

**LIBERATION THEOLOGY, POLITICS AND
SOCIOECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: SOME
HISTORICAL THOUGHTS ON NIGERIA'S SITUATION**

Joseph Haruna MAMMAN, PhD

Christian Religious Education,
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

&

Emmanuel Osewe AKUBOR, PhD

Department of History

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

oseweakubor@gmail.com, akuboreo@oauife.edu.ng

&

Philomena Ayenoya OKOROAFOR

Department of Dramatic Art,

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife

okoroaforphilomena@yahoo.com

Abstract

Scholars have argued that throughout history people have been empowered by the liberating biblical faith instilling in them the resolve to survive political harshness, poverty, ethnicity, sexism, racism, discriminations, bigotry and many forms of injustice. In the case of Nigeria, this played a prominent role in the liberation struggle during the colonial period especially in the area of interrogation and critique of the bases of colonial leadership. This paper therefore examines the reality of liberation theology, politics and socioeconomic empowerment nexus in the post-colonial Nigerian setting. Data obtained from primary and secondary sources were deployed to carry out the study with an analytical and narrative historical method. Findings indicate that although liberation struggle played prominent role in wrestling power and checking political activities during the colonial period, however in the post-colonial period the same theology has become a tool of manipulation and enslavement of large majority of the people. This is evident in the fact that religious institutions in Nigeria failed in her role of interrogating and providing the well needed critique for good leadership practice. In this way, it has failed to eschew transparency, accountability and probity in the quest for economic and social-political transformation. It also found out that unlike in the colonial period when the priests and pastors were actively involved in the struggle, the case

now is that a large chunk of them have limited their activities to the pulpit arguing that politic and socioeconomic empowerment of the people is outside their scope of practice. This act has substantially hampered the socio-economic development of the nation at large.

Keywords: Liberation, Theology, Politics and National Development

Introduction

Scholars have argued that throughout history people have been empowered by the liberating biblical faith instilling in them the resolve to survive political harshness, poverty, ethnicity, sexism, racism, discriminations, bigotry and many forms of injustice. In the case of Nigeria this played a prominent role in the liberation struggle during the colonial period especially in the area of interrogation and critique of the bases of colonial leadership. ***Countries within the African continent have often been criticized for*** their failure to develop an ethic of public probity and accountability, partly exemplified by corruption and impunity. This is even more worrisome when considered in the light of the fact that the continent with specific reference to Nigeria is considered very religious with lots of pastors and churches. This is because the religious institutions are expected to interrogate happenings, provide the genuine way as well as critique evil practices in politics and governance. Unfortunately this has not been the case, as despite the prevalence of religious institutions in Nigeria, the political class who are often members of these religious institutions have failed to eschew transparency, accountability and probity in the quest for economic and social-political transformation.

Liberation Theology and Politics: Establishing the Nexus

Religion and Politics are both as old as human society. Religion has been argued to represent the product of men's efforts to come to terms with a harsh and uncertain world, religion has also been the last resort of all those in distress. Historically, almost all religions known to mankind started in conditions of social and economic dislocation, and were originally movements composed and led largely by the poor and the oppressed in the society. Unfortunately however, as soon as they become popular among the masses, they are captured by the very oppressors that they were meant to dislodge, and are turned into instruments of deception and domination (P Gbasha et al, 1988:6)

On the other hand, evidence shows that politics has been part of human history, because it has been established that in every human society, there is the struggle among various interest and groups to dominate, control and exercise power and authority. It is indeed this struggle over the control and exercise of power to determine or formulate as well as execute decisions and policies articulated by the

wielder of power that is known as Politics. This formed the ground on which Aristotle opined that man by nature is a political animal. Similarly, W Rodney (1976) argued that this part of human nature (political animal) is seen in how man has tried to dominate, control, exercise power and authority from the earliest times, especially when he and others of his kind found it convenient and necessary to come together in groups especially for the sake of survival. In his view, in these relations which develop within any given social group, man is involved in every move that will make him relevant in the scheme of things, because these are crucial to an understanding of the society as a whole, i.e., his responsibility, freedom, skill, etc. have real meaning only in terms of the relations of men in society. In a more specific term, W Rodney (1973:2), giving more insight into politics in human society continued thus:

...Of course, each social group comes into contact with others. The relations between individuals in any two societies are regulated by the form of the two societies. Their respective political structures are important because the ruling elements within each group are the ones that begin to dialogue, trade or fight, as the case may be.

