

THEOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY KAMPEN–UTRECHT

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH–SHYOGWE DIOCESE’S ECO-THEOLOGY IN  
CONVERSATION WITH CONRADIE’S VIEW OF THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION AND  
SALVATION

Master’s thesis for the Master of Intercultural Reformed Theology (MIRT)

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## CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Study Background and Research Problem Statement

According to the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, “The climate emergency is a race we are losing, but it is a race we can win.”<sup>1</sup> Following this statement, he argues that climate change is the major crisis that our contemporary era is faced with is happening on an unprecedented pace beyond human imagination. Yet, people are still immobilized to effectively handle this global threat. Guterres further notes that no part of the earth is immune from the devastating consequences of climate change such as: “rising temperatures that are accelerating environmental degradation, natural disasters, weather extremes, food and water insecurity, economic disruption, conflict, sea levels are rising, the Arctic is melting, coral reefs are dying, billions of tons of CO<sub>2</sub> are released into the atmosphere every year as a result of coal, oil, and gas production, oceans are acidifying, and forests are burning.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, due to the high costs of this climate change, he earnestly calls for “bold collective action” to tackle this ecological crisis that threatens lives of God’s creatures.

The same call is also made to the Rwandans who are in a high-risk situation compared to other parts of the globe. According to recent studies, since 1970, Rwanda has experienced a temperature increase of 1.4°C. This increase in temperature is reported to be higher than the global average, and more of this increase is expected up to 2.5°C by the 2050s from 1970. In the same way, precipitation is highly inconstant and the projections show an expected increase of the

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, “The Climate Crisis – A Race We Can Win,” *Shaping Our Future Together UN75* (2020), accessed February 17, 2023 at <https://www.un.org/en/un75/climate-crisis-race-we-can-win>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, “The Climate Crisis – A Race We Can Win.”

average annual rainfall of roughly 20% by the 2050s from 1970. The same projections indicate that Rwanda and Burundi are the most exposed among other East African countries due to an increasing trend in rainfall intensity for both rainy seasons which is likely to cause floods and storms responsible for landslides, crop losses, health risks, and damage to infrastructure.<sup>3</sup>

Similar to Guterres' call for reactions and actions, the voices that advocate for taking action for the current global crisis are heard from different spheres of society. This is the example of the 2015 Lambeth Declaration. In this declaration, leaders of the faith communities recognized the urgent need for action on climate change. Despite differences in their faiths, they reiterated that they see the earth as a beautiful gift. They share the same calling to care for the earth and have a responsibility to live creatively and sustainably in a world of finite resources. For this reason, since climate change is already disproportionately affecting the poorest in the world, they call upon all nations of the world to urgently limit the global rise in average temperatures to a maximum of 2°C and to remember their responsibility to act now, for themselves, their neighbors and for future generations. The same call also addresses the use of intellectual, economic, and political resources without forgetting spirituality which is a powerful agent of change both individual and collective change. For this regard, faith communities are called to (1) recognize the urgency of the tasks involved in making the transition to a low carbon economy. (2) develop the spiritual and theological resources that will strengthen them individually and together in their care of the earth, each other, and future generations; (3) encourage and pray for those engaged in the intellectual, economic, political, and spiritual effort needed to address this crisis; (4) work with their communities and partners in the UK and internationally to mitigate the effects of climate change on the poorest and most vulnerable

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<sup>3</sup> The Republic of Rwanda, "Green Growth and Climate Resilience" *National Strategy on Climate Change and Low Carbon Development* (Kigali October 2011), accessed February 8, 2023, <https://www.climate-laws.org>

communities in the world; (5) build on the examples of local and international action to live and to work together sustainably, (6) redouble their efforts to reduce emissions that result from their institutional and individual activities.<sup>4</sup>

In the Rwandan context, the same call is made by the *Conseil Protestant du Rwanda* (CPR) or Protestant Council of Rwanda which is the national umbrella of mainstream churches in Rwanda. According to its report, in its support to the Government of Rwanda's effort to lay a good foundation for lasting development and environmental care, the CPR finds it necessary and important to engage in "a sensitization and mobilization campaign within church parishes to integrate different activities related to environment conservation and promotion into church priorities."<sup>5</sup> This intervention is based on the importance of trees and churches' role in rehabilitating the forests to improve the quality of life of the people. This program aims at mobilizing both pastors and Christians in parishes on the issue of environmental degradation due to climate change. It also aims at strengthening the capacity of the churches through education and sensitization workshops so that parishes can put an important program of tree planting in their priorities.<sup>6</sup>

In this regard, my denomination the Anglican–Shyogwe Diocese which is the focal point in this study located in the southern part of Rwanda where this climate change is affecting people in various ways heard this call to take action for mitigating the ecological crisis. The southern part of Rwanda where the Shyogwe Diocese is located is prone to heavy rainfalls that cause severe floods and landslides. Consequently, over the last five years, the Anglican Church–

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<sup>4</sup> Church of England, "The Lambeth Declaration 2015 on Climate Change," accessed July 17, 2023, <https://www.churchofengland.org/>

<sup>5</sup> The Protestant Council of Rwanda, "The Role of Churches Parishes in Protecting, Rehabilitating the Environment and Fighting Against Climate Change in Rwanda," accessed July 17, 2023, <http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/Rwanda-PCCR-plan.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> The Protestant Council of Rwanda, "The Role of Churches Parishes



Shyogwe diocese experienced severe natural disasters due to violent winds and storms that caused unexpected expenses for rebuilding and repairing some of its social infrastructures. These infrastructures include four schools in Nyabinoni, Hanika, Gitarama, and Vunga Parishes; four church buildings in Gikomero, Nyarugenge, Vunga, and Gisanga parishes; landslides have caused the loss of the entire primary school in Rugendabari parish and the church had to buy new land to build new classrooms for people in this area.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the majority of the Shyogwe Diocese's members live in rural areas where most of them heavily depend on the use of land for their survival and firewood for cooking. These practices are causes of landslides, deforestation, and air pollution with the release of big amounts of carbon they are also a sign of stewardship abuse by believers as discussed later in Chapter four and five. From this situation, it is evident that church members have moved from caring for creation to destroying it. How the Shyogwe Diocese reacts and acts to find solutions to this situation matters and shows to which level its members understand their role as stewards of God's creation.

For this reason, as the world is mobilized to find solutions to this issue, the Shyogwe Diocese in collaboration with other churches such as other Anglican dioceses in the southern province of Rwanda and the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda, through its holistic mission undertook some actions (more elaborated in chapter three of this study) to respond to this ecological crisis in terms of reducing carbon emission, afforestation and the use solar energy power. However, though this initiative is still at its initial stage, the Shyogwe Diocese's effort to care for creation is adversely affected by another internal theological narrative on behalf of its very active members known as the *Balokole*.<sup>8</sup> This group of believers sees nothing good in the

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<sup>7</sup> S.M, my respondent (staff in the office of the Shyogwe Diocese) was interviewed on April 21, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> According to "Kevin Ward", in *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* "Tukutendereza Yesu" The Balokole Revival in Uganda," accessed March 24, 2023, <https://dacb.org>

material world and affirms that the current state of the world corrupted by sin is beyond redemption, hence God will destroy it. For this reason, they believe that the focus should be on the salvation of the human soul. Consequently, since this group is well placed to impact the community because of its influence, its position remains dominant among church members, and as a result, there has been some reluctance even a lack of emphasis on a holistic view of salvation by the Shyogwe Diocese.

Moreover, the Shyogwe Diocese would find it useful to revisit some traditional practices that help in the contextualization of some Christian views about creation care however, from the *Balokole*'s point of view, the Rwandan traditional religious practices are ungodly and unreliable for contextualization despite their role in the preservation of environment. The Rwandan Traditional Religion preserved these practices in the form of education passed from one generation to another embedded in its view of the natural world as *Ingobyi/* cradle<sup>9</sup> that carries and protects Rwandans. This *Balokole*'s attitude toward the material world and cultural practices is seemingly rooted in their understanding of the doctrine of creation and salvation, and this situation provokes several questions about the object of salvation: will only the human soul be saved or the creation as a whole? Is there any role that human beings have to play in God's work of salvation?

Therefore, from this background, this study aims at helping the Shyogwe Diocese to have a clear theological position about the doctrine of creation and salvation that answers similar

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*"Balokole"* is a Luganda word meaning "The Saved People" who are the product of the late 1920s and 1930s East African Revival Movement that emerged as an important movement within African Protestantism.<sup>8</sup> In underlining its influence, Ward describes the impact of this movement in terms of its "invigorating and renewing churches' life and offering individuals the challenge of a deeper experience of salvation in Christ and a more radical commitment to Christian discipleship."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>9</sup> National Anthem of Rwanda - Rwanda Nziza, accessed June 7, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q\\_MuyRiRM\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_MuyRiRM_Q)

questions to holistically respond to the current ecological crisis in Rwanda. In doing so, what would be the Shyogwe Diocese's theological understanding of Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15) about the human central role to exercise dominion over the earth, subdue it for the glory of the Creator and its implications for what does exercising dominion over the earth, subdue it for the glory of the Creator mean as stewards and responsibility for creation? What does that particularly mean for Christians in the Shyogwe Diocese? What makes it difficult for members of the Shyogwe Diocese to live this out? And, what is entailed in God's salvific work to His creation?

Consequently, the study investigates how the Shyogwe Diocese's holistic mission responds to the current ecological crisis and how it should be reexamined and redirected to help its members and engage in conversation with its *Balokole* members to have a holistic view of the doctrine of creation and salvation. In search for solution to how the Shyogwe Diocese's holistic mission can be renewed and developed, the study uses the work of Ernst M. Conradie, a South African theologian who extensively wrote about eco-theology. He has the mastery of the African context in this area and for this reason His insights are indispensable to this study. To achieve this goal the study chose to engage in the conversation between the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese and Reformed theologians especially with Conradie and some lessons that can be learned from the contextualization of some Rwandan Traditional Religion's practices that promoted the preservation of creation. Thus, for this reason, the study will be guided by the following research question:

## **1.2. Research question**

### **1.2.1. The main research question**

“What can be learned from a conversation between the representatives of the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese, the *Balokole* believers and Reformed theologians, and especially Conradie with respect to understanding God’s plan and our human responsibility for the creation?”

### **1.2.2. Research sub-questions**

1. What is an ecological crisis, how does this affect the biodiversity in Rwanda and what can be learned from the Rwandan Traditional Religious practices that preserved nature to enhance the church and community members’ involvement in their environmental stewardship?
2. What are the Shyogwe Diocese’s reactions and actions concerning the mitigation of the current ecological crisis and teaching its members about creation and the responsibility of believers for environmental care?
3. What is the *Balokole*’s understanding of creation and salvation?
4. What is the theological position of Reformed theologians (especially Conradie) with respect to creation and salvation; and his understanding of the role of humans as stewards?
5. How can a holistic view of the salvation of creation, the role of stewards, and environmental care of the Anglican church–Shyogwe Diocese be developed and renewed?

### **1.3. Research Objectives**

From the aim and study questions above, this study will be guided by the five objectives:

After a general introduction to the study that disrobed research problem, research question, and the methodology the main research objectives are:

1. To describe the current ecological crisis and the Rwandan situation including its socio-religious context.
2. To describe the Rwandan Traditional Religion and related theological discussion in the Anglican Church Shyogwe Diocese and the *Balokole*. The fourth objective is

3. To understand the Reformed and especially Conradie's view of creation, salvation and stewardship.
4. To engage in conversation between different representatives of the Anglican Church-Shyogwe Diocese including *Balokole* and the Reformed tradition including Conradie.
5. To find out what should be this study's recommendations to the Shyogwe Diocese to help its believers among whom, the *Balokole* to be involved in ecological crisis mitigation.

## **1.4. Research Methodology**

### **1.4.1. Delimitations**

The main focus of this study is the Anglican–Shyogwe Diocese's eco-theology in conversation with Conradie's view of the doctrine of creation and salvation.

The study is limited to the conversation between the representative of the Shyogwe Diocese, *Balokole* believers and Reformed theologians especially Conradie on the holistic view of creation and salvation, and the study proposes to revisit some African/Rwandan socio-religious practices that preserved creation. Since the purpose of this research is to deepen the Shyogwe Diocese's understanding of the role of the believers in the preservation of creation about understanding the doctrine of creation and salvation and stewardship to mitigate the current ecological crisis in Rwanda, for this reason the use of interviews, reading Reformed literature especially Conradie works the study intends:

1. To find how believers including the *Balokole* in Shyogwe diocese understand the creation in terms of value of the material world, their role in taking care of the creation/stewardship.
2. To get information from reformed theologians especially Conradie on how believers in Shyogwe Diocese can comprehend the doctrine of creation and salvation, God's project of

salvation with respect to the object of salvation (the entire creation), and the human beings' role in the process of salvation.

#### **1.4.2. Research Approach and Design**

In this study, the research approach is a qualitative, explorative study intended to better understand and improve the attitude of the Shyogwe Diocese's believers including the *Balokole* toward stewardship and environmental care. In designing this research the focus was on Reformed theologians especially Conradie, and interviews directly conducted through face-to-face with the selected respondents guided by several interview questions. Therefore, to examine the current Shyogwe Diocese eco-theology and stewardship, I conducted nine interviews with three categories of members of the Shyogwe Diocese who understand the role of believers in the creation care following God's mandate, these include three church leaders (pastors), three ordinary believers, three *Balokole* (1 theologian and 2 believers). I conducted interviews within the Shyogwe Diocese in Shyogwe, Gitarama Ntenyo, and Gasharu parishes. I visited my informants in their respective homes and offices in the areas mentioned above. In this regard, two phases were involved in this study: phase one is dedicated to the description of the empirical data, and the second phase on the analysis and interpretation of research findings.

#### **1.4.3. Data Collection Techniques**

I conducted interviews with 9 respondents between April 16 and April 27, 2023. All these were one on one interviews held in Kinyarwanda. With some respondents, I could not use a voice recorder because they were not comfortable with that. However, I managed to record 4 respondents out of 9 informants. I also kept extensive notes during the interviews. After each one, I summarized and described the content and my observations in a field notebook. In this

process, I met face-to-face with three *Balokole*, three other church members, and 3 church leaders as my respondents for interviews. In this study, I also chose to make a representative sample of 9 people for a better understanding of the situation given that there is limited literature about the Shyogwe Diocese: five out of nine interviews were done with women because they are the majority in membership of the Shyogwe Diocese and they are represented in all its spheres of decision making and also most exposed to effects of the ecological crisis. I also conducted secondary research for information on creation, stewardship, and eco-theology through library books and online sources.

#### **1.4.4. Ethical Values and Considerations**

In this study, I was conscious of the ethical research norms and practices concerning the way respondents wanted to answer questions in my interviews. I asked permission to use voice recording and take notes.

