

LIBERATION THEOLOGY, AN ANTIDOTE TO THE CONTEMPORARY FEUDALISM: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE.

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Abstract

This is a further investigation into the ideological history, causes, practices and reactions against the medieval feudalism and how it has metamorphosed into other socioeconomic and political phenomena in the modern times. Similarly, the study probes into the origin, mode of operations and end results of another aspect of theology that sprouted from dehumanizing conditions of the people in the Latin America around the nineteenth century called Liberation theology. It analyzed the forces inherent in both of them and argues that the version of religiosity that teaches self-awareness, realization, self-development and esteem is needed to redeem majority of Nigerians from the shackles of horrible conditions of life they found themselves in this era. The study submits that if Nigerians especially the religious leader will conscientize the liberating force of theology among their followers, hunger, poverty, suppression, oppression, subjugation, discrimination, all manners of injustice and other vices will be checkmated in the country.

Keywords: Liberation, Theology, Nigeria, Religion, Ideology,

Introduction

The history of human being is replete with accounts of horrible and demeaning experiences. From the creation of man to the multiplication of mankind, every stage of man's life has come with all manner of experiences. From the Homeric era, to the Athenian polis era, Greek times, the Roman world, the coming of Christianity, Islam, medieval and modern times have doses of man's reactions (either as an individual or with help of fellow human beings) against unjust treatments and other inhuman activities. All these actions and reactions did not start with the Feudalism and Liberation Theology, they have not stopped with them and will not stop as long as man continues to exist. However, nature will always call that repressive ideologies and actions are checkmated. Nature seems to have a way of ontologically reacting against unjust and unnatural treatments. This is because there are rights that are natural with human and the nature in human has a way of reacting against any unnatural treatment. This study articulates briefly the accounts of unjust actions meted out against human beings

and their reactions during the medieval feudalist society. It also delved into the origin and impacts of liberation theology and how it can be applied to ameliorate or checkmate the present day deplorable conditions of human beings in Nigeria.

Clarification of Terms

- 1. Liberation Theology:** This is a combination of two words: "Liberation and Theology". Liberation is the noun form of the word "liberate" according to Hornby (2010) means to set somebody or a country free from the control of somebody else especially somebody that restrict another person from enjoying life (p.855). In other words, it implies, to set somebody free from bondage. The term "theology" is derived from the two Greek words "theo" and "logos" meaning "God and word". Liberation theology is a movement developed mainly in Latin America which interpreted the Word of God and used it to protest against social injustice meted out against the poor, downtrodden and other vices that confronted the poor masses. It is a process by which a subjugated or marginalized section of people, having gained an awareness of their deplorable conditions, take control of their destiny and fight to overthrow all the fetters of bondage against them.
- 2. Antidote:** It means a way of preventing or acting against something bad, a medicine taken or given to counteract a particular poison. It denotes something that counteracts an unpleasant feeling or situation.
- 3. Contemporary:** The term "contemporary" means something existing or happening now, marked by characteristics of the present period, of the present or modern time, or relating to the present and recent time. It stands for something that is not ancient or remote.
- 4. Feudalism:** The word feudalism has generated some doses of arguments among scholars. Some argued that it was a mere contract and the exchange of land tenure for military services. Brook (1924) states that the term is derived from the Latin words "feudum" "fief" and "feodalitas" and it is connected to the services the fiefs rendered to their lords. Both concepts were used during the Middle Ages and later was referred to a form of property holding in exchange for the provision of services and protection. For the sake of this work vis-à-vis in view of the range of meanings associated to feudalism, the study adopts largely the medieval version of

feudalism, seeks to approach and use it to mean all manner of injustice, subjugation, suppressions, oppressions and underserved treatments meted out against the poor and defenceless Nigerians because of their poor status, tribal origin, religious and political leanings.

In the context of this work, liberation theology, an antidote to the contemporary feudalism: the Nigerian experience, implies employing the aspect of theology that emphasizes the freedom of the downtrodden, poor, gullible and vulnerable Nigerians from the claws of other individuals who derive joy in subjugating others for their primordial reasons. It is all about using the word of God to stifle the metamorphosed version of medieval feudalism in the form of impunity, subjugation, suppression, oppression, poverty, discrimination, hunger, corruption and all manners of injustice ravaging the Nigerian society.

Theoretical Framework- Dependence and Functionalist Theories

The study adopts Dependence theory as propounded by Immanuel Wallenstein. Beyer (1994) states that it has its root to the French *Annales* school history especially the work of Fernand Braudel and in the Marxist driven dependency theory. Both of these approaches emphasize that it is impossible to understand the political and ideological vicissitudes of history without setting these phenomena in their economic and material context. Human history consists as much in the acts of ordinary people as it does in the more visible lives of the great and powerful individuals (p.15). It is chosen in this work because it identifies how both local and global structures had produced the unjust situation of the poor and downtrodden in the society.

