

The religio-theatrical dynamics of the Via Dolorosa: Its significance for the Church in Nigeria

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to interrogate the spirituality of Via Dolorosa (the Way of the Cross) to the Christendom, especially Christian faithfuls in Nigeria and the didactic and theatrical value to the society in general. An exposition of the study enables Christians in Nigeria to come to terms with the signification of Via Dolorosa in relation to their spiritual orthodoxy and its theatrical value thereof. Via Dolorosa is an essential memorabilia in Christendom and represents the traditional route in the ancient City of Jerusalem that Christ travelled on the day he was crucified by Pontius Pilate at a place called the Praetorium. The study reveals the 14 locations marking the routes through which Jesus Christ traversed to the place of crucifixion under the excruciating pains in the hands of his persecutors. It is this unique, religious, and theatrical dynamics of Via Dolorosa that the study seeks to examine. Scarcely had the issue of Via Dolorosa been examined from the theatrical perspective. Via Dolorosa is thus adapted as a dramatic masterpiece for the social benefits of Christians and other numerous audiences.

Keywords: theatricality, memorabilia, crucifixion, Via Dolorosa, Praetorium

Introduction

The term “Via Dolorosa” is not actually mentioned any way in the Bible. However, etymologically, “Via Dolorosa” means “The Way of the Grief” in Latin. Literarily, “Via Dolorosa” means “The Sorrowful Way,” or “The Way of the Cross.” Since time immemorial, Via Dolorosa has been celebrated by the Christian faithfuls to

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commemorate the judgement, crucifixion, burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Mount Calvary in Golgotha. Traditionally, Via Dolorosa represents the route (path) where Jesus was lead in agony by his accusers, carrying the cross of crucifixion. Jesus was accused by the Jewish people of corrupting the nation, and refusing to give tribute to Caesar; and also assuming to be Christ and the King. They also accused him of stirring up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to Jerusalem – offence which Pilate himself testified that he found no fault in this man as recalled thus:

And they began to accuse him, saying, we found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding giving tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King. And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, 'Thou sayest it'. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man (Luke 23:2- 4).

Biblewalks.com (2019) submits that after Pontius Pilate's judgement, Jesus was beaten, mocked and spit upon by the Roman Soldiers. Thereafter, he was forced to carry the cross by himself through the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha, where he was eventually crucified. The gospel according to Mathew (3:27) re-echoed this that:

When Pilate had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews! And after they had mocked him they took the robe off from him, and led him away to crucify him.

The "Via Dolorosa" is currently marked with fourteen "Stations of the Cross" from the initial seven stations in remembrance of the fourteen incidents that occurred along the route by which Jesus was led from the Praetorium to Golgotha, a location commonly known as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

In his article title "Walking the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem," Bumgardner (2019, 1) submits that, "the Stations of the Cross are stops (locations) that commemorate events during the torture, sentencing, carrying of the cross, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus." The Via Dolorosa consists of segments of several streets and one of the main segments is the modern left over of the two main east-west routes, referred to as the "Decumanus Maximus" (Ibid, 2).

Via Dolorosa is a prophesy fulfilled right from the Old Testament period and marks an important foundation of the Ministry of Jesus on earth. Isaiah (9:6-7) had prophesized this that, “for to us a child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder and his name will be called “Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Luke (1:30-31) also emphasizes thus:

And the Angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David (NKJV 2013).

Just as Christ’s birth was prophesized by Isaiah the prophet in the Old Testament, his crucifixion and resurrection was equally foretold in the New Testament in an encounter between Jesus’ disciples and the angel of the Lord. The angel had said, “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified and on the third day rise” (Luke 24: 6-8). Via Dolorosa has attracted a lot of commentaries but little or nothing has been said about the theatricality of Via Dolorosa. That exactly is the pursuit of this research.

The study, therefore, is to interrogate the implication of Via Dolorosa to the spiritual and social well-being of Christians in Nigeria and the world at large. It underscores the significance of Christ’s crucifixion; for by his death humanity was saved.

