

ABSTRACT

Towards Environmental Sustainability in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Theological Framework for Broader Involvement of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria

The Niger Delta environmental crisis fuelled principally by the degradation from oil and gas exploration activities has had negative impact on the sustainability of the region into the long-term future. The fallout of the frequent confrontations between the government and oil companies on one hand and the communities (supported by the so-called Niger Delta militants) on the other has had adverse consequences on the wellbeing of the people and the environment.

Tracing the issues that posed threats to the sustainability of the Niger Delta environment led to the discovery of a complex mix of bio-physical, economic, and socio-political factors. These factors have compounded the state of degradation. In this thesis, the response of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN) to these problems was brought under scrutiny in the light of the failure of key stakeholders, namely, the government, the oil companies and the local communities, to resolve the issues.

The results from the fieldwork show that the PCN is not engaging with these issues in a rigorous and systematic manner. The thesis unravels factors militating against the PCN's participation, and reveals opportunities open to the church. However, what is lacking is a conscious effort by the PCN to pull together a local ecological theology of creation from its inherited theology and from local wisdom. A framework for such a local holistic ecotheology (LHE) is therefore suggested to drive PCN's involvement, and potentially step into the void left by the earlier-mentioned stakeholders.

The LHE is designed to be practical and contextual, having its starting point in the local socio-cultural, economic, political, and ecclesiastical context. It draws from elements of local cultures and tradition, the lived experiences of the people at the grassroots, and from Christian theology. It is proposed as a holistic framework that factors in the challenges facing the people and the environment, and proffers practical suggestions towards resolving the problems.