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A Deconstructive Reading of the Pentecostal Doctrinal View of Catholicism in Fred Amata's Rapture 1 & 2.

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ABSTRACT

The primary motive of the Christian video film genre is to disseminate the Church and to sell religious truths. It is a genre that is mostly explored and exploited by Christian evangelists to project the word and their churches. The aim of this paper is to offer a counter view of Fred Amata's caricatural treatment of Catholicism in Rapture 1&11. This paper used the deconstructive approach to lay bare the ambivalent Pentecostal ideological view held against Catholicism. In Rapture 1&11, the filmmaker has evidently contrived his plots solely on Pentecostal doctrinal constructs. The Pentecostal mission is to denigrate Catholicism. In terms of doctrinal beliefs, the Pentecostal ideology is fore-grounded as the better of the two that is of salvific value to humanity. The veneration of Mary by the Catholic Church does not amount to Mariolatry. Mary is a victim of a Pentecostal/Protestant conspiracy of silence, theologically, liturgically and devotionally (Biema, 2005, p.42).

Keywords: Christian video, Pentecostal, Catholicism, Ideological, Salvific value.

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1. Introduction

Deconstruction is based on the philosophy of Derrida, who has pointed out that Western thought is built on a series of interrelated hierarchical oppositions, such as reason-emotion, presence-absence, fact-value, good-evil, male-female (Culler, 1982, p. 129). Deconstruction undertakes the task of not only describing both a pair of equally valid conflicting oppositions, but also in identifying a

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prevailing ideology that needs to be subverted, undermined, challenged, or otherwise called into question.

A deconstructive reading of any given text relies on gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions in the text, and even on metaphorical associations, to reveal meanings present in the text but outside our everyday level of awareness. Auslander equates the deconstructionist approach to: "... what happens when one works one's way through a certain logic of thinking in such a way as to reveal what that logic cannot admit, what it must exclude, the unthinkable, the singularity that threatens generality ... the anomalies that circulate within and opens up the system" (qtd in Adeaye, 2015, p. 48).

Miller provides a detailed comment on deconstruction:

Deconstruction as a mode of interpretation works by a careful and circumspect entering of each textual labyrinth. ... The deconstructive critic seeks to find, by this process of retracing, the element in the system which is alogical, the thread in the text in question which will unravel it all, or the loose stone which will pull down the whole building. The deconstruction, rather, annihilates the ground on which the building stands by showing that the text has already annihilated the ground, knowingly or unknowingly. Deconstruction is not a dismantling of structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. (qtd. in Dobie, 2002, pp. 147-8)

In the view of deconstructionists, "meaning in text is essentially undecidable. What a text means and how it means, according to them, cannot be determined because it is not possible to systematically find the grammar of a text. Instead, one can find many meanings in a single text, all of them possible and all of them replaceable by others ..." (Dobie, 2002, p. 143)

Deconstruction denies that texts have a single fixed meaning. It offers a means of examining the way language operates below our everyday level of awareness to create meaning. A main tenet of deconstruction is "that texts can generate a variety of meanings in excess of what is intended. In this view, language is not a stable system of correspondences of words to objects but "a sprawling limitless web where there is constant circulation of elements" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 129)

In this paper, the deconstructive approach is used to foreground the satirical barb directed at Catholicism by Pentecostalism. This paper is anchored on the theoretical principle of "Deconstruction" by Jacques Derrida, which advocates intellectual dissection of artistic phenomena with a view to constructive criticism.

2. Christianity and the Concept of End-time

The view concerning the time of Christ's coming for His church is often referred to as the 'rapture.' The word rapture is from the Latin translation of 1 Thessalonians 4: 17, 'rapturo', meaning to lift up. In the Greek original it is "harpadzo", to grab, to take up. Here the issue is the time of our Lord's coming for His church in relation to the final seven years of this age as described in Daniel 9: 27. The great tribulation begins at the middle of this seven year period (Mathew 24: 21) when the 'man of sin' commonly called the Antichrist commits great public blasphemous act, the abomination of desolation. (Mathew 24: 15). Concerning Christ's second coming some basic truths must be known. These include:

1. Our Lord is coming back for His church (John 14: 1-3)
2. His church is 'not appointed to wrath (1 Thess. 5: 9)
3. No one knows the exact time of His coming (Mathew 24: 36, 42, 44)
4. Recent predictors have incorrectly named the day, month and year of our Lord's second coming repeatedly time after time during this century. They have claimed to have counted the

days of Noah's flood, the day of the blowing of the trumpets of Leviticus 23: 24, or some other formula, and many have claimed to have this revealed to them by the Lord.

