

**A DISCOURSE ON RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY AND SEXUAL IMMORALITY IN
OLUCHI HENRIETTA EJIAKU'S *VENERABLE THE GOOD SHEPHERD***

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Abstract

*Theatre apart from entertaining the audience also plays the role of addressing societal ills and engendering attitudinal change that is needed for the development and transformation of the society. The playwright as a creative individual usually weaves out issues that are prevalent in the society and address them in order for the people to adjust and align with acceptable moral behaviour. This paper examines the issue of religious hypocrisy and sexual immorality using Oluchi Henrietta Ejiaku's *Venerable the Good Shepherd* as illustration. In employing content analysis approach of the qualitative method of research, the study found that some religious leaders, who are supposed to serve as role models in their various places of spiritual assignment, take advantage of the vulnerability of their members during their fleeting moments. The study also found that greed, the quest for recognition and materialism are some of the reasons why some persons delve into spiritual leadership positions as represented in the play under study. The study concludes that there is the need for spiritual leaders to take their leadership positions with all sense of responsibility by imbibing discipline, sanctity, and a heart to serve humanity. The study recommends the need for more studies on religious satire in Nigerian drama, proper training of leaders in different sphere of influence especially in the area of discipline, emotional intelligence, ethics, as well as proper implementation of policies that will address offenders who go out of order in the course of handling their leadership assignment or responsibilities.*

KEYWORDS: *Theatre, Drama, Playwright, Religion, Religious Hypocrisy, Sexual Immorality*

INTRODUCTION

In every sphere of human endeavour, there is usually the need for some sort of coordination or giving of instruction from one level to another. In most cases when an information or instruction is coming from a higher authority, there is the tendency that those under such leadership authority, will most likely, accept and respond to such information or instruction. Religious leaders are seen as representative of God on earth, revered, and honoured because they are believed to have a more superior insight, serve as role models, teach, and guide the people towards achieving spiritual growth that will resonate into raising people of good moral behaviour in the society. Therefore, religion is an actual weapon for influencing and reshaping human civilization. From the beginning of time, social movements have included religion.

Religion placed a high value on morality, and those who practiced it were expected to lead moral lives. However, this is not the case as some religious leaders take undue advantage of their members for selfish reasons and this in turn creates conflict in families and the society at large. The role of religion in African theatre has been analyzed, with scholars "highlighting its close connections to political discourse, identity construction, and social norms" (Klinken, 2020, as cited in Onourah & Onourah, 2025). Religion is a recurrent theme in African theatre, reflecting and commenting on the spiritual and cultural landscape of the continent.

Drama as a dynamic art, has over the years played, and is still playing, a functional role in addressing societal issues that can cause unrest, distress, conflict or crisis by drawing the attention of the people to tackle these problems in order to promote peace and harmony in the society. The playwright, who happens to be a creative artist, has been helpful in this regard. As a creative artist, the dramatist (also known as a playwright or play maker) offers a work of art in the form of a play. For the benefit of the audience, he expresses a concept, emotion, or experience through a play by utilizing his inventive mind, circumstances, and resourcefulness. His play or plays may have been published. He is also a literary artist. His aim is to establish social harmony and community cohesion by promoting the holistic development of individuals through art (Anigala, 2019, p. 27). The role of the playwright is to use his/her craft to address issues in the society that will on the long run foster societal development. Playwrights like Wole Soyinka, Zulu Sofola, Ahmed Yerima, Ola Rotimi, Julie Okoh, Emenike Azunwo, Austine Anigala, Peter Omoko, amongst others have written on the subject of religion via their creative works. Using textual analysis and thematic interpretation, this paper examines Oluchi Henrietta Ejiaku's *Venerable the Good Shepherd* as a play that explores the effectiveness of drama in addressing the issue of sexual immorality and religious hypocrisy in our society highlighting the discrepancies between professed religious beliefs and actual behaviour.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is focused on Satire and Social Criticism. Satire is an artistic form, primarily literary and dramatic, that uses ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature, or other techniques to expose human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings, sometimes with the goal of inspiring social reform (Elliott, 2025). It is a form of social criticism that questions authority, and calls for change by employing humor, irony, and exaggeration to communicate a message to the people. Its origins can be found in ancient Greece, when writers such as Aristophanes employed satire to make social and political commentary. It has changed over time to represent modern issues and ideals in a variety of literary eras and civilizations (Thakur & Jain, 2022). Satire is the jester of social criticism, dancing on the brink of ridiculousness to cheerfully reveal society's peculiarities, scandals, and hypocrisies (Gustafsson, 2025). Satire has traditionally been a potent tool for social commentary, providing a distinctive means of criticizing institutions, behaviours, and societal standards. Satirists can draw attention to the absurdities and injustices that frequently go undetected in daily life by employing humor, irony, and exaggeration. Satire in its ability to affect public opinion and perception is one of its most important advantages. Satire has the power to subvert established narratives, challenge authority, and get people to reconsider things they may have previously taken for granted (Murangiri, 2025).

