

Christianity and Filial and Familial Reordering in Ngugi's *The River Between*, Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, and Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain*.

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Abstract

Critics have interrogated the role of Christianity in the lives of Africans on the continent and in Diaspora. While some see its impact in a positive light, others see it negatively. In this essay, I contribute to the debate by examining the depiction of Christianity in three novels (two African novels and one African American novel) owing to the discernible similarities between them. While most contributions in the African and African American milieu examine the effect of Christianity sociologically, I interrogate its impact psychologically. In this vein, I examine how Christian doctrines affect the psyche of the portrayed characters, and how this in turn affects their filial and familial relationship. I argue, using Ngugi wa Thiongo's *The River Between*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, and James Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, that rather than enjoying a positive treatment, Christianity in African and African American novels is derided for causing filial and familial disharmony. In this regard, I assert that these novels portray characters whose dogmatic adherence to the Christian doctrine that Christ came to sever the bond between parents and their children leads to filial and familial alienation.

Key Words: Christianity, Filial, Familial, Reordering

Introduction.

The role of Christianity in the lives of Africans on the continent and in Diaspora has engaged the attention of critics (Raymond F. Hopkins, 1966; Toyin Falola, 2002; Amanda M. Rudolph, 2003; W.O. Moloba, 2004; Karen-King Aribisala, 2006). While some see its impact in a positive light, others see it negatively. For instance, Raymond F. Hopkins sees the overall effect of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa to be a positive one (555). In contrast is Karen-King Aribisala's observation that the Christian Church is "a vehicle for the promotion of a sense of racial inferiority" in the unconscious of the blacks (286). Similarly, Mathew K. Kurian notes in his "Marxism and Christianity" that "the Christian Church, which in its early days reflected the desperate mood of the slaves and the oppressed peoples, became an instrument in the hands of the oppressors and provided the philosophical justifications for the suppression of all democratic movements of the oppressed peoples"(6). Although Kurian looks at the impact of Christianity in India, his observation equally applies to Africans on the continent and in Diaspora. The question that therefore arises is – Is Christianity cloak in Western culture of a positive or negative impact on Africans and African Americans?

In this essay, I make my contribution to this debate by examining the depiction of Christianity in three novels (two African novels and one African American novel) owing to the discernible similarities between them. Whilst the writers of these novels might not have succeeded in crafting their story without the education made available by the missionaries and the Western world, they nevertheless condemn the wholesale consumption and believe of Christian doctrines. However, while most contributions in the African and African American milieu examine the effect of Christianity sociologically, I interrogate its role psychologically. In this vein, I examine how Christian doctrines affect the psyche of the portrayed characters, and how this in turn affects their filial and familial relationships. I argue, using Ngugi wa Thiongo's *The River Between*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, and James Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, that rather than enjoying a positive treatment, Christianity in African and African American novels is derided for causing filial and familial disharmony. In this regard, these novels portray characters whose dogmatic adherence to the Christian doctrine that Christ came to sever the bond between parents and their children leads to filial and familial alienation.

Contextualizing Filial and Familial Reordering.

My idea of filial and familial reordering in the context of this paper is based on Jesus' statement that:

Do not think I came to put peace upon the earth; I came to put, not peace, but a sword. For I came to cause division, with a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a young wife against her mother-in-law. . . .He that has greater affection for father or mother than for me is not worthy of me; and he that has greater affection for son or daughter than for me is not worthy of me. (Mathew 10: 34-37)

To earn eternal salvation, a Christian has to sever all filial and familial ties. According to Kurian, "[s]alvation has been equated to a selfish pursuit of ensuring an abode in heaven through personal acts of repentance and divine grace, devoid of any real commitment to social action" or filial and familial relationship (8-9).

