THE CHALLENGE

A Comedy in One act

By

John N. Tshiama

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When God meets modernity....power struggles and drama ensue

Never shy of the seriously philosophical, Tshiama tackles the big questions of doubt and faith in this his new play The Challenge. In the mid nineteenth century, when the official age of the earth according to the Bible was 5853 years old, religious beliefs were severely tested by Darwinian evolutionary theory, God as a supreme being and the bible as a source of knowledge were challenged and changed forever. God however as a caring benevolent father and figure head survived the onslaughts of the scientific revolution and its impact on ontology in successive religious systems, only to face new challenges in the modern world. It is these new challenges, the pressure of economic forces within the Church and the corruption of capitalism from without, the stuff of the socio-political play, Tshiama explores with surgical precision and determination. As with most good dramas, there is a transformative trickster character who performs this task, who challenges the moral fitness of the church and the biblical text as moral compass to which the protagonist clings.

Shavian in nature, where setting and action are subservient to the message, The Challenge is not without its tensions with Adrian its protagonist in an ideological tug of war. Adrian, a genuinely moral person, finds himself in an uncomfortable position, caught between the rock of a corrupted church and the hard place of sexual liberalism as represented by Harold his neighbour who can only offer him faithless and unstable human love as an alternative. Harold who swears in the name of his grandmother in a reference to the now lost earth religions which once honoured fertility and life, relentlessly exposes the ‘G.H.H’. the gossip, hypocrisy and hatred of the modern ‘African’ church and its authorities, with stories of sexual abuse and dodgy deals. Adrian’s friend, the charismatic but very human Pastor Michel provides a disarming counterpoint to Harold’s challenge in battle of words between the traditional church and modernity. In the challenge, Adrian exposed as being duped by God (played by one of the pastor’s bodyguards) and its representatives is forced to reconsider his relationships to his Maker, his friend and himself with some positive results, Adrian finding something of a place for himself as peacemaker in an uncertain world.

In previous plays such as ‘Red is the Royal Blood’, Tshiama has experimented with blending pre-colonial African theatre troupes with the
dramatic narrative of classical European theatre alla Soyinka, to explore his ideas, but in The Challenge he finds a new voice in the Aristotelian tradition of uniting theme, time and place. Tshiama, a keen observer and recorder of characters displays a natural wit in his writing, pitting the colourful patois of Pastor Michel against the more prosaic Harold. A voice that speaks both to the universal human condition and his community.

Vanessa Dodd, 9th May 2015
CHARACTERS

ADRIAN
PASTOR MICHEL
HAROLD
HAROLD
BODY GUARDS
THE VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY
THE CHOIR
‘The Challenge’ was first performed at Durban University Court Yard Theatre, South Africa, on 22\textsuperscript{nd} of April; with the following cast list:

**ADRIAN**  
Sandile Magagula

**PASTOR MICHEL**  
Andile Tevin Nsibande

**HAROLD**  
Sfundo Maphumulo

**BODYGUARDS**  
Gabriel Miya  
Kwenzokuhle Ngcobo

**VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY**  
Gabriel Miya

**THE CHOIR**  
Nokukhanya Mkhize (Female)  
Zimme Hadebe  
Khethiwe Mzolo  
Nosisa Sithole  
Philile Cele  
Celestia Mpanza  
Thandeka Shangase

**TECHNICAL CREDITS**

Director  
Soyiso Ndaba

Directing Advisor  
Prof Debbie Lutge

Theatre Manager  
Mthandazo Mofokeng

Stage Manager  
Nomvelo Dlamini

Lighting and Sound Design  
Mthandazo Mofokeng

Wardrobe Master  
Simphiwe Mthembu

Administration  
Lebohang Sibisi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS (before the beginning of the show)

Ladies and Gentlemen of the press.

Thanks go to our Acting HOD Stephen van Dyk.

To the playwright John T. Nambombe, I don’t know how to thank you. You allowed me to put your vision into action without asking anything from me. Instead you trusted and helped me. I really appreciate your kindness particularly as most importantly it is the first time this work is being staged.

To my advisor Prof Debbie Lutge thank you so much for all your help. I’ve learnt a lot from you. “Igama lakho ngingu Debbie”

My Stage Manager Nomvelo Dlamini you play your role so humbly. I enjoyed working with you.

“Main man” Mthandazo Mofokeng with the lighting - Ndiyabulela.

Simphiwe Mthembu ne costume thank you.

My last thanks go to my brilliant cast for their dedication, time and respect.

Soyiso Ndaba, the director, 22nd April 2015
THE SET

Upstage centre there is a white cross, centre stage a pulpit. Downstage right there are three blue chairs facing the auditorium, downstage left there is a table decorated with white cloth and two blue chairs. Upstage left a bookshelf.
Present day anywhere in the United Kingdom. The set is a Pentecostal Church. The action takes place on a Friday, between seven and nine in the evening.

Lights up we see PASTOR MICHEL on the pulpit preaching and the two guards standing beside him on both sides and there is a choir wearing blue gowns standing in front of the Pastor while he is preaching.

VOICE OF PASTOR MICHEL

(Off, in French accent)

When the Lord gives to you everything, you said 'Amen!' Beloved! One day, Jesus turned water into wine and stone to bread, you said 'Amen!'. The Lord gives the daily life, you also say 'Amen!' Beloved! Do you think saying 'Amen!' is enough? No, my brothers and sisters. You have to pay back to the Lord what he gave to you with mercy. Well! Last night, God revealed me something. He required me to construct a big religious complex, such as the one made by the King Solomon. Dear brothers and sisters! Commit to the Lord what you owe him. Give what you have, golden or money. God knows how much you have in your pocket. He also knows how much you saved in your depository financial institution account. Commit everything to him and he will bless you. Hebrews chapter 10:22-25 says“ Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ... For he who promised is faithful. And let us think how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit
of exercising, but furthering one another—and all the more as you attend the Day approaching’.

*Lights up. ADRIAN, 45, wearing a white shirt and black trousers sit on the chair behind the desk, doing the church bookkeeping. He’s singing a church tune. A woman is moaning sexually and at the same time the voice of PASTOR MICHEL is heard offstage.*

*Enter PASTOR, 47, wearing a chic costume, a shirt with a black collar, with his guards wearing black t-shirts, trouser and black sunglasses.*

**PASTOR MICHEL**

*(Embarrassed)*

New technology, uh! When they make all those laptops and sophisticated mobile phones, they think that they are more intelligent than God. Adrian, when you use them, problems begin. What a foolish waste.

**ADRIAN stops working and looks at him**

**ADRIAN**

How can I help you, Pastor Michel?

**PASTOR MICHEL**

*(with pride)*

Nothing, Adrian! I don’t need anything from human being. The Lord is with me.

**ADRIAN**

Oh! Stop. When you blame people that mean something is wrong. Please, put your stubbornness behind you.

**PASTOR MICHEL**

All right! My laptop is freezing. Do you know someone who can fix it?
ADRIAN
I have a friend who can check it for you.

PASTOR MICHEL
That would be good if you could call him. Is he a Christian?

ADRIAN
What that have to do with being Christian? Are all hospital doctors Christian?

ADRIAN dials a number from his mobile phone.

ADRIAN
Yes, Harold. It's Adrian. One of my church's laptops has some trouble. Can you come and check it for me, please? Cool. It is the Church of Liberty. Oh! You know the place. I am waiting for you now.

PASTOR MICHEL
Is he coming?

ADRIAN
Well, yes he is.

PASTOR MICHEL sings a gospel tune and dances at the same time.

ADRIAN
Everything is okay?

PASTOR MICHEL
Every day, when I think about the marvels of the Lord, I am so happy. Did you know that King David was dancing for the Lord?

ADRIAN
No, but I understand in the Bible he was playing a sitar. I have never heard that he was dancing.
PASTOR MICHEL
What is this Sit...

ADRIAN
... Sitar.

PASTOR MICHEL
(struggling to say the word)
Sit... tar. What exactly is it?

ADRIAN
I thought you knew about it. It's all in the Bible.

PASTOR MICHEL
Just tell me what it is. All right. Stop pumping my ears with your lectures

ADRIAN
(lecturer's tone) Well! A sitar is a big and long-necked lute with movable frets, played with a wire pick. The pers...

PASTOR MICHEL
(interrupt him)
I understand. Just stop it.

ADRIAN
By the way! How do you know he was dancing?

PASTOR MICHEL
It's in the Bible.

ADRIAN
Sure! It's useless asking you for a biblical evidence, because doubtless you will find me one.

PASTOR MICHEL
According to the King David, it is an obligation for Christians to dance in the church.

ADRIAN
Sure.

PASTOR MICHEL
The King David was a full soul who accomplished good work
for the Lord.

Enter HAROLD with a heavy bag.

HAROLD
Isn’t it the guy who sent a general of his army to die, so he could shag his wife?

PASTOR MICHEL looks at him with disgust.