5. The commandment of our Lord to His church has been, 'watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come' (Mathew 24: 42). This has been taken to mean that the coming of Christ is imminent, that is, it may occur at any time, and the basis for our ever being alert is that we cannot know the time of His arrival, and therefore must constantly be on the watch and,
6. The sure promise of His second coming is the blessed hope of the church (Titus 2: 13). This blessed hope is not to be marred by differences among sincere believers as to the precise schedule of end-time events.

3. A Deconstructive Analysis of Rapture 1&11 (Fred Amata, 2002)

Synopsis of the Film

The film *Rapture 1&2* is used to evince how biblical material can be replayed exploiting the audio-visual video filmic medium. The primary motive of the Christian video film genre is to disseminate the church and to sell religious truths. It is a genre that is mostly explored and exploited by Christian evangelists to project the word and their churches.

The film is produced by Liberty Films, the screen play is directed by Fred Amata. The film opens with a mass in session, at the Catholic Institute of Infant Jesus. Shortly after the Mass, Father Julius (Segun Arinze) meets Father Francis (Richard Mofe-Damijo) at the corridor. He intimates the naïve Father Francis about the fact that every Reverend Father has a Sister as a girlfriend. This includes the Bishop Cornelius who has a chain of them. At night, this is confirmed when Sister Angelica sneaks out into the waiting car of the Bishop who takes her to his place for sexual intercourse. After an illuminating encounter with Evangelist Gold (Helen Ukpabio), Father Francis' belief in the Catholic doctrine begins to wane. He goes to the Bishop to tell him of his intention to quit the Catholic faith. (Here we see the Pentecostal mission to denigrate Catholicism. Pentecostalism represented by Evangelist Gold (Helen Ukpabio) is used as the instrument of attack on Catholicism.) He meets Father Gerald who is already tendering his resignation as a Catholic priest. Pastor Goodnews is the pastor of 'Restored Church of Christ.' A devout man of God, he is always preaching salvation and the need for every child of God to endure persecution until the end when Christ shall come. Meanwhile Pastor Goodnews is being persecuted by his own wife both in the church and at home. He shows a Christ-like spirit of endurance. Father Francis goes back to Evangelist Gold, gleefully telling her that he has surrendered his life to Christ. What is left is for him to resign his priesthood. Pastor Goodnews and his Christian brother are seated at the dining table, about to eat, only to discover that there are cockroaches in the plate. This action of the wife overstretchs his patience and he reacts to the wife. At this crucial moment, rapture takes place. First the dead in Christ are raptured, followed by others. These include Evangelist Gold, leaving behind Father Francis and Pastor Goodnews' co-pastor, leaving him regretting his action.

A meeting of all Presidents of Christian countries is convened to take place in Spain. There, the Catholic Pope is seen presiding as the self-styled, self-imposed President of the world. All initial oppositions from defiant heads of other countries are crushed by his fierce occultic powers. In the end, all are cowed into acceptance of the reign of the Antichrist. The Antichrist declares himself as a man with the solutions to all conceivable problems on earth. He makes it compulsory for everybody to bear the mark of the beast, 666, or forever be doomed. Everything, including the global currency, television station is to carry this insignia. Meanwhile, Father Francis, now Brother Francis becomes a rallying point to those who still believe in Christ. He encourages them not to bear the mark because doing so will ensure their eternal damnation in Hell. He leads them into the forest, running away from the pursuit of the armies of the Antichrist.

In part two, an array of the army of the Antichrist is given firm instructions by Bishop Cornelius, now the Grand Commander of the army. He gives the army the instruction to arrest everybody without

the mark of the beast. Brother Francis and the others are near a stream. Some of them are fatigued, thirsty and hungry. Two volunteers risk going to look for something to eat and drink. They are sighted and shot at by soldiers. They scamper for safety back to the stream, with some leaves which serve as food to their weary and famished mates.

In their detention camp, the soldiers display some of the arrested adherents of Christ. These undergo torture and are asked to renounce Jesus Christ. Out of the two batches that are so tortured, only two members curse and renounce Christ. Meanwhile, Pastor Goodnews and his seemingly repentant wife, now join Brother Francis and his fellow believers in their hideout. Felicity, Pastor Goodnews' wife revolts against being holed up in the hideout so she turns her back on her husband and the rest. She is initiated and reveals the hideout of the most wanted Brother Francis and his mates. She leads the soldiers to the hideout and everybody is arrested.

On the directive of the Grand Commander, they are tortured and locked up in the cold room for three days under 50 celcius. One of them, Shelley dies. They are asked to reject God but they all refuse but on further torture, Brother Paul renounces Christ, and Charles, in trying to escape, is shot and killed. The prime targets now for torture are Pastor Goodnews and Brother Francis. Both receive extreme acts of torture. The left arm of Francis is cut off while Goodnews' eye is gouged out and his tongue cut off. Both of them, however, still firmly avow their belief in Jesus Christ. They are finally ferried through the creek to an isolated place in the forest and tied to a stick, possibly to remain there to die.

