

Reinterpretation of Dominant Themes in Select Evangelical Nollywood Films in the Light of Christian Gospel and Inculturation Theology

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Abstract

This study, titled *"Reinterpretation of Dominant Themes in Selected Evangelical Nollywood Films in Light of the Christian Gospel and Inculturation Theology,"* examines the dominant themes in selected evangelical Nollywood films to assess their alignment with the Christian gospel and their portrayal of African values. Using a qualitative research design, the study employed thematic analysis (TA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to evaluate six evangelical films. Findings reveal that while the films effectively use cinema as a tool for evangelism and incorporate various theological themes, many reinforce biblical principles conducive to Christian living and salvation. However, several films also dilute the gospel message by promoting unrealistic lifestyles, stereotypes, and propaganda. Additionally, most of the selected films depict African cultural practices as pagan, idolatrous, or sinful, reflecting a lack of theological depth, narrative complexity, and cultural inclusivity. The study concludes that while some evangelical Nollywood films successfully merge faith, culture, and entertainment, many fail to present authentic, theologically grounded, and culturally sensitive narratives. It recommends the establishment of ecumenical research centers and regular theological training for filmmakers to enhance the quality and impact of religious cinema in Africa.

Keywords: Reinterpretation, Dominant Themes, Evangelical Nollywood Films, Christian Gospel, Inculturation Theology

Introduction

Evangelical Nollywood films serve as a unique medium for the dissemination of Christian values and moral teachings in Nigeria and beyond. These films often reflect the socio-cultural and spiritual realities of their target audiences. However, when examined through the lens of the Christian Gospel and Inculturation Theology, dominant themes in these films can be reinterpreted to provide deeper insights into the interplay between faith, culture, and theology (Onuzulike, 2017). While spiritual warfare is central to Christian belief (Ephesians 6:12), the Gospel emphasizes love, forgiveness, and the ultimate victory of Christ over evil. Evangelical Nollywood films could shift focus from dramatic confrontations to narratives that highlight Christ's redemptive power and the role of believers in fostering reconciliation and peace. The Gospel does not promise material prosperity but calls for spiritual growth and trust in God's providence (Matthew 6:33). Reinterpreting these themes could lead to films that emphasize contentment, stewardship, and social justice rather than equating faithfulness with wealth (Ozele, 2008). The Christian Gospel celebrates redemption as a process of transformation and renewal (2 Corinthians 5:17). While Nollywood often dramatizes instant change, a Gospel-centered approach might explore gradual growth in faith and the ongoing journey of sanctification.

The Gospel focuses on grace, mercy, and the call to repentance (John 8:11). Rather than rigidly condemning sinners, films could portray God's patience and the loving invitation to turn back to Him. Inculturation Theology emphasizes the need to integrate Christian theology with local cultures, allowing faith to be expressed authentically within a cultural context. Applying this perspective to Evangelical Nollywood films encourages a more nuanced interpretation of dominant themes (Obasi & Msughter, 2023). Traditional Nigerian beliefs about spirits and the supernatural are often demonized in these films. Inculturation Theology advocates for a reimagining of these elements as opportunities for dialogue, showing how Christ fulfills and transforms indigenous spiritual realities rather than eradicating them. Prosperity in African culture is often tied to communal well-being rather than individual success. Films could portray wealth as a tool for community upliftment, aligning with the Gospel's call to love one's neighbor (Mark 12:31). Redemption stories can incorporate traditional African storytelling methods, such as proverbs, communal rituals, and oral narratives, to make the Gospel message resonate more deeply with local audiences.

African cultures often emphasize reconciliation over punitive justice. Films could explore restorative justice themes, showcasing God's healing power in broken relationships and communities. Evangelical films should strive for authentic representation of Nigerian cultures, demonstrating how Christian values can be lived out in these contexts. Collaboration with

theologians can help ensure that the films align with the Christian Gospel while respecting local traditions (Obasi & Msughter, 2023). While remaining engaging, films should avoid sensationalism and instead promote narratives that encourage thoughtful reflection on faith and culture. The reinterpretation of dominant themes in Evangelical Nollywood films through the lenses of the Christian Gospel and Inculturation Theology offers an opportunity for a more profound and culturally sensitive engagement with audiences. This approach enriches storytelling and fosters a deeper understanding of faith as it intersects with the cultural realities of Nigerian society.