Meanwhile, the study also considers the Functionalist theory to explain the cohesive and progressive functions expected of religion and religious leaders to the society and the dangers when they work to the contrary. Iruonagbe (2013) avers that Durkheim, one of the proponents of Functionalist theory believes that social life is impossible without the shared values and moral beliefs that form the collective conscience. The absence of the aforementioned threatens social order, social control, social solidarity or cooperation, development and unity of the people (p.5). Functionalist theory is employed because religion is one of the factors that a society needs to properly function. Therefore, the society will be in danger if religion and religious actors refuse to perform or function efficiently. It

is used to highlight the dangers of how a dysfunctional religion and its actors can retard the growth and progress of the society including Nigeria.

The Origin, Rise and Idea of Feudalism

Virtually every “isms” in the world has been a subject of historical arguments and controversies and feudalism is not an exception. Historicizing its origin, Leys (1994) believes that the feudal system that evolved and developed in the northern French heartland had its antecedents also in late Roman practice. Beyer (1994) affirms that feudalism reached its most developed form in the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Vassalage agreements similar to what would later develop into legalized medieval feudalism originated from the blending of ancient Roman and Germanic traditions. The Romans had a custom of patronage whereby a stronger patron would provide protection to a weaker client in exchange for gifts, political support, and prestige. In the countryside of the later Empire, the reforms of Diocletian and his successors attempted to put certain jobs, notably farming, on a hereditary basis. As governmental authority declined and rural lawlessness increased, these farmers were increasingly forced to rely upon the protection of the local landowner hence a nexus of interdependency was established. The landowners depended upon the peasants for labour and the peasants upon the landowners for protection.

Meanwhile, before then Fines (1970) stresses that at the exits of the Carolingian rulers and Charlemagne who reigned in the eighteenth centuries and succeeded remarkably in creating and maintaining some relatively unified empires, their political units were fragmented and its authority weakened. The mightier of the later Carolingians attempted to regulate the emerging local political lords and enlist them into their services but the power of the emerging local nobles was never obliterated. In the absence of those forceful kings or emperors, local lords expanded the territory and intensified their control over the people (pp.55-67). Iwe (1986) affirms that in the 17th century, the medieval “feudal system” was characterized by the absence of public authority and the exercise by local lords over administrative and judicial functions. The prevalence of bonds between lords and free dependents known as the vassals as forged by the lords bestowed on them the property and homages of the dependents called the “fiefs”. These bonds entailed the rendering of services such as military obligations, counsel, financial support and the obligation of the lords to protect their vassals. Brown (2016) states that feudalism as the social, economic and political conditions that

emerged in the western Europe during the early Middle Ages which stretched between the 5th and 12th centuries when central political authority in the Western empire disappeared, to the 12th century, when kingdoms began to emerge as effective centralized units of government. Feudalism and the related term feudal system are labels invented long after the period to which they were applied. They refer to what those who invented them perceived as the most significant and distinctive characteristics of the early and central Middle Ages. Ancient Germans had a custom of equality among warriors but an elected leader could keep the majority of the wealth especially lands and distributed them to members in return for loyalty.

Furthermore, Iwe (1986) asserts that feudalism in the Middle Ages was a socio-political order which in essence and operation consisted in a hierarchical personal dependence for protection and service, based on land holding or the holding of any other desirable thing- cattle or office. A dependence permeating all the main aspects of social life, military, judicial, economic and religious. It operated in two principles and they were principle of mutual obligation and loyalty, protection and service binding together all the ranks of society from the highest to the lowest.

Brooks (1924) stresses that the Europe of the early Middle Ages was characterized by economic and population decline and by external threat. Feudalism evolved as a way of maintaining a stable population engaged in farming. The towns had been in decline since the end of the Western Empire and to ensure that external threats were faced, levies were collected. There was the universality of feudal institutions. Adam Smith presented feudal government as an era characterized by the absence of commerce and the use of semi-free labour to cultivate lands (pp.47-65). Feudalism is practiced in many different ways, depending on locations and periods.

Features and Characteristics of Feudalism

Apart from the notable features of the existence of lords, serfs and lands, from the works of Brooks (1924), Bean (1968), Okey (1986), Reynolds (1994) and Beyer (1994) feudalism is characterized by the following:

- 1. Castles:** The feudal lords lived in strong, high walls with towers at their intervals and spacious palaces together with their courts. Stored in the castles were grains, arms and weapons. Whenever there was external

invasion, castles provided shelter to the serfs. In some cases, the castles were surrounded by wide ditch and towers erected. From the towers, people could watch the movement of enemies. The gateway of the castle was very strong. They were mostly connected with bridges, deep ditches were dug around the castle and filled up with water. During attack, those bridges were lifted up against the enemy. A feudal lord could have as many castles as he could and he lived inside different castles at different time.

