

SACRED NOISE OR PROPHETIC VOICE? THE NIGERIAN CHURCH, MASS MEDIA, AND THE CRISIS OF MORAL CREDIBILITY IN A PLURALISTIC PUBLIC SPHERE

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Abstract

Nigeria is one of the most intensely religious and most media-saturated nations in Africa, yet the relationship between its dominant religious institutions and its mass media landscape has received insufficient critical attention. This article examines whether Nigerian Christian broadcasting, across television, radio, and digital platforms, functions as a genuine prophetic voice contributing to public moral consciousness, or whether it has degenerated into what this article terms “sacred noise”: institutionally self-promoting communication that crowds out authentic moral discourse while projecting the appearance of spiritual engagement. Drawing on Jürgen Habermas’s theory of the public sphere, the philosophy of religious communication, and African communal ethics, the article argues that the dominance of prosperity gospel theology in Nigerian religious media has produced a systematic distortion of the communicative function that authentic religious witness is called to perform in a pluralistic democratic society. The article identifies three diagnostic markers of this distortion, the commercialisation of religious airtime, the displacement of structural justice by personal prosperity, and the colonisation of religious authority by political patronage, and proposes a framework for prophetic communicative renewal grounded in the church’s irreplaceable moral vocation.

Keywords: Habermas, mass media ethics, moral credibility, Nigerian church, pluralism, prophetic witness.

Introduction

Turn on a television set in any Nigerian city at any hour of the day or night, and the probability is high that at least one of the available channels will be carrying religious programming. Switch on the radio in Lagos, Kano, Enugu, or Abuja, and the same probability applies. Open WhatsApp, YouTube, or Facebook on a Nigerian smartphone, and religious content — sermons, testimonies, miracle claims, prophetic declarations, healing sessions, and prosperity promises — will constitute a significant proportion of what the algorithm presents. Nigeria is, by any measure, one of the most media-saturated religious communication environments in the world (Ukah, 2008). The Nigerian church does not merely occupy the public sphere; in large measure, it defines it.

This extraordinary communicative presence of Nigerian Christianity raises a question of profound importance for both the philosophy of religion and the field of communication and media studies: what is this presence actually doing? Is the saturation of Nigeria's media landscape with religious content performing the prophetic function that authentic Christian witness demands, such as, naming injustice, demanding accountability, speaking truth to power, forming the moral conscience of a democratic citizenry? Or has the Nigerian church's media presence become what this article terms "sacred noise": an enormous volume of communication that performs the appearance of religious engagement while systematically displacing the prophetic content that would give that engagement genuine moral significance?

The distinction between sacred noise and prophetic voice is not merely a theological refinement. It has direct and consequential implications for the health of Nigeria's democracy, the integrity of its public discourse, and the wellbeing of its most vulnerable citizens. A society in which

religious communication is voluminous but morally evasive is one in which the enormous social capital of religious institutions — their reach, their authority, their communal bonds, their capacity to mobilise collective action — is systematically withheld from the work of structural justice and redirected toward institutional self-promotion, commercial enrichment, and political accommodation. In a country where two-thirds of children live in multidimensional poverty, where governance corruption has become structurally normalised, and where religious institutions command a degree of social trust that exceeds that of any secular institution, the moral quality of religious communication is not a matter of ecclesiastical housekeeping. It is a matter of national consequence (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023).

The existing scholarly literature on Nigerian religious media has not, however, adequately addressed this central question. Studies of Nigerian Pentecostalism and its media strategies have focused principally on institutional growth, marketing sophistication, and audience formation. Ukah's foundational analysis documents the commercialisation of Nigerian religious broadcasting and the organisational ingenuity with which Pentecostal ministries have harnessed television, radio, and digital platforms for institutional expansion, but does not evaluate what that broadcasting is communicatively doing to the quality of public moral discourse (Ukah, 2008). Gifford's comparative study of Christianity and development in Africa examines the theological content of religious communication and its implications for social transformation but does not engage the implications of that content for democratic deliberation or the normative standards by which religious communicators' public role should be evaluated (Gifford, 2015). Obijiofor and Hanusch's analysis of Nigerian journalism practice addresses structural questions of media ownership, regulatory frameworks, and professional norms but does not extend its

evaluative framework to the religious communication sector, which falls outside the conventional boundaries of journalism studies (Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2011). Campbell's broader work on digital religion examines the patterns through which religious communities adopt and adapt to new media technologies but remains largely descriptive, concerned with how religious communities use digital platforms rather than with the communicative ethics of what they say and what they silence when they do (Campbell, 2013).

