

Justice to the Environment: Interrogating oil Mining in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria in the Light of African Eco-Theology

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Abstract

This study interrogates oil mining in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria in the light of African Eco-Theology, to determine if due attention and affection is justly directed towards the environment in the face of incessant oil mining in the region. The study solicits intelligence from relevant officials associated with oil mining in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Germane literature on the subject matter were equally consulted. Florence Nightingale's environmental theory was adopted in this study. The required prepositions and deductions were obtained strictly on the qualitative analysis and integration of the gathered data made through phenomenological and culture centered approaches. Findings posit that oil mining in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria catalyzes the severe environmental pollution of the area. The government along with the private companies involved in oil mining in the area have failed to direct adequate passion and care towards the environment in the region regardless of the fact that its inhabitants depend on agriculture, fishery and animal husbandry for livelihood. Consequently, the residents and citizens in the region experience economic hardship, poverty and variety of ailments. This study proposes, among others, that the Nigerian government cum the oil companies in the Niger Delta region must be re-oriented in their focus to plan adequately for the upkeep of the environment in the area apposite to the basic fundamentals of African Eco-Theology. The study equally undertakes to enlighten the Nigerian government, the private multinational oil corporations in Nigeria including the populace that environmental pollution negates core African values apposite to the environment; is a violation of the created order and thus implies disobedience to God's injunction.

Keywords: Justice, Environment, Interrogating, African Eco-Theology, Oil Mining, Biodiversity

Introduction

The natural order including animals, vegetation and its habitat making up the environment was first created before the creation of man by God as recorded in Genesis chapter 1:1-31. The essence is for mankind to take care of his environment and the natural order, and not

to exploit or abuse them. Beatley (1989), Chu and Karr (2017) and Graham (Cited by Biologos, 2023) underscore that mankind should care for the environment because man is the steward or trustee of God's creation. They must not neglect or abuse it. Besides, the environment will naturally become harsh when unattended to by man. This is externalized in the problem that man faces from pollution, climate change and other environmental problems.

The environment is the source of various raw materials that boosts nation's economy of which crude oil is one of them. As oil is mined from the environment, nature demands that man who is the direct beneficiary of the oil proceeds must cater adequately for the environmental biodiversities from where the oil is being extracted. This is equally applicable to other raw materials that are mined and extracted from various parts of the world.

Relevant literature on success in extracting raw materials like coal, iron ore including oil as well as taking good care of the environment wherein they are obtained abounds. Adeola and akingboye et al (2022) express that adequate compensations and remedial actions taken by oil companies and the government which includes actions that will ensure ethical and sustainable practices towards minimizing negative impacts of oil spillage on the agricultural lands along with improving the quality of life of the people in the affected areas within the host communities will suffice apposite to attention regarding environments where oil is extracted. Sonter and Ali et al (2018) affirm that irrespective of the fact that mining poses serious and highly specific threats to biodiversity; mining can equally be an avenue for financing optional or elective cum discretionary livelihood modes that may avert biodiversity loss in long-term perspective. They argue that long-term strategic assessment and planning pertinent to the upkeep of the host environment will definitely wield high and improved effect in preventing biodiversity loss against an increasing mining footprint. Mcphail (2000) and Omotehinse and Ako (2019) externalize that mining activities can have serious negative effects on the environment. Notwithstanding, the inclusion and enforcement of peculiar minimum environmental standards for solid mineral and exploitation; adopting best management practices for reclaiming surface mines; and partnership hinged on sincerity between project developers, governments and local communities are expedient for appropriate care of the environment, and for projects to equally have a lasting development impact. They insist that oil gas and mining projects can contribute to project development and boon for developing host countries without incurring much environmental and social cost. The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) (1997) underscore that the ecological side effects ensuing mining was taken into account at the United Nations conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de

