

**REBELLION AND RESTORATION: ANALYZING APOSTASY AMONG LAGOS
CHRISTIAN YOUTHS THROUGH MOUNT ZION'S MOVIES, *THE PRODIGAL ONES*,
AND *CORPER'S LODGE***

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Abstract

*This study examines *The Prodigal Ones* and *Corper's Lodge* by Mount Zion Faith Ministries as religious and socio-cultural narratives that confront the phenomenon of apostasy and spiritual restoration among Lagos youths. The films portray the struggles of individuals who abandon their Christian faith in pursuit of personal freedom, materialism, and social acceptance, highlighting the tension between traditional religious values and contemporary youth identities in Nigeria. Guided by four key research questions, the study explores: (1) how the films depict apostasy among Lagos youths, (2) the role of faith-based media in shaping public discourse on apostasy and religious tolerance, (3) the theological alignment of the films with Christian doctrines of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation, and (4) the broader socio-cultural implications of youth disillusionment with institutional religion. Using thematic analysis, Cultivation theory and audience responses, the research finds that both films function as moral cautionary tales and redemptive narratives. They address pressing issues such as rebellion, peer influence, family breakdown, and the quest for identity and autonomy. The emphasis on repentance and reconciliation reveals how faith-based media can reshape perceptions of apostasy while promoting dialogue on spiritual resilience and religious freedom. By situating these films within Nigeria's theological and cultural landscape, the study underscores their relevance in addressing the evolving role of religion in youth identity formation and moral decision-making.*

Keywords: Apostasy, *The Prodigal Ones*, Mount Zion Faith Ministries (MZFM), Lagos Youths

Introduction

Apostasy, or the abandonment of religious faith, has become an increasing concern among youths in Lagos, Nigeria (Igwe, 2021). As a rapidly urbanizing and cosmopolitan city, Lagos presents a unique socio-cultural landscape where Christian values frequently intersect with other religions and modern influences, such as interfaith marriage, secularism, materialism, and peer pressure. Many young people, in pursuit of personal ambitions and social acceptance, often drift away from their faith, leading to spiritual crises and moral dilemmas. The number of young people leaving their childhood faith has rapidly increased (McClure, 2020). In particular, the influence of social media on the lives of emerging young adults has affected both their identity and their faith (Beckham, 2022). Citing Krause et al. (2021) and Stonestreet & Kunkle (2020), Beckham (2022) notes that teens spent an average of four hours daily on social media in the 1990s, a figure that has now soared to almost nine hours daily (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2023). Social media now occupies more time in a teen's day than traditional media, such as books, magazines, and television (American Psychological Association, 2018). Moreover, young adults are allowing social media influencers to define their identity rather than their faith (Huff, 2022). Christian drama has long served as an effective tool for addressing issues of faith, morality, and redemption, particularly among young audiences. The Mount Zion Film Productions (MZFP), a pioneering Christian film organization in Nigeria, plays a significant role in using faith-based films to engage with contemporary societal issues. Two of its notable productions, *The Prodigal Ones* and *Corper's Lodge*, explore the theme of apostasy, shedding light on the factors that contribute to spiritual rebellion and the journey toward restoration (Bamiloye, 2023). Inspired by the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke

15:11-32, *The Prodigal Ones* presents a narrative that mirrors the struggles of young Nigerians who, influenced by worldly temptations, wander away from their faith. The film portrays their sources of spiritual confusion, moral compromise, and their eventual realization of the emptiness of a life disconnected from God. More importantly, it emphasizes themes of materialism, divine mercy, repentance, and redemption. Furthermore, the film demonstrates how faith communities and personal conviction play crucial roles in guiding individuals back to spiritual wholeness. This study is anchored in Cultivation Theory, proposed by George Gerbner in the 1970s. Cultivation Theory posits that long-term exposure to media content can shape individuals' perceptions of reality, influencing their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. The theory suggests that the media does not directly change audience opinions but rather cultivates a gradual shaping of worldviews, reinforcing dominant cultural norms and ideologies over time (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Media serves as a powerful agent of socialization, portraying certain social realities and norms that viewers internalize, leading to the cultivation of shared cultural beliefs and values. This is particularly relevant to Christian drama, where repeated exposure to narratives infused with Christian teachings and values can contribute to shaping audiences' perceptions and reinforcing religious ideologies. Relevant to Mount Zion's *The Prodigal Ones* and Corper's *Lodge*, the Cultivation Theory provides a lens to examine how films support Christian ideals and principles. By portraying characters who exemplify Christian virtues, confronting moral dilemmas through a biblical perspective, and illustrating the consequences of both righteous and sinful behaviours, these films cultivate a collective consciousness that aligns with Christian doctrines. Furthermore, the Cultivation Theory helps explain how films promote social transformation by bolstering moral values, encouraging faith-based decision-making, and fostering an environment where Christian teachings shape individual and communal behaviour.

By applying Cultivation Theory to this study, we can assess how Christian films function not just as entertainment but as cultural tools that shape religious and moral consciousness within society. This study analyzes the phenomenon of apostasy among Lagos youths through the lens of *The Prodigal Ones* and *Corper's Lodge*, examining the socio-cultural and psychological factors that often lead to spiritual rebellion. It also explores how Christian drama, as exemplified by Mount Zion's storytelling, serves as a reflective, corrective, and redemptive apparatus in faith-based discourse. By offering a compelling portrayal of spiritual struggles, failures, and restoration, *The Prodigal Ones* and *Corper's Lodge* not only provide entertainment but also serve as a medium for self-examination, evangelism, and moral realignment.

An Overview of *The Prodigal Ones*

Rosy and Bayo were a young couple known for their dedication to the church. They were vibrant, active, and always eager to serve, especially during their years of financial hardship. They prayed earnestly for a breakthrough, and in due time, God answered their prayers. Bayo secured a well-paying job, and Rosy's business flourished. However, as their financial status improved, their commitment to God waned. They became extravagant, attended lavish parties, and neglected their roles in the church. Church programs became an afterthought as their passion faded. Their pastor reached out to them, reminded them of their declining faith and the love they once had for God. Yet, despite his counsel, Rosy and Bayo refused to listen. Soon, their home erupted in turmoil; Bayo and Rosy began to disagree, leading to frequent domestic violence, while their once godly children became disobedient and wayward. The situation escalated when Bayo began to have terrifying dreams of a masquerade flogging him mercilessly, which manifested in real life as he suffered from partial paralysis. On her part, Rosy's health began to deteriorate just as their child, Teniola, faced the prospect of dropping out of school. It was at this

critical moment of desperation that Rosy and Bayo realized how far they had strayed; they turned back to God and repented of their sins. They were restored and united once again, and Rosy and Bayo recommitted themselves to God. Their home found peace, their children were restored, and their faith was rekindled. As their pastor reminded them, "Why have you forgotten the vows you made to Him in the days of your distress?" From that day forward, their testimony became a beacon of hope for others, proving that no matter how far one strays, God's arms are always open for those who return in true repentance.

An Overview of Corper's Lodge

Corper's Lodge is a Nigerian Christian drama series that depicts the lives of five university graduates undergoing the compulsory National Youth Service (NYSC) as they navigate faith, identity, and personal struggles while sharing a lodge. Amaka, a bold content creator, clashes with Femi, a former youth pastor whose past and pride lead to chaos. Alongside them are Emeka, the comedic sidekick; Daniel, a devoted believer struggling to live out his calling; and Clara, the spiritual guide whose quiet strength anchors the group. As secrets unravel and relationships are tested, the characters confront issues such as spiritual complacency, temptation, guilt, and redemption. The movie offers a raw, relatable look at the Christian pilgrimage in today's world, illustrating the challenges of growth, the consequences of poor choices, and the grace that leads to transformation.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research approach, combining a bibliographic review with empirical data collection through interviews and surveys. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with a total of twenty participants purposively selected from Lagos, Nigeria. The

