

JESUS CHRIST vis-à-vis OSU AND ORU IN IGBOLAND: TOWARDS RECONSTRUCTION LIBERATION THEOLOGY

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Abstract

The study sets out to x-ray the conflicts of class distinction among the osu (those sacrificed to deities), oru (cult slave) and amadi (freeborn) in Igboland. The issues involved include title taking, identity, and settlement. Findings showed that they are all human beings; they segregate among themselves on the grounds of ritual political offices, land acquisition, mixed marriage, social status, ignorance, faithlessness among other factors. Recommendations in the way of using Christian sacred text and new scientific strategies capable of improving the situation were offered. Method of approach includes theological and analytical based on the review

Introduction

What was it that caused Bishop Desmond Tutu, the South African 1984 Nobel Peace laureate, to receive an unprecedented standing ovation at a congressional hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.? What was it that prompted the massive congregation at Washington Cathedral to break the solemnity of the Eucharist on the Sunday before Christmas (1984) to welcome Tutu with such a thunderous and prolonged applause? The finest interpretation of these historic incidents should perhaps be related to the growing demonstration solidarity and support for the cause of black vis-à-vis osu and oru liberation.

Tutu himself is an illustrious representative of what the global struggle for black liberation is all about. This gives Tutu the confidence that his work and witness for social justice and liberation is an integral part of God's activity to set us all free from all that enslaves us, from all that makes us less than what he intended us to be. He sets us free to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God (Tutu, 1984). To him, ontologically we are one in our Lord Jesus Christ, and the political and cultural struggle for the dismantling of South African apartheid is also a theological structure, if for no other reason than that the system itself such as osu and oru is caused by a demonic perversion of Christian theology.

The most recent years of Igbo history have been characterized by the discovery of the real-life world of “the other”, of the poor and exploited and their compelling needs. In a social stratification order fashioned economically, culturally, religiously, politically and ideologically by amadi for their own benefit, the “other” side has begun to make its

voice heard. For some years now a growing number of Christians have come to participate in this revolutionary process. Osu (outcast), oru (ohu) (slave) and amadi (diala) (freeborn) are by-products of the system under which many of us as Igbo live and for which we are responsible culturally. Osu and oru are ones who have been shunted to the sidelines of our socio-cultural work. They are people who are stripped of their life and reality as human beings. At bottom we are confronted with a real process of evangelical conversion of coming out of one's self and opening up to God and other people.

More and more Christians in Igbo communities are going through this experience, be they lay people, religious, priests or bishops. This particular process of conversion is conditioned by the surrounding socio-economic, political, cultural and human milieu (Gutierrez, 1979). To Gutierrez, we must break with the ultimate aim of transforming it in our mental categories, our cultural milieu, our social class, our old way of relating to other people, and our old way of identifying ourselves with the Lord. Indeed, we must break with anything and everything that hinders real and effective solidarity with those who are suffering from a situation of injustice, social stratification and spoliation, and from everything that precludes a real meeting with Christ in and through alienated and oppressed human beings.

Personal involvement toward a church of the people in the process of osu and oru liberation constitutes a profound and decisive spiritual experience at the very heart of active political commitment. It involves a re-reading of the gospel message from within the context of liberation praxis. Here theological discourse operates as a mediator between a new way of living the faith and the communication of that experience. The purpose of this research work is to reconstruct the existing statusquo to a better understanding among osu, oru and amadi in Igboland.

Conceptual framework

It is the belief of many Igbo traditionalists that the osu are people historically owned by deities, and are therefore considered to be a 'living sacrifice,' an outcast, untouchable and sub-human (similar to the Roman practice of homo sacer). This caste system received literary attention when it became a key plot point in "No longer at ease" by Chinua Achebe (1977). People regarded as modern-day osu in Igboland are descendants of individuals who volunteered and were sacrificed to the various gods. These fore-fathers pledged themselves and their descendants to these gods. They enjoyed protection and privileges, but were segregated from ordinary folks. Obinna (2012) discusses how this caste system-related identity and power is deployed within government, church and indigenous communities.