#### **1.5. The General Outline**

This thesis is made up of six chapters. The first chapter is the General Introduction to the study with a description of the research problem, research objectives, research question, and research methodology. The second chapter is the description of the current ecological crisis and the Rwandan situation including its socio-religious context. The third chapter is the description of the Anglican Church Shyogwe Diocese's reactions and actions and the *Balokole*'s theological narrative. The fourth chapter is the Reformed theology and especially Conradie's view of creation, salvation and stewardship. The fifth chapter is the conversation between different representatives of the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese including *Balokole* and the Reformed

tradition including Conradie. The sixth chapter is the general conclusion and recommendations to the Shyogwe Diocese

## **1.6. Conclusion**

In consideration of the UN Secretary's call for all global inhabitants to consider the harmful impact of climate change and work hand in hand to curb the current global ecological crisis, in this study, it is essential to contemplate the role of Christian communities in this issue. This curiosity leads to finding out whether the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese is playing the right role with the right theological motivation to provide a responsible and sustainable solution to this ecological crisis. For this regard, it is worth consistently following the line of questions about the current Shyogwe Diocese's reaction and actions concerning the mitigation of the current ecological crisis and teaching its members about creation and the responsibility of believers for environmental care, and what can be learned from a conversation between Anglican Church–Shogwe Diocese, the *Balokole* believers and Reformed theologians and especially Conradie with respect to understanding God's plan and our human responsibility for the creation. In light of this discussion, the study starts with a description of the causes and effects of the current situation of the ecological crisis in Rwanda and the socio-religious context that provided some friendly practices to the environment that are described in the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER TWO: DESCRIPTION OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS AND THE RWANDAN SITUATION INCLUDING ITS SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT**

### **2.0. Introduction**

This chapter describes the current situation ecological crisis in Rwanda and sheds some light on the Rwandan socio-religious context with its practices that can contribute to the preservation of nature. For this reason, the focus is laid on the causes and effects of the current ecological crisis on the Rwandan population; putting in evidence some socio-religious practices that can contribute to nature preservation. In doing so, the chapter aims at providing a context on which the current theological discussion on the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese’s position and the *Balokole*’s view of the material world and their relation to the African/Rwandan Traditional Religion in chapter three and with Ernst Conradie in chapter four that would all in turn contribute to the new insight for the Shyogwe Diocese’s eco-theology to deal with the current ecological crisis in chapter five.

### **2.1. The Description of the ecological crisis in Rwanda**

As mentioned in the introduction of this study, the address of Guterres indicates that no single part of the globe is exempted from the major crisis that our contemporary era is faced with due to climate change.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, the present study affirms this reality and explores the ecological crisis and pays particular attention to Rwanda, a landlocked country located in the Great Lakes region of central Africa. This country is a good example to use when one is talking about the ecological crisis because of its geographical, political, and historical situation. According to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs, Rwanda has historically suffered from periodic natural and manmade disasters, mainly in the form of droughts, floods,

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<sup>10</sup> United Nations, “The Climate Crisis – A Race We Can Win.”

and landslides impacting the agrarian economy and the country's efforts towards sustainable development and poverty reduction. Thus, the vulnerability of this country to intermittent natural catastrophes is a long-term concern.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, recent studies have proved that since 1970, Rwanda has experienced a temperature increase of 1.4°C. This increase in temperature is reported to be higher than the global average, and more of this increase is expected up to 2.5°C by the 2050s from 1970. In the same way, precipitation is highly inconstant and the projections show an expected increase of the average annual rainfall of roughly 20% by the 2050s from 1970. The same projections indicate that Rwanda and Burundi are the most exposed among other East African countries due to an increasing trend in rainfall intensity for both rainy seasons which is likely to cause floods and storms responsible for landslides, crop losses, health risks, and damage to infrastructure.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, the World Bank report states that the 2019/2020 Multidimensional Poverty Index shows that 48.8 percent of the population in Rwanda (6,418 thousand people in 2020) is multidimensionally poor while an additional 22.7 percent is classified as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty (2,984 thousand people in 2020).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, from this background, one might understand to what extent Rwanda has suffered and is still suffering from an ecological crisis in terms of human dignity as God's image bearer, social, cultural structures,

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<sup>11</sup>The Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugees Affairs, "Disaster High Risk zones on Floods and Landslides," *Unity of Research and Public Awareness*, (2012), accessed March 3, 2023, <https://www.preventionweb.net>

<sup>12</sup>The Republic of Rwanda, "Green Growth and Climate Resilience" *National Strategy on Climate Change and Low Carbon Development* (Kigali October 2011). Accessed February 8, 2023, <https://www.climate-laws.org>

<sup>13</sup> UNDP, "Briefing note for countries on the 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index Rwanda," accessed March 24, 2023, <https://hdr.undp.org/>

infrastructure, development facilities, and natural resources which are part the whole environment.<sup>14</sup>

## **2.2. Causes of the ecological crisis in Rwanda**

This ecological crisis in Rwanda is due to different causes resulting from human actions that are related to how people live, and what they produce and consume.

### **2.2.1. The Rwandan Demography**

First of all, the main greatest cause of this ecological crisis in Rwanda is related to its demography. According to the Ministry of Land, Environment, Forestry, Water and Mines, Rwanda is the most densely populated country in Africa with an estimated growth of 2.8% per year. Thus, by 2050, the prediction shows that Rwanda will be having 26 million people, with a population density of 987 people per square kilometer (on its 26,338 square kilometers). These high-density populated zones are currently characterized by overexploitation of lands that lead to the alteration of the vegetal cover and the advancement of the processes of soil erosion and landslides.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, this rapid population growth is at the origin of several defies such as land degradation, loss of biodiversity, excessive deforestation, water shortages, and difficulty in ensuring food security experienced in terms of declining of the overall agricultural production land cultivation is encroaching into wetlands, national parks and forest reserve areas to satisfy unmet demands.<sup>16</sup> In similar way Nahayo reports the increase of the quantity of fertilizers in few years from 2,149 to 27,748 tons and the irrigation spaced from 4,000 to 10,000 ha which can be

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<sup>14</sup> Accord, "Environmental causes and impacts of the genocide in Rwanda: Case studies of the towns of Butare and Cyangugu," *Environment and Human Rights* 2010, accessed March 20, 2023, <https://www.accord.org.za>

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Land, Environment, Forestry, Water and Mines: National Adaptation Programs of Action to Climate Change (2006), accessed February 23, 2023, <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/napa/rwa01e.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Li, Chaodong, Mingyi Yang, Zhanbin Li, and Baiqun Wang, 2021, "How Will Rwandan Land Use/Land Cover Change under High Population Pressure and Changing Climate?" *Applied Sciences* 11, no. 12: 5376, accessed March 6, 2023, at <https://doi.org/10.3390/app11125376>

the reasons of the rise of agricultural emissions.<sup>17</sup> Rwanda is also currently highly exposed to climate change because it mainly depends on rain for its agriculture production. The same dependence is extended to its hydropower source that generates half of its electricity.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, large numbers of internally displaced persons have worsened stress in some ecologically sensitive areas, such as in forests, resulting in localized degradation of forest resources.<sup>19</sup>

### **2.2.2. The use of firewood as cooking energy**

It is reported that in Rwanda like in many other Sub-Saharan African countries, almost 98% of all rural households use wood fuels and residues as their main source of cooking energy: 92% of families use firewood and its derivatives, 5% use charcoal while the use of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) and electricity are practically nonexistent.<sup>20</sup> It is also observed that the city of Kigali uses 70% of national wood energy, especially in terms of charcoal produced in Rwanda.<sup>21</sup> From this destruction of the forest at large scale, Chaodong, made a symbiotic analysis and pointed out the negative outcome of this action:

...destruction of forests causes changes in the water conservation function of the forests, which alters the groundwater cycle at the watershed on the regional scale. In turn, this causes changes in the local microclimate, resulting in changes in conditions such as precipitation and temperature. Precipitation and temperature are the two most important factors affecting food crops, and changes in these factors negatively impact food

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<sup>17</sup> Lamek Nahayo, Li Lanhai, Alphonse Kayiranga, Fidele Karamage, "Agricultural impact on environment and countermeasures in Rwanda," *African Journal of Agricultural Research* 11(25):2205-2212, accessed March 7, 2023, at <https://www.researchgate.net/>

<sup>18</sup> Republic of Rwanda, "Green Growth and Climate Resilience"

<sup>19</sup> Bigagaza, Jean, Carolyne Abong, and Cecile Mukarubuga, "Land scarcity, distribution and conflict in Rwanda," *Scarcity and surfeit: The ecology of Africa's conflicts* (2002): 50-82, accessed March 7, 2023, <https://landportal.org/>

<sup>20</sup> European Union, "Energy Initiative, Biomass Energy Strategy (BEST)," Rwanda Vol.3, Rural Supply & Demand (2009), accessed March 3, 2023, at <http://cleancooking.org>

<sup>21</sup> The Ministry of Natural Resources, "Rwanda Supply Master Plan for fuel wood and charcoal," *Agriconsulting S.p.A* (2013), accessed March 3, 2023, <https://www.environment.gov.rw/>

production, which eventually causes further expansion of cropland which is an important source of livelihood for Rwandans.<sup>22</sup>

From this description, deforestation is a big threat to people's life as it contributes to the lack of clean air like oxygen, low food production, and the destruction of homes to different species of animals.

### **2.2.3. Air, Water, and waste pollution**

Rwanda mainly suffers from three types of pollution: Air pollution water and waste pollution which have severe effects on the health of its population and thus, weigh heavily on its sustainable development. According to Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA) report in 2021, its study and assessment of air quality have found that “particulate matter and nitrogen oxides are the main ambient air pollutants that regularly exceed standards that affect human health due to road traffic, combustion of domestic fuels and industrial production.”<sup>23</sup> Form this observation, it is noteworthy to emphasize that with the dependence on unclean cooking energy, Rwandan population is regularly exposed to dangerous levels of indoor air pollution due to the use of charcoal, wood, and propane gas for cooking and kerosene for lighting.<sup>24</sup> World Health Organization reports cases of stroke, ischemic heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and lung cancer due to air pollution contributes to.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, Rwandans also greatly suffer from water pollution. It is estimated that only 30% of Rwandan water bodies have good ambient water quality. According to REMA, the main cause of water pollution is “sedimentation and siltation of water bodies mainly from soil erosion

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<sup>22</sup> Chaodong, "How Will Rwandan Land Use/Land Cover Change under High Population Pressure and Changing Climate?"

<sup>23</sup> Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA), “Air Quality Monitoring System 2021, accessed March 17, 2023, <https://www.rema.gov.rw/>

<sup>24</sup> GRID-Geneva, Pollution Rwanda, *Interactive Country Fiches*, accessed March 7, 2023, <https://dicf.unepgrid.ch/rwanda/pollution>

<sup>25</sup> World Health Organization, “Household air pollution” 28 November 2022, accessed March 21, 2023, <https://www.who.int/news-room>

and microbiological contamination linked to poor sanitation systems and practices.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, “agricultural and mining activities, as well as poor land and wastewater management pollute the country's water bodies in Rwanda.”<sup>27</sup> Subsequently, the use of contaminated water has an unprecedented harmful effect on human, animal, and plants that depend on water. In the case of human beings, contaminated water is the source of “diarrheal disease, intestinal parasites, and environmental enteropathy, and has complex and reciprocal links with malnutrition.” It is equally stated that in Rwanda, the total number of deaths in 2016 from diarrhea due to lack of water was 1,232, while the total number of deaths from lack of water, sanitation, and hygiene was 2,306.<sup>28</sup> Clean water seems to be among big challenges to a big number of Rwandan populations in both rural and urban areas.

Furthermore, Rwanda is faced with the challenge of managing the generated waste. This deficit leads to additional negative impacts on human health and the atmosphere in Rwanda. It is reported that the waste sector emits 12% of the country’s total emissions, according to the latest Rwanda Green House Gases (GHG) inventory data (which covers emissions up to the year 2015).<sup>29</sup> With the current urbanization, and economic growth in Rwanda, the waste management increasingly becomes a big challenge. Studies report the challenge the city of Kigali is faced with that sees an increase of 63% over the next ten years, from around 600 to 800 tons produced in 2019 to 1,300 tons per day by 2030<sup>30</sup> In this current ecological crisis in Rwanda, not only human lives are heavily endangered but also lives of other creatures that human inherently are to protect. Traditionally Rwandan people were educated to care for their environment, today this seems to be different. What has happened? What can be done to provide a solution to the current

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<sup>26</sup> REMA

<sup>27</sup> GRID-Geneva, “Pollution Rwanda, Interactive Country fiches”

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

ecological crisis? Can the socio-religious practices that promoted the preservation of nature be revisited and become part of the solution?

### **2.3. The Rwandan socio-religious practices that promote the preservation of nature**

#### **2.3.1. Understanding human-being position in the creation**

At the heart of understanding African/ Rwandan socio-religious practices that preserve nature, there are human beings as the key players. It is, therefore, important to understand their position in this matter. In the African/Rwandan worldview, the dignity of the human person is seen in the African view of human origins, worship, morals, and community life. In the creation stories of all African peoples, as Emeghara (a Nigerian theologian) describes it, “Humanity and God are so connected that one would cease to exist without the other. Although God is understood as being all-powerful, ever-present, all-knowing and demanding the greatest honor, fear, and reverence from all creation, the adherent to African Tradition Religion realizes that God’s imprint is within the human being, who imperatively acknowledges God’s existence and worships accordingly.”<sup>31</sup> For this reason, with this closeness to God, an individual lives in a moral society where search for the common good of the society is based on well-tailored relationships.

Therefore, in African tradition, as it is in the Rwandan culture, individuals are treated collectively. People see themselves as a community. The Rwandan proverbs disclose this reality of valuing the community over individuals with the intent to build strong bonds. One of these proverbs is “*inkingi imwe ntigera inzu*” which is slightly translated as “One pillar does not make a house strong.” This understanding of the human value in the community is shared by the

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<sup>31</sup> Nkem Emeghara, “The Dignity of the Human Person in African Belief,” *Theology Annual vol.14* 1992-1993 p.126-137, accessed June 6, 2023, [https:// archive.hsscol.org](https://archive.hsscol.org)

Kenyan theologian John Mbiti's famous adage: "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am." This view underlines the fact that the existence of the individual "*umuntu*" is the existence of the corporate due to his/her *ubumuntu/Ubuntu*<sup>32</sup> that provides essential human virtues that greatly contribute to the health wholeness of the community including the entire creation. In this regard, this *Ubumuntu* creates a deep sense of security in an otherwise insecure world in which African peoples live. Therefore, for Mbiti, this way of life gives firm assurance covering both the physical and metaphysical dimensions of human life as a result of this strong kinship system,<sup>33</sup> in other words, this mode of life puts *umuntu* in a healthy relationship with self, others, creation and God the Creator.

