
THE URHOB0 CONCEPT OF ADULTERY IN THE LIGHT OF JOHN 8: 1-11

John Arierhi Ottuh

Vicar, Winners Baptist Church, Box 1214 Effurun, Delta State
Email: wibachef90@yahoo.com or wibachef90@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The attitude of Jesus in the New Testament towards the treatment of women in the society is that of fairness and equity. The aim of this study therefore, was to examine how the Urhobo traditional understandings of adultery are linked with that of the Jews and how they affect women negatively in Urhoboland and to use Jesus' critical response in John 8: 1-11 to call for a change of the status-quo in Urhoboland. In order to do this the Feminist Liberation Theology model was explored as a method. It was seen that the Urhobo and Jewish understanding of adultery are similar in some areas and that these cultural status-quo are oppressive to women and apart from the oppressive nature of the Urhobo understanding of adultery on women, it can also become a basis for men's promiscuity which can become a gate way for the acquisition and transmission of sexually transmitted disease like HIV/AIDS, and as such could also lead to divorce and family disintegration. This work therefore was a critique of the Urhobo traditional understanding of adultery in the light of Jesus' critical response in John 8: 1- 11 and could be concluded on the premise that men and women are equal sharers of God's image because the duo are created in God's image (*imago Dei*) and as such it is wrong to attach more importance to the interest of men than women.

INTRODUCTION

Every society in the world is made up of both males and females as ordained by God in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1:26-27). Can one say that the custom of a society is worth practising when it is actually working against the interest of a particular sex in the community? In African traditional society just as in the Jewish one, a very low status is accorded women. Most particularly, the men in Africa interpret the Bible in their favour to subjugate women to the whims and caprices of the men. The church even seems to support this. For example, in Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, addressing the matter of orderly conduct at worship he says:

As in all the congregation of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgrace for a woman to speak in the church (1 Corinthians 14:33-35). NIV.

This text has become a reference point for the oppressive subjugation of women in Urhoboland both in the traditional and church communities. With reference to the Old Testament, one example is the practice of concubinage. When a woman's husband has one or more concubines like the Old Testament Solomon in the Bible, the woman has no right to complain to the elders of the man's family or that of the community. If she does, she is put away. As far as the Urhobo tradition is concerned, the husband of a woman has the right to marry as many wives as he likes whereas a married woman cannot allow her

hand to be held by another man without her being accused of adultery. In John 8: 1-11 a woman caught at the scene of adultery was brought to Jesus for judgment. It takes a man and a woman to perform the act but only the woman was brought. The question here is: where is the man? From the attitude of the Jews towards the woman caught at the scene of adultery and the attitude of the Urhobo towards adulteresses, it is very clear that some areas of our traditional tenets are oppressive of women. On the other hand, from the attitude of Jesus towards the Jews and the adulteress in John 8:1-11, we can learn that any traditional tenet which does not put the interest of the women into consideration like that of the men should be critically looked at with the view to making suitable amends. In the Bible passage where Jesus corrected the adulteress, and the Jews, one can see Jesus as one expressing the will of God concerning mankind and respecting the equality of humanity as expressed in Genesis 1:26-27 and it reads:

Then God said, let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. NIV.

Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians expressed the same idea of equal humanity when he says: there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (God's image, Galatians 3:28). Some times one wonders if the God who created the male is the one who created females. If our traditions both in the church and our communities recognize this, women should not be marginalized in any way. The Urhobo must learn to respect the dignity and freedom of women in traditional policy making. The Urhobo concept of adultery is posing a crisis on women in the land. The concept itself is a way of marginalization of women in Urhoboland, that is a way in which women are being enslaved by unjust subjugation of women to men by the communal tradition. Women live at the mercy of men in marriage. A situation where women are not allowed to question the wrong practices of their husbands insinuates oppression. In this case there is no balance relationship and this is becoming a crisis to the women of Urhoboland. The aim of this study therefore, is to examine how the Urhobo traditional understanding of adultery are linked with that of the Jews and how they affect women negatively in Urhoboland and to use Jesus' critical response in John 8: 1-11 to call for a change of the status-quo in Urhoboland. In order to do this the Feminist Liberation Theology model will be explored as a method. It is obvious that the predicament of the Urhobo woman seems to be applicable in the predicament of the woman caught in the scene of adultery in John 8:1-8. Those who brought the woman to Jesus did not bring the man as well neither did they make mention of him. One can see here a similar intention among the Urhobo whereby women who commit adultery are punished by the gods while men are not. It is against this background that this work is being carried out. Therefore the Bible passage under consideration shall be used as a basis for critique. Bringing the woman who committed adultery with a man for justice without the man raises the issue of unfair treatment to the woman. This paper does not support women to commit adultery but it will point out that adultery is a sin no matter who commits it.

Definition of Operational Terms

The Urhobo: The Urhobo according to Otite(1982) form an ethnic group in Delta State of Nigeria who speak Urhobo language. Also Henigie (1974) says that the Urhobo are a major ethnic group in Delta State and are located in over eighty villages and towns including a few cities like Warri, Effurun, Sapele, Ugheli, etc. The Urhobo nation is made up of different subgroups-tribes such as Ugheli, Isoko, Agbon, Uvwie, Okpe, Abraka, Udu, Idjere, Oghara, Orogun, Agbasa to mention but a few. Their major occupation includes farming and fishing. The land is blessed with mineral resources like crude oil. They are found in the Niger Delta Area.

Tradition: The handing down of beliefs, opinions, customs, and stories such as from parents to children, especially by word of mouth or by practice (Barhart and Barnhaft, 1981). In Jewish theology, it means the unwritten precepts and doctrines or any of them believed to have been received by Moses from God and handed down orally from generation to generation (Barhart,1981).