PASTOR MICHEL
(to ADRIAN)
Who the hell is this guy?

HAROLD
Is it the way you welcome hosts in your country?

PASTOR MICHEL
You are no my host. I did not invite you.

HAROLD
Yes, you did. Adrian called me. I am the one who will fix your fucking computer.

PASTOR MICHEL
(to Adrian)
Is it the guy you called? Oh my God.

ADRIAN
Yes, pastor.

HAROLD
(to the pastor)
Am I not your type?
PASTOR MICHEL

What type are you talking about? I am not gay? Oh I knew that. You are a gay.

ADRIAN

Pastor Michel! Meet Harold, my neighbour.

HAROLD gives his hand to shake PASTOR MICHEL hand, but he refuses to shake his hand.

HAROLD

Wow!

Angrily, the PASTOR MICHEL enters his office. ADRIAN hands the laptop to HAROLD and shows him the desk. HAROLD carefully places his bag on the desk and begins his work. ADRIAN continues with his bookkeeping. HAROLD starts singing “La Traviata”.

ADRIAN

Do you mind lowering your voice, Harold? We are in God's house.

HAROLD

What did you say? I can't hear you.

He continues singing loudly.

ADRIAN

(Loudly)
For God sake - why are you singing aloud?

HAROLD

My mother was Italian. She told me to be happy in every situation.
ADRIAN

Look Italian boy! I don’t care about your mother being whatever she was. Bookkeeping job is not easy. I need to concentrate.

HAROLD

I like singing while I am working.

ADRIAN

Well, not me. Just lower your voice.

HAROLD approaches ADRIAN and stands adjacent to him, then places his right arm along his shoulder.

HAROLD

I have a plan after tonight, after ten.

ADRIAN

A plan? What plan?

HAROLD

My girlfriend has a very beautiful black friend. She can introduce her to you if you want. So when we’ll leave here, we can join them in the club.

ADRIAN

Girlfriend... club? What are you even talking about?

HAROLD

What is wrong with you, man?

ADRIAN

Who told you I am into black?

HAROLD

Because you are black.

ADRIAN

I am not interested, man.

HAROLD

Just a suggestion.
ADRIAN
I am a man of principle. I decide not to have sex before I meet the person I really want to get married.

HAROLD
Did I mention shagging?

ADRIAN
I am reminding you that we are in the church. What do you think boyfriends and girlfriends do? Do they just watch cartoons together?

HAROLD laughs loudly.

ADRIAN
What? Why are you laughing at me? What is wrong?

HAROLD
We are in the twenty-first century. People do everything with their girlfriends before they get married, so they can decide if they want to get married or not.

ADRIAN
No. I don’t want.

HAROLD
Come on, Adrian! It’s not like the time of Mary and Joseph. You deserve to enjoy your life. Marriage is a complicated business. People who are inside want to quit and people who are outside want to get in. My God!

ADRIAN
I want it to be legal.

HAROLD
You are not serious, are you? Find a girlfriend and enjoy your life.

ADRIAN stands and walks about agitated.
ADRIAN
You can't change the way I feel inside. I am Christian and I am devoted to God. I don't intend to violate Lord’s law.

HAROLD
What law? Are you really listening to yourself? You speak like Moses. People transgress laws every day. Sometimes laws are meant to be bypassed. Look! You need a break. Have some fresh air and meet someone.

HAROLD
Just give her a try and see for yourself. If you don’t like her, you are free to move on. She is sweet as honey. You know, having a girlfriend provides you with energy.

ADRIAN
What energy?

HAROLD
You will become emotionally stable.

ADRIAN
You see, Harold! A woman is a very dangerous being. It’s because of Eve we are suffering today.

HAROLD
How can you be so misogynistic?

ADRIAN
She gave the forbidden fruit to Adam.

HAROLD
Stop telling yourself stories. They shagged. That is it. And in that time, God hadn’t given his authorization yet.

ADRIAN
Come on Harold. They were married.

HAROLD
Who preceded their marriage? Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, Bertrand Delanoe?
ADRIAN
Stop blaspheming in the God’s house

HAROLD
You are missing something.

ADRIAN
Like what?

HAROLD
Kissing... cuddling... some different stuff. You see what I mean, right?

ADRIAN
I am just too busy for that. Unfortunately I do not have enough time.

HAROLD
Let me tell you a little story.

ADRIAN
Oh my, yes. Made up stories as usual?

HAROLD
No. This is a true story, I swear.

ADRIAN
I don’t believe you when you swear to God.

HAROLD
Not to God! I swear in the name of my grandmother.

ADRIAN
Please, don’t complicate things as they already are. A friend of mine told me that.

ADRIAN
Go on then.

HAROLD
Check-up after check-up, no doctor could heal him. And then he resolved to see a Chinese physician. The Chinese doctor asked him if he was sexually active, he said no’. ‘What a shame’, said the doc. ‘That is the cause of his illness.’ Then he prescribes him some secret drug. The
Chinese doctor advised him to pick up a prostitute and stay with her all night long. You're excited now, aren't you?

**ADRIAN**

No.

**HAROLD**

All right. The same evening, he went to visit a prostitute. He did everything asked by the doctor. On the following day, he returned to visit the doctor and said: ‘I feel good’

**HAROLD sings the song ‘I feel good’**.

**ADRIAN**

*(ironically laughs)*

I have never heard a silly story like this. What are you trying to do to me?

**HAROLD**

Come on! I just want you to open your eyes.

**ADRIAN**

I don’t want to be a hypocrite. In any case, I am overly busy for playing ‘Rudolf Valentino’.

**HAROLD**

Who is that guy again?

**ADRIAN**

I thought you knew everyone.

**HAROLD**

Can you tell me who that guy is?

**ADRIAN**

He was a handsome actor, who liked to have sex with all women, even the married ones.

**HAROLD is very interested.**
HAROLD

Where does he live?

ADRIAN

He died a long time ago.

HAROLD

Did he?

ADRIAN

Yes.

HAROLD

When?

ADRIAN

In nineteen-twenty-six.

HAROLD

What a shame that would be, eh? How do good people die like that?

ADRIAN

Good people? Would you like your wife to be shagged by someone else?

HAROLD

Of course, not.

ADRIAN

So! Why do you think he was a good guy?

HAROLD

Don’t take it from the religious viewpoint. Sometimes people need to change.

ADRIAN

Change? You are crazy, you know?

HAROLD

Since I was born. I like shag...

ADRIAN

*(interrupting)*

Mind your language, would you?
HAROLD
Do you know that lots of religious people shag married women?

ADRIAN
I am not concerned, because I don’t do that.

ADRIAN continues with his work.

HAROLD
All right! I saw your friend the pastor with a girl.

ADRIAN
What did you just say?

HAROLD
Last night, I saw your pastor with a beautiful girl at Odeon cinema.

ADRIAN
You have to be kidding me, right?

HAROLD
Even people you think being saints can do what you think is bad.

ADRIAN
Maybe she was a church member

HAROLD
Do pastors kiss their church members? I heard him saying ‘Good things are made to be tasted.’

ADRIAN
You must be lying! I have known him from my childhood.

HAROLD
Well! People can change. If only you had seen that woman! She was everything a woman should be.

HAROLD describes the girl gesturally.
HAROLD
She is the kind of girl who can make you forget everything.

ADRIAN refuses to look at him.

HAROLD
Look at me, Adrian. She has everything perfect; attractive legs, beautiful breasts, lips, eyebrows, cheeks, butt, waist... Oh my God! Oh, what I would give to smell her shoes!

ADRIAN
Enough!

HAROLD
Your pastor is a con artist.

ADRIAN
I know him better than you.

HAROLD
Obviously you don’t, because it’s not the first time I’ve seen him. I caught him coming out of a hotel with some other young woman. You are like a mother who is saying to the police officer ‘I know my son very well’. You can’t know someone very well.

ADRIAN
Let’s not pay attention to small talk. They are kind of Chinese whispers.

HAROLD
Are you listening to me? I told you I saw him.

ADRIAN
Did you call him when you saw him?

HAROLD
No.

ADRIAN
This implies, it was not him.
HAROLD
What do you mean it was not him?

ADRIAN
You should call him to know if it was actually him.

HAROLD
How could I call him? He always has an air of superiority and a despicable arrogance. I know, for you he may be a saint, but trust, me he is not. He’s not an honest guy, Adrian.

ADRIAN
If he was a bad man, I would know that.

HAROLD
Growing up in the faith, reading the Bible every day, attending church every Sunday, busy childhood life, no girlfriends. How awful! How can you believe me? My father was a Pentecostal Church pastor. You can’t imagine what I have been through. You sit there and you don’t see that you are becoming just like an alcoholic or a drug addict. I am happy today, because I quit the church and put it all behind me.

ADRIAN
Whatever you say, I am not quitting the church, Harold.

HAROLD
I want to save you before it becomes too late. It’s a kind of magic. At the end you start seeing a psychiatrist like a mental case.

