


# Interpreting the David–Bathsheba narrative (2 Sm 11:2–4) as a response by the church in Nigeria to masculine abuse of power for sexual assault

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Sexual violence against women is a social problem all over the world, including Nigeria. This article examines the David–Bathsheba narrative against this background, relating it to the problem of masculine abuse of power for sexual assault in Nigeria. It also attempts to find out how the church in Nigeria could use the narrative as a textual basis for responding to this problem. The article is targeted at Nigerians who abuse masculine power in this way, the women who need to be aware of sex predators and the church in employing the text as a response to sexual violence. The article employs the exegetical approach in the study of 2 Samuel 11:2–4, and the descriptive method in the analysis of masculine abuse of power for sexual assault in Nigeria, and how the church could combat it. The essay finds that David used his position as a king to assault Bathsheba, which makes the narrative relevant for the present-day Nigerian context of masculine abuse of power for sexual assault. The church in Nigeria could respond to the awareness of this relevance by making the narrative a textual basis for a response to the problem of sexual violence. The church could develop a policy on violence against women which must be reflected in all its teaching instruments. The church must create healing avenues for the victims of sexual abuse. It should liaise with government agencies to ensure that relevant laws against sexual abuse are applied adequately.

**Contribution:** The article is a contribution in Christian ethics. It likens David's encounter with Bathsheba to masculine abuse of power for sexual assault in Nigeria. It explains how the church in Nigeria can employ the narrative as a response to this menace.

**Keywords:** David and Bathsheba; power abuse; sexual assault; Nigeria; the church.

## Introduction

Sexual violence against women has been recognised as a social problem all over the world. Several reports have indicated its prevalence in Nigeria, particularly rape, which has no consideration of age, as even children and grandmothers are not spared from the assault of rapists (Babajide-Alabi 2017; Baffour 2014; Folayan et al. 2014; Okenwa, Lawoko & Jansson 2009; Omorodion & Olusanya 1998; Ose 2009). This article attempts to study the David–Bathsheba narrative (2 Sm 11) against this background, with a focus on the role of David as being in the position of authority. The narrative has attracted much attention in Old Testament (OT) scholarship, wherein it has been studied in varied perspectives. One of the most popular approaches is to emphasise the role of David as an adulterer and murderer, especially in view of his condemnation by Nathan in the succeeding chapter.

However, a few studies have accused Bathsheba of complicity in her affair with David, claiming that her bathing where David could see her and at that point in time could have been pre-arranged with David (Hertzberg 1964:309; Klein 2003:56). After all, Bathsheba never made any complaints during and after the event, but simply moved into David's house after the death of her husband.

The article studies the narrative from the perspective of David as a king, laying emphasis on his powers against which Bathsheba might have been helpless. Thus, with its scope limited to the sexual encounter in verses 2–4, the aim of the work is to examine the relevance of the text in contemporary Nigeria in the context of men abusing their positions of authority for sexual violence against women. This context is multifaceted. Reminiscent of David's behaviour, it is often said that in the past, amongst the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, for instance, the *oba* [king] could use his unquestionable powers to force women into marriage with him – an act which eventually led to inflicting sex on unwilling women. This context is sometimes found in the family itself where some men sexually assault their sisters-in-law and stepdaughters. In the institutions of learning of all levels, teachers and lecturers

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also abuse female pupils and students. At places of work, police stations and even in churches, men misuse their authority to rape women. The article also identifies the various ways in which the church in Nigeria exploits the David–Bathsheba narrative as a textual basis for a solution to the rampant sexual violence against women, particularly by men at positions of authority. Thus, the target groups are Nigerian men who wield some form of authority to inflict sexual assault on women, the women who need to be aware of such sex predators and the church in employing the text as a solution for sexual violence. Bonhoeffer (1971) is in agreement with the need for the church to respond to the social welfare of its members when he says, '[t]he church is the church only when it exists for others [sharing] ... in secular problems of ordinary human life' (cited in Mangayi 2014:135). In terms of methodology, the article employs the exegetical approach to the study of 2 Samuel 11:2–4, and the descriptive method in the analysis of masculine abuse of power for sexual assault in Nigeria as well as the role of the church in combating it. The work begins with the study of the nature of material in 2 Samuel 11, after which it examines the culture of rape in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament (HB or OT). It moves further to do an exegesis of 2 Samuel 11:2–4, and dwells on the various dimensions of abuse of masculine power for sexual assault in Nigeria. Finally, the article identifies the ways in which the church in Nigeria can apply the David–Bathsheba story to curb the menace.

## Recognising the nature of material in 2 Samuel 11

The books of Samuel belong to the corpus of Joshua–Kings commonly called the Deuteronomistic History (DH), the final edition of which is the 'work of editors-authors during the period of the exile' (Longman & Dillard 2006:153; cf. Boadt 1984:376; Rogerson 2005:39; Römer 2007). 2 Samuel 11 belongs specifically to the so-called court history of David or succession narrative (Moore & Kelle 2011:200–213; cf. Longman & Dillard 2006:153–154; Rogerson 2005:39–41). According to Moore and Kelle (2011:200–213, cited in Ademiluka 2016:119), early 20th-century biblical scholars had a general consensus that the stories in 2 Samuel 9 to 1 Kings 2 represented 'a reliable historical writing and that their composition was to be regarded as essentially contemporary with the events which are related'. However, by the end of the 20th century, historians saw reasons, particularly from archaeology, to re-evaluate their assumptions about the texts describing the early monarchy. About this time there was (and still is) very little archaeological evidence for the united monarchy in Palestine; there were no sufficient artefacts to clarify the worth of the HB or OT as a historical source about the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon (Moore & Kelle 2011, cited in Ademiluka 2016:120). In the words of Finkelstein (2007):

