

PASTORAL CARE FOR THE OSU INDIVIDUALS IN IGBOLAND

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to individuals of every race and tongue, whose human rights and God's Image are bastardized and abused through one form of discrimination or another.

### ***Introduction:***

The Osu Caste system is a practice among the Igbos of South-East and South-Central, Nigeria. This is a heinous practice that has refused to go away despite the influence and the impact from Christianity, Western education and culture, civilization, cultural contacts, not even the human right declaration that all human beings are equal before God and under the law had helped in obliterating this practice. In Igboland there are two classes of people, the “Nwafor/Diala”, and the Osu. Nwafor/Diala literally means the ‘son of the soil’ and are regarded as the masters or the freeborn, while the Osu are the slaves, the strangers, the outcasts, and the untouchables.

Leo Igwe in his article, “The Osu Caste System” cites the reaction of a famous Nigerian literary colossus, a university don and a Nobel price winner, Chinua Achebe on the question of Osu. Chinua Achebe in one of his works, *No Longer At Ease*, asks the question, what is Osu? And he answered his question thus, “ *Our fathers in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man Osu, a thing given to the idols, and thereafter he became an outcast, and his children, and his children's children forever*” (Leo Igwe, p.1). Leo Igwe in the same article stated thus, “ *The Osu are treated as inferior human beings in a state of permanent and irreversible disability. They are subjected to various forms of abuse and discrimination...made to live separately from the freeborn. In most cases they reside very close to shrines and marketplaces*”.

So, having seen and read what these individuals [the Osus] are put and are still going through in this twenty-first century, I have decided to call the attention of my brothers

and sisters to this obnoxious and handed down tradition from our ancestors, of man's inhumanity to man, so that we could re-visit and possibly re-evaluate its continual existence. Today in Igboland, we no longer have significant number of African traditional religionists or those that could be referred to as idol worshippers. One therefore wonders why the practice still prevails as it engenders division, rivalry, and absence of brotherly and sisterly love within various communities in Igboland. It also engenders hatred, rivalry, lack of development, bridge of peace and harmony, and fans up acrimony within Christian denominations and communities in Igboland.

Therefore, I intend through this work to bring my people in New York, USA, an opportunity to sit, dialogue, think, and to reflect on this practice handed on to us. Hence the old saying of the great philosopher Socrates that, "An unexamined life is not worth living".

Hopefully through the sessions and questionnaires we would be able to re-examine and re-evaluate this tradition handed on to us by our fore-parents. If re-examined and re-evaluated in a positive sense, it all means that one of the cardinal points of the gospel message, 'love of one another' will be enthroned, the goal of pastoral ministry becomes realizable and development of communities in Igboland becomes more visible. Thus the saying, where there is love, there is peace and there is also progress.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### 1:1. Basic history and background

Igboland is made up of five states located in the Southeast of the present day Nigeria and some Igbo people could also be found in the South central states of Nigeria. It will be good to know one or two things about the country Nigeria, where the Igbos are found before I delve into discussing the about Igbos and the Osu caste system in Igboland.

Nigeria as a nation is the creation of European imperialism as was the case during the era of scramble and partition of Africa by the Europeans. The name Nigeria first appeared in London Times, in an article written by the journalist Flora Shaw, who was the African correspondence for the London Times on January 8, 1897. Therefore, it was this lady Flora Shaw who proposed the name Nigeria. She later became the wife of Lord Lugard, who was made the colonial governor of Nigeria by the British royal family

(Dike, 2006, p. 14)

Be that as it may, Nigeria as a nation extends beyond the time the geographical area was given the name by the journalist who turned out to become wife to the colonial master Lugard. The term Nigeria refers collectively to several British protectorates on the river Niger. Victor E. Dike is of the opinion that Nigeria as a nation has been in existence some three millennia before the advent of the Europeans into Africa. According to him the earliest archaeological findings were that, “the Nok, ... inhabited [sic] the central Jos plateau between the Niger and Benue rivers, between 300BC and 200AD... {And} the

Nok are the first known societies and the first known West African Iron-smelting civilization". (Dike, 2006, pp. 14-15)

Going by this fact, it all means that prior to the advent of the colonialists, communities living between the Niger and Benue rivers existed and interacted among themselves in peace and harmony. And these communities living between Niger and Benue rivers of West Africa are what is today referred to as Nigeria, courtesy of the British colonialism.

As Britain gained control, they gained stronghold on this geographical area as they found her so fertile for their business. In 1886 they established a colony in what is today known as Lagos and the Royal Niger Company was chartered in 1886 for trading purposes. Having seen the economic potentials of the areas, the British government in 1899 took over the political administration of Nigeria from her home merchants and companies and administered it herself.

At the dawn of 1906, three protectorates emerged from what used to be one geographical area: the colony of Lagos, the protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and the protectorate of Northern Nigeria. Between 1906 and 1913, these three protectorates were reduced to two: the protectorate of North and the protectorate of Southern Nigeria. In 1900, Britain appointed and named Lord Frederick Lugard, the high commissioner of the protectorate of Northern Nigeria. It was Lord Lugard who amalgamated the two protectorates into one on January 1, 1914 with these words, "After a long consideration His Majesty's Government arrived... at the conclusion that it would be to the great advantage of the countries known as Southern and Northern Nigeria that they should be amalgamated into one government conforming to one policy and mutually cooperating for moral, and material advancement of Nigeria as a whole". (Dike, 2006, p. 15)

In 1939, the most populous country in Africa and the largest area among West African states having been united into one, was divided into three regions [Eastern, Western, and Northern] for administrative convenience of the British home government. In creating these regions however, the minority groups were not considered and agitation started as the minority groups felt ill-treated and marginalized. With the agitation, the fourth region was created as Mid-Western Region in 1963. But many scholars and critics including Dike believed that the creation of the fourth region was the bane and the foundation for tribalism, ethnicism, and the present day agitation for more states in Nigeria.

The agitation for more states continued even after the colonial masters handed power to Nigerians. So, in 1967 the military administration of Gen. Yakubu Gowon abolished the concept of regionalism and divided the country into twelve smaller states. Then in 1975, the nation was further subdivided into nineteen states by military administration of late Gen. Murtala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo. The eight years of the military dictator, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida saw to the creation two additional states in 1987, and nine in 1991. In 1996, Gen. Sanni Abacha created six additional states.

Nigeria is today made up of thirty-six states and has about two hundred and fifty ethnic groups with an estimated ninety seven thousand communities and seven hundred and seventy-four local councils. She also has a broad linguistic configuration of about three hundred and ninety-four. Currently these thirty-six states are grouped into six geographical zones and the Igbo race is one among these zones.

As said above, the Igbo race is mostly located in the Southeastern and South-central parts of Nigeria. The Igalas and Tivs border the Igboland in the North, the Ijaws in the Southeast, the Efiks and the Ibibios in the East and the Binis in the West. Most of the Igbo population is Christian, though a handful still practices the Igbo traditional religion. As Victor E. Dike states, “The Igbo traditional religion is indigenous – a tribal religion – whose major tenets are shared by all Igbo – speaking people of Nigeria. And the traditional Igbo religion is passed on to succeeding generations. The advent of Christianity in Igboland around 1885 had little or no influence on their beliefs”. (p. 1)

The Igbos are people of the same race and speak the same language. But quite unfortunately, the Osu caste system that is replete with prejudices, biases and discrimination had divided and alienated the Igbos from one another. And the Nigerian census of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century put the population of Igbos at about 27million. It saddens me whenever I reflected on the fact that we are of the same great ancestor/race, speak the same language and are numerous in number but are fragmented into divides because of the Osu saga. So, it is at this juncture that I ask the pertinent question, what or who is Osu?



## 1.2. THE UNDERSTANDING OF OSU CASTE SYSTEM:

Ethnic nationalities within and outside of Nigeria have various forms, ways and reasons for discriminating against their kiths and keens. Some of these discriminations are based on religious beliefs and practices, on culture, language, descent or even race. The Igbos discriminate among themselves and against one another on the basis of who is Osu and who is Nwafor/Diala? Different parts of Igboland refer to and identify Osu in varied and different names. Dike reflecting on this said, “Different parts of Igboland refer to the Osu in varied names: it is Adu-Ebo in Nzam in Onitsha {this is the mixture of Igbo and Igala language} and in the Nsukka area it is Oruma {slaves of the gods}. At Awgwu area it is called Nwani or Ohualusi and it is referred to as Osu, Ume, Ohu at Orlu and Owerri areas. It does not matter whether it is referred to as Osu, Ume, Ohu, Oru, Ohu Ume and Omoni {Okpu-Aja} as used or applied in different parts of Igboland these names connote lower and unclean class, or sub-human being. (p. 3)

It would be nice to note that there had been serious and extensive studies as regards the history of the Igbo people, but less work has been done on this issue of the Osu caste system. Some prominent Igbo sons and daughters have documented the history of the Igbo people from the time of the oral tradition to the time when the Igbos came in contact with the Western education. They wrote works on Igbo culture, and its social systems, the rites performed in Igboland such as: the rite of wearing cloths or in the local parlance “Ima Akwa”, the rite of circumcision, and the rite of Igba mgbà {wrestling}, etc. All



these are in print but no serious thought has ever been given to the study of Osu caste practice/system in the whole of Igboland.

It is a fact that the exact time the Osu caste system came into the fabric of Igbo culture, language, and thought pattern is not definitely known but it is also believed that the practice has been with us for over six centuries. Thus Dike states, “Although, the precise time the Osu system came into being is not certain, it is believed that the ancient system has been around for more that {sic} six centuries”. (p. 12) He equally believed that the Osu caste system is a societal institution borne out of a primitive traditional belief system colored by superstition. So the work is forced to repeat the question: who or what is Osu?