Religious exegesis of Via Dolorosa

Via Dolorosa represents the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, Israel, an event that took place before 8th century. Jerusalem is one of the most fascinating cities – a city of immense duality in which the Orthodox Jews live alongside the Uberhip Jerusalemite crowd. The Old City has an immense layered history, religious and cultural draws. The Via Dolorosa also known as Stations of the Cross in Christendom commemorates events during the torture, sentencing, carrying of the cross, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus (Bumgardner 2019, 1). The path of Via Dolorosa is established according to custom than by any archaeological evidence. Writing about the relevance of Via Dolorosa to Christendom, Holy Land Voyager (2014, 1) asserts that, “of the journeys taken by heroic men in human history, no expedition has been more central to our culture

than the one taken by Jesus of Nazareth on his way to the crucifixion.”

The “Via Dolorosa” is one of the most important urban landmarks in the world and arguably the most important site to the Christian world, to celebrate Christ’s sacrifice and its redemptive powers. The signification of Via Dolorosa for the Church in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Jesus’ crucifixion and death on the cross is a constant reminder to Christians in Nigeria of the humongous sacrifice the Lord Jesus made in sacrificing and dying on the cross. The physical cross is of no significance to Christians but metaphorically, the cross signifies “crossing out” all sensory driven characteristics of the body that do not bring any material benefit. For as Nowacki (2018) pointed out:

Our body is our cross in this material world – our spirit is held captive in it (the cross) while on Earth. His dying on the cross and resurrection shows that the physical world is but an illusion and only by living a perfect life devoid of sin can Christians achieve complete spiritual body.

The cross is predestined by God to redeem humanity and also show God’s love and in return, our love for God. For Christians in Nigeria to reciprocate this love, therefore, they must carry the cross to depict their lives as a living sacrifice – to live a Christ-like life otherwise known as “Christification.” As recorded in Mark 8:34, Jesus had called on the people and His disciples in particular to pick up the cross and follow Him. He was calling them to follow His examples and move away from their comfort zones to go and fish-out souls for God. As the Lord called on His people, and nay, His disciples to follow Him, Nigerian Christians are not exclusive of this call, rather the cross which they behold passionately should remind them of His message. They need to be non-conformist but be determined to follow His example of humility, shame and the persecution He suffered for His namesake. Above all, Nigerian Christians should decide to live in the world but not of the world; adopt a value system of following Christ with all their faith and trust; and allowing Jesus to become the model for their life and lifestyle.

The spiritual essence rather than the symbolic or physical nature of the cross is more valuable to Christians because it is the message of the cross that empowers their lives to live for Jesus. To this end, Karpathiou (2016) prayed for the Holy Cross to give all Christians the strength to achieve their highest goal of reaching heaven and to

meet their Maker, the Lord God Jesus Christ. Romans (3:23) also reminds Christians that, “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. To this extent, with the transgression of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, all men have sinned and for our salvation, Jesus died on the cross. The cross, therefore, is atonement for our sins, only if we confess, believe and trust that Christ died for our sins.

To Christians in Nigeria, the cross is a symbol of strength and Jesus cannot give them a cross they cannot bear, especially with the current health challenges of COVID-19 pandemic worldwide. Looking onto the cross give Christians the hope of conquering and subduing all health and spiritual challenges. They should consider the cross as their flag so much that, irrespective of their transgressions and guilt, they should have the faith that Christ cares for them and the cross is the promise of eternal life – the reason for which He died on the cross.