In this regard, E. Meaghan Matheson notes that religious conversion often entails familial reordering and commitment (50). In his reading of the religious conversion of Angela of Foligno who in her Memoir thanked God for being free of any kinship responsibility at the accidental death of her sons, Matheson opines that "Angela's religious conversion could only be valued once she shed herself of her social life. This meant not only forgoing the responsibility of property, but losing any familial responsibility as well"(49). He then adds that "In drinking from Christ's wound, not only is she

creating a bloodline for herself, but she is also declaring Christ as her intimate family and committing herself to His service” (49-50). Therefore filial and familial reordering in Christendom and in the context of this essay entails an individual sacrificing his relationship with family members so as to maintain a relationship with the Christian God in the hope of gaining eternal salvation in heaven.

Filial and Familial Reordering in Ngugi’s *The River Between*, Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, and Baldwin’s *Go Tell it on the Mountain*.

This is the case with Joshua in Ngugi wa Thiongo’s *The River Between*, Eugene in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, and Gabriel Grimes in James Baldwin’s *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. They all sacrifice their emotional family bond to establish, as it were, a new filial and familial one with their Christian God. Using Chege, the symbol and manifestation of Gikuyu¹ traditionalism as a mouthpiece, Ngugi points to this familial re-ordering as it concerns Joshua:

Had he not foreseen this drama? Had he not seen the estrangement between father and daughter, son and father, because of the new faith? This was a punishment to Joshua. It was also a punishment to the hills. It was a warning to all, to stick to the ways of the ridges, to the ancient wisdom of the land, to its ritual and song. (54)

The estrangement between father and daughter is evident in Joshua’s reaction to the death of his daughter, Muthoni. While Nyambura (Muthoni’s sister) and her mother “wept without speaking...Only tears flowed down continuously” (52), “Joshua heard of the death of Muthoni without a sign of emotion on the face...He did not ask...when she died...Miriamu (Muthoni’s mother) wept even more when she saw the impassive face (of her husband)” (53). Although, unlike Angela of Foligno, Joshua has not physically buried his family members, he has emotionally buried them; and for this reason he cannot weep at the death of his daughter. According to the narrator, “To him (Joshua), Muthoni had ceased to exist on the very day that she had sold herself to the devil”(53). Comparing Muthoni to Lot’s wife, Joshua reasons “Lot’s wife had done the same thing and she had been turned to stone, a rock of salt, to be for ever a stern warning to others...But he Joshua was determined to triumph, to walk with a brisk step, his eyes on the cross” (53-54). Karl Marx in his critique of religion advocates the “discovery of man under the rubble of official Christianity” (Cited in Kurian 5). This entails the self-awareness of an individual as regards the reality of his situation, and the apprehension and negation of the ideology that controls his action. It is this discovery of self that Joshua lacks. The failure to be aware of oneself in Marx’ concept of alienation and estrangement is concomitant to not being aware of one’s environment and surroundings. Joshua’s religious conversion, which is an external reality, has affected his emotional relationship to his family. He is alienated from himself as well as his family.

Apart from Ngugi’s *TRB*, Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* also depicts the estrangement of family members as a result of religion. As an example, because his father refuses to join the catholic faith, Eugene disregards and refuses to fend for him. In an emotion laden voice, Aunty Ifeoma, Eugene’s sister complains to Beatrice, Eugene’s wife: “Our father is dying, do you hear me? Dying. He is an old man, how much longer does he have, *gbo*? Yet Eugene will not let him into this house, will not even greet him...If God will judge our father for choosing to follow the way of our ancestors, then let God do the judging, not Eugene” (*PH* 95-96). What Adichie reveals here is how Christianity has severed the emotional bond between Eugene and his father.