An attempt towards an answer will not be so easy as the practice does not make sense either to those ascribed with the tag Osu or to most of those who use the word on others. Therefore the question is better answered via explanation than by definition. Dike attempts to explain an Osu thus, “a cult slave, a child, slave or property of god or a deity and living sacrifice – a sacrificial lamb. An Osu is an outcast, untouchable, owner’s cult, a slave of the deity, and a sacred and a holy being”. (p. 12) It was the literal Nobel Prize winner, Chinua Achebe in one of his works, *Things Fall Apart* that gave a vivid and graphic description of who and what an Osu is before the Igbo people. He describes Osu thus, “A person dedicated to a god, a thing set apart – a taboo forever, and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by the freeborn. He was in fact an outcast, living in a special area of the village, close to the Great Shrine. Wherever he went he carried with him the mark of his forbidden caste – long, tangled dirty hair. A razor was a taboo to him. An Osu could not attend an assembly of the freeborn, and they,

in turn, could not shelter under his roof. He could not take any of the four titles of the clan, and when he died he was buried by his kind in the Evil Forest. (Quoted by Dike, p. 13)

Prior to the advent of Christianity to Igboland, the Igbos had the belief that the gods/deities were so mighty and so powerful that they needed to be placated, else they could wreck havoc in the society when annoyed and not appeased. With this type of traditional religious world-view they carried their problems and worries to these gods/deities and there came need for priests to these deities and gods. Hence individuals were dedicated to take care of the Shrines, deities and gods. This practice of paying homage to the deities/gods and dedicating individuals to these gods/deities with time became the norm and was handed down from one generation to the next in the form of myths. Thus the saying in Igbo parlance: *ihe nna nna anyi ha melu o buro anyi ga-eme ya o bulu alu* {the deeds of our great grand Fathers will never be a taboo in our own era and we are bound to uphold such}.

### 1:3. HOW DOES ONE BECOME AN OSU?

In Igboland of old, one could become an Osu in many and different ways. But there are four primary and core ways through which one could become an Osu. First, an individual could become Osu by the design and will of some other privileged individuals in the society, one could also become Osu in order to save his life from the wrath of the community, and there are others who became Osu because they were captured as slaves during the inter-tribal wars. Finally Nwafor/Diala could become Osu in the case of open sexual relations with the Osu.

In Igboland of ancient, one could become Osu by the will of a selected few individuals in a community. And quite unfortunately, the words of these individuals are final. No one who challenges them goes free. These individuals are known in the whole of Igboland as the Nze na Ozors, and the Akajiofors. They could be referred to in English as the titled men or the custodians of the traditional belief systems of the Igbos. It could be said that they have the power of life and death as they could decide to make any freeborn of their choice an Osu by offering intricate rituals, believed to have the power of transferring Nwafor/Diala into Osu.

But one is puzzled to ask the question, how did they come to their choice of selecting who is to be dedicated to a particular god or deity? When I posited this same question to an elderly man of 92 from my community, his answer to me was, “they knew who and how to make their choice”. When I pressed him further to tell me how they knew, he

simply said, “Fada nwa m, rapu ihe nile melu gboo gboo”, which transliterates, “Father my son, forget all that happened in the past”. (Oral Interview with Ichie Ukwu, Age: 80)

One then sees that some of the ancestors of the present day Osu were converted to Osu status via the whim and capricious of certain privileged individuals in the then Igbo societies. But one could still ask the question, why should the Nze na Ozor of old do a thing like that?

The simple answer I could probably think of is saying that absolute power corrupts absolutely. And again it could be that those who had the power of life and death in the then Igbo society did not like the faces, the achievements or the persona of certain individuals in the societies and as a result they decided to nail them and their off-spring in perpetuity.

Some other way one could become Osu is to get into the Shrine of a god or deities and pronounce himself son to that deity or god. This situation takes place where one contravenes any of the serious laws of the land and thinks to himself that it was better becoming an Osu than be killed by stoning. And as a result he runs into the Shrine of a god to take refuge and to dedicate himself to that god. In such a case the individual's is spared. No one would ever touch him, as he has automatically become dedicated to the god. For example in many societies of Igboland, whosoever goes to the barn or farm of another and steals yam, faces the death penalty. But the culprit could however save his life by voluntarily dedicating his life to a god or deity. In so doing no one would ever lay hands on him else the persons or the entire community would bear the wrath of the god or deity the culprit had embraced to serve. If this happens, the chief priest of that deity (as a sign and mark of ownership by that deity), cuts off, one of the ears, or both ears of the

culprit or some fingers of the culprit so that the culprit's blood touches the altar of that deity as a sign of his dedication. In a situation as described above, the individual together with all his off-spring become Osu in perpetuity.

With this, the long journey and consequences of being Osu has then begun for eternity. The person from thenceforward is seen and understood as a son of the god. He could not marry from among every other person in the society except from his own kind. He is made to live within the Shrine or around the Shrine. He is not expected to be seen within three to four miles radius of the houses of the freeborn. Rainy or dry season, his home/house remains the shrine for him and his posterity in perpetuity.

Furthermore, there were individuals who became Osu as children of circumstance. These were individuals captured during the inter-tribal wars and were dedicated to the gods by their captors in gratitude for leading them to a successful war. This fact was made known to me during my interaction with one of the elderly men in Amichi community. Thus he states, "there are individuals amongst us who are not one of our keens but their grand fathers were captured during the inter-tribal wars and our fathers, 'the pillars of this community' dedicated them to serve us and our gods as our slaves. Today they are the Osus in our midst". (Oral Interview with Okafor-Obele, Age: 90)

The three ways of becoming Osu that have been discussed above seemed to have died down within the Igbo nation. The fourth way to be discussed now is still in vogue even as I write this project. Today in the twenty-first century, one who is not Osu could become one just by having sexual relation with an Osu. If this sexual act between Nwafor and Osu is occult, the non-Osu is spared but if it is known and in the open then the Nwafor automatically becomes an Osu. One however sees a powerful discrimination and

hypocrisy embedded in this practice. If not, why should a sexual encounter between Nwafor/Diala and Osu make Nwafor/Diala an Osu but not vice versa? Speaking on this Oliver A. Onwubiko maintains that, “The persistence of Osu practice and discrimination in Igboland is a cultural aberration which contradicts the basic cultural ethic of the Igbo achievement oriented society. People are believed to achieve their fame, not to inherit it. But the defective socio-religious status of Osu is believed to be inherited. Thus the Osu begets an Osu. But the contradiction becomes more apparent in that the same contact of an Osu with a diala, converts the latter into an Osu but never vice-versa. (Preface, #4)

The most appalling thing is that many Christian Nwafors and Dialas do have clandestine sexual contacts with the Osu and at the same time have no courage to get into marriage with them. So who is been fooled here, if not ourselves?

These become the four principal ways of how one becomes an Osu in Igboland. But there may be other ways of becoming an Osu but the ones discussed above still remain paramount amongst all Igbos.

1:4.

#### THE SPECIFIC NEEDS TO MINISTER

It was Victor E. Dike that said, “Societies are faced with many problems human beings do not have answers to. {Therefore} Any problem created by human beings has a solution, and should tirelessly pursue the quest for solutions to human problems. Without this social {even economic/spiritual} development would be negatively affected. (p. 54) Reflecting on what he said, one realizes that the Osu caste system is not a divine creation or institution but rather a man made custom. It is man’s inhumanity to man and a practice that needed to be eradicated and obliterated. It is a practice that breeds hatred, acrimony, and rancor, discord and impairs the development of communities of Igbo nation. Dike going further on this says that the Osu system has caused lots of community conflicts and discords in Igboland. He gave the list thus, “In 1995, the Oruku community drove the people of Umuode out of their land and many lives and properties were destroyed... also, in the clans of Umuawuka and Emii in Owerri L.G.A, Imo state. Again, a water project in Ifakala community in the 1980s was abandoned because it was ‘located on Osu land’. For the Diala the location of the project in the supposed Osu community makes the water unfit for drinking; this is ridiculous! (Dike, 2007, p. 54)

One then sees that the continual existence of this obnoxious practice instead of breeding brotherly and sisterly love in the communities of Igboland is rather breeding backwardness and under-development in the communities of Southeast and South-Central, states of Nigeria.



In the twenty-first century when communities of nations are converging to see how to better the affairs of the world, the Igbos are busy having some infighting among themselves for a practice that came down to them since time immemorial. Is it not shameful that people who considered themselves followers of Christ should continue to live along this divide of Osu versus Nwafor/Diala? It is on the same line that I note with extreme sadness what happened in my own community in 1995 when the community embarked on a multi million Naira project for the construction of ultra-modern market, rural electrification and telecommunication services in the community. At these ventures, all hands were on deck but when all were realized and achieved, the Osu caste syndrome reared its ugly head. As the community decided to honor those who spent their time, energy, and finances to realize these projects, some important names from the community were missing in the list. The question is why?

The simple answer is that there were individuals who felt that some in the community were second class citizens {Osu} and as a result were not fit to receive any recognition or chieftaincy title from the president of the town. And those {from Osu descent} who were recognized by the community for their services via chieftaincy title were just ridiculed by the type of chieftaincy title bestowed on them.

In this modus operandi one wonders how certain individuals would feel if ever called in the future to join hands in the development of their community. Hence, the individuals had been oppressed and stigmatized by the system itself. Dike frowned at this when he said, "When the people in a community are segregated and freedom of association is restricted, social development is obviously impacted. Thus any culture that is



discriminatory is antithetical to the 'principle of globalization' and human progress. (p. 55)

It is therefore these degradations of the human image and its consequential injustices that informed my quest towards this study and project. The Osu individuals have suffered and endured a lot in the hands of the Nwafors and the Dialas and such sufferings and agonies often times degenerated into open fights in various communities of Igboland. And if this practice is not seriously looked into, there may not be any genuine brotherly and sisterly peace, love, and trust in the communities of Igboland. Dike was of this belief when he said that fairness, equity, and justice dictate that people should intensify their efforts in speaking out against the oppress, the powerless and voiceless and to discard the obnoxious and ancient customs. Such becomes my intention as I engage in this project – to gather people from Igbo extraction here in New York to sit and reflect on this inhuman act meted out to some of our brothers and sisters without any fault of theirs. If this is achieved, there will be a better appreciation of the gospel message of LOVE and FORGIVENNESS in the whole of Igboland.

1:5

## THE RELEVANCE OF THIS PROJECT TO MINISTRY

The relevance of this project to ministry cannot be over-emphasized. Hence the continual existence of this caste system amongst Igbos is taking people farther and farther away from Christ and engenders hatred, political, and economic backwardness in the entire Igboland. And most importantly, the love life of people is ever broken, leading some individuals to serious health problems. Onwubiko was of similar opinion when he stated that, “The effective discussion and solution of the Osu issue will certainly be an “abundant yield for Christ”, in Igboland. Surely, the Christian mission in Igboland has done a tremendous great deal for the Osu emancipation and for the eradication of some of the injustices and social disabilities the Osu had been subjugated to by Igbo traditional religion from time immemorial. But a lot needs to be done to eradicate the Osu caste system. This would, in Igboland..., imply making an Osu a diala and not making the diala an Osu. Since the incipient stages of the Christian mission in Igboland, there seem to have been lacking a constructive and pastoral concern to eradicate the Osu system. (Pp. 3-4)

When the missionaries came to evangelize the Igbos, they did as much as they could, given the circumstances. And it should not be forgotten that there were other issues going on in Igboland such as: the killing of twins, the human sacrifices, the abuse of women via polygamy etc. They must have used the principle of elimination as regards how and where they were to begin first. We also bear in mind the section of *Ad Exteros* which

states that, things that stand out as bad should be reviled by command or at least by silence rather than by words, and that when the opportunity offers itself, when people are disposed to accept the truth, let them be pulled out gradually without rousing feelings.