Evangelical Nollywood films have become a significant cultural phenomenon in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, blending religious themes with entertainment. However, their presentation of Christian themes raises questions about theological depth, cultural integration, and their alignment with the Christian Gospel and Inculturation Theology. This paper explores how these films can be reinterpreted to enrich their theological and cultural significance (Obasi & Msughter, 2023). Reinterpreting the dominant themes in Evangelical Nollywood films through the frameworks of the Christian Gospel and Inculturation Theology enhances their relevance and impact. This approach fosters deeper theological engagement, cultural authenticity, and a richer portrayal of the Christian faith, positioning Nollywood as a vital tool for faith and cultural dialogue in Africa and beyond.

Research Objectives

1. Identify the dominant themes in the selected Evangelical Nollywood movies.
2. Determine whether the themes in the selected movies are portrayed in the light of the Gospel or watered down for entertainment purposes.
3. Examine whether African values and practices in the selected movies are bastardized or promoted in light of Inculturation Theology.

Conceptualizing Film Genres

Genre, a French word meaning "type" or "kind," has been defined in many ways by scholars. Film genres are categories used to classify films based on their narrative style, tone, themes, and audience expectations. Each genre has distinctive characteristics, though many films blend multiple genres to create unique storytelling experiences (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010). Conceptualizing film genres involves understanding them not merely as static categories but as dynamic constructs that evolve with culture, technology, and audience preferences. Genres are shaped by shared conventions, narrative patterns, and stylistic elements while also being fluid and open to reinterpretation. Conceptualizing film genres requires a multidimensional approach that considers their narrative, cultural, and industrial aspects. By understanding genres as evolving constructs, filmmakers and scholars can better appreciate their role in storytelling and

cultural expression while remaining open to innovation and reinterpretation (Obasi & Msughter, 2023).

A film genre is a classification system that groups films based on:

- Themes, plot structures, and character archetypes
- Visual aesthetics, music, pacing, and tone
- Emotional and intellectual responses anticipated by viewers

Genres are frameworks that guide both filmmakers and audiences, offering familiarity while allowing room for innovation. Genres can be understood through the recurring elements that define a genre, such as the lone cowboy in Westerns or jump scares in Horror. Conventions establish the "rules" of a genre but can be subverted to surprise or engage audiences. In addition, through visual and auditory symbols associated with a genre (e.g., spaceships in Sci-Fi, swords in Fantasy). Iconography helps audiences instantly identify a film's genre (Horsfjord et al., 2022).

Genres give films their unique characteristics without limiting them to conventions but allow for the creativity of filmmakers and the elicitation of audience pleasure for particular movies. They serve several purposes: they provide a blueprint for storytelling and audience engagement. They offer familiarity and predictability while allowing for varied experiences within the genre framework. They also aid in marketing and categorizing films for distribution and consumption (Uwah, 2013). Genres are not fixed; they evolve in response to cultural, technological, and artistic influences: Social and political changes can redefine genre themes (e.g., the rise of feminist narratives in action films), innovations in special effects have expanded Sci-Fi and Fantasy genres, blending genres (e.g., Horror-Comedy or Romantic Sci-Fi) creates new subgenres and modern films often deconstruct or parody genre conventions (e.g., *Deadpool* in the superhero genre).

Many films blend multiple genres, making rigid classification difficult (e.g., *Get Out* combines Horror, Thriller, and Social Commentary). Subgenres and niche categories (e.g., Steampunk, Noir) further complicate the concept of a unified genre system. Different cultures interpret and produce genres uniquely (e.g., Bollywood Masala films blend Drama, Romance, and Action). Genres are expanding beyond films to include TV, video games, and interactive media, leading to new hybrid genres (Manus & Markhalemele, 2018). The rise of diverse voices in filmmaking is reshaping traditional genres to include new perspectives and stories. Modern filmmakers often deconstruct genres, subverting expectations to create fresh narratives (e.g., *The Cabin in the Woods* deconstructs Horror).

