

Towards A Moral Discourse On The Phenomenon Of Religious Mimicking In Nigerian Films: An Exegetical Study Of Ii Corinthians 11: 13-15.

Nigeria as a nation is notoriously religious. There is hardly anything done without religious coloration. The question begging for answer is whether such deep love for religion is fake or real. The most probable yardstick to answer the question here or there perhaps should be the agreement of the natural roles of religion with the citizens' moral upliftment. As far as the Nollywood actors are concerned, religion itself might not be fake. Most adherents, particularly the leaders are somewhat less than real. The paper is out to study religious mimicking in some home videos. Since the conclusion in such videos usually end up in expressing the hypocritical tendencies of religious leaders, the paper adopts historical and comparative study of II Corinthians 11:13-15. It concludes that until Paul's warnings are taken into consideration, religion particularly Christianity will continue to occupy space without much value on the society's moral standard.

Key Words: Nollywood, Mimicking, Christianity, Social vices.

Introduction

The prevailing moral decadence in our society has justified the call by Douglas Crow as quoted from Suleiman Jamiu for a discourse that would make a religious tradition relevant to the condition and challenges of modernity.¹ The justification is hinged on the continued increase in social vices in our society in spite of the acclaimed moral and reconciliatory roles of religion in both extended and nuclear families of the world. Perhaps, the assumed failure of religion to make positive moral impacts in Nigeria in spite of its deep religiosity, brought into existence various groups of "moral watchers" in our society. One of such groups is no doubt the Nollywood, a group of artists using their talents in film and home video productions.

The main interest of this paper is the way the Nollywood actors are using religious words, phrase and even costumes as make-belief in order to expose hypocritical tendencies of religious leaders and adherents to the dismay of its teaming fans in Nigerian homes. The exposures in most cases

1 seem to impugn on the characters of religious leaders, but the shocking
 2 neglect of known religious precepts in place of hedonistic gospels from
 3 Christian leaders as seen and heard from both church and electronic
 4 preachers is no doubt a temptation to agree with Nollywood make-belief
 5 actors that all is not well in our Churches. The question now arises: should
 6 the problems of immorality be blamed on religion or its adherents
 7 particularly as it affects Christianity in Nigeria? After all, the more
 8 churches we have now, the more crimes appear to increase.

9 This paper goes into exegetical exposition of II Corinthians 11: 13-15
 10 for the purpose of reassessment of a biblical support for religious
 11 mimicking by Nollywood actors and its implication for the contemporary
 12 church leaders in Nigeria. While religion, if positively channeled, is
 13 capable of healing the wounds of social malaises in the Nigerian society,
 14 the role of these make-beliefs should not be seen as that of disrespect for
 15 religion but a warning to believers that faith only in God rather than in
 16 religious leaders is a necessary antidote to social maladies in our religious
 17 society.
 18
 19

20 Religion and Nollywood

21
 22 William Grassie describes religion as one of the markers of cultural
 23 and national identity, which in turns become a natural aspect of our
 24 species.² According to him, even though the best and the worst things that
 25 humans do seem to be motivated by religion, it is not realistic to discard it
 26 off our life, instead, we must encourage it to try to make it more
 27 wholesome in human affairs.³ Corroborating Grassie's views, Adeoye
 28 Oyewole in his argument for religion as an instrument for the mental well-
 29 being of humanity, expresses his supports for Carl Jung's psycho analytical
 30 theory as a major synergy for religious role in our societies.⁴ According to
 31 him:

32
 33 While Sigmund Fiend believed that religious doctrines were all Illusions and
 34 universal obsessional neurosis of humanity, Carl Jung... viewed religion as
 35 collective mythologies with profound effect on personality. Thus, in Jung's
 36 view, religions are indispensable spiritual supports, whereas in Fiend's, they
 37 are illusory crutches.⁵
 38

39 Since leadership is a necessary nexus in any progressive society
 40 however, positive effects of religion can only be felt in a situation where
 41 leaders allow truthfulness, moderation and objectivity to be their
 42 watchwords. To be a religious leader is not only to be a seeker after truth

1 and knowledge, one should equally be able to live a life worthy of his or
 2 her callings. The call according to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 requires a life that is
 3 proportionate with religious tenets in values and attitude. For example, a
 4 detachment from crass materialism is one of the biblical tenets (cf I John 2:
 5 15- 17) for all Christians, but much more for church leaders who are being
 6 looked upon for directions. Failure to obey this precept could be translated
 7 to sacrificing truth and knowledge on the altar of self-aggrandizement and
 8 other egocentric passions which would be distanced away from religious
 9 values. It is almost impossible for instance, for one to be crassly
 10 materialistic seeking immoral and illegal gains and still spew novel
 11 religious messages and attitudes.

