



The Relationship between Religion and Western Drama **Onyeka Francisca Iwuchukwu**

Department of English, Faculty of Arts,
National Open University of Nigeria

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between religion and drama from the ritualistic origins of drama in oral traditions, the Greek classical age through some major dramatic periods to contemporary Nigerian society. The method adopted is mainly analytical with materials drawn from relevant literature (on/offline), personal observations, and interaction with religious and drama groups. The study observes that drama and religion share some similarities. Findings indicate that religion and drama share a symbiotic relationship both in Classical Greece and contemporary Nigeria but that while it was a communal affair in Greece with the involvement of the State, in Nigeria it is a personal affair for personal enrichment. Another finding is that the utilization of drama by Christian groups has led to the establishment of not just professional drama groups but also institutions for training theatre practitioners who become self-employed as well as employing others. Consequently, it is contributing to the reduction of unemployment in Nigeria as professional theatre practitioners like script writers, actors and various designers. It is expected that this study will add to scholarship in the areas of religious and dramatic studies. In addition, it is hoped that it would help to create awareness of the existence of such avenues for Christian moral growth and personal empowerment. More Christian and even secular groups or individuals may also utilize the dramatic medium for evangelization, edification and empowerment, especially for the youths.

Keywords: Relationship, Religion, Western Drama, oral traditions, personal empowerment

Introduction

Religion is a very contentious word, especially in contemporary Nigerian society where it seems to have assumed a worrisome meaning and application leading to a high level of intolerance among different religious groups. Generally, religion should connote love and peace but unfortunately, religious intolerance has assumed such an overwhelmingly negative level that some fanatics kill, maim and destroy natural and material



resources in defense of their religion. The situation is so devastating that religion and ethnicity are becoming interchangeable as religious and ethnic groups view themselves with mutual suspicion that sometimes leads to deadly attacks against one another. Basically, in Nigeria, the three main religious groups are Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religion. All of them preach tolerance, love and peace. The expectation, therefore, is that there should be peaceful co-existence among the citizens but the reverse is the case. Fortunately, some religious groups are utilizing drama to preach against hate, violence and other social vices geared towards a more peaceful society. In addition to evangelism, the relationship between drama and religion in contemporary Nigeria has aided the reduction of unemployment, especially among the youth. This is because drama production involves many members of staff who work as technical crew in addition to the actors and actresses we see on stage, television, home video, DVDs, series, soaps, cinema, films and many other media through which the performances are presented. Many Christian denominations in Nigeria are utilizing the dramatic medium for evangelism as well as for economic gains. This is evident in the upsurge in the establishment of drama groups, drama ministries, professional theatre companies, and theatre academies to train theatre professionals in various areas of drama and film productions. The ‘drama ministry’ is growing in leaps and bounds so much so that conferences are being organized for stakeholders in the industry. A good example is the recently concluded one tagged “God is a Film Maker” hosted by Kunle Adepoju, a renowned cinematographer held from December 7th to 9th at Molete Baptist Church, Idk odo, challenge Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria.



There are so many sites on the internet but this study intends to bring the attention of more people to the existence of such opportunities for the public to subscribe to either as students or as employees on the

internet for the propagation of various media for religious evangelism through drama.

Religion

Scholars believe that it is difficult to define religion. For instance, BAC Obiefune asserts that religion is “an ubiquitous and perverse concept. It is broad and yet, it is simple...it does not enjoy any uniformly acceptance...” (7). Oladele Balogun opines that it is not basically about definition but that “...the major contention among scholars is on goals, methods, creeds and subjects of religion.” He explains that “Etymologically, *religionis* is from latin words I *ligare* (to bind) *relegere* (to unite or link) and *religio* (relationship). In this sense, religion deals with a binding or uniting or having of a relationship with something that could either be natural or supernatural; although, in most cases, such a relationship is often associated with worldly or transcendental entities. (9). In his own contribution, J. I. Obilor sees religion as “...a capacity or a power which enables man to observe the laws of his nature, the natural and /or the divine law ” (137). Although scholars agree that it is difficult to have one single definition of religion, BAC Obiefune opines