The Evangelical Nollywood Film Genre

The Evangelical Nollywood film genre is a unique subset of Nigerian cinema that combines evangelical Christian themes with Nollywood's storytelling style. These films serve as a medium for moral instruction, faith propagation, and entertainment, often reflecting the socio-cultural

and spiritual realities of Nigeria and its diaspora. Ajayi et al. (2019) observed that Evangelical Nollywood films are characterized by their focus on Christian values, biblical narratives, and themes of spirituality. They aim to evangelize, inspire faith, and address moral dilemmas through dramatized storytelling. Evangelical Nollywood films draw heavily from Pentecostal theology, which emphasizes spiritual warfare, miracles, and prosperity. Traditional Nollywood storytelling techniques, such as melodrama and vibrant characters, are blended with religious content.

The Evangelical Nollywood film genre is a distinctive subcategory within the broader Nollywood industry, characterized by its focus on Christian themes, narratives, and values. This genre plays a pivotal role in the cultural and spiritual landscape of Nigeria and other African societies, blending religious evangelism with the rich storytelling tradition of Nollywood. The Evangelical Nollywood film genre represents a powerful intersection of faith, culture, and entertainment. While it has made significant contributions to Christian media and moral discourse in Nigeria, there is room for growth in its theological depth, narrative complexity, and cultural inclusivity. By addressing these areas, the genre can continue to inspire and evangelize effectively while fostering a deeper understanding of the Gospel within diverse cultural contexts.

This genre consists of films explicitly produced to convey Christian teachings, promote moral values, and evangelize through the medium of cinema. The goals are to inspire faith and repentance, educate on Christian principles, and engage audiences in spiritual and moral discourse. Stories often revolve around characters undergoing personal or spiritual transformation. Prominent themes include portraying battles between good (God, angels) and evil (Satan, demons, witchcraft), and narratives highlighting the power of faith and divine intervention in resolving life's challenges. Additionally, these films utilize linear storytelling with a clear moral resolution, the use of parables and allegories to illustrate Christian teachings, dramatic depictions of spiritual events such as exorcisms or divine revelations, and the integration of traditional African cultural motifs alongside Christian iconography.

Most Evangelical Nollywood films are made with limited resources but prioritize impactful storytelling (Kurfi, 2018). They are distributed through local markets, churches, and digital platforms like YouTube, ensuring wide accessibility. Moreover, they are often funded or supported by churches and Christian ministries to amplify their message. These films integrate Christian theology with African cultural practices, addressing local beliefs and values. They serve as tools for teaching ethical behavior, especially to younger audiences. Furthermore, they are used in church settings for group discussions, fostering spiritual growth within communities.

Unfortunately, of the two forms of religion in Nigeria—the Traditional African Religion (ATR) and Christianity—which are frequently portrayed in Evangelical Nollywood films, only a minority of such films present a balanced picture. More commonly, viewers encounter diabolical portrayals of ATR and a superstitious depiction of Christianity. The African Traditional Religion is often presented as a channel for charms and witchcraft, designed to kill, maim, or defraud others. Christianity, in contrast, is frequently shown as a miracle-working religion that resolves all problems through supernatural means, particularly through the Pentecostal experience.

Igboanusi (2010, p. 133) puts it succinctly:

Homegrown videos of famed Nollywood are stirring the pots of ethical revolution in the Nigerian society at large, by inserting plots of traditional religious practices, cultism and modern Pentecostalism. And people are questioning the amount of running time given to such religious plots in home videos. There is an understandable apprehension regarding the effects of such plots on the young and old alike. This is because it is presumed that media are so powerful that their effects are capable of swinging people to unwholesome attitudes.

This unbalanced presentation of the two religions has had several effects on viewers. One such effect is the perception of religion as a means of acquiring money, wealth, fame, power, health, and security. Religion is also increasingly seen as a problem-solving mechanism, wherein the supernatural can be manipulated at will by religious experts to address or even cause human problems. This perception has created a form of irrational dependency on religion among a large segment of the population. It has also promoted non-conventional forms of religiosity in society, with many individuals either returning to traditional religious practices or embracing a form of Pentecostal Christianity that focuses on immediate problem-solving.