### **2.3.2. Understanding nature as *Ingobyi*/ cradle**

As mentioned earlier in the introduction to this study about the Rwanda socio-religious context, through their way of life, Africans/Rwandans created cultures and practices that promoted interrelationships of religion and culture and this is extended to nature in the light of the environmental care concerns. This worldview is embodied in symbols; proverbs, gods, nature and ancestral spirits, mythologies, totems, and taboos,<sup>34</sup> that are intended to preserve nature from one generation to another. Traditionally, the Rwandan concept *ingobyi* has different meanings and uses: it may be understood as the bride's palanquin that was used to carry her on her

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<sup>32</sup> Kate Webster describes "*Ubumuntu*" as a Kinyarwanda word that means "to be human", carrying a similar meaning to the word Ubuntu (which is also used in Kinyarwanda), a quality that includes the essential human virtues; compassion and humanity. *Ubumuntu* is to be humane: to genuinely care about others, to be generous and kind, to show empathy, to be sympathetic to the plight of others and to recognize the humanity of others. (Kate Webster, "*Ubumuntu*: Why we all need a bit of Rwandan culture right now?", accessed July 24, 2023, <https://www.couriermail.com.au/>)

<sup>33</sup> John S Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy (Second Edition)*, (Oxford, UK: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1989), 141, accessed June 6, 2023, <https://www.google.nl>

<sup>34</sup> Anthony, Ikechukwu, Kanu, Osa. *African Eco-Theology: Meaning Forms and Expressions*, (Maryland, USA: APAS, 2021) 10.



wedding day from her parent’s house to her new family,<sup>35</sup> or also known as hammock used to transport high-ranking officials that include chiefs and kings.<sup>36</sup> The *Ingobyi* also carries the meaning of a lineage land used with common accord with entire members of the family or clan because it was part of collective property.<sup>37</sup> *Ingobyi* also has another connotation as placenta: that organ that develops in the uterus during pregnancy,<sup>38</sup> it plays a vital role in the wellbeing of the baby, as the Mayo Clinic describes it, it is a “structure that provides oxygen and nutrients to a growing baby. It also removes waste products from the baby’s blood. The placenta attaches to the wall of the uterus, and the baby's umbilical cord arises from it;”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, mothers use *Ingobyi* made from animal skins to carry their babies on their back to help them feel warmth, comfort, and affection. However, the last two meanings of *Ingobyi* have the deepest meaning in Rwandans’ existence. The *Ingobyi* as placenta means a place of warmth, comfort, safety, feeding and growth in terms of cradle and placenta dominates the Rwandan worldview and their actions towards nature because it is life-centered. This understanding is still considered to be as important to Rwandans as it is underlined in the opening stanza of the new national anthem dated from 2002: “*Rwanda Nziza gihugu cyacu, wuje imisozi ibiyaga n’ibirunga. Ngobyi iduhetse gahorane ishya...*”<sup>40</sup> This anthem is written from the Rwandan cultural perspective and is a reminder for citizens that they should not carelessly handle or lack respect for their motherland

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<sup>35</sup> Scholastique Mukasonga, *Igifu*, Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2020), 95, accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.google.nl>

<sup>36</sup> David Whitehouse, *Missionaries and the Colonial State: Radicalism and Governance in Rwanda and Burundi, 1900 -1972*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2023), accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.google.nl>

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Biebuyck, *African Agrarian Systems: African Ethnographic Studies of the 20th Century*, (London, G.B: Oxford Press, 1963), accessed June 7, 2023, [www.google.nl](http://www.google.nl)

<sup>38</sup> Dag Heward Mills, “Umubano w’Abashakanye w’icyitegererezo: Agatabo k’Inama ku mubano w’abashakanye,” accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.google.nl>

<sup>39</sup> Mayo Clinic, “Placenta: How it works, what's normal,” accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.mayoclinic.org>

<sup>40</sup> National Anthem of Rwanda - Rwanda Nziza, accessed June 7, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q\\_MuyRiRM\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_MuyRiRM_Q)

that would be equated to destroying the source of warmth, protection, and provision for Rwandans as *Ingobyi* it is to all people.

This Rwandan perspective on the natural world was preserved through its transmission from one generation to another using a traditional education system operated through several mentioned earlier mediums such as symbols; proverbs, gods, nature and ancestral spirits, mythologies, totems, and taboos. Thus, for the African people, Ikechukwu (a Nigerian theologian) affirms the importance of this traditional education system and argues that “all religious traditions whether elementary, pre-literate or advanced, are environmentally friendly and teach environmental preservation and protection.”<sup>41</sup> How then the view of the natural world as *Ingobyi* was preserved and transmitted from one generation to another in the Rwandan society?

### **2.3.1.1. Transmission through proverbs**

In the Rwandan culture, proverbs and witty sayings (*imigani*) are insightful expressions of ideas and truth that constitute an integral part of a society’s culture. They are meant to convey a message either in the forms of appreciation, warning, or revealing the wealth identity and wealth of a society’s culture, and to teach historical and moral lessons.<sup>42</sup> Proverbs as traditional and insightful expressions of truth based on common experience are rich sources of African ecological customs and spirituality. Some of these sayings were commonly used to convey teachings and exhortations needed to relate to and care for the environment. Such Kinyarwanda proverbs include: The one who does not grow food for the nestlings cannot grow it for his children, the tree that will harvest in your old age, you plant it from your early young age; a tree

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<sup>41</sup> Ikechukwu, *African Ecotheology: Meaning, Form and Expression*, p. xi

<sup>42</sup> Adekunle, *Culture and Customs of Rwanda*, p. 54.

on a hill is a meeting place for birds; no one throws a stone where he or she has placed a container of milk.<sup>43</sup>

### **2.3.1.2. Traditional Religion and Eco-spirituality**

Ikechukwu believes that the emergence of eco-spirituality has its impetus in the view that the earth is “the manifestation of the presence of great spirit.”<sup>44</sup> This has been common to different African communities with beliefs that their different deities and spirit forces have taken the form of the different dimensions of the ecosystem.

In the Rwandan socio-religious context, forests were mainly highly valued as sacred places for traditional religious worship of the first king of Rwanda “Gihanga” and his successors. The king held worship ceremonies there to placate the spirits of the ancestors and to secure happiness for the country. At the same time, fountains of water were protected because it was believed by people that the water of these fountains has medicinal properties.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, in the Rwandan culture, the forests were protected because of their contribution to the well-being of the community. It was a custom that the kings in collaboration with rainmakers conducted their cultural rites in forests to make rain known as “*Kuvuba imvura.*” Thus, they cared for the forests as the tank of rain which sprinkles their kingdom and neighboring kingdoms. For a similar reason, people protected forests because they were considered as a stock of their medicinal herbs/ plants sought by the trad-practicians (traditional medicine).<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, there were and still are big trees known as *ibigabiro* and other natural resources preserved for cultural interests, tourist, and historical purposes.

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<sup>43</sup> Ikechukwu, African Eco-theology: Meaning, Form and Expression, p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.11

<sup>45</sup> Emmanuel Munyaneza, “The Role of Cultural Practices in the Conservation of Biodiversity in Rwanda,”

<sup>46</sup> Ibid,

### **2.3.1.3. Transmission through Myths**

Some of the pre-dynastic stories were myths, some were historical, and others were taught moral behavior or character-building, which constituted the bedrock of Rwandan culture and customs. Around fires in the evening, adults often narrated funny but educative stories. Also, moonlight storytelling took place. The evening period was appropriate not only for relaxation but also for social interaction.<sup>47</sup> In the area of environment care, in the southern province of Rwanda where Shyogwe Diocese is located there was a myth narrated to prevent unnecessary frequentations of the Busaga sacred forest, that in that forest “there are animals and plants which protect the forest”. These myths also exist in the neighboring population of the forest of Buhanga and Buhamba which are still less abused by people.<sup>48</sup>

### **2.3.1.4. Transmission through *Ibirangabwoko*/totems**

Among many African societies, animal, plant, and reptile totems were a sociocultural phenomenon. What is revered or how it is revered varies from place to place among the 32 Culture and Customs of Rwanda. Totems were created for clans or individuals. Some clans not only regarded the animals portrayed on their totems as their ancestors, but they also adopted their names. The spread of animal or plant totems may be the result of migration. In Rwanda, it is believed that both humans and animals are endowed with a spiritual force, but when an animal dies, the spiritual force vanishes. The members of these clans were prohibited from killing or eating the animals symbolized on their totems, and they could not cut down their totem plants. Animal totems were even given a human burial if found dead.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the totems known as *ibirangabwoko* in Kinyarwanda for these clans are: *umusambi* 'crested crane' for

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<sup>47</sup> Adekunle, *Culture and Customs of Rwanda*, p. 49.

<sup>48</sup> Emmanuel Munyaneza, “The Role of Cultural Practices in the Conservation of Biodiversity in Rwanda,”

<sup>49</sup> Adekunle, *Culture and Customs of Rwanda*, p. 32.

*Abanyiginya/Abasindi/Abatsobe; inyamanza* 'wagtail' for *Abagesera*; *sakabaka* 'black kite' for *Abasinga*; *ifundi* 'robin' for *Abungura*; *inkende* 'squirrel' for *Abahinda*; *ishwima* 'animals tick-eater bird' for *Abahondogo*; *umuhari* 'jackal' for *Abasita*; *intare* 'lion' for *Abashambo*, *uruvu* 'chameleon' for *Abarihira*; *ingeragere* 'deer' for *Abongera*; *igikeri* 'frog' for *Abega/Abakono*; *impyisi* 'hyena' for *Abacyaba/Ababanda*; *ingwe* 'leopard' for *Abazigaba* and *Abenengwe*.<sup>50</sup>

Whenever it was a possibility, children were taught that it was their duty to defend their totems as a part of their identity as a member of the clan or kinship. In this regard, they must feed, protect, care for, and rescue the totem where and when necessary. It was so important to share great stories with young people on how human beings became great by being kind to these totems.<sup>51</sup>

### **2.3.1.5. African/Rwandan Taboos**

Taboos are understood as the moral principles that encouraged people to relate with one another, with divinities, and with their environment. These principles were expressed in terms of what Africans ought or ought not to do to keep balance and harmony within the community and nature in general.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, Mbiti expands this definition and describes taboos as moral order that helps men to work out and know among themselves what is good and what is evil, right and wrong, truthful and false, and beautiful and ugly, and what people's rights and duties are. Therefore, by these taboos, each society can formulate its values because there is a moral

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<sup>50</sup> Alexandre Kimenyi, "Abahinza-Clans, Totems and Taboos in Rwanda," accessed June 9, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com>

<sup>51</sup> Ikechukwu, *African Ecotheology: Meaning, Form and Expression*, p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14-15.

order in the universe. These values deal with relationships among people, between people and God and other spiritual beings; and man's relationship with the world of nature.<sup>53</sup>

#### **2.3.1.6. The reinforcement of the African traditional education and code of conduct**

In African traditions, it is believed that the creator of the universe has set order in terms of moral conduct that each member of the community has to follow and respect to keep a harmonious relationship between the universe and its inhabitants. Mbiti affirms this code of conduct as he asserts that:

The morals and the institutions of the society are thought to have been given by God, or to be sanctioned ultimately by him. Therefore, any breach of such morals is an offense against the departed members of the family, and against God or the spirits, even if it is the people themselves who may suffer from such a breach and who may take action to punish the offender.<sup>54</sup>

These moral principles embedded into taboos have ecological implications or relevance in all endeavors to manage and preserve natural resources and ecosystems. They constitute a large body of knowledge that is the source of practice, and belief on the relationships of the living beings with one another and the environment. Therefore, Mbiti points out that there were severe punishments for whoever could contravene these taboos: This punishment was in the form of social isolation, misfortune, and even death. If people did not punish the offender, the invisible world will punish him. This view arises from the belief in the religious order of the universe, in which God and other invisible beings are actively engaged in the world of men.<sup>55</sup>

From the description above these socio-religious practices that promote the preservation of nature preserved the Rwandans' view of nature as *Ingobyi*/cradle for many generations with its

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<sup>53</sup> John S Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion Second Edition*, (Oxford, UK: Heinemann Publishers, 1991) 41, accessed June 6, 2023, <https://www.google.nl>

<sup>54</sup> John S Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion Second Edition*, 41

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 41

understanding that entails the safeguarding of the water body, mountains, caves, trees, animals, and forests by people of the local communities. Elrashdi (a Senior Advisor, Economic Affairs AU Observer Mission to the United Nations) affirmed this reality and raised hope for a solution to the current ecological crisis when he argued that since African traditional beliefs that are sources of its socio-cultural practices provide intergenerational environmental ethics to its people; Africa can, still contribute to the conservation of biodiversity.<sup>56</sup> For this reason, Munyaneza (a Rwandan cultural activist), adds that the new generation would be aware of the motivation behind keeping these cultural practices are effective for different generations. He, therefore, points out a fourfold motivation: spiritual (traditional religion), economic, aesthetic, and cultural. This legacy contributed to the safeguarding of a great number of streams of rivers and plant species of Rwandan flora and fauna.<sup>57</sup>

However, because of its ambivalence, that is, on the one hand, a good channel to transmit necessary knowledge and skills to preserve nature, but on the other hand, embodied in rituals and services to spiritual powers, it was rejected by the missionary endeavors, and it was stopped. According to Mani (an Indian- French senior researcher at the University of Oxford), before baptism one had to indiscriminately renounce all the rituals, sociocultural ceremonies, and taboos related to traditional religion.<sup>58</sup> Since then, people's view of this change was portrayed in the public criticism addressed to the church: "*Kiliziya yakuye kirazira*" literary meaning the church has abolished taboos.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, from this point of view, the coming of Christianity has greatly

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<sup>56</sup> Ayoup Z Elrashdi, "African Culture: versatile Approach to Realize the Africa We Want and Achievement of the SDGs-Cradle of Human Civilization and Land of Diversity,"

<sup>57</sup> Emmanuel Munyaneza, "The Role of Cultural Practices in the Conservation of Biodiversity in Rwanda," *Rwanda Cultural Heritage Academy (March 2009)*, accessed February 16, 2023, <https://www.researchgate.net/>

<sup>58</sup> Rama Mani and Thomas G. Weiss, *Responsibility to protect: Cultural Perspectives in the Global South*, (New York: NY, Routledge, 2011), accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.google.nl>

<sup>59</sup> Hannah Grayson and Nicki Hitchcott, *Rwanda Since 1994: Stories of Change*, (Liverpool University Press, 2019), 178, accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.google.nl>

contributed to the loss of ecological awareness and a change of attitude towards nature because it broke this chain of transmission of these cultural values from one generation to another without providing Christian alternative insights to relate to nature.

