

## Discursive Slippage, Church Mafia, and the Editorial Dilemma of “An Untold African Narrative”

Lekan Oyegoke\*

### Abstract

Literature is life converted into symbols which shape up into the various genres. The complexities of the symbols which add up to making human language effective for communicational and creative and other purposes are a match for the extraordinary intricacies of human life experiences. Experimentation by writers with content and form in literature guarantees a violation of the pristine sanctity of the separation of the genres of literature. There seems to be no longer a clear-cut demarcation between fact and fiction, between the temporal and the spiritual, between the tangible and the intangible; both language and literature seem caught in a surreal time warp that strains credibility in the experiences of living and reading. A recent book by MS Ramabulana titled *Church Mafia: Captured by secret powers – an untold African narrative* presents an opportunity to examine a few presumptions in the genre of writing referred to as life story which is about a type of experience that is commonly associated with spirituality and the intangible presenting itself as tangible and credible. The book is in the class of extended testimony in prose. It raises some interesting posers which have literary and spiritual implication, and are the subject of speculation in this essay.

**Keywords:** church mafia; credibility; temporal; spiritual; extended testimony

### Introduction

The self-reflexive subjectivity of literature guarantees it permanent appeal and relevance regardless of the oft exaggerated claims of the indispensability of the products of science and technology. There seems to be nothing more complex than humanity and the given contents of the worlds of reality and fantasy. A good example of the intricacies is human language which is the most complex of all forms of communication, governed as it is by sundry laws of formation and combination which make for coherence and intelligibility. Language serves to express the complexity of human thought and fantasy and to explicate the coterminous planes of reason, reality and spirituality. For its part, literature contains every bit of past, present and future experience conceivable. Therefore, it will be correct to assert that all humanity is present in literature – in all its genres of folklore, poetry, drama, prose fiction and nonfiction. The life story genre of literature illustrates the delicate divide between reality and fantasy, between fact and fiction, in a manner that relentlessly alters age-old conventional landmarks of aesthetic borders. The ethereal shades into the tangible in a complex play of symbols or language with which the numinous world of thought is navigated for spirituality and sentiment, while the imaginative faculty is plumbed for intellectuality and reason, scoured for the articles of faith and the aesthetic. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say; have they not heard? Yes indeed: ‘Their sound has gone out to all the earth and their words to the ends of the world’” (Romans 10:17-18)

The Holy Bible is described as the Word of God. In it, the past, the present, and the future cohere mysteriously in a given moment of existence: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2). The future

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\* Lekan Oyegoke, formerly Professor of Literature in English, University of Botswana. E-mail: [lekanoyegoke@gmail.com](mailto:lekanoyegoke@gmail.com)

provides concrete validation for the intangible in a fascinating twist of ontology: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). The Bible has continued to birth exciting narratives that explore the essence of time and humanity in a sentient plane of experience. Among these, Christian literature has sharpened an undermining of conventional artistic boundaries, especially in the biographical domain consisting of major testimonies in extended and shorter forms. As it is commonly perceived, a testimony is a person’s factual or real-life account of a spiritual experience, an encounter between the tangible and the intangible, usually characterised by a contest between the forces of light and those of darkness. The scenario involving testifier or narrator and the audience of the testimony tends to build on the credibility of the testimony; it is not decided on the part of the audience by conventional suspended disbelief. The reading strategy of suspended disbelief which accompanies the reception of a piece of realist fiction is in the testimony genre replaced by an article of faith that is based on belief in the God of creation who made Adam and Eve and revealed Himself to Abram subsequently, and through Abram or Abraham to the whole world. Therefore, in the speech situation of testifier and audience there is a common belief in the inviolability of the word of God on which the common faith is based that undergirds the reception, by the audience, of the claims of the testifier that the narrative is factual and believable. Faith in God is thus the mainstay of a testimony and the ultimate aim of it is to give God the credit for the favourable outcome contained in the testimony.

Discursive slippage in this essay describes a failure of synchrony between paratext and expression. While the word gives experience its presence in reality, paratext is present to give the text its presence in the world (Genette 1997). Discordance between the text (linguistically constituted) and the paratext (extralinguistically shaped) can have implications for a book’s worth. “An untold African narrative” is a cover subtitle of a book titled *Church Mafia* (2018) written by Makhado Sinthumule Ramabulana. The book falls in the category of extended testimony or biographical account of the author’s experiences in the pilgrimage of life.

