

A CRITICAL STUDY OF ACTS 2-4 IN THE LIGHT OF KARL MARX'S "RELIGION IS THE OPIUM OF THE MASSES"

Obumneme Ezewudo Ugochukwu,¹ Ngele Omaka Kalu,²

Favour Chukwuemeka Uroko³

Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria¹²³

Email: favour.uroko@unn.edu.ng³

Submitted: 27 February 2024 Revision: 10 June 2024 Published: 3 July 2024

Abstract

Karl Marx's analysis and critique of religion captured in his statement: Religion is the opium of the masses is perhaps one of the most famous and most quoted by theists and atheists. Unfortunately, most of those doing the quoting do not really understand exactly what Marx meant, probably due to an incomplete understanding of Marx's general theories on economics and society. Marx's theory on religion as the opium of the masses is based on his belief that religion had certain practical functions both positive and negative to perform in the society. Such practical functions are seen and observed in the contemporary world. His theory was critically examined in the light of Acts 2-4 in order to discover its effect and implications for church and society using economic strait. The methodology adopted is historical critical method and redaction criticism in biblical scholarship. However, many factors are considered responsible for oppression and social disorder. In agreement with some aspects of Marx's view on religion, this paper observes and recommends need for psychological emancipation from religious dogmatism.

Keywords: Acts 2-4; Karl Marx; Marxism; Religion; Opium; Masses.

INTRODUCTION

The abuses of religion and religious suffering gave rise to Karl Marx's theory of religion. Karl Marx's recognized and acknowledged an operative, functional and positive role of religion in consoling the oppressed in their predicaments, in his quote, religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.¹ This quotation is often quoted in part; the interpretation of the metaphor in its context has received much less attention.² Critically, what Karl Marx saw and contemporary conditions emphasized is that religion which supposes to console the brokenheartedly also cause pain to the people. During

¹ Karl Marx and R. Davis, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

² Andrew M. McKinnon. "Reading 'Opium of the People': Expression, Protest and the Dialectics of Religion." *Critical Sociology*, 31, no. 1-2 (2005): 15-38.

Karl Marx era, Christianity could no longer be seen as the opium of the masses because it has lost its passion and the same is applicable to contemporary dispensation.

Unlike the early Christians, the features recorded in Acts 2-4 are seriously lacking in the contemporary world, which accommodates selfish interest, flamboyant pursuit, quest for materialism and commercialization of faith.³ The background of such oppression in Africa particularly in Nigeria could be traced from the time of colonial masters who came in the form of church missionaries in Africa, blindfolded the people through their religion, perpetrated evil yet they preached Christ and indirectly exploited people under their watch (the colonies). Rodney⁴ noted that “the Christian missionaries were as much part of the colonizing forces as were the explorers, traders and soldiers... missionaries were agents of colonialism in the practical sense, whether or not they saw themselves in that light”. Missionaries were accused of propagating the gospel of love and peace in the face of gross injustice, inhumanity and dehumanization. It was the messages of the missionaries that prevented rebellion and self preservation against British traders who were exploiting their African counterparts.

Marxism revealed the exploitation and dehumanization of the masses where the ruling class known as the bourgeoisies control the affairs of the state. There is continual debate about whether or not this community the apostles saw themselves summarily advocate a certain economic system, with some commentators describing the practice of the community as “proto-communism” and others seeing a mandatory divestiture of goods. The history and governance of humanity was a struggle between the ‘bourgeoisies’ and the ‘proletariats’. This struggle arose due to intensifying contradictions between highly productive mechanized and socialized production performed by the proletariat and private ownership and appropriation of the surplus product in the form of surplus value by a small minority of private owners called the bourgeoisies.⁵ In the beginning, people bartered, traded and lived in collective communities but when farms became personal properties, communalism became capitalism and the exploitation of workers for the profit of the property owners, labour sold for money less than it worth, creating surplus value which equates to profits for owners.

³ Clark H. Pinnock. *Reason Enough: A Case for the Christian Faith Exister* (Milton Keynes: The Paternoster Press, 1980).

⁴ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: L' ouverture, 1973), 277.

⁵ Karl Marx and David McLellan, *Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 228-231.

The text Acts 2-4, however, does not suggest an attempt to change the structures beyond Christian community but also to correct the errors of the words of Charles Kingsley, a canon of the Church of England, written four years after Marx. He complained that “we have used the Bible as if it were a mere special constable’s hand book, an opium dose for keeping beasts of burden patient while they were being overloaded, a mere book to keep the poor in order” (Susan 1976).⁶ Although, it would be difficult to think of a small, marginalized, socially powerless group having designs on changing the imperial economic system. It is clear that the community did not fully opt out of the systems of economics within the empire. Likely, fishermen remained members of fishing cartels and artisans continued to do business in the market. Rather, the text suggests something far more demanding. Marx’s account of religion lack epiphenomenon of reality; it is superfluous; and not touching with reality. His quest for humanism has excluded a principle, the possibility of God.

The pericope showed that first century Christians centred in Jerusalem and its leaders included Peter, James the brother of Jesus and John the apostle. The community liquidated their goods for the sake of the less powerful “from time to time” (Acts 4:34) as anyone “had need” (Acts 2:45; 4:35). This describes a kind of radical availability as the normal status of each person’s possessions. That is, the resources-material, political, social, or practical- of any member of the community were put at the constant disposal of the Christian community, even while individual members continued to oversee their particular resources. By the end of the first century, Christianity began to be recognized internally and externally as a separate religion from Judaism which itself was refined and developed further in the centuries after the destruction of the second Temple in AD 70. The study calls for liberation from religious suffering and exploitation to being ‘Christ like’ in order to experience spiritual, physical, psychological, economical renovation.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

For the purpose of the study, the following concepts are clarified for better understanding of the discourse.

⁶ Smith Tamke Susan. “Separating the Sheep from the Goats: Victorian Didactic Hymns.” *North American Conference on British Studies*, 8, no. 3 (1976): 255-273, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4048476>.

Karl Marx - A Brief Biography

Karl Marx was a German socialist, philosopher, political theorist, historian, economist and journalist. He was born on 5th May in the year 1818 to Heinrich Marx (1777-1838) and Henriette Pressburg (1788-1863) in Trier, Germany, a city that was then in the kingdom of Prussia.⁷ He was brought up by middle-class parents of Jewish descent who had abandoned their religion in an attempt to assimilate into an anti-Semitic society. In fact, his father was converted to Lutheranism to avoid losing his work as a lawyer in anti-semantic Prussia. Marx himself rejected religion and ultimately became an atheist because of his early experiences in life including the anti-Semitic laws for which he converted to Protestantism. Though from a Jewish background, his home was only Christian in name and largely non-religious. Educationally, on October 1835 at the age of 17, Marx travelled to the University of Bonn wishing to study philosophy and literature, but his father insisted on law as a more practical field.⁸ He studied law as insisted by his father in Bonn and Berlin; and philosophy at the University of Berlin where he followed the philosophical ideas of the young Hegelians. He received a doctorate from the University of Jena in 1841 after submission of his Ph.D. thesis, a dissertation on ancient Greek philosophy entitled 'The Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature', but he was unable, because of his Jewish ancestry and his liberal political views, to secure a teaching position. Later, he became stateless due to his political publication and spent much of his life with family in London for decades. He then turned to journalism, where his investigations disclosed what he perceived as systematic injustice and corruption at all levels of German society.⁹

Convinced that German (and, more broadly, European) society could not be reformed from within but instead had to be remade from the ground up, Marx became a political radicalist. His views soon bought him to the attention of the police, and, fearing arrest and imprisonment, he left for Paris. There he renewed an acquaintance with his countryman Friedrich Engels, who became his friend and co-author in a collaboration that was to last nearly 40 years. Marx maintained that the poverty, disease, and early death that afflicted the proletariat (the industrial working class) were endemic to

⁷ David McLellan, *Karl Marx 4th Edition: A Biography* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 1.

