



C. Krydz Ikwemesi

Between Eden & Golgotha

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“God, if I worship Thee in fear of hell, burn me in hell. And if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise; but Lord, if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, withhold not Thine everlasting Beauty.”

Rabia, the woman Sufi saint, in
M.V. Kamath, *The Pursuit of Excellence*

“Why then do you mortal men seek after happiness outside yourselves, when it lies within you? You are led away by error and ignorance.”

Anicius Boethius (c. A.D. 480-524),
The Consolation of Philosophy

“Other creatures are content with what is their own, but you, whose mind is made in the image of God, seek to adorn your superior nature with inferior objects, oblivious of the great wrong you do your creator. It was His will that the human race should rule all the earthly creatures, but you have degraded yourself to a position beneath the lowest of all.”

Anicius Boethius, *Ibid.*

To whom can I speak today?
The gentle man has perished
The violent man has access to everybody
To whom can I speak today?
The iniquity that smites the land
It has no end.
To whom can I speak today?
There are no righteous men
The earth is surrendered to criminals.

(Written about four thousand years ago in Egypt’s Middle Kingdom
by a man contemplating suicide).
M.V. Kamath, *The Pursuit of Excellence*



C. Krydz Ikwemesi, *Image Crisis of Christ*, ink, 1991, collection of Gail Povey, USA.

Prologue

Ali Mazrui the Kenyan political philosopher once wrote:

Long before the religion of the crescent or the religion of the cross arrived on the African continent, Africa was at worship, its sons and daughters were at prayer. Indigenous religions had a concept of divinity which was decentralized. God is not in heaven, or on a throne, or necessarily in the shape of Man ... The universe and the force of life are all manifestations of God ... All over Africa the processes of both synthesis and dissonance continue. Three visions of God seek to capture the soul of a continent.⁴

What Mazrui sought to asseverate was that religion was not imported into Africa. Europeans may have taught Africans how to govern themselves on alien terms, but they certainly did not teach them the concept of God or how to reach him. Rather, what they did was to supplant African religious norms with theirs, just the way they did in politics in a bid to colonise not just the political environment but also the psychological one. Up until now, the issue of whether or not the imported religions have made a completely better society out of Africa remains controvertible.

But the religions have succeeded in several respects. Most significantly, in the dying decades of the last century and through the present times when social-political conditions became most unbearable in most parts of Africa, religion provided the opium with which much of the pain was usually vanquished. Beyond that, it also became a veritable survival tonic in both the

positive and negative characterizations of the imagery. For while the “flock” placed hope on religion’s salve for its (the flock’s) continued navigation through the prevalent turbulence of the times, the “shepherd” (the pastor) was sure that he had struck a gold mine. Little wonder there are churches all over and the society has become priest-ridden.

In Nigeria, for instance, churches are coming up at an alarming rate. The economic downturn of the 1990s led many to discover the lucrateness of religion. Today, religion is one of the fastest growing industries in the country. Not only is this trend evil in itself, considering the hypocrisy it entails, it is counter-productive and dangerous for a nation – a continent – that yearns for technological and social development. African churchmen – both real and counterfeit – may well try to break the record of Jesus Christ in miracle-making, but Africa certainly can neither sing nor dance its way through technological advancement. If Africa must truly emerge as the continent of the third millennium as is now being chanted by some its usually loud-mouthed leaders, her youth must be rescued from religious fundamentalism and encouraged to readdress themselves to the art of living with rekindled optimism and a more liberal spirit.

But unfortunately, things have taken a bad turn. Religion which should have provided, and had always provided, the antidote has been inflicted with the same contradictions which attend society. In recent times, it has created more problems than it has solved. The

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propagation of Islam, for instance, has brought war and famine to many lands and subjected people to sub-human treatment within the bonds of Sharia. Christianity, in spite of its apparent liberalism, has been so bastardised and commercialized that it has lost its primal essence. One therefore wonders what alternative umbrella there is for man against life's acidic rain.

I am afraid there is none. The emergence of latter-day saints⁵ of travesty in our community is an extension of the eternal problem of evil. Between Eden and Golgotha and beyond, man is isolated as the lone evil in the material world. Evil emanates from him as does good.

Now that all else, including religion, seem to be failing, it is perhaps time for man to return to Eden (to himself) and thence begin a fresh journey to Golgotha – to salvation, redemption. The following essay may clarify my position.

*C. Krydz Ikwuemesi
Heavensgate,
January 2000*

Between Eden and Golgotha



C. Krydz Ikwemesi,
Come, let us make man in our own image, oil, 1998

Between Eden and Golgotha

The existence of evil has generated a lot of controversy and argument among philosophers. This argument, to me, is no longer attractive, because we are no longer in doubt as to whether or not there is evil in the material world. The question now is whether evil has thrived in society. But even this is no longer controvertible. For throughout human existence good and evil have engaged in a mortal combat over the control of the universe. It has been a protracted battle, with the minds of men as weapons of war. In recent times, it appears that evil is winning that war, if it has not won completely. With an edge over good, it is redefining the ethics of existence among human communities.

When this was first noticed, some of our liveliest philosophers proclaimed “the death of God.” But they were wrong. It was not God that died – for *he* does not die. It was Good, the radiance of God. And when it died, God, flabbergasted by the ingratitude and subversion of a wanton creation, lost interest in the affairs of a world which was bent on going downhill. Of course, Nigeria, “our own dear native land,” to borrow from a British housewife, was not left out.

I must not succumb to the temptation of turning this essay into a rhetoric on religion. But it certainly cannot avoid that factor completely. A discussion on the dynamics of good and evil as it relates to any society

must draw on issues in religion one way or the other. The discussion here is located at that delicate point which Eden is confronted with Golgotha, where the bandwagon and Babel of religious thought beget a mixed bag and the mixed bag begets hypocrisy. Of course, in such a situation, as we have now in Nigeria and many other places, evil remains as cheap as is religious fundamentalism, I mean religious fundamentalism in all its ramifications. However, I think that whatever religious ideologies we may hold, we should exonerate God from the problem of evil. Although death, disease, and old age are evil which the Godhead may have created as means of checking the excesses of man, God cannot be the author of most of the evils which have beclouded the modern world. From greed and avarice down to robbery and murder, all are some of evil which man has cultivated in the course of civilization. Through the inverted value system which he has nurtured throughout the centuries, modern man paved the way for the ascendancy of evil. Hence the issue of the glory of evil and not the existence of it should engage the minds of contemporary thinkers.

It is this same concern that would form the essence of my thesis in this exercise. Alongside some obvious generalisations, the discussion draws on my geopolitical environment and my personal experiences therein.

When God created the world, he placed man at the apex of creation and blessed him with

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extra-animal qualities. Even anthropologists who believe that man shares a common ancestry with the apes also see man as representative of the highest development in the animal kingdom. Thus man remains the masterpiece of God's six-day work of art popularly known as creation, the epitome of being. Man represents a phenomenon, a phenomenon which he himself does not even understand.

Whether as a special animal or *mma ndu*,⁶ man is supposed to be rational, reasonable, and intelligent. These, among others, are qualities which justify man's position in the natural scheme of things. Perhaps this is why Leon Battista Alberti,⁷ addressing man sometime in the 14th century, eulogised him thus:

To you is given a body more graceful than other animals, to you power of apt and various movements, to you most sharp and delicate senses, to you wit, reason, memory, like an immortal god.⁸

Like an immortal god! That was in 1400. And Alberti could have been right. For it was the following year, 1401, that saw the birth of Masaccio,⁹ marking the real beginning of the Renaissance. No doubt, Alberti must have been impressed with the kind of humanism that was blossoming in Florence at the time. The characterisation of man "as the measure of all things" by Protagoras must have held a certain fancy for Alberti. Little wonder he and his fellow Florentines could afford to feel like immortal gods in the 15th century!