ADRIAN
I will surely not consider myself being addicted to something. I just go to the church, and listen to what the Bible says.

HAROLD
Religion makes people do such crazy things. Remember what Karl Marx said? ‘Religion is the opium of the people!’.
ADRIAN
That one was a sick man.

HAROLD
Do you know the story of the esoteric sect, the Solar Temple?

ADRIAN
No.

HAROLD
What do you mean ‘no’?

ADRIAN
Because I don’t know.

HAROLD
All the members of the sect committed collective suicide organized by their founding father Joseph and Luc Jouret.

ADRIAN
You said yourself it was a sect.

HAROLD
It doesn’t matter, whether a sect or a well-known religious group. All of them have the same objective. To maintain their supremacy over others. They’re all hypocrites and cheats. They’re all false modesty and piety. They usually have sex with women even with men and children. Think about the Vatican and the priest scandal? To deflect public outrage, they think it is better to commit sin in private, not in public, but commit sin they do.

ADRIAN
I am a Pentecostal.

HAROLD
What difference does it make, Pentecostal, Catholic or others?
HAROLD
Think back! You told me yourself, your family were very religious, and you suffered a lot. You see, you and I have the something in common.

ADRIAN
Different people react differently. I admit that we have a similar problem, but it cannot make of me an atheist. I am not against God, but all those who call themselves believers and work the biblical rules. It is true my father was an example for me, but what he demanded of me, in my opinion, helped me to become an honourable soul.

HAROLD
Maybe your father was not shagging all over.

ADRIAN
I know, but he was not good enough to me. At a young age, he forced me to attend the church, whether I liked it or not. Any refusal had a consequence, a punishment, the deprivation of the day’s meal. His wife did not like me. I was responsible for all bad things happened in the house. And even so, they were calling themselves Christians who swore only by the Bible. Were reared with the idea ‘God said you have to do everything your parents ask you. You should not doubt on God’s word, otherwise you get to Hades. I realized today it was a kind of child abuse- disguised. I still ask myself the question, why some religious behave badly in the name of God, but it is not my place to judge them.

HAROLD
Don’t let him turn you into a fanatic. You are clearly an intelligent man. That guy Michel and his church are using you. The church only means three things: G.H.H.

ADRIAN
What is this?
HAROLD
Gossip, hatred, hypocrisy. That is the reason people enjoy gathering here.

ADRIAN
That is not true.

ADRIAN looks at HAROLD’s bag on the desk.

ADRIAN
What is it in your bag?

HAROLD
Oh! I forgot that I brought for you something which change your mind about the religion.

ADRIAN
Show me your bag.

ADRIAN wants to take it by force but HAROLD keeps it strongly.

ADRIAN
Are they Job Centre claims?

HAROLD
No. I don’t do Job Centre.

ADRIAN
I saw you there.

HAROLD
Why didn’t you call me? That means it wasn’t me. I am a business man.

ADRIAN
What business man? What products do you sell?

HAROLD
It’s a secret.
ADRIAN
What secret?

HAROLD
I offer services.

ADRIAN
What services?

HAROLD approaches ADRIAN’s ear.

HAROLD
(whispers in Adrian ear)
I’m... an escort.

ADRIAN
(loudly laughs)
What? You an escort? What a shame that would be, eh?

HAROLD
(whispers in his ear)
Not out loud, Adrian. It’s a very good job.

ADRIAN
Do you consider it a job? That is a con job.

HAROLD
I entertain women and give them joy and give them all the pleasure they need.

ADRIAN
What? Surely you are not serious.

HAROLD
It is safer than getting money from poor people in the church.

ADRIAN
It is crazy the way you hate the church.

HAROLD opens his bag and takes an internet paper with different articles.
HAROLD
Let me read it for you.

ADRIAN
I can read by myself.

HAROLD gives the article to ADRIAN.

ADRIAN
A Christian priest busted for raping girls. Yamata, Kyoto - Christian... He's Japanese. Why didn’t you say so?

HAROLD
Have you got problems with the Japanese?

ADRIAN
Just... hmm, they are not truly Christian.

HAROLD
What do you mean by that? Are they not human beings?

ADRIAN
I did not say that. Just... Hmm... Hmm... They are not proper Christian.

HAROLD
What do you mean not ‘proper Christian’?

ADRIAN
They are Shintoists.

HAROLD
What’s Shinto?... whatever!

ADRIAN
Shintoist comes from Shinto.

He puts a chair next to ADRIAN and starts explaining like a lecturer.

ADRIAN
Shinto is the original natural spirituality of Japan. It is a set of.....
HAROLD

ADRIAN
(continues the reading)
‘Christian cult leader Tamotsu Nagata, the suspected rapist of several elementary school age girls, was arrested on Wednesday, police said.’ (To Harold.) Like I said, he is just a Japanese Christian. I need an article about proper Christians, like American, European, African...

HAROLD gives him another article.

HAROLD
What about this one?

ADRIAN
(Reading) ‘The Catholic Church abuse cases are a series of allegations, investigations, trials and convictions of minor sexual abuse crimes committed by Catholic priests, nuns and members of Roman Catholic orders against children as young as....

ADRIAN
You’re not telling me anything new here. I’ve known that one since I was a kid. Anyway, I am not Roman Catholic. We were calling our Parish Church 'Sango Bidoba'.

HAROLD
'Bidoba'?

ADRIAN
Someone who likes too much fucking.
HAROLD
Do you mean your priest was shagging boys?

ADRIAN
This is a church. Stop saying those words.

HAROLD
Fucking or shagging, what is the difference?

ADRIAN
Anyway, my family was Roman Catholic before my father opts for Protestantism.

HAROLD
(showing him another net document)
This guy does not belong to the Roman Catholic. He is pure race protestant. ‘Gregory Ivan Hawkins, 54, is the pastor....

ADRIAN
How do you know that?

HAROLD
Read it, please.

ADRIAN
(reading)
Gregory Ivan Hawkins, 54, is the pastor.... of Zion Plaza Church in Tulsa, Okla. He was charged in July the 23rd, 2013, with four counts of lewd molestation and two counts of assault involving the misuse of a teen relative. (To Harold.)

ADRIAN
Okay, you made a point. I will read it later.

HAROLD’s Mobile phone rings.

HAROLD
Excuse me for a moment. Sounds like I need to answer this call.
HAROLD

(angrily) Why? What made you change your mind? Tired eh?
I don’t believe you. You should call me around six o’clock. What are you up to? Are you sure there’s nothing else?

He suddenly cut the conversation.

ADRIAN

Why are you so upset?

HAROLD

She’s not going to the club tonight.

ADRIAN

Who?

HAROLD

My girlfriend. She doesn’t want to go to the club.

ADRIAN

Maybe something came up.

HAROLD

Or maybe she found someone else. Women are changeable...like the British weather.

ADRIAN

Have a seat Harold. Don’t make yourself ill. Anyway, what makes you think like that? Has she cheated on you once?

HAROLD

No.

ADRIAN

What is the problem, then?

HAROLD

Just, hmm, I love her so much.

ADRIAN

Trust her and think positive. Everything will be good. Do you need some advice?
HAROLD

(laughs)
Advice from you?

ADRIAN
Yes, why not? Don’t even give one hundred percent of your love in a girlfriend. Give her sixty percent and keep forty. So when she decides to leave you, you will not suffer a lot.

HAROLD
Where did you learn that?

ADRIAN
I saw it on the television.

HAROLD
Son of a bitch.

Both Laugh.

ADRIAN
Take a glass of wine, drink and forget about that this evening. You will see tomorrow everything will good.

HAROLD
I’ll try.

ADRIAN
After that you can come read the Bible with me.

HAROLD
Spare me that, Adrian.

ADRIAN
It is good for your spirituality.

HAROLD
I need some fresh air, not spirituality. Let me repair your pastor’s laptop.

ADRIAN bows his head thinking.
ADRIAN
Gregory Ivan Hawkins! Yamata Kyoto! What a waste of time!

Enter PASTOR MICHEL.

PASTOR MICHEL
Yamamoto? Are you doing in Japanese Kendo now?

ADRIAN
No. We are talking about bad pastors in Japan.

PASTOR MICHEL
What is this again?

ADRIAN
Come and read.

ADRIAN gives him articles.

ADRIAN
I begin to realise that in the religion there are too many questions, but not enough answers.

PASTOR MICHEL
(after reading)
Bullshit!

ADRIAN
Pastor!

PASTOR MICHEL
Oh sorry! Adrian! The Bible always answers every single question.

ADRIAN
Give me some answers after you read this.

PASTOR MICHEL
Shit!

ADRIAN
Pastor! You can’t swear.
PASTOR MICHEL
Oh sorry! Don’t you understand that your neighbour wants to put in a deep shit with the Lord?

ADRIAN
Pastor!

PASTOR MICHEL
Oh shit! Sorry again.

