

## New Testament's Saul, Achebe's Enoch And Religious Fanaticism In Contemporary Nigeria

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### Abstract

The face of true religion has sometimes been disfigured by the reality of religious fanaticism. This paper examined the pattern of this reality in pre-conversion Saul and then in the character Enoch in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. It found out, through comparative cum hermeneutical methodology, that there are, indeed, subtle similarities between the two, Saul and Enoch. Thus, it proposed that this Saul could have been the inspiration for Achebe's Enoch. It then looked at the relationship between the Saul-Enoch pattern of religious fanaticism and religious fanaticism in Nigeria today. It was equally uncovered that though not wearing the same clothes, the two, however, share many things in common. The effects of such fanaticism on national development and ways of curbing it were finally considered.

**Keywords:** Saul, Enoch, Chinua Achebe, Religious fanaticism, Nigeria.

### Introduction

Radcliffe (2005), it was, who had pointed out that, "The point of any religion is to point us to God who is the point of everything" (1), a correct observation which could be expanded and ipso facto underscored by maintaining that in pointing one to God it, that is, religion, points one as well to man, created, as it were, in the image and likeness of the same God. In fact, religion - and that is, true religion- is meant to show one the face of God, is meant to help one to forge an intimate relationship with Him and at the same time is meant to help one to see this man created, as said above, in God's image and likeness, not as an enemy, but as a friend, not as a stranger, but as a neighbour to be lived with in peace, love and harmony. Reality, however, shows that this picture of true religion is often blurred by some who even as they exercise their own religion find it difficult to give a little space to the other to do so even if the latter's own version of the same religion is different from theirs. These

“some”, call them fanatics, or even fundamentalists, are not confined, as a matter of fact, to the three monotheisms of Judaism, Christianity and Islam but also to Buddhism, Hinduism, and even Confucianism (Armstrong, 2000, ix), etc. By their attitude - an attitude defined by Iwe (1985, 221) as “the practice of religion beyond bounds of reason”—they often tend to make Ingersoll’s unqualified observation that, “Religion makes enemies instead of friends[...] covers all the horizon of memory with visions of war, of outrage, of persecution, of tyranny, and death” (1993, 1), wear the garb of verity.

It will be the aim of this paper to study the pattern of this attitude, religious fanaticism, that is, in Saul before his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, and then in the character Enoch in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, a novel for which Orobator (2008) had once made a confession that could be made here, as well, thus: “What I have found intriguing in reading and rereading this novel [*Things Fall Apart*] is the fact that it contains such profound source of wisdom, narratives, and events that can enrich, structure, and enlighten theological reflection from an African perspective. More significantly, this captivating African story provides me with an accessible methodology for giving theological reflection a distinctively African flavor” (20-21). And because of the similarities between the two, Saul and Enoch, this paper proposes that this Saul could have been the inspiration for Achebe’s Enoch since, according to Macquarrie (1993, 27), “No matter how novel any event or any idea, it is almost certain that it has not just come ‘out of the blue,’ as we say. When we begin to consider it, we learn that it has antecedents”. It then looks at the relationship between the Saul-Enoch pattern of religious fanaticism and religious fanaticism in contemporary Nigeria, the effects of such fanaticism on national development and finally suggests ways of curbing it.

### **New Testament’s Saul: The Making of A Religious Fanatic**

In his book, *Pensees*, the French philosopher and mathematician, Blaise Pascal (2003), had made the following observation: “Saint Athanasius was a man called Athanasius” (XIV, 867). And it is an observation that could similarly be made here: “St. Saul” was a man called Saul, or, to go by his Roman name, a man called Paul. Yes, before the Saul who, following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:1-19) – an encounter that completely changed him- had gone on three missionary journeys (cf. Acts 13:4-14: 28; Acts 15:40-18:23; 18:24-20:38), to the extent that he would, at the end of the day, not only be called by Brown (1994, 35), a “great missionary”, or, even, an “indefatigable missionary”, as Onwukeme (2011, 4) would see him, or still, an “apostolic missionary” in the view of Bosch (2011, 126), or better, an “important missionary”, according to

the duo of Crossan and Reed (2004, 29), but also the “greatest missionary of all time” as Wagner (2008, 166) would consider him, there was actually a certain Saul, a certain Saul who is the object of this paper here.

According to a Second-century account, precisely, the *Acts of Paul*, this Saul, in terms of physical appearance, was a “man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel” (3:1 cited in Murphy-O’Connor 2008 a<sup>44</sup>). This fact tends to receive a kind of confirmation when Saul would observe that some people had spoken of him as having “no presence” (2 Cor.10:10). Commenting on the foregoing, while Polhill (1999, 39) tells us that, “In the first-century thought tallness was sometimes seen as leading to slowness, but short people got things done. That is why generals and even the emperor could be described as short”, Murphy-O’Connor (2008 b) would observe that, “Bandy legs normally suggested that the person was firmly planted, and thus was a sign of sturdy common sense; he was highly realistic” (157).

However, it was in the first decade AD (Fitzmyer, 1990, 1332), that this Paul was “born, not like Jesus and the apostles in a village or country town, but in a city” (Blenkinsopp, 1965, 11)- a “no mean city” (Acts 21:39), the city of Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. And this city which came under Roman control in 67 BC would, as a matter of fact, register its influence on Saul in various ways. According to Onwukeme (2011):

It was customary for a young Jew to learn a trade. The rabbis inculcated this upon parents. Tarsus was a city famous for cultivation and production of linen material. Thus in this city Paul worked at the trade, tent-making (I Thess 2, 9; 2 Thess 3, 8; I Cor 9, 10-11; Acts 18, 3). As he takes a walk around the city of Tarsus, he stops to watch the builders at new houses, how the wise master builders draw the cords and lay the foundation and others build on it. He sees how sometimes one’s work has to be taken down and done over again and the man’s wages are reduced for bad work. This experience of Paul explains the images he uses in I Cor 3, 10; Gal 2, 18. He uses images of a butcher as well (I Cor 10, 25). Paul sees that trumpet is blown to tell the soldier when to get ready for march or for battle (I Cor 14, 8). He draws many illustrations from soldiers’ life (2 Cor 10, 2-5; 2 Tim 2, 3-4). All these are influence of Tarsus on Paul (8).