In line with W Rodney's view, J.P. Wogaman(cited in P Udotai, 2015:21) opined that after all, politics determine whether we are at war or peace. It affects the nation's job supply, wealth creation and distribution, and property right. It determines our freedom to speak, write or worship. Even the circumstances of family life often depend on government policy, including the quality and content of public education”.

From the above therefore, the paper opines that the essence of politics is to have the interest of each member of the society at heart and cater well for them. In this sense politics entails government's ability to make and enforce rules and to deliver services, regardless of whether that government is democratic or not. It is about the representation of citizens, and accountability to citizens. This is commonly referred to as the Common Good. In this way, Common good refers to the specific purpose which motivates and binds a group of individuals together (social relationship). In this way, it goes beyond the mere collection of private good into what J. Maritain (1951) describes as “the good life of the multitude, of a multitude of persons; it is their communion in good living, it is therefore common to both the whole and the parts into which it flows back and which, in turn must benefit from it”. It is thus for the true and effective realization of this that liberation theology became necessary in human history.

Politics and Socioeconomic Development: Theology and Church

The general argument has been that Politics and Religion do not mix. It is based on this that Experts have argued that some conservative church hierarchy, true to its

age-old slavish linkages with imperialism and the ruling oligarchies has consistently argued that Christians in general and the priests in particular, should only concern themselves with saving the soul of man, and with life hereafter (R. Umaru, 1988:19). In this way, the Church, her priests and teaching should be more focused on teaching the people holiness and directing souls to heaven. This was the message under which a large part of what later became colonial areas were captured and ruled by the colonialists.

However, historians have traced the origin of Liberation Theology to activities emerging from the Reformation and Counter Reformation which took place in the second and third decades of the 16th century. This marked the period when new meanings and interpretations were given to theology and practices of the Church. In the reformers philosophy of life, St. Paul and St. Augustine counted more than Aristotle and Plato. This reinterpretation and radical move away from the traditional teachings of the Church brought about a religious and political revolution which shattered the unity of medieval Europe and helped create the modern church and the modern state (V.H.H Greene, 1952:117, C Brinton et al, (1957:75). This may have informed the radical changes in mode of worship, some elements of Christian doctrine, theology, and liturgy as well the acceptance of indigenous names for baptism by some African Churches between the late 19th and 20th centuries (T.G.O Gbadamosi and J.F.Ade-Ajayi, 1980:361).

However, extant literature and available historical documents, have argued that in more modern time, the Christian religion has played a crucial role in promoting good governance and accountability in the world over. A critical analysis of the position of the church as it relates to this was made clear in 1929, when the Pope in an audience made it clear that politics and political agenda in terms of government that is not tailored towards good governance/common good is the same as the incarnate Devil, and that the church knowing that under this condition, the salvation of a soul is at stake, and there is need to save a soul from a great danger, will always summon courage to confront the incarnate Devil (E.O.Akubor,2013:68). It has also been established that the watershed of the Church's position on this was the martyrdom of the Colombian revolutionary priest Camilo Torres; and the publication in 1967 of the papal declaration, *populorum Progressio*, which was addressed to the development problems of the Third World. In the thoughts of scholars this marked the peak of what is known today as Liberation Theology. This is graphically illustrated by U Richard (1988:19-21) thus:

...a new, radical even revolutionary tendency has emerged challenging this orthodoxy. This new tendency holds that the proper role of a Christian, both priest and laity alike is to identify with the poor and the down-trodden, and to

join their struggle, whether peaceful or armed, towards seizing political power and restructuring society. It is one and the same time a theology which seeks to liberate people, Christians and non Christians alike from oppression and exploitation, so that they can better serve their God, and at the same time to liberate the church and Christianity from the caricature that has been made of them since the ruling classes captured Christianity for their exclusive use.