According to Beattie (1980), endogamy as in Igboland, is especially associated with the caste system. Caste implies not only that there are different 'kinds' of people, but that these kinds, often distinguished by the occupation or generic origin they traditionally follow, are arranged in a hierarchical series (Beattie, 1980). Any caste or sub-caste occupies a particular position on the ladder, with some below it and some over it. In societies so organized it is generally held to be very important that each caste or sub-caste should keep itself to itself, and avoid mixing with other castes, especially with lower ones. The rule of endogamy, often (in India) always associated with strongly institutionalized notions of purity and impurity, helps to ensure caste separateness: it expresses the high value socially attached to such exclusiveness.

The osu (outcast) are also persons whose parents or they themselves were in the past, offered as sacrifices to certain shrines and were from then regarded as the property of the gods or ancestral deities represented in the shrines. The osu, by virtue of this ritual position, becomes “virtually dangerous”, for physical contact with them means physical contact with the powers of the deities who own them—a risk no man is prepared to take. They are therefore subjected to numerous taboos which are very strictly observed; no freeborn for example, cuts the hair of an osu or crosses an osu's legs or cohabits with osu or marries an osu. An osu does not attend gathering of free-men and even on such occasions when they could be present, they do not exert any direct influence on decisions (Olisa, 2002).

In the daily activities of an osu, as in all his life achievements, his reference group is the community of his fellow osu and not of the freeborn; thus he can marry, pick a wife from an osu community; he can take titles, enjoying the benefits or the prestige within the osu community (for outside it no one recognizes the titles). He is not supposed to hold any ritual office. The exclusion of osu from political role recruitment is therefore clear and unquestioned in Igbo traditional society. According to Uchendu (1965), Arinze (1978), Obute (1995) and Dike (2002), an Osu is a male or female consecrated and dedicated to gods in order to appease the gods to carry away sins, calamities and evil things that may affect the dedicator. He is a sacrificial lamp, a slave or property of that deity he is dedicated to.

The ordinary non-ritual slave, oru (ohu), is in much better position than the osu. Here of course conditions differ from area to area. The oru is the subject of numerous taboo avoidances, socio ostracism and one experiencing political inferiority complex. Citing Jones, Olisa (2002) described the oru as an ordinary person without the support of his kinsmen. This concept is only partly correct. Some oru were sold originally by their kinsmen for one reason or the other, in this case they had, indeed, lost the support of their kinsmen. On the other hand, many oru were forcibly captured originally to the loss and sorrow of their kinsmen. In their position as oru, both categories have no kinsmen

any more. The key point about the *oru* is that he was caught and owned if the slaves multiply over years and constitute families, the ownership aspect fades away, more or less, but they have no titles to land and political authority roles.

Brief Igbo Ethnography

The Igbo culture group occupies the south-eastern form of modern Nigeria (Nwaezeigwe, 2007). Their land is located roughly between latitude 5 and 7 degrees north of the Equator, and longitude 6 and 8 degrees east of the Greenwich. Igboland is bound by a host of other culture groups with significant cultural and linguistic interfaces. These groups include the Edo-speaking and related groups, such as the Bini to the west, Esan to the northwest as well as the Urhobo and Isoko to the southwest. Other groups include the Igala, Idoma, Igede and Tiv lying to the north, the Ekoi speaking groups of old Ogoja province to the east, the Ibibio speaking groups to the southeast and the Ogoni, and Ijaw speaking groups to the south.

The Igboland area falls also within five main vegetation belts namely: mangrove forest, fresh water, swamp forest, rain forest, derived savanna, and guinea savanna (Nmah, 2007). The Igbo are by far one of the most travelled enterprising groups in black Africa. They are notably the most widely dispersed and travelled single culture group in the present day Nigeria. The Igbo have characteristically been compared to the Jews and Irish, as well as such peoples as the Kivu and Kikuyu of Kenya, the Chagga of Tanzania, the Ewe of Ghana and Togo, and the Bamileke of Cameroon (Nwaezeigwe, 2007).

As the dominant culture group in the east, they inhabit the five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. Unlike the Yoruba and Edo of Nigeria or the Ashanti of Ghana, the Igbo are the only ethnic group of their size and the status in the West African sub-region that have no centralized state. Each village or clan has considerable local autonomy based on patrilineal descent-group arranged in various ways and segmented internally on association groups like age-grades, secret societies and title associations such as Nze, Ozo, Ofo and Ikenga.