Adultery: According to Mish (1995) adultery is a voluntary sexual intercourse between a married man and someone other than his wife or between a married woman and someone other than her husband. In other words, adultery is any sexual intercourse between a person who is married and another person who is not his or her marriage partner. Sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons is fornication.

Concubinage: This is a situation whereby a man has lover or lovers who he did not marry legally beside his wife or wives.

The Urhobo Situation on Adultery

The issue of adultery is not peculiar to the Urhobo alone but due to the subject matter this paper shall be restricted to the Urhobo culture. The understanding of adultery in Urhoboland is a situation whereby a married woman allows a man who is not her husband to have sex or express sex with her. On the other hand a man does not commit adultery unless if he is caught having sex or fondling with another man's wife. The woman in Urhobo traditional milieu does not have the right from stopping her husband from having concubines or from marrying other wives. This understanding is well expressed in folklore traditional song of the Urhobo and it goes thus: "*Aye rho guono ruoruo re, gbe no rovwe aye, rho guono ruoruo re gbe no rovwe*". The song simply means: "a wife who needs no other woman in the house should leave the marriage". If a woman is caught having a lover she is regarded as an abominable person in the society and is humiliated and disapproved in public. A woman who commits adultery is seen as "*aye ro gbo farie*", that is, a promiscuous woman even if she had sex with only one man outside her marriage. Another word that is also associated with *Ofarie* (promiscuity) in Urhoboland is *Igbelaja* (prostitute). By tradition a man is never regarded as a prostitute. However, if he has sex with another man's wife he will be severely punished. If a married woman commits adultery, *erivwi* (the spirit of the ancestors) will attack her and even kill her husband and her children but it is not so if a man commits adultery. Even the gods of the land recognize this. Also in Urhoboland a girl is expected to be a virgin till marriage but not so for the boys. In the Urhobo traditional understanding, a girl who loses her virginity before marriage is regarded as *Igbelaja* (prostitute) and as such she is a disgrace to her family

and the society at large but a boy who has sex with several girls before marriage is never seen as a prostitute. Furthermore, in the Urhobo traditional understanding of sex, it is only the man that should ask his wife for sex. If the woman should tell her husband verbally that she needs him, she is also regarded as *Igbelaja* (prostitute). Both *Ofarie* (promiscuity) and *Igbelaja* (prostitution) are related to adultery in Urhoboland. The writer being a part of the Urhobo community has observed that many housewives are not happy with the situation but what can they do, since the community does not even allow them to complain, not to talk of helping them out. Some of the women who could not bear it any more left their marriages and their children and many of these children are suffering from lack of maternal love and care. Many of them refused to remarry because they are afraid of being maltreated by their husbands. Due to the fact that a man is allowed by the Urhobo tradition to have sex outside the marriage by allowing men to have lovers and concubines, some of these men have been exposed to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases which they in turn transmitted to their wives and some have died innocently. Women are afraid of being host of sexually transmitted diseases hence some run away from their husband's house, leaving their children to suffer. The women are advocating sex between one husband and one wife but the disagreement of men to this is a very serious crisis in deed.

The Urhobo understanding of adultery is male biased because it is in favour of men. Those who make traditional or cultural laws are mainly males. This is so because those who constitute the *Ovie's* (King's) cabinets in Urhoboland are more of men. These problems call for a greater concern from the church, the society and the government to restore the dignity of women in their matrimonial homes, and the society at large. One can imagine here that the more the Urhobo tradition allows men to have sex outside their marriage partner without convicting them of adultery, prostitution and promiscuity, the more people will test HIV/AIDS positive, the more we will have divorcees and the more we will have unprotected women and children in the society. Let us refrain from justifying ourselves with traditions which support sexual misconduct of any kind. Why should a man be justified by tradition for committing adultery?

The Urhobo Traditional Religious Theologumenon

In the Urhobo existence, they have developed some thoughts, beliefs, religions, concepts, rich folklores, and work culture in their attempt to explain their environment and survive in it. The Urhobo believe in the supreme Being called *Oghene* (God). The Urhobo believe that *Oghene* created man and everything we see in the world. The throne of creation is called *Urhoro* and it also connotes the abode of babies not yet born (Onobrakpeya, 2003). According to the Urhobo belief, after one's image is molded out of clay by *Oghene*, one must kneel down before this throne to say with his mouth what one wishes in life. Once this wish was made, it was blessed and could not be revoked (Onobrakpeya, 2003). The life of the person right from birth thereafter becomes strictly governed by the wish. They also believe that every man has a destiny (*Urhievwe*) from *Oghene*. The Urhobo believe that every creature of God such as moon (*Emeravwe*), the sun (*Uvo*), water (*ame*), etc, have their functions in cosmic activities. The Urhobo believe that *Oghene* is transcendent and as such he created other gods and other spirits to act on his behalf in the affairs of men. Also these gods are believed to be empowering the spirit of the ancestors and other spirits to act in the affairs of men. Some of the gods include, *edjokpa* (god of palm tree)

emedjo (dancing masquerades), *okunovu* (water related deity), *Erivwi* (spirit of the ancestors) helps to Fetch out and punish culprits who violate the norms and values of the land(Erivwo,1991). Urhobo value and wisdom are reflected in the names of people and things, proverbs, songs, prayers and incantations. They are the results of careful observations of nature and the understanding of both the physical and spiritual aspects of man. These became codes or canons, which guide behaviour and reasoning and are profusely, quoted during speeches. The Urhobo welcome their visitors with kolanuts, drinks and money. An acceptance speech is always concluded with a prayer expressing five points life expectations: *Emamoremo* (good children), *Ufuoma* (peace), *Omakpokpo* (good health), *Idolo* (wealth) and *Otovwe* (long life). The Urhobo also believe in reincarnation. People who had lived and died do return to the world again through rebirth to have another life which may be different from the previous life they lived. Almost every clan in Urhoboland has her own myth of creation and names of their gods and beliefs but the ones above are some of the major Urhobo world-view.

