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JON SOBRINO'S LIBERATION CHRISTOLOGY AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR THE  
"CRUCIFIED PEOPLE" OF THE NIGER DELTA REGION IN NIGERIA.

A Thesis

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts in Theology

By

Augustine Lezorgia Wayii

May 2018

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Augustine Lezorgia Wayii

2018

JON SOBRINO’S LIBERATION CHRISTOLOGY AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR  
THE “CRUCIFIED PEOPLE” OF THE NIGER DELTA REGION IN NIGERIA.

By

Augustine Lezorgia Wayii

Approved March 26, 2018

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## ABSTRACT

### JON SOBRINO'S LIBERATION CHRISTOLOGY AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR THE "CRUCIFIED PEOPLE" OF THE NIGER DELTA REGION IN NIGERIA.

By

Augustine Lezorgia Wayii

May 2018

Thesis supervised by Dr. Elisabeth T. Vasko

The thesis was carried out to investigate Sobrino's liberation Christology and its implication for the "crucified people" of Niger Delta region in Nigeria. The thesis became very crucial because God's gift of oil to the Niger Delta region has become a source of sorrow and death as a result of unjust structures by the Nigerian government and the multinational oil companies. Sobrino's liberation Christology was very much appropriate for this research work because of the way he uses the present-day crucified people to understand better the crucified Christ. The "crucified people" in the Niger Delta region like the other crucified peoples in history are seen as those undergoing real death caused by poverty generated by unjust structures. Sobrino's liberation Christology advocates that the crucified people should be brought down from the cross. Sobrino calls for solidarity and mercy from those who have left them in that inhuman condition. Thus,

the thesis challenged the injustice and oppression against the Niger Delta people. It stressed more on the role of Christian theology and the prophetic role of Christ's faithful in the face of socio-economic and political oppression in the Niger Delta region.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others who sacrificed their lives for the liberation of the people of Niger Delta region in Nigeria.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is no better way to begin this acknowledgment than to first and foremost thank the Almighty God for love and mercy showered upon me throughout my program. May God be praised both now and forevermore, Amen.

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To my beloved Bishop, Most Rev. Camillus Etokudoh, I say a big thank you for your fatherly encouragement, love, and support. I extend my thanks to my brother priests, Frs. Camillus O. Njoku, Luther Raymond, Jerome Etenduk, Louismary Okeyia, Francis



Normakoh, Emmanuel Osigwe, Polycarp Nwidam, Lawrence Nwile, Paul Monday Karabari, Philip Okwai, Innocent Orduah and entire presbyterium of Port Harcourt Diocese.

I wish to also express my sincere gratitude to a special friend and strong supporter, Rev. Carmen A. D'Amico and the parishioners of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Meadowlands. My special thanks to Bishop David Zubik, Bishop William Waltersheid, Sr. Marlene Luffy, CDP, Very Rev. Mark Eckman, Rev. Mike Roche and parishioners of Epiphany Church, Uptown, Pittsburgh for offering me accommodation and caring for me.

I would like to register my heartfelt appreciation to my own family for their love, support, and concern towards my education. Finally, I would also wish to acknowledge the assistance and motivation of my friends, Frs. Daniel Adjei, John Mark Ogu, James Adeoye, Innocent U. Onuh, Mr. Macdonald Odita, Mrs. Siraka Felix, Srs. Caroline Gabriel, Kamsi Nwaogwugwu, Jessica Ogbedeagu, miss Queeneth Emenike and Elizabeth Ordu. I thank many others whose names are not mentioned here that your love and affection have been a source of inspiration in making this thesis a reality.

Augustine Lezorgia Wayii

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CAN Christian Association of Nigeria
- CMS Church Missionary Society
- MOSOP Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People
- NDPVF Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force
- NDV Niger Delta Vigilantes
- NDVS Niger Delta Volunteer Service
- OPEC Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
- UCA University of Central America
- U.N United Nations
- UNEP United Nations Environment Programme

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Coming from an oil-rich region in Nigeria called Niger Delta; where the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies have combined efforts to put the people into different forms of oppression or crucifixion that result to the death of so many people, this thesis explores the implications of Jon Sobrino's liberation Christology for the people of Niger Delta region in Nigeria. The underlying questions surrounding the discussion in this thesis are: "Where is God when those who decried injustice and violence are killed? Why is God's gift of oil to the Niger Delta region a source of sorrow and death?"

It was John Wangbu who remarks that "the wealth of Nigeria as a Nation lies in the Niger Delta region. Without Niger Delta oil, Nigeria will be gasping for breath."<sup>1</sup> This means that the Nigerian economy is continued by the presence of oil and gas in the Niger Delta region. However, successive governments have exploited the oil resources of the region to develop other parts of the country and enriched their own pockets. In this way, the Niger Delta is suffering from structural injustice and violence by the government and the multinational companies operating within the region. This accounts for the high level of brutality with which the people of Niger Delta are subjected to each time they legitimately demand their rights. The most painful of such brutality and inhumanity in the history of the Ogoni people of Niger Delta region was the gruesome hanging of Dr. Ken Saro-Wiwa (an environmental activist) and eight others on November 10, 1995,<sup>2</sup> by the Abacha administration and the many lives that are lost thereafter. In fact, Niger Delta region is the most vulnerable part of Nigeria. As Crysdale puts it "It is not what

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<sup>1</sup> John K. Wangbu, "Environmental and Social Cost of Oil in Nigeria: Niger Delta Agitation for Justice Vis-à-vis Principles of Catholic Social Teachings" in *Niger Delta- Rich Region, Poor People*, ed. John Wangbu (Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press, 2005), xi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*,1.

they *do* that offends but who they *are*.”<sup>3</sup> In this way, the experiences of the people of Niger Delta region can be likened to Sobrino’s view about the crucified people of El Salvador and other Latin American countries, which Sobrino describes.<sup>4</sup> As stated above, the Nigerian economy is largely dependent upon oil and gas in the Niger Delta region. Ironically, this region with such variety of resources and enormous potentials for sustainable development has remained pitifully underdeveloped over a disproportionately extended period of time.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Monsi quoting Tamuno advances that, “The problem of the Niger Delta region is to find a sustainable solution to a sustained trauma, which has outlasted a succession of colonial and post-colonial administrations.” Monsi avers that “the people are deprived of many basic social amenities including road communications, suitable housing, potable water supply, health facilities etc.”<sup>6</sup> Again, he goes further to express that, “Water-borne diseases from water contamination (especially during floods), exposure to poor sanitary conditions, hazardous emissions and toxic materials, often lead to severe health complications and high mortality.”<sup>7</sup> It is against this backdrop that I have chosen to reflect on the implications of Sobrino’s liberation Christology for my people. Hence, it is appropriate to explore in this thesis how Sobrino’s liberation Christology uses “the light of the poor to penetrate better the totality of Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the aim of this thesis is to challenge the injustice and oppression by the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies against the Niger Delta people and at the same time provoking Christians in becoming more proactive by acting as the hope and voice of the

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<sup>3</sup>Cynthia S. W. Crysdale, *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1999), 14. (italics in the original).

<sup>4</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 53

<sup>5</sup>Alexis Monsi, “Resource Control: Implications, Challenges and imperatives,” in *The Church and the Politics of Resource Control*, eds. Ferdinand Nwaigbo et al. (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Ciwa Publications, 2006), 10.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 33.

crucified peoples in history. For this reason, the thesis will stress more on the role of Christian theology especially Christology and the prophetic dimension of the Church in the face of socio-economic and political oppression in the Niger Delta region. The topic under consideration is a unique one because no previous researchers from the African continent and elsewhere have applied Sobrino's liberation Christology to the people of Niger Delta region in Nigeria. Even though a good number of studies have been done and volumes have been written on the problems of oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region in Nigeria, they mainly focus attention on the remote and immediate causes of crisis in the region (e.g., Wangbu 2005), abuse of human rights (e.g., Human Rights Watch, 1999, Okonta and Douglas, 2001), environmental degradation and conflict (e.g., Ikelegbe 2005, Wangbu 2005, Ukeje 2011, Ifedi and Anyu 2011, Ibala 2011, ), the Church/resource control ( Nwaigbo et al, 2006). Nevertheless, the only research work that is somewhat related is "Crude Oil, Conflict and Christian Witness in Nigeria: Baptist and Pentecostal Perspectives" by Nkem E. Osuigwe. It is an ethnographic examination of the instrumentalist and functionalist evaluation of African evangelical Christianity and is being carried out to test the veracity of Paul Gifford's statement who claims, among other things, that such Christianity is deficient in social responsibility and is a-political and is anti-development. However, it is very glaring that to the best knowledge of the researcher none of the works available has been carried out on Sobrino's liberation Christology and the people of Niger Delta region with regard to the effects of oil exploration. It is based on this fact that the thesis is planned to deal with this lack of literature. For this reason, this thesis uses as primary sources the works of Sobrino and materials from those who have written about the crisis in the Niger Delta region especially from the Ogoni ethnic group. In addition, other relevant materials dealing with the subject matter will be cited in this work.

## THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

The thesis is divided into three chapters: Chapter one treats the Niger Delta region in general. It looks at the geography, the people and their experiences with oil exploration. This chapter underscores the Niger Delta region as the economic base of Nigeria as a nation. It is advantageously located in the Gulf of Guinea, which has 5-7 percent of the world's petroleum reserves.<sup>9</sup> Yet the oil resources of the Niger region have become an absurdity, a curse, a source of poverty, hunger, misery, and death. The environment of the Niger Delta region is considered as hell on earth as a result of oil pollution from oil exploration.<sup>10</sup> Hence, the U.N report said the pollution of Ogoni land will take 30 years to clean up.<sup>11</sup>

Chapter two explicates the methodology and liberation Christology of Sobrino and its relevance for the Niger Delta region. The works of Sobrino will be used in this chapter to point out how Sobrino begins his liberation Christology from the historical Jesus. Also, some key concepts in Sobrino's Christology will be reviewed. From his Latin American context, Sobrino accentuates how Jesus identifies with the poor, the crucified people of the world. He writes that "in this crucified people Christ acquires a body in history and that the crucified people embody Christ in history as crucified."<sup>12</sup> In addition, this chapter speaks against institutionalized violence which perpetuates injustice. For this reason, Sobrino insists that structural violence and repressive injustice must be unmasked.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, apart from the traditional understanding of

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<sup>9</sup>Charles Ukeje, "Changing the Paradigm of Pacification: Oil and Militarization in Nigeria's Delta Region", *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-Violence*, eds. Cyril Obi and Siri Rustad (New York: Zed Books, 2011) 97.

<sup>10</sup>Eromo Egbejule, "Nigeria must own up to the Blood Shed for Oil." Retrieved December 10, 2017, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/10/nigeria-ken-saro-wiwa-20-years-niger-delta-crisis>

<sup>11</sup>Fegalo Nsuke, "Mosop's 30 Day Ultimatum to Nigerian Government: Time to Act is Now! Retrieved December 10, 2017, from <http://www.lnc-usa.org/blog/genocide-through-crude-oil-pollution-poisoning-in-ogoniland/>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 216.



martyrdom, he adds that those who die for Jesus' cause<sup>14</sup> like justice are also martyrs, that is, the 'Jesuanic martyrs.'<sup>15</sup> This chapter concludes with the application of Sobrino's liberation Christology to the situation of the people of Niger Delta region in Nigeria.

Chapter three examines the relevance of Christian theology (Christology) and prophetic role of Christ's faithful to the crisis in the Niger Delta. This chapter stresses on the relevance of Christian theology to the lives of the "crucified people" and not just as an academic exercise, and then the prophetic role of Christ's faithful to the crisis in the region. On the prophetic dimension, Paul Gifford says that whenever the gospel of Christ is preached prophetically and powerfully it has a tremendous impact on the people.<sup>16</sup> The thesis insists on Christ's faithful to rise to their prophetic role by challenging the unjust structures of injustice and oppression that have crippled the lives of the suffering minorities especially the crucified peoples of the Niger Delta.

The general conclusion will be drawn by calling for total emancipation and development from the government; advocating that leaders should not allow their personal interest to take precedence over the common good, and creating a system where politics of service will replace politics of domination. The thesis will invite all the Christian Churches and humanitarian bodies to serve as the hope and voice of the marginalized like the crucified people of the Niger Delta region. Meanwhile, as we expect that the development of the Niger Delta region should be top-priority of the government and multinational oil firms, the crucified people are enjoined to take solace in the words of Sobrino that, "Slavery to evil One is not the final human destiny; liberation is possible."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>15</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), xxxii.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Gifford, "Introduction: Democratisation and the Churches," in *The Christian Churches and Democratisation of Africa* (Leiden, New York, and Koln: E.J. Brill, 1995), 1-13.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 94

## CHAPTER ONE

### NIGER DELTA: THE PEOPLE, OIL EXPLORATION, AND CONFLICT

#### INTRODUCTION

Considering the harms we have caused on “Mother Earth” by our careless use and exploitation of the goods with which God has endowed her,<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis echoes “What is happening to our common home”?<sup>19</sup> Following this line of thought, this thesis inquires “What is happening today to the land in the Niger Delta region in Nigeria that has caused a lot of sorrows and death”? The environmental degradation with its concomitant effects on the “crucified people” of Niger Delta region is no longer news. Regardless of the constant extraction of millions or billions of dollars worth of environmental resources from the Niger Delta region, the people still remain among the poorest and most disadvantaged in Nigeria. As Crysdale puts it “this social location has a profound impact on one’s ability to claim a voice,”<sup>20</sup> thus, the problems of the “crucified people” of Niger Delta region must be given a theological voice.

Let us, therefore, begin with the history of a people that warrants a prophetic theological voice.

#### 1.1 BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE NIGER DELTA PEOPLE

Historically, the Niger Delta as a region predates Nigeria’s emergence as the British colony by at least a decade. It later became an active center of Nigerian economic activities from

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<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis Encyclical Letter: *Laudato Si’ (On the Care for our common Home)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2015), 1

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, no.17.

<sup>20</sup> Cynthia S. W. Crysdale, *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1999), 71.

the colonial times. In the view of Akpobibibo, Britain's Niger Delta Protectorate and the Niger Delta Coast Protectorate were previously well recognized by the middle 1880s and the late 1890s before further British interests led to the formation of Southern Nigeria in 1990.<sup>21</sup> Niger Delta people formed the largest group amongst the ethnic minorities spread over the southern region of Nigeria. The Niger Delta is one of the biggest wetlands in the world and the location of most of Nigeria's biodiversity.<sup>22</sup> Also, the Niger Delta has fertile agricultural land, forests, rivers, creeks, and coastal waters teeming with fish and sundry aquatic creatures. It is advantageously located in the Gulf of Guinea, which has 5-7 percent of the world's petroleum reserves.<sup>23</sup>

Presently, Niger Delta region comprises of nine states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, namely Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa-Ibom, Delta, Edo, Cross River (South-South geopolitical zone), Abia, Imo ( South-East geopolitical zone), and Ondo (South-West geopolitical zone).<sup>24</sup> Politically, these nine states are termed as "Niger Delta" because of the bulk of Nigeria's oil wealth.<sup>25</sup> According to Opara-nadi, the nine states "account for approximately 90 percent of the value of Nigeria's export"<sup>26</sup> out of the thirty- six states in Nigeria. Also, the region has a population of more than 21 million and covers a geographical area of more than seventy thousand square kilometers. Majority of the indigenous peoples depend mainly on farming and

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<sup>21</sup>O. Akpobibibo, Sustainable Development as a strategy for conflict prevention. Part 2. The case of the Niger Delta. Ogele Features Conflict Prevention in the Niger Delta. Retrieved on December 10, 2017, from [http://www.ogele.org/features/features\\_nigerdelta.html](http://www.ogele.org/features/features_nigerdelta.html).