Although I would be flabbergasted to hear anyone make such a claim as Alberti's in today's world, man in spite of his obvious brutish tendencies continues to see himself as the final word in creation. It is this feeling in its micro and misguided manifestation, that is, at the group level, that induces an unhealthy superiority complex where man as a concept becomes fragmented and some of the fragments are considered more authentic than others. Slavery, colonialism, or even the Jewish holocaust can be traced to such an attitude. Similarly, the Igbo holocaust in Nigeria in the late sixties, the "ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo, and some of the recent ethno-religious upheavals in Nigeria and other parts of Africa are veritable testimonies of man's affinity with the beasts despite his age-long claim to primacy.

Many people may prefer to look at the problem of evil from the point of view of the Bible. Most of these are the self-styled prophets (of doom) who would like to believe that we are in the age of the fulfilment of the Scriptures. It is easy for such people to find explanation for every aberration in society in the Scriptures. They believe that the world has run its course and that the various expressions of evil we witness are manifestations of the death pangs of a cosmos about to be destroyed less by its own folly than by the mounting fury of its creator. But I believe that God in heaven, given all his attributes, cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, want his pronouncements to be fulfilled through the multiplication of evil.

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Otherwise, the meek and the just would also suffer unjustly, as they are even doing in these wicked times. After all, God is an all-loving, all-benevolent being whose love “passeth all understanding”. This age of *Kali* cannot be the brainchild of such a God. Apart from natural evil like death, disease, and old age, man should accept every blame for the abysmally unattractive situation in which he finds himself today.

Even God cannot be totally blamed for the so-called natural evil. After all, *Genesis* suggests that the original intention of the Godhead was that man should have everlasting life. But when the ancestors of man sinned by disobeying God – his benefactor – God was so angry that he cast him out of the Garden he had assigned to him. Some would argue that being “just and faithful” God should have condoned that defiance by Adam and his wife. But it is perfectly logical that man decided to disobey his benefactor and his benefactor, in a fit of anger, cut off both material and spiritual aid which he had hitherto enjoyed.

Whether myth or fact this incident as narrated in the Bible marked the fall of man. It was not long after that that man committed his first evil outside the Garden. Driven by envy, Cain one of the sons of Adam, murders Abel, his brother, in cold blood. It was the mother of all evil. That incident is very significant because it was then that mankind is supposed to have descended from its Olympian heights to compete with the so-called lower animals.

It could be argued that God should have changed his mind and restored man to his original position by

reabsorbing him into the mainstream of the supernatural. Or, that since he is a “perfect orderer”, God should have eradicated every form of evil from the world right from the very beginning so that the universe would attain perfection – the ultimate purpose of God. But interestingly, man himself is evil on two legs, looking for every opportunity to manifest itself. If old age and disease were to be eradicated from the material world, men, for instance, would still kill one another. So how could death, a principal evil in itself, be banished from the world? It is impossible, unless by the removal of death we mean the complete erasure of the idea of death as an end to killing from both the cosmos and from the minds of men.

But even in the face of this logic, accusing fingers are still directed against God as the “Cause of all Causes”. In this capacity, God is believed to be the cause of the universe, and if so, the cause of everything that characterises it, including good and evil. In this connection, maybe God had fashioned out evil as a deterrent against man’s wantonness which still persists in spite of the presence of the presumed corrective evil. Or, maybe the intention was to create the necessary vitality in an otherwise hyper-utopian world. In this very sense, one can only say that evil has exceeded its limits and ought to be curtailed or withdrawn by God.

Yet in the light of this argument, one should also note the school of thought which believes that God, the *Cause* of the Universe, also has a *cause*. This argument, though plausible, remains inconclusive because if God

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is caused by something else, that *something else*, is also caused by another cause. And it goes on indefinitely without any conclusion on what the “*cause of all causes*” is or should be. If we are ready to concede that God is not the *original cause*, or that the universe is an evolutionary accident, then it follows as a matter of logic that God is not the original author of evil.

I believe that the problem of evil and man are co-eval. There is no evil in the world, excepting man. To me, disease, old age, and death are not evil but part of a natural order. After all, man is not just the spirit-soul, but also matter animated by the soul, and so is liable to aberration and occasional malfunction. People tend to talk about evil as if it resides in houses or flies in the air all on its own. Yet the truth is that evil is a psychological entity which resides in the minds of men. When it is let loose in great numbers, as it has been in Nigeria, it quickly drives out good and enjoys a semblance of triumph.

The Nigerian experience remains a classic exemplar. On all the occasions when the Nigerian military sacked the civilian regime alleging corruption and the like, they only were able to demonstrate Montaigne’s maxim that “In trying to make themselves angels, men transform themselves into beasts.”¹⁰ For the Nigeria they finally left behind in 1999 was worse than the one they had met, say, in 1984. Not only were they avid students of Machiavelli, they literally transformed the Nigerian state into a hell on earth. Like miserable apostates of hell who they vividly approximated, they reduced statecraft to a mere combination of political divination

and reckless machinations, and pitifully mesmerised the people into cowards and *zombies*. That Nigeria seemingly survived this flourish of evil is one of the greatest miracles of the 20th century.

But did Nigeria survive? Has it really survived the onslaught of political bandits and masquerades whose aberrant collective conscience dictates and sanctions nothing but greed, avarice, and high-handedness at the expense of the common good?

The Nigerian experience is, of course, not an isolated case. Empires and nations have fallen apart in history due to bad leadership and the often diabolic proclivities of the political and economic elite. Some nations remain poor today not because it is their destiny to be so. Even the Bible suggests that people and, by implication, nations, are not created poor or rich. The ability to attain wealth or poverty is in man's will which God, I believe, has given him the liberty to direct. A nation's fortune, therefore, is the concrete manifestation of the collective will of the people as directed by the few who make up the leadership. In other words, when evil overcomes a nation or a people, it is neither God nor the devil but the people themselves that are responsible.

Personally, I believe that God is a positive-minded being who spreads his spirit of positivism as far as his power stretches. Perhaps it is on this principle that God originally anchored his personal purpose for the universe, giving man the freedom to explore, but, perhaps, not to conquer the world. This proviso may

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seem surprising especially in the face of the preceding argument. But it becomes logical when one looks at the real meaning of God's warning to Adam not to eat a particular fruit in the Garden. Some people would argue that it was God's plan that man should live a simple life with the barest minimum of worry like other animals. For in the forbidden fruit lay knowledge in all its ramifications – the knowledge of life and death, of health and disease, of joy and pain, of hunger and satisfaction, and of good and evil. Perhaps God had wanted to save from man the attendant burden of this knowledge. Or, did he just prefer a simple-minded man?

It has been argued that the biblical account of creation is nothing but a cleverly woven myth of Jewish origin. It is not my intention to refute or advance this line of thought here. But what I can say is that the world was originally woven around myriad myths, some plausible, others outrageous, all seeking to explain the riddle of being. The Chinese, the European, the Indian, and even the Yoruba and Igbo, all have their own myths about the origin of life, with each seeking to establish the authenticity of the culture which it represents. It could be argued that what makes the Jewish "myth" popular is its attachment to the holy literature of the Christian faith. For that reason, it has reached millions of people in spite of some of the glaring illogicalities which characterise parts of its narratives.

But to this extent, I must concede that myths in themselves are no scientific formulae or theories which must dovetail here and there in their quest to define

certain worldly phenomena. The role of myth is to find plausible answers to the question of existence as well as infuse meaning into the cultural codes of a people. In looking at the story of man from the point of view of the Bible or other non-scientific sources – call them myths or whatever – we should always concede this fact before we begin to juxtapose them with science in the dangerous attempt to pulverize their meanings. Moreover, in spite of some illogicalities found in biblical anthropology, we must also concede that some of its records may have moved away from the realm of myth especially in the face of recent ethnographical evidence emanating from mere curiosity and organized research.

