roles, the media report, interpret, analyse and critique happenings, events and situations in the world, often suggesting alternative cour-

ses. They are expected to and do carry out these functions in relation to every and all aspects of society: politics, economics, *religion*, academics, international relations, etc. within the bounds of law and ethics. The point being made is that it is the same duty the media owe other areas of human activity or endeavour that they owe religion. Given the sentimentality of religion however, special caution or sensitivity is required from the media in discharging their duty concerning religion.

Nigeria as a Plural Society. That Nigeria is a plural society is generally beyond question. Omotola (2010) has described it as a "deeply segmented" "plural society par excellence." The facts of her characteristics bear the description out. Nigeria, the most populous African country, has, within its estimated 173.6 million population (World Bank, 2015) over 250 ethnic groups and more than 450 linguistic divisions. It is also multi-religious, with available data putting her religious composition between 50% and 53% for Muslims, 40–45% for Christians and 2–10% for African Traditional Religion (ATR) (Omotola, 2010). Her ethnic boundaries are also almost coterminous with the religious inclinations of her citizens. The country is also socially stratified/divided with over 60% of her population within the poverty circle.

The implication of this deeply segmented composition has been unsavoury rivalry and struggle for ascendancy among Nigeria's various ethnic and religious groups. In the realm of religious pluralism, in order to douse tension, the Nigerian state has come in to constitutionally adopt secularism (Omotola, 2009). Thus, section 10 of her operative 1999 Constitution provides that: 'the government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion'. This provision is complemented by another in section 38 guaranteeing the right of Nigerians to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The import of these provisions is to ensure that the Nigerian state is insulated from religion and its influence to the extent that it is able to maintain some form of neutrality and independence on religious matters while every citizen practises and associates with any religion of his or her choice.

In spite of the adoption of secularism however, all governments in Nigeria – local, state and federal – have persisted not only in patronising religion but also in promoting some religions, notably Islam and Christianity, into dominance, over and above the African Traditional Religion. The evidences of these are not far fetched. They include the sponsorship of the building of churches and mosques by the governments, the offering of Christian and Muslim prayers at official functions, the sponsorship of pilgrims to Jerusalem and Mecca and the practice of Sharia in some Northern States (*Punch*: 4/11/2008).

Religion and Media: The Nigerian Example. As Hackett (2003) has noted, "studies of religion, media and culture are rare in/on Africa" and Nigeria as "existing media studies … pay little or no attention to religion." There are several aspects of possible studies on religion and media. What we explore in this study

are (the text and context of) the Nigerian media reports which have directly induced religious violence in Nigeria: The literature reveals that such reports are not many and are far between over the years. Perhaps because of strict broadcast regulations on religious publications in the country, such reports are also limited to the print media. What we have mostly in Nigeria are media contributions that are claimed to have further inflamed passions after the outbreak of various religious riots. These kinds of contributions cut across both the print and broadcast media. The contributions of the *New Nigerian* newspaper and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) Kaduna, both known for their 'pro – Northern establishment and pro – orthodox Islamic views' (Ibrahim 1989:68), to the Kaduna State religious riots of 1987 in this regard are well documented. For example:

Between March 9–11 [1987], the FRCN is reported to have broadcast regular bulletins (in both Hausa and English) concerning the massacre of Muslims and burning of mosques in Kafanchan, while it failed to report details of the counter attack on Christians (Umechukwu, 1995:33 cf Hackett, 2003).

Similar complaints, against the Nigerian media, of such one-sided and inaccurate reporting that can have a catalytic effect with regards to pre- existing tensions are usually rife during religious crises in Nigeria. Concerning the explored theme of this study however, only two print media publications that frontally induced religious violence have been found. These are the December 1990 *Fun Times* publication and the November 2002 *ThisDay* Miss World Pageant article. Here is a brief context of the two.

The *Fun Times* Publication. *Fun Times*, a subsidiary of the Nigerian government-owned *Daily Times*, in December 1990, published a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed and Jesus Christ. Sequel to this, Mallam Yakubu Yahaya, a leader of the 'Fundamentalist' Islamic Movement in Nigeria and his followers ransacked the office of the *Daily Times* in Katsina city and set it ablaze. The Katsina State government, under military Governor Col. John Madaki – a Christian – warned Yahaya and his group to desist from causing further trouble, threatening Yahaya with arrest and summary execution. This led to further demonstrations by Muslims and the burning of an effigy of the governor. One police officer was reportedly killed and six others were injured in the demonstrations. The government arrested over 150 people and set up a special military tribunal to try them for rioting and criminal conspiracy after alleged 'shiites' demands for the imposition of Sharia Law in the state. The special military tribunal sentenced Yahaya to six months and 18 months respectively on a two-count charge of conspiracy and rioting, while 47 others bagged between three to six months imprisonment (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1993).