But above all, this Tarsus did confer on Saul a Roman citizenship via his parents, his father in particular. Hence, Acts of the Apostles which, apart from the letters of Saul, gives information about Saul, “by expanding upon other material that had been preserved in the community”(Perkins, 1992, 177)- even if there may be appreciable variations between the two (Brisebois, 1986, 5) - would present the following scenario involving Saul and a commander, thus: “On hearing this the officer went to the commander and said, ‘What are you doing? That man is a Roman citizen’. So the commander came and asked him, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?’ ‘Yes,’ answered Paul. The commander then said, ‘It cost me a large sum of money to become a Roman citizen.’ Paul answered, ‘I am one by birth’” (Acts 22:26-28).

And though, as said above, he was a Roman citizen via his parents, the fact still remains that his parents were originally from Gischala, a small town in Galilee (Onwukeme, 2011, 2). They were, that is to say, Jews, Jews in diaspora, making Paul a full-blooded Jew, though also one in diaspora. And this is a reality that Saul would acknowledge when he said: “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia”(Acts 22:3) or, even more elaborately in his Letter to the Philippians, thus: “I was circumcised when eight days old. I was born of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin; I am a Hebrew, born of Hebrews”(3:5) – even as Pereira (1993, 21) would observe that the latter, “I am a Hebrew, born of Hebrews”, that is, is “Paul’s own comment on his spiritual pedigree. Theologically speaking, this meant that he was reared in the Creeds of the devout Jew of his time, viz., belief in one God, righteous and holy, in the election of Israel to be His special people, in the Law (Torah) as the unique revelation of God’s nature and will for man, and in the hope of the Messiah”.

But then, as Benedict XVI (2008, 1) would make clear, since there was this usual custom whereby at about the age of 12 to 13, a Jewish boy would become a bar mitzvah (“son of the commandment”), Saul also had to become one. According to Kizhakkeyil (2007, 18), it was after this that Saul’s father, as a matter of fact, had informed him, thus: “together with your secular studies, I want you to learn our pharisaic tradition and heritage”(cited in Ezeanyino, 2012, 88) and thus would Saul be sent to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, he studied at the feet of Gamaliel. “I was educated in the school of Gamaliel, according to the strict observance of our Law” (Acts 22:3). And by “according to the strict observance of our Law”, he was saying that, true to his father’s wishes, he had learnt the “Pharisaic tradition and heritage”, since the Pharisees are the “strictest group in Jewish religion”(Pereira, 1993, 21). Hence, he, the “son of a Pharisee”(Acts 23:6), would become himself a Pharisee, a “consummate Pharisee” as Thomas (2005, 217 cited in Ezeanyino,

95) would call him. “With regard to the Law”, he says in the Letter to the Philippians, “I am a Pharisee”(3:5. cf. Acts 26:5).

And it was here in Jerusalem that he would become radicalized, he would become a fanatic so to say, in defence of the same Law in which he had been trained and would go all out in trying to bring back to the Law all those he considered to have strayed from it epitomized, among others, by their blasphemous confession of Jesus as the Lord and Messiah. And “those” were mainly followers of the Way, followers of the same Jesus, members of the nascent Church. “[S]uch was my zeal for the Law”, he would confess, “that I persecuted the Church”(Phil 3:6) – persecuted the Church “to the point of death and arrested its followers, both men and women, throwing them into prison”(Acts 22: 4).

Hence, while Ukwuegbu (2008, 70-71) tells us that Paul’s “heroes and role models may well have[been] three zealots from the past: Phinehas, the biblical grandson of Aaron (Num 25: 11, 13; Psalm 106:30-31); the Prophet Elijah (I Kings 18:17-40; 9-10); and the priestly hero Mattathias (I Mac 2:23-28)”, Murphy-O’Connor (2007) would observe, that:

The hostility with which he attempted to drive Christians back to the Law made him a ‘zealot’ in the old classical sense, and clearly he was proud to stand in that tradition(Gal. 1.13-14; Phil 3:5). Words were his weapons, confrontation his strategy and verbal harassment his tactic. He would never rest, and was determined to grind down the followers of Jesus. He could challenge, revile, insult, slander, threaten – in a word, make the lives of Christians a misery(55).

However, in Orwell’s *Animal Farm*(2000), there is this observation that all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others(90). Similarly, here, while there might have been others who were molded in the same fanatical mentality as Saul’s and might have participated, as it were, in the same persecution of Christians, placed on the same scale, however, Saul’s own fanaticism appeared higher. “I furiously persecuted the Church of God and tried to destroy it. For I was more devoted to the Jewish religion than many fellow Jews of my age, and I defended the traditions of my ancestors fanatically”(Gal. 1:13-14).

### **Achebe’s Enoch: The Face of A Religious Fanatic**

As pointed out before now, Enoch is actually a character in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*(2008). Son of the priest of the snake cult, Achebe points out that, “The story went around that Enoch had killed and eaten the sacred python, and that his father had cursed him”(142). He was among the first citizens of

Umuofia to convert to the “lunatic religion” brought to Umuofia by the white men – even as it is made clear that “there was a growing feeling that there might be something in it[the lunatic religion] after all, something vaguely akin to method in the overwhelming madness”(142). On his physique, like Saul, it is observed that he was short of stature. “Enoch was short and slight of build and always seemed to be in great haste”(148). And while, as it was found out above, that Saul had crooked legs, Achebe, speaking about Enoch’s own – and one would wonder why it must be his legs as well – would observe, thus: “His feet were short and broad, and when he stood or walked his heels came together and his feet opened outwards as if they had quarreled and meant to go in different directions”(148).

