

Innovations

The Concept of People and Collective Participation in Liberation Theology: The Nigeria Context

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Abstract: *Liberation theology is a movement that emerged in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, which seeks to apply the Christian faith to the social, political, and economic realities of the oppressed. This paper examined how the concept of “people” and collective participation is understood and practiced in liberation theology in the Nigeria context. The paper saw as a problem, some challenges that hinder people and collective participation in liberation theology in Nigeria, such as the lack of education, the marginalization of women, the persecution of Christians, the infiltration of foreign ideologies, and the fragmentation of liberation movements. The main objective of the paper was to analyze the main features and challenges of people and collective participation in liberation theology in Nigeria and to propose some recommendations for enhancing people and collective participation in liberation theology in Nigeria. The paper adopted a qualitative research methodology, using secondary sources such as books, articles, reports, and documents. Our findings showed that people and collective participation in liberation theology in Nigeria is influenced by various factors, such as the colonial legacy, the ethnic diversity, the religious pluralism, the political instability, the economic inequality, and the cultural identity. The paper concluded by offering some recommendations for enhancing people and collective participation in liberation theology in Nigeria, such as the promotion of dialogue, the empowerment of grassroots communities, the integration of indigenous values, the formation of alliances, and the development of contextualized theologies.*

Key Words: *Liberation Theology, Christian Faith, People, Collective Participation, Nigerian Context, Latin America*

Background to the Study

The concept of “People” and collective participation in Liberation Theology is a topic that has been explored in various contexts. Liberation Theology is a movement that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America, which sought to address the social, economic, and political oppression of the poor and marginalized. It is a theology that emphasizes the importance of collective action and social justice in the struggle for liberation. Liberation theology was influenced by the Second Vatican Council, the social Medellín Conference, the dependency theory, the Marxist analysis, and popular movements. The movement emphasized the active participation of the oppressed masses towards their own liberation. It was characterized by a preference for the poor and a focus on social justice. The movement was met with internal opposition within the Vatican in the 1980s. Despite this, it has continued to inspire marginalized social actors (Sullivan-González 1) Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, and many more are significant contributors to the development of liberation theology. Liberation theology aimed to reinterpret the Christian faith from the perspective of the poor and oppressed, and to denounce the structures of sin that perpetuate their misery. It also sought to empower the poor to become agents of their own liberation, through their participation in base communities social and political action.

Liberation theology, since then has evolved and spread to other regions, including Africa, where it adapted to local challenges and contexts to the specific realities and challenges of each situation. In Africa, the emergence of liberation theology is traced to 1970s and 1980s, as a response to the fight against colonialism, neocolonial exploitation, ethnic strife, environmental degradation, and cultural estrangement prevalent throughout the continent, (Okanlawon⁹). African liberation theologians sought to recover the African cultural identity and values, such as ubuntu (humanity), ujamaa (familyhood), and sankofa (returning to the source), and to integrate them with the Christian message of liberation. They also emphasized the role of African traditional religions, African women, and African youth in the liberation process.

Nigeria is one of the African countries where liberation theology has been developed and practiced. It has more than 200 ethnic groups, 500 languages, and two major religions: Islam and Christianity. In Nigeria, a unique kind of liberation theology has been shaped by the country's diverse history and culture. Nigerian theologians have developed this theology to deal with challenges like colonialism, civil war, corruption, poverty, inequality, violence, and terrorism from a Christian viewpoint. In Nigeria, Pentecostal theology, which focuses on deliverance and success, is also influential. The blending of inculturation and liberation theologies offers a thorough perspective on how liberation theology evolves and applied to

Nigeria situation. Falola explores the intricate relationship between religious beliefs, political dynamics, and secular ideologies, highlighting their impact on the development of Nigerian liberation theology. (58)

In Nigeria context liberation theology is a reaction to the predominant state of poverty, oppression, and injustice. Nigerian liberation theologians have addressed these issues from a Christian perspective, advocating for the church to work collectively with the aim of changing the socio-economic and political framework which inhibits social, economic, and political justice. This theology is established on the principle of human dignity, fairness and equity (Ottuh65)

Several Nigerian liberation theologians have made notable contributions to the theological landscape. M. A. Fabiyi has contextualized liberation theology within Nigeria, emphasizing social justice and empowerment. A. O. Adegbola highlights the role of indigenous African spirituality in liberation movements, bridging traditional beliefs with Christian praxis. Gabriel Ositelu III emphasizes the church's role in addressing systematic oppression. Matthew Hassan Kukah addresses corruption and political marginalization, advocating for systematic change and social justice. Teresa Okure emphasizes the importance of interfaith dialogue and solidarity in liberation theology. Justin Ukpung explores the intersection of African traditional values and Christian liberation praxis. John Onaiyekan advocates for peace and reconciliation in Nigeria's socio-political landscape. Anthony Akinwale contributes to the dialogue on social justice and human rights from a theological perspective. These theologians enrich Nigerian liberation theology by addressing a wide range of socio-political challenges and advocating for the liberation of oppressed communities.

The concept of people and collective participation is central to liberation theology in general, and to Nigerian liberation theology in particular. It reflects the belief that God speaks through the poor and oppressed, and that they are called to participate actively in their own liberation process. It also reflects the value of solidarity among different oppressed groups, both within Nigeria and beyond. Nigerian liberation theologians have used various terms to express this concept, such as “the people of God”, “the community of believers”, “the church of the poor”, “the prophetic communities”, “the popular movements”, “the civil society”, etc. They have also proposed various ways to foster this concept, such as biblical interpretation from below, contextual theological education, social analysis and action, interreligious dialogue, and cooperation, etc. The study will draw on a range of sources, including academic literature, historical documents, and interviews with key figures in the Nigerian Liberation Theology movement. It will explore the ways

in which Liberation Theology has been used to address issues such as poverty, inequality, and corruption in Nigeria.

Overall, this study seeks to solve the problem of oppression in the society by introducing the concept of "People" and collective participation towards the liberation of the society. It aims to shed light on the ways in which this theology is understood and can help in Nigeria, and its potential for addressing social, economic, and political issues.

Overview of Liberation Theology

Liberation theology emerges from the fusion of two terms: "liberation" and "theology." "Liberation theology," as a term, was coined in 1971 by the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez, who wrote one of the movement's defining books, *A Theology of Liberation* (Gutiérrez, 47). The concept of "liberation," as defined by Hornby, denotes the act of freeing individuals or nations from the dominion of others, particularly those who impose constraints hindering one's ability to lead a fulfilling life (Hornby, 855). It signifies emancipation from bondage. Derived from the Greek words "theo" and "logos," meaning "God" and "word" respectively, "theology" refers to the study of religious beliefs and doctrines. Originating predominantly in Latin America, liberation theology interprets the teachings of Christianity to denounce social injustices inflicted upon the impoverished and marginalized segments of society. It serves as a means by which oppressed communities, upon realizing the severity of their circumstances, strive to dismantle the structures of oppression restraining them from realizing their full potential.