...the idea of religion emanates from the uncertainties associated with existence. The origin, existence (sustenance) of humans and the rest of creation have been mind-bugging. Philosophical investigation has not fathomed it, nor scientific experimentations. Questions about ultimate realities stare people in the face. The only explanation appears to be anchored in the belief and understanding that there must be a Being other than humans, transcendent and immanent, responsible for all that exists. The Being must not be subject to uncertainty, the character of existence; and as such not subject to mutations, the result of which would be corruptibility. (6-7)

For a layman, religion is simply one’s belief in a supernatural being who is given different names in different religious cultures and is responsible for the daily existence of human beings on earth. This being is therefore revered and worshipped in adoration, supplication and thanksgiving to obtain material favours in this world and everlasting happiness in heaven. Religion



could therefore be seen as “... man’s archetypal journey in search for his soul, his identity, his god (Yesufu:59)”

Drama, Ritual and Religion

Sometimes, religion and ritual are used interchangeably because they are similar in some aspects. A ritual is seen as an honest act that follows a particular pattern that is performed for a particular effect (result) and in accordance with a particular tradition. It seems to have evolved because of man’s desire to ensure harmony and equilibrium in the traditional society. For instance, if there is a disruption in the seasons or an incidence of calamity in a community, it is attributed to an offence against the gods and so an attraction of the god’s wrath. Consequently, they seek ways or means of appeasing the gods as we see in the play, *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles where there is a plague and the citizens are suffering. The King therefore went in search of the cause of the plague to find out what to do (appeasement) to avert further loss of life or its outright stoppage.

This appeasement is usually conducted only once but, in some cases, it becomes a regular form of ceremony for the community. When it becomes a regular occurrence following a definite pattern to achieve a specific result, it becomes a ritual. Ritual involves a group of people so, is communal in nature. Religion also is communal in practice but personal in nature because it is a belief in one form of supernatural being or the other and an individual chooses who/what to believe in and how to practice it. Faith is usually associated with religion because, it is through faith that a person would subscribe to an unseen being in a manner of supplication for positive expectations of what is asked for, and thanksgiving for favours received. Drama is simply an imitation/re-enactment of action. Somehow, both ritual and religion involve enactment or re-enactment that looks like drama but is different from drama because of intent and mode of presentation. When the intent is simply to entertain, inform, or educate, it is drama and the audience is made up of human beings. But if the intent is to achieve a particular result and the audience involves both human and supernatural beings, it is ritual or religion.

Drama

The word drama comes from the Greek verb “dran” which means ‘to act’ or to perform. Generally, the origin of drama is traced to ritual performances used in supplication or appeasement to gods in some traditional societies. This ritual, as expected, involved a ceremony in which the priest played an important role (acting) at a designated location, mostly shrines (stage). The priest would normally wear a special dress (costume) for the occasion. So role-playing/acting, costume, and utterance or incantations (language) are regarded as dramatic elements. If the ritual is presented for entertainment and there is an element of impersonation, imitation of an action, or re-enactment of an action, it becomes drama. Another account traces the origin of drama to man’s desire for entertainment which is manifested during festivals or other ceremonies, where they recreate the feats of some legendary or mythical heroes to entertain the people. This recreation contains elements of impersonation/re-enactment which are elements of drama. Drama is the performance genre of oral literature others being the spoken (fiction) and the sung (poetry).