#### **2.4. Conclusion**

This chapter described the current state of the ecological crisis in Rwanda, its causes related to causes with a focus on human activities that include overpopulation that ranks Rwanda among the countries with the highest density demography on one square kilometer, deforestation, pollution (air, water, and waste) that threaten the life of the biodiversity. This chapter reveals that Rwanda and Burundi are the most exposed countries due to the temperature increase of 1.4°C reported to be higher than the global average and with the further expectation of a progressive increase up to 2.5°C by the 2050s. Consequently, in the same way, rainfalls are highly inconstant and the projections show an expected increase of the average annual rainfall of roughly 20% by the 2050s. This will be followed by floods and storms responsible for landslides, crop losses, health risks, and damage to infrastructure, economic growth, and development. This chapter also makes retrospection into the Rwandan socio-religious practices to find out whether there might be some insights for the Shyogwe Diocese to create the appropriate channels of communication to engage and involve its members including the *Balokole* and the surrounding community in its actions envisaged to find solutions to the current ecological crisis as discussed in the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER THREE: THE DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF ACTIONS AND REACTIONS OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH–SHYOGWE DIOCESE AND THE *BALOKOLE* TO THE CURRENT ECOLOGICAL CRISIS**

### **3.0. Introduction**

The two previous chapters respectively introduced the problem of study and described the context of study that includes the current ecological crisis and the Rwandan traditional religious practices embedded in the view of nature as *ingobyi* through which the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese is operating. In relation to this background, this chapter describes how the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese and its members especially the *Balokole* relate to this context. In this regard, it describes and analyzes the current theological position of the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese in caring for God’s creation and the *Balokole*’s view of the material world in order to figure out strengths and weaknesses in the Shyogwe Diocese’s initiative in the effort to mitigate the current ecological crisis in Rwanda. This chapter also uses some interviews from the Shyogwe Diocese’s members about how they appreciate the current church’s action.

### **3.1. The Shyogwe Diocese’s Reaction and Actions Concerning the Current Ecological Crisis**

The Shyogwe Diocese is one of the 13 dioceses of the Anglican Church of Rwanda. It is situated in the southwest of Rwanda. Under the leadership of the current Bishop Jered Kalimba, the diocese has a strong focus on a holistic mission. “Thy Kingdom come” is the diocesan motto, reflecting their desire to be involved in ushering in God’s Kingdom.<sup>60</sup> Apart from proclaiming the Gospel of Christ through its 36 parishes, 156 sub-parishes, and 632 active cell groups Shyogwe Diocese is also involved in socio-economic activities, more importantly, empowering

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<sup>60</sup> Shyogwe Diocese Rwanda, accessed March 23, 2023, <https://www.cmsireland.org/shyogwe>

saving groups, building and managing 24 primary and secondary schools and 4 health centers.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, this holistic mission is extended to creation care. In this regard, the study focuses on its activities carried out via the Rural Development Inter-diocesan Service (RDIS), which is a religious organization owned by Butare, Cyangugu, Kigeme, and Shyogwe Dioceses that operates in the Southern and part of Western provinces of Rwanda. This organization aims at promoting sustainable development in four dioceses of the mentioned above Anglican Church Dioceses. Its core objective is to mobilize the local church members to be involved in developing their local community, and so lifting themselves out of poverty as its mission statement stipulates: “To safeguard the environment, increase the production aiming at sustainable and holistic development.”<sup>62</sup> Regarding ecological crisis mitigation and adaptation, The Shyogwe Diocese and RDIS have initiated some programs that are intended to curb the current ecological crisis. This study shares some of these programs:

### **3.1.1. Carbon project**

The Carbon Project aims at carbon emission reduction for sustainable environment care by reducing the use of firewood, which is causing massive deforestation in Rwanda. It mainly focuses on producing Improved Cook stoves (ICS) and Water Ceramic Filters (WCF).<sup>63</sup>

The Shyogwe Diocese and RDIS therefore, participate in the distribution and mobilization of the use of power-saving stoves as a very important activity as a way to reduce the use of charcoal and firewood. So far, the reports account for the distribution of seedlings (more than 3 million seedlings were distributed in the last 7 years, and more than 13000 Improved Cook stoves and 1050 Ceramic Water Filters were donated to poor rural households in South and West

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<sup>61</sup> N.V, my respondent (a pastor in the Shyogwe Diocese) interviewed April 20, 2023.

<sup>62</sup> Rural Development Inter-diocesan Service, accessed March 23, 2023, <http://www.rdis.org.rw>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

Rwanda.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, it is said that this project made easy the cooking process and contributed to smock reduction and cleanness. Beneficiaries of this project use clean water that reduced waterborne diseases. In addition to minimizing the use of firewood, Shyogwe Diocese and RDIS are playing an important role in terms of reforestation through the establishment of tree nurseries and capacity-building activities.<sup>65</sup>

### **3.1.2. Investment in renewable energy**

The Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese and RDIS in collaboration with the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda (EPR) are jointly implementing a pilot phase of a Project for Supplying ‘Solar Home Systems’ in Off-grid areas in their respective Church areas. The project has started with a pilot phase, whereby 200 households with limited finances are given solar energy items on loan. In addition to this, RDIS runs a project for improving the living standards of households and reducing the strain on natural resources through the distribution of Improved Cook Stoves and Ceramic Water Filters.<sup>66</sup>

### **3.1.3. Training the Local People for Environment Care**

Training volunteers as community environment animators and environment conservation promoters who sensitize people about energy-saving stoves, installing solar panels in rural areas, soil management, and erosion prevention. On top of this, the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese and RDIS encourage the local community to reduce manmade harm to the environment. Encourage our local churches and local communities to adopt policies and practices that

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<sup>64</sup> Rural Development Inter-diocesan Service

<sup>65</sup> L. N. My informant (an ordinary member of Shyogwe diocese) was interviewed on April 17, 2023.

<sup>66</sup> Rural Development Inter-diocesan Service, “Launch of the project on Supplying of ‘Solar Home Systems’ in Gisagara district, Rwanda (2018),” accessed March 23, 2023, <http://www.rdis.org.rw>

minimize environmental damage.<sup>67</sup> For this reason, RDIS encourages the dioceses including the Anglican Church-Shyogwe Diocese to add to their annual strategic plan the environmental care and risk reduction theme following its environment care mandate: “To safeguard the environment, increase production aiming at sustainable and holistic development.”<sup>68</sup> However, though the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese has made this important step, it is noteworthy asking how this effort is owned by its members especially the *Balokole* believers and the community in general.

### **3.2. The *Balokole* Members of the Shyogwe Diocese**

#### **3.2.1. The *Balokole*’s Practices and Influence**

The *Balokole* mentioned in this study, are active members of the Anglican church-Shyogwe Diocese. They represent other groups of the *Balokole* found in other protestant denominations in Rwanda and other East African countries even beyond where their influence is still felt. According to Kevin Ward (lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at Leeds University) “*Balokole*” is a Luganda word meaning “The Saved People” who are the product of the late 1920s and 1930s East African Revival Movement that emerged as an important movement within African Protestantism.<sup>69</sup> It is reported that the impetus of this movement was the dissatisfaction with the spiritual state of members of the Anglican Church of Uganda that has lost its evangelistic zeal and quality of its Christian discipleship because of its compromises with

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<sup>67</sup> Rural Development Inter-diocesan Service, “The Role of church in addressing climate change,” accessed March 23, 2023, <https://shyogwe.com>

<sup>68</sup> Rural Development Inter-diocesan Service, “The Role of church in addressing climate change,” accessed March 23, 2023, <https://shyogwe.com>

<sup>69</sup> Kevin Ward, *The Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, accessed February 16, 2023, <https://dacb.org/histories/uganda-tukutendereza-yesu/>

both traditional culture and the material opportunities opened up by modern society.<sup>70</sup> This movement widely spread in the whole of East Africa and continued to profoundly influence the spirituality of different churches in this region up today. In underlining this influence, Ward describes the impact of this movement in terms of its “invigorating and renewing churches’ life and offering individuals the challenge of a deeper experience of salvation in Christ and a more radical commitment to Christian discipleship.”<sup>71</sup> In the case of the Shyogwe Diocese, the *Balokole* influence the whole spectrum of spirituality because of their zeal to pray and preach the gospel. For this reason, they constitute a core group of the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese that can become effective stewards and coworkers with God, if they were exposed to clear theological positions that value the material world, understand the human role in God’s Creation and God’s redemptive work, and their role in it.

### **3.2.2 The *Balokole*’s Attitude to the Material World and Traditional Religious Practices**

Though the impetus of the *Balokole*’s attitude to disengage from the traditional religious practices that promoted the preservation of nature is not well documented, Kaunda (a Zambian researcher), reports some related causes common to African Christian converts. He points out the Christian missionary influence on new African converts who were convinced to abandon their traditional culture which, according to the missionaries, was considered to be idolatrous, evil, etc., and for this reason, they vehemently resisted anything related to it. For this reason, in their belief, the *Balokole* engaged and still engage in a counter-cultural identity and they do this by refusing to make compromises with the traditional spirituality and what they called idolatrous

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<sup>70</sup> Kevin Ward, Emma Wild-Wood, *The East African Revival: History and Legacies*, (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 3, accessed February 16, 2023, <https://books.google.nl>

<sup>71</sup> Kevin Ward, *The Dictionary of African Christian Biography*

practices of the traditional religion.<sup>72</sup> Ward further argues that this understanding created a dualistic worldview that sees the world divided into good and evil, hence, they portray their community as made of those who follow God led by the powerful Spirit and those who follow the devil who will be destroyed alongside their corrupt world. For Ward, they also emphasize their membership in a new clan recreating old communitarian values in a new form.<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, in their practices, the *Balokole* are convinced that they have nothing to do with the earth. In their teachings and singing they proclaim that they left behind all worldly success for the sake of Christ and their typical testimony was “All worldly things we left behind and left them until now; You people of the world, the world is ending” or “The Lord is calling us to meet with Him because the worldly things are aiming to an end.” They consider it wise and right that they ought to pursue eternal happiness in heaven even if it might involve temporary sacrifice.<sup>74</sup> Thus, from this perspective, it is believed that only human souls can be saved while the earth and all things in it will not be saved but destroyed. For this reason, they focus on preparing their spiritual life as citizens of heaven. In other words, they considered their life on earth as one of “mere pilgrims on earth” taking economic, social, and political matters as of little importance to them because their real home is heaven.<sup>75</sup> From the above Kaunda’s argument, the feeling of “world-flight” characterized African believers including the *Balokole* who, according to Ward, opposed some kingdom’s or government policies: they refused to plant tobacco and affirmed publicly that what they primarily pursued was not economic gain in this world but spiritual

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<sup>72</sup> Ward, *The East African Revival: Histories and Legacies*, p. 5.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5

<sup>74</sup> Daewon Moon, *African Initiative and Inspiration in Easter African Revival*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2022), 150. Accessed February 16, 2023 at <https://books.google.nl>

<sup>75</sup> Kaunda and Marja Hinfelaar, *Competing for Caesar: Religion and Politics in Postcolonial Zambia*, 230

reward in the world to come. They also organized a campaign to burn sorghum fields, a crop used for brewing beer.<sup>76</sup> One would wonder about what was the motivation behind this attitude.

### **3.2.3. The *Balokole* and their Eschatological Expectations**

For Moon, this attitude of considering worldly things worthless by the revival movement was infused with their eschatological expectations. For this reason, the imminent return of Christ was (and is still) a frequent topic for preaching, which promoted a sense of urgency in evangelism.<sup>77</sup> This understanding has been kept for one generation of *Balokole* to another. In sayings and singing they present “the radical dichotomy between the saved and the damned in the minds of the brethren.”<sup>78</sup> Today in one of their songs which is included in the current common protestant hymn book (hymn number 431 in Kinyarwanda) and available in other local languages in East Africa) summarizes their theological perspective in stipulating their conviction and explicitly affirming that sinners, the earth, and all things in it will be decimated:

1. You who delight in the worldly pleasures you will never feel satisfied for even your ancestors were not satisfied.
2. You who refuse to repent we pity you we give you the warning but you make yourself deaf!
3. All these that deceive you none will be saved except those who accepted to repent and be saved by Jesus.
4. This earth will be put to an end and all in it : cows, farms banana plantations , and beer
5. Nothing will be left: everything will become ash, when this earth will be put to an end where will you stay?
6. We, the saved ones are delighted to pass through this earth having peace

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<sup>76</sup> Kevin Ward, *The Dictionary of African Christian Biography*

<sup>77</sup> Daewon Moon, *African Initiative and Inspiration in Easter African Revival*, 150

<sup>78</sup> Kevin Ward, *The Dictionary of African Christian Biography*

7. Our Lord Jesus, we thank you because you died for us so that we may not perish.<sup>79</sup>

Furthermore, Wild-Wood indicates that concerning the material world and stewardship the *Balokole* also continually expressed their suspicion of educational aspirations and condemned worldly achievement and wealth.<sup>80</sup> From this context, what should be the next step for the Shyogwe Diocese's new theological narrative that would contribute to fruitful conversation with its *Balokole* members to have converging actions in the battle to mitigate the current ecological crisis?

### **3.3. The Analysis and Evaluation of the Shyogwe Diocese's Actions and the *Balokole*'s Beliefs**

As it is noted in the previous sections of this chapter, the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese is among other Christian organizations that engage in environmental care initiatives. In this regard, the study found out that through its holistic mission that includes creation care, the Shyogwe Diocese collaborates with other Christian communities via the Rural Development Inter-diocesan Service (RDIS) whose mission is: “To safeguard the environment, increase the production aiming at sustainable and holistic development.”<sup>81</sup> In this initiative, the focus is on three main activities which include the Carbon Project that aims at carbon emission reduction for sustainable environment care (distributing Improved Cook-stoves and Ceramic Water Filters); Investment in renewable energy (Supplying ‘Solar Home Systems’ in Off-grid areas) and training the local people for environment care (sensitizing people about energy-saving stoves,

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<sup>79</sup> The Kinyarwanda Hymn Book (Indirimbo zo Gushimisha Imana n'iz'Agakiza) number 431. <https://gushimisha-imana-agakiza.en.aptoide.com/app>

<sup>80</sup> Emma Wild-Wood, “Homeless and Free for the Gospel: Revivalists In The Eac”. In *Migration and Christian Identity in Congo (DRC)*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2008), 128, accessed March 25, 2023, <https://brill.com/> <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004164642.i-235.62>

<sup>81</sup> Rural Development Inter-diocesan Service, “The Role of church in addressing climate change,” accessed April 17, 2023, <http://www.rdis.org.rw/workshop-11-2018>



installing solar panels). However, are all these activities sufficient to respond theologically to the current ecological crisis? The next section analyzes this initiative by the Shyogwe Diocese through the lens of its members that voluntarily gave their views about this church's initiative during interviews. Though all information provided by respondents are not used in this discussion more details are available in appendix C of this study.