(Quoted by Onwubiko, p. 3)

For long, the local church had adopted this policy and attitude to the Osu caste system. She had not done enough towards bringing the Osu issue on her table for some honest dialogue, discussion, or catechesis. The missionaries patiently waited for an opportune time and there is no better opportunity than now that so many sons and daughters of Igbo extraction are in numbers in the clergy. The continual existence of this practice makes all Igbos, particularly those who still uphold the practice, hypocrites. Hence the teaching of the Master, Jesus that faith in Him means there is no more Jew or Gentile. Thus we are all ONE in Him. Therefore, discussion and eradication of Osu caste system in Igboland should be now. If not, peoples' lives would continue to be messed up and the gospel message/pastoral ministry becomes just a farce in Igboland. The synod of Bishops special Assembly for Africa had this to say as they reflected on Osu caste system in Igboland, "Evangelization seeks to induce interior change and true conversion through the power of the message proclaimed. The church in Africa is called upon to renew, through the word of God, the people's culture, their values, thought patterns and models of life. It will entail theological investigation and research in the light of scripture and Tradition. (Instrumentum Laboris, 1993, #4).

## CHAPTER TWO: THE RELIGIOUS AND THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES:

2:1.

### THE HUMAN PERSON AS THE ‘IMAGO DEI’

In combating with prejudices against the Osu individuals, it is very pertinent to bear in mind our core and fundamental tradition that considers every person as creatures of God (Ps. 139: 14-18). Our tradition sees and understands the being of all mankind as the ‘Imago Dei’. This becomes the basic principle that characterizes and distinguishes mankind from all other beings and existences. The beginning of the Hebrew Scripture stated that, “God created (humankind) man in his own image, in the image of God he created him (them); male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). As a result of being in this image of God, the human individual possesses the dignity as a person and not just something or a thing but someone, somebody – a being that reflects another greater Being – GOD (Social Doctrine of the Church: 2005, p. 50, # 108). So it all means that if he/she is not just a thing, or something but SOMEONE, it then follows that any individual person must be treated as a person, and not as a slave, a thing, or as an outcast. Thus, our tradition holds that this likeness with God shows and means that the essence and the existence of a person are constitutively related to God in the most profound manner (CCC: 1995, # 356, 358)

Thus among all the world’s visible creatures, only the human person has the capacity for God, “*homo est Dei Capax*”. And as a result, he/she is a personal being, created by God to be in relationship with God, with him/herself, his/her neighbors and with other

lower beings. The human person then finds life and self-expression only as he/she is in relationship with God and the other. Unfortunately, this is what is seriously missing and lacking in the practice of the Osu caste system in Igboland. We as Igbos claim to be Christians and to be in a very serious relationship with God, but relationship with God does not exist if there is no genuine relationship with neighbors. Hence, the genuine relationship between God and mankind is, “reflected in the relational and social dimension of human nature. (Thus) Man (human beings) in fact, is not a solitary being, but a social being, and unless he relates himself (themselves) to others he (they) can neither live nor develop his potential” (Vat. II: GS 12).

That God created us male and female to live peacefully in a community is very important and significant. So whenever any group of person or persons decide, and arrogate power, unto themselves to segregate against everyone else, there comes discrimination, rivalry, wars, injustices, as is the case in many communities of Igboland. John Paul II in his encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae* declares, “In one’s neighbor, whether man or woman, there is a reflection of God himself, the definitive goal and fulfillment of every person” (1995, #35).

This therefore means that, we are all children of the Most High God and not persons or individuals dedicated to idols or deities. So as Christians, and as Igbos, we are all redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. And as such, there should be no more negative feelings about Osu or Nwafor. The social doctrine of the church re-iterates this thought thus, “It is therefore necessary that public authorities keep careful watch so that restrictions placed on freedom or any onus placed on personal activity will never become harmful to personal dignity, thus guaranteeing the effective practicability of human

rights. All this, ... is based on the vision of man as a person, ... as an active and responsible subject of his own growth process, together with the community to which he belongs” (Social doctrine of the church: 2005, # 133, p. 59).

So an authentic development in social, religious, economic, and even political life of the Igbos will not be so possible unless it starts with people and has the good of the people as its point of reference. If not, the religious and economic development of the Igbos will simply be a mirage. Peace in all Igbo communities will also be far fetched.

2:2.

#### THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST AS NEW CREATURES:

By the virtue of our sacramental baptism, we are all one in Christ. Thus we share in one cup, one faith, one baptism in the Lord and as a result of this privileged position, no one is to be looked down upon as a Jew or a Gentile. We have become brothers and sisters, and co-heirs with Christ to the kingdom of his Father. As the Apostle Paul said that in one spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit (1Corith. 12:13). So if this becomes what the Igbo-Christians believe, one then asks the question: Why should there be a division amongst them? Hence the Apostle Paul admonishes all Christians thus, “For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26-28).

More so, at baptism and at the re-newal of our baptismal commitment at the Easter vigil, we reject Satan, all his works, and empty promises. We reject the glamour of evil, and refuse to be mastered by sin. We reject sin so as to live in the freedom of God’s children. We reject Satan the father of sin and prince of darkness. We affirm and believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. We believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, who was born of the virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father (The Rite of the Seven Sacrament: Baptism, pp. 15-17).



Yes, we profess and claim to believe in all of these, but what happens when we ascribe the tag “Osu” to God’s creatures? We affirmed to have rejected Satan, his works, empty promises, and have equally pulled down altars and shrines dedicated to these deities and gods. We equally affirmed that these deities and gods have no power over us, as they are the handiwork of human beings. But the crux of the matter is that, even though the physical shrines to these gods and deities had been pulled down and destroyed many Igbo sons and daughters still carry their altars and shrines in their hearts. There are no more physical altars to these gods and deities but most of the Igbos still harbor in their hearts these altars to these unknown gods and deities. Hence, some in our midst are still referred to as Osu – i.e. sons and daughters of gods/deities. Having been baptized in Christ our faith tradition encourages the baptized thus, “Men and women must respond to the gift of salvation not with a partial, abstract or merely verbal acceptance, but with the whole of their lives – in every relationship that defines life – so as not to neglect anything, leaving it in a profane and worldly realm where it is irrelevant or foreign to salvation... it is her (church) right to proclaim the Gospel...to make the liberating word of the Gospel resound in the complex worlds of production, labor, business, finance, trade, politics, law, culture, social communication, where men and women live” (Social Doctrine: 2005, # 70, p. 31). In view of having accepted Christian baptism and principles to guide our lives, we are then obliged to listen to the gospel message of Christ and relate with each other as brothers and sisters.

The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation further re-iterated these words from Paul that, Jesus by words and deeds, and fully and definitively by his death and resurrection has revealed to humanity that God is Father and that we are all called by



grace to become his children in the Spirit and therefore brothers and sisters among ourselves (Dei Verbum: #10)

Therefore, as we claim to be convinced and committed Christians, we are then bound to listen to the teachings of Christ, and his Apostles. Moreover, the continual existence of this caste system does not encourage, enhance or promote the prayers of Jesus, that we love one another as he has loved us (John. 13:34). In the Christian scriptures, a scribe asked Jesus of the greatest and the first commandment, and Jesus gave the answer, “the first is: Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (MK. 12: 29-31). So there ought to be a relationship with God, recognized as Creator and Father, and openness in concrete love towards humankind who must be treated as another self, even if the person is an enemy (Social Doctrine: 2005: #40, p. 18).

So, we are supposed to be grateful and thankful to the good Lord who created us as individuals, within a race – the Igbo race. He created us in his Image and continues to make us more like him. We must by implication, love each other as we look forward, eagerly to the day when we shall totally be like him, since we shall all see him as he is.

2:3.

## THE CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

Having worked for twenty one years as a Seminarian and as a Priest in many parishes of Igboland, brought me face to face with the near absence of the core message of Christ – that there be no Jew or Gentile among his followers. In some parishes where I worked, my initial impressions were that those communities do not accept foreigners amongst them, that they segregate from people they found uncongenial. But on a deeper look, I discovered that even among them, there were lots of discriminations and segregations going on.

### *(a). Discrimination/Segregation/Anti-social Behaviors:*

Discrimination and segregation affect the lives of those discriminated and segregated against. It equally led to some serious psychological and physiological problems together with its consequent low self-esteem for those discriminated and segregated against. Dike commentating on the Osu discrimination going on in Igboland said, “Discrimination hinders the social mobility of those being discriminated against, it causes psychological and other health problems. Although no work has been done in this area, the Osu is expected to have similar problem faced by others” (p. 55). They are denied equality of treatment that they so desire as members of the community. Gordon W. Allport gave a vivid definition of what I meant by discrimination as it is found in Igboland. He said, “A criminal, a psychotic, a filthy person may desire “equality of treatment” and we may without compunction deny it to him. Differential treatment based on individual qualities probably should not be classed as discrimination” (pp. 51-52).

Therefore the discrimination being considered under this clinical principle becomes a distinction made on the grounds of natural or social categories, that has no relation either to individual capacities or merits or to the concrete behavior of the individual person. Among the Igbos, there is an inequality in the enjoyment of the right to marry and found a family, inequality of opportunity for sharing the benefits of culture, inequality in access to public office, inequality in the enjoyment of free communication and association, an unequal recognition before the laws of the land, to mention but a few. The end result of all these become serious mental health problems to the individual under going these man-made stresses.

In view of the above, came different forms of anti-social behaviors in many communities of Igboland. Some of the youths from the Osu divide took it upon themselves, to act out, against whatever they feel was of no interest to them. Thus they began sleeping around with girls from the Nwafor divide – as it is held that once a freeborn sleeps with the Osu he/she has become an Osu and not vice versa. So they took it upon their shoulders to make many of the Nwafor girls Osu. The resultant effect of this became giving birth to children out of wedlock. Let it not be forgotten that these young adults (the boy and the teenage mother) had no job or any means of livelihood or income with which to take care of these children. Many of these children are taken to the motherless homes and orphanages to be taken care of by some religious groups, while others are left without any proper guidance right from their infancy.