[T]he mention of the 'House of David' in the Tel Dan inscription from the ninth century BCE leaves no doubt that David and Solomon were historical figures ... [b]ut the great biblical story of the United Monarchy is left with no material evidence. (p. 115)

Birch et al. (2005:272) affirm that 'most scholars agree that these narratives circulated independently from their

present context in an earlier form [*and were later*] drawn into this larger story by deuteronomistic editors'. In other words, for the narratives such as in 2 Samuel 11, the sources available to the Deuteronomist 'were not written documents but oral traditions ... folk memories about prominent families in Iron Age Cisjordan' (Noll 2013:218). For Noll (2013), as oral traditions are rarely transmitted in a fixed form, they cannot be reliable. Many scholars agree on this point, and even that some of the biblical stories might be fictitious. However, it is pertinent to note that the word 'fiction' is not necessarily synonymous with falsehood. According to Mann (2011:8), 'the word "fiction" derives from the Latin word meaning "to form"'. Seen from this perspective, every historian engages in fiction in order to give shape to the past. This is what the authors of the DH and other biblical writers did (Mann 2011):

[*They were*] writers, editors and redactors giving shape to the past in literary form ... [T]hey shape the past in order to speak to the present, and the remarkable dimension of scripture is that the text has continued to speak to people's present down to this day. (p. 8)

Making the text to speak about the present in this way is what is called synchronic interpretation, as against the diachronic, which focuses on the processes that produced the text, as in the historical-critical approach.

According to Lusk (2004:online), the synchronic reading 'treats the Bible as a finished product, as a coherent, logical, unified whole'. In view of the fact that countless readers to date have found the 'text meaningful without knowing its historical setting ... there is a growing interest in a synchronic reading' (Mann 2011:9). There is interest in knowing what the text says in the form in which we have it now. As Mann (2011:9) rightly affirms, 'looking at the text synchronically prevents reading it only as editorial opinion speaking to the specific time of the editor'. At the same time, reading the text only synchronically would not adequately acknowledge the processes that produced the final product. Interpreters must therefore be careful not to 'lose sight of the conclusions of older literary critics regarding the sources' (Mann 2011:9). In focusing on the final form of the text, the synchronic approach is a corollary of the narrative analysis which studies how the Bible uses the form of story to communicate its message. The narrative reading does not question the text for its historical veracity but rather 'invites the reader to explore the dimensions of the narrative in its so-called "final" form ...' (Oosthuizen 1994:85, 89). Hence, the significance of a narrative and synchronic reading of the text, over against the historical-critical method, resides in the fact that it engages the text in its canonical form. Childs (1979) in his canonical criticism had emphasised the significance of the canonical form of the OT. The thrust of the canonical approach is an attempt to harmonise the findings of historical criticism, on the one hand, and the needs of believers in the modern world, on the other hand (Kruger 1994:183). To this end, in the study of the David–Bathsheba narrative, this article employs a synchronic and narrative reading, examining the text in its present form, thereby making it relevant to the modern

Nigerian reader, particularly in his or her context of masculine abuse of power for sexual assault.

## The culture of sexual violence in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament

Graybill (2019) situates the David–Bathsheba narrative in the HB or OT rape culture, which constitutes an aspect of the ‘domestic abuse [which] is a significant ... behavior in Jewish communities in Israel and the Diaspora’ (Graetz 2002:online). Graybill (2019:online) emphasises that ancient Israel had a ‘rape culture ... [as] many of the features that contemporary commentators identify as central to rape culture appear in the Hebrew Bible’. He cites many instances of this culture in the HB or OT. In Genesis 19:8–11, Lot offers his two daughters to certain men of Sodom who desire to rape his male guests. This story is in itself, in several respects, reminiscent of the narrative of the Levite and his concubine in Judges 19, which ‘many consider ... to be the most heinous of sexual abuse acts in the Old Testament’ (Ademiluka 2018:346). A Levite and his concubine had to spend the night in Gibeah in the land of Benjamin, and in the night, the men of the city demanded to rape him. Their host offered instead the concubine and his own virgin daughter but the men refused, and the Levite pushed out his concubine to them. She was raped to death and her body was discovered in the morning. Graybill (2019:online) points out some inter-textual connections in the Genesis and Judges narratives. In both texts, alternate targets are provided for the rapists, which points ‘to the larger economy of sexual violence [and the representation] of women as interchangeable sexual commodities’, connections which indicate that the rape culture is pervasive across biblical texts, times and authors (Graybill 2019:online).

Another rape narrative is that in Genesis 34, where Dinah, the only daughter of Jacob, is raped by Shechem. After the affair, Shechem desires to marry Dinah. Various interpretations have been given to Dinah’s encounter with Shechem. Some believe that it was a ‘consensual premarital sex’ (Ademiluka 2018:348; cf. Graybill 2019:online). However, Klopper (2010) classifies Dinah’s encounter with Shechem as ‘a classic case of acquaintance, or date rape’ (cited in Ademiluka 2018:348). Graybill (2019:online) observes that the Dinah narrative depicts several ‘issues surrounding rape, female sexuality, and the status of women in the biblical text’. Similar to the sexual abuse of women captured in warfare (Dt 21:10–14), Dinah’s case may be understood in the context of ‘female sexuality as an extension of masculine economies of power and control in the Hebrew Bible’ (Graybill 2019:online). The motif of women sexuality, being a means of ‘establishing power relations between men’ (Graybill 2019:online), is also reflected in 2 Samuel 16:21–22, where Absalom demonstrates ‘his assumption of royal power and prerogative by intercourse with his father’s concubines’ (Brockington 1982:335). Smith (2014:online) points out that the violation of his father’s concubines by Absalom was part of the power struggle between him and David, as in the ancient world ‘taking of the wives of the predecessor was a part of the succession’.