Some areas, however, have developed a relatively centralized monarchy such as Onitsha, Niger Igbo, Oguta among others. Nwabara (1977) and Nwafor (1973) argue that the Igbo are a compendium of paradoxes, but their greater asset is a copious supply of versatile common sense and the unique capacity for improvisation. Today, the world, "Igbo" may be used in three senses namely to refer to Igbo territory, to the domestic speakers of the language, and to the language spoken by them (Uchendu, 1965).

Conflicts Among *osu*, *oru* Versus *Amadi* in Igboland

Besides all this, *osu* and *oru* people in Igboland share in a sense of creaturely selfhood which places heavier emphasis on the acknowledgement of life as a process of

unconditional dependence on a creative force transcending the realm of the human. This creaturely selfhood, according to Davis (1983), finds expression not only in a strong sense of family, kinship and community, in religious outpourings of innate hopefulness centered on that creative force and which guides the future, but also on the release of scales of creativity, resourcefulness, and resilience often beyond the normally expected levels of their social capacity. No one who has given serious attention to Nkanu, Mbanu, Awka and Arochukwu vis-à-vis Haitian arts and culture can fully explain how such creativity and resilience could flourish so powerfully in such systemic conditions of socio-economic, cultural, religious and political depravity as also experienced by osu and oru in communities experiencing social stratification in Igboland.

In contemporary era, osu and oru races have not generated for themselves the capacity to communicate with, and interpret each other apart from those who are apprehensive of these groups. The shark results have emerged as mutual contempt for each other (osu, oru versus amadi)-usually based on ignorance. The global economic realities tend to reflect the cultural and political realities. The reins of power and control in the world are not in the hands of those who make up the vast majority of the world's inhabitants. The balance of power is at one and the same time the balance of terror, and those who hold that balance are not among the most populous countries on earth where poverty and powerlessness go hand in hand, osu cum oru groups in Igboland are largely the predominant inheritors and progenitors of this dual condition.

They (osu) live all their lives near the shrine of the deity they are dedicated to. Therefore, they have to live away from the people, so as to serve in that shrine. Although Christianity has been in Igboland for more than a century, and majority of Igbo are Christians, yet the osu caste system still persists as a social sore, notwithstanding the progress made in education and civilizing of the Igbo people.

Osu who is under the constitution must be upright and live a pious life which the god he is to serve will accept. Failure to do that would bring disaster upon the osu. The osu is not allowed to engage in any social function such as taking titles like nze, ozo, eze and any other related chieftaincy titles. They will not join the amadi (freeborn) during festivals. They are regarded as taboo and are revered. They cannot marry or intermarry with the freeborn. They are not allowed to mingle with freeborn and cannot make public speeches at any gathering unlike the freeborn. Implicitly to osu is oru (slave). Oru can be a slave who was a victim of either inter-tribal war or of economic circumstance. Orji (1999) sees oru as slaves that could be bought with money. He was only the most humiliated servant of his master.

Marriage among the osu must be within the osu group. An osu must marry an osu and cannot marry diala, thus is agreement with the principle of endogamy, which means that marriage will take place within the same group. Some of the osu tend to live in the cities than villages, because of their discrimination in their various villages.

Osu caste system is more religious than cultural phenomenon, because the osu is a bonafide property of a religious class of the particular deity that owns him. The osu belongs to the property of the whole community or of the worshippers. The osu caste system finds rationalization in Igbo religious belief and dogma. It is a societal institution born out of the primitive traditional belief system coloured by superstition and propagated by ignorance. It is a system which originated from a person used in sacrifice to placate a god for an abomination of a people in order to avert its anger on them.

Today, once the name osu is mentioned in any Igbo community, it bears a specific connotation and designates a particular group of people, who have been stigmatized from time immemorial as social outcasts to the point of dehumanization. Even osu may be attached to their individual names such as Osuagwu (one dedicated to supreme deity), Nwosu (a child of an outcast), Osuji (one dedicated to yam deity), Osuani (one dedicated to earth goddess), Osuetiti etcetera. No one can say exactly how the osu caste system came to have its present connotation in Igboland. Many theories of origin are postulated, but the more appropriate is the one that states that osu are people sacrificed to deities in Igboland. The osu caste system and oru stigmatization has created a rigid distinction of social status in Igboland. There are amadi, oru and osu status, and each class is treated differently. The amadi, oru and osu are segregated in most cases. Some of them live in clusters among the amadi, and social interaction between them are superficial.