Most significantly, the public sphere theory of Jürgen Habermas, which provides the most philosophically rigorous available framework for evaluating the communicative quality of public discourse in democratic societies, has been applied almost exclusively to Western secular contexts in which religious voices are peripheral participants in the public sphere rather than its dominant communicative force (Habermas, 1989; 2008). The implications of Habermas's framework for a society such as Nigeria, where religious institutions define rather than merely contribute to the public sphere, and where the communicative reach of churches and mosques exceeds that of the state, civil society, and commercial media combined, remain largely unexplored. Equally absent from the existing literature is a sustained application of the normative distinction between prophetic and ceremonial modes of religious communication, as theorised by Brueggemann (2001) and others in the biblical studies tradition, to the evaluation of Nigerian religious broadcasting as a public sphere phenomenon. The question of whether Nigerian religious media performs or displaces prophetic witness has simply not been asked with the systematic rigour that its consequences for democratic public life demand.

This article addresses these gaps directly. It makes three original scholarly contributions. First, it provides the first sustained application of Habermasian public sphere theory to the communicative ethics of

Nigerian religious broadcasting, demonstrating both the framework's analytical power in this context and the contextual adaptations that a society of dominant rather than peripheral religious communication requires. Second, it deploys the normative distinction between prophetic communication and "sacred noise" as an original analytical framework, grounded in the philosophy of religious communication, for evaluating the moral quality of Nigerian religious media, a framework that the existing literature has neither developed nor applied. Third, it identifies, with empirical and theoretical precision, three structural markers of communicative distortion in Nigerian religious broadcasting — the commercialisation of religious airtime, the displacement of structural justice by personal prosperity, and the colonisation of religious authority by political patronage, and proposes a framework for communicative renewal grounded in the prophetic tradition and African communal ethics. Together, these contributions advance scholarship at the intersection of religious communication ethics, African public sphere theory, and the sociology of Nigerian Pentecostalism.

This article proceeds through five sections. Section 2 develops the theoretical framework, engaging Habermas's concept of the public sphere and the philosophy of religious communication to establish the normative standard against which Nigerian religious media is evaluated. Section 3 diagnoses the three principal markers of communicative distortion in Nigerian religious broadcasting. Section 4 excavates the theological roots of this distortion and articulates the prophetic alternative that authentic religious communication demands. Section 5 develops a framework for communicative renewal. Section 6 offers conclusions.

Theoretical Framework: The Public Sphere, Religious Communication, and Prophetic Witness

Habermas and the Public Sphere

Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere, developed in 'The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere' (1989) and refined across subsequent decades of philosophical work, provides the most influential available framework for evaluating the communicative function of institutions within democratic societies. For Habermas, the public sphere is the social domain in which private citizens come together as a public to deliberate about matters of common concern, exercising communicative reason in the formation of public opinion and the scrutiny of political power (Habermas, 1989). The health of democratic life depends on the quality of public sphere communication: whether it is genuinely deliberative, oriented toward the common good, open to critical scrutiny, and capable of holding power accountable.

Habermas's earlier work was ambivalent about the role of religion in the public sphere, reflecting an Enlightenment assumption that religious reason is inherently non-public, particular, tradition-bound, and inaccessible to those outside the specific religious community making the argument. His later work, however, represents a significant revision. In 'Between Naturalism and Religion' (2008), Habermas acknowledges that religious traditions carry genuine moral insights, concerning human dignity, solidarity, the limits of instrumental reason, that secular philosophy has often failed to articulate with equivalent force, and that a public sphere that systematically excludes religious voices impoverishes democratic deliberation (Habermas, 2008). The challenge, as Habermas frames it, is to find conditions under which religious communication can participate in democratic public discourse without either imposing confessional particularity on those who do not share its premises or surrendering the depth of its moral resources to the demands of a thin secular common ground.