Liberation Theology, a movement emerging within the Catholic Church in Latin America during the 1960s, was a response to the region's entrenched poverty and social injustice (Gutiérrez, 47). It found solidification at the 1968 Bishop's Conference in Medellín, Colombia, where it vigorously affirmed the rights of the poor (CEPAL, 284). Led by theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez, Liberation Theology emphasized the church's obligation to prioritize the oppressed and marginalized. Despite encountering challenges in gaining mass appeal, particularly with many of Latin America's poor favoring non-Catholic churches over the Christian Base Communities associated with liberation theology, the movement succeeded in promoting social and economic justice within the Catholic Church (Smith, 98).

Other leaders of the movement included the Belgian-born Brazilian priest José Comblin, Archbishop Óscar Romero of El Salvador, Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff, Jesuit scholar Jon Sobrino, and Archbishop Helder Câmara of Brazil. Liberation theology was a response to widespread poverty, a heavily Catholic population, and the influence of Vatican II. It combined Marxist social analysis with biblical teachings, emphasizing God's care for the poor. This theology was championed by

theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez and Ignacio Ellacuría, who called for a preferential option for the poor and the realization of God's reign in history. It also led to the formation of Christian base communities, which empowered the poor to read their reality in light of the Exodus story and advocate for social justice. However, the movement faced opposition, both internally within the Vatican and externally through repression and assassination by security forces. Despite these challenges, liberation theology has continued to inspire marginalized groups to seek liberation.

In understanding liberation theology, it is important to note that it originated in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s. due to the following situation: (i) Poverty and hunger were common. (ii) The countries were heavily Catholic. (iii) Vatican II had pivoted Catholicism to a more open stance to the world around it. (iv) Communist revolutions around the globe sparked hope for impoverished people. Into this environment, Catholic theologians began forming a theology which brought together Marxist social analysis with biblical teachings about God's care for the poor.

Review of Literature

Gutiérrez's "A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation" (1971) stands as a pivotal text that centers on the empowerment of the marginalized and oppressed, disrupting conventional religious doctrines, Planas (1986) delves deeper into this narrative, underlining the movement's political stance and its emphasis on enacting societal change. Gill (2002) examines the worldwide influence of liberation theology, observing its reception across continents like Latin America, Asia, and Africa, alongside the obstacles it faces due to opposition from the Vatican. Bretherton expands on this discourse by underscoring the importance of an ecological theology of liberation, which underscores the interdependence of social justice and environmental concerns. Gutierrez further explained his liberation theology view of history's goal not as the glorious return of Jesus to rescue us from evil but as a permanent cultural revolution: "The goal is not only better living conditions, a radical change of structures, a social revolution; it is much more: the continuous creation, never ending, of a new way to be a man, a permanent cultural revolution." In this text, Gutiérrez articulates the core ideas of liberation theology and its relationship to Christian faith, explain his notion of Christian poverty as an act of loving solidarity with the poor as well as a liberatory protest against poverty. (97)

Gutiérrez further emphasized that true "liberation" has three main dimensions: First, it involves political and social liberation, the elimination of the immediate causes of poverty and injustice. Second, liberation involves the emancipation of the poor, the marginalized, the downtrodden and the oppressed

from all “those things that limit their capacity to develop themselves freely and in dignity”. Third, liberation theology involves liberation from selfishness and sin, a re-establishment of a relationship with God and with other people. (90)

Liberation theologians, influenced by Karl Marx, highlight the significance of class conflict and poverty in society (McLaren, 33). They perceive liberation theology as a revival of biblical radicalism, aiming to redefine the church and base community movements Roelofs, (32). Emphasis was that workers are exploited because they do not own the means of production. They are alienated by working on machines/property belonging to someone else for which a minority of the profits goes to the worker. The lack of investment and identity with their work for the worker is what Marx called alienation. Radical change to the structure of the economy was needed, to address the root causes of poverty. Inequality and alienation are caused by the private ownership of the means of production, so people should overthrow that system by political revolution. Marx even thought it was inevitable that this kind of revolution would happen. Liberation theology claims that Marx’s analysis of capitalism is useful, arguments against the validity or usefulness of Marx are therefore arguments against liberation theology.

Stålsett's assertion that liberation theology signifies a renewal of theological approach and substance is supported by Hallum, who examines its emergence in Latin America and its emphasis on advancing social and economic equity (19). The complex aspects of liberation theology, such as its connections to Marxist principles and its progression towards grassroots change, are also addressed in Hallum's work. Liberation theology is critical reflection on social praxis considering the Christian faith in God, Gutiérrez, defending the human dignity, and promoting the just participation of poor and marginalized people opines that, it is a theology deliberately aimed at serving human and social liberation. Liberation theology, with its emphasis on justice and freedom for the marginalized, is a crucial aspect of operationalizing the Christian faith in the face of domination and marginalization (17). Daniels notes that this theology calls for a new model of the Church as a liberator, one that is in solidarity with the poor and marginalized and engages in praxis (80). It also challenges Christians to understand and practice freedom in their daily lives. “What is needed is a model of social, political and economic participation ‘that can include popular movements’ . . . Such movements are ‘social poets’ that, in their own way, work, propose, promote and liberate. They help make possible an integral human development that goes beyond ‘the idea of social policies being a policy for the poor, but never with the poor and never of the poor, much less part of a project that reunites people.’” Pope Francis’ encyclical

"FratelliTutti" emphasizes the importance of fraternity and social friendship in building a just and peaceful world, (Francis 169).

Liberation theology, centered on socio-economic examination and the preferential treatment of the impoverished, has expanded to encompass cultural and gender issues. Liberation theology became the political praxis of theologians that were at the fore front of the movement, who popularized the phrase "preferential option for the poor".

The option for the poor is simply the idea that, as reflected in canon law, "The Christian faithful are also obliged to promote social justice and mindful of the precept of the Lord, to assist the poor." It indicates an obligation, on the part of those who would call themselves Christian, first and foremost to care for the poor and vulnerable, (Dault 15). This expression was used first by Jesuit Fr. General PedroArrupe in 1968 and soon after the World Synod of Catholic Bishops in 1971 chose as its theme "Justice in the World" (Crosby 16). The concept of the preferential option for the poor, a key tenet of Catholic social teaching, has significant implications for bioethics, (Reilly 8)

Caspersen observed "Dialogue must not only favor the preferential option on behalf of the poor, the marginalized and the excluded, but also respect them as having a leading role to play. "The primary purpose of this special commitment to the poor is to enable them to become active participants in the life of society. It is to enable all persons to share in and contribute to the common good. The 'option for the poor,' therefore, is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another." The emergence of the idea that God communicates uniquely through the impoverished and the need to view the Bible through the lens of the poor has led to the establishment of Christian Base Communities in Latin America (88). These communities, as highlighted by Escobar have been instrumental in raising the hopes of the poor and oppressed, embodying the Church's preferential love for the common people. (3)

The Base Christian Communities (BCC)are small groups within a parish who meet regularly for Bible study, led by a priest, nun, or lay member; who elect their own leaders; and who decide democratically with what other activities the community should be concerned. At their inception, CBCs were seen as a mechanism by which the liberal Catholic doctrine developed during the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and the Bishops' Conference held at Medellín, Colombia (1968), could be implemented. The goal was to bring the laity into the life of the church, to bring the church into dialogue with the world, and to teach that the

church is a community of equals before God in which everyone has obligations to each other and responsibilities to share.