Again, like Saul whom it was shown was in “a good state of body”, about Enoch it is said that “Such was the excessive energy bottled up in Enoch’s small body that it was always erupting in quarrels and fights”(148). Similarly, while Saul, as made clear above, had confessed, thus: “You have heard of my previous activity in the Jewish community[...]. For I was more devoted to the Jewish religion than many fellow Jews of my age, and I defended the traditions of my ancestors fanatically”(Gal. 1:13-14), so also about Enoch, Achebe states: “Enoch’s devotion to the new faith had seemed so much greater than Mr Brown’s that the villagers called him The Outsider who wept more than the bereaved”(148).

As Onwukeme (2011, 13)points out, “Paul is presented as a youthwho looked on with admiration at the grisly execution of Stephen (Acts 7, 58; 8, 1; 22, 20). He is presented as an archpersecutor, bursting into Christian homes and throwing their occupants into prison(Acts 8,3). He asks for letters from the High Priest enabling him to bring prisoners from Damascus(Acts 9, 1-2; 22, 4-5). Paul himself says: ‘I not only shut up many of the saints in prison, by the authority from the chief priests but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them’(Acts 26, 10)”. What this shows, among others, is that in the persecution against the Church, Saul was never at the back, but, instead, wasactually in the thick of the storm! And the same could be said of Enoch in the conflict that erupted between the church and Umuofia. As Achebe observes: “It was Enoch who touched off the great conflict between church and clan in Umuofia which had been gathering since Mr. Brown left”(148).Continuing, he says:

It happened during the annual ceremony which was held in honor of the earth deity. At such times the ancestors of the clan who had been committed to Mother Earth at their death emerged again as *egwugwu* through tiny ant-holes. One of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an *egwugwu* in public, or to say or do anything which might

reduce its immortal prestige in the eyes of the uninitiated. And this was what Enoch did. The annual worship of the earth goddess fell on a Sunday, and the masked spirits were abroad. The Christian women who had been to church could not therefore go home. Some of their men had gone out to beg the *egwugwu* to retire for a short while for the women to pass. They agreed and were already retiring, when Enoch boasted aloud that they would not dare to touch a Christian. Whereupon they all came back and one of them gave Enoch a good stroke of the cane, which was always carried. Enoch fell on him and tore off his mask. The other *egwugwu* immediately surrounded their desecrated companion, to shield him from the profane gaze of women and children, and led him away. Enoch had killed an ancestral spirit, and Umuofia was thrown into confusion (148-149).

### **The Aforementioned Similarities Between Saul and Achebe's Enoch: Mere Coincidence or Something More?**

On May 13, 1981, during the first anniversary of the assassination attempt on him, Pope John Paul II had made the following observation: "In the designs of Providence, there are no mere coincidences" (cited in Hebblethwaite, 1995, 94). And it could be said here as well that it may not just be mere coincidence the fact that the above-mentioned similarities exist between Enoch and the biblical pre-conversion Saul. It is possible –and this is actually what this paper wishes to point out here – that Saul before his conversion was actually the inspiration for Achebe's Enoch. Of course, characters in novels and plays do not fall from the sky. Even if at the beginning of such novels the authors usually put on disclaimers like, "The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author" (See Akpan, 2008; Achebe, 1967), the fact still remains that the characters are usually inspired by people living or dead.

For instance, when in an interview some twelve years ago, precisely in 2003, Chimamanda Adichie, following her novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, a novel set, as a matter of fact, in the serene town of Nsukka and then in Enugu, was asked how much of her novel was drawn from real people and experiences in her life, she had answered, thus: "I grew up in a university town, in a close-knit, moderately Catholic family, and I observed many of Nigeria's political upheavals. So the themes in the novel - family, religion, politics - are drawn from real life. But the characters are mine and are not based on anybody I know, at least not consciously. The exception is the character Mama Joe, the eccentric, interesting, and sweet woman who braided my hair for many years.

I wanted to pay tribute to her!”(Daniels, 2003).A meticulous reading of the novel, however, would reveal, among others, that the character Ade Coker, the editor of Kambili’s father’s *Standard Newspaper*, has all the trappings of the late Dele Giwa, the former Nigerian editor of *Newswatch Magazine*. Not only is there that close resemblance between Giwa and Coker, especially following their running battles with the government on account of their editorials, but also there is this peculiar similarity in the manner of their deaths: by letter-bombs(Adichie, 2004, 206).

Again, Hochschild (1999, 141) would observe that the character Kurt, in Conrad’s novel, *Heart of Darkness*(1973), well-known not only for his words, “Exterminate all the brutes”(72), which he had written as a footnote to his 17-page report to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, but also for his last words, “The horror! The horror!”(100), was actually inspired by some real people who had something to do with the Congo, the latter where Conrad himself had spent some six months in the year 1890. According to him, Hochschild, that is: “Conrad stayed true to life when creating the charismatic, murderous figure at the center of his novel, perhaps the twentieth century’s most famous literary villain. Mr. Kurtz was clearly inspired by several real people, among them Georges Antoine Klein, a French agent for an ivory-gathering firm at Stanley Falls [...]. Major Edmond Barttelot, the man whom Stanley left in charge of the rear column on the Emin Pasha expedition[...]. Arthur Hodister, famed for his harem of African women and for gathering huge amounts of ivory[...]. Captain Leon Rom of the Force Republique. It is from Rom that Conrad may have taken the signal feature of his villain: the collection of African heads surrounding Kurtz's house”(144-145). No wonder, about his book in general, *Heart of Darkness*, the same Conrad, according to Hochschild, is said to have declared: “Heart of Darkness is experience...pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts of the case”(143).