sample comprised seven campus fellowship leaders and officers, five students of Religious Studies, four chaplains, and four fellowship members, all drawn from various Christian denominations within and outside the University of Lagos. Among the 20 participants, there were eleven males and nine females. Data collection took place between April and June 2025, using a structured interview guide to facilitate interviews that lasted no more than 20 minutes, with recordings made using a tape recorder. Most interviews were conducted in English and were held face-to-face, both individually and in groups, while the study also utilized Google Forms to broaden accessibility. A trained research assistant handled transcription, and where permission was granted, names and statuses of participants were reflected in the documentation. The researchers thematically analyzed the data.

Research Questions

The under listed questions guided the study.

1. How do The Prodigal Ones and Corper's Lodge portray apostasy among Lagos youths?
2. To what extent do faith-based media shape public discourse on apostasy and restoration?
3. How do the films align with theological perspectives on repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation?
4. In what ways do these films reflect the broader socio-cultural implications of youths' disillusionment with conventional religions?

Discussion of Findings

Understanding Apostasy among Lagos Youths.

Mount Zion's *The Prodigal Ones* and Corper's *Lodge* effectively reflect the spiritual crises facing Lagos youths. These films portray apostasy not just as rebellion, but as a complex and often painful journey shaped by both societal and internal pressures. Peer pressure and materialism are recurring themes in audience reflections. Several respondents pointed out that "peer influence, a flawed parental system," and "worldly pleasures and wayward friends" are significant contributors to the spiritual decline of many youths. The films illustrate how "the fear of what people will say" and "the need to explore" lead young Christians to question or abandon their faith, highlighting the fragility of youthful convictions in a consumerist and status-driven society. The depiction of material success as a factor in spiritual decline is a compelling choice in the films. Sarah noted that "people are usually more spiritual when in need and less spiritual when blessed," while Ayomide elaborated, saying, "when you finally have what you have been asking God for, you become so comfortable... You forget about the source of your wealth." The storyline reveals how the pursuit of wealth can consume one's spiritual discipline, leading to procrastination, laziness, and ultimately apostasy. One respondent succinctly summarized this progression: "You start by forgetting to pray... then forget to go to church... and this kills your spiritual life." In relation to dominant media narratives, the films challenge the glorification of quick wealth and the secular media's portrayal of prosperity as the ultimate goal. One viewer noted, "the media portrays deceit, fraud, and crime as the surest way to make it big," contrasting sharply with the films' Christian ethos of hard work, perseverance, and moral integrity. By doing so, the films present a counter-narrative that urges youths to consider the spiritual costs of negligence and unbridled ambition. Significantly, *The Prodigal Ones* and *Corper's Lodge* humanize apostates, portraying them as "complex characters with relatable struggles." The audience is invited into the inner turmoil of the characters, fostering empathy and helping them

avoid similar pitfalls. As one viewer remarked, "the film provides background information on the apostates' past experiences, struggles, and reasons for leaving their faith," which allows the audience to "understand their perspective, relate, and show empathy." The emotional and spiritual journeys of the characters are enhanced through narrative techniques such as dialogue, symbolism, and character arcs. For example, scenes where characters spend lavishly at parties while neglecting their church commitments symbolize spiritual imbalance. One viewer pointed out the symbolism of the masquerade in *The Prodigal Ones*; to her, it "represents darkness," while the church symbolizes "light." These elements create powerful metaphors that help the audience comprehend the gravity of apostasy and the hope of redemption. Character arcs are transformative as well. A protagonist's journey from spiritual fervour to complacency and eventual restoration embodies the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son. As another viewer noted, "the journey from wealth and privilege to spiritual crisis and redemption serves as a powerful narrative arc." Ultimately, both films function as tools for spiritual instruction and moral persuasion. They do not simply depict apostasy as an unmitigated failure but as a diversion on a longer path toward repentance and reconciliation. By demonstrating that "apostates are also human... not above temptations," the films create space for compassionate dialogue and encourage the belief that "no matter how far you fall, you can be restored by God."