The Understanding of Adultery in Urhobo Cultural Milieu

The concept of adultery has different cultural meanings to various peoples of the world. The Urhobo people are not an exception. This is why it becomes pertinent to investigate the meaning of adultery from the perspective of a particular local culture of a people. Under this sub-heading therefore, this paper shall present the concept of adultery from an Urhobo cultural perspective. In the Urhobo cultural milieu adultery can be interpreted in terms of direct and indirect sexual acts. Direct sexual acts are those sexual acts of having sex with a person and indirect sexual acts are those acts that signify or imply sexual moods or expressions. In the above light, according to Ubrurhe and Eghwubare (2000) a married woman who allows another man to tap her buttocks or hold her hand, or fondle with her breast or genitals commits adultery of the indirect sexual act. Also a married woman who allows another man to have sex with her commits adultery against her husband, the ancestors, *erivwi* (the spirit world) and the community at large. Erivwo(1991) calls this act *umuemu* (sin) and the frequent indulgent in it as *orunkuruku* (iniquity). A married woman who allows another man to hug her or dances to the seductive song of another man who praises her with sexual tones is seen as a derailing woman who has appetite for adultery. For example, if a man sings a song, with such phrases like: "*evie we yoma* (your breast is so beautiful), or *owe ya ye ro me yoma vwe vu ra kpona*"(you are the most beautiful woman on earth), for a married woman who appreciates them, she is supposed to have consented to adultery.

Lewis (1969) says that the Urhobo unlike the Eskimo in North America and perhaps elsewhere, do not practice wife hospitality. Wife hospitality is a cultural system whereby a husband accepts sharing his wife or wives with visitors who would spend the night or nights with him (Ilega,2001) and an Urhobo woman who offers herself to have sex with a male visitor commits adultery. Also, a widow who does not refund her bride price to her husband's family before marrying another man commits adultery(Ilega,2001). The Urhobo practices levirate marriage. However, where the widow refuses marrying either the brother or a relative of the late husband, she is under law to return whatever bride price that was paid on her to her parents before she can be free to marry or have sex with another man. Adultery in Urhoboland is also associated with the act of fornication and prostitution (*Igbelaja*) generally known as *ofarie* (*promiscuity*). Fornication is associated

with adultery from ancient traditional practice because it is expected that the first man to have sex with a girl must be her husband. This is why a girl is expected to remain a virgin (*virgo intacta*) till marriage. Unlike the Muria people of India who allow long period of sexual relationship before marriage, the ancient Urhobo tradition forbids pre-marital sex for the girls (Ilega, 2001). In the Urhobo cultural setting, a married man does not commit adultery except when he has sex with a married woman but a married woman commits adultery when she has sex with any man other than her husband. Women are more severely punished for adultery in Urhobo tradition. This is true because an Urhobo married man can be allowed to have *osen* (concubine) while married women are not allowed by the traditional law. *Osen* provides friendship between married men and unmarried women that allows sexual relationship between them (Hornby, 1963). A concubine does not have the status of a wife until the man decides to marry her.

Adultery in Relation to Men and Women in Urhobo Cultural Setting

- i. A woman who commits adultery is seen as a sexually immoral person and as such she is a taboo, but not so to a man. Even if a man commits adultery and paying the fine, he has no stigma attached but the woman is stigmatized in that community for the rest of her life.
- ii. A man does not commit adultery except when he has sex with or sexually fondles a married woman, but a woman commits adultery when she has sexual attachment to any man other than her husband. This implies that the men are excused to have extra-marital affairs with other women provided those women are not married.
- iii. Polyandry is regarded as an act of adultery, promiscuity, and prostitution but polygamy is not regarded as such. A man is allowed to marry as many wives as he pleases. A man is allowed to have lovers (concubines) and it is not regarded as adultery. On the other hand, a woman commits adultery if she has more than one husband. Polyandry which is a system of marrying more than one husband simultaneously is unacceptable in Urhobo tradition and as such it is a taboo.
- iv. A woman who commits adultery is publicly disgraced while a man who does the same is not except when he has sex with another man's wife. Men are usually fined and severely punished when they commit sexual acts with married women.
- v. A woman whose husband sleeps with another woman has no traditional right to report or punish her husband. But her husband can report. A woman has no right to divorce her husband but she can go away from her husband's house and leave the marriage provided she returns the bride price her husband paid on her. The community frowns at this. If a married woman slept with another man, her husband has the right to send her away.
 1. Any woman who commits adultery and wants to be restored to her husband must perform traditional ritual cleansing but a man is not subjected to this if he commits adultery against the wife.
 2. Even if an adulteress had been traditionally and ritually cleansed or forgiven, her moral image is dented before the society for almost all her life time but men do not go through this.
 3. Women who commit adultery are subjected to punishment by men, but men are not allowed to be punished by women. The elders' forum consists of men only.