This Day's Miss World Article. On Saturday, November 16, 2002, *This Day* newspaper published an article written by one of its staff, Miss Isioma Daniel, on the 2002 Miss World Beauty Pageant being hosted in Nigeria. In the article titled:

"The World at their Feet," its author partly wrote: "The Muslims thought it was immoral to bring ninety-two women to Nigeria and ask them to revel in vanity. What would Muhammad think? In all honesty, he would probably have chosen a wife from among them."

Some Nigerian Muslims felt that parts of this article were "offensive and blasphemous and denigrating to Prophet Mohammed." Following the publication, protests and riots broke out in Kaduna on Wednesday November 20, 2002 and spread to Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. Anekwe (2002) aptly summaries subsequent developments:

…*ThisDay* office in Kaduna was set on fire by some Muslim youths. The day's paper was also burnt at its Circulation Annex Office. The Muslim youths, chanting anti-Miss World slogan, went round the city brandishing dangerous weapons and shouting "Allah Akbar (God is Great)". The protest continued even on Thursday and Friday… a Fatwa (Death Sentence) was said to have been passed on the publisher, Mr. Nduka Obaigbena and Editor, Eniola Bello, (and the journalist who wrote the article) courtesy of the protesters. More than a hundred lives is said to have been lost in the incident, with the burning of houses, churches and mosques.

The then Executive Governor of Kaduna State, Alhaji Muhammadu Makarfi, lost one of his houses to the riots and many citizens also lost a lot of property. Apart from the deaths and the destructions, over 500 persons were injured in Kaduna. The Miss World contest and the contestants were hurriedly moved out of Abuja to London, while Miss Daniel also fled to the United States. It took several apologies and pleas for forgiveness from the newspaper, appeals for calm from the governor, the Sultan of Sokoto and President – General of the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (SCIA), Alhaji Muhammad Maccido, and others and a dusk–to-dawn curfew to restore normalcy to Kaduna State several days later.

Appraisal. A critical examination of the two publications and the attendant religiously–toned reactions, within the context of Nigeria's secular status and the rule of law, reveals as follow:

The reactions of the Muslim leaders and youths/followers in the two cases do not align with expectations under the rule of law. As a constitutional democracy, Nigeria guarantees her citizens a qualified degree of freedom of expression and of the press in sections 22, 39 and 45 of her *1999 Constitution*. Any person or group aggrieved by any media publication is therefore required to seek legal redress in the court of law, rather than degenerate into riots, violence, arson and murder. As a first civilised step, such a person or group could lodge a formal complaint with the publisher or editor of the publication and demand a retraction of the offending publication. Legal redress could then be necessary and follow where the affected media wrongly remain adamant. The Special Military Tribunal in the *Fun Times* case was therefore legally right in punishing the culprits for rioting. Although the

right of peaceful protest is protected in Nigeria by virtue of the combined effects of Sections 40 (right to peaceful assembly and association) and 41 (right to freedom of movement) of the 1999 Constitution, rioting, arson and murder are illegal.

Also, Nigeria being a secular state, the Fatwa (the religious death sentence) passed on *ThisDay's* publisher, editor and author of the 'offensive' Miss World Pageant story is not an acceptable mode of redress.

Given that riots and violence are not the expected or normal reactions to offensive publications, we may then ask why these were the cases concerning the two Nigerian publications involving religion. The emotive nature of religion does not seem an adequate answer to this query because all religions are said to preach peace. Moreover, even under emotion, rational human beings are still expected to maintain some degree of logicality. The answer, it appears, is to be found in the nature and composition of the Nigerian nation and the use to which some Nigerian elites have been putting religion.

We discussed the multi-religious nature of Nigeria earlier, with between 50% and 53% of her estimated 173.6 million population (World Bank, 2015) being Muslims, 40–45% being Christians and 2–10% being African Traditional Religion practitioners. We also noted that Nigeria's ethnic boundaries are almost coterminous with the religious inclinations of her citizens. The implication of the latter is that with high unemployment rate and poverty, it becomes much easier to excite irrational religious sentiments among practitioners of particular religions within particular ethnic groups.

