

The Book of Philemon: An Architectural Paradigm for Brotherhood in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The concept of brotherhood is commonly used in the humanities. Brotherhood is a feeling that develops beyond the instinct found in man. The true brotherhood is love, where personal interest is a second option. Religious books and ethno-cultural tenets in Nigeria have various references to this; their teachings recognise a deep emotional connection between believers of the same faith, which also exists among non-religious organisations. It is not limited to blood relations but symbolises kindness and unity. Paul displays this concept in his letter to Philemon towards Onesimus, a runaway slave. Beyond a reasonable doubt in Nigeria, the overt and covert praxis of brotherhood has elapsed and substituted for servitude. Despite the worldwide abolition of slavery, relevant existing literature revealed that slavery still infiltrates human existence due to hardship situations in the country and the quest for personal interest and superiority. However, the work concluded and recommended that individuals should take responsibility for promoting oneness, without the racial and socio-ethnic structures that thwart Nigerian society today. Leaders should demonstrate strong leadership by protecting their citizens' rights. Since maltreatment, slavery, human trafficking, and all other inhuman habits are considered detrimental within the ethno-cultural setting today.

Keywords: Book of Philemon, Architectural, Paradigm, Brotherhood, Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

Brotherhood has always played a fascinating role in human societies, perhaps nowhere more visibly than among nomadic communities and warring nations. It's a complex web of relationships that includes blood brotherhood, just one type among various covenants or bonds that unite people in similar yet distinct ways from kinship. We also see other forms of constructed family ties: adoption, godparenthood, and similar arrangements. Blood brotherhood gets its dramatic name from the ritual mixing of participants' blood, a practice that might seem extreme today but created powerful alliances. These bonds enabled members to support each other through thick and thin, with loyalty and affection practiced among groups often used strategically to unite potentially hostile factions, forge military alliances, or broker peace (Zdravko 2021).

Over time, brotherhood has evolved into this multifaceted concept that points toward social unity, welfare, solidarity in the face of danger, universal humanitarianism, enthusiasm, and mutual support. Yet something is unsettling beneath the surface, a considerable sentimental haze that barely conceals what can only be described as harsh commandments. It represents a bond that seems beyond criticism, a value that everyone is expected

to embrace without question. Talk about student brotherhood, universal brotherhood, inter-religious brotherhood, political brotherhood, and clerical brotherhood. Sometimes it feels like brotherhood serves primarily as the ultimate rhetorical weapon designed to shut down any opposition or rejection (Bertrand 2018).

The brotherhood idea spans virtually all religions and cultures. From the Islamic viewpoint, Islam treats all Muslims as one extended family, calling them brothers and sisters. Muslims from every ethnicity, tribe, language, and age group share deep feelings of brotherhood with each other, whether they live in the far east or the western hemisphere. During Hajj rituals, when Muslims gather at the holy Ka'ba, God's symbolic house and the focal point of monotheism, this connection becomes remarkably tangible, offering an almost objective demonstration of Islamic brotherhood's power (Jamil et al., 2023).

The Prophet faced an immediate practical challenge with the Makkan refugees who had neither homes nor money. Most had been well-off in Makkah but left everything behind. The Prophet's priority was helping them settle into their new surroundings. His solution came through Islam's brotherhood concept. He gathered the Muslims and suggested that each Ansari (Madinan)

Muslim should partner with a refugee (Makkan) Muslim as brothers. They immediately embraced this idea. Each Ansari took one Makkan Muslim as his brother. This bond often became stronger than actual blood relationships. The Ansari would share half of everything, house, land, money, and belongings with his Makkan brother (Jamil et al., 2023).

