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RECENT ECO-THEOLOGICAL INITIATIVES AS PROMOTED BY THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

Chad Rimmer

The Lutheran World Federation has been engaged in initiatives related to creation or climate change for over three decades. The first statement on creation issued by LWF governance was in 1977 at the 6th Assembly in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. In 1984, one of the sub-themes of the 7th LWF Assembly was *In Christ: Hope for Creation*. At the 8th Assembly in 1990 in Curitiba, Brazil, the theme *The Cry of the Poor* became a platform to highlight the disproportional effects of climate change on the poor, relating the cries of creation to those of the climate vulnerable. That nexus also related the theological concept of justification and justice. LWF Council increasingly released statements on climate justice¹, and the Department of Theology (*in different forms*) produced many eco-theological studies on creation and climate change. The most recent evolution of the LWF's environmental engagement focuses on the intergenerational injustices of climate change (which we see in the Kids Climate Court Case, global strike-out for the climate demonstrations inspired by Greta Thunberg). The Youth led LWF COP Delegations are a vehicle for many of our joint ecumenical engagements in the UNFCCC Processes, and youth implemented climate projects across the communion. So, in mapping recent initiatives in eco-theology, I wish to characterize them as the most recent incarnations of the LWF's historical initiative.

In 2017, the 12th LWF Assembly met under the theme, *Liberated by God's Grace*, which included a sub-theme, *Creation Not For Sale*. The Assembly passed two resolutions regarding climate justice, care for creation and the need for education and diakonia. These resolutions led to a process of outlining strategic directions for engaging climate justice, and greatly influenced the LWF Strategy for 2019 -2024. Rooted in the Assembly's mandate, the new strategy prioritizes a commitment to build the capacity of LWF member churches to advocate, educate (including theological education), and to engage in adaptation, mitigation and youth led climate initiatives. In other words, our vocation to minister to creation and the climate vulnerable are playing an increasing role in forming the LWF's self-understanding of what it means to be "a communion in Christ, living and working together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world."

By explicitly prioritizing climate justice in the new strategy, the LWF is realizing Celia Deanne-Drummond's concept of eco-theology as a discipline concerned with recovering the bases of just relationships in a holistic sense. As I speak, the LWF Council is still in session. I left early to attend this conference, but not before the Council passed a new structure to implement the new strategy. This new structure gives an important signal about the LWF's desire to expand a programmatic commitment to eco-theology. One must first remember that the LWF is a communion of

¹ The theme of 2008 LWF Council in Tanzania was titled, "The Melting Snow on Mount Kilimanjaro – a witness to the Suffering of Creation". In total, 18 LWF Assemblies and Council meetings have produced statements on creation or climate justice. A summary can be found at <https://www.lutheranworld.org/climate-justice/resolutions-statements-climate>

churches. So, in a very real sense, everything that is done by any member church, represented even on this panel by the Church of Sweden, EKD churches and others, are part of the LWF's public witness. Obviously the initiatives are too numerous to begin listing here. However, our global programs, projects and advocacy commitments represent an additional layer of initiatives as a communion of churches. That is why the new structure is significant.

Within the new structure, the LWF will establish an Action for Justice Unit. This unit will use a local to global methodology to coordinate advocacy and resource projects. I can say more about that methodology if you are interested. But the important point is that within this unit, the LWF has recruited a new Climate Justice Officer. This person will lead the Communion Office in advocacy issues related to UNFCCC and other climate related processes in civil society, and coordinate work with LWF World Service Country Programs to resource adaptation and mitigation projects. In addition to coordinating humanitarian responses to disaster relief, our diaconal interventions will build the resilience of member churches needing to adapt to loss and damage and their capacity to engage in national advocacy. These capacities will be increasingly significant as we strive to secure NDCs during the implementation phase of the Paris rulebook.