Janeiro in June 1992. UNEP streamline that much has already been achieved; yet even more can still be accomplished with regards to providing environmental protection to mining host communities. New proposals which include the creation of new technologies for adequate mining cum aversion of environmental damages geared towards control; were presented towards expediting actions or salvaging the human habitat from destruction resulting from mining. UNEP explicate that the UNCED meeting at Rio de Janeiro succeeded in gearing various desperate environmental problems arising from mining in general that had for many years been addressed individually by various nations into a general global context. The challenge now is to ensure that all operations in various countries and Nigeria in particular conform to and appropriate the current good practice and methodology. Dubinski (2015) and Bansard and Schroder (2021) aver that over-exploitation of natural resources harms the health of ecosystems and the wellbeing of people. They declare that adopting the following measures to ensure the protection of natural resources, the environment, and community development in the area of the mining environment which includes, developing extended product responsibility and supply chain legislation; guaranteeing green public procurement and supporting technical innovation to enhance resources circularity; adopting decision-making processes that include and respect women, indigenous peoples, and local communities; will go a long way in addressing environment destruction and hazards that ensues from mining. Flickr (2021) and Atalla and Mills et al (2022) add that tackling the environmental, economic and social impact of climate change accruing especially from mining requires a huge transformation across all governmental cum mining sectors in a given state; a bold, joint societal approach sustained by long term government commitment; reduction of fossil fuel drilling on public lands; and equitable transition to responsible renewable energy including solar and wind to fulfill mankind's energy needs while preserving the environment and communities.

Apposite to the oil mining in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, Ejobowah (2000), Ogunkan (2022) and Bello and Nwaeke (2023) elucidate that pipeline vandalism, crude oil theft, pollution and oil spillage causes serious environmental degradation which results in serious conflicts. They aver that Nigeria's environmental governance frameworks are completely inadequate to deal with the magnitude of the country's environmental challenges especially the ones accruing from oil mining. The authors streamline that sustainable management of the environment requires governance systems where the legal, policy cum institutional requirements of environmental management are perceived as the joint responsibilities of both the shareholders as well as various stakeholders. The authors submit that once good governance is upheld in Nigeria, environmental management will be effective and sustainable. They also recommend among others, comprehensive, comprehensible,

enforceable environmental enactment and the strengthening of the institutional framework of environmental governance; a compelling environmental restoration of natural resources by deploying and treatment technologies; and the immediate sanction of the multinational companies discharging oils or creating environmental pollution through necessary laws and regulations, in order to effect adequate environmental protection in Nigeria.

Granted that proof of success in protecting the environment in oil mining regions in various parts of the world thrives, coupled with the various recommendations that have been proffered to the Nigerian government over the years pertinent to protection of the earth from pollution accruing from oil exploration; environmental degradation and biodiversity loss still persists at the Niger Delta region. This study attempts to lend a voice on the ensuing catastrophe and calamity provoked by oil mining in the Niger Delta regions. It equally undertakes to bridge the gap in knowledge pertinent to the fact that negligence by the federal, government of Nigeria, in enforcing the sanctions they placed on the multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta regions, in addition to the multinational oil company's indifference in effecting remedy towards environmental restoration and prevention of subsequent degradation implies a gross violation and disobedience to the created order as well as an error of omission and commission.

This study seeks justice in the light of African Eco-theology for the Niger Delta region environs where oil is being explored without corollary care for its biodiversities. The data for this study were collected from both interview with government and non-governmental officials affiliated with oil mining at the Niger Delta Region in addition to the consultation of the extant literatures on the subject matter. Florence Nightingale's Environmental Theory was adopted in this study. The required propositions and deductions were drawn strictly on the qualitative analysis and integration of the gathered data made via phenomenological and culture centered approaches.

Outlining the Niger Delta Region

Francis and Lapin et al (2011) reckon that 32 million people live in the Niger Delta which constitutes 22% of Nigeria's total population. They streamline that 62% of the Niger delta population are below the age of 30. The authors aver that the region is very heterogeneous with over 40 different ethnic groups that speak 120 mutually unintelligible languages and dialects. Francis and Lapin et al underscore that the Ijaw ethnic group is the largest; others include the Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ibibio-Efik, and Igbo sub-groups. Historically, fishing and agriculture have been the two main occupations in the region. Francis and Lapin et al (2011) affirm that the main stakeholders in the Niger Delta are the federal government; state and

local government; regional development institutions; international oil companies; resistance and armed groups; along with the communities. Ike and Emaziye (2012) and Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group (2024), register that states in the Niger Delta region are Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers State. Duru (2010) and Douglas and Okonta (2018) enhance that the Niger Delta comprises the area covered by the natural delta of the Niger river and the areas to the East and west, which also produce oil. The natural limits of the Niger Delta can be defined by its geology and hydrology. Its approximate northern boundaries are located close to the bifurcation of the Niger River of Aboh, which the western and eastern boundaries are around the Benin and Imo rivers respectively. The area covers approximately 25,000 square kilometers. Duru (2010) asserts that the broader Niger Delta region, which includes all oil-producing areas and others considered relevant for reasons of administrative conscience, political expedience and development objectives, extends the land area to 75,000 square kilometers. The Niger Delta region is extremely heterogeneous pertinent to culture and ethnicity.

