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## **A Study of the Evangelical Genre in Nollywood: Ugo Ugbor's *40 Days in the Wilderness* and Ifeanyi Ogbonna's *Years in Rome* as Case Study**

### **Abstract**

Nollywood has continued to grow in leaps and bounds in spite of the enormous challenges that manifest in such technical spheres as effective camera manipulation; the utilization of highly suggestive and objectively revealing lighting in the depiction of atmosphere and mood; the application of suitable sound and sound effects to highlight actions so as to elude appropriate emotional response; the evolution of interest-generating and interest-sustaining storylines; the attainment of far-reaching casting methods and approaches and such nagging management questions as worthwhile production management strategies. The reasons for this success story can be traced to the commercial viability of Nollywood films; the topicality of the subjects they treat; the array of stars they parade and the range of genres they patronize. The evangelical genre characterized by the teachings, practice and the belief of the Christian faith with the ultimate aim of establishing the supremacy of God and winning adherents in the name of Jesus Christ has come to occupy a dominant place in Nollywood. It is for the foregoing that this paper which adopts the literary, historical and artistic methodology, has examined the evangelical genre in Nollywood using Ugo Ugbor's "40 Days in the Wilderness" and Ifeanyi Ogbonna's "Years in Rome" as case study. The study reveals that evangelical films are essentially for the propagation of the tenets of the Christian faith. The paper recommends that churches and government should sponsor evangelical film production as this would provide job opportunity for many theatre/media practitioners as well as encourage professionalism in the industry.



## Introduction

The mass media (film inclusive) possesses the capacity to influence the behaviour of individuals that make up the society through entertainment and edification. One is entirely in agreement with Eni in his article entitled "Popular Video Culture and the Influence of the Media" when he states that:

The mass media is a strong and powerful tool of human communication. It has the ability to reach out to a lot of people at the same time cutting through class distinction, tribes and nationalities, because of its ability to effect, influence or induce an effect while informing, educating and entertaining (103)

Politicians, businessmen, companies, schools have utilized the media to promote and change the image of their establishments for the better because of its strong persuasive tendency and the speed by which it travels bearing its message. It is in this vein that religious groups use the media to reach a wide range of audience and, as a consequence, win more followers. These religious groups pay for radio and television slots for the propagation of the gospel of Christ. An x-ray of Christian programmes on television and radio in contemporary Nigeria, for instance, attests that the new generation churches that use the media in this regard include Christ Embassy Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Salvation Ministry, House on the Rock, The Synagogue and Living Faith Church to mention but a few.

Apart from the use of radio and television, the growth and influence of Nollywood has created yet another medium for the spread of the gospel – the video film medium. This singular motive of spreading the gospel through the film medium has given birth to the evangelical genre which focuses on the ethos of Christianity through language, characterization and subject matter. It is as a result of the popularity this genre is fast acquiring, the array of themes treated and the artistic manner of packaging these video films as deduced from the finished product that this paper shall examine Ugo Ugbor's *40 Days in the Wilderness* and Ifeanyi Ogbonna's *Years in Rome* as case study.

## Film, Drama and Evangelism

A brief examination of the relationship among film, drama and



evangelism is considered apt here as this would provide the necessary springboard for this study. The technological visual medium which operates on twenty-four frames per second known as film, motion picture cinema or the movies is not alien to Nigeria. The Nigerian Film Corporation has documented that:

The first film shown in Nigeria was in 1903 at Glover Hall, Lagos, while the first film shot in Nigeria was in Jos, Plateau State, in 1904. The film was titled *Palaver*. Thereafter, the Colonial Film Unit came into existence and popularized film-showing through mobile cinema vans. The cinema-going culture was sustained with British and American exploits. (<http://www.nigfilmcorp.com/>)

This film culture has become invigorated ever since. Yeseibo, in his article entitled "Popular Genre in the Video Film in Nigeria", has traced the evolution of contemporary film production in Nigeria to the Structural Adjustment Programme among other factors. According to him, "the emergence of the video film was the result of an interplay of some factors, the prominent being the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)". With the 1992 *Living in Bondage* video film production, film has become an economic industry in Nigeria popularly referred as Nollywood. According to Adenugba Olushola, "the Nigerian film industry surnamed – Nollywood – is undoubtedly the most important and most popular film industry in Africa. It is the world's third largest producer of films, howbeit video films".