2. **Manor:** Another significant feature of feudalist system was the existence of manor. It means the land associated with the castle. The lands were like mini estates and the castles, barons and church acquired these lands.
3. **Demense:** Demense was another characteristics of feudalism. This occurred after lands were distributed among the serfs by the lords, whatever remained with him was known as Demense. This law entirely belonged to the lord which he could use according to his whims and caprices.
4. **The Knighthood:** Feudalism was characterized by Knighthood as well. The Knights took oaths to fight and protect the weak. It regarded education as the rights of the sons and relatives of the lords because they were meant to be Knights. Before a person became a Knight, he had to work as a "Page" or servant near another Knight. When he had served properly, he would be appointed as an "esquire" or body-guard of that Knight. During that period, he would learn how to clean the weapons and prepare a horse. After he had achieved mastery in these works, he would be appointed as a Knight. But he had to spend a night inside the Church in prayer. During the prayer, he had to kneel before a priest who would deliver a light blow on his palm and neck with this blessing, "be a valiant Knight". After becoming a Knight, he had to purchase horse and arms for himself. By exhibiting chivalry, he could save an old man, the destitute and weak from the clutches of injustice and tyranny. A Knight was also taught to respect women.
5. **The Rights and Duties of Feudal Lords:** There were duties and rights expected of the lords. Their duty was to save their subjects from the invaders but they enjoyed certain rights as well. They lords could become

the owners of the lands of a vassal who died without leaving a son or none at all.

6. **Duties of Vassals:** In the feudal society, the vassals or subjects had duties toward the lords. The vassals had to be present in the court whenever the lords had the need of them. The vassals rendered compulsory military services to the lords for forty days in a year. He accompanied his master to the battle field and guarded his castle. The vassal had to pay money to his lord or master on the occasion of his daughter's marriage, when his son became a Knight and when he became captive in the hands of his enemy and was to be released. The vassals had to render these duties because the lords guaranteed their security of life and property against external invasions.
7. **Ceremony of Homage:** The leading feature of feudalism prevailing in Europe was the ceremony of homage. This ceremony was organized to cement the bond between the lords and vassals. After assembling in the castle of the lord, each man used to kneel before the lord with uncovered head. Then each one placed his folded hands on the hands of the lord. He then took the oath to be his man or vassal. This ceremony was famously called "Homage" because the vassal used it to take a vow to remain loyal to his Lord.
8. **Investiture:** After the vassals have paid homage, then the lord raised him up and kissed them. He recognized them as his subjects or vassals. Then the lord placed in the hands of the vassal a little earth or some leaves or a sword as a token of gift. It was a legal document concerning fief (land given to vassal), a staff and a flag were also handed over to the vassal. This sanction was termed as investiture.
9. **Judiciary was an Incarnation of the Caste:** In the feudal society, the judiciary that ought to be the mouthpiece of the downtrodden which in the Nigerian parlance stands as, "the last hope of the common man" was at the whims and caprices of the castles. Trevelyan (1960) concurs that the growth of a leisured class established a class of warriors living at the expense of the cultivators of the soil (p. 146).

Iwe (1986) regrets that medieval feudalism bastardized human right. The feudal hierarchical aristocracy subjected the mass labouring serfs to the privileged upper class of the society. The clergy, nobles and bourgeoisies made up the trinity that ruled human destinies and played part in the politics of the time. The upper class lived in considerable pleasure and leisure at the expense of the overburdened feudal serfs who formed good portions of the population. This harsh arrangement left the serfs in abject poverty, servile submission and inequality. The state of poverty and submission made them shifty, fearful, ignorant, full of superstition, trusting in charms and strange traditions of a folklore immemorial antiquity. Even in his domestic life, the serf was still at the mercy of the lord. He was by birth an inheritance bound to the soil, he and his family could be combined when estates exchanged hands. He could not marry his daughter save with his lord's consent and on the payment of heavy fine. The medieval serfs were solely service to the lords. He could not at will withdraw his service. They were attached with bailiffs or overseers who ensured they do their work with fidelity. The sum conditions of the serfs were that they lived in hovels. He sums it up by alluding that feudalism has been regarded as the fabric of medieval society and the stage of social and economic. Feudalism provided stability within societies, restoring public order and strengthening the monarchy. The level of pervasiveness of the feudalists made students of the past eager to understand how they had come into being. It is discovered that similarities of terminology and practice were found in the surviving documents from the Middle Ages- especially the *Libri feudorum* ("Book of Fiefs"), an Italian compilation of customs relating to property holding which was made in the 12th century and incorporated into Roman law. (pp.45-67).

Decline of Feudalism

Bean (1968), Iwe (1986), Okey (1986) and Reynolds (1994) maintain that the institution of feudalism survived in England until it was abolished by Parliament in 1645. Until their eradication by the National Assembly between 1789 and 1793, they had considerable importance in France, where they were employed to create and reinforce familial and social bonds. By the thirteenth century, Europe's economy was involved in a transformation from a mostly agrarian system to one that was money-based and mixed. Coupled with the fact that over time, the lords could no longer provide new lands to their vassals neither could they enforce their right to reassign lands which had become de facto hereditary property,

feudalism became less tenable as a working relationship. At some stage, payments for military service became quantified in the amount of gold instead of land. Therefore, it became easier for the monarchs to pay peasants with mineral wealth, and many more were recruited and trained, putting more gold into circulation. By this way, the land based feudalism was undermined. By the end of the Middle Ages, the kings were seeking a way to become independent of willful nobles and they first hired mercenaries and later created standing national armies. Feudalism declined also with the rise of towns and a money driven economy when land ceased to be the only important form of wealth. With the development of new methods of fighting, as human beings progressed, however, this system was broken down and the Industrial Revolution changed the structure of societies, allowing greater development of science and technology in the modern age. Feudalism begins to reshape into other forms.

