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**EUCCHARIST AS FRUIT OF THE EARTH AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL
DEGRADATION IN THE NIGER DELTA: IMPLICATION OF LOUIS MARIE-
CHAUVET’S TRIPARTITE CYCLE OF GIFT, RECEPTION AND RETURN GIFT
FOR AN ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION**

A thesis by

Michael Edomobi, SJ

Presented to

The Faculty of the

Jesuit School of Theology

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Committee Signatures

Professor Paul A. Janowiak, SJ, (Director) Date

Professor Mary E. McGann, RSCJ, (Reader) Date

ABSTRACT

EUCHARIST AS FRUIT OF THE EARTH AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN THE NIGER DELTA: IMPLICATION OF LOUIS MARIE- CHAUVET’S TRIPARTITE CYCLE OF GIFT, RECEPTION AND RETURN GIFT FOR AN ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION

Michael Edomobi, SJ

There is a heightened global consciousness now more than ever before on the protection of the environment. Of late is the encyclical letter *Laudato si* of Pope Francis on care for our common home. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is the context of my research. This region is endowed with massive oil deposits, which have been extracted for decades by the government of Nigeria and by multinational oil companies, at the expense of the people of the region whose environment suffer degradation and their means of livelihood destroyed.

This study juxtaposes Eucharist as fruit of the earth and the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It argues that the meal character of Christian Eucharist, with its focus on the “fruit of the earth,” implies an environmental response of healing the Earth and addressing the injustice being done to the people of the Niger Delta. In order to accomplish this, the thesis employs Louis Marie Chauvet’s tripartite model of gift, reception and return gift in tandem with the “see-judge-act” practice of Catholic Social Teaching, both of which underscores the ethical implications of Christian Eucharist.

This thesis looks at how our daily participation in the Eucharist shapes our ethical living and heightens our ecological consciousness in daily life. It does not only acknowledge the importance of the Eucharist, but it extends its purview well beyond the rites to propose actions that are geared towards addressing the environmental injustices inflicted on the

environment and communities by the activities of oil companies and the veritable call for Eco-justice. Hence, this proposed action corresponds to the “return gift” in Chauvet’s tripartite cycle, which emphasizes action aimed at correcting the ecological injustice suffered by communities in the Niger Delta region.

Finally, the thesis argues that humanity must not give up on the chances of the renewal of creation. It expresses a glimmer of hope for the healing and restoration of creation. The study concludes with some new insights on the various ways our participation in the Eucharist urges us to act and uphold social and ecological justice.

Professor Paul A. Janowiak, SJ (Director)

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David Hume argues that ingratitude is “the most horrible and unnatural crime that a person is capable of committing.”¹ In order not to be guilty of this, I want to use this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all those who contributed in one way or other to make the journey of this thesis successful.

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¹ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Lexington, Ky.: Maestro Reprints, 2012), 466.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis in loving memory of my late mother, Ezinne Rosary Edomobi whose loving care and upbringing in the faith has led me to the altar of God. I love you mom, and may you continue to intercede for me in God's bosom as I do the same for you.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is focused on the “Eucharist as Fruit of the Earth and the Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta.” The people of the Niger Delta of Nigeria are of particular interest to me because I am part of the community and I identify with the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anguish of my people.² Another reason why the story of the Niger Delta people appeals to me is the seeming paradox of the poor living conditions and prevailing injustice to a land and people that generate the natural resources for which the nation largely depends for its economic sustenance. More importantly is the fact that the Niger Delta is one of the 10 most important wetland and coastal marine ecosystems in the world and is home to some 31 million people.³ The Niger Delta is also the location of massive oil deposits, which have been extracted for decades by the government of Nigeria and by multinational oil companies. Oil has generated an estimated \$600 billion since the 1960s.⁴

Despite this, most of the Niger Delta’s population lives in poverty. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) describes the region as suffering from “administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor, and endemic conflict.”⁵ The majority of the people of the Niger Delta do not have adequate access to clean water or health-care. Their poverty, and its contrast with the wealth generated by oil, has become one of the world’s

² Vatican Council. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium Et Spes; Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965.* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998), 1.

³ Nicholas Tago, “Oil Pollution, Human Rights Violations Still Rampant in Niger Delta,” http://www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art_12120.html (accessed September 24, 2017).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

starkest and most disturbing examples of the “resource curse.”⁶ Little wonder, Ken Saro – Wiwa⁷ writes:

He cursed the earth for spouting oil, black gold, they called it. And he cursed the gods for not drying the oil wells. What did it matter that millions of barrels of oil were mined and exported daily, so long as this poor woman wept those tears of despair?⁸

To such a people, what does it mean to say that Eucharist is fruit of the earth and a meal, when their lands and rivers have been contaminated by oil spillage, making it impossible for them to till the earth and produce food for their sustenance. These, no doubt, heightened my interest in carrying out this research. And to help me understand this I have employed the work of Louis Marie Chauvet’s tripartite model of gift, reception and return gift and the “see-judge-act” practice of Catholic Social Teaching.

The Eucharist is at the heart of the Church’s liturgy. Just as the human heart is pivotal to the existence of the human person, so is the Eucharist in the life of the Church. For Gordon Smith, in *A Holy Meal*, the Eucharist is a holy meal which involves an intentional encounter with God.⁹ It is a communal event where we eat together, depend on one another and grow in faith, hope, and love together as God’s family.¹⁰ In other words, the Eucharist is both

⁶ Nicholas Tago, “Oil Pollution, Human Rights Violations Still Rampant in Niger Delta,” http://www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art_12120.html (accessed September 24, 2017).

⁷ Ken Saro-Wiwa was a novelist and an environmental right activist from Ogoni land in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. He was the leader of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). He and 8 Ogoni leaders were hanged on November 10th 1995 after being accused of murder without legal counsel or right to appeal.

⁸ Ken Saro-Wiwa, “*Environmental degradation in the Niger Delta*,” <http://www.cleannigerdelta.org/index.php/environmentaldegredation> (accessed April 15, 2017).

⁹ Gordon T. Smith, *A Holy Meal: The Lord’s Supper in the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2005), 9.

¹⁰ Smith, 10.

physical and spiritual food to nourish our bodies. We cannot live without eating. Elizabeth Groppe, in *Eating and Drinking*, says that eating is an ontological act.¹¹ She contends that we are persons-in-communion and we exist by forming our very bodies at the table with others through the medium of the fruits of the earth that we share.¹²

The Eucharist according to Louis Marie-Chauvet consists of the tripartite cycle of gift, reception and return gift.¹³ Employing the above analogy, creation is God's gift to humanity. A gift actualizes its purpose when the one gifted acknowledges reception. Similarly, God's gift of creation to humanity can actualize its purpose when it is preserved and protected. In other words, as faithful stewards of creation, we have the responsibility of safeguarding creation from all sorts of exploitation. According to Denis Edwards, when humans come to the Eucharist, they bring the fruits of creation, and in some way the whole of creation, to the Eucharistic table.¹⁴ He notes that in the Eucharist, creation is lifted up to God in offering and thanksgiving. This lifting up of creation is the first part of the return gift that needs an ethical follow up, as the thesis will subsequently demonstrate.

When the Church gathers around the Eucharistic table to gain nourishment, she gathers not just for herself but also for the life of the world. This sustenance of the life of the world that is creation is subject to the quality and wholeness of the gifts we bring to the table. The questions that arise are myriad. First, what is the quality and wholeness of the fruit of the

¹¹ Elizabeth Teresa Groppe, *Eating and Drinking*, Compass (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 1.

¹² Groppe, 1.

¹³ Timothy M. Brunk, *Liturgy and Life: The Unity of Sacrament and Ethics in the Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet*, American University Studies, v. 254 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 79.

¹⁴ Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2006), 100.

earth that we bring to the Eucharistic table as gifts in the Niger Delta? Second, how does the Eucharist shape ethical living in daily life? Third, how does the Eucharist shape ecological consciousness and conversion in daily life? Fourth, how safe and suitable are the agricultural practices that lead to the growing of wheat and grapes? Lastly, are we concerned about the exploitation of poor farm workers and the unjust wage system?”

In the light of the above questions, when the Christian community in the Niger Delta gather at the Eucharistic table to celebrate the Eucharist, there should be an awakened consciousness to the cries of the earth that produces the wheat for which human hands will then work to have the bread. This consciousness can make us realize that the actions of the corporations are wrong and must be addressed in the light of God’s gift.

No doubt, human beings have the freedom and capacity to create and at the same time to destroy. Human persons, though part of nature, often distance themselves from nature to interact with it. The excess and indiscriminate exercise of human freedom proves to be self-annihilating for their freedom as well as existence.¹⁵ Hence, human beings by their narrow selfish interest in the exploitation and degradation of nature are constantly disrupting and destroying the environmental balance.

Chauvet’s Cycle of Gift, Reception, and Return-Gift

Louis-Marie Chauvet presents to us the tripartite structure of Christian existence, built on the three pillars of “Scripture,” “Sacrament,” and “Ethics.”¹⁶ These three pillars correspond

¹⁵ Khanduri, *Human Freedom and Environment: Contemporary Paradigms and Moral Strategies*, 105.

¹⁶ Brunk, *Liturgy and Life*, 57.

to “gift,” “reception,” and “return-gift,” as we have mentioned earlier. He equally refers to them as “cognition,” “recognition,” and “praxis” and also “knowledge,” “gratitude,” and “action.”¹⁷

Since we are interested in the gift (Eucharist), offered and accepted, Chauvet’s tripartite structure of “gift,” “reception,” and “return-gift,” will help in expounding this. What does he mean by these terms? To answer this, we shall expound on each of the models he proposed.

First, the “gift” parallels with “Scripture” – where Christ donates himself to us by his self-communication through the written and spoken word. Chauvet notes that the scripture referred is not limited to the Hebrew Scriptures. He says:

Under the paradigm “Scripture,” we can classify everything that pertains to the knowledge of God’s mystery revealed in Jesus Christ. These include: The Bible in the first place of course since it contains all the foundational texts of the church’s faith; but also, all the theological discourse of yesterday and today, because theology is at the bottom nothing else than the orderly and critically organized elucidation of the difficulties present in our foundational text. Catechism belongs also, at least in large part, to this pole of Christian identity, which immediately depends on biblical revelation.¹⁸

Second, “reception” corresponds to the “Sacrament.” The mandate to be food for others is contingent on our reception of the gift freely offered to us. The aphorism “You cannot give what you do not have,” comes alive here. Christ offers us his body, broken and shared, to eat and also his blood to drink, to be nourished and in turn to become source of nourishment to others. Chauvet explains this model of “reception” when he notes,

¹⁷ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2001), 31.

¹⁸ Ibid, 29.

The Sacrament is the various forms of celebration, which the Church performs in memory of Jesus' death and resurrection. Among these forms, there are first the "two major Sacraments," according to Scholastic terminology, that is, baptism and Eucharist... It is through these two sacraments that every person is initiated into the mystery of Christ, that is, becomes a member of this living body.¹⁹

Third, "return-gift" equals "Ethics." How do we express gratitude for a gift received? As a rule, we say "Thank you." Saliers and LaFont in their earlier discourse on "exchange of gifts," accede to Chauvet's paradigm of "return-gift." Hence, for Chauvet the embodiment of the expression of gratitude is in ethical living. What does he mean by "ethical living? In his own words he says,

These consist of ethical conduct by which Christians testify to the gospel by their actions.... Under this paradigm "ethics," we place all that pertains to action in the name of the gospel.²⁰

Thesis Statement

Using Louis Marie Chauvet's tripartite model of gift, reception and return gift in tandem with the "see-judge-act" practice of Catholic Social Teaching, both of which underscores the ethical implications of Christian Eucharist, I will argue that the meal character of Christian Eucharist, with its focus on the "fruit of the earth," implies an environmental response of healing the Earth and addressing the injustice being done to the people of the Niger Delta.

Contextual Eco-Theological Method

This study employs a contextual eco-theological approach that is inter-disciplinary based on the pastoral circle of See, Judge and Act. This approach is in dialogue with Louis Marie-Chauvet's cycle of gift, reception and return gift. This approach does not only seek to

¹⁹ Chauvet, 29-30.

²⁰ Chauvet, 31.

understand the complexity of a particular context but also make faith-informed action plans that can transform the context for people to live the fullness of life that Jesus came to give.²¹ This methodology begins with a social analysis (see) of the context, which can make clear to worshipping communities that creation, which is God's gift, is being defiled, and that they have a responsibility to receive and care for God's gift and to act on its behalf. It then moves to theological reflection on Eucharist as meal and supporting perspectives from scripture, Catholic Social Teaching and Ignatian spirituality that enable communities to assess their responsibility, in light of gifts they have received, to "become nourishment for others" (judge). Finally, it then advocates for specific forms of action (return gift) needed to challenge the incessant environmental degradation and correct the ecological injustice suffered by certain communities in the Niger Delta region. The significance of this methodology of doing contextual theology is that it stands with the poor and the oppressed.

Significance

This work looks at how our daily participation in the Eucharist shapes our ethical living and heightens our ecological consciousness in daily life. It does not only acknowledge the importance of the Eucharist, but it extends well beyond the rites to propose actions that are geared towards promotion of justice, equality and freedom in a world, where communities are marginalized and unjustly treated. Hence, the "return gift" in Chauvet's tripartite cycle emphasizes action aimed at correcting the ecological injustice suffered by certain communities in the Niger Delta region because of environmental degradation of their land and rivers.

²¹ See Jn 10:10.

Procedure

This study will be divided into four chapters. Chapter One, will highlight the social analysis (see) of the context, which can make clear to worshiping communities that creation, which is God's gift, is being defiled, and that they have a responsibility to receive and care for God's gift and to act on its behalf. It looks at the here and now of the present situation of the Niger Delta people.

Chapter Two tries to understand the meaning of the situation in the Niger Delta by engaging in a theological reflection on Eucharist as meal that enable communities to assess their responsibility, in light of gifts they have received, to "become nourishment for others" (judge). It articulates the meaning of Eucharist as fruit of the earth and the meal character of the Eucharist to a people whose soil is polluted and rendered incapable of growing crops because of oil spillage and the activities of oil extracting industries. It also explores the ecological implication of the Eucharistic meal and the protection of the land and agricultural workers in the Niger Delta.

Chapter Three continues with the "reception" aspect of Chauvet's tripartite cycle. It will emphasize the faith dimension of our relationship with creation and a theological reflection (judge) on creation and ecological justice in the Niger Delta. The thesis will employ supporting perspectives from scripture, Catholic Social Teaching and Ignatian spirituality to enable communities to assess their responsibility, in light of gifts they have received, to "become nourishment for others" (judge).

Chapter Four will explore the "return gift" aspect of Chauvet's tripartite cycle. It advocates for specific forms of action (return gift) needed to challenge the incessant environmental

degradation and correct the ecological injustice suffered by certain communities in the Niger Delta region.

Finally, this study will proffer new insights on the Eucharist as fruit of the earth and the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta in the general conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

GIFT (SEE)– THE SOCIO-POLITICAL- ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT OF THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

This chapter will involve a social analysis (see) of the Niger Delta context that can make clear to worshipping communities that creation, as God’s gift, is being defiled, and that they have a responsibility to receive and care for God’s gift and to act on its behalf. It reports the present situation of the Niger Delta people.

1.1 Population and Geographical location of Niger Delta in Nigeria

The Niger Delta is one of the 10 most important wetland and coastal marine ecosystems in the world and is home to some 31 million people.²² It encompasses over 20,000 square kilometers. It is a vast floodplain built up by the accumulation of centuries of silt washed down the Benue and Niger Rivers, composed of four main ecological zones – coastal barrier islands, mangroves, fresh water swamp forests and lowland rainforests – whose boundaries vary according to the patterns of seasonal flooding.²³ The mangrove forest of Nigeria is the third largest in the world and the largest in Africa; over 60% of this mangrove, or 6000 square kilometers, is found in the Niger Delta.²⁴ They are found in the South East and South-South region of Nigeria. There are nine states constituting the Niger Delta region: Abia, Akwa-ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers.

²²Nicholas Tago, “Oil Pollution, Human Rights Violations Still Rampant in Niger Delta,” http://www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art_12120.html (accessed September 24, 2017).