Charles Taylor's complementary analysis in 'A Secular Age' (2007) deepens

this framework by establishing that modernity does not eliminate religion from public life but transforms the conditions under which religious conviction is held and communicated. In what Taylor calls a "secular age," faith exists under conditions of genuine plurality and contestation: it is one option among many, and its public credibility must be continuously renewed through the quality of the communities it produces, the moral seriousness of its public witness, and the integrity of the relationship between its professed values and its institutional practices (Taylor, 2007). The implication for religious communicators is demanding: in a pluralistic public sphere, the church cannot rely on cultural default or institutional authority alone to sustain its moral credibility. It must earn that credibility through the quality of what it says and does.

The Philosophy of Religious Communication: Prophetic Witness as Communicative Vocation

The philosophy of religious communication has developed alongside the sociology and media studies of religion, though the two fields have engaged each other insufficiently. For this article, the most important philosophical contribution is the distinction between what may be termed "ceremonial" and "prophetic" modes of religious communication, a distinction that draws on the biblical prophetic tradition and its contemporary theological interpreters (Brueggemann, 2001).

Ceremonial religious communication is concerned primarily with the reproduction of institutional identity, the performance of communal belonging, and the consolidation of religious authority. It tells communities what they already believe, confirms the legitimacy of existing religious leadership, and reinforces the boundaries of the religious group. It is not without value: communities need ceremonies of belonging, and institutional continuity requires communicative reinforcement. But ceremonial communication, left to itself, tends toward what Brueggemann (2001) calls "the

royal consciousness,” the accommodation of religious authority to dominant power arrangements, the sanctification of the status quo, and the domestication of the transcendent horizon of faith into a religious validation of existing social structures.

Prophetic religious communication, by contrast, names reality from the perspective of the God who stands with the oppressed and against the oppressor. It confronts power with the claims of the powerless, names structural sin as sin, demands accountability from those entrusted with public responsibility, and imagines alternative social arrangements grounded in the values of justice, dignity, and communal solidarity. The prophetic communicator does not merely reflect the moral consensus of the community; she challenges it, speaking, as Amos spoke, from the margins to the centre, from the perspective of the widow, the orphan, and the poor against the comfort of the self-satisfied religious establishment (Amos 5:21–24). Brueggemann (2001) argues that prophetic communication is not merely a supplement to the church’s mission but constitutive of its identity: a church that has lost its prophetic voice has not merely become less effective; it has ceased, in any meaningful theological sense, to be the church.

Applied to the Nigerian media landscape, the distinction between sacred noise and prophetic voice maps directly onto the distinction between ceremonial and prophetic modes of religious communication. The question this article poses is therefore a specific and empirically traceable one: which of these modes dominates Nigerian religious broadcasting, and what are the consequences for the quality of public sphere communication in a society that desperately needs the prophetic voice its churches are uniquely positioned to provide?

Three Markers of Communicative Distortion in Nigerian Religious Broadcasting

This article identifies three diagnostic markers through which the displacement of prophetic voice by sacred noise can be observed in contemporary Nigerian religious media. These markers are structurally connected, each reinforcing the others within a mutually sustaining system of communicative distortion.

Airtime Commercialisation

The first and most structurally consequential marker is the commercialisation of religious airtime: the transformation of broadcast time from a public communication resource into a commercial commodity purchased by religious organisations for institutional and financial advancement. The dominant model of Nigerian religious broadcasting is not public service but purchased airtime, in which churches, ministries, and individual religious entrepreneurs buy broadcast slots for the direct promotion of their organisations, leaders, and commercial products, books, anointing oils, prophetic calendars, prayer packages, and spiritually branded commodities (Ukah, 2008).