Having come this far, I shall now attempt a definition of God – as a concept – so as to steer the argument away from the controversy of what happened in the garden at Eden. Literally, God, or whatever name we may wish to call him, as an entity, cannot be defined, given his acclaimed attributes. But I prefer to look at God as a supreme force not just as a *persona*. It is this supreme force that is the essence of the universe and the very life of it. Whatever names we choose to call it can only be terms of convenience as it is too great to be funnelled into a word. Many people tend to confuse their nomenclature for this great spiritual force with its essence and practical implications. This situation readily explains the escalation of fanaticism, hypocrisy and downright intolerance in today's world.

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In a lighter mood, though, I should take the liberty to say that the term God is a derivative of Good, and that *Good* was the original name of the universe. Being the author of *Good*, God, then, as an eternal being or super-cosmic force, had attained perfection before he conceived the idea of creation. And when he did, he also wanted the consequence of the exercise of creation (the Universe) to be perfect. But unfortunately, his wish has been derailed or overtaken by events.

Atheists and other people continue to blame God for the problem of evil. A nineteenth century artist, Blake, saw God as the greatest enemy of mankind.¹¹ A highly visionary artist, Blake was known to have done a book which he called *Urizen*. I don't know what that word means. But according to Kenneth Clark, one of the most insightful art historians of all times, *Urizen* was "the embodiment of all that Blake hated – definition, restriction, measurement, materialism." He had conceived *Urizen* as the prophet of this evil, "dialectical materialism", with a painting of Karl Marx "drowning in the waters of materialism".

But Blake did not stop there. He went on to show the "terrible" result of *Urizen's* ascendancy in some other paintings, one showing "Newton on the higher plane, embodying the evil power of the measuring mind" and the other showing "Nebuchadnezzar on the lowest plane (signifying) material man reduced to a beast".¹² With these works, Blake was only trying to make a point which we may find to be at variance with some established religious dogma. First, with the picture of Newton, he tried graphically to convey his

disgust for “order” and “restriction”, two words which could easily summarise God’s purpose for creation. Then with the *Nebuchadnezzar* he sought to present man as the helpless victim of the excesses of those two words¹³ or the outright negation of them.

The words “order” and “restriction” are very significant here because of the controversy they, especially the first, have generated among philosophers. It is often argued that the world could not have been the work of a “perfect orderer”. The term refers normally to God who is believed to have “measured”, “designed,” “ordered”, and “defined” the world at the beginning of times. One is not in doubt as to whether or not Blake believed in this theory. He did. But like most of his kind, he chose to see God – that orderer – as the cause of both good and evil in the material world. In fact, going by Kenneth Clark’s account, there is no doubt that Blake had his reservations about God. For in one of his most celebrated works, he really had a crack at the Christian God who, he claims, he had seen pop in his head through the window to look at him (Blake) as a child.¹⁴ Although presented as *Urizen* the Creator and aptly titled *The Ancient of Days*, the work represents an attempt by a mortal to take on an immortal being who seemed to overwhelm his comprehension; it was a swipe at “the measuring law-giving God of Genesis whom Blake regarded as the enemy of mankind.”¹⁵ But Blake is dead now – since the 19th century. Yet we still have many modern Blakes who hold similar views concerning God. On the other side still, there is the

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majority, the postmodern saints of travesty, who would constantly push the buck of evil to the devil. While the latter-day Blake would easily cry "*Chim egbue m*" (my god has killed me), for instance, in the face of most calamities, including self-caused ones, the latter-day saint of travesty would quickly classify every deed and ill-luck as the "handwork of the devil." In the face of such blame-reversal, where can one place the reckless driver who



William Blake, *Urizen*. Kenneth Clark, 1973, p.162

runs into a ditch as a result of his own recklessness? Or the hypocritical priest whose additional hobby is sodomy? Or the masochistic one who poisons a

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perceived foe through the holy communion? Due to greed and avarice, all aspects of life in the material world are ridden with untold evil. The attempt by man to blame the supernatural, of whatever characterisation, only contradicts logic and common sense.

The modern Christian, while castigating the devil, has also created an image crisis for God. There are one and a million views about God and his ways. Varying theories and doctrines about God have been advanced over the years by Christians and other religious groups. Hence, what we have today, going by the innumerable doctrines, is a fragmented God – with as many fragments as there are churches or even individuals. Some churches have become religious business centres where God is *sold* over the counter according to each member's needs and financial strength. In doing so, these churches have killed the idea of God which was put forth in the universe at the beginning of times. They have compelled that peace-loving force to withdraw from most churches, if not the entire world. And there are still those who love to wear the God-label, while their hearts are hot ovens where evil is baked and churned out at the slightest opportunity. These are the window-dressing born-again, the enemies of movement who enjoy playing the Pharisee wherever they are. Whenever they pray, they boo and jeer and kick at an imaginary devil, which, ironically, dwells in their own diseased minds. In these times when prayer has literally become a variant of acrobatics among most religious sects, it may be interesting to find out what Jesus Christ

himself says about prayer, for instance, in the book of Matthew (6:5-19):

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men...But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”



Kalu Okorie, *The Son of God*, graphite, 2003

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Not only that. It is worth noting that prayer is not just the act of kneeling down and making supplication unto God for one's immediate needs. Prayer is a pastiche of the generality of man's relation with his creator. Life as we live it is a prolonged prayer. When life's prayer has been well said, it ultimately liberates the soul from the miserable cycle of birth and death and reunites it with the eternal God for the continuance of a subliminal existence by transcendental means at the end of the physical life which Bertrand Russell aptly describes as a "fitful fever." Prayer, according to Soren Kierkegaard, does not change God; it changes the one who prays. In other words, prayer changes our world, the world.



William Blake, *The Ancient of Days*,
Kenneth Clark 1975, p.164

The bastardisation of prayer is now common among Nigerian Christians, especially the new-breed, who

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seem to have taken to shameless *Phariseeism*. Not only is everybody a “born-again” Christian; today, every young man in the street is a prospective pastor. The number of Nigerian boys and girls who attend church services and fellowships is quite intimidating. Yet crime and other forms of immorality have not abated.

Beyond so-called cultism in the universities, a good number of our youth find expression for their hooliganism in ethnic movements which terrorise the environment in the guise of agitating for self-determination. From the Niger Delta down to Lagos, Anambra State, Jos, Kaduna, Ife, and other places where serious ethnic clashes have occurred in the recent past, the youth were both the vanguard and the scapegoat. And yet Nigeria has the highest number of pastors and churchgoers – most of them youths – in the world.

The proliferation of churches and the attendant hypocritical, if preponderate, spirituality in much of Africa, as in Nigeria, is a direct outcome of the failure of socio-political systems and institutions in the continent. After the demise of classical colonization (by which I mean colonization by external forces), most independent governments in Africa failed to meet the expectations of their peoples. Rather than endear themselves to their peoples, the new crop of leaders constituted itself into oracles and began to build personality cults around individuals. While greed and ostentation took a front seat, the ideals of the common good took the last place in the group agenda. The trend has continued to shape the thinking of political thought

in Africa. In a country like Nigeria, it has created, over the years, a rich-poor polarity among the populace through a systematic and gradual decimation and elimination of the middle class which is the elastic band of any culture or economy. As I have argued elsewhere, this situation has occasioned a drastic loss of faith in political institutions and leaders. The emergent logic is, if the leaders of society have become glorified prodigals, why not surrender to the “Lord of Lords?” If the believed fleeting mechanism of society is surrendered to criminals wearing the cloak of political leaders, why not turn to the reassuring promise of heaven and nirvana?