The Contemporary Feudalism: The Nigerian Situation

Gutierrez (1988) avers that the tools used in analyzing the situation of the people Latin America vary with time (p.24). Therefore, contemporary feudalism in Nigeria manifests in the aspects of ethnicity, economics, religion, politics, electioneering, civil and public services among others.

1. Political Feudalists

Nigerian politics is money driven and determines largely by the people often described as the god fathers. Mayeni (2019) avers that godfathers in Nigerian politics do not usually run for office themselves rather many people believe that they are the ones who decide the election winners and losers. They are political sponsors who use money and influence to win support for their preferred candidates. Their choice sons are not always selected for their political acumen but on their ability to repay and enrich their godfather. The holder of the political position becomes a stooge to his godfather. By the time the godson refuses to meet their demands, he is eventually impeached from political office.

Apart from destroying governance, this ugly merchandise must have the culture of re-enacting political violence in the states. Unfortunately, in the midst of these situations, nothing meaningful is done for the masses. While the god father is hatching the plot for the removal of his political son, the son is using public resources to fight for his survival. Godfatherism is one of the pandemic that is endangering Nigerian system. It compels elected or selected official to siphon funds made for public infrastructural development into private accounts, thereby

jeopardizing and mortgaging the future of the citizens and this is worse than medieval feudalism.

2. "Use and Dump" Feudalists

During electioneering, politicians bamboozled Nigerians with all kinds of promises and they end up doing none. The worst of them is how they use the illicit drug induced youths to carry out their political campaigns. These boys are often mobilized for violence aimed at intimidating their opponents and rigging themselves into office. But as soon as these politicians get into office, these boys are abandoned. In the end these used and dumped youths became terrors to the poor masses. These politicians are addressed as "use and dump" feudalists because they have refused to meaningfully develop or remunerate these boys who worked for them.

3. Economic Feudalists

This is the case of where some people especially the wealthy people and bourgeoisie establishments employ others mostly poor ones, pay them peanuts, harass them and reject them as soon as these employees are in need or trouble. It is the mentality where some rich individuals pay little or nothing to the likes of their drivers, cooks, cleaners, gate keepers and others. This is when people are seen as mere instruments for achieving other people's selfish ends. Hence, what some rich individuals and establishments pay their workers cannot feed the dogs in their house.

4. Ethnic Feudalists

Nigeria is theoretically run upon tripod ethnic nationals: Igbo, Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba and any other tribe outside these three is considered "the minority". With time, it appears by all intent and purposes that the Nigerian president is reserved for people from few tribes. Unfortunately, any tribe that controls the central government begins to feel and behave as if others are serfs. The state apparatuses are subtly programmed to protect them and they are often treated as people above the law. The state law is interpreted differently for them and by them while others are treated with different law.

5. Social Feudalists

Nigerian society is patterned between the rich and the poor, politicians and the others. This accounts for why it is stratified between the Government Reserved Areas (GRAs), urban and rural areas. While the wealthy people and politicians

live in the government reserved areas, the poor people live the ghetto, slumps and that is how social amenities are allocated to them. The public power supply can be seen functioning at the GRAs while those living in the ghetto and slumps are abandoned to their fate where it is supplied once at the end of the month, it is done to taunt them to pay bill. These slumps and ghettos can only be remembered during election campaign, they are usually visited with salt, soap and other insulting peanuts by these sociopolitical feudalists.

6. Religious Feudalists

There are many atrocities being committed under the guise of religion in Nigeria. For example, the poor members of some religious organizations usually contribute through their noses to sustain some of these organizations and even help establish investments like schools for them. But at the completion of those projects, these supposedly sacred organizations hike the prices of services and at the end, the poor people's children will never be educated in those schools. The implication is that the poor members of these organizations have unwittingly built good schools for the children of the wealthy and thereby extending their servitudes.

More so, the pitiable conditions of some workers in these religious organizations who are mostly used to generate resources for these supposedly sacred organization through is nothing but despicable. Sometimes the milk of their resources are sent to the man or men at the top. These religious bourgeoisies continue to lavish in pleasures at the expense of other lower workers who suffer in hovels. These workers who can be regarded as religious serfs find it extremely difficult to send their children to good schools or even get reasonable shelters for themselves. What some of these senior executives who can be considered as religious lords spend on their dogs can pay other workers for months not to talk of what they spent on their children as ordinary pocket money. This is why religion seems to be oblivious of its social change. No wonder Udeaga (1992) argued that religion is an instrument used for securing dominance of the few over the masses (p.24).