In line with the above, C.M. Love (nd), illustrated how this new, radical even revolutionary tendency that emerged challenged this orthodoxy. This position has been made even more explicit in C.M. Love (n.d) when he opined thus:

The Church is most effective in working for good governance when it is united, when the local church leads in coalition with civil society and in solidarity with international Catholic institutions, when forum shopping is used to work around blocked local politics, when women and youth participate and lead, when land and property rights issues are addressed, and when institutions put in place long term strategic, proactive plans, rather than primarily ad hoc, reactive programs when violence looms. *Pacem in Terris* was a successful game changer, encouraging greater participatory governance committed to human rights and religious freedom, and more effective international regimes globally. Seventy five percent of the countries that democratized after the Second Vatican Council were predominantly Catholic countries. Major armed conflicts have declined by half over the past two decades. Nuclear weapons arsenals declined by nearly 2/3 from Cold War highs of 66,000 to 23,000 today, with lower limits looming, and increased international cooperation to improve nuclear safety and counter proliferation. The effectiveness of international institutions still varies, but the Church in coalition with others has helped usher in a host of new international institutions, which try perpetrators of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity, remove land mines and aid mine victims.

In line with Love's position, Orjinta I (1998), argued that although the Church's position is clearly spelt out in the Catholic Social Thought, her recent thoughts in the area of ensuring good governance have been intensified through what has been described as Liberation Theology. Orjinta explains thus;

Basically, this has been carried out through the Theology of Liberation, which is an attempt to look at the world in terms of involvement with the underprivileged and oppressed, and to find within the Christian gospel both the analytical tools and the energizing power to work for radical change in the world. These analytical tools have also, and often initially, involved sociological and economic analysis, frequently along Marxist lines and the

biblical and ecclesiastical resources have involved a critical stance toward institutional religion's long alliance with the status quo.

The scholar further argued that with particularity, reference must be made to the two encyclicals of Pope Pius XI; *Mit Brennender Sorge* of 14 March, 1937 (Against National Socialism) and *Divini Redemptoris* of March 19, 1937 (on atheistic Communism). Pius XI In *Divini Redemptoris* maintains;

In the face of such a threat, the Catholic church could not and does not remain silent. The Apostolic See, above all has not refrained from raising its voice, for it knows that its proper and social mission is to defend truth, justice and all these eternal values which Communism (atheistic) ignores or attacks...

From that period till date the church has continually pursued this through various means. This was the case when at the end of the 1994 African Synod (at which occasion the woes of the African continent were reflected upon by the leaders of the African Church), Pope John Paul II said:

The Church must continue to exercise her prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless, so that everywhere the human dignity of every individual will be acknowledged and that people will always be at the center of all government programmes. (Post Synodal Document, no 70).

It is therefore not surprising that in most parts of the world through Liberation Theology the church has continued to represent agents of wholesome development of people, in words and action. Some examples of these actions and persons includes Cardinal Wyszynski and his protégé, Pope John Paul II, who resisted and overthrew communism in Poland; Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Rev. Alan Boesak and their activities leading to the creation of a civil society which was able to respond to the challenges of overthrowing apartheid; Helder Camara, the harmless Archbishop of Recife, who fought against the Americans and the structure of sin they erected in his native Brazil; Camillo Torres who laid down his life fighting for the freedom of his people in Colombia; Rev Martin Luther King Jr who preached non-violent resistance to the oppression of the Black people of America; Jean Bertrand Aristide who found himself in the eye of the storm of his people's freedom in Haiti (R Umoru, 1988: 21, M.H. Kukah, 2007:3, E Bassey, 2015:25).

Thus, under the teachings of Liberation Theology, Politics has been described as the art of managing the fruits of God's gift to humanity, an equitable management of the abundance of humanity that is God's children's and the art of restraining the strong and the greedy from destroying the weak (M.H.Kukah, 2007:5)

Development of Liberation Theology and its Application in the Nigerian Context

From the discourse so far, it is clear that every theology is contextual, emerging from the sociocultural, economic, religious, and historical conditions of its time and environment. In this way, theology is placed in more historical context in what historians argue as space and time. This is even more relevant to this paper when considered in the light of the fact that the most popular of liberation theologies, Latin American liberation theology, was a product of the historical situation in which the people within the environment at that time found themselves (J Ogbonnaya, 2015:1)

According to available fact, the people of Latin America found themselves in much hardship as a result of poor leadership and corruption. According to sources, there was so much oppression, suppression of the will of the people and injustice arising from the socioeconomic and political conditions in the area in the 1960s. At the peak of inflicting these on the people were the transnational corporations in collaboration with corrupt governments and international communities. The institutions during this period mismanaged the situation so much so that at the end of the day, the Latin American countries were unable to repay the huge sums borrowed from international financial institutions to finance development projects during the economic crash of the late 1960s and early 1970s. This in turn inflicted hardships that increased poverty and deprivation among the people. Notably, in the thoughts of Ogbonnaya (2015:3) the eventual emergence of Liberation Theology in the area and its relevance to the Nigerian situation is in the fact that the situations in both areas bear some resemblance as apart from internal exploitations, the situation were complicated by totalitarian oppression, from which the people using liberation theology sought the liberation of the people from such injustices and the promotion of their integral development in the light of the gospel, using predominantly Marxist socioeconomic analysis.