Be that as it may, that Achebe could have created his character Enoch in the image and likeness of the biblical Saul is actually not surprising and this for the following reasons:

**a. The Influence of the Bible on Him Generally:** While Shorter (1996) had informed us that the Kenyan novelist, Ngugiwa Thiong’o, “is the [African] writer most influenced by the Bible and by Christian images and themes” (76), it is a fact that Achebe was no less influenced by the same bible. Achebe himself (2012, 10-11) would indirectly confess, thus: “The Bible played an important role in my education. My parents often read passages out loud to us during prayer time and encouraged us, when we were all able, to read and memorize several passages. Sunday school continued this tradition

of Christian evangelical education, this time with several other children from the village”.

**b. Family Background:** Neither should it be surprising that he could have read the extra-biblical sources, especially, the *Acts of Paul*, from which parts of the picture painted of Saul above were derived. For one, Achebe came of a family that cherished the reading of books and education in general. About his father, he had observed: “My father was an early Christian convert and a good student[...]. He was a brilliant man, who deeply valued education and read a great deal mainly the Bible and religious books, periodicals, and almanacs from the Church Mission Society”(8). Little further, he would maintain:

My most powerful memories of my father are the ones of him working as a catechist and a teacher. He read constantly and had a small library. My father also had a number of collages and maps hanging on the walls, and books that he encouraged his children to read. He would often walk us through the house telling stories linked to each prized possession. It was from him that I was exposed to the magic in the mere title of William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night Dream* and to an Igbo translation of John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*(10).

For his love of books, Achebe’s father could have been as well the inspiration in this sense for the character Isaac Okonkwo, Obi Okonkwo’s father, in *No Longer at Ease* (1987). About this Isaac Okonkwo, he, Achebe, had said: “Mr Okonkwo believed utterly and completely in the things of the white man. And the symbol of the white man’s power was the written word, or better still, the printed word[...]. The result of Okonkwo’s mystic regard for the written word was that his room was full of old books and papers - from Blackie’s *Arithmetic*, which he used in 1908, to Obi’s Durell, from obsolete cockroach-eaten translations of the Bible into the Onitsha dialect to yellowed Scripture Union Cards of 1920 and earlier. Okonkwo never destroyed a piece of paper. He had two boxes full of them” (115). And it is likely that it was from this father of his that he had acquired the same love for reading. After all, Varkey (2003, 16) had once observed that, “No child becomes what he or she is by accident. The influence of parents and of other significant adults in the life of the child is of capital importance”. And Achebe himself would confess, thus: “My family was very pleased with my school performance, from the end of primary school through to this time. No matter that I was not known for my athletic ability; they encouraged me to read voraciously, taking great pleasure in my nickname: Dictionary” (27).

c. **Change of Course at the University:** And while he could have carried his “voraciousness” for books up to the university, the University College, Ibadan, where he had studied, another thing that happened there could have afforded him all the more the opportunity to have possibly come across the apocryphal Saul. As he points out: “Umuahia had a large contingent of students admitted to University College, Ibadan, with a number of students winning at least minor scholarships. I received my scholarship to study medicine at Ibadan. I wanted to be in the arts but felt pressure to choose medicine instead. After a year of work I changed to English, history, and theology, but by so doing I lost the bursary and was left with the prospect of paying tuition”(28). And it is possible that in the lectures in theology one of which would have been in New Testament Studies, the lecturer might have mentioned the apocryphal Saul and Achebe being always eager to read could have gone to the library and read him up.

#### **Factors That Helped Achebe’s Enoch In His Fanaticism**

If it could be said to be only a possibility the foregoing observation that the New Testament’s Saul could have been the inspiration for Achebe’s Enoch, the same could not be said of the fact, as also underlined above, that both Saul and Enoch suffered from the same ‘disease’ – a disease that is actually the interest of the paper - religious fanaticism. However, in agriculture, good soil is usually needed for the better health and growth of plants. In the case of Achebe’s Enoch and his fanaticism, the good soil was provided by the following factors:

**a. The Departure of Mr Brown:** Mr Brown was the first missionary who came to Umuofia. He was a man of prudent and balanced spirituality. As Achebe observes: “Mr. Brown, the white missionary, [...] was very firm in restraining his flock from provoking the wrath of the clan. [...]. Mr. Brown preached against such excess of zeal. Everything was possible, he told his energetic flock, but everything was not expedient. And so Mr. Brown came to be respected even by the clan, because he trod softly on its faith. He made friends with some of the great men of the clan and on one of his frequent visits to the neighboring villages he had been presented with a carved elephant tusk, which was a sign of dignity and rank. One of the great men in that village was called Akunna and he had given one of his sons to be taught the white man’s knowledge in Mr. Brown’s school. Whenever Mr. Brown went to that village he spent long hours with Akunna in his obi talking through an interpreter about religion. Neither of them succeeded in converting the other but they learned more about their different beliefs. [...]. In this way Mr. Brown learned a good deal about the religion of the clan and he came to the conclusion that a frontal attack on it would not succeed”(142-144).

Indeed, it was Warren (cited in Bevans, 2009) who had pointed out that in the event of the encounter between a Christian missionary and a man of another faith or culture, there will always be the necessity of a deep humility. According to him:

When we approach the man of another faith than our own it will be in a spirit of expectancy to find how God has been speaking to him and what new understandings of grace and love of God we may ourselves discover in this encounter. Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival(176).

And it is as if Mr Brown had studied Warren's book. The respect that he had for the culture of the people he came to evangelize, the Umuofia people, would be one that would be reciprocated by the same people. And this could be seen in what Ajofiah had told the interpreter to inform Rev. Smith: "We like his brother[Mr Brown] who was with us before. He was foolish, but we liked him" (151-152).