The Roots and Development of Liberation Theology

By way of simplification, Liberation theology is a Christian concept of theology that was developed in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, focusing on liberation of the oppressed. Oji (2004) notes that in the sixteenth century, Latin America was conquered and ruled by Spain and Portugal in close ally with

Roman Catholic Church. The Latin America experienced weighty political subjugation, economic exploitation and social injustice which resulted in degrading human poverty and sufferings. The people were not allowed to enjoy the wealth accruing from the gold they produced. Hence, they lost their rights to the ownership of land and could not produce food for themselves. They were also discriminated based on occupation especially those from Africa and Indian descent. They were excluded from the schools similar to what happened in South Africa during the Apartheid. Unfortunately, the Catholic Church that ought to have protected the people compounded their problems by being ally to the states that oppressed them. However, with the entrance of the protestant Christianity as the religion of investors and developers, current Enlightenment and post Enlightenment alongside with the Karl Marx critique on religion led to the revolutionary agitations. Both Britain and America showed interests in the political and economic wealth of the Latin American. They poured in investments and military might to protect their investments. Regrettably, instead of the investments improving the living conditions of the people of Latin America, they compounded it. This is because the foreign overlords who contributed to the investments wanted to more of their profits than people's improvement. The exploitations were heightened by poor remunerations. In 1965, a development programme in Latin America came under critical essays and seminars by catholic priests sent to work among the poverty ravaged people and through their efforts liberation theory was born (pp.1-4). Apart from them, the second Vatican council (1962-1965). This summit opened the doors for Catholic involvement in social issues and the conditions of human persons.

Haynes (1994) and Beyer (1994) affirms that, to address the situation of poverty in Latin America, some concerned individuals played huge roles in advancing the cause of Liberation Theology. They include: Paulo Freire a Brazilian educator, suggested the program of "conscientization" and taught that the oppressed and the oppressor must liberate themselves from their "dominated-conditioned" and mentalities. Gustavo Gutiérrez (named the father of Liberation Theology) observed that liberation means a global and unique process through which persons become free, assume their proper destiny and become sons of God and brothers of men. Praxis as commitment to this liberation should precede any theoretical reflection in theology. He believes that even the use of violence by the oppressed should be permitted for the purpose of liberation and it should not be equated with the unjust violence of the oppressor. Oji (2004) adds that Juan Luis Segundo did the hermeneutical treatment liberation from the Bible and Leonardo

Boff challenged the Church by asserting that it should be open for positive change because of the possibility that the Holy Spirit would take further action in the “base communities,” José Míguez Bonino in his Marxist treatise has strongly defended the Christian use of Marxist as the best instrument available for social revolution in spite of its uneasy tension with the religious nature of the Christian faith. Rubem Alves makes it a bit scarier when he said that unless the oppressed are willing to resist this world of injustice in favour of a future world of hope, “God will suffer”.

Like every other movement in human history, Liberation theology did not go without an initial opposition from both the church and the state. Kozloff (2008) avers that Pope Paul VI, who reigned the Vatican from 1963 to 1978, tried to slow the progressive momentum highlighted from the Second Vatican Council. Pope Benedict XVI known as former Cardinal Ratzinger, before he became the pope headed the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from 1983. In March 1983, he published an article entitled “Ten Observations on the Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez,” where he accused Gutiérrez of giving political interpretation to the Bible and also teaching people an earthly paradise. With the issuance of “Instruction on certain aspects of the theology of liberation” and “Instruction on Christian freedom and liberation” in 1984 and 1986 respectively, Ratzinger officially condemned liberation theology. Beyer (1994) stresses that at the third Conselho Episcopal Latino-America (CELAM III) simply called the Council of Roman Catholic Bishops of Latin America in 1979, Pope John Paul II took a pacifying stand when he expressed concern for liberation theology and the miserable condition of the poor in Latin America. Haynes (1994) argues that the second CELAM council in 1968 was like a hunting dog because the themes discussed there cannot be swept under the carpet.

For the writer, Liberation Theology has its root from the old testament of the Christian Bible. In Exodus chapter three, God said He had seen the sufferings of His people in Egypt and had come to deliver them. When the powers that be resisted the liberation of the Jews, it cost them their lives and that of every first born in Egypt. Liberation theology is similar to the concept of Black theology which became a spiritual weapon in the hands of the oppressed who tried to regain their identity. Contextualizing liberation theology in the African setting Martey (1995) said liberation theology is a theological paradigm in Africa, hermeneutic procedure that seeks to understand the African reality and to

interpret this reality in the light of the gospel Jesus Christ and to bring transformation of the oppressive status quo (p.36).

The Impact of Liberation Theology

Liberation theology may not have solved all the problems of the poor masses, racial discrimination, injustice and other degrading conditions of human persons but it has had an impact much wider than an ecclesiastical dispute within the Catholic Church itself. It promoted awareness that the poor and impoverished can struggle for change instead of continuing to live in hovels. Liberationists stood for social revolution and the Catholic Church and dominant political powers feared revolution and started preaching peaceful transformation. By contrast, many Latin Americans in base communities simply created parallel societies comprising their own communities instead of following the option of social revolution. However, they learnt self-reliance, hygiene, and various skills from priests and social workers and then from one another. Protestant theologians watching the internecine Catholic disputes exploited the situation to champion their cause. Just like Martin Luther's criticisms four centuries earlier, they identified with their brothers. Before then, liberation theology has been recognized within liberal protestants as an important school of thought, enjoying equal standing with other contemporary schools of theology such as black theology and feminist theology. The Protestantism taught in Latin America then emphasized an ethic of self-reliance and greater equality between men and women.

