

Conventional Preachers in Selected Plays of Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw

Njong Divine

Higher Teacher Training College-Bertoua, The University of Bertoua, Bertoua, The Republic of Cameroon

Email address:

njong_zec@yahoo.com

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Abstract: Bernard Shaw's fervent admiration of Henrik Ibsen is not only registered in the former's "The Quintessence of Ibsenism" but is also identifiable in the identical thematic concerns of both playwrights. Although the two authors may differ in the tone and mood of their plays, they are unanimous on the fact that the world is in motion and old values and previous conceptions are adrift. By presenting Ibsen and Shaw as precursors of change from a world of conventional practices to a freer and flexible world where both the woman and the man can impact each in his or her own way, this research endeavour seeks to consider the playwrights as revolutionists with a positive agenda for humanity. In this sense, the study examines the two authors as 19th century iconoclasts and seeks to determine their religious philosophies as illustrated in their plays. From a feminist perspective, the paper entitled "Conventional Preachers in Selected Plays of Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw" examines how modes of conventional preaching conflict with the evolutionary religious ideas of both authors. In line with feminist theology, the study which attempts to counter arguments or practices that place women in inferior spiritual or moral positions is based on the hypothesis that the heroines of Ibsen and Shaw are rebels against established theological preachings. The research postulates that Ibsen and Shaw are highly critical of the hypocritical religious preachers of the Norwegian and Victorian societies. It focuses on how the authors used the stage in the late nineteenth century to deliver the Victorian and Norwegian societies from rigid conventions. According to the study, conventional preaching is anti-feminist and society needs a more vibrant and progressive religion as conceived by Ibsen and propagated by Shaw.

Keywords: Iconoclasts, Religious Philosophies, Conflict, Feminist, Conventional Preachers

1. Introduction

The history of religion is almost as old as the history of mankind and it has been the closest companion to humanity. Whether in the form of beliefs, myths, superstitions or rituals, people from all parts and ranks of the world continue to identify with a chosen set of attitudes and practices that define their religious perspectives. Such practices and belief systems decide the action of its practitioners and sometimes punish their inaction or wrong action. For many, their identities and personalities have seriously been influenced by their theological orientations and it is difficult to imagine them out of their spiritual world. Religion can therefore, be seen as agency for socialization and collaboration providing an ethical and moral framework for its followers. In most societies and cultures, it acts as glue, binding people together with common beliefs, rituals and practices and making them

stronger as a group over the individual.

While religion has been a strong and sometimes indispensable instrument of peace around the world, it has also in some situations, led to conflicts, wars, divorces and even revolutions because of its differing nature. Whether it is Monotheism, Atheism, Polytheism, Islam, Theism, Judaism, Henotheism, Atenism or Buddhism, each religion is highly jealous of its values and codes of conduct and this often leads to fanaticism and extremism.

Given the sensitive nature of the subject, religion has survived as one of the ever-present institutions in every society. Critics, politicians, law-makers and social activists in every civilization grapple with religious issues in order to define religious orientations for the betterment of human life. While some critics uphold conventional religious practices, others like Ibsen and Shaw, castigate and vilify traditional religious mores and practices. For the playwrights, some

religious creeds are responsible for the plight of the woman and should be uprooted for society to progress. In their plays, the authors condemn all preachers of archaic doctrines that continue to enslave the woman in the name of culture or religion. For them, such preachings and their preachers are hypocritical and deceptive and should be sacrificed for a more evolutionary and true-to-life doctrine.

When one reads through the plays of the authors, one easily realizes that the playwrights have a tremendous fascination with conventional preachers. In other words, the authors create a number of characters imbued with the fervent zeal of the traditional religious preacher (though their beliefs may have nothing to do with religion or God) in order to reveal certain aspects upon which they are attempting to bring meaningful change. In some instances, Ibsen and Shaw set their preachers' personality and beliefs contrary to those of other characters and explain their philosophy as it is borne of the conflict that ensues. These preacher character types claim their ideology to be above all contention and the playwrights use them to demonstrate that even the most steadfast zealot can be changed for the better in the name of societal progress. In other instances, however, the ideology of the preacher is upheld and his zeal applauded. The characters that represent this type well are Pastor Manders, Parson Rorlund, Helmer, The Inquisitor and Barbara from *Ghosts*, *The Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *Saint Joan* and *Major Barbara* respectively. In order to truly understand Ibsen and Shaw and the purpose of their various arguments, the audience must first understand the conventional preacher as described in the plays mentioned.

2. Theoretical Perspective

In order to fully analyse the religious perspectives of Ibsen and Shaw and their attitude towards anti-feminist conventional preachings, the feminist theory is adopted for the analysis in this study. According to Gail Finney in "Ibsen and Feminism", feminism is about respecting diverse women's experiences, identities, knowledge and strengths, and striving to empower all women to realise their full rights [9]. Based on Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as the Other, this paper will show how conventional preachers in the Norwegian and Victorian societies used religion to victimise and disempower women. In *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir theorized that religion oppresses women in much the same way as it oppresses the proletariat in Marxist theory [7]. He opined in *The Second Sex* that "There must be a religion for women as there must be one for the common people, and for exactly the same reason" [7]. According to de Beauvoir, religion is used by men to oppress women and to compensate for them for the second-class status. He argued that historically, men, who have traditionally controlled most institutions in society, also control religion [7]. It is men who control religious beliefs, and they use God to justify their control of society. He writes in *The Second Sex* that "For the Jews, Mohammedans, and Christians, among others, men is master by divine right; the fear of God will therefor repress

any impulse towards revolt in the downtrodden female" [7].

