

THE FUNCTION OF ALLEGORY IN NIGERIAN DRAMA: A STUDY OF AGORO'S *THE PRISON PLAYS*

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ABSTRACT

Nigerian drama, apart from mirroring the society, recording events, reinterpreting history, portraying the communion between human beings and cosmic powers, has the vital task of correcting the society through emphasis on creating awareness on different social issues, and allegory which is a literary technique functions as the instrument used in the expression and discussion of these social issues as direct finger pointing and name-calling, might lead to backlashes and even court cases. This is why the content in Nigerian drama is always holding double barrel meaning due to the plural function of allegory in Nigerian drama. Already, studies on the discus of allegory and its functions in Nigerian drama abound, but most of these studies do not acknowledge the function and role of allegory in Saviour Nathan A. Agoro's *The Prison Plays*, and nothing is said about them in the discus of allegory in Nigerian drama. It is on this premise, that the study is focused on revealing the function of allegory in the above dramas; how these dramas are used as evangelical tools, and also as a medium through which societal ills are highlighted and corrected. The study through its literary and textual analytic approach, defines allegory and shows that allegory in drama is a potent force or weapon with which to suggest a decent and high level of morals in our society, and plays like *The Prison Plays* through the functional role of allegory are tools for the communication of the need for evangelism and salvation from the power of sin and wickedness. The study recommends that Nigerian playwrights should continue to use this literary tool (allegory) to make their society better by discussing social ills and proffering solution to them, as allegory function as an effective weapon for social reforms.



INTRODUCTION

Many scholars and critics have attempted to distinguish Nigerian drama from dramas of other nations in the world, especially as regards its allegorical nature. This setting apart is necessary because apart from mirroring the society, recording events, reinterpreting history, portraying the communion between human beings and the cosmic powers, Nigerian drama has and still continues to play a vital role in correcting the society through emphasis on creating awareness on different social issues. Since drama is known to imitate action or men in action, Nigerian drama can as well effect social change that is related to the people's socio-cultural reality and the problems within their environment. Thus, Nigerian drama continues to be appealing, didactic and culturally relevant. Speaking about Nigerian

drama, Yemi Ogunbiyi (1981) states that "Nigerian drama originated with the Nigerian himself, embodying his first pre-occupations, his first struggles, successes, set-backs and all" (3) and this embodiment is revealed and seen in the content and discuss set forth in these different Nigerian plays. This view is buttressed in the statement that "Nigerian drama lie in the numerous traditional, religious and functional rituals to be found in practically every Nigerian society" (Ogunbiyi 1981; 4), and without these different Nigerian social feature and characteristics, the uniqueness found in Nigerian drama would not have a place.

Saviour Nathan Agoro (2004) presents Ola Rotimi's classification of Nigerian drama by stating that Nigerian drama is categorized into four divisions namely "ritual drama, traditional drama, folk

opera, and Nigerian drama in English" (30). This division is based on the different areas in Nigerian society where people tend to find focus and derive content from in their writing of Nigerian drama, and all of these different divisions still reflect Nigeria. It is this reflective nature of Nigerian drama that makes Stephen Inegbe (2003) to state that:

In Nigeria, drama is a reflection of life. Right from the pre-colonial, pre-literate days, it has been in existence and it reflected in the people's rituals, mythology and forms of social engagements. The typical Nigerian is bound to frown on drama as an entertainment because, to him, it transcends that. It is a medium through which he reaches out to, or better still, courts the supernatural world and certain enigmatic development or phenomena of the life in order to transcend them (1).

It is obvious, one could agree with Inegbe because Nigerians have seen drama as a reflection of their society, and as an instrument of advocating and effecting a positive change within the society. It is also true that Nigerian drama does not exist for mere aesthetic purpose alone, it performs diverse functions-religious, socio-political, entertainment. It is this same view and stand in terms of perspective that makes Seiza Mike (2002) to see Nigerian drama as:

An instrument of group dynamics and mass psychology that creates a spontaneous interaction among the audience. Thus, it can be employed as an ideological tool to reinforce and legitimize the values of the dominant group in the Nigerian society (1).