<sup>22</sup>J.P Afam Ifedi and J. Ndume Anyu, "'Blood Oil,' Ethnicity, and Conflict in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," in *Mediterranean Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 74-75.

<sup>23</sup>Charles Ukeje, "Changing the Paradigm of Pacification: Oil and Militarization in Nigeria's Delta Region", *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-Violence*, eds. Cyril Obi and Siri Rustad (New York: Zed Books, 2011) 97.

<sup>24</sup>Oliver A. Opara-nadi, "The Place of Religion and Conflict Management in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria- Analysis of the Role of Churches," in *The Church and the Politics of Resource Control*, eds. Ferdinand Nwaigbo et al (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Ciwa Publications, 2006), 19.

<sup>25</sup>Ibala Samuel Ibala, "The Ijaw National Congress and Conflict Resolution in the Niger Delta", in *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro. Violence*, eds. Cyril Obi and Siri Rustad (New York: Zed Books, 2011), 72.

<sup>26</sup>Oliver A. Opara-nadi, "The Place of Religion and Conflict Management in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria- Analysis of the Role of Churches," in *The Church and the Politics of Resource Control*, eds. Ferdinand Nwaigbo et al (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Ciwa Publications, 2006), 19.

fishing for their livelihood.<sup>27</sup> However, we shall see in the next section how oil exploration in the region has hampered their means of livelihood and has caused them great sorrows.

## **1.2. ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION FROM OIL EXPLORATION IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION**

The discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities in the Niger Delta region actually marked another turning point in its history. Crude oil was first discovered in 1956 in Oloibiri in the present day Bayelsa State. Subsequent oil discovery took place in communities like Afam, Bomu, Ebubu, Umuechem, and Korokoro in Rivers State.<sup>28</sup> In effect, “between the mid-1950s and 2005, approximately 5284 oil wells have been drilled in more than 1,500 communities in the Niger Delta,”<sup>29</sup> with the average production of 2.4 million barrels a day.<sup>30</sup> It is based on this fact that Nigeria is regarded as the largest producer of petroleum in Africa and the largest producer of sweet (almost sulfur-free) crude oil among OPEC member countries.<sup>31</sup> The major oil companies that later joined Shell Bp in the region are Texaco, Mobil, Tennessee Nigeria Incorporated now called Tenneco, Gulf, Nigeria Agip Oil Company, Safrap now called Elf and Esso West Africa.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the Niger Delta region has been impoverished by the activities of these oil industries in the region. The state of affairs is bothersome when one thinks about the amount of wealth extracted from the Niger Delta region. For example, “from 1970 to 1988, the Federal

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<sup>27</sup>J.P Afam Ifedi and J. Ndume Anyu, “‘Blood Oil,’ Ethnicity, and Conflict in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria,” in *Mediterranean Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 75-76.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 137. Also, John Wangbu, ed., *Niger Delta: Rich Region Poor People* (Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press Ltd., 2005), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Olukayode Taiwo and Tade Aina, “Environmental Implications of Oil Production and Policy Framework in Nigeria” in S. Tomori, “*Oil and Gas Sector in the Nigerian Economy*” (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1991), 49.

<sup>31</sup>John Wangbu, ed., *Niger Delta: Rich Region Poor People* (Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press Ltd., 2005), 3.

<sup>32</sup>J.K Onoh, *The Nigerian Oil Economy: From Prosperity to Glut* (Kent: Croom Helm, 1983), 22.

Government received a total of \$183.1 billion from oil from the Delta.”<sup>33</sup> In a similar vein, Wiwa observes that “from Ogoni region alone it has been estimated that Shell has over \$30 billion from oil.”<sup>34</sup> Again, stressing on the injustice done to Oloibiri community among others, Michael Watts reports that there is:

No running water, no electricity, no roads, and no functioning primary school; the creeks have been so heavily dredged, canalized, and polluted that traditional rural livelihoods have been eviscerated. ‘I have explored for oil in Venezuela and... Kuwait’ said a British engineer ‘but I have never seen an oil-rich town as impoverished as Oloibiri.’<sup>35</sup>

Also, oil spillage, gas flaring, chemical and industrial wastes have caused serious harm to the entire ecosystem as well as the health of the people. The dignity and health of the people of the Niger Delta region are not considered due to the treatment that they have received from Nigerian government in conjunction with the multinational oil companies. The beautiful mangrove vegetation with its biodiversity of plants and animals are quickly becoming extinct. The regular oil spills in the Niger Delta region wreck fishing and farming activities, which are the main occupations of the people. The rivers and seas that are good sources of water and livelihood have turned to be a poisonous substance and a danger to public health because of industrial wastes, oil spillage, and gas flaring. The normal rainfall that used to be the main source of drinking water has turned acidic and the agricultural land is no longer effective for food production because of the undue mining activities in the region. The agricultural land has turned to be acidic and toxic because of poor industrial waste management and disposal. Quoting Leonard Boff, Cox asserts that “the destruction of Earth and local environments affect humans.

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<sup>33</sup>H. J. R., Dappa-Biriye, R.R., Briggs, B. Idoniboye-Obu, D.M. J., Fubara, *The Endangered Environment of the Niger Delta-Constraints and Strategies, an Ngo Memorandum of the Rivers Chiefs and Peoples Conference, for the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Environment and Development and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, Rio de Janeiro, 1992, 51.

<sup>34</sup>Ken Saro Wiwa, “Shell in Ogoni and the Niger Delta,” in *Emiroaf* 8.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Watts, “The Rule of Oil: Petro-Politics and the Anatomy of an Insurgency,” in *Journal of African Development* 11, no.2 (Winter 2009): 35.

Polluted water can lead to disease; polluted air creates smog, making breathing difficult; and poisoned soil yields poisoned food.”<sup>36</sup>This statement describes clearly the impact of oil exploration on the people of Niger Delta; that the green vegetation and clean air have turned to grey vegetation and pollutant air, the beautiful atmosphere has turned to heart weave, acid rain, and toxic atmosphere. The land of seafood and vegetables has no more food to sustain the people, poverty strikes deeper and deeper and hyperinflation is the order of the day. According to Paul, “It is a systematic and widespread violation of the basic of human right for many to go without, amid so much. Human rights are the birthright of everyone, no one has the right to deny them, and everyone has the right to fight for their right.”<sup>37</sup>

The exploration of oil and gas in the Niger Delta region for over sixty-one years has both destroyed the environment as well as the entire ecosystem. Thus, Saro-Wiwa writes, “the Niger Delta people have quietly endured military oppression and have watched their environment become polluted by oil. Shell would be slapped with hefty fines if it were to pollute any European or American country one-tenth as much as it did in Nigeria.”<sup>38</sup> The oil resources in Niger Delta, to say the least, have become an absurdity, a curse, a source of poverty, hunger, misery, and death. From Ogoni land alone in the Niger Delta region “Shell had operated... for over 50years and left nothing other than a completely devastated land. The U.N report said the pollution of Ogoniland will take 30 years to clean up.”<sup>39</sup> With this report on the ground, one may think that the government will respond positively to the situation. But for over six years now that

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<sup>36</sup>Kathryn Lilla Cox, “Green Solidarity: Liberation, the Ecological Crisis, and the Poor,” in *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*, ed. Tobias Winright (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, Christian Brothers Publications, 2011), 279.

<sup>37</sup>Farmer Paul, *Pathologies of Power, Health, Human Right, and the War on the Poor* (Los Angeles: University of Californian Press, 2005), 75.

<sup>38</sup>Ken Saro –Wiwa, *Oil Tragedy in Nigeria* (Port Harcourt, Sunray 1992) 11-13.

<sup>39</sup>Fegalo Nsuke, “Mosop’s 30 Day Ultimatum to Nigerian Government: Time to Act is Now!” Retrieved December 10, 2017 from <http://www.lnc-usa.org/blog/genocide-through-crude-oil-pollution-poisoning-in-ogoniland/>

*The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)* submitted its *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* to the Federal Government of Nigeria and Shell; both the Nigerian government and Shell are yet to act on the report. As reported by *Lower Niger Congress-USA*, “The non-implementation of the UNEP report on Ogoniland points to the fact that the Nigerian government is indeed committed to the systematic destruction of Ogoni”<sup>40</sup> in the Niger Delta region. This UNEP report relates well to what Dr. Ken Saro-Wiwa had said over two decades ago – that his homeland had become hell on Earth.<sup>41</sup> “The report stressed the severity of the environmental impact of oil exploration, pointing to the alarming presence of benzene in wells in the Nisisioken Ogale area at a level more than 900% higher than World Health Organization guidelines.”<sup>42</sup> The natural endowment has turned to be a woe and frustration for the people of the Niger Delta region. The question, therefore, remains: “Why is God’s gift of oil a source of sorrows and death for the Niger Delta people?” “What kind of environment are we leaving behind for the future generation?” It is the task of every generation to leave a good and conducive environment that is fit for human habitation for the future generations.<sup>43</sup> Quoting the Portuguese bishops, Pope Francis states that “The environment is part of a logic of receptivity. It is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it to the next.”<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, the destruction of both the environment and the eco-system without any adequate compensation from the Nigeria government and multinational oil companies has fueled the conflict that has remained in the region as we shall see in the next section.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *The compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vatican, 2004. No.467. Retrieved December 10, 2017 from [www.vatican.va/.../pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/.../rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_c](http://www.vatican.va/.../pontifical_councils/justpeace/.../rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_c)

<sup>44</sup>Pope Francis Encyclical Letter: *Laudato Si’ (On the Care for our common Home)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vatican 2015), no 159.

### 1.3. CONFLICT IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION

The conflict in the Niger Delta region in Nigeria has lasted for more than a decade. The history of the crisis in the Niger Delta region cannot be disentangled from the history of British colonial administration and oil exploration in the nation.<sup>45</sup> Early relations between Europeans and Niger Delta peoples were dominated by slavery and slave trade. Thus, slavery actually formed the nature of the conflict, collaboration, and competition for economic and political superiority between and among the many ethnic groups that exist in the Niger Delta region. Slavery was the crucial economic factor, means of production, and way of life in the Niger Delta region for more than three hundred years, starting in the late fifteenth century.<sup>46</sup> Available records of slave shipments from Bonny and Old Calabar by English slave traders show that between 1650 and 1800 about 1,010,000 slaves were shipped from the Bight of Biafra ports; between 1690 and 1807, another 1,069,100 slaves were shipped by the English traders from the port cities in the Bights of Biafra and Benin.<sup>47</sup> The Portuguese, French, Dutch, Swedish, and British slave traders traded with local elites. Disagreements over lack of payment intermittently ended in pitched gun conflicts between Africans and European traders, and the cross-fertilization of ideas among the many diverse groups was rampant.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, with the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1956 and other communities in the Niger Delta, “crude oil has come to pit the Niger Delta region against the economic interests of

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<sup>45</sup>Levi Obijiofor, “Journalism in the Digital Age: The Nigerian Press Framing of the Niger Delta Conflict,” in *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 30, no. 2 (2009), 176.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); International Crisis Group, “The Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria’s Delta Unrest,” in *Africa Report* no.115 (August 2006), 4. Retrieved December 10, 2017, from <http://crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4310>. Also available at <http://adakaboro.org/resources/articles/37-articles/78-theswampsofinsurgency>

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.



the Nigerian government.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, the conflict at this stage involves the Nigerian government and its attempted monopolistic exploitation of crude oil. The Niger Delta region from the time of the nation’s independence (1960) till date has experienced nothing but exploitation, oppression, injustice, and inequity. With the discovery of oil, the Niger Delta region has experienced two kinds of severe wars: a long time ecological war levied by the multinational oil companies operating in the region, and political war of oppression and greed, which dispossesses the Niger Delta of their right and wealth.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Ikelegbe remarks that:

While the region provides the oil wealth used to develop the nation, it has been plagued by environmental degradation, pollution, destruction of local occupations and income resources, high levels of unemployment, poor economic infrastructures, and near total neglect by the Federal Government.<sup>51</sup>

Hence, indigenes of the Niger Delta region are now compelled to ask for compensation from the Federal Government and the multinational oil firm for the many years of looting, abandonment, and destruction of their ecosystem.<sup>52</sup> On this note, the first protest of unhappiness by the people of Niger Delta region over their status in the sovereign nation of Nigeria took place on February 23, 1966. This protest was organized by Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, an Ijaw by ethnic origin. Boro with over 159 of his compatriots staged a secessionist effort under the banner of the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS), announcing an independent Niger Delta Peoples Republic. At last, he was killed in 1968 under bizarre circumstances. Also, angered by the situation of the Niger Delta people, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) was formed in the attempt to rescue Ogoni people and the entire Niger Delta region from internal colonialism and environmental strangulation as well as challenging the horrible, disgraceful and

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day* (NY: Penquin Books, 1995), 148.

<sup>51</sup>Augustine Ikelegbe, “Encounters of Insurgent Youth Associations with the State in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region Of Nigeria,” in *Journal of Third World Studies* XX11, no. 1 (2005): 151-152.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

repressive system imposed by the military regime in Nigeria. This led Dr. Ken Saro-Wiwa to walk away from his business and writing career and sacrifice it all for the Niger Delta cause. He argues that the attitude and activities of Shell in the Niger Delta were colonialist, whereas in Europe and elsewhere they employ a different set of behaviors.

Presently, there are a good number of civil society groups in the Niger Delta region advocating for fiscal federalism, self-determination, resource control, and equity.<sup>53</sup> However, some of these groups have used non-violent means while others have used violent means. Osigwe observes that “this expression of grievances has taken two approaches, namely, the elite who employ dialogue with government and the multinational oil companies, and the unemployed youths who have taken to armed violence and the kidnapping of key employees of the oil companies.”<sup>54</sup> Some of these law-abiding youths because of frustration are regularly being led astray by those militant groups who are aggressively looking for ways to transform the economic, political and social conditions in the Niger Delta region. However, some of these militant groups are opportunistic and are going about their own private interests, for example, the Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV) led by Ateke Tom and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) led by Mujahid Dokubo-Asari. These two major groups have formed other smaller groups that are spread across the region with the aim of controlling petroleum resources through oil “bunkering,” that is, an act of tapping of an oil pipeline and taking out oil into a barge for sale. Quoting an anonymous laboratory scientist, Osuigwe gives a sarcastic picture of how “bunkering” started in the region:

Part of the problem of the Niger Delta is total neglect by every successive Government that has been in power. They’ve been neglected for a long time; and

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<sup>53</sup>Nkem Emerald Osuigwe, “Crude Oil, Conflict and Christian Witness in Nigeria: Baptist and Pentecostal Perspectives,” (Ph.D. Dissertation submitted to The University of Edinburgh 2010), 83.