Graybill (2019:online) also identifies the rape culture in ancient Israel in ‘larger conditions of culture’ such as in the use of slave women in Genesis 16:30 as surrogates for their barren mistresses, which he interprets as ‘sexual exploitation of slaves’.<sup>1</sup>

However, not all interpreters agree that 2 Samuel 11:2–4 belong to the HB or OT sexual exploitation literature. Whilst ‘some see Bathsheba as a clever opportunist who was a willing and eager participant in a torrid love affair ... others see her as an innocent victim, exploited by a powerful king’ (Lipka 2019:online; cf. Davidson 2006:81). Before deciding on which of these views is appropriate, it is necessary to do a thorough exegesis of 2 Samuel 11:2–4.

## Did David rape Bathsheba? An exegesis of 2 Samuel 11:2–4

There are two main points in the narrative, namely, David was strolling on the roof of his palace and saw a beautiful woman bathing (v. 2), and he sent to inquire about the woman, took her and lay with her (vv. 3–4). From his rooftop, David saw a woman bathing. The narrator presupposes that David considered the woman beautiful as he sent to find out about her. The description of Bathsheba’s beauty also depicts the proximity of her house to that of David’s; it was close enough for David to recognise that the woman was beautiful (Abasili 2011:7). Mann (2011:193) concludes: ‘[c]learly she was bathing outside, but the extent of her exposure is unknown’. The conclusion that Bathsheba was bathing *outside* sounds vague; it is more plausible to suggest that she was somehow in public view but not necessarily naked. This idea derives from the hint in verse 4 that she was performing the required ‘ritual washing at the conclusion of her menstrual period.’<sup>2</sup> [Hence,] [i]f she were in public view, she would have washed without disrobing’ (Garland & Garland 2007:2). It is important to note that public nudity was against ancient Jewish culture (Garland & Garland 2007:2). It is not clear from the text whether David being at the rooftop at the same time Bathsheba was bathing was accidental or he was there ‘trolling, so to speak, for sexual conquests’ (Garland & Garland 2007:3).

David sent to find out who the woman was, and afterwards sent his messengers to bring Bathsheba, ‘and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her’ (v. 4, Revised Standard Version [RSV]). The main action verbs here are שלח [to send], לקח [to take] and שכב [to lie]. As the text stands, the phrase ותבוא אליו [‘and she came to him’] in the Masoretic text (MT) is superfluous and, in fact, interrupts the flow of the reading – for which reason it has been observed that the phrase is a textual variant, omitted in some versions, for example, the Greek Old Testament or Septuagint (LXX) (Andruska 2017:104). This fact is missed by interpretations that attempt

1. But Ademiluka (2019) interprets the Hagar–Abram relationship as legitimate surrogacy.

2. The levitical legislation (Lv 15:19–33) states that a woman is in impurity for 7 days of her menstrual period after which she is expected to engage in ritual washing ‘in the evening seven days after the completion of her menstrual period’ (Peninsula Bible church [PBC] 2016:online; cf. Davidson 2006:85). Its mention in this story is to indicate that ‘she had recently menstruated, so that without doubt the pregnancy belonged to David’ (Payne 1994:327; cf. Mann 2011:193).



to describe the role of Bathsheba in the story based on the phrase, either as a willing participant (Abasili 2011:11; Bailey 1990:88; Kirk-Duggan 2003:59) or simply being 'obedient ... to the explicit command of her sovereign lord, the king' (Davidson 2006:87). Once the position of the phrase is thus resolved, all the actions taken in verse 4 remain that of David. Garsiel (1993) opines that 'the series, "he saw ... sent ... inquired ... sent ... took her ... lay with her ..." indicates that the main initiative was David's' (cited in Andruska 2017:104; cf. Davidson 2006:87). Apart from this, others have interpreted David's actions in this phrase as devoid of any affection, and have rather reduced Bathsheba as a mere object of sex (Abasili 2011:9; Brueggemann 1990:273; Fokkelman 1981:52).