The study posits that in the 19th century Norwegian and Victorian societies when Ibsen and Shaw wrote, religion was a tool of deception. Religion deceived women into accepting roles that were both inferior and debasing and the situation has not changed much in modern societies. Religion continues to be used to silence women over significant forms of marginalisation with false claims that accepting demeaning roles as mother is "divine" and prescribed by God. Referring to this, de Beauvoir posits that "women who accept their religiously sanctioned roles as mother actually benefit religious institutions. This is because they socialise them into religious belief: thus reproducing power inequalities" [7]. Finally, for de Beauvoir, the compensations women receive from traditional religious institutions for accepting their inferior status are not adequate. From de Beauvoir's perspective of feminism, the present research is critical of the hypocritical preachings of Ibsen and Shaw's clergymen intended to confine the woman to victimised and inferior positions in the society as seen in the plays of the playwrights under study. The study juxtaposes such hypocritical preachers of false truths with the anti-feminist evolutionary characters in the plays who, arguably, represent the religious views of the authors. The feminist view that Mary Daly expresses in *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* that Christianity was a set of patriarchal myths and that women were part of a 'planetary sexual caste system' which was patriarchal and exploitative of women is also in accordance with the issues raised here [8].

3. Ibsen and the "Preacher" Character Types

Ibsen's conventional characters can easily be traced in his religious plays where they are held either by some personal religious creed or by the traditional Christian religion. Most of the preachers preach a religion that subjects the woman to the kitchen and family. A very glaring case is Pastor Manders in *Ghosts* who cautions Mrs. Alving about reading books that contain intellectual ideas. Pastor Manders worries that Mrs. Alving will be morally corrupted by reading new, free-thinking ideas, but the readings that he finds dangerous make her feel more secure. Rather than corrupting her, they just let her know that she is not alone in the way she sees things: as she tells him, "I seem to find explanation and confirmation of all sorts of things that I myself have been thinking" [2].

Pastor Manders' doctrine to Mrs Alving that she must be loyal to her marriage exposes him as the preacher of conventional religion who considers the institution of marriage very sacred and thinks that it must never be violated. Here, the pastor is seen as one who keeps orthodoxy and moral values. When Mrs Alving runs away from the terrible conditions of her marriage, Pastor Manders would not forgive her because he considers it a complete betrayal of her matrimonial duties. In spite of the arguments Mrs Alving

tries to put forward, the pastor remains adamant and condemns her in the following words:

All your life has been possessed by a wilful rebellious spirit. Your natural inclination always led you toward the indiscipline and lawless. You could never tolerate the slightest restrain, you always disregarded your responsibility carelessly and unscrupulously as though it were a burden you had to cast aside. It no longer suited you to be a wife so you left your husband. The cares of motherhood were too much for you. So you sent your child away to be brought up by strangers. [2].

Here, one realises that the pastor cannot see any good reason in Mrs Alving leaving her home. He sees the act as one of disloyalty to marital vows and rebellious. Although portrayed as a very hypocritical religious leader, Pastor Manders sermonises to Mrs Alving and epitomises the uncompromising traditional Christian teacher. He holds strong to marriage vows and belief that they must never be broken no matter the circumstances. When the pastor rebukes Mrs Alving here, one immediately imagines that there would have been more tension in *A Doll's House* had Ibsen brought in another Pastor Manders. Nevertheless, although not being portrayed as a pastor, Helmer in *A Doll's House* tries to stop the rebellious wife from leaving her family and reminds her of her duties as a woman.

It is clear that Ibsen's preachers work negatively towards the liberation and freedom of the woman. According to Anthony S. Abbott in *The Vital lie, Rreality and Illusion in Modern Drama*, the preacher character types we meet in the plays of Ibsen are hypocritical religious leaders whose doctrine confines the woman to strict matrimonial laws [6]. Mrs Alving is refused the right to move out of the lie she is buried in as marriage and is advised to remain submissive to her terrible husband. In a bid to justify her position, Mrs Alving declares that:

MRS. ALVING: You have now spoken out, Pastor Manders; and tomorrow you are to speak publicly in memory of my husband. I shall not speak tomorrow. But now I will speak out a little to you, as you have spoken to me.... I want you to know that after nineteen years of marriage my husband remained as dissolute in his desires as he was when you married us. After Oswald's birth, I thought Alving seemed to be a little better. But it did not last long. And then I had to struggle twice as hard, fighting for life or death, so that nobody should know what sort of man my child's father was. I had my little son to bear it for. But when the last insult was added; when my own servant-maid---- Then I swore to myself: This shall come to an end. And so I took the upper hand in the house -- the whole control over him and over everything else. For now I had a weapon against him, you see; he dared not oppose me. It was then that Oswald was sent from home. He was in his seventh year, and was beginning to observe and ask questions, as children do. That I could not bear. I thought the child must get poisoned by merely breathing the air in this polluted home. That was why I placed him out. And now you can see, too, why he was never allowed to set foot inside his

home so long as his father lived. No one knows what it has cost me.... From the day after tomorrow it shall be for me as though he who is dead had never lived in this house. No one shall be here but my boy and his mother. [2].