The story of human race is to enjoy absolute fundamental human rights such as freedom from inhuman treatment, slavery, discrimination, and freedom of thought, assembly, association and other rights that are reasonably justifiable in a democratic society (Nmah, 2008). Marriage between the osu cum amadi is seldom seen. People do not cry when an osu dies except his like. His death is like that of an animal's death. He is buried by his kind and no freeborn is expected to attend his burial. Such is also experienced during their wedding, mother's thanksgiving and the like in the traditional setting and technically during and after service. The freeborn cannot take shelter at the osu house beyond 6 pm. Religiously, the osu is regarded as “umu-okoli aja” (person who eats what has been offered to the gods). He cannot be consecrated as a priest to any deity nor come near when the freeborn is offering his sacrifice. He is not allowed to offer anything to the deity, because he himself is a victim of offering. His property is regarded as belonging to his gods. He only comes like a vulture when the freeborn might have finished sacrificing and is gone, to eat whatever that is left over.

Achebe (1959) in his book titled, “Things Fall Apart” notes in a conversation, which ensued over the question of admitting the outcast to a local little church in the village of Mbanta between Mr. Kiaga, a missionary, and one of the converts that an osu could not attend an assembly of the freeborn and the freeborn in return could not shelter under their roof. Politically, he could not take any of the four titles of the clan, and when he dies, he is buried by his kind in the evil forest. How could such a man be a follower of Christ?

There is also a belief that people interact less or avoid the osu, because they fear that the spirit of the deities (which the osu people serve) would haunt those who socialized with them. As a result, it is regarded as a taboo to ordain a person discovered to be an osu as a priest, because he was said to be religiously unclean. Onwubiko (1993) opined thus:

The osu is not chosen by the deity, but rather conditioned to stay with or choose the deity as a last resort. He does not fall into any of the hierarchies of those who own the deity. He had no sacred function to perform except the service he did. (p.33).

The above statement shows the level of osu status in Igboland. Economically, the osu and oru are industrious which could be seen in their crave for education, farming, medicine, engineering and the like.

Culturally, the osu and oru systems are cultural albatross for Igbo people, as it is an impediments to human relationships and social progress. If discrimination and segregation are inimical to social progress, then no society should preserve that aspect of its culture, which hinders its progress. The early osu or oru ranks were not-celibate and thus had families, and their offerings inherited their status.

In contemporary society, there are sets of people that still suffer discrimination, but this is seen in areas of leadership positions, title taking, and free choice of marriage. The freeborn does not want the osu or oru as a leader, priest nor is he willing to allow his son or daughter to marry an osu or oru. In other words, there is no mixed marriage between amadi and osu cum oru. To Nmah (2013), in marriage the rule of exogamy is rigidly applied to forbid also marriage between two members of the same lineage. Marriage between osu or oru (cult slave) and amadi is aru (an abomination). Endogamy, which prohibits marriage outside one's social group, exists only in one form namely osu, oru or amadi must marry among their own social groups in most parts of Igboland.

The purpose of the initial inquiry conducted by families at the earliest point of the marriage negotiation is to ensure that this role is not broken. According to Nmah (2003), another similar marriage is the status-linked marriage “yam-oriented” of male and female called Njoku (Ifejioku), and Mmaji respectively. These children are usually born to members of the yam titled society called Ezeji (yam chief) as in Ikwuano, Mbaise, and Ngwa. As the human representatives of the yam deity, these children are entitled to privileges. Mmaji must be the first wife of Njoku as well as the only wife with Mmaji status. Other co-wives (iyom di) must not be Mmaji. Any Njoku or Mmaji

who becomes a Christian must find a female or male opposite to marry. As a Christian, he is forced by his culture, and often by fear, to owe allegiance to two worlds viz the traditional religion and the Christian faith.