**b. The Influence of Rev. James Smith:** Rev. Smith replaced Rev. Brown in Umuofia when the latter's health broke down (145). In temperament and personality, he could be said to be the opposite of Rev. Brown. In fact, Achebe called him "a different kind of man" (147). And this difference actually showed even in the way and manner that he undertook his missionary enterprise in Umuofia. It is observed by Achebe that, he "condemned openly Mr. Brown's policy of compromise and accommodation. He saw things as black and white. And black was evil. He saw the world as a battlefield in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the sons of darkness. He spoke in his sermons about sheep and goats and about wheat and tares. He believed in slaying the prophets of Baal" (147). Yes, it was the Swedish musical group, Abba, who, in their song, "I Have a Dream", had mused, among others, thus:

I have a dream, a song to sing  
To help me cope with anything  
If you see the wonder of a fairy tale  
You can take the future even if you fail  
I believe in angels  
Something good in everything I see  
(MetroLyrics, 2015).

And if such could be said to have been the song of Mr Brown, the same could not be said of Rev. Smith. For him, there was nothing, absolutely nothing, good to be seen in the culture and tradition of the Umuofia people, in the culture and tradition of a place he “believed unformed, where only darkness moved on the face of the waters”(Kingsolver, 2005, 10). Hence, the culture had to be supplanted and replaced. Unlike Mr Brown who knew how to tread softly on the dreams and culture of a people and a culture different from his as Warren had advocated above, no such mentality could be found in Rev. Smith. Yes, it was the 14-year old daughter of Nathan Price, Leah Price, in the same Kingsolver’s *Poisonwood Bible* who had made the following confession: “We struck out for Africa carrying all our excess baggage on our bodies, under our clothes. Also, we had clothes under our clothes. My sisters and I left home wearing six pairs of underdrawers, two half-slips and camisoles; several dresses one on top of the other, with pedal pushers underneath; and outside of everything an all-weather coat”(15). Similarly, Rev Smith struck out for Africa, for Umuofia in this case, carrying all his excess baggage of superiority complex on his body, even under his clothes. “[O]ne of the underlying presuppositions of the encounter between Christianity and African religion was the idea that the former was superior to the latter. Missionaries presented the culture that underpinned Christianity as civilized and therefore superior. It had nothing to receive from the host culture and religion; it had everything to give to it, in order to save Africans from total damnation”(Orobator, 2008, 121). Indeed, Rev Smith was one of such missionaries and the consequence was that he never really settled down to know and understand the people among whom he lived(Mbefo, 1989, 37).

Similarly, it was Reilly (1978) who had observed that “in dealing with religion and with Christianity, it is unwise to play the numbers game” (10). Rev. Smith would equally accuse Mr Brown of having played the number game in his mission in Umuofia. For him, Mr Brown was only interested in the number of those who came to be Christians rather than in whether truly they had converted from their pagan ways and come to know the tenets of their new religion. As Achebe says:

Mr. Smith was greatly distressed by the ignorance which many of his flock showed even in such things as the Trinity and the Sacraments. It only showed that they were seeds sown on a rocky soil. Mr. Brown had thought of nothing but numbers. He should have known that the kingdom of God did not depend on large crowds. Our Lord Himself stressed the importance of fewness. Narrow is the way and few the number. To fill the Lord’s holy temple with an idolatrous

crowd clamoring for signs was a folly of everlasting consequence. Our Lord used the whip only once in His life-to drive the crowd away from His church(147).

And criticizing Mr Brown this way, it is little surprising that under him a different picture of things would be painted. “There was a saying in Umuofia”, Achebe comes in once more, “that as a man danced so the drums were beaten for him. Mr. Smith danced a furious step and so the drums went mad. The over-zealous converts who had smarted under Mr. Brown’s restraining hand now flourished in full favor. One of them was Enoch”(148).

**c. The Hospitality of African Traditional Religion:** And finally, the same Orobator (2008, 120)it was who had pointed out that, “The realities themselves (faith, gospel, religion and culture) are not static or closed: they are dynamic and open to growth and change”. And while it is a fact that concerns all cultures and religions – Murphy-O’Connor (2007), for instance, would observe that, “Judaism was very tolerant of deviant ideas provided they did not threaten social cohesion”(54) – there is a way in which it could be said to be more characteristic of African culture and its religion. “It is important to note”, says Ezigbo (2012, 200), “that hospitality (i.e. the ability to welcome, embrace and nurture the other) is ingrained in African Indigenous Religions. This makes them, to use the words of Jacob Olupona, ‘receptive to change’[...]. It is this character of African indigenous Religions that allowed Christianity and Islam to take root in Africa and to permeate the religious experience of Africans”. Yes, African traditional religion and especially the one that existed inUmuofia was a tolerant, hospitable and welcoming one. It was “ecumenical and non-discriminatory in nature” (Iwe, 1985, 220). It was simply African. And this could be seen as well in the following words addressed byAchebe’sAjofia to Rev Smith: “You can stay with us if you like our ways. You can worship your own god. It is good that a man should worship the gods and spirits of his fathers”(152). And it is paradoxically in a way this same welcoming spirit of African traditional religion in Umuofiathat actually made the fanaticism of Enoch possible. Reason: If the missionaries had not been welcomed, or rather, if their “lunatic religion” had not been given a space in the religious sphere of the Umuofia people(which, as said above, would have been both un-African and un-Umuofian), Enoch would not have joined the new faith even to talk of his devotion to it being so much greater than Mr Brown’s that the villagers would refer to him as the outsider who wept more than the bereaved!(148)