Mrs Alvings justifications here would not change the pastor's orthodox position. What is important to note here is the fact that the pastor is more concerned with public opinion than the religious implication of the sin Mrs Alving commits. Pastor Manders is ruled by a neurotic concern for public opinion. It leads him to much foolishness, to the extent that he is eventually tricked into funding Engstrand sailor's saloon. In the Pastor, we see the connection between public opinion and duty. When the Pastor tells Mrs. Alving that she must save Oswald from sin, it is unclear whether he is motivated by a pure sense of moral duty or by deference to public opinion, because for him they are essentially the same. It is because of the Pastor's principles that he does not give in to the mutual attraction that he and Mrs. Alving share and that would have made them both happy.

Pastor Manders's preaching brings to mind the case of Parson Rorlund, another Preacher character type in Ibsen's *The Pillars of Society*. Like Pastor Manders, the latter is another religious hypocrite who upholds traditional religion that limits the world of the woman to the family and kitchen. As traditional morality prescribes, Rorlund's sermons in *Pillars of Society* put the woman completely at the discretion of her husband. Like Pastor Manders in *Ghosts*, he seems to preach from the biblical passage which calls on women to respect their husbands in the same way as they respect God. According to the passage, the husband is the head of the family in the same way as the lord is the head of the church [12]. It is from this perspective that Rorlund preaches and undermines all the consequences the biblical prescription has on the woman.

When we meet Rorlund in the first Act of the play, he is reading from a book entitled *Women in Service of Society* to a group of town women called "The society for Moral Delinquents". Rorlund's evangelisation mission here is intended to confine the women to their home and husbands. He advises the women to stay in their homes and read their bibles stating that by so doing, they will stay away from worldly concerns. The church which is represented here by Ibsen's preachers is seen as an instrument of the state that helps in subjugating the woman.

In *A Doll's House*, the situation is not different as we have seen in Helmer, another preacher character type that takes away the rights and happiness of the woman. Helmer treats his wife Nora as if she were a child. When the play begins, Nora is a typical Norwegian lady whose roles in marriage are limited to childbearing and catering for her husband. However, she is completely transformed into a rebel before the end of the play and decides to separate with her husband and children in spite of Torvald's preachings. In the following conversation, Torvald tries to remind Nora of her duties as a woman but the metamorphosed Nora is determined to determine a new perspective for herself.

Helmer. To desert your home, your husband and your

children! And you don't consider what people will say!

Nora. I cannot consider that at all. I only know that it is necessary for me.

Helmer. It's shocking. This is how you would neglect your most sacred duties.

Nora. What do you consider my most sacred duties?

Helmer. Do I need to tell you that? Are they not your duties to your husband and your children?

Nora. I have other duties just as sacred.

Helmer. That you have not. What duties could those be?

Nora. Duties to myself.

Helmer. Before all else, you are a wife and a mother.

Nora. I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are-- or, at all events, that I must try and become one. I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them. [3].

Torvald reveals himself in the above speech as an exponent of conventional religion. He maltreats the wife and when she rebels, he preaches to her about her sacred duties which limit her to her husband and children. What is interesting to note here is the fact that like Pastor Manders in *Ghosts*, Helmer is more concerned with what people would say than with what is right. The Preacher character types of Ibsen are seen here as evangelists that are more concerned with public opinion than with the religion they represent. Nora makes it clear to Helmer that she has no regard for public opinion and must leave him and the children. Helmer is embarrassed and proceeds to preach to his wife about religion in the following conversation:

Helmer. Can you not understand your place in your own home? Have you not a reliable guide in such matters as that?--have you no religion?

Nora. I am afraid, Torvald, I do not exactly know what religion is.

Helmer. What are you saying?

Nora. I know nothing but what the clergyman said, when I went to be confirmed. He told us that religion was this, and that, and the other. When I am away from all this, and am alone, I will look into that matter too. I will see if what the clergyman said is true, or at all events if it is true for me.

Helmer. This is unheard of in a girl of your age! But if religion cannot lead you aright, let me try and awaken your conscience. I suppose you have some moral sense?

Or-- answer me-- am I to think you have none?

Nora. I assure you, Torvald, that is not an easy question to answer. I really don't know. The thing perplexes me altogether. I only know that you and I look at it in quite a different light. I am learning, too, that the law is quite another thing from what I supposed; but I find it impossible to convince myself that the law is right. According to it a woman has no right to spare her old dying father, or to save her husband's life. I can't believe that. [3].