Thus a good number of people turn to religion and God with ulterior motive, seeking to achieve the same material desires which the society could no longer guarantee. Not only does this make the people vegetate and live an uncreative life in the main, it also foregrounds the anthropologist’s claim that religion does not necessarily make people better human beings. In this regard, Nigerians are a classic example, given the intimidating number of churches, church-goers, and pastors. Ultimately, one is left to wonder whether religion in modern Africa has been a tool for emancipation or one for neocolonisation, particularly in the last two decades, especially as it has raised more questions than it has answered in the social milieu.

Concerning the hypocrisy of latter-day churchmen and church-goers, Gandhi finds some justification in his assertion: “I admire Christ but not Christians.”¹⁶ And

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like Albino Luciani, the visionary but luckless Pope John 1,¹⁷ I wish earnestly that the picture painted of Christians (in Europe) by Sandhu Singh would cease to be true. But, can it?:

One day I was sitting on the banks of a river. I took from the water a round stone and I broke it. Inside it was perfectly dry. That stone had been lying in the water for a very long time but the water had not penetrated it. Then I thought that the same thing happened to men in Europe. For centuries they have been surrounded by Christianity but Christianity has not penetrated, does not live within them.¹⁸

Singh's comment becomes even more apt today when one reflects on what the modern world has made of Christianity and other religions. The faith, like some other major ones, has been the victim of distancing from the history and teachings of its founding fathers, the Apostles, and benefactor Jesus Christ. Its pendulum swings dangerously between a philosophy of life which it is and a mass movement which the doctrine of men have caused it to become. And it is obvious that in our world, that pendulum swings more to the latter side. The inner bankruptcy which attends religion when it degenerates to a band-wagon mass movement creates a situation of "too much God and no good". In Nigeria, Africa and the entire world, the evidence and implications are there for all who seek after the truth to see. Religion and pentecostalist arrogance have become some of the factors that feed the terror that is at the heart of postmodernity.

It is unfortunate that in spite of all the religious fervour in these parts, evil is not ebbing. It continues to define social life and the fabrics of political structures. Nobody who was praying for the progress of Nigeria, with all its multitude of dashing pastors and brutally efficient believers, could have contemplated that a plague like Abacha, for instance, could befall Nigeria. Yet, here we are, in all our holiness, licking the Abacha wounds which we helped to inflict on ourselves and our children, even when we thump our chest with mock confidence and brag: “We prayed him out of existence!” Yes, *We prayed him out!* But what did we pray in? Where can we now effectively draw the line between Abacha’s Nigeria and what came after it? It is no different. It is only an ugly continuum. And the most frightening and annoying part is that most Nigerian leaders in the post-Abacha era would claim to be “born again.” What does it matter if they are saints, when they lack humility, compassion, and the capacity to seek and defend the common good?

The point being made is that the situation in the society does not reflect the religious expediency in the air. Religious revivalism in itself is useless so long as its ends are not manifest in the practical workings of society for the common good of the people. The reality is that in trying to curb evil in the world, religion has inadvertently added to it. For religion to continue to be relevant in the new millennium, it should not just play the role of a gateway to eternity or a survival tonic

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against the harsh realities of being. It must also address itself more realistically and vigorously to the rather capricious demands of a grossly endangered universe.

The dogged but blind pursuit of the kingdom of God by this generation of Nigerians with little or no concern for the amelioration of society is only an evidence of the selfishness and animal in man. The kingdom of God is in us and all around us. It is not in church buildings, crusades, and fellowships. If we cannot pursue virtues and values which promote peace, justice, and humanity for the benefit of ourselves and society, eternity will elude us as a matter of logic. Religion for religion's sake is a cesspool with gold fish swimming on the surface.

Even for those who would describe religion as "a deterrent against those who would do evil in society", that definition can no longer hold water. For as religious revivalism increases, so also does the apparent triumph of evil, and one is left to wonder how water went into the flute of the proverbial pumkin.

The answer is simple. It is because there is no sincerity in the disposition of most of those who seek divine intervention in their affairs. People run to churches and various evangelical ministries today either to gain promotion at their work places or to obtain divine boost for their businesses or even to enable them buy such funny items as cars and houses. Beclouded by their own materialism, they pass through God but refuse to allow God pass through them. Otherwise, how do you explain a situation where you have "born-again" presidents, vice-chancellors, soldiers, managing

Between Eden and Golgotha
directors, police chiefs, clerks, and market women, and
the society is not better off ?¹⁹



Kalu Okorie, *In the Night, Darkly*, 2003,

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Who or what, then, is the cause of evil? Is it God, as some people would have us believe? Or, is it the devil as the latter-day saint would prefer to claim? I dare say that it is neither of them. I look at God as a wonderful artist. No artist would like his oeuvre to rot away without care. It is impossible for God to subject the entire world – his very work of art – to such degeneracy. For if he did, some of his well-known attributes would become questionable. And I take it that the devil has retired from the world “after a long and honourable career”.²⁰ No one remembers him any more. Our “bread-and-butter clerics of ample gait, stuffed with the toast of rectory tea” have preached him out of existence.²¹ So with the devil gone and the memories of his hell-fire forgotten, evil becomes a heroic way of life in a society which he (the devil) would easily prod forward with his three-pronged oyster-fork, if he were still in active service!

In the light and darkness of the forgoing premises, who then takes the praise and blame for some of the violations of humanity that are rampant in the present world? As society is believed to exist because of men,²² the consequences of its dynamics should, to a large degree, be the responsibility of men.

As I have indicated, it is not my wish that this exercise should degenerate into a polemic in religion. But I must go on to look at the churches more critically to highlight how some of them have helped in the promotion of evil in these parts.

Not unnaturally, religion is believed by anthropologists to be the product of men’s mind over

the years. Even some anthropological records have it that religion could have been there before the appearance of the so-called *homo sapiens* on the evolutionary scene. A school of thought claims, for instance, that chimpanzees used to do “rain dance” which, it is believed, represented a religious inclination of a rudimentary kind. With the advent of man and the evolution of society, religion was contrived as a deterrent against those who would do evil in, or against, society.²³

But I must say that the theory of evolution is one scientific theory I have reservations about as I do biblical cosmogony. This is because both, though quite plausible, are ridden with slots which may never be filled in the near future. I am not rendering both theories null and void in any way. But there are places where they resonate with incongruent ideas. For instance, beyond Eden, it is not clear how the human race was generated from Adam, and no one has explained why more apes have not evolved into men in our time.

This is why I find it difficult here to put all my eggs in any one basket belonging to either of the two theories. Yet I must concede that when God created the world – however he did it – he did not create any particular religion along with man. Man simply had to devise a way of relating to the supernatural which God aptly represents. There are simply no records in the Scriptures or related literature of how or when God created or sanctioned any particular religion for use by

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man in relating with him. Yet men, in their lust for superiority over one another, would always want to feel that their religion is superior to that of others. Having led to wars and massacres in many parts of the world, this kind of misguided jingoism has transformed religion into a necessary evil.

Only few rational people would bear to be confronted with the argument that all religions are inter-related and aspire to the same ideal. Yet the central themes of every religion are worship, adoration, and submission to its god – the ultimate benefactor. What differ are the methods through which these goals are pursued by the various religions. This means that religion could be described as a singular destination with various access routes. It is bigotry for anyone to claim that his chosen route to this destination is the safest. Such a feeling would only represent intolerance – religion employed in the evil service and boosting of the ego.

The God of the universe is one God. Otherwise, there would have been more than one universe. I am unable to understand why men should continue to fight for the legitimacy of one religion over another. World religions in modern times are like labels placed on God and those who place a premium on these labels are only making a Babel out of religion and thus creating an image crisis for God and all the interests he represents.