HAROLD
This pastor yours is awful.

PASTOR MICHEL
You, shut up …

(to ADRIAN)
All those articles are fake.

ADRIAN
Why can’t you envisage the possibility that they are authentic?

PASTOR MICHEL
Maybe the guys who wrote them are racists.

ADRIAN
That is what I said when I first read the article. (He hands him another article) What about this one?

PASTOR MICHEL
Japanese? I have never heard about Japanese Christians in my life.

ADRIAN
Well! You are wrong.

Adrian’s mobile phone rings.

ADRIAN
(on the phone)
No, I haven't seen anyone yet. I know, but I don’t want
to get married at the age of twenty-five year like you. No. I don’t need a post pack. I will let you know when I am ready. No. I don’t want to get married right away. I am telling you I don’t necessitate a post pack. I will choose myself, my wife when I will be ready. I don’t need your money, dad. Church? Yes, I am actually still attending. I will speak to you later. Yes. Call me in half an hour. I am very busy now. Yes. I know that.

PASTOR MICHEL

I bet it was your dad.

ADRIAN

Yes. He wants me to find a woman. I am even surprised he called me. He never showed an interest in me. Pastor, I need answers.

PASTOR MICHEL

Well! You can call on God. I might confess that at any time I have some doubts, I call on God. God loves you, Adrian. The bible says: ‘Everything you ask will be given to you.

ADRIAN

Are you kidding? How? Do you have his telephone number?

PASTOR MICHEL

Oh! The Lord is calling.

ADRIAN

Are you kidding me? I did not hear your phone ringing.

PASTOR MICHEL

It is the miracle of God.

PASTOR MICHEL walks to the corner of the scene.

PASTOR MICHEL

That is right. I know he is a bit stubborn, but I will try. Yes, my Lord. I will tell him. I will give it to
him. Amen!

PASTOR MICHEL comes back where ADRIAN is sitting.

PASTOR MICHEL
This is the number. Call on him, he will answer you.

ADRIAN
Son of bitch!

Both laugh.

ADRIAN
What do you want me to tell him?

PASTOR MICHEL
You are the one who is complaining, Adrian, not me. Use your brain instead.

ADRIAN
(repeating)
Use your brain, huh!

(to PASTOR MICHEL)
Very encouraging!

PASTOR MICHEL’s phone rings, he answers and goes to the corner out of earshot; and rushes to enter his office. ADRIAN is looking at him when he is speaking on the telephone.

ADRIAN
(to himself)
Call on God! That is funny. Harold can be right. (Looking at the direction of the heaven) If you really exist, why don’t you stop this crime?

He gets up and walks around the church agitated, stands as if by a window, looking out to the audience. Enter a guard pretending that he’s forgotten some under the pulpit then
takes the microphone and pretends to be God.

ADRIAN
God! Where is he? Does he really exist? He might not exist since he understands nothing, he hears nothing and he surely does nothing. Otherwise, he will step in to prevent any criminal offence. I go to the church every Sunday, but I discover around me people suffering, starving, people who don’t have jobs, like me. Why God? What did they deserve to live this kind of life?

Suddenly, there is an almighty bang, like a huge clap of thunder, and the stage is lit with a blinding light. A wild gust of wind sweeps everything from the table... Adrian drops to his knees in terror and puts his hands over his head, he is sweating profusely and his heart is racing.

ADRIAN
Who is that?

Then a voice is heard. Adrian’s body is shaking.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
I am the one you are looking for. Don’t be afraid Adrian. Go and sit back down. I am the one you were looking for. I am your God, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the last.

ADRIAN
Are you real? Are you the same who appeared to Moses?

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
Yes, I am.

ADRIAN
May I see you?
VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
No man sees me, and lives. My face shall not be seen.
Even Moses did not see my face.

ADRIAN
It’s been a long time you did not appear to people.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
I do appear, but indirectly. Sometimes I send someone else. Like the apparitions of the Virgin Mary.

ADRIAN
I did not hear you mention the apparition of Saint Antonin to Kimpa Vita.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
Who is that?

ADRIAN
Beatrice of Kongo. Do you remember?

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
Is she alive or dead?

ADRIAN
She died a long time ago. I thought you knew everything.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
Are you sure I appeared to her?

ADRIAN
No, but People said it was saint Antonin, one of your servants.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
Ah!

ADRIAN
What this ‘Ah’ means? Did you forget her because she was like me?

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
No. I am a God of equity. Wait a minute! Beatrice of Kongo! The one who said Emmanuel, my son and other early
Christian figures were from the Kingdom of Kongo?

ADRIAN

Yes.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
That could be because she changed her Christian name.

ADRIAN
What Christian name. Japanese and Chinese don’t have Christian names. *(He imitates Japanese and Chinese accents)* Keiko, Kanji, Yang Li, Yang Tang..... Yes.

ADRIAN
All right! Did you know we belong to the same country?

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
Of course, I know everything.

ADRIAN
Sure.

ADRIAN sits back more relaxed.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
Now! Ask me any question you want my son. I know everything, but ask me just for formalities, because I know everything.

ADRIAN
Oh right, for formalities! *(Nicely)* I like that too. Look at these articles. I just wanted to ask you if you could prevent those crimes.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
I recognize that people shout and swear at me thinking I do nothing about those crimes, especially committed by religious. But you know, everything has its moment.

ADRIAN
I know you are the Almighty, the Master of the universe.
But in our country elders say adults can also dance in the sound of tom-tom play by the young. You don’t mind me giving you some ideas, do you?

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)

Of course, not. You can.

ADRIAN

Thank you very much. You know, Mister Almighty, you have all the power, can’t you just help them to stop what they are doing?

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)

When I created Adam and Eve, I gave them a free will to accept or not for what I asked them.

ADRIAN

You mean kind of democracy.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)

No. Theocracy.

ADRIAN

Do you know that the theocracy down here looks like the dictatorship? I don’t want to name the countries.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)

My theocracy is different. I give people the opportunity to express themselves like I did to Adam and Eve.

ADRIAN

I believe you, dear Almighty, but people continue to blame you.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)

It is comfortable to blame me for the abuses and ills that men have in life, particularly when it adds up to the numbers of those that observe different religious texts. Like you said, they sustain the right to say and do what they desire, but the day will come, I will make all of them disappear and a new world will be made.
ADRIAN
But in the meantime, they continue to do bad things.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
I am a God of patience.

ADRIAN
But everyone blames you.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (Guard)
They have the right to blame me, but they are wrong.

ADRIAN
I understand that, but you are the leader and the omnipotent. In a country if the economy or health system falls down, everyone blames the regime. Have you got a government with ministers or something like that?

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
Naturally, I have a government which is composed of my angels. They are like my ministers.

ADRIAN
Who is the premier minister?

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
My beloved son Emmanuel is the premier minister.

ADRIAN
If he really is your beloved son, why did you send him to be killed?

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
It was the only way to clear humans of their sin.

ADRIAN
I believe you could find another way to proceed.

VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
What would you do in my place?

PASTOR MICHEL
(offstage)
Is that you talking alone, Adrian?
Enter HAROLD. The ALMIGHTY VOICE stops.

ADRIAN
(to the Voice)
Wait! Can you come later?

THE VOICE OF THE ALMIGHTY (GUARD)
Read well your Bible. I only appear once.

HAROLD
Eh! I can hear you now. Who are you talking to?

ADRIAN
Can’t you be quiet for a while? I have unfinished business.

HAROLD
What kind of business is that?

ADRIAN
The kind which is not your business.

HAROLD
Please Adrian. I need your help.

ADRIAN
What do you want, now?

HAROLD
I am suspecting my girlfriend of cheating on me.

ADRIAN
It is normal. Does she know you do escort?

HAROLD
No.

ADRIAN
They always know.

HAROLD
What do you mean?

ADRIAN
Women always know. You interrupt my business.
HAROLD

What business, Adrian?

ADRIAN

If I tell you, you will not believe me.

HAROLD

Try me.

ADRIAN

I was talking with God.

HAROLD

(laughs)

Are you serious?

ADRIAN

I am.

HAROLD

You are just kidding. Let’s talk about my problem.

ADRIAN

What makes you think your girlfriend is cheating?

HAROLD

I have a kind of intuition.

ADRIAN

Intuition?

HAROLD

Intuition is always right in at least two significant ways; it is always in response to something. It always has your best interest at heart.

ADRIAN

And who said that?

HAROLD

Gavin De Becker in The Gift of Fear, survival....

ADRIAN

(interrupting)

... Yes, yes, yes. I got it.
HAROLD
You see, that is why I believe in it so strongly. I do feel that I am right. I don’t know why. I just can't explain it.

ADRIAN
Sometimes the intuition can be wrong. Maybe you are thinking so much negative.

HAROLD
I don’t know. Sometimes her phone is turned off. When I get her finally, the only excuse she gives me is that ‘It was in silent mode’.