Role of Faith-Based Media in Shaping Public Discourse on Apostasy and Leniency toward Apostates.

Faith-based films like *The Prodigal Ones* and Corper's *Lodge* play an increasingly vital role in shaping public discourse on apostasy and religious tolerance in Nigeria, particularly among Christian youths. These films address the often-taboo subject of religious backsliding, making it "a topic that should be discussed in our environment," emphasizing that "we shouldn't shy away

from it." By portraying characters who struggle with faith, the films encourage audiences to reflect on the internal and external factors leading to spiritual decline, as well as on their own personal experiences. Viewers can identify with various scenes and characters, expressing, "me too." Importantly, the films personify apostates, allowing viewers to empathize with them rather than vilify or stigmatize them. One response noted that *The Prodigal Ones* offers "a visual display of the inner struggle every young believer experiences," which in turn "gives hope and assurance that with perseverance, there will ultimately be a happy ending." Through this portrayal, the films contribute to a more compassionate understanding of those who stray from their faith.

At the same time, responses acknowledged the dual nature of the films' influence on leniency toward backsliders. On one hand, they "encourage understanding and compassion," particularly by illustrating that "apostates are human beings too and may not always be right." On the other hand, there were concerns that the films' portrayal of traditional religious elements, such as depicting the Egungun (masquerade) as a sign of calamity, could unintentionally "instigate religious conflict." Additionally, Falako (2024) expressed concerns regarding the persistent negative and retrogressive portrayals of African realities in evangelical films. Despite this tension, the films remain powerful tools for spiritual and moral persuasion. They convey messages through storytelling, reinforcing Christian values like repentance, humility, and perseverance. As one viewer reflected, "Watching a film like this helps us learn the lessons from the story." Another described it as "a tool for steadfastness in Christian faith." These narratives, grounded in everyday struggles, allow viewers to reflect on their own spiritual choices, making the films not only entertaining but also a source of moral guidance for a generation seeking clarity and conviction in their beliefs and daily lives.

Repentance, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation in The Prodigal Ones and Corpers' Lodge.

Mount Zion's *The Prodigal Ones* and *Corpers' Lodge* provide a theologically rich exploration of Christian doctrines such as repentance, divine mercy, spiritual restoration, and reconciliation. Through emotionally charged narratives and spiritually grounded character arcs, the films portray how even the most wayward can find their way back to God through genuine repentance. Many viewers emphasized that "God is always willing to accept us whenever we genuinely repent, regardless of our past sins." This core message is further affirmed by another respondent who stated that "the love of God knows no end, regardless of the weight of sin." This aligns closely with the New Testament's teachings on forgiveness, such as Jesus' instruction to Peter to forgive "seventy times seven" times (Matthew 18:21-22), underscoring the limitless nature of divine mercy. Moreover, the connection between repentance, confession, and vulnerability is one of the film's most notable theological reflections. Viewers observed that confession plays a key role in triggering mercy: "The husband's confession to the pastor" and "the wife pleading for forgiveness while her daughter is in the hospital" were highlighted as pivotal turning points. These moments illustrate that repentance is "not just a feeling but an action", a theme resonant with biblical teachings found throughout the Psalms and Epistles. For example, Psalm 51 captures David's response when confronted by the prophet Nathan: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your unfailing love; according to Your great compassion, blot out my transgressions." However, such themes can be inadequate in many relationships. Suffering is portrayed as an instrument of divine correction and grace, reflecting biblical views of trials as a means of spiritual refinement. As one viewer summarized, "Spiritual decline brings a lot of baggage, and after restoration, the grace of God abounds." The films depict suffering as a gateway to reflection, humility, and transformation. One response drew a parallel with Paul's