While hinting on the futility of this problem, perhaps, Xenophanes of Colophone (c.530 B.C.) said

But if oxen (and horses) and lions had hands, or could draw with hands and create works of art like those made by men, horses would draw pictures of gods like horses, and oxen of gods like oxen, and they would make the bodies (of their gods) in accordance with the form that each species possesses. Aethiopians have gods with snub-noses and black hair, Thracians have gods with grey eyes and red hair.²⁴

Xenophanes' opinion above also suggests that God, after creation, and with the passage of time, gave every people a messiah according to their own culture. This, perhaps, accounts for the fundamental similarity in the contents of the teachings of all the great prophets. Each prophet only blends his teachings with the central myth and cultural codes of the society where he finds himself. Yet in contemporary society, Moslems cannot see eye to eye with Christians and vice versa. The same goes for other major religions. Generally, man, as *homo-religiosus*, continues to exhibit that sense of intolerance which he commonly shares with the beasts. As a result, wars and other conflicts all over the world have been religious where they were not fundamentally tribal.

I have discussed the triumph of evil in the form of intolerance at the inter-religious level. At the intra-religious or denominational level, the division is more palpable and often stronger. In the Christian religion, for instance, the central figure is Christ, yet Roman Catholics and Anglicans do not agree. Since the historic Reformation, both have been in a cold war over legitimacy. In spite of its several adherents all over the world, Christianity, like most other religions, has not helped in the alleviation of evil. Rather, it has

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aggravated it and enhanced its triumph through inter-denominational acrimonies. More than any other factor, intolerance among religious sects has been the cheapest assailant of the significance of Eden and Golgotha.

In this bitter fight for legitimacy and, of course, supremacy, the churches have impiously tampered with the teachings of Christ over time to suit their selfish interests. The reckless misinterpretation of doctrines and biblical narrations remains as shocking as the politicization and commercialization of religion itself. The growing unhealthy competition among Christians has assumed embarrassing proportions. Some Christian sects even claim that they were established by Christ himself. But the fact remains that Christ never founded any church on earth. It was never his mission to found one. What we have as Christian churches are human institutions which grew out of the solidarity of Christ's followership, by virtue of his very crucifixion. Unfortunately, this misconception has led some denominations to discourage or even forbid their members from marrying outside their fold. When my wife and I were about to wed, it was required by my own parish of the Anglican Communion in Enugu that the marriage banns be signed and announced in my wife's parish of the Catholic Diocese in her village. The Reverend Father there refused to sign or announce the banns and we had to go on without the consent of his church. This reality becomes very intriguing and curious when one considers that it is the same churches that would turn around and charge their members to "love thy neighbour as thyself"! If we are forbidden

from loving or marrying fellow human beings for the simple reason that they belong to other religious sects, who then is our neighbour? How can we do the will of God?

In his conceit, material man has turned the churches into interest groups, if not transcendental political parties. The unvoiced maxim seems to be "*If you don't belong to my church, then you are evil!*" We have created a fragmented world with equally fragmented ideas and values. Even our idea of God is so fragmented: *If you do not hold on to my own fragment of God, then you are evil.* But this is madness. And I am sure that such promotion of evil does not impress God. What could be so disgusting than that someone should fail a job interview simply because he is not "born again" or simply because he does not belong to a certain sect?

A friend of mine who was carrying out his National Youth Service in Rivers State of Nigeria in 1993 happened to be posted to one of the evangelical churches there. He was a graphic artist, and the church needed one badly. Having presented his portfolio, the pastor was greatly enthused with his capabilities. But then he asked him whether he was a "born-again". He said no. The result was simple. He failed the interview, because he was *not qualified* for it. In that split second, merit was thrown out of the window in favour of dubious religious labels. If my friend had lied that he was a "born-again", they would have signed him on. They did not know that spiritual rebirth is not a state of

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mind which one can assume and discard at will. Even if it were, the best proof would be the individual's outward character and not self-proclamation. Spiritual rebirth is a *volte face* of the soul which is ignited by a spark from the Almighty. Genuine spiritual rebirth presupposes an unalloyed love for humanity irrespective of creed or ideology. It is not a label which can be put on and off like a soldier's epaulette. It occurs and resides deep down in the soul from where it permeates the individual's actions and behaviours in order to bring happiness to everyone he/she comes across.

But the reverse is the case with our contemporary churchgoers and church leaders. Instead of spreading happiness and prosperity, they perpetrate sectionalism and division within the human race. Others continue to preach poverty and austerity as virtues of eternity. To these people, to be worthy of God's mercies demands personal shabbiness, impecuniosity, hyper-conservatism, and what Blake aptly refers to as "mind-forg'd manacles". Consequently, they turn spiritual rebirth into a burden instead of blessing. This is why most people would not hear of it, because they don't want to *vegetate* when the supreme God has given them the right to *live*.

In this way, the all-important spiritual rebirth becomes evil to a world that is highly materialistic and apprehensive. If you said, "*Forget the world and come to my church*" you would be making two wrong demands. One, that the individual should die psychologically. Two, that he should embrace your fragment of God (your church). The right thing would

be to use the world (life) which God has placed at our disposal in glorifying him. We don't need to die a psychological death to be able to recognise the essence of God. After all, God created man to explore and enjoy this life, albeit with moderation and continence. For nothing in this world created by God is intrinsically evil. Evil comes from the minds of men where it resides. The evil nature of any particular thing derives from the use and abuse of it by men in their crazy materialistic pursuits. It is a bitter irony, for instance, for men to turn around and say that the acquisition of money is evil, when money is, in essence, one of the facilitators of life and society. It is common knowledge that money in itself does not think. Nor does it possess hands or knives or guns. It is simply there to facilitate exchange. In today's world where the unimaginable is always happening, people have engaged in untold thoughtless acts in their bid to acquire wealth and power. In Nigeria, people have committed ritual murder as a means to opulence. Sometime in the late 1980s, for instance, a stevedore was caught under an overhead bridge at Onitsha in Eastern Nigeria making love to a mad woman in broad daylight. When he was apprehended and queried, he confessed that he had been advised by a bush doctor to commit the act so that he could become rich! There was even the more recent story of two young men who were transformed into vultures as part of the requirement for their enrichment ritual. Then it happened that the witch doctor who was handling their case died in a road disaster when he went

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out to buy extra work material, and they could not reclaim their human bodies. These sound like fairy tales, but such things do happen, and they are evidence of how far people can go for the sake of money. Is it not a paradox, then, that some of us should blame money – these helpless pieces of embossed metal and coloured papers – for our own greed and folly?

Our society today is replete with a lot of prophets of gloom who always ascribe most of the terrible happenings of these times to God in the sense that these things are signs of the last days. But this is also an irony. It is reminiscent of that proverbial elder who spanks the child and quickly tries to “steal” the tears from his eyes. For I believe that the world is like a banquet to which God has invited the human race. In their conceit, men have made a mess of that banquet, and God, the supreme host, is unhappy. But they prefer to blame the host – God – for the ugly turn of events. Even if the last days are here, I refuse to believe that they are the handwork of God. Rather they represent the culmination of the collective tragedy of a generation which is grossly inclined to vanity and wickedness.

I do not believe that God would want to annihilate all creation – this feat of his imagination and divine ingenuity. God is not human. But I cannot think of any artist who after making a masterpiece, sets it ablaze. It cannot be the intention of God to destroy his own oeuvre (the material world). Rather it is the evil done by men that will ultimately wear out the world. As I have mentioned earlier, it is not impossible for evil to drive out Good – the original purpose of the universe.