This assertion is, without doubt is a useful one, that is, as a conceptual framework, providing us with a neat structure to operate from. As regards the origin of Nigerian drama, it is still argued and sad that very little is known that is reliable and precise, for the simple reason that no comprehensive study has been made so far of the subject either by the old government sociologists or by the new drama experts of today. This is why it

is still argued and stated that Nigerian drama did not begin at the University of Ibadan, the root goes beyond there. This is because, even if Nigerian drama might have formally began in a particular location like the University of Ibadan, it originally began with the Nigerian society; the rich contents of Nigerian drama are not derived from sources that are far from the Nigerian socio, political, religious and even cultural setting; there sources and content are in most cases derived from, and focused on the Nigerian socio, politic, economic, cultural, religious and other happenings. Despite this fact, the medium and channel through which the expression and discussion of these contents in drama is achieved, is not always direct; as direct finger pointing and name-calling, might lead to backlashes and even court cases. This is why the content in Nigerian drama is always holding double barrel meaning through the use of allegory, and Nigerian dramatists are well gifted in the use of this literary technique.

Despite the forgoing, many still do not acknowledge this allegorical nature and function of Nigerian drama and its content, especially in the *The Prison Plays* of Saviour Nathan A. Agoro. It is on this premise, that the study is focused on establishing a concrete fact on the function and allegorical nature of the above dramas, and how they are used as evangelical tools, and also as a medium through which societal ills are highlighted. By this, the study aims to reveal how drama is, and can be used as a veritable tool for religious sanitization and promotion of high moral standards in the society and also to identify specifically the theme of evangelism in the select Agoro's works. Therefore, the discus of this paper encompasses the identification of the effect of evangelism and the need for salvation with specific reference to the select text. The allegorical style peculiar to these plays is also examined, and the way they are used to explore the style of compressionism. That is, the characters are locked up in a prison cell, thereby impinging on their freedom. As regards significance, this paper help students, scholars and academics who are both producers and consumers of knowledge in and outside the orbit of the literary (drama) arts, to

appreciate the works of S. N. Agoro. They will find this essay useful because of the integrated approach that is carefully used in its discuss; providing enlightenment on the need for salvation and eradication of corruption in the society, and how drama serves as a tool and medium of achieving the above aim. This research is subjected to the literary approach which investigates and deduce facts relying mainly on existing literatures with the primary literature, and source of primary data been the select plays. On the basis that this study falls within the circuit of dramatic literature, a critical method of textual evaluation and analysis is adopted, and the select texts are subjected to critical textual evaluation and analysis.

ALLEGORY AS A LITERARY CONCEPT

A concept central to this study is allegory. The nature of allegory is very significant in drama generally, and is more pronounced in Nigerian drama. Allegory is said to be the use of abstract figures to personify virtues and vices struggling for the possession of the soul of man. A. S. Hornby (2000) defines allegory as "a story, play, picture, etc. in which each character or event is a symbol representing an idea or a quality, such as truth, evil, death, etc." (28). Allegory is also a medium of social criticism, which means a systematic presentation of social ills with the ultimate aim of correcting them. The playwright uses this literary concept and techniques by picking out these ills and presents them, using the stage as a medium to reach the audience. Allegory can also mean a figurative illustration of truths or generalizations about human conduct or experience in a narrative or description by the use of symbolic fictional figures and actions which resemble the subject's properties and circumstances but also represents something else. In the view of Barbara E. Kurtz (1990):

Allegory is only a mirror which translates what is through what is not; and all its beauty consists in its capacity to bring out so artfully the copy's resemblance to the original that the onlooker will think that he is simultaneously seeing both (236).

Barbara's position of allegory validates our

judgment of allegory as a double barrel gun used in passing across two or more messages at the same time. Allegory as regards content in drama or literature according to Moffat Moyo (2010) refers to a story that can be read on two different levels. What this means is that characters or events in an allegory stand for something else. The writer uses these characters and events to convey another message which we may term as a moral (117). By this, in an allegorical drama or literature, characters and events are built to mean something totally different, and to tell a story/pass across a message that is totally different from the one seen at the surface. This literary concept is used to conceal so many things from the reader, and also to avoid spoon feeding the readers, and allowing them to skim beyond the surface, and dig deep to figure out the subterranean meaning contained in the literature. As a literary device, allegory is a good tool for religious sanitization, political discuss and criticism, social criticism (especially if well handled). It serves as a guide for cultural promotion, religious endorsement; civil life and many others.