The first of the three key verbs in verses 3–4 is שלח, which as used here connotes the exercise of power (PBC 2016). The king first *sent* to inquire about the woman, and when her identity was ascertained, David again *sent* messengers to bring her. In this context, therefore, in which royal messengers were sent to bring a subject of the king's, שלח 'should probably be understood in the sense of "fetch" [*as in the New Jerusalem Bible*] or "summon" and clearly implies psychological power pressure on the part of David' (Davidson 2006:88). The verbs לקח and שכב are used to describe David's act in verse 4, ויקחה וישכב עמה [and he took her and lay with her']. In Qal (classical Hebrew verb) as used here, לקח 'has a rich semantic field which includes' (Abasili 2011:9) 'take', 'seize', 'grasp', 'capture', 'bring', 'snatch' etc. (cf. Kaiser 1980:481). שכב appears most often in Qal, primarily meaning 'to lie down' either in death or for sexual relation (Hamilton 1980:921). The expression ויקחה וישכב עמה in the context of sexual relation is better understood when compared with similar instances of 'taking and lying with' in the HB or OT. Gravett (2004) has examined extensively how forceful, 'non-consensual sexual intercourse, what we call "rape," is described in biblical narratives, images and laws' (cited in Andruska 2017:105). Gravett (2004) notes that whilst there is no Hebrew equivalent for the English word 'rape', there are typical verbs used to depict sexual violence in a way that it connotes rape. She calls attention particularly to the use of לקח in the Shechem–Dinah encounter in Genesis 34:2, arguing that לקח 'indicates force and violence in a number of biblical texts, just as it conveys violence on the part of Shechem' (Gravett 2004, cited in Andruska 2017:105). Some English translations recognise the idea of 'force' as being suggested by Gravett (2004) when they render לקח in Genesis 34:2 as 'seized' instead of 'took' (e.g. RSV, ESV, NJB).<sup>3</sup> Gravett (2004) argues further that the combination of לקח 'with a typical verb for sexual intercourse, שכב, in Genesis 34:2 indicates rape' (cited in Andruska 2017:105). This view is buttressed by Hamilton (1980:921) in his assertion that whenever שכב and its 'derivatives are used in a context of sexual relationships, those relationships are illicit' (cf. Ex 22:16 [H 15]; Lv 18:22; 20:13; Dt 22:22). Andruska (2017:106) asserts that Genesis 34:2 uses virtually the same expression for the assault on Dinah as in 2 Samuel 11:4 (ויקחה אתה וישכב אתה), which 'signal, explicitly, that Bathsheba was raped'. The action of 'taking/seizing and lying with' is also found in the

regulations concerning rape in Deuteronomy 22:25–28, where the offence is punishable by death. For example, in verse 25, the Hiph'il of חזק is used, in which case it means 'to seize' 'lay hold of', 'constrain' (Feyerabend 1957:94; cf. Abasili 2011:6); it is also combined with שכב as in 2 Samuel 11:4 and Genesis 34:2, and is commonly translated as 'and the man seizes her and lies with her'. 'Hence, we have a clear case of the use of physical power against the betrothed virgin [*which is a pointer to*] the role of physical violence' in the HB conception of rape (Abasili 2011:6). All these similarities with 2 Samuel 11:4 prove that (Andruska 2017):

[T]he author is indicating that Bathsheba was in fact raped. [*The text*] is using typical verbs for sexual intercourse in a nontypical way to depict a sexually violent act: rape. (p. 107)

Nevertheless, some interpreters have argued to the contrary that Bathsheba's encounter with David was not a rape. For example, Koenig (2011) maintains that there are no words to indicate force or humiliation in 2 Samuel 11:4 as in the cases of Dinah and Tamar (cited in Andruska 2017:107). Abasili (2011) examines Bathsheba's experience in relation to the laws on rape in Deuteronomy 22, and the Amnon–Tamar encounter in 2 Samuel 13. According to Abasili (2011), judging from the former text:

[I]n the HB rape is the physical use of power by a man in overpowering a woman into non-consensual sex [*in which*] ... the victim is expected to [*cry*] ... out (or at least be presumed to have cried out for help but not heard). (p. 6)

The rape of Tamar complies with this definition in that she cried out loud and was heard after the incidence, indicating that she had been raped (vv. 14–16). Abasili (2011) argues that לקח in 2 Samuel 11:4 does not involve physical force on Bathsheba. He explains further that (Abasili (2011):

[T]here is no clear evidence that the messengers literally seized and dragged her to the palace. ... The language here lacks the physical overpowering as in the case of Amnon and Tamar, and consequently Bathsheba is not depicted as crying out during or after the sexual intercourse. [T]herefore, it is not a case of 'biblical rape'. (pp. 11–12)

These scholars, therefore, deny that Bathsheba was raped on the premise that there is no indication of violence against her since she did not cry out during or after the encounter with David. However, in the first place, as Kirk-Duggan (2012) plausibly points out, the Deuteronomy laws on rape are inadequate in determining the act by the physical reaction of the victim. Kirk-Duggan (2012) reiterates that:

[*These laws*] ignore the terror and fear that one can have when being threatened. [*They*] give no consideration ... for the amount of force, size of perpetrator, or state of mind of the woman. If she had been threatened or traumatized before, was hesitant or fearful, she might freeze in the face of brutality and not be able to scream or be defensive. She may have thought resistance would result in death. If he had any weapon, resistance would be futile. (p. 277)

Thus, Kirk-Duggan (2012) aptly catches the aspect of 'the strict code of silence amongst victims' (Folayan et al.

3. RSV stands for Revised Standard Version, ESV for English Standard Version and NJB for New Jerusalem Bible.

2014:online), which is the major factor that has stood against solving the problem of sexual violence everywhere.

Many reasons account for this silence, but the major one is fear on the part of the victim. As some studies have shown, sometimes victims have their lives spared by their assailants on the condition that they would keep silence (Okenwa et al. 2009), and out of fear they accept this bargain. David might not have used physical threat on Bathsheba but his position as a king, who had the power of life and death (cf. 2 Sm 12:5), was enough to scare her to silence both during and after the incidence. Abasili (2011:11) himself acknowledges that David 'uses his status and authority as king to have what he wants [and] of course, nobody would expect Bathsheba to resist the king's summon', likening David's action here to that of Abimelech in Genesis 20:2, where the latter used the royal power to take Abraham's wife. That Bathsheba did not make any physical reaction either during or after David's act could be rightly attributed to her fear of David's position of being a king. David's authority was demonstrated in 'sending multiple messengers to fetch her [v. 4]. It was a power move that could not be refused' (Garland & Garland 2007:3). In this regard, Mann (2011:193) opines that 'a male authority figure automatically has power over anyone, especially women in a patriarchal culture – how much more the king!' Lipka (2019:online) is therefore correct when he declares Bathsheba as 'an innocent victim who was subjected to an egregious abuse of power'. And here lies the difference in the Bathsheba and Tamar stories: Amnon is not a king; hence, there is not the fear of throne power. Therefore, as Davidson (2006) affirms:

[Even if] *נָפַל* used for the sexual intercourse between David and Bathsheba does not stress the use of overpowering physical brutality on the part of David ... [g]iven the context of (at least psychological) coercion in this passage, the best modern expression to describe David's action is 'power rape', in which a person in a position of authority abuses that 'power' to victimize a subservient and vulnerable person sexually, whether or not the victim appears to give 'consent'. (p. 89)

In other words, Garland and Garland (2007) maintain that:

[S]ince consent was impossible, given her powerless position, David in essence raped her. Rape means to have sex against the will, without the consent, of another – and she did not have the power to consent. Even if there was no physical struggle, even if she gave in to him, it was rape. (p. 4)

As Garland and Garland (2007) rightly observe, the David–Bathsheba narrative:

[I]s not just some ancient story; it is a story repeated over and over today. [Sexual] [a]buse of power happens in schools, in the workplace, and in the church, when people have opportunity to use and abuse others because they have some form of authority over them. (p. 7)

This statement is absolutely applicable to the Nigerian context; hence, in the following section, this article examines masculine abuse of power in Nigeria for sexual assault.

## Masculine power and sexual assault in Nigeria

In Nigeria, almost every day there are reports on 'the tenacity and the tendentious sexual assaults meted on Nigerian' women (Odu, Falana & Olotu 2014:472). Every now and then:

[I]t is reported that a teacher has raped a student, a religious leader has raped his flock ... a man has raped a sister-in-law or daughter-in-law, a master has raped a housemaid ... a boss has raped his staff ... a traditional ruler has raped a subject ... (Chiazor et al. 2016:7769; cf. Ogunbode, Bello & Ogunbode 2014:104)

As the above statement indicates, masculine abuse of power for sexual assault exists in various contexts in Nigeria, including the patriarchal traditional setting, the home front, the workplace, the church, and several others. The African traditional patriarchal society with its encouragement of polygamy engenders masculine abuse of power for sexual violence. Polygamy used to be perceived as a means of raising social status of the family concerned. Africans had a mindset that a big family earned 'its head great respect in the eyes of the community' (Mbiti 1969:142). Polygamy was thus a status of prestige, particularly for wealthy men, foremost amongst whom were the traditional rulers; that is why such men would 'get married to young looking girls in order to show off social status' (Muthengi 1995:60; cf. Makinde 2004:167). This attitude is most common with traditional rulers. In the traditional African society, amongst the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, for instance, the *oba* [king] has not only prestige but also absolute power over his subjects. With this power, in the past the *oba* usually accumulated women. Osha (2018:online) attests to the fact that accumulation of women was part of traditional rulership amongst the Yoruba when he says, '[t]he basic organisational unit of the agglomeration that came to be known as the Yoruba empire is the household of a husband and his several wives'. In fact, tradition has it that in the past the *oba* had the power to take any woman as his wife irrespective of whether she was already married to another man, and her consent never counted. It also did not matter if the *oba* already had several wives. It is important to note that this attitude of forcing women into marriage is still witnessed even today in some parts of Yorubaland (Familusi 2012:305). It need not be said that forcing a woman into marriage necessarily involves imposing sex on her, which amounts to sexual assault.

Masculine abuse of power for sexual assault also exists in families through the various forms of '[c]hild sexual abuse [which] is ... usually committed by a person in a position of power and trust in the child's life' (FABMUMNG 2017:online). This act is usually in the form of assault by men on their wives' younger female relations or housemaids. For example, in May 2017, David Oluwatoba was arraigned before a magistrate court in Igede-Ekiti in Ekiti state for raping 'KemiIge, a 4 years old girl ... [who] ... was his step daughter' (Falade & Fasuan 2017:16). Oluwatoba was later sentenced to 14-year imprisonment. Chiazor et al. (2016:7770) report the

case of 'a 62-year-old man [who] was arraigned before a magistrate court in Ogun state for defiling his 10-year-old stepdaughter'. Another type of masculine abuse of power for sexual assault is:

Child marriage ... whereby minors are given in matrimony. Such marriages are typically arranged and often forced [since] young children are generally not capable of giving valid consent to enter into [a] marriage. (Ede 2018:online)

According to the World Health Organization (WHO; 2002:157), in the *World Report on Violence and Health*, this practice amounts to sexual violence on the part of husbands because these children are unable to give consent or withhold their consent, and having not known sex, 'their first sexual encounters are often forced'. In northern Nigeria, for example, in Kebbi state, children as young as 11 years old are married and thus abused sexually (WHO 2002:157).

Several studies have shown that in Nigeria men regularly abuse their power for sexual violence on women at places of work, especially in the institutions of learning. In a research conducted by David et al. (2018:203) in southwestern Nigeria, it was discovered that school teachers were amongst the perpetrators of child sexual abuse in their institutions of learning of that region. In the *World Report on Violence and Health*, WHO (2002) similarly:

[H]ighlighted the role of teachers ... in facilitating or perpetrating sexual coercion. [It] ... found cases of schoolteachers attempting to gain sex, in return for good grades or for not failing pupils ... in Nigeria among other African countries. (p. 155)

Examples abound of school teachers being involved in sexual assault on their students. For instance, in 2013, Ibitoye Babatunde, a school proprietor, was charged to court in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti state for raping 'a 10 years old girl Nwaji Ugochukwu. [He] ... was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment' (Falade & Fasuan 2017:15). In the same vein, Ajayi Taiwo, a vice principal, 'raped a 12 years old girl in his office ... [and] was sentenced to life imprisonment' (Falade & Fasuan 2017:16).