Consequences and Punishments for Adultery in Urhobo Cultural Milieu

In Urhoboland adultery is more severe when a woman commits it. The gods and the spirit of the ancestors called *erivwi* are very active on the part of the woman. If a man commits adultery with another man's wife and he is not caught, *erivwi* or *esse* does not hold him. This is why women who are married fear to commit adultery. On the other hand an Urhobo man may not want to commit adultery with another man's wife because of the consequences and punishment attached when caught. However, those who violates the law of adultery have themselves to blame. The following are the consequences and punishment for adultery in Urhoboland:

- 1. Sickness:** When a woman commits adultery and she is not caught during the act, *evriwi* (the spirit of the ancestors) who sees every thing will arrest the woman's nuclear family. That is, the children of the woman will fall sick and die. It can also affect the husband of the woman in ill health which can also lead to death. The only remedy is for the woman to confess her adulterous acts so that the ancestors and the gods of the land can be appeased by sacrifice of chicken, goat, plantain and yam. Apart from the man and the children being sick it could also be the turn of the woman to be sick. The nature of her sickness will reveal to the public that she has committed adultery. One of such sickness is a swollen body especially the legs and the stomach and this can lead to her death. If the woman refused to confess *erivwi* and *esse* can kill the whole nuclear family. On the other hand it is not so on the part of a man. If a man commits adultery with another man's wife and he was not caught it will not bring sickness to the children, neither the wife nor himself. In this case it seems the gods and the ancestors recognize men as sacred cows. A man who committed adultery is always afraid of being exposed by the woman when *erivwi* visits her home. This is why it is rare for a man to commit adultery with another man's wife in Urhoboland. When a woman commits adultery *erivwi* must make sure that justice prevails over her by bringing disaster to her, and her children and husband. This is why an Urhobo married woman dread adultery, so it is rare for a woman to commit adultery.
- 2. Death during Childbirth:** A woman who commits adultery stands the danger of death during childbirth. When an adulteress has not been caught physically in the act, she could still be caught on the course of child delivery, when she develops complications. To ease delivery, she has to confess her sins of adultery, after which the ritual to remove her pollution is enacted. The sin of adultery is categorized into singular and plural. When a house wife commits adultery ones it is called *umuemu ro farie* (sin of adultery) and if she did it several times it is called *orukunrunkun* (iniquity). The nature or the degree of sin determines the type of ritual cleansing that will be done for her. It is believed that if she refuses to confess during childbirth, she could die in the process.
- 3. Fine:** Fine is a way of punishment for adultery especially on the side of the man who had sex with another man's wife. When a man is caught in the act of adultery or in the acts that relates to adultery he is made to pay a stipulated fine according to what the husband of the woman demands. In a normal fine the culprit is asked to bring goat, chicken, yam, plantain and money. The goat and chicken will be killed and their blood will be used for sacrifice. Also eggshell are put in a stick to make *evworo* (cleansing) on the culprits so that they can be free from the wrath of the divinities and the family ancestors. When the goat, chicken, plantain and yam are cooked the

culprits are not expected to perceive the aroma not to talk of eating it. Sometimes, the amount of money given to the adulterer to pay as fine is normally very high because it is believed that when he feels the impact he would be discouraged from committing such an act next time. Also, as part of fine, the adulterer could be stripped naked and thoroughly flogged with a warning not to near that woman again. An adulteress can also be made by her husband to pay a fine of goat or chicken, and hot drink to appease the husband's wrath.

4. **Ostracism:** A man who has become so notorious in the community to have been committing adultery with people's wives after several warnings and fines is driven out from the community for as long as the elders may deem fit to avoid subsequent damages. Such a person will be cursed as he is being sent away from the community because he has violated the tradition of the ancestors. The duration of the ostracism is not specific but determined by the elders of the community. In some cases such a person can be completely banished from that particular community.
5. **Divorce:** When a married woman continues in adultery the husband may resort to divorce her to avoid subsequent embarrassment and shame. If a woman is caught with a particular man for one or several times, the husband can decide to ask the man to refund all the money spent on the wife as the bride price, thereafter he leaves the woman for the man. If the wife of a man gives birth to a child suspected by the man not to be his child, the woman can be divorced. If a man commits adultery with another woman whether married or not, the wife has no right to divorce her husband. The punishment given to an adulteress can be divorce. When a woman is divorced by her husband, she must be made to refund all expenses that her husband had made during her bride price; and when she does that she is free to marry any other man she likes. In some cases, the new man who is about to marry her is asked to return the expenses of the first husband of the woman and then marry her. Failure to do that amounts to adultery if he has sex with the divorced woman.

Authenticity of John 8:1-11

John 8:1-11 is the story of a woman caught at the scene of adultery. The woman was brought by the Pharisees and the teachers of the law to Jesus for judgment. This pericope (John 8:1-11) has generated a lot of scholarly arguments. One of such arguments is that of its authenticity. Some scholars say that the pericope does not belong here. Leon Morris(1993) is of the opinion that this story may not have belonged originally to the Gospel of John, and that it is absent from almost all the early manuscripts, and those that have it sometimes place it elsewhere (example, after Luke 21:38). He argues that though the story of John 8:1-11 may not belong here, it is authentic. He also opines that the earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53- 8:11. Also, Alexander(1983) argues that though John 7:53 – 8:11 may not belong here, as scholars may prefer to arrange it, the story is quite genuine. Metzger(1971) says that external evidence shows that John 7:53 – 8:11 does not belong to the fourth Gospel because there are divergences seen in the style and vocabulary of the pericope which makes it different from the fourth Gospel (John). Another reason advanced by Metzger(1971) to show that the pericope (John 7:53-8:11) does not belong here is that John 7:53 – 8:11 interrupts the sequence of John 7:52 and 8:12ff. Metzger also argues that the omission of this pericope from earlier manuscripts could have been that scribes deliberately expunged the

pericope from the fourth Gospel because it was liable to be understood in a sense too indulgent to adultery. Though John 8:1-8 may not belong here, its authenticity cannot be denied because the account has all the earmarks of historical veracity and it is obviously a piece of oral tradition which circulated in certain parts of the Western Church and which was subsequently incorporated into various manuscripts at various places. Gundry(1981) is also of the opinion that the story of the woman taken in adultery does not belong in canonical scripture and that the earliest and best manuscripts, undiscovered when King James Version was published in 1611, omit it entirely. Gundry(1981) also argues that the story itself may be historically true, however, it must have been preserved in Christian oral tradition before interpolation into the canonical text. From the above, we see that many scholars are of the opinion that the story is authentic. It is therefore plausible to say that the text is genuine. All the canonized scriptures of the Bible were once oral traditions. Therefore, if scholars agree that this pericope comes from oral tradition then it is authentic. The story line and Jesus' reaction can be useful for critical study in a culture where the idea of adultery is oppressive of women like that of the Jews and the Urhobo. Hence John 8:1 -11 is an important pericope for this study.