Scholars are divided on the origin of Western drama. Some trace the origin to Greece but others insist that drama in its definitive form or pattern evolved from Egypt which is regarded as one of the cradles of civilization in the world. The latter group argues that it was borrowed by Western merchants who developed and documented it and thereafter, traces the origin to Greece. However, the account of tracing the origin of drama to Greece is more plausible because the evolution is clear and well-documented (Iwuchukwu: 10). Greek drama evolved from a religious festival (ritual) in honour of Dionysius to ensure the fertility of the land and the well-being of its people. During this festival, a chorus of fifty men sang and danced around the altar of the god dressed in goatskins. The choral song, known as dithyramb, was sung in honour of the god some of which were stories about the god. The choral leader who sometimes dresses like a mythological character performs as part of the chorus. During a particular performance, a member of the chorus called Thepsis stood out from the chorus and instead of singing in the honour of the god, sang as the god, pretending to be the god. He performed in between the dances of the chorus and conversed at times with the leader of the chorus. Thus, dialogue was also introduced. With this action by Thepsis, drama was literally born and



he is believed to have been the first person to introduce the elements of the individual actor, impersonation and dialogue and so “the performance changed from poetry performance to drama (Brocket: 67)”.

There are numerous definitions of drama but Aristotle’s definition sums up all others. He defines drama simply as an imitation of an action. Besides Aristotle’s postulations on drama, generally, drama is used to educate, entertain and inform the audience and sometimes for social mobilisation.

The presentation of drama and religious ceremony share similar elements which include character (role-playing), central idea or message, costume/make-up, stage and audience. Sometimes, drama is presented as part of a religious ceremony or festival, and at other times it stands on its own in the form of entertainment. Some of the performances are used as instruments of social engineering in society just like in religion. Language is also utilized in religion and drama. Despite these seeming similarities, the relationship between drama and religion has been both pleasant and unpleasant. Another element that drama shares with religion is the employment of “restored behaviour” or behavior that is repeated. “This repetition sets dramatic performance and religious behaviour apart from the behavior of everyday life. The distance of the performers from the behaviour (role-playing) makes the behaviour “...symbolic and reflexive” in a way that normal human behaviour is not. (Obilor: 16) Another important element that is central to both drama and religious performances is the use of stage. This may not necessarily be in the form of the proscenium stage in the Western theatre but there is usually a designated space for the performer and another one (auditorium) for the audience.

Some societies especially in Western culture assigned “the secular theatre a religious importance and power” (Odunaike:12) as seen in ancient Greece, where, in the sixth century BC, the Grecian ruler, Peisistratus, raised the status and expanded the scope of the Dionysian festival to include drama contests. In addition, he instituted prizes for the best play presented during the festival. Some of the great tragic playwrights of that age who presented trilogies were Aeschylus and Sophocles while Aristophanes wrote comedies. We learn that

The first tragic contest occurred in 534 BC. During this festival, the priest of Dionysius occupied the central seat at the dramatic performances yet the plays did not have religious undertones. Instead, the playwrights explored secular themes that helped to ...reinforce the Athenian class and political ideology. Athenian playwrights of the fifth century seemed particularly interested in analysing the benefits of Athenian institutions, such as democracy or the courts. The plays were performed at a religious festival but other than that, have very little connection with religious thought (Brockert:70).

Although there seems to be a good relationship between drama and religion in the Classical Greek period it was during the same age that Plato threatened to banish dramatists in his Republic. This shows that from the classical age to the present the relationship between drama, the state and religion has not always been cordial. Some religious groups banned dramatic performances and barred their members from associating with drama or dramatists. For instance, the early Christian church discredited drama as seen in Tertullian's book, *De Spectaculis* quoted in Omole, in which he insisted that Christians should not attend dramatic performances because such performances depict licentious behaviour as acting arouses passions that could lead to sinful feelings/actions so performing a role is immoral while actors are immoral people. Consequently, leaning on the element of make-belief in drama, he condemns acting insisting that "God regards as adultery all that is unreal... [and] will never approve any putting on of voice, or sex, or age; He never will approve pretended loves, and wraths, and groans, and tears" (23). This is akin to Plato's claim that dramatic performances are thrice removed from the truth because dramatists deceive people by presenting unrealistic actions like fighting and winning battles on stage but not in reality. Concluding, Tertullian linked acting to pagan worship because Roman theatre was a temple of Venus while Greek drama originated from the Dionysian ritual festivals. The Catholics shared the above views so together with the Puritans banned drama and the theatres were closed down during the early medieval and commonwealth periods respectively.