John Bowlby a child psychiatrist wrote that in his studies there were forty-four juvenile thieves in his clinic who had anti-social behaviors. This is because of the lack of affection as a result of earlier maternal deprivation and separation. Thus those kids

developed anti-social behaviors towards their society (Joan Berzoff et. al: 2008, p. 190). The same is the case with the Osu individuals. As they are not often included or considered in the affairs of the community, many of their wards did develop non-chalant and anti-social behaviors towards whatever is of moral value in Igboland.

As Joan Berzoff said that, “Social factors – oppression, trauma, neglect, abuse, and violence – may increase a person’s experience of helplessness and vulnerability, and result in the development of anxiety symptoms” (p. 389). Those and many other issues are what the Osu individuals suffer at the hands of the freeborn. The majority of them undergo mental torture, oppression, abuse of their human rights, violence to their God image, and in the long run some become depressed, anxious and eventually degenerate into deeper mental problems. Berzoff gave some details as regards anxiety and how it occurs and is understood in various cultures. In Jewish, Hispanic or Italian families, anxiety is expressed with *Deep Emotion* that may appear exaggerated to those with different backgrounds. For white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, whose culture may value independence and stoicism, anxiety may erupt when *autonomy* is threatened. While in Asian cultures where interdependence is the norm, anxiety may arise when there has been some *inability to rely on others* or too much *separateness from others* (p. 389). In Nigerian African culture, we believe in mankind being, “a being-with” – (i.e. a being with others). Africans see and understand their lives as a life lived in communion with others. We hold and believe that no one is an Island, thus we have the expression – Igwebuiké (i.e. together we stand). So by disenfranchising the Osu this interdependence with others will in itself alone, bring about anxiety, to their mental, physical, and biological wellness. This often leads some of them to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

(b) ***Group Isolation/Depression:***

Berzoff states that the term depression “is used in many ways. In its wider usage, it often refers to a ‘lowering’... In a person, it often refers to lowered self-esteem and decreased functioning in a variety of manifestations (p. 357). Therefore, depression does not just refer to syndrome, with all of its technical definitions. But more so, it is an affective state that we have each experienced. It could be a state of sadness, depletion, deflation, emptiness, hopelessness, and boredom. And yet because we often begin from the premise that everyone knows what depression is, we can too easily minimize its potentially debilitating impact and complexity. He believes that depression is precipitated by an external event such as the actual loss of a person, of work, of ideals, or of an object of significance. This becomes the bane and the plight of the Osu individuals, as they are made to loose their personhood, dignity, and their significance within their own peers and communities. Under this type of environment and classism, a majority of their numbers, do get into depression.

Berzoff is also of the opinion that in depression or in mania, one sees the opposite: that is, a state of speeding up or of agitation. In the case of the Osu individuals, I see more of agitation as it concerns whatever is going on in the community. The agitation in question may not be so visible or in the surface but if one looks beneath the surface, one would notice a silent, tacit revolt and agitation from the Osu individuals as regards certain activities or programs either going on or about to take place in the community. The simple reason I could figure out for their reaction becomes: they were not involved in determining what goes on in the society they live. So they felt marginalized and unappreciated by their community. With this their internal world become poor and

empty. If not checked in the long run it predisposes some of them into psychotic depression, as I witnessed in most of these communities where I worked. As we do not have equipment or enough clinicians, therapists, psychiatrists, and psychologists in Nigeria, it would be wise for all Igbos to live in peace with one another rather than segregating against one another.

**(c) *Destruction of the Love Life of Individuals***

In the light of all we have discussed above, one sees that many love lives are destroyed within Igbo communities living within and outside Nigeria. A case study is what happened few months ago. A few months ago one of my friends got into serious depression because she could not be allowed to marry the sweet heart, she has been dating for the past two years. What was the reason? The parents of the lady insist the young man is from Osu divide and as a result is unfit to marry their daughter. This is very sad and very shameful.

The young lady has today stopped going to church. What was her reason of exiting the church? She told me that her parents had been deceiving her all along, telling her to love everyone with Christ's love. The position her parents took as regards her boy friend is not in consonance with all they had been teaching her on love and faith in Christ. Thus, she said, "Father I am in a dilemma now. It is either the church is a congregation of hypocrites or that my parents are hypocrites and if so they no longer deserve my obedience. As I write this paper the young lady in question has left her parent's house and is now on her own. She does not want to have anything in common with her parents at least for now. The question could be asked, why this type of "extreme anger"?



The simple answer is that she has seen her love life being destroyed by her parents, as they refused to accept the dowry from her fiancée. Bride price is an amount (of money) the groom pays to the parents of the bride as a form of contract to show that he intends to have the hands of their daughter in marriage. The bride price is usually paid in monetary form. The acceptance of the bride price by the parents of the bride is an important and essential part of marriage ceremony. Without this bride price, the Igbos affirm there is no marriage and that the two individuals are mere friends and not husband and wife. Even in situations where such unions may produce children, the kids have no locus standi in Igboland. They (children) can never take the name of the man that brought them into the world (Patriarchal family system). The children from this type of union are considered bastards within the Igbo race. This becomes so shameful and so demeaning to the dignity of such children and makes them look subhuman. These stigmas lead to inferiority complex (to children), fragmentation of the communities, and bring about anxiety both to the kids, their parents and to the entire communities.

One could without fear of contradiction affirm that the continual existence of this caste system brings no good to anybody. It is like a whirlwind that breeds no good to anybody, not even to Nwafors, talk-less of the Osus.

## Chapter Three: The actual Execution of the Project

### 3: 1The Formation of a Group:

This chapter seems to be the core and the hardest part of the entire project. This is for the fact that the chapter has to do with the gathering of individuals, taking into consideration their feelings and suspicions of one another at the beginning of the group. This chapter deals also with making of phone contacts and sending e-mails to remind participants of the need to be on time for our discussion and dialogue. It also has to do with the choice of the meeting place that would be acceptable to everyone. Hence, some of the participants in the group are not of the Catholic faith but are very interested to come and share in the group discussion in order to find out, and to understand, and know better how this Osu practice would have been either promoting or hindering development and brotherly love in the entire Southeast of Nigeria.

The group comprises twenty adults: six lay men, eight lay females, three Catholic priests, one Pentecostal minister, one Protestant minister on vacation in Queens, New York, and one Catholic nun. They are within the age brackets of 36 and 60. The six laymen, and eight laywomen are from the Igbo Catholic community that I often celebrated Mass with every second Sunday of the month. They live here in New York but from different boroughs. Two in the group are individuals (a man and lady) who had come to me, to seek counseling as they found out that the practice under discussion, could not permit them to be married as husband and wife. As I informed them about the group, they loved it and volunteered to join. While others, are clergy from different religious traditions and background that I had contacted as regards the topic.



Basically the group came to be formed by the word of mouth. Thus, I made the initial announcement after one of the Masses I celebrated with the Igbo community living within the geographical boundaries of the diocese of Brooklyn and Queens. As I made the announcement after the Mass, I saw that there were some mixed-feelings with the congregants so I added quickly that it is not compulsory for everyone to attend, but that it is open for whosoever likes. I equally asked them to disseminate the message about this group to other Igbo sons and daughters bearing in mind that the group and the eventual discussion/dialogue goes beyond what any religious tradition or affiliation could handle alone. Such becomes the reason why we had in the group Igbos from various religious traditions and backgrounds.

These different backgrounds and traditions added real flair and spice to the entire discussion and equally gave it the legitimate backing that the recommendations from the group are not just the wish of certain group of people or that of a particular religious tradition. But they are the wish, the yearning and the aspiration of many Igbo sons and daughters who come from various religious traditions, orientations and background. As I am writing and thinking about the formation of the group, certain questions keep coming to my mind; what actually made the people eager to come together for this discussion, what made it so easy for them to say I am going to come irrespective of one's faith background? The answers to these questions and many more hopefully would be seen in the following chapter.

I purposely adopted one criterion for invitation to the group – the person must have been born or lived in Igboland so as to have the requisite knowledge in view of the discussion. Hence some discussion I had with some individual of Igbo descent who were

born here in the United States show that they have little idea of the enormity of this caste system. Many of them dismissed the idea of coming together to talk about it as a good avenue to while away time. Thus having been born in America and grown up in America and living in America, they do not understand what the Osu individuals go through in the hands of the Nwafors back home in Nigeria. That was the only reason why I limited participation in the group to open only to those individuals who were born and brought up in Nigeria.

Having said this, does not mean that Americans of Nigerian descent who would like to attend the group would be barred from coming into the discussion arena, but I wanted more of those who had the requisite knowledge of what is to be discussed.

3: 2

#### The Purpose of the Group/Meeting:

The purpose of the group was made clear to all the members who affirmed and expressed their willingness to participate. The majority of the participants affirmed that it is time to find solutions to many of the bickerings in Igboland – the caste system inclusive. Confidentiality was emphasized and members promised to keep what was discussed in the group, within the group. The group met several times for discussion, based on the interest generated by the topic. Some of them confessed that they always look forward to the day of the discussion. The group held the session for one and half hours at each meeting, though at times longer than one and half hours. I took it upon myself to contact and remind them of our meetings, via telephone calls and e-mails. After the first meeting in the parish school, all agreed that the venue for subsequent discussions remain the parish premises.

At that first day of our meeting after the introduction, I handed out to each participant a questionnaire to be filled as regards how one feels with regard to Osu practice and Osu individuals in Igboland (see attached exhibit A). I also collected their answers and feelings to the questions asked on the questionnaire sheets fifteen minutes after handing it out. Immediately after this exercise, I began the session officially by telling them a story about the Osu caste system in various communities of Igboland. I concretized what I was telling them by sharing two stories with them.

The first was about a young man (Nwafor) who decided to marry the love of his life who incidentally was an Osu lady. The young man stood against the advice, and warnings and threats coming from his immediate family and kinsmen/women. Consequently, upon

his insistence on marrying the lady, the village members fined, ostracized, and kicked him away from the community. This did not dissuade the young man as he went with the love of his life [wife] to live in another community where their story was not known. To make matters worse and heart breaking for the young man, he was neither allowed nor welcomed to come for the village meetings. He was also not to visit his father who was sick. It was so unfortunate that when the father of this young man died as a result of prolonged sickness and old age, he was barred from coming for the funeral. The villagers wrote him that if they see him around the community during the funeral arrangement or funeral proper, that they would leave the ‘corpus’ of the father to be buried by him alone. They equally threatened that he might not leave the village in peace to tell the story. At this, his brothers and sisters wrote and warned him sternly never to show face for the funeral preparation meetings or burial proper – not minding he is the first son of their father and the visible head of the family.