The Bastardization of Christian Gospel in Nollywood Movies

Life often presents paradoxes—seemingly contradictory realities that challenge human understanding. Issues like divorce, salvation, and love are complex and deeply personal, raising profound questions about purpose, morality, and relationships. The Christian Gospel provides a framework for addressing these paradoxes by offering hope, reconciliation, and meaning through faith in Jesus Christ. Divorce often signifies the failure of a covenant meant to last a lifetime, creating tension between brokenness and the ideal of lifelong commitment. The Gospel acknowledges human brokenness but offers grace for healing. In Matthew 19:8, Jesus acknowledges the reality of divorce due to human sinfulness but also points to God's original design for marriage as a lifelong union. The Gospel emphasizes reconciliation—both with God and others (2 Corinthians 5:18). Even in the aftermath of divorce, individuals can experience spiritual renewal and restored relationships. The church, as the body of Christ, is called to provide support and compassion to those affected by divorce, embodying Christ's love.

The bastardization of Christian beliefs and practices in films, particularly in Nollywood films, is a complex issue that reflects broader concerns about how faith is portrayed in popular culture. Nollywood, Nigeria's vibrant film industry, has often included Christian themes, characters, and narratives, but at times, the way Christian beliefs and practices are represented can be criticized for misinterpretation, exaggeration, or distortion. In some Nollywood films, Christianity is portrayed as a commodity, with pastors or churches depicted as profit-driven enterprises rather than spiritual sanctuaries. This commercialization of faith undermines the true essence of Christian teaching, which emphasizes selfless service, humility, and the pursuit of eternal life—not material gain (Kilonzo, 2018).

Films featuring prosperity gospel preachers often emphasize wealth, health, and material blessings as the primary focus of Christian life, frequently to the exclusion of repentance, salvation, or self-sacrifice. These portrayals include pastors living lavish lifestyles while their congregations struggle financially, suggesting that Christianity is a business transaction rather than a life-transforming faith. Such depictions can lead to misconceptions about the priorities of the Christian faith, making people view the church and its practices as tools for personal gain, rather than as avenues for spiritual growth and service to others.

The concept of salvation and deliverance in many Nollywood films is often oversimplified or sensationalized. In these films, the focus may be on dramatic, miraculous events—such as instant deliverance from evil spirits, curses, or addictions—without emphasizing the deeper spiritual and moral transformation that salvation in Christ entails. These include films where characters are “delivered” from demonic possession or life struggles through a quick, emotional prayer or incantation, with little focus on the need for long-term repentance, discipleship, and personal transformation. Overly dramatized portrayals of exorcism or spiritual warfare reduce the process to a spectacle rather than a serious spiritual and theological practice, often accompanied by exaggerated visual effects and unrealistic portrayals of demons (Kilonzo, 2018).

Many Nollywood films featuring Christian characters may present a skewed or contradictory portrayal of Christian ethics and morality. For example, characters who are supposed to embody Christian values might engage in unethical or immoral behavior—such as lying, cheating, or even violence—without showing the appropriate consequences or moral reckoning. Instances include characters who claim to be devout Christians engaging in affairs, dishonesty, or criminal activities, yet still portray themselves as upright, often with no real repentance or acknowledgment of sin. Additionally, some films present idealized portrayals of church leaders that ignore the personal

struggles or flaws which can affect Christian leaders, creating an unrealistic view of Christian leadership.

These portrayals can confuse viewers about the true moral teachings of Christianity, reducing the emphasis on genuine repentance, transformation, and accountability, which are central to Christian ethics. In many Nollywood films, biblical themes or Christian doctrine may be introduced or quoted, but often without an accurate understanding or consistent application of Christian theology. This can lead to misinterpretations or distortions of foundational Christian beliefs. Examples include quoting Bible verses out of context to support the plot or actions of characters, twisting the original meaning of Scripture to fit the narrative, and presenting a prosperity gospel or punitive view of God's character that is inconsistent with traditional Christian teachings. Films may portray miracles or divine intervention in a way that suggests God is a tool used to fulfill personal desires or wishes, rather than seeing God's intervention in the context of His will and the advancement of His kingdom. This leads to theological confusion, where viewers may misunderstand or be misled by inaccurate representations of biblical teachings. It can also reinforce a shallow spirituality that focuses more on material success or personal gain rather than the deeper, spiritual goals of the Christian faith.