Brown (1996) says that this pericope is not attested to by many of the earliest witnesses like Codex Sinaiticus of the fourth century, (A) Codex Alexandrinus of fifth century, (B) Codex Vaticanus of fourth century, (C) Codex Ephraimaic of the fifth century, etc. From the Greek critical textual apparatus, only some parts of the passage are attested to by (D) Codex Bezae of fifth century, (A) Codex Alexandrinus of fourth century, papirai F¹ and F¹³. In the same vein, Metzger(1971) opines that the pericope was absent from such early manuscripts as "p^{66,75} N B L N T W X Y Δ O ψ 0530141, 0211, 22, 33, 124,157, 209,565, 788,828,1230, 1241,1242,1253,2193 al" (Alland,1981). Metzger(1971) observes that John the author of the Johannine literature is likely not the author of the pericope in question because "its style and vocabulary differs from the rest of the fourth Gospel, and that it interrupts the sequence of 7:52 and 8:12ff". On the other hand, as Shepherd (1990) says it is possible that this omission could be as a result of "lack of space on the missing leaves to include the section along with the rest of the text". According to Shepherd, in some manuscripts this passage occurs after Luke 21:38 but is not an original part of Luke's gospel.

The question here is, since many earliest witnesses did not attest to this pericope can it be regarded as authentic? In answer to this question, Shepherd says that whether it was placed after Luke 21:38 or after John 7:52 or in the last part of John, the pericope should be regarded as authentic because "it conforms to all we know about Jesus as one who came to seek and save the lost, not to condemn men but to offer them forgiveness and acceptance". Its inclusion in John 7:52- 8:11 was suggested by 8:15, 46. Shepherd further opines that this passage (John 8:1-11) has interesting parallels with the story of Susanna in the Apocrepha; "Jesus is the new Daniel come to judgment in truth and equity" (Daniel and Susanna 1-64). Also in answer to the question of authenticity of John 8:1-11, Metzger (1971) writes:

At the same time the account has all the earmarks of historical veracity. It is obviously a piece of oral tradition which was subsequently incorporated into various manuscripts at various places. Most copyist apparently thought that

it would interrupt John's narrative least if it were inserted after 7:52 (D E F G H K M U R II 28 700 892 al).

The above quotation suggests that this pericope really happened in Israel. Its message is very clear in Jesus' mission of salvation, veracious judgment and equity. Therefore, this passage can be applied to a milieu where women are mercilessly subjected to the unjust whims and caprices of men all in the name of traditional laws.

Contexts and Exegesis of John 8:1-11

Literary Context of John 8:1-11

Though some scholars are of the opinion that John 8:1-11 does not fit into this position in the gospel, it has been observed that John 8:1-11 is a historical text which took the form of oral tradition for a long time before its fixture or canonization after John 7 or in between John 7 and 8 (Shepherd 1990). The pericope is a historical text structured within a cluster of loosely connected logia on the character of Jesus towards man's condition. The text is not mentioned very often in the early days of Christianity probably because of the severe punishment that was accorded sexual sin (Morris, 1981). The text as it is in John's Gospel here is preceded by arguments in John 7:1-52 which were aimed at discrediting the authenticity of Jesus' ministry before the common people. The text after John 8:12-59 also continues the controversy of Jesus' genuineness as the messiah. John 8:1-11 is linked with both the preceding and the one that follows to form the theme: Controversy and intrigue. The whole text of John 8:1-11 is a reflection of controversy and a critical response. The narrative on the process in which the Jews intended to trap Jesus and Jesus' critical response begins at vv.3 and 7 respectively. According to Marsh (1977), some of the literary tools of John are symbolism and allegory. Richardson (1959) also attested that the style and content of John 8:1-11 look like those of St. Luke and that the pericope interrupts the continuity of 7:52 with the succeeding passage, 8:12ff. In 7:45-52 the officers are unable to arrest Jesus and Nicodemus speaks on his behalf but to no avail (Marsh, 1977). 7:53-8:11 reveals that the Jews set a trap for the purpose of arresting Jesus and 8:12-59 is a continuation of Jesus' dispute with the Jews. The incidents of Jesus' conflict with the Jews made John 8:1-11 to have a link with chapters 7 and 8. Sander (1962) divides the passage from chapters 7 and 8 thus:

- A. 7:1-9, 10-13, 14-36, 37-44, 45-52
- B. 7: 53-8:11
- C. 8:12-59

Each of these sub-units is composed around Jesus and the Jews. All the sub-units feature controversy on how Jesus could be victimized.

Socio-Historical Context of John 8:1-11

John 8:1-11 has its background from the Old Testament, the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses says that those who were guilty of adultery were to be put to death by burning (Gen. 38:24) or by stoning (Deut. 22:23ff, Lev. 20:10). This custom in the ancient Jewish time demanded that both the man and the woman be stoned to death. This custom in the Old Testament as recorded in Deuteronomy 22:22 and elsewhere encouraged concern for purity (Willies, 1906). The Lord's community is both inclusive and exclusive. It is marked by purity and holiness and practical humanity (Lambert, 1976). In the Old Testament

custom the bride's chastity is uncompromised. In the Jewish custom of adultery in the Rabbinic literature according to Roger(1996) stipulates thus:

The condemned person was stripped naked and the person who served as the number one witness against the condemned would push him or her backward off a platform that was ten to twelve feet high. If the condemned person did not die, the number two witness would then drop a large stone on the person's chest. The third witness would then drop another stone if it was necessary. If the condemned was still alive, those standing by would all drop stones on the condemned until him or her finally dies.