The theatricality of Via Dolorosa

The history of theatre as an ancient art is a long one. But the point of its evolution is speculative due to its primitive nature. Theatre is a universal art and as Ogundeji (2000, 2) points out, “theatre and drama have religio-genic root, which is true of other arts or other disciplines, based on the life and beliefs of a people.” The implication is that every society like the Greek society has its own form of theatre. This is in tandem with Enekwe’s (1991, 12) argument that, “society and history determine the shape of drama; and as European theatre itself demonstrates, the apparatus of the theatre can be put together in different ways which reinforces Edith Hamilton’s (1963, 35) view that, “the way a nation goes whether that of the mind or that of the spirit is decisive in its effect upon art.” However, what we have today as complete examples of Greek plays emanates from the Athenians. In line with this historical antecedent, Eze (2008, 3) posits that, “Athens maintained as it were, a certain degree of superiority in theatre of the ancient Greece because it enriched its drama with materials from its immediate past history and mythology.” The Greeks encouraged competitiveness in dramatic activities which enable dramatists to enjoy noble status. This development brought fame to the Greek theatre. By definition, theatre literarily means a place or building, consisting of a stage and seating, in which an audience gathers to watch plays, musical performance, and public ceremonies, among others. But the world of the theatre has

tremendous range and embraces within itself many diverse areas. Theatre does not only refer to a physical playhouse but also what happens inside this house. To this end, Eze (2011, 19) in his book, *The Essence of Drama*, reasons that, “theatre is used to describe all the performing art areas, including the masquerade display dance, western type of drama, song, music, circus, etc. Theatre takes place when one or more people consciously project himself or themselves in a creative activity by means of bodily and/or vocal signs before an audience within a given space and time. Theatre, therefore, is “an integral part of man’s communal existence, and is directly connected with the poetry of life, its rhythms and life cycles” (Kennedy 1973, 42).

Theatrical activity can either be mimetic or non-mimetic; in a mimetic theatre, activity is essentially an imitated act, an act of make-belief where performers merely create illusion of actuality. The non-mimetic theatre refers to other forms of theatre where performers are usually themselves, and not other people’s surrogates – human beings in their total physical being are not juxtaposed with an imagined act to produce an illusion of actuality (Beckerman 1970, 22).

Drama flourished in Greece and Rome before the birth of Christ; but the first dramas in England during the Middle Ages were purely native productions. These native dramas or productions began in Churches and were intended to make the sacred stories of the Bible clearer to the congregation and other common people. The plays at this time contain few sentences and were performed in Latin. Marriott (1948, 30) believes that, “the church service, with its liturgy and the celebration of High Mass, tends itself to dramatization; and abundant materials for plays were to be found in the Bible.” Other scenes from Old and New Testament were acted, and as the congregation grew larger, it became necessary to perform the plays outside the church. The priests and choristers were the first actors and later the laymen were invited to assist.

The first plays were called mystery plays as they dealt with the Bible stories while miracle plays were added, which dealt with the stories of Jesus Christ and the Apostles and the miracles they performed. It also contains Jesus’ encounter with the Jews, trial, and his eventual crucifixion on the Cross of Calvary. Through these liturgical dramas, it was possible to witness for instance, “the Day of Creation,” “the Garden of Eden,” “the Murder of Abel,” “the Sacrifice of Isaac,” “the Deluge in the time of Noah,” “the Story of

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Moses and the Israelites,” “the Occupation of the Promised Land,” “the Life of Jesus Christ from his Birth, through Judgement, Crucifixion and finally His Resurrection.” In fact, the original idea behind the churches in encouraging plays was to familiarize the congregation with the sacred stories and then to drive home a moral which should help people in their daily life – to teach a lesson.

The Via Dolorosa, therefore, falls into these realms of theatricals. It encompasses the epic of Jesus Christ from his judgement, crucifixion and resurrection. Christ’s last moments spanning from his trial to his crucifixion constitute an epic in itself like Homer’s *Odyssey*. As a result, Holy Voyager (2014) contends that, “Jesus’ final walk through the streets of Jerusalem has become a legend for all monotheistic religions.”

According to Canby (1999, 1), “there is one extremely theatrical moment in Via Dolorosa – a scenic effect that appears near the end as a kind of vision of peace.” This scenic effect lasts no longer than a slow blink of the eye and it is all that is needed. Via Dolorosa is an experience of most uncommon theatricality. A retrospective view of the biographical antecedents of Jesus Christ readily revealed that he was persecuted and finally crucified in the hands of his accusers in a bid to save mankind. A historical account of these events from the Holy Bible, documentaries, films or movies, plays, etc all portray the dramatic way in which Jesus was betrayed, arrested, docked, mocked, judged, crucified, and finally buried for an offence which Pontius Pilate himself attested that he did not commit. But trying to please the multitudes, Pilate released Barabbas for them instead of the innocent, good man. This dramatic irony and ridiculous pervasion of justice is equally emphasized in New King James Version that:

Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head and they put on him a purple robe, and said, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore, went forth again, and said unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him (John 19:1-6).