<sup>54</sup>Emmanuel Osigwe, “Justice and Reconciliation in the Niger Delta of Nigeria: Exploring Insights from Catholic Social Thought,” in *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* 28 (2016): 55.

what they do for them is to keep making promises to them of water, light, infrastructure. And how does the Government of the day describe it? They would say that everything is in the pipeline: water in the pipeline, light in the pipeline, infrastructure in the pipeline, and because the Niger Delta people are looking for that thing in the pipeline, you see vandalism. So we have vandalism in the Niger Delta today because they are tired of getting those things in the pipeline.

Although oil “bunkering” is seen as an illegal activity by the government, these jobless youths from the region are using it as a means for their survival. Often times, the two major groups are always rebelling against each other over the control of bunkering routes. The war between them in most cases have affected the natives of the region, resulting in several deaths, destruction of properties, disrupting of economic activity, as well as the displacement of persons. Their mode of operation is violence carried out through kidnapping, disruption, and vandalization of oil facilities. Also, they attacked army and police barracks as well as armed forces personnel.<sup>55</sup>

Today, militancy is a serious problem in the Niger Delta region, and it has come to stay. As noted by Osuigwe, some of these militant groups from the Niger Delta region are sponsored for various purposes or interests, be it political, economic, cult-related, ethnic, communal as well as criminal.<sup>56</sup> In every ramification, the conflict in the Niger Delta region is seen from the point of grievance, neglect by the government, to greed because of the huge amount of money that accrues from the oil revenue, which has been pocketed by some few politicians and leaders in the country.<sup>57</sup> In fact, one would have expected that after celebrating fifty-seven years of independence (1960-2017) situation in the Niger Delta would have improved. So, “why is God’s gift of oil to the region a source of conflict, poverty, and death”? Regrettably, many have lost their lives, many are suffering and many are in bondage as a result of an oil-based conflict.

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<sup>55</sup>Nkem Emerald Osuigwe, “Crude Oil, Conflict and Christian Witness in Nigeria: Baptist and Pentecostal Perspectives” (Ph.D. Dissertation submitted to The University of Edinburgh 2010), 86.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>57</sup> Augustine Ikelegbe, “Encounters of Insurgent Youth Associations with the State in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region Of Nigeria,” in *Journal of Third World Studies* XX11, no.1 (2005): 151-152.

It is specifically for this reason that researcher in this work examines the usefulness of Sobrino's liberation Christology for the "crucified people" in history as we shall see in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE METHODOLOGY AND LIBERATION CHRISTOLOGY OF SOBRINO AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR THE PEOPLE OF NIGER DELTA REGION

#### 2.1. LIBERATION CHRISTOLOGY OF SOBRINO

Sobrino's liberation Christology begins with the historical Jesus. He argues “I have chosen as my starting point the reality of Jesus of Nazareth, his life, his mission, and his fate, what is usually called the historical Jesus.”<sup>58</sup>Sobrino suggests that a Christology that starts with the historical Jesus is most able to open up for us “the totality of Christ.” This totality includes both historical and transcendental elements. Sobrino maintains that regaining the historical Jesus is important for Christology specifically in order to uphold Jesus’ divinity.<sup>59</sup>So, if Christology is to get out of reducing Jesus Christ to any simply human projection, it must persist on the historical uniqueness of Jesus. It is exactly the actual historical particularity of Jesus’ life, mission, and the fate that discloses the stupendous character of God. For Sobrino, a Christology that emerges to be “low” because of its stress on the historical particularity of Jesus may, in fact, be safeguarding the character of God as mystery, as transcendent, more certainly than putatively “high” Christologies that, end up diminishing Christ to our human constructs, whether hypothetical, existential, or political. In other words, the historical Christ is an essential protection against constructing “Christs” in our own image.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, inspired by Puebla, Sobrino chooses a different starting point for his Christology. Rather than starting with dogma,

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<sup>58</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 36.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>60</sup>Roberto S. Goizueta, “The Christology of Jon Sobrino,” in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 92-93.

or previous Christological texts, Sobrino argues that “we have to determine the current *locus* in which Christology can and must be done, in accordance with this sign of the times... and we have to justify the decision, to begin with, the historical Jesus.”<sup>61</sup> He actually starts with “something really happening today in history, the new image of Christ, and the new faith in Christ.”<sup>62</sup> History has shown that the essence of Christian faith is in danger when the historical Jesus is neglected for the Christ of faith. This is because the historical Jesus is the hermeneutic principle uniting knowledge of Christ and real-life praxis. Hence, Goizueta describes Sobrino’s spirituality to be;

Deeply Christocentric; it is predicated on and derived from an ongoing encounter with Christ. Yet such an encounter has concrete historical contours; to encounter Christ-or, more specifically, to be encountered by Christ presupposed that we be present there where Christ is himself present, where Christ himself has said he will be present.<sup>63</sup>

Therefore, if “theologically” the initial point for Christology is the reality and the truth of Jesus Christ as the person who loved us first, “phenomenologically” the starting or initial point is this “locus,” this “place” where we are met by him and obtained his love and grace. Moreover, it is Christ himself who makes known this advantaged locus or place for us. For this reason, Christological reflection cannot be embarked on apart from the reflection on the Jesus of history as he is exposed in the Sacred Scriptures and in tradition. Here, we realize not only who Christ is but also where he is and, therefore, where we must situate ourselves concretely if we are to meet and come to know that Christ. In essence, Sobrino’s Christology is “from above” as long as it emphasizes the reality, truth, and main concern of God’s self-revelation in the person of Jesus

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<sup>61</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 22.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Roberto S. Goizueta, “The Christology of Jon Sobrino,” in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 91.

Christ, but it is “from below” as long as it emphasizes that the reliability of God’s self-revelation in Christ specifically as the revelation of “the Truth, the Way, and the Life.”<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, Sobrino looks at the life of Jesus "around three fundamental and historically established data: (a) his relationship with the Kingdom of God; (b) his relationship with God the Father; and (c) his death on the cross."<sup>65</sup> One of the most significant parts of Sobrino’s Christological reflection is his thought about the basic relationship between Jesus Christ and the kingdom or reign of God. The fact is that without this appreciation, the social, as well as ethical implications of Christ’s life and work will be lost. Jesus was always conscious of his unique relationship with the Father and to God’s reign. And the God of Jesus Christ is one who is basically relational, who cannot be known apart from God’s relationship to history and to God’s people. Since God’s reign entails God in history where God enters to change injustice; it is obvious that God’s reign entails a conflict with cruel “principalities and power”<sup>66</sup> that in turn bring forth their resistance. Sobrino avers that Jesus’ notion of the kingdom of God is embedded in the Hebrew Scriptures about the oppressed people who hope for justice in history.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the announcement of the kingdom of God by Jesus is an appeal to this hope, which surfaces in the context of harmful conditions, for instance, slavery in Egypt, or exile in Babylon.<sup>68</sup> The kingdom was intended to change an undeserved situation into a deserved one.

Again, Sobrino expresses that “the Kingdom of God is for the poor ....The poor as the addressees of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>69</sup> Jesus identified the poor as special beneficiaries of the

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 91-92.

<sup>65</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 63

<sup>66</sup>Roberto S. Goizueta, “The Christology of Jon Sobrino,” in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 97.

<sup>67</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 74-75.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 79.

good news of the kingdom of God. Jesus identified himself as the one who brings good news to the poor (cf. Lk. 4:8; 7:22; Matt. 11:5). However, “the Kingdom of God is universal, and open to all, though not to all in the same way.”<sup>70</sup> Both the rich and poor are offered salvation. “For the poor, this implies acceptance of the liberative hope given expression in God’s reign; for the rich, it implies acceptance of the possibility of conversion.”<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the rich can enter into solidarity with poor thereby coming to an awareness of God’s gratuitous, universal love.

## **2.2. UNDERSTANDING KEY CONCEPTS IN SOBRINO’S LIBERATION CHRISTOLOGY**

**2.2.1 THE CROSS AND CRUCIFIED PEOPLE:** Sobrino’s liberation Christology gives a prime place to the cross of Jesus. He starts with a clear focus on the death of Jesus: “There is no doubt that Jesus died a violent death.”<sup>72</sup> Sobrino then explores the reasons for this violent death, drawing mostly on the historical scholarship concerning why Jesus was killed, and giving a theological analysis for why Jesus died. That the Son of God actually died on the cross was for a purpose. Jesus died “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23; 4:28). However, how is it possible that Jesus should have died on the cross? Why did Jesus die? How can we rationally come to terms with a fact that is intrinsically scandalous? Even though the death of Jesus on the cross is actually negative for everyone, there is something excellent and positive about it. In fact, it is by the cross of Jesus that God has given salvation to

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>71</sup>Roberto S. Goizueta, “The Christology of Jon Sobrino,” in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 96.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 195.



humankind.<sup>73</sup> With Jesus, the meaning has changed from cross of scandal to the cross of salvation.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, there is now nothing scandalous in God allowing Jesus the beloved Son to die on the cross because it is only in this way could God have achieved the greater good of salvation. This is actually part of the mystery of God. Sobrino goes further to show how the cross manifests the love of Jesus. According to Sobrino, “The cross, as a historically necessary component of love, is part of its historical fullness, what God was pleased by was this fullness of love.”<sup>75</sup> Sobrino makes appropriate connections to the idea of “the crucified God,” with reference to Moltmann's treatment of the same idea, and then to “the crucified people,” that is, the Body of Christ on earth and particularly in Latin America- the poor for whom the Good News was brought and who continue to be oppressed by the powers of this world.

But Sobrino does not simply dwell on the historical cross of Jesus. He moves us from the time of Jesus to speak also about the crosses and the crucified peoples of today. He writes that the crucified peoples of the Third World are today the great theological setting, the locus in which to understand the cross of Jesus. In other words, Sobrino wants to make the locus of the crucified peoples his Christological starting point. Sobrino continually links the death of Jesus with the death of so many crucified people. In essence, when we remember the reality of the crucified peoples we cannot help but be reminded of Jesus’ own suffering for us on the cross. Sobrino often relates the death of Jesus on the cross with the death of so many crucified people. Hence, he says “Among all the signs we see—some of them are obvious and some barely perceptible—in every age there is always one that stands out,....That sign is the historically crucified people, which is always present although the historical method of crucifixion

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 219.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 221.

<sup>75</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 228.

constantly changes.”<sup>76</sup>The Christological justification of the crucified people emerged from the analysis of resemblance between the crucified people and the figure of Yahweh’s Suffering Servant.<sup>77</sup> To substantiate on this point, Archbishop Romero as quoted by Sobrino says “Jesus Christ, the liberator, ‘is so closely identified with the people that interpreters of scripture cannot tell whether Yahweh’s Servant proclaimed by Isaiah is the suffering people or Christ who comes to redeem us’”<sup>78</sup> In a similar development, Ellacuria expresses that “This crucified people is the historical continuation of Yahweh’s Servant, whom the sin of the world continues to deprive of his human face. The powerful of this world continue to strip them of everything, to snatch everything from them, even their lives.”<sup>79</sup> He establishes that the crucified people, the poor, the marginalized, are the actual presence of the crucified Christ in history. He writes that “in this crucified people Christ acquires a body in history and that the crucified people embody Christ in history as crucified.”<sup>80</sup> The relationship between the crucified people and the cross of Jesus remains a basic fundamental fact in Sobrino’s liberation Christology.

**2.2.2 VIOLENCE, AND MARTYRDOM:** Related to the themes of the cross and crucified people are the themes of violence and martyrdom. Sobrino stresses the reality of violence as well as the victim in Latin America. He says “Latin America is an extremely violent continent, primarily because of the omnipresent and cruel structural injustice, and also the repression by armies and death squadrons.”<sup>81</sup> Sobrino mentions that the major and worst of all

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<sup>76</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 51

<sup>77</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 255

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>79</sup>Ignacio Ellacuria, “Discernir el signo de los tiempos,” in *Diakonia* 17 (1981): 58.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 255.

<sup>81</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 212

kinds of violence is a structural injustice, which produces, on the one hand, oppressive violence by the state and ultra-right wing groups to maintain it and, on the other hand, the violence of accepted revolution as a reaction.<sup>82</sup> Sobrino emphasizes the Jesus' teaching and practice that demand absolutely the unmasking of and a resolute struggle against the form of violence that is the worst and mainly generative of others because it is the most heartless and the historical principle at the origin of all dehumanization: structural injustice in the form of institutionalized violence. Sobrino states clearly that the violence of our world is so profound and so cruel that it calls for a response. It is for this reason, Medellin speaks against such institutionalized violence which perpetuates injustice. For Sobrino, such structural violence and repressive injustice must be unmasked.<sup>83</sup> However, Sobrino argues that the foremost and most daring in fighting all types of injustice is not violence. For Sobrino, Christians do not usually give their explicit witness through violence.<sup>84</sup> According to Sobrino, "all violence, even violence that may be legitimate, is potentially dehumanizing."<sup>85</sup> This is one of the major teachings of Sobrino that will be very useful in the Niger Delta region. Violent agitation by the youths has caused a lot of mayhem and given a negative image to the region. Hence, Sobrino opines that all forms of violence must seek for redemption which can only be actualized in the person of Jesus Christ. Sobrino states that the evil in our societies must be redeemed and such redemption may also come from the blood of the martyrs. A typical example is that of Romero, Ellacuria, Juan R. Moreno, Rutilia Grande, UCA martyrs, U.S Church women and many others.

So in order to value the excellence of the violent deaths of Christians and to declare them as martyrs, there is need to expand the concept of "martyr" from the traditional understanding of

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 212-213.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 216

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 218

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 216

it. The traditional meaning of martyr (witness) is seen as one whose life is taken in *odium fidei*, who gives it up wholeheartedly and without using violence. Martyrdom has always been seen as witnessing to the truth of faith. It is a free and enduring acceptance of death for one's faith.<sup>86</sup>

Based on this, Sobrino challenges the traditional notion of martyrdom. According to Sobrino:

A martyr is defined as not only or principally someone who dies *for Christ*, but someone who dies *for Jesus' cause*. Martyrdom, in this definition, is not only death in fidelity to a demand of Christ's . . . but the faithful reproduction of Jesus' death. The essence of martyrdom is an affinity with the death of Jesus.<sup>87</sup>

Sobrino describes martyrs as those who go after Jesus in things that are important, live in commitment to the cause of Jesus, and die for the same reasons that led to the death of Jesus. Sobrino called them "Jesuanic" martyrs.<sup>88</sup> For Sobrino, the needed material stipulation for martyrdom is a violent death of someone, but the formal stipulation is that such a death must be an expression and the high point of defending the oppressed and poor, as Jesus did. They actually loved and defended their sisters and brothers who are poor. Thus, the gospel of John declares "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (15:13). Again, stressing on persecution and death that await followers of Christ, Sobrino cites the gospel of Matthew in this regard: "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you...on my account" (5: 11). The phrase "on my account" personalizes the rationale for maltreatment and martyrdom but more importantly refers back to Jesus' cause. These martyrs are like Jesus because they prophetically gave their lives for the Kingdom. So, it is obvious that the theme of martyrdom is very important in Sobrino's liberation Christology. Nevertheless, while we may

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<sup>86</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples* (Maryknoll, New York, 2003), 120-121.