This custom demanded that no one should be involved in the killing of an innocent person that is why the principal witnesses are requested to initiate the killing. At that time it was also customary for the eldest accuser to throw the first stone. The time of Jesus in the New Testament was the era of the Roman power over the Jews. During the time of Jesus the Jews were not authorized by the Roman authorities to carry out capital punishment (Rogers,1996). In the Jewish society of both Old and New Testament era, more importance was attached to males than females, hence a boy at age thirteen was trained in the law to become "*Bar Mitzvah*- son of the law and for religious purposes he was counted as a man" whereas girls were left uneducated to be trained by their mothers for domestic purpose (Gundry,1981).At this time also the social status accorded a woman was very low hence they could be regarded as a household property of a man (Gower,1983). It was also the traditional practice of the Jews to divorce a woman on the basis of adultery. Up to the time of Jesus the Shammai school of thought still held that adultery on the side of a woman should be regarded as sexual immorality and as such should be the only basis for divorce (Davies,1956).

The woman caught in the scene of adultery in John 8:1-11 lived within a society that subjugated women under men. They could humiliate or disgrace her because it was at their disposal to do so. It was a community which traditional laws respected men and disregarded women. This was the background in which Jesus and the adulteress found themselves.

Exegesis of John 8:1-11

The pericope starts from John 7:52-8:11. In the context of this study, one of the major themes in this pericope is *amartia* (sin) but before the issue of sin arose in this passage, other developments were introduced. In verses 1-2 *Katistas* (sat) which is the aorist participle of *Katizo* (I sit down) suggests that Jesus was doing something with people who sat down. The word *edidasken* (teaching) as it is used in the passage is an imperfect indicative showing an uncompleted action. It shows that at the time the people brought the woman caught at the scene of adultery to Jesus, he was teaching and the teaching was probably interrupted. The word *kai* (and) a conjunction joined the action of the Pharisees and the Scribes with the previous action and it also introduced the new action thereby showing a sequence. Verses 3-4 talks about a woman who committed adultery. *Gunaika epi moichein kateilemmenen* (a woman caught or taken in adultery). The Greek word *moichein* means adultery. *Moichein* as used in this passage carries the idea of sexual

intercourse between a man and woman who are not husband and wife (Way,1962). The Greek word *gune* carries an indefinite article so that it can read a woman. *Gunaika* as it is used in this pericope carries the idea of a married woman that is, *gunaikos* (a wife) of somebody. This means that the woman that was brought to Jesus who was indicted of adultery probably had a husband. The words: *stesantes auten en meso* (set her in the midst), suggest that she was brought to Jesus for judgment. This is where the law comes in. But before they quoted the law of adultery they also acted lawfully by emphasizing that there were more than two witnesses who saw her because the law says that one must not accuse anyone of sin without two or more witnesses. The act of adultery as it is used in the passage is *moicheuomene* and it is the present participle of *moicheuomai* (v.4) which means to commit adultery (Killen,1975). This word has the idea of a man and a woman committing the act. The word *kateilemmen* which means to seize or to take indicates that they dragged her violently to Jesus saying that she was *ep autophoro* (caught) in the act with a man: but the man was not brought along. Also the word *kateilemmen* (caught) is a perfect past participle of *katalambano* (to seize or to take). This gives the idea of apprehension and it indicates a deliberate action to bring shame on the woman (Vine,n.d.). They did not bring the man. After establishing their evidence, they went further to the law and Jesus' judgment (verses 5-11). The Greek word *o nomos* (the law) as it is used in this passage is a noun and it connotes the idea of ethos (ethics) and judgment (*krima*). In this understanding Vine writes thus:

akin to nemo, to divide out, distribute, primarily meant that which is assigned: hence, usage, custom, and then, law, law as prescribed by custom, or by statute; the word *ethos*, custom, was retained for unwritten law, while *nomos* became the established name for law as decreed by a state and set up as the standard for the administration of justice.

When *nomos* carries the definite article *o* it refers to the Law of Moses. In this passage, law suggests that the Jewish people accepted the Law of Moses as a laid down tradition. The verb form of *nomos* is *nemo* and it can mean to grant, to assign or to deal out. According to Esser (1976), the word *nomos* as found in literature from the time of Hesiod, 7th century B.C. thus:

originally referred to distributing and what follows from it. It meant that which has been laid down, ordered or assigned; but more particularly the results of this arrangements was regularized and attain the status of transition. The word therefore denotes custom, usage, statute, law, especially in the context of distribution of goods, and law and order. The legal, ethical and religious meanings of *nomos* are inseparable in antiquity....

The word *nomos* carries the idea of laid down order or custom in a society. It also carries the idea of judgment in its verb form *krino*, which means to judge. The idea of judgment was given in the passage by the word *eneteilato* (commanded). The word *eneteilato* as it is used in the passage is the aorist middle indicative of *entellomai* meaning to command. It carries the idea of being commanded or instructed or ordered to do something. *Entellomai* was completed by *toioutos* (such a one) be *lithazo* (stoned) to death. The

whole sentence suggest in verse 5 the act of judgment and they requested Jesus to pass his own judgment (*krima*) based on the evidence of the witnesses before Him. Though the word *krima* could mean dispute, decision, verdict and judgment, in the context of this passage it can mean verdict or judgment. Why did they bring the woman to Jesus for judgment? Their intention was declared by the word *peirazontes* which is the present participle of *peirazo* meaning to test or tempt (v.6). This shows that they were tempting Jesus in order for him to fall into their trap. In this understanding, Ngewa (2003) opines, thus:

Those who dragged in the woman and questioned Jesus about her had only one motive: 'they were using this question as trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him' (8:6). They were not sincerely requesting advice or wanting to learn. They were disturbed by Jesus' growing popularity among the people and were desperate to find some legal grounds for attacking him.