This is demonstrated by Papa Nnukwu’s comment that “My son owns that house that can fit every man in Abba, and yet many times I have nothing to put on my plate. I should not have let him (Eugene) follow those missionaries” (83). Papa Nnukwu attributes Eugene’s attitude towards him as a fall-out of his association with the missionaries. Eugene’s acceptance of the catholic faith, and desire to preserve his status within this fold accounts for his rejection of the cultural and traditional life into which he was born. In his review of this novel, Ranti Williams asserts that it is Eugene’s “misunderstanding of Christianity that led him to reject the animist beliefs of his own ageing father and

to repudiate the old man himself” (website). Marx in his critique of religion opines that “they restrained the human mind, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies” (Cited in Greg Rusell 313). Due to the fact that Eugene is enslaved under the Christian rule that there should be no communion between a “believer” and an “unbeliever,” he condemns his father’s animist beliefs. Christianity can then be said to have severed the relationship between father and son.

Apart from the relationship between Eugene and his father, Christianity is also depicted to affect negatively his relationship with his sister, Aunty Ifeoma. She herself complains about this development to Beatrice, Eugene’s wife:

Have you forgotten that Eugene offered to buy me a car... But first he wanted us to join the Knights of St. John. He wanted us to send Amaka to convent school. He even wanted me to stop wearing makeup! I want a new car, *nwunye m*, and I want to use my gas cooker again... and I want money so that I will not have to unravel Chima’s trousers when he outgrows them. But I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things (95).

Aunty Ifeoma is as much a Catholic as her brother: it is therefore a complex situation that Eugene questions her brand of Catholicism. For not practicing Eugene’s brand of religion, Aunty Ifeoma is left to stew in her poverty. As a result of the high price of cooking gas, which she cannot afford, she resorts to cooking with kerosene stove and refuses to ask her brother for gas; even though “there are many full gas cylinders lying around in [Eugene’s] factory” (95).

Eugene’s religious dilemma and how it affects his private relationship can also be seen in his relationship with his wife and children. Unlike Angela of Foligno, he did not experience any Eucharistic vision or communion with Jesus, yet he sacrifices the emotional bond between himself and his family members to maintain his relationship with Father Benedict who is the symbol of his religious conviction. He slaps, beats, and flogs his immediate family members at will based on his religious convictions. For instance, for “desecrating the Eucharistic fast” (102), Eugene flogs both mother and children. According to the catholic faith, the Eucharist fast mandated that no solid food should be eaten by the faithful an hour before Mass (*PH* 101). But because Kambili’s period started that morning and she had to take a pain killer, her mother recommended, ten minutes before Mass, that she secretly take some little corn flakes before taking the drugs. But while eating the corn flakes, the following ensued. Kambili herself reports:

I started to wolf the cereal down, standing. Mama gave me the panadol tablets, still in the silver-colored foil... I was almost done eating it when the door opened and Papa came in.... “Has the devil asked you all to go on errands for him?” The Igbo words burst out of Papa’s mouth. “Has the devil built a tent in my house?”... He unbuckled his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first... Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm...

I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back (101-2).

The flogging is in spite of Mama’s explanation to Eugene that Kambili’s “period started and she has cramps” (101). What one would have expected is for Eugene to show understanding and take into consideration the extenuating circumstances responsible for Kambili’s action. But his religious fervidity stopped him from sparing a moment to examine the explanation provided by his wife. At this point what is uppermost in his mind is his familial “responsibility” to God that is threatened by this action. A religious crisis is foisted on this African family as a result of their Christian faith.

Moreover, like Ngugi’s *TRB* and Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, James Baldwin’s *Go Tell it on the Mountain* can be read as a treatise on the religious dilemma facing African Americans. Critics describe

this novel “as a sociological examination of the role of the church in the black community” (Charles Scruggs, 1)². But more than its sociological examination is its psychological dimension. As it is the case in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, religion acts as a force of discord in this novel. Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus* falls out with his immediate and extended family as a result of religion just as Gabriel Grimes in *Mountain* is not in tune with his wife, children, sister, and lover because of his supposed piety. Thus, like Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, Baldwin’s *Mountain* explores the family disharmony caused by Christianity.