Base Christian Communities (BCC) have a fundamental impact on liberation theology because they enable marginalized communities especially the poor to actively participate in theological reflection and social change. As a driving force in the liberation theology movement, BCC question established hierarchies, advocate for a "preferential option for the poor," and highlight the connection between social justice and faith. According to Segundo the liberation theologian "must at all times integrate the disciplines that provide light on the past with the disciplines that aid in the explanation of the present." (18)

In summary the research has done a review on the origin of liberation theology and roles played by Gutierrez the founder, it discussed the Base Christian Community's (BCC) contributions to the development of liberation theology. However, the research discovered a gap in literature, which the concept of people and collective participation in liberation of the society, this is area the research intends to fill.

Critique and Controversies of Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology, as a theological movement, emerges from a commitment to addressing social injustices, inequality, and oppression within the framework of Christian beliefs. It places a significant emphasis on advocating for the rights and well-being of the marginalized, drawing inspiration from the life experiences of the most impoverished and vulnerable members of society. Despite its commendable objectives, Liberation Theology has not been immune to criticism and controversy, particularly from the Vatican, with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) taking a prominent role in expressing concerns. The critiques often center around perceived associations with Marxist ideology, prompting the CDF, under the leadership of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 1984, to issue the document "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation.'"

In his critique, Cardinal Ratzinger rejected certain elements of the theology of liberation, particularly its emphasis on institutionalized or systemic sin. Additionally, he argued against the identification of members of the Catholic Church hierarchy in South America with the same privileged class that historically oppressed Indigenous populations since the era of Pizarro and beyond. Cardinal Ratzinger's perspective offers a nuanced critique that highlights the complexities within the theological discourse surrounding liberation theology in the Latin American context. (Ratzinger 1)

Critics of liberation theology have raised several concerns, including:

Marxist Influence:

Critique: One of the major criticisms of Liberation Theology is its perceived association with Marxist ideology. Some argue that the movement relies too heavily on Marxist concepts of class struggle and revolution, which can be seen as incompatible with traditional Christian teachings.

Controversy: The Marxist influence has led to tensions within the Catholic Church, with some conservative factions opposing Liberation Theology on doctrinal grounds.

Political Engagement:

Critique: Liberation Theology is often criticized for its active involvement in political and social issues. Some argue that this engagement blurs the lines between theology and politics, potentially compromising the integrity of religious institutions.

Controversy: Critics suggest that the movement's alignment with political movements and armed struggle in some instances has led to violence and division within communities.

Class Struggle vs. Spiritual Focus:

Critique: Some argue that Liberation Theology places too much emphasis on addressing social and economic issues, potentially neglecting the spiritual aspects of Christianity.

Controversy: The prioritization of social justice over traditional religious practices has sparked debates within the church about the proper balance between addressing worldly concerns and spiritual salvation.

Cultural Relativism:

Critique: Liberation Theology is accused of sometimes embracing cultural relativism, wherein local cultural values and practices are given precedence over universal moral principles. Critics argue that this can lead to a dilution of Christian doctrine.

Controversy: Balancing cultural sensitivity with adherence to core theological tenets is a persistent challenge for Liberation Theology advocates.

Feminist Critiques:

Critique: Some feminists argue that Liberation Theology does not adequately address issues of gender and women's liberation. They are concerned about the patriarchal anthropology and cosmology present in liberation theology, they were involved in a radical anti-patriarchal approach and proposed a new, inclusive and non-patriarchal theology (Eteng, 2018).

Controversy: The feminist critique highlights the need for a more inclusive and intersectional approach within Liberation Theology.

Orthodox Theological Concerns:

Critique: Traditional and conservative theologians often criticize Liberation Theology for departing from orthodox theological interpretations. The emphasis on praxis (action) over doctrine can be seen as a departure from traditional theological frameworks.

Controversy: The tension between orthodoxy and the need for relevant engagement with contemporary social issues continues to be a point of debate within the theological community.

It's important to note that these criticisms are not universally accepted, and there are defenders of liberation theology who argue that it has made significant contributions to addressing social inequality and promoting justice from a Christian perspective. While Liberation Theology has made significant contributions to addressing social injustice from a Christian perspective, it has not been without controversy. The movement's engagement with political ideologies, potential dilution of core Christian teachings, and challenges in addressing issues like gender inequality have led to ongoing debates within both religious and secular spheres.

Understanding the Concept of "People" in Liberation Theology

The concept of "people" in Liberation Theology, especially within the context of Latin America, denotes a vibrant and inclusive community of individuals who collectively undergo suffering and oppression, Lubardic notes that, this concept underscores the proactive involvement of marginalized communities in crafting their destinies, portraying it as a continual journey rather than a fixed entity. It is grounded in the conviction that God stands alongside the marginalized, urging their emancipation from injustice. This principle resonates with the theological ideals of solidarity and community. Within the Church, the term "people" carries profound meaning, referring to the collective body of believers united as the body of Christ,

(524) Ndinda is the opinion that Hegel's political philosophy adds complexity to the concept, as the term "people" can signify both ethical existence and the political community (15). Rogers explain that the term "people" embraces a range of ethnicities, backgrounds, and social standings, reflecting the inclusive essence of this theological framework (200). In the era of the Reformation, the theological idea of the "people of God" shifted to highlight the followers and believers chosen by God (Leppin51).

Within the context of the Church, the term "people" often refers to the community of believers, who are seen as members of the body of Christ. This concept is deeply rooted in the New Testament, where the apostle Paul frequently uses the metaphor of the body to describe the unity and diversity within the Christian community (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-27). This understanding of solidarity and community extends beyond the boundaries of the Church itself to encompass all of humanity. In Catholic social teaching, there is an emphasis on the dignity of every person and the promotion of the common good, reflecting the belief that all people are interconnected and called to work together for the flourishing of society. Therefore, the term "people" holds significant theological and ethical implications within the Church, reminding believers of their call to solidarity, community, and service both within the Christian community and in the wider world.