The bastardization of Christian beliefs and practices in Nollywood films is a significant concern, as it can shape public perceptions of Christianity in ways that mislead or misinform. While films can serve as powerful tools for cultural engagement, evangelism, and entertainment, it is essential that filmmakers approach the depiction of faith with greater theological awareness and responsibility. Proper biblical teaching, ethical storytelling, and honest portrayals of Christian life can help ensure that Christian beliefs are accurately and respectfully represented, fostering a deeper understanding of the faith both within and outside the church (Horsfjord et al., 2023). This is the point of the Vatican II document on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 57), which states that through culture and its progress in the arts and the sciences, human beings come into greater understanding of truth, goodness, and beauty, and this inclines them to deeper communion with God as they grow in wisdom through wonder and contemplation. This implies that the screen can help individuals look at reality with wonder and contemplation. Hence, film audiences need to raise deeper questions regarding every film viewed, given that films are projections of realities and not realities themselves.

Use of Films as a Channel of Inculturation and Evangelization

Inculturation is not merely an effort at cultural revival but a serious theological enterprise aimed at making the faith relevant to people within their local cultures. It involves bringing the Word of God into meaningful dialogue with every culture. In that encounter, inherited traditions—both

foreign and local—are scrutinized, transformed, or purified. This is the only way the Gospel can become firmly rooted in local contexts. Schineller (1990), in his classic work on inculturation, emphasizes that inculturation involves all aspects of Christian life and cannot be limited to certain elements alone. Even when discussing a theology of inculturation, the actual process extends beyond the field of theology. Furthermore, he defines theology as:

... the way theology is studied and written about, the way children are taught the rudiments of the faith, the way the parish council is structured, the way the diocese is organized, the architecture of churches, the shape and form of prayers—all of these areas fall under the scope of inculturation (p. 24).

This indicates that the Good News of Christ is meant to renew and transform every culture, enabling it to blossom from within and become capable of contributing to humanity's interior freedom (Gaudium et Spes, 1965, no. 57).

To achieve this noble mission of cultural transformation, the Church must endeavor to use channels that effectively appeal to the people for transmitting the Gospel message. This is where the film industry becomes a powerful resource for evangelization and inculturation. Pope Paul VI defines the Church's mission in the papal exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) as that of "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new" (no. 18). This entails not only proclaiming the Gospel across broader geographic areas and to more people but also, "upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life," which conflict with the Word of God and His plan of salvation (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 9; Ike, 2012).

Films, particularly in a diverse and culturally rich context like Nigeria, offer a vital medium for inculturation. Nollywood films can integrate traditional values, beliefs, and challenges, using them as a bridge to present Christian teachings in a culturally relevant way. By embedding Christian themes in familiar cultural narratives—such as family conflicts, generational struggles, and societal expectations—filmmakers can make the paradoxes of the Gospel more accessible. A character facing the tension between personal desires and family obligations, for instance, could illustrate the Christian paradox of self-denial and fulfillment, inviting audiences to reflect on Christ's call to self-sacrifice (Luke 9:23). Portraying life's paradoxes in culturally familiar settings allows viewers to relate to characters' struggles and resonate with Christian resolutions. In the

African context, narratives involving ancestral worship, witchcraft, or generational curses can serve as entry points for discussing spiritual freedom and deliverance through Christ.

Similarly, using films as a pulpit for evangelization provides an effective and accessible means of conveying the Christian message, especially in settings where traditional forms of evangelization may not be as impactful. Nollywood—one of the largest film industries globally—has the potential to reach millions with the Gospel and to engage deeply with life’s most pressing questions, such as suffering, justice, love, death, and salvation. Films possess a unique capacity to connect with diverse audiences across cultural, social, and geographic divides (Ajayi et al., 2019). Their visual and emotional power makes them an especially compelling medium for presenting the Christian message to those who might not otherwise engage with church activities or Christian literature.

Films can address life’s paradoxes in ways that resonate with people’s lived experiences. The paradox of suffering and hope, for example, can be powerfully depicted through characters who endure trials with faith, revealing Christ as a source of strength and transformation. Symbolic and relatable narratives can translate complex theological concepts—such as salvation, grace, and eternal life—into tangible realities through character development and personal stories.

Films also allow for the exploration of complex themes through characters who struggle with contradictions that the Gospel seeks to resolve. They can depict characters who experience failure or weakness yet discover true strength through faith in Christ, echoing Paul’s message that God’s power is perfected in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). These narratives can inspire viewers to reflect on their own lives and challenges, encouraging them to seek the same hope found in Christ.