⁸ Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx: A Life* (London: Fourth Estate, 2001), 14.

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm. "Marx, Karl Heinrich. (1818-1883)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

capitalism: they were systemic and structural problems that could be resolved only by replacing capitalism with communism. Under this alternative system, the major means of industrial production-such as mines, mills, factories and railroads-would be publicly owned and operated for the benefit of all. Marx, meanwhile, had begun to lay the theoretical and (he believed) scientific foundations of communism, first in the *German Ideology* (written 1845-46, published 1932) and later in *Das Kapital* (1867; *Capital*). His theory has three main aspects: first, a materialist conception of history; second, a critique of capitalism and its inner workings; and third, an account of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and its eventual replacement by communism.¹⁰

Marx was the founder of communism and though he was not antagonistic towards religion; he saw it from a uniquely historical perspective. Marx saw religion as a reflection of a flawed society. It was the extreme inequality, oppression, human degradation, exploitation, enslavement and deep suffering of the masses that drove his enquiry into the cause of these maladies. His enquiry led to his conclusion that religion functioned as an element or instrument to keep the masses under oppression through its doctrines and teachings. He died of respiratory problems in London in 1883. His philosophy led to the Russian Revolution in 1917-21 as well as the overthrow of the 300 years government through a revolt led by Vladdimir Lenin. He envisioned a classless society and a society where the means of production (land in particular) will be communally owned.¹¹

Opium

Opium is a substance extracted from the opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum* L.), which has been consumed since antiquity.¹² Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (8th Edition), viewed the word "Opium" as a powerful drug made from the juice of a type of peppy, used in the part for medicines to reduce pain and help people. People also take it illegally for pleasure. Medicinal uses of opium were well known in ancient civilizations. Opium was mentioned in the most important medical texts of the ancient world. Opium was used to calm suffering of the masses in the midst of oppression. Lenin was a

¹⁰ Brian Morris. "Enrich From: The Radical Humanist." *New Humanist*, 10, no. 2 (1986): 3-8.

¹¹ Dare O. Omonijo, Obiajulu. A.U. Nnedum, Onyekwere C. Uche, and Bernard C. Chine. "Religion as the Opium of the Masses: A Study of the Contemporary Relevance of Karl Marx." *Asian Research Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 1, no. 32 (2016): 1-7.

¹² Mojtaba Heydari, M.H. Hashempur, and Arman Zargar. "Medicinal aspects of opium as described in Avicenna's Canon of Medicine." *Acta Med Hist Adriat*, 11, no. 1 (2013): 101-112.

companion and contemporary of Marx, he described opium as a spiritual gin which means an intoxicant administered to the masses by the ruling class to ensure their perpetual subjugation and oppression.¹³ Opium was a tool used by the ruling to console the masses in order not to be overthrown by the masses. Its function was to calm human beings, to make them subservient and submissive even in the face of oppression.

Religion

Religion does not have a universal acceptable definition and different scholars defined it from various perspective. Karl Marx viewed it from sociological perspective based on functionalism, that is, its role in the society. He did not agree as to the basis of that function. For most people, religion is seen through faith or teachings about God and morality. This teaching controls societal behaviour. Marx had a hard time believing in unseen truths. He believed that religion is a misleading factor and process of alienation used by the poor to find comfort. Austin (2019) says that religion is one of those social institutions which are dependent upon the material and economic realities in a given society. It has no independent history but is instead the creature of productive forces. As Marx wrote, "The religious world is but the reflex of the real world."

Communalism

The word 'communism' did not come into use until the 1840s. It is derived from the Latin word *communis*, meaning 'shared' or 'common'- visions of a society that may be considered communist appeared as long ago as the 4th century BCE.¹⁴ The word Communism is an economic ideology that advocates for a classless society in which all property and wealth are communally-owned, instead of by individual.¹⁵ The objectives of the ideology are for non-profit purposes. This is a replacement of private ownership of goods or prosperities with public ownership. This theory was developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It is an opposite of a capitalist one, which aims for profit purposes. The society is formed based on people's opinion and production of capital.

¹³ Christian Uchegbue. "A Critical Evaluation of Marx's Theory of Religion." *American Journal of Social Issues & Humanities*, 1, no. 2 (2011): 50-81.

¹⁴ Richard D. Wolff, "Communism." in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica's International Publishing, 2019).

¹⁵ James Chen, "Communism." in *Investopedia*, October 13, 2020.

Countries that practiced communism were the Soviet Union and China. The Cold war ended with the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, following a push to reform the economic and political system while China has drastically revised its economic system to include elements of capitalism. The failure of Communism was a result of lack of profit incentive among citizens, the failure of central planning, and the impact of power being seized by such a small number of people, who then exploited it and game the system. The term's modern usage originated with Victor d'Hupay, an 18th-century French aristocrat who advocated living in "communes" in which all property would be shared, and "all may benefit from everybody's work." The idea was hardly new even at that time, however: the first Christians practiced a simple kind of communism-as described in the book of Acts 4:32-37, for example-both as a form of solidarity, holding property in common and as a way of renouncing worldly possessions. This system is known as *koinonia*, which inspired later religious groups such as the 17th-century English "Diggers" to reject private ownership. Communism is thus a form of socialism - a higher and more advanced form, according to its advocates. Exactly how communism differs from socialism has long been a matter of debate, but the distinction rests largely on the communists' adherence to the revolutionary socialism of Karl Marx. A system of social organization in which all property is owned by the community and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs.

THE SITZ IM LEBEN OF ACTS 2-4

In using historical inter-texture which is the specificity of the referenced historical event or time frame. Robbins,¹⁶ noted that "Historical intertexture differs from social intertexture by its focus on a particular event or period of time rather than social practices that occur regularly as events in one's life." So the book of Acts most widely believed to have been written by Luke the Evangelist, a Gentile physician (Colossians 4:14), approximately 60-64 A.D.,¹⁷ as historical book contains very specific time references that confine the recorded events to a period of less than 50 days from the time of Jesus' first post-resurrection appearances to his apostles to the following day of Pentecost, formation, governance, organisation and development of the early Church

¹⁶ Vernon Robbins. *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 118.

¹⁷ K. Boa, *The Time of Acts. In the Open Bible Expanded Edition* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1985).

within and outside Palestine. There are social and political situation surrounding the events in Acts 2-4 for instance the fulfilment of prophesy relates to leadership empowerment in the early church, and interconnection between the life of Jesus and the ministry of the apostle Paul.¹⁸ The apostles are found to be at centre of those events for the coming of the Holy Spirit and the spread of the gospel. Peter efforts to identify the specific events and relatively short well defined period of time of Jesus' life on earth as the beginning moment of the otherwise non-specific afterwards or 'Last Days'.¹⁹ Immediately after the death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus Christ, the social conditions within the Jewish community were not favourably secured for the apostles. Hence, they headed to the instruction of Christ before his ascension that they should await him and the coming of Holy Spirit at the upper room. This meant that the apostle had a sort of restricted movement because of fear and obedience to the instruction of Jesus. The setting is a religious festival where Jews of the diaspora have gathered to celebrate their national identity and unity.²⁰ Those who attended the festival were called by Apostle Peter to accept Messianic community which is superior to Judaism and other forms of religious practices.