In the case of Nigeria (just as in most countries in the African continent), the idea of Liberation Theology becomes even more relevant when seen in the light of the fact that after centuries of slave trade during which most communities were reduced to articles of commerce and ought to have been economically liberated by the 1807 Slave Trade Abolition Act, the area witnessed another century of colonialism under Britain. During this period, the country's human and other natural resources/wealth was plundered by the British imperial power, to serve the Industrial Britain. Interestingly, during the colonial period and after, various African communities (Nigerian area inclusive) found themselves distorted by the merging together of previously heterogeneous peoples and the creation of artificial nation-states that seemed almost intended to fail. This period which came to an end in the 1960's,

ushered in neocolonialism, during which many African governments (Nigeria inclusive) worked under the tutelage of their former colonial masters, forcing African countries to serve foreign interests. Giving example of this E.O. Akubor (2011: 197-219) wrote:

As rewards for opening up the resources of the developing countries to the western powers, members of the ruling classes are promised and given juicy appointments in the companies established in their soil by the Western powers. Examples of these relationships exist in various parts of the Developing world, for instance in 1973, the leading director of Lonrho in East Africa (Kenya) was Mr. Udi Gacega, (he was the company's first black director) the son-in-law of President Kenyatta and nephew of the Foreign Minister, Njoroge Mungai. In Zaire, the director of Lonrho was MrMbotiLitho, a cousin of Mubutu's father. Mboti was also the minister of Finance and a leading businessman, owning the largest chain stores in Zaire. In Ivory Coast Lonrho's leading director was M. DiaHouphet-Boigny, nephew of President Houphet-Boigny. A major figure in its West Africa operation was Gil Olympio, son of the late Sylvanus Olympio, who was the President of Togo, and virtually a member of Houphet-Boigny's family by marriage. In Zambia too, the relations with the ruling class and powerful are so close that when a board of directors revolt threatened 'Tiny' Rowland's position as managing director, the Zambian government intervened and offered £8 million to Lonrho as long as Rowland remained in his post . These Multinationals are in some cases involved in direct stealing of public funds. For example, the issue of Julius Berger recently coming out to say over 2 billion was found in excess in a contract after it was discovered by members of the National Assembly

Continuing further E.O. Akubor (citing Madeley 1999), argued thus:

The above situation is summed up in Madeley's analysis in which he argued that the reason why the ruling classes in the developing nations are able to remain relevant is because they are involved in *race to the bottom*, a situation in which they have to turn against their people especially through dubious acts to please their masters; in this way there is hiring of child labor, cheating workers on overtime pay, imposing merciless quotas, and operating unsafe practices.

It is in line with the above, that the paper argues that Liberation Theology as applied in the case of Latin America in the early days, can also come to play in the case of

Nigeria, where the situation seems the same. Although scholars have argued that even with the level of exploitation of Nigeria's natural resources by a few, heightened injustice, deprivation, oppression, violence, and economic mismanagement all over the place, the people have not adequately formulated a theology that can be called liberation theology in the Latin American sense. However, in the opinion of this paper, as long as Latin American theology was instrumental to the liberation of the area, it can also be applied in the Nigerian context not only in the area of liberation from all forms of cultural domination, not only from colonialism but also in the area of postcolonial oppression and bad governance.