Rapture shares a thematic affinity with *The Coming of the Antichrist* (Opeoluwa and Anorue, 2000), *Will Jesus Come?* (F.Okoro Ojiegbo and Amata, 2000), among other video films. In *Rapture 1 & 11*, the filmmaker has evidently contrived his plots solely on Pentecostal doctrinal constructs. This becomes clearly evident as the video film is even dedicated to the body of Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria. Pentecostal Churches share a particular set of religious ideas and practices such as being born again, baptism in the holy spirit/Ghost which translates in speaking in tongues, divine healing and strong emphasis on personal prayer. Pentecostal Churches rely on the word (Bible) alone; they reject the use of special gowns, candles and incense.

Christian belief is concretely anchored on the fact that Christ will evidently come to rapture His Church from the reign of the Antichrist. The video film *Rapture* is an audio-visual reenactment of this belief. The video film takes a satirical swipe at the Catholic Church. In the film's diegesis, the Catholic is seen as wrongly giving undue honour to Mary, mother of Jesus Christ. (This perception is, however, antithetical to the doctrine of Catholicism.) One of the distinctive beliefs of the Catholic Church is the veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus as the Blessed Virgin Mary or *Theotokos*, affirmed by the Council of Ephesus in 431. In the words of Brian Maguire, Mary "was the first and last disciple to reach out during his life." (p. 42). The veneration of Mary, is not tantamount to 'Mariolatry', the alleged elevation of the Virgin to a status approaching Christ's. Mary is portrayed as the victim of a Protestant conspiracy of silence: theologically, liturgically and devotionally." (p. 42) As a super co-sufferer with Christ, Mary was dubbed Mater Dolorosa. She was believed to be humanity's merciful mediator, a special pleader to him in our name. Martin Luther found in Mary "a perfect example of God visiting his grace, unearned, upon the most humble." (p. 44)

Mary, according to Gaventa,

is present in all these key situations: at Jesus' birth, at his death, in the upper room." Mary is the only named woman in a mostly male group gathered in an upper room who guided by the Holy Spirit, will make up the new Church. Mary was transmuted into the "mother of all believers," when Jesus, on the Cross, named her the mother of John. Mary is a reminder of the mercy and compassion and nearness of God. Mary's motherly love is explicitly expressed in her witnessing her son's scourging, sopping up his blood, kissing his bloody face – and her

flashback, as Christ stumbles in carrying the Cross, to a moment in his boyhood when he fell and cried and she could cradle him in her arms. Mary is held forth as the maternal face of God. (qtd. in Biema, 2005, p.44)

Also through the satiric persona of Father Gerald, the video film criticizes the view the Catholics hold about the infallibility of his holiness, the Pope. This critical stance is a misplaced one arising out of ignorance. Bruce (1994) provides a clearer insight on the topic of the dogma of papal infallibility:

This exclusively relates to spiritual authority which has firmly been expressed over time, culminating in 1870 with the dogma of papal infallibility for rare occasions when the pope speaks *ex cathedra* – literally from the chair of Saint Peter – to issue a formal definition of faith or morals. (p. 9)

The pope is considered one of the world's most powerful people because of his extensive diplomatic, cultural, and spiritual influence on 1.3 billion Catholics and beyond. He is also the official representative of the Catholic Church that is the largest non-government provider of education and health care in the world, with a vast international network of charities. (Rostow, 1968, p.15)

There is also a caricatural treatment of Bishop Cornelius, the head of the Institute of Infant Jesus. Bishop Cornelius and his subordinates engage in sexual escapades with the reverend sisters in the convent. This is a narrative strategy by the filmmaker to depict the abysmal level of decay in the Catholic Church. The name 'Institute of Infant Jesus' is also a pejorative device by the narrative to confer doctrinal inferiority on the Catholic Church as opposed to Pentecostal Churches. Again this view is debunked by eminent scholars. According to Ele (2019, p. 2),

... the Catholic Church is a Pentecostal Church. The Holy Spirit inaugurated her on the day of Pentecost as a missionary Church. On this day, her nature and deepest identity as missionary became evidently clear in history as she overcame the fear of the Jews to the public domain of mission with boldness under the power of the Holy Spirit." (p.2) The Catholic Church was founded by Jesus Christ in Jerusalem in AD 33. Jesus Christ is the invisible head of the Catholic Church. (Ephesians 5: 23, Col 1:18)

The Catholic Church was the only Church in existence for fifteen centuries and a quarter. Ojefua aptly puts it thus: "For one thousand, five hundred and twenty-five years, there was, apart from a few schematics in the East, only one Church on earth, the Catholic Church united under the Pope, the Vicar of Christ and the Successor of St. Peter. The Church maintained unbroken succession from the apostles. It was after 1,525 years that Luther rebelled against the authority of the Catholic Church, and founded a new Church." (qtd in Ele, 2019, p. 3) Apart from the Catholic Church, every other Church is man-made. Pentecostalism is a heterogeneous phenomenon.