Oil Exploration and Violation of the Environment in the Niger Delta Region

Okumagba (2011) explicates that the year 1956 marked the beginning of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region. He underscores that the indiscriminate manner in which oil exploration activities were undertaken at the region along with the lack of concern for the environment seriously affects the region and the environment biodiversities adversely. Vaughan (2011) reinforces that oil was first found in Nigeria in 1956 by a joint operation between Royal Dutch Shell and British Petroleum when Nigeria was still a British protectorate. The two then begun production in 1958, and were later joined by host of other foreign oil companies in the 1960's, shortly after the independence and the eventual civil war in Nigeria. Vaughan stresses that the fast-growing oil industry was shrouded in controversy from the inception, with criticism that its financial proceeds were being embezzled rather than utilized in assisting millions of people living in abject poverty or reduce its impact on the local environment as well as channeling the resources towards addressing the violation and exploitation of the environmental biodiversities courtesy of the same oil mining in the Niger Delta region. The financial resources accrued from oil mining in the Niger Delta region then were being misappropriated. Vaughan (2011) notifies that a peculiar major oil spill of Ogoniland, the south-east of Niger in 1970 led to thousands of gallons being spilt on farmlands and rivers, ultimately resulting in a £26m fine for shell in Nigerian courts 30 years later owing to the extent of damage done to the environment biodiversity and its corollary adverse effect on the citizens and residents of the region. The author affirms that the Nigerian government exclaimed that there were more than 7,000 oil

spillages between 1970 and 2000 in the Niger Delta regions. The negligence of both the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian state towards the environmental pollution in the Niger Delta region in addition to the severe economic crisis that it fosters ignited the various violent cum non-violent oppositions to the oil companies by the Ogoni people in the early 1990s: This as well culminated in the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa by the Nigeria's military government over trumped up charges of terrorism and incitement to murder.

Subsequent acts of terrorism which includes sabotaging of oil pipelines and kidnapping of oil company staffers among others; followed in an escalation to the environmental degradation and underdevelopment by armed military groups between 2006 and part of 2009. Vaughan (2011) expresses that a ceasefire was later called in 2009 by the movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND); which did not yield much positive result since the same group later declared an "all-out oil war" (p. 2) in 2010 after a cracked-down by the Nigerian military. Various strands of minor court cases are brought each year in Nigeria over oil spills and pollution. Vaughan records that in 2010, shell oil company admitted spilling 14,000 tonnes of crude oil in the creeks of the Niger Delta in 2009, double the year before that and quadrupled that of 2007. United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) (2024) stipulates that environmental contamination in Oginiland from oil spills remains untreated, or only partially remediated till date. UN Environment program in 2011 (Cited by Vidal, 2011) emphasizes that decades of oil pollution in Ogoniland area of the Niger Delta may take 30 years in what would become the world's largest ever clean-up operation: This is the resultant effect of the oil company's indifference in recovering the environment coupled with the Nigerian state's laxity in getting the oil multinational companies to do the needful. Describing a situation of oil spillage in Bodo, Niger Delta region in 2011, Vidal (2011) exclaims:

The air stinks; the water stinks, and even the fish and crabs caught in Bodo creek smell of pure "sweaty bonny" light crude oil. The oil has found its way deep into the village wells, it lies thick in the mudflats and there are brown and yellow slicks all along the lengthy network of creeks, swamps, mangrove forests and rivers that surround Bodo in the Niger Delta. (p. 1).

Thus, the people lament that both the environment biodiversities and the residents therein suffered the calamity and peril on the watch of the oil multinational companies and the Nigerian State. This caused serious poverty to all living in the area as 80% of them were fishermen and depends largely on water. This constitutes absolute injustice to the environment handed over to man by God to oversee.