To define and elaborate on the concept of "people" in liberation theology, it's essential to explore into its various dimensions: According to Cambridge Dictionary (dictionary.cambridge.org) When you say the "people", you mean the "large number of ordinary men and women who do not have position of power in society". Merriam-webster.com defines "people" as "human beings making up a group or assembly or linked by common interest". These definitions of "people" firstly emphasize the distinction between those in positions of power and those who are not. Secondly, emphasis is put on common interest and shared humanity of human beings. These perspectives collectively underscore the complexity and fluidity of the concept of "people."

Liberation theologians often stress the importance of recognizing the common interests and shared humanity among all individuals, regardless of their social status. They argue that by uniting people based on their shared interests and common humanity, positive social change can be achieved to uplift the marginalized and oppressed. In both definitions, the core idea of liberation theology is present: a focus on addressing the needs and injustices faced by those who are marginalized or oppressed in society.

It is worth to note that the term "people" in ordinary usage can have two distinct connotations. First, to we can speak of the "people" imply a political context,

as in the adage “the voice of the people is the voice of God”. On the other hand, it is refer to a people as having cultural unity in mind; thus, we can speak of the Jews as being one people, though they were split in many tribes. These two meaning of the term “people” have played an important role in the elaboration of two opposite theories about the basis of social cohesion, one which stresses the cultural aspect of the given society and one which emphasizes the function of a political institution in creating a genuine community. One regards the identity of people as embodied in language, historical and cultural tradition, and the other synthesizes these elements and sees them materialized in political institution. Generally, the “concept of people” in liberation theology sees; people as a community, linked by historical, cultural, and political ties, people as a base of political representation; and people as agents of history in societal transformation.

Theologians and the Notion of “People”

Theologians have redefined the concept of "people" to include the agency, subjectivity, and embodiment of marginalized and oppressed individuals, (Sinner 119). This transformation gains particular relevance amidst the rise of populism, as it confronts the simplistic portrayal of the masses and underscores the significance of active participation by the populace, (Field 105). Theologians are also summoned to contemplate the diverse nature of humanity and advocate for human dignity, particularly within the framework of cultural diversity and interculturality.

In the context of liberation theology, there’s a strong emphasis on the relationship between prioritizing the "people" and committing to the option for the poor. Emerging from the Greek term "laos [theou]," this perspective seeks the emancipation of marginalized individuals within both society and the church. It introduces the concept of the "crucified people," aligning the concrete suffering of the marginalized with the salvific work of Jesus Christ, (Orique et al. 56). Primarily, the term "Laos" conveys a sense of belonging, indicating a chosen possession by God, motivated by His immense love. However, it denotes the general populace, akin to the Greek term "ochlos" which is evident in passages like Matthew 4:23 and Luke 9:13, it refers to the crowd gathered to listen to Jesus. The theological foundation of the 'people of God' concept heavily relies on the biblical story of God's covenant with the nation of Israel, His chosen people. how Christians, as a whole, internalize the idea of being the new Israel (Acts 15:14; 1 Peter 2:10), (Nicolaidis4).

In Korean Minjung theology, the term "people" bears resemblance to the Greek term "ochlos," historically used disparagingly by figures like Philo and Josephus to portray disorderly or ignorant masses (Eckhardt221). This parallel underscore the negative implications linked with the term and its potential influence on how the Minjung are perceived. Moreover, the adoption of the term "people" in this context might also signify a growing rejection of traditional Greek customs, as

evident in Philo's writings, (Niehoff97). Ernesto Laclau's reinterpretation of populism, in his book "On Populist Reason," notes the significance of understanding the populace as "people" within a societal framework rather than solely through a nationalistic lens (20). This is elaborated by Hugo Assmann, who perceives "people" not merely as individuals lacking something, but as carriers of hopes and aspirations. Assmann advocates for an educational strategy that prioritizes fostering solidarity, competence, and sensitivity (De Lissovoy214).

Sinner & Gabatz and Vergara both examine the concept of "the people" within the context of populism. Sinner highlights the fragility of this concept, particularly within populist movements, advocating for the recognition of participatory popular entities (354). Kaegi provides historical and theological insights into these discussions, particularly through the writings of Augustine and Jerome, where the term "populus" signifies a cohesive political entity (532).

In his work "Populism, People and a Task for Public Theology", Rudolf von Sinner elaborates on the transformation of the concept of "people". He discusses how "from the amorphous mass emerges the people, the populus from the plebs, the People of God from the human species, the city of God from within the earthly city. In general, the people of God are, a process, an "event" rather than an institution, as underlined in their specific ways". Sinner argues about the evolution of the notion of 'people' within the context of public theology and populism. He underscores the intricate and changeable nature of the term 'people' within public theology, demonstrating how its interpretation can shift and adopt new connotations in response to societal changes and theological reflections. Here's an explanation of the key points:

- i. **Amorphous Mass to People:** The idea that from an initially undefined and shapeless mass of individuals, a distinct notion of "people" emerges. This transition represents a shift from a disorganized and undifferentiated collective to a more organized and purposeful group.
- ii. **Populus from Plebs:** Populous typically refers to the people or the populace, while "plebs" often denote the common people or the less privileged. This transformation signifies a shift from commonality to a more organized and recognized collective.
- iii. **People of God from Human Species:** The "People of God" emerge from the broader human species. This suggests a spiritual and ethical dimension to the concept of "people," emphasizing a sense of divine purpose and mission.

City of God from Earthly City: This is the emergence of the "city of God" from within the confines of the earthly city. This metaphorical imagery underscores the idea that the concept of "people" can transcend mere physical or political boundaries and be associated with a higher moral or spiritual order.

- iv. **Not a Given, but a Process:** The idea emphasizes that the concept of "people" is not fixed or predetermined. Instead, it is portrayed as an ongoing process that evolves and develops over time. This suggests that the understanding of who constitutes "people" can change in response to social, political, and ethical developments.
- v. **An "Event" Rather than an Institution:** This is characterizing the concept of "people" as an "event" rather than an institution. This implies that the emergence and definition of "people" are not static or formalized but are dynamic and contingent on specific circumstances and contexts.

The theologians' engagement with the notion of "people" is integral to the framework of liberation theology, particularly within the context of Latin America. This concept serves as a foundational pillar, embodying a collective identity for those who are oppressed, highlighting the importance of unity, shared interests, and a common humanity. Rooted deeply in the option for the poor, this theological perspective aims to emancipate marginalized individuals both within society and the church. The introduction of the "crucified people" concept further emphasizes the connection between the suffering of the oppressed and Christ's salvific mission. Terms such as "people of God" and "laos[theos]" in Greek not only underscore its theoretical significance but also demonstrate its evolution over time. Embracing principles of solidarity, social justice, shared humanity, and transformative potential, the notion of "people" remains central in discussions surrounding populism and public theology. Theologians continually advocate for the liberation and empowerment of all marginalized communities, echoing the imperative for justice, compassion, and dignity for every individual.