With its long history in Nigeria, the film medium has come to influence the Nigerian economy as well as the entertainment culture. Affirming the economic potentials of Nollywood, Ekwuazi, in Yeseibo (2005), informs that "the Nigerian video has spawned an industry that turns out close to a thousand films every year, generates three hundred thousand jobs yearly; has a turnover of about five billion naira yearly and with a growth rate of 60% percent". Indeed, this industry known as Nollywood has not only asserted itself in terms of economic growth but has equally produced several genres which include the city girl genre, the romance genre, ritual genre, comedy genre, action/gangster genre, the cultural genre, the epic/adventure genre, the fantasy genre and the evangelical genre amongst others.

Before dwelling on the evangelical genre, which constitutes the focus of this paper, it is important to state that drama, that enactment



of a situation for an audience which, most times, uses such theatrical elements as costume, scenery, lighting and an architecturally designed locale; drama, the mainstay of Nollywood is not for entertainment alone but also for the development of the individual and, by extension, the society. Drama, from its earliest times, has served this function. According to Russell Brown in his opinion of art (which is equally valid for drama since drama is an art form):

Art ultimately must be valued because of its capacity to improve the quality of life: by increasing our sensitivity to others and our surrounding, by shaping our perception, by reshaping our values so that moral and societal concerns take precedence over material being.

The dramatist, like the journalist, has often been condemned and persecuted by the powers that be for daring to ask for an equitable system of governance where the dreams and aspirations of the masses would be respected. In the Middle Ages, for instance, drama was seen as fetish: a profession for the rejects of society which was not worthy to be associated with the church. Actors were hounded, molested, hunted and arrested for daring to perform. However, because of the potency of drama as a persuasive means of communication, the church later saw reason and, indeed, inculcated drama in its church activities in order to make its lessons more graphic since the majority of Christian converts could not understand Latin, the official language of the church. It was hoped that the use eye-catching spectacle could be an important means of conveying church doctrine (<http://www.theatrehistory.com/medieval/medieval001.html>). In spite of the persecution and condemnation, drama has always triumphed because of its ability to persuade the individual to embrace positive attitudinal change.

It is for the same reason of persuasive communication that drama has asserted itself in film. This assertion has been so forceful that it has led to the evolution of various film genres. Film genres, according to Tim Dirks can be described as:

the forms of identifiable types, categories, classification or groups of film that are recurring and have similar, familiar or instantly recognizable syntax, filmic techniques or conventions that include one or more of the following: settings, props, plot nature/character, content and subject matter, themes, period, central narrative events,



motifs, styles, structures, situations, recurring icons (e.g. six guns or ten gallon hats as in Westerns), stock character (or characterization) and stars. Many films straddle several film genres. (Tim Dirks, [www.filmsites.org/genres.html](http://www.filmsites.org/genres.html), 12-10-2006).

Wikipedia submits that:

a genre is the description of a particular form, art or utterance according to a set of criteria peculiar to that form. For Wikipedia, "genres are formed by sets of conventions and any works cross into multiple genres by way of borrowing and recombining these conventions."

In the words of H.M. Abrams genre is a "French term in origin that denotes type or class of literature, and that the genre into which literary works have been grouped at different times are very numerous, and the criteria on which the classification are based are highly variable" (115). Dwelling on the specificity of evangelical genre, Olushola Adenugba posits that:

Evangelical genre deals with plots in which the solution to the dilemma being faced by the protagonist is occasioned by the intervention of a higher celestial power usually "Christian" in nature such as angels, a pastor, prayer power etc. Oftentimes, evangelical films feature the triumph of good over evil. It involves the turning around for good of evil/bad circumstances. The evangelical genre also covers all films made about Christianity, the Christian faith, experiences of Christians in their quest for salvation and solutions to their different problems etc.