Liberation Theology and the struggle for self-determination in Nigeria: Yesterday, Today and the Future

It has been established that the effect of liberation theology has not escaped the Nigerian area especially as it relates to politics, self determination and socioeconomic empowerment. In an analysis of events leading to the struggle against colonial domination and the quest for independence, G.O. Olusanya (1980:547), argued that liberation theology aided the building and development of nationalist struggle among African. He specifically noted that most of the major characters (nationalist) in the liberation struggle were mainly products of the mission schools and that it was by educating them and later denying them equality with the whites that the Christian missions helped to contribute their own quota to the emergence of Nigerian nationalism. It was therefore not surprising that from the onset these mission-made nationalists refused to give up their territories without struggle and even when they did, rejected, as far as possible under their new status as conquered peoples, the trappings of the Western society, and those repatriates revolted against the very Western culture that had nourished them, because they were denied a respectable place within that same culture because of their race. With this type of treatment, they turn angrily towards the culture of their forebearers for renewal of pride and for the strength to face the new situation. In a more specific term, Olusanya argued thus

This group of Nigerians was led by men such as Edward Wilmot Blyden, Bishop James Johnson, Mobolaji Agbebi, John Payne Jackson, Williams Bright Davies, Tejumade Osholake Johnson, to mention a few. They were strongly opposed to the attempts of Christian missions to denationalize Africans and were never weary of advocating a conscious rejection of these aspects of Western culture which seemed to them to be of no value to Africans and of calling on them to drink deep from the fountain of their heritage. They were also exponents and founders of the indigenous African churches which were the first concrete manifestations of cultural nationalism. Some of

them demonstrated their rejection of Western culture in practical terms by dropping their English names and dresses. For example, David Vincent became MojolaAgbebi and abandoned altogether the wearing of English dress even when in Europe, Rev. S.H. Samuel became AdegboyegaEdun and George William Johnson became OsholakeTejumade Johnson

The activities of these could be argued to have laid the foundation for the role of liberation theology in the emancipation of various groups in the area.

Examining the Situation in Post-Colonial Nigeria: From Liberation Theology to Manipulation Theology

From the Biblical instructions and teachings of Christianity, it is clear that reaching out to people to spread the gospel is a task for every Christian. Based on this, Christians are instructed by the teachings in the bible to use every opportunity that presents itself to preach the gospel, truthfully and according to the holy bible, as well as put in place structures and infrastructure that will help achieve this. In Nigeria, Christianity has grown rapidly since its introduction into the country by missionaries before the colonial era, and presently, there are more churches in Nigeria than anywhere else in the world. However, recent studies especially documentary on churches in Nigeria revealed a growing number of prosperity churches who teach the people that the life of prosperity is a blessing, and with this teaching millionaire pastors manipulate the people into giving what they have to the church with the hope of getting blessings from God. It must be made clear here that while the paper is not against teaching about prosperity and power, the paper completely condemns the act of not laying down structures through which the adherent could achieve this). P.M. Gaiya (2004:163) specifically noted this thus:

...instead of doing theology from and with the people and on issues of primary importance for the people, they concentrate on theological academic gimmicks which are at the periphery of people's living experience of pain and hope. Their theology lack prophetic insight and witness; they lack sense of urgency and relevance; and consequently they do not appeal to the people whom they should minister.

Although the act of giving is supported in the bible, the issue here is that some of these churches use this to take advantage of the suffering in the society and give offering ultimatum to members. It has been established that some of these churches take advantage of the poverty within the country by encouraging the people to give because God will bless them in multiple folds. They skip the teachings of obeying the commandments of God and they do not focus on spreading the teachings that do not have to do with giving to receive blessings. In some cases, they strike fear in the

hearts of the people by stating that if they do not sow (give) a particular amount of money, they should not expect blessings from God. E Blair (2015;2) gave examples from research carried among churches in Nigeria and he observed thus:

In one of the churches, the congregation was told to only mingle with richer people who can take them further in life and the ladies among them were told that the Lord does not want them to be with a man who will hold them back but rather with a man who can take them further and provide financial security. Ladies are promised rich husbands within a specific time frame if they give to the lord and men are promised financial favours from strangers or job promotions if they give to the lord, and many more. These teachings are modified teachings of the bible to make it easier to get more money from the people and as more people become aware of the money which could be made from starting up a church, they quickly move on to start up their own ministries and continue the viscous cycle of extortion, taking advantage of the people's suffering by promising the life of prosperity if they learn to give to God.