The Rebirth of Drama in the Medieval Age

The Catholic Church which spearheaded the suppression of drama became instrumental in its rebirth in the medieval age. This rebirth resulted in the emergence of different forms of drama like liturgical drama, mystery, and morality plays some of which have survived to date.

The rebirth of drama in the late medieval period started with the liturgical drama. The Catholic mass is believed to be the re-enactment of Christ's passion, death and resurrection but in the early church. It was conducted in Latin. As time went on, the priests realised that the congregation did not actually understand the mass, especially the liturgical epistles and gospels. They therefore introduced the dramatisation of the gospel so as to make the biblical stories more vivid and concrete for easier understanding and assimilation of the message by the congregation. This dramatisation started with the gospel of the Easter celebration which is the commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In biblical documentation, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb of Jesus to anoint his body but were met at the entrance of the tomb by an Angel who said to them: "Why are you looking among the dead for one who is alive? (Mark: 24:5). This drama, popularly known as *Quem Queritis* (Whom do you seek), was presented in the form of a dialogue between the Marys and the Angel at the tomb. Gradually, it metamorphosed into a short simple play with stage directions written by Bishop Ethelwold in the *Regularis Concordia*. The stage direction comprised instructions to the monks (actors) on how to position themselves around the tomb (blocking) "in imitation of the angel seated in the tomb, and of the women coming with spices to anoint the body of Jesus" (Gassner;37). The initial and original performance took place in a space beside the altar for the congregation.

However, as it grew in popularity, some modifications were added and gradually extended to other major feasts in the liturgical calendar of the church. It also grew in magnitude so much that it became a distracting feature during Mass, deviated from the original intent and some priests could no longer handle the performances. Drama was therefore taken outside the church. The scope kept on expanding to include some other interesting stories from the bible that were not part of the liturgical readings. Guilds were also formed with each of them adopting a patron saint and

started dramatising the lives of the saints thereby increasing the number of performances to assuage the yearnings of the people for more performances. As soon as the drama was taken outside the church, the priests lost control, some stories were then performed in the vernacular with the infiltration of extraneous issues into the plays like the sheep stealing episode in *The Second Shepherd's Play*. The institution of the Feast of Corpus Christi by Pope Urban IV in 1264 added a significant boost to the liturgical drama. The celebration of the feast though in a procession was like a pageant (Ogden:26). This feast presents a public affirmation of the catholic doctrine of the transmutation of Christ in the Eucharist. In addition, dramatists modified and extended biblical themes to include secular issues but the plays still retained a didactic focus. Gradually full-blown plays were presented leading to the emergence of three genres of drama-

1. Liturgical Drama- plays presented during mass
2. Mystery/Miracle Plays- plays on miracles/mysteries in the bible and the lives of saints.
3. Morality Plays – full-length plays used to teach morals.

Two surviving plays of the Medieval age are *The Second Shepherd Play* and *Everyman*.

Religion, Drama and the Renaissance/Neoclassical Age

During the Renaissance, the age following the medieval, new forms of drama emerged. This could be attributed to the spirit of the renaissance age which emphasised freedom and desire for knowledge and innovations. The Elizabethan in England is sometimes interchanged with the Renaissance which is referred to as the golden age of drama because Queen Elizabeth I loved pomp and pageantry. she patronised and promoted dramatic performances and indeed took drama to enviable heights. During this age, there were patrons for dramatists and dramatic performances and it also produced great and renowned playwrights like William Shakespeare, Ben Johnson and Christopher Marlowe as well as the building of great theatres like the Globe.