There were political situation headed by Roman Officers against Christians. They took violent action to repress the growing movement Christians. That early period was full of threat and a growing sense of fear and hatred towards Christians. This growing internal strife and instability within the Jewish community at Jerusalem intersects with the underlying historical context of social unrest and at times, violent reaction by Jewish zealots against Roman occupation and rule. The apostles were faced with a huge politics of persecution and separation from the Jewish community. This is explicitly seen after the incidents of the healing of the lame man at the beautiful gate by Peter and John. The Jewish leaders commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus Christ, the resurrected Lord. In the social context and situation, the event of Pentecost witnessed cross-cultural conversion into Christian Faith. The book of Acts carefully note issues like "baptism of the Spirit, signs and wonders, Church discipline, the diversity of ministries,

¹⁸ Sass R. Wayne. "Acts 2: An Example of the Divine Empowerment of Leaders." *Emerging Leadership Journeys*, 5, no.1 (2012): 36-55; George W.E. Russell and Charles F.G. Masterman. *Leaders of the Church (1800-1900): Frederick Denison Maurice (1907)* (London: A.R Mowbray & Co. Limited, 2007).

¹⁹ Craig Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009).

²⁰ Emmanuel Onwu, *Basic Issues in the Close of New Testament Era* (Nsukka: Great AP Express Publishers Limited, 2004), 16.

Christian conversion, racial prejudice, missionary principles, the cost of Christian unity, motives and methods in evangelism, the call to suffer for Christ, Church and state, and divine providence".²¹ Acts also make reference to the book of Old Testament like Acts 2: 29 referred to the patriarch David who was a warrior and figure throughout the region; and Acts 2:17 referred to the words of Prophet Joel (Joel 2:28). Acts 2:42-46 pictures the communal living among the early disciples of Jesus Christ. Lawson²² indicates that strong social bonds are formed when people share food together and other material needs. Yet, despite geographical differences and the vicissitudes of history, all the countries of the Mediterranean basin share ways of being and lifestyles.²³ Acts 2:42-44, portrays that the first Jewish converts in Jerusalem and the believers formed the commune where they were devoted to the apostles' teaching, were in fellowship with each other, ate together, and prayed. Acts has evidenced of Mediterranean culture and other diverse culture (Robbins 1996). For instance, in the aspect of cultural voices, Jerusalem became the temporary nexus of many of these cultures such as Jewish cultures, Greco-Roman cultures, Palestine culture and other (Reese and Klassen 1977). It was also an earliest Christian community.

1 CRITICAL STUDY OF ACTS 2, 3 AND 4

The text features the formation of the Jerusalem Church. Anozie²⁴ says that "the significant with the Jerusalem Church was her expectation of the speedy coming again of the Lord-the Messianic hope." This led the believers in Christ to devote themselves in apostles teaching, and fellowship. Does Acts 2-4 teach communism? First of all, what do Acts 2:44-45 says immediately after Pentecost, "all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as any might have need." In Acts 4:32-35, it says of the early congregation that "not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them... for there was not a

²¹ John R.W. Stott. *The Message of Acts: to the Ends of the Earth*. (Westmont, IL: Inter-varsity Press, 1990), 5.

²² Steven Lawson. "The priority of biblical preaching: An expository study of Acts 2:42-47." *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 158, no. 630 (2001): 198-217.

²³ Mohamed Essid. "History of Mediterranean food." *MediTERRA: The mediterranean diet for sustainable regional development*, Chapter 2 (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2012), 51-69, <https://doi.org/10.3917/scpo.chea.2012.02.0051>.

²⁴ Eric Anozie, *The Early Church A Historical Perspective* (Enugu: Frefabag Investment Ltd., 2007), 18.

needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each as any had need." It sounds like communism here, so how could anyone argue otherwise? However, such a superficial reading may miss that which a closer look at the text reveals.

The early believers did not sell all their possessions - Even though it may seem that the phrases "had all things in common" or "selling their property" or "all things were common property" means that the early believers sold everything and had a common pot, the context immediately qualifies these general statements. The believers continued to live and meet in their own homes. Lindsley²⁵ noted the words of Craig Blomberg, in Blomberg book, *'Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions'*, verses 43-47 are dominated by highly marked imperfect tense verbs, whereas one normally expects aorist (once-for-all actions) in historical narrative. There is no once-for-all divestiture of property in view here, but periodic acts of charity as needs arose. This is even clearer in Acts 4-5. In Acts 4:34b-35, it says: "from time to time, those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet..." Blomberg also says there are rash of imperfect verbs here, this time explicitly reflected in the NIV's 'from time to time.' The periodic selling of property confirms our interpretation of Acts 2:44 above. This was not a one-time divestiture of all one's possessions. The theme 'according to need,' reappears, too. Interestingly, what does not appear in this paragraph is any statement of complete equality among believers. Presumably, there was quite a spectrum, ranging from those who still held property which they had not sold... all the way to those who were still living at a very basic level. Looking at the positive example of Barnabas (Acts 4) and the negative one of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5); Barnabas "owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." It does not say that this giving comprised all his possessions or that it was the only tract of land he owned. It provides a positive example of what was going on in Acts 2-4.²⁶

²⁵ Art Lindsley, "Does Acts 2-5 teaches Socialism?" *Washington Times, LLC*, 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/oct/6/does-acts-2-5-teach-socialism>; Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions (Volume 7) (New Studies in Biblical Theology)* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000).

²⁶ Steven Lawson. "The priority of biblical preaching: An expository study of Acts 2:42-47".

When Barnabas saw that there were needs he could meet, he was generous with what he owned. Perhaps, some have speculated, he was the first person of substantial wealth to donate to the cause. Then, on the negative aspect of Ananias and Sapphira, they sold “a piece of property,” kept part of the proceeds for themselves. The problem with this was not that they had not sold also their possessions or that they needed to give all of the proceeds of their land to the apostles, but that they lied about it. They pretended to be more generous than they were.²⁷ Ananias, then later Sapphira, comes before Peter and dies (presumably as a divine judgment). Peter explicitly says that “when it was unsold it was your own” and after it was sold, it was “under your control” (verse 4). The problem, as Peter points out, was that Ananias had “lied to the Holy Spirit” (Verse 3). He had “lied to God” and not “to men” (verse 5).²⁸ The early Christians were generous and they demonstrated such by selling part of their possessions and gave the proceeds to the apostles for distribution.

The early Christians’ sharing was totally voluntary - they contributed their goods freely, without coercion, voluntarily. The sharing was noble, and did not necessitate that believers give up their rights to private property. Christians are even instructed to give in just this manner, freely, for “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:8). The text reveals that private property rights were still in effect. This is neither communalism (abolition of private property) nor communism (state ownership of the means of production).

It was not a permanent practice but a temporary measure - the generous giving is a permanent norm, the particular situation in Acts 2-4 seems to have been a temporary response to a particular need. We don’t see a recurrence of this scenario throughout the rest of Acts, in Paul’s letters, or in the rest of the New Testament. So what was going on here? Pentecost had just happened. People of many nations were in attendance (thus the necessity of speaking in tongues). After the initial preaching by Peter and others, there were, that first day, three thousand new believers (Acts 2:41). More believers were being added to their numbers each day (verse 47). Should these new believers immediately return to their homes in other parts of Israel or outside Palestine? Would they not want to continue in the apostles’ teaching, worship,

²⁷ Pieter Horst. “Hellenistic Parallels to the Acts of the Apostles 2:1-47.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 8, iss. 25 (1985): 49-60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X8500802503>.

²⁸ Micheal Grant. *A Guide to the Ancient World* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1997).

fellowship, and prayers (verse 42-46)? But then how could these visitors provide for themselves? How would they have enough to eat and a place to stay for an extended period? The answer is that those who had, gave to those who had not. Eventually, most of these new believers returned home.²⁹ There was no longer this extraordinary need for food and shelter.