However, the worst cases of men using their power and position to inflict sexual assault on women are found amongst the Nigerian policemen. 'Women detained for criminal offences, relatives of criminal suspects and sex workers who cannot pay bribes are often targeted for rape and other abuse by police officers' (Country Information and Guidance 2015:online). Amnesty International (2006:online) has obtained reports in Nigeria to this effect:

[W]omen have been raped by the police in the street, while being transferred to police stations, while in police custody, or when visiting male detainees ... [R]ape and other forms of sexual violence, or the threat of such violence ... [are] among various methods of torture used by the police to extract confessions or other information. [Other] methods include insertion of foreign objects, such as broomsticks or broken bottles, into woman's vagina.

The organisation gives illustrations to buttress these claims. For instance, there is the case of an 18-year-old woman who, in February 2002, was taken to a police station in Enugu, Enugu state, and sexually abused by police officers before being released the next morning. A barrister from the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) took the case to Enugu court, and 'the victim was awarded N300,000 (approximately US\$2345) in compensation ... but the perpetrators continued to serve in the police force' (Amnesty International 2006:online). In 2004, there was also the case of two young students who were abducted and repeatedly raped at gunpoint by three police officers, including a deputy superintendent of police, also in Enugu state. The three police officers were charged to court for rape and abduction and 'are reported to have been dismissed from the Nigerian police force' (Amnesty International 2006:online). Similar incidents are witnessed in Nigerian prisons where:

[W]omen and girls are frequently raped while in detention, or when they visit a detained male relative ... They believe that by being forced into having sex with a police officer, the detainee that they are visiting may be released more quickly. (Amnesty International 2006:online)

According to the organisation, it has been reported by human rights organisations in Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt that the police 'frequently raid streets, harassing, arresting and gang-raping [commercial sex workers] before releasing them without charge' (Amnesty International 2006:online).

In Nigeria, masculine abuse of power for sexual assault is witnessed even in the church. Reports indicate that 'some men on the altar are demons disguised as angels' in view of the fact that some church elders and pastors have been found guilty of rape, wife battering and other criminal acts against women (Woman.NG 2017). There are many stories about church elders, choirmasters, youth pastors and senior pastors raping underage and teenage girls who are members of their congregations (Ayomide 2019; Woman.NG 2017). In the words of Agazue (2016:online), '[a]s women become the predominant followers of these [neo-pentecostal] churches, sexual exploitation of vulnerable women by [their] male religious leaders, often called prophets, has become commonplace'. These religious leaders exercise their authority in various ways in the act of sexual assault on their female members. There are those prophets 'whose exorcism methods include the "anointing" of the private parts of those women whom they allege are possessed by witchcraft, mermaid or marine spirits' (Agazue 2015:17), the 'anointing' which is usually done through sexual intercourse. Sometimes, such brainwashed women also pass their own daughters or female friends to their pastors for 'spiritual cleansing', another term for having sex with church members by subterfuge (Agazue 2016).

Agazue (2016:online) gives illustrations of how making fake 'promises of "spiritual cleansing" and the need to fulfil the "will of God" serves as a new avenue to prey on female followers ... [by] pastors'. Placing her on secrecy oath, Dennis Mmadu, a Lagos-based prophet, sexually ravaged 24-year-old



Cynthia Nwanguma for 7 days. According to Agazue (2016:online), throughout the 7 days:

[*Mmadu*] was anointing her breasts and private part with oil ... claiming to be having holy sex with her ... to heal her from [*a*] strange illness that ... would make her barren all her life.

The prophet did not just assault the poor student nurse but charged her the sum of ₦21,800 for 'spiritual cleansing'. The police came into the matter and arrested the 'man of God' when his victim came to know reality and demanded refund of her money and the prophet refused to pay.

A similar 'spiritual cleansing' encounter took place in Kogi state 'between a 37-year-old pastor and his 18-year-old female church member ... named Mary' (Agazue 2016:online). This pastor told Mary that her waist and private part had been ravaged by demons and she needed deliverance, otherwise she would remain childless forever. The pastor claimed that the demons could be cast out only through sexual intercourse, and she must not tell anybody the mode of deliverance. Mary narrated her ordeal as follows:

After praying into an olive oil, he asked me to undress while he [*robbed*] my waist and private parts with the anointing oil mixed with some substances, he then undressed himself and used the same oil on his private part before he descended on me and started to do the thing. (Agazue 2016:online)

Mary's parents got to know about her encounter with the 'man of God' when they found her pregnant. They reported the pastor to the police and got him arrested. Similar stories abound in Nigeria of 'men of God' abusing their ecclesiastical position for sexual assault on female members of their congregations. In the following section, this article examines how the church in Nigeria can exploit the David–Bathsheba narrative for a solution to the incessant masculine abuse of power for sexual assault, particularly on female members.