### **3.3.1. Science-centered and the lack of effective initiative dissemination**

The analysis of this initiative, first of all, shows that though the current church mission in caring for creation is theoretically grounded in theology, its implementation is still more of climate science that seeks to provide scientific ecological insights and practical skills. Therefore, however much this scientific knowledge is needed by believers, it should have as its foundation theological understanding. Apart from its lack of theological foundation, the same Shyogwe Diocese's initiative lacks in its dissemination among the church including its *Balokole* members and community members. Umuziranenge (a Rwandan researcher) who assessed this initiative of the Shyogwe Diocese in creation care reported a gap in what she calls "low community awareness about the risks of climate change that constitutes an obstacle to ownership of protection measures and lack of knowledge and skills among community and church members about climate care."<sup>82</sup> From this observation, the gap that exists in the holistic mission of Shyogwe Diocese reflects a theological deficit because the ongoing initiative to mitigate the current ecological crisis is not underlined and explained in the church's liturgy, preaching and singing in the Shyogwe Diocese. This makes the church and community members' responsibility remain unveiled. Therefore, how this initiative can have a theological foundation and be

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<sup>82</sup> Umuziranenge G., *Eco-Theology and Climate Justice in Rwanda* In L. Andrianos, M. Biehl, R. Gütter, J. Motte, A. Parlindungan, T. Sandner, J. Stork, & D. Werner, *Kairos for Creation*. Wuppertal, Germany, 16 – 19 June 2019. Foedus-verlag, Solingen, pp. 263-269

developed to inspire the church and community members to share Christian stories that can play a vital role in ecological crisis mitigation is essential for the Shyogwe Diocese. In this regard, the next sections evaluate the Shyogwe Diocese initiative for creation care to find out what is needed to have a practical holistic mission that cares for God's creation.

### **3.3.2. The lack in stewardship understanding**

As mentioned above, the assessment of the Shyogwe Diocese's holistic mission showed that it lacks community ecological awareness. A similar observation is made by some church members when they attempted to answer the questions about the meaning of stewardship. This deficit is felt in terms of failure to fix some daily ecological challenges which, sometimes lead to ill relationships among people in the Rwandan community. Some church's members under influence of the *Balokole*'s view of the earth as hostile and irredeemable do not feel responsible for their individual and corporate obligation to take care of their environment. This example points out the need for these people to be aware of their role in taking care of their environment which includes the material world and other creatures living in it. For the respondent M.AU (a senior pastor in the Shyogwe Diocese), this lack of ecological awareness is viewed in terms of the lack of the meaning of stewardship largely shared by members of the Shyogwe Diocese including the *Balokole* and its surrounding communities. This is what he shared:

Till now, some of our believers have no idea about stewardship and environmental care. In our village, there are disputes related to the lack of water management from the roofs of houses that cause damage to their neighbors' properties. What is clear is that in building their houses, some people do not understand what is required to manage this water collected by roofs such as gutters and water tanks or ditches. This lack of knowledge makes people indifferent to taking appropriate actions to limit damages.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> M. AU., a senior Pastor in Shyogwe Diocese, was interviewed on April 15, 2023

In my view, the lack of basic knowledge and skills to manage water from roofs and other related natural materials that can cause harm to the environmental welfare in the vicinity of the Shyogwe Diocese reflects the abuse of stewardship as a result of not recognizing God as the creator and human responsibility to care for God's creation which include their neighbors and the rest of biodiversity in their environment. For the Shyogwe Diocese members and its *Balokole* believers, the concept of stewardship is a major theme that they should keep at heart because of its implication to fulfilling God's purpose of creating humankind in His image. Therefore, as this study pointed out the reluctance of the *Balokole* believers to have nothing to do with the corrupt earth, the Shyogwe Diocese has a task to help its influential members that it is their responsibility as believers as it is for every human to take care of creation for God's glory.

Secondly, some respondents pointed out the lack of theological motif in the current ecological initiative of the Shyogwe Diocese initiative to care for creation. The previous observation was that the Shyogwe Diocese's environmental care activities are carried out in more of a scientific way than a theological point of view. This situation influences the whole envisaged work and determines the motivation behind every action of people involved in environmental care. It should be more than a socio-economic initiative that helps people to encounter the Creator and serve Him with joy and at the same time enjoying the fruit of their labor. However as my respondent (M.V) says:

People work to earn their living and not as stewards of God's creation. Most of the time, works and services performed by our church come in the form of projects that generate income and people work without realizing their role as God's stewards. In short, we have a big gap in doctrinal teaching especially concerning caring for God's creation.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> M.V., An ordinary church member of Shyogwe Diocese was interviewed on April 15, 2023.

The Shyogwe Diocese should take seriously this observation by its member and seek to redesign this initiative following the understanding of the biblical notion of stewardship that every human must be responsible for. As it is in this case, the lack of theological motivation in stewardship comes from a lack of appropriate Christian understanding of human responsibility in God's creation or a mindset marred by sin that makes people seemingly do good works without dependence on God's guidance but enjoy being under the supervision of other human beings. This makes it difficult to achieve sustainability in environmental care because it is anthropocentric. This requires proper theological understanding by believers to do this work with passion and joy from the fact of being God's image bearer. For this reason, the Shyogwe Diocese has a task to help its educated members also acquire spiritual knowledge to benefit from these scientific skills as Stockwell observes:

“Scientists who happen to be Christian are the ones who understand the origin and the ultimate purpose of the world. Hence, it is these scientists who understand best what humans are for in the world. Human beings are created in the image of God, but they are also part of the earth and part of the ecological system. We do not look at scientific phenomena as mere observers. Rather, we are participants in organic nature all around us. Further, humans exist as microcosms of the larger cosmos in our very being, for all the creative processes are also happening inside us.”<sup>85</sup>

Thirdly, regarding the *Balokole* current dominant view of the replacement of the current earth with a new one, the Shyogwe Diocese still suffers from the misunderstanding of the doctrine of salvation expressed in hope for the creation of a new earth after the destruction of the current corrupted one. My respondent (N.V) describes the view of some of his church members/*Balokole* with whom he had a conversation about his conversation with

When talking about our responsibility as stewards, everyone has his way of taking care of the environment. Disasters take us by surprise because we did know they are

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<sup>85</sup> Clinton E. Stockwell “Abraham Kuiper, Ecology and the Diversity of God's Creation,” University of Chicago (2012), 5, accessed March 8, 2023, at <https://www.academia.edu/>

coming or how to prevent them. This situation keeps on repeating itself and causes a lot of damage to our properties and rampant poverty... when we experience these disasters the dominant interpretation of them is that the world is close to its end, Christ is about to return, thus we should be prepared to go and live where there will be no more sufferings.<sup>86</sup>

From this view that the world is coming to its end and that people should be prepared to quit it, the words of Christ about the signs of the end times come into play especially quoting Mat. 24:7 and Luke 21:11. This understanding is common among believers of the Shyogwe Diocese under the influence of the *Balokole* legacy who constantly comfort one another with these words in times of disaster. As a result, this understanding leads people to undervalue creation and reduce it to a useless asset that needs to be gotten rid of. In the Rwandan context as it may be in many other African countries, despair due to present suffering, economic inequalities, government corruption, famine, murder and war, oppression, and other sorts of evil is the trigger for a big number of believers to increase their zeal to escape the earth and quicken their time to be in heaven. This situation makes it clear how the Shyogwe Diocese should double its efforts to have a clear theological position and engage in conversation with its *Balokole* members in biblical interpretation, especially in relation to the doctrine of salvation to fully understand God's gracious plan towards His creation and that God is still in control of every situation to keep His creation flourishing through the work of His people. In addition, this situation requires the Shyogwe Diocese to strengthen its engagement in community socio-economic development to help people meet their basic needs as a way to create a favorable environment for sharing the gospel with members of the community.

Fourthly, apart from this despair due to socio-economic injustice, the rampant poverty becomes a big setback to the holistic mission of the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese that

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<sup>86</sup> N.V., a Pastor of Shyogwe Diocese was interviewed on April 20, 2023.

follows the line of “A holy soul in a healthy body.” This idea is currently challenged by the lack of basic needs that its members experience in their daily life. People increasingly experience hardships related to food insecurity, safe water, appropriate shelter, clean energy, quality education, access to health services, etc. One of my respondents pointed out that extreme poverty is among the top hindrances to the struggle against environmental deterioration.

When talking about sustainable environmental care, it is important to think about poverty alleviation among the local population. It is difficult to change some habits that cause harm to the environment among people living in extreme poverty. People in these conditions are desperate and see no bright future in the world and pray for God to take them to heaven.<sup>87</sup>

In the Rwandan context one of the factors that influence some believers to view the world as hostile, is the precarious life situation they live especially the extreme poverty that leaves people without choice to negatively respond to the call to care for their environment. For instance, some may be willing to avoid air pollution but do not have the means to access clean energy others may need good education that can help them to find ways out of their situation but fail to get their basic education. Such a situation presents a reasonable challenge to the holistic mission of the Shyogwe Diocese to consider the implementation of some socio-economic initiatives and to look for the way to make members of the community conscious of the situation and work together to find solutions to their problems with whatever resources they have, and to become effective earth-keepers. This goes with conversing with the *Balokole* believers that rightly and faithfully acquiring wealth cannot stop a believer to be sanctified and accepted by God.

Fifthly, as mentioned in chapter two of this study, the Rwandan traditional socio-religious practices intended to preserve creation were of great importance for the survival of several forests, streams of water, different species of plants and animals, etc. The reason for these

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<sup>87</sup> A. M., a member of the *Balokole* group in the Shyogwe Diocese interviewed April 17, 2023.

practices is explained by Bavinck when he argues that the intimate relationship that exists between the creator human and non-human is rooted in the general revelation which is at the source of religious and ethical sense that exist among all peoples though humankind has not found God by its light.<sup>88</sup>

For this reason, due to the importance of traditional religious practices in the preservation of creation, there is much to be learned by the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese in terms of making its Christian ecological message more relevant to the members of the church and community. Paul Tillich’s observation on the relation between culture and Christian theology is a valuable inspiration in understanding the importance of contextualizing these religious practices when he says: “Social ideas and actions, legal projects and procedures, political programs and decisions, can become objects of theology, not from the point of view of their social, legal, and political form, but from the point of view of their power of actualizing some aspects of that which concerns us ultimately in and through their social, legal, and political forms.”<sup>89</sup> This insight is a good reminder for the Shyogwe Diocese and its *Balokole* believers that the traditional ideas and practices hold deep meanings that can help in the process of sharing ecological message. In the same way, Len D. Hansen (a Professor of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa) emphasizes the need to make the Christian narrative more intelligible to people’s situations and adds this Tillich’s observation that “Christian theology and its structures and symbols have to speak meaningfully and critically to the burning issues of human life if they were to possess any public relevancy.”<sup>90</sup> For Tillich,

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<sup>88</sup> Conradie, *Creation and Salvation*, p. 59.

<sup>89</sup> Werner Schüßler, “Paul Tillich – Interpreter of Life The importance of his philosophico-theological thinking today,” *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion*, accessed July 24, 2023, <https://www.aup-online.com/>

<sup>90</sup> Len D. Hansen, *Christian in Public: Aims, Methodologies and Issues in Public Theology*, (Stellenbosch University, Beyers Naude Centre, 2007), 155, accessed July 24, 2023, <https://www.google.nl>

there must be a connection between faith and culture. Thus the contextualization of the Christian message using the traditional mediums with which people are familiar can yield more desirable fruits.

Sixthly, the lack of proper theological training for pastors and church leaders is at the heart of the problem of the lack of Christian narrative awareness in the community. The gap left by the abandonment of the socio-religious practices that preserved the environment and the lack of effective alternative Christian practices is heavily felt in the Rwandan context. Though humankind can understand what creation entails through God's common grace, there is a need to study the doctrine of creation and salvation and properly share information about the role of human beings as stewards of God's creation and coworkers in God's work of saving His creation. In this study, one of the gaps in the Shyogwe Diocese's holistic mission is the theological formation of pastors and other church leaders on the doctrine of creation and who in turn are responsible to share this knowledge with other church members including the *Balokole* believers and other community members. This was revealed by my respondent (EMG):

I am a pastor for over forty years now, but honestly speaking, I did not take stewardship and creation care as my priority, not because it is not important but because it is something that is given less emphasis in our theological training. The issue is now to advocate for this emphasis in our theological institutions to equip the new generation of pastors who understand the role of believers as stewards of God's creation.<sup>91</sup>

This observation about gaps in our theological training is a key element of the problem of understanding the doctrine of creation and salvation among believers in the Shyogwe Diocese. There is no other way that the church members can appropriate the earth-keeping responsibility once the church has not played its central role in it. As pastors and church leaders, this theological knowledge is so essential to understand and help others understand God's purpose in

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<sup>91</sup> E.M.G., a retired *Mulokole* Pastor in Shyogwe Diocese was interviewed on April 17, 2023



creating the world which is for His glory, and for the human being created in His image to passionately and actively participate in the care and preservation of His creation. In doing so, believers should feel part of the earth and apply their inherited creative skills to make it a better place to experience their encounter with God.

Lastly, the above-mentioned cultural and theological gap in the Rwandan community in terms of people's friendly interaction with their environment also made people confine God the Creator in church building. People supposedly see God's glory in the physical structure temple and miss it in nature. Traditionally, people made a step and kept some spaces for worship purposes. This belief helped people to warmly interact with their environment as a place to meet God and ancestral spirits. In the face of the current belief that God does not exist in His creation and that the current earth will be replaced by a new one thus, prayers for salvation from it, the Shyogwe Diocese needs to effectively respond to this view. The current *Balokole* believers' practice of praying in mountains under the influence of other charismatic group believers can serve as an opportunity for the Shyogwe Diocese to engage in talk with its *Balokole* over the presence of God in His creation thus, the earth is not as hostile as they thought. Otherwise, this lack of ecological spirituality affects the people's understanding of God's plan for the entire creation as a Savior. Additionally, this gap implies that believers do not see the presence of God in nature which implies a lack of a close relationship with nature which is instead looked at as hostile and consistently pray to be separated from it. Therefore, this understanding continues to cause the lack of proper earth keeping as God intended it.

From the interviews with the Shyogwe Diocese's members, I learned how much the task of assuming creation care responsibility is a battle that the Shyogwe Diocese should take seriously. Most of interviewees in all categories almost have the same view about human's

responsibility as steward of God's creation. They all point fingers to the church for not having taught about this task. This implies that the 1930s *Balokole* teachings have had a far reaching impact on church's people at all levels. This is the right time for the Shyogwe Diocese to prepare the appropriate message to use all these scattered forces to participate in God's creative work.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

This chapter described and analyzed the actions and reactions of the Anglican Church—Shyogwe Diocese and the *Balokole* to the current ecological crisis. The study recommended the Shyogwe Diocese's reaction and action to this crisis in Rwanda through its holistic mission. In light of the mentioned reflections, it is important to note that the Shyogwe Diocese should, first of all, revisit its holistic mission and makes it theologically grounded to help its members understand their role in caring for God's creation and engage in effective conversation with its *Balokole* members to have convergent ideas in the battle to curb the current ecological crisis. Secondly, the Shyogwe Diocese should contextualize the Christian creation and salvation narrative in the language or customs of the Rwandans to be effective in its holistic mission in terms of valuing the material world, encouraging earth keeping and becoming God's coworkers in His saving work; a knowledge that would be extended to other members of the community. From this perspective, it is worth noting that the *Balokole* view of the world as a hostile temporal place that will be destroyed because of sin also constitutes another theological narrative that needs to be redirected in the light of understanding the relationship that exists between the doctrine of creation and salvation as described in the work of Ernst Conradie in his oeuvre entitled "Creation and Salvation: Dialogue on Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for Contemporary Eco-theology" discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE REFORMED VIEW AND ESPECIALLY CONRADIE'S VIEW OF THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION AND SALVATION**

### **4.0. Introduction**

This chapter aims to shed light on the possible ways for the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese to shape its eco-theological understanding in line with how reformed tradition and particularly Ernst Conradie defines eco-theology and describes the relationship between Creation and Salvation. As the study unfolds, it explains how to value the material world, the redemptive work of God, and the human role as steward and coworker with God. This chapter also lays the foundation for what constitutes the conversation between the Anglican Church–Shogwe Diocese, the *Balokole* believers, African cultural practices that promote the preservation of Creation, and Reformed theologians, especially Conradie that are the object of the next chapter.