This is, perhaps, what is happening now. When this is achieved universally, it is not impossible that God – that moving spirit behind the workings of the universe – may withdraw. If that happens, life as we know it would lose its vitality and social conditions would become most unbearable; irrational man would drown in the sea of his own folly, as the “tigers of wrath” become more relevant than “the horses of instruction”. But is it just possible that the mind of an all-loving God would conceive such wanton brutality against a world which, according to the Bible, he made during six days of sustained creativity?

What is happening now is that there are a lot of self-styled prophets who derive joy in instilling fear in the minds of people. To them, that is a way of curbing the spread of evil. But fear in itself is evil. The use of one evil to curb or eradicate another, however, can only be described as hyper-evil. The above fact also confirms the ideology in certain quarters which purports that religion is opium for the masses. And one is tempted to go along with such school of thought when one considers that religion has been used, either by chance or by design, to wage a psychological war against the have-not. They have been made to believe that poverty has divine justification – a kind of transcendental investment which yields divine dividends in heaven. I don't know the basis for this logic. But what worries me is that these people who preach heaven and nirvana are never poor themselves. They live in expensive houses and ride luxury cars. Yet they would want their

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congregations to live in penury. I refuse to believe that the supreme God created millions of people only to allow them to vegetate.

Although some of our churchmen recently discovered the beauty of the message of prosperity with its potential to boost the flock, the message has also been bastardised. Like that of doom before it, it has become a weapon among holy mouths of these times, a kind of amplifier of the opium which religion can represent. The message of salvation is fast becoming unattractive to our new-breed churchmen. Everybody is talking prosperity. The latter-day pastor wants to ride a big car, he loves to wear robes of brocade, live in a good house, and control mouth-watering bank accounts. The only way he can keep his congregation's mind at rest while doing these, he believes, is by preaching prosperity and giving the people the courage to hope that sooner or later they would become as comfortable as he. Beyond that, the congregation should have neither memory nor desire so that it would continue to till the land for holy, "divinely-ordained", grabbing hands, a people whose only *raison d'etre* is their auto-authentication and their capacity for soap-box antics and homiletic tactics.

It is regrettable that people have continued to encourage this situation. It is now fashionable for people to believe in churches and pastors rather than in God. This is what I would rather describe as "churchism". Yet it is arguable that the greatest relationship anyone can have with God is that anchored on one's personal love and appreciation of God. A

relationship with God dictated by *soi-disant*, self-anointed reverend ministers can only be as hypocritical as the workings of the minds of our latter-day saints, as suspect as the blessedness on their faces when they hanker after the virtues of offering and tithe. For, in their own brand of the Gospel, that poor widow who impressed Jesus Christ with her mite has lost significance. And why not? The god of latter-day “churchism” is a money-loving god. And he certainly loves a cheerful giver!

The pursuit by churchmen (and now women, too) of indignity and ostentation in relation to financial matters has always been a feature of “churchism”. The claim by some people in recent times that the quest for material wealth is peculiar to the pentecostalists could be fuelled by bigotry or orthodox fundamentalism. Some pentecostalist pastors may be wont to flaunt their wealth with puerile recklessness, but the smoke screen of austerity that has in the large part been associated with orthodoxy does not translate to poverty. The church has always been the richest of institutions, from the time of the graceful Holy Fathers down to this era of dashing, postmodern clergy.

The church’s riches must have taken a dramatic turn in 312 upon the equally dramatic conversion of Constantine I to Christianity. As David Yallop has put it, “When the Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and gave colossal wealth to the then Pope, Silvester I, he created the first rich Pope”. Dante is

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believed to be lamenting this situation in the closing lines of the *Inferno*:

Alas! Constantine, how much misfortune you caused,
Not by becoming Christian, but by the dowry
Which the first rich Father accepted from you.²⁵

With the passage of time, the “misfortune” which Dante laments has plummeted. The “misfortune” is nearly two thousands years old. If it has imaged religion as the continuation of politics by other means, then the “misfortune” of the church is the misfortune of the modern world. In a sense, it is part of the postmodern nihilism.

It is, perhaps, for the newly rediscovered potential of religion to spin money that many of our young men and women have turned to pastoral work. Our society is fast becoming a priest-ridden one. In a desperate bid to keep their hold on a society groping for new vistas, these bread-and-butter churchmen have even adopted a rather corrosive approach. Everything outside the sphere of the church is anathema. Every cultural practice, including the more positive ones, is *contra christus*. This is possibly why Africans validate their marriage at least twice. What we have christened “*traditional marriage*” or even the statutory one is never valid enough until the couple walks up a modern church altar amidst singing, clapping and festivity in the classic European tradition which is diametrically opposed to the very significant marriage that Jesus Christ attended in Canaan.

There is too much hypocrisy in contemporary society and it is in the church of today that that hypocrisy is more vividly mirrored. Contemporary *churchists* reinforce the scepticism held about the great thinker, King Solomon, by a school of thought, especially in his “Songs of Solomon”. It believes that Solomon, even though he fell out of God’s favour, was able to impress himself not only on his people, but also on future generations, including our own. His charisma was infectious and he appears to be notoriously fortunate. For this school of thought, this explains why up until now, the church still attaches to his “salacious poetry” a kind of profundity of meaning which it scarcely merits. The critics insist that compared to his earlier thoughts as encapsulated in “Proverbs”, or even the Psalms of David, his visionary, industrious, and more creative father, the “Songs” look fanciful. For them, beyond the “Proverbs”, Solomon comes across in most parts of the “Songs” as a very imaginative and prodigious artist, albeit one who is merely pouring encomiums on an anonymous lover or mistress, probably the queen of Sheba who has also been identified as the “queen of Ethiopia”. Interestingly, the “Songs...” remains an integral part of the Bible and its contents are largely held to be Solomon’s imagery for Christ’s relation with the Church. If the above postulations are to be upheld, the alleged misinterpretation of the text can only be a synecdoche for the present situation where *soi-disant* pastors often

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re-represent biblical texts and injunctions to suit their own personal agenda and interests?

The self-serving exploits of postmodern pastors represent just another dimension of evil. The word of God is no longer the *Good News* it was intended to be, but a message of gloom and doom. Our latter-day saints have created an entirely New God of their own, something close to what Blake called the “False God of the Enlightenment” – “the God of human reason.” Of course, such a God is bound to be as erratic as the foibles of human nature and his laws will be as twisted as the mind of material man. It cannot be the same God who, at the beginning of times, said to the whole company of heaven, “Come, let us make man in our image”.

If our fanatics insist that the current state of affairs in the world is the will of God, one is certainly left with a cold towel slung across one’s shoulders. I say this because I believe that man should be responsible for his actions. Even if God occasionally summons misfortune upon men, he must have some purpose, and much of that purpose is likely to be anchored on the actions of men which are more or less subject to their own will. Pico della Mirandola “a typical man of the Renaissance”, paints a fascinating picture of this possibility when he critically envisions man in the following terms:

We (God is speaking) have given you, oh Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor any endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you

may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which we have laid down; you by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody we have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you at all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of the earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine.²⁶

If man is thus imbued with the “power of apt” and the ability for discernment, why should he not be responsible for the cumulative implications of his actions? If the church can see only the hand of God in everything, including the prevailing decadence all over, then it raises a number of uncomfortable questions for itself. For instance, where was the church when the world was going to pieces? Where were the priests, the pastors, the monks, the nuns, the brothers – everybody – when evil went up the ladder? Where were they when the youth tacitly rebelled against accepted codes of behaviour? They were busy chasing rats while their houses burned. They were pitifully embroiled in sectional bickering; they were plundering, sacking, and raping *Golgotha* for their own selfish ends; they were busy dissecting God on the deplorable table of religious

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intolerance. When they finished and returned home with the booty – their individual fragments of God – the stark reality of *Eden* had re-emerged with its hassling implications and disconcerting significance. And what could be more annoying than that some of our self-styled saints now turn around to blame an imaginary foe, the devil, in an attempt to hide their own folly? In all my experience, I have never contemplated such hypocrisy, such falsehood. As I write this, I wonder what Jesus Christ would make of the prevailing mess if he were to return now. Without doubt, the situation is, in one word, *unfortunate*.