Laraine C. O'Connell (1988) explains that allegory can still be identified as "speaking in other terms" it is an oblique way of writing that presents one thing in words and another in meaning. We have allegory when the events of a narrative obviously and continuously refer to another simultaneous structure of events or ideas, or natural phenomena and these two might even appear as contrasting. Allegory says one thing and means another. It is a set of things in narrative sequence standing for a different set of things in temporal or para-temporal sequences; in short, it is a complex narrative metaphor (p. 7). This explanation reveals the double functionality of allegory in drama and literature, it shows how much as a literary techniques, allegory serves and functions as a tool that indirectly points to issue and discusses them. Allegory is also considered as a term denoting a technique of literature, which in turn gives rise to a method of criticism. It is a technique of fiction-writing. Allegory has remained an important mode employed successfully by various modern authors. Its value is proved by the fact that it has survived

centuries of use, abuse and criticism (O'Connell 1988; 8). This reveals clearly that as a literary term and techniques, allegory has come a very long way in the society, in the writing and also in the discuss of drama. Allegory washes the hearts of people in society, and at the same time, proffers positive changes to that particular problem, by way of showing it through drama.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE PRISON PLAYS

The Prison Plays are Saviour Nathan A. Agoro's dual plays published first in 2002. The plays are built in a part one and two sequence with *The Catalyst* serving as part one, and *Another Chance*, as part two/the continuation of the other.

***The Catalyst* – Synopsis**

As the story unfolds, Dada and Akpan, two criminals who are serving jail term, are enumerating their vices, and the crimes that brought them to prison. Akpan who is condemned to death for robbery and murder is remorseful, while Dada who is serving a seven-year jail term for raping a frigid old woman of his mother's age is not remorseful because he feels his lot is better than Akpan's. Dada in spite of all the vices he has committed and his present state of obscurity makes jest of Akpan as he forgets that he is not better than Akpan in spite of his condemnation to be shot in public for his crimes. Dada believes that there is hope because he will only serve seven years in jail and thereafter, he will be rehabilitated, while Akpan does not have hope since he is condemned to death. Dada remains resolute and full of optimism that he will be released from the cell after seven years and never for once feels any form of remorse for his evil acts, rather he continues to make jest of Akpan the condemned murderer.

After returning from their daily labour, Dada is embittered about a situation he encountered during his time of labour that day. He lucidly explains his experience with his former girlfriend that has turned to be Christian. Dada is disappointed because she broke off with him, because of her new faith in Jesus Christ and she is still standing firm. Dada's story provokes Akpan to

mock him and suggest that Dada turns to God after his seven troublesome years in the prison, in order to win back Matilda. Dada feels bad and disappointed because the two of them cannot marry because he has become an ex-conflict. Despite this, Dada is quite hopeful as Matilda promised to be praying for him to be converted, but he is pessimistic that before he comes out of prison she would have gotten married.

Akpan in trying to prevent Dada from emotional stress, urges him to forget about his relationship with Matilda as it will cause more damages in his life before he leaves this prison. Amidst their discussion and consolation, Aneze, a born again child of God, is thrown into their cell for preaching in the public. As he later explains, he contravenes Decree 56 of the government policy. Aneze's imprisonment gives Akpan and Dada worries as they think he is imprisoned because he is a criminal, but they become speechless and do not appreciate the fact that, Aneze is sent to jail for preaching the gospel of Christ in public.

Despite hearing the story narrated by Aneze, Dada expresses disappointment, that if really Aneze is a born again Christian, he is a disgrace to God. Akpan on the other hand calls him a hypocrite, insisting that nothing on earth should make a Christian, who has given total allegiance to Jesus Christ, come into a prison cell, except maybe to pray for prisoners. In spite of their negative attitude towards him, Aneze never relents in telling them the gospel truth. He keeps on preaching to them about the existence of hell and heaven and the need for them to repent, to avoid the agony of hell. As a child of God, Aneze is very optimistic that in no distant time he will be released from the cell through God's intervention.

After hearing long sermons from Aneze, Dada and Akpan shift the acceptance of God's word to each other. Aneze continues to exercise his faith, and despite the cruelty meted on him, he remains resolute in his faith and full of optimism that he will be released from the prison. He continues to pray fervently to God for His intervention. Due to his continually preaching and prayers, Akpan

becomes convicted and gives his life to Jesus Christ; accepting him as his Lord and personal Saviour. Dada on the other hand becomes more antagonistic and unrepentant. At the end, due to Aneze and Akpan's consistent prayer of mercy and pardon, the sitting government of Zamfara is overthrown and Aneze and Akpan are given state pardon by the new government. Dada could not find freedom because of his lack of faith in God, so he confronts reality when Akpan because of his new allegiance to Christ is released with Aneze despite the sentence against his life by the government. At the point of Akpan's release, Dada becomes sorrowful and repents, begging for mercy. But it is too late as he looks at Akpan and Aneze being released from prison, leaving him alone in the cell.