### **4.1. Conradie's View of Creation and Salvation**

#### **4.1.1. Definition of Eco-theology**

Discussing creation and salvation, Conradie emphasizes their implication for contemporary eco-theology in response to the current ecological crisis. What is important for Conradie is the Kuyperian understanding of the relationship between creation and salvation which is embedded in the Christian faith in God as both Creator and Savior with the story of God's work and the relation between God's work of salvation and human participation to save the planet.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, to clarify this point, he also makes a distinction between God's act of creating (*creatio*) and the created order (*creatura*) as the outcome of God's ordering.<sup>93</sup> For this reason, the below five rubrics seem to be pillars of Conradie's Eco-theology that he defines as

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<sup>92</sup> Conradie, Ernest M. *Creation and Salvation: Dialogue on Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for Contemporary Ecotheology*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2011), 5

<sup>93</sup> Conradie, *Creation and Salvation*, p. 8

“an attempt to retrieve the ecological wisdom embedded in the Christian tradition as a response to environmental threats and injustices. At the same time, it is an attempt to reinvestigate, rediscover and renew the Christian tradition in the light of the challenges posed by the environmental crisis.”<sup>94</sup> In the process of explaining a model of eco-theology, in this book Conradie builds his work on these rubrics: Eco-theology as a multidisciplinary subject; Common grace as a God’s way of restraining evil in the world; Common grace and providence; Creation and Re-creation; Creation and Salvation that are discussed below in the next sections.

#### **4.1.2. Eco-theology as a multidisciplinary subject**

Intending to provide a deep meaning of the concept of eco-theology, Conradie provides a space for a Christian critique of the economic and cultural patterns underlying ecological destruction and an ecological critique of Christianity. For this reason, he argues that the eco-theology’s concern should not be only the Christian response to environmental challenges; but also an opportunity for renewal and reformation.<sup>95</sup> He therefore, urges believers to have a broadened view of eco-theology and warns against the danger of reducing it to “environmental ethics as a sub-discipline of Christian ethics.” Thus, in the Reformed tradition, “the ecological transformation of Christianity touches upon the visions, beliefs, ethos, praxis, and spiritualities embedded in the Christian tradition.” This is therefore broad as it covers all the traditional sub-disciplines of Christian theology such as biblical studies, the history of Christianity, Christian doctrine, Christian ethics and reflection on the liturgy, preaching, ministry, pastoral care, Christian education, Christian mission and theology of religions.<sup>96</sup>

#### **4.1.3. The Reformed Tradition’s View of Common Grace and Providence**

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<sup>94</sup> Conradie, *Creation and Salvation*, p.10

<sup>95</sup> Conradie, *Creation and Salvation*, p.10

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

According to Conradie, in the Reformed tradition, common grace is in line with God's providence which is "an expression of God's patience with a fallen but still beloved creation." In this regard, he argues that God's intervention is expressed in terms of sustaining, nurturing it, and engaging with it anew to heal the broken relationship with Him and restore creation to what it was intended to be.<sup>97</sup> For this regard, Conradie points out a six-fold Kuyperian usefulness of common grace: (i) this grace aims at restraining, blocking or redirecting the consequences of sin; (ii) without common grace, "life on earth would immediately have turned into a hell and under such hellish conditions the church of God would not have had a place to strike root anywhere;" (iii) common grace is the source of various gifts to humans that contribute to human prosperity including technological development and cultural progress;<sup>98</sup> (iv) though common grace is not salvific in itself, through it, God's salvific work comes in terms of preservation of the creation instead of renewing it; (v) through common grace, God's providence is not mainly evidenced in His everyday care to provide for human material needs such as food, rain, shelter, clothing, healing and education but it is importantly displayed in His way of restraining evil, preventing the self-destruction of the creation and making life bearable;<sup>99</sup> (vi) common grace plays a role "to affirm the goodness that is still present in creation despite the impact of sin, outside the Christian sphere of influence in terms of a widespread sense of moral conscience and in terms of religious practices that help to preserve identity and community. In this respect, common grace plays an unprecedented role in the formation of worldviews (life system) in different communities outside the Christian tradition, as portrayed in their artistic and intellectual

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 101

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.,101

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.,104

achievements.” Such a life system provides insight to its adherents on our relationship with God, with fellow human beings, and with the world.<sup>100</sup>

Furthermore, Kees van der Kooi (the professor of dogmatics at VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands) argues that through His common grace, “God brings the potencies of His creation into being and performs what He, as Creator originally had in mind. In this respect, common grace has a meaning relatively independent of particular grace, which is about the salvation of human beings.”<sup>101</sup>

#### **4.1.4. Conradie on Creation and Re-creation**

Conradie affirms the reformed view that the redemptive work of Christ revealed the universality of God’s grace. This brought a clear understanding of the relationship between creation and re-creation through this analogy: Christ as the new Adam came to reorder what the old Adam disordered and therefore, through His words and deeds Jesus did not create a new creation as opposed to the old one but brought fulfillment where the old Adam failed.<sup>102</sup> In addition, Kees van der Kooi (*in Creation and Salvation*) asserts that Christ’s work is God’s work of salvation that goes far beyond restoration because God’s grace does not only restore a former situation, it also completes creation.<sup>103</sup> In this regard, Conradie comes back to Kuyper and Bavinck’s term “re-creation” (*herscheping*) which suggests that the eschatological completion of God’s acts of salvation is indeed creative and aimed at the healing of God’s creation

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<sup>100</sup> Conradie, *Creation and Salvation*, p.107

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. p. 218

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p. 107

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p. 220

understood as the continuity between this creation (*creatura*) in which we live and the outcome of God's act of re-creation.<sup>104</sup>

Moreover, Myers (the lecturer in Systematic theology at Charles Sturt University in Sydney, Australia) (*in Creation and Salvation*) supports this eschatological view by the use of Paul's description of the situation of creation originating from the Genesis tragic scenario in terms of the broken relationship between human-human, human and the animal world, human and the ground, and above all, human and God. Creation becoming subjected to bondage, corruption, and futility is now groaning in anticipation of its liberation (Romans 8: 18-25). He depicts this eschatological liberation in terms of transfiguration that will occur when God's glory will be revealed to His creation in a new look. Myers sees this happening already in the church where this new creation has already begun and the glory of the world's freedom before God is already taking form. Paul's designation of the entire world order as the suffering of the present time is an indication that "the disordered order of the world as described in Genesis 2 and 3, is already passing away." For this reason, according to Myers, through the work of Christ, "the creature is indeed *creatura viatorum*, set in motion towards the order and freedom of a new creation."<sup>105</sup> In the same way Spencer (An American theologian and senior research at the Institute for Faith, Work & Economics) adds that this eschatological perspective dominates Christian faith because eschatology is directly connected to the doctrine of creation since it describes the fulfillment of the divine purposes in creation.<sup>106</sup>

#### **4.1.5. The Work of the Triune God**

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<sup>104</sup> Conradie, *Creation and Salvation*, p.141

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p. 228

<sup>106</sup> Andrew J. Spencer, *Doctrine in Shades of Green: Theological Perspective for Environmental Ethics*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2022), accessed June 15, 2023, at <https://books.google.nl>

To strengthen this ground, Conradie underlines Kuyper's focus on the work of the Third Person of the Trinity towards re-creation in terms of quickening life as God originally intended it. This work of re-creation involves the affirmation, preservation, and final restoration of God's good creation that includes the public sphere.<sup>107</sup> In this Trinitarian work of creation and recreation, based on Athanasius' view of creation, Denis Edwards (an Australian theologian) argues that in the creation work God creates through His own Word or Wisdom who has the very being of God and who is God. Creatures were created out of nothing which implies that they have no reason for their own existence and that they live by divine benevolence. Thus, they are only stable by participating in the Word. He further observes that creation is not something done once for all, it is a continuous divine act through which each creature continues to exist only by its ongoing participation in the creative Word."<sup>108</sup> In this participation in the Word the indwelling Spirit is a divine bond that unites creatures to the Word and, through the Word, to the Father. Therefore, Edwards summarizes this action as follows:

in the divine act of continuous creation, the Spirit enables each creature to be open, and to receive the creative Word. Creation is a fully Trinitarian act that enables a world of creatures to participate in the Word, or partake of the Word in the Spirit. It is only through participation that individual creatures exist and interact in the community of creation. It is in this way both creation and new creation occur through this structure of participation of the Word in the Spirit: the Father creates and renews all things through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.<sup>109</sup>

Furthermore, in this process of recreation Conradie sheds more light on this Trinitarian act and argues that through the incarnation of the Word, the Spirit binds creation to the Word made flesh that human beings might be forgiven, deified and adopted as beloved sons and daughters and to the rest of creation that it might be transformed in Christ in its proper way. This transformation

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<sup>107</sup> Conradie, *Creation and Salvation*, p.116

<sup>108</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, Sigurd Bergmann, Celia Deane-Drummond and Denis Edwards, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London: UK 2014), 14, accessed July 27, 2023, <https://www.google.nl>

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15



involves the unimaginable fulfillment of the rest of creation, its final liberation from pain and death, and its full creaturely realization in God. We ‘hope for what we do not see’ (Rom. 8.25), both for ourselves and for other creatures.<sup>110</sup>

However, before this final liberation of creation, the human’s position and role as God’s image bearer must be defined in terms of the mentioned-above participation in the continuous act of creation.

## **4.2. Human’s Position in Creation**

For Conradie, the term “eco-theology is etymologically coined from the two words ‘*oikos*’ and theology, and for this reason, the root metaphor for this theology is “the whole household of God.”<sup>111</sup> From this perspective, this theology has its primary concern the health of all forms of life in this one household of God. According to Conradie, this concern encompasses seven important spheres of God’s household: the integrity of the biophysical foundation of the household (the earth’s biosphere), the economic management of the household’s affairs, the need for peace and reconciliation amidst ethnic, religious and domestic violence within this single household, a concern for issues of health and education, the place of women and children within this household, a theology of life and an ecumenical sense of unity not only of the church but also of the human as a whole and all of God’s creation.<sup>112</sup>

### **4.2.1. Human as God’s image bearer**

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<sup>110</sup> Conradie, Sigurd Bergmann, Celia Deane-Drummond and Denis Edwards, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology*, p. 25

<sup>111</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, “Stewards or Sojourners in the Household of God” *Scriptura* 73 (2000) pp. 153-174 University of the Western Cape, accessed August 3, 2023, file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/Stewards\_or\_Sojourners\_in\_the\_Household.pdf

<sup>112</sup> Conradie, “Stewards or Sojourners in the Household of God?”, p. 153

On the place of humans in creation, Conradie assesses the ongoing debate over the place of humanity within nature on the one hand the view that humans have been created in the image of God, to reflect the character of God and represent His interest in the world; and on the other hand, the view that human beings are part of the whole creation, one species in the community of living. According to Conradie, these two views present a deficit in understanding Christian anthropology. For him, “the dialectic between humanity as being created in the image of God and being ‘dust from the earth’ is best understood within the more fundamental contrast between sin and grace, between fallen creation and God’s renewed creation.”<sup>113</sup> Moreover, Conradie still warns people against the misuse of the human privilege among other creates as described by Bavinck who says “Among creatures, only man is the image of God, God’s highest and richest self-revelation and consequently the head and crown of the whole creation, image of God and the epitome of nature both *mikrotheos* (microgod) and *mikrocosmos* (microcosm).”<sup>114</sup> Conradie agrees with this description and argues that though humankind has got such privilege to be an image bearer of God and have dominion over the earth; this status cannot be used to legitimize the exploitation of the earth.<sup>115</sup> Due to the current ecological abuse, the Christian trend shows the need to understand God’s intended place of human beings within the created order. Human beings were not created apart from nature and the universe was not created for human purposes.<sup>116</sup> Conradie adds “Nature should not be regarded merely as the stage on which the drama of human salvation is taking place that often leads to arrogance and neglect of

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<sup>113</sup> Conradie, “Stewards or Sojourners in the Household of God?” p. 153

<sup>114</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt and trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 531, accessed June 28, 2023, <https://www.google.nl>

<sup>115</sup> Conradie, “Stewards or Sojourners in the Household of God?” p.156

<sup>116</sup> Conradie, “Stewards or Sojourners in the Household of God?” p.155

responsibility. The Christians who are concerned with eco-justice make a call for a new theology of stewardship.”<sup>117</sup>

#### **4.2.1. Human Beings as Stewards**

The current ecological crisis has led theologians to adopt a new approach to move beyond a theology of dominion that has been understood as domination with humans at the center as the master, the lord of creation, which is to be subdued and ruled over. This attitude created the envy to plunder and ravage nature resources.<sup>118</sup> From this point of view, Conradie observes that human beings should understand that the mandate in Genesis 1:27 is not to be interpreted as domination or military conquest but as caring, protecting, nurturing, gardening as prescribed in Genesis 2:15.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, he argues that the theology of stewardship is up to “a more harmonious and environmentally sensitive relationship between humanity and creation. In this regard, human beings should be regarded as the stewards, caretakers, priests, custodians or guardians of creation.”<sup>120</sup> He adds that this understanding fosters an environmental ethos that emphasizes the wise use of resources bearing in mind that they are not our own but entrusted to us by God for our care.<sup>121</sup> The Psalmist underlines this reality about God’s ownership over creation “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.” (Psalm 24:1-2), while Psalm 50:10-12 adds, “For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine and all that is in it” (NIV). The scriptures specifically show the owner

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.155

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p.155

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p.155

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p.156

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p.156

of creation and Conradie mentioned humans' role is to take care of is entrusted to them as stewards

In this regard, Mouw describes this stewardship role as an expression of God's investment in cultural formation.<sup>122</sup> This cultural formation entails human responsibility as described in Genesis 1 and 2. This responsibility involves the obligation first of all to build a strong godly community (Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it Gen. 1:28). For Wolters, God created a flawless universe with the purpose to let humankind play their role in the work of creation as God's stewards. Thus, being fruitful would lead to being creative, it is a task of development by which, human beings must fill it even more; by subduing it they must form it even more. In this regard, humankind, as God's representatives on earth, carries on where God left off."<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, by subduing, Kuyper underlines the need to always understand God's original intent and His plan for the restoration of the created order. For this reason, "subduing" the earth is not the extensive exploitation and abuse of the earth's resources but "to honor, replenish and protect it as caretakers of God's handiwork to pursue a path of sustainability, for ourselves and for those who follow."<sup>124</sup> We are called to be stewards of the earth, not its exploiters. Humankind must be cautious about the distribution of food and the earth's resources, and not indulge in the selfish exploitation of it. To replenish the earth is to make sure there is abundant food and plentiful natural resources for subsequent generations.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Richard J. Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship : Essays in the Line of Abraham Kuyper*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 42, accessed June 28, 2023, <https://www.google.nl/>

<sup>123</sup> Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basis for a Reformational Worldview. Second Edition*, Postscript by Michael W. Goheen, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 41.