Then the second story was about a traditional ruler who was seeking for real peace and reconciliation in his community. This he did by giving some Osu individuals traditional titles after due consultation with his cabinet. But quite unfortunately, he was mysteriously murdered by the anti- Osu group, for what they called, “the desecration of the handed down culture of their fathers”.

As I was sharing this story with the group, I noticed that some members were nodding their heads in surprise, some in affirmation that it served the traditional ruler and the young boy right, while others appeared indifferent to whatever the stories depicted. At the end of my stories, there was a grave silence in the group and it seemed nobody knew what or how to begin or probably what to say. We respected and allowed this solemn

moment [silence] to settle deep in our consciousness. After some minutes of silence a voice echoed quietly, “But what did our faith say, as regards love of God and of neighbor?”

With this question came mixed feelings and divergent opinions from the participants in the group. There were some of the participants who firmly affirmed that Osu remains an Osu until Christ comes again. For them there is no dialogue as far as Osu caste is concerned. They should remain what they had always been, nothing more or less. And for some others, Osu has no meaning. Thus Christ has liberated us all and made us all children of God and children of the Kingdom. One person specifically voiced out this biblical phrase that in Christ Jesus, there is no Jew and there is no Gentile.

3:3

#### The Actual Discussion/Dialogue:

Having come to this point in the group, the actual discussion and dialogue then started. I decided from the outset to hold whatever my thoughts and feelings are about the topic, [i.e. not to speak for or against the topic]. I took the role of a facilitator and allowed the group to speak to the topic. I only interjected to bring the discussion back to the room and to the topic whenever it becomes obvious that they are derailing. It is amazing to me seeing through the group, why the freeborn react to the Osu individuals the way they do. Thus through the group I understood that prior to the advent of Christianity, the Osu individuals were treated as Lords, Kings, and were seen as Sacred – for they were regarded sons and daughters of gods.

In the light of that type of ‘fear driven respect’ some of them, [the Osus] behaved and acted maliciously towards the freeborn. They [Osus] would go to the market place or to the farm/garden of the freeborn and take forcefully whatever they wanted and liked without asking for permission from the owner. They were in those days seen and understood as beings that are above the law. After all, they were god’s children. The freeborn had to endure all those until the advent of Christianity in Igboland in 1885. It was through this group dialogue and discussion that I understood properly what Onwubiko wrote in his work that, “The missionaries went about rescuing them (Osu) from the power of “the darkness” of the Igbo culture into “the light” of the Christian community, without absolving them within the religio-cultural and socio-ritual dimensions of reconciliation in Igboland. (Hence) It was a one-sided reconciliation...the missionaries either did not understand the intricacies of the social realities of the outcasts

nor [sic] gave solutions that did psychologically, sociologically and religiously affect, and therefore change realities of the outcast, as situations today have proved” (p. 64).

The initial few sessions were tensed with anger and resentment towards the Osu individuals as some members kept emphasizing on what and how they related with the freeborn before the advent of Christianity. While on the other hand, there was understanding, love and mercy from some of the members of the group towards the Osu individuals as they stated that the Nwafors should also apologize to the Osus for the inhuman treatments meted out to them over a century of Christianity’s existence in Igboland. After the first two weeks of session, tensions began to cool and calm down in all quarters. There began authentic, sincere, truthful, honest, and constructive discussions and dialogues amongst the members. They looked Osu caste system in the face and began to give it a surgical analysis. Thus they came up with some recommendations that according to them are to be implemented without delay, both here in New York and in Nigeria. [These recommendations will be taken up in the next chapter] Some members of the group volunteered that while in Nigeria for vacation, to go and meet with some prominent Igbo traditional rulers and religious leaders of various denominations to let them know of what the Igbo sons and daughters in Diaspora had decided as it concerns Osu caste system in Igboland.



3: 4

#### Methods for Assessing Outcomes:

To evaluate the outcome of the above activities and the overall project at the end, I will be looking to see a change or a shift or no change at all in the behaviors and attitudes or speech of the participating members of the group towards Osu caste system and individuals. I will look at the feelings of the participants prior to the sessions and what their feelings were after the entire exercise: to see if there are some visible changes, I will look at the recommendations from the group, if any, to see what they are, where it is pointing to or what they insinuate.

Importantly also, I will re-view the Pre and Post questionnaire given to the group. These would show vividly a change from what their earlier opinions were and where they are at the present. There were questionnaires I sent to many Igbo sons and daughter living in various parts of the globe, and in various fields of human endeavor. I will equally look at those to see what they had to say as regards this practice in Igboland. Then again, I will look at the oral interviews I had with some Igbo elders living here in America and in various communities of Igboland. It is in view of all these that I will then assess and determine the gains, losses, or no change in the psyche and mentality of the people with whom I worked, either in the group setting, or through the oral interview, or through their answers to my questionnaire.

## Chapter Four

### 4: 1

#### Evaluation of the outcome

As I started this project I had my intention and focus – to study and research into this caste system in my culture, to know how this caste system originated, to know how the Osu individuals feel about their conditions and situation, to seek to understand the reason for the continual existence of this practice within the entire Igboland, and to seek for a possible reconciliation between the Osu and the Nwafor. At the inception of the project, I hoped and thought it was going to be an easy exercise. Since a majority of the Igbo sons and daughters are Christians, I presumed my work would be welcomed with open arms. I thought that those of us living in the States would have a global outlook on issues, bearing in mind the day-to-day life experiences in America. But I was in deed mistaken.

Through the group discussions, the oral interviews, and the questionnaires, I found out that a lot of the freeborn have deep-seated anger against the Osu individuals. Some of the freeborn never wanted the Osu issue to ever come up for discussion or dialogue. They believed firmly that Osu remains Osu until Christ comes back. They hold tenaciously that what our grandfathers upheld should not be changed in our generation. They were so afraid of the repercussions they felt would follow its re-visitation from the ancestors; - life would be interrupted, and they don't want such. Many of them feel that re-visiting the Osu issue will be dishonoring the ancestors who would in turn visit the Nwafors with anger and incalculable harms. Thus the Igbos had this firm belief and the world-view in the communion of the saints. For them to sit down with Osu individuals and dialogue on how to free and integrate the Osu within the framework and fabric of Igbo life and culture

was unthinkable to them (the nwafor). As a matter of fact, ancestral worship stands against the inclusion of the Osus into the mainstream of Igbo peoples' life and culture. I am aware that this is one of the things that needed to be engaged and resolved if Igbo nation is to be on the part of progress in all aspects of life.

Then the Osu individuals asserted that whoever refers to them as Osu, must never be regarded as a genuine Christian, no matter the person's social or religious status. Hence they believed and affirmed that the founder of Christianity decreed that faith in Him sanctions and abhors segregation in whatever shape or form. Thus in their opinion, we are all one in Him and Igbo culture should not stand or be placed above the teachings of Christ.

4: 2

## THE EXECUTION OF THE PROJECT

In the execution of this project proper, I formulated a questionnaire that was sent out to people from Igboland living in various parts of the globe. Some living here in the United States, others in Germany, in Rome, in UK, and back home in Nigeria. With the questionnaire sent to many people from Igbo extraction living in different parts of the world and working in various spheres of human endeavor, a priest friend wrote to ask me the question: “Why on earth should I dissipate my energy in something that had been as old as Igbo nation herself”. These are his words, “Hyacinth, why waste your time, energy, and strength in something that is older than your great grand father? Don’t you think you have something better to do with your time and energy? Or you think you would become the Messiah to reconcile the irreconcilable. I wish you well”.

With this type of letter from my best friend (and a priest) I was almost discouraged in going further with this project. But there was something in me that echoed thus, “Do not be discouraged, Rome was not built in a day, and a journey of one thousand miles begins with a step. Do not be afraid of being misunderstood or being labeled as an Osu. You are on a worthy cause”. With these comforting words, I became determined more than ever to carry-on with the project. So, I continued sending forth my questionnaires to people.

It has often been observed that people most of the times do not like to respond to questionnaires either because they have no time or because they are not interested in the topic under discussion. But such was not to be in my own questionnaire. To my greatest surprise and anticipation, the majority responded to the questionnaire and even wrote more than what was asked in the questionnaire. A good number of them were furious

why this Osu practice should still continue in Igboland, while few were not sure what direction to take.

4:3

#### SOME RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

I will sample few replies to the questionnaire to how most of the people feel about the continual existence of Osu practice in Igboland. One person began his response to the Osu issue thus; *“The issue or the reality of the continued existence of the Osu caste system in Igboland in its diverse concepts and applications, even after the supposed acceptance of the Christian faith is a poser. It is either a proposition of the state of the faith amongst the people or an invitation to a consideration of the practice of the faith amongst the evangelized or both. In this brief reflection, I wish to demonstrate that the Osu issue, is an invalid question though it persists and where it does exist, it’s a testimony that the Christian faith has not been fully realized and thus a call for a renewed and informed evangelization”*. For him the concept of branding or referring one as Osu is a misrepresentation to what belief in Christ ought to mean and stand for.

Another fellow responding to the questionnaire stated unequivocally that, *“The present debate about how the descendants of the Osu is to be regarded and his/her integration into the society of the so called freeborn is a ragging debate in many Igbo communities. But I wish to make a progression. A question is important: is the Osu hereditary, that is, can it be inherited or are the descendants of an Osu free to decide to be or not? The dynamic is this, the Osu issue is not genetic and so cannot be inherited, it is a socio-cultural cum religious dedication and such is a personal decision. Just as we are born into a religious family and can remain or change, so this ought to be the case”*. Concluding his response to the questionnaire he said, *“The more basic question is this: if the deity to which a person was consecrated no longer exist or has become*

*obsolete and invalid, how can one continue to hold another as consecrated to it. It is also important to consider the Christian variant. We believe and profess as Christians that our equality does not derive solely from our creatureliness but also from our Christian baptism, through which we have been made one with Christ. Paul in Ephesians says that, Christ made us one breaking down the wall of the division in his own body. Also, Peter in the Acts of the Apostles warns that no one has the right to call God's creature unclean". Therefore this fellow believes that the continual practice of this caste system in Igboland is a manifest denial of the basic tenets of the Christian faith. After all, who has the right to say to another, you are less human or less equal, when God himself created us all equal.*

*Another fellow living and working in France responded to the questionnaire thus, "I have gone through the questionnaire and you can imagine my response to the yes and no questions. Those who go about regarding others as inferior are the low-minded and under-developed people. Having lived in foreign countries both in Africa and in Europe, I understand fully how stupid those who think that they are superior to others because of their race or social status are. Such people are the real inferior persons. The church in Igboland today is doing little or nothing to fight this sickness. Everybody is quiet hoping that it (Osu caste system) will die a natural death. I am not in that group. I believe in calling a spade a spade. I say it clearly and distinctly whenever the Word of God has to do with discrimination. I let the people know what our religion teaches and stands for and I had never failed to let the congregants know my stand on the issues of discrimination. Many of our people are really uncivilized, they should be told what they are in clear terms –hypocrites. The concept of Osu is itself non-existent*



*since our people have embraced Christianity. It is totally incompatible with Christian faith. It is the height of hypocrisy. Hence, people are ready to borrow money from a person qualified as "Osu", make love with him or her, eat with him or her and still claims to be superior. Is that not madness!"*

Those are some of the responses I got from the questionnaire sent out and it showed how eager, willing and expectant majority of the people want this practice abolished.