Martin Okonkwo, *It is Finished*, graphite, 2003

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Epilogue

Religion, the great truth about man's search for meaning, trespassed during the Middle Ages into two realms not its own: factual knowledge and political power. The result was ignorance and persecution.

Jonathan Sacks²⁷

It is logical to conclude here that the socio-political reality in Africa – nay, Nigeria – today is a direct result of the African Middle Ages. Compared to Europe's Dark Ages, Africa's equivalent appears more sophisticated in the negative sense. It is true that the church has not acquired political power in Nigeria, for instance, but religion's grip on the individual and the family (the most important unit of society) remains formidable. That way, religion has a great influence on society and, by implication, the affairs of state.

Of course, some people may contend that the centrality of religion to society and community is not strange to Africa. Or, that the influence of religion in a modernising (not modern) state like Nigeria is strongly located in the private domain. These claims may be true, but we must concede that the public sector and government are made up of private entities whose vision would certainly shape that of the collective. Religion in these parts may not be a centralising state affair, but its overbearing influence in the social milieu cannot be denied. There should be nothing wrong about this fact if religion confines itself to the role of arbiter of socio-

spiritual values. But when people forcefully transform it into a totalising – or even totalitarian – tool for social existence, it runs the risk of “trespass” as Jonathan Sacks has said and yields results that are dangerous to the perpetuation of society and society’s pursuit of truth and happiness.

There is no doubt that in Nigeria, religion has permeated the spheres of politics and factual knowledge. In the former, it may have to compromise its principles for the advantage of its vanguard. In the latter, it plays on the transient nature of the intellect and scholarship and images them as frivolity and futility against the often intimidating and attractive logic of salvation and eternity.

Religion may not have taken up permanent residence with party politics in Nigeria, but there is no doubt that it is politics unto itself. It is neither “a guardian of (social) freedom”, nor does it “direct the customs of the community”. In these parts, it encodes some objectionable shackles of its own and is made to operate as a vehicle for nescience, for muffling of customs and traditions that are equally central to the continuance of society.

In any healthy society, religion would merely complement factual knowledge and politics without seeking to overwhelm them and become the sole social nutrient on which society feeds. But that is not the case in Nigeria (and perhaps many African countries). Because religion has been bastardised and commercialised, the churchmen and women of travesty

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wrongly position it as a social burden rather than as a major aspect of the conscience of society. The truth is that religion has been miscarried in these parts. The privatization of religion has led to untold crises which claimed so many lives in Nigeria, for instance. It has also helped to provide cover for some of the evils and injustices that attend “modernising” Nigeria. This is a country where an elected public officer would say that he wants to ask God whether he should seek re-election to his high office, when already he has made elaborate and fool-proof plans to rig himself back into that office. When he eventually emerges winner (of course with the ignoble collaboration of the electoral establishment), he organises a thanksgiving service in one of the cathedrals or mosques with bishops or chief imams presiding.

Today in Nigeria, when a governor or president or their wives attend religious services, they not only come late so that the congregation would stand as they saunter in, stuffed with ample “dividends” of an uncanny model of democracy, they also insult God by coming with a retinue of uniformed, armed men. Of course, this is a vivid paradox, as it rudely underscores the inequality of men (even in the church) in contradistinction to the Biblical claim that people are equal in the sight of God!

No doubt, this is a by-product of the class-consciousness in Nigeria, which has become so endemic and institutionalised. Government policies over the years have merely advanced this situation, extending the rich-poor divide, causing the have to continue to have and the have-not to continue not to have. No sincere and honest civil servant in Nigeria can afford a brand new

car. Life in Nigeria among the masses is lived along second hand lines. Second hand goods, including cars, pressing irons, refrigerators, electric kettles, clothes, air conditioners, televisions, and the like have found a dumping ground in Nigeria. Though they are not that cheap in price, they have continued to provide some succour to the poor masses in a country where greed and corruption have obliterated the middle class, a country where a Federal Minister of Communications once said that telephone was not meant for the masses, where a president once insinuated that car was a luxury and that education and teachers were not really of any use.

And yet the nation sings and claps! There are churches all over. Pastoral work is the vogue because of the new moralizing (not moral) authority and pecuniary gain it now assures. From the president down to governors and councillors, all organise prayer sessions in the government houses. Yet they would not open their hearts to the divine touch of God, if only that would make them pursue good governance and recognise the responsibility and the need to provide their people with basic human needs, including potable water, electricity, good roads, health care and the right to justice and equity, not necessarily as so-called “dividends of democracy”, but as part of the inalienable conditions of any community which hopes to aspire above and beyond a glorified zoo, a jungle, or an organised animal kingdom.

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And yet the nation sings and claps! The education industry which would have come to the rescue in this dehumanised situation is also embroiled in its problems, both internally and externally made. In Nigeria, politics and soldiery are more important than education. The industry has been bastardised. As Hanno Rauterberg, a German scholar and journalist put it, the schools resemble “ruined factories” and the teachers and students have thrown in the towel. From primary schools up to universities, all have become fantasy islands where anything happens. Government’s insensitivity to the problems of education in Nigeria has helped to chase away some of the best minds from the sector, while attracting mediocre teachers and nincompoops in the form of teachers and students. Even here our bastardised sense of religion has taken its toll. There are born-again, fundamentalist teachers, principals, vice-chancellors, and students, yet the characteristic evils of the industry would not abate. Cultism, malpractice (in exams, faculty and staff promotion), poor funding, inadequate infrastructure, all have defied eradication. In the universities, I have heard of teachers who demand sex from their female students and money from the males to enable them pass in exams. I have heard of a teacher who copied and reproduced his colleague’s B.A. thesis as his own M.A. thesis. There was hullabaloo. It took the grace of God to ensure that ethnic sentiments did not sway official opinion in his favour. I also know of others who have asked students to contribute money and furnish their offices as well as those who collect as much as

₦10,000.00 before they read the thesis of each of their advisees. Not only that. The thesis must be typed at business centres owned by the lecturer(s) and such lecturers would always collect some huge sums of money from their students as a pre-condition for accepting and grading assignments. I must not forget those, including professors, who publish curious books which never sell outside the classes they teach. The problem is not so much the sale of the books as their contents, which are often poorly researched, poorly written and plagiarised material. I know about professors who order books from Europe and the United States with the sole intent of republishing them in Nigeria with their names as authors. Added to this is the paradox that some of our liveliest teachers are members of one “happy-clappy” fellowship or the other. They would even turn their classes into homilies. Yet they have not the capacity to lead by example, as people on whom the future of society may depend. As John Stuart Mill has argued, the germs of a stable political society is a system of education whose inalienable ingredient is “restraining discipline” which inculcates in the individual “the habit, and thence the power, of subordinating his personal impulses and aims, to what were considered the ends of society”.²⁹

Certainly, the above examples do not paint a picture of a healthy, progressive education industry, one which can lead a nation to real technological and social advancement. If education in Nigeria has degenerated into the privatisation of ignorance, who cares? It is very

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difficult for a nation which has had the misfortune of having bread-and-butter leaders to appreciate the need and use of sound education based on liberal and empirical principles. When barbarians take over a nation, it would be strange if they invest in qualitative education that can give birth to a truly free society. But the problem with the Nigerian education system is that the barbarians are not only outside; they are also to be found inside the system. In a truly human society where the syndromes of social implosion and explosion are constantly neutralized to ensure the perpetuation of mankind, education is always the cornerstone. Investment made therein is an investment in the future of the people. In this part of the world, education may not be a luxury, yet it lacks constructive focus.