<sup>87</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 267 (Italics in the original).

<sup>88</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples* (Maryknoll, New York, 2003), 122.

not seek martyrdom ourselves, we can be inspired by the depth of their sacrifice and ultimate identification with the saving love of the cross of Jesus.

**2.2.3 TRUTH AND REALITY:** In Sobrino's view we really need a will to truth or honesty toward reality.<sup>89</sup> According to Sobrino, "we need the integrity not to manipulate reality, the decisiveness to proclaim it, and the adequate reaction to the demands that spring from it, even when they often go against our own interests."<sup>90</sup> It is very difficult to face reality in life especially the environmental degradation and poverty in the Niger Delta region. It is very hard to see and hear reality, to let it be without exploitation, even when the reality is uttered by an "outcry"-especially with the number of people that live on less than a dollar per day. For Sobrino, "reality 'speaks' to human beings in many ways. But it always speaks, challenges, and demands a deep and integral conversion in the realms of knowing, hoping, doing, and celebrating."<sup>91</sup> Also, Quoting Karl Rahner, Sobrino would say that reality wants to express itself that it wants to have a word (to speak).<sup>92</sup> Thus, in the face of the suffering of the people, it is not merely to carry out deeds of mercy but to be honest toward reality. This honesty unavoidably leads to acts of mercy, but not the other way round. That is why the dominant people do not want the truth of reality to come out; it entails a subjective conversion and an objective revolution, so they put all their effort into keeping it concealed so everything will stay more or less the same. In the end, the truth is altered or canceled, and the reality is concealed.<sup>93</sup>

For Sobrino, there is a serious lack of honesty toward reality in our contemporary world. He notices that today's enlightened democracies lack that "'free expression of reality' and one of

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<sup>89</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 29.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 30.

the most casualties is truth.”<sup>94</sup> The truth is always suppressed even by the communications media. The way of saying things or not saying things can help to conceal reality and render them invisible.<sup>95</sup> For this reason, Sobrino expresses that “the present concealment of the reality of our world is truly scandalous, and this has led to the current process of dehumanization; this directly affects the affluent world, which is shamelessly trying to control the poor world.”<sup>96</sup> The point of emphasis is that there is no will to truth, no yearning to take earnestly either the abnormalities or the goodness of human persons. Here, the example of Jesus is paramount as one who was honest toward reality and unmasked the lie that oppressed that reality. The mission of Jesus was “to liberate human beings from the trap of justifying unjust and inhuman situations in the social consciousness.”<sup>97</sup> This mission was carried out through a double denunciation by Jesus against culpable blindness and hypocrisy, as well as the manipulation of God. Human beings who are not physically blind tend to be blind. Thus, Jesus would say “Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?” (Matt. 7:3). This statement of Jesus expresses lack of honesty on the part of the religious leaders of his time. So, if people are not ready to see the reality in front of them, there can be no solution. For Sobrino, “culpable blindness leads to falsification of reality, to lie; existentially it leads to a self-interested way of understanding reality, to selfishness.”<sup>98</sup> This culpable blindness on the part of the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies is what has kept the people of Niger Delta region as a dehumanized people in history. Again, hypocrisy on the part of the religious leaders was what Jesus condemned (cf Matt.23:1-36; Lk 11:37-53; Mk 12:38-40). Here, Humans conceal their true reality from others-and most likely from themselves-by pretending to be the opposite of what

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

they are. For Sobrino, “hypocrisy is one of the more repugnant ways of concealing reality.”<sup>99</sup> The reality remains concealed, and in this case, distorted. Hypocrisy not only rebuffs, to be honest with reality but elevates that lack of honesty.<sup>100</sup> In several ways, the governments of Nigeria and multinational oil companies have acted hypocritically to the people of Niger Delta. Two years ago there was a flag off to the clean-up of Ogoni land as required by the UNEP report. In fact, the whole ceremony was mere camouflage; nothing has been done since then to better the environment.

Furthermore, Jesus unmasks ways of manipulating God by using outward fulfillment of religious rites and practices to replace right relations with God (cf. Mk.7:10-13). The Pharisees and Scribes are not only liars and hypocrites but they occasionally make sacred oppression and injustice in God’s name. In essence, human beings lie and manipulate God in order to conceal what they are doing to reality and to give an ultimate explanation to the unjustifiable things that they are doing to reality.<sup>101</sup> As a result, Sobrino avers that “to face and live reality in an adequate, human way, we need a ‘will’ to truth; we must want to know the reality and not conceal it.”<sup>102</sup> He talks about three dispositions that are essential to an engagement with reality, that is, the concrete situation faced by the people. These include:

Honesty with the real, fidelity to the real, and allowing ourselves to be carried forward by the real are acts of spirit that, in one form or another, by action or omission, every human being performs. Thus we have called them, all three taken together, fundamental spirituality because they concern every human being.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>103</sup>Jon Sobrino, “Spirituality and the Following of Jesus,” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, eds. Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuria (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 685ff.

For Sobrino, the standard of this address is reality and the person “heeds” this word by being honest with reality, by being faithful to reality, and by allowing oneself to be carried by reality. In this manner, “the mystery of God does indeed become present in reality. Transcendence becomes present in history. In this wise, in responding to reality, explicitly or implicitly we have experience of God in history.”<sup>104</sup>

**2.2.4 SOLIDARITY AND COMPASSION:** The concepts of solidarity and compassion are prominent in Sobrino’s Christology. For Sobrino, “Solidarity means *letting oneself be affected* by the suffering of other human beings, sharing their pain and tragedy....It means giving priority to building up the human side: individuals, communities, and peoples.”<sup>105</sup> Sobrino stresses that our aid to people should take the form of solidarity. He says “aid without solidarity lacks the mystique and dynamism that lead to the formation of the human family. More importantly, it lacks the mystique of mercy and justice that is needed for the survival of the species, not in a random way but as a human family.”<sup>106</sup> Whereas aid means giving from what one has to ease another’s suffering, solidarity goes deeper than that. Aid is an excuse not to face the real need that a calamity poses which is solidarity. Also, aid can serve as an avenue for the givers to build individual or institutional status and power and to boost their ego. Solidarity implies “not only giving but self-giving.”<sup>107</sup> From the Christian perspective, the most important part of solidarity is that it expresses the idea of bearing one another burdens. While Paul sees solidarity as “bearing one another’s burdens,” Jesus sees it as “celebrating the shared

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 686.

<sup>105</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 19. (Italics in the original).

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 18.



table.”<sup>108</sup> Solidarity means assisting one another, those who give and those who receive. The fact is that givers must be ready for receiving the victims’ will to live, their self-esteem, creativeness, and hope, and regularly their forgiveness. Sobrino emphasizes on the need for human solidarity in the society. According to him, “it is important that solidarity be ‘for each other,’ but it has a higher goal, to be ‘with each other’; higher still, to be ‘partnership and joy among unequals.’”<sup>109</sup>

Also, compassion is another concept. For Sobrino, “we cannot be human without making suffering and compassion central in our life.”<sup>110</sup> Sobrino talks about what is crucial or ultimate for human beings. “That ‘ultimate’ is the suffering of victims. And the ‘ultimate’ reaction is compassion for them, co-suffering with them, living and pouring out a life for an end to their suffering.”<sup>111</sup> Sobrino expresses that the suffering of human beings should attract compassion. Not to be moved to compassion for those who suffer so unnecessarily means that one has not hitherto confronted oneself with this reality in a human way. “When we respond [to reality] with mercy, we are being honest with reality.”<sup>112</sup> Agony and the need for compassion cannot be relativized. For Sobrino, sufferings, as well as compassion, are what allow us to be genuine to conquer docetism.<sup>113</sup> He articulates “Unless we allow ourselves to feel suffering and react with compassion, we lose something fundamental; that, I believe, is the great crisis of our time.”<sup>114</sup> This implies that compassion is actually central to us as human beings. Like the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:33-34; he is an entirely recognized human being, not because he is “the best,” or “democratic,” or “religious,” but because he is motivated by the virtue of

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 20

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>112</sup>Jon Sobrino, “Spirituality and the Following of Jesus,” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, eds. Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuria (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 684.

<sup>113</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 112.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

compassion.<sup>115</sup> During his day, Jesus was always in solidarity with the oppressed people and performed miracles out of compassion.

### **2.3 APPLYING SOBRINO'S LIBERATION CHRISTOLOGY TO THE SITUATION IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION**

The liberation Christology of Sobrino is a praxis-oriented condemnation of domination, of unjust socio-economic and political systems/structures that make human life unbearable, be it in Latin America, Asia or Africa. It is a Christology that is rooted in praxis; that has a preferential option for the poor and the oppressed in the society. Thus, the Christological vision of Sobrino has a lot of implications for the “crucified people” of Niger Delta region in Nigeria. Sobrino expresses the “unbearable fact” of the crucified people in the inhuman poverty and wretchedness in which they live, the marginalization of the poorest of the poor and the crucifixion by destitution and disease that leads to real death for so many. Sobrino sees the crucified people as the present-day embodiment of the Suffering Servant and as carriers of salvation.<sup>116</sup> The historical and social situation of Niger Delta region in the words of Sobrino “is marked by unjust, cruel and overwhelming poverty.”<sup>117</sup> Living in the Niger Delta region is a heavy burden because of environmental degradation and pollution resulting from injustice against the people. For Sobrino “Injustice crucifies; there are ‘different forms of crucifixion’

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

<sup>116</sup>Paul G. Crowley, “Theology in the Light of Human Suffering: A Note on ‘Taking the Crucified Down from the Cross,’” in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 21.

<sup>117</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 32.

according to the circumstances.”<sup>118</sup> Consequently, it is crucial that we bring the crucified people down from the cross. The tragedy that has been on the people of Niger Delta must be brought to an end. According to Sobrino, this is the condition of an “anthropodicy by which human beings can be justified.”<sup>119</sup> Sobrino would have us take the “crucified people” down from their crosses of affliction. He would disrupt these crucifixions because these crucifixions are themselves expressions of the unjust suffering, suffering caused by the sins of repressive power. It is imperative to remember that every part of Sobrino’s theology stands in relation to the drama of human suffering to which he has been an essential witness in his years in El Salvador. The Niger Delta peoples have gone through the different stages of crucifixion by the government and the multinational oil companies. They have suffered not only directly by virtue of political, social, economic, and military oppression and from the forces of empire and market globalization but also not directly through the effects of this warping of their lives. They are not only poverty-stricken but inexplicably defenseless. They can vanish as if their lives were of no importance whatsoever. The people of the Niger Delta region are actually suffering from the paroxysms of greed, inhumanity, envy, and barbarity which were the very forces that sent Jesus to the cross. So, the only consolation is that the “crucified peoples” of the Niger Delta are not suffering alone; it is truly a participation in the suffering of Christ (cf. Col 1:24). As Ela puts it “the struggles of our people bring the memory of the Crucified One right into our life and times.”<sup>120</sup> Like Jesus, his death on the cross was not a coincidence but he was actually condemned to death by the leaders of this world; the same thing is playing out today for all those who are suffering from

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<sup>118</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 53.

<sup>119</sup>Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 53.

<sup>120</sup>Jean-Marc Ela, “Christianity and Liberation in Africa,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 146

unjust structures of oppression. But what is different in the case of Jesus is his resurrection on behalf of the victims of this world with which he defends them. Hence, there is an “intrinsic connection between the violent human rejection of Jesus (crucifixion) and God’s ultimate response to that rejection (resurrection).”<sup>121</sup> The death and life are exposed as intrinsically relational terms: the cross symbolizes not just an individual’s death but the death of communion, and in like manner, the resurrection symbolizes not just the raising of an individual but the restoration of communion that is in the form of right justice as well as reconciliation.<sup>122</sup>

Oil of poverty is a massive reality in the Niger Delta region whose wealth has created their poverty by nourishing the prosperity of those corrupt leaders and multinational oil firms. The poverty here is not a normal phenomenon of simple want or lack. It is a historical phenomenon of misery. Sobrino describes it as poverty that is “dialectical...poverty because there is wealth, and there is wealth because there is poverty.”<sup>123</sup> According to Sobrino “we might wonder whether there is anything more tremendous and terrifying, anything better calculated to fill us with trembling, than the situation of poverty and daily death of humanity’s poor.”<sup>124</sup> Indeed, the “crucified people” of the Niger Delta region are like the poor man who will have to wait for the leftovers, the crumbs that fall from the table of the rich man (cf. Lk. 16:19-31). Sobrino sees this parable as the “the most realistic parable of our world: the few who live in abundance and the many beggars.”<sup>125</sup> Indeed, some people are living vulgarly on the other extreme of affluence and extravagance to the point of becoming numb to the misery and anguish of those who suffer. Sobrino takes “the irruption of the poor as the primary reality. He says

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<sup>121</sup>Roberto S. Goizueta, “The Christology of Jon Sobrino,” in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 98.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>123</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 160.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>125</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), xxxiv.

further that “in the world of poverty, the poor and Jesus of Nazareth converge and point to each other.”<sup>126</sup> Jesus’ mission was always toward the poor and oppressed ones in the society. Thus, Jesus condemns those human traditions that run counter to the primal will of God on the side of life and works assiduously to provide for the betterment of the people (cf. Mark 7: 8-13; 2:23-28; 6:30-44; Matt. 15:3-9; 25: 35-40). Jesus preaches about the kingdom of God; a kingdom of life, and not death. Accordingly, if the kingdom of God is for the poor, then it has to be the kingdom that promotes life.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, poverty in the Delta region has become a serious instrument of death through unjust structures that makes it exceedingly hard to meet the basic needs of life as well as the oppression that brings forth and maintain these unwarranted structures. For this reason, Sobrino expresses that the “response to the poor is an ethical demand, but it is also a practice that is salvific for those who enter into solidarity with the poor.”<sup>128</sup> Ethically, the ecclesial “option for the poor” signifies what Sobrino, following Ignacio Ellacuria, explains as the “historicization” of human dignity and rights.<sup>129</sup> By walking with the poor we come to know Christ better. Thus, he uses “the light of the poor to penetrate better the totality of Christ.”<sup>130</sup> Sobrino gives several reasons why Jesus wants to defend the poor. First, the law of Israel is the will of God, and the Torah defends life. Second, Jesus condemns traditions that run counter to God, for example forbidding corn to be plucked from the Sabbath in Mark’s Gospel. Indeed, Jesus gives central importance to the meal and more specifically, the key staple of the day, bread. Jesus eats with sinners and the multiplication of the loaves and fishes indicate that the poor must

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<sup>126</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 35.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>128</sup>Jon Sobrino, “Bearing with One Another in Faith,” in *Theology of Christian Solidarity*, ed. Jon Sobrino and Juan Hernandez Pico, trans. Phillip Berryman ( Mary knoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 10-11.