letter to Philemon: “The suffering makes them think about returning to God,” similar to how the runaway slave, Onesimus, was sent back not merely as a slave but as a brother in Christ (Philemon 1:10). The concept of grace is intricately woven into the narrative. One viewer eloquently stated, “Grace reunites us with God... it is by grace, through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, that we can be reconciled.” This understanding reflects a profound interpretation of grace not as a passive gift but as a dynamic, redemptive power that empowers the believer to return to right standing with God, self, and society. In terms of reconciliation, the films illustrate a multi-layered process: reconciliation with God, within the family, and with the church. Scenes depicting family worship and spiritual confession underscore the home as the primary site of spiritual renewal. “Once you are at peace with God,” noted Alozie Esther, a member of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in Lagos, “then you are at peace with anything and anyone”(personal communication on 5th November,2025). The church, as Christ’s family, is also portrayed as a supportive structure that facilitates holistic healing: “The film reveals hidden truths to the church leader and helps him bring back the lost members.”

Socio-Cultural Implications of Youth Disillusionment with Conventional Religions.

In *Corpers’ Lodge* and *The Prodigal Ones*, one sees more than just entertainment; these films provide a deep and urgent reflection on how societal and cultural shifts are impacting young people's views of faith. Some participants opined that many Nigerian youths, especially in cities like Lagos, are increasingly disillusioned with institutional Christianity. These films capture that struggle by illustrating Characters in stories that grapple with relatable flaws, often find themselves caught between the expectations of the Church and the demands of the world. Kemi Adebari emphasized, "Peer group influence plays a major role in the life of an individual... they can either make or mar you." This sentiment resonates strongly through characters like Amanda

and Femi. Amanda, a bold and trendy content creator, symbolizes the youth who prioritize digital fame and social validation over spiritual growth. Her narrative illustrates how social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, often replace church attendance for this generation. On the opposite end, Femi embodies another aspect of this crisis: spiritual fatigue. Once a passionate youth pastor, he strayed into worldly pleasures, pursuing "fresh fish" (women of questionable virtue) until he was left with metaphorical "fresh bread" (the Word of God) and a sense of brokenness. His downfall reveals how unchecked ego and the desire for peer validation can undermine even the most promising spiritual callings. The tension between biblical values and modern lifestyles is not merely a dramatic element; it reflects a deeper issue. Funmi Oluwadare (personal communication on 4th December, 2025) noted, "The love of money and an ungodly social life" often leads to a disconnection from God. This observation underscores how materialism and a pleasure-driven culture are displacing genuine spiritual commitment. Moreover, "The Prodigal Ones" addresses the impact of family and the loss of generational faith. One contributor remarked, "A child can suffer for the sins of the parents. If the parents don't have a relationship with God, the child's journey will be difficult." The film explores how spiritual disconnection does not happen in isolation but is part of a broader process of apostasy, intricately tied to one's roots. Importantly, both films strive to avoid a tone of condemnation and stigmatization; instead, they offer an invitation to reflect. Daniel's unwavering decision to serve in a rural orphanage, despite his family's disapproval, serves as a powerful metaphor: when lived out, purpose can transcend societal noise. His journey reminds us that "every person's purpose is an answer to someone's prayer." Ultimately, these narratives reveal that apostasy among youth is rarely a deliberate rejection of God; rather, it often results from cultural conflict, digital distractions, and an ongoing search for identity. The Church must acknowledge this reality and

respond with grace, relevance, and a genuine willingness to listen. As a bride to nation-builder, the church must invest in massive human right educational programme needed to raise the level of general consciousness in any given area so as to arouse actively the people's initiative and participation in nation building (Oko, 2018)

Conclusion and Recommendation

Both films vividly depict the silent crises faced by Christian youths as they navigate a landscape filled with cultural trends, peer pressure, and spiritual conviction. These stories illustrate that rebellion often begins slightly but can escalate quickly when purpose, mentorship, and faith are absent. Nevertheless, the films show that restoration is always possible. Daniel's journey in "Corper's Lodge" mirrors the experiences of many young believers today: pressured, tested, but ultimately called back to their purpose. It serves as a reminder that God still calls, even amidst doubt and distraction. To effectively reach this generation, the Church must mentor the youths and have constant honest, relevant, and lovely engagement. Faith must feel real once again.

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