However, the long-drawn battle between the Catholics and the Protestants influenced the drama of this period adversely. Playwrights were conscious of this and so avoided plays that could ignite religious conflict between the two religious groups. For instance, despite her encouragement for drama,



Queen Elizabeth 1 banned religious drama in England in 1559 and specifically suppressed cycle plays in 1570. (Ogeden:12) This notwithstanding, some Renaissance plays contain moral undertones as seen in Christopher Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus (1588). The play reflects the conflicting worldviews of the Medieval and the Renaissance worlds as the playwright dramatises forces of good and evil fighting for Faustus's soul and condemns excess materialism, especially unrestrained quest for worldly knowledge which, he feels, should be pursued with caution. The conclusion of the play projects the biblical injunction of “what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his soul”. (Mark: 8:34-38)

Christian clergy continued to influence the development of Western drama. For instance, a few years after the Puritans in England closed down the theatres during the Commonwealth, the Protestant minister Jeremy Collier aided the suppression of Restoration comedy insisting in his “Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage” (1698) that the licentious behaviour of the characters, particularly the women, in restoration plays was condemnable and that the way the characters were taking the Lord's name in vain; mocking the clergy and the way evil was rewarded in the plays was not right (Brocket: 24).

Neo-classical age witnessed the decline of the power of the church so in Italy, some powerful families resuscitated and began to celebrate an Italian culture that pre-existed the church. The Medici family, for instance, sponsored spectacles that included drama. However, Christian morality still influenced artistic productions. In the sixteen century, the neoclassicists advocated a return to the Classical ideals and insisted “that truthfulness meant a higher, moral truth rather than a specific, historical truth” so did not really care about morality and drama (Brocket 31) but were more interested in the purity of the dramatic form - adherence to set rules. In the Modern period, dramatists reflect religion from various perspectives like as dramatization of religious themes, infusion of religious elements and outright propaganda and evangelism.

Drama and Religion in Nigeria 1: Oral Literature

In oral literature, drama is referred to as the performance genre, others being the sung (poetry) and the spoken (Prose). Drama as an art form therefore

thrives on performance because it involves imitation of an action, an enactment, or a re-enactment of a story in lifelike situations to entertain, lampoon, condemn, satirize, educate, or inculcate moral values. In all these, action or imitation of an action is involved. Aristotelian concept of drama with its emphasis on imitation, plot, dialogue, conflict and so on has generated much controversy on what constitutes drama in the context of Nigerian traditional performances. Based on the Aristotelian concept, Ruth Finnegan insists that drama did not exist in pre-colonial African societies but that what existed is what she described as “certain dramatic and quasi-dramatic phenomena” (500). This generated a controversy among Nigerian dramatic scholars on the definition of African traditional drama. While some oppose her, others align with her leading to the emergence of the relativist and the evolutionist schools of thought on the issue. My position in the controversy is that, for drama to exist there must be an element of imitation of an action but dialogue and unified plot structure should not be considered as obligatory. However, in some traditional performances ritual and drama are so interwoven that, it becomes difficult to extricate the drama embedded in such performances. Some of these performances include masquerades some of which are seen as gods or heroic ancestors (impersonation). Masquerades take different forms and a variety of features depending on the cultural background, the purpose, the content and the pattern. A mask is a covering or a disguise (costume) used to transform the identity of the individual or the wearer into that of another character (acting). So, there is an element of impersonation and role-playing. In traditional Nigerian mask performances

Also, ancestral worship is very common in some Nigerian traditional communities. Deceased relatives, especially the elders, are regarded as ancestors and are believed to have some influence on their younger generations. People, therefore, are cautious not to offend their ancestors but whenever such a thing happens, such ancestors are appeased. Apart from such appeasement, ancestors are invoked or revered from time to time as the occasion demands to intercede or intervene for the living in some critical moments. These are presented in ceremonies which sometimes contain dramatic elements. In some Igbo societies for instance, after breaking the kola nut, a piece of the kola nut is thrown outside for the ancestors to eat before the mortals would eat their own share. Also, before taking a gulp of



palm wine, part of the wine is used to pour libation to the ancestors before the mortals drink their own, thus acknowledging the ever-presence of the ancestors.

However, whenever there is a serious problem or in a communal reverence, the diviner is usually consulted and he prescribes the requirements for the ceremony. He acts as a mediator (role-playing) between the living and the dead so the living worships the dead with reverence in supplication, penitence, invocation, or thanksgiving. This in some cases assumes a higher sacrificial dimension and culminates in a festival in which some forms of representation and imitation of action are involved. The priest yields his personality as a person and assumes the role of a priest. Unfortunately, some of these dramatic performances, as part of rituals or bigger festivals, are gradually being phased out due to the intervention of Christianity, the colonial religion that condemned every aspect of indigenous religion and dramatic performance.