Social criticism is the method or technique used for examining how sociological problems are produced by the current social structure. Social critics usually suggest solutions to perceived inequalities and advocates for either cooperative reforms, or drastic, revolutionary changes to current systems. Social criticism concentrates on issues of contemporary society, particularly as they relate to perceived injustices and power dynamics in general. It examines communal systems that are thought to be defective and concentrates on workable solutions through particular actions, radical, or even revolutionary change. Kenneth Burke, a literary critic and critical theorist from the 20th century, proposed this kind of literary criticism. His title, "Literature as Equipment for Living," emphasizes the importance and clarity of this analysis (Blanchard, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION

There is no ideal definition of religion, as many academics have correctly noted. Thus, one's perspective can determine how one defines religion (Onuorah, 2022). Religion according to Omorogbe (2012) is a phenomenon in human's existence that cannot be overlooked even among skeptics, agnostics and atheist. It moulds and controls the totality of man's life to a point that man could give up not just his material possessions but his life. Men like Francis of Assisi, Buddha, Peter Waddo, the early Apostles and Church fathers to mention but a few, gave up their financial possessions and lives for their religious beliefs. Omorogbe (2012) further asserts that religion is so powerful that it influences man's behaviour and thinking hence we have the different branches of religion like Philosophy of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Psychology of Religion, Theology, etc. These branches of religion unveil man's relationship with his object of worship and interaction with the immediate society. The Concept of God which is incomprehensibly mysterious forms the core component of religion. This incomprehensible nature of God has given rise to the different world religions and theories as they conceive God differently like the story of the blind men who described an elephant by the part they could touch. Akinmayowa (2020) opines that religion is an undeniable reality in human existence and is as old as man. In his opinion, religion portends innate reality which finds expression in physical symbols, languages and culture.

Religion is a belief system of a suzerainty relationship between perceived 'Being' and man which involves worship, reverence, faith, trust, and hope from the perceived being to man (Ody, 2017). The issue of relationship and oath as emphasized in this definition is reflected in the etymology of religion traced to the Latin "religere" meaning to "bind together". In the modern era, religion has affected people's physical, spiritual, moral, social, political, and economic life. It appears that religion has had a significant impact on the affairs of many countries worldwide, which suggests that no country is completely ignorant of religious concepts and practices. Consequently, religion has been a major factor and has clearly benefited the growth of most, if not all, societies. Nevertheless, religion also has a highly detrimental impact because, when misused, it is the root cause of intolerance, oppression, discrimination, crises, and civil conflicts, among other things. This is a product of frivolity and religious extremism (Onuorah, 2022).

RELIGION AND MORALITY

Morality constitutes a very important aspect of any society. Akinmayowa (2020) observes that

morality as a component of ethics, which has been defined in different ways by scholars, is a branch of philosophy that standardizes, defends, and recommends concepts of right and wrong conduct. Omorogbe (1993) sees morality as the nominative science of human conduct. Morality has to do with the principles of how a man orders his life in human society. It is what society deems to be "acceptable" and "right." Moral behaviour occasionally requires people to put society's needs ahead of their own immediate interests. In certain cultures, something that is seen acceptable may not be in others. Religion, family, life events, and geographic location all have an impact on morals. Works like; Piaget's theory of moral development, B.F. Skinner's behavioural theory, Kohlberg's moral reasoning, Gilligan's perspective on gender disparities in moral reasoning, Freud's morality and the superego, and others have garnered attention over the years (Morin, 2025).