The Premise of Eco-Theology

In an effort to capture vividly what eco-theology entails, Graham (cited by Biologos, 2023) insists that the world belongs to God; citing Psalm 24:1 which declares “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it”; he maintains that mankind should care for the environment not only as a result of the dangers they face from pollution, climate change and other environmental problems, but for the fact that God created the world and made human beings the stewards or trustees of the created order. Human beings are not to abuse nor neglect their environment. Graham (cited by Biologos) concludes that once human kind fails to conceive the world as God’s creation, they will end up abusing it. Selfishness and greed then takes over; mankind will end up not caring about the environment or the problems that such action of injustice to the environment is posing for future generations. This exposition by Graham portrays eco-theology as the concept of expressing care, concern and passion towards the environment and its biodiversities as God’s stewards and trustees over the created order. It is a theological view point that hinges on mankind’s maintenance of deep mutual cum interdependent relationship with the environment devoid of exploitative and abusive mindset towards it.

Santmire (2000) expatiates that eco-theology describes theological discourse that promotes the whole “family or household” of God’s creation, especially the natural world (earth’s biodiversities), as an interrelated system: Remarking that “*Eco*” is from the Greek root word “*Oikos*” reflected as “household”. Spencer (2023) supplements that eco-theology is consistent with praxis theology, in that it emphasizes on expression of love and care for the natural order including its inhabitants. Eco-theology is thus “love centered”: Love for the entire created order without an oppressor or subjugator nor “the oppressed or subjugated”. Conradie (2020) in his effort to further elucidate on the concept of eco-theology attempts a historical discourse in its premises. The author avers that eco-theology is a Christian theological thought that emerged as a scholarly discourse in the 1970s, partly in response to growing ecological concerns, expressed for instance in the contested report to the club of Rome on limits to growth; and partly in response to the equally contested thesis by Lynn White that Christianity is a root cause of the environmental crisis given its in-depth anthropocentric orientation. Efforts to resolve the ensuing accusation resulted in the consultation of various sources by Christian apologists in order to stand in defense of Christian Faithful’s. Such sources consulted include; biblical roots and subsequent history of the Christian tradition, its classic texts, doctrines, moral codes, forms of praxis, Saints and leading theologians. Conradie (2020) explicates that for the period of 22 years, eco-theology retained a clear focus, namely reflection on the relationship between human kind and the natural order, later reformulated as the position and role of humanity within the

biophysical environment or as some puts it, humanity's significance in cosmic evolution. The author then submits that eco-theology could be equated with renewed attention to the doctrine of creation, anthropology and environmental ethics. Eco-theology seeks justice for the earth's biodiversity. It attempts to secure balance in a world of crisis and chaos. It instructs human kind on reflecting the true image of God by catering adequately for all the created order as God first exhibited.

The Fundamental Contents of African Eco-Theology

Ijezie (2021) in recognizing the fact that mankind is created for a purpose of which he equally underscores as "the human vocation"; argues that eco-theology can provide a contextual theological framework for confronting the myriad of problems emanating from the way people treat the environment along with the ecological challenges of the African context. His submission entails that eco-theology can serve as a tool for redirecting the indigenous Africans on the pathway of environmental protection and care. Ijezie (2021) reflections appear to be the problem that Kanu (2021) addresses when he attempts a deep theological discourse on the formularies of "African eco-theology". Kanu thus elucidates on African eco-theology viz:

African eco-theology is, therefore, simply a theology of social responsibility, with a view to saving the future generation, to save the mother earth and the universe, the air, water and the soil from further degradation. African eco-theology is the African prophetic voice crying for protection and preservation of the life of human beings, their environment and the entire cosmos; a voice that springs from the African worldview of the relationship between the human person and nature. (p.xi).

One realizes that eco-theological thoughts is already inherent in the mind and worldview of the indigenous African since the formation which the African worldview gives to the human mind regarding the environment is one in which nature is conceived not only as a physical home but a spiritual abode as Kanu (2021) explicates. It is obvious that Africans wield high respect and regard for the natural order because God is perceived as reflecting His presence, attributes and nature via various spirit mediums and intermediaries represented by the resources from the environment biodiversities. Barga (2021) explains that African theology acknowledges the sacred quality of the ecological system because it serves as the abode for divinities, deities, spirits as well as the medium through which the Supernatural Beings can be accessed. Barga delineates that traditionally, God is perceived in the African cosmology as the agent of creation. Thus the Africans conception of the environment in addition to their interaction with same is largely religious based. Mbiti (cited by Barga) enhances that the Africans believe that mankind dwells in a religious cosmos; hence the created order and