The Catalyst – the Structure

Structurally, the play has only one act, made up of five scenes and a single setting a prison cell. The scenes take place in the prison cell, thereby impinging the freedom of characters. The characters are cashiered in a world of isolation and under a full-blown absurdist situation; they are locked up, thus their freedom impinged restricted to a world of torture. These techniques of compressionism are all vital in the passing on of the story in the play, and this why Ben Binebai holds and states that “it is evident that the compressionist technique, which is a known abode of the absurdist and existentialist world of theatricality is adopted with realistic paraphernalia to narrate a realistic story” (1.)

The Catalyst – Themes

The Catalyst has two striking themes and they are; evangelism and the need for salvation. Though, there are other sub-themes, we are paying more attention to these two. S.N. Agoro consciously places these two significant themes in *The Catalyst* to form his main point of discussion. The playwright sees the need for effective evangelism, thus he is suggesting to the Christians who are called by God to carry out the great commission God has given to them no matter the risk and constraints. The playwright actually sees souls perishing and since it is not the will of God for them

to perish but to have eternal live, it is very important that Christians go to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to these dying souls. It is also the belief of the playwright that through evangelism, those that are condemned to death by man, can gain salvation and thereafter be delivered. It is evident that the playwright seeks to enjoin believer to rise up to their responsibility of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. As they have received it freely, they should freely give it out not minding the persecution they might face in the course of doing this great work. Agoro also reminds Christians to see souls as more important than earthly pleasures.

On the other hand, the need for salvation is vividly portrayed in *The Catalyst*. Here the playwright gives a message to believers that, many unbelievers are eager in their minds to accept Jesus Christ but because the flesh is controlling them, they are not able to come out from those evil ways, except believers confront them with the word of God. The fact becomes clear that in spite of the gravity of offense committed, when one is receptive to the word of God, there is no doubt that such guilt will be pardoned and that individual will automatically turn to be a new creature regardless of the sins previously committed.

These two themes are striking in *The Catalyst*. The playwright sees a great problem in the society; the corrupt nature of the society and graciously seeks for ways to address these inimical acts using the word of God and by enjoining believers to preach the word of God, using every opportunity they see as means to correct and make the society better.

The Catalyst – Characterization

Characters are the main wheels through which dramatic themes and contents are portrayed and wheeled to the reader, and no dramatic discuss will be complete without the mention of the characters. In the case of *The Catalyst*, the use of characters as objects of allegory pervades the entire play. The playwright presents the characters in the way it suits his taste, for the proper communication of his message of evangelism and the need for salvation. *The Catalyst* has five visible

and functional characters who are Akpan, Dada, Aneze, Udensi and Major Jaja.

Akpan

He is a condemned murderer facing death sentence. Interrogation and deductions from the play reveal that Akpan, together with Dada are die – hard criminals who think they have seen most of what people call 'heaven' and 'hell'. Akpan says, since he is regarded as nothing in the society, he will do everything within his reach to earn a living not minding the consequences that will befall him. This drives him to live a criminal life of robbery and murder. He is without hope. He feels dejected, so he has no regard for the lives of other people. But through the preaching of the Aneze in the prison, he receives the word of God, repents and is given state pardon and released through divine intervention.

Dada

He is a rapist serving a seven-year jail term for having sex with a frigid old woman of his mother's age. Dada is portrayed as someone who always finds delight in committing evil. He is resolute and full of optimism that he will be released in spite of the crime he has committed. Apart from his crime, Dada is also a hardened criminal who contends against the Christian dogma. This is evident in his statement and actions. Dada misses the chance of accepting Jesus Christ because of his unbelief. He does not find any atom of truth in what Aneze preaches; rather he states that they are figments of man's imagination geared towards frightening them to turn from their evil ways. Everything becomes clear to him when he sees Akpan and Aneze released through divine intervention, and he remains to continue his jail term, he cries and repents on the spot, but it is too late.