This commercial infrastructure operates at significant scale. The Redeemed Christian Church of God runs Dove Media across multiple national channels; Christ Embassy (LoveWorld) operates LoveWorld TV, LoveWorld Radio, and LoveWorld SAT, with programming built around healing testimonies and seed-faith appeals; Winners Chapel broadcasts through its Faith Broadcasting Network in a format that interweaves doctrinal teaching with recurring calls for financial giving (Ukah, 2008; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2015). The sermon language is consistent across these platforms: "Before the close of this programme, sow a seed of fifty thousand naira, God will give you a hundredfold return before this month ends"; or "Your miracle is tied to your seed. Pick up that phone tonight." Banda (2019) terms this "transactional theology," in which the divine relationship is reframed as a commercial

exchange and the broadcaster occupies the structural position of the broker through whom the transaction must pass. The visual grammar reinforces the logic: countdown clocks urging viewers to call before time expires, scrolling banners listing testimonies of those who gave and were rewarded, pastors offering anointed handkerchiefs or bottles of oil for "a love gift of ₦5,000 or more" (Gifford, 2004).

When airtime is purchased rather than earned through public confidence, the communicator's primary accountability is to the commercial logic that funds the broadcast rather than to the truthfulness or moral seriousness of the content. The prosperity gospel thrives in this model precisely because its theological framework, equating giving with divine reward, generates direct financial return in a way that prophetic communication about structural injustice does not (Gifford, 2004). From a Habermasian perspective, this is the "colonisation of the lifeworld" by systemic imperatives: the logic of economic exchange value penetrating a communicative domain that should be governed by communicative reason oriented toward mutual understanding (Habermas, 1989). The result is a public sphere saturated with religious content that is, in its deepest communicative logic, anti-prophetic: designed to comfort, attract, and monetise rather than to confront, challenge, and transform.

Displacement of Justice by Prosperity

The second marker is the systematic displacement of structural justice concerns by personal prosperity content. Nigerian religious broadcasting is dominated by themes of personal destiny, financial breakthrough, marital success, healing, and spiritual protection. Content addressing structural poverty, governance accountability, or economic inequality is, by comparison, negligible (Obielosi, 2019; Ukah, 2008).

Obielosi's (2019) content analysis of twelve major Nigerian religious channels over six months found that 78 percent of sermon content was prosperity-oriented while fewer

than four percent engaged any dimension of structural injustice or collective moral responsibility (p. 63). This asymmetry is reflected in the programme titles that dominate Nigerian religious broadcasting schedules: "Your Season of Overflow," "Breaking Financial Barriers," "Divine Acceleration," "Commanding Your Morning." Titles such as "Confronting Corruption," "The Church and the Poor," or "Speaking Truth to Power" are conspicuously absent. The communicative silence during Nigeria's governance crises is instructive: during the #EndSARS protests of October 2020, when youth demanded accountability for police brutality, the dominant Pentecostal broadcasting establishment offered prayers for national peace while framing civil dissent as spiritual rebellion. During the 2023 fuel subsidy removal, which drove millions deeper into poverty, major televangelists urged congregants to "trust God's process" rather than naming the structural injustice involved.

This asymmetry is theologically determined. The prosperity gospel interprets poverty and suffering as spiritual conditions requiring spiritual solutions, more faith, more giving, more deliverance, rather than structural injustices requiring structural remedies. The structural causes of poverty are rendered invisible by a framework that locates its cause and cure entirely within the spiritual domain of the individual (Gutiérrez, 1973). The silence of Nigerian religious broadcasting on structural injustice is not merely an absence; it is a communicative act with political consequences. It normalises injustice by declining to name it, signals to those in power that their accountability to God's people does not extend to the governance of public resources, and leaves the poor without the theological validation of their claims that prophetic communication would provide (Brueggemann, 2001).

Political Capture of Religious Authority

The third marker is the colonisation of religious authority by political patronage

networks. Nigerian political actors at every level systematically cultivate relationships with prominent religious communicators, providing financial patronage and institutional support in exchange for public endorsement and spiritual legitimization (Kukah, 1993). Religious leaders, for their part, have accepted these relationships in exchange for political influence, financial resources, and institutional protection.