Drama and Religion in Nigeria 2: Concerts to Written Plays

Western drama was introduced in Nigeria through Christianity and education. They established primary and secondary schools where the students were exposed to drama presentations as concerts mainly at the end of the year ceremonies. The Catholic Church pioneered the use of drama in evangelization drama to bridge the communication gap. In the words of Yemi Ogunbiyi, "... the French Order of Catholic Priests (Societes des Missions Africaines) which arrived in Lagos in 1867, was compelled to rely on the power of the theatre for a more effective communication...." (18). In addition to religion and politics, these colonialists brought their culture of going to theatres for amusement. They organized concerts to entertain some important personalities from Britain and the priests/teachers tried to influence their parishioners and pupils with European civilization-like concerts which became one of the "steps of doctrinal and cultural indoctrination" (Gbilekaa 3). In missionary schools, dramatic clubs or societies were established to organise concerts at the end of their school calendar or during festivities like Easter and Christmas. The Catholic Church was the greatest producer of drama during this period because it also used the dramatic medium to teach English Language in an effort to improve communication between foreigners and the indigenes (Ogunbiyi:18).

Gradually, like the medieval drama, the drama was taken outside the church. For instance, the French priests who founded St Gregory’s College in 1818 organised grand concerts where drama sketches and plays by playwrights like Moliere were staged. The Reverend Sisters who founded St Mary’s convent were not left out of these performances which were usually parts of Easter and Christmas festivities. These dramatic presentations were so effective and popular that the “Catholic Church built a hall that could sit about 800 (eight hundred) people for perhaps staging of concerts” (Gbilekaa:6).

Apart from concerts in schools, other associations in the Catholic Church also presented dramatic performances on their founders/feasts and other significant feasts in the liturgical calendar just like in the medieval age. One prominent feature of the dramatic presentations of the Church was that, they dealt with religious or secular issues so classical/renaissance plays were equally presented. In contemporary Nigeria, the re-enactment of Christ’s grueling journey to Golgotha and his ignominious death on the cross by the Catholic Church, during the stations of the cross on Good Friday, has taken a greater dimension. This aspect of the Easter Tridum liturgy is now taken away from the church to the streets. Even the reading of the passion is also a form of drama as three people, the priest and two lectors present the gospel in a form of re-enactment/impersonation but the acting is reflected mainly through inflection of tones and sometimes, with gestures. The role of Jesus is played by the priest while one lector impersonates other characters and the second lector is the narrator linking the story for a fuller understanding by the congregation.

I was part of the school and religious concerts as a pupil at St Patrick’s Primary School Awka and a member of Children of Mary at the St Patrick’s Catholic Church Awka. In the school, we had end-of-the-year concerts that included drama presentations, poetry performances, songs and dances. The plays were usually improvisations or adaptations of abridged versions of foreign stories like *Cinderella*, plays from *More Tales* and *Lamb Tales from Shakespeare*, and others.

Also, in the church, there was always one dramatic presentation or the other by different societies in the church especially, the women groups of the



Catholic Women Organisation (CWO). For instance, St. Theresa's group has their patron feast day on the 3rd of October while the Immaculata group celebrates their own on the 8th of December. In my society, Children Mary, our plays were improvised based on contemporary issues or traditional folktales. They include tales about the wicked stepmother, the children who refused to help an old woman and the consequences of such action; the untrained young girl who was rejected by her husband; the young girl who rejected many suitors and ended up marrying a monster and many others. The plays were didactic and provided entertainment for the audience made up of the priests and members of the congregation who stayed back after mass.