What a dramatic irony, to crucify a man who was found faultless and to release the one who had actually committed an offence. Tragically, to show the rebellion against Jesus, about 600 soldiers of the whole Roman cohort were commissioned to arrest only one man. He was dressed up in purple and a crown of thorns not actually to eulogize him but in mockery of him saying “Hail, King of the Jews!” Mark

(15:18-19) recorded that, “they kept beating his Head with a reed, and spitting at him, and kneeling and bowing before him.” This explains another way of mocking Jesus by hailing him as “King of Jews and kneeling and bowing before him; yet mocking and spitting him at the same time (Davis 1965, 1). Though the Bible did not mention the fall of Jesus or why it was necessary to seek the assistance of Simon of Cyrene to help him carry the cross, however, some Gospel writers has described these hours of suffering as enunciated by Curtis (2007) thus:

He agonized in the Garden and was soaked with sweat, and soon men were beating him up, and then officially he had been whipped until his back was a pulpy mess. He had hardly slept, and his head had been hit again and again with a rod so that Jesus knew extremely weakness and loss of blood.

Subsequently, not knowing what next to do to humiliate Jesus, they put his own clothes on him to a Cross. Jesus’ offence was clearly written on aboard, carried by one of the soldiers to the execution site at Golgotha - to ensure his suffering permeates. This was to act as a warning and deterrence to many other people. The Romans took this action in order to instil fear to everyone who might want to indulge in law-breaking.

These scenarios starting from Jesus’ arrest, judgement, crucifixion, burial and resurrection at Mount Calvary are what has been celebrated since time immemorial as the Via Dolorosa - the route or path which he followed in the course of his travails. The Via Dolorosa which marks these events, constitutes materials and locations for dramatics and, therefore, theatrical. Today, Christians all over the world, especially the Roman Catholics, celebrate the “Station of the Cross,” in commemoration of the above events and the path Jesus took from the place of judgement (Praetorium) to Golgotha where he was crucified.

Stations of the Cross is celebrated every Friday, especially on Good Friday by 3 pm. Processions along the Stations of the Cross are an important epoch-making events and part of spiritual practice of millions of Christians. Via Dolorosa is an historic route. It is theatrical in itself because the celebrants who constitute both the actors and the audience, process solemnly and devotionally along the routes starting from the Lion’s Gate at the Muslim Quarters and terminating at the Christian Quarters. The celebrants also carry the Cross signifying the ‘character’ of Jesus Christ amidst candle light,

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incense, and other props, marching through the routes chanting songs, lyrics and other musical accompaniments. The celebrants comprising of the clergies and the laities appear in their historical robes or costumes denoting their religious status. The whole episodes are quite dramatic and aesthetically illuminating.

As far back as the 4th century during the Byzantine era, Christians have venerated Jesus' walk (Via Dolorosa) to the place of his crucifixion. The Stations of the Cross or the route through which Christ walked connotes a stage in theatrical parlance, where his travails took place. Each Station of the Cross or locale is marked with a Roman Numeral Plaque to commemorate the event that took place there. Because it is not always easy to identify the plaques, there are commentaries to guide visitors who may not be familiar with the routes. The 14 stations historically mark an important spiritual significance of Via Dolorosa. Aesthetically, the path of Via Dolorosa winds through busy streets with lined up snack stalls and tourist shops. The Way of the Cross is open to the public and visitors can chose either to make their own way or book a guided tour to add context. The path is also a busy one and often noisy, with the bustling of outdoor markets. It is easy to get lost in the winding maze of lively streets that make up the Arab Souk in the centre of the Muslim Quarter. Moreover, the buzzing outdoor markets are a sight to behold, with traders hawking wares on streets that are thousands of years old.