Religion and morality are closely related as religious faith serves as the foundation of ethical behaviour, shares values like justice and compassion and frequently influences social norms and behaviour. The intersection of morality and religion involves the relationship between religious views and morals. It is easy for religions to possess value frameworks regarding personal behaviour meant to guide believers in determining between right and wrong. Rossano (2007) reveals that religion may depend on morality while morality can stand independently of religion. By implication, morality and religion can overlap. Within the wide range of ethical traditions, religious traditions co-exist with secular value frameworks such as humanism, utilitarianism, and others. From the 17th century, it is generally accepted that religion provided the unique basis for morality, and that without religion, there could be no morality. Ezeonwumelu (2021) emphasizes that in the history of man, religion has played a crucial role in influencing morally-conscious societies. In his view, religion and morality are inseparable and complimentary in building a better society if only religion performs its role. However, the majority of religious practices in the modern era are perceived as deviating from the moral standards of their ideal tenets in favour of materialism, terrorism, and economic gain (Onuorah, 2022). The moral crisis being experienced in our contemporary world in spite of the multiplicity of religious denominations raises a greater objection with regard to the impact of religion on morality (Iwuagwu, 2018).

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGION IN NIGERIA

Religion in Nigeria is a fundamental, pervasive force influencing every aspect of life, which include social cohesion, moral standards, and economic behaviour. As a deeply religious and pluralistic society, religion serves as a crucial and cultural agent that shapes traditions as well promoting, values like; honesty, patriotism, hard work, dignity of labour, sacredness of life and so on. Religion also influences political and economic systems. It equally enhances cultural identity and integration, moral formation, social cohesion, governmental policies, economic impact and promotes unity among people with different ethnic groups not related by blood. Ugwulebo & Duruji (2022) submits that religion and culture play enormous role in developing the individual's moral and behavioural capabilities for meaningful contributions to national development.

RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY AMONG ADHERENTS

Religious hypocrisy means the practice of laying claim to particular religious moral standards,

but not actually living it out. This can be made manifest in different ways, such as double standards, selective interpretation, and appearance over substance. Religious hypocrisy is not limited to a particular faith but it can be found in all the world religions. It comes from human flaws like pride, greed, or fear. Ayegboyi (2023) reveals how Jesus in the New Testament condemned the religious hypocrisy of the Pharisees, one of the Jewish religious sects. There is also the attitude of Politicians using religion to justify actions that contradict their stated values. Social media practitioners are not let out in public piety showcasing religious acts while privately engaging in contradictory behaviour. In the modern era, hypocrisy is common among religious institutions. The moral lives of religious leaders and the general public are adversely impacted by religious hypocrisy, which paints a vivid image of the decline in public morals and ethics (Onuorah, 2022).

DRAMA AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL COMMENTARY

Playwrights of all ages like Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Lope de Vega, Niccolo Machiavelli, William Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen, Jean Paul Sartre, Arthur Miller, James Ene Henshaw, Wole Soyinka, J.P Clark etc., have contributed uncountable creative pieces which are most appropriate for social structuring and restructuring (Azunwo, & Odoyi, 2021, p.157). Drama has long been an effective medium for social criticism, creating the opportunity for people to discuss challenging issues in order to find solutions. Satire is the general term for dramatic works that attempt to make scathing remarks about society. The purpose of satirical works is to 'hurt us so that we can amend.' Through the use of satire, the dramatist draws the audience's or reader's attention so that, even when we laugh, we recognize our shortcomings. Thus, the artist is objectively evaluating, exposing, or critically assessing the socio-political realities in society when they use theatre as a weapon for social commentary (Bamidele, Ebo, as cited in Okeke, 2011, p.113). In contemporary Nigerian play, sexual immorality and religious hypocrisy are prevalent themes that mirror socio economic challenges that people can identify with.