Aneze

He is a prisoner of conscience, jailed for preaching in public against Decree 56. His role in the play is very significant as it helps to advance the plot. Aneze is portrayed as a preacher of the Gospel, who has sold his entirety for the work and furtherance of the gospel of Christ. Aneze's character suggests a kind of believer who is ready

to die for the gospel, because his hope and goal is far beyond here on earth. He always finds delight and pleasure in preaching the gospel of Christ, so he uses every available opportunity to preach the good tidings to the people. As far as Aneze is concerned, there is nothing worth emulating in the world because, he feels, the whole earth is made up of only perishable things, and corruptible seeds. So, what one should do is to prepare one's self, get ready for that glorious home that is prepared with good things and incorruptible seed. Aneze's character is quite challenging to Christians today as he can be likened to the bible character of Daniel whom God came through for in the lion's den.

Udensi

He is a prison warder. He is portrayed as a persecutor of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is evident in the way he treats Aneze. Apparently, Udensi does not believe in God and the Christian practice and what he does is to maltreat Aneze, claiming to have been sent by his superior officer. The way he maltreats Aneze attests to the fact that, he is against the people of God. However, because of his wickedness and cruelty, Dada and Akpan team up to beat him. There is no disputing the fact that Udensi is a callous, cruel and unsympathetic as a warder.

Major Jaja

He is a young Army officer. His functions in the play are quite explicit and very significant. Major Jaja only appears in one scene to announce the incredible release of Akpan and Aneze. Thereafter he is not seen again in the play. He can be likened to the angel that God sent to open the prison gate for Paul and Silas in the prison.

Another Chance – Plot

As a continuation of *The Catalyst*, *Another Chance* also shares the same setting and plot. *Another Chance* tells the continuous story of “the salvaging power of God through evangelism.” It opens in the same cell where Dada who is now a converted prisoner is already joined by other prisoners; Zama and Bonta. As the dramatic action unfolds, Zama and Bonta just like the opening scene of *The*

Catalyst, recounts the crimes they have committed and how they got to prison. Bonta is guilty of rape like Dada, but sees nothing wrong with his crime. Instead of feeling remorseful, he braces up and resolves to commit more crimes if the opportunity arises. Bonta is pessimistic because, he feels there is no one to look up to. His hope and everything that has to do with his success in life is shattered. Bonta is jailed for raping a ten-year old girl because of his inability to control his sexual urge. Zama narrates how he is imprisoned for robbery and murder. Zema feels no remorse, and has no human sympathy for mankind. He blames the Police for his imprisonment, and also accuses the D.P.O for betrayal of trust as he was a partner in their robbery, and always had a fair share of the stolen goods. Without mincing words, he narrates how they operated in different occasions and never got caught, and ends his narration with how he was later caught and thrown in prison. Zama is not sorry for the evil he has committed because of his hopeless and helpless situation. The two inmates do not see any reason for accepting Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

Dada the now converted criminal becomes a committed Christian. His underlying love for Christ makes him earn the nick-name "Pastor" as Zema and Bonta mock him. Dada turns to be Aneze of *The Catalyst* in *Another Chance*. Having experienced a lot, he uses his past experience as a point of emphasis to the two criminals, and Udensi the warder who becomes prisoner. Dada is anxious to grab the second chance, so he strives hard to refuse anything from deterring him from utilizing the second chance graciously provided by God. Dada sees the other prisoners as people who are in great need, so he makes the most of every opportunity to proclaim the good tidings to them in order to change their life for the better. But Dada's preaching to Bonta and Zema is a mere waste of time. To them, Dada is only fooling himself with religious philosophies that will do him no good rather than extenuating his personality. It becomes obvious that in spite of their defiant response to the word of God, Dada never relents in doing his primary duty of reconciling the sinners to God as a called believer. Udensi the warder-

turned-prisoner finds it difficult to believe the word of God because of the injustice done to him, he feels dejected.

He thinks if God really exists, He would not have allowed this injustice come near him. Dada cautions Udensi to accept the injustice in good faith rather than blame God. Dada persistently preaches the gospel and encourages him. Though Bonta and Zema refuse to believe the gospel of Christ, Udensi sees truth in the word, after hearing a voice from God in his dream and he becomes a born again Christian. Consequent upon his prompt acceptance of the word, the heavens are provoked and response comes almost immediately. Both Dada and Udensi are released and set free because of their faith in Jesus Christ. The fact is obvious that, God who does his things in mysterious ways uses Akpan the then condemned criminal of *The Catalyst* as the messiah to release them.