<sup>124</sup> Clinton Stockwell, "Abraham Kuyper, Ecology and the Diversity of God's Creation" *The Kuyper Center for Public Theology Princeton Theological Seminary* (2012), p. 11

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11

Secondly, Human beings created in God's image are earth-keepers called to till and guard the earth (Gen. 2.15) and this task involves taking care of creation resources that include nurturing and never exploiting them for selfish gain. As mentioned in the previous section, this entails a constant remembrance that creation belongs to God and that God has entrusted it to them to be developed for His glory as Creator and their well-being as God's image bearers. For this reason, they are called upon to distance themselves from any action that intends to exploit, degrade or pollute the land, air, and water which in turn can result in soil erosion, landslides, barrenness, flood increase of temperature, famine, diseases etc. However, Smith argues that human intention in using the creation resources depends on the picture they have about their flourishing and he says:

When we inhabit the world primarily in a non-cognitive, affective mode of intentionality, implicit in that love is an end. Our ultimate love is oriented by and to a picture of what we think flourishing looks like for us to live well, and the picture then governs, shapes, and motivates our decisions and actions. A vision of the good life captures our hearts and imaginations not by providing a set of rules or ideas, but by painting what it looks like for us to flourish and live well. This is why such pictures are communicated most powerfully in stories, legends, myths, plays, novels, and films.<sup>126</sup>

Therefore, to have sustainability in this humankind's task as stewards requires a long-term plan for believers who, after understanding that Creation belongs to God, should preserve and transmit this knowledge from one generation to another who are raised to understand what it means to be God's image bearers. In this regard, Mouw infers that since cultural obedience was replaced by disobedience, resulting in a distortion of the cultural activity for which we were created, then, "to be redeemed from sin, is to be restored to the patterns of obedient cultural formation for which we were created. Therefore, the fulfillment of the cultural mandate then requires the discovery and implementation of God's complex ordering design, both among and

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<sup>126</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation, Vol.1 of Cultural Liturgies*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2009), 52-53.

within the spheres.”<sup>127</sup> For Conradie, proper earth-keeping or stewardship requires the Benedictine task of using resource wisely, sound management, reliability, commitment, dedication, hard work and responsibility towards God as owner of the land. This understanding creates a sense of humility in fulfilling the dominion task acting as what Conradie calls a *primus inter pares*.<sup>128</sup> To acquire this understanding, believers should read Genesis 1:27-8 together with Genesis 2:15 where humanity is called to “till” and to “keep” the soil. In this regard, human rule over the earth is a matter of serving and preserving the earth.<sup>129</sup>

To this view of fulfilling the cultural mandate in different spheres of society, Kraemer adds that after being conformed to Christ, believers in the mentioned-above human’s participation in the ongoing creation ought to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with their God in all their different places of work such as education, courts, health care because according to cultural mandate, all these activities though not recognized in churches and theological institutions, are sacred, they are all equal because they all contribute to human flourishing and the honor of God.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, for a better participation in the continuous God’s act of creation, Neville Carr (a senior lecturer, at St John's University Tanzania) proposes the community of believers a radical change in the current understanding of the word ‘ministry’ and redirect it from its main focus on what he call “the so-called sacred domain” namely: church, clergy, worship and equip believers to realize the interconnectedness of the two ‘Commissions,’ where Matthew 28 should be interpreted via Genesis 1, and vice versa.<sup>131</sup> Evidently, Carr’s view

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<sup>127</sup> Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship : Essays in the Line of Abraham Kuyper*, 42

<sup>128</sup> Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology*, p. 78

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 78

<sup>130</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, (London: Lutterworth, 1958), 9,10

<sup>131</sup> Neville Carr, “The Dominion Mandate: lessons for pastors, theologians and believers” *Ethos* 4 August 2020, accessed June 21, 2023, <http://www.ethos.org.au>

marks a shift from individual responsibility to the collective responsibility of the community of believers: God's Kingdom agents or the church.

### **4.3. The church as a new way to usher in the new creation**

#### **4.3.1. The Church is the light of and the salt to the world**

As mentioned above Conradie referring to Myers' eschatological view of new creation, the description of the eschatological liberation of creation depicted in terms of transfiguration that will occur when God's glory will be revealed to His creation is happening already in the church where this new creation has already begun and the glory of the world's freedom before God is already taking form.<sup>132</sup> In this regard, for the church to accomplish this mission it must be the light of and the salt to the world in other words, Conradie infers that the church is "an expression of or witness to the reign of God inaugurated by Jesus, (as coworker in God's saving work) and is thus situated in the tension between the already and the not-yet of God's coming reign on a journey in which it has not yet arrived at the destination or become fully what God intends it to be."<sup>133</sup> In this regard, he agrees with Bosch who argues that "while the church is part of the human community, it nevertheless has to remain identifiably different from the world, else it will cease to be able to minister to it."<sup>134</sup>

Furthermore, being the light of and the salt to the world, believers should be imitators of Christ always working toward their divine calling. Conradie makes it clear that the distinctiveness that exists between the church and a secular organization is less in "what it does

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<sup>132</sup> Conradie, *Creation and Salvation*, p. 228

<sup>133</sup> Conradie, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology*, p. 140

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, p. 140

and more in the area of its self-perception and motivation.”<sup>135</sup> For him the unique nature of the church lies in its awareness of “a divine calling and identity in the spirit of Christ as servant.”<sup>136</sup> This divine calling and Christ’s role model of servant-hood make the church a community of people who ought to live in healthy relationships between humans and God, and between humans and non-human nature. In this way Conradie describes the church as “dynamic and alive, filled with God’s Spirit and able to have a powerful influence over all areas of creation.”<sup>137</sup>

#### **4.3.2. The church is a community of worshippers and agents for social transformation**

The church as a community made of individuals who act according to the gospel to fulfill the calling to be the light to and the salt of the earth is also understood as the local congregation, a community that worships together, and as the Body of Christ that is present and active in the world by way of its various organized ministries.

##### **4.3.2.1. The church as a community of worshippers and a need for liturgical transformation**

According to Conradie, in response to the current ecological crisis, there is a need for a Christian approach to environmental ethics that can shine forth even stronger by witnessing alternative communities in their liturgy and practical ethics. For this reason, he advocates for the reclamation and celebration of the ancient liturgies that insisted on creaturely participation in the praise and joy of God along with new ones that suit the contemporary context. These updated liturgies will provide an appropriate means to confess our guilt to one another and God; they also

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid. p. 141

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. p. 141

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. p. 141



become a way to acknowledge the collective responsibility of humanity in the failure to live up to environmental ideals. In this regard, Conradie infers that:

“The priestly task of Christian eco-theology is necessary to keep alive what may be called a liturgical vision of the world. Worshippers enter the Christian liturgy with the burdens of the world on their shoulders, as sinners and as sinned against, with all their natural theologies, ideologies, idolatries and heresies. Through the liturgy worshippers may slowly learn to see the world in a new light, in the light of the Light of the world. They may begin to see the world around them through God’s eyes, as God’s beloved creation. They may realize that this messed-up world and the messed-up lives in and around them are nevertheless beloved, so much so that for God it is even worth dying for. They may learn to see the invisible, an intuition deeply embedded in Hebrew, Greek and African sensibilities. They may begin to see the earth in the light of “heaven”, in terms of what the world may become and in a hidden way already is.<sup>138</sup>

In terms of spiritual transformation, Conradie also underlines that after church liturgy; believers go with God’s blessing and get inspiration about a different world that the Lord has already established though it is still hidden. In this regard, as they continually encounter liturgy, it enables them to transform the world according to “the core identity and characteristics of the Triune God, namely mercy and therefore justice.”<sup>139</sup> He further suggests a six-fold duty to believers who take part in liturgy: (1) to read and interpret biblical texts with “an ecological hermeneutics; (2) to recover some and critique other stories from the history of Christianity; (3) to engage critically with the content and significance of the Christian faith; (4) to explore common ethical categories such as justice, rights, duties, responsibilities, values and virtues, what is good and what is right; (5) to engage in critical reflection on ecclesial praxis (liturgies, preaching, eco-congregations, pastoral care, ministries, etc.); (6) to reflect on God’s mission in the world, also in seeking common ground through dialogue with other living faiths and indeed

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<sup>138</sup> Conradie , “The Four Tasks of Christian Eco-theology: Revisiting the Current Debate,” p. 8

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p.8

with all other sectors of society, including government, business and industry, trade unions and the like.<sup>140</sup>

#### **4.3.2.2. The church as an agent of social transformation**

For Conradie, the church in its role of stewards also refers to a denomination with its leadership whose responsibility is to develop programs and projects and to take decisions concerning the denomination at regional, national, and international levels. At the global level, the church in its relationships and cooperation with other denominations and traditions, functions in the ecumenical sphere. However, at all these levels any decision about the use and care for creation should be gospel-centered and the priority of the church. This forms part of the wider duty of the church to address social issues including the current ecological crisis.<sup>141</sup>

In addressing the social issues that include the current ecological crisis, Conradie analyses the root causes of climate change namely cultural (consumption) and structural roots (spiritual) and urges the church as an agent of social and spiritual transformation to encourage people to find an alternative to the current economic order that can generate appropriate wealth, distribute it more equitably and help people to redefine their understanding of what wealth entails.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, to address the spiritual root cause of the current ecological crisis, Believers should take their Christian message seriously and be eager to share the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. People must understand God's grace and the content

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid. p.8-9

<sup>141</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, "The Church and Climate Change," *Signs of the Times Series*. Volume 1, (Cape Town: Cluster)

<sup>142</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, "Climate Change and the Church: Some Reflections from the South African Context," *The Ecumenical Review*, 62 no 2 (July 2010), p 159-169. accessed July 31, 2023 <https://web.p.ebscohost.com>

and significance of the Christian faith.<sup>143</sup> For this reason, Conradie observes to efficiently deal with the current ecological crisis there is a need to restore our communion with God which lies beyond repentance, and good Christian initiatives but solely depends on the Father's gracious will for communion with Creation. From this point of view, the church ministry of reconciliation differs from what Christ has done outside us and on our behalf and not only in us and through us once and for all (Rom. 6:10).<sup>144</sup>

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the reformed tradition's view of creation and salvation with a special focus on the work of Conradie that emphasizes the need to understand the relationship between creation and salvation embedded in the Christian faith in God as both Creator and Savior. In this regard, it was important to note that despite the fall, God did not abandon His creation and by His common grace in the form of providence, He expressed patience with a fallen but still beloved creation. Through the redemptive work of Christ, He sustains nurtures, and engages with it anew to heal the broken relationship with Him and to restore creation to what it was intended to be. Humankind must play their role as God's image bearers as stewards and God's coworkers in His work of saving His creation. In this responsibility, the chapter indicates that the church must have an effective eco-theology which is an attempt to reinvestigate, rediscover, and renew the Christian tradition in the light of the challenges posed by the environmental crisis. For this reason, the role of the church is to work as God's agent for spiritual and socio-economic transformation. In light of this conclusion on Conradie's and the Reformed tradition's view of the doctrine of creation and salvation, the next chapter focuses on

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid,

<sup>144</sup> Sigurd Bergmann and Heather Eaton, *Ecological Awareness: Exploring Religion, Ethics and Aesthetics*, (Lit Verlag Dr. w. Hopf, Berlin, 2011) p.87-88, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.google.nl/>

the conversation around eco-theology between Conradie and the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese and its context.

**CHAPTER FIVE: THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE  
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH–SHYOGWE DIOCESE,  
THE *BALOKOLE* BELIEVERS AND THE REFORMED THEOLOGIANS AND  
ESPECIALLY CONRADIE**

**5.0. Introduction**

Concerning the discussion in the previous chapters which presented the context of the current ecological crisis in Rwanda, the Rwandan socio-religious practices embedded in the traditional Rwandan view of the earth as *ingobyi* that promoted the preservation of the earth/creation; the current initiative of the Shyogwe Diocese in creation care, and Conradie's view of the doctrine of creation and salvation, this chapter presents the discussion between voices of the Anglican church–Shyogwe Diocese (mainstream), *Balokole* believers and Conradie with other Western theological voices. This will be done to inspire a new strategy for the new Shyogwe Diocese's eco-theology that will help its members and other members of the community to better understand their responsibility in God's creation care as believers and help other people in their community to appropriate this understanding. For this reason, the chapter focuses on the resemblances and differences between the Shyogwe Diocese's and the Balokole's theological narrative and Conradie's theological view of the doctrine of creation and salvation; and how the Rwandan traditional view of the earth as *ingobyi* can inspire the new eco-theology of the Shyogwe Diocese. Then, this chapter will close by summarizing some new resolutions and suggestions that can provide sustainable solutions to the current ecological crisis in Rwanda. The following are insights that can inspire a new strategy for the Shyogwe Diocese's eco-theology:

**5.1. Getting our own house in order: the starting point of effective eco-theology**

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, Conradie defines eco-theology as “an attempt to recover the ecological wisdom rooted in the Christian belief in a response to environmental threats and injustices.<sup>145</sup> In this regard, according to Conradie, to effectively engage other people in the battle against the current ecological crisis “the most significant contribution that Christians can make to the global discourse on climate change is to get their own house in order.”<sup>146</sup> This task requires believers to engage in a comprehensive reform movement within Christianity. Consequently, since eco-theology is a multidisciplinary study, this long-suffering reformation (because of some eventual resistance) must have for target the significant flaws in the Christian tradition and all theological sub-disciplines such as reading the Bible, a retrieval and critique of Christian histories, returning to Christian symbols, virtue ethics, applied ethics, ecclesial praxis, liturgical renewal, pastoral care, preaching, Christian formation and education, Christian mission and missionary projects and submit them to correction.<sup>147</sup>

Furthermore, for Conradie, the reflection on each aspect of the Christian faith plays a vital role in acquiring an adequate theological rationale that sustains the Christian earth-keeping attitude and practices. The trigger for the church’s action should not be the church’s contribution in times of crisis but the church’s theological rationale about earth-keeping from the very core of the Christian faith.<sup>148</sup> He reiterates that the sustainability of any Christian endeavor for earth-keeping is only possible when it is related to the deepest convictions and symbols of the Christian tradition.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Conradie, *Creation and Salvation*, p.10

<sup>146</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, “The Four Tasks of Christian Eco-theology: Revisiting the Current Debate,” *Scriptura* 119 (2020:1), pp. 5 <http://scriptura.journals.ac.za>

<sup>147</sup> Conradie, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology*, p. 2

<sup>148</sup> Conradie, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology*, p. 5