One hadith puts it beautifully: "A Muslim is another Muslim's brother, so he never oppresses him, does not stop helping him, and does not abandon him during difficult times." Despite differences in race, culture, nationality, and religion, Islam insists that dialogue, investigation, and beliefs should remain permanent and deeply rooted, following common principles between different religions and belief systems. No one is inherently superior to another (Jamil et al., 2023). Variations in approaches to building communities and healthy competition are recognized as natural phenomena arising from dynamic Islamic teachings, but these shouldn't transform into contradictions, excommunication (takfir), or corruption (tafsiq) that can block progress and lead to failure and destruction.

Al-Qur'an says;

ثُرْحُمُو نَلْعَلْكُمْ اَللَّهُو اَتَّقُوا اَخَوَكُمْ يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوا اَلْحُوَّةُ الْمَوْثُوْنَ اِيْمًا

The believers are nothing else than brothers. Therefore, make peace between your brethren and observe your duty to Allah that you may obtain mercy (Quran 49:10).

Yet brotherhood sometimes becomes almost indistinguishable from friendship. While these two social relationships share substantial similarities, important differences deserve attention. Brotherhood seems to represent a collective relationship with a group of people, not just a personal connection with specific individuals. More precisely, brotherhood appears to flourish in groups with strong collective solidarity and what sociologists call "we-feeling" (Thomas 2020). It relates to a form of mechanical solidarity that emerges from group belonging and shared beliefs and sentiments common to all members, rather than the individualistic ethos and crisscrossing loyalties that characterize modern societies.

The Greek word for brotherhood, ἀδελφότητα, carries multiple meanings: fraternity, confraternity, solidarity, and unity, among others. Theological thinking about brotherhood traces back to the people of Israel, the first monotheistic community, followed by Christianity and Islam. From the Israelite perspective, there exists a powerful brotherhood bond that isn't limited to the narrow family definition of siblings born from the same mother (Genesis 4:2). It transcends racial boundaries (2 Kings 19:13) and encompasses

characteristics like ethnicity (Deuteronomy 25:3, Judges 1:3). This represents more than just internal unity it actually distinguishes the people of Israel from other peoples (Zohreh 2012).

The Bible offers some sobering examples of the kind of brotherhood that doesn't quite measure up to divine expectations. Blood brothers like Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, these stories show how family members can often pose threats to each other. Christ addresses this tension directly in his teaching about true relatives: "Who is my mother and who my brethren are?" He stretched out his hand toward his disciples and said, "Here are my mother and my brethren! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and my mother" (Matthew 12:49-50) (Marlowe 2004).

This statement emerged when disciples at a house in Capernaum told Jesus that his brothers were waiting outside to speak with him. His response was simple yet profound: physical brotherhood matters, but spiritual brotherhood matters more. Whatever someone's earthly family situation might be, their real brothers are those who share the same heavenly Father. This explains why Jesus's followers began using "brothers" when referring to one another.

Jesus didn't invent this terminology. Jews had long called each other "brethren," as it's seen throughout Acts 2:29; 3:17; 7:2; 13:15, 26, 38; 22:1; 23:1, 5, 6; and 28:17. In the New Testament, though, Christians used the word adelphos more frequently when thinking about fellow Church members. Paul even coined the term pseudadelphos ("false brother") for his Jewish "brothers" who pretended to be Christian brothers (Galatians 2:4). Interestingly, the word "Christian" was actually invented by non-Christians and wasn't commonly used within the Church itself. The name "Christian" was applied to describe believers objectively (Evans 2024). Christian brotherhood qualifies as brotherhood in faith, but it goes deeper; it's brotherhood in Christ the Lord. The words "brother" and "sister," beyond indicating family connections, express religious and social bonds. Among the baptized, these terms indicate not just a shared sense of belonging but a fraternal bond of Christ with each person and, by extension, a bond of brotherhood between them (Sundberg 2019).