ADRIAN
You are just jealous, Harold.

HAROLD
Me, jealous? No.

ADRIAN
You can’t admit it. You know what?

HAROLD
Women do that most of the time.

ADRIAN
How can you be a misogynist? Men do that too. Most of the time when they are with someone else, they turn the phone off.

HAROLD
Adrian, please tell me what I can do.

ADRIAN
The only way is to trust her.

HAROLD
You are not helping me.

ADRIAN
I don’t know what to say.

HAROLD
How can you be so unhelpful Adrian? I am sure it is
because you read too much into the Bible.

Enter the PASTOR MICHEL and sits at his desk.

PASTOR MICHEL
(to ADRIAN)
I heard you talking to yourself.

ADRIAN
Not at all. I was talking with the Almighty.

PASTOR MICHEL takes a seat.

PASTOR MICHEL
Do you mean God?

ADRIAN
Yes. You told me to call on him and I did it.

PASTOR MICHEL
You are lying. You did not see him.

ADRIAN
For what reason should I lie?

PASTOR MICHEL
To impress me.

ADRIAN
Impress you for what, pastor?

PASTOR MICHEL
Do you mean God like God? The one who appeared to Moses appeared to you?

ADRIAN
Yes, his voice. Even Moses has never seen him. No one can see him my friend.

PASTOR MICHEL
Maybe it was in your dreaming. A lot of people dream talking with kings, queens, presidents, celebrities... In
reality, they don’t.

ADRIAN
Do you remember what you told me? ‘Ask and you will receive’. That is what I did.

PASTOR MICHEL
I was joking.

ADRIAN
(ironic)
Dear Church minister, don’t joke with Lord’s plans. His ways are impenetrable.

PASTOR MICHEL
If God wants to speak to someone, it will be me and not you.

ADRIAN
Why is that?

PASTOR MICHEL
Why? Oh! You with your ‘why’. It is because I am his servant.

ADRIAN
Well, he preferred me. He was so fantastic. He would tell me lots of things if Harold did not interrupt us.

PASTOR MICHEL
Will he come back?

ADRIAN
You know better than me he never comes twice. Read well your Bible that is what he said to me.

PASTOR MICHEL
Hmm!

HAROLD
I am sure, Mister Pastor is jealous.

PASTOR MICHEL
Me, jealous? No.
HAROLD

Why did your face change like that, my Reverend Pastor?

PASTOR MICHEL

It is not your business.

ADRIAN

Don’t be jealous my friend. One day, he will talk to you.

PASTOR MICHEL

Do you really think I believe you?

ADRIAN

Are you playing the Apostle Thomas?

PASTOR MICHEL

I am even worse than him.

ADRIAN

Man of not much faith.

HAROLD

(to the PASTOR MICHEL)
You told him to call on God, didn’t you? You said ‘Ask and you will receive’. That’s what he did.

PASTOR MICHEL

This is a discussion between Christians. It is not your business. Anyway, I was joking when I told him that.

HAROLD

(ironic.)
Dear Church minister, don’t joke with the Lord’s plans. His ways are impenetrable.

PASTOR MICHEL

(to HAROLD)
You shut up. I am not talking to you. (To ADRIAN) Tell me. What did you ask him?

ADRIAN

I asked him about the hypocrisy of the religious.
PASTOR MICHEL
Why ask God, a stupid question like that?

ADRIAN
Do you think hypocrisy is not a sin?

PASTOR MICHEL
Not really.

ADRIAN
You are not serious.

HAROLD
Did he give you any answers?

ADRIAN
He answered some of my doubts. During our conversation, of course, he blamed Satan, but human beings are also responsible for the bad behaviour.

PASTOR MICHEL
Do you see? He told you himself the world is under Satan’s influence. The duplicity of the evil one is too complex for Christians, like us. Satan is a real strong being. God is really good. He loves you and gives you the opportunity to accomplish everything you desire.

ADRIAN
(ironically)
You are right. This is the reason people act the way they do, so they can lay the blame on Satan.

PASTOR MICHEL
You don’t believe in Satan power, do you?

ADRIAN
No. And I don’t want him to always be a scapegoat.

PASTOR MICHEL
It is not because he is a God of love, he can’t get angry. It happened in the past.
HAROLD
Rubbish! If God is good and love, he should be hefty enough to deal with Satan and all the evil in the universe. He must be evil himself, to have the capacity and do nothing about it. Do you know what? I’m not finished with him yet. I’d like to ask him some questions.

PASTOR MICHEL
(to HAROLD)
Shut up!

HAROLD
(to ADRIAN)
This a challenge to God, Adrian. Call him again.

ADRIAN
I am not challenging him. I am challenging those who serve him with hypocrisy. He is not the problem. He gave to everyone, especially his servants to do well, but...

PASTOR MICHEL
(interrupting)
...he is infallible, but we are not. Damn it! I already told you if God wants to speak to someone, it should be me, his humble servant!

HAROLD
Sorry, guys. I’m going to leave you specialists of God to iron out your differences. I don’t want to be part of a fight between childhood friends. I have to finish the laptop.

ADRIAN
Stay, please!

HAROLD
I don’t need to stay here.
PASTOR MICHEL
Let him go this son of a bitch.

HAROLD
What did you call me?

HAROLD approaches PASTOR MICHEL and wants to grab him by his shirt, but ADRIAN intervenes. Pastor shouts for help, enter his guards.

HAROLD
I’m not going anymore. I’ll stay right here.

ADRIAN
You are so naughty a pastor.

PASTOR MICHEL
Jesus, when furious, scattered people who dealt in front of the temple.

ADRIAN
For God’s sake! You are not Jesus. You are PASTOR MICHEL.

PASTOR MICHEL
(starts jumping)
Out from here, you evil spirit! Lord, bless this house. Bless my brother Adrian, let them not fall into this trap.

ADRIAN
I don’t even recognize you anymore.

PASTOR MICHEL
What are you talking about?

ADRIAN
I am talking about your way of life. You don’t encourage people by acting like a criminal.
PASTOR MICHEL
(furious)
He will break him the way he did Egyptians when they enslaved Israel.

ADRIAN
You don’t even believe in what you are talking about. If you consult the holy books of the Egyptians, they will tell you another side of the story.

PASTOR MICHEL
The Bible is the only book which tells the truth.

HAROLD
What about the Koran, the Tanhak, the Tipitaka, the Vedas and the Kojiki?

PASTOR MICHEL
You, again?

HAROLD
My dear friend, everyone tells stories in their way. That is strange.

PASTOR MICHEL
God does not recognize those books.

HAROLD
Why?

PASTOR MICHEL
They have rejected his son, Emmanuel.

HAROLD
Did they?

PASTOR MICHEL
Everyone has to accept my son, Emmanuel, but they did not. They take him like a simple prophet. Sending him to the earth was an expiatory sacrifice, the lamb who has to free the world of its sin. And the salute comes from him.
HAROLD
Like a father, who has two children, but only loves one. Reminds me of the story of Isaac and Esau.

PASTOR MICHEL
God likes testing his people. It is the best way to know if they still believe in him.

HAROLD
That is ridiculous. Does he like playing with people’s lives? I can’t believe that.

ADRIAN
You are getting wrong. God is not the one to blame.

HAROLD
Observing them dying?

ADRIAN
He created the life for a purpose, not for destroying people.

HAROLD
If he created life for a purpose, why end it before it can fulfil that purpose?

PASTOR MICHEL
He recognizes that he allowed the evil, but it does not mean he did it. Human beings need to be punished. They are all like children. You have to shake them a little before they listen to you.

HAROLD
Including you!

PASTOR MICHEL
Did you start again? I will break your neck.

ADRIAN
Can’t you two behave like adults? I am fed up to be your baby all the time.

PASTOR MICHEL
He’s corrupting you. My God! Can’t you see that?

ADRIAN
I don’t need your help. I am big enough to take care of myself.

HAROLD opens his bag. He takes three small plastic cups and a bottle of wine. He pours wine into the cups.

HAROLD
I suggest peace now. Let’s forget everything for a while. Cheers!

PASTOR MICHEL stands away from the bottle of wine.

ADRIAN
Chill out! It is, after all, just a drink.

PASTOR MICHEL
You know that God’s servant does not drink alcohol.

ADRIAN
You are completely wrong.

PASTOR MICHEL
Am I?

ADRIAN
Give me your Bible.

PASTOR MICHEL refuses to give the Bible to ADRIAN, but ADRIAN grabs it, there is a tug of fighting, with ADRIAN. ADRIAN wins and opens it.

ADRIAN
The first letter of Paul to Timothy says ‘No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.’ And you know that during a party, Jesus turned water into wine. So
what is the problem if you are Jesus’ followers?

PASTOR MICHEL

At that time, the wine did not contain alcohol.

ADRIAN

Rubbish! Wine has contained alcohol since the beginning of the universe. Tell me, if the wine did not contain alcohol that time, how come people were sometimes drunk?