This factor would not have been as potent as it has been but for the selfish and manipulative use of religion by Nigerian elites. Despite the secular nature of Nigeria, many observers believe that "religion was and continues to be manipulated to create and exacerbate conflict… as part of a wider strategy of the elite to acquire political influence and economic control over the country's resources" (Ibrahim, 1991; see also Hackett, 2003).

Concerning the affected media, the authors of the two religiously 'offensive' publications and their editors betrayed a lack of appreciation of and or high level of insensitivity to the socio-religious nature of their environment. An adequate understanding of and sensitivity to the Nigerian environment would have informed them, as *ThisDay* later realised and published in its "Apology to All Muslims," that given their operating environment, such publications were "not only unjustified but (also) utterly provocative." It could be rightly argued, of course, that the two media and their journalists have the freedom under the law to engage in the publications. Sensitive and appropriately ethically-schooled communication practitioners are aware that not all legally permissible information are ethically good for publishing. The journalist must be aware of the ethical responsibilities which loom large, even in the absence of legal restraints.

The *Fatwa* passed on the publisher of *ThisDay* newspaper can only be understood in a religious context as he does not sit with the editorial team of the paper

to determine or vet what gets published. He can only be legally liable for the contents of his newspaper vicariously. Even then, a religious death sentence will never apply as penalty in secular Nigeria.

Recommendations. As Nigeria's experience on the relationship between religion and media, analysed in the cases presented above, shows, there is the need on the part of journalists in plural societies, to have an adequate understanding of the multiple nature of the environment in which they and their public media operate. This, in fact, is required of all media in all environments. The cases also reinforce the imperative of adequate sensitivity to the media's milieu. A knowledge of the information whose publishing are protected by law alone is not enough; journalists and the media must be aware of the ethical responsibilities which loom large in communication even in the absence of legal restraints. The ceaseless controversies and unpleasant reactions generated by the (Denmark) Jyllands – Posten Mohammad cartoons and Mr. Geert Wilders' *Fitna* film are vivid examples. The central issue is: should individuals and the media needlessly and unethically offend the religious sensibilities of other citizens and peoples in the exercise of their freedom of expression? The logical response should be in the negative in the interest of peace and harmony in multi-religious plural societies.

Generally, careless or irresponsible media coverage of, or comments on, events have the tendency to ignite or exacerbate tensions. When this involves emotive religion, the tendency rises. When, as in the case of Nigeria, there is the presence of political and religious elites at the ready to manipulate religion for selfish personal economic and political advantages, particularly in largely illiterate region of the country, even little infractions can cause/become combustions. There is, therefore, the need for journalists in such multi-religious plural societies to be constantly circumspect or cautious in covering or commenting on religion. Adequate journalistic sensitivity and circumspection on plural issues like religion is a product of sufficient education, particularly in ethics. Only journalists with adequate training should therefore be allowed to practise journalism in plural societies. In the course of their duties, such journalists, as reporters, writers and editors, should also always strictly adhere to professionalism.

In addition, for adequate sensitivity to religious implications of publications in multi religious plural societies, the bodies or associations of journalists in such societies should include, in their codes of ethics, specific provisions discouraging needless inciteful or provocative comments on religion and religious issues. As pointed out earlier, while underscoring the imperative of ethics in society, issues like inciteful religious comments can better be handled through ethics than by law, or by a combination of both. In spite of the combustive multi-religious nature of Nigeria, no ethical provision is provided on religious coverage and comments in the extant *Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists*. Such a provision is recommended to nip in the bud, in future, the kind of needless and unwarranted com-

ment on the 2002 Miss World Pageant by *ThisDay* newspaper which led to religious killings and mayhem in Nigeria.