## How the church in Nigeria can use the David–Bathsheba narrative as a textual basis for response to masculine abuse of power for sexual assault

Mangayi (2014:135) states that for its message to be effective, the church has to be pragmatic in attending to the living conditions of its members. Hence, Biko (1978) states that 'Christianity cannot remain abstract and removed from the people's environmental problems ... [*It is*] through engaging with societal problems ... that the significance of the Christian message is rediscovered' (cited in Headley & Kobe 2017). In Nigeria, the application of the David–Bathsheba story by the church is usually focused on David as an adulterer and murderer; emphasis is seldom placed on David abusing his power of being a king for assault on hapless Bathsheba. However, as the PBS (2016:3) has aptly pointed out, it is inadequate to simply describe David's sin as adultery. This is because '[*a*]dultery can take many forms [*and*] ... implies

a consensual relationship between two people, [*which*] doesn't appear to be the case. David had all the power; Bathsheba had none'. The point being made here is that the emphasis is misplaced when it falls on the issue of adultery; rather, the stress should be on power differential between David and Bathsheba. In this regard, the church in Nigeria has much more to do in the area of the application of this narrative to the contemporary society. Other than using the text as a teaching against adultery, the church should employ it as a response to end the rampant sexual violence on its female members, particularly by influential men. It is not to say that the church has not responded at all to the issue of women abuse. Some denominations 'have taken bold steps in addressing the problem of child abuse in the country through preaching, public sensitization, and establishment of motherless babies' homes' (Ede 2018:online). However, as Ayomide (2019:online) has rightly noted, the church in Nigeria:

[*H*]as remained very conservative in tackling the cultures of rape [*and*] sexual harassment ... The church in Nigeria seems to be out of sync with the reality most of its female members face, a bleak reality of fear, catcalling, sexual harassment and intimidation.

From the perspective of viewing David as a power abuser for sexual assault, there are several steps that the church in Nigeria can take in applying the narrative to the contemporary society. In view of the high rate of sexual violence in the country, the story of David's assault on Bathsheba is a challenge for the church to, as a matter of general policy, '[*i*]nclude the issue of violence against women in sermons, catechetical instruction and theological curricula' (The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) 2002:13). Through this policy, pastors are enabled to teach 'their congregation about ... appropriate sexual behaviour' (Ayomide 2019:online). Through such regular teachings, men are admonished to see how the act of sexual violence runs against human dignity and Christian principles. They are, thus, made to realise that sexual violence is 'a sin that disregards the image of God both [*sic*] in the perpetrator as well as in the victim' (LWF 2002:13). In a way, today Bathsheba represents women who are ignorant of the existence of sexual predators in the society. Hence, Bathsheba also serves as a reminder for the church to design a regular means of enlightening its female members 'about the reality of the various forms of violence against women in ... society particular to their contexts' (LWF 2002:13). As stated before, females should be made aware of predators at their places of work, in the police, in educational institutions and even amongst their male worshippers in the church as well as their own pastors.

As mentioned earlier, Bathsheba's silence out of fear is relevant in the context of the culture of silence surrounding sexual violence everywhere. Several factors are responsible for the code of silence; however, from the perspective of Bathsheba, rape victims face popular misconception that the victim must have been 'asking for it' all along. For this reason, '[*a*]ny woman who admits publicly to having been raped encounters a pervasive belief that she must somehow have

brought it on herself' (Bloomfield 2009:n.p.). Hence, most victims keep silence, especially if the abusers are men who are presumed to have some reputation in society. To this end, according to Chiazor et al. (2016), in Nigeria:

[T]he social stigma associated with rape ... forces victims to conceal rape assaults in order to save themselves from shame and public embarrassment. Even parents of the raped often find it difficult to come out publicly to report such cases. [*This is because*] ... when a woman is raped and it becomes public knowledge, [s]he and her family are 'ostracized' due to the dishonor associated with rape. (p. 7775)

As stated above, the code of silence is stricter when assault is committed by influential men on certain positions of authority, such as political office holders and church priests. It is in this regard that King David as a power abuser and sexual assaulter speaks in specific Nigerian context. In Nigeria, influential persons commit sexual assault, and in the bid to protect their reputation, they embark on heinous efforts to make their victims silent. To prevent victims from speaking out, sometimes such men of so-called reputation subject them and their family members 'to intimidation, including anonymous death threats' (Amnesty International 2006:online). Oftentimes, intimidation is used when attempts to bribe victims have failed. According to James (2016:online), if a priest is involved, often the:

[T]raumatized youngsters [*are instructed*] to say nothing about what had been done to them. Parents who [*learn*] of the abuse, often wracked by shame, guilt, and denial, [*try*] to forget [*about it*]. The few who [*complain are*] invariably urged to keep silent.

Hence, Bathsheba's silence also challenges the church in Nigeria to provide avenues for the victims of sexual abuse to voice out their trauma. Apart from fear, silence is also caused by the fact that a victim has no one to confide in. In this regard, the church should be 'a safe place to which victims of violence can turn for safety, support and healing' (LWF 2002:13). Writing on the healing of victims of sexual abuse, Morse (2018:online) states that 'trauma changes the body so that the traumatic experience gets trapped inside a person; the church can create an environment which gives the individual body a chance to heal'. This could be possible by providing what she calls 'Listening "Healers"'. As Morse (2018:online) states, according to her:

[*These are the*] persons who would create sacred space for hearing and receiving the stories of trauma survivors. The first step in healing and restoration is the graceful act of listening fully to the stories people need to tell. One of the ways trauma victims begin to stretch again is telling their stories, and having someone honor them with listening.

The church in Nigeria could encourage sex abuse victims to emulate the new trend of western world whereby 'abuse survivors have found their voices and are going public online, courageously telling their stories on survivor websites to a wider listening Internet audience' (James 2016:online).