It is axiom that osu caste system has been abolished in principle in some communities in Igboland, but the truth is that in some places such as Nkanu, Awka, Owerri, Mbanu, Mbaise, Isuochi, Arochukwu, Etiti among others oru and osu have been institutionalized as norm. It does require much imagination to visualize the suffocating world of a young man full of talent and ambition, but who is paralyzed by the realization that he is, for the rest of his life, on the wrong side of permanent social divide or the world of regrets that he cannot get married to a partner on the basis of being an osu or an oru.

The looming hopelessness of the future, which they see to be theirs, has caused many of their females to go into prostitution. Some people have observed that they constitute quite a number of the girls that roam the big cities. We may blame these girls for being wayward, impatient and for lack of absolute trust in God. Blaming them may not be enough, the duty we owe ourselves to God, and to each of them is to breakdown completely the social barrier that marks them out as pariahs.

Some communities (Ihiala, Nnewi, Okigwe, Isuochi etcetera) are said to have made notable attempts towards stamping out the osu caste syndrome in Igboland. None of these efforts bore the desired fruits. The reason for their failures has always been the demand by the community that the Igwe (the paramount ruler) or the freeborn Christian must lead in that endeavours by either marrying an osu or oru himself or getting an osu or an oru girl for any of his sons.

To Uchenna (1965), although osu or oru functions as a special priest, he is not accorded high status as the other priests (freeborn) who are generally respected. Rather the osu or oru is hated and feared, treated as if nothing and discussed with a tune of horror and contempt. (p.76). Political dependence bred cultural dependence as could be seen by osu and oru towards amadi. Herod, who was educated in Rome, constructed grandiose works that would have done justice to an Egyptian Pharaoh: palaces, baths, theatres and fortresses. The presence of Roman culture made the oppression all the more hateful and revolting because of the religious bent of the Jews.

Social stratification in Igboland especially in Nkanu (Ugwuaji, Akwuke, Nike, Umueze, Obeagu, Ugbawka, Mgurumbu, Ameachi and so on), Awka (Nando), Isuochi, Mbaise, Owerri, Udi and so on, are characterized by disunity, hatred, envy, jealous, leadership tussle, wrong marital choice, and proliferation of churches. The advent of Christianity is pointing to the need for the eradication of such an ugly situation. Still the osu or oru in Igboland encounter sociological problem. It has to do with culture, but

their belief is their strength and weakness. It is their strength because it is an indispensable nexus with their past, and it is their weakness because some of these customs and traditions are dehumanizing. According to Olisa (2002), the osu act within limits permitted them by custom, as other segments at the same level hence the term “segmentary lineage structure” which is applied to Igbo society by anthropologists.

Social stratification systems function to encourage hostility, suspicion and distrust among the various segments of society and thus limit the possibilities of extensive social integration. Such views are well known facts in Africa, India and elsewhere and it reflect the root causes of the recent London and Paris riots, protest and demonstrations in Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy, occupied Wall street movements, Arab spring and more profoundly the endemic conflict in Nkanuland, Isuochi, and Africa. This is consequent upon socio-economic, political, cultural and religious exclusion.

One may be tempted to ask, “Why should society really care about the extent of inequality and exclusion?” This is because inequality and social exclusion in whatever guise or form induces “spillover” effects on quality of life, even for people not normally affected by material wants. Wide income disparities and cultural alienation result in frustration, stress, and family disruption, which then increases the rate of crime, violence, idolatry, greed, hatred, envy and homicide.

Global perspective on outcaste system

In India, there are about seven known caste systems namely the philosophers, farmers, herdsmen, craftsmen and traders, soldiers, and overseers, and the king and his officials (government officials and councilors). Caste system in Africa varies from one community to the next. Some societies have a markedly developed, rigid caste system between groups of differing origins, whereas others are characterized by a looser relationship between their constituent elements. Countries in Africa that have societies with caste systems within their borders include Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Niger, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Nigeria, Chad, Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti and Eritrea.

The hatred, jealous, and envy that characterized osu, ohu, aro, ezza/izzi, njoku/mmaji and diala caste systems in Igboland is similar to that of Hutus, Tutsis and Twa (pygmies) in Rwanda, Burundi and eastern Congo where caste system is known as ubuhake. The Tutsi, who comprise about 15% of the population of these areas, were the ruling, cattle-owning caste. Below them were the Hutu, the farmers about 80% of the population. Less than 3% of the population is Twa. In 1972, Tutsis were responsible for a wholesale massacre of Hutus just like the one between the ohu and diala in Nkanuland by 1923 and of recent. In the 1990s, Hutus responded with counter-massacres.

