

## **Should Humanity Avenge Divinity? A Reading of Reuben Oyishi's *Clash of Divinity* and Chinua Achebe's 'Dead Men's Path.'**

African belief system is centered on religion and this prevails even after the coming of the white man, although many of the natives converted to Christianity - the white man's religion. Belief in a Supreme Being, retribution of justice and life after death has been observed to be essential parts of many religions and In African traditional religion, the belief of the Supreme Being is clearly spelt out, with the acknowledgement of spirit and divinities set forth as messengers of the one Supreme Being. It is also believed that these divinities are not created but came into being in the nature of things with regard to the ordering of the universe. This also corresponds to the Christian theology of the divinity of Christ, as they believe that Christ was not created but came forth from the father. (Idowu, 1973.)

Mankind has come to accept the supremacy and power of the divine in the ordering of the universe and therefore looks up to the divine for protection, providence and other essentials of life. In turn, divinity has made human their instrument and has also charged them with the task of propagating their worship on earth, a task which humans carry out with utmost zeal.

Owing to the existence and contact of different religion and divinities, coupled with divergent and conflicting believes and practices, clashes erupt in the society and are galvanized by the actions of their over-zealous followers. This is the case presented

in Reuben Oyishi's *Clash of Divinity* where Rev. Dinma leads Imobi women who are members of his church; Assembly Divine, to revolt against the Omoba spirit by seeing its nakedness on the day of its return to the spirit world and in Achebe's '*Dead Men's Path*' where Michael Obi revolts against the gods by closing up their ancestral path. This creates among the spiritual beings involved, a fury which should be left to be dealt by the divinities themselves and not to be avenged by man.

The involvement of humanity in the act of vengeance on behalf of the divinity is a total caricature of the supremacy and power of the divinity and therefore should not be upheld. In Oyishi's *Clash of Divinity*, one is presented with instances of display of power by the divinities of Imobi land. There is the presentation of the land goddess, Ali, who is believed to be more powerful in cases of adultery and therefore catches up with Eliza after her action, inflicts her with sickness and thereafter, death. (17) And also the case of the Omoba spirit's ability to strike mad, women who do not declare their presence on the day of Omoba's return to the spirit world. Their Christian counterpart also cites instances in the bible where their God performed acts which show his powerful nature. Since divinities like these are known for their ability to carry out great deeds, then the act of vengeance should not be considered a concern for humans, but another avenue for these divinities to display their power and supremacy. Therefore, the involvement of humans in the fight of the gods totally undermines their power and supremacy which they intend to extol.

The acknowledgment that vengeance is of the divinities and not man is clearly stated in most religions of the world religions, of which traditional African religion and Christianity is among. This is attested to in the *Clash of Divinity*, as Ozo Elihe, a member of the cult of nine, clearly states “it is not our duty to avenge the spirit of Omoba, the spirit will avenge itself.”(126).This echoes Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God* where Ulu admonishes his priest thus:

who told you this was your own fight?... I say who told you this was your fight to arrange it the way it suits you?... .Beware, you do not come between me and my victim or you may receive blows not meant for you! Do you not know what happens when two elephants fight? Go home and sleep and leave me to settle my quarrel with Idemili... .Now tell me how it concerns you. I say go home and sleep... (192)

The Christians also believe in the tenets of the bible which clearly states that vengeance is of the lord (Rom 12:12-19). This is backed up by Rev. Ogidi and Udo who argued for the release for the detained Imobi men, owing to the knowledge of this scripture. With this, the involvement of humanity in the act of vengeance is a clear transgression of the tenets of both the traditional African religion and Christianity which are the religion concerned in our text of study.

Divinities are all knowing, flawless and just. This accounts for the people’s submission to the verdict of heavy sacrifices in order to appease the ancestors in ‘*Dead Men’s Path*’, submission of the Imobi daughters married to another village to the task of

entertaining Omaba spirit in *Clash of Divinity* and also the acceptance of the impending disaster on Assembly Divine and its only means of solution by Rev. Zeus Nwibe. Therefore, humanity who is characterized by countless flaws is not qualified to interfere in the matters of the just divinities without an instruction to do so. The neglect of this only brings to light one of the greatest flaws of man which is his inclination to extremism. This is attested to by the extreme actions of pulling down not only the fence on the ancestral path but the school building and the beating, rape, burning of church and attempt to kill both Rev. Dinma and his wife by Imobi youths in '*Dead Men's Path*' and *Clash of Divinity* respectively.