Nonetheless, it is one thing to listen to the victims of sexual assault, and the other is to treat their stories effectively. In the

first place, in view of the fact that influential abusers may seek to harm their victims, the church should liaise with security agencies for adequate protection of victims to enhance the breaking of the code of silence. In addition, the church should avoid introducing the theology of forgiveness into the treatment of sexual violence. According to Easter (2018:online), some churches may claim that:

God's forgiveness acquits abusers from facing consequences ... from the church or from law enforcement. [*Hence*] victims [*are*] pressured to forgive and forget, not [*to*] press charges, or ... 'make a scene' if the abuser claims repentance' [*Sometimes*] victims [*are*] told that if they would just 'give their abuse to God', they would no longer feel the effects of abuse.

However, as Easter (2018:online) plausibly notes, the theology of forgiveness 'is all too often distorted and becomes a tool used by predators to shame and silence their victims and to absolve themselves of responsibility for their abuse and crimes'. Moreover, 'life-long wounds ... suffered by victims are exacerbated when ... they are pressured to forgive and disappear in silence' (James 2016:online). That is why 'congregations should never pressure survivors of abuse into forgiveness' (Heinzekehr 2017:online).

From the perspective of David as being an influential figure, the church derives impetus from Nathan, the prophet, who later in the succeeding chapter confronted David for his crime, assuring him that he will not escape God's punishment. In this regard, the church must be prepared to make abusers face prosecution no matter how highly placed they are, and irrespective of their financial weight in their congregations. For proper handling of sexual abuse in the church in which important figures such as church leaders are involved, it has been aptly advised that investigations are not conducted internally. This is because:

Research shows that we [*give*] ... favored treatment to members of our in-group and to those close to us. We judge our friends more positively than other people judge them, and we are likelier to excuse unfair behavior by an in-group member than we are to excuse the same behavior committed by someone outside the group. Given that church leaders are often personally close, this calls into question their ability to be impartial when judging one of their own. (Zamzow 2018:online)

Moreover, if churches handle sexual assaults internally, they may want to do 'a self-protection [*by*] not wanting other people to know or airing our dirty laundry' (Heinzekehr 2017:online). The disadvantage of this practice is that it gives room for cover-up which seeks to 'protect and shield the positions, reputations, and finances of those covering the abuse ... [*thereby favouring*] predators over victims' (Easter 2018:online).

Trying abusers internally does not only lead to cover up the crime; it also enables offenders to escape with their crimes whilst victims are denied justice. If priests are involved, rather than being made to face legal prosecution, they are simply relocated to other churches, where they continue with sexual assaults (James 2016). Therefore, in order to have



impartial judgement and to avoid cover-up, 'it is essential to have sexual abuse allegations investigated by an independent party that does not have a vested interest in the church' (Zamzow 2018:online).

The advice against handling sexual assaults by church leaders internally is most relevant in Nigeria in view of the fact that many of such cases concern leaders who are founders of their own churches. As discussed above, abuses in such churches are discovered only when the law enforcement agencies are alerted.

The church can intervene in this situation through its umbrella bodies such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) or the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) of which most churches are members. It is advisable that these organisations must have vigil groups in congregations to have reports of sexual violence in respective churches. As these bodies are recognised by government, they can liaise with government to ensure that relevant laws relating to sexual violence are duly applied without fear and favour. Apart from this, the church has to press for 'the upgrading of the existing obsolete laws so as to ensure better protection of rape victims' (Chiazor et al. 2016:7780). For instance, in the existing laws, contrary to current happenings such as those seen in the preceding section:

[R]ape is limited to penile penetration of the vagina [*while*] anal or oral sex or penetration using objects or other parts of the body such as the tongue or finger, [*sic*] do not constitute sexual intercourse for the offence of rape. (Agary 2017:online)

The existence of the *Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act* (VAPPA) of 2015 is acknowledged, which is a giant improvement of the existing laws on sexual violence, but unfortunately it is limited to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (Law Pavilion 2016). For example, this law recognises sex as going beyond the primary sex organs to include:

[W]hen a person intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person with any other part of his or her body or anything else without consent, or where such consent is obtained by force or means of threat or intimidation of any kind. (Law Pavilion 2016: online)

The law prescribes life imprisonment for the offence of rape. The *Lagos State Protection against Domestic Violence Law* (2007) also has provisions similar to those of VAPPA (Agary 2017). It will therefore go a long way to ameliorate masculine abuse of power for sexual assault if other states also adopt VAPPA or enact similar laws like that of Lagos state. When sexual violence laws are updated, offenders are caught up with some of the acts they escape with at present, and it will be 'more difficult for perpetrators to persist in their violent behavior' (Antai 2011:online).

## Conclusion

The narrative of the encounter between David and Bathsheba has been studied from several perspectives, but this article examined it with a focus on David with his powers of being a king *vis-à-vis* Bathsheba, his hapless subject. Contrary to

some interpreters' opinion of consensual sex, this article concludes that David used his position of being a king to assault Bathsheba. The narrative speaks to the Nigerian context of men at positions of authority, in families, schools, places of work and in the church, who abuse their power to rape vulnerable women. The church in Nigeria could apply this narrative as a textual basis for responding to the problems of sexual violence.

The narrative challenges the church to develop a policy on violence against women, which must be reflected in all its teaching instruments. This policy should include awareness of women regarding sex predators present in the society.

Whilst providing adequate security, the church should make victims realise the need to speak out and must create avenues for listening to them. The church must avoid introducing the theology of forgiveness for abusers. Rather than handling cases of sexual violence internally, the church should liaise with relevant government agencies to ensure that relevant laws against sexual abuse are adequately applied.

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The author declares that no competing interests exist.

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