<sup>129</sup>Robert Lassalle-Klein, “Ignacio Ellacuria’s Debt to Xavier Zubiri: Critical Principles for a Latin American Philosophy and Theology of Liberation,” in *Love That Produces Hope: The Thought of Ignacio Ellacuria*, eds. Kevin F. Burke, S.J., and Robert Lassalle-Klein (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2006), 88-127.

<sup>130</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 33.

be fed.<sup>131</sup> In the opinion of Boff, it is only by providing the basic needs of the people that we can rightly say that they are honored and respected as creative agents that make contributions to the wider society.<sup>132</sup> It is ironical to say that Niger Delta region is so blessed with abundant natural resources enough to even cater for every person in the entire nation of Nigeria yet poverty, and hunger is parading on two legs. In fact, this structural dialectic turns out to be very conflictual when the poor become aggressively aware of their situation, and arrange socially and politically to struggle against undeserved structures. Whenever the people of the region will advocate for their right of ceasing to be poor because of their natural endowment, the slow death that constitutes their historical lot turns violent. The Poor people of Niger Delta region are victims of repression because they are conceived as dangerous. This repression inflicts a new form of death on the poor people of Niger Delta because they are a minority group that is being suppressed always by the majority group. Poverty resulting from environmental degradation has become the most humiliating and destructive scourge in the Niger Delta region. With the vast poverty and uncivil strife in the Niger Delta region, Sobrino advances that “in the human race of today, the life of the poor is ever the prime analogate of the human right.”<sup>133</sup> The right of the poor like other human rights is viewed as a sacred thing.<sup>134</sup> In a recent report from the United Nations Development Program, Nigeria is ranked 152 on its index of human development, with more than 64 percent of the population living in extreme poverty.<sup>135</sup> The Niger Delta peoples have no access to good things of life, and life’s fulfillment and expectations are greatly threatened. By keeping the people of Niger Delta poor, marginalized, and crucified, environmental degradation

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<sup>131</sup>Ibid., 85

<sup>132</sup>Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, trans. John Cumming (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 95.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid.

<sup>135</sup>“UNDP in Nigeria.” Retrieved January 10, 2018 from [www.ng.undp.org](http://www.ng.undp.org).

is now the originator of conflict and war. Again, Sobrino describes “death-dealing poverty, insofar as it is rooted in injustice, stands forth as the greatest of moral evils and expresses the fundamental sin of this world: the destruction of life.”<sup>136</sup> Also, death-poverty together with its causes and penalties creates the fundamental question of the meaning or the absurdity of history—the question of whether life is to be lived with hope, compliance, or pessimism.<sup>137</sup>

As rightly observed by Sobrino, the division and conflict that presently make miserable human history are the results of what he portrays as the theological-idolatric structure of present reality. He describes that on the one hand, history’s structure includes “the true God (of life), God mediation (the kingdom) and its mediator (Jesus),” and, on the other hand, “the idols (of death), their mediation (the anti-kingdom) and mediators (oppressors).”<sup>138</sup> For Sobrino, idols are the “actual realities that shape society and determine the life and death of the masses.”<sup>139</sup> These idols are those limited realities, like power or riches, to which their human mediators have mistakenly, attribute the absoluteness and ultimateness that are appropriately related to God. The anti-kingdom implies those systemic forces, such as unjust structures and fake ideologies that bring about the values intrinsic to the idol of choice. These idols, as well as their unjust arrangement, dehumanize the mediators who put their hopes in them, just as they produced countless victims through segregation and repression.<sup>140</sup> In the Niger Delta region today, the pursuit of wealth through oil exploration has become the great idol served by those who ferociously prey upon the enormous majorities. The idolatry of wealth which characterizes the reality in Nigeria perpetuates unjust economic arrangements around the Niger Delta region. It

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<sup>136</sup>Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 32.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>138</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 162.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*, 185-186.

<sup>140</sup>O. Ernesto Valiente, *Liberation through Reconciliation: Jon Sobrino’s Christological Spirituality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 156.

becomes concretized through a display of social structures, organizations, and juridical systems that promote its existence and enable the powerful to protect their privileges. This is indeed the creation of injustice that cries to heaven, and called for awareness to the groan of the victims for total liberation.

Moreover, describing the injustices perpetrated against the Ogoni people in Niger Delta region by the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies, Saro-Wiwa writes:

If you take away all the resources of the (Ogoni) people, you take away their land, you pollute their streams, you made it impossible for them to farm or fish, which is their main source of livelihood, and then what comes out of their soil you take entirely away...if more people in Ogoni are dying than being born if Ogoni boys and girls are not going to school...if those who manage to scale through (sic) cannot find jobs...then surely you are leading the tribe to extinction.<sup>141</sup>

This implies that the government and multinational are only interested in economic gain than the integral development of the people of that region. This accounts for the reason for which these multinational oil firms in the region will carry out their oil drilling activities, even with serious damage to the ecosystem, terrestrial and aquatic life, without any meaningful development to better the lives of the people. Hence, the thesis calls on perpetrators in their different ranks and color to be converted to a new vision for humanity and begin to take the crucified down from their heavy crosses. Even in the face of the present reality in the Delta region, perpetrators are even blind to it. It is this kind of blindness to reality especially by perpetrators of injustice that Sobrino describes as “*institutionalized concealment, distortion, and lies*. And vast resources are used to maintain that structure.”<sup>142</sup>Sobrino grieves over the truth that is oppressed both structurally and environmentally. The spiritual ecology is badly wounded. Apart from the polluted air the body breathes, the human spirit is infected by half-truths,

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<sup>141</sup>Eghosa E. Osaghae, “The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of the Nigerian State,” in *African Affairs* 94, 376 (July, 1995):.325-344.

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid.*, 33 ( italics in the original)



propaganda, and pretense, slight and obvious lies. This scenario is being encouraged, sometimes made compulsory by the government, international institutions, civil institutions, and political parties, all admiring democracy. Thus, Sobrino articulates that “imprisoning truth with injustice is the fundamental sin of human beings and also of nations.”<sup>143</sup> In addition, Sobrino blames religious, ecclesiastical, academic and cultural institutions failing to react in proportion to the level of concealment and at times are openly complicit with the situation.<sup>144</sup>

Again, in Sobrino’s concept of martyrdom; martyrs are not only those who die for Christ but those who die for Jesus’ cause. In other words, “Martyrs are those who live and die as Jesus did, defending the poor and oppressed. We called them ‘Jesuanic martyrs.’”<sup>145</sup> Consequently, the courageous efforts and bloodshed by the people of Niger Delta cannot be in vain. For Sobrino, these sisters and brothers have actually fulfilled Jesus’ statement that “There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends” (Jn 15:13). Indeed, this same spirit motivated Dr. Ken Saro Wiwa before his execution in 1995 to say:

We all stand before history. I am a man of peace, of ideas. Appalled by the denigrating poverty of my people who live in richly endowed land, distressed by their political marginalization and economic strangulation, angered by the devastation of their land, their ultimate heritage, anxious to preserve their right to life and a decent living, and determined to usher to this country as a whole a fair and just democratic system which protects everyone and every ethnic group and gives us all a valid claim to human civilization, I have devoted my intellectual and material resources, my very life, to a cause in which I have total belief and from which I cannot be blackmailed or intimidated.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 261

<sup>144</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>145</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), xxxii.

<sup>146</sup>Words from the final statement of Kenule Beeson SaroWiwa: Retrieved January 22, 2018, from <https://www.turntowardlife.org/essays/chapter5/chapter5.pdf>

Thus, all daughters and sons of the Niger Delta region who lost their lives in this struggle for the emancipation of the “crucified people” of Niger Delta are seen as martyrs, and to honor them for their sacrificial love, the Ogoni ethnic group observes every November 10 as a remembrance day for the martyrs of Niger Delta region.

Even though the “crucified people” of Niger Delta region have experienced the different forms of crucifixion arising from structural violence and oppressive injustice, Sobrino’s liberation Christology urges them to continue their struggle without using violence. According to Sobrino, “all violence, even violence that may be legitimate, is potentially dehumanizing.”<sup>147</sup> To stress on the importance of non-violent struggle, Sobrino declares Archbishop Romero’s constant thesis: “it is wrong to put all one’s trust in violence to solve problems that have many aspects, it is wrong to let the military level dominate the struggle; violence should never be turned into a cult.”<sup>148</sup> The only alternative to violence as given by Jesus is the utopia of peace. Being aware of the presence of evil in the world Jesus will always say “be good as your heavenly Father is good, be prepared to lose your life in order to win it.”<sup>149</sup> Buttressing on this point further, Douglas states that:

God enters into this world of violence, yet God does not take it into God’s self. Thus, God responds to the violence of the world, not in an eye-for-an-eye manner. Instead, God responds in a way that negates and denounces the violence that perverts and demeans the integrity of human creation.”<sup>150</sup>

The above statements against violence challenge some of the youths of the Niger Delta region to desist from using violence in attacking violence. Some of these youth groups or gangs have taken

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<sup>147</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 216.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2015), 184.

to the kidnapping of oil workers and even the vandalization of oil facilities/installations. Nevertheless, in line with Sobrino's Christology, this thesis advocates for non-violent struggle in the Niger Delta region. Innocent people are suffering a lot from the activities of the gangs. The nonviolence recommended in this case "is not the same as passivity or accommodation to violence. Rather, it is a forceful response that protects the integrity of life."<sup>151</sup> In the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero as quoted by Sobrino, "we have to defend the little thing that is God's greatest gift: life."<sup>152</sup> Stressing further the need for non-violence confrontation, Ehusani avers that:

Any form of peaceful or non-violent confrontation with oppressive powers which can lead to freedom of the oppressed or at least the alleviation of their suffering is not only acceptable but desirable. Any form of mass action that is peaceful and is capable of bringing pressure to bear on the unjust ruler is desirable.<sup>153</sup>

The essence of any nonviolent struggle is to rescue people from destruction and not to cause destruction. By and large, as mentioned above, all types of violence must seek for redemption and this can only be realized in the person of Jesus Christ.

Above all, Sobrino emphasizes that there is no Christology that is neutral. It takes form in the perspective of a particular moment in history.<sup>154</sup> Hence, his Christology will constantly create a tormenting challenge to those who would wish to keep at arm's length from Christian theology the problem of human suffering caused by injustice, what we ought to do about it in the name of the gospel. On this issue, Sobrino cautions theologians in this way: "If we do not take this fact of death seriously, theology will be accused of complicity and irrelevance: 'its questions will lack

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 184.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid.

<sup>153</sup>George Omaku, Ehusani, *A Prophetic Church* (Ede: Provincial Pastoral Institute, 1996), 105.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid.,31

reality and not relate to real men and women.”<sup>155</sup> Following Sobrino’s example, we are all invited at this moment in history to discover what it means to enter into solidarity with the sufferers of history especially the “crucified” of the Niger Delta region and help take them down from the cross.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid.,32

<sup>156</sup>Paul G. Crowley, “Theology in the Light of Human Suffering: A Note on ‘Taking the Crucified Down from the Cross,’” in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 29.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE RELEVANCE OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY (CHRISTOLOGY) AND THE PROPHETIC ROLE OF CHRIST'S FAITHFUL TO THE SITUATION OF THE PEOPLE OF NIGER DELTA

#### 3.1 THE RELEVANCE OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY (CHRISTOLOGY) TO THE “CRUCIFIED PEOPLE” OF NIGER DELTA

The role of Christian theology (especially Christology) to the “crucified people” of the Niger Delta region was of particular interest to the researcher as this thesis aimed at stressing more on what our theological reflections can offer to those who are undergoing socio-economic and political oppression in our world. In the view of Sobrino, it is better “to recognize the necessity of doing theology in a relationship with the actual, concrete realities of the world.”<sup>157</sup> Although Sobrino talks about the three concrete realities: a religiously plural world, a culturally diverse world, and a suffering world, he remarks that the subject matter of theology in a suffering world has a methodological priority over the other two subject matters because it refers basically to the reality of the world.<sup>158</sup> Therefore, Sobrino advances that every theology must deal with suffering, ascertain the basic form of suffering, and ask what can be done about suffering in the world. Except a theology goes about this task, its historical significance and essential development are in trouble.<sup>159</sup> He goes further to state that the function of theology

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<sup>157</sup>Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 27.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 29.

today cannot be carried out either in the First World or Third World if the colossal, brutal and escalating suffering that permeates our world is overlooked. In other words, “insofar as theology is not done amid the world of suffering, as it factually exists, it has not yet found its proper place.”<sup>160</sup> In line with this, Dean Brackley quoting Sobrino says “although a theologian might work at many possible physical sites, such as a university, a seminary, a diocesan office, a parish or somewhere else. The world of the poor is theology’s *Sitz im Leben-und in Tode*. The poor are its life-and-death location.”<sup>161</sup> It is for this reason that Sobrino insists that the place of theology is the reality which presents the highest historical mediation of God-where one can discover the “signs of the times,” understood in a rigorously theological sense. Now, taking cognizance of the fact the people of the Niger Delta region have suffered from oil-related violence for years, and in a similar light, various civil protests have been ferociously put down by security personnel and even the famous literary voice of the oil protest in the Niger Delta of Ken Saro Wiwa and others were hanged, what will be the role of the Christian theology in the face of this quagmire. There is still more to this; that while the people are deprived of the benefits from oil resources despite the fact that their environment has been destroyed by the multinational oil companies, some of the natives especially the youths have taken affairs into their own hands through oil “bunkering,” vandalization of oil facilities and hostage-taking of both oil workers and other prominent men and women of the region. All these nefarious activities have led to a dreadful rise in gun-related injuries and killing of many innocent people from the region. Nevertheless, considering the horrendous situation in the Niger Delta region, can our Christian theology be of any relevance to the people? What are the Niger Delta Christian theologians doing to promote a theology that will

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>161</sup> <sup>161</sup>Dean Brackley, “Theology and Solidarity: Learning from Sobrino’s Method” in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 9. (Italics in the original).

respond rapidly to the cry of the “crucified people” of the region? As Sobrino puts it, “before one can theologize, one has to be situated in a specific place. One’s understanding of this place will determine how one understands theology and the theological task called for by one’s place.”<sup>162</sup> Therefore, this thesis immediately invites Christian theologians from the region to come under an umbrella and to use their expertise in promoting a commitment that will better the lives of the citizenry.

Thus, what becomes the function of Christian theology to the people of Niger Delta where God’s gift of oil has become a curse; the cause of poverty and violence? Bujo responded by saying that “If our theology... restricts itself to an academic exercise taking place exclusively in the lecture halls of universities...and seminaries, we must necessarily conclude that it can be of no relevance or significance.”<sup>163</sup> In a similar development, Uzukwu stresses that “Theology should not be content with liturgical sedation, talking drums that deaden the senses, and ignore the oppressive heavy hands laid on the people, as the Negro Spirituals did with the African American slaves.”<sup>164</sup> This means that theology must go beyond an academic exercise or mere inculturation in Churches to challenging the root causes of suffering in the society. Stressing on this viewpoint, the “All Africa Conference of Churches” in 1987 in her report advocate for “a Christology from the shelves of universities and the sanctuaries of the Churches; and make it a living, dynamic, active and creative reality in our communities and among our people.”<sup>165</sup> The crux of the matter is that those who are marginalized and relegated to the border of life would hardly hold unto a religion or Christian theology exclusively for its intellectual content.