Another point being inferred in the film is that the Antichrist and his archangels will come from these inferior Christian sects, like the Catholic Church. This is why the filmmaker represents the Pope (Avinaash Bhanvinaachi) as the Antichrist with the Bishop and Father Julius as the commanding officers of his army. The narrative also parodies the papal visit of the Pope to Nigeria to canonize the late Father Tansi, who is characterized as a nonentity in the film. In the film's diegesis, the Catholic community is irredeemably corrupt and will therefore be eluded salvation unless her members are converted to true Christianity. This explains why Father Gerald, on knowing the truth, resigns and attains spiritual salvation. Through the narrative strategy of parallelism, the Catholic Church, representing the old church, is represented by the patriarchal figure of Bishop Cornelius, portrayed as corrupt. On the other hand, the new church is represented as matriarchal, one that is struggling to attain salvation. Pastor Goodnews epitomizes this new church which is making frantic efforts to take over the old church.

However, as a devout man struggling to attain salvation, Pastor Goodnews' efforts are thwarted by his wife who is constantly persecuting him. This is an adumbration of the point that good men fall victim to temptations of their wives. It is an echo of the primordial patriarchal belief that women are always the harbingers or sources of evil to men. This ancient belief is avowed by Hippolytus in Euripides' *Hippolytus*. It is a belief that is traceable to our first ancestors, Adam and Eve who is believed to have caused the first man on earth to have fallen from God's grace.

Women are also portrayed as voiceless in the narrative. Their views are repressed by their husbands. A case in point is Mrs. Kingsley who cannot bring her Christian brethren to fellowship in her house. In this light, the film reinforces the patriarchal superiority of men to women. As objects of male gratification, they are like ice cream ready for male consumption in the film. They are represented as sexual objects for male pleasure. Their waist dances, for the entertainment of their male counterparts, is in the main, suggestive of this.

The image of Evangelist Gold in the video is quite symbolic. In the midst of the hypocritical Bishop and his haven of amoral subordinates, Evangelist Gold is symbolized as the redemptive instrument of God. This we discern through her televangelism. It is through the edificatory message using this medium, that Father Francis, Pastor Goodnews and others get adequately educated about the facts surrounding the end time prophecy in the Bible. This self-styling as an instrument of God's salvation is a narrative technique aimed at elevating her social self within and outside the narrative time. Through this televangelism, the hitherto naïve but ideal Father Francis, in the midst of evil men, is transposed to a star image of Adam. In the end of the film, he metamorphoses into a messianic figure as he is ferried to his Calvary recalling vividly the case of Jesus Christ.

4. Conclusion

Fred Amata's *Rapture* is a burlesque treatment of Catholicism from a Pentecostal view-point. The perceived ideological view in the film is that the Pentecostal sect is the church of Christ and therefore the true church. The concomitant belief is that, as the true church, only members of the Pentecostal church qualify to be raptured in the end-time. Another strand of belief is that Catholics worship God through Mary, the mother of Christ. This view is however being debunked as it has been widely taken that Catholics only venerate Mary. In part 1 of *Rapture*, the Pope who is the ultimate authority in the Catholic Church, is symbolized as a black Pope, inferring the possibility of election of a black Pope in the Catholic community. The burning of the flags, after the meeting of all Presidents, at the command of the self-styled world President is symbolic. This action in the narrative is symbolic of surrender of the sovereignty of developing nations. The world President seems to represent the world powers who continually glut these developing countries with mere promises to remedy their economic quagmire.

In part 11 of *Rapture*, the filmmaker is in the main burlesquing the military institution. The military is represented as a brutish institution preying on innocent citizens. The Catholic Church is caricatured as degenerating to the status of a military state that is engaged in the forceful recruitment of agents of Satan. In most of the scenes of torture of those who doggedly refuse to denounce the authority of Jesus Christ, the camera closes up on the portrait of the beast. This is a narrative technique of portraying the bestiality of the torturers who personify the beast.

In the end, in spite of the fact that the events in the video film obey the law of causality, the open ending elicits befuddling guesses. We cannot infer correctly what fate would befall Brother Francis and Pastor Goodnews in the island where they are tied to their Calvary. By merely chronicling a biblical event without making a positive statement, the filmmaker has failed in not being able to ascend beyond a mere chronicler of events.

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