Collective Participation in Liberation Theology

Collective participation emerges as a potent force in liberation theology, enabling the oppressed to collaborate in their own emancipation, (Cook 98). According to Thomas et al., collective action, also referred to as social protest, serves as a fundamental tool for promoting social equality and justice. It is shaped by various factors including social identity, norms, and psychological consequences (189). This idea was supported by Ostrander, whose research demonstrates that a curriculum emphasizing political social work enhances the political efficacy and

involvement of social workers (268). Subašić and Drury both emphasize the pivotal role of inclusive social identity and collective action in fostering social change. Subašić underscores the significance of shared victimization, while Drury highlights the personal and political importance of realizing one's social identity through collective efforts.

Collective participation serves as a vital means for marginalized communities to actively engage in their own liberation and social transformation. Rooted in the theological premise of solidarity with the oppressed, it embodies the principle that individuals, when united in purpose and action, can challenge systemic injustices, and promote the liberation of all people. Healy et al. argue that the solidarity economy movement, with its aim to replace exploitation with cooperation, exclusion with participation, and marginalization with practices of inclusion, holds the potential to overcome poverty dynamics through cooperative, participatory, and inclusive sharing of spaces and resources. They contend that this movement offers transformative responses to poverty by advocating for collective participation in addressing societal inequalities and injustices. Secondly, the movement reflects the theological principle of solidarity with the marginalized, rooted in the belief in God's preferential option for the poor and oppressed (28).

Becker et al. argue that collective action participation leads to increased outgroup-directed anger and contempt, while simultaneously promoting self-directed positive effect. Moreover, they suggest that such participation predicts individuals' willingness to engage in future collective actions. It extends beyond mere activism to encompass a holistic praxis integrating spirituality, solidarity, and action. Through collective participation, individuals not only challenge unjust structures but also cultivate transformative relationships, nurture inclusive communities, and embody the liberating message of the Gospel. This praxis empowers individuals to recognize their shared humanity and interconnectedness, affirming their dignity and worth as children of God while reclaiming their rightful place in society and asserting their right to liberation.

In practical terms, collective participation fosters a sense of communal empowerment and agency among the oppressed. By recognizing their shared humanity and interconnectedness, individuals affirm their dignity and worth as children of God, reclaiming their rightful place in society and asserting their right to liberation. Collective participation in liberation theology embodies the transformative power of faith, solidarity, and social action, offering marginalized communities a platform to engage in their own liberation and advocate for justice. Through collective action, individuals embody the liberating presence of God and work towards a world characterized by justice, compassion, and liberation for all.

Biblical and Theological Foundation of People-Centric Liberation

The assertion that "Liberation theology is the recovery of biblical radicalism, challenging established hierarchies and promoting social, political, economic, and religious change", Roelofs et al. succinctly captures the essence and purpose of Liberation Theology. This theological movement represents a return to the roots of biblical teachings, where radicalism and social justice were central themes. Liberation Theology emerges as a response to the call for transformative change, challenging entrenched power structures and advocating for the liberation of the oppressed across various dimensions of human existence.

Grounded in theological reflection (549). Liberation Theology critiques exploitation and injustice, drawing from God's discordance with such injustices in the Old Testament, rather than merely deeming them socially undesirable, (Elliott 34). inspiration from the biblical narrative, seeking to unravel its theological foundations to pave the way for people-centric liberation.

The following are key principles deeply rooted in the biblical and theological underpinnings of Liberation Theology:

Exodus Narrative: The Exodus story (Exodus 1-15), depicting the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, serves as a foundational narrative for Liberation Theology. It highlights God's preferential option for the oppressed and marginalized, calling for solidarity with the downtrodden and the pursuit of freedom from all forms of oppression.

Prophetic Tradition: Liberation Theology draws heavily from the prophetic tradition, where prophets such as Amos (Amos 5:24), Isaiah (Isaiah 1:17), and Micah (Micah 6:8) spoke out against injustice, exploitation, and inequality. Their calls for social justice and righteousness resonate strongly within Liberation Theology, inspiring advocates to challenge unjust social structures and advocate for systemic change.

Jesus' Ministry: The life and teachings of Jesus Christ, particularly his focus on compassion, solidarity with the poor, and confrontation of oppressive systems, provide a moral compass for Liberation Theology. Jesus' identification with the marginalized and his call to love one's neighbor (Matthew 22:39).

Imago Dei: Central to Liberation Theology is the concept of Imago Dei, affirming that all humans bear the image of the Divine (Genesis 1:27). This belief underscores the inherent dignity, worth, and equality of every individual, fueling the movement's fervent pursuit of justice and liberation for the oppressed.

New Testament Community: The early Christian communities described in the New Testament, characterized by communal living, sharing of resources, and inclusivity (Acts 2:44-45), offer a vision of a society based on equality and mutual support. Liberation Theology draws inspiration from these communal practices, envisioning a society where all members are valued and cared for.

Theological Reflection: Liberation Theology engages in critical theological reflection on the scriptures, interpreting them through the lens of liberation and social justice. This reflective process involves questioning existing power structures, reinterpreting traditional doctrines, and discerning God's liberating presence in the struggles of the oppressed.

The biblical and theological foundation of people-centric liberation emphasizes the roots of biblical teachings and theological reflections that inspire Liberation Theology's pursuit of transformative change. From narratives like the Exodus story and the prophetic tradition to Jesus' ministry and the concept of Imago Dei, these foundations affirm the inherent dignity and worth of every individual. Drawing from the communal practices of early Christian communities, Liberation Theology prompts critical reflection to confront injustice and envision a society where everyone is valued and cared for.

The Practical Situation of Nigeria

The practical situation of Nigeria which calls for people and collective participation toward liberation ranges from: poverty, high inflation, oppression, inequality, corruption and insecurity.

Poverty is a state in which a person lacks the basic needs and resources to live a healthy, fulfilling life. Poverty is often measured using income, access to basic services like healthcare and education. It is a situation of extremed lack. About seventy percent (70%) of Nigerians are poor and experience difficulty in meeting up with basic need like food, shelter, healthcare education etc. The Nigerian workers depend on loans for sustenance, and at retirement from service they do not have savings to live on.

High inflation is an economic term that refers to the rate at which the general level of prices for goods and services rise, causing purchasing power to decline. Inflation means that, the same amount of money can buy fewer goods and services over time, the Nigerian worker with fixed income are the most hit where prices of goods or commodities rises every day.

Oppression means treating people in a cruel and unfair manner, especially by not giving them the same freedom and rights as other people. The government of Nigeria is cruel to her worker, there are paid peanuts which cannot sustain them,

and when they protest for increment through industrial actions they are deemed salaries, for example the ASUU strike of 2022 and the eight months withheld salaries.