nature at large are intimately associated with the divine being. Barga (2021) streamlines that among Africans or the indigenous people, “religion has been a source of environmental preservation and protection even though, abuses also exist” (p. 54-55). He further affirms that “religion occupies a unique place in ascertaining environmental friendliness and at the same time; it is a major instrument that has been used to cause environmental problems” (p. 54). This account for the way the Africans relate with the “Earth or Land” for instance. Quintessence is the Igbo cosmology; “*Ala*” is pristine and hallowed. Sacrifices are made to the earth gods for bountiful harvests. The land is the major source of livelihood for the indigenous Igbo people. Oath sworn or taken by the “Land” (*Ala*) is perceived as being highly effective and potential. This equally provokes the high regard and reverence that the Igbo people and of course Africans at large accords the environment and its biodiversity. The land is sacred, sacrosanct and is never violated by an indigenous African because of the spiritual significance of the environment in the existence of human kind. Elucidating deeper on the concept of African eco-theology, Barga (2021) underscores that:

Nature or environment in African context is God’s disclosure for it discloses God as the giver of the environment for human and non-human sustenance. The concept nature shapes the African worldview, philosophy and their response to natural realities. The universe for the African is a spiritual and material home. The universe exists in unity with its creator and the community realizes itself in God through His providence in the universe. The natural phenomena and objects in African mentality bear witness to God... Africans find God disclosed to them through animals, plants, spiritual beings, heavenly beings and earthly objects. Through nature, human beings receive God’s love, charity and consonance which enhance a holistic development in human life and growth. (p.58).

Kanu (2021) expatiates that unlike the broader concerns and sources of eco-theology, African eco-theology distinguishes itself by focusing on “the interrelationships of African religion and culture with nature in the light of environmental concerns” (p. 6). He declares that African eco-theology taps from the wealth of African worldview, world of symbols and culture that maintains that there is a very strong bond and association between the human person and nature. The author declares that African eco-theology emphasizes on the need for the African Christian to perceive pleasing God as incomplete when one had not catered for one’s neighbours and the environment wherein one finds oneself. Balance must be maintained via extension of love and care towards one’s neighbor as well as directing same towards the environment and its biodiversities: Making utmost effort in protecting ecological concerns. Kanu thus expresses that this conception captures not just the vertical relationship with God, but imbibes a horizontal relationship with both fellow man and

nature which assures a holistic form of spirituality. With the basic concept of African eco-theology, oil exploration will simply be a blessing to residents and citizens of Niger Delta regions as all the stakeholders will be striving to protect the environment even as it enriches both the Nigerian state cum the oil multinational companies, courtesy of the oil being explored therein.

Florence Nightingale's Environmental Theory

Rahim (2013) records that Florence Nightingale environmental theory was informed by religious spiritualism. Cook quoted by Selanders (cited by Rahim) declares that her devotion towards God and her belief of spirituality was the foundation for all her exploits in her profession cum vocation as a nurse. This theory was the premise that enabled her to lay the foundation of modern nursing. Rahim (2013) in his exposition of Florence Nightingale's environmental theory affirm that the theory was propounded in 1860 by Florence Nightingale. It presupposes that nature has some laws which when adopted correctly by humans, aid those that are sick to recover and restore their health fast; and those who are healthy to remain immune from illness and promote cum enjoy good health. Heather (2020) adds that Florence Nightingale's environmental theory was the beginning of a lifetime's work, being one of her numerous healthcare reforms which stand till date as the practice of infection control. The author emphasizes that Nightingale's environmental theory changed the face of infection control exponentially. It facilitated healing process and brought hope of eventual positive results over medical diagnosis in health care.