**New Testament’s Saul, Achebe’s Enoch and Religious Fanaticism in Nigeria Today: Nature and Implications**

The questions being put on our table under this section are: Can elements of Saul-Enoch fanaticism be detected in Nigeria today? Are there some who are molded, or better, who behave in a manner similar to both Saul's and Enoch's in our country nowadays? Yes, while Orobator (2008, 117), as if to answer these questions, had observed that "only a small minority of Christians in Africa still behave in a manner similar to Enoch's", which may not be incorrect, but when you consider the fact that in Nigeria today what has actually happened is that Enoch's type of fanaticism has only changed colour, texture and dimension, one can understand better the gravity of religious fanaticism on our hands. "Today's world", says Nwaigbo (2005), "is flooded with an unmanageable abundance of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism" (55). And if you replace "Today's world" with "Today's Nigeria" not much would change. Akinade (2014, 40) actually acknowledges the presence of an "avalanche of religious extremism in many parts of the country". Indeed, in Nigeria today, Enoch-ian fanaticism – not forgetting its Saul-ish counterpart – is seen, in all its freshness and abundance, in our villages wheresome converts to the two major religions in the country, Christianity and Islam, take it upon themselves to force their new-found faith down the throat of others. "Chinua Achebe's Enoch", says Orobator (2008), manifested such religious zealotry as to shock even the missionaries and infuriate his own people in Umuofia. As he understood it, his African religious worldview and the new religion were mutually exclusive. For the latter to survive and become rooted in Umuofia, the former had to be uprooted and eliminated, even by acts of violence. Either the people of Umuofia embraced the new religion and abandoned their heathen gods, or, in the words of the missionaries, they would be 'thrown into fire that burned like palm-oil'. Enoch's extremism admitted of no middle or common ground (116-117).

And the aforementioned converts do exactly the same. Their extremism or zealotry admits as well of no middle ground. It is a zealotry that is adept at throwing things into "fire that burns like palm-oil" and it is often shown in the following ways:

**a. Burning of Mbaris, the Houses for the gods, and Shrines of deities:** Yes, one of the things easily thrown into such fires are Mbaris, houses for the gods (Metuh, 1991, 8; Nwala, 1985, 202), and shrines of deities, which being African are always considered evil and pagan and the gods housed therein impotent. Their patron saints in this business of burning appear to be those three converts who, Achebe observes in chapter eighteen of the novel, had

“gone into the village [of Mbanta] and boasted openly that all the gods were dead and impotent and that they were prepared to defy them by burning all their shrines”(124). As Nwaigbo (2005, 69) observes: “The reason why there are conflicts between the Christians and Muslims in this country is that they fell down in their religious and ethical duties to respect the rights of each other. Likewise, both Christian and Muslim fundamentalists are not respecting the rights of the traditional religionists in the country. The Christian fundamentalist in the Eastern part of the Nigeria have been destroying the Mbari shrines and other local deities claiming that they are pagan heritage. The Muslim fundamentalists in the Western section of the country have been continually and systematically destroying the Morem shrine dedicated to the heroines of Yorubaland. In many places, this situation has led to open clashes between the traditional religionists and Christian or Muslim fundamentalists” (See also Eme, 2010: 97). And not only does such attitude deprive African traditionalists of their places of worship and sacrifice but also valuable sources of historical and sociological knowledge are simply wasted.

**b. Destruction of Ancient Trees Planted by Our Forefathers:** Another thing that is easily destroyed – or to be consistent in the use of metaphor – that is easily thrown into fires, are ancient trees planted by our forefathers, trees that are not only branded evil but also deemed the reservoirs of witches and wizards blocking the “progress” of the entire village and thus had to be cut down. And this attitude simply does not go without some implications. For instance, many there are who go on vacations, for instance, to Europe, and have to spend money going to visit ancient sites like the Colosseum in Rome, excavation sites at Pompey in Southern Italy, etc. They often marvel at their ancient-ness. But what is forgotten is that the same ancient trees that are easily cut down by present-day Enochs and Sauls could, all things being equal, attract visitors and tourists to the country and add to the economy. Similarly, those trees equally play significant role in the environmental health of the villages. They help provide oxygen while absorbing carbon dioxide and thus ensure good respiratory health. Hence, Tron (cited in Mwambazambi, 2010) would confess: “I therefore reclaim the environment and blossoming of all trees for our lungs, flowers for our smiling and birds for our dreams” (59). While that does not mean that those ancient trees that pose threats to the living should not be cut down, the fact is that when they are cut down by these same religious zealots, nothing is planted most of the times in their place unlike the situation that obtained in Rwanda long before the genocide wherein for each tree that was cut, two were planted (Tesi, 2000, 208) or even the one in Kenya with Maathai’s Green Belt Movement (2006).

Moreover, these same trees that are cut down at times do have also herbal significance and could have helped in the cure of many diseases. As Orobator (2008, 132) maintains:

Many African societies believe that nature provides a cure for all kinds of ailments. In *Things Fall Apart*, when Okonkwo's young daughter, Ezinma, fell sick in the middle of the night, he immediately 'took his machete and went into the bush to collect the leaves and grasses and barks of trees that went into making the medicine for *iba*(fever).' In cities and villages in Africa, the art of herbal medicine continues to thrive as an alternative or a complement to orthodox biomedical practice. When a cure is needed, many Africans turn to nature: herbs, seeds, leaves, shoots, barks, roots, and the like to find a cure for their ailments. This practice is founded on the religious belief that nature is sacred and contains healing properties. It is understandable that people who have this belief will be reluctant to adopt practices that destroy or harm their natural environment.

**c. Regarding of the Elderly Ones as Threats That Should, like Ancient Trees Above, be "Cut Down":** This mentality and attitude of destroying ancient trees are, sometimes, passed over to fellow human beings, especially the old ones, the aged. Yes, elderly people who, ordinarily, are "the guardians of our collective memory, and thus the privileged interpreters of that body of ideals and common values which support and guide life in society" (John Paul II, 1999 a, 10), in many villages and cities of Africa today, especially in Nigeria, are being branded "witches and wizards" blocking the progress and wellbeing of the younger ones (Notwithstanding that sometimes some of these latter group do not want to do what they ought to have done, things that would have literally ensured their success). Just as the ancient trees, as said above, are cut down, here also these elderly ones are considered threats that should be "cut down". What is, however, forgotten is that gradually the seed is being sown in the consciousness of the younger ones that old age is a curse. And this, of course, is un-African. Africans are known for their care and esteem of old age and elderly people. According Benedict XVI (2011): "In Africa, the elderly are held in particular veneration. They are not banished from families or marginalized as in other cultures. On the contrary, they are esteemed and perfectly integrated within their families, of which they are indeed the pinnacle. This beautiful African appreciation of old age should inspire Western societies to treat the elderly with greater dignity" (47).