Travis Kroeker has observed that

In Jesus the crucified messiah the sovereignty of history and all creation is disclosed in the form of the suffering servant, and only those willing to empty themselves of possessive desires that cling graspingly to the eternal form. . . only those who take the kenotic form of the servant may journey messianically with the eternal in time. (17)

To enjoy future eternal glory in heaven, Christendom teaches that a Christian must live a life of self-denial. Therefore, Gabriel believes that he is a pilgrim in this world and rejects the wealth and comfort that this world has to provide, thereby unconsciously reinforcing the dominant ideology of the socio-economic dynamics within which he operates.

By rejecting the wealth and comfort of this world, Gabriel creates for his family a grim life. John Grimes (Gabriel’s step-son) says as much when he reasons that:

The way of the cross (of his step-father) had given him a belly filled with wind and had bent his mother’s back; they had never worn fine clothes, but here, where the buildings contested God’s power and where the men and women did not fear God, here he might eat and drink to his heart’s content and clothe his body with wondrous fabrics, rich to the eye and pleasing to the touch (39).

John Grimes makes this observation in Broadway in New York. The setting here is, therefore, symbolic. What Baldwin uses this setting to achieve is to compare the wealth and comfort of those who are on the Broad-way that leads to death with the poverty and discomfort of those who are on the narrow road that leads to life; and there is a sense in which Baldwin argues that it is the religious devotion of the latter that is responsible for their poverty.

Nevertheless, that external reality can lead to private problems and vice-versa is also obvious from Gabriel Grimes relationship with his immediate and extended family. According to Scruggs, Gabriel’s “treatment of Esther, (his lover) whom he abandoned, of Royal, whom he refused to recognize as his son, of Elizabeth (his wife), whom he tries to make pay for his sins, of John (his step-son), whom he hates as a sign of Elizabeth’s sin - these acts stem from his inability to recognize that he too is a pilgrim in the earthly city” (10). Therefore, like Eugene, Gabriel’s religious enslavement is responsible for his inability to integrate with his immediate and extended family.

James Baldwin opines that “becoming a missionary is one step away from being a tyrant” (24); and it does appear that it is on the basis of this understanding that Baldwin sketches the character of Gabriel Grimes. In her comparison of *Mountain* and *The Amen Corner*,³ Barbara Olson asserts that “both novel and play feature black fundamentalist preachers whose zeal for God’s house has all but consumed any possibility of natural and healthy relationship in their own homes” (295). Like Eugene, because of Gabriel’s perceived zeal for God, his life is marked by an inability to give or receive love. As already explained, the religious conversion of an individual results in a familial re-ordering which weakens or cuts the emotional bond between family members. Yet, a kernel teaching of Christianity is that Christians should love their neighbour as themselves. It is therefore paradoxical that a Christian

minister cannot give or receive love. Yet his inability to give love is predicated on the Christian notion that a servant of God must love God than his/her family members.

Brendan Hoban, a priest in his "Priesthood at Risk: The Celibacy Factor" reports of a Cardinal that told an international gathering of priests that "they had no need to love another person, it was sufficient to love the church" (196). This is the ideology that regulates Gabriel's interaction with his family members. He believes that his love for God and the Church compensates for his unloving attitude toward his relatives. Yet, the scripture posits that an individual who is unable to love his neighbour whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. Thomas Merton's observation illustrates the problem in Gabriel's life. Merton lived a celibate life until he was 50 years old, when he went to a hospital to have an operation on his back, and met and fell in love with a young nurse. It is at this point that he writes in his Memoir:

In the monastery, with our vows of chastity, we are ideally supposed to go beyond married love into something more pure, more perfect, more totally oblation. This should then make us the most *human* of people. But that is the trouble: how can one go 'further' than something to which one has not yet attained? . . . it . . . means that we cannot love perfectly if we have not in some way loved maturely and truly (Cited in Sheehly and Kimmerling 712-713).