### **Church Mafia**

Included in the cluster of inscriptions known as paratext on the book cover is the book’s title. The phrase “church mafia” hits the reader with an immense semantic baggage. Jesus Christ first used the word “church” in a declaration to affirm a revelation made by His disciple Simon Bar-Jonah: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Much has been said and written about this scripture. Jesus frequently uses word pictures to describe concepts and numinous spiritual verities for vividness and clarity. “Church” as used by Jesus denotes a spiritual presence of saints or believers in Him, both those who are living and those who are deceased. Church thus bestrides the physical world and the spiritual realm. It will be correct then to assert that the church has a spiritual dimension that is prone to contestation as affirmed in the second part of the scripture which talks about the gates of Hades or Hell. Apart from reference to physical and spiritual presence, there is an opposition between victory and defeat in the part of the scripture about hell’s gates not being able to prevail against the church also known as the body of Christ over which Jesus is head literally (Colossians 1:18). In the physical, the word “church” also serves to describe a designated place of worship for people who are followers of Jesus Christ.

The word “church” is thus problematical as clipped to the book cover. The church of God has a long history of ups and downs because of the prevailing contest between the forces of light and those of darkness, as hinted at in the earlier cited biblical passage from the book of Matthew.

It is a history of love and hate, of faith and persecution, of loyalty and betrayal, of personal travails and triumphs, of discouragement and resoluteness, of lack and plenitude, of disgrace and honour, of power and mercy, of war and peace, of sorrow and joy, of life and death, and many more contrasting existential and revelation conditions and circumstances. The denotative and connotative load on the word church is huge.

For its part, “mafia” comes with a decidedly negative connotation. Both its rendering in the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English* is denotatively negative: “1. A secret organization of criminals, that is active especially in Sicily, Italy and the US; 2 a group of people within an organization or a community who use their power to get advantages for themselves.” These definitions of the word place its function squarely in the world of darkness and the gates of hell which is averse to the church. From the point of view of connotation, the yoking together of “church” and “mafia” in a title of a book would appear to be rather conflictual however much the sensational appeal of the phrase. The cognitive opposition in both terms might put a strain on the reader-response sensibility of certain categories of the reading public while stirring the curiosity in some others. Either way, the result might prove somewhat counterproductive to the publishing and sale of the book.

### **An Untold African Narrative**

The claim that the story is an untold African narrative needs to be tested. However, the initial task is how to place the story. To do so, two questions must be tackled: first, what is the nature of the materials contained in the book? Second, what is the implied audience of the story? The experiences recounted seem, in certain respects, to place the work in the picaresque and allegorical moulds. The protagonist is born into a Christian home and growing up he takes to Christian ministry. His formative years are not lacking in boyhood and adolescent pranks which also shape his choice of adventures in adult life (Ramabulana 2018:9-13). His inspiration for ministry is initially from his parents and his grandmother Koko Leah. He graduates from Bible School and sets out in ministry. He then falls into bad company. His associates in ministry seem to be doing well in terms of their ability to pull big crowds to their crusades and “churches”, and in having material comforts such as expensive gold wristwatches and cell phones, fancy designer suits and shoes, flashy cars, and big houses. He soon finds out that they know some other way different from piety to attain these material possessions. He is easily persuaded to join them and he follows suit to get the “power” required to accomplish the kind of prosperity on display by the self-styled apostles, bishops, prophets and prophetesses operating in the narrative’s main setting of South Africa: “Instead of investing in my pastoral career by enrolling in leadership and ethics courses, I found myself raising money to travel to countries in Africa to obtain anointing and more powers. As a young pastor, who now envied people who operated as prophets, I also wanted to be called a prophet; hence I became obsessed with visiting experienced spiritualist around Africa for powers” (Ramabulana 2018:28).

His curiosity and desire for fame and prosperity are irrepressible. He sets aside his biblical teachings from Bible School and pursues his newfound interest and ambition to become a popular crowd-puller in crusades and an affluent prophet or “man of God” to attain which he must source for the requisite power. The quest for “power” takes him to remote parts of South Africa, and then isolated settlements and villages in Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In those locations he encounters witches and warlocks who are native doctors and traditional healers and he gets initiated into sundry cults and the membership of various covens. He enters into pacts with several priests and priestesses and is covenanted to an assortment of terrestrial