Gonzalo (2023) in his extensive study on Florence Nightingale's environmental theory emphasizes that the theory defined Nursing as "the act of utilizing the patient's environment to assist him in recovery" (p. 10). This implies that keeping the environment clean and taking adequate care of its biodiversities facilitates and expedites healing and sound health. Gonzalo further explains that the theory involves the nurse's initiative to configure environmental settings appropriate for the subsequent restoration of the patient's health: Moreover, the theory equally proposes that external factors associated with the patient's surroundings affect the life or biologic and physiologic processes and the patient's development as well. Florence Nightingale in this theory identifies fresh air, pure water, efficient drainage, cleanliness or sanitation and light or direct sunlight as the five environmental factors that facilitates healing as well as fosters sound health. This theory posits that once human kind cares adequately and passionately for the environmental concerns, the environment will be habitable and comfortable for humans along with facilitating their sound health. Multinational oil companies, the Nigerian government and all the stakeholders associated with oil exploration in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria

must work in synergy to ensure that the environment at the Niger Delta Regions are properly cared for; its biodiversities equally protected: This will equally ensure the Divine as well as natural immunity, sound health and the survival of its residents. It will also present them as sure stewards and trustees of the Divine order. This simply instructs acts of Divine love.

African Eco-Theology as a means of Justice to the Environment in the Niger Delta Region

The words of Kanu (2021) pertinent to the formation which the African worldview bequeaths to the human mind that equally constitutes African eco-theological thoughts will suffice as an introductory assertion to this section thus:

The African world is a world hood that exists in unity with its creator and the community expresses her realization of this by maintaining the relationship through caring for nature. It is in this sense that the African understands his or her life as sacramental... in that they point to something deeper than can be seen.... Nature becomes, for the African, the locus in and through which God touches His people and reveals Himself to them. The exploitation, destruction or mismanagement of this world becomes a destruction of the modes of the divine presence. This understanding between the African and nature is at the heart of the African Christian theological reflections on the environment, and also constitutes what distinguishes African eco-theology from other eco-theologies. (p. x-xi).

In view of the above assertion, proper care, attention and protection can be channeled to the environment within the Niger Delta Regions of Nigeria in view of African eco-theological prospects via the following means:

- *The investing on together with the motivation of Environmental Education and awareness:* By integrating African eco-theological propositions into educational curriculum and programs, individuals can be empowered with knowledge and understanding of the ecological consequences of oil exploration cum spillage. This can aid in mobilizing the communities within Niger Delta regions towards expediting actions focused on demanding accountability from oil companies and the government.
- *Esteem and appreciation for the created order:* African eco-theology prioritizes on the sacredness of the natural world and the interconnectedness cum relationship of all things created both living and non-living entities. Via the promotion of deep regard and respect for the created order, the Nigerian government, the oil companies as well as the individuals in the communities within the Niger Delta region of

Nigeria will acknowledge the value and importance of the environment in their daily lives. This can enhance a greater sense of responsibility and stewardship towards the environment, in addition to the need to expedite actions with regards to addressing pollution caused by oil exploration. It will equally stop the sabotaging of oil pipelines by militias and other associated gangs.

- *Environmental advocacy and activism:* African eco-theology encourages individuals to endorse justice as well as stand against injustice and advocate for the rights of marginalized communities. In the Niger Delta case study, this implies supporting local communities affected by oil pollution and amplifying their voices. Through organizing and participating in peaceful protests, lobbying for stricter regulations, and demanding corporate accountability, eco-theological principle can be applied to promote environmental justice and challenge the status quo.
- *Sustainable Development and Alternative Energy Sources:* African eco-theology emphasizes the need for maintainable advancement that respects the environmental biodiversities as well as promotes the welfare of communities. This could include advocating for the adoption of unconventional cleaner and more maintainable energy sources, such as solar or wind power, to reduce the over-reliance on oil extraction in the Niger Delta regions. By promoting unconventional and alternative, harmonizing or complementary energy solutions, eco-theological principles can contribute to a more maintainable and environmentally friendly future for the region.
- *Capitalizing on as well as reinforcing the engagement on agriculture as Nigeria major source of national income:* African eco-theological principles enhance the appreciation and acknowledgement of the environmental biodiversities. The land in the Niger Delta regions of Nigeria is very fertile for agriculture. The government of Nigeria should limit the rate of oil exploration in the Niger Delta and invest on agriculture in the region. This will serve as a major national source of income for Nigeria and equally offer more employment opportunities for individuals in the Niger Delta area. Through this insight, African eco-theological thoughts will be promoted the more and the populace will get to appreciate nature and the act of natural reservation.
- *Community-based initiatives spurred by the spirit of brotherhood:* African eco-theology conceives the environment as both physical and the spiritual abode for mankind and the God's. It also emphasizes on the promotion of concerted efforts of all in building and upkeep of the community. Local communities can be encouraged to take ownership of environmental initiatives, like reforestation

projects or sustainable agriculture; the sense of agency and resilience is actualized via this medium courtesy of African eco-theology. Initiatives as this can assist in mitigating the effects of oil pollution and promote sustainable practices that benefit both the environment and the well-being of the communities.