Inequality occurs in a situation where humans are not treated the same way due to differences in sex gender, class and position. In Nigeria inequalities abound among the rich and the poor, the political class and the ordinary Nigeria citizen's male and females. It is so obvious and unfortunate that the minister of power recently made a statement that electricity Tariff should be increased to curtail indiscriminate use of Air Conditioner and refrigerator by the common Nigerians, while the political class enjoy their Air Conditioners.

In the area of corruption, Nigerian society is characterized by dishonest practices such as embezzlement of public funds, looting of government property, misappropriation of development funds, elimination of political opponents, rigging of elections and mutilations of election results. The Nigeria's Electoral System, the vote of the masses do not count or determine anymore, Post Electoral Court Cases are not relevant because the judiciary and INEC are corrupt. The 2023 Nigeria's Presidential and other Election are clear evidences of corrupt judiciary system. Eme (2007) observes that corruption is displayed in every social institution in the country.

Insecurity is a bane to peaceful co-existence in Nigeria, the society is characterized by activities that threatens the existence of citizens, especially the North, West and Eastern part of the country. The Islamic terrorist, Fulani Militia, Boko Haram, Kidnappers, Armed Robbers, Thieves all combined forces to make lives unbearable for Nigerians. Violence, destructions of properties are the order of the day. In the North, Plateau State has been the central focus of attacks since December 24th 2024. The incidence occurred between 8:30pm to 12 midnights at Bokkos and BarkinLadi Local Government Area, when the unfortunate Christians were at the peak of their celebrations. (Stephen Baba 2023). Today, Night journeys are very risky ventures in Nigeria.

The awareness of these situation in Nigeria, and the conscientization of the society can motivate the people towards collective participation for the liberation of Nigeria from all forms of vices.

The Context of Collective Participation in Nigeria

Nigeria is a nation of diverse cultures, ethnicities, and languages. Within its complex socio-political landscape, collective participation plays a pivotal role in shaping its destiny. As asserted by Khan, collective participation in Nigeria is a crucial factor in shaping the country's historical, political, economic, and social landscape. Among the different ethnic and religious groups in Nigerian society, the profound influence of collective engagement is undeniable. Each of these domains reflects the pivotal role of collective participation towards the liberation of the oppressed in the society, this can take place in different contexts.

Historical Context: In Nigeria's historical context, collective participation has been of paramount significance, spanning from the colonial era through periods of political turbulence and governance challenges. Tangban explain underscores the pivotal role of collective action as a platform for Nigerians to articulate grievances, instigate change, and cultivate unity amidst diverse groups. This sentiment is vividly reflected in Nigeria's quest for independence from colonial rule, where widespread mobilization and collective resistance were pivotal in demanding self-governance and sovereignty. During episodes of political instability and military dictatorships in Nigeria collective participation emerged as a formidable force against oppressive regimes and in advocating for democratic principles. Movements such as pro-democracy protests and civil disobedience campaigns exemplified the resilience and determination of Nigerians to assert their rights and reshape governance structures. These movements not only catalyzed significant political reforms but also underscored the intrinsic importance of collective action in upholding democratic values and principles.

Political Context: The Nigerian political landscape is shaped by the indispensable role of collective participation in ensuring democratic governance and accountability, which is evident in the active engagement of citizens in elections, advocacy, and monitoring processes (Udofia, 435). Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for enhancing political participation, particularly in mobilizing citizens and candidates (Madueke, 49). Additionally, recognizing the importance of inclusivity and representation, initiatives promoting gender inclusion, youth empowerment, and minority rights advocacy are integral for fostering equitable development and social cohesion (George, 205). Civil society organizations, grassroots movements, and pressure groups play crucial roles in holding elected officials accountable and advocating for policy reforms that serve the collective interests of the populace (Adedeji, 19). This underscores the enduring significance of collective action in shaping Nigeria's political landscape. The Nigerian independence struggle, marked by the emergence of the petit bourgeoisie and the elite, was characterized by a lack of unity and political strength, leading to a neo-colonial state (Momoh, 158). Despite this, the Nigerian labour movement played a significant role in the struggle for democratic restoration, challenging the state's socio-economic and political inequality (Tar, 170). Movements like the Nigerian independence struggle and the fight against military dictatorships serve as poignant examples.

Economic Development: Collective participation is fundamental for sustainable economic development and poverty alleviation in Nigeria, as emphasized by scholars (Sam, 16). Initiatives like cooperatives and microfinance schemes empower

individuals by enabling them to pool resources, access capital, and engage in entrepreneurial activities. These community-driven efforts not only stimulate local economies but also foster social solidarity and resilience against poverty. Ajani highlights the significance of community participation in urban areas, particularly in optimizing institutional frameworks for efficient waste management (40). Similarly, Oni highlights the role of community participation in rural areas for the success of development projects and poverty alleviation efforts (20).

Furthermore, collective participation serves as a conduit for collaboration between the public and private sectors, leading to innovative solutions for development challenges. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) leverage the strengths of both sectors to invest in critical areas such as infrastructure, healthcare, and education, thereby spurring economic growth and enhancing the quality of life for Nigerians.

Social Cohesion: Social cohesion, as articulated by scholars such as D. Helly et al. and A. Green et al. holds paramount importance in Nigeria's diverse socio-cultural landscape. Helly et al. critique the conventional definition of social cohesion, pointing out its shortcomings in addressing structural inequalities and limiting the scope of social capital. They emphasize the need to acknowledge and address these structural disparities to truly foster cohesion within society (8,29).

Similarly, Green et al. further expands the understanding of social cohesion to encompass not only social attitudes and behaviors but also institutional features such as shared values, common identity, and tolerance. It becomes evident that collective participation plays a pivotal role in promoting dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation among different communities. Civil society initiatives, interfaith dialogues, and cultural exchange programs contribute to bridging divides and fostering a sense of national identity, aligning with the broader understanding of social cohesion advocated by Green et al. (8).

The significance of collective participation in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Its influence across historical, political, economic, and social dimensions underscores its indispensable role in shaping the nation's path forward. As Nigerians continue to engage collectively, they hold the key to steering their country towards a brighter and more prosperous future.

Liberation Theologians in Nigeria

Nigeria has produced a number of liberation theologians who have left lasting impacts on the theological landscape, contributing significantly to the discourse on social justice and liberation. These theologians have not only engaged in theological reflections but have also actively participated in addressing pressing socio-political challenges within Nigeria. Their work is characterized by a deep commitment to the liberation of oppressed communities and the promotion of human dignity. Through their scholarship, activism, and pastoral leadership, they have played pivotal roles in advocating for systemic change and fostering a more just and equitable society. Here are notable studies of six Nigerian liberation theologians:

Rev. Fr. Prof. John Afiagbokai Onimhawo, born on February 16, 1954, in Edo State, Nigeria, is a respected Nigerian theologian and a professor of Religious Management and Cultural Studies at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria. His career spans various roles within the religious sphere, including serving as Secretary to the Bishop, Assistant Priest, Parish Priest, and Chaplain at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma.

