

Attn: BISAM: Biblical Studies and Mission

**THE SAMERITAN WOMAN (Jn. 4: 1-42) AND OSU CASTE SYSTEM
IN IGBOLAND NIGERIA: THE MISSION RESPONSE**

ABSTRACT

Missionary activity in Igboland, Nigeria began at the turn of the twentieth century. Contact with Christianity was first with the Church Missionary Society (henceforth CMS). For nearly 30 years, the CMS maintained an unchallenged missionary influence having arrived in the area in 1857 howbeit progress in the mission work. The arrival, however, of the Roman Catholic Mission (henceforth RCM) on Christmas day in 1885 (under two intrepid French Holy Ghost priests namely, Fr. Joseph Lutz and Fr. Horn) brought about an aggressive evangelism that was hitherto unknown in Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries among the Igbo.

It is true that the people were attracted to Christianity at the incipient stage of the missionary enterprise in the early nineteenth century especially due to the adoption of the school apostolate by the RCM as a means to evangelize the people yet belief in certain cultural elements persist. An example is the caste system that engenders hostilities between the freeborn (*diala*) and outcaste (*osu*) in the Igbo society similar to the Jewish/Samaritan relations in John's gospel (Jn. 4: 1-42).

In the analysis of the major and minor characters in the Samaritan story vis-à-vis Jesus and his interaction with the Samaritan woman, the Samaritans, and the Jews and also Jesus; the question may too be asked: who are the Igbo, and the outcaste in the Igbo society? Are the situations similar and how? An interpretative analysis of the relationship between the Jews and Samaritans shows how the story of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well stimulates everyone to some form of reflection about barriers in communal and personal faith and life; and summons people nay the Igbo to reconciliation and breaking down prejudice. This is important especially today where the task of mission is broadening to mean a shift from proclamation to the empowerment of the local people to help them determine how the message of Jesus' gospel is to be actively proclaimed and how it ought to be fully lived out in the peoples' concrete human situations.