Helmer's preachings about religion fail to rekindle their marriage which is at the point of collapse. Nora refuses to acknowledge any religion that subjugates her rights and decides to leave Helmer and face the realities of the world herself. She therefore disobeys Helmer and by extension retaliates against the doctrine that Rorlund preaches in *Pillars of Society*. Rorlund advises the women to stay at home and away from the society and read their bibles [1]. Nora rejects such views represented by Ibsen's Preacher character types and steps out of her marriage. Patriarchy's socialization of women into servicing creatures is the major accusation in Nora's painful account to Torvald of how first her father, and then he, used her for their amusement. She recounts how she had no right to think for herself, only the duty to accept their opinions. Excluded from meaning anything, Nora and Mrs Alving have never been subjects, only objects [11].

Commenting on Ibsen's religious views, Harris Kaasa in "Ibsen and the Theologians states" that:

Ibsen was never enamored of theology and theologians. He regarded theology as a positive hindrance to religion, in the same way as aestheticism might be to poetry. Between 1872 and 1885 he referred in letters to several cabinet ministers for church affairs, from Hans Riddervold to Elias Blix, and he invariably regarded them as his enemies. He was critical of revivalism and contemptuous of those who "consider it more important to build chapels than theaters" and are "more eager to support the Zulu mission than the art museum," who do not need literature because they get along so well with the Parliamentary News and the Lutheran Weekly. [10].

4. Anti-Conventional Sermon in Saint Joan

The Inquisitor in Shaw's *Saint Joan* is one of the very complex conventional preachers in Shaw's Plays. Although it can be suggested that the inquisitor is aware of Joan's innocence, he preaches strongly against Joan's voices which represent a threat to the iron-clad institution of the church. Convicted on the grounds of heresy, Joan of Arc faces and even challenges the Inquisitor's religious preachings. While both Joan and the inquisitor can be seen as preachers, the former is a more evolutionary preacher who disrupts traditional ecclesiastic norms in favour of a true-to-life religion. Without disagreeing with the basic ideologies of Catholicism, Joan represents a free thinker who communicates directly with God and disregards the laws of the church. Unlike the inquisitor whose preachings are geared towards empowering the church, Joan's preachings, especially in the trial scene, are focused on empowering herself in order to achieve God's wish for her. While Joan believes that she is directly inspired by God, the Inquisitor's indictment of her utilizes a variety of rhetorical strategies, such as diction and biblical allusion, to bolster his standing.

In what is clearly the longest speech in the play, the inquisitor preaches that «the woman who quarrels with her

clothes, and puts on the dress of a man, is like the man who throws off his fur gown and dresses like John the Baptist: they are followed, as surely as the night follows the day, by bands of wild women and men who refuse to wear any clothes at all ». In line with strict Victorian standards, the Inquisitor indicts Joan for dressing in men's clothes and even wearing a hat. For the conventional preacher, Joan's dressing code constitutes a challenge to catholic doctrine and he alludes to John the Baptist in the bible in a bid to give credibility to his ideas. Here, the Inquisitor represents conventional preachers who concentrate on minor irrelevant details instead of focusing on what can improve on the life of mankind. As a custodian of religious values, one would expect the Inquisitor to focus on more serious issues and not on ensuring that no woman dresses like a man.

The use of biblical allusion furthers the Inquisitor's remarks in his arguments and directly supports his claim against Joan because it defines the crime's severity. While explaining heresy, he refers to God and his disciple in order to reveal the seriousness of Joan's crime. He states that as the "founder of heresy that will wreck both Church and Empire," God's mercifulness cannot apply to Joan's situation. According to him, Joan deceives everyone by "[dressing] like John the Baptist," a disciple of Christ and so deserves no mercy or clemency [5].

As a more imaginative preacher imbued with what Shaw calls the Life Force, Joan responds that "the clothes are a small matter, the least of all things". Here, Shaw emphasizes the point of creative imagination through which divinity manifests itself to the pure and elevated souls. In the play, Shaw makes frequent use of the word, God, but the word, God, has a different connotation for Shaw. God is for him only the Life Force at its highest level of expression. So, to Shaw, God is the Life Force and Joan is the Life Force incarnate. She is the personification of his conception of Godhood.

In another sermon intended to further establish Joan's guilt, the Inquisitor further notes in his preachings that:

When maids will neither marry nor take regular vows, and men reject marriage and exalt their lusts into divine inspirations, then, as surely as the summer follows the spring, they begin with polygamy, and end by incest. Heresy at first seems innocent and even laudable; but it ends in such a monstrous horror of unnatural wickedness that the most tender-hearted among you, if you saw it at work as I have seen it, would clamor against the mercy of the Church in dealing with it. [5].

Here, the inquisitor questions Joan's celibacy and mocks her claim of any divine mission. He seems to suggest that every maiden that refuses to get married or take any regular vows is suspicious and evil. As an unmarried virgin who claims to communicate directly with God without necessary relying on the church, the Inquisitor charges Joan with heresy and treason.