**d. Treating their Family Members With Disdain:** Sometimes this zealotry leads them to treat members of their families with disdain especially those of them who, for one reason or the other, refuse to follow them in their new-found faith. Material assistance and all others are withheld from these as a way of punishing them or inducing them to have a rethink. The attitude of Eugene Achike (Papa) to his father, Papa-Nnukwu, in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) is a case in point here. He had asked the old man who was a traditionalist (166), with promises of good things, to abandon his religion and come over to Catholicism, or rather, to his brand of fanatical Catholicism. But the old man refused. "Papa-Nnukwu had told the *umunna*", Kambili points out, "how Papa had offered to build him a house, buy him a car, and hire him a driver, as long as he converted and threw away the chi in the thatch shrine in his yard. Papa-Nnukwu laughed and said [...he] would not throw away his chi; he had already told Papa this many times" (61). Calling Papa-Nnukwu, therefore, as often as he could, a "heathen" (62; 191; 194), Papa would ban him like all heathens from coming to his house. "Papa himself never greeted Papa-Nnukwu, never visited him, but he sent slim wads of naira through Kevin [their family driver] or through one of our *umunna* members, slimmer wads than he gave Kevin as a Christmas bonus [...]. Papa-Nnukwu had never set foot in it [Papa's compound], because when Papa had decreed that heathens were not allowed in his compound, he had not made an exception for his father" (62-63).

**e. Violent Fundamentalism:** However, because "Only a thin wall separates fundamentalism and fanaticism" (Igwegbe, 2005, 132), it is not too rarely that the fanaticism that has been the object of this piece has given birth to fundamentalists. These fundamentalists, Armstrong (2000) observes, "have no time for democracy, pluralism, religious tolerance, peacekeeping, free speech, or the separation of church and state" (xi). In Nigeria today, that description so much fits members of Boko Haram who for years now have been terrorizing many villages and towns in the northern part of the country. While a number of factors has been posited as being responsible for the emergence of their group (Kukah, 2010), what cannot be downplayed, however, is the role that religious fanaticism had played. It was like the good soil on which it grew. Who can estimate the effects of the activities of this same group on our national development? Today, schools, banks, industries among others have almost closed down in the North-eastern part of the country. Property worth billions and billions of naira have also been lost. Some even estimate that it would take up to two or three decades to get this zone back to where it should have been or even where others comparatively are. What of the number of lives that has been lost? What of the number that has been maimed for life. What of the number that has been displaced? John

Paul II (1990, 58) would often remind us that “Man is the principal agent of development, not money or technology”. These are the same persons who would have made the development being talked about here possible.

If the greatest “heat” of this sect is being felt today in the Northern part of the country where insecurity and political instability are gradually assuming unimaginable proportion, what cannot be denied is that we are in for this together as a nation. It has begun taking a great toll also on the generality of the citizens. The time, the energy, and billions and billions of naira that have been sunk into fighting the insurgency would have been channelled into other sectors of the economy. That would have ensured growth, that would have ensured development. Indeed, if recently CNN predicted that Nigeria would be the third fastest-growing economy in 2015 with growth rate of 7% and coming, as it were, after China with 7.3% and Qatar with 7.1% (2015), it could be said that if not for the menace of Boko Haram which has made investors wary of coming into the country, Nigeria would have done better. Also recently, the African Cup of Nations was hosted by Equatorial Guinea after the previous host, Morocco, pulled out following the Ebola outbreak. And except for the same insecurity engineered by Boko Haram group, Nigeria would have been the preferred venue for the games. While it would have, yes, seen Nigeria spend, it would have also not only put enough into the nation’s coffer, but would have also seen the national team, the Super Eagles, participate at the game and thereby provide an opportunity for the citizens of the country to showcase their patriotism since it is only during such games that Nigerians present a more united front.

### **Saul, Enoch and the Overcoming of Religious Fanaticism in Nigeria Today**

Though Achebe never made known the steps taken by Enoch to overcome his fanaticism, the New Testament is, however, replete with information of how Saul was able to overcome his fanaticism, or better, how he ceased, in his fanaticism, from being the arch-persecutor of Christians to being the arch-propagator of the gospel message to such an extent that he would not only be called the “popularizer of the Christian faith” (Gombis, 2010, 1), but some, like Wrede (1907, 180), would even consider him the second founder of christianity! And that has to do always with what happened to him on his way to Damascus. Aply captured by Luke in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, it is observed that having armed himself with letters from the high priest in Jerusalem, he had set off for Damascus. “As he traveled along and was approaching Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ And he asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The voice

replied, ‘I am Jesus whom you persecute. Now get up and go into the city; there you will be told what you are to do’”(Acts 9:3-6).

Even as Saul is often depicted in arts and pictures as travelling by horse and as one who suddenly met our Lord and fell from his horse - something regarded as an innovation of the twelfth-century and relating, possibly, to the allegorical tradition depicting Superbia falling from her horse(Davis, 2013, 404-405) - what the Bible says above is that he simply “fell to the ground”. According to Onwukeme (2011),

The deeper meaning of this falling to the ground is that Paul fell from his lofty convictions. He fell from his lofty thoughts to more realistic views about God. Paul’s conversion was not from vice to virtue, not from sinful ways to good ways, but from seeing the law as the ultimate to seeing Christ as the ultimate. His conversion was from legalistic and spiritual arrogance of the Jews to Christian humility of grace (41).