Another Chance – the Structure

Another Chance like *The Catalyst* has one act, which has six sequential scenes. The action and the structural strength of the play lie within its single setting of the prison cell. The setting restricts the freedom of the characters. This goes to underscore the fact that, the characters are cashiered in an isolated world as they are locked up in the prison cell.

Another Chance – Theme

Apart from the striking theme of evangelism and the need for salvation that also present itself in this second part of *The Prison Plays*, the theme of God's Deliverance Power through Evangelism is also strongly present in the play. It is obvious that the playwright notes a significant need in the Christian ministry and the society at large. He sees the society as corrupt, decadent with all forms of criminal activities and outrageous violation of human rights and the need for religious sanitization; this he does through the demonstration of God's Deliverance Power through Evangelism, and the need for salvation, which denotes that the word of God alone can bring solution to the dying and decaying society. The fact is that, Agoro presents this significant

theme in a manner that creates easy accessibility to the work. The playwright envisages what might likely happen in the Christian ministry, if they do not wake up from their slumber and take up their responsibilities as believers. He enlightens Christians to hide their earthly wisdom and allow God to work in those hard situations that may seem and appear as threats to their faith. Agoro through this theme enjoins believers to see the need for evangelism as a duty and a priority of every believer.

Another Chance – Characterization

Just like *The Catalyst*, the use of characters as object of allegory also pervades the play. *Another Chance* displays five visible and functional characters. Dada a converted prisoner, Udensi a warder who becomes a prisoner, Bonta a rapist, Zema a murderer and Manda a warder. A voice is recognized and it is quite significant to the play to. The significance of the voice is that, it makes the word that Dada preaches easy for Udensi to understand, and accept the truth about the word that is preached. The voice can be likened to the voice of angels or even God Himself.

Dada

He is the rapist in *The Catalyst* serving a seven year jail term. Because of his lack of faith, he is not released with Akpan and Aneze in the first part. After seeing the power of God being demonstrated, he becomes born-again in *Another Chance*. Dada follows Jesus in and outside the prison cell. He is presented now as a die – hard Christian who has decided to follow the directives and leadership of the Holy Spirit. That could be seen in Scene 2 where Dada says “since that day I told God to forgive me too, it has been a lot different with me” (50). That is, after his experience in *The Catalyst*. Dada is the Aneze of *The Catalyst* in *Another Chance*. Dada always utilizes every opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus to his cell mates, making them realize the existence of God and the power of salvation regardless of one's sin. He is resolute in his faith in God, and becomes optimistic that God will deliver him and whoever sees the reason of accepting Jesus as his saviour. Dada's persistence preaching

in the cell results in his and Udensi's freedom and release.

Bonta

He is a rapist jailed for sexually abusing a ten-year old girl. Bonta is in a helpless and hopeless state, and sees no reason for living. The fact is very obvious that in spite of the ceaseless and persistent preaching of Dada in the cell, Bonta is not persuaded to repent, rather he becomes more hardened to commit more of such crimes. Bonta is a character that is determined to die for the sins he has committed not minding the agony of hell. At the Bonta and Zema are left alone in the prison to their fate.

Zema

He is an armed robber. He feels rejected, hopeless and betrayed. Just like Bonta he is a die-hard criminal who have little or no feelings for humans. Interactions and deductions from the play text reveal that, Zema works with the police in fermenting troubles in the society. But he laments bitterly about the police betrayal of his trust. In his state of despair and obscurity, he remains resolute in his mind to bear whatever consequences that would come his way. He does not see any truth in the word of God. After seeing the reality of Dada and Udensi's release from the prison, he does not heed the word of God. As a result, he is denied freedom and left alone in the prison to his fate because of unbelief.

Udensi

He is a warder in *The Catalyst* who becomes a prisoner in *Another Chance*. He is portrayed as a pathetic character. Here is a prison warder who has been stripped off his rights and he now holds on desperately to the treatment of prison and prisoners who regards him as a criminal and an object of ridicule to the other cell mates. Not even pledges of loyalty could redeem Udensi, as the circumstance and framed up story that brought him to prison is unthinkable. In spite of all he encounters and his present state of obscurity, he becomes loyal and submissive to the directives of the Holy Spirit, leading him to gain salvation and having total freedom from the prison. Because of

his readiness to accept Jesus Christ, his sins are forgiven and he is released alongside Dada the preacher.