The attitude of “what’s mine is yours if you need it” continued. In Acts 6, the widows were being neglected in the “daily distribution of food” and seven men were appointed to oversee that process. There was a later famine relief effort by the disciples in Acts 11:27-30. There was always a concern that the needs of the poor be met (Gal 2:10). There were often communal meals (1 Cor.11:20). There were also many who were wealthy and gave generously (but had not given everything away): Dorcas (Acts 9:36), Cornelius (Acts 10:1), Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6-12), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), Jason (Acts 17:5-9), Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2-3), Mnason of Cyprus (Acts 21:16) and others.³⁰ The spirit of generosity in Acts 2- remained, but there was no push to abolish private property and establish communism or socialism in any form. There was a concern for equitable distribution of goods to the poor (2 Cor. 8:13-15- the Greek *isotes* means equitable or fair) but not an egalitarian communism. In any case, the communal sharing (while retaining some private property) in Acts 2-5 was not the practice of the early church in the rest of Acts and New Testament.³¹

PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION OF MARX’S “RELIGION IS THE OPIUM OF THE MASSES”

The social scientific literature shows that religion is shaped by social structures as well as economic and political structures. As an integral part of many cultures, religion can also shape these same structures in turn. For Marx, human beings are always in the process of producing and reproducing their real lives. For him, against the priority of consciousness, he says life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. In other words, metaphysics, consciousness, morality, religion

²⁹ Micheal Grant. *A Guide to the Ancient World*; Steven Lawson. “The priority of biblical preaching: An expository study of Acts 2:42-47”.

³⁰ Pieter Horst. “Hellenistic Parallels to the Acts of the Apostles 2:1-47”.

³¹ Edward Reese and Frank R. Klassen, *The Reese Chronological Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1977).

and all ideologies are dependent on the material conditions of human existence.³² Marx proposes a materialist conception of religion which explains religion as a function of material needs, and of the material conditions of human life which gives rise to these needs.³³ Marx saw religion as an expression of material realities and economic injustice. Thus problems in religion are ultimately problems in society. Religion being a symptom of disease is used by oppressors to make people feel better about the distress they experience due to being poor and exploited. From this stems his comment that religion is the opium of the masses. According to Marx, all the institutions which are prominent in our daily lives like marriage, church, government, arts, and the others can only be truly comprehended when examined in relation to economic factors. This is because economics constitute the base of all of human life and history.³⁴ In the same manner, religion is one of the social institutions dependent on material and economic realities in a given society. For this reason he said the religious world is but a reflex of the real world. On this ground, all human social institutions develop on the context of economics resulting to two consequences. First, economic realities are the drives and determinant of human behaviour. Two, all of human history is that of class struggle between the have and have not who must work to survive.

It was the claim of Marx that religion distorts human perceptions of social and material worlds. This distortion was heightened and most exemplified in capitalist societies. In this system the function of religion is to legitimate the interests of the dominant capitalist claim. It does so by maintaining the status quo through prevention of the exploited class from recognizing the root cause of their alienation. Hence, religion provides comfort (opium) for the alienated people, not a solution to their problem.³⁵ Religion turns the attention of the oppressed away from the exploitation that conditions their human existence on daily basis. It also discourages the people from challenging the established order and from pushing charges that would positively affect their lives. This religion achieved by focusing on illusory eternal hope thereby fostering a false consciousness and encouraging cultural values and beliefs that entrench the status quo. It was Marx's teaching that the teachings of Christianity and its focus on heaven as a

³² Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader* 1978 (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978), 154.

³³ Kai Nielsen. "Is Religion the Opium of the People? Marxianism and Religion." in *Can Religion be Explained Away?* (New York, NY: Springer Link, 1996), 177–223, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-248582_9.

³⁴ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1997).

³⁵ Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader* 1978 (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978), 54.

reward for godliness was only a ploy by the ruling dominant class to manipulate the masses into docility. Religion is therefore a functional element that seeks to preserve the dominant oppressors' class.³⁶ It was Marx's position that the working class need to galvanize themselves, change the consciousness promoted by religion and overthrow capitalism in order to establish a classless socialist society. Such doing will take away unequal social relations, alienation and offering no more need for religion. It is Marx's conclusion that religion serves as a coping strategy for the deprived that prevents them from recognizing their oppression.

Marx also condemned capitalism as promoter of exploitation because it holds that profit is maximized when the workers are paid below the value of their contributions. So while religion is an illusion that provides reasons and excuses to keep society functioning just as it is, in the same manner, capitalism takes our productive labour and alienates us from its value. Since religion through its doctrines promotes the system, Marx argued that religion is the heart of a heartless world, the sense of senseless conditions. It was the opium of the masses.³⁷ For him, religion is irrational and avoids recognition of underlying reality. Religion in his view negates all that is dignified in a human being by rendering them servile and more amenable to accepting the status quo.³⁸ Consequently, religion is hypocritical in that while professing valuable principles, it sides with the oppressors. Religion cites Jesus who advocated helping the poor yet Christian Church merged with the oppressive Roman State, taking part in the enslavement of people for centuries. Also, in the middle ages, the Catholic Church preached about heaven but acquired as much property and power as possible here on earth. It was this debased form of Christianity that Marx criticized. Thus since the prevalent form of Christianity cannot help man's dignity there was need for a new economic reality. This new economic reality demanded a new religious superstructure by which it could be justified and defended. Obviously, Marx does not condemn religion but the prevalent form of religion which presented man an illusory happiness and there was need to give up this illusion. Marx agrees that people are in distress but religion

³⁶ Michael Welton. "Opium of the People? The Religious Heritage of Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School." *CounterPunch Magazine*, 2015.

³⁷ W. Hollenweger. "Karl Marx and His Confession of Faith." *The Expository Times*, LXXXIV, iss. 5 (1973): 30-136, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001452467308400502>.

³⁸ Esther Oluffa Pedersen. "Religion is the Opium of the people: An Investigation into the Intellectual Context of Marx's Critique of Religion." *History of Political Thought*, 36, no.2 (2015): 354-387, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26228603>.

instead of providing them real happiness provides them with illusory fantasies by telling the poor that the economic reality cannot give them happiness in this life. They should therefore not be worried since they will find true happiness in the next life. Consequently, religion does not fix a physical injury but makes one forget pain and suffering for a while-opium. Religion does not help to solve the underlying causes of people's pain and suffering but rather helps them forget why they are suffering and causes them to look forward to an imaginary future.³⁹

But, scholars have also identified conditions under which religion may help foster class consciousness and collective action. The varying tenets of Islamic religion and Christian religion are quite good examples. Thomson in his book "The Making of the English Working Class" demonstrates how religion through Methodism helped the working class to cope with their hard working conditions through its doctrines, prayers and communal gatherings. In fact, many religions today teach that the deplorable working conditions are the result of man's own sins.⁴⁰ This teaching is aimed at encouraging docile legitimacy to challenge the status quo. Those who preach against this perspective are in the minority few, lacking in resources, institutional support and cultural legitimacy to challenge the dominant narrative. The point is that it is not the case that religion always supports the existing class structure. There are many instances of missionaries, pastors and priests who interpreted their faith in a way that impelled them to go against capitalist owners. So, indeed, religion serves to mold people into docile and passive workers who support their own exploitation. But it also serves to spur people into actions that would change their lives and exploitation. Marx's idea of religion was focused only on the popular religion of his time and he did not devote critical time to religion in general. He focused on the religion with which he was most familiar and therefore presented religion in a negative light alone, thereby making the actual doctrines of religion almost irrelevant. He failed to realize that religion is used to naturalize the religious and economic divisions. It can equally serve as a powerful unifier that helps to foster class consciousness.⁴¹

³⁹ Chine Austin, "Religion as Opium of the People: Karl Marx's View on Religion and Economics." *Learnreligions*, 2019. Accessed June 15, 2020.