12 In Shola Odunfa's consideration of what Nigeria's movies industries
 13 reveals about the country's spirituality, he opines that a major reason
 14 which made him to like Nollywood films is that it makes it easier for him
 15 to relate the stories told and the morals implied.⁶ He said "I do not need a
 16 fertile imagination to understand the plots... if there are any serious ones-
 17 neither do I find it difficult to connect to the spiritual impulses of the
 18 characters."⁷

19 In support of Odunfa's submission, a number of home videos display
 20 Nigerian deep religiosity in less spiritual proportion. First is the dramatic
 21 upsurge of apparent fundamentalism in Christian religious practice. The
 22 vogue in our society today is the turning away from orthodox churches
 23 and the rushing to the Pentecostal churches ostensibly for the waves of
 24 new gospel of prosperity and miracles. The new army of Pentecostal "born
 25 again" being launched into the Nigerian land scrape has become one of the
 26 synergies for hedonistic tendencies as seen in the rituals of tithe and
 27 offerings in the churches. Prophetic message in tithes and offerings no
 28 longer come in riddles and proverbs but in plain Nigerian, but biblical mis-
 29 interpretative language- God loves a cheerful giver. And one does not have
 30 anything over the other except in most important matter of bank balance.

31 Secondly, Pentecostal leaders' success depends to a very large extent
 32 on the ability to work on the psyche of Nigerian for personal gains. An
 33 average Nigerian believes strongly in destiny. It is believed that no matter
 34 how hardworking or lazy an individual is, the will of the gods, as pre-
 35 destined, will come to pass. Appeasing the gods rather than taking
 36 responsibilities through "spiritual" leaders is always encouraged.

37 Odia Ofeimun, while acknowledging the ability of Nollywood actors
 38 to project the reality of their stories, observes that much of what you see in
 39 Nollywood in relation to religion is hogwash because the human ability to
 40 solve problems is denied.⁸ According to him:

41

1 The power to make things happen is given to God, who already gave powers
 2 to use. It's as if you are denying that God gave you those powers when you
 3 credit to him every evil or good that happens. In Nollywood that is the way
 4 it happens. Problems that have direct objectives and scientific solutions are
 5 made to appear so outlandish, so out of this world, so other worldly, that it
 6 is solely by appealing to God that they get solved... every night mare is
 7 interpreted as a spiritual attack which some pastors will deal with. People
 8 have stopped using their brains. Societies like that are asking to be
 9 colonized.⁹

10
 11 Of equal importance is the double standard of some church pastors in
 12 their occult practices and traditional religious ritual. However large and
 13 strong the followers of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria are, traditional
 14 beliefs still have a very strong pull most especially in times of personal
 15 troubles or tragedies. In the views of Don Akhilomen, while some leading
 16 Church leaders are laying claims to have the ability to dispense the grace
 17 of divine healing as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church,
 18 Pentecostal practices in Nigeria have been uniquely colored by social-
 19 cultural and economic background of the Nigeria people.¹⁰ He opines that,
 20 "...the traditional religious belief in the efficacy of magic, sorcery and
 21 witchcraft has also largely influenced the popularity and practice of faith
 22 healing by Pentecostal pastors in Nigeria".¹¹

23 Despite the upsurge of social vices and the seeming ineffectiveness of
 24 religious practices in our environments, effective Pentecostal practices,
 25 coupled with the growing popularity and accompanying wealth and
 26 prosperity of many church leaders, Pentecostal churches continued to
 27 emerge in all nooks and crannies of this country, claiming similar abilities
 28 and soliciting for similarly large audiences. Who could then blame the
 29 Nollywood actors for presenting the religious leaders in the ways their
 30 lives, attitudes and styles present them in our mist? Will anyone not be
 31 tempted to ask of the impact of such Pentecostal efforts, if indeed the
 32 motives are heavenly than worldly? If the real God is actually being
 33 projected by some religious leaders, would there not be difference between
 34 human efforts and God's in our approach at solving the current socio-
 35 political problems? A recourse to the emerging challenges in our lives
 36 shows that Nigerians face myriads of problems ranging from leadership to
 37 economic, social, financial, health and spiritual to mention just a few.
 38 These Nollywood actors and the hedonistic pastors are simply responding
 39 to the Nigeria's current situation by using the best means at their disposals
 40 to get what they want. But, while the latter is exposing the anti-religious
 41 antics of the formal, the formal is using their antics to draw followers after
 42 themselves with all the hedonistic tendencies in an already bad society as

regularly seen in robberies, fraud, bribery, insurgencies, corruptions, prostitutions, abortions, examination mal practices, money and sex for marks among lecturers and money and sex for employment in virtually all aspect of our social life.