There is one other structural development that signals the LWF's initiative related to eco-theology. The diaconal, humanitarian and advocacy engagements that I mentioned above embody important parts of the LWF's public witness to climate justice. However, all of our diapraxis and advocacy related to climate justice needs to be continually reformed by ongoing theological reflection and education. This critical, transformative task is the domain of eco-theology as a trans-contextual, theologico-ethical discipline and as a spirituality.

For this reason, the new Department of Theology, Mission and Justice will dedicate a program within the Theological Studies Unit specifically to the area of eco-theology. A programmatic focus on eco-theology will integrate the ecological implications of gender studies and economics, or integrate human rights discourse and public theology with the eco-theological narratives of children, youth and indigenous communities. Integrating diverse theological enquiries is necessary to a proper understanding of eco-theology. It will also help us explore Lutheran theological commitments related to creation, anthropology, and vocation. It will help us explore our Trinitarian theology of the Spirit and spiritual theology related to our liturgical seasons and place-based worship (*which I will speak more directly to in tomorrow's session*). Securing this programmatic commitment to study eco-theology as a communion can also coordinate our member churches' and theological institutions efforts to develop and share educational resources dedicated to creation care, and promoting ecological and placed based education in Christian education curricula.

Practically, these strategic commitments will open up a few new initiatives. First, a global Network for Theological Education and Formation will be a platform for convening seminars and facilitating education partnerships related to eco-theology between member churches and theological institutions. For example, an upcoming seminar on teaching eco-theology will be led by the Church of Norway. Second, we can highlight the eco-theological implications of gender justice, and the gender implications of climate justice. Third, we will be in a good position to strengthen our commitment to intergenerational climate justice. Youth will continue to inform our rights based approach through theological research and fostering a local to global approach that connects the theological reflection of member churches to the global initiatives. Finally, we will strengthen our Lutheran commitment to joint ecumenical witness, particularly in close collaboration with the World Council of Churches, ACT Alliance, and our interfaith partnerships at the level of the COP. Eco-theology has provided another entry point for new partnerships

through the Season of Creation. The Season of Creation brings us into a new ecumenical constellation with the Global Catholic Climate Movement, Green Anglicans, WCRC, A Rocha, World Evangelical Alliance, et. al. Our collaboration a way to demonstrate ecumenical solidarity with creation prayer, worship and joint action. For 2020, the Season of Creation prayers, parish resource and youth statement will focus on the theme of Biodiversity.

So the LWF can add new initiatives to the map in the area of eco-theology. But all of these initiatives grow out of our communion's historic commitment to justice and reconciliation. Particularly in an era of ethno-nationalism and forces of disintegration, these programmatic initiatives witness to our belief in the hope of communion for the healing of the whole inhabited earth. To that end, eco-theology is not just about non-human creation. An ecological hermeneutic looks to the holistic dimensions of restoring right relationships among creation, which must necessarily integrate economic, political, social and anthropological commitments under one Trinitarian theological ecology.

ECO-THEOLOGY AND CLIMATE JUSTICE IN RWANDA

Gloriose Umuziranenge

Introduction

Nowadays, one of the greatest problems over the world is climate change and Global climate is warming at an unprecedented rate¹. According to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, developing countries are expected to suffer the most from the negative impacts of climate change². Indeed, poor developing nations who have done little to cause the emissions of greenhouse gas are also affected by the impact of climate change at the same level as developed countries who have emitted much of the pollution and who have a strong capacity of dealing with the consequences through mitigation and adaptation measures.

Rwanda is located in the central-eastern part of Africa. It shares borders with Uganda in the North, Tanzania in the East and South East, Burundi in the South and Democratic Republic of Congo in the West. Rwanda is a small landlocked country of 26,338 Km². It is one of the highest population densities in Africa (1,060/sq mi) and its population is estimated at 12.79 million in 2019³. Therefore Rwanda's future socio-economic development is uncertain as its population grows and the climate changes, causing pressure on land, water, food and energy resources. Rwanda is experiencing severe consequences of climate change where especially in rural parts of Rwanda heavy rains caused widespread, flooding, severe soil erosion, landslides, crop and livestock loss, and destruction of road infrastructure and property countrywide and in some parts, the highest cost of human life⁴. In addition it threatens agricultural production. Climate change associated impacts found to be a main challenge for rural poor farmers dominating the agriculture sector because of their limited adaptive capacity to cope with these impacts⁵. Therefore in rural areas where people depend on agriculture, farmers face substantial risk of crop failure and famine when drought hit.