Agoro in his article entitled "Evangelical Drama as a Subgenre in Christian Drama in Nigeria" defines evangelical drama as the type of drama that is concerned with the presentation of the message of the gospel through the medium of the theatre so that members of the audience would have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved from their sins. He explains further that:

Evangelistic genre must have at least a character, normally a committed Christian through whom the gospel message is presented, although the message could, sometimes, be presented indirectly through characters that do not profess the Christian faith. And that in evangelical drama, the dialogue is usually built around biblical themes, there is always the obligatory scene in



which a character or group of characters is confronted with the decision to accept or reject Jesus Christ as their personal saviour.

Evangelical genre in Nollywood is a recent experience as noted by Olushola Adenugba. According to him:

Evangelical films found its way into Nollywood in 1995 following the success of Mount Zion's production of *Agbara Nla* (the Ultimate Power), *the Wounded Heart*, *The Attack from Home*, and *When God Says Yes* amongst other. Popular evangelical film producers in Nigeria includes Helen Upkabio (Liberty Film Production) Mike Bamiloye (Mount Zion).

Generally, propagandist Pentecostal practice in evangelisation which insists on a spiritual rebirth (also referred to as being born again) attended by the ability to chant a customised mantra during meditation or in a seemingly automated prayer session, has given rise to the evangelical genre in film practice. Evangelism in Christendom has evolved from its erstwhile one-on-one soul winning crusade which involved long, vigorous and arduous Sunday-Sunday trek that would barely cover twelve close-knit villages in six months to the use of the electronic media of mass appeal. Indeed, like the great mystery and morality plays of the Middle Ages which "became almost holy rites" (Whiting, 387), the film medium has popularized drama thereby paving the way for the propagation of the gospel in keeping with the biblical commandment which runs thus:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. – *Matthew 28:19,20 NIV*

From the above views, it is discernible that the evangelical genre is basically that dramatic film type which, in all efforts, strives to propagate the gospel of Christ. It also serves the purpose of exposing evil practices; orchestrate the temptations and trials of one's faith in the process of serving God and enunciate the importance of having faith in God.



### **Storyline of *40 Days in the Wilderness and Years in Rome***

*40 Days in the Wilderness* is centred on the tribulations and trials of Tony and his friend Ken in their Christian faith mission. Tony, who has taken a decision to be a minister of God, travels to the city to undergo pastoral training where he meets his friend Ken who is on the same mission. They attend 'Hand of God Church Inc' where Pastor Jerry is the minister-in-charge. Their first time of worshipping in the church boosts their faith in God and belief in the Holy Spirit as Pastor Jerry miraculously heals the sick which include the lame, the deaf and the blind through vigorous prayers and pulsating speaking in tongues. Returning home to his sister's residence in the city with his friend, Ken, Tony expresses to his sister his desire to be like Pastor Jerry who heals the sick, raises the dead and ministers to people about the Lord and saviour, Jesus Christ. Consequently, Tony and Ken register with Pastor Jerry as student pastors.

Summoning the entire student pastors (twelve in number) for a crucial meeting through his secretary, Pastor Jerry unveils his plan to take all of them on evangelism in a far away land where they will minister to the community and win souls for God. He also informs them that only those who survive will be ordained as ministers of God. Pastor Jerry and the twelve student pastors, including Tony and Ken, take off on the mission. Pastor Jerry leads them through Babuka forest after crossing the river where five of the students die in mysterious circumstances. This high death rate and the terrifying obstacles that confront them in the forest propel Tony and Ken to go into fasting and praying for victory in the course of their mission. Back in the city, Tony's sister dreams of the dilemma facing Tony in his sojourn and goes into prayer with Assistant Pastor in 'Hand of God Church Inc' who stays behind to take care of the church in the absence of Pastor Jerry.