Exegetical Study of II Corinthians 11: 13-15

The Text:

13. *oi(ga\r toiu=toi yeudapo/stoloi, e)rga/tai do/lioi, metasxhmatizo/menoi ei)\$ a)posto/lou\$ Xristou=. 14. kai\ ou) qau=ma: au)to\\$ ga\r o(satana=\$ metasxhmati/zetai ei)\$ a&ggelon fwto/\$. 15. ou) me/ga ou@n ei) kai\ oi(dia/konoi au)tou= metasxhmati/zontai w(\$ dia/konoi dikaios/nh\$: w!n to\ te/lo\$ e&stai kata\ ta\ e&rga au)tw=n.*

Transliteration: 13:

Hoi gar toioutoi i pseudapostoi ergatai dolioi metaschematizomenoi eis apostolos christou. 14. Kai ou thauma autos gar ho satanas metaschematizetai ies angelon photos. 15. Ou mega ounai kai hoi diakonoi autou metaschemematizontai os dikaiosunes on to telos estai kata ta erga auton.

Translation:

13. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen and masquerading as apostle of Christ. 14. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as angel of light. 15. It is not surprising then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.¹³

Apostle Paul's correspondence to the Corinthian church addresses series of challenges faced by members. These challenges range from social, to legal and doctrinal problems. Chapter eleven and indeed the entire book which is now known as second Corinthians, was written for the sole purpose of addressing doctrinal problems, raised by some interlopers, whose identity remains a subject of debate to date.¹⁴ The interlopers, represented by someone Paul describes as a newcomer *erchomenos* brought into the church a new feeling of resentment among the members who before then had a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (11: 3-4). In order to have a strong hold on the church, they meant to undermine Paul's prestige

1 in the eyes of his converts. Unknown to them and the church however, a
 2 fundamental doctrine of Christianity is being seriously distorted. In his
 3 usual characteristics manner, Paul engages the church with interplay of
 4 Greek words to express his surprise that the church members who before
 5 then were in good standing in Christ could easily succumb to the
 6 newcomers. The distorted doctrine affects not only the Jesus they first
 7 received, a new spirit and gospel was indeed being cunningly introduced
 8 to them by those who regard themselves as more superior in the ministry
 9 (super Apostles). According to Paul, while Jesus the interlopers brought to
 10 the church is another of the same kind *allon*, their spirit and their gospel
 11 are indeed others of different kinds *heteron* (11:4). That is, while they
 12 appear to be genuinely regenerated, the gospel they preached was clearly
 13 different from the canonical one the church received initially and definitely
 14 not with the same kind of spirit the apostle projected to them.

15 As exposed in II Corinthians 11: 7-12, the real spirit driving the
 16 interlopers is the spirit of mammon.¹⁵ They were surprised that Paul could
 17 engage in vigorous labour among the Corinthians church free of charge.
 18 Harris puts it succinctly when he observes that:

19
 20 Paul, they alleged, was a double-minded (apostle) who acted capriciously (II
 21 Cor. 1: 17-18; 10: 2-4) and lorded it over his converts (1:24; 7: 2), so restricting
 22 their spiritual development (6: 12). He carried no letters of commendation
 23 (13: 1; 10: 13) because he commended himself (4: 2, 5; 5: 12; 6: 4; 10: 12, 18; 12:
 24 11; cf I Cor. 9: 1-3; 14: 18; 15: 10b) as obscure (4:3; 6: 2-3), so also the letters he
 25 wrote were unintelligible or devious (1:13) and written with the perverse aim
 26 of condemning and destroying (7:2-3; 10:8, 13:10 and causing pain (2:2, 4-5; 7:
 27 8)...his refusal to accept remuneration from the Corinthians proved that he
 28 cared little for them and that he was aware of being a counterfeit apostle, not
 29 the mouthpiece of Christ (11: 5, 7-11, 13; 12:11-15; 13:3,6). Yet he exploited the
 30 willingness of the church to support him by having his agents organize a
 31 collection, ostensibly for the saints at Jerusalem but in reality for himself
 32 (12:16-18).¹⁶