Meanwhile, Beyer (1994) and Haynes (1994) concur that Black theology emerged in response to the problem of racism in the United States of America around the same time as liberation theology in Latin America. Liberation theologians see a close relationship between religion and the modern problem of the society. They argued that the marginalized and subjugated are not poor by providence or fate but by the unjust social structures of the society. They believe in giving religion back its liberating power. Liberation theology therefore explicitly espouses key modern values especially with stress on inclusiveness, equality and progress. They believe that these values are the heart of authentic Christianity.

The Condition of Nigeria Today

Nigeria as a country is amalgamated in 1914 and got her political independence on 1st October, 1960. Having gone through the initial civilian rule that was halted largely because of ethnicity, passed through the throes of the military dictators

and returned to civilian rule in 1999 and probably being aware of the dangers of feudalism, the framers of the present 1999 Nigerian constitution in chapters two and three outlined the following:

14. (1) The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a State based on the principles of democracy and *social justice*. (b) the *security and welfare* of the people shall be the *primary purpose* of government:

16. (1) The State shall, within the context of the ideals and objectives for which provisions are made in this Constitution.

(b) *control the national economy* in such *manner* as to secure the *maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity...*) that the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the *concentration* of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or of a group; and

(d) that suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens.

18. (1) Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels. (3) Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end Government shall as and when practicable provide

(a) *free*, compulsory and universal primary education;

(b) *free* secondary education;

(c) *free* university education;

Take a critical look at these italicized words and phrases and you will be shocked at the level of breach of trust and social contracts the state actors in Nigeria have carried out against the Nigerian masses. Just like it was in medieval Europe where feudalism was in operation and Latin America before the founding of the Liberation theology, that is how it is to Nigeria today. Despite the fact that the country is richly blessed with both human and natural resources, the country has myriads of man-made problems. Alechenu, Ihuoma, Nwogu and Isenyo (2020) state that the country is voted the global headquarters of poverty, the World Bank added that seventy-one (71) million Nigerians lack access to improved water, while one hundred and thirty (130) million people do not meet the Millennium Development Goal standards for sanitation.

Largely because of poverty, injustice and politics, the socioeconomic, political and religious life of Nigeria has been roundly heated up with agitations and counter agitations and it has made the country a scary society. The return to the so called civilian rule in 1999, gave some group of politicians the avenue to churn out the agitation for the implementation of Sharia in Nigeria. Expectedly, hundreds of thousands of poor people lost their lives and property of unquantifiable costs. Simultaneously, the deadly kidnapping ventures took a wilder dimension beginning from the oil rich Niger Delta. Similarly, other ethnic national movements sprouted in the likes of EGBESU boys, OPC (Odua Peoples' Congress), MOSOP (Movement for the survival of the Ogoni people), (NDPVF) Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, MASSOB (Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra), Arewa Youth Forum, Coalition of Northern (Youth) Groups, later the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and MAFO (Movement against Fulani Occupation).

Lately, the most horrible and dreadful dimension of all these have been the mindless invasion and destruction of farm lands, raping and murderous bloodletting of defenceless and innocent people by the killer herdsmen in Nigeria. Similar to the form of medieval feudalism and the state of Latin American before the thought of Liberation Theology was borne, where might was right the government of the day especially the federal government seems to be looking the other side as if different laws are made for different people. For example, the same government has unilaterally proscribed MASSOB and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) who later took to the street with their countless processions to protest against perceived injustice.

Referring to the section 14 subsection 3 of the 1999 constitution, it is made clear that:

The composition of the federal government or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner that as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to protect national unity, also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies.

In flagrant to this provision, Nigerian successive political actors seem to be promoting injustice in clear perversion of the quota system and federal character principles in appointments into key offices in Nigeria. The impunity appears

much evident with the administration of President Muhammad Buhari. Take for example, the Nigerian heads of security and para military agencies except for Chiefs of Defence and Naval Staff appointed from the south, the heads of other security agencies such as the Army, Air Force, Police, Nigeria Intelligence Agency, Department of State Security Services, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, Defence intelligence Agency, Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Customs, Nigerian correctional centers to mention but a few are all Northerners and Muslims. Many people are of the view that these parochial, clannish, lopsided and provocative appointments are aimed at promoting superiority and the expansionist zeal of some groups.

The country's system covertly encourages massive exploitations. For example, the premium motor spirit (PMS) known as fuel (which God freely gave to the people) was close to five years ago hiked to close to one hundred percent without any tangible increment on the workers' stipends. When the thirty thousand (30,000) naira a month was reluctantly passed into law, many states refused to pay it to workers. Before the increment by this current regime from eighty-six (86) naira to one hundred and forty-five (145) naira per a liter, a bag of rice was sold for six or seven thousand naira (7,000) while the minimum wage was eighteen thousand naira (18,000). Today, a bag of rice is sold for about twenty thousand (28,000) naira and the worker is being reluctantly paid thirty thousand (30,000) naira by the federal government while the state governments paid whatever they like. The implication therefore is that, assuming the worker did not spend his/her wage on transportation, house rent, soaps for washing his/her clothes and any other need in a month, his/her earning in a month can only afford him/her a bag of rice without other condiments and firewood, kerosene or cooking gas that can be used for cooking the rice. Again must the worker only live on eating rice in a month and still survive? Has he/she got no children and other dependents? Probably, this may be a person who has spent years in training and even the university. But in his/her village or street, one may see a school dropout who when appointed into a political office, within a few months, the person will become stupendously rich and powerful yet the worker may spend thirty-five years without anything to show for it.