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<sup>162</sup>Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 30-31.

<sup>163</sup> Benezet Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publication-Africa, 1990), 124-125.

<sup>164</sup> Elochukwu Eugene, Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 33.

<sup>165</sup> Obioma Des. Obi, *Human Suffering: A Challenge to the Christian Faith in the Igbo/African Christian Families (An Anthropological and Theological Study)* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2001), 134.

According to Ehusani, “intellectual abstractions are for the comfortable, whose basic needs are taken for granted.”<sup>166</sup> They will scarcely hold onto a religion because of its advanced doctrines, no matter how deeply invented or devised. They will not even hold onto a religion that only gives salvation for the soul after a wretched existence in this world, supposed as the unavoidable vale of tears. Consequently, this thesis proposes a religion with “incarnate truths, incarnate dogmas, and incarnate doctrines”<sup>167</sup> for the “crucified people” in the Niger Delta region. Any theology that brings about human wholeness and touches the reality of life will be very useful for the people of Niger Delta region. Therefore, Bujo insists that theologians should sustain close contact with all classes of people so far to implement a preferential option for the poor in the light of Matthew 25:35ff.<sup>168</sup> Uzukwu falls into this same template when he writes that:

Theology in Africa takes seriously this situation of misery and oppression as a context for its reflection....African theology of liberation has raised its voice, since the 1980s, to denounce the misery that besets our people and to identify the root causes of our crisis. It tries to trace the historical origin of our burden from the time of slavery through colonialism to independence.<sup>169</sup>

Likewise, making a social commitment to the people of their region, the declaration of a meeting of African or the third world theologians in Accra (1977) specifies that “We stand against oppression in any form because the Gospel of Jesus demands our participation in the struggle to free people from all forms of dehumanization.”<sup>170</sup> It is this same kind of commitment on the part of African theologians in Accra that this thesis advocates in the Niger Delta region. The region is in need such a Christian Theology that breaks chains of hardships and helps them in achieving real liberation in the society. As Christian theologians, it is important not to

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<sup>166</sup>George Omaku, Ehusani, *A Prophetic Church* (Ede: Provincial Pastoral Institute, 1996), 27.

<sup>167</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>168</sup>Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2011), 253.

<sup>169</sup>Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 2-3.

<sup>170</sup>Jean-Marc Ella, “Christianity and Liberation in Africa,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 139-140.



undermine the fact that Jesus the Liberator brings good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, give sight to the blind, set the oppressed free and proclaim a year of favor to us (cf. Lk 4:18-19). Hence, the thesis confronts Christian theologians to evolve a theology that is useful for the region, and at the same time take some practical steps to address the historical suffering that affects the Niger Delta people. The historical suffering as experienced in the Niger Delta region in the words of Sobrino is “massive, affecting the majority of humanity, making it practically impossible for people to direct their own lives, causing poverty that brings death slowly and violently.”<sup>171</sup> As a result of this suffering, Sobrino opines that theology must be seen as an intellectual exercise whose main concern is to eradicate this kind of suffering that affects the lives of the people.<sup>172</sup> Also, Sobrino quoting Hugo Assmann would say that “if the yearly deaths of thirty million poor people do not keep theology busy, nothing will.”<sup>173</sup>

All the same, our Christian theology has provided us with enough of theories in identifying with the marginalized; it is now time to put these theories into practice. These practical steps can be in the form of workshops, rallies, and peaceful protests, press conferences as well as seminars by the Christian theologians from the region. It will certainly be an appropriate and interesting venture for Christian theologians to give their prophetic theological voices to the crisis in the Niger Delta region otherwise their theologizing becomes moribund.

Also, in the light of this historical suffering, we shall examine further to see how the knowledge of Christian theology can help not just the Christian theologians but also the entire Christ faithful from the region to make a prophetic presence to the crisis in the Niger Delta

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<sup>171</sup> Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 29.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 32.

region. With this, we come to another important theme of the thesis: the prophetic role of Christ's faithful to the crisis in the Niger Delta region.

### **3.2 THE PROPHETIC ROLE OF CHRIST'S FAITHFUL TO THE CRISIS IN THE NIGER DELTA.**

Another major theme that interests the researcher of this thesis is the prophetic role of Christ's faithful to the crisis in the Niger Delta region. According to Sobrino, "Prophets are very necessary today if the institutional element in the Church is to adapt to the time. Prophets remind us of the creative and renovating character of the Christian faith, which makes it possible to transform the times in accordance with the faith."<sup>174</sup>Hence, the key aim of this thesis is to arouse the consciousness of all Christ's faithful in the Niger Delta region to embrace their prophetic role rather than becoming complacent, despondent and conformist to the problems of the region.

Highlighting on this all-important fact, the document of the Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* states that "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time, especially those of the poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the anguish of the followers of Christ as well."<sup>175</sup> Indeed, it is at the heart of the mission of the Church to be in the forefront of fighting poverty, injustice, unemployment, the culture of violence and social discrimination. However, since the era of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* until now Pope Francis, the Church has declared before the world its "preferential option for the poor." This means that the Church like Jesus Christ shall

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<sup>174</sup> Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 220.

<sup>175</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, December 7, 1965, no. 26, in *Vatican Council II Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Gen. ed. Austin Flannery (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1998), 903 (Emphasis added).

be on the side of the poor and the marginalized especially in the conflict between the poor and the rich. Thus, the Church through her different social documents has developed principles for a more civilized world, and for the advancement of a society of love, justice, peace, and equity. According to Pope Francis “Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society’s neglected members.”<sup>176</sup> This mission becomes more pertinent when the government itself is the source of much suffering, misery, and injustice.

As noted in the previous chapter, Sobrino describes the two structures of human history: the theological and idolatric structures. These two types of reality are not only different, but are divided, not harmonizing, and work against each other. This structure of reality is what explains Jesus’ prophetic praxis and the theological aspect of this praxis.<sup>177</sup> According to Sobrino, this prophetic praxis is “needed because the positive proclamation of the kingdom has to be made in the presence of the anti-Kingdom by upholding the true God.”<sup>178</sup> For Sobrino, there is need to confront this anti-Kingdom that makes a decision that affects the whole structure of society and even puts many individuals to death. He says further that there is a need for a prophetic praxis that brings about express condemnation of the anti-Kingdom.<sup>179</sup>

Today, Niger Delta region is in anguish and crying together with its poor, oppressed, and underprivileged people. It is crying out for emancipation from injustice, corruption, discrimination, violence, greed, economic inequality, political oppression, judicial perversion, environmental degradation, hunger, famine, disease and many untold hardships. In the midst of these crises, what will Christ’s faithful do in bringing about a decisive and transformational

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., no. 186.

<sup>177</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 162.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 16.

prophetic contribution in the public domain? On the other hand, what would be the proper relationship between religious beliefs and public life?

For the many years of Christian mission and witness in the Niger Delta region, an authentic witnessing of the Christian faith in the public sphere is not yet achieved. Sometimes, it is difficult to distinguish between a Christian leader and pagan leader. Christianity came into Nigeria by Portuguese Catholic missionaries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They arrived first in Benin in 1515 and later in Warri (a city in the Niger Delta region) in 1570.<sup>180</sup> Thereafter, between 1841 and 1891, many other missionary groups arrived in the country. These include; the Church Missionary Society (CMS) from Germany, Catholic Society of African Missions of France, Wesleyan Missionary Society of England, the Foreign Mission Committee of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention of America.<sup>181</sup> Apart from Warri that first embraced Christianity in the region, other communities in the Niger Delta region also accepted the Christian faith between the 1841 and 1891. As noted by Ayandele, Anglican faith was received in Bonny (1864), in Brass (1868), in Calabar (1874), and in Okrika (1880);<sup>182</sup> the Presbyterians in Calabar (1846); the Methodists in Opobo (1884); the Roman Catholic Church was established by the Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritan) in Onitsha (Eastern Nigeria) in 1884 and it later spread to some parts of the Niger Delta region; Qua Iboe Church came to Cross River in 1887.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup>Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (London: SPCK, 1995), 62-63. Also, see Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1983), 36-52.

<sup>181</sup>J.F. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (London: Longmans, 1965), xiii-xiv.

<sup>182</sup>E.A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (London: Longman, 1966), 71.

<sup>183</sup>Robert L. McKeown, *In the Land of the Oil Rivers: The Story of the Qua Iboe Mission* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1902), 61-67.

From the above history, the Christian Churches have existed more than one hundred years in the Niger Delta region. This implies that many Christians in the region go to Church, and at the same time, they are affected by the neglect, the injustice, the environmental pollution, and degradation, as well as the violence and conflict that the situation has aggravated. Notwithstanding the earlier arrival of Christianity in the region, many Christians still continue to pay lip service to the social gospel of Christ. According to Osuigwe, “there are two kinds of Christianity: one that is so heavenly-minded that it lacks earthly relevance – “a miserable kind of Christianity,” and the other that engages with the society by exposing and speaking against social injustice.”<sup>184</sup> Where do we categorize Christians in the Niger Delta region in the midst of environmental degradation, greed, and injustice? And in what way can Christ’s faithful live out their faith in public beyond the confines of Church structures? The social dimension or teaching of the Christian religion do not seem to have taken root in Niger Delta region especially when it comes to prophetic confrontation with undeserved public structures and dealing with the evil status-quo. Christian Churches in the Niger Delta have taken part in social transformation more at the level of social analysis than with social action that indicts oppressors. Therefore, the thesis emphasizes that the Church of Christ remains one of the strongest forces for conscientizing civil society and liberating it from the fetter cast on it by the oppressors of the land. In the light of this thought, Uzukwu describes “the Church as the highest testimony of the renewal of the earth.”<sup>185</sup> So, the only way that the Church of Christ can fulfill her mission of conscientizing civil society, liberating captives and renewing the face of the earth is by making her members be conscious of their prophetic role in the society. According to the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (*Lumen*

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<sup>184</sup>Nkem Emerald Osuigwe , “Crude Oil, Conflict and Christian Witness in Nigeria: Baptist and Pentecostal Perspectives,” (Ph.D. Dissertation submitted to The University of Edinburgh 2010), 213.

<sup>185</sup> Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 47.

*Gentium*), “The holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office.”<sup>186</sup> The thesis, therefore, insists that this consciousness must be awakened in all Christ’s faithful to respond positively to the horrifying situation in the Niger Delta. The thesis enjoins all Christ’s faithful to rise to their prophetic role to challenge the many years of neglect, dehumanization, and oppression that are experienced by the people of Niger Delta region of Nigeria. In fact, it was very appropriate when the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria in 1995 issued a communiqué on the Human Rights in West Africa. This particular communiqué expresses deep concern over the news of the killing of Dr. Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others from Ogoni community on November 10, 1995. Thus, the Bishops express:

We, therefore, take this opportunity to once again declare our strong stand for the defense of life. We deplore the rampant devaluation of human life in our country such factors as environmental degradation, serious impoverishment of our people, deep ethnic-religious tensions, and often ruthless handling of situations of social unrest by the civil authorities. All human life is sacred, and must be respected by all; under all circumstances. We, therefore, deplore and condemn all wanton shedding of blood by whomsoever, and for whatever excuse.

This communiqué was actually a step in the right direction. However, the region continues to be in dire need of more prophetic utterances even from leaders of other ecclesial communities. According to Ehusani, “Prophets are the visionaries of their time. When all others are blind, prophets are the ones granted to see the handwriting on the wall, to interpret the signs of the times, and to see the light beyond the tunnel.”<sup>187</sup> Consequent upon this fact, Gifford states that whenever the gospel of Christ is preached prophetically and powerfully it has a tremendous

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<sup>186</sup>Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, November 21, 1964, no. 12, in *Vatican Council II Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Gen. ed. Austin Flannery (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1998), 363.

<sup>187</sup>George Omaku, Ehusani, *A Prophetic Church* (Ede: Provincial Pastoral Institute, 1996), 59.

impact on the people.<sup>188</sup> To exercise one's prophetic role implies that one must be ready at all times, to tell the truth even to those who may not be ready to hear it, and must condemn evil in the society no matter the cost. Take for instance, in the history of the people of Israel; prophets arose during the period of the kings to check the wild behavior of the monarchs. Again, as described by Getty-Sullivan "The prophets...serve as the conscience of the nation and of the king in particular."<sup>189</sup> Whereas false prophets fooled around the rulers and kings as flatterers, the true prophets of God were gifted with the amazing courage to speak the truth before rulers and kings. They cautioned the people of God of the political and socio-economic effects of their sins, guaranteed them of God's mercy and forgiveness if they are remorseful. In the words of Ehusani, "The poor see prophets as those who formulate their desperate cry into divine discourse, which will soon win for them freedom and liberation. The prophets are for them harbingers of hope and the heralds of freedom."<sup>190</sup> True prophets possess the vision of life as it ought to be, and it is this vision that drives them in their difficult assignment. Buttressing on this fact, Udoette avers that a "prophet is a radical critic of the status quo that is not approved by God; and ... a gentle dispenser of God's mercies and consolation."<sup>191</sup> Prophets are gifted with uncommon courage not only to condemn evil in broad-spectrum but also to name the particular agents of wickedness in society. Hence, Prophet Nathan challenged King David who had Uriah killed at war and took over his wife. He confronted him with the truth and told David to his face "You are the man!"(cf. 2 Samuel 12:1-15). Likewise, when King Ahab killed Naboth and took possession of his vineyard, Prophet Elijah faced Ahab with the truth and said "I have found you. Because you have sold

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<sup>188</sup> Paul Gifford, "Introduction: Democratisation and the Churches," in *The Christian Churches and Democratisation of Africa* (Leiden, New York, and Koln: E.J. Brill, 1995), 1-13.

<sup>189</sup>Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *The Quick Reference Guide to the Catholic Bible* (Maryland: The Word Among Us Press, 2014), 128.

<sup>190</sup>*Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>191</sup>Donatus Udoette, *Prophecy, Power, and Charismata: Exploring the Theology and Impact of St. Paul in Contemporary Christianity* (Uyo: Alcollins Printers Nig., 2012), 31.

yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord” (1 Kings 21:20). Again, John the Baptist did same to Herod when he took over Philip’s wife (cf. Luke 3:18-20). Prophets are those who warn wicked people of the inescapability of vengeance by God while giving the much-desired hope to people who are suffering in the society. Some of the major subject matters found in many of the prophets in the Old Testament consist of strict demand for monotheism and a denunciation of idols; the temple and the Torah as unifying sacred realities; a call for true leadership and for uprightness according to the commandment; and social responsibility to the vulnerable especially the orphans and widows.<sup>192</sup> On this aspect of social commitment to the defenseless, Prophet Micah attacks the capitalists and secular leaders who were guilty of exploitation and corrupt practices against the poor (2:1-13; 3:1-12);<sup>193</sup> Prophet Amos criticizes the leaders in Israel over social injustice and hypocrisy. He expresses grief for the many sins of Israel, in particular, social injustice against the powerless and the needy (2:6-12; 5:12-17);<sup>194</sup> Prophet Isaiah addresses his audience “Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you” (Isaiah 35: 3-4). Prophets are recognized as those who give confidence to the victims of injustice and oppression with the assurance that God will be able to intervene and turn things around for their good.