- *Fair distribution of environmental benefit including the burdens among the communities impacted by oil mining, the Nigerian government and the multinational oil companies located in the Niger Delta region:* African eco-theology promotes eco-justice principles; this can enforce fair distribution of resources accrued from oil exploration in the Niger Delta region. The local communities will be benefiting from the oil mining and thus are pacified; engaging them voluntarily in the execution of their roles towards the care and protection of the environmental concerns. The Nigerian government and the multinational oil companies as well will jointly embark sincerely in safe guarding the environment within the Niger Delta regions.

African eco-theology will go a long way in bringing peace and stability including the channeling of love and care for the environmental biodiversities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Much effort is not even needed in the basic instructing of African eco-theological principles on the individuals and all the stakeholders associated with oil exploration in the Niger Delta region since a reasonable number of them are Africans; and the African mindset already is formed from the cradle with all entailed in the African eco-theological fundamental contents. They just need to adopt all that they have been bequeathed with naturally into life application of wisdom and living reality.

Conclusion

The practice of showing affection for along with the protection of the environmental concerns portrays the reflection of Divine attribute of immaculacy. The environment automatically responds positively by benefiting mankind more as man treats and tends to the environmental biodiversities just like Afunugo (2023) asserts that African eco-theology proves a viable tool for instructing the values and importance of ecological biodiversities in addition to the need to protect and conserve it. All the stakeholders involved in the oil exploration in the Niger Delta region of Nigerian ought to acquaint themselves with the tenets of African eco-theological thoughts. Knowledge accrued from this study will aid in mitigating environmental pollution caused by oil spillage as well as man's negligence of the environmental concerns in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Mankind should not allow natural endowments pertinent to the environmental biodiversities to become a source of

pain or curse to humanity. God's blessings definitely add no sorrow: It simply enriches (Proverb 10:22).

Recommendations

Bearing in mind that African eco-theology champions the course of care for both the environment and one's neighbor; thus, breaking religious fundamentalist barriers. This study proffers the following recommendations:

1. Religious groups in Nigeria should always emphasize on stewardship ethics. Since every religion promotes good virtues; they should always enthrone their religious teachings that bother on stewardship, urging responsible care for the environment and encouraging sustainable practices as well among other relevant teachings they inculcate.
2. The Nigerian populace should all lend their voice on the sufferings of the Niger Delta regions pertinent to oil spillage in the area. The citizens of Nigeria should not isolate themselves from their plight. Citizens of Nigerian should employ concerted efforts towards drawing on religious teachings of justice to advocate for fair treatment of affected communities: Ensuring they have a say in decisions impacting their environment.
3. Niger Delta local stakeholders levied with the task of managing funds allocated by the Federal government of Nigeria should make sure that such funds are properly harnessed and appropriated in the development of the region.
4. The federal government of Nigeria should find a way to influence the adoption of ethical business practices by the oil multinational companies and all the stakeholders associated with oil exploration in the Niger Delta region in the oil transaction. This equally involves adherence to and aligning with religious values of honesty, fairness and accountability.
5. Religious platforms should equally be utilized in educating communities in the Niger Delta regions and the Nigerian populace about the environmental consequences of oil exploration and spillage; as well as fostering a sense of responsibility in all individuals.
6. Different religious groups in the Niger Delta should employ a medium to facilitate collaboration among them geared towards creating a united front in addressing environmental issues; transcending religions boundaries.
7. Religious leaders can facilitate dialogue and collaboration between oil companies, government agencies, affected communities, and environmental organizations. These dialogues can promote understanding, build trust, instill caution cum

discipline and lead to the development of effective strategies for resolving environmental pollution.

8. Religious traditions in Nigeria emphasize on the power of prayer and reflection. Communities can come together to pray for the healing of the environment in the Niger Delta regions; and for guidance in finding just and sustainable solutions to the environment pollution caused by oil exploration.

Since the propositions of African eco-theology is formed and conveyed via religious intuitions and insight; integrating the afore-specified religious principles to environmental policies and actions will yield a more holistic and culturally relevant approach which can be adopted to mitigate the impact of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

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