The Catholic Church which continued to be at the vanguard of promoting Christian doctrines with dramatic performances was very rigid with the themes being dramatized to avoid the infiltration of pagan practices. Some of their followers were not comfortable with it so left to form their own churches just like King Henry VIII did in England. This led to secession and the establishment of other churches and eventually, the concerts, as the main manifestation of colonial theatre in Nigeria, declined and were unable to evolve an authentic Nigerian character” (Banham, 145)

Some modern Nigerian playwrights infuse religious elements in their plays in terms of reflection on such elements, inculcation of religious belief systems and or the dramatisation of religious themes. For instance, Wole Soyinka in his play, *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) incorporated the Egungun mask religious practice and the concept of the 'willing carrier' by the king's horseman, Elesin Oba, on the night of the king's burial. He also dramatized religious hypocrisy as a theme in his play, *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1964). Other Nigerian playwrights have continued to incorporate religious beliefs, elements and themes from various perspectives in their plays. I have also dramatized religious themes, especially religious hypocrisy and reflected some religious beliefs in almost all my plays.

Drama and Religion in Nigeria from Stage to Screen/Academy

Information technological advancement in mass communication started from the radio through the television to various forms of films. Christianity groups have followed the trend, utilizing these media for evangelism

through drama. Drama in the church started with adaptations of biblical stories and stories presented to teach moral lessons. Gradually, globally, the plays were broadcast on radio and gradually to television and films. There is no doubt that drama aids evangelism because “drama teaches morality by capturing and portraying venality, corruption and biased judgment... by daring to pronounce judgment on social vices ” (Mbachaga:45) but it is also a viable avenue for gainful employment.

Now in contemporary Nigerian society, the high rate of unemployment has led to the proliferation of churches and accelerated the explosion of drama evangelization and the establishment of professional theatre companies and academies. Nearly all major Pentecostal churches own television stations with drama channels and theatre companies which include film production units. In addition, some of them incorporate Drama ministry in the curriculum of their universities while others have established theatre academies where they teach various courses in acting, technical theatre and film production including marketing. In a recent study published online, Gospel Film News, Daniel Damilare, listed twenty Drama and Film Schools in Nigeria with details of the operation of each of them and affirms that the schools are “reliable and affordable”. He opines that these schools have been a strong part of drama evangelism in Nigeria since the inception of Mount Zion Institute of Christian Drama in 1995 and that the list is not exhaustive as “very few of these schools are known”. (<http://www.globalfilma.info/html/about.php>) [List of Christian Drama and Film Schools in Nigeria - Gospel Film News](#). The pastors, provosts and general overseers are working tirelessly to outdo themselves in the establishment of film production schools to the extent that by 2021, Damilare listed twenty such schools in Nigeria. The interesting aspect in all these is that even those who condemned drama as sinful like Pastor Kumiya, have joined the ‘rat race’ of using drama for evangelism. The obvious reason is that it is very profitable though they all claim that they are winning souls for Christ. Whatever the case, the good news is that Christian drama ministry is providing employment opportunities to many youths who are exploring and utilizing their talent in various aspects of drama production. The justification for the use of drama is hinged basically on the ability of drama to present stories realistically to the audience in a concrete form. Thus, Vilox explains:



“When we act out scriptural stories and principles, we're ...making them real to those who are performing as well as to those who are watching. A dramatic performance can be more transformative and memorable than simply conveying information. Preaching becomes more attractive when something visual is added than when it is presented as just a monologue from behind the pulpit” Again to completely comprehend a message, people need to "see" it, absorb it, and integrate it for an extended period of time’ He, therefore, encourages more churches to use drama but the intent should be “... not just a financial one” but to use the resources to honor God and inspire people” (Vince Wilcox) <https://www.dramaministry.com/directors-chair/view/95/10-powerful-reasons-why-church-drama-is-a-good-> retrieved October 6, 2023

Conclusion

Sometimes, religious practices and dramatic presentations share many elements in common. They include role-playing, performance space and an audience. In addition, many of the world's dramatic forms evolved from religious rituals. Some of them continued to be connected to religious celebrations in one way or the other. Drama in the classical period evolved from religious Dionysian festival and continued to be part of the annual festival. Serious drama in Europe was reborn in the Middle Ages within the Catholic Church and gave the dramatic world three forms of drama-liturgical drama, mystery and morality plays. Throughout the ages, drama and religion have shared relationships that were sometimes cordial and sometimes not too cordial. However, Christians in the contemporary world have continued to utilize the dramatic medium for evangelism, and correction of social ills for the edification of their members while reaping some financial benefits. Drama in the church has grown from short drama sketches, and concerts through stage/radio/television plays to movies and films. Other religious groups should be encouraged to follow suit for evangelism, financial benefits and job creation to reduce the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria.