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugees (MIDIMAR) from January to end April, 2018 recorded 95 people dead and 195 injured. Disasters damaged 4,560 Ha of crops and de-

1 IPCC. Summary for Policymakers. In: Stocker TF, Qin D, Plattner G-K, et al., eds. *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA.

2 IPCC, 2007: Summary for Policymakers. In: *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, M.L. Parry, O.F. Canziani, J.P. Palutikof, P.J. van der Linden and C.E. Hanson, Eds., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 7-22.

3 National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR, 2012), Fourth Rwanda Population and Housing Census. Thematic Report: Population Projections.

4 REMA. (2013). "The Assessment of Economic Impacts of the 2012 Wet Season Flooding in Rwanda." Kigali, Rwanda

5 MINAGRI. (2013). "Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture in Rwanda – Phase III." Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources. Kigali, Rwanda.

stroyed 370 houses. They destroyed 12 roads, 7 churches, 18 bridges and killed 700 livestock⁶. According to the study conducted to assess the effects climate change on food security in Rwanda (case of Bugesera District), decline in the food crop productivity has been found to be the main effects caused by extreme climatic events⁷.

To address the adverse impacts of climate change especially on agricultural productivity in Rwanda several adaptation measures have been discussed and put in place by the government in order to intensify agriculture sector and further improve economic growth such as the promotion of non rain-fed agriculture, increased use of modern agricultural techniques, cultivation of drought-tolerant crops in arid and semiarid zones, introduction of precocious (early-maturing) varieties in arid and semiarid zones, promotion of value addition and other postharvest techniques for agricultural products and reinforcing early-warning and rapid intervention systems.

In its vision 2050, Rwanda envisages to be a developed country, with a strong services sector, low unemployment and low levels of poverty. It is a country where agriculture and industry have a minimal negative impact on the environment, operating in a sustainable way, and enabling Rwanda to be self-sufficient regarding basic necessities. By 2050, development will be achieved with low carbon domestic energy resources and practices, reducing Rwanda's contribution to climate change while allowing it to be independent of imported oil for power generation. Finally, Rwanda will have the robust local and regional knowledge to be able to respond and adapt to changes in the climate and the resulting impacts, supporting other African countries as a regional services hub to do the same⁸.

The National Green Growth and Climate Resilience Strategy 2011-2050: 14 programmes of action

In Rwanda, 14 programmes of actions for green growth and climate resilience were put in place by the Government as follows:

- Sustainable intensification of small scale farming
- Agricultural diversity for local and export markets
- Integrated Water Resource Management and Planning
- Sustainable Land Use Management and Planning
- Low carbon mix of power generation for national grid
- Sustainable small-scale energy installations in rural areas
- Green industry and private sector investment
- Climate compatible mining.
- Efficient resilient transport systems.
- Low carbon urban settlements.
- Ecotourism, Conservation.
- Sustainable forestry, agroforestry and biomass energy.
- Disaster Management and Disease Prevention
- Climate data and projections

6 <https://reliefweb.int/report/rwanda/midimar-supported-and-comforted-population-affected-disasters>.

7 Rwanyirizi and Rugema. (2013). "Climate Change Effects on Food Security in Rwanda: Case Study of Wetland Rice Production in Bugesera." *Rwanda Journal 1 (1): 35-51*.

8 Gov of Rwanda. (2011). Green Growth and Climate Resilience National Strategy for Climate Change and Low Carbon Development. Kigali-Rwanda.