Synopsis of the play *Venerable the Good Shepherd*

The play *Venerable the Good Shepherd* satirizes the issue of religious hypocrisy and sexual immorality that is prevalent in our society today. Venerable, an Anglican priest at St. Cecilia Anglican Church takes advantage of the marital challenge of childlessness in Mr. Onuwa's family by luring his wife to bed under the guise of counseling her to solve her marital problems. As the play begins, Mr. and Mrs. Onuwa are seen discussing the challenge of their inability to have a child after nine years of marriage. As they discuss the issue, Onuwa's mother visits them and expresses her dissatisfaction over their current state of childlessness, and accuses Mrs. Onuwa of manipulating her son. Mr. Onuwa's mother drops a letter requesting him to marry another wife already prepared for him in the village by his father. The story takes another turn as the adulterous engagement between Venerable and Mrs. Onuwa results in a two-month old pregnancy. This situation throws her into confusion as she is unable to seduce her husband to go to bed with her to justify the pregnancy. Venerable, on the other hand, assures Mrs. Onuwa that he will counsel her husband to perform his manly duties towards procreation so as to cover their misdeed. When the situation becomes tense for Mrs. Onuwa knowing that her pregnancy which is a product of an adulterous act cannot be hidden any more, she decides to take the bull by the horn by confessing to the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of St. Cecilia Anglican Church.

Venerable on hearing the confession of Mrs. Onuwa shamefully removes his collar and resigns from priesthood.

Discussion on the issue of Religious Hypocrisy and Sexual Immorality in Oluchi Henrietta Ejiaku's *Venerable the Good Shepherd*

In order to analyze the inconsistencies between declared religious beliefs and real behaviours, the play *Venerable the Good Shepherd* provides a critical lens. In Ejiaku's *Venerable the Good Shepherd*, the issue of religious hypocrisy and sexual immorality is brought to the fore. Venerable who is supposed to be charged with the responsibility of impacting and imparting the lives of people to follow the path of righteousness by virtue of his ordination as a priest and as a shepherd over the flocks of St. Cecilia Anglican Church, engages in adultery with Mrs. Onuwa a member of his parish under the guise of counseling her to surmount her marital challenges of childlessness. In trying to protect his reputation, Venerable employs plans to cover up his evil deeds by suggesting to Mrs. Onuwa to sleep with her husband by all means to cover up their mistakes. When this plan could not be achieved, he further asks Mrs. Onuwa to abort the pregnancy.

VENERABLE: God be with you. But wait. (*Whispers*) Come, has he finally touched you? (p.56).

MRS ONUWA: (*Tensed*) Shhh...he has refused despite all my attempts to seduce him. And now this pregnancy has run into the second month (p.56).

VENERABLE: Jesu...shamah, what do we do?

MRS ONUWA: I don't know (p.56).

VENERABLE: Jah...Jehovah, but this is a matter of honour, I suggest you go for an abortion (p.57).

MRS ONUWA: God forbid! For nine good years, no fruit of the womb. And now, I have one and all you can is abortion? Never! (p.57).

The main character, Venerable, is exposed to be having extramarital affairs despite promoting values like compassion, integrity, and chastity. In addition to challenging the audience to consider how they view religious leaders, this inconsistency calls into doubt the sincerity of spiritual leadership. This kind of hypocrisy is reminiscent of real life situations where religious leaders have been involved in scandals that call into question their moral authority. A central theme in the play is the contradiction between private sin and public piety. Although Venerable is a model shepherd of God's sheep in St. Cecilia Anglican Church as seen in the play, his own life is rife with moral decay. The play as a satire lampoons the societal ills of religious hypocrisy and encourages the audience/readers to consider not just specific religious leaders but also the systems of religious institutions that allow such deceit to flourish under the guise of morality.