Christian love, particularly as self-sacrifice, is a theme that lends itself naturally to film. By portraying characters who make profound sacrifices for others, films can evoke the kind of love that Christ demonstrated on the cross—where love is measured not by gain, but by the willingness to give. Many films also explore humanity’s greatest paradox—death. By presenting the resurrection as a victory over death, films can depict the Christian belief in eternal life through Christ (John 11:25–26), sparking dialogue about mortality, faith, and spiritual rebirth.

Films can further explore the paradox of redemption through suffering, portraying how broken lives are restored through Christ. Such narratives allow viewers to reflect on their own pain and discover the healing power of the Gospel. Additionally, the paradox of salvation by grace—not merit—can be shown through characters who are forgiven and redeemed despite their past,

revealing God's unconditional love. This counters the worldly notion that one must earn salvation, instead highlighting grace as transformative and inclusive.

Moreover, films can highlight how the Christian Gospel challenges prevailing societal values. Christ's teachings that "the last shall be first" and "the greatest shall be the servant of all" (Mark 9:35) present an alternative vision of greatness and justice. A film centered on these themes could provoke conversations on humility, service, and leadership within God's kingdom (Onuzulike, 2007). Viewers can witness how faith in Christ influences everyday decisions—relationships, conflicts, forgiveness, and resilience—demonstrating that the Gospel is not just belief but a lived reality. Films can emphasize the power of repentance and forgiveness by showing characters who undergo genuine change through their encounter with Christ, effectively illustrating 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."

Additionally, films can depict Christian communities as places of compassion, accountability, and shared spiritual growth. By portraying the church as a supportive and transformative community, films can inspire viewers to seek deeper fellowship and belonging in local congregations.

By showcasing core Christian values such as love, reconciliation, service, and justice, films can inspire individuals to embody these virtues in their personal and communal lives. Using films as tools for evangelization offers a dynamic and engaging way to present the Gospel as the answer to life's deepest questions. Through rich storytelling, character development, and cultural relevance, films can help viewers discover hope, meaning, and transformation in the message of Christ. In this way, films become not just entertainment, but powerful vehicles for theological reflection, spiritual growth, and cultural renewal.

Synopsis of the Selected Evangelical Nollywood Films

The Mandate (2006): Directed and produced by Kalawole David Okeowol. The story revolves around the struggle of two born-again Christians—Royland Oseirujo, an architect, and Esther, a manager of a successful company—to become man and wife.

Parish War (2010): Directed by Ikenna Aniekwe and produced by Charles Offor. This film is a satire of the Catholic priesthood and the priestly method of carrying out the evangelizing mission of the Church in a parish.

Knocking on Heaven's Door (2014): Directed by Desmond Elliot and produced by Emen Isong and Ini Edo. The movie explores everyday issues facing many young married Christian couples, such as domestic violence, jealousy, and active faith in God amidst family crises.

Hidden Sin (2016): Written, directed, and produced by Lekan Asikhia. The plot centers around the destructive power of hidden sins in the life of a believer.

***Slave to Sin* (2016):** Written, directed, and produced by Lekan Asikhia. The film, a sequel to *Hidden Sin*, presents the consequences of believers not having Christ Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

***Deliverance from Sin* (2016):** Written by Olayinka Asikhia and produced by Tunde Owah. The movie, which concludes the *Hidden Sin* trilogy, explores repentance and the consequences of sin.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design, which informed the choice of thematic analysis (TA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) as tools for data collection. A total of six Evangelical Nollywood movies were analyzed.

Discussion of Findings Research Objective 1: Identify the Dominant Themes in the Selected Evangelical Nollywood Movies

This objective aimed to identify the main themes explored in the selected movies. Findings reveal that a number of theological themes run across the six films, such as salvation, repentance, love, justice, trust, endurance, hope, judgment, sin, redemption, grace, greed, disobedience, betrayal, truth, commitment to community, faith, service, forgiveness, peace, charity, reverence, dignity, domestic abuse, jealousy, divorce, religion, and true worship. For instance, the recurrent theme in the three Mount Zion films—*Hidden Sin*, *Slave to Sin* (Part 2), and *Deliverance from Sin* (Part 3)—is salvation. These movies employ various narratives to demonstrate the consequences of sin, aiming to lead viewers toward being “born again.” Similarly, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door* explores themes such as domestic abuse, jealousy, divorce, love, and the role of active faith in God during family crises.