The above does not in any way differ from the view of A Zakka (2014:1), who argued that in Nigeria, religion seems to have become an instrument of manipulation, exploitation, deceit, and large-scale blindfolding of ordinary people in Nigeria. To the scholar, it is one of the elements militating against social consciousness and the development of the working class, as a class, in Nigeria; The development of a class of the dispossessed, the oppressed, the marginalized, who feel and share common interests and are keen to fight for those common interests. A Zakka (2014:1) continued thus

Religion is thrown in as a wedge, as a source of conflict among ordinary people. Like Karl Marx said, religion becomes the opium of society. Every little thing is covered and given a religious coloration, when it is actually not. It is a tremendous setback to the development of social consciousness in Nigeria and the rest of Africa as a whole.

Both K Maier (2000), P.M.Gaiya (2004) and M.H. Kukah (2006) argued that the radical shift from liberation Theology to what could be best described as Manipulation Theology can best be traced to the struggle for survival among people in the face of economic hardship, so much so that the liberation of both the physical and spiritual aspect of man has been abandoned in pursuit of high class people and top government officials; hence the establishment of “the rich peoples church” (K Maier, 2000:264). In this way career success, wealth, status in society, good marriages, plentiful children, even “miracle houses” all await those who accept Jesus

through these churches. Summarizing the messages of this type of theology, Maier wrote

The message is that the Lord expects is followers to enjoy material prosperity, and those who embrace the church...shall rise from “the dunghill to the palace”. There is none of the admonitions about bad living or spirits and demons;...emphasis on the good life provides antidote to the despair that thrives in the society outside the hallowed walls of the cathedral.

The above in the analysis of M.H. Kukah (2006:5) is based on the fact that the effect of SAP (Structural Adjustment Programme) made life difficult for many Nigerians and they look for some sort of short cut. In this way those that patronize such centers are those looking for miracles including armed robbers, 419ers, people who have stolen money and don't want to be caught. In this way, liberation theology which is really an attempt to rescue theology from those who as it were hijacked it and were using it as instrument of oppression continue to sink into abysmal depths.

The above could be very well expressed in the way most bodies have abandoned the Liberation Theology for manipulation theology, conniving with the political class to enslave the people whom they are supposed to have liberated. This could best describe the reason why in the last elections in Nigeria, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) raised alarm that their ranks and file had been penetrated by politicians who gave out millions of naira to win their support. In the case of CAN, the body allegedly collected N35 billion from the president's cronies on the pretext of sharing such to pastors, priests and ministers all over Nigeria to support one candidate against the other (at the end of the day, a faction of the body was able to declare only N10 billion). Similarly, the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) was alleged to have collected N12 billion meant to ensure that in remote villages, the incumbent was given enough votes spread around the North to get the mandatory 25 percent. A week after the postponement of the February 28th polls, crisis broke out among some leaders of JNI, in which they accused their leaders of declaring only N5 billion out of the N12 billion naira allegedly received (Akukwe, 2015). Some analysts and scholars have argued that the alleged involvement of money must have influenced the prophets and types of prophecies they proclaimed.

Thus as a result of the inability to make good the teachings of Liberation Theology, while a few who parade themselves as men of God continue to smile to the bank on daily basis from milking the poor, there remain a large number of the deprived, dislodged and dislocated in the Nigerian society. In the Nigerian situation, the large number of deprived, dislodged and dislocated are the majority of our people; they are the minority ethnic and religious groups who are treated as inferior. They are the peasant farmers who struggle to be able to work on infertile land to earn a living for

their families. They are the ethnic groups whose lands have been degraded and displaced by the multinational oil companies and abandoned by the government without a place where they can settle down or raise their children. They are the anguished unemployed youths who have nothing for their families and have been forced to form militia groups to protect their ethnic groups and environment. They are the widows who are stripped of their rightful belongings and kicked out of their matrimonial homes by greedy in-laws. They are the beautiful unemployed graduates roaming the streets of Europe and America prostituting in search of a better life. They are the millions of families who live in degrading conditions without the basic necessities of life. They are the malnourished children who die of preventable diseases. They are the weak who are not protected by the law and are being dehumanized on a daily basis. These are the people that should form the context of liberation and empowerment where there is lack of the basic necessities of human existence such as food, clothing, shelter and medical care, the lack of which cause death. These are the moving images of human suffering of most of our people, causing the mass exodus in search for better living conditions overseas, calling for justice in the land blessed with human and natural resources (P.M. Gaiya, 2004:166-167).