What emanates from Merton's observation is that marriage and romantic love is a pre-requisite for oblation love. How then can Gabriel claim to love God when he is unable to love his wife? Gabriel's confusion, therefore, emanates from his Christian faith.

Florence (Gabriel's sister) sums up the unloving attitude of Gabriel and its consequence when she threatened him:

I going to tell you something, Gabriel...I know you thinking at the bottom of your heart that if you just make her (Elizabeth) and her bastard boy pay enough for her sin, your son won't have to pay for yours. But I ain't going to let you do that. You done made enough folks pay for sin, it's time you started paying....Deborah...was cut down- but she left word. She weren't no enemy of nobody- and she didn't see nothing but evil (249).

Deborah is Gabriel's first wife. That "she didn't see nothing but evil" implies that she did not enjoy a natural and healthy relationship with her husband before her death. That he has also "made enough folks pay for sin" and wants to make Elizabeth pay for her sin is suggestive of a kind of frosty relationship between him and Elizabeth, and other family members. Therefore, like Eugene, Gabriel's religious conviction affects his filial and familial relationship. He replaces his filial and familial love with the love of God.

Baldwin even juxtaposes the characters of the three men in Elizabeth's life; and his conclusion appears to be that it is the religious Gabriel that is incapable of giving or receiving love. He is, therefore, like Thomas Merton, who, confesses of "his inability to love or be loved" before his romantic encounter with a young nurse (Cited in Sheehly and Kimmerling 713). For instance, although her father is accused of being a "wicked man," Elizabeth's view is that it "made no difference to her love for him had she been told, and even seen it proved, that he was first cousin to the Devil...and she would not have regretted being his daughter, or have asked for anything better than to suffer at his side in Hell....Perhaps his life had been wicked, but he had been very good to her" (*Mountain* 179-80). The goodness of Elizabeth's father towards her is in comparison to Gabriel's unloving attitude. Even though the point the author makes is that religion or Christianity is not necessarily a force for goodness, what is of direct relevance in this essay is how Christianity affects the psyche of individuals as depicted in imaginative literature. In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript*, Karl Marx asserts that "If you love without evoking love in return, i.e. if you are not able, by the manifestation of yourself as a loving person, to make yourself a *beloved person*, then your love is impotent and a misfortune" (Cited in T.B. Bottomore vi). Gabriel's love is "impotent and a misfortune" to the limit

that he is unable to elicit his wife's love in return. Unlike the religious Gabriel, however, the "wicked"³ and unreligious Elizabeth's father is able to give and receive love from his daughter because he is not enslaved by religious precepts. It is, therefore, paradoxical that the unreligious Elizabeth's father who is going to burn in hell, according to Christian doctrine, turns out to be a manifestation of love which is the epitome of God's quality.

Moreover, the unreligious Richard in contrast to Gabriel is also portrayed as a loving man. So exciting is the relationship between Richard and Elizabeth that she could not "wish that she had not known him; nor deny that so long as he was there, the rejoicing of Heaven could have meant nothing to her - that, being forced to choose between Richard and God, she could only, even with weeping, have turned away from God" (182-183). She also claims that "in those days (of their relationship), had the Lord Himself descended from Heaven with trumpets telling her to turn back, she could scarcely have heard Him, and could certainly not have heeded" (187). Elizabeth, therefore recalls the character of Juanita in Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie*, who exclaims, as a result of her relationship with her lover Richard Meridian, that "I want a lover made of flesh and blood...I don't want to be God's mother! He (God) can have His icy, snow-white heaven!" (125). It is not God as a person that is being rejected here, but God as represented by "churchified" Christianity, especially from the characterization of Gabriel.