When they arrive Zuma, King Buka and his council of chiefs who are already in a festive mood, receive Pastor Jerry and his men warmly. As Tony and Ken begin to evangelise in Zuma community, they meet their first challenge when a man in a group they try to preach to resists them by stating that the only god they know in Zuma community is Kubala. Another man from this same group, wielding a machete, charges them to heal a woman afflicted by



Kubala for disobedience to prove the superiority of their God. Ken and Tony call on God who heeds their call and the woman receives her healing. As a consequence of this, Afubua, Buju's sister, beckons on Tony and Ken to pray for Buju who is destined to be sacrificed to Kubala the next day. They pray for him and Kubala rejects Buju for the sacrifice. This deliverance prompts Buju to reveal to Tony that Pastor Jerry has brought them to acquire powers from Kubala through whom he is spiritually fortified. At first, Tony expresses doubt about the information that Pastor Jerry worships Kubala. However, piecing evidences together, he finds reasons to believe.

Buju's revelation and the probable consequences of spreading the gospel in the community by Tony and Ken prompt Kubala worshipers to arrange for the immediate initiation of the remaining five student pastors into the cult of Kubala as they declare Tony, Ken and Buju wanted. They are subsequently arrested. Pastor Jerry asks the remaining five student pastors to be prepared for the acquisition of power from Kubala. This information astounds the students as it conflicts with their expectation of going for evangelism. One of them resists being initiated into the cult of Kubala expressing his determination to return home instead. He is struck dead. This frightens the others into accepting the offer. The four student pastors are taken to the shrine of Kubala where they perform the initiation rites. The community warriors arrest Tony, Ken and Buju and keep them as lambs waiting to be sacrificed on the altar of Kubala. However, they escape into the bush having been miraculously rescued by Afubua, Buju's sister. Upon the discovery that they have escaped, the chief priest of the cult of Kubala warns that Tony, Ken and Buju must be found otherwise all the chiefs in the community will begin to die one after the other. King Zuba expresses disappointment in Pastor Jerry for not taking the initiates through the necessary procedure by giving them the magical water to drink before bringing them to the village. King Zuba declares that by this act of negligence, Pastor Jerry has failed his first thanksgiving ritual after eight years of receiving power from Kubala.

At the height of the crises as Tony, Ken, Buju and Afubua are haunted and hunted in the forest; God consumes Pastor Jerry and his cohort. Buju and Afubua, his sister, appeal to Tony and Ken to follow them back to the village to preach and convert the people of Zuma to accept their powerful God. Tony and Ken oblige as they



evangelise and the people of Zuma turn to the Christian God abandoning their Kubala deity.

*Years in Rome* is crafted on intrigue, blackmail, hypocrisy, sexual abuse and murder. In the final analysis, good is victorious over evil. Magrace's husband, a cultist, is bent on destroying her for divorcing him and refusing to pay a ransom of fifteen million naira. To execute his mission, he sends Reverend Preto, his agent, to serve as Principal in Magrace Secondary School. With this development, awkward things begin to happen in the school. Mr. Andrew, a teacher in the School, is falsely accused of raping Mmasi, a young student. As a consequence, he is sentenced to twenty-one years imprisonment. This false accusation is one of the evil machinations to rundown Magrace, the proprietress, and her business. Andrew, while in prison, is compelled by the prisoners to be their teacher.

Rev Preto begins his mission by taking advantage of Lilian through sexual abuse in his office when she is reported to him for stealing money in her class. Specialising in vulnerable school girls who have been involved in one misdemeanour or the other, Rev Preto finds his next victim in the ploy to rundown Magrace School in Becky who has committed an abortion. He takes advantage of her sexually promising her marriage and the glamour of flying her abroad.

Mr. Andrew's mother and her pastor go into prayers for his safety and deliverance. As a result, Mr. Andrew wins the favour of God. Consequently, Chairman secures his release and makes him a private teacher in his home. Magrace continues to meet temptation as she is involved in a ghastly motor accident in which a young boy loses his life. Out of desperation, she runs to Rev. Preto for prayers. But Rev. Preto is quite busy sowing his wild oats evidenced by Philipa's narration that she is pregnant for him. He intimidates her by asking her to get out of his office. When Philipa brings out a tape in which she recorded their conversation, Rev. Preto resorts to begging and calling for a truce. Philipa demands fifty percent of his salary every month as ransom for the pregnancy.