Human existence and Christian witness in Igbo social stratification communities

We must affirm that, in spite of all the grave realities of *osu*, *oru* or *amadi* existence, to be *osu*, *oru* or *amadi* is to be human. Being human has to be seen as having a dual significance. On the one hand, there is the humanness that distinguishes us from other class species of the natural order. Our species constitutes the *hominitas* or *homosapiens*.

On the other hand, being human also signifies the *humanitas*, the shared qualities among our family of the species. Nevertheless, this humanity experiences biological incompleteness and openness, which seeks completion and fulfillment in mutually enriching relationship. Significantly, there is an inescapable interrelatedness about being human (humanness). Christian theology suggests that there are some factors of response arising from this.

First, there is this factor of repentance from sin as a basic Christian response to the reality of being human.

Second, respect for humanity is another factor in being human. This entails self-respect and mutual respect and has universal moral force. It manifests itself in legal, ethical, religious, and social systems, in every culture and human expectations are based on the authority which it commands.

Third, there is the factor of human responsibility. The biblical character, Cain, Genesis 4 challenges the very fabric of the human family as he attempts to evade the straight forward question, "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain's retort, "Am I my brother's keeper?" strikes at the heart of what it means to share in the *humanitas*. The implication of the story is that the Bible confronts us with the expectation that we are indeed our brother's keeper and our sister's keeper as well.

Christians and persons of other faiths affirm that we share a responsibility for each other, and that the ethical implication of human responsibility are all founded on the basic human right, namely, the right to be human. Human responsibility is not confined to boundaries of time, race, creed, caste, or class; it is not determined by expediency or generosity, by legal code or social contract. It belongs to the very essence of being human, and those who would answer the call to be human must also strive to become responsibly so.

Finally, reconciliation also suggests itself as a crucial factor of human response. We have already spoken of the human tendency to self-destruction through sin. Thus, reconciliation becomes not an option for the responsible human, but a necessity, the relentless working out of the meaning and methods of harmony between humans. This

way will be the crucial element of repentance, respect, and responsibility combined. As Christians, we recognize that the only reality that we have is our utter, complete, and unconditional dependence on God as revealed in Jesus Christ. This sense of our dependence on personal and providential care is challenged constantly. Liberation, like righteousness, thus reflects the very nature of God and God's will for creation.

At the bottom it is the whole problem of faith and its foundations. We are faced with the challenge of being able to talk about God, not to a world come of age, but to a world of diminished and belittled human beings, not to non believers, but to people rendered less than human. At this point, it is imperative to highlight certain basic features of such an evangelization liberation process as follows:

1. It must base on solidarity with the discriminated classes.
2. The gospel must be inclusive rather than exclusive.
3. It will operate in the very midst of a conflict ridden totality.
4. It will operate from the horizon of faith, making use of the new scientific line of reasoning as opined by Vidales (1979).

The proclamation of the word of God cannot be done in a naïve fashion. It will be truly critical and prophetic to the extent that we are capable of re-reading God's message in the light of concrete historical experiences. Thus we need the help of a new scientific line of reasoning to see into genesis, development, and structured systematization of various problems. The mystery of historical salvation is realized fully in the risen of Jesus Christ. In Christ, there is no race, class, creed, salve, free or ethnic distinction (Romans 10:9-13, Galatians 3:28, 5:5-16).

Jesus Christ as the Paradigm of *osú, orú* and Amadi Liberation Praxis

Jesus Christ means freedom, not only in name and symbol, but also in fact and history. It is in Jesus that we come in fullest understanding of the claim that *humanitas* is created in the image of God. Jesus' response to God was one of filial obedience or *philia* piety which denotes social religious love, or the affection friends. There are many factors to these most complex biblical themes. In regard to most of them—love as service, sacrifice, forgiveness, caring, compassion, charity, love in its social manifestation as peace-missions had exemplary records in most of the societies they served and died for (Barrett, 1970). But there was one vital element missing. Brotherly love according to the New Testament is willingness to serve and sacrifice, to forgive and make allowances, to share and sympathize, to lift up the fallen and restore the erring in a community which owes its whole existence to the mercy of God and the sacrificial death of his Christ.