The practice is ritualised and publicly visible. Presidents and state governors routinely attend "thanksgiving services" at prominent Pentecostal churches immediately after electoral victories, using the ministry's broadcast platform to confer divine legitimacy on political outcomes (Kukah, 1993). During the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections, several major televised clergy issued public "prophetic endorsements" of specific candidates to combined broadcast audiences numbering in the tens of millions (Obielosi, 2019). National honours, the MON, OFR, and CON designations, have been conferred on prominent religious broadcasters by the administrations those same broadcasters were institutionally positioned to scrutinise. The communicative consequence is direct: the ministries most closely associated with political patronage networks produce the least accountability-oriented broadcasting (Gaiya, 2002).

Religious communicators who are financially or institutionally dependent on political patrons cannot credibly exercise prophetic scrutiny of those patrons' governance. A pastor who receives government contracts, flies on official aircraft, and whose church is prominently attended by the state governor speaks not as a free prophetic voice but as a patron's advocate in sacred garments (Obielosi, 2019). Habermas's model of communicative rationality requires public discourse to be oriented toward the common good rather than strategic interests (Habermas, 1989). Religious communication aligned with patronage networks fails this test

fundamentally: it uses divine authority to advance sectional interests and corrupts the distinctive contribution that religious witness is called to make to democratic deliberation. In a society where religious identity shapes political loyalty with extraordinary force, this is not merely an ecclesiastical problem; it is a democratic one.

Theological Roots of Sacred Noise and the Prophetic Alternative

What Has Gone Wrong

The three markers identified above are not independent pathologies; they share a common theological root in the prosperity gospel framework that now dominates Nigerian religious broadcasting. A theology that interprets wealth as divine reward cannot credibly challenge the governance structures through which wealth is inequitably concentrated. A theology that attributes poverty to insufficient faith cannot give voice to the structural claims of the poor. And a theology that celebrates the financial success of its communicators as God's blessing cannot scrutinise the political relationships that underwrite that success (Gifford, 2004).

The empirical reach of this theological framework in Nigeria is substantial. A 2020 Pew Research Center survey found that 77 percent of Nigerian Christians agreed that "God will grant financial success and good health to believers who have enough faith," compared to a global median of 46 percent, making Nigeria one of the strongest prosperity gospel markets in the world (Pew Research Center, 2020). Gifford's comparative fieldwork across Ghanaian and Nigerian Pentecostal churches documents a homogenised sermonic pattern in which the preacher constructs a narrative of spiritual causation, poverty as curse, wealth as an anointing, and then positions the local congregation as the site at which that causation can be reversed through faith and financial seed (Gifford, 2004). The pattern is reproduced identically whether the preacher

addresses a congregation of 50 in a rented hall in Mushin or 50,000 in an arena church in Redemption Camp. Its dominance means that millions of Nigerians weekly receive a theological account of poverty that makes structural advocacy both theologically unnecessary and spiritually suspicious.

The communicative consequences are documented in congregational behaviour. Bong (2019) found that Nigerian Pentecostal church members exposed primarily to prosperity gospel preaching were significantly less likely to report engaging in any form of civic or political participation, voting, petitioning, community advocacy, than members whose congregations maintained a broader social ethics tradition, suggesting that the theology does not merely shape what preachers say but what congregants do in the world beyond the broadcast (Bong, 2019). This is the communicative pathology in its fullest expression: a theological framework that not only silences prophetic communication from the pulpit but deactivates prophetic engagement in the pew.

The Prophetic Alternative

The prophetic alternative to sacred noise is not a communicative style adjustment; it is a theological reorientation grounded in the biblical prophetic tradition's three defining commitments.

The first is truthful naming: making visible what institutional interest and ideological distortion have concealed. Amos named elite exploitation of the poor as a covenant violation (Amos 2:6–8). Isaiah named ritualism disconnected from justice as an offence to God (Isa. 1:10–17). Jeremiah named false prophets who proclaimed peace when there was none as liars in divine service (Jer. 6:14). Applied to Nigeria, truthful naming means communicating explicitly about the structural causes of poverty, governance failure, and theological distortion, rather than offering spiritual comfort that leaves structural realities unchallenged.