Things begin to come to a head when a pastor prays for Mmasi and her step-father afflicted by skin disease. Mmasi's step-father confesses that he raped Mmasi, his step-daughter. Pastor glorifies God for the confession and explains to Juli, Mmasi's mother, that the true path to deliverance for her husband is to search for Andrew and ask him for forgiveness. The search for Andrew is fruitless as



Pastor and Mmasi's mother discover that Andrew's mother has moved out of her residence.

Boxed into a corner, Rev. Preto resorts to killing his pregnant victims to conceal his illicit relationship with them. He takes the first step by poisoning a drink meant for Philipa. But Philipa collects the monthly ransom of fifty per cent of Rev Preto's salary as agreed and walks away without accepting the drink offer. Becky comes to announce to Rev. Preto that she is pregnant for him. Rev Preto offers her the poisoned drink reassuring her that he will marry her. Becky dies on her way home after drinking the poisoned drink. He takes Lillian to a hotel and strangles her to death. His nefarious actions come to limelight as the two late students, Lillian and Becky, reveal to Philipa the cause of their death at a time Philipa is preparing to undertake a journey with Rev Preto. Upon agreement, Philipa releases her physical body to Becky and Lilian who use her to torment Rev Preto. Once in this spiritual tangle, Rev Preto, in spite of his pretended religious personality, begins to discuss sexual intercourse freely with the students in a classroom. As part of the torture for his past misdeeds also, his cloths begin to disappear mysteriously from his bathroom. He begins to sleepwalk half-naked before his students who mock him for this abnormal behaviour. The mockery gets to Magrace, the proprietress of the school, who calls him to advise him but he kills her in the process. At the end of the story, the spirits of Lilian and Becky confront him and he confesses that he is the agent sent by Magrace's husband to destroy her and her business for being stubborn and for establishing the school on his land without paying reparation. The confrontation which ensues between the demonic Rev Preto and the spirits of Lilian and Becky manifests in physical form. At the end, Rev. Preto is defeated and consumed by a huge conflagration. With his death, it is envisaged that peace and tranquillity would return to the world of the living.

### ***40 Days in the Wilderness and Years in Rome as Films of the Evangelical Genre***

The critical canons for situating a film in the evangelical genre may be examined from the perspectives of content/subject matter, language, characterization, plot structure and the use of such elements of performance as costume, setting, music and properties. Importantly, all these should reflect the Christian ethos just as the



subject must conform to the philosophy of Christianity because the evangelical genre is meant to exalt the name of God through Jesus Christ his son and attract converts into the faith. Its language which should derive largely from the Bible (the Christian holy book) usually forms part of the dialogue. Importantly and as Olushola Adenugba observes, the evangelical genre which covers all films made about Christianity must focus on the Christian faith and the "experiences of Christians in their quest for salvation and solutions to their different problems". The evangelistic genre is also meant to portray the devil as a trickster whose machinations must be exposed so that human beings are not gullible and then fall into his snare.

The central theme common to *40 Days in the Wilderness* and *Years in Rome* is the age-long notion of good triumphing over evil howbeit from the Christian perspective. The subject matter of *40 Days in the Wilderness* is Christian evangelization with the ultimate aim of winning souls for God through Jesus Christ his son. While *40 Days in the Wilderness* demonstrates the power of God over the devil and his cohort, *Years in Rome* exposes the hypocritical nature of some acclaimed men of God. In *40 Days in the Wilderness*, the battle is between God (as represented by his faithful servants Ken and Tony) and the Devil (as represented by Kubala, the deity of Zuma community, and such human agents as Pastor Jerry). This battle between God and Devil is replicated in *Years in Rome*. God is represented by such faithful servants as Philipa, Andrew and the two pastors. Rev. Preto is the agent of Devil sent to perpetuate evil by destroying Magrace, Lilian and Becky.

Evangelism, as a characteristic of the Evangelical genre, is established in *40 Days in the Wilderness* through the characters of Ken and Tony, the heroes in the film. This can be seen as they evangelize to the people of Zuba:

**Ken:** My brethren, you still will have to listen to us. There is only one God. Besides him, there is no other God. This God we are talking about is the God that answereth by fire. He is the Lord of lords; the King of kings; He is the ancient of days. Our God can save you from all kinds of trouble. He can heal you from any kind of sickness or disease. Our God can provide anything you want in abundance according to his riches in glory through Christ Jesus. Oh, praise the Lord.