²³ Eweje, G., “Environmental Costs and Responsibilities Resulting from Oil Exploitation in Developing Countries: The Case of the Niger Delta of Nigeria,” *Journal of Business Ethics*, 69 (1). 27-56, 2006.

²⁴ Ibid.

The people of the Niger Delta are generally engaged in farming and fishing, the two major occupations, which the tropical climate, rain forest, the numerous rivers and creeks encourage. They are distributed into small settlements with less than 1,000 people in different parts of the Niger Delta. The NDDC Regional Master Plan established that there are 13,329 settlements in the region with 94% of them having populations of less than 5,000. Based on the above statistics, only 1% (about 98 settlements) can be classified as urban centers considering their population size.²⁵

However, given the small size of the various settlements scattered all over the region, Mabogunje, in his article *The Debt to Posterity: Reflections on a National Policy on Environmental Management*, argues that the population or size of a particular settlement plays an important role in the promotion of development, whether human or economic.²⁶ In other words, areas with large population are more likely to attract human and economic development and growth, than sparsely inhabited settlements. Little wonder, the Niger Delta region is impoverished and devoid of economic and social development.

1.2 Social Analysis of the Niger Delta Region

1.2.1 Brief History of the Niger Delta

The current exploitation of the people and land of the Niger Delta dates back to antiquity. In the 11th century the present Niger Delta region grew out of the Oyo and Benin kingdoms.

²⁵ Gideon Omuta, *Poverty and Environmental Quality in the Niger Delta Region: Dependence on Biomass Fuels as source of Household Energy*, <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/poverty-and-environmental-quality-in-the-niger-delta-region-dependence-on-biomass-fuels-as-the-source-of-household-energy/> (accessed January 23, 2018).

²⁶ Mabogunje, A.L. (1988), "The Debt to Posterity: Reflections on a National Policy on Environmental Management" in Sada, P.O. and Odemerho, F.O. (eds.) *Environmental Issues and Management in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Evans Brothers.

Political and religious authority resided in the “Oba.” The Benin kingdom grew in size to over 100,000 inhabitants.²⁷ Udeme Ekpo, in *The Niger Delta and Oil Politics* argues that outside of Benin, the Niger Delta was a collection of regions which consists of strong traditional institutions that wielded enormous political powers, as was the case in the Itsekiri, Brass, Urhobo, Kalabari, Bonny and Calabar Kingdoms.²⁸ The strategic location of the area and the activities of the people, however, places the Niger Delta on a strong pedestal for socio-economic growth quite early.²⁹ The Niger Delta region was a major gateway for the export of slaves during the inglorious Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade between Africa and Europe.

When the slave trade was abolished following the industrial development of Europe, it was substituted with trade in industrial raw materials. Deinbo Briggs, in *Critical Reflections on the Niger Delta Question*, says that “all political power is directed to specific economic ends, and there is no such thing as power as an end in itself. Hence, the power of the colonizer served the interests of the colonizer.³⁰ They bought raw materials at very low prices, which were used in the production of goods and the people were made to pay exorbitant prices for the products.³¹ Palm oil, became very lucrative and the main stay of the economy of the Niger Delta. The European merchants developed a Trust system which guaranteed a regular

²⁷ Stakeholder Democracy Network, “A History of the Niger Delta,” <http://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/about-the-niger-delta/niger-delta-history/> (accessed January 16, 2018).

²⁸ Udeme Ekpo, *The Niger Delta and Oil Politics* (Lagos: International Energy Communications, 2004), 2.

²⁹ Ekpo, 1.

³⁰ D. A. Briggs, *Critical Reflections on the Niger Delta Question* (Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria: Larigraphics Printers, 2007), 4.

³¹ Ekpo, *The Niger Delta and Oil Politics*, 9.

supply of palm produce. This commerce flourished among the European merchants for a long time until oil was discovered.

1.2.2 Political Structure

The Niger Delta region before the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in one of the villages in the area called *Oloibiri* in 1956 (the present Bayelsa State), was predominantly a peaceful community. The people depended largely on farming and fishing for their livelihood. Okoko, et al, will argue in *The Politics of Oil and the Development of Underdevelopment in the Niger Delta* that the exploration and production of mineral oils and gas and associated products have further undermined the economy of the Niger Delta.³² In addition, it has largely resulted in the degradation of the environment and destroyed the traditional economies of the region.³³

The people of the Niger Delta have continuously struggled and pushed for self-determination and the right to control the resources that emanates from their region. No doubt, oil resources remain under the exclusive control of the federal government. Hence, the communities are deprived the right to own and manage their oil resources. This has often led to conflicts and violent crises in this area. Udemé Ekpo, captures the scenario when he notes that

. . . for more than four decades the people of the Niger Delta had lived with the anomaly of having to feed on the crumbs of the national cake which is baked in their territory, but which is shared in the nation's capital – hundreds of kilometers away – with other Nigerians who know nothing about the negative effects of oil exploration and production as the highest beneficiaries. Hence, they had been content to accept

³² Kimse Okoko, Johnson N. Nna, and Ibaba S. Ibaba, *The Politics of Oil and the Development of Underdevelopment in the Niger Delta* (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2006), 3.

³³ Okoko, Nna, and Ibaba, 3.

the little handouts, which came their way, in forms of a few development projects, from the federal government.³⁴

The agitations and claims of the Niger Delta region are not unfounded. They are simply demanding a just and fair treatment as their ancestral land and resources produce the wealth that sustains the nation. It would be ludicrous for such a region to live in abject poverty while the wealth accruing from the resources found in their land are used to develop other regions. This quest for justice led to what Emmanuel Duru, in *The Politics of Oil in the Niger Delta*, would call a twelve-day revolution. Isaac Adaka Boro, in 1966, led a guerilla army of Ijaw nationals to declare the “Niger Delta Republic.” The Nigerian government summarily overcame Boro and his group. They were tried and convicted for treason and later condemned to death on June 21, 1966.³⁵

In the 1990s, Ken Saro-Wiwa, former playwright, social critic and one-time federal administrator of the region, led a non-violent protest, mobilizing a mass action against Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC).³⁶ This was to call attention and to seek to redress the environmental degradation by oil extracting multinational companies in Ogoni land. The government of the day did not find it amusing, as he and eight others were convicted and hanged on November 10, 1995.

The struggle and claims of the people of the Niger Delta did not stop with the killings of the “Ogoni nine.” In fact, it assumed a violent and worrisome proportion as opposed to the peaceful and non-violent approach of Ken Saro-Wiwa. The youths of Niger Delta have

³⁴ Ekpo, *The Niger Delta and Oil Politics*, 133.

³⁵ Emmanuel Duru, “The Politics of Oil in the Niger Delta,” <http://www.e-ir.info/2010/12/05/the-politics-of-oil-in-the-niger-delta/>(accessed January 16, 2018).

³⁶ Ibid.

resorted to militancy and use of force to fight their cause. They sabotage the government by carrying out deadly and paralyzing attacks on oil and gas installations and facilities, thereby disrupting the activities of oil prospecting, exploration and exploitation by the multinational oil companies. More so, they are involved in hostage-taking and kidnapping of oil workers for ransom.

1.2.3 Economic Structure

Omojimate Ben, U., in his article *The Economic Dimensions of the Niger Delta Ethnic Conflicts*, succinctly x-rays the economic life of the people of the Niger Delta pre-and post-discovery of oil in their communities.³⁷ He argues that the economic life of the people of the Niger Delta is largely determined by their environment. Thus, those who live around the coastal areas are largely fishermen and traders, whereas those in the hinterland cultivate food crops such as cassava, yam, vegetables, and cash crops such as palm oil and rubber.³⁸ In the light of the different specialization between the two groups, they developed a bilateral trading relation that benefited both parties. Consequently, the coastal fishermen supplied fish to the hinterland, and the farmers in the hinterland made available their produce to those in the coastal areas.³⁹

In order to ascertain the economic structure of the Niger Delta people, I will rely heavily on the document of the Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan report adopted in 2006. Based on the report, the economy of the Niger Delta Region is largely driven by the informal

³⁷ Omojimate Ben, U., "The Economic Dimensions of the Niger Delta Ethnic Conflict," *African Research Review*, 5 (22). 46-55, 2011.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

sector⁴⁰ in terms of percentage of people engaged. About 80% of all employed persons in the Niger Delta are engaged in the private sector,⁴¹ with the greater proportion working in the informal sector.⁴²

Surprisingly, despite the prevalence of oil in the region, agriculture remains the highest employer of labor. According to the report, the highest proportion of people employed is engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing industry, which accounts for 44.2%. Trade or selling activities constitutes 17.4%; education and health, 7.1%; services, 9.8%; administration, 5.4%; transport, 2.2%; construction, 2.8%; while a combination of other activities accounts for 11.1%.⁴³ This, however, does not detract from the fact that, the Niger Delta Region still hosts some key industries, including three refineries, two petrochemical plants, one liquefied natural gas plant, two liquefied petroleum gas plants soon to come into production, a fertilizer plant, a major steel plant, and three gas fired electric generating stations.⁴⁴

Notwithstanding the few industries found in the region, unemployment is significantly high. According to the report the unemployment rate stood at nearly 5%.⁴⁵ Akachi Odoemene, in his article, *Social Consequences of Environmental Change in the Niger Delta of Nigeria*,

⁴⁰ The informal sector refers to those workers who are self-employed, or who work for those who are self-employed. People who earn a living through self-employment in most cases are not on payrolls, and thus are not taxed. Many informal workers do their businesses in unprotected and unsecured places.

⁴¹ The private sector is the part of a country's economic system that is run by individuals and companies, rather than the government. Most private sector organizations are run with the intention of making profit.

⁴² Niger Delta Regional Master Plan, (Niger Delta Development Commission, 2006), 21.

⁴³ Ibid, 22.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 24.

differs significantly, with the unemployment rate in the region reported to be 30%.⁴⁶ He attributed this to the low skills syndrome leading to un-employability of the inhabitants of the region. Little wonder, armed robbery and kidnapping for ransom is rampant in that region. Omojimate Ben, U., purports that for there to be lasting peace in this region, the government should embark on an intentional, rapid industrialization and job creation project. This should be followed by the provision of social and economic infrastructures.⁴⁷

1.2.4 Gender Structure

In times of conflict, women and children, more than men, often bear the full brunt. This is true for the Niger Delta women, as they were subjected to all kinds of violence – physical and psychological, the destruction of properties, and loss of loved ones (husbands), which puts them in an unfortunate situation of being the bread winners.⁴⁸

The effects of environmental degradation by the oil companies is mostly felt in the agricultural sector where women are key players as farmers and petty traders. According to Florence U Masajuwa and Adekunle Ajiseiyawo, in their article, “Strengthening the Gender Balance: Women and Decision Making in Oil Producing Communities in the Niger Delta,” the women’s main source of income in the Niger Delta comes from fishing, farming and petty-trading.⁴⁹ They sell these products to support their families. Hence, women should be

⁴⁶ Akachi Odoemene., “*Social Consequences of Environmental Change in the Niger Delta of Nigeria*,” *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 4 (2). 123-135, 2011.

⁴⁷ Omojimate Ben, U., “The Economic Dimensions of the Niger Delta Ethnic Conflict,” *African Research Review*, 5 (22). 46-55, 2011.

⁴⁸ Agbegbedia Oghenevwoke Anthony, “Gender Mainstreaming and the Impacts of the Federal Government Amnesty Program in the Niger Delta Region,” *International Journal of Gender and Women’s Studies*, 2 (2). 177-195, 2014.

⁴⁹ Florence Masajuwa, et al, “Strengthening the Gender Balance: Women and Decision Making in Oil Producing Communities in the Niger Delta,”

provided with equal opportunities to productive resources open to their men counterparts, since they constitute the majority of the subsistence farmers, fishermen/women, and petty-traders.⁵⁰

Agbegbedia Anthony, in his article on “Gender Mainstreaming and the Impacts of the Federal Government Amnesty Program in the Niger Delta Region,” defined “gender” and distinguished between “gender equality and the mainstream.” For him,

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles ascribed to women and men, as opposed to biological and physical characteristics. It varies according to socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts, and are affected by other factors, including age, class, and ethnicity. Gender roles are learned and negotiated, or contested.⁵¹

Gender equality relates to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women, men, girls, and boys. While gender mainstreaming is seen as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programs in all areas and at all levels.⁵²

The Niger Delta women have been relegated to the background when it comes to key policy and decision-making processes. Hence, there is an urgent need to empower, educate, and conscientise the women to stand up for their rights, views, and interests. Their voice should be heard and not suppressed. They should stand on the various documents, both regional and international that promote gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

https://edouniversity.edu.ng/oerrepository/articles/strengthening_the_gender_balance_women_and_decision_making_in_oil_producing_communities_in_the_niger_delta.pdf (accessed January 20, 2018).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Agbegbedia Oghenevwoke Anthony, “Gender Mainstreaming and the Impacts of the Federal Government Amnesty Program in the Niger Delta Region,” *International Journal of Gender and Women’s Studies*, 2 (2). 177-195, 2014.

⁵² Ibid.

Attention should be drawn to the National Gender Policy of 2006. This document was compiled and adopted by the National Assembly in 2007, as a guiding document to enable relevant ministries to mainstream gender into their programs and policies. The gender policy addresses the systematic inequalities between women and men in our society, without ignoring the fundamental differences between them.⁵³

On the international front, apart from the *Declaration of Human Rights* article 1, that says “all human beings are born free and equal,” there are others. *The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) is another important one. Article 5 requires state parties to take all appropriate measures to change the social and cultural outlook of the roles of women in the society.⁵⁴

Armed with the above laws and promulgations protecting women from discrimination and unequal treatment, the community should support the Niger Delta women to advocate for their right to be treated equally and with utmost dignity.

1.2.5 Ecological Structure: The Groans of Creation and Ways Humanity has Failed Creation

Paul in the New Testament puts the pain of creation in the largest possible context: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now” (Romans 8:22). Howard Snyder, in *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace: Overcoming the Divorce between Earth and Heaven*, says humanity’s sin against creation is

⁵³ Florence Masajuwa, et al, “Strengthening the Gender Balance: Women and Decision Making in Oil Producing Communities in the Niger Delta,” https://edouniversity.edu.ng/oerrepository/articles/strengthening_the_gender_balance_women_and_decision_making_in_oil_producing_communities_in_the_niger_delta.pdf (accessed January 20, 2018).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

four-dimensional: alienation from God, ourselves, one another and the land.⁵⁵ For us to ensure a holistic healing, full reconciliation with God, ourselves, and one another depends upon reconciliation with the land. In order to propose a cure, we must diagnose correctly. The groaning of creation is evident in climate change, increasing threats to the oceans, deforestation, the alarming rate of species depletion, degradation of the environment by oil extraction companies, and the attendant effect on host communities and many others.

To buttress some of the ways humanity has faltered against creation, I will look at two concrete cases of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta of Nigeria and the perceived injustice meted on the inhabitants of this area.

1.2.5.1 Environmental Degradation in Erovie and Ubeji Communities of the Niger Delta Region

Erovie is a rural community in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. In 1999, Shell Oil Company injected a million liters of toxic waste into an abandoned oil well in Erovie. Consequently, the residents of this community began to experience health problems. Many who consumed crops or drank water from the swamps in the area complained of vomiting, dizziness, stomach ache, and coughing. In less than two months, ninety-three members of the community had died from the mysterious illness. The tests conducted by two independent universities and three other laboratories, conducted in the year after the health problems emerged, depicted the presence of toxic substances in the blood samples of the deceased.

⁵⁵ Howard A. Snyder and Joel Scandrett, *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace: Overcoming the Divorce between Earth and Heaven* (Eugene, Or: Cascade Books, 2011), 85.

The entire test confirmed poisonous concentrations of lead, zinc, and mercury in the dumped substances.⁵⁶ This unjust situation calls for environmental justice.

Similarly, in 2002 the people of the Ubeji community in the Warri area of the Niger Delta state claimed to have been viciously affected by more than a decade of oil exploration in their fragile mangrove habitat. Waste disposal and pollution by the Warri Refining and Petrochemical Company (WRPC) have destroyed fishing and reportedly caused a number of deaths by poisoning among the people inhabiting this area.⁵⁷

It is worrying to note that government and the stakeholders in the oil companies have paid lip service to the problems of environmental degradation, pollution, coastal erosion, as well as the extermination of wild life in these oil-producing communities.