In addition, when Jesus started his public ministry, he showed himself as the prophet par excellence. For this reason, Sobrino emphasizes that “in ...praxis, Jesus can be seen to be in the line of the classic prophets of Israel...in their confrontation with the anti-Kingdom and its

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<sup>192</sup>Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *The Quick Reference Guide to the Catholic Bible* (Maryland: The Word Among Us Press, 2014), 129.

<sup>193</sup>Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 285-286.

<sup>194</sup> Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *The Quick Reference Guide to the Catholic Bible* (Maryland: The Word Among Us Press, 2014), 168.



idols.”<sup>195</sup> As Sobrino rightly observes, Jesus’ condemnations are aimed at the repressive groups, combined sinners, who generate structural sin, and not at individuals. Jesus criticizes the rich, Pharisees, scribes, priest and rulers, as those who hold religious, economic, cultural and political powers during his time.<sup>196</sup> Thus, Sobrino upholds that what Jesus was maintaining, and protecting with his words and actions, was the fact that his God is a God of life and not God of death and it is upon this basis that the goodness or evilness of religious and social rules and practices ought to be judged.<sup>197</sup>

However, with the different forms of crucifixion suffered by Niger Delta peoples, the question now is: What does it imply to come into the crucifixion story as one of the crucified?<sup>198</sup> Why is God’s gift of oil a major source of crucifixion to the people of Niger Delta? To this question, Crysdale in her concern for the marginalized women and those on the “underside” of history advances that:

For the crucified of the world, salvation involves finding a voice to declare humanity in the face of powerful messages to the contrary....The very speaking out becomes evidence that such designated non-Selves are in fact capable of thinking, reasoning, speaking, deciding, acting, reaching out toward that which lies beyond.<sup>199</sup>

This means that it is absolutely necessary for those on the “underside” of history to discover how they have allowed their true selves to be destroyed and victimized, and the need to tell their stories. According to Crysdale, “The Point is to tell a story that must be told, for to not tell it

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<sup>195</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 179.

<sup>196</sup>*Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>197</sup>*Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>198</sup>Cynthia S. W. Crysdale, *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1999), 15.

<sup>199</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

would mean spiritual death.”<sup>200</sup> Meanwhile, the “crucified people” of the Niger Delta people need not remain in an illicit silence. Beattie relates that:

Silence is oppressive when it is imposed on people as a way of not having to acknowledge the complex realities of their lives...Such silence leads to stigmatization and exclusion while allowing ruling authorities to control the lives of others by way of rigid rules and harsh condemnations.<sup>201</sup>

For this reason, the thesis insists on Christ’s faithful to raise their prophetic voices to the crisis in the Niger Delta region by challenging the unjust structures of injustice and oppression that crippled the lives of the people. A critical example that is the root cause of Niger Delta crisis is the unjust policies and laws of the Federal Government. Against these obnoxious laws, Sobrino quoting M.E. Boismard avers that “all laws have to yield to a necessity of life.”<sup>202</sup> Citing the example of the disciples who plucked heads of grain on the Sabbath (see Mark 2: 23-38), Sobrino expresses that “any law or custom that prevents their hunger from being satisfied is against the will of God.”<sup>203</sup> Yet, it remains a reality that the Federal Republic of Nigeria have used some laws in appropriating the ownership of oil resources in Niger Delta region to itself, thereby depriving the people on whose land the resources are situated the benefits that should accumulate to them. The first legislation is Petroleum Act of 1969 that (1) the entire ownership and control of all petroleum in, under or upon any land to which this section applies shall be vested in the state; (2) this section applies to all land (including land covered by water).<sup>204</sup> The second legislation is the Offshore Oil Revenue (Registration of Grants) Act 9, 1971, which says: An Act to make provisions for all instruments relating to any lease, license, permit or right issued

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<sup>200</sup>Ibid.

<sup>201</sup>Tina Beattie, “Material Well Being in Sub-Saharan Africa: From Silent Suffering to Human Flourishing,” in *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*, ed., Agbonkhianmeghe E., Orobator (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2016), 178.

<sup>202</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 163.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup>Petroleum Act 1969 No 51. An Act to provide for the exploration of petroleum from territorial waters.... the provisions of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

or granted to any person in connection with the petroleum industry in Nigeria to continue to be registered in the States which are contiguous to the territorial waters and the continental shelf of Nigeria, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in any other enactment.<sup>205</sup> The third legislation that took away the ownership and the control of the petroleum from the Niger Delta people is the Land use decree of 1979, which gave the State Governor ownership of all lands. The decree states that “(1)Subject to the provisions of this Act, all land comprised in the territory of each State in the Federation are hereby vested in the Governor of that State and such land shall be held in trust and administered for the use and common benefit of all Nigerians in accordance with the provisions of this Act.”<sup>206</sup> The uneven distribution of the revenue that comes from petroleum products is one of the main reasons that the Niger Delta people seek greater access to a larger share of the oil proceeds.<sup>207</sup> The struggles over the ownership, control, resource <sup>208</sup> benefit from oil have given rise to violence, conflict and high level of insecurity in the Niger Delta region. However, confronted with this reality, can we say that silence and concealment on the part of Christ’s faithful will yield the desired result? Quoting Ellacuria, Sobrino states that the foundation of the liberative method consists of three aspects such as getting a grip on reality, taking on the burden of reality and taking responsibility for reality.<sup>209</sup> Thus, this thesis goes further to confront Christ’s faithful in their different ranks to open their eyes to the people’s reality. This immediately indicts Christ’s faithful who are involved in politics to examine their own contribution in ameliorating the problems in the Niger Delta region. Little wonder, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria through their communiqué insists that:

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<sup>205</sup>The Off-Shore Oil Revenues (Registration of Grants) Act 1971/1972

<sup>206</sup>The Land Use Act 1978, Part 1.

<sup>207</sup>Ejovi Austine, Ebie Sunday and Akpokighe O. Raymond, “Globalization and Environmental Degradation of Niger Delta Region of Nigeria,” in *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol.4, No 13, 2014, 147

<sup>208</sup> Augustine Ikelegbe, “Encounters of Insurgent Youth Associations with the State in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region Of Nigeria,” in *Journal of Third World Studies* XX11, no. 1 (2005): 151-152.

<sup>209</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 34.

Good and honest people with God-given inclination and talent for political leadership should not hesitate to offer themselves for the service of the nation. In spite of the high risks of public office in our land, it must be assumed by honest people in the spirit of service and sacred mission, in order to rescue our land from endemic moral corruption, political instability and unjust socio-economic systems and policies.<sup>210</sup>

At the same time, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) especially the Niger Delta Chapter is equally invited to the table to re-evaluate their own impacts in the region. There is need to examine further whether such body called “CAN” should continue to exist or not. Notwithstanding the sacrifices of the task, is it possible for all the Christian Churches to come together and form a formidable team for the emancipation of the Niger Delta states? The time is now for Christian Churches to ignore the various dividing issues and be united to challenge the unjust structures of oppression and to pull down the political system that ensured and enforced the exploitation of the people. It is even more appropriate now for Christ’s faithful from their various quarters to raise their voices for the amendment of these laws that are against the Niger Delta region. In line with this thought, Sobrino intends that the Church must at all times be contextually “merciful” and the Church that is “merciful” practices a definite mutuality by listening to the plights of the people and responding to their plights. This is because the understanding of the Church for Sobrino comes into view from his Christology. Hence, the Church must embody or incarnate the mission that Jesus lived out and practiced during his life here on earth especially the mission of mercy.<sup>211</sup> According to Sobrino,

It is this principle of mercy that ought to be in operative in Jesus’ church. And it is this *pathos* of mercy that ought to “inform” the church---give it its specificity, shape and mold it....The church should be and do many other things, as well. But

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<sup>210</sup> Peter Schineller, ed., *The Voice of the Voiceless: Pastoral Letters and Communiqués of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria 1960-2002* (Ibadan: Daily Graphics Nigeria Ltd, 2002), no. 32.

<sup>211</sup> Thomas M. Kelly, “A Church Rooted in Mercy: Ecclesial Signposts in Sobrino’s Theology,” in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 155.

unless it is steeped--- as a church at once Christian and human---in the mercy of the parable of the Good Samaritan unless the church is the Good Samaritan before all else, all else will be irrelevant---even dangerous, should it succeed in passing for its fundamental principle.<sup>212</sup>

As rightly pointed out by Kelly, there is no doubt that the Church has always carried out works of mercy and encouraged her members to do same but there is suffering in all the communities and some suffering is simply the dehumanizing poverty that kills the human body, spirit, and communities in the two-thirds of the world today.<sup>213</sup> For this reason, Sobrino is very cautious when using the word “mercy.” Sobrino does not want it to be confused with a simple response to immediate needs without a confrontation with the structures that generated those needs. Hence, he uses other words like “prophetic praxis,” “practice in spirit” or “messianic practice”<sup>214</sup> On this reason, Sobrino’s liberation Christology encourages Christian Churches from the Niger Delta region to key into the vision that shapes and molds the entire life, mission, and fate of Jesus.

Thus, it becomes more challenging for the Christian Churches to be aware that battered and bleeding individual bodies are realities in the Niger Delta region caused by an unjust structure of injustice and violence. While the individual bodies continue to bleed, their socio-economic, cultural, religious and political bodies are bleeding as well. Just as Thomas M. Kelly while reflecting on the theology of Sobrino, remarks that if the Church is truly guided by the principle of mercy, it will not only take care of symptoms but also expose causes. However, in doing this, one should expect some kind of persecution. It is obvious that mercy without some aspects of persecution points to “works” of mercy disengaged from one’s circumstance or

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<sup>212</sup> Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 20-21.

<sup>213</sup> Thomas M. Kelly, “A Church Rooted in Mercy: Ecclesial Signposts in Sobrino’s Theology,” in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 158.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

background. So the principle of mercy, in this case, requires not just practical work for the kingdom, the messianic voice, but the complete disagreement with the anti-kingdom. Here, the prophetic voice is important.<sup>215</sup> Also, Boff argues further to say that,

Christianity will surely find its roots when it takes its position on the margin and creates its theory and practice from that margin. After all, Jesus, the apostles, and the first Christians lived on the margin of the powerful society of their time. The gospel as good news is heard with all its impact only by those who are (actually or by option) on the margin of society. There that gospel rings forth as liberation for the oppressed, justice for the impoverished, and a political voice for the marginalized.<sup>216</sup>

It is to this effect that the thesis insists on all Christ's faithful to take seriously their prophetic role and be the "voice of the voiceless."<sup>217</sup>

Furthermore, we have noticed today that there are various degrees of marginalization affecting the people of Niger Delta region. As noted by Osuigwe, there is international capital marginalizing the Niger Delta through the Multinational Oil Companies (these are foreign oil companies) that are operating in the region; the northern part of Nigeria marginalizing the southern part especially the Niger Delta people; the majority ethnic groups marginalizing the minority groups like Niger Delta group; the elites including those from the region marginalizing the "common masses; the minorities marginalizing minorities even among the communities in the Niger Delta area;<sup>218</sup> and then the marginalization of non-indigenes, that is, those who are not from that particular region but living and doing business.<sup>219</sup> It is as a result of the different levels of marginalization that the thesis invites Christ faithful to assume their prophetic role for and on

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>216</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Faith on the Edge: Religion and Marginalized Existence* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 42.

<sup>217</sup> Pope John Paul II Apostolic Exhortations: *Ecclesia in Africa* (On the Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000) (September 14, 1995), no. 70.

<sup>218</sup> Nkem Emerald Osuigwe, "Crude Oil, Conflict and Christian Witness in Nigeria: Baptist and Pentecostal Perspectives," Ph.D. Dissertation submitted to The University of Edinburgh 2010, 302-303.

<sup>219</sup> Human Rights Watch, "'They Do Not Own This Place': Government Discrimination against 'Non-Indigenes' in Nigeria," in *Human Right Watch* 18, no. 3(A) (April 2006).

behalf of the “crucified people” of the Niger Delta region in bringing about liberation. In fact, the prevailing circumstances of the region challenge all Christ faithful to let their faith take flesh in the lives of the people. The Christian faith must have practical dimensions that promote greater solidarity, compassion, justice, equity, and community. Nolan expresses that “we take refuge in abstractions when we divorce faith from life, or preach a ‘universal’ gospel and, most of all, when we engage in a ritual, liturgy or sacramental celebration that is separated off from the hard realities of daily life.”<sup>220</sup> This means that Christian activities or ceremonies become mere ritual and formalities once they are separated from the concrete reality of life. He goes on to say that “when a Church preaches and celebrates a gospel that does not challenge anyone to *transcend* the status quo with its sinfulness, that Church has lost contact with the transcendent God in our midst and is worshipping an idol.”<sup>221</sup> Today, the most common idol that is being worshipped is wealth. Prophetic activities are carried out today because of money, thus leading to compromising attitude on the part of some Christ’s faithful. The crisis in the Niger Delta region demands what Michael Westmoreland-White et al. as quoted by Ehusani call,

Incarnational discipleship on the part of Christians- a discipleship whose passion for justice, equity, well-being, liberation and salvation, will provoke not only powerful statements, but also concrete prophetic action towards realizing the liberation of the oppressed, the conversion of the oppressor, the empowerment of the poor, the practice of authentic religion, and ultimately, the salvation of all.<sup>222</sup>

The Niger Delta region is in dire need of those Christians who are ready to do exactly what Westmoreland-White and others have described above. Although every Christian by virtue of

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<sup>220</sup>Albert Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 212. (Italics in the original text).

<sup>221</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>222</sup>Leonardo Boff, *Faith on the Edge: Religion and Marginalized Existence* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 62; Michael Westmoreland-White, et al., “Disciples of the Incarnation,” in *SOJOURNERS*, May 1994, 26.

baptism shares in the priestly, prophetic and kingly function of Christ,<sup>223</sup> Udoette avers that “ordained ministers are expected to be at the frontline in exercising these functions.”<sup>224</sup> They must exercise a prophetic ministry that does not compromise with evil but stands against it and denounces it even at the cost of the prophet’s life. However, many of what we have today as ordained ministers are just sycophants, praise singers, and propagandists for those who even oppress the Niger Delta people. This thesis, therefore, challenges Christian leaders in their different ranks and titles to exercise their prophetic role in building up, consoling and challenging the evil structures that affect the people of Niger Delta region. Consequently, Christian leaders and followers must take seriously the duty of shaping the direction of the Niger Delta society through their prophetic ministry with the new understanding that the kingdom of God is to be brought about through the integral development of the political, economic, social, religious and cultural dimensions of the human person.<sup>225</sup> Thus, Christ faithful cannot just live as passive spectators in the unfolding events in the Niger Delta region. They must keep the light of faith even in the midst of tempest situation. The prophetic role of Christ’s faithful which this thesis sets out to re-awaken in the Niger Delta region is the same vision that has inspired many Church persons in history to put their lives on the frontline in the support for human dignity, justice, equity and freedom, and in the defense of the weak, the poor, and the marginalized in their society. Some of them are Cardinal Sin of the Philippines who led a non-violent protest of women and men against the dictatorial government of President Ferdinand Marcos; Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador who died as a martyr in the cause of defending the poor and the oppressed; Archbishop Helder Camara of Brazil who live a life of commitment to the oppressed

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<sup>223</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), no. 1268.