**Tony:** Alleluia.

**Ken:** My brethren, if only you will believe. Kubala does not save. Kubala cannot heal you. But our God, the God of Shedrack Messack and



Abednego can heal you and give you everlasting salvation. Oh, Alleluia.

**Tony:** Amen. It is not only that. You see, our God is willing to forgive you your sins if only you can accept Jesus as your Lord and personal saviour. He is willing to forgive you your sins and make you whole. (Min. 06-18. Part One)

Through evangelism, Buju and his sister are converted. Indeed, the entire Zuma community turns to God.

Tony and Ken are presented in *40 Days in the Wilderness* as heroic characters that should be admired and emulated because of their commitment to prayer, evangelism and healing. This is in conformity with the great commission of Jesus Christ as recorded in the gospel account of Mathew, Mark and Luke. Such prayer sessions which abound in the film include where Tony and Brenda, his sister, pray committing the missionary journey into the hands of God.

**Brenda:** Father, we commit this journey into your hands, God, we want you to be their guide in the name of Jesus.

**Tony:** Amen.

**Brenda:** Father, you said ask and it shall be given; seek and you shall find. Lord, we are asking and seeking your face in this their journey that they are about to embark on. This journey, oh Lord, is for your ministerial work. We want you to come and be their guide. Take them there safely and bring them back...

**Tony:** Amen....

(*40 Days in the Wilderness* Min. 20.28-22.26. Part One)

Similarly, Ken and Tony pray for an afflicted woman who receives healing (Min. 12:19-26. Part One); Buju earmarked as a sacrifice for Kubala is miraculously saved (Min. 22: 30- 23. Part One) and the evangelists emerge victorious during the confrontation with Kubala's agents in the forest (Min. 37:20-39:42). This is in consonance with the Christian doctrine as recorded in the bible that at the mention of the name of Jesus Christ, every knee must bow. In consonance with the expectation of heroic characters in the evangelical genre, Tony and Ken are without blemish.

In *Years in Rome*, the characters are sustained along the lines of evangelical drama as they gain their freedom or healing through prayer. This is evident in Andrew's miraculous release from prison through the prayer of his mother. Mmasi and her step-father afflicted



with skin disease on account of their indulgence in fornication gain their healing through Pastor's prayer.

**Pastor:** In Jesus mighty name we pray.

**Juli:** Amen.

**Pastor:** Father, you say we should call you in times of trouble and you will answer us. Everlasting father, king of kings, the rock of ages, the omnipotent, the omniscience, I call upon you to send down your holy ghost upon these children, heal them oh Lord Jesus... (Min 14-16: 26. Part Two)

The antagonists in the evangelical genre are usually perpetrators of evil who are presented to draw contrast between good and bad. These presentations are made to persuade the audience to see the danger inherent in associating with such characters and, as a consequence, take heed. The archetypal characters that readily come to mind in this regard are Pastor Jerry in *40 Days in the Wilderness* and Rev. Preto in *Years in Rome*. Whereas Pastor Jerry of the 'Hand of God' Church in *40 Days in the Wilderness* is seen healing the sick which include the cripple and the deaf (Min. 06:30), his true identity is revealed as a charlatan at the end (Min. 59:00).

Rev. Preto's title and clothing are deceptive. His title, reverend, should command awe and respect. But throughout the film, he is not seen ministering. Instead, he abuses female students of Magrace Secondary School sexually. Like Pastor Jerry, he lures his victims to their death as evidenced in his poisoning of Becky; the murder of Lilian in the hotel room (Min. 23:33-25 Part Two) and his murder of Magrace in her office (Min 40: 02-41:35 Part Two). One clear message here is that Christians must have or develop their spiritual foresight as the crème de la crème physical attributes of seemingly exemplary characters in society must not be taken as a manifestation of Godly spiritual disposition.