Taking the above into consideration, while the paper argues that Liberation Theology played a vital role in the liberation struggle in Nigeria, it is also of the view that this began to change with the attainment of Independence, especially from the 1980s. This does not however mean that the number of emerging groups breaking away from the orthodox groups dwindled; rather it continued to increase but with much different agenda. For example, PObi (1988:22),opined that although the new groups argued that they were always there for the liberation of both the physical man and his soul hereafter, they are not doing much work towards that.

In the opinion of this paper, what is currently being experienced in Nigeria is the case of moving from Liberation Theology to manipulation of theological teachings. This is not limited to the Christian religion and teaching alone as seen in the country today and this is deliberate and meant to serve particular interests. In line with this, the position of scholars is that the real basis of this manipulation in Nigeria today is the need to obscure from the people of Nigeria, a fundamental aspect of their reality; that is the domination of our political economy by a class of intermediaries who are being increasingly exposed. This is basically to enable this class to cover themselves with religious and ethnic disguises in order to further entrench division among Nigerians, slow down their awakening at any cost; even the unity of the country, for which so much has been sacrificed(Y.B. Usman, 1979:89). This argument by Usman has been supported by other scholars like M Tukur (cited in M.H. Kukah, 1993: 121) who argued that certain groups manipulate this for selfish reasons. In a more specific manner, he opined thus:

Certain groups with political ambition at various times use religion as a means of mobilizing support, the advantage being either way, these individuals would still use the support they earn in portraying themselves as defenders of religion or defenders of their people from the cloak of religious domination. The idea then was for either side to build up a pool of supporters that should be relied on for electoral advantage for the advancement of their collective class interest.

Liberation Theology in Nigeria: How and Where Nigeria got it wrong.

Reading through the history of people and societies where liberation theology has been used for real emancipation of the people shows that the theologians were those with what has been described as prophetic insight and witness. This is to say that apart from being directly involved in the struggle, they had good grasp of the people's history. The theologians were not in anyway involved in gimmicks but used the realities around them to interpret the people's future and on that basis warned their people. Thus their theology and prophetic insight is sustained by knowledge of local history, politics, culture and dreams of the people and nation. In all and throughout the holy books, the prophets were always there, guiding the people in the right path, encouraging them in times of despair and in some cases even following them to the battle front when they were to encounter their enemies. In this way, the Prophets at various times, won the confidence and trust of the people. This was the case in Polish history in which as a result of the positive involvement of the religious in Polish government and political life, the Church remained the umbrella under which Poles maintained their distinct identity; it was the reservoir of Polish art, culture and language (M.H Kukah, 1999:183). This was also the case of Philippines where Cardinal Sin (Archbishop of Manilla), was able to use religious teaching and influence to restore the dignity of the voting power of the people, even when Fidel Marcos tried to trample on it (E. Bassey, 2015:25). The same could be said of religion in South Africa under Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Rev. Alan Boesak and the subsequent creation of a civil society which was able to respond to the challenges of overthrowing apartheid. Today the country enjoys a democratic government which is argued to be one of the most stable and fastest growing in Africa.

Unfortunately, the situation in Nigeria today is such that unlike the early pastors who would give education freely to their congregation just because they wanted them enlightened and to tower above their peers in the society which education brings, rather than give cheap education to their congregation who definitely might have contributed towards the construction of these schools, the fees are placed at a range no ordinary member of the church can afford. The churches were once ministering to the spiritual, educational and even economic needs of the people, but now, it is expected by many of the churches specifically, the new generation churches that the

people, even the poverty-stricken, provide copiously for the church. Offering which in the past was voluntary and meant for the sustenance of laudable church work, is now made compulsory with some pastors pronouncing curses on who ever refuses to come with one and it is hardly ever used for any positive humanitarian work.

From the above, the paper argues that the country got it wrong when those who were suppose to be involved in the teaching of the people lost touch with the people's reality and when theological teaching and leadership (like other professions in Nigeria) became business for all. It is clear that religious leaders whether as Christian Pastors, Islamic Clerics or Traditional Priests are major stake holders in the stability and progress of the society (HRVIC Report, 2002). It is therefore not surprising that most political leaders in most societies would seek for their counsel and prayers in time of crises and political instability. Thus, it must be stated from the onset that the paper does not see anything wrong in pastors and prophets intervening in state affairs. The argument however that is this intervention must be one geared towards the success of the society and the well-being of the people.