Additionally, he has contributed significantly to academia as an External Examiner at several universities.

A notable aspect of Rev. Fr. Prof. Onimhawo's scholarly work revolves around the development of ethnic liberation theology in Nigeria. He criticizes the existing socio-economic, political, and religious structures of Nigeria, arguing that they perpetuate injustice and oppression, particularly among minority groups. In his work, "Religious Extremism: A Challenge to National Unity and Development", he provides a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic, political, and ethic-religious survival of Nigeria nation. He identifies religious extremism with religious violence, sectarianism, and terrorism, and discuss the link between them in contemporary Nigeria society. He argues that religious extremist is willing to kill and be killed because they embrace theologies that sanction violence in the service of God, they view their victims as enemies of God.

Rev. Fr. Prof. John A. Onimhawo's contributions provide a compelling study of a Nigerian theologian's impact on his community and beyond. His emphasis on the role of religion in addressing systemic oppression and advocating for the liberation of marginalized communities offers valuable insights into the transformative potential of religious institutions in effecting meaningful social change.

Anselm Jimoh: Anselm Jimoh is a Catholic priest, an Associate Professor of Philosophy at SS. Peter and Paul Seminary, Ibadan, Nigeria. A notable figure in

Liberation Theology, with a particular focus on African Epistemology. His contributions, especially in the context of Nigeria, are significant.

In his work "Liberation Theology and the Nigerian Reality," Jimoh provides a comprehensive understanding of Liberation Theology and its relevance to social justice. He stresses the pivotal role of the Church in advocating for equality, fairness, and the dignity of individuals, while vehemently opposing all forms of injustice. His critique of the prosperity gospel prevalent in Nigeria underscores his commitment to social justice and his belief in the potential of Liberation Theology to effect transformative change.

In Nigeria, where socio-economic inequalities and political corruption are rampant, Jimoh's advocacy for the Church's proactive engagement in promoting justice and equality strikes a chord. His perspectives resonate with many who perceive religion as a potent force for positive societal transformation. Anselm Jimoh's work reveal the significant role religious institutions can play in driving social change, illuminating the path for those dedicated to combating injustice and inequality in Nigeria. As a Nigerian Liberation Theologian, Jimoh's legacy continues to inspire and guide individuals striving for social and economic justice, showcasing the tangible impact of Liberation Theology in addressing real-world challenges.

Matthew Hassan Kukah: Matthew Hassan Kukah, born on August 31, 1952, in Anchuna, Nigeria, is a significant figure in Nigerian Catholicism. His upbringing in a multi-faith environment instilled in him a deep commitment to justice and truth. He attended St. Fidelis Primary School and later pursued his theological studies at various institutions, culminating in a Ph.D. from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in 1990.

Kukah's early experiences as a parish priest in Kakuri, Kaduna, shaped his activism against injustice, bad governance, and social repression. He served as Secretary-General of the Catholic Bishops Conference, engaging in committees related to human rights and electoral reform. Kukah's advocacy extended beyond the church, earning him a reputation as a voice for the voiceless. His theological perspective aligns closely with liberation theology, emphasizing social justice, equality, and the dignity of every human person. Kukah advocates for the Church's active role in addressing Nigeria's socio-political and economic challenges, believing in the importance of national unity and interfaith dialogue.

One of Kukah's most impactful contributions is his book "Witness to Justice: An Insider's Account of Nigeria's Truth Commission," which delves into truth-seeking processes and human rights violations in Nigeria. This work further solidifies his

position as a leading voice for justice and accountability, showcasing his unwavering commitment to liberation theology principles in the Nigerian context.

Currently serving as the Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Sokoto, Kukah continues to be a prominent figure in Nigerian Catholicism and civil society. His appointment by Pope Francis to the Dicastery on Integral Human Development highlights his global influence and recognition as a champion of human rights and social justice. Through his pastoral work, activism, and scholarly endeavors, Kukah remains steadfast in his commitment to liberation theology and the pursuit of a more just and equitable society.

John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan: John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, born on January 29, 1944, in Kabba, Nigeria, emerged as a prominent Nigerian prelate of the Catholic Church. His formative years were marked by a commitment to learning and service. Onaiyekan's educational journey began at St. Mary's Catholic School in Kabba, followed by Mount St. Michael's Secondary School in Aliade, Benue State. His religious studies led him to Ss. Peter & Paul Major Seminary in Bodija, Ibadan, and further studies in Rome, where he completed his priestly ordination in 1969.

Onaiyekan's leadership within the Catholic Church was characterized by a steadfast commitment to peace, justice, and reconciliation. His tenure as Archbishop of the Latin Church Archdiocese of Abuja (1994–2019) saw him advocating tirelessly for dialogue and reconciliation as pathways to societal healing. He transcended religious boundaries, earning respect beyond the Catholic community. Furthermore, Onaiyekan consistently spoke out against injustice, corruption, and violence, championing the cause of the marginalized and advocating for their rights and dignity. A pivotal aspect of Onaiyekan's legacy lies in his dedication to interfaith dialogue and collaboration. As president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, (CBCN) he actively engaged in fostering understanding and cooperation between different religious communities. His efforts in this realm contributed significantly to peacebuilding and social cohesion in Nigeria, transcending religious divides and promoting mutual respect and understanding.

Onaiyekan's theological reflections were deeply rooted in the Nigerian context, addressing the country's pressing issues through the lens of liberation theology. He tackled issues such as poverty, ethnic tensions, and political instability, advocating for social justice and human rights. His commitment to liberation theology principles made him a beacon of hope in Nigeria's struggle for justice and equality.

Onaiyekan's scholarly contributions include "The Priesthood in Pre-monarchical Ancient Israel and among the Owe-Yoruba of Kabba: A Comparative Study," an unpublished dissertation (1976). Additionally, his article "The Shariah in Nigeria: A Christian View," published in the *Bulletin on Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa* (1987), reflects his engagement with issues of justice and religious freedom in Nigeria.

Currently, Onaiyekan remains actively involved in various capacities within the Catholic Church and beyond. He continues to advocate for peace, justice, and reconciliation, drawing on his extensive experience and theological insights. While he has retired as Archbishop of Abuja, his influence and impact persist, as he remains a respected voice in Nigerian society and the global Catholic community.