And yet the nation sings and claps! The people are not unaware of these problems and ugly reality, but they are, perhaps, too chicken-hearted and supine to rise to the challenges of their time. Rather, they choose to vanquish the situation “in song and dance”. But it is not always that philippics and prayers have solved practical problems. At times, God would not help those who would not help themselves. As Sacks (2000) puts it, “The real danger to any culture lies elsewhere, in the inability to recognise when it is in danger”.³⁰ The problem with Nigeria as with much of Africa is that of insincerity, dishonesty and lack of commitment to the common good. This problem is fundamental and has been entrenched as a way of life.

As with the individual, it is easy for a nation to learn habits, but very difficult (not impossible) to

unlearn them. This is more so when these habits span generations and attain the status of norms, when, in fact, they are inimical to society. In a moralising society like ours, evil is a way of life; religion is reduced to a mere umbrella against the inevitability of retribution. *Yet my people sing and clap!*

I may well end this epilogue with a quotation from Sacks, with whose words I began, where he recalls the words of Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

Nations, like men, are teachable only in their youth. With age they become incorrigible. Once customs are established and prejudices rooted, reform is a dangerous and fruitless exercise; a people cannot bear to see its evils touched, even if only to be eradicated, it is like a stupid, pusillanimous invalid who trembles at the sight of a physician.³¹

I also agree with Sacks when he says that “A society in which we are afraid to walk in streets or parks, or to open the door to a stranger, or to engage in debate with an audience which does not share our views has become a less free environment, because there are fewer things we can do ‘freely’, without precautions.”³²

What we owe posterity, therefore, may not be millions of cathedrals and a legacy of empty “churchism”, but an honest, sustainable transformation of our society into a truly humanised ecology where the lamb would never have cause to ask the tiger, in the words of William Blake, “*Did he who made the lamb make thee?*”

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Notes

1. See M.V. Kamath 2000. *The Pursuit of Excellence*. Newdelhi: Rupa & Co. p.11.
2. Anicius Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. London: Penguin Books, p.31.
3. *Ibid*, p.35.
4. Ali Mazrui 1986. *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*. London: BBC Publications, pp.135-157
5. The term “letter-day saints” is used rather derisively here to describe the self-redeeming church-goers of these days and does not refer to any particular church or sect.
6. *Mma Ndu* is the Igbo expression literally meaning “the beauty of life”. It is also the full and longer form of *Madu* or *Mmadu*, the Igbo equivalent for “human being”.
7. Leon Battista Alberti was a genius of the Italian Renaissance, distinguished in painting, poetry, philosophy, music and architecture. He was also a renowned theorist.
8. See Kenneth Clark, 1969. *Civilisation*, London: BBC Publications and John Murray (page unknown).
9. Masaccio whose real name was Tommaso di ser Giovanni di Mone, was born in 1401 and died about 27 years later. He has been described as an “Italian painter of crucial importance in the history of Renaissance painting”.
10. Kenneth Clark, op cit.
11. See Kenneth Clark. *The Romantic Rebellion*, pp.161-169.
12. *Ibid*.
13. *Ibid*.
14. Concerning Blake’s visionary nature, Kenneth Clark writes:

Everybody who writes about Blake begins by saying that he was a visionary. It is a vague term. All artists, even the most realistic, start from some kind of vision – that is what leads them to select what they need from the infinite diversity of appearances. But with Blake the word vision has a more precise meaning. He did not draw from nature because, as he said repeatedly, his visions were clearer and more vivid than his optical perception of the world around him. He saw these visions

as a child; saw God put his head in at the window, saw the prophet Ezekiel sitting under a tree at Peckham Rye. There is nothing extraordinary in this; many imaginative children have similar experiences. What is exceptional is that Blake kept these intense powers of visualization after the age of puberty. Exceptional, but not incredible, because this can be paralleled in other forms of mental activity. Some people have the gift of total recall and others can remember accurately whole pages of figures; physiologically these endowments seem to me quite as hard to explain as the accurate visualization of images.”
(Kenneth Clark, *Ibid*, p.147)

15. *Ibid*, pp. 161-169.
16. If Gandhi said this about Christians in his day, I wonder what he would say about Nigeria or Africa of today, with the teeming number of Christians of travesty, although the situation, of course, is the same or almost the same all over the world. See David Yallop. *In God's Name*, London: Corgi Books, 1985, p.94.
17. Albino Luciani is the original name of the charismatic Pope John Paul I whose Papacy lasted for some memorable 33 days. In his investigative book, *In God's Name*, David Yallop concludes that Luciani was murdered in his bedroom in the Papal Apartments in the Vatican sometime between the late hours of September 28 and the early hours of September 29, 1978.
18. See Yallop, *Ibid*. Singh could probably extend the signification of his imagery beyond Europe if he were living today. For many, Christianity has become a trump card that is played according to the situation one finds oneself. Instrumentalist Christianity (that is, Christianity as a magic wand) is in itself evil *par excellence*.
19. This scenario appears to be the bane of contemporary Nigeria.
20. I believe that contrary to contemporary popular opinion (especially here in Nigeria) about the devil being immanent in the world of today as the cause of all evil, Stephen Leacock seems to argue that it is rather the “retirement” of the devil from the material world that is responsible for the sorry state of affairs:

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The devil is passing out of fashion. After a long and honourable career he is falling into an ungrateful oblivion. His existence has become shadowy, his outline attenuated, and his personality displeasing to a complacent generation. So he stands now leaning on the handle of his three-pronged oyster fork and looking into the ashes of his smothered fire. Theology will have none of him. Genial clergy of ample girth, stuffed with the buttered toast of a rectory tea, are preaching him out of existence. The fires of his material hell are replaced by the steam heat of moral torture. This, even the most sensitive of sinners faces with equanimity.

Now that the Devil is passing away an unappreciative generation fails to realize the high social function that he once performed. There he stood for ages a simple and workable basis of human morality; an admirable first-hand reason for being good, which needed no ulterior explanation. The rude peasant of the Middle Ages, the illiterate artisan of the shop, the long-haired hind of the fields, had no need to speculate upon the problem of existence and the tangled skein of moral enquiry. The Devil took all that off their hands. He had either to "be good" or else he "got the fork", just as in our time the unsuccessful comedian of amateur night in the vaudeville houses "gets the bird". Humanity, with the Devil to prod it from behind, moved steadily upwards on the path of moral development. Then having attained a certain elevation, it turned upon its tracks, denied that there had been any Devil, rubbed itself for a moment by way of investigation, said that there had been no prodding, and then fell to wandering about on the hilltops without any fixed idea of goal or direction.

In order words, with the disappearance of the Devil there still remains unsolved the problem of conduct, and behind it the riddle of the universe.

See E.H. Winter and Reed Smith 1961. *Learning to Write*. Toronto: the Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, pp.106-107.

21. *Ibid.*

22. According to Kenneth Kaunda, society is there because of man and not vice versa. See Nnamdi Azikiwe, 1979. *Ideology for*

Nigeria: Capitalism. Socialism or Welfarism? Lagos and Ibadan: Macmillan Nigeria Publisher, p.70.

23. Although people are not born with religion, there is nobody without a religion. Whether it implies belief or disbelief in God, religion's greatest function has been to provide a rein with which man can ride the crazy tides of life.
24. Corinne Brown *Understanding Other Cultures* (publication details unknown).
25. David Yallop, *Ibid*, p.143.
26. Jack Wasserman 1975. "Leonardo da Vinci", *Leonardo da Vinci*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. p.55.
27. Jonathan Sacks 2000. *The Politics of Hope*, London: Vintage, p.146.
28. *Ibid*, p.234
29. *Ibid*.
30. *Ibid*.
31. *Ibid*.
32. *Ibid*, 204.