The attitude of the scribes and the Pharisees show intrigue in disguise. Before they met Jesus, they had already condemned the woman in their hearts, but did not condemn the adulterer (the man). This could be seen as an injustice to the woman. After making the woman stand in front of the whole group, the Scribes and the Pharisees said to Jesus: "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such woman. Now *ti legeis*; (what sayest thou? Vv.4-5). The Greek word *legeis* (you say) is the present active indicative of *lego* meaning (I say). This suggests a present action. Jesus was expected to give his own verdict at the spot. To their way of thinking, there were only two possible answers Jesus could give: "stone or leave her alone". If he approves of stoning her, then his entire message of love and mercy would have been at stake and he would have exceeded the legal powers given to the Jews by the Romans because: the Jews did not have authority to pass or carry out a death penalty at that time. On the other hand, if he said, "leave her alone", he would appear to be condoning her sin and disregarding the law of Moses. According to Ngewa (2003), Whichever option Jesus may chose would cost him his popularity among the people. Then the leaders would be able to arrest him with the people's approval. In the opinion of Tenney(1976) concerning this pericope, the woman was merely the bait for the trap by which the Scribes and the Pharisees hoped to take Jesus.

In the context of this study, verses 7 and 11 form the core of this analysis because they talk about sin, *amartia*. The word sin is defined in the New Testament in John 3:4 and it reads: "every one who sins breaks the law; infact sin is lawlessness". This implies that sin is the transgression of the law. Which law (*nomos*)? The Law of Moses. In verse 7, what can we see as the sin of the people who brought the adulteress to Jesus for judgment? Their sin is the sin of injustice (oppression). it is the sin of injustice because the law (*nomos*) in the old Testament which they referred to in verse 5, states that both the man and the woman be punished for adultery but here they brought only the woman. Where is the man? They had committed the sin of injustice by not brining the man along with the woman. In this passage, why did Jesus not ask the accusers to stone the woman? Jesus did not condemn the woman because it would have been unjust for him to punish her without the man and it would have been illegal for him to do so when the Roman authority controlling their community then forbade the Jews from carrying out capital

punishment. When Jesus said go and sin no more (v. 11) which sin did he refer to? Jesus here refers to the sin of adultery and other sins. This implies that adultery is a sin no matter who commits it. Thus, from this passage (John 8:1-11) Jesus stands as a critic of injustice (sin). The Church and her leaders must preach against injustice of any kind. Also political leaders should endeavour to protect women in the society from being oppressed or marginalized in any form.

The Meaning of the Story in John 8:1-11

Bible passages are not read in isolation. They carry with it some theological meanings or significance. Almost all the New Testament books were written to solve problems or to at least clarify theological issues in the early church communities. The nature of the argument or problem determined the construction of the story. Perhaps John's church community may have been grappling with the issue of adultery as well. In this line of thought Manus (2005) says that: one of the major questions that confronts an exegete grappling with an African contextual bible reading is how to determine the historical context of the early church community that transmitted a particular tradition. According to Overman(1990) and Saldarini (1994) the church community then was apparently one whose several Jewish members had shortly been ejected from official Judaism largely dominated and ruled by the Pharisaic group. With this type of background in mind what comes to mind here is: what could this story in John 8:1-11 have meant to the original recipients who were Jewish Christians both at home and in diaspora? Brown (2004) points out some meanings of the story in John 8:1-11 as follows:

1. It portrays justice and mercy. Here the justice of Jesus is not condoning the sin and his mercy in forgiving the sinner is one of the great gospel lessons.
2. It portrays intrigue and injustice. If the Jews were allowed by Roman authority to carry out capital punishment there should be no need to ask Jesus to pronounce judgment. They knew that if Jesus said "do or do not" he would be in trouble. The intrigue was to trap Jesus. The injustice portrayed is based on bringing only the woman for punishment when the Old Testament law says that both man and woman be punished for adultery.
3. It gives the portrait of Jesus as being liberal. Verse 7 of John 8 has been interpreted by some scholars to mean a reference point for maudlin justification for indifference towards sins of the flesh. However, John is not saying that every magistrate must be sinless to judge others. Here Jesus was dealing with Zealots who have taken upon themselves the indignant enforcement of the law, and He has every right to demand that their case be thoroughly, lawful and their motives be honest. He recognizes that although they are zealous for the word of the law, they are not interested in the purpose of the law.

Also Derrett (1963) opines that the passage portrays injustice and illegality. He argues that despite the Roman ban, the Pharisees and the mob wanted Jesus to permit them to exercise lynch law and stone the woman.

Hermeneutical Implications of John 8:1-11

- (i) Adultery by a Woman and a Man is a Sin vv. 1-7
To suppose that the narrative before us palliates the sin of adultery and exhibits Jesus as making light the seventh commandment is surely a great

misunderstanding of the law (Rogers,1996) because there is no sentence in the passage to justify such an assertion. Rather Jesus can be seen in this passage as one who criticized the act of the accusers of the woman. Jesus told the accusers of the adulteress: if anyone of you is without sin, let him be the first to cast a stone at her (v.7). In Jewish cultural setting then, this statement took into account the special role which the witnesses of the scene were required to fulfill: they were to initiate the stoning. Accordingly they needed to be appropriate witnesses who had not committed such a sin before (Ngewa,2003). Rogers(1996) also confirms that in the Jewish setting the principal witnesses were required to initiate the stoning. Amazingly they all left the woman alone because they realized that the guilt of sin is not restricted only to a woman. All of them being men were also convicted of their sins. Both men and women commit the sin of adultery. Ngewa(2003) says that it is possible that when Jesus bent down to write he was writing down the sins of the accusers because he knew what was in everyone's heart. Sin is sin no matter who commits it. When a man or woman commits adultery it is a sin.