4:4

## GROUP SESSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

The group sessions were a wonderful eye-opener for me. There were certain things I never knew or read from the books consulted during the research that were made known to me during the group. A typical example is what I discovered during the session – the reason why many of the freeborn so hated the Osu individuals. Prior to the advent of Christianity, the Osu individuals were treated as Lords, Kings and Queens. They were also seen as Sacred – sons and daughters dedicated to gods. As a result of this type of fear driven respect, most of the Osus behaved and acted in so many negative ways to the Nwafors. They did go into people's barns and took away whatever they wanted without any consideration to the feelings of the owner, and without any permission from the owner.

Therefore during the group sessions, there were mixed feelings, resentments, blames and counter blames from both divide. But at the end, tensions calmed and nerves cooled. Thus effective discussions and dialogue ensued and one of the participants confessed of not knowing or understanding the real negative and psycho-social implications of branding one an Osu, until it was discussed in the group. Thus she swore to fight against any form of discrimination on any group of people, not minding the race or nationality. As the discussion was going on, one in the group confessed that it was right there in the group that he really understood what the Osu individuals are going through. Thus he said, "From today henceforth, I swear, I will never see discrimination in any form or shape and keep quiet. It is a disease that must be fought and done away with everywhere and not just in Igboland".

One of the most important outcomes of the group is that people within the group session began raising some serious questions about culture. Is culture static? They however agreed that culture is dynamic and not static. They agreed that there were times when our grand parents were going about naked or scantily dressed, but not so today. In like manner, that Osu episode ought to be a thing of the past. They laid emphasis on education and made an important distinction between literacy and education. For one of them, education is from the Latin word, “educatio, educare”, ‘to lead out of ignorance’. So they concluded that the number of the educated people in the entire Southeast of Nigeria should be able to help our people out of this present ignorance. It is at this juncture that they suggested having an education endowment fund in the remotest and poorest communities of Igboland to help indigent families send their wards to school. They were of the opinion that with education, some of the prevalent ignorance within communities would be reduced or even eliminated.

If I were to summarize the feelings and thoughts of the members of the group, I think they were saying that the genesis and the apocalypses of Osu caste system in Igboland were unknown to them. And quite unfortunately, they accepted and lived what had been handed on to them without asking any questions. But through the help of the group sessions they now know better and affirmed with Socrates that an unexamined life is not worthy living. Thus the effective discussions that ensued materialized into these recommendations to the entire Igbo race, in Nigeria and in Diaspora.

The Recommendations are as follows:

1. The Osu caste system in Igboland must be addressed and be abolished forth-with.
2. The mentally and psychologically wounded as a result of this practice must be helped to seek psychological counseling and healing, Osus and non-Osus inclusive.
3. There must be enactment of Bull/Statues abolishing this practice thereby enthrone and upholding intermarriage amongst all sons and daughters of Igbo race.
4. Letters must be sent to all religious/traditional leaders to sensitize all Igbo sons and daughters on the adverse health effects of this practice on individuals.
5. Delegates must be sent home to speak to communities on the urgent need to abolish this ungodly practice.
6. Articles are to be published (in vernacular and in English) on the lack of development brought on the entire Igbo race as a result of this practice.
7. Clergies in Igboland are to be helped and mobilized materially from abroad in order to help them dispense the gospel without looking on the faces of the anti-Osu individuals who might decide not to help the works of evangelization in parishes.
8. Prayer Services, and Masses ought to be organized and celebrated for reconciliation amongst all Igbo sons and daughters.

These eight points are the result of the group sessions and the participants in the group were all determined to see them actualized in various communities of Igboland without further delay.

4: 5

#### DEVELOPMENTS NOT ANTICIPATED IN THE ORIGINAL PROPOSAL

As I was think about this project, I had the impression that it is going to be a work that would be welcomed by all in the ministry, bearing in mind the problems ministers encounter in hands of anti Osu groups. But I was indeed mistaken, as some of them (Priests and Pastors) were the real ones who held firmly this obnoxious practice.

Amongst the clergy of various ranks and files, were those who still maintained that Osu caste system must continue and that they would not allow their sisters or brothers to marry from the Osu clan. I was greatly surprised and almost frustrated by the height of hypocrisy among some of the religious leaders in Igboland. On Sunday, in their churches they mount the pulpit preaching oneness in Christ. But outside the church, in their homes, they continue to hold on to and propagate this seed of discord (Osu Caste System) dividing the Igbo nation.

I received a questionnaire sent to a parish chairman on his feelings as regards the situation of the Osus in Igboland. It is very unfortunate to say that his feelings, and thoughts towards the Osus left much to be desired. He even referred to them as “ndi ohu anyi, i.e. our slaves, our servants”. He concluded his response by saying that he feels bad whenever they come forward in the church for baptism, that left alone they (Osus) ought to be given special seats in the church, than intermingling in the seats with every other person. Hence they are not worthy to sit side by side with the freeborn – a parish chairman indeed. What a pity!

The dedication with which I carried out this project made some people including my colleagues (Priests) feel that I might be one of the Osus trying to improve the cause of my

Osu brothers and sisters. A priest jokingly wrote me that the reason why he is responding to my questionnaire is because he has asked priests from my town and was told that I am not an Osu. That if I had been one he would never have responded. Thus I would be deemed fighting the cause for my brothers and sisters. The thinking of this priest reminded me of what another priest writing on this very topic said, "It is risky for an Igbo to talk of the osu/diala problem. It is risky because no Igbo can talk of it from a neutral locus. He must be a diala or osu. The problem of being misunderstood is just there. The problem of being classified is also there. This is why many people shy away from the discussion. Maybe I can be allowed a personal reminiscence here...I submitted an article to the Bigard Torch (Seminary Yearly Magazine) with the title: The Osu Caste System and Christianity in Igboland. When the article appeared in the Torch, it bore the title: Osu Caste System Dying but...What shocked me was that my person, not the ideas expressed, became more of the object of discussion. Some people questioned my interest and some even did go to my home to find out my background. I am happy they did. But it was a shock to me. If seminarians, some now priests, and most left the seminary, could go to such lengths, then imagine what happens in the village markets!" (Onwubiko, 1993, p. 9)

Those and other negative feelings are not what I was anticipating as I was beginning the project. But having read some write-ups from few individuals who wrote on the same issue, I derived my strength and courage to go on and finish the project. Moreover, there is an inner voice urging me on. So, I am not perturbed or concerned about being called Osu until something positive happens with regard to the treatment meted out to these our brothers and sisters. All Igbos must know that they are also sons and daughters of Abraham, co heirs with Christ to the Kingdom of the Father. Therefore, I firmly believe

and pray that in a few years to come that the idea of Osu in the entire Igboland must be confined to the dustbin of history.



## Chapter Five:

### 5: 1 THE IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS, BOTH ANTICIPATED AND NOT

#### ANTICIPATED

Embarking on this project was a great learning moment and opportunity for me. Thus I felt at the beginning of the project that it would receive an overwhelming acceptance by all sons and daughters of the Igbo nation, bearing in mind the in-road that the Christian religion has made in the lives, world-view, and cultures of the Igbo people. I also had the view that it would be well accepted by Igbos living here in the United States as they are in continual contact with people from various ethnic backgrounds, orientations and cultures. I presumed that many (Igbos) living in New York would be eager to come together for a dialogue on the Osu phenomenon as to find a way to bring it to an end.

It was indeed wonderful that a sizable number of people of Igbo descent came and participated actively for the group sessions. Almost all were of the view that the Osu practice in Igboland must be abolished and done away with. They believed that it made no sense branding God's creatures – 'dedicated to idol' as Osu implies. But it is also quite ironic that the same group of people who held that the practice must be abolished were on the other hand insistent that their wards would not be allowed or supported to marry individuals from the Osu divide or vice versa. By implication then, what they wanted abolished in one hand, they are in the other hand fanning into flame. This stance brought some setbacks at the beginning of group session and discussions.

There is also a powerful and underlying hypocrisy among some of the clergies of all faith traditions, within Igboland as far as Osu issue is concerned. While many of the lay faithful are dissipating their energy, "fighting" seriously for the death of Osu practice in

the entire Igboland, some of my colleagues in the clergy are even making things so difficult for them. Hence on Sundays, these clergies preach common brotherhood and sisterhood of the baptized in Christ – No Jew, No Gentile. But in the confines of their homes and families, they sing different tunes. This then becomes the height of insincerity and insensitivity to the sufferings of the flock of Christ entrusted into their hands by Christ himself who called them as an ordained ministers in their various churches. One is not to forget this very important fact that, they (the ministers) are supposed to be the ambassadors of the gospel and messengers of God's peace to all people.

Having pointed out the above, it is also to be noted with joy and gratitude that at the time the group sessions were coming to an end, that all the participants came to the conclusion that it's time the Osu practice is brought to an end in the entire Southeast of Nigeria. Therefore the implications of results both anticipated and not anticipated as I reported them in chapter four played a great role shaping the outlook of this project. Thus some of the participants at the group who initially found it difficult to change their mentality and behavior towards Osu became at the end of the group sessions promoters for the equality of all human beings. The vivid implications and results for pro and against this practice as reported would be seen in the contributions the project made in clarifying and expanding the religious and clinical principles as discussed below.

5:2

## THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PROJECT TO RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES

As already hinted what my thoughts and feelings were as I was beginning the project, it is also good to note that it was during the group sessions that some serious, hard-core questions and thoughts were raised as far as what being a follower of Christ means, what discipleship in Christ means, and who then is a true disciple of Christ? It was also during the group sessions that some of the Christian traditional belief systems, practices, and dogmas about the equality of all mankind were looked into once again. Questions were asked, clarification made, and theologies explained and expounded for easier grasp and understanding of all the participants. The theologies the group based their discussions on had nothing to do with any particular denomination. The Holy Writ was the bases for all discussions as far as discipleship in Christ is concerned and nothing else. So, there was no particular denomination's dogma expounded here other than the Christian scripture.