1.2.5.2 Erovie Community of the Niger Delta: A Cry for Eco-justice

“The man dies in all who keeps silent in the face of tyranny.”⁵⁸ – Wole Soyinka.

A human right is an entitlement or legal claim one has – by virtue of being human – against a state. It is a claim by one against another to the extent that by exercising one’s right does not prevent someone else from exercising his or hers. The basic notion of a claim is a call (Lat. *clamare*) for ‘the acceptability of something admittedly contestable.’ Etymologically,

⁵⁶ Sunday Ofehe, “Environmental Pollution in the Niger Delta” <http://www.nigerdeltacampaign.com/index.php/2010/02/environmental-pollution-in-the-niger-delta/> (accessed April 15, 2017).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Wole Soyinka, *The Man Died*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 13.

‘claim’ means calling out – to cry out, or to shout out.⁵⁹ Obviously, these two communities are crying and calling out to the government and the oil corporations to stop the incessant environmental pollution and degradation of their communities. It is worthwhile noting that these people are not only claiming these rights for themselves but for the generations unborn and to enhance efforts to conserve the environment for the future. Hence, they are not making unfounded claims; they are simply asking for respect for their inalienable rights. Their rights are justified and their claims are valid. What more could they be asking for? They are demanding that the oil exploration companies should respect the Environmental Guidelines and Standards for the Petroleum Industry in Nigeria (EGASPIN). They are demanding that the continuous gas flaring and oil spillage, which pollutes the environment and destroys the ecosystem, should stop. They are demanding that their rights to health and a healthy environment, as stated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in article 12(2) on the right to health, should be enforced.” They are equally demanding the implementation of their right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food and water as stated in Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in article 25(1).

1.2.6 Social Structure

The social problems emanating from the activities of the multinational oil exploring companies in the Niger Delta are enormous. These include violence, crime, youth militancy and gangsterism, kidnapping and hostage taking, poverty, despondency, underdevelopment, and the erosion of the society’s social and moral fabric.⁶⁰ The restiveness of youths in the

⁵⁹ Richard Rwiza, *Ethics of Human Rights, The African Contribution* (Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2012), 6.

⁶⁰ Akachi Odoemene., “*Social Consequences of Environmental Change in the Niger Delta of Nigeria,*” *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 4 (2). 123-135, 2011.

Niger Delta and their activities have consequences on businesses and industries in the area. A good number of the business firms in the area have stopped operations because of kidnapping, hostage taking and attacks on oil installations.⁶¹

Despite the negative picture painted of the Niger Delta region, there are so many good things about this region and people that are not brought to the narrative. The region is blessed with a rich and enduring history, culture and hospitality.⁶² The various cultures that make up the Niger Delta region exhibit a colorful interplay and exposure of some of Nigeria's most hidden and virgin culture and tourism export products.⁶³ From dances, fashion, food, flora, fauna, and marine ecology sites.⁶⁴ The creek and coastal nature of the Niger Delta bestow it a uniqueness that expresses itself in the tourism potentials that litter the length and breadth of the region.⁶⁵ Some of these include the famous Oloibiri museum, where crude oil was first discovered in large quantity in 1956, Nana palace in Koko, Delta state, Ibeno sand beach, Mary Slessor house in Uyo, Akwa Ibom state, obudu cattle ranch and tinapa business resort in Cross River state.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Akachi Odoemene., “*Social Consequences of Environmental Change in the Niger Delta of Nigeria*,” *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 4 (2). 123-135, 2011.

⁶² Frank Meke, “Ndoma Egba, refreshing view on the Niger Delta Region.” <http://sunnewsonline.com/ndoma-egba-refreshing-view-on-niger-delta-tourism/> (accessed April 30, 2018).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Emeka Umejei, “Tourism: A Viable Tool for Peace, Economic Revival in The Niger Delta.” <https://emekaumejei.wordpress.com/2009/01/13/tourism-a-viable-tool-for-peace-economic-revival-in-the-niger-delta-2/> (accessed April 30, 2018).

⁶⁶ Emeka Umejei, “Tourism: A Viable Tool for Peace, Economic Revival in The Niger Delta.” <https://emekaumejei.wordpress.com/2009/01/13/tourism-a-viable-tool-for-peace-economic-revival-in-the-niger-delta-2/> (accessed April 30, 2018).

Furthermore, the activities of oil exploration in the region have also affected the culture and tradition of the people. Omoweh Daniel, in *Shell Petroleum Development Company, the state and underdevelopment of Nigeria's Niger Delta: a study in environmental degradation*, argues that the oil workers in the course of their work destroy shrines of the divinities and sacred sites. Thus, they violate the tradition and culture of the people with impunity.⁶⁷ As if this was not enough, their totemic animals are constantly killed both during and after oil production. For most of the communities in the Niger Delta, it is axiomatic that they revere and consider sacred certain animals like the python, alligator, crocodile, antelope and others.⁶⁸ Thus, killing these animals with reckless abandon amounts to disrespect and desecration of the culture and essence of the people.

Another different but interesting dimension to the social problems of the Niger Delta region concerns the role of women. As noted earlier, women and children suffer the most in times of conflict and civil unrest. Akachi Odoemene contends that women are raped and abused by security forces sent by the government or the multinational oil Companies. An instance of note is the incidence of 28 October 1999, when scores of women and girls were raped by a contingent of Nigeria Mobile police and soldiers who invaded Choba town in the city of Port-Harcourt on the orders of Wilbros, an American Oil Servicing Company in the community.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Daniel A Omoweh, *Shell Petroleum Development Company, the State and Underdevelopment of Nigeria's Niger Delta: A Study in Environmental Degradation* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006), 196.

⁶⁸ Omoweh, 192.

⁶⁹ Akachi Odoemene., "Social Consequences of Environmental Change in the Niger Delta of Nigeria," *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 4 (2). 123-135, 2011.

Similarly, Omoweh Daniel looks at how the women and young girls in the region are lured by the oil workers to have sex with them. This worrisome situation has heightened the promiscuity among women in the area. Consequently, it creates a situation in the community where you have fatherless babies, who are left to be taken care of by these women who barely can sustain themselves economically.⁷⁰ Prostitution is common, as girls and young women seeking economic survival trade their bodies for a few Naira, or at most a few dollars. Sadly enough, married women are also involved in this sex trade.⁷¹

1.3 Conclusion

The above exposition on the Niger Delta region and the environmental degradation going on there is not an attempt to paint the federal government in a bad light. Neither is the analysis an exaggerated and unfounded appeal to sympathy. This critical analysis of the Niger Delta sociopolitical context aims to depict how the intentional pillaging and pilfering of the hitherto fertile and productive environment have become a bane to the sociopolitical and economic development of the region. Notwithstanding, the negative image painted of the Niger Delta, the region is blessed with a rich and enduring history, culture and hospitality. The creek and coastal nature of the Niger Delta makes it a potential tourism haven that is yet to be tapped. That said, this chapter responded to the questions of who the Niger Delta people are? And what their current situation is? It threw light on the debilitating condition experienced by the region and the effects oil exploitation and exploration have had and is having on the land and people from this area. Consequently, at the end of this chapter, we

⁷⁰ Omoweh, *Shell Petroleum Development Company, the State and Underdevelopment of Nigeria's Niger Delta*, 197.

⁷¹ Akachi Odoemene., "Social Consequences of Environmental Change in the Niger Delta of Nigeria," *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 4 (2). 123-135, 2011.

have a panoramic view of the environmental degradation and injustices perpetrated by the multinational oil exploration companies.

The next chapter articulates the meaning of Eucharist as fruit of the earth and the meal character of the Eucharist to a people whose soil is polluted and rendered incapable of growing crops because of oil spillage and the activities of oil extracting industries. It also explores the ecological implication of the Eucharistic meal for the protection of the land and agricultural workers in the Niger Delta.

CHAPTER TWO

RECEPTION (JUDGE) – EUCHARIST AS MEAL AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN THE NIGER DELTA

*Laudato Si*⁷² calls Catholic Christians to a heightened global consciousness that focuses now, more than ever before, on the protection of the environment and the human communities who suffer most from its degradation. Undoubtedly, human alteration of the global environment and environmental degradation has far-reaching consequences on the inhabitants of the earth. Yet Eucharist calls us to receive the Earth as gift (reception), and to recognize our role in becoming the gift of Christ's life and mission that we have received. Eucharist is a meal, and thus turns us towards the Earth on which our eating depends. This chapter questions, what are the implications of the Eucharistic meal when the land is severely degraded? And what resources regarding meals and hospitality can the people of this region bring to a fuller reception of God's precious gift in Eucharist?

No doubt, there is a need for us to be in communion and form our very bodies at one Eucharistic table. But of what value would this communion be for a family in the Niger Delta who has lost its entire crop of maize, beans, yam, and cassava to oil spillage on their land? What use will this communion be to a family who depends largely on fishing for sustenance, but can no longer fish from their ancestral rivers polluted by crude oil spilled from the corroded pipes from the oil extracting companies? These are the questions begging for answers as the people of the Niger Delta struggle to make meaning of the place of the

⁷² *Laudato Si* is the second encyclical of Pope Francis. The encyclical has the subtitle, "On Care for our Common Home." In it, the Pope laments environmental degradation and global warming and calls all people of the world to take swift and unified global action. The encyclical, dated 24 May 2015, was officially published on 18 June 2015.

Eucharistic meal in the face of the ecological injustices perpetrated against their communities by the multinational oil companies.

To respond to these questions, I will first explore the meal character of the Eucharist and how the gifts we offer are for the Niger Delta Eucharistic community the “fruit of the earth and works of human hands.” Second, I will look at the Eucharist and meal sharing in the Niger Delta. Third, I will analyze the concept of hospitality in the Niger Delta and the Eucharistic meal. Fourth, I will look at the ecological implications of the Eucharistic meal. Fifth, I will analyze the Implications of Eucharist as a meal for the protection of the land and agricultural workers in the Niger Delta. Finally, I will look at the land as locus for the Eucharistic encounter in the Niger Delta, with some concluding remarks.

2.1 Fruit of the Earth and Works of Human hands: The meal character of Eucharist

The first Eucharist was a meal. This meal consists of bread broken and shared for all to eat, and wine shared for all to drink and be nourished. Food is a necessity of life; we can barely survive without it. Monica Hellwig writes in *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, “To be human is to be hungry.”⁷³ When we are hungry, we naturally crave food to satisfy our hunger. Have we ever reflected on how the food we consume reaches our table? Iliia Delio in *Care for Creation* says, “All life depends on energy, and most life on earth depends on the sun as the ultimate source of energy.”⁷⁴ She goes on to add that plants capture solar energy reaching earth’s surface and convert it to sugars, which in turn become the basic

⁷³ Monica Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, 2nd ed., rev. and expanded (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1992), 3.

⁷⁴ Iliia Delio, Keith Warner, and Pamela Wood, *Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007), 22.

building blocks for life.⁷⁵ Hence, we depend on the interconnectedness of creation to provide our food. In the same vein, Wendell Berry in *The Pleasure of Eating* notes that eating is perhaps the most profound enactment of our connection with the world. It is an agricultural, economic, political, and religious act, for in eating we connect to the earth and its seasons, to the farmers and the pickers, to the canners and the truckers, as well as to the hungry and sated.⁷⁶ Sallie McFague in *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* says that this experience should awaken in us our own shared humanity, and evoke a sense of trust, gratitude, and compassion toward our God, our neighbor, and all of creation.⁷⁷

Kevin Irwin drew wisdom from Philippe Rouillard's concept of the symbolism of bread and wine as used by Jesus in the context of sharing meals with those he encountered. He argues that the production of the wheat and the vine that forms the raw material for the production of bread and wine rely on the agrarian cycle of planting seeds, which then die in the earth and rise to become mature stalks of wheat and bunches of grapes.⁷⁸ He related the analogy of the seeds dying and rising to symbolize the dying and rising of Jesus. Similarly, Enrique Dussel in *Can We Always Celebrate the Eucharist?* says, "To eat the bread is to break it up, chew it, and deny it. The death of the bread is life to life. Bread was a sort of death to man in his work. Hence, the bread of life that feeds and dies as it gives life."⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Delio, Warner, and Wood, 22.

⁷⁶ Wendell Berry, "The Pleasure of Eating," in Daniel Halpern, ed., *Not for Bread Alone* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco, 1993), 17.

⁷⁷ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 57-59, 106-107.

⁷⁸ Kevin W. Irwin and Edmund D. Pellegrino, eds., *Preserving the Creation: Environmental Theology and Ethics* (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 85.

⁷⁹ Mary Collins and Marcus Lefébure, *Can We Always Celebrate the Eucharist?* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 58.

Patrick McCormick in *A Banqueter's Guide to the All-Night Soup Kitchen of the Kingdom of God* reminds us of our dependence on others – all the people who labor to make food and drink available on our tables.⁸⁰ He argues that we should not only be grateful to them but we should show concern about what is being done to the plants and animals and persons who prepare and make these foods and drink readily available on our tables. Do we care to know what poisons or toxins were sprayed on fields or workers, injected into animals or plants?⁸¹ How were the chickens, pigs, or cattle, which ended up as our evening meals raised, fed, or killed? Under what condition do those who plant and harvest, butcher and package, or prepare and serve our meals work? What are they paid? What risks do they run? What injuries do they suffer? In addition, what compensations are they offered?⁸² Awareness of all of these should help us develop a greater appreciation for the fruits of creation and justice for the hands that labor to produce our food. Arthur Simon in *Bread for the World*, highlighted the dangers of DDT and related pesticides. They do not readily decompose, so their components find their way into the food chain and ultimately into human bodies in increasing quantities.⁸³

Just recently, Gaia Pianigani published an article, “*Grapes, Death and Injustice in Italy Fields*,” in *The New York Times* of Wednesday, April 12, 2017.⁸⁴ She decries a system of

⁸⁰ Patrick T. McCormick, *A Banqueter's Guide to the All-Night Soup Kitchen of the Kingdom of God* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2004), 9.

⁸¹ McCormick, 9.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Arthur R. Simon, *Bread for the World*, Rev. ed (New York: Grand Rapids: Paulist Press; W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1984), 56.

⁸⁴ Gaia Pianigiani, “Grapes, Death and Injustice in Italy Fields,” *The New York Times* (California, April 12, 2017), VOL. CLXVI... No. 57,565 edition, A1.

exploitation of farm workers comparable to slavery that cripples workers' rights. An agricultural worker named Paola Clemente died of a heart attack in a vineyard in San Giorgio Ionico, Italy. Her death raises the search light over what the authorities, labor experts, and union organizers described as an elaborate system of modern-day slavery – involving more than 40,000 Italian women, as well as migrant and seasonal laborers – that remains at the core of Italy's agricultural economy.⁸⁵ The husband of the deceased farm worker painfully describes her in these words:

She wakes up in the middle of the night – 1.50 am – to catch the private bus that will take her and dozens of other women to the vineyards. There she would pick and sort table grapes up to 12 hours, taking home as little as 27 euros a day, about \$29, after middlemen skimmed her pay.⁸⁶

Little wonder, Enrique Dussel drawing from Ecclesiasticus 34:18, “Bread is life to the destitute and it is murder to deprive them of it. To rob your neighbor of his livelihood is to kill him, and the man who cheats the worker of his wages sheds blood.”⁸⁷ This bread or wine contains the objectivized life of the worker, her blood, intelligence, efforts, love, enjoyment, happiness and indeed, the kingdom. In addition, what was being done was taking this bread unjustly from him and offering it to God. For this bread to become the very “body” of the ‘lamb that was slain,’ it has to be the bread of life, bread that has satisfied, fed, denied the denials of death, need, domination, and sin: the bread of justice.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Gaia Pianigiani, A7.

⁸⁶ Pianigiani, A7.

⁸⁷ Mary Collins and Marcus Lefébure, *Can We Always Celebrate the Eucharist?* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 60.

⁸⁸ Collins and Lefébure, 61.

2.2 Eucharist and meal sharing in the Niger Delta

Traditionally, in most parts of Africa and in the Niger Delta, it is customary to sit around a table or a mat while sharing a meal from a calabash or pot. It would be considered improper for one to eat alone. The meal character of the Eucharist is such that it is a communal event of breaking and sharing of a meal. Matthew Kustenbauder gave a fitting description of what happens around a meal in a traditional African family home.