Manda

He is a warder who is committed and loyal to his superior officers. He is portrayed as a faithful warder that always discharges his duties with sincerity and fairness. He has few lines in the play. Manda's behavior and treatment of prisoners is different from Udensi's. Udensi in *The Catalyst*, only finds delight in hurting people but Manda is polite in his dealings with the prisoners. He comes out and performs his official duties and leaves.

SETTING IN THE PRISON PLAYS

The two *Prison Plays* shares the same kind of settings. The only difference is that, the prison cell in *Another Chance* has a bed at one corner of the cell, while *The Catalyst* has one blanket and two old pillows, with only one door leading to the cell. All the scenes of the play take place in the prison cell. But the allegorical significance of the setting is contemporary Nigerian which religious intolerance and general violation of human rights is the order of the day as religious practice is making wave in the society, and the society is undergoing a process of change.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE IN THE PRISON PLAYS

The language of the two prison plays is direct and simple with little or no poetic presence. This simplicity of language makes it accessible to all groups and readers. As regards style, the playwright creates a world that does not give characters in the plays freedom, as a result of the kind of crime they commit. The prison cell restricts both the characters movement and freedom to the outside world. In fact, the characters are compelled by those in authority to live in the cell, in order for them to learn from their mistakes and change for the betterment of themselves and the society. The prison is also visited with torture. The playwright cautions the society to learn from the mistake of others and change for a better society.

THE FUNCTION OF ALLEGORY IN THE PRISON PLAYS

As already examined and revealed, *The Prison Plays* are *The Catalyst* and *Another Chance*. Agoro dramatizes biblical stories allegorically in the dual compendium titled *The Prison Plays*. This might be considered as a deliberate act seeing the way the locale and the characters are presented. Reading meaning to the works from an analytic standpoint, beginning with *The Catalyst*, the prison is taken as the whole world, where every human being lives. In Christian parlance, the earth is considered as the prison. Akpan and Dada are the sinners who populate the earth allegorically for whom Jesus came. Aneze, the prisoner of conscience is an established example and a symbolic representation of Jesus Christ who came to the earth (the prison) in the form of man (a criminal) to redeem man from the powers of darkness and give total freedom to man for a committed worship of God. Udensi on the other hand can be allegorically taken as representing the Roman soldiers who disputed the legitimacy of Jesus as the son of God, saw the life of Jesus as a threat to them and were very curious and anxious to get rid of Jesus (Aneze in this case). Udensi can also be allegorically taken as those we have in our society that have brought order, policies and decrees to the society.

These people are poised and focused on seeing that the law is continually upheld in the society (prison) by timely and strict performance of their duties. *The Catalyst* has open biblical allusion. As the dramatic action unfolds, the story of how Christ was nailed comes to mind. Furthermore, Aneze finding himself in the midst of the two criminals suggests the encounter of Christ with the two condemned criminals on the cross charged to pass on through crucifixion. Aneze, saving Akpan through his preaching, takes our mind back to the incident that happened in the bible, as recorded in Matthew 27:32-47, where one of the condemned criminals that was nailed with Jesus Christ on cross (the prison in this case), was saved because he defended and believed in Jesus Christ. Aneze allegorically represents Christ in *The Catalyst*, because, he was put to jail for no offence, just as Jesus Christ passed through in the bible. It is clear that, the playwright is suggesting the need for salvation and effective evangelism through this

play, and also the need for Christians to live Christ like in word and deed no matter the location and place they find themselves.

Another Chance the second play in *The Prison Plays*, is an allegorical confirmation of the story of *The Catalyst*. Dada from the end of *The Catalyst* on one hand is presented as a symbol of those Christians who take the grace of God for granted and miss the rapture and because of the experience, he is now ready to even pay with his life, in order not to miss the second chance that is graciously provided for him and any person who may see it very necessary. On a second thought and view, he also represents the disciples of Jesus Christ that are left to carry on the work of God after the ascension of Christ. This above representation is confirmed in the beneath textual evidence:

Dada: God is giving another chance to make-up your mind for him. Will you let this opportunity slip pass you too?

Udensi: Another chance for knowing him? Was that why, the God of justice allowed me to suffer from injustice?

Dada: God deals with people in many diverse ways. For me the catalyst for my salvation was the deliverance of Ita Akpan, a cell mate, from the jaws of death (51).