The significance of the 14 stations of the Cross for the Church in Nigeria

Via Dolorosa represents the fourteen Stations of the Cross in commemoration of Jesus' walk from the Praetorium to the place of his crucifixion. Through this Sorrowful Ways, as eminently captured in Isaiah (53:5), Jesus was pierced and suffered for our transgressions; crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by His wound we are healed. Patty (1989) equally re-echoed this event in an emotional lyrics entitled, "Via Dolorosa – The Finest Moment" and states:

Down the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem that day
The soldiers tried to clear the narrow street
But the crowd pressed in to see
The man condemned to die on Calvary...

Down the Via Dolorosa called the way of the Suffering

Like a lamb came the Messiah, Christ the King
But He chose to walk that road out of
His love for you and me
Down the Via Dolorosa, all the way to Calvary.

For the Christians in Nigeria and elsewhere, the Via Dolorosa is an exercise in faith – believers are by this development strengthened in their faith about the true meaning of Christ’s crucifixion. Christ’s crucifixion on the cross of Calvary has brought salvation to mankind and has become a source of spiritual practice and upliftment to millions of Christians today. Via Dolorosa also reflects catholic tradition more than mere history.

The cross in which Christ was crucified has a way of calling our attention to eternal life through our faith and trust in the death for which he died for our salvation. Jesus allowed what happened to him in the hands of his accusers because of his love for us. The cross was meant to provide mankind salvation even if it entails his being alone (Curtis 2007). Bucher (2019) also reverberates this love of Christ to mankind and states that:

It was out of love for us that God sent his Son, and love that compelled Christ to accept the fate of the cross. His sacrificial love redefined the human understanding of the word. Love was the main focus of Jesus’ ministry on earth. He redefined acceptance, paying attention to those on the fringes of life. He healed beyond our human capacity to understand, and granted forgiveness for sins which had been deemed unforgivable.

In John (13:34) Jesus himself had said, “a new command I give you: love one another, as I loved you, so you must love one another.” Christians in Nigeria and elsewhere should love one another as Christ loves the Church. They should live their lives in truly Christian way by loving their neighbours as themselves. This is the remarkable difference between Christian love and societal love. It is a selfless love in which the “love for others” is emphatic.

Jesus did not choose to die. He died because of the sins of the world and without his death, it is impossible to earn grace. Jesus made a way; and the way he died granted mankind freedom and forgiveness. Through Christ, the Holy Spirit lives in us, and we are able to communicate with God through prayers and His word. The crucifixion He suffered on the cross was the way to eternal salvation (2 Cor. 5:17). The love of God is pre-eminent as emphasized in John (3:16-17) that, “for God so loved the world that he gave his one and

only begotten Son, that everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him.”

Jesus’ death on the cross has provided a redemptive sacrifice to all mankind to which Christians today celebrate through the symbol of the cross. The cross also gives a retrospective perception to Christians about the suffering of Christ from the point of prosecution to crucifixion which He undertook on their behalf so as to receive joy in God through Jesus whom they received atonement. To this end, Okanlawon’s (2018) study, therefore, encourages Christians in the nation to imbibe the behavioural lifestyle of Jesus Christ as exemplified in His sacrificial and his servant hood. The implication being that, the sign of the cross reminds Christians of God’s love for them through Christ’s sacrifice. The cross also symbolizes Jesus’ resolve to die in atonement for the sins of the world and to reconcile humanity with God. And for Fowler (1991, 43), “the death of Jesus on the cross is the remedial action precedent to the restorative action of God’s indwelling life in man.”