demon gods and marine goddesses. He is made to pass through different kinds of rituals many of which he finds humiliating because he is required to undertake them in various degrees of undress or complete nudity in the open and in the dark and sometimes in broad daylight. He enters into a blood pact not only with the votaries of the traditional beliefs but also with certain votive animals and reptiles that are offered in ritual sacrifices. Some of the rituals and sacrifices involve human body parts cut out of victims of strange disappearances and kidnapping. The suppliers of the human body parts are syndicates who network and orchestrate sudden magical disappearances of people in the countries he visits for the satanic powers. He is covenanted through gory incisions on his body to various altars and the trysting places of demons which are specified by name. He is allowed to choose what type of “power” he wants as there are conditions tied to each kind of demonic transaction. He ends up loaded with charms and fetishes that he must carry with him back to his base in South Africa. He is taught how to set up an altar on his own premises in replication of the altars he is covenanted to with the help of the witches and wizards and the priests and priestesses of his secret spiritual dalliance in different parts of Africa.

In the relevant sections of the book containing these accounts, the narrator is first-person but is curiously distanced from the narration. The narrative lens is more on the ritual scenes and experiences about which the protagonist only refers to his curiosity, fear, embarrassment or shame in some instances of experience. The biblical references in the book are few and, predictably, there is little incisive theological analysis of the events and the experiences recounted. From time to time, the narrative materials give out as items of the prose romance fiction reminiscent of Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm Wine Drinkard* which follows an allegorical pattern and a quest motif. Characterisation tends to be symbolic of the forces of light or those of darkness. There is a search for something or someone. In the *Church Mafia* the search by the protagonist and narrator is for “power”, the open sesame to fame, influence and fabulous wealth associated increasingly with certain categories of “men of God”. In *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, it is a quest by the protagonist and narrator to recover a faithful servant from the land of the dead. *Church Mafia* is a life story while *The Palm Wine Drinkard* is fiction; but curiously both of them are pretty much similar in the presentation of material.

As it happens, the materials of spiritual devilry contained in both works are anthropological and extant. They are biblical as well: “But they mingled with the Gentiles and learned their works; they served their idols, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood. Thus they were defiled by their own works, and played the harlot by their own deeds” (Psalm 106:35-39). Characterisation in *Church Mafia* is inappropriately flat or wooden; an allegorical style would appear rather unsuitable for a biographical work that is not fiction. For instance, John Bunyan’s acclaimed *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) is a successful allegory in part because it is fictional. *Church Mafia’s* protagonist sets aside all that he has learnt in Bible School so as to be successful in ministry: “As I proceeded with work in the Soshanguve township, some of the good tips and advice I received from the Bible School started to fade away as I concentrated too much on building the new congregation and retaining church members, rather than on attending intercession gatherings, pastoral seminars and training” (Ramabulana 2018:28). The characterisation lacks depth.

The materials of charms or muti and the cultural rituals of human and animal sacrifices are regular fare in African prose fiction. The material type is contained in glorified form in folklore, in poetry, in drama, in prose fiction. The stuff of demon gods and goddesses feeds the variety of prose literature described as magic realist and the popular film genre known as “African magic”

issuing mostly from southern Nigeria. Experimentation is partly the reason for using such materials in African writing, but it is undertaken mainly as a strategy of Africanization of the literature of the African continent. The literature of Africa earlier criticized as being rather Eurocentric resorts to adopting indigenous African materials as a way of denouncing Judeo-Christian matter. The counter discourse thus foregrounds and glorifies in its narratology what the Bible and Christianity condemn in clear terms: “They joined themselves also to Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices made to the dead. Thus, they provoked Him to anger with their deeds, and the plague broke out among them” (Psalm 106:28-29). The bulk of African literature submits to a different kind of spirituality whose allegiance is to one or another of the numerous local deities depending on the geopolitical setting.

### Discursive Slippage

Discursive slippage is used here to describe a misalliance between any two elements, or subjects, in a speech situation. The concept is based on the conventional assumption that a piece of literature is a form of discourse, a type of speech. A suitable narrative strategy is expected to establish a credible level of orientation between narrator and assumed reader for effectiveness of communication. A slippage or a lack of impactful impression on audience by speaker occurs when this does not happen. Therefore, the need arises to problematize this kind of discrepancy or discursive misalignment.

#### *Who is Church Mafia written for?*

A student of cultural anthropology not already familiar with African literature would find the work interesting because it divulges in some detail certain aspects of ritual sacrifice and the occult world of witchcraft and sorcery. It also attempts a description of the infiltration into the church – as contrasted with Christianity – of secret cults in a manner more blatant than the phenomenon in African church history referred to as Ethiopianism. As with African literature, the goal of Ethiopianism was to Africanize Christian worship by bringing in through the African clergy some cultural elements that violated biblical standards believed in some respects to be alien to the African cultural experience. For example, membership of the Ogboni Fraternity (a secret cult in Yoruba land connected to sorcery) was deemed acceptable by the part of the clergy favourable to Ethiopianism while others thought otherwise. The distinction between church and Christianity may not be of much importance to the cultural anthropologist or a literary critic, but it will be for a reader who is Christian.