Still in *Another Chance*, Udensi – The warder – turn – prisoner's conversion, reminds us of the conversion of Saul the persecutor to Paul the preacher. While Zema and Bonta represent the die-hard unbelievers who have sold their entire lives to the devil. They also remind us of those that will be used as agent of darkness in the last days after the second coming of Christ. They represent unbelievers that are determined to make hell, because they find delight in committing evil and are not ready to repent. This second play in *The Prison Plays*, also displays and indicate the stories of the Apostles of Christ and the persecution they faced after the death and the ascension, especially the accusation and false arrest of Udensi. In categorical description, the two plays allegorically

tells the story of the new testament after the ascension of Christ.

Apart from the content of the plays, the title of the plays stands as allegories too. While *The Catalyst* stand to represent Jesus Christ who came to introduce us to a new order, and urges us to follow this new path. As the bible describe Him, He is the way to the new dimension of living and the father, and that is exactly what Jesus is; *The Catalyst*. The second play *Second Chance* which stands as a continuation of the work of Jesus *The Catalyst*, stands as a warning to all in the world, with the deep undertone of how God is giving everyone under the heaven a *Second Chance* to turn away from their sins and embrace HIS ways before it becomes too late and they end up like the Zema and Bonta who continues to fight and struggle for space in prison (hell). By placing and narrating these biblical stories in a single play, one can say that the playwright is allegorically speaking of the first and second death, and even the first coming of Christ which is fulfilled in *The Catalyst* and the second coming of Christ which is revealed in the *Second Chance*; all of these are allegorical. The plays especially the *Second Chance* advocates that, there are still chances for those persons that have not yet settled their debts with Jesus Christ, to make an amendment and rededicate themselves to the service of God Almighty, before Christ's second coming. These plays present the playwright as an evangelist that seeks to use drama and its allegorical features as a tool for religious consciousness and awareness. He presents himself as a patriotic citizen that is not satisfied with the level of morality in the society. The following conversation in the text supports this line of thinking:

Dada: If you have a change of heart towards God, he would change the hearts of people outside and prepare them to him.

Zema: Bonta, this is your last chance maybe, if you accept Christ into your life it would be a lot better for you, when you leave this place (54).

More so, the like of those who will take good

advantage of the second chance provided them will testify like Dada who says "I bless God. Udensi has made use of the second chance" (60).

CONCLUSION

This study which is focused on the discuss of the function allegory in Nigeria drama using Saviour Nathan A. Agoro (2002) *The Prison Plays* as it case study, has thoroughly examined and bring to light the dual function of allegory in the above drama, and they serve as a tool for evangelism and also for discussing and correcting social ills. The revealed, the predominant setting of these plays is the contemporary Nigeria, specifically the military regime, and the issues covered are ones not strange to the Nigerian society. Based on the examination of the two plays, it is clear that S. N. A. Agoro is a radical and committed writer and is described in the words of Ben Binebai (2004) as "a moral and religious cartographer", that helps to re-chart and strengthen the map of religious consciousness, and this is very much true as the texts examined have religious undertones focused on creating the Christina religion's consciousness.

The Catalyst and *Another Chance* are religious metaphors for the Nigerian society, they also bear the function of religious allegory on contemporary Nigeria, comparing Christians and unbelievers, and bringing to knowledge the need for salvation and effective evangelism. The plays also express great concern on religious intolerance and pegs the way for a society that will give reference to every form of religion that is profitable to man and the society. This is why, Agoro seriously advocates the need for the society and individuals to strive for a high level of morality which they lack, and which Jesus teaches and admonishes. He uses religious philosophy as a veritable weapon for religious, social, political and even cultural sanitization, promotion, with focus on creating religious consciousness in Christian life. Agoro also uses the plays as a means of advocating the eradication of corruption in the society, and also clamour for social change that will provide liberties. The study is by no means exhaustive, it is only a prelude for future researchers along this terrain of the use of allegory in Nigerian drama.

As way of recommendation, the literary artist who is the most sensitive part of the society, should critically assess his society daily and be able to look beyond the past and the present, and marry them together, with the aim of using it to explain the future. The playwright should also continue to use this literary tool (allegory) to make his society better by discussing social ills and proffering solution to them, as allegory is an effective weapon for social reforms when used in drama, as it picks out societal ills and tries as much as possible to correct them within the drama context.

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