According to the Inquisitor, all heretics like Joan in the society should be condemned and wiped off for the authority of the church to prevail. He further states that "for two

hundred years the Holy Office has striven with these diabolical madnesses; and it knows that they begin always by vain and ignorant persons setting up their own judgment against the Church, and taking it upon themselves to be the interpreters of God's will" [5]. The Inquisitor's sermon here is intended to enlighten everyone present on Joan's crimes and sins. Joan's violation of religious institutions and claim to communicate directly with God challenges the sacrosanctity of catholic faith and the Inquisitor's preachings at the trial scene makes the case against Joan very strong.

However, the inquisitor's message comes across to the reader more as a political message than a religious sermon. His worry is not about any serious moral depravity in Joan's character but in her actions which undermine the authority of the church. What matters to the Inquisitor as much as to the archbishop, is not the immorality in the maiden's actions or words but the survival of the church as an institution. In spite of all the charges, Joan is steadfast, determined and visionary. Even at the face of death, she refuses to deny her assignment from God and continues to pledge her loyalty to God over loyalty to church. It should be noted that Joan's revolt in her attire and action does not in any way suggest that she refuses or undermines the role of the church.

Unlike the inquisitor, the archbishop and Cauchon whose religious perspectives are limited to respect for church hierarchy, Joan is a more proactive preacher who preaches a more practical sermon. For her, dressing in men's attire is not a religious affair but an essential tool at war. In that attire, Shaw presents the warrior as the only one suitable to free the French from the English, crown the dauphin of Rheims Cathedral, and raise the siege of Orleans. Joan's unconventionality which is the source of the conflict in the play is not only seen through her dressings and attitudes but also in her belief that her mission on earth comes directly from God. Such ideas and attitudes collide with those of the inquisitor and the Archbishop who stand for rigid religious beliefs that question all miracles or special powers that might undermine the church in some way.

Shaw believes that the church and the state fear any voice of truth that might undermine them. Consequently, they conspire to crush these threatening elements. The Bishop and the Earl of Warwick have no real malice towards Joan. However, they condemn her because she is seen as a supreme threat to the systems they represent. Joan is well equipped with the qualities that would assert her individuality and becomes an epitome of the protestant who prefers to believe in her own conscience than in the church's authority. This is the reason why the inquisitor attributes her miracles to witchcraft and heresy. Talking about Joan's supposed crimes, the Inquisitor further states that:

The devilish pride that has led her into her present peril has left no mark on her countenance. Strange as it may seem to you, it has even left no mark on her character outside those special matters in which she is proud; so that you will see a diabolical pride and a natural humility seated side by side in the selfsame soul. [5].

In order to justify the severity of Joan's crimes and to label

her as an epitome of pure evil, the Inquisitor uses words like “monstrous,” “wickedness,” and “diabolical” to describe Joan. Such negative adjectives emphasize Joan’s inauspicious qualities and immediately cause the God-fearing audience to see her as a devil’s incarnate. He implies that with her presence, society will face significant disaster. He scrutinizes how Joan’s physical characteristic’s phony innocence by stating that her actions do not in fact reflect her true self. He claims that Joan’s “devilish pride” cannot be left alone and must be stringently dealt with for the sake of the community’s protection [5].

Joan’s clash with the traditional religious preachers of her society stem from the fact that she does not only behave and speak as an equal to men; she admonishes them, teaches them and, finally, sees herself as a saviour-figure. She alienates herself from her community (the family and the village), enters the patriarchal public sphere of the state and the church and constructs her discourse of power ignorant of the consequences. Here, Joan’s decision to revolt against the moral and religious mores assigned to the Victorian woman represent Shaw’s visionary and evolutionary perspective of religion.

Instead of accepting the female deadlock imposed by stereotypical Victorian norms, John opts for a different woman who must walk out of the home or cage and contribute in bringing meaningful change to the society. Like Nora who walks out of her marriage and children with the same inspiration, Joan walks away from all religious institutions and their representatives whose preachings stifle the progress of the society. She is seen as a contrast to traditional preachers because she represents a more vibrant and dynamic preacher. Throughout the play, her actions can be seen as a strong signal to all preachings and ecclesiastic teachings that encourage patriarchal societies. Her leadership skills at war front and her successes mean that, like men, women have a leading and major role to play for society to progress.

Equally, Joan’s actions champion the idea that an individual can act on his or her inspiration without necessarily subjecting his or her ideas to the will of institutions as claimed by traditional preachers. Shaw deliberately contrasts Joan with such traditional preachers in order to question the authenticity and efficacy of institutional governance. This is suggestive of the fact that the majority of the people that make up such institutions have not acquired the right education or inspiration to define and interpret the right solutions to the problems that plague mankind. Shaw postulates that only those inspired by the Life Force like Joan, can bring about meaningful change for the good of all in the society. Traditional preachers like the Inquisitor and the archbishop in *Saint Joan*, Major Barbara in *Major Barbara*, Pastor Manders in *Ghosts*, Thomas Helmer in *A Doll’s House*, Parson Rorlund in *The Pillars of Society* are too conventional in their approach and are not inspired by the Life Force. Consequently, they lack the vibrancy and vitality needed to solve the problems facing modern society.