33
 34 As observed by Richards in support of Harris "why should Paul's
 35 willingness to support himself be a cause for criticism".¹⁷ Paul had earlier
 36 explain that while he had a "right" to support, he surrendered that right (1
 37 Cor.9) not only as a sacrifice in favor of an external reward, but a genuine
 38 means of encouraging the Christian church that money is neither only nor
 39 always a motive for spiritual services. Paul's opponents have distorted
 40 Paul's motive for their selfish aggrandizement. And as expressed by Bruce,
 41

1 In Paul's mind, arguments did not affect his personal status so much as the
 2 truth of the gospel and the nature of the church. If his ministry bore the
 3 stamp of divine approval, if the Corinthians church was the zeal of his
 4 apostleship, then the opposition of those intruders was opposition not
 5 merely to him but to the lord who commissioned him, to the spirit who
 6 empowered him, and to the gospel which he proclaimed.¹⁸

7
 8 The people, who engage in these character assassinations, presenting
 9 errors as truth, are those being referred to as "such men" (11: 13). For the
 10 first time in his letters and indeed the whole of the New Testament, Paul
 11 refers to such people as false apostles *pseudapostoloi* who are both deceitful
 12 and dishonest workers. To demonstrate how serious the nature of their
 13 tactics, they are described as satanic agents who transformed
 14 *metaschematozo* themselves as agents of Christ. Here lies the real danger the
 15 church at Corinth faced. These interlopers would be difficult to identify
 16 physically and by motives. The word masquerade appears three
 17 consecutive time in the three verses under review. The first
 18 *metaschematizomenoi* (a present middle masculine participle plural noun) to
 19 describe the interlopers themselves, the second being *metaschemazetai* (a
 20 third person plural present perceive indicative verb) to express Satan's
 21 attitude of changing colours at will, and the third is *metaschematizotai* (a
 22 third person plural present perceive indicative verb) as a prove of the facts
 23 that a leopards child cannot change from leopards skin.¹⁹

24 The active voice in which the voice appears forms an interesting angle
 25 to their meaning. While *metaschematizomenoi* is a participle with active
 26 meaning, the rest two are perceive verbs in active voice to indicate that the
 27 actions of the interlopers are not done for the sake of anybody, not even for
 28 the sake of the ones they claimed to represent, but themselves alone. This
 29 corresponds to Paul's teaching in Romans 16: 18 and Philippians 3: 19b,
 30 where such people's god is said to be their appetite and their stomach
 31 respectively. Rather than serving the lord Jesus, they engage in flattery and
 32 smooth talk to deceive naive minds. This attitude of theirs is said to be in
 33 agreement with that of Satan who appeared as agent of enlightenment
 34 (photos) to deceive Eve with his subtlety *panourgia*, a word best define as
 35 craftiness and trickery. Since Satan, their real mentor is capable of posing
 36 as "gentlemen of the cloth, when indeed he is nothing but cloth itself, it
 37 should never be surprising then if the interlopers exchange the
 38 righteousness of Christ for pecuniary gains. According to Tasker, "Satan
 39 never present himself as Satan; neither does he present sin as sin"²⁰. He
 40 will always present himself as the real God who knows what is best for
 41 man and who will provide the real pleasure, enjoyment, and fulfillment. So

also are force ministers who disguise as angels of righteousness, particularly the righteousness given by Christ. They stress the life and teachings of Jesus but ignore His righteousness that emphasizes the fact that. "... a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Lk.12: 15). And that nothing makes life worthy than contentment and moderation (Heb. 13: 15; 1 Tim. 6:6 cf. Phil. 4: 11 etc.).

Paul and Nollywood Religious Mimicking

Paul's polemic as explained above and the religious mimicking being displayed by Nollywood actors in some Nigerian films are no doubt serving the same purposes-exhibition of the activities of fake religious leaders and a godly warning to innocent, sincere and devoted Christians. And although, their methods and motives differ, both can conveniently bear the title of messenger per excellent.