In Africa it is rare for people to eat alone—meals are communal activities. Hands are washed before the meal begins, usually by a child who pours water over the cupped hands of the adults in the group. Everyone sits around a common dish of cassava, maize, or plantain. Each person takes a portion, shapes it into a ball, and then dips it into a single dish of relish, soup, or greens. If there is meat, the best portions are first offered to visitors or elders in the group. Drink, also, is often served from a common bowl or cup, which is passed from one to another. The meal concludes with another hand washing. Eating a meal together is the most basic way of sharing common life; it restores what has been lost and gives strength for what lies ahead.⁸⁹

Philippe Rouillard in his article “From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist” was able to make the distinction between a meal and simply eating and drinking. For him, the meal consists in eating together and following a certain order.⁹⁰ It depicts the human need for communion and sharing. Furthermore, Izunna Okonkwo in *Eucharist and the African Communalism*, points out clearly that a meal in the traditional African context is a symbol of friendship, love, and unity. Hence, when food and drink are shared, life is shared as well. It is in the light of this that an African mother, while cooking, will prepare extra food for the sake of an unexpected visitor.⁹¹ Rouillard, adds his voice saying that those who share the

⁸⁹ Matthew Kustenbauder, “Rediscovering The Eucharist as Communal Meal: African Contributions to the World Christian Church,” *The Other Journal*, August 8, 2005, 1, <https://theotherjournal.com/2005/08/08/rediscovering-the-eucharist-as-communal-meal-african-contributions-to-the-world-christian-church/>. (accessed November 17, 2017).

⁹⁰ Philippe Rouillard, “From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist,” *Worship* 52, no. 5 (September 1978): 431.

⁹¹ Izunna Okonkwo, “Eucharist and the African Communalism,” *AFER* 52, no. 2–3 (June 2010): 112.

same meal constitute the same body, and the fact of inviting someone to eat with one is perceived as an efficacious sign of integration and communion.⁹²

Unfortunately, the culture of sharing a meal is gradually disappearing as many young people are becoming accustomed to individualized eating. As a result, the traditional social context of the meal at which families gather around the table to talk over the events of the day, and to be family together, is increasingly waning.⁹³

In the Niger Delta, meal sharing is not limited to human beings in communion with one another, but also in communion with the divine. Hence, such sharing involves not only the living but also the dead. This explains why libations (with wine) are poured on the ground for the dead (the ancestors) and some fraction of some food particles are set apart for them, with the belief that the ancestors will consume their own share of the meal.⁹⁴ Similarly, in other parts of Nigeria, the communion meal involves the process whereby after the sacrifice of a chicken or a goat the blood and the fatty parts, which the fetish is considered to relish, are offered to him, while the flesh of the animals is eaten by the people.⁹⁵ Angel Montoya in *Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist*, concurs concerning the communion with the divine in saying that food is meant to be a gift given not only by other people, but also by the earth or nature, and often by spiritual beings, gods and goddesses.⁹⁶

⁹² Rouillard, "From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist," 432.

⁹³ Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2007), 259.

⁹⁴ Izunna Okonkwo, *The Eucharist and World Hunger: Socio-Theological Exploration*, 2011, 434.

⁹⁵ Rouillard, "From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist," 434.

⁹⁶ Angel F. Méndez Montoya, *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 143.

No doubt, the Eucharist embodies these features. Izunna Okonkwo argues that the Eucharist is a celebration that incorporates the living and the dead, as well as a mystery that renders present in a unique way, Christ, the Bread of Life.⁹⁷ Rouillard has a unique way of explaining the relationship of the human being and the divine with regards to entering into communion through meal sharing. Interestingly, he says, the human person lets him/herself be eaten by the god and in turn eats the god, in order to receive strength and immortality by means of sharing a symbolic meal.⁹⁸ Likewise, Norman Wirzba in *Food and Faith, a Theology of Eating*, says just as we eat Jesus in the Eucharistic elements (bread and wine), we should allow Jesus to eat us as well.⁹⁹ In explaining this, he alluded to Bernard of Clairvaux, who writes:

. . . for he feeds upon us and is fed by us that we may be more closely bound to Him. Otherwise, we are not perfectly united to Him. For if I eat and am not eaten, then He is in me, but I am not yet in Him... But he eats me that He may have me in Himself, and He, in turn, is eaten by me that He may be in me.¹⁰⁰

Allowing ourselves to be eaten by Jesus signifies the process of purification and mortification that takes place in our lives so that we can more fully be conformed to Christ's life.¹⁰¹ For as the Johannine author writes: unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it produces many others and yields a rich

⁹⁷ Okonkwo, *The Eucharist and World Hunger*, 434.

⁹⁸ Rouillard, "From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist," 432.

⁹⁹ Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 160.

¹⁰⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux, in Wirzba, 161.

¹⁰¹ Wirzba, 161.

harvest.¹⁰² Just as others (creation) need to die to nourish us, so we too need to die to so many things that hinder us from being available to become food and nourishment for others.

2.3 Hospitality in the Niger Delta and the Eucharistic Meal

The family always makes room for an unexpected guest when preparing meals. This echoes the significance attached to hospitality in most African cultures, and particularly in the Niger Delta. Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz in *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, argues that “food and drink are essential elements of African hospitality. Sharing food and drink has a deep meaning for the African people both on the physical (nourishment) and symbolic level (bonding).”¹⁰³ This hospitality stems from the community-oriented understanding of the people of the Niger Delta. A visitor is normally welcomed with Kola nuts, groundnut paste, water, and wine (palm wine) as an entrée before the main meal is served. Hospitality to strangers is encouraged, as one may inadvertently welcome an ancestor (respected dead family members who are now spirits) disguised in the form of a guest,¹⁰⁴ just as Abraham in showing hospitality welcomed angels in the Hebrew scriptures.¹⁰⁵

The meal and cuisine of a particular culture define who they are as a people. The invitation to a meal, therefore, is an invitation to enter into the world and experiences of the other.

¹⁰² John 12:24.

¹⁰³ Joseph G. Healey and Donald Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1996), 183.

¹⁰⁴ Okonkwo, *The Eucharist and World Hunger*, 421.

¹⁰⁵ Gen 18:1-15.

Mary McGann, in her article, “The Meal that Reconnects: Eucharistic Eating and the Global Food Crisis,” enunciates thus,

To eat together is to make room within oneself for the life of others – the living creature whose life has been offered on our behalf, the nurturing presence of those who prepared the meal, the cultural histories that shape the taste and texture of this meal, the affective presence of those who share table fellowship, and the stories, tears and laughter that grace and accompany such a sharing of food.¹⁰⁶

Invariably, by inviting the other to a meal is to say, according to Ghislain LaFont, that the stranger is now one of us. In other words, we are giving from our own subsistence, from our own foods, from our own life, in order that the stranger might live from it. Hence, to invite a stranger to a meal is to give life.¹⁰⁷

Jesus gave life too, by inviting strangers to meals. The New Testament Scripture is replete with such accounts. Gordon Smith gave a succinct analysis of Jesus’ ministry around meals. Eating and conversations during meals were important for Jesus. He ate with his followers, with his friends, and with outcasts. These meals were for Jesus acts of compassion, acceptance, forgiveness, mercy and reconciliation. Jesus intentionally ate with those at the margins of the society: outcasts, tax collectors, personalities like Zacchaeus and Mary Magdalene, whom society rejected. These he welcomes and shares a meal, an act which was scandalous to the religious authorities of the day.¹⁰⁸ Jesus understood the importance of meal fellowship, such that he ate the last supper meal with his disciples as a memorial meal before his passion, death, and resurrection.

¹⁰⁶ Mary McGann, “The Meal that Reconnects: Eucharistic Eating and the Global Food Crisis,” unpublished paper, NAAL, (Jan 2015): 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ghislain Lafont, *Eucharist: The Meal and the Word* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 31.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, *A Holy Meal*, 14.

2.4 Ecological Implication of the Eucharistic meal

The celebration of the Eucharist is an invitation to thanksgiving for the gifts of creation represented in the elements of bread and wine. According to Dennis Edwards, the bread represents everyday nourishment and sustenance, while wine represents the God-given abundance of life.¹⁰⁹ Etymologically, the word Eucharist emanates from the Greek word *eukaristein*, which means “thanksgiving.” The meal character of the Eucharist suggests a communal gathering where we share the holy meal (bread and wine) that are gifts of creation, the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands. Hence, Edwards in his article, “Eucharist and Ecology: Keeping Memorial of Creation,” says that participating at a common table set with bread and wine calls us to thanksgiving and conversion.¹¹⁰

The meal we are called to share when we gather as a community is not simply bread and wine placed on the table, but the whole of creation. Alexander Schmemmann, in *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, writes: “That is why it is not simply bread that lies in the *diskos*. On it, all of God’s creation is presented, manifested in Christ as the new creation, the fulfilment of the glory of God. And it is not ‘simply’ people who are gathered in this assembly, but the new humanity, recreated in the ‘ineffable glory’ of its Creator.”¹¹¹ Similarly, Daniel Sheerin in *The Eucharist: Message of the Fathers of the Church*, alluded to St. Augustine of Hippo, who on addressing the newly baptized, invited them to see

¹⁰⁹ Denis Edwards, “Eucharist and Ecology: Keeping Memorial of Creation,” *Worship* 82, no. 3 (May 2008): 197.

¹¹⁰ Edwards, 199.

¹¹¹ Alexander Shmemann, *The Eucharist--Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 118.

themselves laid out on the table in the bread baked, and in the wine fermented to which all had access, and when it came to receiving the sacrament he offered them that “which you already are.”¹¹² Thus, we are a part of the web of life in the ecosystem which is offered to God as a gift during the Eucharist.

When the community gathers to share a meal, the whole of creation is present in an act of self-offering for the life of the world. This meal sharing is an occasion to reflect on the quality of the fruit of the earth that we present, where the food comes from, how it was grown, by whom and at what cost to the climate, farmers, species, and soil.¹¹³ As the fruit of the earth, Michel de Verteuil, in *Eucharist as Word*, would remind us that without the earth there can be no Eucharist for us to celebrate. And this earth has a history:

It is the climax of a long evolutionary process lasting millions of years, it has had to survive many natural disasters and be tilled by generations of farmers so that it could produce the wheat that would become the bread which is now on the altar.¹¹⁴

Consequently, there is a whole web of life and a link with the long-interconnected food chain in the ecosystem, from the many tiny creatures who make our soil capable of producing food, to those who plant and harvest the wheat, those who turn it into flour, those who transport it to where it is baked – all are necessary for us to celebrate the Eucharist. According to Pope Benedict XVI, there is a synergy of forces at work to bring bread to the table: from the living

¹¹² Daniel J. Sheerin, *The Eucharist*, Message of the Fathers of the Church, v. 7 (Wilmington, Del: M. Glazier, 1986), 118.

¹¹³ Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 265.

¹¹⁴ Michel De Verteuil, *Eucharist as Word: Lectio Divina and the Eucharist* (Dublin, Ireland: Veritas, 2001), 19.

soil to the gift of sunshine and rain; from the one who plants to the one who harvests the wheat; from the mill to the oven.¹¹⁵

This synergy that the Pope advocates should be the ideal, but the reality is different. Hence, with the advent of the industrial food economy, Northcott argues that the cultures of food and farming, and the ecosystem of the earth itself, are sacrificed on the altar of the global economy.¹¹⁶ This, according to Edwards, invariably leads to an unbearable cost to poor farmers who till the soil and to the whole web of life that constitutes the ecosystem. As the practice of ruthless land clearing, irrigation and fishing practices, the lack of commitment to biodiversity and the neglect of the rights of animals can cause terrible suffering.¹¹⁷

The meal character of the Eucharist suggests a communal gathering where the gifts presented by the community are blessed, broken and shared. Regrettably, this practice is gradually being undermined by a culture of individuated meals, that divorces the act of sharing. The food industry not only creates a certain remoteness of people from food production and agricultural practices but has succeeded in destroying the traditional family culture of sharing an intentional cooked meal around a common table. They have actualized this through flooding the market and shops with pre-prepared and pre-packaged foods.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, "The Consecrated Host Truly is the Bread of Heaven," sermon on the Feast of Corpus Christi at the Basilica of St. John Lutheran on 15 June 2006, Vatican Information Service.

¹¹⁶ Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 260.

¹¹⁷ Edwards, "Eucharist and Ecology," 199.

¹¹⁸ Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 259.

According to Mary McGann, the art of cooking has been replaced by micro wave “warm-ups,” and food is marketed to meet these expectations.¹¹⁹ This unhealthy eating lifestyle, no doubt, has far-reaching health implications. In the same vein, should this individualized eating habit and micro wave/fast food culture be extended to the Eucharistic meal, there will be no need for the congregation to gather, as the Eucharist will be delivered to everyone in their homes. This will, however, defeat the whole purpose of the Eucharist, for there is no Eucharist without a gathered worshipping community of believers who together body-forth Christ.

2.5 Implications of Eucharist as Meal for the Protection of the Land and Agricultural Workers in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta community has suffered despoliation of their land and water ways due to the activities of the oil companies. Their soil has been contaminated and yield unwholesome crops – the fruit of their land. The ancient meaning of the anaphora signifies “lifting up.” Thus, in the Eucharist, the gifts of creation are lifted up and the Spirit is invoked to transform the gifts of creation and the assembled community into the body of Christ.¹²⁰ And so, when the community gathers to celebrate the Eucharist and present/lift up their gifts, not only bread and wine but other produce, we might ask, what is the quality and wholeness of the fruit of the earth that they bring to the Eucharistic table as gifts?

¹¹⁹ Mary McGann, “The Meal that Reconnects: Eucharistic Eating and the Global Food Crisis,” unpublished paper, NAAL, (Jan 2015): 5.

¹²⁰ Edwards, “Eucharist and Ecology,” 208.

John Zizioulas, in articulating his term of a “eucharistic ethos” that has an “ecological significance,” argues that human beings are “priests of creation” and they have a responsibility of bringing the rest of creation into communion with God. This is done by lifting the whole of creation to God as a gift within the liturgy.¹²¹

In the light of this lifting up, when the Niger Delta community comes to the Eucharistic table the gifts they are lifting up bear the effects of oil spills, waste dumping, and pollution which have decimated fish stocks and seriously damaged their agricultural land upon which they depend for sustenance. They lift up gifts of creation threatened by climate change, increasing threats to the oceans, deforestation, the alarming rate of species depletion, and the degradation of the environment by oil extraction companies and the attendant effect on their communities. All these which symbolize their own broken bodies are to be transformed through the invocation of the Spirit (epiclesis) into the broken body of Christ. Ronald Rolheiser, in *Our One Great Act of Fidelity*, further accentuates the idea of the brokenness of the body of Christ in communion with the broken bodies of the poor when he says:

. . . Bread is made up of broken kernels of wheat that had to be crushed in their individuality and be baked in a fire to become that bread. Wine is the product of crushed grapes and represents the blood of Jesus Christ and the blood and suffering of all that is crushed in our world and in our lives.¹²²

In turn, the Eucharist invites communities to justice and to stand up against the injustices perpetrated against their land and their people. Hence according to Rolheiser, the Eucharist

¹²¹ Brian Treanor, Ellis Benson, and Norman Wirzba, eds., *Being-in-Creation: Human Responsibility in an Endangered World*, Groundworks: Ecological Issues in Philosophy and Theology (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 104.

¹²² Ronald Rolheiser, *Our One Great Act of Fidelity: Waiting for Christ in the Eucharist*, 1st ed (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2011), 29.

offers up the tears and blood of the poor and invites us to help alleviate the conditions that produce tears and blood.¹²³

In the same vein, when the Niger Delta community lift up their gifts to God and they say in the Eucharistic prayer “through the goodness of God that we have received these gifts we offer,” what do they mean? How can we reconcile the fact that the gifts of cassava, yam or cocoyam that the Niger Delta community offers in the Eucharist from their land that has been rendered infertile by the harmful drilling waste dumped by oil companies were from the goodness of God? Did the goodness of God intend the rape of the soil, the poisoning of ground water, and the incessant dumping of harmful waste effluents on the land?¹²⁴ No doubt, the activities of the multinational oil companies have devastating effects on the environment and land of the Niger Delta. There is an urgent need for prophetic action to bring about ecojustice and reconciliation with God, with others, and with creation.¹²⁵

2.5.1 The Land as Locus for the Eucharistic Encounter in the Niger Delta

David Power in “The Eucharistic table: In Communion with the Hungry,” says that “when the earth is destroyed or exploited, people’s entire life and their vision of the cosmos and of their place in it is destroyed.”¹²⁶ This is true for the people of the Niger Delta. Their ancestral land has been taken from them and turned into oil-fields. Those who have access to land can no longer farm on it because of the dangerous chemicals constantly disposed on the land,

¹²³ Rolheiser, 75.