Majority of the workers are not regularly paid their salaries and not to talk of pensioners who are dying on daily basis for lack of care from the governments they have served with their youthful days and energies. The security apparatus seems to be working optimally when it comes to protecting the wealthy and

politically exposed individuals and their property. The same agencies only mobilize the remaining part of their formidability and astuteness to unleash, harass, intimidate and even kill armless and poor Nigerians while killer herdsmen (rated the fourth most dangerous terrorists in the world) carry out their nefarious activities unchallenged.

Generally, like Achebe (1983) pointed out that, bad leadership has been the only problem with Nigeria (p.1). It has affected the economic condition of the country causing the horrible experiences such as unemployment, poverty, absence of social amenities, corruption, ethnicity, clannishness, parochialism, impunity, suppression and oppression. According to the Nigerian minister of Labour and Employment, Senator Chris Ngige, would rise to 33.5 per cent by 2020. The end result of unemployment in any society is poverty and escalation of crimes and crises. It is horrifying to watch how majority of the youths engage in illicit drugs, alcohol and betting activities meaning that in no distant future the country will brag more of *BetNiger* youths. In view of all these, Nigeria has become a country where her people are highly vulnerable, gullible and afraid to ask questions.

The much hyped fight against corruption has lost its acceptability among many Nigerians. To have a glimpse of how majority of the so-called corruption is fought, in the build up to the 2019 Senate presidential election, many analysts projected Senator Danjuma Goje to head the Nigerian Red Chamber. But on 6th June, 2019, immediately he had a meeting with the president, he publicly withdrew from the race and Adebulu (2019) states that the corruption case of twenty-five billion naira against him at the Court of Appeal in Jos was subsequently withdrawn by the attorney general of the federation, Abubakar Malami (SAN). Instead of fighting against electoral corruption and building strong public institutions to where they can checkmate impunity and corruption, Nigerian politicians are busy deceiving the poor masses with opiated slogans. Nigeria has digitalized some of her modes of payments and taxations but has not digitalized her electoral system simply because politicians corruptly impose themselves on the people through the wobbling system. The worst form of corruption in Nigeria is this unprecedented electoral corruption. This is because it has the ability to enthrone mediocre and bandits in office as leaders.

The country is suffering from a wholesome infrastructural deficit. The deficits ranges from the epileptic power supply and near mortuary as health centers. Majority of the social amenities are only built on radio and television stations.

Until the arrival of coronavirus, the secretary to the Nigerian government, Boss Mustapha, according to Iroanusi (2020) confessed that he never knew that Nigerian health system was in such “a bad state” (p.8). The Nigerian politicians and privileged public office holders will not to know that Nigerian health system is in a shambles since they trot US, Europe and Dubai with their families and cohorts to treat ordinary malaria while the poor masses they claim to be serving are abandoned to their fates.

Just as it was obtained in the medieval feudal system where judiciary was at the whims and caprices of the lords, many poor people are not getting justice today from the law court. The wealthy and politically exposed individuals usually hire the services of the best lawyers and through them delay justice and often buy it for the highest bidders. Nigeria can only lay claim to judicial system without justice system.

As noted earlier, the peasants in the medieval feudalism at a point protested against their lords in England, that is how agitations are growing especially for an ethnic presidency seems to be making headline news simply because other Nigerians feel rightly insecure when a politician from other tribe is in the saddle because of the level of impunity and clannishness of some accidental leaders in Nigeria.

Liberation Theology an antidote to the Contemporary Feudalism

Liberation theology made impact from where it started. For example, it has helped many of the poor in the Latin America to create their own self-reliant communities. One of the major problems Nigeria as a country has been facing is the problem of self-reliance. Majority of the youth are anxiously working towards securing government jobs while almost all the states cannot do anything meaningful in the area of development because they do not believe that they stand financially if they are not given allocation from the federation accounts yet in their various lands lie untapped natural resources. Socrates opines that unexamined life is not worth living. Liberation theology will help individuals, local and state governments in Nigeria to look inward and tap their resources. Liberation theology bequeathed Marxist elements to black theology in the United States of America. Ukpong (1995) maintains that liberation theology helped minjung theology (theology of people) in Korea and Dalit theology (theology of the untouchable) in India to emerge. It built a considerable base, when it was connected with the Marxist-led Sandinista government of Nicaragua in the 1980s.

Moreover, many scholars such as Durkheim and Engels saw religion as materialist fact and they believed that it is the creation of man. But religion has gone deeper to remaining a cognitive phenomenon, a system of hypotheses aimed at explaining reality by reference to the supernatural entity and which also attracts veneration. In view of this, people are forced to depend on the supernatural entity and they are cultured to the feelings that what becomes their values are seen from the perspective of this supernatural reality. This recognition and dependence instill some kind of consciousness and reverence for the laws and tenets of the supernatural.