It was at these group sessions that the Igbo sons and daughters began really to reflect and to raise some serious questions as to what it means to be in the Image and Likeness of God, and what it means to bear the Christian name "Paul" rather than bearing names of our fore-parents before the advent of Christianity: - names like; "Nwafor"(Son of Afor, Afor is one of the seven market days in Igboland), or "Nwagwu", (Son of Agwu, Agwu is one of the deities in Igboland). The group therefore, sat on what the name and Image of Christ means and stands for whoever bears it. They dialogued and discussed via the scriptures the reasons why no one should be treated as if less or non-human. It was through the help of the scriptures that they concluded that no one is to be treated with

disrespect or be dehumanized. Thus we all are in the Image and likeness of God and so bear His Divine spark.

During one of the sessions, a fellow shared a very pathetic story with us. He actually came to the group with statistics of how women were treated prior to and even after Christian religion took root in his community. He gave a litany of what women had to go through in the hands of men at the demise of their husband. According to him, widows were restricted from taking bath for weeks as a sign of respect to their deceased husband. If a woman is suspected to have a hand in the death of her husband, she was made to drink the water with which the husband body was washed. They (widows) were to put on a wooly heavy black dress for a year and six months as a sign of mourning and respect to their husband. As the man was about to end the litany of woes women suffered in the hands of men in his community, another fellow took over the floor.

This time a widow and she shared with the group how she was made or forced to shave off every hair on her body just because it was what the custom stipulates a woman should do at the demise of her husband. She shared sorrowfully, how humiliating it was for her to strip before a group of women whose duty it was to act as the barber. The most agonizing thing according to her was that she was not even allowed to see the body of her husband on the day of the funeral and at the moment of internment. She could not say a final good bye to her husband.

It was during the discussions in the session that majority affirmed that if these abuses on women had been stopped in almost all the communities of Igboland, that Osu caste system could as well be looked into and be stopped. Through the instrumentality of this project, the group participants re-emphasized once again that we are all children of the

Most High God and not persons or individuals dedicated to idols or deities. So the group affirmed categorically that Osu caste system in Igboland is obnoxious and the bane of under-development and lack of peace in the entire Southeast of Nigeria. It was the project group sessions that helped the participants to reflect and think through these abuses suffered by the Osus individuals. Hence they were able to come up with some solutions and made some serious contributions as to the way forward with regards to discrimination and segregation in Igboland.

This project would be likened to the work of the national Negro Committee of 1909 in America. Nineteen hundred and nine was the era in American history when there was a great chasm in education between the White and Black American children. Black American children were forced to walk past several White schools to reach the “color” primary school. Thus the 1847 Virginia Criminal Code states, “Any white person who shall assemble with slaves, (or), or free Negroes... for the purpose of instructing them to read or write, ... shall be punished by confinement in the jail ... and by fine ...” [Brown V. Board: 1909]. It was under this code that Margaret Douglass of Norfolk, Virginia, a former slaveholder was arrested, imprisoned, and fined when authorities discovered she was teaching “free colored children” of the Christ’s Church Sunday school to read and write. Such continued until January 1909 when an interracial group assembled in the apartment of William English Walling to discuss proposals for an organization that would advocate the civil and political rights of African Americans.

It was this group that decided to issue a “call” for a national conference on the centennial of Abraham Lincoln’s birth February 12, 1909. In this conference, they stated the urgency for equal educational opportunities for all and in all the states, and that public

school expenditure should be the same for Negro and White children. [Edward A. Tiryakian, 1958, Art. Race, Equality and Religion]. The contributions of this group to the issues of race and racism in America is the same call this project makes on all sons and daughters of Igbo nation with regard to Osu caste system. The most important contribution of this project to the religious principles discussed is that all Igbos should realize that, if we are to account adequately for the presence and power of the norm of the common humanity, that one must go beyond humanity and history and say that the norm is grounded in nothing other than in the revelation of God's grace. This essential point becomes one of the important contributions the project made with reference to the religious principles discussed in chapter two of the project. There is also another point considered under this religious principle – a disciple of Christ as a new creature.



5:3

## THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST AS NEW CREATURES

This is another area where the project made another serious contribution in clarifying and expanding the religious principles as discussed in chapter two. It is in the area of equality of all human beings. This equality is, of course, based in the teaching of Christ that we are all created equal before God. The project followed consistently, this line of thought to affirm that all (including those regarded as Osu) must obtain their full rights and dignity as bestowed on them by our common Creator and as enshrined in the charter of United Nations. The work sorted to bring to an end all ill feelings, prejudices and frictions between the Nwafor and the Osu. It makes a passionate and a clarion call to all Igbos especially the clergy, to stand up and speak out against any social, cultural or religious systems that perpetuate any member of Igbo community as an inferior being.

Through the sacrament of initiation or baptism, one then becomes a Christian and is initiated into the death and resurrection of Christ. In view of this baptism, therefore, all the baptized become one in Christ, a common brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ. The project then affirms that fundamental belief in the unity and common brotherhood/sisterhood of all baptized (mankind) in Christ. Thus in baptism, Christians affirm to have rejected Satan, his works, and empty promises and about 95% of Igbos are Christians. More so, the majority of Igbo communities had even gone a step further in confessing their faith in Christ by pulling down altars and shrines dedicated to those “unknown gods and deities”. They refer to them as the handiwork of human beings and invariably have no powers over human beings and are not worthy of any human worship, adoration or dedication.



So, then, one of the most important contributions the project made in clarifying and expanding the religious principles becomes that it opened the eyes and the minds of the participants in the group session to realize this important fact that – we are all equal and have all sinned, have all fallen short of the glory of God, and can only be saved by the grace of God. Therefore being or descending from Osu or Nwafor divide has absolutely no place in God's register, thus we are all his created, chosen, and redeemed children.

One of the cardinal contributions of the project as it concerned religious principles is that in the realm of spirit, all mankind are equal, bound together in their common love of Christ who is their common Savior. Marais was of similar opinion when he pointed out that, the early Christians were joined in the deepest of spiritual bonds. The catacombs did not indicate whether those buried were freemen or slaves. They rather felt their spiritual unity so much that they were buried not with their ancestral families but with their fellow believers, for those constituted their real families. [Edward A. Tiryakian, 1961, Art. 3htm]. One sees obviously that the spiritual brotherhood or sisterhood divisions based on race, color, or economic considerations play no, or only an extremely insignificant part in defining any human person. It is therefore the stand of this project that all differences, however important they may appear, either in the social life, economic or religious sphere become matters of secondary importance bearing in mind our faith and common identity in Christ.

5:4

## THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PROJECT TO CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

The contributions of this project in expanding and clarifying the clinical principles discussed in chapter two cannot be over-emphasized. The Osu caste system has been going on in Igboland for centuries and not many people gave serious thought to the mental, emotional and physical health conditions of individuals referred to as Osu. It was however during the group sessions that some of the plights of these people discriminated upon as Osu became glaringly manifest and visible to the participants in the group. I am equally of the opinion that anyone from Igbo descent that reads this project would as well become very clear to some of the emotional, psychological and mental torture the Osu individuals are put through.

The project through the aid of the group sessions explored some of the discriminations and segregations that the Osu individuals are put through and how these affected their psyche. It was at these interactions and discussions that the group came to the painful realization that these discriminations and segregations led most of the Osus to one form of psychological or physiological problems, while at the same time not down-playing the low self-esteem involved. The group gave concrete examples about what the Osu goes through – lack of freedom and choice to marry whoever one likes and feels compatible with, denial of one's right to share in the benefits of one's culture, lack of equal access to public office, lack of free association and communication and an unequal recognition before the laws of the land.

Looking critically and surgically on the above enumerated points, the group was not in doubt that those were the issues that push most of the Osu teenagers and even adults to

anti-social behaviors in various Igbo communities. The project helped buttress the point that oppression, trauma, neglect and abuse of peoples' rights will bring nothing other than anxiety symptoms which if not checked and stopped would lead to nothing but Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Berzoff in discussing the clinical principles was of the view that depression does not just refer to a syndrome with all of its technical definitions. But more so, that it is an affective state that we have each experienced. It could be a state of sadness, depletion, deflation, emptiness, hopelessness and boredom. He believes that depression is precipitated by an external event such as the actual loss of a person, of work, of ideals, or of an object of significance. These are the cases with the Osu individuals as they are made to loose their personhood, identity, dignity, and their significance within and among their peers, and societies. Berzoff was also of the opinion that in depression or in mania, one witnesses the opposite – i.e., a state of speeding up or of agitation. Could we as Igbos, deny the fact that such (agitations) happens with most of the Osu individuals? They often agitate against many things that go on in their various communities, whether the things are for the benefit of their communities or not. Hence they always feel they are not counted or considered as members of their communities.

When the group began discussing these issues brought to our notice by Berzoff, it became an "AHAA" moment for the members of the group. Then and there, they began realizing the reason for the numerous agitations that go on in many Igbo communities. They concluded that the reason must likely be that the Osu individuals felt left out or pushed to the edges of decision making in their communities. Consequently upon such feelings, their actions in their communities became: if our voices and contributions do not

matter/count, and are not necessary, let then our violence and tacit agitations be recognized and noticed.

The contributions of this project towards clarifying and expanding the clinical principles enunciated in chapter two were so visible as they helped the participants in the group session to see for themselves what their Osu brothers and sisters go through in the name of culture and handed down traditions. The highest contribution of this project to the clinical principles is on the need and the urgency for all Igbos to see the health and physical problems their Osu brothers and sisters endure. In recognizing such, they would then behave and relate better with each other and in so doing, peace, love, joy, economic, and intellectual development would abound in the entire Southeast of Nigeria.

5: 5

## THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PROJECT TO MINISTRY IN A WIDER CONTEXT

The contributions of this project to ministry in a wider sense are so important and necessary. When I made up my mind to explore on Osu caste system as found in the Southeast of Nigeria, little did I know of the impact it would generate and create in many religious ministries and traditions, and in the psyche of the participating group. When I called the sons and daughters of Igbo extraction from varied denominations living in the State of New York (America), for the group sessions and discussions, some of them were reluctant to join in the group and when they did, there were suspicions, doubts, silent revolts and agitations within the group. There were those in the group who felt that the Osu issue is not a topic to be discussed outside of Igboland. Thus they believed and understood the Osu phenomenon to be religio-cultural, and an infallible dogma from Igbo great grand ancestors. Thus, re-visiting or trying to change this handed down tradition would not be without its repercussions. So they maintained that Osu remains Osu irrespective of whatever any person or group of persons or any religion says. On the other side of the aisle were those who believed that we are all members of the same human family and are created equal by the same God whose Image and likeness we all bear.