Among the successful green economy in Rwanda, we can highlight the Rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems (Lands, forests, National Parks, Wetlands), CIP: Crop Intensification Program⁹, Tourism revenue sharing to benefit local communities around national Parks shifted from 5% to 10 % since 2017, Ban on plastic bags use¹⁰, successful Green village pilots has demonstrated poverty reduction benefits: Ease access to electricity and other infrastructures and community empowerment and awareness increased, green demonstration villages.

What the Bible says on Creation and stewardship?

The issue of environment deterioration and its consequences has ethical and spiritual dimensions, among others. The biblical concept on Creation and stewardship by human being teaches clear that “Human beings” are responsible for taking care of God’s creation. (Genesis 2:15). Theologically, this means that salvation brought by Jesus Christ do not only send us to be witness to others but rather and more importantly to take care of God’s creation in its wholeness. Hence, the Church of God is called and sent to sensitize the community for the change of attitudes and practices towards environment.

In Rwanda the majority of the populations are believers in one of the existing religions. The dominant religious group is the Catholics, who represent 44% of the resident population of the country. The second most prevalent religious group are the Protestants (38%), while other religion groups are made up of Adventists (12%), Muslims (2%) and Jehovah’s Witnesses (1%). While those with no religious affiliation represent 2.5%, adherents of the traditionalist/animists and of other religions each represent less than 1% of the population. Thus, Christian religious groups represent 95% of the population of Rwanda¹¹. In addition, religion is cultural language which people in Rwanda understand well because they are deeply imbedded into religion systems and rationalities. Christianity being a majority, a better understanding on (Holy writings), can help the sensitization. However in this paper let me confine myself in Christianity responsibility on environmental conservation.

Christians believe that God created the universe, everything created belongs to God, not us, God gave human beings the responsibility to care for it and they believe that a good Christian is the one who protect the environment. He created the male and female, blessed them, and said, “Have many children, so that your descendents will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals. I have provided all kinds of grain and all kinds of fruit for you to eat; but for all the wild animals and birds I have provided grass and leafy plants for food” (Genesis, 1). The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it. Unfortunately, in proudness of wanting to be like God, human beings rebelled, one of the consequences of human rebellion is the rejection of being God’s stewards. Human have destroyed the Creation of God to the extent that even human beings

9 The policy about crop intensification program is aimed at boosting agricultural productivity through an improvement of productive inputs use, irrigation coverage and soil quality. Under CIP, the government procures improved seed and fertilizer, which distributes to farmers in selected zones chosen for their food crop production potential.

10 Danielsson, M. (2017). The plastic bag ban in Rwanda: local procedures and successful outcomes.

11 National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR, 2012), Fourth Population and Housing Census. Thematic Report: Socio-cultural characteristics of the population.

are in turn destroying themselves. Indeed, in so much as it has neglected the socio-ecological implications of its teachings; Christianity has a certain responsibility in helping to bring about the ecological crisis despite also holding within itself the potential to provide a robust foundation for socio-ecological actions linking social justice and ecological health as the essence of environmental justice¹². Therefore environmental justice seeks for better conservation outcomes by involving all people and treats them fairly in all activities regarding the environment¹³. It refers to the process by which environmental actors and the community work together by identifying needs, shared values and challenges and setting up measures and goals to address them as well as implementing together different activities and projects. This concept is linked to the principles of eco-theology in connecting the pain of people to degraded ecosystems, seeking to alleviate both human pain and ecological degradation¹⁴. Therefore religious philosophy ought to have the option to address current emergencies and crisis for offering progressively natural and socially sustainable initiatives and choices.

In Rwandan context, there is a sense of responsibility for creation care in the community. However, the Church has never, and should not be an observer when it comes to her responsibility as an institution called by God to be steward of God's creation. Moreover, there is a change, role and the understanding of what the church should do the local community. Furthermore, the Church called to give spiritual hope or Christian education but also much more education related to environment education. By having the church as an actor Christians can bridge scientific arguments on climate change that can be translated into Christian's understanding and culture. The church is important in translating climate data and climate change information into cultural practices and behaviors of the people in the community. Thus, it is easy for Christian to believe that respect for God can be connected to the respect of creation.