¹²⁴ Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 256.

¹²⁵ Patxi Alvarez, SJ, “Healing a Broken World,” *Promotio Iustitiae*, no. 106 (February 2011): 31.

¹²⁶ David Noel Power, “The Eucharistic Table: In Communion with the Hungry,” *Worship* 83, no. 5 (September 2009): 395.

thus rendering it infertile for cultivation. Pope Francis, in his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*, decried this incessant degradation of the land by multinationals in developing countries.

Francis writes:

After ceasing their activities and withdrawing, multinationals leave behind great human and environmental liabilities such as unemployment, abandoned towns, the depletion of natural reserves, deforestation, the impoverishment of agriculture and local stock breeding, open pits, riven hills, polluted rivers and a handful of social works which are no longer sustainable.¹²⁷

Francis' idea of nature as a '*loci*' of God's presence,¹²⁸ resonates with David Power's image of the sacrament of God's presence in the land and his focus on the local community and the land that forms and nourishes them. Thus, when the people of the Niger Delta gather to celebrate the Eucharist on the day of the Lord, they gather on their ancestral land, irrespective of the plundering and pollution, to lift up their gifts to God in thanksgiving. Power argues that for this people,

It is on this land, on this parcel of earth, that Christ takes abode, that it is with his people, here in this place of theirs, that he shares food, drink, family life, toil and the awe of created things. . . Christ is present in this particular people, in this place, in this part of the earth where the assembled people dwell and live and move and have their being.¹²⁹

Consequently, the land is the place where the people gather and encounter the broken body of Christ in the Eucharist. It is for these reasons that the land and the agricultural workers

¹²⁷ "Papa-Francesco_20150524_enciclica-Laudato-Si_en.Pdf," 21, accessed November 22, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf.

¹²⁸ "Papa-Francesco_20150524_enciclica-Laudato-Si_en. Pdf," 88.

¹²⁹ Power, "The Eucharistic Table," 394.

need to be protected. Pope Francis is particularly concerned about small-scale farmers who eke out a living from the produce of their land. He writes:

For example, there is a great variety of small-scale food production systems which feed the greater part of the world's peoples, using a modest amount of land and producing less waste, be it in small agricultural parcels, in orchards and gardens, hunting and wild harvesting or local fishing. Economies of scale, especially in the agricultural sector, end up forcing small holders to sell their land or to abandon their traditional crops.¹³⁰

As a result of these economies of scale, Northcott reiterates the Pope's position in saying that millions of small farmers have been forced to migrate to other areas when they can no longer compete with the demands of the industrial food economy.¹³¹ In the case of the Niger Delta, the pollution on their land is such that cultivating it is an exercise in futility, as their land has been rendered infertile and incapable of producing healthy farm produce. Hence, they either migrate to already congested cities in search of non-existent white-collar jobs, or to forests and hillsides where their desperation drives them to displace ancient forest with their crops or to farm marginal slopes.¹³² Power strongly believes that for us to be truly faithful gatherers at the Eucharistic table of the Lord, we cannot but turn our attention to these numerous communities of people who have been deprived of life's sustenance by reason of environmentally destructive human activity.¹³³

¹³⁰ "Papa-Francesco_20150524_enciclica-Laudato-Si_en. Pdf," 129.

¹³¹ Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 259.

¹³² Northcott, 259.

¹³³ Power, "The Eucharistic Table," 392.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that implicit in the reception of Christ's life and mission in Eucharist is an ethical imperative that calls Eucharistic communities in the Niger Delta to address the degradation of their soil and water through a collective response of prophetic action, resistance and powerful protest. The Nobel Prize Laureate, Wole Soyinka in *The Man Died*, says, "The man dies in all who keeps silent in the face of tyranny."¹³⁴ God has entrusted creation into the care of the human person, thus making him/her stewards of creation. It behooves the human person to protect and conserve creation.

Similarly, the Nigerian government over the years has not lived up to expectations in her duty of protecting the interest of the people of the Niger Delta on whose land the country benefits from its oil deposit. Undoubtedly, oil remains the mainstay of Nigeria's economy today. According to a June 30, 2009, report by Amnesty International, "Oil has generated an estimated 600 billion dollars since 1960, with Nigeria exporting 948 million barrels of crude oil per day to the United States. Nigeria was the third largest supplier of U.S. crude oil in 2009, right behind Canada and Mexico, and ahead of Saudi Arabia."¹³⁵

Sadly enough, the inhabitants of the Niger Delta suffer the horrendous effects of environmental degradation and pollution on their land. The effects of oil spills, waste dumping, and pollution have decimated fish stocks and seriously damaged agricultural land that the indigenes depend on for sustenance. When they gather around the table, what quality

¹³⁴ Wole Soyinka, *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 13.

¹³⁵ Sven Eberlein, "Goodnight and Good luck Jonathan: The Niger Delta cries out for Eco Justice," <http://svenworld.com/2010/02/15/goodnight-and-goodluck-jonathan-the-niger-delta-cries-out-for-ecojustice/> (accessed April 15, 2017).

of fruits of the earth and works of their hands, could they lift to God? They can no longer cultivate and reap the fruits of the earth and their bodies are sickened by the environmental pollution.

Consequently, the government and multinational oil companies have the duty to respect and protect the inalienable rights of the people of the Niger Delta. For when they fail to do this, they are stealing the fruits and bread of the poor and God cannot accept such bread of injustice.¹³⁶

The next chapter considers the “reception” aspect of Chauvet’s tripartite cycle. It will emphasize the faith dimension of our relationship with creation and theological reflection (judge). This will employ scriptural reflections on God’s cosmic covenant with creation, the Church’s Social Teachings on promoting human rights and ecological justice, among others, to comprehend the ecological crisis and injustice perpetrated on the land and people of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

¹³⁶ Collins and Lefébure, *Can We Always Celebrate the Eucharist?* 63.

CHAPTER THREE

RECEPTION (JUDGE) –THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON CREATION AND ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE IN THE NIGER DELTA

In the previous chapter, we focused on the Eucharist as meal and the implications of its reception as God's gift for communities in the Niger Delta. It then moves to theological reflection (judge) on Eucharist as meal creation and eco-justice in the Niger Delta. This reflection is viewed from three lenses: Biblical perspective of creation and justice, Ecclesial teachings on ecological justice, and Ignatian Spirituality and ecological justice.

3.1 God's Cosmic Covenant with Creation

3.1.1 Biblical Background

The story of Noah is found in the first book of the Old Testament (Genesis 6:9 –9:17). Noah was the son of Lamech and the tenth generation in descent from Adam. He was a just and God-fearing man but lived in a period when 'the earth was corrupt...filled with violence.' (Gen 6:11). God told Noah that he had decided to destroy all living creatures with a great flood. Noah was ordered to build a wooden ark with three decks, according to certain precise measurements. It was stocked with every kind of food.

Before the flood began, Noah went into the ark with his wife, his three sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth) and their wives, and a male and female of each living creature. The flood lasted for forty days and forty nights at the end of which Noah came out, together with his wife and

his sons and his son's wives, and all the living creatures. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and offered sacrifice on the altar.¹³⁷

God made a covenantal promise not just to Noah but also to all creatures that survived the flood, that God would never again destroy creation with a flood. According to the Priestly tradition, God in this covenant is bound by God's own commitment, regardless of the actions of the covenant recipient. This is different from the Mosaic covenant (Deuteronomic covenant) where a party is bound to the covenant maker who imposes conditions and sanctions (blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience).¹³⁸ Consequently, God's covenant with Noah can be seen as an ecological covenant, in that it includes not only human beings but all creation, plants, animals and so on – “every living being of all flesh that is upon the earth” (Gen 9:16).

The covenant has significant ecological implications because God has established it with “all flesh,” with birds and animals and the earth itself, even though the destructive activities of humanity to other created beings does not show that they share a common covenant relationship. What does it mean for our ecological consideration that God has made promises to non-humans?¹³⁹ God cares for their lives and seeks to enhance them in various ways. Human beings should follow the divine lead. God envisions a future in which all the

¹³⁷ Gen. 8:20.

¹³⁸ Philip N. Joranson and Ken Butigan, *Cry of the Environment: Rebuilding the Christian Creation Tradition* (New Mexico: Bear & Company, 1984),52.

¹³⁹ Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume II* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 401.

recipients of His covenant are no longer estranged and can experience God's salvation together (Hosea 2:18).¹⁴⁰

3.1.2 Thematic Emphasis on the Ecological dimension of Noah's Ark

The Igbos of the eastern part of Nigeria have a saying: "Otu aka ruta mmanu ozuo oha onu," which literally means, "If one finger touches palm oil, it goes around to the rest of the fingers." Thus, an individual's offense affects the entire community. In recent decades, human behavior has had a deeply adverse impact on created order. Is it a wonder why God would show as much interest in saving animals and plants as he did in saving Noah? The lives of animals, plants and humans are so interconnected that our future on this planet is linked to one another's wellbeing. Although human sin has had significant negative consequences for the earth, if humans assume appropriate responsibility, we may anticipate significant potential for good.¹⁴¹

Worthy of note is the fact that the catastrophe of the flood was not simply a natural disaster. A proverb has it that "the toad does not run in the day time for nothing and the big drum does not sound without a cause." Hence, the narrator in Gen 6:13, says, "All flesh had corrupted its style of life and through them the earth is filled with violence." The language suggests that violence is a disease that contaminates all those beings, human and non-human, that live on the earth. Violence affects human beings; it permeates the non-human realm of animals, birds and fish; it pollutes the earthly environment.¹⁴² In other words, though the rest

¹⁴⁰ Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume II*, 401.

¹⁴¹ Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume II*, 397.

¹⁴² Philip N. Joranson and Ken Butigan, *Cry of the Environment: Rebuilding the Christian Creation Tradition* (New Mexico: Bear & Company, 1984),52.

of creation had not participated in human sin (violence), it had been contaminated by contact with human beings and would be destroyed along with them (Gen 6:7). Sin is like yeast, which affects a whole loaf of bread.¹⁴³ Human beauty and human community had once been the crown of creation (Gen1:31), but human corruption drew all creation down in ruin.¹⁴⁴

3.2 The Relationship Between Eucharist and Justice: Scriptural Perspectives

Worship, most especially the celebration of the Eucharist, is never simply an exclusive event, involving God and the individual worshipper – vertical dimension of faith.¹⁴⁵ Rather it always includes others and places strong demands on human relationships modelled after Jesus who is broken and shared for us in the Eucharist – horizontal dimension.¹⁴⁶ In other words, we are called to do likewise – become his body broken and shared for others. According to Stephen Barton, worship and justice connect to each other intrinsically.¹⁴⁷ To depict this link, he alludes to God’s universal call to holiness to the people of Israel in the Old Testament, which placed on them the imperative of worship and obedience. Concerning worship, the Lord said to Moses,

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is

¹⁴³ Adeyemo Tokunboh, *African Bible Commentary* (Nairobi: World alive Publishers, 2006), 21.

¹⁴⁴ Tokunboh, *African Bible Commentary*, 21.

¹⁴⁵ This is associated with one’s direct and personal relationship with God and involves participating in the sacraments, Eucharistic adoration, and devotions such as the Rosary or the Stations of the Cross, honoring the saints, and cultivating private prayer.

¹⁴⁶ The horizontal dimension commonly refers to how one demonstrates faith in Christ by serving and loving others and includes a special concern for the poor and suffering.

¹⁴⁷ Stephen C. Barton, “Mercy and Not Sacrifice, Biblical Perspectives on Liturgy and Ethics,” <http://sce.sagepub.com/content/15/1/25.citation/> (accessed March 16, 2016), 25.

mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. 19:4-6 RSV).

This scriptural narrative recount how God saved and liberated the Israelites from the Egyptians. It also contains a promise of making them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The Israelites will realize the promise if they obey God's commandments that he gives in Exodus 20: 2-17, which is an exhortation to morally upright living that celebrates God's holiness in lives devoted to doing God's will in one's relation with others.

No doubt, God's call for justice on the part of His people is replete in the denunciations of the Old Testament prophets. Hence, the prophet Amos, often called the prophet of social justice, would accuse the people of Israel of neglect and injustice: they are likened to those "who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way" (Amos 2:7).¹⁴⁸ Amos believed that it is justice and righteousness, not cultic ritual alone, that brings forth the divine salvific waters. He says:

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps; but let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24 NRS).¹⁴⁹

The prophet Micah would succinctly outline what God wants of His people when he says, "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8 NRS).

¹⁴⁸ Daniel J. Harrington and James F. Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, Md: Sheed & Ward, 2002), 129.

¹⁴⁹ David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1992), 481.

The post-exilic prophet Isaiah urges the people of Jerusalem thus: “To loosen the bonds of injustice...to let the oppressed go free...to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house” (Is 58:6-7 NRS). So, for God, it is not so much cultic sacrifice and worship that matter, but the just treatment of a neighbor; hence, the prophet Hosea would say: “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hos 6:6 NRS). As Kathleen Hughes argues, such denunciation of religious formalism devoid of interior morality is a reminder that worship is an expression of social responsibility and not its substitute.¹⁵⁰

Accordingly, this intrinsic relationship between worship and the call for justice is seen in different writings of the New Testament, but now in the direct reference to the Eucharist. St. Paul strongly criticizes the Corinthians for their way of worship. In Paul’s words, “When you assemble as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.... When you meet together, it is not for the Lord’s supper that you eat.... Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the Lord” (1Cor 11:17-33). St. Paul, just as the prophet Amos of the Old Testament, condemns the Corinthians community because their behaviors outside the Eucharistic communion belie their worship.

Jesus on his part equally criticizes the scribes and the Pharisees for their hypocritical lifestyles. He says, “Even so, on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing” (Mat 23:28 NAB). Obviously, they did not practice what they preached. Thomas Scirghi believes that genuine worship consists of the praise of God and

¹⁵⁰ Kathleen Hughes and Mark R. Francis, eds., *Living No Longer for Ourselves: Liturgy and Justice in the Nineties* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1991), 41.

the practice of justice for the people of God.¹⁵¹ In a similar but different dimension, Jesus emphasized the importance of bearing fruit as a mark of genuine discipleship. Thus, Jesus declared, “By their fruits you will know them” (Mt 7:16). Hence, Christian worship will be judged effective by the fruit it bears in day-to-day living in the larger community. In other words, this fruit is borne through the work of justice.¹⁵² Consequently, the relationship between worship and social justice is an intrinsic and organic one. Worship (celebration of the Eucharist) is, therefore, inconceivable without the imperative of justice.

Similarly, the synoptic gospels account of the Last Supper depicts the unity of worship and justice in the life of Christ. In the Institution Narrative, Jesus breaks the bread, offers a blessing, gives thanks, and shares the cup; He identifies the bread with His body and the cup with His blood.¹⁵³ Margaret Scott in *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, contends that when Jesus breaks the bread, his body is broken and given to all, for the broken and victims of injustice and exploitation (the Niger Delta community), to give them healing and wholeness.¹⁵⁴ In addition, she argues that Christ’s blood, shed for all, is poured out in a freeing and life giving stream, mingling with the blood of the Niger Delta activist for social justice, in the ilk of Ken Saro Wiwa and all those who have shed their blood for the cause of

¹⁵¹ Garcia-Rivera et al, *Living Beauty, The Art of Liturgy*, 144.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Lauren S. Murphy, “Overcoming the Division: The Relationship between the Eucharist and Social Justice.” https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=theology_graduate_theses (accessed March 27, 2018), 22.

¹⁵⁴ Margaret Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 81.

justice, who, like him have bled and still bleed by protesting injustice and the incessant degradation of the land and environment of the Niger Delta.¹⁵⁵

3.3 The Role of The Church in Promoting Human Rights and Ecological Justice

The Church is cognizant of the signs of the times and has a duty to scrutinize and interpret them in the light of the gospel. In this regard, the Church has spoken out against the incessant degradation and pollution of the natural environment. Thus, various popes have written several documents and encyclicals to this effect. In this regard, I shall briefly highlight the position of the Church in matters regarding environmental degradation and the need to protect the earth.