In African slavery contexts, the master-slave relationship is maintained through deliberately created asymmetric power relations and dependency. These unequal power dynamics aren't naturally occurring phenomena; they're products of humanity's unfortunate tendency toward feeling superior to fellow humans (Duke and Osim 2020). Behnam et al. (2017) point out how these cultural dynamics allow individuals or groups to claim

inherited social status, economic advantages, and technological superiority, which keeps stratified societies intact. The asymmetric patterns that characterize slavery culture remain consistent across slave systems throughout history.

Awoniyi offers a different perspective, arguing that Traditional African Cultures actually recognize human dignity and integrity as essential characteristics of God's creatures. African brotherhood, he suggests, connects intrinsically with our shared humanity. There's only one universal family to which all humans belong, though this family has been fragmented into multiple peoples and cultures. Recognizing all humans as brothers based on our common membership in one human species represents a lofty ideal that holds great significance for African people (Awoniyi 2015). Given these various perspectives, the concept of brotherhood appears well understood but poorly practiced, especially within Nigeria's socio-political and religious economic organizations.

Overview of the Book of Philemon

Paul's letter to Philemon reads like a carefully crafted personal appeal. Paul was sitting in a Roman prison when he wrote it, and he'd likely met Onesimus during his imprisonment. Philemon was a wealthy slave owner living in Colosse. Here's where the story gets interesting: Onesimus, one of Philemon's slaves, apparently stole some property and ran away to Rome. That's where he encountered Paul and became a Christian. Now, Paul faced a delicate situation; he needed to send Onesimus back to Colosse with Tychicus to make things right with Philemon. The stakes were high; runaway slaves typically faced severe punishment, possibly even death. Paul's letter serves as a powerful testimony to justice, mercy, forgiveness, and grace (Shipp 2020).

The book has sparked quite a range of interpretations among scholars. One school of thought argues that Onesimus wasn't actually a runaway at all. According to this view, the church members who met in Philemon's home knew Onesimus was with Paul. If this is true, then Paul isn't writing to request Onesimus's return but rather to ask that Onesimus no longer be treated as a slave and be allowed to remain in gospel service (Jeal 2015).

A different hermeneutical approach views the epistle as a narrative concerning alienation between two Christian siblings, Philemon and Onesimus (Still 2011). Through this lens, Paul composed the correspondence as an exemplar for Christian restoration, confronting the complexities of Christian existence and underscoring the

significance of Christian equity. The epistle transforms into an entreaty for conflicted family members to achieve restoration through love. An additional viewpoint proposes that the correspondence arose from a patron-client relational framework. Possibly, Philemon attempted to function as Paul's benefactor by dispatching Onesimus for service. Paul may be courteously declining this offering while diplomatically cautioning Philemon against improper conduct (Francois 2019).

Within this scenario, Onesimus had not fled but had approached Paul with Philemon's consent, anticipating that Paul would intercede on his behalf with his dissatisfied owner. Throughout his visit, he embraced Christianity. Paul subsequently returns him to Philemon. This interpretation indicates Paul was not shielding Onesimus from fugitive slave consequences but functioning as his mediator to restore master and slave relationships (Chris 2000). What appears striking regarding this situation is how Jewish society generally did not embrace brotherhood customs, particularly in circumstances such as this. Although Philemon held prominence as a Christian, cultural forces apparently continued influencing him. The dialogue within the epistle discloses Paul's positive expectation for Onesimus's liberation, an expectation that confronts social, racial, and economic obstacles, despite Paul not explicitly demanding slavery's elimination.

Exposition of the text

Philemon emerges as among the most fascinating canonical writings, partially because academics and theologians persistently debate whether it provides lessons deserving imitation. There exists remarkably minimal disagreement regarding authorship; most scholars accept that Paul the apostle authentically composed this correspondence. Where academics diverge concerns the writing location, with three primary possibilities: Rome, Ephesus, and Caesarea.