Venerable in the play symbolizes or represents the hypocrites that we see in different aspects of our society today especially in the religious institutions, where spiritual leaders who are supposed to guide and lead the people in their congregation towards attaining spiritual sanctity and moral uprightness, live a life of pretense and take undue advantage of their members at all cost for their own selfish desires. Sexual immorality is shown in *Venerable the Good Shepherd* as a means of oppression and control, especially for weaker women, rather than just as a moral lapse. With a focus on Mrs. Onuwa, who is a victim of Venerable's antics, Ejiaku highlights the gendered aspects of exploitation by giving voice to those who are frequently silenced in real life situations. The play highlights the complicity of silence, and the way groups and individuals frequently turn a blind eye to abuses that go unchecked. Ejiaku criticizes the abuse of spiritual authority to satisfy sexual cravings through these depictions, presenting such actions as betrayals of divine trust as well as personal transgressions. While the audience is aware of Venerable's secrets as encapsulated in hypocrisy, his followers like Mr. Onuwa is unaware. Mr. Onuwa who is serving faithfully under Venerable believes that he is a good man sent by God to sanitize their congregation. But Venerable on the other hand, in a bid to mask his evil activities in the church nominates Mr. Onuwa as one of the candidates for the Knighthood of St. Christopher so as to present himself as a nice man that is fighting for his spiritual growth and the sanctity of the church. Venerable's character to the outside world contradicts his real personality, as he exaggerates situations. It is ironic that Venerable, who is supposed to be a symbol of morality in the society, is going contrary to the moral dictate of the church as captured in the play.

MR ONUWA: My own Vicar, the chosen shepherd of our time,
the modern reincarnation of the ancient Joshua, the Venerable. You are welcome (p. 57).

VENERABLE: The Chief Scribe of the Parochial Church Council, my original colleague in the crusade against infidelity in the church. Look, Mr. Onuwa, I've come to inform you that you've been nominated as one of the candidates for the Knighthood of St. Christopher (p.57).

MR ONUWA: Wao! This is very interesting. (*He breaks into a song immediately*)...so you mean I will be installed a knight, KSC, very soon?(p.58).

While Venerable outwardly or publicly emphasize the need to address sexual immorality in the church, behind the scene, he is a major driver of this evil act. He hypocritically preaches the message of righteousness and mention names of some members of his congregation who were reported to have been engaged in immoral activities to Mr. Onuwa. The irony is that because Venerable is a spiritual figure, Mr. Onuwa has high regards for him in the church and by extension finds it difficult to believe that the Venerable can possibly do such a thing even to his wife. This is the kind of situation that occur in our society where spiritual leaders who are

supposed to show good example in the society by being role models, eventually destroy the people they are meant to protect and inspire. This issue also goes beyond religious leaders to other persons in positions of leadership in the society.

Since society is a combination of people and their belief systems, when there is a failure in the structure, it will definitely affect the individuals in the society. This idea seems to align with Durkheim's theory that views society as more than just a collection of individuals. Nickerson (2025) in reference to Durkheim's theory observed that it is a system guided by social facts, or shared norms and values that shape behaviour. He emphasized how social order is maintained through solidarity, how breakdowns lead to anomie, and why religion and morality are central to social life. Instead of bringing peace into the homes of families under his jurisdiction as a spiritual leader, he creates conflict in the family of Mr. Onuwa with his adulterous activity pretending to be a morally upright priest that members can confide in.

VENERABLE: You see, Mr. Onuwa, I must confess that since my seven good years in the ministry, I've never come across any PCC member who flourishes in immorality. No, no...never. But my experience here in St. Cecilia is terribly different.

MR ONUWA: (Shamefully) But...Vicar...Sir, what do we do to avert this shame and probable curse from God Almighty?

VENERABLE: You see, the Bible says, "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to every nation". Just two weeks ago, a report came to me that Mr. Ekwedike, the Church Treasurer was caught with the wife of Bro Ogechi in a hotel room, romancing.

MR ONUWA: Jesus Christ. What! But Ogechi came newly into church. Why should this happen to him?

VENERABLE: In the days of Noah, man was given to pleasure until he was finally overtaken by the flood. Now the anger of God is upon the church militants here on earth. Last week, Evangelist Chigemezu escaped being raped by a personality in the church.