First, the World Synod of Catholic Bishops in 1971 produced a document on the issue of justice in the world (*Justitia in Mundo*). It discusses how the rich industrialized nations maintain their claim to meet their own material demands, which invariably impoverishes other nations and poses the danger of destroying the very physical foundations of life on earth.¹⁵⁶ The role of the Church, however, is to care for the environment and to situate the question of environment in the context of global existence.

Second, *Octogesima Adveniens*, an apostolic letter of Pope Paul VI issued on May 14, 1971, talks about the environment as among many other new social problems. It says that the human person is gradually becoming aware of his/her excesses in the exploitation and degradation of the environment. This awareness behooves the human person to take

¹⁵⁵ Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 81.

¹⁵⁶ *The Synodal Document on the Justice in the World (Justitia in Mundo)*, November 1971, (Boston: St. Paul's Edition, 1971), 22.

responsibility for conserving and protecting our environment – an environment that is threatened by pollution, refuse and degradation of all sorts.¹⁵⁷

Third, Pope John Paul II issued an encyclical, *Centisimus Annus*, on May 1 1991, which considers modern socio-economic issues and appeals for a serious emphasis on ecological issues. The letter insists that measures should be in place to put an end to the irrational destruction of the natural environment.¹⁵⁸ It posits that humans must preserve both the natural and human environment. This includes the natural habitats of the various animal and plants species threatened with extinction. Each of these species makes its particular contribution to the balance of nature in general.¹⁵⁹

Fourth, Pope Benedict XVI issued the encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, on 29 June 2009. He states that human beings should exercise a responsible stewardship towards nature. At the same time, we must recognize our grave duty to hand on the earth to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it.¹⁶⁰ The Holy Father says that the Church has a responsibility towards creation, and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere.¹⁶¹ Hence, when human relationships that is anchored on justice and compassion is respected within society, relationship with the environment improves.¹⁶² Furthermore, in

¹⁵⁷ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter of the eightieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, *Octogesima Adveniens* of May 14, 1971, (Massachusetts: United States Catholic Conference, 1971), 12.

¹⁵⁸ Pope John Paul II, social encyclical *Centisimus Annus* on the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, May 1st 1991(Ibadan: Ambassador Publications, 1991),73.

¹⁵⁹ Pope John Paul II, social encyclical *Centisimus Annus*, May 1st 1991,74.

¹⁶⁰ Benedict VI, Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate*, on integral Human Development in Charity and Truth, June 29th ,2009 (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 2009), 96.

¹⁶¹ Benedict VI, Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29th ,2009, 98.

¹⁶² Benedict VI, Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29th ,2009, 99.

2011, when Pope Benedict XVI addressed the African Bishops in his Post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Africae Munus*, of 19 November, he warned that with the incessant and wanton exploitation of nature, the balance of the ecosystem is disrupted. Such disequilibrium invariably brings about deforestation, serious damage to nature, forest, fauna and flora, with countless species risking extinction.¹⁶³

Finally, Pope Francis in his recent encyclical letter, *Laudato si*, of 24th of May 2015, on care for our common home, urged humanity to be alive to their responsibility of caring for and protecting creation. This is a clarion call, which includes everyone, since the environmental challenges we are facing and their human roots concern and affect us all. The Pope, in this document, not only accentuates the urgency and the need for us to protect the environment but also considers it a matter of injustice to future generations should we, by our selfish, individualistic greed and utilitarian penchants, deplete the environment.¹⁶⁴

Undoubtedly, the awareness raised within the international community on climate change and protection of the natural ecosystem¹⁶⁵ has been phenomenal. Numerous policy documents on environmental protection laws have resulted from these summits. The goal of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration was to limit greenhouse gas concentration in the

¹⁶³ Benedict XVI, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Africa's Commitment, *Africae Munus* on the Church in Africa in service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace (19th November 2011), Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 2011. No.80.

¹⁶⁴ Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato si*, on care for our common home, May 24th, 2015 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 159-162.

¹⁶⁵ This was coined by A.G Tansley in 1935; the term 'ecosystem' refers to an integrated system composed of a biotic community, its abiotic environment, and their dynamic interactions. A diversity of ecosystems exists throughout the world, from tropical mangroves to temperate alpine lakes, each with a unique set of components and dynamics.

atmosphere and to reverse the trend of global warming.¹⁶⁶ The Basel Convention was called primarily to address the treatment of hazardous wastes.¹⁶⁷ The Vienna Convention addressed the issue of the protection of the ozone layer and its implementation through the Montreal Protocol and amendments.¹⁶⁸ The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, proclaimed human beings to be at the center of concerns for sustainable development.¹⁶⁹ The 47th session reports on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) held recently in Paris, from the 13th – 16th March, 2018 alludes to the fact that human influence, primarily the burning of fossil fuels, has been the dominant cause of global warming over the past several decades.¹⁷⁰ The report includes stronger evidence of the many ways the planet is already experiencing the effects of human-caused planet change – sea-level rise, shrinking glaciers, decreasing snow and ice-cover, warmer oceans and more frequent and intense extreme weather events, such as heat waves and snow storms.¹⁷¹ There is no questioning the fact that these policy documents on environmental protection laws are great initiatives, but the major Achilles heel of these proposals lies in their implementation. The Intergovernmental Panel

¹⁶⁶ “Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972,” <http://www.un-documents.net/aconf48-14r1.pdf> (accessed March 27, 2018), 20.

¹⁶⁷ “Basel Convention on the control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous wastes and their disposal,” <http://www.basel.int/Portals/4/Basel%20Convention/docs/text/BaselConventionText-e.pdf> (accessed March 27, 2018), 15.

¹⁶⁸ “Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer & Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer,” http://www.sviva.gov.il/English/env_topics/InternationalCooperation/IntlConventions/Pages/ViennaConvention.aspx (accessed March 27, 2018), 1.

¹⁶⁹ “The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 1992,” http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/RIO_E.PDF (accessed March 27, 2018), 9.

¹⁷⁰ Elizabeth Shogren, “Five Key Takeaways from the latest Climate Change Reports,” <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/11/141102-ipcc-synthesis-report-climate-change-science-environment/> (accessed March 27, 2018), 1.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

on Climate Change’s crucial forty-page summary, exhorted the policy makers to back up these policies with the political will to enforce and implement them for the good of our common home and for posterity.¹⁷²

3.4 Ignatian Spirituality as a Path to the Restoration of Creation

St. Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises* emphasizes the need for humanity to find God in all things (SpEx #233).¹⁷³ This includes creation and all that is within it. God is present in the people and the land of the Niger Delta. Ignatius believes strongly in the created world, and that all things in this world are gifts of God, created for us, to be the means by which we can come to know him better, love him more surely, and serve him more faithfully (SpEx #23).¹⁷⁴ According to Peter Schineller, in his article, “St. Ignatius and Creation-Centered Spirituality,” the created world is the indispensable medium, the locus in and through which God comes to us and we in turn move to God.¹⁷⁵ Put differently, everything exists and lives in God, for creation ‘lives, moves and has its being in God.’¹⁷⁶ St. Paul would proclaim in the Areopagus that everything is in God, that “It is God who gives everything – including life and breadth – to everyone.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Elizabeth Shogren, “Five Key Takeaways from the latest Climate Change Reports,” <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/11/141102-ipcc-synthesis-report-climate-change-science-environment/> (accessed March 27, 2018), 1.

¹⁷³ George E. Ganss, S.J. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, edited and translated by George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis; Institute of Jesuits Sources, 1992), 26-27.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Peter Schineller, “St. Ignatius and Creation-Centered Spirituality,” <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/29Schineller.pdf/> (accessed February 16, 2018), 47.

¹⁷⁶ Acts 17:28.

¹⁷⁷ Acts 17:22.

Humanity's relation to creation is based on an integral, intrinsic interconnectedness that cannot be untangled. This relationship is not just limited to creation but to God as well. The 1999 Jesuit document on ecology, "Healing a Broken World," states that for Ignatius there is a three-fold relationship of subjects that includes God, humans, and the rest of creation.¹⁷⁸ In order to properly examine these relationships, I will look at three aspects of St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*: The Principle and Foundation, the First Week, and the Contemplation to Attain Love (*Contemplatio ad Amorem*) (SpEx #230).¹⁷⁹

First, the Principle and Foundation alludes to how God, through His indwelling presence in creation, enters a loving relationship with humanity. God, our "Creator and Lord,"¹⁸⁰ continues to labor in creation and invites humanity to be co-creators and responsible healers of His created world. According to the Principle and Foundation, "the other things on the face of the earth are created for human beings in order to help them pursue the end for which they were created (SpEx #23)."¹⁸¹ Creation is a gift from God to help humanity attain the fullness of a relationship with God. Joseph Carver, S.J. in his article "Ignatian Spirituality and Ecology: Entering into Conversation with the Earth," argues that there is an interrelatedness in the rapport between creation and humanity. He buttresses his point by citing Peter Hans Kolvenbach's Discourse to GC 34, 6 January 1995, which says,

For human beings there is no authentic search for God without an insertion into the life of Creation, and, on the other hand, all solidarity with human beings and every

¹⁷⁸ Patxi Alvarez, SJ, "Healing a Broken World," *Promotio Iustitiae*, no. 106 (February 2011): 31.

¹⁷⁹ George E. Ganss, S.J. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, edited and translated by George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis; Institute of Jesuits Sources, 1992), 26-27.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ George E. Ganss, S.J. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, edited and translated by George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis; Institute of Jesuits Sources, 1992), 26-27.

engagement with the created world cannot be authentic without a discovery of God.¹⁸²

Similarly, Father Kolvenbach in his address at the opening of the Arrupe College in Harare, Zimbabwe, reiterated that the three-fold relationship between humanity, creation and God is “so closely united that a person cannot find God unless he finds him through the environment and, conversely, that his relationship to the environment will be out of balance unless humanity relates with God.”¹⁸³

St. Ignatius in the Principle and Foundation of the *Spiritual Exercises* then calls humanity to indifference, that is, to develop an internal freedom to see created things in their relationship to God and His plans for the common good of people.¹⁸⁴ In the same way, while trying to explain Ignatian indifference, David Fleming, SJ, in his contemporary version of the Principle and Foundation says,

All the things in this world are gifts of God, presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily. As a result, we appreciate and use all these gifts of God insofar as they help us develop as loving persons. But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives, they displace God and so hinder our growth toward our goal.¹⁸⁵

In other words, we must create a balance before all of these created gifts, and humanity should desire and choose that which leads to an intimate relationship with God. The

¹⁸² Joseph Carver S.J. “Ignatian Spirituality and Ecology: Entering into Conversation with the Earth,” *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal*, Vol.4: No.2, Article 10, 2015.

¹⁸³ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, “Our Responsibility for God’s Creation,” address at the opening of Arrupe College, Jesuit School of Philosophy and Humanities, Harare, Zimbabwe, August 22 1998. (Ottawa: The Jesuits Centre for Social Faith and Justice, 1999), 12.

¹⁸⁴ Patxi Alvarez, SJ, “Healing a Broken World,” *Promotio Iustitiae*, no. 106 (February 2011): 34.

¹⁸⁵ David L. Fleming and Ignatius, *Draw Me into Your Friendship: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading of The Spiritual Exercises*, Series IV--Studies on Jesuit Topics, no. 17 (St. Louis, Mo: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 27.

responsible use of these gifts of God as recommended in the Principle and Foundation places a demand on the oil companies in the Niger Delta to put an end to the flaring of poisonous gas that pollutes the air, thereby creating health hazards for inhabitants of the oil regions. Consequently, the human person is morally responsible for his/her activities which go against him/herself, the other, creation and God.

Second, in the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius would have the retreatant contemplate the experience of sin in their lives, keeping in mind a merciful God who loves us, irrespective of our sins. Frank Turner in his article, “Theological Reflection: Natural and Mineral Resources,” defined sin as “degradation and dehumanization as seen through the eyes of faith.”¹⁸⁶ Undoubtedly, this definition corroborates the idea that the despoliation of the land and resources of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is an ecological sin. The First Week exercise is meant to bring to the consciousness of the human person how he/she has participated in the social and structural sin that is characteristic of our world. In the context of the Niger Delta, on the one hand, the indigenes of the region driven by poverty are complicit in the degradation of their environment when they indiscriminately fell trees to meet their needs for fire wood and charcoal for cooking.¹⁸⁷ This activity gives way to global warming, erosion and flood problems.¹⁸⁸ They are also complicit in the structural sin of degradation of their environment when they engage in bush burning as a method of hunting

¹⁸⁶ Frank Turner, Theological Reflection: Natural and Mineral Resources,” http://www.ecojesuit.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Theological-Reflection-on-Natural-and-Mineral-Resources_-FTurner_Oct-20141.pdf (accessed February 17, 2018), 3.

¹⁸⁷ Godwill Chukwu. (2008). Poverty-driven causes and effects of environmental degradation in Nigeria. *Pacific Journal of Science and Technology*. 9. 608 - 611.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

of wild animals or bush clearing.¹⁸⁹ This practice adversely impacts the environment by destroying the fragile web of life and the animals and plant species in the forest.¹⁹⁰

On the other hand, the activities of the multinational oil exploration companies have caused untold hardship on the inhabitants of the region. These include the perpetual gas flaring and spillage of crude oil on the farmland and in the rivers of the Niger Delta. Thus, air is polluted and unhealthy for the inhabitants, and lands and rivers are rendered infertile to grow crops. Rivers, hitherto known for producing large quantities of fish are now oil-laden and continue to suffocate aquatic life. The life on land and in the water has been altered, and the ecosystem is at the brink of total collapse. How do we explain these ecological crises through the lens of faith?

Fr. Kolvenbach, S.J., in the Arrupe College address noted above, states that the various ecological crises are a “denial of the relationship with God.”¹⁹¹ In other words, the ecological crises exist because we fail to recognize creation as God’s dwelling place, enabling us to enslave creation by our sin.¹⁹² Hence, humans, through their irresponsible acts and policies, continue to destroy the very environment in which life’s sustenance is rooted. The intention of this meditation is not just for humanity to acknowledge complicity in both the individual

¹⁸⁹ Godwill Chukwu. (2008). Poverty-driven causes and effects of environmental degradation in Nigeria. *Pacific Journal of Science and Technology*. 9. 608 - 611.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Kolvenbach, “Our Responsibility for God’s Creation,” (Ottawa: The Jesuits Centre for Social Faith and Justice, 1999), 13.

¹⁹² James Profit, S.J. “The Spiritual Exercises and Ecology,” http://www.sjweb.info/sjs/networks/ecology/Exercises_ENG.pdf (accessed February 17, 2018), 1.

and collective ecological sins against creation, but to make amends and resolve to reconcile and heal creation by intentionally instituted policies and actions.

Third, in the Fourth Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius invites the retreatants to restore creation in the Contemplation to Attain Love. In the four points he suggests, the retreatants are invited to a heightened awareness of God's presence in creation, humanity's interconnectedness with creation, and the created world. Specifically, in the second point he reminds the human person of how God's indwelling presence is found in elements, plants, animals and human beings. God's presence breathes life into created beings for the life of the world. Likewise, in the third point, God continues to labor in creation and invites the retreatants – in this case, the Eucharistic community in the Niger Delta and the oil extracting companies – to be co-laborers in the healing and restoration of creation. He calls us to remember

. . . how God works and labors for me in all things created on the face of the earth . . . as in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, and others, giving them being, preserving them, giving them vegetation and sensation (SpEx #236).¹⁹³

It is in the light of this call to remember that we acknowledge that God continues to create and re-create us daily. Likewise, God calls humanity to the labor of becoming co-creators and to responsibly protect and care for His created world.

3.5 Conclusion

The groaning of creation over the abuse done to it may seem overwhelming, especially to the land and people of the Niger Delta, but there is a glimmer of hope on the horizon. As

¹⁹³ George E. Ganss, S.J. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, edited and translated by George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis; Institute of Jesuits Sources, 1992), 26-27.