⁴⁰ Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1966).

⁴¹ Megan Roger and Mary Ellen Konieczny. "Does Religion Always Help the Poor? Variations in Religion and Social Class in the West and Societies in the Global South." *Palgrave Communications*, 4, no. 7 (2018): 1-11.

Religion and religious communities often play important roles in social movements and advocacy that can profoundly impact the lives of the poor and oppressed. It can be used as a channel of change. In fact, there are other social influences upon religion as against the view held by Marx and religion can in turn have an influence on society's economic system. Take for instance, the Christian fights to Christianize the world, the Maccabeus, the Jihadists, and so on. Religion cannot solely be wished and washed away because it helps people navigate their everyday life. Moreover, Marx failed to realize that religion was beyond full and complete comprehension. He claimed religion is wholly determined by material and economic realities. This is not true because capitalism did not appear in countries prior to Protestantism where Protestantism is the religious system created by capitalism.⁴² Marx also claims that value can only be created by human labour. Unfortunately, industries relying less on human labour and more upon machines and cybernats many a time get more profit and less casualties as well. Further, Marx did not also realize that the attitude of worshippers and ministers of God might run contrary to the dictates of Christianity as reflected in the oppression of the masses by the political dominant class who claim to be religious. His tenets showed lack of understanding or misunderstanding of the tenets of Christian religion. This is why scholars have criticized Marxist philosophy as historically inaccurate, scientifically weak and logically inaccurate.⁴³

Christianity reached other nations through the instrumentality of colonialism. Since colonialism sought to oppress the people and dominate them Marx must have felt that the Christian teachings were mere facades created by the colonialists and ruling class to subjugate the masses. Indeed, as Christianity moved from one environment to the other, its ideal teachings were watered down. Thus the reality became better described as superficial Christianity. Even today, the teachings of Christ seem to have lost its efficacy. Marx held that religion would pass way with the socialist resolution of the existential opprobrium that gave birth to it. Yet, today, more than ever, individuals, groups and even states are employing religion to achieve goals and objectives that include socio-economic and political aspects of human existence. The influence of religion in the existentialist affairs of men have given some people the enabling ground

⁴² Vladimir I. Lenin, *On Religion* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965); John Lewis. "Marx and Religion." *New Humanist*, 91, no. 2 (1975): 34-37.

⁴³ Dare O. Omonijo, Obiajulu. A.U. Nnedum, Onyekwere C. Uche, and Bernard C. Chine. "Religion as the Opium of the Masses: A Study of the Contemporary Relevance of Karl Marx": 1-7.

to commit despicable atrocities and carry out bizarre activities against their fellow humans in the name of projecting certain religious tenets.⁴⁴ It cannot therefore be overemphasized that Marx was wrong because religion is still very much in force. People keep employing it and little wonder Voltaire wrote that “those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities”.

Some have also argued that Marx did not aim to get rid of God but instead to free man from religion which man created. For example, Christianity has a strong presence in Nigeria accounting for about 50.8% of the Nigerian population. Yet, its society is marred by violence, corruption, tribal wars, hate, moral depravity and decadence, cultism, exploitation and victimization, perversion of justice and many other social ill and vices. In Nigeria, there is so much religiosity but without the accompanying spirituality. The problem in Nigerian Christian is not confession or profession but application of biblical principles enshrined in the scripture. From the light of Marx, Christians endure victimization, persecution, oppression, exploitation, killings and other ills of injustice because heaven is their target. Whatever virtue they uphold is in regard of the cherished eternity. It should be noted that these atrocities are not peculiar to the Christian faith. In fact, these are today the normal way of life to the extent that any Christian pastor who condemns them has inevitably asked that people stop worshipping at his congregation. Marx witnessed a period in which there was strong conformity to the dictates of the Church. Today, this spirit of conformity is replaced with enlightenments and disobedience. What remains the same is the mode of transactions. The transactions of many Christian organisations do not offer any difference from the capitalists but the interest is no longer in eternity as Marx held but on prosperity and materialism.⁴⁵ Nowadays people valued prosperity than holiness and righteousness which have affected our national development. The question being raised hitherto is whether Marx’s statement should be accepted into the Nigerian situation whole and entire.

Marx makes a caricature of religion when he said religion (Christian religion) was the opium of the masses. Speaking today about religion as the opium of the masses

⁴⁴ Stephen Chijioke Nwinyia. “Rationalizing Muslims’ Propensity to Violent Conflicts: Towards Peaceful Coexistence in Multi-Religious Society.” *West African Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 19 (2019): 1-16, <https://journals.ezenwaohaetorc.org/index.php/WAJOPS/article/view/1360>.

⁴⁵ Benjamin C. Diara, *History and Doctrine of Evangelical Christianity*. (Enugu: Iman Publicity, 2009).

in the face of problems leaves questions as to what one really believes in. This is because God does not grant that one worship Him at the expense of living a comfortable life. Marx critique of religion focuses on the popular wave of people's emotion. And this is what he mistakenly refers to as religion. He was not criticizing the correct religion so one has to see through his critique. Marx developed his theory following the reign of two radically different epochs: Medieval era and modern era. During the Medieval period reason was not allowed to bloom as in the modern times. The Medieval period was one in which Christianity sprang up to its fullest.

In relation to the bible passage Acts 2-4, the two epochs are different. In Acts 2-4 Christianity was at minority and kings never wanted to hear of its teachings. This led to the several persecutions of Christians. Once Christianity was established in the Medieval Ages everything must bow to religion. In this Age the Church was in its full swing to the extent that travelling of kings demanded that they receive the blessings from the Pope who was the commander. In Germany, there were also kingly bishops who had political authority aside ecclesiastical authorities over certain areas. These bishops were exceedingly respected. So at this time everything pronounced by the Church was accepted without question as true. To question the authority of the Church was counted as heresy and punishable by death. For example, those who challenged the Church including scientists (Copernicus, Galileo) were oppressed and persecuted.⁴⁶ Thus reason was subdued and the truth of Christian revelations was assumed to be infallible. It was only in the Netherlands that people who challenged the authority of the Church could run to and considered themselves free from the Church's penalty. And it was for this reason that rebels moved to the nation.

The Modern times came immediately overthrowing all the authority of the religion-the Church. In the modern period reason came into its full flowers, countering and criticizing the medieval for the errors that were allowed to reign in the hands of the Church. During this period came also the industrial revolution in Europe resulting to the capitalist emergence. The capitalists wanted the peasants to work in the factory with little or no pay. This is the environment within which Marx developed his theory which was hugely accepted by the peasants. It is within this background we can better appreciate Marx's statement that religion was the opium of the masses and that religion

⁴⁶ Leveillee P. Nicholas. "Copernicus, Galileo, and the Church: Science in a Religious World." *Inquiries Journal of the Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities*, 3, no. 5 (2011).

tells the masses not to rebel just so that the status quo can be sustained. As opium people are repelled from acting on the ground that they would make heaven. The expression is therefore a question of the Age of which the Church was the beginning and end all. In the contemporary times, there must be a balance to the intent that total secularization is bad; that the belief that there is no mystery, that human life is not sacred and that nothing is holy is wrong. If this stance is taken then injustice will reign and life might just return to the Hobbesian state of nature. So Marx was saying that even if we must agree that God and morality exist in the face of stark reality of freedom and that even if it is empirically impossible to scientifically move on, then we must create another world where these things are possible. Marx thereby shows the necessity of religion and shows that the other human being has right. He tells us that the human being is not immortal. Another achievement his statement made is viewing people's spiritual lives in relation to their material lives and no longer in isolation.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF ACTS 2-4 FOR NIGERIAN CHURCHES

The manifestations of events that happened in Acts 2-4 are Pentecost, church leadership, fellowship (communalism), persecution, evangelization, miracles, and church election. These features are important part of the early church which some Nigerian church pretend to practice. These features of the early church are discussed in the light of Nigerian churches.