Nigerian Christians should see the Stations of the Cross as their hope for the light overcoming darkness (all principalities and powers), of good overcoming evil, of victorious life over death and the hope of salvation through Jesus Christ. For the sacrifice He made on their behalf for dying on the cross, Christians too should emulate this virtue of sacrificing for others. This is achievable through unity of purpose in their Christian living and forgiving one another in all things. Through unity the reason for Christ’s death and resurrection will not be in vain. The Stations of the Cross as celebrated in Christendom is a symbol of strength. It is in fact the Christian’s beacon of strength and assurance to their lives. This is because many Christians (especially Roman Catholics) hardly leave their houses without wearing the physical cross-chain-like necklace on their necks. This is a hope for protection against unknown forces which humanities face on daily basis. Thus, Christianity without living the lifestyle of Christ and the purpose for which He died on the cross is an aberration. Because we are all responsible for His death, one may reason that our collective sins may have put Him on the Cross.” Charles Wesley’s hymn also re-echoes this assertion which states:

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior’s blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—

For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me ?

Christians have been walking the 14 stations for over hundreds of years now. However, the first and the last stations are the most famous – the Praetorium from where Jesus carried the cross to the place of crucifixion now called the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Originally the stations seven in number, is now fourteen as examined respectively:

Station 1: signifies the place of the Condemnation of Jesus Christ by Pontius Pilate at the Franciscan convent of the Flagellation. The two churches in Franciscan compound – the Flagellation and the Church of Condemnation is where Jesus was condemned and a crown of thorns put on his head. For Pilate having then delivered him unto them to be crucified, took Jesus, and led him away” (John 19:17).

Station 2: is where Jesus received the Cross onward to “the place of a skull” in Golgotha. Thereafter, Pilate wrote a title on the cross bearing: “Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.”

Station 3: signifies the first fall of Jesus while carrying the cross. Station three is located at Hagai Street at a sharp turn to the South-east.

Station 4: Jesus met his mother, Mary, at Station 4 according to the Jewish tradition. It is stated in John (19:26) that, “when Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciples standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother woman, behold thy son!”

Station 5: Here Simon the Cyrenian was commissioned to assisted Jesus with the cross. It is recorded that “... as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus” (Luke 23:16).

Station 6: houses a small Great Catholic Church called “The Holy Face” signifying the wiping of Jesus’ face with a silk veil by Veronica. Station 6 is where Jesus met by a great multitudes of men and women who had gathered to sympathize with him saying, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children” (Luke 23:27-28).

Station 7: This station according to tradition shows the route Jesus passed through from the “Gate of Judgement” to the place of

crucifixion. Due to the nature of the hill and pressure from the cross, Jesus falls a second time.

Station 8: shows Jesus' encounter with the daughters of Jerusalem. Luke 23:28 states, "But Jesus looked unto them said, daughters of Jerusalem weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." It is also identified with a stone on the wall with an inscription "IC-XC NI-KA" meaning "Jesus Christ Conquers." A procession marking the Via Dolorosa is celebrated every Friday by 3pm stopping at Station 8.

Station 9: signifies the 3rd fall of Jesus Christ on his way to the crucifixion at Mount Calvary, Golgotha. Pilgrims follow this path of Via Dolorosa, singing and reading verses while holding a wooden cross – this presents a very dramatic scene in itself. It is also marked with the presence of the Armenian Chapel of St. Helen, Ethiopian Church of St. Michael and Quarters for the Ethiopian monks.

Station 10: this location signifies how Jesus was stripped off his clothes. Mark 15:24 captures this more vividly that, "when they had crucified him, they parted his garment; casting lots upon then, what every man should take."

Station 11: it is located within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and represents where Jesus was nailed to the cross at Golgotha.

Station 12: Jesus was crucified, died on the cross thereby ending his agony. The exact location of this event is symbolized by a silver disk with a central hole, underneath the altar where the Cross stood, and pilgrims kneel and kiss the spot – portraying another dramatic scene.

Station 13: According to John (19:40), "Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jew is to bury." Here, Jesus is taken down from the Cross and according to Jewish tradition was laid on the stone (tomb) after removing it from the Cross. Another remarkable feature of this location is the stone of anointing that greet the visitors, who kneel, pray and kiss the stone.