On the part of religious leaders and religionists generally in multi-religious plural societies, there is the serious need for tolerance. It should be appreciated that though the media are subject to law and ethics, they can sometimes be sensational or even irresponsible in their coverage of, or comments on, events and issues. The media in any society are run and operated by human beings with various interests, expertise and inclinations. Whenever they engage in errors of omission or commission, as they sometimes will, even concerning religion, violent protests, killings and mayhem should not be the ideal reaction, even in plural multi-religious societies. Nigeria's former President, Olusegun Obasanjo, under whom media publication – induced religious violence forced the 2002 Miss World pageant out of Nigeria in 2002, is reported to have reacted that such "could happen at any time irresponsible journalism is committed against Islam" (news.bbc.co.uk). This need not be so under a regime of tolerance. It also need not be so perpetually in the case of Nigeria. As has been pointed out at a UNESCO forum (UNESCO, 1994):

Our communities of faith have a responsibility to encourage conduct imbued with wisdom, compassion, sharing, charity, solidarity and love; inspiring one and all to choose the path of freedom and responsibility. Religions must be a source of helpful energy.

Of course, tolerance comes from essential appreciation of issues and viewpoints which only accrues from adequate education. Continuous massive education on tolerance is, therefore, also recommended for religious leaders and followers in multi-religious plural societies. Recommended in addition is general education that is capable of opening the eyes and minds of Nigeria's largely illiterate segments. It is instructive that religious violence in Nigeria has largely been restricted to its Northern region where a majority of the people are illiterates.

Conclusion. We have, in this study, explored the relationship between religion and media in plural societies with Nigeria as an example. Because of the relatively harsh socio – economic conditions in developing countries, religion is more pronounced therein than in the developed world while the media are more advanced in the latter. Irrespective of the status of countries however, religion and media are two potent forces for the development of society. While they can be used for destructive ends, religion and media can be key building blocks in creating truly diverse and pluralistic societies.

For this to be achieved, mass communication (not media-) practitioners in plural societies must imbibe adequate sensitivity to their environment and constantly bring this to bear on their communication duties. Religionists must also be mature and tolerant in their reactions to illegal and unethical media publications. No United Nations resolution on 'defamation' or 'vilification' of religions (4) will work without these safeguards. Individual citizens, journalists, media associations

and religions – all have a role to play in ensuring perpetual peace and development in plural societies.

NOTES

(1) In Okogie and Ors. v. Attorney General of Lagos State, a Lagos High Court declared that: The word medium under section 36 (2) of the *1979* (Nigerian] *Constitution* is not limited only to the orthodox mass communication media, but reasonably include schools. Accordingly, any statutory abolition of private primary schools in Lagos State would constitute a violation of the right of proprietors of these schools to freedom of expression.

(2) Redeemer's University (RUN) and Vrije Universities are examples of Christian religion's contribution in this regard. In the United States, over four million students, about one child in every twelve, attend religious schools, most of them Christian. By the half of 2006, there were 6318 Christian schools in the Netherlands, 4955 primary schools, 1054 high schools and 309 colleges and universities. Many of Nigeria's primary and secondary schools and private universities are owned by religion.

(3) A UNESCO – organised meeting on 'The Contribution of Religion in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace' has observed that while religions have contributed to the peace of the world, they have also led to division, hatred and war. Religious people have too often betrayed the high ideals they themselves have preached.

(4) The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Affairs Committee ('the Third Committee') of the UN General Assembly, on November 25, 2010, passed a resolution on 'Vilification of Religions' which was proposed by Morocco on 12th November, 2010 on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC).

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РЕЛИГИЯ И СМИ В ПЛЮРАЛИСТИЧЕСКОМ ОБЩЕСТВЕ: ОПЫТ НИГЕРИИ

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Религия и СМИ – это два жизненно важных и незаменимых института в обществе. В настоящей статье предпринята попытка критического исследования взаимоотношений между религией и СМИ в плюралистических обществах на примере опыта Нигерии. Как правило, плюралистические общества часто сталкиваются с проблемами строительства государства, которые характеризуются сложностью их решения, особенно в развивающихся странах. Это в том числе характерно и для Нигерии, стране с одним из самых сложных этнических и религиозных конфигураций, где этнические и религиозные границы частично совпадают. В таких обществах СМИ должны играть важную роль в обеспечении единства в разнообразии обеих этнических и религиозных фронтов через этическую журналистику. В противном случае СМИ могут стать скорее обузой, чем действенным инструментом в управлении религиозным плюрализмом. Опыт Нигерии включает оба названных аспекта. В статье даются рекомендации о том, как изменить положение СМИ в целях поощрения и укрепления религиозной терпимости и гармонии в плюралистических обществах.

Ключевые слова: религия, СМИ, плюралистическое общество, религиозная толерантность, этическая журналистика.