(ii) Punishing the Woman alone is Injustice

To subject only a woman to judgment for committing adultery without also judging the man is a display of injustice and oppression against the woman. It takes a man and a woman to commit the act of adultery (vv.3-7). Many scholars have argued as to what Jesus wrote on the ground. Tenney (1976) in this regard says that no one knows precisely what Jesus wrote on the ground. Whatever it was that He wrote was not recorded in the bible passage, but Jesus' message was clear in His verbal response. This message is a critique of the act of the woman's accusers who did not bring the man along with the woman as required by the Old Testament law. Jesus here is confronting the accusers of the need for consistency in passing judgment. The law they referred to was the same law that says that both the man and the woman be judged but where is the man (Deut. 22:22)? The woman's accusers allowing the man to go free imply injustice to the woman. This is probably what Jesus was confronting. Wasike(2006) says that the time has come for Africans to develop different values-values founded on the dignity of all, children, women, and men and which are Christ-centered. In Christ all people and their cultures are drawn into God. Christ challenges every act of injustice today as he did to the woman's accusers in John 8:1-11. He denounced whatever enslaved people and rejected anything that kept people from appreciating their basic human dignity. Injustice (to follow human) was what Paul also confronted in Galatians 3:28 when he says: "There is neither... male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (NIV). This implies that unity in Christ transcends ethnic, social and gender distinctions (see Rom. 10:12, 1Cor. 12:13, Eph. 2:15-16). Distinctions such as ethnicity, economic status, or gender are irrelevant in the church and should also be irrelevant in the Urhobo society because all humans were created in God's image (Gal. 3: 28).

(iii) Real Piety is Devoid of Oppression and Injustice (vv. 7-10)

How can the woman's accusers claim to be pious when they allowed the man to go free and brought the woman with whom the man committed adultery for punishment? Justice demands the duo be punished. If what the woman did is called adultery then it should be called adultery when a man committed it. These men were using their freedom to oppress the woman. Paul in Galatians 5:13

admonished that we should use our freedom for service to humanity not to enbondage humanity. Therefore, real piety considers justice. Jesus' critique of the accusers brought real piety into the picture of the passage. This illustrates that no man is qualified to judge others by his own righteousness especially when God's holiness is in view.

- (iv) The Forgiveness of Sin is not a Yardstick to Continue Sinning (v.11)
Jesus said neither do I condemn you but go and sin no more. One may think here that Jesus condoned adultery. But he did not condone adultery because he says: do not sin again. This does not in any way encourage people to commit adultery so that they will seek for forgiveness but Jesus rather gave the right admonition thereby stopping both man and woman from committing adultery.

CONCLUSION

This work has shown that the cultural understanding of adultery in Urhoboland has an undertone of oppression to women because when men have sex with their concubines and lovers outside their marriages it is not regarded as adultery but when a woman does same it is regarded as adultery. The paper argues that women and men are human beings created by God and the attitude of Jesus in John 8:1-11 is a critique of those who accused the adulteress without doing same to the adulterer. One can also see that the accusers of the adulteress are gender-biased in the passage because the adulterer was excused due to the fact that he was a man while the adulteress was subjected to punishment just because she was a woman. The exegesis of the passage has also shown that the sin of the woman's accusers was the sin of injustice. Gender discrimination has hindered many female children from going to school in the past. The church being the body of Christ should fight against gender discrimination like Jesus did. The church through sound biblical teachings should discourage traditions, which are expressions of oppression, discrimination, injustice and immorality.

Tradition, culture and ethical practices (which the local people have today) had been in existence before of the church to Africa hence it is difficult for the church to change them automatically. However, the church is saddled with the responsibility of preaching and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ by speech and practice without ceasing. As we can see in Jesus' response to the Jews in John 8:1-11, He condemned sin. The church has to be involved in opposing bad practices in the society. Due to some religious, socio-economic and health reasons adultery (promiscuity) should be discouraged. As Christians, the Bible condemns sexual immorality such as fornication and adultery. By implication God hates adultery from both men and women. This is true when Jesus said go and sin no more. Adultery can lead to disintegration of marriage union between a man and woman and the family at large. It can also lead to emotional and psychological trauma. Promiscuity can lead to overpopulation due to indiscriminate childbearing that may result from unregulated sexual act in the society. Overpopulation can cause more unemployment in the society. Health wise, sex outside marriage can lead to the acquiring and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS among others. Due to the above negative realities advanced for the prohibition of adultery (promiscuity), men and women in urhoboland should be encouraged to desist from traditions that allow or justify unregulated sexual relationships that promote adultery and fornication. Women and men alike should be advised to Shun all promiscuous acts that lead to adultery. Christian men

and women should be seen as co heirs of the kingdom and be treated as such. In the light of Jesus' teaching, both men and women must be seen by the church as co- image of the creator and should be treated as such. In Jesus' response in John 8 1-11, Jesus did not condone adultery. The church in urhoboland should not condone adultery. When Jesus said "go and sin no more" it implies that both men and women should stop committing sin including adultery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the observations and findings of the writer which are based on the available sources explored, the following recommendations are given:

- i. The traditional law of the Urhobo in the matter of adultery is gender biased against women. Modern Urhobo people should look at this situation with a critical mind and seek to change it.
- ii. The Church in Urhoboland should take proactive steps to educate the people to be critical of the situation.
- iii. Since this traditional concept of adultery has been a long age practice among the Urhobo, there is the need for total and frequent reorientation about the subject matter. The Church and the government should be involved in doing this. Seminars should be organized by the church from time to time for people in Urhoboland to know the religious and social effect of adultery (extramarital sexual affairs).
- iv. The church should punish members who commit adultery with love and lead them to sincere repentance and not ritualistic repentance.

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