The ways of the divinities are different from the ways of man. This is one idea observed by both the people of Assembly divine and the followers of Omaba spirit. Humans as impatient as they are, expect swift action of vengeance from the divinities. This makes them take laws into their hands when results are not forth coming as they expect and they back this up with the believe that one should not leave to the divinities what they can do themselves, as said by the leaders of Assembly Divine, after they detained the fifty men of Imobi.

But humans tend to forget that the divinities are spirit and therefore think and act differently from men. Unlike impatient men, they bid time in meting out vengeance and the elders of the cult of nine comes to observe this, as they think, "could it be that Omaba was bidding its time" (149). In the same light, it also

dawns on them that the god of Assembly Divine was yet to avenge the touching of his anointed. This springs forth this rhetorical question from their wondering minds, “what was it about time that divinity held on to it?”

However, the bidding of time by the divinities do not express weakness of any sort as they act when deemed fit as believed by Ozo Ugwojo, who explains to the people that “Omaba might not act quickly, but will surely kill the mosquito and display a palm of blood”(149). In the same vein, the unsolicited involvement of man does not prevent the divinities from acting if they wanted to, as the God of Assembly Divine decides to act despite its followers action of detaining fifty men of Imobi for three months. His avenge can be first traced to the defect of Zeus Nwibe to assembly Divine, an act which is equivalent as being dead to the people of Imobi. Zeus, the son of Nweze Agaba is a product of communal effort as the community had contributed financially to his studies abroad. As a result, Zeus is expected to show his gratitude but instead defects to the enemy group, Assembly Divine. This makes the people feel like the proverbial man who washes his hands only to break kernel for the cock. The God of Assembly Divine has taken their own and used him as a means to tear down the practice of the Omaba spirit, the practice of his own people.

The ‘death’ of Zeus leads to mock condolences and burial demonstrations by the people of Imobi and Matthew Ezenwa, a friend to Zeus dies in a motor accident immediately after paying

his condolence visit to Zeus' family. This is noted and accepted by Nweze Agaba, as a form of avenge by the God of Assembly Divine as he thinks, "How come is it that Matthew died on his way back from his condolence visit to his family. Was it nemesis? Was the God of Zeus so alive that he would hoist his enemies in their own petard with such a great force of immediacy?" (180)

Finally, the God of Assembly Divine clearly states to Zeus his servant that whoever touches the lord's anointed was sure to face repercussion, even if it means impending danger on the entire church because some perpetrators of the atrocity were now members of the church. However, a solution is given to avert this disaster, which involves the church and individuals who had a hand in the assault of Rev. Dinma and his wife, to ask for forgiveness as well as ask him to pray for the church and pronounce freedom on the entire Imobi land.

But these instructions are neglected by Oguanu Oyeugwu alias seventeen-seventeen and other members of his group who spearheaded the act of burning the church, beating and rape of Rev. Dinma and his wife. This once more attracts the wrath of the God of Assembly Divine, as He kills each of the members who had refused to attend the atonement service, almost in the same way they had treated the lord's servant for he that kills with the sword, dies by the sword. Ozo Elihe observes this and therefore, advises the people to fear the God of assembly divine.

As has been clearly posed through Reuben Oyishi's *Clash of divinity*, the involvement of humanity or not in the act of vengeance does not prevent these spiritual being from fighting a battle that is clearly theirs, then what is the essence of humanity's unsolicited interference? It brings forth nothing but heightens up the situation thereby resulting to chaos and destruction as in the texts of study, '*Dead Men's Path*' and *Clash of Divinity*.

Humanity should therefore maintain their stand in their relationship with the divinities as propagators of their worship, dependent followers and observers of the instructions of their gods, thereby mediating into their affairs only when instructed to do so. Deviation from this only place humanity in a position where they might receive blows not meant for them as rightly stated by Ulu in Achebe's *Arrow of God*.

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