Sister Teresa Okure: Sister Teresa Okure, a pioneering figure in Nigerian theology, was born in Nigeria and later became the first African to join the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. Her commitment to religious life and scholarship laid the foundation for her remarkable journey as a theologian. She holds a Ph.D. in theology from Fordham University and currently serves as a Professor in Residence at the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA) in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

In her theological contributions, Sister Okure challenges Western Christology's patriarchal and imperial tendencies, advocating for a more inclusive and contextually relevant understanding of Jesus. Emphasizing the importance of grounding theology in lived experiences, especially those of marginalized communities, she urges a departure from sole reliance on textual analysis. As a biblical scholar, Sister Okure engages in gender hermeneutics, exploring the intersections of biblical texts with gender issues. Her work bridges the gap between biblical interpretation and the lived realities of African women. Through her writings, such as "Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective," she offers unique insights into the experiences and challenges faced by African women, urging theologians to affirm life and connect with real struggles.

Active in various national and international theological and biblical associations, Sister Okure is the founding president of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CBAN) and participates in the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) and other associations. Through her scholarship, teaching, and leadership, Sister Okure continues to advance theological discourse, foster interfaith understanding, and advocate for justice in Nigeria and beyond.

Her notable publications include: "Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective". Co-editor of the biblical commentary series "Texts @ Contexts" (since 2010). Co-editor of the "Global Bible Commentary" (since 2004).

Justin S. Ukpong: Reverend Justin S. Ukpong, born on December 26, 1940, in Ikot Essen Oku, Etinan LGA, AkwaIbom State, Nigeria, embarked on a transformative journey of theological exploration and cultural integration. His educational path led him through Bigard Seminary in Enugu (1961–1968) and further studies at St. Francis Xavier University in Rome (1976, 1978, 1980), where he delved deeper into theological inquiry.

Recognizing the vital intersection of theology and culture, Reverend Ukpong championed the integration of African cultural values into biblical interpretation. His inculturation hermeneutics emphasized the necessity of utilizing an African conceptual frame of reference for interpreting the Bible within the African context. In his theological contributions, Ukpong emphasized that biblical exegesis and hermeneutics should fuse together, collapsing the past into the present. He broke away from Euro-American “contextless” biblical scholarship, advocating for an African framework that contextualizes biblical interpretation within African realities.

Reverend Ukpong's scholarly endeavors culminated in notable publications such as “Biblical Interpretation in African Contexts,” which explores how African cultural perspectives enrich biblical interpretation, and “Inculturation Hermeneutics in African Christianity,” delving into the practical application of inculturation hermeneutics within African Christian communities.

Furthermore, Reverend Justin Ukpong delves into the intersection of African traditional values and Christian liberation praxis, offering insights into culturally relevant approaches to social justice advocacy. Throughout his career, he has held various academic and pastoral positions, spanning institutions in Nigeria, South Africa, and the United States. His legacy lies in bridging the gap between biblical scholarship and African cultural contexts, embodying the essence of a Nigerian theologian dedicated to social transformation and cultural integration.

O. A. Adegbola: Reverend A. O. Adegbola, a visionary Nigerian theologian, has significantly shaped the intersection of indigenous African spirituality and Christian liberation praxis. Born on December 26, 1918, in IganOkoto, Ogun State, Nigeria, Adegbola was deeply influenced by his Christian heritage. Both of his parents, Daniel AdegbolaOlurinu and Janet OdufunkeAbakeAdegbola, were devout Christians, with his father actively involved in establishing the Wesleyan School in IganOkoto in 1911.

Adegbola's educational journey began at Wesley College in Ibadan, where he pursued theological studies and obtained a higher elementary certificate in December 1940. He continued his theological training at Wesley College, receiving the Intermediate-Bachelor of Divinity (Inter-BD, London) in 1946. Furthering his

education, Adegbola traveled to the United Kingdom, attending Richmond College and focusing on divinity studies.

Reverend Adegbola's theological insights were deeply rooted in the context of African religiosity and its interaction with liberation movements. He keenly observed the disruptive impact of Western Christianity and capitalist modernity on indigenous African spirituality, which led to the subversion of traditional beliefs. Recognizing the resilience of African religiosity, particularly evident in African Initiated Churches (AICs), Adegbola identified it as a significant site of liberation spirituality. Employing the metaphor of *mokhukhu* (a shack), he metaphorically situated the sanity, agency, and consciousness of black Africans within the narrative of African religiosity.

Central to Adegbola's theological stance was the assertion that African religiosity serves as a vital resource for an alternative civilization. He challenged Western frameworks and advocated for the equal recognition of African value systems alongside others. Reverend A. O. Adegbola's commitment to bridging traditional beliefs with Christian praxis has left an indelible mark. His legacy continues to inspire dialogue, cultural understanding, and liberation movements within African spirituality and Nigeria in particular. Through his visionary insights and theological contributions, Adegbola has paved the way for a deeper understanding of indigenous African spirituality and its role in liberation struggles. According to Reverend Adegbola, the participation in the process of liberation of the Nigerian society can be possible through gradual and adequate conscientization of the society. This is a social educational program aimed at creating socio-political awareness among the people for an eventual peaceful transformation of the structures of oppression. To conscientize the masses means to wake them up, stir them, create and build up a new awareness in them, give them new consciousness, stir them up to action, give them new skills, mobilize them to join towards change. (Qtd in Uchegbue 1989). The people and collective participation towards liberation can be a reality through conscientization.

Conclusion

Liberation theology emerges as a potent framework within Christian theology, emphasizing the urgent need to liberate oppressed communities from various injustices. This study provides profound insights into its significance and implications through an exploration of foundational principles, critiques, and the notion of "people." It highlights the crucial role of theologians in shaping this concept and promoting collective engagement in liberation efforts, firmly rooted in biblical and theological principles.

Furthermore, the practical application of people-centric liberation in Nigeria reveals both its potential and challenges. collective participation inspired by liberation theology can significantly impact on Nigerian society where conscientization is adopted. Case studies of liberation theologians in Nigeria exemplify how theological convictions can catalyze tangible social change, underscoring the enduring relevance and impact of liberation theology in contemporary contexts.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for further research and practical implementation:

1. **Continued Engagement:** The study suggests the need for continued engagement with liberation theology, both theoretically and practically, to deepen our understanding of its principles and their application in diverse contexts.
2. **Dialogue and Collaboration:** There is a need for dialogue and collaboration between theologians, activists, and community leaders to ensure that liberation efforts are inclusive, effective, and sustainable.
3. **Education and Training:** Efforts should be made to educate and train individuals, particularly within religious and grassroots communities, about the principles and practices of liberation theology, empowering them to become agents of change, this can be done through the tool of conscientiation.
4. **Contextualization:** Liberation theology should be contextualized to specific cultural, social, and political realities, recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities present in different contexts.
5. **Ethical Reflection:** Ethical reflection should be integrated into liberation praxis, ensuring that actions are guided by principles of justice, compassion, and solidarity with the marginalized.

By incorporating these recommendations into future research and practice, we can further advance the cause of liberation theology and contribute to the ongoing struggle for justice and human dignity.

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