A concrete illustration of what this would look like in practice is provided by the brief but significant public ministry of Pastor Tunde Bakare of the Citadel Global Community Church, Lagos, one of the few prominent Nigerian Pentecostal voices to consistently name government corruption, elite impunity, and institutional failure from his pulpit and broadcast platform. Bakare's sermon series explicitly engaging the constitutional obligations of Nigerian governance, broadcast on national television, drew both large audiences and sustained institutional hostility, demonstrating that prophetic communication is both possible and consequential within the Nigerian religious media environment, but that it operates against significant structural resistance (Adebayo, 2021). His example isolates the variable: the theological content and communicative courage required for prophetic witness exist within Nigerian Christianity; what is lacking is structural support for that witness against the commercial and political incentives that reward sacred noise.

The second commitment is speaking from the margins. Brueggemann (2001) argues that the prophetic imagination involves the capacity to grieve publicly, to give voice to the pain the dominant culture is organised to deny, thereby opening the possibility of transformation. A Nigerian broadcaster who gives sustained, morally engaged attention to the malnourished child in Borno, the trafficked girl in Lagos, and the school-less boy in Sokoto performs a prophetic communicative act that prosperity content systematically fails to perform. The third commitment is institutional accountability: holding governmental institutions to their obligations toward the most vulnerable, not as a political party in sacred garments but as an independent moral witness whose loyalty is to the God of justice rather than to any human patron (Kukah, 1993).

International comparisons demonstrate that this prophetic role is not merely

aspirational. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's radio broadcasts during South African apartheid, subsequently studied as a landmark case of religious communication in the public sphere, demonstrated how a religious communicator with institutional independence could use a broadcast platform to name structural sin, validate the dignity of the oppressed, and hold power accountable without surrendering theological depth or pastoral credibility (Christians et al., 2009). In the West African context, the Catholic Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) in Nigeria has produced some of the most consistent structural advocacy broadcasting in the country, demonstrating that the institutional infrastructure for prophetic communication exists within Nigerian Christianity, but that it operates at the margins of a media landscape comprehensively dominated by the prosperity gospel ecosystem (Obi, 2018).

Toward Communicative Renewal

For Religious Communicators

The preceding analysis generates specific implications for religious communicators, broadcasting institutions, and theological education. For individual religious communicators, communicative renewal requires a deliberate reorientation of content from personal breakthrough to communal justice: a regular, morally serious engagement with the structural conditions of Nigerian society from the perspective of those most affected by injustice. The principle of communicative responsibility holds that moral obligations are calibrated to the scale of influence: the greater the audience, the greater the obligation to exercise that influence with truthfulness and regard for the most vulnerable (Christians et al., 2009).

This reorientation is not without precedent in the Nigerian media landscape. In 2022, the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) began a deliberate denominational programme of what its leadership called

"prophetic broadcasting," allocating dedicated slots on its radio network to issues of governance accountability, corruption, and child welfare, in explicit contrast to the prosperity gospel format dominating commercial religious airtime (Adeyemi, 2023). Early audience data reported by Adeyemi (2023) showed unexpectedly strong listener retention, suggesting that the assumption that audiences will only engage prosperity content reflects the preferences of ministry financiers more than those of ordinary listeners. Similarly, JDPC's community radio initiatives in Plateau and Benue States, regions severely affected by farmer-herder conflicts, have used religious broadcasting explicitly to promote interreligious peacebuilding and hold local government officials accountable for displacement responses, achieving measurable reductions in intergroup hostility in participating communities (Obi, 2018).

Communicative renewal also requires the public declaration of financial and political independence from patronage relationships that compromise prophetic freedom. And it requires communicative humility: the willingness to acknowledge theological error, correct harmful messages communicated in the past, and model for audiences the intellectual honesty that democratic deliberation requires of all participants (Christians et al., 2009).

For broadcasting regulatory bodies, renewal requires the development of content standards specific to religious programming that evaluate not only hate speech and defamation, the current regulatory focus, but the public interest quality of religious communication. The United Kingdom's Ofcom framework for broadcast standards provides a comparative reference: its requirements that religious broadcasting demonstrate "due accuracy" and refrain from exploiting the vulnerability of audiences in fundraising appeals address precisely the commercial distortions documented in this article (Ofcom,

2023). An adapted Nigerian equivalent, one sensitive to the distinctive cultural and theological context, would constitute a significant structural intervention against the conditions producing sacred noise. For theological education institutions, renewal requires mandatory formation in media ethics, public sphere theory, and the communicative responsibilities of large-audience religious communicators, competencies conspicuously absent from most Nigerian seminary curricula (Adeyemi, 2023).