Protestant Churches green initiatives in Rwanda

In Rwanda there are strategies and processes which try to strengthen the role done by churches in environmental education. Since Churches have the advantage that they talk the language which God commanded to Christians on creation care. Reminding Christian values, the church can take as a point of departure when addressing the problem of environmental destruction and major actions of conserving the environment. Churches are much easily in contact with the local people (Christians) and they could embed climate change effects and climate justice into Christian language and rationality. This is even what the states can learn and do properly.

On the track of dealing with climate change effects in Rwanda, Protestants churches were not left behind. Protestant University of Rwanda, in a partnership with United Evangelical Mission, stated an environmental awareness program to help underserved communities shape their knowledge with regards to environmental protection, especially climate change mitigation and adaptation measures as a matter of environmental justice, as well as a biblical perspective with

12 Dawson, N., Grogan, K., Martin, A., Mertz, O., Pasgaard, M., & Rasmussen, L. V. (2017). Environmental justice research shows the importance of social feedbacks in ecosystem service trade-offs. *Ecology and Society*, 22(3).

13 Leciejewski, M., & Perkins, H. A. (2015). Environmental justice in Appalachia: Procedural inequities in the mine permitting process in Southeast Ohio. *Environmental Justice*, 8(4), 111-116.

14 Hrynkow, C. W. (2017). Greening God? Christian Ecotheology, Environmental Justice, and Socio-Ecological Flourishing. *Environmental Justice*, 10(3), 81-87.

regard to environmental care. In fact, 80 participants from Protestant churches received trainings to help address local environmental, health, and economic challenges thanks to UEM to the support provided in the implementation of this activity. The training has been held at PIASS since January 2017 in consecutive phases. It is aimed at improving knowledge and skills of church members, most from the Anglican Church, the Presbyterian Church and others, about mitigating and adapting the effects of climate and its consequences on human welfare, especially on food security in Rwanda, waste management and sustainable development goals, as well as learning from what other practitioners have done in environmental protection related matters. Participants were Church Leaders, Mother's Unions associations, Protestants Schools' directors, and churches development officers. The partnership between PUR and UEM created a working group with the emphasis on the connections between environmental justice and the role of Protestant churches and how they can integrate environmental justice and trainings in their strategic planning. The training facilitates collaboration between churches and environmental justice stakeholders and it strengthens the capacity of communities and church-based organizations to engage in environment advocacy and awareness in planning. Trainings offer knowledge to the participants and make them able to respond to nature conservation in their communities. It is expected that, at the end of each training, the trainees are able to explain the consequences of human actions on the deterioration of the integrity of creation, articulate theological and biblical insights on the place of human beings in the created world and their responsibility as stewards of God in taking care of creation and argue the role of Christians in sensitization, advocacy and practices for the integrity of the created order.

Implemented activities by EAR¹⁵ in Rwanda

Implemented activities by churches in Rwanda are community mobilization on environmental conservation, training and sensitization on energy saving stoves (EAR Diocese Shyogwe), training on soil management and soil erosion prevention, trees plantation and distribution of seedlings in local community, distribution of ceramic water filters in local community. Initiatives carried out by EAR are community improvement initiatives and are operated as a joint activity between Butare, Cyangugu, Kigeme and Shyogwe dioceses of the Anglican Church of Rwanda. The 4 dioceses agree with that the church has a critical position to play inside the socio-economic development of the human beings. They recognition on selling harmony and participating in the healing technique of the human beings inside the 4 dioceses via social transformation introduced approximately through non secular change and participation of the community in identifying and enforcing applicable tasks to overcoming their each day issues. The church has a role as a restoration ministry in reconciliation, restoration, and rehabilitation. The church has also been concerned with rural improvement, vocational education, schooling, and in the war against HIV/AIDS. The agricultural improvement Inter-Diocesan carrier (RDIS) is a community development undertaking operated as a joint movement via Butare, Cyangugu, Kigeme and Shyogwe dioceses of the Anglican Church in Rwanda. The enterprise has very deep involvement in the groups it works with, no longer only because of the presence of the Anglican Church inside the vicinity, but additionally on the basis of the numerous initiatives and programmes that it is undertaking, together with threat reduction and environmental protection, tree nursery were prepared, improved cooking stoves, land terracing, Swamp control, Saving and credit score, Mobilization of