Works Cited

- Balogun, Oladele. *Religion, Language and National Integration: Through the Lens of a Philosopher*. Abuja: NOUN Press. 2019
- Banham Martin ed. 1994, *Cambridge Guide to Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1994
- Brockett, Oscar G., and Franklin J. Hildy. *History of the Theatre*, 9th ed. Boston, 2003.
- Damilare Daniel “[List of Christian Drama and Film Schools in Nigeria](https://www.gospelfilmnews.com/god-is-a-filmmaker-conference-by-ace-cinematographer-set-to-hold/) <https://www.gospelfilmnews.com/god-is-a-filmmaker-conference-by-ace-cinematographer-set-to-hold/> Retrieved November 2023
- Gbilekaa, S. E. *Radical Theatre in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Caltop Publications. 1997
- Gassner, John, ed. *Medieval and Tudor Drama*. New York, 1963.
- Good News Bible with Deuterocanonical Books Today’s English Version. Kolkat 2002.
- Iwuchukwu, Onyeka. *Elements of Drama*. Lagos: NOUN Press. 2008.
- Iwuchukwu, Onyeka *Introduction to Nigerian Literature 1* Abuja: NOUN Press. 2017ed.
- Julius-Adeoye, R. J. & Omoruyi, E. A. (2016). Theatre Performances, Pentecostal Christianity and Faith-Based Universities in Nigeria. Retrieved from www.jhss-khazar.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Theatre-Performances-Pentecostal-Christianity-And-Faith-Based-Universities-In-Nigeria retrieved November 2023
- Mbachaga, Jonathan Desen “The Creative Writer as a Social Critic: James Alachi’s *Enekole* Approached” in *Theatre and Sociocriticism: The Dramaturgy of James Alachi* Sunday Ododo & Jonathan Mbachaga ed. Maiduguri: SONTA. 2014. 43-52
- Meister, C. V. *Introducing Philosophy of Religion* New York: Routledge 2009



- Obiefuna, B.A.C *Religion and Human Relations in Contemporary Nigeria: The Wounds, The Healing. An Inaugural Lecture of Nnamdi Azikiwe University.* Onitsha: Noben Press 2018.
- Obilor, J *Studies in Humanities: a Handbook.* Owerri: Austus Printers 2003.
- Odunaike, D. A. “Performers’ Rights and Evolution of Performance in Nigeria.” *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization* Vol.53, 2016 61. Retrieved from www.iiste.org November 2023
- Ogden, Dunbar H. *The Staging of Drama in the Medieval Church.* Newark, Del., London, and Cranbury, N.J., 2002.
- Ogunbiyi, Yemi “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile”. Yemi Ogunbiyi ed. *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book.* Lagos: Nigeria Magazine 1981. 3-56
- Omole, Timothy Opeyemi “Christian Drama/Theatre: *Its Development with reference to Nigerian Churches* <https://www.academia.edu/40046273/> retrieved October 2023
- Stewart, J *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion.* New Jersey; Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007.
- Tertullian. *De spectaculis.* Florence, 1961. Tertullian. Quoted in Opeyemi 2023
- Yesufu, Abdul R. “Ritual and the Quest for Selfhood in Okigbo’s Labyrinths and Brathwaite’s Masks ”, *Selected Critical Essays Volume 2* 2016 Asaba: Deaconry. pp 58-80 <https://www.ancedram.org>. <https://www.globalfilma.info/html/about.php>
<https://www.thesnaremovie.com/production-team>