PASTOR MICHEL

In another letter of Paul to Timothy, it says ‘They must not drink the alcohol.

ADRIAN

Who says?

PASTOR MICHEL

Leaders of the church.

ADRIAN

Can you, please, give me the chapter?

PASTOR MICHEL

(hesitating)

Hmm...Hmm... I will give it to you another day.

ADRIAN

The chapter in reality says that ‘Deacons likewise must be dignified, not addicted to too much wine.’ You see, all you pastors omit that voluntarily.

PASTOR MICHEL

We don’t.

ADRIAN

Yes, you do.

PASTOR MICHEL

You misinterpret the Holy Scripture.

ADRIAN

Let me tell you a little story. This happened during a wedding party in the North of France. While the pastor was there, everyone one had to drink orange or apple
juice. No one could dance as the music was religious.

**PASTOR MICHEL**

Stop lying Adrian.

**ADRIAN**

I am not. When the pastor left the party, it was a stream of alcohol and then the music changed rhythm. It was kind of when the cat is away, the mouse will dance. Is it not an example of the hypocrisy which occurs in most of your church? Are you sure the Almighty approves of this kind of attitude?

**PASTOR MICHEL**

You are lying.

**ADRIAN**

I did not finish yet. He took off his clothes and lay on the bed. Some minutes later, the woman, her husband and some friends came in. They found him naked, they started beating him, and then they sent him out naked in the street. Some Indian people gave him some clothes. The husband took the bottle of wine and whisky to the pastor. Do you know what happened? The pastor did not even take reprehensive decision. He protected his member.

**PASTOR MICHEL**

How do you know that?

**ADRIAN**

I have my sources.

**PASTOR MICHEL**

How come I have never heard that story?

**ADRIAN**

You are a pastor. They wouldn’t tell you that.

**PASTOR MICHEL**

You don’t need to stick with that guy in criticizing God’s servant who...

**ADRIAN**

What is saying is true. You mercilessly raise poor members’
money to make yourself rich.

PASTOR MICHEL
That is not fair, Adrian. I am your friend. You can’t accuse me like that. You are one of us.

ADRIAN
Well! I am not anymore.

PASTOR MICHEL
You have to rebuke yourself.

ADRIAN
If I don’t tell you that, no one will do it. I am helping you and at the same time giving you the opportunity to correct your vice.

PASTOR MICHEL’s mobile phone rings. He hesitates to pick then picks up.

PASTOR MICHEL
Yes, I understand. It is a matter of urgency. Good fifteen minutes is good. I will see you later.

ADRIAN
What is the problem?

PASTOR MICHEL
Nothing important. Just a little business.

ADRIAN
Are you sure you are not hiding something from me?.

PASTOR MICHEL
I have never lied to you before, Adrian. I will not start today.

ADRIAN
Hope that you did not put yourself in the trouble.

PASTOR MICHEL
Me, in the shit? No. It can’t happen. I will be back. I have to bless someone in my office.

ADRIAN
Why are you in rush, pastor?

Exit the PASTOR MICHEL without answering.
ADRIAN
(to himself)
I can stake my life on it. He is not telling me the truth. I am sure that he is in trouble.

HAROLD
I told you the man wasn’t cool. He is hiding something. I am sure he has no honest plans. He is also a womanizer.

Suddenly the voices of PASTOR MICHEL and a WOMAN are coming off stage. The adult female is sexually moaning. ADRIAN and HAROLD become quiet.

VOICE OF PASTOR MICHEL
You will see the impossibilities being made possible. Every blockage barrier has become technical for you. Everything you are looking for, you will get it. I want you to put up your hands so I can anoint you with oil so that the work of God can be confirmed today.

ADRIAN and HAROLD at each other.

HAROLD
What is happening?

ADRIAN
He’s praying. I told you he is a man of God.

HAROLD
I’m going to see what’s happening in there. It’s too intense and spiritual for me.

HAROLD goes to peep through the door. ADRIAN holds him back, but he escapes his grasp and gently opens the door.

VOICE OF PASTOR MICHEL
Say amen in the name of Jesus.

The voice of the woman is not heard by the audience.
VOICE OF PASTOR MICHEL

I pray for you that the ticket for Dubai is coming. That man is coming. I see it coming. The ticket is coming, that man is coming. You will have everything you want.

HAROLD sees PASTOR MICHEL having sexual intercourse with a woman. He turns to ADRIAN

HAROLD

Oh my God! They're shagging.

ADRIAN

Can’t you use another word?

HAROLD

What word?

ADRIAN

You could say they are making love.

HAROLD

Making love is too sweet. I can’t say that. Anyway, they are not making love because he does not love her. He’s just taking advantage of her. Wait a bit! I know that girl. She is the one I saw with him in the cinema. Adrian, come and look.

ADRIAN

Maybe he is blessing her.

HAROLD

You can’t be serious. You have to see him in action.

ADRIAN looks with HAROLD.

HAROLD

Do you know that girl?

ADRIAN

(whispering)

Yes, it is Bernadette. She is in the choir.

HAROLD

My God, Adrian. You have to quit.
While they are watching, PASTOR MICHEL comes to open the door and they go back quickly to their respective places. PASTOR MICHEL enters with the sweat on his face. He is wiping it.

PASTOR MICHEL
Oh my God! The devils who possessed this woman were really strong. In the name of God, they all left.

ADRIAN and HAROLD look at PASTOR MICHEL without saying a word. PASTOR MICHEL looks at them too.

PASTOR MICHEL
What? Why are you looking at me like that?

ADRIAN
You tell us.

PASTOR MICHEL
Tell you what?

ADRIAN
We saw you making love to a woman.

PASTOR MICHEL sits on the chair before ADRIAN.

PASTOR MICHEL
I can’t believe it's coming from you, Adrian.

ADRIAN
Oh! Do you prefer me to keep quiet?

PASTOR MICHEL
Is that man is still here?

ADRIAN
It is not him the problem. We need to talk.

PASTOR MICHEL
What do you want to talk about?

ADRIAN
What is the mortal sin between refusing the Lord’s word and committing the fornication?

PASTOR MICHEL
Why this question?
ADRIAN
You know why I am asking this question.

PASTOR MICHEL
I don’t know what you are talking about.

ADRIAN
Come on, Pastor Michel! You know that very well.

PASTOR MICHEL
If you need something, I told you I am ready to help.

ADRIAN
I don’t want anything from you, PASTOR MICHEL. I just want the truth.

PASTOR MICHEL
I am your friend.

ADRIAN
You can’t corrupt me. I refuse to be an accomplice. One day, all the money you receive from the church members will put you in trouble. Everything will blow up on you.

PASTOR MICHEL
I don’t do anything illegal. Second of the Corinthians chapter nine and verse six says ‘But as to this, he that sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and he that bountifully will also reap bountifully’.

ADRIAN
Why most of you pastors are cons? They use these kind of verses to con their members. Pity for those members who give ten per cent of their salary every month!

PASTOR MICHEL
I don’t con church members. Besides, members freely give money for the Lord.

ADRIAN
Does the Lord need the money? Look at you, pastor, Michel. The television channel which supposes to be for the church community belongs to you. You have a nice car bought with the church money. I also heard that you own some hotels back home. You show off yourself when you send some packs in the third world.
PASTOR MICHEL
I do what the Lord asks me to do. What exactly is the problem?

ADRIAN
Have you no shame when you receive money from poor people on welfare? You oblige them to pay ten percent of their money. Let me do the calculation for you. Hundred forty-seven pounds, time ten, divide two hundred.

PASTOR MICHEL
It is only fourteen pounds seventy pence. So what is the problem? May I remind you that most of them have three to five children and they receive child benefit and child tax credit?

ADRIAN
They also give money every Sunday.

PASTOR MICHEL
Adrian! They just give one pound.

ADRIAN
All these years, I thought I knew you. Tell me about the three and a half million you collected for the church complexes? I heard that you build luxury flats with that money.

PASTOR MICHEL
Eh Adrian! It is me, pastor, Michel, your friend. I did not change.

ADRIAN
People should give voluntarily. And the money has to be kept in the church community account for expensive and helping members. You put it in your pocket. Look at your car, your dress and your jewels. You even have body guards. Did Jesus have body guards?

PASTOR MICHEL
Yes, his apostles. Didn’t you read that Peter cut one of the soldiers’ ears?

ADRIAN
I also know that Jesus did not like it.

PASTOR MICHEL
I don’t approve all of the bad actions of my bodyguards. They
are there to protect me. There are lots of competitions in our world.

ADRIAN
You mean in the world of false church ministers?

PASTOR MICHEL
I am not one of them. I hold a degree in the Bible High education. My ministry comes from Nazareth.

ADRIAN
I am sure from there you learn how to scam members, particularly women.

PASTOR MICHEL
I am a pastor, but I need to eat, pay my rent and my expenses.