This scenario that played out in the group is what actually happens in all Igbo communities whenever the Osu issue comes up for discussion. Many communities had a mapped out fine for whoever refers to another as Osu, or treats another as sub-human. But it never goes beyond the stipulation of fine and no one has been actually made to pay the stipulated fine in a case where one contravenes that status. To be considered married in the Catholic Church for example, there are some basic prerequisites that needed to be

fulfilled before the actual celebration of the marriage. One of the prerequisites is the publication of the ban either by public announcement at Mass or by publishing it in the parish bulletin for three consecutive Sundays. Within these three weeks of the publication of the ban, anyone who has a serious reason why the two individuals should not be united in marriage should make his/her objection known to the pastor. The only condition under which the two individuals should not be married is if they have any canonical impediment. In the absence of that, they are free to enter into marriage. But in some communities of Igboland, some individuals are denied this right to marry under the guise of upholding the traditions handed on by the ancestors. But we know that some of these traditions and cultural taboos go against the Christian principles and belief systems. And again how right is it to assess or judge a Christian with pagan tenets and principles?

It is, however, on this point that it becomes so shameful and sad to see those who call themselves Christians to be on the forefront waging war against marriages between Nwafor and Osu individuals. In certain situations these individuals had gone to the extent of threatening the pastor if the pastor insists on officiating at such a marriage between Osu and Nwafor. In situations where pastors stood their ground and officiate at such marriages the next thing would be that they would cook up one story against such ministers to see that they are removed from the parish. Hence, they felt that such pastors are getting dangerously close to their cultural heritage. But through this project, the participants affirmed that such type of culture is anti- Christian, anti-social, anti-human, and, of the devil. Accordingly the group stated that as Christians they affirm and uphold the doctrine taught by Jesus their master that there is No Jew, and No Gentile. In situations as narrated above they said that, love lives of people are messed up and most of



the times, the individuals concerned develop serious health problems and the gospel message becomes ridiculed, and compromised. Then justice, right, and freedom of people are stifled.

The highest contribution of this project to ministry is that it went beyond the confines of any particular denomination. The make up of the group for the sessions/discussions went far beyond the frontiers of any single denomination and the eight point recommendations were sent to all Igbo communities, cultures, chiefs, Christian denominations, paramount rulers, Igwes, and Obis, to begin honest and sincere dialogue for the abolition of this Osu phenomenon. That becomes one of the beauties of this project. Hence, in many communities of Igboland, there still exists some serious and unhealthy rivalry between and amongst different Christian denominations. A point to buttress this fact is what took place in 2003 in one of the communities of Igboland. There was a wealthy young man that decided to help his community erect two places of worship for the Catholics and the Protestants. But it was disgraceful and appalling that his kinsmen were on his neck and forced and dissuaded him from carrying out this noble venture. The young man yielded and built a church just for one religious denomination instead of two. Had he decided to carry out his wish without harkening to their demand, probably he may not be alive today. That type of attitude was not noticed during the entire duration of the sessions. Hence a participant in the group wrote me expressing her joy and happiness for bringing people together not minding one's religious affiliation. She said, "It is now clear to me that all Christian denominations in Igboland need to sit-down and dialogue with one voice as regards some of the ills found in many of our communities".



It is also worthy of note that through this project, the participants mapped out some amount of money to help poor communities build schools for the education of their ward. Hence, they affirmed that ignorance seems to be the bane of some of this segregations and discriminations found in Igboland. They also set aside some form of stipend for ministers that work in very poor and remote areas of Igboland. All these went far beyond the confines of any religious affiliation. And from my own perspective during the group, this seemed to be the beginning of honest dialogue and relationship between different Christian religions in the entire Igboland.

The project also suggested that those who had developed some form of mental/psychological wounds (as a result of this segregation) should be helped to seek psychological counseling and healing without any payment from their pockets. This will show them that the entire Igboland feel sorry for whatever injuries they have suffered for years and centuries.

5: 6

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE MINISTRY

Having come thus far in the execution of this project, it is my hope and expectation that there would be from thenceforward a better understanding of the tenets of Christianity in the many communities of Southeast Nigeria. This view is conceived as a result of what I witnessed during the group – lack of elemental knowledge about the teachings of Christ. Many people fill the churches on Sundays but have no basic knowledge of what Christianity is all about. Some have the requisite knowledge but indulge in some syncretism in their religious practices and observances. They mix up Christian principles with African traditional practice. Therefore this projects comes at an opportune moment for all Igbos to re-access what they believe in and then ask the fundamental question, who are we worshipping Jesus or some human/handed down traditions? Thus the core and fulcrum of this project is based on equality of all in the eye of God the creator. When this is fully grasped, internalized, and allowed to control the lives and the world-view of all Igbo people, then the future of ministry in Igboland becomes admirable, easy and appreciable. At that, there would be one sheep and one shepherd. But if people continue to count, and insist, think, and relate along the lines of cultural isolation, segregation, sectionalism, and classism the project maintains that the prospect of future and happy ministry in the entire Southeast of Nigeria would be a mirage and far fetched.

On the contrary, if we as Igbos should look at the communality of our common humanity and treat all as equal under God and under the law, then the future of ministry in Igboland would be bright. Then there would be no Jew, no Gentile, and the prophesy

of Isaiah would be fulfilled and realized in Igboland that, “The wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; The calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them...cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest.... The baby shall play by the cobra’s den, and the child lay his hand on the adder’s lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord.” [Isaiah 11: 6 -9].

This prophecy of Isaiah is the implication for future ministry and becomes what this project is advocating on all Igbo people. The era that will usher in peace, love, forgiveness, tolerance, justice, respect for rights of people and freedom of people is the aim for this project. This of course would not be easy as was the case at the beginning of the group. But with determination and faith in God and in each other, we shall get at that Promised Land where we shall see each other as true brothers and sisters. Surely the Christian churches had been silent on this discrimination issue for long, so now is the time to begin to reflect deeply on how to understand ourselves as brothers and sisters. Else, the hatred, acrimony, rancor, discord and under-development that being the people of Southeast of Nigeria would continue unabated. When the prophesy of Isaiah is allowed to take root, lots of conflicts, and disharmony caused by the Osu phenomenon in many communities of Igboland would be a thing of the past.

It then beholds on all pastors, catechists, elders, deacons, and apostles, of all Christian denominations to be on the forefront for the realization of this noble venture. The traditional rulers, chiefs, councilors and all other office holders in Igboland are to strive and put into action the recommendations already sent to them. At this point also, it is to be said that, if all the Christian denominations should put aside their differences and work

together to realize this vision of common brotherhood and sisterhood of all “Ndigbo” then lasting peace, love, economic, social, and intellectual developments in many communities of Igboland would be overwhelming. Then and only then would the slogan “marginalization of Ndigbo” by the Nigerian polity would be dealt a very deadly blow. All these become the implications for ministry and future ministry in the communities of Southeast Nigeria.

## APPENDIX

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE STUDY OF OSU CASTE SYSTEM IN IGBOLAND.

A:

1. The osus are:

(a) Inferior human beings      (b) Slave tribe      (c) Children of gods      (d) The same as freeborn      (e) all of the above.

2. I will never marry an Osu

T

F

3. I will never allow my children to marry Osu or to marry from the Osu descent

T

F

4. The Osus are not supposed and cannot be Christians

T

F

5. The Osus can be ordained bishops, priests or be consecrated as religious

Yes

No

6. I will never support or allow an Osu to become the Traditional Ruler of the my town

T

F

7. I will never allow or support an Osu to be a titled man/woman in my town

T

F

8. An Osu should never have the same right in the community as freeborn

T

F

9. An Osu should be confined to the shrine

T

F

10. It is OK to treat the Osu as an outcast

Yes

No

Write a paragraph or more describing your feelings towards the Osus or about the Osus.

11. Can you publicly identify yourself as an Osu?

Yes

No

12. How do you feel when you hear others talk in derogatory way about the Osus?

(a) Angry      (b) Hurt      (c) Bitter      (d) Resentful      (e) All of the above

13. Do you feel comfortable being in groups that speak disparagingly of the Osus?

Yes

No

14. Do you feel that the church does enough to bring about healing between the Osus and the freeborn?

Yes

No

15. How do you feel about intermarriage between the Osus and the Nwafors'?

(a) Should marry      (b) Should never      (c) Allowed in certain cases

16. In few sentences write about your feelings on not being able to be fully included in the affairs of the town, such as, Kingship, title taking, marriage etc.

Write a paragraph on how you feel about some Igbo people that regard themselves as freeborn while disregarding every other person either as Osu or as Slave.

## B

QUESTIONS THAT AROSE AS A RESULT OF ENGAGING ON THIS PROJECT:  
QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION.

Going through this project there came some serious questions that the scope of this work would not be able to handle or answer effectively. These questions or concerns came from three sources; - individuals that responded to the questionnaires, issues raised during the group discussions, and through my own reflections at the group sessions, and through reading other peoples' work during the writing.

Those concerns and questions are as follows:

1. If the blood of Christ sets us free how come that it does not apply to the Osu individuals?
2. Is Osu hereditary, that is, can it be inherited or are the descendants of an Osu free to decide to be or not? Is it genetic and as a result can be inherited?
3. If the deity to which a person was consecrated no longer exists or has become obsolete and invalid, how can one continue to hold another as consecrated to it?
4. As Christians does our equality derive solely from our creatureliness or from our Christian baptism in Christ through which we have been made one with Christ, no Jew, no Gentile?
5. The church in Igboland today is doing little or nothing to fight this sickness. Everybody is quiet hoping that it (Osu caste system) will die a natural death, but is it so?



6. Why is that people are ready to borrow money from a person qualified as “Osu”, make love with him or her, eat with him or her and still not be willing to marry him or her. Is that not the height of hypocrisy?
7. Is culture static or dynamic?
8. Why should the contact between Osu and non-Osu make an Osu, Osu and not vice versa? Is it prejudice or what?
9. Why is that the same group of people who held that the practice must be abolished were on the other hand insistent that their wards would not be allowed or supported to marry from the Osu divide or vice versa?

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