In Nigerian Church today, the word "fellowship" is grossly misused by applying it to recreation activity, entertainment and social gatherings only. Joseph⁴⁷ notes that "Churches provide sport opportunities including church leagues and tournaments, as well as various other sport, fitness and recreation programme activities." The motives behind such recreational activities may seem to be part of fellowship aiming to draw the interest of the un-churched people have interest in the church. One can also observe that each sports activity has no place for deliberation of the Scripture and devotion for prayers. At the ongoing of such gathering, anti- communism, maltreatment, anger, war and other forms of wickedness are seen. The motive behind such should be checkmate in order to say it is part of fellowship. Nowadays, comedians are invited to perform

⁴⁷ Eruteyan Joseph Jeroh, "The Multi-dimensional Relationship Between Religion and Sport." *Journal of Physical Education and Sports Management*, 3, no. 1 (2012): 5, <https://doi.org/10.5897/JPEM.9000021>.

during Church service. Some churches do it to have more congregation and for other reasons. This is anti-communism because such gathering makes mockery of the house of God. It goes contrary to what Jesus said about God's house which should be called house of prayers (Matthew 21:13) and not house of entertainment.⁴⁸ Church is a place of prayer, sober reflection, deliberation of God's Word and examination of life to reflect the life of the Kingdom of God. With proliferation of churches, the 'pastors' uses various devious means to carry out their work. Miracles are today performed with charms and diabolic objects; they are no longer willing and ready for persecution. The elections of church leaders are done for preferential purposes such as embezzlement of church funds and tithes etc. in the early church, Christian leaders were committed to the Lord Jesus, disciplined and depended on the guidance of the Holy Spirit despite persecution and conflict at that time. The case is contrary to the twenty-first century church, leaders love money more than the gospel of Christ, and depend on their ability.

The contemporary Nigerian church is engulfed by the quest for materialism and power, prevalent in the society. This substantiates the Marxian maxim of religion as the opium of the people. Nigerian church in the contemporary world exploits the masses by using the spirit of religion as salvation for man's quest for divine transition. Conventionality, church liturgy and messages show preference for the poor, but the structure and functional praxis of Nigerian churches, such as elitist form of theology, classist form (Marxian concept) of its clergy and the relationship between church leaders and politico-economic power brokers and stakeholders in our society betray and reverse this preferences for the affluent.⁴⁹ The implication has dimensionally changed the state of many church leaders in Nigeria. Many church leaders consciously or unconsciously measured success in life in terms of wealth, prestige and power. No wonder in the church, issues that concern the rich resound high, while that of the poor is many a time acknowledged or at best handle lackadaisically. Every minister in Nigeria is a vision seer and a miracle worker or preferred to be one. This necessitates from the point that the effect of religion on the people as an opium which has brought a social construct of class division reduces the people to mere hope-seekers. Therefore, the

⁴⁸ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005).

⁴⁹ George Ehusam. "Christian Commitment: The African Dilemma." in *African Dilemma: A Cry for Life*, Eatwot West Central Africa Sub-Regional Conference, Nigeria, 1991; Marleen de Witt. "Afrikania's Dilemma. Reframing African Authenticity in a Christian Public Sphere." *Etnofoor*, 17, no.1 (2004): 133-155, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25758072>.

church ministers use the tool of vision seeing and miracle working to exploit and divide the people, hence giving them a palliative dictum of eternal enrichment in the life after.

The experience of COVID-19 Pandemic taught a lot of lessons to Christian. The experience was unpreparedness, unexpected and unimaginable which affect the economy of the nation and the church. Outbreak of disease, lockdown, sit at home, poverty, persecution and difficulties suppose to be period when Christians demonstrate high level of communal living and love to one another. The period in question witnesses self-centeredness and exploitation among Christians. It affected fulltime pastors, spiritual life (worship, fellowship, baptism, holy Eucharist and confirmation etc) and economic life (food and finance etc) of worshippers, church economy, and payment of salaries of church workers. The church was mandated to close and to maintain social distance. Some churches experienced food insecurity and scarcity due to no fellowship, absent of offerings and tithe. Experiences as noted by Irekamba;⁵⁰ firstly, Archbishop Joseph Imariabe Ojo, General Overseer/Presiding Bishop of Calvary Kingdom Church Int'l, Lagos says that the Lockdown affected fulltime pastors differently from part-time pastors. Some pastors did not put all their proverbial eggs in one basket. For the first two weeks in Lagos, the churches were allowed to maintain social distancing and not have a gathering of more than 25 people. At that time, part-time pastors were still able to get income from their employers or personal businesses, while those who do no other thing than preaching were seriously disadvantaged. Secondly, Most Rev. Dr. Isaac Ayo Olawuyi, Archbishop of Lagos, Methodist church Nigeria laments that the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic is an interruption that has shaken the world, the economy, the society and church to the fabric. For the first time in the history of our generation, the church was closed against public worship on Sundays, and to the extent that Christians could not go to church on Easter Sunday for worship. This has not only affected the worship, the fellowship, the administration and the spiritual life of worshippers but has also adversely affected the church's economy. For about seven weeks of the lockdown now, no church service has been held, no gathering, no meetings, no offerings, no tithes and no thanksgiving offerings. Many pastors, due to this situation, cannot feed their families. Church members are crying because of hunger. They are

⁵⁰ Chris Irekamba. "COVID-19: How churches cope without regular services." *The Guardian Sunday Magazine*, 2020. Accessed Juni 19, 2023, <https://m.guardian.ng/sunday-magazine/cityfile/covid-19-how-churches-cope-without-regular-services>.

looking up to the church for aids and palliatives. He also noted the two ways the church was affected: it stops public worship and affects church finances; and it demoralizes many believers.⁵¹ Since the lockdown, the church adopts devise means of encouraging members to begin Family Worship, use of social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Zoom to undertake church activities. Thirdly, Rev. Francis Ejiroghene Waive, General Overseer, Church of the Anointing, Warri, Delta State says that paying salaries of church ministers and other categories of staff has been a huge challenge. But worse still is the challenge of providing palliatives to the vulnerable and indeed all parishioners. The church has provided foodstuffs severally to our church members. No church members has not also benefitted from our palliatives, as those who live near our churches, as well as friends and family of our members couldn't be left out. Fourthly, Pastor Johnson Odesola, Assistant General Overseer (Admin/Personnel) & Pastor-in-Charge Region 1, The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Redemption Camp, Nigeria asserts that even though the Church is closed, we still stay connected through social media. Pastor Enoch Adeboye has been preaching on Sundays centrally on our DOVE television that can reach people almost in every part of the world. The church has also helped meet the physical needs of the congregants through making phone calls to everyone, creating a food supply chain to supplement what some families may need like rice, beans, garri, Indomie noodles, egg, yam and of course, money, as well as assisting members in paying house rents and hospital bills. And also encouraged our members to religiously adhere to government's directives, as they relate to the fight against COVID-19 and use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); frequent washing of hands, sanitise their hands and use of facemask. Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) have not done much in sensitizing the people and influencing the government to meet the need of the people. After the ban for lockdown was lifted, it was observed that many food items were packed in the warehouse at Lagos and some parts of the state leaving the masses die of hunger. This is pathetic.