Upon careful comparison of this correspondence with Colossians, it becomes evident that both were composed simultaneously from identical locations. Similar to Colossians, Philemon was written during Paul's imprisonment (Philemon 1:1, 10, 13, 23; Colossians 4:18). Timothy accompanies Paul in both correspondences (Philemon 1; Colossians 1:1). The identical group Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke appears in both greeting sections (Philemon 1:23, 24; Colossians 4:10-14). Onesimus, who represents the focal point of the Philemon correspondence, was actually among the messengers who delivered the Colossian epistle (Colossians 4:6-9). If Philemon was composed approximately simultaneously with Colossians and the additional prison epistles (Ephesians and

Philippians), then it corresponds to the timeframe referenced in Acts 28:30-31, and sometime between 61-63 A.D (Felder 2000). The chronology varies depending on Paul's presumed writing location. Caesarea appears to be the least preferred choice among biblical academics (Felder, 2000). Most scholarly discussion focuses on whether it was composed in Rome (60-61CE) or Ephesus (55-57CE).

Slavery represents a harsh reality involving detaining human beings involuntarily, typically to compel unpaid labor. Centuries passed, and Western nations arrived in Africa for slave trading, which was ultimately halted largely through missionary initiatives. However, abolition did not eliminate slavery; various manifestations simply transformed and evolved.

The most ancient evidence of slavery emerges in Sumerian documents, where terminology for male and female slaves employed composite symbols: nita and kur (male of foreign territory), nunus and kur (female of foreign territory), literally denoting humans designated for enslavement (Mendelsohn 1946). Ancient Babylon offers substantial evidence of captured foreigners and war prisoners being reduced to bondage, a practice extensively documented in Ancient Near Eastern chronicles. The Hammurabi Code accepted this universal enslavement practice as given, establishing that captured governmental officials should receive ransom if they possessed insufficient personal resources, and that women whose spouses were imprisoned could remarry if they lacked the means for supporting themselves and their offspring. Later Assyrian Chronicles repeatedly reference enormous numbers of war captives "from the four corners of the world" who were transported to Assyria and compelled to perform forced labor.

Syria during the Middle Second Millennium BC implemented identical procedures, demonstrating no consideration for war prisoners. In one recorded instance, during a conflict between King Carchemish and Ugarit, Ugarit petitioned King Carchemish to release one captive for one hundred Shekels as ransom. The king of Carchemish replied that he had previously sold prisoners for forty Shekels per individual and could not be expected to liberate a high-status captive for such a minimal proposal. The Tell el-Amarna correspondence (14th century BC) describes war captives being transmitted as presents by Syrian and Palestinian rulers to their Egyptian superiors (Mendelsohn 1946).

Consequently, slavery during the early Roman Empire period was not significantly different from what existed in other ancient and historically documented territories, especially throughout the Ancient Near East.

Slavery had already established itself as an economic and social institution across the Fertile Crescent, particularly within the ancient kingdoms of Babylon, Assyria, and Syria. Egypt maintained extensive involvement as well. Since these kingdoms maintained substantial relationships with biblical Palestine, slavery in Ancient Israel, as documented in the Old Testament, is better comprehended through a proper examination of these neighboring peoples' slave arrangements. Biblical slave legislation appears in Exodus 21, Leviticus 25, and Deuteronomy 15, among other passages. Additional extra-biblical information concerning Jewish slavery exists in the Aramaic Papyri from the Jewish settlement at Elephantine in Egypt, dated approximately to the fifth century BC (Dim, 2013). Nevertheless, it remains clear that slave ownership constituted part of these peoples' cultural and customary practices, and consequences associated with arrangement violations by any slave meant death, and Paul understood these realities.