<sup>224</sup> Donatus Udoette, *Prophecy, Power, and Charismata: Exploring the Theology and Impact of St. Paul in Contemporary Christianity* (Uyo: Alcollins Printers Nig., 2012), 24.

<sup>225</sup> George Omaku, Ehusani, *A Prophetic Church* (Ede: Provincial Pastoral Institute, 1996), 94.



and disadvantaged in his country; Mother Theresa of Calcutta who was so committed to the poor, and many others too numerous to mention. The commendable lives of these contemporary Christ's faithful are worth emulating in a country like Nigeria in general and Niger Delta region in particular. Nonetheless, Christian must bear in mind that the prophetic mission is too demanding. It is a risky undertaking with God, an undertaking akin to that which was carried out by Abraham when he had to take the risk of leaving his known environment to an unknown and completely new land which God alone was to show him (cf. Gen 12:1). The prophetic vocation is risky, complex, and sometimes disappointing.<sup>226</sup> Thus, Jesus tells his disciples:

They will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death (Lk.21:12-16).

This statement of Jesus prepares every disciple for any form of persecution in the event of witnessing for Christ. To this effect, Christ's faithful must be ready to pay the price for justice, equity, and peace, which may sometimes include martyrdom.

Still, the thesis invites all Christian churches within the Niger Delta region to wake up from their long conformist, complacent, despondent and apathetic attitude to initiate programs and projects aimed at educating and empowering the poor, as well as emancipating those unjustly held captive under the yoke of oppression. Indeed, the awkward socio-economic and political realities of Nigeria as a nation are a constant reminder to all Christ's faithful to discard the attitude of complacency and stand for something that brings meaning into the meaningless situation. It is a fact that many Christ's faithful today have abandoned their prophetic role and

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<sup>226</sup>Donatus Udoette, *Messengers of God: Prophetic Movement in Israel and Theological Themes in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Ikot-Ekpen: St. Joseph Publications, 2008), 32-34.

have fallen for power, lust and wealth. The cravings for these temporal things have robbed them of their consciences. That is why many Christ faithful of today are able to hire themselves out as instruments in the hands of tormenters of the poor people. Many Christ's faithful within the Niger Delta region have abused the prophetic function. Instead of becoming God's herald charge with the duty of announcing the will of God here and now to the people, they end up feeding the people with cataclysmic prophecies that terrify them out of their minds and make them have a tendency to see God no longer as a loving Father, but as one whose task is to punish them with catastrophes. Many of such ministers are good at making strange prophetic declarations that cause division, destroy families, and even set communities against themselves. Niger Delta region is urgently in need of visionary Christian leaders who can tell some basic truths to Nigerian leaders that the real problem affecting the Niger Delta people is injustice and greed. According to Ehusani, "The real problem today is the conspiracy of the greedy elite to further impoverish the poor, through the selfish appropriation and reckless plunder of the mineral and agricultural resources of our fatherland."<sup>227</sup> Thus, we need Christ's faithful that will courageously exercise their prophetic role by stressing on the evils of our society that serve as obstructions to integral development and prosperity of the Niger Delta people.

Moreover, Christian Churches within the region must be courageous enough to defend the right to basic health care, education, sufficient sustenance as well as protection from all types of violence and abuse. There is an urgent need for all Christ's faithful to be in the forefront for the struggle to liberate the Niger Delta region from structural injustices and oppression. The dream of justice must be kept alive until victory is won for the people. For many years the Niger Delta region in the words of O'Hara has "been the site of major confrontations between the people who live there and the Nigeria government security forces, resulting in extrajudicial

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<sup>227</sup>George Omaku, Ehusani, *A Prophetic Church* (Ede: Provincial Pastoral Institute, 1996), 64.

killings, arbitrary detentions, torture, rape and destruction of property.”<sup>228</sup>This shows clearly how the “crucified people” of the Niger Delta region have been deprived of their human dignity by the government and the multinational oil companies.

On a very serious note, the thesis urges on the Christian Churches in their prophetic ministry to condemn in strong terms the violent nature of the youths in their agitation which over and over again leads to the destruction of lives of many innocent people. Thus, Christian Churches must lay more emphasis on the respect and sacredness of life which is an important value even in the African culture. Through their prophetic ministry, Christian Churches within the region must have a tremendous influence on the moral and spiritual lives of the youths and their parents; plan better ways of amplifying the voices of these wounded people to quarters where they could be heard and a solution is given to their problem. The prophetic mission compels Christ’s faithful to always stand up for the promotion of human life and dignity and to work assiduously in bringing about peace, justice, and unity among the various people of the region.<sup>229</sup>

Above all, the thesis insists that the prophetic role of Christian Churches must not be confined to the pulpits of Churches or around the Churches structures; it must also be carried out through peaceful demonstrations and rallies, press releases, communiqués etc. The thesis enjoins the Christian Churches in the Niger Delta region to adopt a similar method used by the Christian Churches in South Africa in addressing the political crisis (apartheid) in their country. They

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<sup>228</sup> Kevin O’Hara, “Environmental Human Rights Issues and Development in the Niger Delta,” in *Human Rights in Niger: The Way Forward*, ed. Callistus Onyebuchi Asogwa (Enugu, Nigeria: Praise House Publishers, 2004), 269-270.

<sup>229</sup> Oliver A. Opara-nadi, “The Place of Religion and Conflict Management in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria- Analysis of the Role of Churches,” in *The Church and the Politics of Resource Control*, eds. Ferdinand Nwaigbo et al ( Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Ciwa Publications, 2006), 28-29.

came up with their famous “*Kairos document*”<sup>230</sup> as a Christian, biblical and theological commentary on the political crisis in their country. Thus, to conclude this section, it is important to advance further that Niger Delta region is in terrible need of public prophetic theology.

**3.2.1 THE NEED FOR PUBLIC PROPHETIC THEOLOGY IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION:** The above discussion on the role of Christ faithful captures what public prophetic theology is set out to do in any society especially in the Niger Delta region. Prophetic Theology is derived from the scriptural understanding of prophecy, that is, the obligation of the prophetic authorization to be truthful in witnessing for the kingdom of God. This type of theology like other liberation theologies challenges Christ’s faithful to declare publicly their vision in their own society and also in the world for the rediscovery and confirmation of their faith. It is an obligation to bear witness and to declare their prophetic voices in public life that entails an enthused and attentive reading of the signs from the point of view of the marginalized. Public Prophetic Theology entails a polemical way of voicing worries as well as a dialogical approach with others, in favor of the marginalized and oppressed. Public prophetic theology is not only about the precision of our media messages, seminars, press releases, adverts etc but also what Christ’s faithful do with others in the public space to give witness to our obligation to the praxis of faith among the oppressed. Also, public prophetic theology is more of an active involvement in the drawing of policies that are fashioned by the narratives and voices of the poor who always occupied the central position in any deliberation. This is done to constantly confront the powers that oppress and destabilize the interest of the poor in the society. Public prophetic

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<sup>230</sup>*The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: a Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* 2nd edition. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 1.

theology is not a visitor in public life, but a member that is obligated to offer witness to the suffering masses who on the underside of history.<sup>231</sup> Public prophetic theology as a form of the theology of liberation is fitting today in the crisis of environmental degradation, poverty, and injustice in the Niger Delta region. It empowers the people to offer their prophetic theological voices toward the realization of liberation, justice, freedom, and compassion for “crucified people.”

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<sup>231</sup>Vuyani S. Vellem, “Prophetic in Black Theology, with special reference to the Kairo Document,” in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66, no. 1, 1-6. Retrieved on February 5, 2018 from <http://www.hts.org.za>.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussions, it is a massive reality that the “crucified people” of the Niger Delta region are faced with myriads of problems ranging from environmental problems, poverty, injustice, violence, just to mention but a few. They looked forward to being taken down from the cross. As observed by Sobrino “we live in a heartless world, in which Dives and Lazarus can live together and nobody cares.”<sup>232</sup> Even though reality ‘speaks’ to human beings in many ways, there is a severe lack of honesty toward reality on the part of the government and multinational oil companies to the problems of the Niger Delta people. Nonetheless, the thesis confronts those corrupt leaders and workers of oil firms who are working constantly against the “crucified people” of Niger Delta region to help in “replacing unjust relations (which) entails both new persons (conversion) and a new social order where the politics of service replaces the politics of domination (Mark 10:42; Lk 13:32).”<sup>233</sup> It is imperative for leaders to understand the true meaning of power as shown by Jesus on the cross. For Osuigwe, “through his life, death, and resurrection Jesus demonstrates that true power comes by way of self-donation and seeming powerlessness and the fact that its greatest purpose is humble service rather than domination.”<sup>234</sup> Nigerian leaders and workers of multinational oil companies and even saboteurs from the region are called to have a personal conversion, show compassion, and solidarity toward the “crucified people” of Niger Delta region. Bringing the “crucified people” down from the cross should be the major priority of the government and the multinational oil companies. This will be one of the ways of expressing that God’s gift of oil to the people is a blessing and not a curse.

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<sup>232</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 61.

<sup>233</sup>Dean Brackley, *Divine Revolution: Salvation & Liberation in Catholic Thought* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 136. (emphasis added).

<sup>234</sup>Nkem Emerald Osuigwe, “Crude Oil, Conflict and Christian Witness in Nigeria: Baptist and Pentecostal Perspectives” (Ph.D. Dissertation submitted to The University of Edinburgh 2010), 303.

The people of the Niger Delta region have been on the “cross” for over sixty years today since the beginning of oil exploration in the region. While oil wealth has produced paradise conditions for Nigerian leaders, oil industries, and local elites, oil exploration has turned the Niger Delta into a hellhole. Instead of bringing an integral development to the people, oil resource has created pervasive suffering, environmental degradation, and poverty, with most of the huge income secretly disappearing in a systemic scheme of corruption. The people have actually found themselves exploited and oppressed by those corrupt leaders and the multinational oil companies whose spirit and insatiable desire for wealth are even crueler than the colonialists.<sup>235</sup>For centuries, this region is left in a sub-human condition with little or no attention in terms of health care, education, road, electricity, drinking water, housing system, women empowerment and job opportunity. Moreover, the state of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta region when compared to the state of development in Abuja (the Federal capital territory), and other parts of the country where no natural resource exists is indeed “a fundamental breach of human solidarity, a negation of humanity.”<sup>236</sup>The thesis confronts corrupt leaders from the highest to the lowest level not to allow their personal interest and ambition to take precedence over the common good of the people. There is an urgent need for meaningful development in the Niger Delta region at least to compensate for the ecological and maritime devastation of the region due to oil exploration. The “crucified people” of the Niger Delta region are looking forward to total emancipation and development from the government and multinational oil companies. The development that this thesis proposes is one that is total and integral, and it is line with what Pope Paul VI articulated in his encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* that: “The development we speak of here cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it

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<sup>235</sup>Patrick Eloka, Omutah, *From Vatican II to African Synod: Catholic Social Teaching in African Context* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2004), 90.

<sup>236</sup>*Ibid.*, 61.

must be well rounded.”<sup>237</sup>The same encyclical admits that many people in the world are under pressure to break away from the negative effects of poverty, hunger, ignorance and endemic disease, and to have a better life. This statement actually captures the yearnings of the “crucified people” of the Niger Delta region who have suffered from the many years of oil exploration and marginalization.

In addition, since the “crucified people” of Niger Delta have actually lost hope in the unjust structure of the civil society, the thesis makes a clarion call to all Christian bodies and humanitarian organizations within and outside the Niger Delta region to serve as the people’s hope and voice in drawing the attention of both the government and oil companies in the developmental restoration of the region. In the light of this situation, Sobrino says clearly that there is an urgent need to hearken to the question of the gospel hymn, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”<sup>238</sup> In this direction, the Public Prophetic Theology that is suggested for addressing the crisis in the Niger Delta region will insist on the Christian Churches to take a central position and demonstrate a more social commitment to justice, peace, reconciliation and integral development in the region. The Christian Churches, in this case, must stand out as the only institutions that have no socio-economic and political interests in the Niger Delta region. The reason for this position is that the Niger Delta conflict, as observed by Opara, is consistently a fight of interest. All the fighters- the governments, the multinational oil companies, local leaders, and the youths have their various interests.<sup>239</sup> Thus, Christian Churches under an umbrella should be the only neutral arbiter that can enter into a substantive dialogue with the

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<sup>237</sup>Pope Paul VI’s Encyclical: *Populorum Progressio* (Encyclical on the Development of Peoples) (March 26, 1967), no. 14.

<sup>238</sup>Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns & Francis McDonagh (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 28.

<sup>239</sup>Oliver A. Opara-nadi, “The Place of Religion and Conflict Management in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria- Analysis of the Role of Churches,” in *The Church and the Politics of Resource Control*, eds. Ferdinand Nwaigbo et al (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Ciwa Publications, 2006), 31.



government and the multinational oil; the youths and the local leaders on how to end the crisis in the region. The Christian Churches must serve as an effective instrument in resolving conflict in the region. Also, it expects Christian Churches to embark on peaceful demonstrations, publications of communiqués, press releases, memoranda and other non-violent modes of agitation. In addition, a public prophetic theology in the region will insist on development and creation of jobs for the people. It is an only one-sided effort on the part of the government to give amnesty to ex-militants, and then leaving jobless youths without employment; in fact, it is even a way of encouraging idle youths to become militants in order for them to have the same kind of settlement. Christian Churches should influence the government to erect proper structures that will end violent agitation in the region. The Christian Churches must continue to exercise their prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless so that everywhere the human dignity of every individual will be acknowledged, and that people will always be at the center of all government programs.<sup>240</sup> For Christ faithful to be truly prophetic, they must throw away any view of Church in terms of privilege and power, and begin to assume the posture of vulnerability through sharing the life of the powerless and helpless people of the region. In other words, Christ faithful must show realistic gestures of solidarity with the oppressed. The Christian Churches must be ready to even put their reputation at stake in the fight for, and the defense of the victims of repressive injustice and structural violence in the Niger Delta region.

Finally, it was never God's design that the gift of oil to the people of Niger Delta region will turn out to be an absurdity, a source of poverty and misery; it was indeed God's precious gift for human integral development both for the people of that region and the entire humanity, but the powerful "emperors" of this earth has abused its use and trample on the rights of the people.

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<sup>240</sup>Pope John Paul II Apostolic Exhortations: *Ecclesia in Africa* (On the Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000) (September 14, 1995), no. 70.

As Crysdale puts it “We’ve always known God was good, it is people we have trouble with.”<sup>241</sup> Nevertheless, since the history of Jesus does not end on the cross but God raised him from the dead, it is the hope of the “crucified people” of Niger Delta region that their own history will not end with historical crosses but the God who identifies with the poor will surely raise them from the dead. When this begins to take place then the liberation Christology of Sobrino must have been integrated enough in the Niger Delta region and by implication other parts of the world that suffered this kind of untold hardship and inhumanity.

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<sup>241</sup> Cynthia S. W. Crysdale, *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1999), 32.

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