ADRIAN
Have you told Job that? (Pause) I did not think so.

PASTOR MICHEL
Would you denounce me?

ADRIAN
No. You will do it by yourself.

PASTOR MICHEL
No way!

ADRIAN
Yes, way.

PASTOR MICHEL
I will lose everything, my members, my church, my television channel.

ADRIAN
God will appreciate it.

PASTOR MICHEL
We are in the jungle, Adrian, don’t you see? You have to eat people before they eat you.

ADRIAN
Oh my God! Harold was right. I defended you when he told me that you are not the one I was thinking you are. You are so heartless.

PASTOR MICHEL
Are you even listening to your gay friend?
ADRIAN
You see. You are not even able to understand what I keep telling. Harold is not a gay. He is far better than you.

PASTOR MICHEL
He is an evil spirit and a womanizer.

ADRIAN
Are you not? After Harold saw you with a girl, I tried to find some information. The girl’s name is Bernadette. Everyone knows that you go out with her. She is not the only one. Rumour says you are sleeping with more than five young women from the church. Do you know the silly thing? They started being jealous of each other.

PASTOR MICHEL
I don’t have time for gossips.

ADRIAN
Small talk? I wouldn’t be so sure if I was you.

PASTOR MICHEL
They are all liars. Some members of my church want to put me down and take my place. Be sure my friend, it won’t happen. I am God. I am like Moses. I transmit commandments, and they obey.

ADRIAN
That is what I was talking about. Everything is about you. You think you are the centre of everything. That is too bad for a man who is claiming to be a God’s servant.

PASTOR MICHEL
I am a human being, you know.

ADRIAN
Your church members trusted you.

PASTOR MICHEL
Many times, I gave you the opportunity to join me, but you have never accepted.

ADRIAN
You know me, pastor, Michel. I am not like that. I don’t have the money, but I will not do such things.
PASTOR MICHEL
You are a very stubborn man I have ever known.

ADRIAN
I am not a stubborn person. I just want to be honest.

PASTOR MICHEL
Honest people don’t become rich.

ADRIAN
Thank you, God’s servant.

PASTOR MICHEL
Why thanks me?

ADRIAN
You’ve given me the answer I was looking for.

PASTOR MICHEL
What answer?

ADRIAN
To become rich, you have to con people. Whatever the means. Well! Being a church minister gives you the opportunity to ruin the most vulnerable. I now understand the reason why God permits bad people to get everything.

PASTOR MICHEL
I am not a bad guy. You are wrong. I regard myself as a ‘conduit of God’. I help to find their passion, to cure impotency and infertility, help them to hold an advanced career and I make them even wealthy.

ADRIAN
That is why you use magic to impress your members?

PASTOR MICHEL
Come on, Adrian. Join me.

ADRIAN
No. All my life I always try to do the right thing and do as many good works for people as possible without needing anything in return. But it seems like no matter how much good I do, I only receive bad karma in return. Other people I know who do bad things are prospering and I am still where I was five years ago. They get a lot, because they don’t care who they hurt to get it. I hope that they will receive their
punishment one day.

PASTOR MICHEL
Maybe not in this life, but next time around, they will be born as a dew worm or some such and some guy will come along and use them as bait on a hook.

ADRIAN
It’s a joke for you, isn’t it? This is the reason, I am really starting to question myself about God and the religion.

PASTOR MICHEL
In the near future, everything will be fine.

ADRIAN
When? In the paradise? What became of the friend who had the ambition to make a great career in education? Where is this friend who was ready to help when people had problems?

PASTOR MICHEL
I am the same person. I suggested to pay for you your booking fees so you can work with me, but you refused. You are an intelligent man, Adrian. Stop your madness. You will not change the world. The world will remain as it is.

ADRIAN
I am not trying to change the world, but I would like to stop people like you. Two years ago, a ten-year-old girl was sent back to Africa accused of witchcraft. I asked you if you were involved, you said you were not.

PASTOR MICHEL
Are you investigating of me now?

ADRIAN
I want my friend back.

PASTOR MICHEL
It is too late. I can’t give up on everything I worked for.

ADRIAN
For God’s sake, you did not work hard for that. You are simply stealing money from your own members.

PASTOR MICHEL
I thought I would take a stab from someone else, but coming from you, I am very disappointed.
ADRIAN
Don’t reverse the situation. I am not the one you have to blame. You have to blame yourself because you chose this path. I can’t understand why the religion, in general, is full of hypocrisy. People who see themselves as religious hold some values, but fail to realize what those values mean.

PASTOR MICHEL
Do you believe you hold the monopoly of morals?

ADRIAN
You are the pastor. I heard talking about your judicial setbacks with your solicitor. That is strange you are hiding it to me.

PASTOR MICHEL
Everything is fine. Why should I hide something from you?

PASTOR MICHEL’s mobile phone rings incessantly. He does not pick up.

ADRIAN
Why don’t you answer your phone? Any trouble my dear pastor?

PASTOR MICHEL
No.

PASTOR MICHEL mobile phone rings again. He puts off the call.

ADRIAN
Why can’t you pick up the call? You are a pastor. You suppose to show a good and irreproachable example.

PASTOR MICHEL
For what are you blaming me? I serve my God every day.

ADRIAN
By flirting with church members? By not being tolerant? By being a hypocrite?

PASTOR MICHEL
Why am I listening to you anyway?

ADRIAN
Do you really think I was born yesterday? It is true, I did
not want to believe it when I heard everything, but now my eyes are opened.

**PASTOR MICHEL**

I can’t get it anymore. You are becoming crazy. I will be back when you finish with your frenzy. Damn it, I already told you they are all gossips.

**ADRIAN**

Gossips, huh!

*PASTOR MICHEL* mobile phone rings again. *He picks up and exits.*

*ADRIAN’s mobile phone rings.*

**ADRIAN**

Yes, dad. I am here. Of course, yes. Something is just bothering me. Tell me something. I have been deceived by my pastor, the son of papa Leon. Do you remember him? Not only is he sleeping with church members, he is also taking advantage of the church money. I heard that he built more than two villas there. The bad thing is, he’s denying everything.

*Offstage, the pastor is praying loudly.*

**ADRIAN**

I know he is human and can be weak, but he need to give an example. I did not see him, but I heard him. Of course, not. I am not becoming an atheist. I always trust in God, but I start hating all those pastors who work for money and forget the principle of honesty. I attempted to speak to him, only he is denying all the facts. I am not quitting God, only I don’t desire to be a church member anymore.

**ADRIAN**

Pastor Michel!

**ADRIAN**

Pastor Michel! I am quitting.

**PASTOR MICHEL**

Pardon me?
ADRIAN
I am leaving.

PASTOR MICHEL
May I wait for you tomorrow?

ADRIAN
I said I quit your church. I don’t want to work for you anymore.

PASTOR MICHEL
You have no right to do this to me. You can’t quit the Lord.

ADRIAN
I am not quitting the Lord, but your church.

PASTOR MICHEL
Why?

ADRIAN
Don’t do like you don’t know what is happening, pastor.

PASTOR MICHEL
At least this son of a bitch is gone.

ADRIAN
Can you hear yourself what you are saying?

PASTOR MICHEL
He is doing everything to separate us. Can’t you see that?

ADRIAN
No. You are doing everything to separate us. Not him. You are exactly like Gregory Ivan Hawkins, Yamata Kyoto!

PASTOR MICHEL
Gregory Ivan, Yamamoto. What is it all about?

ADRIAN
It is Yamata. No Yamamoto. They are like you. They don’t respect God. They abuse their church members.

PASTOR MICHEL
So what? We are all human beings. We can make mistakes. We pray every day because we want to stop making mistakes, but it is not easy. Now can we change the conversation?

ADRIAN
Why? That is bothering you?
PASTOR MICHEL
We need to chat about something positive like God blessed our church. We now have three and a half million in our account.

ADRIAN
Is it the only thing which interests you?

PASTOR MICHEL
Of course, not. How can you say that?

ADRIAN
God servants don’t have to act like that. You know what, I need answers.

PASTOR MICHEL
God loves you, Adrian. Through the Bible, he provides enough answers. Maybe you should talk to your father. The bible says ‘Everything you ask will be given to you.’

ADRIAN
I know God exists. My problem is why he can’t stop his servants committing sexual crimes and abusing women.

PASTOR MICHEL
Are you blaming me for something?

ADRIAN
Are you blaming yourself for something? You said you did not abuse that woman in your office. So what is your problem?

PASTOR MICHEL
I don’t like the way you said it.

ADRIAN
Why?

Enter HAROLD.

HAROLD
I told you. They all act weird.

PASTOR MICHEL
(to HAROLD)
Shut up. (To ADRIAN) I will kill you gay friend.
HAROLD
I heard you. I am not a gay.

PASTOR MICHEL
He is not a gay. I already told.

PASTOR MICHEL
Why is he corrupting?