Verses 1-9

Paul's correspondence also represents what Romans termed an *epistulacommendaticia*, a letter of recommendation. The custom of composing correspondence to present its carrier or ensure favorable reception was a well-established practice during the New Testament era (Frank, 1979). The epistle to Philemon simultaneously addresses Apphia and Archippus. Philemon serves as the designated primary addressee; this becomes evident beyond the letter's ending when second-person plural pronouns are employed (referencing all three recipients). The remainder of the correspondence utilizes second-person singular pronouns when addressing the principal recipient, Philemon. Paul's mention of the "church in your home" distinctly suggests that a single household is meant, likely indicating these three persons were connected by family ties. Possibly, Apphia and Archippus were Philemon's family members. Philemon's epistle extends barely beyond a brief note in length, comprising merely 335 Greek words, and functions as more than a simple memorandum in character. While the correspondence contains no theological discourse, it emerges from a distinct theological assumption focused on Onesimus's conversion (Walter 2000). Understanding Philemon's compassionate character, Paul need not employ his apostolic power to direct Philemon in any manner. He recognizes he can rely on Philemon's magnanimous disposition to pardon Onesimus and welcome him back (verses 8-9). Onesimus had previously been an ineffective servant, but now his entire existence has been transformed. He has

assisted Paul during his imprisonment and has become like a son to Paul.

Verses 10-20

While Paul would prefer to retain Onesimus with him, he believes the proper course involves returning him to his original owner, Philemon. Undoubtedly, Philemon would gladly permit Onesimus to remain in Rome, where he could continue caring for Paul, but that decision belongs to Philemon, not Paul. Whatever action Philemon takes, Paul desires him to act voluntarily, not due to Paul's compulsion. Perhaps divine providence intended Onesimus's temporary departure from Philemon so that he might achieve eternal salvation. No longer will he function as an indolent and uncooperative servant, but as an eager and supportive brother in Christ. Philemon should consequently regard him as a brother (Scott 2003). If Onesimus appropriated or destroyed anything during his departure, Paul will cheerfully cover the expense on Onesimus's behalf. Nevertheless, Philemon should not overlook the obligation he owes Paul, including his eternal salvation (O'Brien 1982). However, Paul's joy will be significantly greater if Philemon freely pardons everything. Paul maintains confidence that Philemon will demonstrate magnanimity, accomplishing even beyond Paul's suggestions and granting complete liberation to the servant.

The successive relative clauses that reference Onesimus demonstrate a progressive intensification, moving from someone who has simply experienced conversion to an individual who proves valuable in ministerial service, ultimately becoming one who represents Paul's very essence. Earlier in his correspondence, Paul had employed the term "heart" when describing how Philemon's demonstration of love brought "refreshment" to the saints. In this context, the synecdochic use of "hearts" transforms into a metaphor that conveys the deeply personal bond between Paul and Onesimus. By returning Onesimus to Philemon, Paul places a substantial portion of his own identity at stake. It appears Paul may also be suggesting that, should his petition be unsuccessful, the matter remains unresolved, and such separation would cause Paul profound emotional distress. The pronouns used in verse 12 (you, me) mirror the pattern found in verse 11, emphasizing how these three individuals' destinies are interconnected. Philemon's response to Onesimus cannot occur in isolation; his decision will significantly impact Paul and all who witness the reading of this correspondence. Paul clearly articulates that his preferred outcome involves Onesimus being restored to Philemon and subsequently returned to Paul for ministerial purposes (Ralph 1985). Paul

consistently maintains focus on his imprisoned state throughout his appeal, emphasizing that this request originates not from comfort or abundance but from his suffering endured for the gospel's sake. After articulating his investment in the reconciliation between Onesimus and Philemon, which culminates in his wish for Onesimus to return for ministry, Paul shifts perspective from his own concerns to Philemon's advantage in receiving Onesimus graciously. The purposive structure continues in verse 14, highlighting Paul's deliberate choice to avoid coercing Philemon, instead allowing him to select a response that genuinely reflects his loving nature. Paul further develops his statement from verse 13. Paul's restraint, "I did not want to do anything" in verse 14a, corresponds to his desire to retain Onesimus mentioned in verse 13a; the "goodness" referenced in verse 14b pertains to Philemon creating circumstances that would enable Onesimus to resume his prison ministry to Paul (verse 13b). Paul articulates dual motivations for returning Onesimus. Initially, he desires Onesimus's return to his imprisonment. Additionally, he wants Philemon to freely achieve reconciliation with Onesimus. Nevertheless, these two motivational factors cannot be easily separated. Onesimus's service to Paul is intrinsically connected to Philemon's willingness to respond voluntarily with a clear conscience (Marine and Bachmann 1960).