In the same vein, *Parish War* emphasizes discipline, wisdom, and virtuous living among priests to enable them to effectively guide the faithful toward salvation. While the film dramatizes the repercussions of scandals in religious settings, it also addresses themes of hurt, revenge, and their consequences—such as loss of authority, lack of inner peace, familial discord, and emotional turmoil. *The Mandate* explores themes of marital discernment, love, and trust. These findings support Ajayi et al.'s (2019) observation that Evangelical Nollywood films are characterized by a strong focus on themes of spirituality and religion, as they aim to evangelize, inspire faith, and address moral dilemmas through dramatized storytelling.

Research Objective 2: Determine Whether the Themes Were Portrayed in the Light of the Christian Gospel or Watered Down for Entertainment Purposes

Findings reveal that while some of the analyzed movies uphold Christian values, others dilute them for entertainment purposes. For example, *Parish War*, filmed during a period when the

global Church was under media scrutiny due to clerical scandals, satirizes this issue in the Nigerian context. However, the overemphasis on Fr. Sylvester's scandal and his subsequent exit from the priesthood overshadows the positive portrayal of his successor. This suggests that some filmmakers react to social issues with ideologically skewed narratives, rather than offering wellresearched theological insights. This approach can lead to the ridicule of Christian denominations that differ in belief.

Similarly, *The Mandate* contains questionable theological interpretations. When Esther prays for a life partner, she internalizes the message of Genesis 2:18, echoing views held by various world religions. However, the Christian Gospel emphasizes that one's value and fulfillment are found in service to God and humanity—not solely in marriage. Jesus Christ, who remained unmarried, exemplifies this ideal. Likewise, the Catholic Church promotes celibacy among clergy as a means of full devotion to God's work. The portrayal of miracles in *The Mandate*—such as Esther raising the dead and healing her cousin instantly—also stretches theological credibility. While liberal Christians may enjoy such narratives, they risk promoting an unrealistic, overly sensationalized version of Christianity. Igboanusi (2010) notes that few Nigerian films present a balanced picture of Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR); most rely on superstitious or fantastical elements that distort theological truth. In the *Hidden Sin* trilogy, the depiction of Sandra's judgment trivializes the concept of divine justice. While the narrative may suggest God's mercy by granting her a second chance, it contradicts scriptures such as Matthew 5:8, which emphasize the purity required to see God. Sandra's ability to return to life and face earthly justice undermines the finality and gravity associated with spiritual judgment.

In *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, issues such as domestic abuse and separation are not realistically explored. The film fails to address the critical question of when a person should leave an abusive marriage. Although the Bible condemns both violence and divorce (Malachi 2:14–16), it also advocates prudence in avoiding danger (Proverbs 27:12). Debby's continued suffering, multiple miscarriages, and near-death experience at the hands of her husband suggest that the film avoids taking a firm stand on this serious issue. As the protagonist, Debby's worldview dominates the narrative, yet viewers are left without guidance on navigating abuse within marriage. This approach ultimately validates harmful behavior and misses an opportunity to deliver a responsible moral message. These examples indicate that not all religious imagery in the analyzed texts is theologically sound or uplifting. In the effort to appeal to a broad audience, some messages fall into the category of "easy theology." Obasi and Msughter (2023) argue that while Evangelical Nollywood films represent a significant intersection of faith, culture, and entertainment, there is room for improvement in theological depth, narrative complexity, and cultural inclusivity.

On the other hand, the *Hidden Sin* trilogy features characters like Mrs. Adebayo (Mama Titi), a prayerful yet quarrelsome church member portrayed as foolish and violent. Her constant conflicts lead to tragic losses, including the deaths of her children. Her cries to God—"Am I not praying enough?"—reveal a lack of spiritual discernment. Her husband's retort—"Foolish woman, are you not ashamed... and you call yourself a Christian"—encapsulates her hypocritical faith. Additionally, Lawrence, another character, exemplifies hidden sin and hypocrisy. Despite numerous warnings from God through others, he commits murder to further his career and maintains a facade of devotion until he is imprisoned. Similarly, Sandra, who dies from a botched abortion, represents moral failure despite outward religiosity. Her death echoes scriptural warnings against murder and sin (Exodus 20:13; Romans 6:23).