God promised in His covenant with Noah and all creation that came out of the Ark, never again would creation be destroyed by flood. Humanity must not give up on the chances of the renewal of creation. St. Paul in his discourse on the law and sin says, “But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (NRSV, Rom 5: 20). This grace is steeped in Christian hope, which is the fruit of religious faith in the resurrection of Christ. This hope is anchored in the belief that there will be a renewal of creation. For George Ehusani, in his article, “Towards Achieving Environmental Justice and Ecological Harmony: A Theological Reflection,” this renewed hope will foster a new day of ecological responsibility and ecological justice.¹⁹⁴ In his words,

The new day will call us to repentance and conversion for the sins we have committed against natural creation and lead us in a process of transformation of heart and mind which will involve the adjustment of some fundamental presuppositions we have had regarding ourselves and our environment.¹⁹⁵

It is in the light of this renewed hope that the next chapter will explore the “return gift” aspect of Chauvet’s tripartite cycle. It will basically analyze the ways we are called to become what we eat and drink at the Eucharist, which is food for others. It looks at the practical ways in which our participation in the Eucharist can bring about justice and reconciliation among the people and land of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

¹⁹⁴ George Ehusani, “Towards Achieving Environmental Justice and Ecological Harmony: A Theological Reflection,” <http://www.georgeehusani.org/home/index.php/papers-and-essays/248-towards-achieving-environmental-justice-and-ecological-harmony-a-theological-reflection-?format=pdf> (accessed February 19, 2018), 8.

¹⁹⁵ George Ehusani, “Towards Achieving Environmental Justice and Ecological Harmony: A Theological Reflection,” <http://www.georgeehusani.org/home/index.php/papers-and-essays/248-towards-achieving-environmental-justice-and-ecological-harmony-a-theological-reflection-?format=pdf> (accessed February 19, 2018), 8.

CHAPTER FOUR

RETURN GIFT (ACT) – THE EUCHARIST: ETHICAL LIVING AND CREATION

For Louis Marie Chauvet the terms “return-gift” and “ethics,” are essentially interrelated. How do we express gratitude for a gift received? As a rule, we say “Thank you.” Saliers and LaFont in their earlier discourse on “exchange of gifts,” accede to Chauvet’s paradigm of “return-gift.” For Chauvet the embodiment of the expression of gratitude is in ethical living. What does he mean by “ethical living”? In his own words he says,

These consist of ethical conducts by which Christians testify to the gospel by their actions...Under this paradigm “ethics,” we place all that pertains to action in the name of the gospel.¹⁹⁶

The imperative to become “food for others” and “healers of creation” that I will explore here aptly corresponds to this model of “return-gift.”

4.1 The Eucharist: An Invitation to Become Food for Others

The old adage “*You are what you eat*” was alleged to have originated from the works of Brillat-Savarin in the book, *Physiologie du gout, ou, Meditations de gastronomie transcendante*. He says, “*Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es.*”¹⁹⁷ This means, “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” Ghislain Lafont captures this concept very well when he says, “Nutrition is the live presupposition of every existence. If

¹⁹⁶ Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 2001, 31.

¹⁹⁷ Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du goût, ou Méditations de Gastronomie Transcendante; ouvrage théorique, historique et à l’ordre du jour, dédié aux Gastronomes parisiens, par un professeur, membre de plusieurs sociétés littéraires et savantes, Volume I, Paris: A. Sautelet et Cie Librairies, 1826, viii.*

we assimilate what we eat, we are also assimilated to it; and a sort of mystical communion can be established.”¹⁹⁸ Similarly, we can apply this analogy to the Eucharist, broken and shared at the Lord’s table for us to eat and gain nourishment both physically and spiritually. The aspect of being broken and shared is fundamental, such that Lafont aptly illustrates the processes a food goes through in order for proper assimilation to take place. He says:

A solid (food) is first destroyed in order to be absorbed. It is necessary to bite and chew; the process of cooking the food is a process of attacking the living in order to render them edible before human teeth complete the transformation.¹⁹⁹

At the Eucharistic table, Christ, in order to become food for us to chew and digest, had to lay down his life for others – His body broken and His blood poured out on the cross for the salvation of all. Thus, for us to be food for others, we are called to imitate Christ and to give ourselves for the good of others – to pour out our own life as Christ did. When we gather around the Eucharistic table, we bring and offer our broken selves, made real in our day-to-day struggles, disappointments, sufferings, pains, and challenges and together offer them as a thanksgiving offering in union with that of Christ in the Holy Spirit to God. It is this very broken self that has been hallowed by the epiclesis of the Holy Spirit so that we, at the end of each Mass, are sent (“Missa” – to be sent) to become food for others. Lafont concurs with the above analogy when he says:

The consecrated species of the Eucharist follows the same path as all other food, hence a total transformation is worked through the phenomenon of eating, the faithful are thus transformed into what they have received – they become together with all who eat it, the body of Christ.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Ghislain Lafont, *Eucharist: The Meal and the Word* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 11.

¹⁹⁹ Lafont, 11.

²⁰⁰ Lafont, 14.

In the same vein, Don Saliers following Augustine, agrees with Lafont that by participating in the Eucharistic table of the Lord we, by that very act of eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, become what we eat. Having become Christ, He sends us to be Christ to others, to be that Eucharistic food for others to eat and gain nourishment. Saliers says:

The image of the bread, itself composed of wheat and kneaded by hands over a process of growth and maturing – this is what we are called to become for God’s world. We are, by virtue of our deepest calling, to be bread for others. Our God is truly prodigal, a spendthrift God who sets a feast before us, even in our ordinariness, to be a feast for others. So, we must be speaking and touching and feeding and reconciling in God’s name; we are to be sowers of seed and bakers of bread, wonderfully given to a world of need.²⁰¹

This beautiful image of becoming bread for others can be realized only when we allow Christ – the bread of life – to nourish us at the Eucharistic table. He offers us himself – broken and shared for the life of the world. A gift does not actualize its purpose until the gift is accepted.

La Font, in articulating the exchange that happens between the giver and receiver says:

For the exchange to be truly established, it is paradoxically necessary to renounce all and to give, without counting the cost, all that one has... Self-offering is a privileged place where one can truly achieve full humanity... It is as if all our plenty has made us lose view of the rhythm that saves – gift and acceptance... The Eucharist is a meal offered and accepted. It is substance given for the life of those who eat and life received with thanksgiving.²⁰²

It is through this “return-gift” that Christians are called to testify to the gospel by their actions in daily life.

²⁰¹ Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 68.

²⁰² Lafont, *Eucharist*, 2008, 35–36.

4.2 The Eucharist: An Invitation to Heal Wounded Creation and Protect the People of the Niger Delta Region

Dennis Edwards, in *Earth Revealing – Earth Healing: Ecology and Christian Theology*, contends that healing involves making whole, righting of wrongs, and bringing together some kind of rupture.²⁰³ Lucy Larkin, in the chapter on “The Relationship Quilt, Feminism, and the Healing of Nature” in Dennis Edward’s book, says that healing is a prerequisite for flourishing. She goes further to describe healing as creating right relationships.²⁰⁴ In other words, for the earth to flourish, it requires healing. Moreover, to do this, we need to create the right relationship with the earth. How do we do this?

Peter Brown and Geoffrey Garver in their article, “Humans and Nature: The Right Relationship,” argue that right relationship is based on feeling a sense of awe for the cosmos and embracing an ethic of humankind’s appropriate place in, and relationship to, the cosmos and the earth.²⁰⁵ In order to develop this feeling of awe for the cosmos, Sallie McFague states that we must see and appreciate other non-human creation as subjects and not as objects, as relationships are only possible between subjects. Hence, to treat nature as subjects and not as objects is to confer value on it and bring it into kinship with humanity.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Denis Edwards, ed., *Earth Revealing--Earth Healing: Ecology and Christian Theology* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2001), 145.

²⁰⁴ Edwards, 146.

²⁰⁵ Peter Brown & Geoffrey Garver, “Humans and Nature: The Right Relationship,” https://www.humansandnature.org/filebin/pdf/minding_nature/April_2009_Humans_and_Nature.pdf (accessed March 5, 2018), 1.

²⁰⁶ Denis Edwards, ed., *Earth Revealing--Earth Healing: Ecology and Christian Theology* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2001), 148.

At times, we tend to be involved in a wrong relationship with creation. I will take a cursory look at the definition Aldo Leopold – a conservation biologist – gave in the 1940’s when working out what he called the land ethic.²⁰⁷ He says that “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”²⁰⁸ This wrong relationship is evident in the environmental degradation going on in the Niger Delta and other ecological crises, such as climate change, overpopulation, loss of topsoil and fresh water, increasing rates of species extinction, deforestation, imperiled coral reefs, unstoppable invasive species, toxic chemicals that remain for eons in the environment, persistent human poverty, hunger, and so on.²⁰⁹

In the same vein, Dona Lehman, in *What on Earth Can You Do?* says that global warming threatens our collective existence, with the tremendous amount of greenhouse gas pumped into the atmosphere.²¹⁰ Most of the increase is due to the burning of fossil fuels and the perpetual gas flaring by oil extracting companies in places like the Niger Delta in Nigeria.

Peter Brown and Geoffrey Garver, however, contend that a right relationship with life and the world is both a personal and a collective choice, but it is a choice that we must make.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Peter Brown & Geoffrey Garver, “Humans and Nature: The Right Relationship,” https://www.humansandnature.org/filebin/pdf/minding_nature/April_2009_Humans_and_Nature.pdf (accessed March 5, 2018), 9.

²⁰⁸ Peter Brown & Geoffrey Garver, “Humans and Nature: The Right Relationship,” https://www.humansandnature.org/filebin/pdf/minding_nature/April_2009_Humans_and_Nature.pdf (accessed March 5, 2018), 9.

²⁰⁹ Ibid,10.

²¹⁰ Donna Lehman, *What on Earth Can You Do?: Making Your Church a Creation Awareness Center* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1993), 50.

²¹¹ Peter Brown & Geoffrey Garver, “Humans and Nature: The Right Relationship,” https://www.humansandnature.org/filebin/pdf/minding_nature/April_2009_Humans_and_Nature.pdf (accessed March 5, 2018), 10.

This is similar to Louis Marie Chauvet’s “obligatory generosity,” in *Symbol and Sacrament*.²¹² It is a relationship built on mutual respect for all life, fairness, and interdependence that exist amongst the entire community of living beings on the earth.²¹³ We see this interdependence and interconnectedness each time we present our gifts (bread and wine) on the altar. We not only bring this fruit of the earth, but we bring the embodiment of our relationships to the soil, to the environment, and to all God’s creatures with whom we share the world.²¹⁴

Andrew Casad in his article, “The Eucharist and Right Relationship to the Land,” argues that the Eucharist invites the Eucharistic community in the Niger Delta to be in right relationship with one another, God and creation.²¹⁵ In other words, these three relationships are interconnected. Hence, there is no way we can heal creation, without our conscious effort to heal our broken relationships with one another and with God. As Jesus says, “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23-24).²¹⁶ Casad further claims that it is only when we have cooperated

²¹² Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1995), 108–9.

²¹³ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1995), 108–9.

²¹⁴ Andrew Casad, “The Eucharist and the Right Relationship to the Land,” <https://catholicurallife.org/the-eucharist-and-right-relationship-to-the-land-by-andrew-casad/> (accessed March 5, 2018), 1.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

with Christ to heal our broken relationships that we can then come forward and receive his broken body that reconciles us with the Father.²¹⁷

4.3 The Link Between Eucharist and Justice in Our Daily Life

As Christians, our worship or Eucharistic celebrations should spur us to care and love our neighbor and to work for justice and uprightness in our day-to-day living and encounters with others. Unfortunately, this is not always the case; there seem to be a lack of correspondence between what is prayed within a Eucharistic celebration and what is practiced throughout the wider community.²¹⁸ This reality calls into question the sincerity and effectiveness of the worship. Little wonder that the prophet Amos denounced in very clear terms the worship of the Israelites whose external rites and religious formalism belied their interior morality and, as such, negated their worship.²¹⁹

In order to fully benefit from the fruits of our Eucharistic celebration, we must realize according to St. Augustine, that by eating the body of Christ, we become the body of Christ.²²⁰ Consequently, we should perceive Christ's real presence in one another and particularly in the poor. For Christ said in scriptures that he will be made known and present in the weakest: those who are hungry or thirsty, strangers or naked, sick or imprisoned, and

²¹⁷ Andrew Casad, "The Eucharist and the Right Relationship to the Land," <https://catholicrurallife.org/the-eucharist-and-right-relationship-to-the-land-by-andrew-casad/> (accessed March 5, 2018), 1.

²¹⁸ Garcia-Rivera et al, *Living Beauty, The art of Liturgy*, 145.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 143.

²²⁰ St. Augustine, Sermon 228B, in Sermons 184-229Z, trans. Edmund Hill, OP, Works of St. Augustine in Translation (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 262.

in those malnourished children in the Niger Delta who are deprived of food as their land are rendered infertile and incapable of producing crops due to oil spillage.²²¹

The early Church understood how worship involved partaking in the Eucharistic meal and living a life committed to justice in our day to day living.²²² James Dallen in his article, “Liturgy and Justice,” captures the early Churches perspective on participation in the Eucharistic celebration and the works of justice in this question: “How can those who share the bread of life in a holy meal deny food to the hungry?”²²³ In other words, the Eucharistic celebration obliges us to caring for the poor.

The Eucharist and justice go together. Marcel Metzger in *History of the Liturgy*, gives an account by Justin Martyr in his Apology explaining what Christians do when they gather together to celebrate the Eucharist.

After the reception of the consecrated bread and wine, “those who prosper, and who so wish, contribute...as much as [they] choose to. What is collected is deposited with the president, and he takes care of orphans and widows.”²²⁴

The offertory collected by the assembled community on a Sunday Eucharistic celebration is used to take care of the poor in the community.

²²¹ Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 85.

²²² Lauren S. Murphy, “Overcoming the Division: The Relationship between the Eucharist and Social Justice.” https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=theology_graduate_theses (accessed March 27, 2018), 28.

²²³ James Dallen, “Liturgy and Justice,” *Worship* 65, no. 4 (July 1, 1991): 299.

²²⁴ Marcel Metzger, *History of the Liturgy: The Major Stages* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1997), 40.

In recent times, Pope John Paul II, in *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, argues that we cannot have a Eucharist that is not connected with the works of justice. In other words, for the Eucharist to be authentic it must be committed to doing something about

the many forms of poverty which are present in our world... the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the disease which afflicts developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardship faced by the unemployed, the struggle of immigrants. This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebration is judged.²²⁵

Hence, our Eucharistic celebrations must speak to our day to day life struggles and vice-versa. Put differently, our Eucharistic celebration should be an extension of our daily life.

The worshipping community should not leave the gifts received at the Eucharist at the doors of the Church at the end of Mass but should make them effective in their lives through the way they relate to others and their works of justice. In other words, the Church as a sacrament “effects the reality that she signifies.”²²⁶ These gifts point in two directions: outward and inward.²²⁷ At the culmination of the Mass, the presiding priest invites the congregation to go and share the gifts they have received with others, thereby directing them outward. In the same vein, the faithful are directed inward by having them return to the Church in order to be nourished spiritually by the word of God. This inward re-direction also avails them of the opportunity for worship and thanksgiving to God for the achievements and failures of their daily life.

²²⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28.

²²⁶ David Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (New York: Crossroad Publishers, 1992), 294.

²²⁷ Garcia-Rivera et al, *Living Beauty, The art of Liturgy*, 145.

Similarly, Charles Price and Louis Weil talk of intensive and extensive liturgy. For them, intensive liturgy is what happens in church, especially on Sunday morning. “By its intensive liturgies, the church encounters Christ as present in Word and Sacraments. Under these forms, Christians appropriate his example and the power which he makes available.”²²⁸ On the other hand, extensive liturgy is what happens when we bring what we receive in church into the world, where “...one appropriates an example and its power for a purpose. One leaves the intensive liturgy to live in accordance with the model and in the strength of the grace which it supplies.”²²⁹ However, these two types of liturgy are mutually dependent, in that as our intensive liturgies drive us into the world to do our extensive liturgies, so our extensive liturgies bring us back week by week to the Christian assembly, to seek God’s presence once more under the embodied forms of Word and Sacrament.²³⁰

Consequently, this extensive liturgy bids the Eucharistic community to speak out on behalf of the suffering poor who are mostly affected by the despoliation of the land and environment of the Niger Delta. The faithful gatherers at the Eucharistic table are called to engage in prophetic acts of resistance and protest, that seek to address the structural violence against the land and people of the Niger Delta.