Also, by teaching men, Joan seems to be cancelling certain biblical prescriptions which, according to her, no longer

stand the taste of time. In his letter to Timothy in the bible, Paul writes: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent” [12]. Joan not only refuses to be silent, but she also treats others as if they were ignorant in the matters of religion. By so doing, Joan ignorantly challenges traditional preachers and destabilizes the core of Victorian customs with regard to women. Her actions signal the beginning of a new era for the woman and indicate that societal mores are destructible. In spite of the sanctions she receives for her actions, Joan like a typical Shavian heroine does not suffer from despondency but forges ahead like Nora in *A Doll’s House*.

Joan faces stiff resistance from traditional preachers who consider her a heretic but her belief and determination push her into soldiering. She is confident of herself and tells Dunois that “I will lead and your men will follow. That is all I can do. But I must do it: you shall not stop me” [5]. Joan therefore, sounds unstoppable and her courage is further seen when she tells Dunois that “you soldiers do not know how to use the big guns. You think you can win battle with a great noise and smoke” [5].

The main conflict in Shaw’s *Saint Joan* is hardly very different from the one in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*. Joan does not suffer the deception of marital life in Victorian society but like Nora, she collides with traditional preachers because she struggles to assert her individual personality. Joan’s self-awareness is noticed earlier in the play from Joan’s claims of revelations from God. She therefore, rejects the dogmatic Christian doctrine of papal infallibility which requires that the individual must submit not only to the pope but to the church. Joan claims that her vision and voices come directly from God and the church rejects such voices as heretical since Joan is acting as an individual. When she insists on the righteousness of her voices, she does so innocently and unaware of the destructive implications of her assertion to the church.

The church is however forced to destroy Joan’s individuality to save the majority or thousands of other Christians. Worth noting here is that Joan asserts her individuality; she seems to perceive God, as the individual will as opposed to the conventional representation of God. She chooses to believe more in herself than in the constituted authority of the church. In a broader perspective, Joan like Nora, chooses to assert her individuality than to conform to the demands of society. Her society condemns her for wearing men’s clothes and for involving herself in military affairs and this brings to mind the male – oriented society that Nora faces in *A Doll’s House*.

5. Major Barbara: The Saddened Conventional Preacher

Another very interesting conventional preacher is the eponymous heroine, Major Barbara in Shaw’s *Major Barbara*. In the play, Shaw uses money to dramatize the conflict between good and evil and exploits the lack of

money to justify the fact that the worst problem in society is not evil but poverty. Although Major Barbara can be seen as a “new woman” in the play in the way she transcends feminine gender roles, she represents conventional preachers when it comes to religion [4]. Pitted against her father who offers an alternative religious opinion on economics, Barbara preaches against what she calls “tainted money” and seems to suggest that poverty is pious in the eyes of God. As a conventional Christian preacher, she suggests that religion has little regard for money and believes in the biblical message that “It is difficult for a rich man to go to heaven as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle” [12]. This idea clashes with her father, Undershaft, who preaches that any religion that accepts poverty does not fit the facts of life and must be wiped out and replaced with one that does. It should be noted that Undershaft’s religion of money and gunpowder is an embodiment of The Life Force religion that Shaw considers as the alternative religion that must replace traditional religion.

Deviating from Christian religion, Undershaft criticizes the Christian endorsement of poverty. As an agent of the life Force, he wages a war against poverty and all religions that embrace it. Undershaft’s determination to delete every religion that is life-denying is similar to Joan’s innocent intention to threaten the bases of conventional religion. The hero and the heroine epitomize the Shavian superman that must secede from conventional laws in order to ensure society’s progress and happiness.

Barbara leads the Salvation Army and is the ultimate voice of the Christian faith. Her army opposes the views of her capitalist father and works on the premise that faith and spiritual ideals are the inevitable requisites for salvation. Major Barbara and her fellow members of the West Ham Salvation Army Shelter discard Undershaft’s view as the selfish pagan views of a materialist. He is considered by Major Barbara and her followers as “The Prince of Darkness” and as one who defends the material aspects of life [4].

Major Barbara can therefore be seen as a dramatisation of a religious conflict. Major Barbara represents the conventional or Christian point of view and Andrew Undershaft is Shaw’s representative of The Life Force. Towards the end of Act 1 of the play, these characters assert their opposing values:

UNDERSHAFT: Well, I will make a bargain with you. If I go to see you. Tomorrow in your salvation shelter, will you come the day after to see me in my canon works?

BARBARA: Take care. It may end in your giving up the cannons for the sake of the Salvation Army.

UNDERSHAFT: Are you sure it will not end in your giving up the Salvation Army for the sake of the cannons?

BARBARA: I will take my chance of that.

UNDERSHAFT: And I will take my chance of the other. [4].