HAROLD
Is he your dad? (To the PASTOR) Remember! I am repairing your fucking laptop. Stop being weirdo.

PASTOR MICHEL
You are fired, you fucking gay.

ADRIAN
I quit.

PASTOR MICHEL
Why?

ADRIAN
Because you fired him.

ADRIAN starts going towards the door. PASTOR MICHEL follows him.

PASTOR MICHEL
Please, Adrian. Don’t go. We can arrange it.

ADRIAN stops and looks at PASTOR MICHEL.

ADRIAN
Arrange what?

PASTOR MICHEL
Please for our friendship’s sake sit down a bit.

PASTOR MICHEL
I can help you to find a good job. I have good friends who can help. You will get a good salary. I need you in the church. Adrian. Please, stay.

ADRIAN
Thank you very much for the offer, but I can’t. I don’t have any more time for the church. I have to concentrate on my studies.
PASTOR MICHEL
I will pay for your studies.

ADRIAN
No pastor, Michel. Do you think all is about the money? Emmanuel can take my place. He’s a good guy.

PASTOR MICHEL
I just don't have any confidence in him.

ADRIAN
(ironic)
Didn’t Jesus say you have to trust each other?

PASTOR MICHEL
He worked for me sometimes ago, but he wasn’t honest. I need an honest man like you.

ADRIAN
What I am doing here is illegal.

PASTOR MICHEL
God will understand because you are doing his work. Your God has to be in the first place. (Pause) What I am offering you will help you in your studies. I am sure you need something.

PASTOR MICHEL takes money from his wallet.

ADRIAN
I can’t, PASTOR MICHEL.

PASTOR MICHEL
Please Adrian!

ADRIAN
No, pastor.

PASTOR MICHEL
As you wish!

ADRIAN
My last advice as a friend is for you have to give up.

PASTOR MICHEL
Give up? I already told you, I can’t do that. After what I have been through by building this Church you are asking me to stop. What do you want to do after that?
ADRIAN
Find a proper job.

PASTOR MICHEL
Do you want to do a kitchen porter, cleaning? Stop it Adrian. I can’t lose all my privileges.

ADRIAN
Then one day you will be in trouble. And don’t come to me.

PASTOR MICHEL mobile phone rings. He checks it and goes into his office.

PASTOR MICHEL
Don’t go yet, please. We need to discuss.

HAROLD
Where is he going again? What’s wrong with him? I don’t understand why religious people act like witches.

ADRIAN
Maybe he went to check it or something else. He is so preoccupied.

HAROLD
Eh! This guy has a hell of a Jeep. It must have cost a fortune. Where does he get the money from?

ADRIAN
I don’t know. Ask him.

HAROLD
Why do you keep saying ‘ask him’?

ADRIAN
You are always asking me questions about him.

HAROLD
You said you know him better.

Enter the PASTOR MICHEL.

PASTOR MICHEL
I am in the shit. I am in the shit. I am in the shit.
ADRIAN and HAROLD Look at each other

ADRIAN AND HAROLD

How shit?

PASTOR MICHEL

Very deep shit!

ADRIAN

I told you. I told you. I told you.

PASTOR MICHEL

Stop repeating you told me. Have you ever made a mistake? You suppose to help me.

ADRIAN

How can I help you if you were hiding the truth from me?

HAROLD

What did you tell him?

PASTOR MICHEL

Shut up. It is not your business. You better take care of your escort business.

HAROLD

Who told you that? (Looks at ADRIAN) You. I will kill you.

ADRIAN

Sorry.

PASTOR MICHEL

My little finger! My little finger also told me, you reported me to Adrian I was with a young lady with big butt.

HAROLD

Ah! How do you know that? (He looks at ADRIAN) How?

ADRIAN

Sorry.

PASTOR MICHEL

I like my little finger.

HAROLD

How come your little finger didn’t prevent you from being in deep shit? You know what? I’m happy you’re in deep shit.

PASTOR MICHEL

You are an evil
HAROLD
No I’m not, but you are.

PASTOR MICHEL
You are because you don’t know Jesus.

HAROLD
Well! You can ask Jesus to help you out when you go to prison.

PASTOR MICHEL
God will be with me.

Blackout, lights up. The choir is on stage singing.

CURTAIN
Synopsis

The religious scepticism is caused by those who pretend to be religious, but do not respect the commandments of God, they claim to love and serving.

This is ‘The Challenge.’ The Challenge is a comedy of manner. The action takes place somewhere in the United Kingdom. The play has one single space which is a closed space and a real time between seven and nine in the evening.

Adrian as a mature student, who is completing a Master degree in philosophy and religious studies is the central character who is pulled between two people, his neighbour, Harold and his childhood and best friend, Michel who is the pastor of a New African Pentecostal Church. Movingly, the play demonstrates how it is difficult for him to decide the way to act between his long year friendship with Michel and Harold he just known for living in the same building, and the impact this matter will set up conflict within this personal relationship.

THE AUTHOR’S NOTE

It gives rise to a swath of complex issues. Perennials Church faith tainted with capitalism ruining the vulnerable, taxing the poor and its pressures of the modern world. Braced in by fossilised traditions keeping quiet, showing respect, anti-homosexual stances but promiscuous exposes the hypocrisy of the African church, brave new world. Musical hybrid opera with gospel. Wit caustic. Harold the voice of temptation, trickster figure. Adrian tries hard to preserve traditional and genuine moral positions between the rock of his corrupted church and hard place of Harold, tempter extraordinaire and voice of modernity that everything is stories. Harold who swears in the name of his grandmother a stark reminder of the lost mother religions of the past. Blurred line between saints and sinners. Harold exposes the power hungry and the hypocrisy of the church, a soap box modern. Gather together in the name of the GHH gossip, hypocrisy and hatred. Drama is in the slow erosion of Adrian’s faith but
is he a winner? Playful human pastor, serious Adrian. Harold is vulnerable when vesting so much in human love. Guard as God political statement that those in power hide behind God to protect themselves. Theocracy/democracy.

Childlike faith challenges the exclusivity of the Bible and Christian faith, even Adrian is duped. Tug of war between the modern and the traditional church who almost come to fisticuffs. Peace brought about by modern mass of wine in plastic cups. Pastor Michael makes up stories to conserve his power.

Attacks tithing. Ultimate challenge not to God but to its intermediaries. God the guard, God Adrian’s literal father. Michel turns out to be tempter with promises of protection, money, social mobility. Reversal of fortune he who builds his faith in money, or love of women will be prey to instability, loses friendship.

THE DIRECTOR’S NOTE

The Challenge is a farcical comedy that focuses on the hypocrisy of how people use religion to fulfil their dreams/desires. Religion is manipulated to man’s rather than God’s will and many duped by self-proclaimed prophets in the business of religion. The reason this particular work struck a chord was because Times Live newspaper in the 16 September issue reported that 116 people had died in Lagos on September 12, “when a guest house belonging to the Synagogue Church Of All Nations in Lagos -- headed by preacher TB Joshua - collapsed”. Many of these parishioners’, placing their trust in those they followed, had embarked on a ‘pilgrimage’ to see a man they had watched on television.

(http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2014/11/16/74-nigerian-church-collapse-bodies-back-in-satheit). I hope the hilarity of ‘blind belief’ warns of the present rise in the religious exploitation of those who suspend their logic. After all, we are created with the ability to function logically enabling us to evaluate pastors who protest the word of GOD to con people. Canned religion with growing TV audiences and rapidly growing African social media advertising - is not the answer to our social woes. I believe in the power of thought. Knowing is the first step to bringing change to our society. Finally, I would like to thank John N Tshiama, the author of this play, for generously allowing me to present this play this evening.
Rehearsal’s pictures February 2015 to April 2015 at Durban University Court Yard (South Africa)

Pic 1

Pic 2
Performance’s pictures on 22\textsuperscript{nd} April 2015, at Durban University Court Yard (South Africa) * (Copy and paste the link below)

Image 1

https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B229-7aUJJDvh0xuUXgwY3hqaVE/edit?usp=drive_web

Image 2

https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B229-7aUJJDvhYTRpcWhDZzFzUEW8/edit?usp=drive_web

Image 3

https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B229-7aUJJDvhRtdeWs3LTNFaDg/edit?usp=drive_web

The video extract of the play (1\textsuperscript{st} part)

https://youtu.be/TQdml4WYSFM
AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY

John Tshiama NAMBOMBE, Belgian citizen, born in Central Africa part. Started acting at the age of twelve before studying Drama at the National Institute of Arts. Worked as an actor and director in Kinshasa and Brussels. BA (HONS) in scriptwriting at the University Centre, Doncaster and he completed a MA in Scriptwriting for Screen Media and Stage at the University of South Wales, Newport. May 26th 2013, performed as co-lead, in a political play at the Hay-on-Wye festival.

Published two plays: “Red is the Royal Blood” in April 2009 and “Question of Honour and Fidelity” in May 2010.