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*„Ọ nūrụ ube nwanne agbala ọsọ“. A theology of fraternal solidarity:
An Igbo perspective to liberation theology*

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Abstract (English)

The unfortunate reality of man-made poverty and the undeserved affluence of corrupt elite in our world has been acknowledged and deplored by various theologians and humanists in many ways. Experiences of oppression, vulnerability and marginalisation have led to a sustained reflection on the Christian tradition. The situations of abject poverty and human need in the so called Third World, has thus given the theology of liberation a particular urgency and distinctive outline that energized it within the second half of the past 20th century. Liberation theology's concern with human well-being and its understanding of the Church's mission in terms of practical measures for alleviating human suffering has also gained for it tremendous influence and attention in our time. However, evidences of a declining profile that could be attributed in part to the Church's reluctance in appreciating this theology's merits have led some liberation theologians to exasperation. Some of them blame it on a certain type of academicism which posits ideological neutrality as the ultimate criterion, and relativizes all claims to absoluteness and all evaluations of some ideas over others. In their apologetics, liberation theologians castigate the apparent phobia for Marxism, which seems to betray the Church's doctrinal position as one affected by uncritical ideological prejudice. As the yoke of the so-called poor is aggravated, the response of the Church towards issues concerning liberation sometimes seems to give credence to the Marxist assumption that the chains of the oppressed are obscured by the flowers of ideology. Tearing down the walls of such obscurity remains a major challenge to theology today and tomorrow. Consequently, probing the extent to which Christian teaching is influenced by, or liberated from ideological prejudice has come to be a pertinent issue that demands constant theological re-examination. African theologians have often made a plea for a "listening" ear from the Church. Such listening presupposes that there is something to be hearkened to, a need to be met. The cries of the poor and of all people deprived or marginalised on various accounts have grown louder in our time. These cries demand adequate response of Christian love. Conceptualizing a theological model for such response is a task with which Christian theology must engage itself. And this involves, above all, listening to the message of our culture and assimilating the values therein. This dissertation – "Ọ nūrụ ube nwanne agbala ọsọ, A Theology of Fraternal Solidarity: An Igbo Perspective To Liberation Theology,, re-examines in the light of historical facts those problems that gave birth to liberation theology, and seeks to offer an Igbo model of response to these problems. The work is conceptualized as both an appraisal of liberation theology, a critique of the Church's social doctrine as well as a proposal of a new cultural perspective that ought to accompany theological reflections in Africa. It aims at synthesizing inculturation and liberation in an African Igbo context—a context that necessitates a culturally authentic and prophetic theology, following the exhortations of an African theologian, Emmanuel Martey, who maintains that theological hermeneutics in Africa must necessarily have a unitary perception of both inculturation and liberation. Making Christ and his message intelligible to Africans, by using native categories that at best illuminate African humanism, is a new way of doing theology, which this dissertation appropriates and recommends. It is a way of making theology more socially and culturally relevant to Africans (in this case Igbo in particular) and of teaching them therein a refusal to accept that one's own dignity and importance is affirmed by a denial of the other's dignity and worth. In this sense, I intend to go beyond a liberation-oriented hermeneutic in order to address the deficiency that lies at the root of social injustice—a deficiency recognised

in this work as an aberrant perception, which human beings in the opposing sides of the social-economical, sexual, religious and racial divide have of one another. The aim is also to encourage Africans to be prepared not only to rise above myopic parochialism but also to collectively lend spiritual depth to the well-sung conviviality that is a distinctive mark of African culture and temperament. To encourage them to be willing to perceive, embrace and love one another and people of other cultures and religions as true brothers and sisters and thus contribute in building a civilization of love in which exploiters, oppressors and bigots no longer have a room for active role. Theology must be ready to confront men and women of today with the question: Cain, where is your brother Abel? Hence, a secondary aim of this work is to decry the cruelties of history and to insist that they must not be allowed to continue to haunt the present and obscure the future of our world. In doing this, my attention focuses at unveiling the biblical as well as Christological matrix for a theology of solidarity that is not only bona fide Christian but also truly Igbo in its cultural expression. The aim is that of making Christian theology more easily intelligible to the Igbo as well as bringing to light how Igbo understanding of life and relationship enriches theology today. Albeit, the scope is limited to Igbo perspective, an overview of Latin American liberation theology and the Church's social teaching forms an essential prolegomenon to this work, hence, the bibliography includes a variety of diverse literatures insofar as such provide resonant theological, historical or social-analytical contributions to the theme of discourse. Lastly, I wish to state that theologizing or philosophizing in Africa is often essentially idiomatic. By this I mean that, by the use of idioms, Africans convey volumes of wisdom that bears upon social and human sciences. *Ọ nọrụ ube nwanne agbala ọsọ* is a pithy saying, but it is no less a theological treatise, in which an idiomatic perspective to liberation and solidarity is compactly and profoundly articulated.