The above exchange exposes the religious conflict between Undershaft and his daughter, Barbara. Both father and daughter are confident of their power to convert the other. Undershaft is bent on converting everyone to his religion of

money and gunpowder. To Andrew Undershaft, the millionaire manufacturer of torpedoes and aerial battleships, any religion that does not fit the facts of life must be scraped out and replaced with a religion that does. Thus, the Christian religion has failed because it is essentially life-denying. It is through Undershaft that Shaw advocates his beliefs that poverty is the worst crime and that only a successful socialist can build a perfect society. Undershaft seems to argue for Shaw that religion must be life giving. This is one of the main ideas on which the religious conflict in *Major Barbara* is based. As an embodiment of The Life Force, Undershaft criticises the Christian virtue of humility principally because of its endorsement of poverty. As an agent of The Life Force, Undershaft wages a war against poverty and all religions that embrace it.

On the other hand, Major Barbara, the ultimate voice of the Christian faith, and her fellow members of the West Ham Salvation Army Shelter work from the premise that faith and spiritual ideals are the inevitable prerequisites for salvation. Hence, they discard Undershaft’s views as the selfish pagan views of a materialist. It is not unconnected with their scorn of Undershaft that they attribute various titles and tags to his person. He is variously described as “The Prince of Darkness”, “Dionysos”, “Machiavelli” and “The Devil’s Disciple” [4]. As a representative of The Life Force, Undershaft defends the material aspects of life. He ridicules the Christian ethics of humility and poverty and considers the Christian religion an obstacle and an enemy to progress. To him, as long as the mass of converts, Christians and Christian leaders do believe like Peter Shirley that the rich are evil and the poor good, poverty shall never be eradicated.

Equally, the two opposing preachers, Undershaft and Major Barbara, have very different opinions when it comes to saving souls. While Undershaft views soul-saving basically in terms of physical well-being, for Barbara, soul saving is a purely spiritual exercise. She preaches that the prime motive of life is to save souls from a spiritual perspective. For her, hunger is physical and consequently of secondary importance since the spiritual must be fed before the physical. As the representative of The Life Force religion, Undershaft disagrees and preaches that soul-saving is closely related to material well-being. He postulates that soul saving is impossible with hunger and poverty. It is in this light that when referring to his workmen at Perivale St. Andrew’s, he shocks Barbara when he says, “I save their souls just as I saved yours” [4]. This ideological conflict is exemplified in the following dialogue between Major Barbara and her father Andrew Undershaft.

BARBARA: (revolted) You saved my soul! What do you mean?

UNDERSHAFT: I fed you and cloth you and housed you. I took care that you should have money enough to live handsomely –more than enough; so that you could be wasteful, careless, generous. That saved your soul from the seven deadly sins.

BARBARA: (bewildered) The seven deadly sins!

UNDERSHAFT: Yes, the deadly seven...food, clothing,

firing, rent, taxes, respectability and children. Nothing can lift those seven millstones from man's neck but money; and the spirit cannot soar until the millstones are lifted. [4].

Here, Undershaft echoes Shaw's stand that religion must be life-giving and not life-denying. According to him, a person's soul is saved when the person is given food, shelter and clothes. As this study illustrates, Shaw's idea is that a soul that is hungry cannot be saved if not fed. He, therefore, deviates from the conventional religious stand on soul-saving and argues that soul-saving means providing the basic necessities to the souls that need them.

It should be noted that although a conventional preacher, Barbara is more dedicated to her spiritual assignments than the hypocritical conventional preacher we meet in Ibsen's plays. In the first act of *Major Barbara*, the heroine is presented as a child of God. It is for her "heavenly Father" that Barbara has abandoned her father's money and her mother's concept of a "brilliant career" and chosen to do the work of God. When Lady Britomart tells Undershaft that Barbara "has no father to advise her," Barbara replies, "Oh yes she has. There are no orphans in the Salvation Army." God the Father has become Barbara's parent as well as the center of her work. Even Barbara's name and clothes reflect her total absorption into the world of this father. She is no longer Barbara Undershaft but Major Barbara. Despite the resemblance she bears to her father and mother, Barbara sees her identity as fixed. She is the child of God. God's work (as represented by the Army's mission) is her work. Barbara sees no compromise in this; her work with the Army is the ultimate expression of her devotion to God [4].

However, Shaw uses Rummy Mitchens and Snobby Price to illustrate the limits of Barbara's doctrine. In Barbara's ministry, a man confesses his sins publicly and is kept in the Salvation Army Shelter to undergo some form of spiritual cleansing and renewal. While there he is fed for free and fortified spiritually. Shaw demonstrates that the result is that pretensions to contrition cannot be distinguished from sincere confessions. Hence, those desperately in need of survival are bound to confess sins that they never committed in a bid to survive at the expense of the Salvation Army. Snobby Price and Rummy Mitchens are experts in this game of survival as evident in the following dialogue:

Price: Wot! Oh Rummy, Rummy! Respectable Married woman, Rummy, gitin rescued by the Salvation Army by pretending to be a bad un. Same old game!

Rummy: What am I to do I can't starve. Them Salvation lasses is dear good girl, but the better you are, the worse the likes to think you were before they rescued you. Why shouldn't they a bit O credit, poor loves! They are worn to rags by their work. And where would they get the money to rescue if we were to let on we're no worse than other people? You know what ladies and gentlemen are.