However, the portrayal of Richard in this narrative is that he is an atheist. On one occasion, when Elizabeth mentioned the love of Jesus to him, he responds that "You can tell that puking bastard to kiss my big black arse" (189). In this context, Richard also recalls the character of his namesake in *Blues for Mister Charlie*. Viewed from this standpoint, however, it is ironic that whenever Elizabeth thinks of Gabriel, "she remembered Richard... with a terrible pain; and then she felt herself shrinking from Gabriel's anticipated touch" (216). The excitement that Elizabeth gets from the relationship with Richard is non-existent in her relationship with Gabriel her husband, because of his religious bigotry. Thus, while Richard's touch transports Elizabeth to a state of nirvana; that of Gabriel does not. Yet, Richard is supposed to be condemned to burn in hell for not being a believer, while Gabriel is said to be in a position to be rewarded with a life of bliss in heaven for being a Christian.

The ratiocination of Kambili regarding her father and mother in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* applies to Gabriel and Elizabeth. She states, "I could not even think of her and Papa together, on the bed they shared... When I thought of affection between them, I thought of them exchanging the sign of peace at Mass, the way Papa would hold her tenderly in his arms after they had clasped hands" (*PH* 21). As a result of Eugene's religious fervour, his daughter cannot even imagine him having sex with his wife. This appears to be the case with Gabriel: because of his religious zeal, sex for him seems to be just for the purpose of procreation, and not to express love; and it is apparently for this reason that Elizabeth cringes at Gabriel's touch. In this way, Gabriel and Eugene are reminiscent of Margery Kempe who remains married to her husband while creating a celibate relationship so as to devote herself wholly to God (Matheson 50). To the extent that their sexual relationships with their wives are devoid of emotion because of their religious conviction, they have created a "celibate" relationship with their spouses. Elizabeth and Mama are, therefore, victims of their husband's religious conviction. They both suffer the emotional deprivation caused by "celibacy."

This is especially the case with Elizabeth, who, before her marriage to Gabriel in Baldwin's *Mountain*, had enjoyed a sexually satisfying relationship with Richard. Denied of the sexual ecstasy she had enjoyed with the unreligious Richard, she agonizes over her relationship with the religious Gabriel. Kimmerling states that:

In a sexual partnership such negative emotions (such as anger, fear, resentment, hostility, and distrust) can be neutralized through a combination of dialogue about feelings and loving sexual intercourse. But in a celibate relationship where the powerful physical method of neutralizing, reassuring, and reaffirming

is involuntarily closed off, negative emotions can accumulate and intensify, causing our faith in ourselves, or our friend, to waver (715).

This is true of Elizabeth. Since sexual intercourse between her and Gabriel is devoid of love, she cringes whenever Gabriel attempts to touch her. In the absence of loving sexual intercourse, dialogue between her and Gabriel “becomes difficult and costly” (Sheehly and Kimmerling 715). Rather than having Gabriel as her confidant, she confides in Florence, Gabriel’s sister.

It is perhaps in his relationship with Esther that the effect of Gabriel’s religious piety becomes very pronounced. After having extra-marital affairs with Esther for nine days, he suddenly realizes that he has been committing sin and he calls off the relationship. Unknown to him, he has already gotten Esther pregnant. To cover-up his sin, he sends her away to cater for herself and her unborn child alone. Having moved to Chicago, Esther’s letter to Gabriel reads in part:

I ain’t holy like you are, but I know right from wrong. I’m going to have my baby and I’m going to bring him up to be a man. And I ain’t going to read to him out of no Bibles and I ain’t going to take him to hear no preaching. If he don’t drink nothing but moonshine all his natural days he be a better man than his Daddy (156).

According to B. Pakrasi, Baldwin’s “vituperations are not directed against... humans... as much as they are against the institutions which manipulate people” (61). It then means that the author’s indictment is not as much against Gabriel as it is against religion or Christianity, which makes Gabriel to be who he is. Yet, by sending Esther away, Gabriel strips himself of humanity. It is then no wonder that Esther vows not to read the bible to her son or take him to listen to any preaching. Accordingly, Gabriel’s religious conviction affects not only his economic circumstance; but also his filial and familial interactions.