Station 14: it is where Jesus was laid in the tomb decorated with a marble lid cover. It also marks the final station of Via Dolorosa house called "Rofunda." For in Luke (24:50-53), "a man named Joseph from the Jewish town of Arimathea, a member of the council, a good and righteous man; went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it and wrapped it in a linen shroud, and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb, where no one had ever yet been laid."

These historical antecedents of Via Dolorosa bring to an end the journey of the “Way of the Grief” which Jesus suffered. However, a new journey has evolved from this, kick-starting a new faith that has changed the world. The entire Christendom is now awash with this historical event – The Via Dolorosa.

The Cross and Black African liberation

The study is dealing with the issue of the cross and African liberation, with reference to the concept of liberation theology and the significance of the cross in the African suffering. Theology of liberation is part of praxis oriented theology. Liberation theology was developed in the Latin America of the early 50s. Post colonial Latin America is the home of liberation theology, though liberation theology is prevalent in practically every part of the world (Retour, 2005). Liberation theology was born in the context of the new consciousness of the new age in the history of Latin America, an age which stressed the participation of the people in the process of their liberation. The mission of Jesus cannot be said to be complete without liberation of the poor, less privileges which he said he came to accomplish in his manifesto in Luke (4:18-19), muted succinctly during his post baptism and suffering Galilean proclamation:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed; and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Vrs. 18, 19).

The above manifesto of Jesus as Ukoma (2006) calls it could not have been realized without the death of Jesus at the cross. The Via Dolorosa could be contextualized in African as well as Nigerian cosmology as suffering. This Cross is portrayed in a vivid manner as a symbol of suffering of the black race that had passed through the crucible and excruciating pain of racial discrimination of western hegemony - politically, culturally, economically etc. This is rooted in the pseudo-ideological white supremacy. In the Seventh station of the cross painted by Cohen (2008, 139), Simon of Cyrene, the man of Cyrene in North Africa was forced to help Jesus carry the cross by a Roman who represented the West. This is a symbol of suffering, injustice and racial discrimination against Africa. Yet, the cross of Jesus in the long run brought Africa into limelight as far as the salvific history of humankind is concerned. The same cross that is a

symbol of shame and suffering for the black African, Nigerian Christian amidst Islamic persecution in form of terrorism and the entire human remains a means of liberation of humanity and African race from corruption, poverty, social inequality, political apathy and western hegemony. This is what motivated erstwhile African Fathers to develop political theology for African Liberation in form of Negritude, Ethiopianism and African renaissance of Ujama, Ubuntu factor and later dialectical political theology to enable Africa stage a liberation theology from the perspective of Christian Faith and Pan African Nationalism (Kalu 2000; Agha 1996; Chinwokwu 2001, 2008; Ngele 2008, 2013). The idea of theology of liberation of Africa muted here is in line with Latin American liberation theology as well as praxis oriented theology formulated by African-American to address the state of injustice, racial discrimination, social inequality and hegemony of all strands in the 50s and 60s in Western clime. The Via Dolorosa in the context of this study remains a point of focus in that, it reminds readers that the cross is significant in the liberation of Africans in that the cross of Jesus is not only a symbol of Nigeria Christianity as well as the Church in Africa sharing in the suffering of Christ Jesus, but remains a means of the liberation of Africa and the entire human race.

Conclusion

In retrospection to the trials, condemnation, and eventual crucifixion Jesus faced in the hands of his accusers, it is worthy to note how a good and righteous man had to suffer for the sins of the entire humanity. For as Peter (2011) avers, “false accusations; condemnation for speaking the truth; rigged trials; unjust imprisonment; misunderstanding; jealousy; the innocent dying while the guilty get off free” all trailed the fate of Jesus. It is such a hopeless situation where the good men standing by and doing nothing. Nowhere was this rejection of Jesus Christ more truly and agonizing than as captured in Via Dolorosa – the Road of Sorrows. As we cast our minds back to Christ’s redemptive mission on earth, Christians should not forget the precious price he paid for the sake of their salvation. Prophet Isaiah, however, have some words of succour for Christians generally that Christ, “... was pierced for our transgression; crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him; and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

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