MR ONUWA: (Eagerly). And who is that personality?

VENERABLE: In the name of Elohim, Lady Chief Mrs.

Egweji...the poor boy said while the prayer was on, he felt some romantic touches on his palm. At first, he felt it was the Holy Spirit was at work. All of a sudden the story changed from "Amen to "I love you...I need you, please hold me tight, my boy. No, our God is a God of mercy"...the poor boy opened his eyes. And behold, our highly Reverend Lady was almost stripping herself naked and advancing towards him (p.58-59).

MR ONUWA: (Eagerly). So?

VENERABLE: For Heaven's sake! The boy took to his heels. So that was how he survived the temptation?

MR ONUWA: God have mercy upon us. (Looks around and whispers). I hope the news has not gone around town o...?

VENERABLE: Evangelist ran straight to me and told me everything, so I warned him sternly not to let the cat out of the bag (59-60).

Apart from Venerable, people like Lady Chief Mrs. Egweji who is supposed to be a good example to the young people in the congregation is seen trying to rape Evangelist Chigemezu under the guise of requesting to be prayed for. After her deed was exposed she tries to use her power by forcing Mr. Onuwa to forward a letter to the Bishop on behalf of St. Cecilia church in order to transfer the evangelist to the village because he did not accede to her request.

MR ONUWA: She confronted me last Sunday after service and ordered me to forward a letter to the Bishop.

VENERABLE: Jesus, the good shepherd! A letter for what?

MR ONUWA: That Evangelist Chigemezu should be transferred to a village church where he can cope.

VENERABLE: Have you written the letter then?

MR ONUWA: Ah...ah...the vicar, you should sound as if you don't know me. I simply asked her a simple question (p.60).

Venerable as a perpetrator of hypocrisy and sexual immorality finds it difficult to pray against

those involved in such act when asked by Mr. Onuwa to do so.

VENERABLE: Look my Bible says, "touch not my anointed and do my prophets no harm". 2nd Timothy 2:24 says: "And a servant of the lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach and be patient." God will fight his own fight in this church, Mr. Onuwa.

MR ONUWA: I think I agree with you. But, Vicar, sir, pray that God should punish any man or woman who is involved in any kind of immorality.

V E N E R A B L E : (I n d e c i s i v e l y) A m e n .
Rogbogboshama...Amen...God will uplift...No...sorry uproot any man or woman or forces of immorality... (p.61).

In the play, the church, which is supposed to be a place of moral clarity and truth, becomes a platform for sin and deceit. The irony is heightened and the exploitation of faith for selfish gains is highlighted when immoral persons utilize religious terminology.

VENERABLE: (*Laughs*). There is nothing too much for Venerable the good shepherd of Christ. Do you know that you are a tree of life to those who take hold of you and any man who retains you must be happy? (*Moves closer to her*).

MRS ONUWA: Papa, I'm relying solely on you. Please, don't fail me.

VENERABLE: Sister, Jah...the good shepherd. Listen (*changes mood*). Your problem with your husband is solved already if you appease the good shepherd. The Bible says, "Honour thy Lord with your possessions."

MRS ONUWA: (*Calmly*). How can I appease you, Venerable?

VENERABLE: (*Moves closer and looks deep into her eyes*)
By "knowing me." (*Laughs*).

MRS ONUWA: What do you mean "knowing" you?

VENERABLE: Woman, don't tell me you don't read your

Bible regularly. Adam, knew Eve, and they begat Cain and Abel. That is exactly the kind of "knowing" I'm talking about.

MRS ONUWA: But do you realize you're my father in the Lord and besides, I'm married (p.77).

The Venerable's corrupt nature prevents him from realizing the seriousness of his offense in attempting to conceive the idea of having carnal knowledge of a married woman which is culturally and religiously wrong. Mrs. Onuwa on her own part could not discipline herself as a married woman even if she is expecting to have a child after years of marriage. She also fails to tell her husband of her adulterous activity with the Venerable. Instead she hides the secret until things went out of control. Her later confession is a testament that she realizes that her action is against the moral code expected of a woman both in the traditional and contemporary society. This revelation of the truth sets her free from the bondage of guilt and the exposure of the Venerable's hypocritical and immoral life style.