15 Eglise Anglicane au Rwanda

saving groups, promotion of profits-producing sports, nutrition safety interventions, Irish potato developing - rice developing, Pineapple growing and processing, fish farming, animal herding, goats, pigs, hens, water and sanitation, water conservation, water tanks, Biogas (very few trials, mainly in schools), go-phase/ability building, own family making plans, financial savings and credit attain and animal husbandry. Moreover, the Dioceses run various colleges and fitness facilities. With reference to climate change mitigation and adaptation huge achievements of the church are highlighted under: advanced cook Stoves undertaking: From 2007 to 2013, RDIS distributed approximately 3000 improved Stoves (ICS), constructed from locally available substances (bricks, clay, cement). And given that since 2012, RDIS is effectively implementing a Carbon project for improved cooking Stoves and Water Ceramic Filters in Rwanda. The reason of this project (Carbon Emission reduction for Self Sustainable Environmental Care) is particularly to lessen the use of firewood, which is extremely scarce in Rwanda. RDIS is likewise concerned with reforestation through the establishment of tree nurseries and capacity building activities. RDIS therefore, participate in the distribution and mobilization on the use of power-saving stoves as a very important activity as a way to reduce the use of charcoal and firewood¹⁶. This project has facilitated beneficiaries in the cooking process which seems to be easy compared with the use of firewood, the process which is very quick, reduced smokes in the Kitchen, and the cleanness of the kitchen. Water ceramic filters have reduced the time spent on drinking water boiling and water born diseases were reduced according to beneficiaries, the project generated employment in the local community. Even though Churches are committed to address some of the effects of climate change, they still face the challenge of low community awareness about the risks of climate change which constitutes an obstacle to ownership of protection measures, lack of knowledge and skills among community and church members in relation to climate protection, difficult collaboration between environmental actors (churches, civil society, foreign agencies and government services and Lack of enough resources to implement projects to address climate change.

Conclusion and recommendations

Environmental justice as a new paradigm in conservation and protection of environment could be linked to community empowerment due to the fact that when the community is socially and economically empowered, threats which they cause to the environment are reduced. Raising awareness of the community on environmental justice related matters and promoting equality in using natural resource impact promote a holistic for sustainable development. For a country to advance in sustainable development and enhance environmental justice there is a need to strengthen community participation in different projects and domains so that they can feel comfortable with what is happening in their living environment. Environmental Justice links human rights and development to achieve a human-centred approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its resolution equitably and fairly. Therefore citizens of the developed world should intervene to minimize the impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable by supporting developing countries and communities to adapt their livelihoods, protect their resources and embrace low carbon development (climate justice). Better environmental conservation actions require active participation and in-

16 2nd Assessment of Environmental Protection Activities in UEM member churches in the African Region 2011-2015

volvement of all including women, children, vulnerable people, and very poor people as they are the ones who firstly affected by the consequences of climate change. Churches should actively participate as they have advantage of translating climate change and climate justice information at local community scale through gospel that Christians can understand easily. And as God's people, Christians have a responsibility to work for climate justice by reducing climate crisis. Churches should be involved in carbon emissions reduction strategies. For instance, churches should be involved in promoting ecological agriculture using organic fertilizers. Churches may also include teachings related to protecting our planet as a God given treasure, especially in Sunday schools so that people feel concerned with this matter from a very young age.