Liberation Theology and Politics in Nigeria: Any Hope for Socio-economic Empowerment?

From the discourse, it is clear that while Liberation Theology could be argued to have helped instill a sense of patriotism and self determination in the early Nigerian people, the situation now is completely different. This is largely due to the fact that apart from economic hardship which may have led to the sudden increase in the number of churches and worship centers, a large number of the “men of God” lack prophetic insight and witness. However, the situation cannot continue in this way, as Liberation Theology must be repositioned to represent what it actually should be. It is in line with this that the paper makes the following suggestions.

- Ø There must be deliberate effort to make relevant bodies match their words with concrete action. This was much visible in the activities of the early missionary bodies, who while preaching the gospel also established schools, hospitals and other amenities that could help the people live a good life. A good example of this is the De Marillac Centre for Street Children Port Harcourt founded by the Daughters of Charity, to serve the needy, disadvantaged and/or marginalized especially the children and single mothers (Lenten Campaign 2008:57)
- Ø Theologians must show good examples by not just preaching from the pulpits, but being actively involved in showing the people the way to true liberation. This paper has been able to demonstrate from cases cited in Cardinal Sin in Manila, the Church in Poland, Desmond Tutu and Rev. Alan Boesak in South Africa among others. Presently in Nigeria, there are just a

handful of such clergy men. At the individual level clergy men like Rev. Idowu Feron and Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah have been at the forefront of such.

- Ø Considering the contributions the people make towards the development of the church, it should be able to empower them, especially in hard times, as well as provide the needed direction in terms of teaching. This is the case of the Nigerian Conference of Women Religious (NCWR) which started a project known as Committee for the Support of Dignity of Women (COSUDOW) in 1999. COSUDOW works directly with enslaved women and Children in order to restore to the victims, their lost dignity and personhood.
- Ø The Church should make sure that it provides the necessary avenues to teach her adherents (who are also members of the political class), the essence of politics. This is done in some religious bodies like the Caritas/Justice, Development and Peace Commission of the Catholic church, The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), just to mention a few. The Christian Association of Nigeria and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria must really come out tough on the proliferation of churches. As it is today, it is clear that some theologians are not what they claim to be. The “Church business” seems to be easy and lucrative and as such those who have lost their jobs and those involved in dangerous businesses find it easier to open churches and manipulate people.

As a way of summarizing the above and the reality of Liberation Theology in this, there is the need to look at it from the point of view of G Ehusani (nd), who posited thus:

Thus, agents of the Gospel in Nigeria nay Africa must now be engaged in promoting democratic values and good governance if they are truly to be the voice of the voiceless; if they are to be truly agents of wholesome development of their people. Involvement in the work of justice and advocacy for democracy can no longer be seen as an optional extra. But like the 1971 Synod of Bishops says, it should now be seen as a constitutive dimension of the work of evangelization. That is why we must now discuss what democracy is in detail, and how the promotion of this form of governance will enhance the quality of life of our people.

Conclusion

From the discourse, it is clear that although liberation theology had really helped in setting the tone of politics in most parts of the world and was also responsible for the response of Nigerians towards non violent liberation struggle; the reverse is the situation presently. This is because as noted above liberation theology has been hijacked by some few who now connive with the authorities to manipulate the minds

and acts of the people. It must be noted that liberation theology does not necessarily mean violence, but a more critical and analytical approach to the issue of justice, love and right of people as contained in the holy book. Thus, there is an urgent need for the liberation of theology itself and its repositioning to achieve the much needed goal. This is because liberation theology which has been limited to prosperity message is destructive and has negative effects. This new brand of teaching and blind spirituality is not only destructive, damaging, and deceptive but worse than slavery. It is bondage, abuse, deception, manipulation, godlessness and satanic capitalism. Through this and in connivance with politician, most Nigerian Christians are only not enslaved spiritually, morally and financially but intellectually as well. It is economic, moral, and intellectual slavery. The manipulative gospel is also destroying Nigerian society –family, homes,etc; causing a combination of disappointment, hurts, discouragement, and anger toward God and sometimes causes people to turn away from God. In a nutshell, what we have today is 419 in the Church. What we have today is materialistic Christianity and there is enormous danger in it.

Finally, it must be noted that a new responsibility has now devolved on theologians and leaders of religious bodies to respond appropriately to the challenges of nation building and socio-economic development.

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