Hence, even as, true to what was said of him by Christ, that he was to be his chosen instrument to bring his name to the pagan nations and their kings, and the people of Israel as well(cf. Acts 9:15), in being this, especially after his Damascus encounter, there is observed a marked difference in his attitude. Though he transferred his zeal for the Law to zeal for Christ and his gospel, he never exhibited that fanaticism of his that before now never accepted – to borrow an Igbo proverb popularized, however, by Achebe (Moyers, 1989, 333), here– that, “Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it”. He never showed the same fanaticism that never gave the other whose views or religious inclinations were different from his, space to be, space to live and space to act. A fanaticism that never tolerated the other.

A case in point will always be his preaching in Athens(cf. Acts 17:18-34). There, Saul had used what the Athenians knew of, “an altar with this inscription: *To an Unknown God*”, in order to lead them to what they knew not of, or better still, in order to make known to them what they worshipped as unknown (cf. Acts 17:23).At the end of the preaching, we are told that “some made fun of him, while others said ‘We must hear you on this topic some other time’. At that point Paul left. But a few did join him and believed”(Acts 17:32-34). In fact, Brown (2001, 301, footnote 78) tells us that “Paul’s message had only limited success there, and we are told of no other early mission to that city”.

But in the midst of the aforementioned “limited success” of his preaching there- a success less than what he would record anywhere else(Barclay, 2003, 155) – shines out something more positive which sometimes, however, is missed: The fact that even as it has been pointed out above that some people

made fun of him and even as some did put off their hearing of him to a later date, he himself never, as he did to the followers of Christ before now, “considered nothing but violence and death” (Acts 9:1) towards them. He accepted their freedom to be and to so act and never engaged at all - to borrow only the title of Ukwuegbu’s book – in “Confrontational Evangelization”(1995). Orobator (2008, 117) is also of this view: “My favorite story of Paul’s missionary journeys is his encounter with the Athenians(Acts 17:16-34). Paul had no doubt about the fact that he was the bearer of the true religion, and his audience only had to listen and be converted. His attempt to correlate his God with their “Unknown God” ended in a laughable failure – the Athenians erupted in laughter (Acts 17: 32). Yet Paul neither resorted to violence nor called fire and brimstone on the stubborn Athenians”.

And that is to say, therefore, that to curb religious fanaticism and even fundamentalism in Nigeria today, there is:

**a. Need For Followers of the Major Religions in Nigeria, to, like Paul, “fall to the ground”:** That means to fall from the height of their spiritual arrogance to the ground of humility. This is to enable them to understand, to borrow Auntie Ifeoma’s words to her niece, Kambili, in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*(2004), that “sometimes what was different was just as good as what was familiar”(166). To understand that there may be something good in the other’s views, in the other’s religion, and that in all, the other has the right, inalienable and fundamental, to hold on, within the bounds of reason, to his\her views, to his\her religion, freely and not be forced to embrace another. “[T]he human person”, say the Fathers of Vatican II Council (1965), “has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. [...T]he right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person”(2).

**b. Need for Critical Religious Pedagogy:** Yes, while according to Benedict XVI (2011, 76), “Illiteracy represents one of the principal obstacles to development. It is a scourge on a par with that of the pandemics. True, it does not kill directly, but it contributes actively to the marginalization of the person – which is a form of social death – and it blocks access to knowledge”, education in general, on the other hand, helps to widen one’s horizon of understanding, enlarges the elasticity of one’s perspectives, liberates one from the shackles of myopism, makes for the attainment of a certain degree of psycho-physical maturity, a maturity that makes easy

manipulation and brainwashing by another difficult. In fact, education ensures holistic development of the human person. And the pedagogy we are talking about here, critical religious pedagogy, that is, or simply, critical religious education, and one that needs to be started quite early in life, in addition to the aforementioned, would help the followers of the major religions in the country know of the aforesaid right of the other to religious freedom and of the need to respect that right. It would equally help them know of the significance of not giving in to violence in the event of any misunderstanding but always to opt for dialogue while upholding, as a matter of fact, what Iwuchukwu (2013) calls the “principle of inclusive religious and cultural pluralism”(xi).

**c. Need for the Cultivation of a Culture of Peace:** The same pedagogy would see to the cultivation of a culture of peace. Generally, peace is related to development. Where it is lacking, the flower of development can rarely grow. Where it abounds, development will always blossom. Peace makes many things possible. But it has never come about, however, without justice. “Without justice there is no peace!” exclaims John Paul II (1991, 3). And this is where the government has a part to play in making sure that the enabling environment is created for justice to flourish. Defined classically, justice is “to render to every man his due” and when that happens, many positive things happen. For one, it can help “reduce differences, eliminate discrimination, assure the conditions for the respect of personal dignity” (John Paul II, 1999 b, 3) – even as it can help to do something more: Reduce the ground where religious fanaticism grows.

**d. Need to Fight Injustice, Poverty, Corruption, Embezzlement etc.:** Religious fanaticism thrives as well where injustice abounds. It equally thrives where poverty, corruption, embezzlement, etc., abound. Activities and programmes of government, therefore, that help to fight these ills while at the same time improving the standard of living of the citizenry would surely go a long way in pulling the rug off the feet of religious fanaticism.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has endeavoured to draw a sketch of the nature of fanaticism in both pre-Christian Saul and Achebe’s Enoch. The similarities between the pattern of the fanaticism observed in both were underscored and the same similarities did give us the impetus to suggest that pre-Christian Saul might have been the inspiration for Achebe’s Enoch. The nature of religious fanaticism in contemporary Nigeria was also x-rayed and found, if not wearing the exact habiliment as Saul’s and Enoch’s, but to at least share so many things in common. The implications of such fanaticism were discussed. Among ways of curbing it, the readiness of the followers of the major religions in Nigeria to fall, like Saul, from the height of spiritual

arrogance, to the ground of humility in dealing with others was especially stressed. Such humility enables one to listen to the other and in the same vein, to be listened to and thus will be established the much-needed dialogue.

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