Moreover, religion has been an agent of social change and Russell in all his fierce criticism of religion, reluctantly accepted that Christianity has made unimaginable contributions to human developments. He cited as his proof, the establishment of universities of Oxford, Bologna, Paris and Cambridge and others in Europe (p.24). Unarguably, all the religions of the world have special place for the poor, abhors impunity, corruption, operation and suppression. The consciousness and reverence for the supernatural reality will checkmate the excesses and impunity of the state and social actors. To be religious is to be liberated, grace does not mean bondage neither does it exclude freedom rather grace establishes freedom.

According to Heselbarth (1985), the blacks believed that Jesus Christ was a black as long as He was sent to deliver the poor (Luke 4:18). For them, "to be Black is to be where the oppressed are" (p. 217). The blacks understood their lives with the help of the biblical texts and also understood God in the light of their experience. Apawo and Sarogini (2000) state that African women theologians advocated that African theologies should focus on the transformation of the society and this places African theologies within the field of liberation theologies. Such theologies should conscientize communities of people or to make them become aware of their deplorable conditions which is the first step towards overcoming it.

Osei-Bonsu (2005) argues that the Latin American liberation theology gave birth to the Black African theology and he chose to re-caption it "the African liberation theology" (pp.94-95). According to Oji (2004), Pope John Paul 11 wrote that social thinking and social practice inspired by the Gospel must always be marked by a special sensitivity towards those who are extremely poor, those suffering from, all physical, mental and moral ills that afflict humanity, including hunger, neglect unemployment (sic) and despair...

You must also seek out the structural which foster the cause different forms of poverty in the world... so that you can apply the proper remedies.

It may not yet be the Uhuru But...

However, it should be noted that in spite of its strong theological and ideological stance on praxis for social revolution, Liberation theology had hardly been able to accomplish that kind of revolution. Sigmund (1992) observed that most of the poor people in Latin America are by nature too religious and pious to accept liberation theology's radical program for social revolution. They have been mainly interested in the pursuit of their own parallel societies and looking at the condition and configuration of Nigerian society today as a place where majority of the people are concerned with the momentary solutions to their challenges, bedeviled by ethnic cleavages and gullibility occasioned mostly by offensive poverty and colossal injustice entrenched in the country, liberation theology may not catch their attention. Moreover, with the level of conspiracy among the rich and wealthy in the Nigeria who use the security apparatuses to intimidate and even kill the people, liberation theology may not be popular. Again, because the religious leaders who are supposed to champion the cause of liberation theology are culpable of the subjugation and really beneficence of the wobbling and oppressive system.

However, Munsterberg (1914) states that society is advanced by contrasting views, discussions and struggles (p.49). Of course, Nigeria is advancing both in population and idea and there is hope that the people one day will definitely be aware of who they are. Similarly, Brooks (1923) warns that a ruling class is seldom conscious of its own decay and most of the world's catastrophes of history have been caused by an obstinate resistance to change when resistance was no longer possible. Thus, while an incessant alteration in social equilibrium is inevitable, a revolution is a problem in dynamics on the correct solution of which the fortunes of a declining class depend (p.47). Iwe (1986) states that in the fourteenth century, these serfs revolted in places such as in France in 1357 and England in 1382. However, their protests could not depose the lords who employed the steel policemen against them. The end result was the massacre but their uprising in England led to sanctioning of the English magna carta. Though it did not affect or ameliorate their sufferings, it was a good starting point for other good things to come.

Conclusion

Feudalism especially from the era of medieval was a socioeconomic and political idea of subjugation, suppression and oppression which even when it was thought to have stopped with the evolution of other world orders, it has just been modified and metamorphosed into other ideologies that are driven specifically by politics and economics. It is my unshaking belief that man is not merely an evolution as it has been propounded earlier but more of a revolutionary being and this unique quality has become historically and ideologically crystalized with the emergence of major world religions especially Christianity. In the first century of Christian era, human person is conceived as sacred, independent and indestructible. The rights of human person embody the spiritual image of his Maker. The emergence and recognition of this sacred nature of human person as a personality was a major revolution and historic triumph of a fundamental and critical human value. Liberation theology is a religious movement that arose in late twentieth-century in Latin America that sought to apply religious faith in assisting the poor and oppressed expose both the heightened awareness of the sinful socioeconomic structures that caused social inequities and their active participation in changing those structures. It did not provide immediate relief but with time, it brought attention to the plights of the downtrodden.

The same conditions prevalent in the Latin America thrive in the present day Nigeria and religion being one of the potent forces in Nigeria can be interpreted the same as it was in Latin America to inspire the downtrodden oppressed and subjugated in getting out of this socioeconomic and political dungeon. Beyer (1994) argues that the liberation theologians want religion to be publicly influential, but they do not insist on a particular religion (p.141). In other words, the struggle for the liberation of the poor and oppressed is not particular to Christianity rather all regions bodies and traditions should rise and use religion to defend the downtrodden. It will be mortally, injurious for religion to wait and another social force comes to redeem mankind from the claws of this horrific condition in Nigeria.

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