The concept of apostleship in both classical and biblical Greek carries the idea of an ambassador with a clear mission in favor of a superior's message.²¹ One could bare such message either by copying his or her superior's style *prosopopoia*,²² or imitating the character when positive and mimicking when negative both embraced by another Greek word "*mimeomai*" a deponent verb from the noun form of "*mimos*".²³ A clearer picture of the usage of this word especially in its mimicking from is seen when the preposition "*ana*" (on or upon) is combined with the future verb form of "*mimeomai*" "*mimnesko*" to form a Greek compound word "*anamimnesko*" (to put to remembrance). As used in 1 Cor. 4: 17 and 2 Tim. 1: 6, it carries the implied meaning of exhibiting something or someone.²⁴

Pentecostalism has indeed become the wave of the moment. Conflicting motives have made it difficult to separate the genuine from adulterated. Yet, people need a constant reminder and encouragement to seek for the genuine in the midst of the diluted. It would be difficult to impress such a reminder except the evil ones among them are constantly exposed in the open. Paul's silence in the face of serious such pretentious interlopers would have meant consent. It could also be cancerous evil as many might take them for real and fall without remedy. What is more dangerous is that they are not likely to fall alone without pulling others along. Kudos should there go to the mimicking actors for exposing those Paul himself refers to in Acts 20: 29 - 30, as those whose duty is distorting the truth in order to draw away disciples after themselves.

One of the fundamental Christian doctrines as taught by Paul, particularly for Christian blessings is giving than receiving. At the end of

his first letter to the Corinthians, he mentioned a “collection for God’s people” (16: 14). Between A. D 52 and 57, much of his energy had been devoted to raising money for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem (Rom. 15: 26; Gal.2: 10). Richards gives four possible reasons for poverty among the Christian populace at that time. These are:

1. Many were ostracized and would neither be employed nor have the right to purchase food because of being counted as apostates.
2. Food shortage from the overpopulation of A. D 46 and misrule of Claudius (Acts 11: 27 – 30).
3. Heavy taxes imposed in Palestine by both Romans and local leaders.
4. The selfish activities of the powerful aristocrats in the use of their wealth that further impoverished the poor.²⁵

Whatever the reason, Christians of that period were near destitute and in a vivid demonstration of the central Christian truth, Paul raised money not only in the spirit of equality, love and godliness but even towards others rather than towards self. They were reminded about the fact that each would receive what he or she sows (2 Cor. 9: 6 – 7), and that no one can out give God, who supplies us with all we need so that we can be generous towards others (9: 8 – 11). This is the distinct Christian theology that Paul exemplified among the Corinthian church that made him a trust worthy leader with his persistence commitment to servant hood, display of hard work, suffering, deep concern for God’s people and an evidence that God is still at work in the face of various challenges. And it is this that the interlopers meant to distort and replaced with a self induced message which Paul refers to as another (heteron) gospel. And it is the same adulterated messages that the Nollywood actors are trying to expose in our own society even for their own commercial gains. After all many of them profess one religion or the other and the activities of their leaders are never hidden from them. Were Paul to be alive to see the efforts of Nollywood actors at exposing fake religious leaders in our society, how would he have reacted? The reactions would have been that of joy despite the fact of non ministerial callings as shown in a near similar situation in his letter to the Philippians’ Church (Phil.1: 18).

Conclusion

Nigeria, no doubt is in a difficult period. Just like in the first century Christian times, Nigerians are forced to bear the burdens exacerbated by

1 joblessness and poverty, occasioned by leadership problems, heavy taxes
 2 and immoral display of ill-gotten wealth, all of which are strong enough to
 3 push people into any kind of means in order to assuage the terrible effects
 4 of poverty in our society. Although, no reason is good enough to drive
 5 people into crime in a religious society, the worst of crimes is perhaps the
 6 crimes being perpetrated at the altars. Some of such crimes as occultism,
 7 deception, fraud and deliberate falsehood in teachings and pretentious
 8 living are no doubt cankerworm in the nerves of the society at large. Such
 9 have the force to sway away gullible adults from the right attitudes to life
 10 and drive our young and innocent citizens to crime by propagating evil
 11 seeds in their minds and making them look like good. Those young once
 12 are the future hope of any nation. Having tried all kind of formulas as
 13 probable solution to the ills of the country without success, moving back to
 14 the basic tenets of religion is no doubt the way forward. Religious itself
 15 cannot be blamed for moral decadence in our society. The teachings and
 16 practices depend on better examples from religious leaders. If religious
 17 mimicking would stop from Nollywood actors, the religious leaders must
 18 learn to do it right by following the lives and correct teachings of their
 19 progenitors. Or else they are as Paul has described the interlopers at the
 20 Church in Corinth – fake ministers with fake messages.

21 In the meantime, Femi Abbas' prayers would be appropriate for our
 22 religious nation. Oh God, "Give us a leader from amongst us whose piety
 23 will be the basis of his leadership, whose conscience will be the scale of his
 24 conduct; whose words will match his deeds; and whose temptation will
 25 check his greed and avarice".²⁶

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