Anti-communalism affects the church polity, faith and welfare creating space for leadership struggle, economic problem, conflict and schism. Hospitality, understanding that man's property belongs to God, meeting people's need, love, cooperation, trust, faithfulness, selflessness and diligence to work would have been the major strength for

⁵¹ Moses Adasu. "Worldliness and Lack of Spirituality in the Church." *News Cathdica*, 19 (1992): 1-14.

uniting and strengthening Christians and a foundation for stable and durable church. Suspicion, hatred and distrust among the Nigerian Christians help to fight the spirit of communal living.⁵² Adequate distribution of positions and resources between and among various church groups, organizations, zone and units; promotion of equity and fair play, poverty alleviation programme, adequate public enlightenment and prayer inclusion will strengthen togetherness in Nigerian Church while reducing incidence of suspicion, hatred and distrust between and among the various groups, organization, zones and units in the church. Communal living is one of the values for societal and church development. It enhances stability in the church and meets people's need. When there is conflict, self-centeredness, lack of understanding in the church, some elements of demonstrations, protests and criticisms are seen. Quest for welfare and political leadership appeared to have caused division against the biblical principles and values noted in Acts 2-4 which prescribed justice, peace and mutual co-existence between and among Christians irrespective of denomination and background. Denomination that supposed to be instrument for unifying has been reinvented as a more divisive.⁵³

Marx is concerned with religious function in human society. He demonstrated that with religion, human's burden would be solved, even though conflict which is inevitable in human society has contributed to human problems. In the time of the apostles, there are no classes, they had things in common. Okafor⁵⁴ notes that in the period of primitive communism, where classes did not exist and the primitive men commonly shared with others what they had gathered through hunting expeditions, all other stages i.e., slavery, feudalism, capitalism are characterized by conflict between two opposing classes, until a revolution occurs during capitalism leading to socialism and finally communism. Every Christian or church wants to satisfy their material and personal needs, which if not carefully addressed would lead to conflicts.

Exploiting ethnicity in the church have created room for anti-communism, Otite⁵⁵ regarded ethnicity as: "...no more than an ideology of exploitation, an ever ready instrument in the hands of the elite. The members of the elite camouflage their class

⁵² Onigu Otite. "Ethnicity and Class in a Plural Society," 87-107.

⁵³ John P. Smith. "Acts 2: Spirit-Empowered Leadership." *Emerging Leadership Journeys*, 1, no. 1 (2008): 25-38.

⁵⁴ Emmanuel Emeka Okafor. "Sociological Implications of Communal and Ethno-Religious Clashes in New Democratic Nigeria." *Kamla-Raj 2007 Stud. Tribes Tribals*, 5, no. 1 (2007), 41.

⁵⁵ Onigu Otite, "Ethnicity and Class in a Plural Society." in *Nigeria in Research in Race and Ethnic Relations* (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1979), 98.

interests, mystify the variable of ethnicity, and indoctrinate the masses by making them believe that they share common interests which are threatened. This suggests that the leaders merely exploit ethnicity thereby reinforcing its potency as a factor in the relationships among Nigerians. Ethnicity becomes a strategy for the achievement and retention by the elite of their leadership position... In the process, class interests are subsumed under, and projected as ethnic group interest". Since communism encourages fair competition, equal distribution of wealth and justice, the mindset of ethnicity in Nigerian church should not be adopted. Christians are one before God and anything contrary to the unity of the church should be resisted with passion. Some church leaders who have personal interest have also manipulated the church system for personal advantage thereby creating mutual suspicion and fear.

On the welfare of the church, removal of faithful Christians in the welfare committee degrade the church system and promote instability in the church. It will led to social and economic misplacement, and further widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Poverty has been a problem in Africa and Nigeria is not left out. Okafor⁵⁶ also wrote that "Poverty is demeaning, depressing and dehumanizing. And for the poor it is a dead end, a state from which neither they nor their children can escape." In contemporary dispensation, poverty and inequality among Nigerian Christians has increased; poor Christians are exploited in the name of seeking for miracle and liberation. It has led many young Christians to join dirty businesses which affect their Christian faith. It has led them to fall into the hands of wicked politician to be used to achieve their personal interest⁵⁷.

On the faith, level of ignorance, afflictions and fears among Christians have created hatred and distrust. For example, issue of one particular denomination assumed to be controlling the economy of the state in some part of Nigeria has created enmity among Christians in another denomination. Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) have some progress towards uniting all Christians in the country. They have made progress in expansion of the gospel, consolidating togetherness among Christians and defending the Church before government and other religions of the world.

⁵⁶ Emmanuel Emeka Okafor. "Sociological Implications of Communal and Ethno-Religious Clashes in New Democratic Nigeria": 42-44.

⁵⁷ Antonio Perez-Esclarin, *Atheism and Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 1974); Lauer S. Quentin, *The Atheism of Karl Marx: Marxism and Christianity*. New York: Humanities Press, 1968.

The implications of anti-communism in Nigerian churches involve togetherness, cooperation, fellowship and service. These are values which strengthen the church polity, welfare, and faith. Ignorance of Christians' freedom has engulfed emotions, and increased mutual suspicion and distrust. The communal living has been politicised to the extent that it has become a divisive factor. This is capable of scaring non-Christians from the church. The church can no longer be trusted because of double standard, competition and conflict. Also development and attaining the needs, desires, expectations and aspirations of Christians will be met. Communal living is one of the major challenges to Nigerian Church. Reformation and reconstruction of social, political and religious structure of the Nigerian Church will create uniform model of communal living. For Church to function effectively in the area of welfare, the need of the people should be met whether spiritually, physically, educationally, emotionally and otherwise. These will foster Christians' participation in fellowship and evangelism; maintaining accountability in office; dedication and transparency to duties, promoting and tolerating one another in love and delivering selfless services. Also there is a need to accommodate Christians from different background, while at the same time promoting Christian faith. Enlightenment programme on the need to care for another, fellowshiping and cooperation. This will reduce the incident of youths becoming victim of moral decadence in human society.

CONCLUSION

The study of Acts 2-4 in the understanding of Karl Marx maxim of religion as the opium will continue to be recurrent decimal in the society especially the church community. Hence, there is a need for the Nigerian contemporary church to look back and imitate the basic good qualities of the early church community such as mode of leadership, meeting the needs of brethren, election, evangelization and fellowship. Suffice it to say that proper direction of the tenets of the teachings of Jesus Christ is actually what Karl Marx was trying to project as against the misuse of religion as a tool to exploit and oppress the poor masses. So in effect, thus recommends a steady biblical hermeneutical understanding of the book of Acts, because it is a typical manual guide for the foundation of church.

REFERENCES

- Adasu, Moses. "Worldliness and Lack of Spirituality in the Church." *News Cathdica*, 19 (1992): 1-14.
- Ajibola, Falaye. "Religious Corruption: A Dilemma of the Nigerian State." *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 15, no. 1 (2013), 170-185.
- Anozie, Eric. *The Early Church A Historical Perspective*. Enugu: Frefabag Investment Ltd., 2007.
- Austin, Chine. "Religion as Opium of the People: Karl Marx's View on Religion and Economics." *Learnreligions*, 2019. Accessed June 15, 2020, <https://www.learnreligions.com/religion-as-opium-of-the-people-250555>.
- Boa, K. *The Time of Acts. In the Open Bible Expanded Edition*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1985.
- Chen, James. "Communism." in *Investopedia*, October 13, 2023, Accessed June 19, 2021, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/communism.asp>.
- Chinwokwu, Emmauel Nlenanya. *A Critical Introduction to the Tradition of Jesus*. Nsukka: AP Express Publishers, 2015.
- Diara, Benjamin C. *History and Doctrine of Evangelical Christianity*. Enugu: Iman Publicity, 2009.
- Ehusam, George. "Christian Commitment: The African Dilemma." in *African Dilemma: A Cry for Life*, Eatwot West Central Africa Sub-Regional Conference, Nigeria, 1991.
- Essid, Mohamed. "History of Mediterranean food." *MediTERRA: The mediterranean diet for sustainable regional development*, Chapter 2 (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2012), 51-69, <https://doi.org/10.3917/scpo.chea.2012.02.0051>.
- Grant, Micheal. *A Guide to the Ancient World*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1997.
- Haight, Roger D. *Christian Community in History: Historical Ecclesiology*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004.
- Heydari, Mojtaba, M.H. Hashempur, and Arman Zargaran. "Medicinal aspects of opium as described in Avicenna's Canon of Medicine." *Acta Med Hist Adriat*, 11, no.1 (2013): 101-112.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. "Karl Heinrich Marx. (1818-1883)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