The choice of the different settings in *40 Days in the Wilderness* is quite apt as most of the actions are made to take place in the forest and in the village thereby depicting the flora and fauna of simple rural habitation. It also suggests a virgin land waiting to be explored by evangelists. The reception area of King Buka's palace, which is in the open, is made up of a cheerless thatched roof. The structure, made rectangular by sticks projected in the foreground, has drab mat walls on which rest animal skins. At the two sides of the shrine



of Kubala are two large white cloths tied to dangle side by side. In front of these are palm fronds. In the middle of the shrine is a reddish tree-like structure with a large animal skull of two horns. There is fire blazing forth from a calabash bowl at the base of the tree. These have been used to evoke the spine-chilling and eerie atmosphere associated with shrines. At another level, these amply demonstrate the rural setting which is in sharp contrast with Brenda's apartment in the city and the ebullient structure that houses 'Hand of God Church Inc'.

There would appear to be improbable but acceptable situations in *40 Days in the Wilderness* as the evangelical genre leaves so much to the imagination apparently because of the esoteric and abstract nature of the subject matter the genre handles. An example would be found in Pastor Jerry's charge when he addresses the student pastors before they embark on the journey:

**Pastor Jerry:** For you to be a servant of God goes beyond being born again... it goes beyond the spiritual.

This appears improbable as no student pastor asks Pastor Jerry what he means by this statement. But again, their inability to question underscores their gullibility. The sequence in which Tony and Ken are forced by a machete-wielding indigene of Zuba to heal a woman afflicted by Kubala appears improbable for spiritual healing ought not to be performed under the force of arms. The rejection of Buju as a sacrificial lamb by Kubala just because Tony and Ken prayed appears improbable but quite acceptable in the evangelical genre. The decision of Tony and Ken to return to Zuba to evangelise immediately after their travails in the forest just because Buju and Afubua appealed to them appears magical. Even the use of thunder to kill Kubala worshippers at the end of the story is quite mysterious. But again, all these are possible in films of the evangelical genre. In *Years in Rome*, Lilian that stole some amount of money and Becky who committed an abortion become the tools used to fight Rev Preto although in the spiritual realm. Because of their past moral degeneracy for which they have not repented or asked for forgiveness, it becomes improbable to hold them up as heroines or role models.

However, even at the risk of being accused of critical impudence if not imprudence, certain questions remain pertinent. In terms of



dramatic structure it is observed that the student pastors that died mysteriously in the forest would appear to have no moral weakness to justify their being killed. Lot's wife in the biblical was turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying the order not to look back when Sodom and Gomorrah were being destroyed just as Nebuchadnezzar paid the ultimate price for equating himself with God. The Christian faith is based on obedience. There is the need, therefore, to develop characters in a manner that would justify their being punished instead of being projected as obedient characters without moral blemish yet must die recklessly as if daring to serve God is a crime. Again, even at the risk of being accused of critical impudence if not imprudence, this researcher observes that in the dramatic construct of *40 Days in the Wilderness*, Pastor Jerry is granted eight long years during which he successfully uses powers from Kubala to heal the sick in a regular Christian church. The very act of operating successfully in a Christian church using devilish powers is questionable. In a Machiavellian manner, the question also becomes why vilify Pastor Jerry when his powers, irrespective of the source of acquisition, can make the lame walk, the blind see and the deaf hear? Even the eight years he is granted to operate through the powers of Kubala appear long and tempting as some desperate apostle of Machiavelli may find it worthwhile to acquire such powers for a fulfilling and exciting life for such a long time than live a lowly, dull and uninspiring life of so many years.

Whereas so much may be taken for granted in terms of dramatic structure in the evangelical genre as the focus is on evangelisation, certain technical factors of production must be taken seriously. Make-up constitutes one such area. As an aftermath of Buju's struggle to free himself from the clutches of the monster, he sustains a cut on the left hand side of his forehead. However, in the next sequence the make-up of the cut 'migrates' to the right hand side of his forehead. The rather scanty setting of the sequence where Pastor Jerry miraculously heals the sick at the beginning of the film appears incongruous with his portrayal as a man of God who has been making waves for eight years. Presumably, the lean production budget may have occasioned this.