4.4 The Prophetic “Return-gift” – Resistance and Protest from the Niger Delta Communities

The politics of oil exploration in the Niger Delta and its environmental degradation are not devoid of a series of justifiable resistance actions and protests from the host communities.

²²⁸ Charles P. Price and Louis Weil, *Liturgy for Living*, Rev. ed (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub, 2000), 296.

²²⁹ Charles P. Price et al, *Liturgy for Living*, 296.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, 297.

The Niger Delta community is aware of the structural evil at work in the destruction of their environment, and they are unwilling to be silenced by the perpetrators. These communal protests seek to constrain corporate practices considered detrimental to the wellbeing of the people of Niger Delta and to advocate that the oil companies be alive to their corporate social responsibilities to their host communities. Hence, the community's prophetic actions against the multinational oil companies are evident in the nonviolent and peaceful protest by the Niger Delta community.

Historically, the clamor for justice and protection of the environment in the Niger Delta has led to the creation of many pressure groups. They include the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), the Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA), the Ijaw National Congress (INC), and others.²³¹ Prominent among these groups is the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS), founded by Adaka Boro in 1966, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), founded by Ken Saro Wiwa in the 1990's, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), founded by Alhaji Dokubo Asari in 2004, and MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta), founded in the late nineties.²³²

Women have played an integral part in protests and demonstrations. Deinbo Briggs in *Critical Reflection on the Niger Delta Question* presents several cases of women staging a protest against the activities of the multinational oil companies. For this study, I will examine two case scenarios. First, in July 2002, about 150 Itsekiri women from Ugborodo and Ogidigben communities in the coastal area of Warri, Delta State, seized the crude oil

²³¹ Okoko, Nna, and Ibaba, *The Politics of Oil and the Development of Underdevelopment in the Niger Delta*, 129.

²³² Okoko, Nna, and Ibaba, 131.

terminal of Chevron Nigeria Limited, an American oil firm operating in the Niger Delta.²³³ Some of the women occupied a boat, while others occupied the waiting room at the airport. The women accused Chevron of utter neglect and exploitation.²³⁴ The Niger Delta community lacked basic amenities like good roads, pipe-borne water and electricity. They demanded, among other things, that the degradation of their land and pollution of their rivers should stop, in order for them to make a sustainable livelihood from farming and fishing. More so, they wanted their children to be employed by the oil firm and that the Itsekiri indigenes working as contract staff should be made permanent staff.²³⁵ The protest was later called off, after reaching a negotiation that was mutually beneficial to both parties.

Second, according to Ronke Iyabowale Ako-Nai in *Gender and Power Relations in Nigeria*, following the Escravos Tank Farm occupation, hundreds of aggrieved peasant women from the Ijaw communities of Gbaramatu and Egbema laid siege to four oil flow stations belonging to the Chevron-Texaco Oil Corporation.²³⁶ The women for two weeks occupied the flow stations of Abiteye, Maraba, Dibi and Olero Creek. Like their counterparts from Ugborodo and Ogidigben, they charged Chevron-Texaco with neglect and environmental degradation. The Ijaw women demanded that the multinational oil extracting companies provide them basic amenities such as pipe borne water, electricity, good roads and schools

²³³ Briggs, *Critical Reflections on the Niger Delta Question*, 64.

²³⁴ Briggs, 65.

²³⁵ Briggs, 65..

²³⁶ Ronke Iyabowale Ako-Nai, ed., *Gender and Power Relations in Nigeria* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 318.

for their children. They later called off the siege when they signed a Memorandum of Understanding between Chevron-Texaco and them.²³⁷

Furthermore, we see a similar trend of prophetic action of the Eucharistic community against injustice and structural political evil in the recent and on-going protest from the Catholic Christians of the Democratic Republic of Congo, led by the Congolese Episcopate. They are protesting against the government of President Joseph Kabila, who has been in office since 2001, and plans to remove term limits that barred him from re-election. In an article entitled “DR Congo: The Catholic Church for the Poor and with the Poor,” published by the Comboni Missionaries, Fr. Donald Zagore, Society for African Missions (SMA), an Ivorian writer and theologian says,

The Christians of Congo are writing a new page in the history of African Christianity. A Christianity that now refuses to be locked up in the sacristy; that refuses to be an accomplice of politics breaking the silence so that death is not the last word; that embraces martyrdom in defense of justice and truth; a Christianity that claims to be prophetic while remaining for the poor and with the poor, the only flame that still shines in the depths of darkness; a Christianity that renounces its comfort, which accepts to get its hands dirty.²³⁸

Thus, like the Catholic Christian community in DR Congo, the Eucharistic community of the Niger Delta is called to get its hands dirty in the struggle against injustice perpetrated against the poor, especially vulnerable women and children who suffer the horrendous effects of environmental degradation.

²³⁷ Ako-Nai, 318.

²³⁸ Comboni Missionaries, “DR Congo: The Catholic Church For The Poor And With The Poor,” <http://www.combonimissionaries.co.uk/index.php/2018/01/22/dr-congo-the-catholic-church-for-the-poor-and-with-the-poor/> (accessed February 27, 2018), 1.

4.5 The Intersection of Eucharist and Life in African Communities

The Eucharist is at the center of the Church's liturgy. When we gather around the table of the Lord and feast on the body and blood of Christ, we become what we have received. If this is the case, our actions outside the four walls of the Church should manifest Christ. Instances abound where two warring communities share in the Eucharistic table, and when they leave the Church, they continue their fights. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 is a typical example. It is unfortunate that the same people who profess one faith, one baptism, and who eat from one table – the table of one cup, one body, broken and shared for the life of the world – would slaughter each other.

Are we not living a lie when we refuse to become what we eat and drink to others – the body and blood of Christ? The Igbo will never share a kola nut with an enemy.²³⁹ This is a fact widely understood among the Igbos, yet this same people will come to share in the Eucharist amidst their grievances with one another. However, this sort of practice is not peculiar to our contemporary society; St. Paul faced a similar problem with the Corinthian Church. Thus, he says,

Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you! (1Co 11:17-22 NRSV)

²³⁹ Odozor, Paulinus Ikechukwu. 2008. "Liturgy and life: a discussion from an African Christian theological perspective." *Worship* 82, no. 5: 413-433. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 5, 2016).

Just as Paul denounced this practice, we should do likewise, for it will be making a mockery of the Eucharist if our day-to-day living in the community does not reflect Christ whom we have received at the Eucharistic table.

Another instance that depicts the intersection between the Eucharist we consume and its effect on the lives of African communities is that given by Vincent Donovan, in his book, *Christianity Rediscovered*. He gives a beautiful example of the ceremony of the passing of grass among the Maasai people of East Africa, who live in Southern Kenya and Northern Tanzania. They are semi-nomadic people, and they have a deep relationship with their cattle. They believe that God created the cattle for them and that they are the sole custodians of all the cattle on earth. They measure wealth by the number of cattle and children one has. According to Donovan, the grass is a sacred symbol among the Maasai. “Since their cattle and they themselves, lived off the grass, it was a vital and holy sign to them, a sign of peace and happiness and well-being.”²⁴⁰

He elaborates how the symbol of the grass tuft raised can initiate peace among warring communities. Thus, “a tuft of grass offered by one Maasai and accepted by the other, was an assurance that no violence would erupt because of the differences and arguments.”²⁴¹ He opined that no Maasai would violate that sacred sign of peace offered, because it is not only a sign of peace, it is peace.²⁴² Armed with this knowledge and conviction about the

²⁴⁰ Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 25th anniversary ed (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2003), 94.

²⁴¹ Donovan, 94.

²⁴² Ibid.

symbolism of the grass for the Maasai, Donovan incorporates this thinking into the Liturgy of the Eucharist. He says,

As the mass began, I picked up a tuft of grass and passed it on to the first elder who met me and greeted him with “the peace of Christ.” He accepted it and passed it on to his family, and they passed it on to neighboring elders and their families. It had to pass through all the villages. In the event where life in the village had been less than human or holy, then there was no Mass. If there had been selfishness, forgetfulness, hatefulness, and lack of forgiveness in the work done, in the life led, let them not make a sacrilege out of it by calling it the Body of Christ. And the leaders did decide occasionally that, despite the prayers and readings and discussions, if the grass had stopped, if someone or some group in the society had refused to accept the grass as the sign of the peace of Christ, there would be no Eucharist at this time.²⁴³

Inasmuch as we desire peace and unity among the Maasai, can we celebrate the Mass without having a perfect condition of absolute peace and a society devoid of dissension and rancor?

I believe the Eucharist is a meal that we are all invited to participate in and be spiritually nourished for the Christian journey. The Eucharistic meal is not meant to nourish only the spiritually healthy but the spiritually sick as well. Similarly, Donovan argues that the communities most times have the will to overcome their weaknesses and are ready to forge ahead in resolving their differences. In such situations, the Eucharist is celebrated.²⁴⁴

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have assumed that creation is a gift from God to humanity. For creation to flourish we need to be in right relationship with others, creation and God. When we do this, we are intentional in our efforts to heal the wounded creation. On the contrary, when we engage in wrong relationship with creation, we contribute to the despoliation of the environment that ultimately amounts to inflicting wounds on creation.

²⁴³ Donovan, 96.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

The “return-gift” Louis-Marie Chauvet proposed invites us to testify to the gospel by our actions in daily life. Hence, as Christ’s body is taken, blessed, broken and shared for our nourishment in the Eucharist, so are we called to do likewise, and become nourishment for others. In other words, we are invited to become what we receive – the body of Christ.

Consequently, ‘becoming what we receive’ presupposes we are to work for justice and uprightness in our day-to-day living and encounters with others. Invariably, this quest for justice is evident in the prophetic actions of resistance and protest by the Niger Delta people against the multinational oil extracting companies. It implies an ecological conversion from the way we relate with creation, especially the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta.

Finally, this chapter tried to establish a nexus between Eucharist and the daily living in African communities using produce from the earth as symbols of this connection. It was shown that kola nuts and grass are both symbols of peace in different parts of Africa. In the event where the communities or individuals are not in peace with each other, then they should not participate in the Eucharistic meal and vice-versa. I don’t agree with this notion. I believe that the community’s participation in the Eucharistic meal ought to be a means of reconciling communities. Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* reminded the Church that “the Eucharist, although it is the fulness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.”²⁴⁵ That said, the Eucharistic meal should be inclusive and welcoming of those who are not in right

²⁴⁵ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, on the proclamation of the Gospel in today’s world, on 24 November, 2013. https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed May 2018, 2018), 47.

relationship with creation and with one another. Hence, the Eucharistic meal should be broken and shared with the aim of initiating peace and reconciliation among the Eucharistic community.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored how the meal character of Christian Eucharist, with its focus on the “fruit of the earth,” implies an environmental response of healing the Earth and addressing the injustice being done to the people of the Niger Delta. This was possible using Louis Marie Chauvet’s tripartite model of gift, reception and return gift in tandem with the “see-judge-act” practice of Catholic Social Teaching, both of which underscores the ethical implications of Christian Eucharist.

First, it responded to the questions of “who the Niger Delta people are” and “what their current situation is.” It threw light on the debilitating condition experienced by the region and the effects oil exploitation and exploration have had and is having on the land and people from this area. Consequently, at the end of the chapter, we had a panoramic view of the environmental degradation and injustices perpetrated by the multinational oil companies.

Second, in the theme of Eucharist as meal and the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, the theses argue that when we gather in communion as a community, we form our very bodies at one table. Consequently, by the very fact of sharing in the Eucharistic meal, we are called to act against the injustice perpetrated by the multinational oil companies in the light of environmental degradation of soil and water in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Margaret Scott reiterates this call for protest against injustice when she contends that we live in a world in which corporate is rapidly becoming synonymous with corruption and self-interest [as with the oil companies] and that the Eucharistic phrase – “this is my body,” beckons the Eucharistic community to a daily protest each time it is repeated.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 81.

Third, to understand how our participation in the Eucharistic meal invites us to act for justice and to discern the meaning of the situation in the Niger Delta, this thesis suggests a focus on a theological reflection on creation and eco-justice in the Niger Delta. This reflection was viewed from three lenses: Biblical perspective of creation and justice, Ecclesial teachings on ecological justice, and Ignatian Spirituality and ecological justice. God promised Noah and all creation that came out of the Ark in His covenant, never again would creation be destroyed by flood. Humanity must not give up on the chances of the renewal of creation. There is a glimmer of hope in the horizon for the healing and restoration of creation.

Fourth, according to Louis Marie Chauvet in *Symbol and Sacrament*, “Every gift obligates.”²⁴⁷ In other words, the gifts we receive require a feedback from us – return-gift as a sign of gratitude. It is on this note of return-gift that the thesis explored and analyzed the ways we are called to become what we eat and drink at the Eucharist, which is food for others. It examined the practical ways in which our participation in the Eucharist can bring about justice and reconciliation among the people and land of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This includes an awakening of the consciousness of the Eucharistic community to responses of prophetic action, resistance and peaceful protest against the multinational oil companies and the degradation of their environment.

In the light of the foregoing one can draw a few insights and conclusions that are in no way exhaustive of the various ways our participation in the Eucharist impels us to act and uphold social and ecological justice.

²⁴⁷ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 108.

The Eucharistic meal which we share as a community each time we gather around the table of the Word and Sacrament calls us to social justice and ecological justice as well. In other words, the Eucharist and social/ecological justice are intrinsically linked together. One cannot participate in the Eucharist and be oblivious to the commitment to social and environmental justice. This presupposes the call to prophetic action of the Eucharistic community against the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. Margaret Scott corroborates this when she says “the Eucharist is revealed as a sacrament of protest and resistance that requires us to stand with the oppressed.”²⁴⁸

Furthermore, the meal character of the Eucharist invites us to a heightened consciousness of the issue of global hunger. It’s alarming to note that according to the recent report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, eleven percent (815 million people) of the world’s population go hungry every day.²⁴⁹ The Eucharist challenges us to seek a place at the table of life for all God’s children who are excluded by famine, drought, natural disasters, sickness, conflicts and war.²⁵⁰

Another interesting insight this thesis has evoked is that the Eucharist raises our awareness to the incessant degradation of the environment that threatens the life we all share in common. Hence, when we present our gifts for consecration, we present the whole of creation: the wheat fields and vineyard, the roots and the soils, the sun, rain, air and the

²⁴⁸ Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 114.

²⁴⁹ James Dearie, “World hunger escalates, says UN Report,” <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/world-hunger-escalates-says-un-report> (accessed April 4, 2018).

²⁵⁰ Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 117.

seasons.²⁵¹ When we allow the earth that produces our food to be destroyed it is the poor and the vulnerable women and children that suffers the most. The Eucharist draws our attention to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. It invites us to act and work so that the bread and wine be fruit of a fertile, pure and uncontaminated land.²⁵² Apparently, this is not the case in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Finally, this thesis presents some stimulating insights about the Eucharistic meal initiating peace and reconciliation in the Niger Delta communities. Peace and reconciliation are two important aspects of social and ecological justice. Naim Ateek in *Justice and only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, argues that concerning the Eucharistic meal, “Where peace is, a meal is prepared. It is the feast of reconciliation ready to be celebrated.”²⁵³ This may be true to some extent, but one cannot wait for a perfect society devoid of conflicts before we celebrate the Eucharistic meal. I believe, the Eucharistic meal should be inclusive and welcoming of those who are not in right relationship with creation and with one another. Our gathering at the Eucharistic table where we share the one body and blood broken and poured out for us to be one united body, should initiate the process of peace and reconciliation among the Eucharistic community. However, Margaret Scott contends that the door of peace is reached only through the gate of forgiveness and justice.²⁵⁴ She added that the hand of forgiveness reaches out in peace once the wrongs and injustice are

²⁵¹ Scott, 59.

²⁵² Scott, 61.

²⁵³ Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 177.

²⁵⁴ Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 28.

acknowledged.²⁵⁵ The oil companies have to be held accountable to their corporate responsibility in reconciling and establishing of right relationship with creation and their host communities. The Eucharistic community must not give up on the chances of the renewal of creation. Christians are people of the resurrection, and so the Eucharistic community in the Niger Delta should not give up on the hope of a genuine ecological conversion and renewal of creation.

²⁵⁵ Scott, 28.

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