- Hollenweger, W. "Karl Marx and His Confession of Faith." *The Expository Times*, LXXXIV, iss. 5 (1973): 30-136, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001452467308400502>.
- Horst, Pieter. "Hellenistic Parallels to the Acts of the Apostles 2:1-47." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 8, iss. 25 (1985): 49-60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X8500802503>.
- Hurtado, Larry W. *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005.
- Irekamba, Chris. "COVID-19: How churches cope without regular services." *The Guardian Sunday Magazine*, 2020, Accessed June 15, 2020. <https://m.guardian.ng/sunday-magazine/cityfile/covid-19-how-churches-cope-without-regular-services>.
- Jeroh, Eruteyan Joseph. "The Multi-dimensional Relationship Between Religion and Sport." *Journal of Physical Education and Sports Management*, 3, no. 1 (2012): 5, <https://doi.org/10.5897/JPESM.9000021>.
- Smith, John P. "Acts 2: Spirit-Empowered Leadership." *Emerging Leadership Journeys*, 1, no. 1 (2008): 25-38, https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/elj/issue1/ELJ_V1Is1_Smith.pdf.
- Keener, Craig. "The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary." *The New International Commentary on the New Testament Series*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009.
- Lawson, Steven. "The priority of biblical preaching: An expository study of Acts 2:42-47." *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 158, no. 630 (2001): 198-217.
- Lenin, Vladimir. I. *On Religion*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965.
- Lewis, John. "Marx and Religion." *New Humanist*, 91, no. 2 (1975): 34-37.
- Lindsley, Art. "Does Acts 2-5 teaches Socialism?" *Washington Times, LLC*, 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/oct/6/does-acts-2-5-teach-socialism>.
- Marx, Karl. *Early Writings*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.
- Marx, Karl. *Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right Collected works*. Translated by A.M. Mckinnon, Collected Works, Vol. 3, New York, 1976.
- Marx, Karl. *The Marx-Engels Reader 1978*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978.

Marx, Karl and David McLellan. *Selected Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Marx, Karl and Fredrick Engels. *The German Ideology*. New York: International Publishers, 1940.

Marx, Karl and Fredrick Engels. *On Religion*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975.

Marx, Karl and R. Davis. *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

McKinnon, Andrew M. "Reading 'Opium of the People': Expression, Protest and the Dialectics of Religion." *Critical Sociology*, 31, no. 1-2 (2005): 15-38.

McLellan, David. *Karl Marx 4th Edition: A Biography*, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.

Morris, Brian. "Enrich From: The Radical Humanist." *New Humanist*, 10, no. 2 (1986): 3-8.

Nicholas, Leveillee P. "Copernicus, Galileo, and the Church: Science in a Religious World." *Inquiries Journal of the Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities*, 3, no. 5 (2011), <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=1675>.

Nielsen, Kai. "Is Religion the Opium of the People? Marxianism and Religion." in *Can Religion be Explained Away?* (New York, NY: Springer Link, 1996), 177-223, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-248582_9.

Nwinya, Stephen Chijioke. "Rationalizing Muslims' Propensity to Violent Conflicts: Towards Peaceful Coexistence in Multi-Religious Society." *West African Journal Of Philosophical Studies*, 19 (2019): 1-16, <https://journals.ezenwaohaetorc.org/index.php/WAJOPS/article/view/1360>.

Okafor, Emmanuel Emeka. "Sociological Implications of Communal and Ethno-Religious Clashes in New Democratic Nigeria." *Kamla-Raj 2007 Stud. Tribes Tribals*, 5, no. 1 (2007): 35-45

Omonijo, Dare O., Obiajulu. A.U. Nnedum, Onyekwere C. Uche, and Bernard C. Chine. "Religion as the Opium of the Masses: A Study of the Contemporary Relevance of Karl Marx." *Asian Research Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 1, no. 32 (2016): 1-7.

Onwu, Emmanuel. *Basic Issues in the Close of New Testament Era*. Nsukka: Great AP Express Publishers Limited, 2004.

Otite, Onigu. "Ethnicity and Class in a Plural Society." in *Nigeria in Research in Race and Ethnic Relations*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1979, 87-107.

- Parker, Charles H. and Jerry H. Bentley. *Between the Middle Ages and Modernity: Individual and Community in the Early Modern World*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2007.
- Pedersen, Esther Oluffa. "Religion is the Opium of the people: An Investigation into the Intellectual Context of Marx's Critique of Religion." *History of Political Thought*, 36, no. 2 (2015): 354-387,
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26228603>.
- Perez-Esclarin, Antonio. *Atheism and Liberation*. London: SCM Press, 1974.
- Pinnock, Clark H. *Reason Enough: A Case for the Christian Faith Exister*. Milton Keynes: The Paternoster Press, 1980.
- Quentin, Lauer S. *The Atheism of Karl Marx: Marxism and Christianity*. New York: Humanities Press, 1968.
- Reese, Edward and Frank R. Klassen. *The Reese Chronological Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1977.
- Wolff, Richard D. "Communism." in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica's International Publishing, 2019.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/communism/additional-info#history>
- Robbins, Vernon. *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: L' ouverture, 1973.
- Roger, Megan and Mary Ellen Konieczny. "Does Religion Always Help the Poor? Variations in Religion and Social Class in the West and Societies in the Global South." *Palgrave Communications*, 4, no. 7 (2018): 1-11.
- Russell, George W.E. and Charles F.G. Masterman. *Leaders of the Church (1800-1900 Leaders of The Church, 1800-1900: Frederick Denison Maurice (1907)*. London: A.R Mowbray & Co. Limited, 2007.
- Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1997.
- Stott, John R W. *The Message of Acts: to the Ends of the Earth*. Westmont, IL: Inter-varsity Press, 1990.
- Susan, Smith Tamke. "Separating the Sheep from the Goats: Victorian Didactic Hymns." *North American Conference on British Studies*, 8, no. 3 (1976): 255-273,
<https://doi.org/10.2307/4048476>.

-
- Thompson, Edward Palmer. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1966.
- Uchegbue, Christian. "A Critical Evaluation of Marx's Theory of Religion." *American Journal of Social Issues & Humanities*, 1, no. 2 (2011): 50-81.
- Wayne, Sass R. "Acts 2: An Example of the Divine Empowerment of Leaders." *Emerging Leadership Journeys*, 5, no.1 (2012): 36-55,
<https://www.regent.edu/journal/emerging-leadership-journeys/biblical-principles-of-empowerment-acts-2>.
- Welton, Michael. "Opium of the People? The Religious Heritage of Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School." *CounterPunch Magazine*, 2015.
- Wheen, Francis. *Karl Marx: A Life*. London: Fourth Estate, 2001.
- Witt, Marleen de. "Afrikania's Dilemma. Reframing African Authenticity in a Christian Public Sphere." *Etnofoor*, 17, no.1 (2004): 133-155,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25758072>.



QUAERENS: Journal of Theology and Christianity Studies is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.