As indicated earlier, “church” refers to the community of believers in Christ who have Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour and live in obedience to biblical precepts and standards. There is the basic injunction according to the Gospel of John (3:3,16): “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’.” Also, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”. A Christian reader of *Church Mafia* will keep in view the difference between church and Christianity and in doing so will separate between a Bible believing church and all the others – with the latter group continuing to swell in number and variety. Jesus predicted this development when He was here in the flesh. He said: “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24).

This means that there is the true Church and there are the false “churches” that borrow the name “church” to serve the devil and perpetrate evil. It also means that there are the elect who are so because of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ at His crucifixion. The elect are led by servants of God who are guided by the word of God and by the Holy Spirit. As for the false church, its sole goal is to deceive the populace, including the Christians who are at heart genuine followers of Jesus

Christ. As Jesus indicated in the quoted passage, the diabolical mission of the kingdom of darkness thrives on deceit, and about its mission Jesus says: “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). After the protagonist in *Church Mafia* has obtained the “powers” he is searching for, he is instructed by his handler and mentor in the quest for power on how practically to lay out his deception of the people: “Khatha-Khatha, if it is possible, please rename your church a miracle centre because the word miracle is selling nowadays. South Africans love miracles and if you say your church is a miracle centre for all nations, it will imply that your market will comprise of all nations and races” (Ramabulana 2018:127). This is a mercenary ploy, a mercantile strategy decried by Scripture: “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame – who set their mind on earthly things” (Philippians 3:18-19)

Apart from the conspicuous living and flamboyant lifestyle displayed by their leaders, which they admire and praise, the adherents of the counterfeit churches are fed a diet of false doctrines and teachings: “Prophet Jeremiah made it clear to me when he said many things would change drastically; more so my preaching and practice in my ministry. He told me that my teachings and preaching should focus more on prosperity, wealth, money, miracles and healing because that was what the majority of people were looking for in churches today” (Ramabulana 2018:112). Neither the prophets, prophetesses who head these churches nor their teeming followers have the correct concept of the word “church”. The tendency to overgeneralize by lumping all denominations and fellowships in a single conceptual basket is not dissimilar to the understanding by non-Christians (or unbelievers) of the word “church”: “Prophet Jeremiah also said ‘The church has moved away from being a community upliftment initiative programme into a mini shopping centre where prophets and pastors are selling spiritual materials such as the so-called holy oil and holy waters. You should create a consultation office if you want to start making a lot of cash fast’” (Ramabulana 2018:112-113).

The observation of Prophet Jeremiah about church is incorrect of the Bible believing church and is only applicable to the counterfeit version of church. But this point is not always readily obvious. In part, it explains why the thrust of the narrative tends to be more cultural and spiritist than it is appositely spiritual. The subject-matter and narrative fall under cultural anthropology; the style is picaresque and follows the quest motif with an allegorical ambience. The wooden characters are unengaging because characterisation leaves out much that should have been given in-depth attention. Charles Dickens, shown by critics to be adept at using flat characters to good effect, does so in the appropriate domain of fictional narrative. Ramabulana’s work is not fiction but a life story. A stereotype should be out of place in a biographical piece or testimony seeking to set the records straight out of a personal life-transforming experience. The *prima facie* concern of the narrative is a topical and controversial one; the central issue taken up is also in an important way about subtle forms of endangerment.

First, the Bible says to permit no sorcerer or witch to live (Exodus 22:18-20) and it is the same sentence of (second) death or hellfire on all who engage in witchcraft or sorcery who fail to repent, whatever the guise or setting of involvement: “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). Second, because so much about the false church is built on deception, ignorant victims of the wiles of (magical) healings and deliverances stand the risk of premature death. The protagonist is given advice on how to do a

public poster advertisement of his demonically sourced wares: “You can just replace Dr Yaya with your occult name and the name of your ministry, but please make sure that you include the Power of Jesus at the bottom of the poster” (Ramabulana 2018:116). Patrons of these kinds of healing and deliverance meetings and wares are often encouraged to act contrary to medical advice at grave cost to themselves. Third, both the prophet or prophetess or acolyte and patron of the false church come under satanic ban and oppression, the former by blood covenant, the latter by association.