## Conclusion

The increasing growth rate of adherents of the Christian faith in



contemporary Nigeria as attested to by the proliferation of churches which dot virtually every street in the cities and, quite often, parade parishes in the villages makes the evangelical genre relevant. Importantly also, this development creates an economic opportunity for Nollywood film producers and their allies. It is imperative, therefore, that Nigerian film makers, Christians and non-Christians alike, take full advantage of this development to provide jobs for professionals of various extractions in the industry.

Undoubtedly, the resolution of films of the evangelistic genre, like any other Christian films, is to favour God. This, most often, is achieved through the hero in the film. Good must always triumph over evil along Christian lines in order to justify the supremacy of God. This has been adequately expressed in Ugo Ugbor's *40 Days in the Wilderness* and Ifeanyi Ogbonna's *Years in Rome*. However, this paper observes still that there is the need to pay fuller attention to the dramatic structure of films of the evangelical genre. The resolution of *Years in Rome* could mislead young Christians and future adherents as there is no justification for portraying Lilian and Becky as 'heroines' having died without repenting of their sins which they committed by stealing and through fornication. That their spirits have been used in the physical form through Philipa is desirous to the extent that they have been able to bring Rev Preto to a damnable end. But using them in this manner creates the impression that they are role models. Indeed, this sounds a discordant note with the tenets of the Holy Scriptures which uphold that righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach and the wages of sin is death. Without meaning to be prescriptive or pedantic, the character of Andrew in *Years in Rome* who is sent to prison for an offence he did not commit but is miraculously released and elevated to the position of a private teacher by Chairman, like Paul and Timothy in the bible, could have been fully developed to be the hero in the film. In a parallel vein, the dramatic structure in *40 Days in the Wilderness* can be enhanced by offering reasons or, at least, suggestions why some characters should die. The characters of the student pastors that died in the forest have simply been used as buffer characters in the plot structure of the film. The same applies to the student pastor who is miraculously struck dead for opting to go back home instead of becoming a devotee of Kubala. One would expect that such a character is 'canonized' for daring to



stand by the Lord even in moments of tribulations.

A number of the artistically inconsistent moments in the two films may be traced to inadequacy of financial resources. As a result of this and considering the huge financial involvement in film-making generally, this paper calls on government and religious bodies to fund films of the evangelical genre as these films, apart from spreading the word, are marketable in the global market to rake in the much needed foreign exchange.

In order to promote standardization, protect and preserve the industry, this paper calls on government and stake holders in the industry to realise the need for control. Whereas such government agencies as the Nigerian Film Corporation, Nigeria Copyright Council, the Censors Board and such guilds as Directors Guild of Nigeria (DGN) and Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN) exist, there is the need for the establishment of an umbrella body such as the much discussed Motion Picture Practitioners Council of Nigeria (MOPPICON) to control and advise on the nature and quality of films produced. This move will equally deter dabblers who stray into the industry occasioned, perhaps, by the boredom forced on them by the drudgery of their professional calling or because of the beguiling pecuniary lure offered by the industry. Importantly also, the establishment of a professional body as MOPPICON will go a long way in checking the production of substandard and lack-lustre films.

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### Select Filmography

Title: *40 Days in the Wilderness* (2005)

Screenplay: Gift Young & Ugo Ugbor

D.O.P: Waheed Adeogun and Kalu Anya

Producer: Ezihe Richmond

Director: Ugo Ugbor

Starring: Clem Ohamezeh, Osita Iheme, Benedict Johnson, Kenneth Chukwu, Joe Okoro, Vivian Oyakhire

Company: Rich-Rock Production

Title: *Years in Rome* (2007)

Screenplay: Andronicus Emeka Titus

D.O.P: Azeze Apata

Producer: Paul Ejikeme Afube

Director: Ifeanyi Ogbonna

Starring: Mike Ezeronye, Ngozi Ezeonu, Emeka Ike, Linda Clems, Fred Ebere, Joy Helen, Derby Brown, Omokhigiene, Ine Aju, Chucks Ogbonna, Melechi Chukwudebe.

Company: P.J. Movies Production Ltd.