Paul presents a comprehensive rationale for reconciliation at this juncture. "This" serves as a forward-pointing reference to Philemon "receiving Onesimus back forever." Paul begins demonstrating that his discussion encompasses reconciliation extending beyond conventional master-slave social or professional dynamics. His reference to eternity ("forever") broadens his appeal's scope from the master-slave framework to encompass spiritual, perpetual fellowship among believers. Verse 15 concludes the purposive sequence initiated in verse 13. Onesimus's departure from Philemon (verse 15a) corresponds to Paul's release of Onesimus (verse 13b) and Paul's inaction (verse 14b). Paul employs the passive construction "was... separated" to highlight divine sovereignty operating throughout these circumstances. This climactic moment in Paul's eloquent presentation effectively intensifies his appeal's significance; Philemon possesses the opportunity to receive not merely a slave but a brother in Christ (Scott 2003).

Paul connects Onesimus's conversion to reconciliation matters, expanding upon his meaning of "having him back forever." Due to Onesimus's conversion, all three men now relate to each other (observe the pronominal sequence: me-you) as family members. Onesimus's position advances

from "more than a slave" to "a beloved brother" (verse 1 designates Philemon as "beloved"), and his relationships with Paul and Onesimus are similarly elevated: "to me" ("especially"), and "to you" ("much more"). Consequently, he should be viewed as a transformed individual, both in practical terms ("in the flesh") and spiritually ("in the Lord"). Paul, having addressed both his interests and Philemon's, now concludes his appeal and directly states Philemon's appropriate action. He previously indicated that sending Onesimus equated to sending his own heart (verse 12), and here he applies this principle to Philemon, who should welcome Onesimus as he would Paul himself. Paul maintains his modest stance, identifying himself as Philemon's "partner," ensuring that what follows should not be interpreted as apostolic command but as an equal's appeal (Luke, 1999).

The three purposive clauses from the preceding section are succeeded by three imperative clauses, with this being the initial one. Paul clarifies his request to Philemon, yet even his clarification avoids explicitly detailing Philemon's required actions. This appeal's ambiguous nature reminds Philemon that Paul seeks a heart transformation resulting in a proper Christian perspective. Paul's unity with Onesimus reflects the union with Christ through which all Christians achieve reconciliation with the Father. If Philemon has experienced union with Christ's blessings, he should naturally extend identical blessings to his Christian brother, Onesimus.

Verses 21-25 exemplify Paul's characteristic approach to interpersonal relationships. His consistent practice involved expecting excellence from others; Paul maintained unwavering confidence that Philemon would honor his request. Paul's specific mention of Epaphras distinguishes him from others, and designating him as a fellow prisoner may simply indicate his voluntary participation in Paul's imprisonment (Bruce, 1986). The final greetings in verses 23 and 25 originate from the same companions mentioned in Colossians; both Philemon and Onesimus are entrusted to brotherly grace.

Slavery and Brotherhood within Nigeria's Framework

Throughout much of Africa, enslaved individuals frequently became victims of inter-tribal conflicts and economic hardships. War captives from inter-group battles were commonly sold into bondage. Parents experiencing severe financial difficulties might sell their children, or individuals could face kidnapping and subsequent sale into slavery (Daniel, 1985). The slavery institution has existed within human civilization since ancient times; it represents humanity's oldest practices.