These narratives suggest that while some films dilute Christian teachings for entertainment, others reinforce biblical values such as integrity, repentance, and the consequences of sin. Overall, the films analyzed present diverse Christian identities and offer valuable, albeit sometimes flawed, contributions to religious discourse in Nollywood cinema. Their central goal remains evangelization and the salvation of souls—a hallmark of Evangelical Nollywood storytelling.

Research Objective 3: To Find Out if the African Values and Practices in the Selected Movies Were Bastardized or Promoted in the Light of Inculturation Theology

Findings indicate that the selected movies misrepresented or ridiculed some African values and practices. For instance, in *The Mandate*, after Esther—a born-again Christian with special gifts—received a revelation that Royland (another member of her church) was actually her destined husband, she began to respond to his advances. Yet, when he eventually proposed to her, Esther not only rejected him but also withdrew from the relationship due to his new status as the traditional ruler of his community. To Esther, a born-again Christian should not associate with, or become, a traditional ruler. This raises questions about whether traditional rulers are disinherited from the Kingdom of God. However, the Bible clearly states that God sent His only Son out of love for the world and that anyone who believes in Him will have eternal life (John 3:16).

Furthermore, even after their evident marriage—largely influenced by Esther—Royland, now known as Ose and the custodian of his people's culture by virtue of his exalted position, rejects every invitation by the council of chiefs and the chief priest to partake in traditional rites, no matter how "clean" these functions appear. In one of his confrontations with them, he bluntly tells the chief priest and the chiefs to exempt him from such "barbaric and demonic" practices.

Most scenes in the movie portray tradition in a cynical and dismissive manner. This raises concerns about African traditional beliefs and practices being labeled as pagan, idolatrous, and sinful. However, several Bible passages acknowledge the importance of local traditions and practices (1 Cor. 9:19–23; Acts 16:1–3; Romans 14:1–15:7). A typical example is Paul's adoption of local customs to effectively spread the gospel (1 Cor. 9:19–23). Again, in Acts 16:1–3, out of respect for local Jewish traditions, Paul circumcises Timothy. These instances illustrate that God delights in and blesses the diversity of nations and languages (Gen. 10:1–32). They also show that people from every nation, tribe, and language can worship God together (Rev. 7:9–10), as Christ has removed all cultural and social divisions (Gal. 3:28).

Inculturation theology emphasizes the integration of the gospel with local cultures for a more authentic and meaningful expression of the Christian faith within specific contexts. This is because the Good News of Christ is intended to renew and transform every culture, allowing it to blossom from within and become capable of contributing to humanity's interior freedom (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 57).

Conclusion

The study established that the analyzed films explored a number of theological themes—salvation, repentance, love, justice, judgment, sin, redemption, grace, betrayal, battery, jealousy, true worship, and more. This affirms that the selected films, like most Evangelical Nollywood productions, use the screen as a pulpit to evangelize their viewers.

The study also found that, true to the Evangelical genre, some of the analyzed films promoted Christian values. They presented a wide range of Christian identities, which were either refuted or reinforced to encourage fruitful Christian living and the salvation of souls, using biblical principles. However, various scenes in most of the selected films diluted gospel messages by validating abusive or unrealistic lifestyles and promoting propaganda or stereotypes. Although liberal Christians may enjoy such shallow theological narratives for entertainment purposes, the core messages of these films may not align with the gospel and could lead to misconceptions, a weakening of faith among believers, and both physical and spiritual loss of blessings and lives in society.

The study equally established that most of the selected movies misrepresented or ridiculed some African values and practices. For example, themes suggesting that traditional rulers are disinherited from the Kingdom of God and that African traditional practices are inherently pagan, idolatrous, and sinful were prevalent in the analyzed texts. However, Inculturation Theology affirms that the gospel should be integrated into local cultures to ensure a more authentic and

meaningful expression of the Christian faith. Such integration allows the Good News of Christ to renew and transform every culture from within, fostering the interior freedom of all people. In light of these findings, the study recommends the censorship of Nigerian movies, the establishment of ecumenical and research centers for filmmakers, and the regular training and retraining of filmmakers by the Church.

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