For Broadcasting Institutions and Regulatory Bodies

The National Broadcasting Commission bears regulatory responsibility for the quality of religious broadcasting on licensed channels in Nigeria. The current broadcasting code's provisions for religious content are inadequate to address the specific communicative pathologies identified in this article: they regulate content that incites violence or hatred but provide no framework for addressing the subtler but equally consequential harms of prosperity gospel misinformation, the commercialisation of spiritual authority, or the displacement of prophetic witness by institutional self-promotion.

A regulatory framework adequate to the communicative health of Nigeria's public sphere would require broadcasters who purchase airtime for religious programming to demonstrate compliance with minimum standards of theological accuracy, financial transparency, and public interest content. It would establish a complaints mechanism through which viewers and listeners can report harmful religious broadcasting and receive a guaranteed regulatory response. And it would engage religious umbrella organisations, the Christian Association of Nigeria, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, in the development of self-regulatory codes that establish minimum communicative

standards for their member organisations' media activities (Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2011).

For Theological Education Institutions

The communicative pathologies identified in this article are ultimately rooted in theological formation: in the absence of adequate training in prophetic communication ethics, social theology, and the critical analysis of media culture in the curricula of Nigerian theological seminaries, Bible colleges, and Islamic educational institutions. A religious communicator who has never been introduced to the prophetic tradition's demands, who has never studied the communication ethics literature, and who has never been equipped to analyse the ideological functions of media content is poorly prepared to resist the commercial and political pressures that produce sacred noise.

Communicative renewal at the institutional level requires that theological education programmes include mandatory formation in three areas: the philosophy of religious communication, equipping students to think critically about the communicative obligations of religious leaders in a pluralistic public sphere; social ethics and structural justice, enabling students to connect theological convictions with the empirical realities of Nigerian social life; and media literacy, training students to navigate digital media environments with critical discernment rather than naive adoption of whatever communicative strategies generate the largest following. Institutions that produce religious communicators without these competencies are not merely failing their students; they are contributing to the communicative distortions that weaken Nigeria's public sphere.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the distinction between sacred noise and prophetic voice is not a theological abstraction but a communicative reality with concrete consequences for the health of Nigerian democracy, the moral formation of Nigerian

public consciousness, and the wellbeing of Nigeria's most vulnerable citizens. The saturation of Nigerian media with religious content, an extraordinary communicative fact that has no equivalent in most of the world's democracies, is not in itself evidence of prophetic vitality. Volume is not the same as moral seriousness. Reach is not the same as truth. And the appearance of spiritual engagement is not the same as the costly communicative act that authentic prophetic witness requires.

The three markers of communicative distortion identified in this article, the commercialisation of religious airtime, the displacement of structural justice by personal prosperity, and the colonisation of religious authority by political patronage, are not peripheral or occasional features of Nigerian religious broadcasting. They are structurally produced outcomes of a theological and economic system that has, over several decades, systematically redirected the communicative energy of the Nigerian church away from prophetic witness and toward institutional self-promotion. Recovering the prophetic voice that Nigeria's public sphere so urgently needs requires theological courage, communicative integrity, institutional accountability, and the willingness to accept the costs that authentic prophetic witness has always imposed on those who exercise it.

The Hebrew prophet Amos, standing at the shrine of Bethel in the eighth century before Christ, told the comfortable religious establishment of his day something that they did not want to hear: that their elaborate worship was an offence to God because it coexisted with, and implicitly sustained, the exploitation of the poor (Amos 5:21–24). He was not popular. He was not commercially successful. He did not command a television channel or a WhatsApp network with a million subscribers. But he spoke the truth, and what he said changed the moral vocabulary of human civilisation. The Nigerian church, in its extraordinary communicative reach and its

profound social influence, possesses resources for prophetic witness that Amos could not have imagined. The question that this article has posed, and that only the church itself can answer, is whether it will use them.

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