MRS ONUWA: Please, help me beg him to forgive me and for God Almighty to forgive me too. I'm no longer living in His word.

MEMBER IV: Madam what exactly are you talking about?

MRS ONUWA: It is too heavy for me to say, I don't know how to tell this gathering that I am two months pregnant for Venerable

(Immediately the wife of VENERABLE rushes to her, gazes at her and declares)

VENERABLE'S WIFE: I think this is a joke. Impossible! My husband does not leave the church premises at all, so how come? I agree with you. But, Vicar, sir, pray that God should punish any man or woman who is involved in any kind of immorality (p.75)

VENERABLE: Please, Mr. Onuwa, before God forgives me, I want you to accept me. I pretended to have been fighting against immorality in the church with you, but I was a major perpetrator of immorality...I henceforth surrender my white collar, my symbol of priesthood. I forced myself into it, instead of waiting for divine call, I can't be priest anymore. I will retire to the village and start a new life. But the church should pray for me (p.79).

(All the while, MR. ONUWA places his right hand on his right cheek and gazes at VENERABLE and his wife from time to time).

EVANG: *(Recovers from sober reflection)* My brethren, we've seen that this tragedy is self-explanatory even as it is a blow and shame to this church. So, now that all this has happened, what do we do to Venerable and Mrs Onuwa?

MEMBER II: ... This matter is very simple. Both parties have confessed and pleaded guilty to their sin, unmasked. Indeed, they have sinned. So, let's see how we can bring their souls back to God (p.79).

Mr. Onuwa's reaction to the issue that transpired between the Venerable who he has so much regard for and his wife's infidelity is a testament to the fact that when some religious leaders who are supposed to be role models in the society, engage in such evil act, it has a long time effect on the family and the society at large as seen in the family of Mr. Onuwa who could not endure the pain inflicted on him by the wife.

MR ONUWA: ... The deed has been done. Our Venerable, the good shepherd as he claims, has already surrendered his collar. No problem. We shall only forward a letter to the Bishop. He has the final say. (People nod in affirmation). For my wife... *(He pauses. The listening intensifies)*. We are legally married, that is true... But, whereas she is pregnant for the good shepherd, her own pastor, and whereas she defiled the marital vows we took together before the presence of God, and whereas, in my capacity as the Church Secretary I should lead by example, I declare that my wife, be converted to my sister in Christ in the church because I've made up my mind for a divorce. *(Immediately his wife collapses. People rush to revive her, while VENERABLE'S WIFE crosses to grab the husband by the neck. LADY EGWEJI and EKWEDIKE sneak out one after the other)* (p.80-81).

Oluchi Henrietta Ejiaku's *Venerable the Good Shepherd*, is a fearless and unapologetic examination of the murky side of religious institutions. The play is a social critique that exposes the pervasive issue of sexual immorality and religious hypocrisy, particularly among those in positions of spiritual authority.

CONCLUSION

Through the use of drama to confront the problem of sexual immorality and religious hypocrisy in Oluchi Henrietta Ejiaku's *Venerable the Good Shepherd*, the study has examined how morality and religion can serve as a panacea for societal advancement when applied effectively. The play demonstrates how followers can get disillusioned with hypocrisy. The playwright employed drama as a tool for social criticism through incisive critique of the issue of religious hypocrisy and sexual immorality, challenging the audience/readers to demand fairness and sincerity in spiritual leadership, urging the faithful and religious leaders to restore the purity of the faith they claim to believe in. Based on the discussions, the following recommendations are made: the need for more studies on religious satire in Nigerian drama, the need for religious institutions to put in place a system of 'checks and balances' for leaders so as to investigate and monitor their behaviours; the need to discipline erring spiritual leaders and counsel them when necessary; the need to organize regular training to re-orient their minds as well as sanction those involved in any form of abuse on their followers.

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