Since Jesus Christ means freedom, human existence and human response, he provides also for us the central paradigm of liberation. Four aspects of this paradigm will briefly occupy our attention viz the personal, religious, historical, and the social. In respect to

personal sphere, Christ entered fully into the task of what it meant to be human, and he demonstrated the full meaning of personal—feelings, fears, limitations, relationships, openness, preferences, loyalties, commitment, and conflict. So Jesus opens up to all persons the possibilities of life-affirming priesthood, thereby enabling his followers to discern that God truckles to no one's person (Acts 10:34). Jesus is the paradigm of liberation in the religious sphere. His own prophetic consciousness was so entwined with his filial consciousness that who he was to become was the essential message of what he was to proclaim by word and action.

The historical paradigm of liberation praxis is a search for equality between *osu*, *oru* and *amadi* in Igboland. The historical Jesus brings near to us the meaning of history as the sphere of God's activity, and most powerfully demonstrates that God is historically active in Jesus and through us. As the paradigm of liberation praxis in the social sphere, Jesus confronts and challenges the structures of society which inhibit the full realization of what it means to be human.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nevertheless, this research work is offered as a starter for discussing the theological implications of *osu* or *oru vis-à-vis amadi* liberation praxis in the light of the three key Christological pronouncements in the New Testament: freedom, reconciliation and justification (John 10:10, Galatians 5:1, 6; 2 Corinthians 5:19). It is at this juncture that certain ethical obligations follow. Williams (1985) avers that, "The time has come when we, as blacks (*osu*, *oru* and *amadi* inclusive), should show that we have the courage to say that wrong is wrong, no matter which race, class or creed is the perpetrator. It will give our causes more credibility and confirmed that we, too, are determined to hold ourselves to the same ideals we demand in others" (p. 10).

Osu caste system, *oru* and *amadi* liberation praxis demands the reaching up towards the highest standards of excellence and virtue in confronting all the structures of evil from which we seek to be free. Modernity through strong educational institution, strong political institution, dynamic cultural institution, mixed marriage, dialogue and especially Christianity can impact positively ameliorating the problems of *oru* and *osu* caste systems in Igboland.

In some Igbo areas in the past such as Abia, Ebonyi and Imo states, the *oru* can marry a freeborn and can take titles taken by freeborn. In some communities, an *oru* who is capable can be favoured by the master, at the expense of his own son, in the question of inheritance, hence, in these areas; slaves have been known to establish trading houses on the support of living masters or on the wealth inherited from former masters. The rise to the power of king Jaja of Opobo is a good historical illustration of this point. Jaja was captured as a slave from an Igbo village and over the years he rose to prominence out of native wisdom, drive and hard work and was unanimously chosen as king by the people of Opobo (Cooke, 1972).

In most other parts of Igboland, the descendants of oru parents are in time regarded as free citizens; not so in Nike (especially the entire Nkanu areas), unless they have made the payments for their liberty (Horton, 1954). With westernization, the oru became immediately free from these limitations. The nature of conflicts which this change has been generating is seen in the Nkanu riot of 1923 and of recent.

The modern day of education has, however, contributed to an extent the removal of ignorance from some citizens. As a result some people know their rights and can seek for redress in a law court of competent jurisdiction whenever their rights are been violated. Education in this case involves a transformation of the citizenry and making them aware of their duties and rewards in their respective societies.

To make progress on this osu caste system or oru class problem, the mass education should be conducted in local dialects. When the people are educated, it will create awareness, reduce the high rate of illiteracy among the people and in turn increase social interaction. The same is true of improved legislation, active participation of the mass media, religious organizations and social dialogue.

The osu caste system or oru class has its origins in attitudes and behaviours that are widely shared among some of the people in Igboland and beyond. It is true that formed habits are hard to remedy, but there is the need for the campaign to be consistent and continuous exercise. The osu, oru and amadi should have equal access to title of the land. Inquiries as to whether one is an osu or an oru before marriage should be stopped.

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