The issue is controversial because the general public is unable and, many times, also unwilling to accept that there is such a thing as a false church despite that the Bible reiterates the possibility of there being one: “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience smeared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:1-2). The false church seldom refers in depth to Scripture in its teaching and other sessions, if at all, only making oblique references to the name of Jesus while focusing more on the person of the presiding apostle, bishop, prophet, or prophetess, and on general topics relating to miracles, healing, deliverance, fame, and money-making. Many of the patrons of the false church tend, in the first place, also to be favourably disposed to consulting sangomas or witchdoctors in their own right and would not consider visits to a false prophet or prophetess an anomaly. In many parts of Africa traditional practices remain a significant way of life that shades easily into Christianity which arrived with European colonialism. Therefore, what the false church is doing now is capitalising on the customary respect that the witchdoctor enjoys as well as the growing fame of Jesus Christ brought about by the Christian faith in Africa. In the event, the false church is quick to protest victimisation by the real church which it accuses of a holier-than-thou attitude towards it. The grouse is based on lack of acknowledgement and sometimes the denial to it of membership of certain respectable umbrella bodies, such as the Pentecostal Fellowship.

For its part, the church of true believers is seldom judgemental in these issues and only takes a principled stand based on Scripture for the avoidance of contention: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15-16). Also, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). Usually, the false church is characterised by all kinds of scandals of immorality, deception, and thievery. The self-styled bishops, prophets, prophetesses, etc., of the false church are in practice no different from regular con artists in their dealings with the clientele. They are shamans who commit acts of infidelity, they get themselves involved in fornication and adultery with their members and others, they extort and blackmail the confused and helpless, they intimidate and abuse their fearful followers, and they get regularly embroiled in legal battles over such matters as money, marriage, wife battering, separation, divorce, children’s custody, they cross swords over movable and immovable assets.

In reality, there is no perfect church. The true church is not without its own faults, as illustrated by Jesus’ letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation chapters 2 and 3. But it does not follow that church is church. There is a huge spiritual divide between the true church and the false church. Referring to His second coming, Jesus says of Himself: “And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left” (Matthew 25:33). For now, the ability to tell the true church apart from the false church is hinged on familiarity with the word of God which is found in the Holy Bible. This is the reason the true church expends a lot of time and resources on teaching the word of

God and encouraging its members to own a copy of the Bible and read it regularly to be able to know God's will for humans. For its part, the false church also works hard to place its followers' focus on the personality of the founder of the given ministry and, as already mentioned, on carnal issues that are peripheral to those of personal salvation through belief in Jesus Christ and the requirement to adopt a holy lifestyle of complete obedience to the word of God on obtaining salvation. The salvation in point is unconditional divine mercy and forgiveness of sins by God. The erasure of sin is effected by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross of Calvary, so the true church gives attention wholly to the Saviour: "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

The false church is headed by the devil. It is the reason that it side-lines the Bible in its ministrations. Dr Yaya, the narrator's adviser and facilitator, relates his own experience: "Most South Africans I have helped are attracted by the following things: bringing back loved ones, how to get employed and pass interviews, how to grow and protect your business, and how to receive miracle money" (Ramabulana 2018:115). As a publicity stunt, "miracles" are staged, meaning, they are rehearsed in advance and enacted, as though real, by the acolytes, groomed for this purpose, in "crusades". The goal is to reinforce the magical displays put up to attract more members. The false church has proliferated in recent times to exploit the gullibility and spiritual yearnings of the people. However, the ultimate aim of the devil is to tarnish the image of the church and fulfil its mission to steal, to kill, and to destroy (John 10:10).

### **Editorial Flourish**

An editorial flourish would not be out of place to improve the overall aesthetic and thematic appeal of the work. It should have the author add a deeper analysis of his spiritual experiences out of consideration for the interest of the Christian reader. In the present edition of the book, the spiritual crises and the deep emotional responses experienced by the protagonist in their wake receive scant analytic reflection. As earlier explained, the African traditional material contained in *Church Mafia* is regular menu and a familiar item in the turf of cultural anthropology, sociology, African literature and film. Its shock-value is lost coming unmediated into an extended testimony and the eddying currents also denude the story of suspense and surprise. Psychologising a bit more will be an enabling agent of defamiliarization of material. The material needs to be galvanized in a specific way to generate fresh shock or sensational appeal. Moreover, the contents of the book do not seem to constitute "an untold African narrative". Also, to the point, the assertion on the book's cover that reads "captured by secret powers" is misleading: the protagonist makes clear how and why he willingly submitted himself to his sponsors and handlers in the kingdom of darkness. He initiated most of the numerous visits to the covens of witches and the hideouts of warlocks in his "search for power". His consent was sought and obtained before he entered into the blood pacts and covenants with the devil. He was told and he acquiesced to the conditions and consequences of the many rituals he underwent in his quest for power. Virtually all that he experienced in his adult life was at his own volition, the motivation apart. He willingly agreed to live a ministerial life of grand deception as a prophet and "man of God". He deceived his followers without qualms for a long time before his arrest by the police.