Kroeker opines that the path of the cross “simply constitutes a reversal of worldly values in which obedient Christians build up heavenly treasures by trading on a divine spiritual economy that denigrates this world only to gain preeminence in the other world” (17). This belief in the abstraction of a life that is outside and beyond the present life influences Gabriel’s reaction to Esther’s pregnancy. By sending Esther away to fend for herself and her unborn child alone, he condemns her to death. Her “bastard son”, who Gabriel refuses to acknowledge as his son also dies later. Despite this, Gabriel still claims that his “name is written in the Book of Life” (244). Florence thinks otherwise; and this prompts her to ask Gabriel the following rhetorical questions:

Is you going to look on her face (Esther’s) too? Is her name written in the Book of life?...Did you ever see him (Esther’s bastard son)? You going to meet him in heaven, too? (*Mountain* 245).

Although Gabriel rejects the wealth, comfort, and excitement of the present world so as to gain a “better life” in heaven, because of his treatment of Esther and her son, it appears that he will also loose out on that score. His dilemma is that it is his calling as a minister of God that precipitated his action in the first place, and ironically it is this same action that he takes for the protection and preservation of his calling that would cost him his future hope of living forever in heaven.

Helen Sheehly’s observation of the plight of a woman who falls in love with a priest applies to Esther. According to her, when a woman falls in love with a priest, “the priest often panics and, perhaps as a result of seeking spiritual direction, he drops her like a hot coal. She is Eve. He, by refusing to dialogue, buys his own peace, but at the price of hers. She is left feeling rejected, used and bewildered”(711). This is the case with Esther in relation to Gabriel. Whilst Esther who has not been indoctrinated with Christian doctrine sees nothing wrong in spreading her legs for her evangelist lover, Gabriel based on religious precepts sees his romantic affair with her as a sin. To buy his spiritual peace back, Gabriel drops Esther “like a hot coal.” While this action earns Gabriel some measure of psychological relaxation in terms of his worship of God, it leaves Esther dejected.

Not only Gabriel's lover and wives that suffer from his religious conviction, his children are also depicted as recipients of his warped religious logic. For example, in response to their mother's position that "you don't know how lucky you is to have a father what worries about you and tries to see to it that you come up right" (27), Roy states:

We don't know how lucky we is to have a father what don't want you to go to the movies, and don't want you to play in the streets, and don't want you to have no friends, and he don't want this and he don't want that, and he don't want you to do *nothing*. We so lucky to have a father who just wants us to go to church and read the bible and beller like a fool in front of the altar and stay home all nice and quiet, like a little mouse...Don't know what I done to be so lucky (27).

This statement is sarcastic. Roy's view is that they - the children are actually unlucky to have a father whose every decision is predicated on his religious conviction. Thus, religion or Christianity can be said to have erected a barricade between Gabriel and his children. The impression also created from the above passage is that Gabriel Grimes' children, in the same mold with Eugene's children in Adichie's *Purple Hibicus*, are not allowed to enjoy their childhood as a result of religion. Viewed from this angle, Christianity acts as an obstacle against the emotional bonding of African and African American families.

Notes.

1. Gikuyu is a tribe in Kenya.
2. Apart from Charles Scruggs, critics such as Shirley S. Allen in "Religious Symbolism and Psychic Reality in Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain*" in *CLA JOURNAL*, 19, (1975), PP. 173-99; and Albert Gerard in "The Sons of Ham" in *Studies in the Novel*, 3, (1971) also see this novel in the same light.
3. *The Amen Corner* is a play. Unlike in *Mountain*, which has a male protagonist, this play's major character is a female by the name, Margaret. And like Gabriel Grimes, her every decision is influenced by her religious convictions.
4. It does appear that Elizabeth's father runs a chain of brothels; and for this reason, after her mother's death, her aunty, who is another religious character, forcefully takes Elizabeth away from her father, arguing that such a man cannot properly bring up a child.

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