PRICE: We're companions in misfortune, Rummy...

RUMMY: Who saved you, Mr Price? Was it Major Barbara?

PRICE: No: I came here on my own. I'm going to be Bronterre O'Brien Price, the converted painter. I know not

they like. I'll tell em how I blasphemed and gambled and wooped my poor old mother. [4].

Shaw uses Snobby Price and Rummy Mitchens to castigate any religion that is based on confession and the forgiveness of sins. The religion that Barbara preaches encourages hypocrisy because people confess sins in order to be sheltered and fed by the militant Christian organisation. Hunger and poverty are the motivating factors for adherents to Barbara's religion and not any genuine spiritual motivation. The Army's goals are opposed to its achievements and Snobby Price and Rummy Mitchen's illustrate this well. The situation in the play brings to mind the religious situation in Cameroon today and in many parts of the world where people adhere to religious organisations because of poverty and hunger and not necessarily because of spirituality. Through Undershaft, Shaw demonstrates the difficulty for a poor or hungry person to contemplate genuine spiritual issues.

Undershaft's gospel of "money and gunpowder" finally triumph's over Barbara's religion when the Salvation Army suffers a financial crisis and would stop functioning if money is not arranged urgently from any source [4]. Undershaft offers to help but Barbara refuses to save the Salvation Army with "tainted money". Unfortunately for the Major, her superior overturn's her repulsion and accepts the money.

Barbara loses faith in the Army and Undershaft tempts his daughter and prospective son-in-law to abrogate their life in the Salvation Army for his life in the munitions business. Barbara is shocked and frustrated at this turn of the situation. Barbara insists that the money is tainted, that its blood money, gleaned from her father with the sweat of his underpaid workers and by the misery suffered by the victims of Undershaft's armaments industry. She throws off her badge and refuses to go with the Army. She refuses to pray with them and says that perhaps she will never pray again.

Losing her faith in the Army, Barbara finally comes to see that eliminating poverty is in itself a good deed and that, because of the material success of Undershaft's workers, she can no longer bribe them with bread or heaven; she is free to work, unencumbered, on saving their souls. Despite this sense of Barbara reaching a sort of maturity at the end of the play, Shaw presents Barbara's growth as a paradox. The audience's final view of Barbara is of her calling for her mother, seeking her guidance. Thus, Shaw complicates the concept of growth and development, leaving the audience with the sense that Barbara has matured and yet is still, in some ways, a child.

In the end, Undershaft succeeds in persuading her daughter to accept that capitalists save the souls of poor, hungry, miserable people better by providing them with respectable jobs. He suggests that the bread and treacle and dreams of heaven offered by the Salvation Army sustain poverty which blights whole cities and spreads horrible pestilence. Poverty, he says, is the worst crime and souls are not saved by words and dreams but by a permanent job, good wages, and a sound house in a handsome street. He tells Barbara that it is cheap work converting starving men with a Bible in one hand, and a slice of bread in the other. He succeeds in winning his

daughter to his point of view. Barbara declares: "I have got rid of the bribe of bread. I have got rid of the bribe of heaven. Let God's work be done for its own sake: the work he had to create us to do because it cannot be done except by living men and women" [4].

However, Shaw's emphasis on the importance of Undershaft's money in saving the souls of the poor should not be mistaken for the author's approval of capitalism. Undershaft's money is made by poorly paid workers under terrible working situations and like Barbara who refers to it as tainted and blood money made by victims of Undershaft's armaments industry, Shaw is also critical of capitalism. For him, both capitalism and poverty are all sins but capitalism is a better sin than poverty and Shaw uses the former to fight the latter.

6. Conclusion

After detecting that the Christian religion of his time was sterile, Shaw decided like Ibsen, to write plays that would not only make audiences and readers re-examine their consciences and overhaul their conventional beliefs, but which would convert the world to his opinions. One of such opinions is the idea of a true religion expressed in his religious plays such as *Major Barbara* and *Saint Joan*. This idea goes contrary to what the Christian orthodox believers of his time held. The rivalry between The Life Force and the Christian religion clearly exposes Shaw's intention to demolish the aspects of the Christian religion that impede development and progress and force human beings to behave like robots.

Ibsen and Shaw understood the fact that religion is one of the supreme values of life and sought to correct its mission and misrepresentation in the Norwegian and Victorian societies. Their iconoclastic and non-conformist sentiments are represented in their plays by highly motivated heroines whose evolutionary ideas clash with the religious mores of their societies. According to them, any credal church or form of ecclesiasticism which preaches the inferiority of the woman and do not lend itself to her emancipation is a weapon of exploitation and marginalisation and should be dismantled. According to the study, the woman has suffered,

and still suffers, because of the results of traditional beliefs and theological dogmas around the world. For any meaningful change to be perceived, the study proposes a serious overhaul of conventional theological teachings that undermine women. Like feminist theologians, the study seeks the equality and welfare of women by opposing and dismantling what are seen as patriarchal or androcentric systems of power, domination and exclusion.

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