This dehumanizing phenomenon, which received worldwide abolition in 1888 when Brazil became the final nation to end it, continues to infiltrate human existence presently. Despite numerous countries enacting anti-slavery legislation and prohibiting all its manifestations, contemporary slavery forms practiced and experienced globally have generated the modern slavery framework (Babatunde et al., 2021). Slavery constitutes a structure of economic, socio-cultural, and political disparities among socially constructed population categories within societies, established through sanctioned legal or non-legal human capacity commodification, resulting in autonomy loss and self-ownership deprivation among those commodified. This definition differentiates slavery from alternative human exploitation structures. Slavery arrangements deny enslaved individuals specific rights, including potential labor, life, and bodily rights, while simultaneously creating ownership rights for masters. Social norms legitimize these arrangements, and laws often provide additional legitimization (Baz and Eric 2015). Slavery structures are founded on ideological frameworks and maintained through physical and psychological abuse techniques and violent coercion methods. They persist across time and generations through continued commodification and biological and socio-cultural reproduction.

Therefore, human brotherhood offers expression for humanity's nature and kinship, providing security for human dignity recognition, individual value, personality respect, and human rights protection, treating people as essential beings rather than mere economic units. Brotherhood's highest expression appears in evaluating democracy's genuine foundation and liberty.

Contemporary Nigeria experiences agitation for dominance, authoritarianism, nationalism, tribalism, racism, class divisions, and gender inequality, all representing modern slavery elements that have become commonplace. Nigerian slavery involves understanding society's personal and social mechanisms that generate oppression, dehumanization, and degradation; addressing these remains crucial for establishing the just and democratic society universally envisioned. Oppressions are integrated within socio-cultural, economic, and religio-political frameworks throughout human society. The situation proves particularly distressing in Nigerian society, where cultural, traditional, and belief system principles penetrate every human endeavor. These cultural and traditional principles serve as sources for subjugating population groups to other groups' arbitrary control within Nigerian society (Ernes and Helen 2014).

Oppression justification targeting physically challenged and lower-class citizens, while such systematic processes are accepted as normal, nevertheless generates comprehensive oppression. Oppression represents evil and describes domination and exploitation relationships, economic, social, and psychological, between individuals; between social groups and classes within and across societies, and globally between entire societies, such as Northern Hemisphere's oppression of Southern Hemisphere nations. Oppression generates discriminatory injustice, dehumanization, and creates terrible living conditions, including unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and healthcare absence imposed by oppressors upon dominated and exploited individuals, social groups, classes, genders, and populations. Oppression appears through sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, ageism, and ethno-religious discrimination. It manifests in gender restrictions such as 'be a man and not a woman' (Gil 1994). This self-centered approach significantly harms contemporary society.

Implication: The rising cases of maltreatment, human trafficking, and severe torture signpost a culture of servitude gaining ascendancy in Nigeria, but which must be stopped because it has a serious deterioration on the socio-political, economic, and religio-cultural development. This is a call for serious, sustained advocacy for social revolution towards the eradication of the overlordship of some aristocratic leaders. From the content of the text, Paul considered Onesimus as his brother, who was not to be crucified by law but to be embraced and brought to Christ's fold. This is worth emulation for people in power to see the less privileged people as part of them and not to be enslaved.

II. CONCLUSION

It is to be noted in Paul's letter to Philemon concerning Onesimus that the new relationship (brotherhood) never gave Onesimus express permission to misuse the opportunity, but it made him rather be a better slave and more efficient servant and serve his master in such a way that he could offer his service to Christ. However, the paper suggests that the fact that voters come out in mass to vote should be a stronger reason why political leaders in Nigeria should protect the rights of the masses, because their coming out displays love and trust in the person of their choice. This should rather be reciprocated in looking for means to care for their welfare, just like Apostle Paul to Onesimus. People in power, depending on their designation, should freely identify and not be embarrassed to relate with the less privileged in society, like Paul, who called Onesimus 'my child' even though he is a slave.

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