How the protagonist and narrator got converted and restored to Jesus Christ should be given paramount attention in a book of this sort. This way, characterisation will come out more robustly in the narrative; given psychological depth, the characters will be more rounded, because the passions of the mind, a mainstay of Christian literature, are more fully explored. It is the kind of effect that



Doreen Irving achieves in her bestselling unputdownable book titled *From witchcraft to Christ*: it is an exciting account of her extraordinary saga under the power of darkness and her subsequent miraculous conversion to the kingdom of the beloved and saints of God (Ephesians 1:13-14). Her extended testimony is detailed and vivid of her involvement with Satanism and witchcraft where she receives the powers of conjuration, clairvoyance, astral travel, levitation, etc. She has an encounter with the gospel, and she receives Jesus Christ into her life. She makes Him her Lord and Saviour and everything changes (2 Corinthians 5:17). After her salvation, she discovers that the “powers” she had been operating were from evil spirits that had taken residence in her. For example, if she needed to exercise the power of divination, a demon of divination resident in her would spring into action to carry out the sign and wonder (Acts 16:16). On giving her life to Jesus, the switch in allegiance from the devil caused the demons to rage against her and torment her to a point of near suicide. This was how she learnt that the demonic activity had been mostly launched from within her soul. She submits to deliverance sessions during which the power in the name of Jesus is deployed to expel the evil spirits from her life. She describes the trauma and drama of the battle for her soul in gripping detail of suspense and surprise. Her life is restored to normality and spiritual newness (2 Corinthians 5:17) and she is able to run a successful Christian ministry (Mark 16:15-18). All of this reaches the reader in narrative twists and turns.

A deeper probing of the mind of the protagonist and narrator in *Church Mafia* will move the narrative more decisively into the genre of Christian literature, and, because of this, a more fitting title than “church mafia” must be found for the book. As has been explained, there is no such thing as a church mafia in reality, because a sense of church that is run by a ruling cabal is untenable. What there is, as has been demonstrated, is an ontological opposition between the true church and a false church: in which equation “false church” is equal to “nonchurch” or “no church” or “not church”. It follows that the paratext “church mafia” is a feature of not-church. The inclusion of “church” and “Jesus” by nonchurch in their naming and advertisement or publicity is, as disclosed in the narrative, a mere commercial gimmick in the setup and processes of grand deception. As such, the concept of “church mafia” is irrelevant to the true church. The power of the Holy Spirit administers the true church without any conflict whatsoever with the word of God, while the false church is presided over by the devil with the aim to propagate and promote such doctrines and behaviour that run counter to the purpose and counsel of the Lord. These points will come out more clearly if given prominence in a self-reflexive probing of material and narration of experience. The suggestions must be accorded greater thoughtful attention and fleshed out in subsequent editions of the book to give vim to its largely unmediated potential. Otherwise, the “untold African narrative” remains pretty much untold. In sum, the editorial flourish envisaged amounts to an invitation to a major revision of author narrative strategy.

### **Conclusion**

*Church Mafia* recounts the author’s experiences as a Christian. But it gives scant attention to a central issue of Christianity, that of spiritual conversion, that of a personal salvation experience which transforms a person from the status of sinner to that of saint and beneficiary of Jesus Christ’s sacrificial gift to humankind involving His crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection (Colossians 1:13-14). The author’s conception of “church” is faulty because of inability to distinguish between the real church and the false church that Jesus said would characterise the world’s endtime condition. The term “church mafia” is a misnomer and irrelevant to the subject-matter of the book. The bulk of the book’s content is spirit material of the world of magic realist fiction and film the type dubbed

“African magic”. The clichéd material therefore robs the book of the strategies of surprise and suspense, among other significant narrative credibility elements of a life story. The author should be able to correct the deficiency in subsequent editions if the narrator explores the spiritual experience from a more in-depth biblical perspective.

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