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6

In the same way, this study has described the Shyogwe Diocese's initiatives such as intervention in the Carbon Project that aims at carbon emission reduction for sustainable environment care practiced using distributing Improved Cook-stoves and Ceramic Water Filters; Investment in renewable energy (Supplying 'Solar Home Systems' in Off-grid areas); training the local people for environment care (sensitizing people about energy saving stoves, installing solar panels). This creation care initiative is done in line with Conradie's church description as an institution that helps people to acquire an adequate theological rationale that sustains the Christian earth-keeping attitude and practices in what he calls the attempt to reinvestigate, rediscover and renew the Christian tradition in the light of the challenges posed by environmental destruction.<sup>150</sup>

However, the assessment of the Shyogwe Diocese's holistic mission showed that there is a need, to first of all, get the Shyogwe Diocese as a house in order. It was found that the impetus for the Shyogwe Diocese's action is its contribution to the current ecological crisis and not its theological rationale about earth-keeping. This study revealed that this church's initiative lacks in its community ecological awareness. In an attempt to answer questions about the meaning of stewardship, respondents from the Shyogwe Diocese showed the need for the church to build the *Balokole* believers' and other church members' individual and collective conscience about environmental care. They all need to understand that they are "stewards of God's household"<sup>151</sup> and that they should use the privilege of being created in God's image as a responsibility to make the earth better not dominate and exploit it.<sup>152</sup> Due to the current ecological abuse, that is also evident in the area where the Shyogwe Diocese is located, its members including the *Balokole*

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 6

<sup>151</sup> Conradie, "Stewards or Sojourners in the Household of God?", p. 153

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p.156

need to understand God's intended place of human beings within the created order. As Conradie pointed out, human beings were not separately created apart from nature and the universe was not created for human purposes.<sup>153</sup> Because of all these challenges, the Shyogwe Diocese needs to rethink of the Christian tradition and all theological sub-disciplines that are central to its eco-theology as Conradie lists them: there should be well-organize Bible study at believers homes, in the respective cell groups, work places (offices, schools and health centers), Believers should be acquainted with church history and other to learn from the church success and failure, revisit and understand important Christian symbols, virtue ethics, applied ethics, ecclesial praxis, liturgical renewal, pastoral care, preaching, Christian formation and education, Christian mission, and missionary projects.<sup>154</sup> In doing so, the Shyogwe Diocese would have a well-grounded theological rationale that will contribute to its theocentric eco-mission.

## **5.2. The Church and the theocentric eco-mission**

Conradie describes the church as an instrument of God's purposes through which His mission in terms of reconciliation and renewal of creation is done. For this reason, the mission of the church flows from its nature and theology and this has significant implications for the creation care and theological reflection on the practice of eco-mission.<sup>155</sup> According to Conradie, though eco-theology is expressed in several different themes and emphases, and while a valid eco-mission may emerge from almost any one of those different emphases, eco-theology requires an approach that is at once life and God-centered.<sup>156</sup> He further notes that the church should focus on a theocentric approach in effort to encourage ecological mission in and through the

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<sup>153</sup> Conradie, "Stewards or Sojourners in the Household of God?" p.155

<sup>154</sup> Conradie, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology*, p. 2

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 144

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 144



Christian community because biocentrism<sup>157</sup> which is highly defended in different western communities is not for this end. For Conradie, it would instead be significant if a theocentric approach were built on a bio-centric base to offer the best hope for a balanced understanding of a global ecosystem and our place in it.<sup>158</sup>

In the related aspect of the foundation of the church's mission and approach in understanding the church's eco-mission, the analysis of the Shyogwe Diocese's ecological initiative shows that its current eco-mission is theoretically grounded in theology and its implementation is still more of climate science that seeks to provide scientific ecological insights and practical skills. Therefore, however much this scientific knowledge is needed by believers; it should have as its foundation theological understanding. It is reported that because of the nature of this eco-mission, there is a felt gap in its dissemination among the church and community members termed 'low community ecological awareness.'<sup>159</sup> As mentioned earlier in the analysis of the Shyogwe Diocese's holistic mission, a theological gap exists because most its activities executed to mitigate the current ecological crisis are not underlined and explained in the church's liturgy, preaching singing as other doctrines that are regularly referred to in the Shyogwe Diocese. Consequently, this deficit in the Shyogwe Diocese's initiative is part of the root causes of the challenged attitude of indifference its members including the *Balokole* in relation to creation care. This puts the church in a position of a need to make its eco-mission 'theocentric' and help its members including the *Balokole* to understand God as Creator and Savior to

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<sup>157</sup> Britannica defines Biocentrism as an ethical perspective holding that all life deserves equal moral consideration or has equal moral standing. Traditional Western ethics has always been anthropocentric, meaning that only presently living human beings deserve moral consideration. As environmental issues such as nuclear waste disposal, human population growth, and resource depletion came to the fore, many ethicists argued that moral standing should be extended to include future generations of human beings. Britannica, History and Society, Biocentrism Ethics, accessed August 3, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com>

<sup>158</sup> Conradie, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology*, p. 144

<sup>159</sup> Umuziranenge G., "Eco-Theology and Climate Justice in Rwanda," pp. 263-269

appropriate this theocentric eco-mission. In this regard, the Shyogwe Diocese's initiative should be in line with Jesus' teaching in the gospels, about the attitude of those who manage or administer the property of others and the sovereignty of the owner. In Matthew 20:8 He made it clear that there must be accountability by the steward about the development and increase of production from the provided resources. This work involves bearing in mind that the owner requests this accountability. This is the case in Matthew's account of the Parable of the Talents (25:14-30). From this example the Shyogwe Diocese's believers including the *Balokole* should understand that God has entrusted humans with his creation and He will come to evaluate their effectiveness according to His standards. This also illustrated in the parable of the dishonest steward in Luke 16:1-13 who is judged according to his failure to meet God's standards. To be more explicit about what is involved in this task of stewardship, the Lausanne Movement in its 'Kingdom Stewardship' has made biblical list of stewardship responsibilities that believers must exercise in God's mission in the world; truth; new life in Christ; tangible assets such as money and possessions; grace and forgiveness; the environment; God's revelation of his will in the Bible; institutions such as the family, the state, and the church; our bodies; time; relationships of all kinds in the family and beyond; our character formation; our various service roles; and our talents, natural aptitudes and spiritual gifts.<sup>160</sup> Additionally, Conradie agrees with this view and charges the church to avoid reducing the notion of stewardship to acquisition, maintenance and management of church monies and properties, instead, to use it as means to the church's real spiritual mission. For this reason, the church should cultivate stewardship in congregational life in order that the church's mission can be carried on.<sup>161</sup>

### **5.3. Understanding re-creation: in new creation the old is not replaced by the new**

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<sup>160</sup> Lausanne Movement, Kingdom Stewardship, accessed August 12, 2023, <https://lausanne.org/>

<sup>161</sup> Conradie, "Stewards or Sojourners in the household of God?" p.156

According to Conradie the starting point in any effort to do eco-theology is to understand the relationship between creation and salvation which is rooted in the Christian faith in God as both Creator and Savior with the story of God's work and the relation between God's work of salvation and human participation to save the planet.<sup>162</sup> In this regard, Conradie argues that the redemptive work of Christ revealed the universality of God's grace in that it creates a clear understanding of the relationship between creation and re-creation. God provided a remedy to the Genesis tragic scenario characterized by the broken relationship between human-human, human and the animal world, human and the ground, and above all, human and God. From this situation creation became subjected to bondage, corruption, and futility and until now groaning in anticipation of its liberation (Romans 8: 18-25).<sup>163</sup> Conradie notes that to deal with the effect of Adam's sin, through the incarnation, Christ as the new Adam came to reorder what the old Adam disordered and the implications for this are that Jesus did not create a new creation as opposed to the old one but brought fulfillment where the old Adam failed.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, Conradie with the theology of restoration which is a way to understand the aim of creation in terms of God's glory emphasizes that God's remedy in terms of incarnation came as the only response to the fall of humanity to restore the mentioned above-broken relationships. This restoration should not be understood as a form of eternal maintenance but a salvific act of healing that which is broken."<sup>165</sup> For Bavinck this is a work based on God's grace and affirms that because "Grace permeates and wholly renews the creation, nature, reborn by grace, will be brought to its highest revelation. That situation will again return in which we serve God freely and happily, without compulsion or

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<sup>162</sup> Conradie, Ernest M. *Creation and Salvation*, p. 5

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228

<sup>164</sup> Conradie, *Creation and Salvation*, p.107

<sup>165</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, *Saving the Earth? The Legacy of Reformed Views on "Re-creation,"* (Lit Verlag Dr.W.Hopf: Berlin, 2013), p. 44, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.google.nl>

fear, simply out of love, and in harmony with our true nature.”<sup>166</sup> In this way, Conradie contemplates new scenery about the new creation and adds “Sin has a non-necessary character, while salvation is aimed at allowing creatures to exist before God once again.”<sup>167</sup> This new existence before God is what in the Reformed tradition term known as ‘re-creation’ that reflects the eschatological completion of God’s acts of salvation aimed at healing His creation, thus, emphasizing the continuity of God’s work.<sup>168</sup>

Contrarily to Conradie’s view on the continuity of the current creation, the *Balokole* hold a theological narrative that God will destroy the earth because it is corrupted by sin, and create a new one where righteousness will reign and that the born-again people have nothing to do with the perishing earth and all in it, that their ultimate goal is to pursue eternal happiness in heaven,<sup>169</sup> that they are a mere pilgrim on earth, and that only human souls can be saved,<sup>170</sup> it is compelling for the Anglican church–Shyogwe Diocese to shape its eco-theology and engage in conversation with its members and more especially the *Balokole* to have a common understanding of the doctrine of creation and salvation. In this regard, there should be emphasis on God’s redemptive work which is not only limited to the salvation of individual sinners but to the entire cosmos. In doing so, the Shyogwe Diocese should help its *Balokole* to follow the lead of Christ and embrace the same matter embraced in His incarnation as Conradie observed.

For this reason, in this conversation, it is also important to understand God’s purpose for creation as expressed in Bavinck’s voice “God’s will is its origin and God’s glory its goal.”

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<sup>166</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 2: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt and trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 18.

<sup>167</sup> Conradie, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology*

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Daewon Moon, *African Initiative and Inspiration in Easter African Revival*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2022), 150. Accessed February 16, 2023 at <https://books.google.nl>

<sup>170</sup> Kaunda and Marja Hinfelaar, *Competing for Caesar: Religion and Politics in Postcolonial Zambia*, 230

Consequently, He, in a loving, fatherly way preserves it and does not intend to destroy it.<sup>171</sup> In the same way, as discussed above, though the effect of sin on creation was deeply felt, God plans to restore creation through the work of Christ and re-create it by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God's acts of salvation are creative and aimed at the healing of His creation understood as the continuity between this creation in which we live and the outcome of God's act of re-creation.<sup>172</sup> From this Reformed theological background, the Shyogwe Diocese can share a strong Christian message with its members including the *Balokole* that through the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ, believers come to know that it is an irony to love God without loving His beloved creatures and it is neither possible "to follow Jesus, the Word made flesh, without embracing the matter and flesh embraced in his incarnation."<sup>173</sup> In this salvific work, Christ identified with those He came to redeem who are created from the material world and sacramentally the elements used (bread and wine) to remember him are part of the material world. For this reason the *Balokole* believers should learn that Christ honored the material world and that they should imitate Him and that they still have a mission to accomplish in the world.

#### **5.4. The church's practice of eco-mission and the flourishing community**

According to Conradie, the time has come to close the gap between rhetoric and action for the church and to go beyond making mere pronouncements about environmental issues or stating what they believe governments should be doing. The church as a Christian community as was mentioned earlier also has an obligation, even a divine calling, to set its own house in order and to engage in practical eco-mission along with other groups with a related vision.<sup>174</sup> Since the

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<sup>171</sup> Herman Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology*, ed. John Bolt and trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 17.

<sup>172</sup> Conradie, *Creation and Salvation*, p.141

<sup>173</sup> Conradie, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology* , p. 28

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p.175

church is not an island, Conradie sees more benefits for the local church first of all to engage in partnership on local and global levels to impact communities. He argues:

Once environmental consciousness seeps into our religious experience on a regular basis, we can expect the kind of changes in attitudes that are desirable on a local and global scale. Those churches that have a universal reach have a particular responsibility to represent a Christian theological view in the global public sphere. But the ecumenical mandate of all Christian communities is to work together at a local level to build ecologically responsible forms of flourishing.<sup>175</sup>

Secondly, to engage in the community the church should start with the practical steps of which the first simple step concerns individual responsibility that helps a person to “be more self-conscious about the kind of food that he/she eats and its ecological footprint, be more aware of the overall energy he/she consumes and feel a sense of responsibility to work at ameliorating structural sin by working with non-government organizations or other forms of political advocacy.”<sup>176</sup> Thirdly, in this regard, Conradie sees the need to reform university policy-making regarding the practical aspect of academics. He encourages those working in the education context to find scope to make a difference in practice in what he calls building or recycling schemes. For him, though these practices may be used like environmental indulgences to relieve guilt without proper attention to structural sin, they can at least flag up in a significant way the need to pay attention to these issues more seriously.<sup>177</sup> Fourthly, the church should engage in building a collective conscience that involves an awareness of what the communities in which people are placed assume as the norm for moral action. This awareness can leave some people challenged and this collective conscience which is according to Conradie “self-consciously more environmentally aware” is essential in addressing complex problems such as climate change.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p.175

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p.175

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 175

For this reason, he urges believers to have something important to contribute to what conscience means and how to foster sensitivity to it at individual and collective levels.<sup>178</sup>

In the same regard, Conradie infers that through what he calls the “royal” task of believers, the church has an added practical task to exercise responsibility concerning earth-keeping at local and global levels. This exercise requires critical reflection on peoples’ attitudes, praxis, and wisdom and it can work well and bear fruits if it is indeed based on a well-grounded Christian basis. For Conradie, from a theological perspective, this reflection may be the most important of the three responsibilities (prophetic, priestly, and royal) given that Christianity is not an aim in itself but is aimed at the coming reign of God. This task requires constant engagement in the public sphere between churches, faith-based organizations, and various levels of government, business, and industry on a range of concrete issues but also moral visions, rights, values, middle axioms, policies, and programs. For its effectiveness it, for example, requires critical engagement with the sustainable development goals (SDGs) as proposed by the United Nations.<sup>179</sup>

In its engagement with the public sphere in terms of holistic mission, the Shyogwe Diocese’s vision is “A holy soul in a healthy body.” In this way, it initiated some tasks to meet this vision and these include investment in socio-economic activities more importantly empowering saving groups, investing in education and health facilities for the Rwandan people. In addition to these spiritual and social initiatives, this holistic mission is extended to creation care whereby the Shyogwe Diocese works hand in hand with both local and global churches and Christian organizations to advocate for the poor and the degrading environment. However, as it

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<sup>178</sup> Conradie, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology*, p. 175

<sup>179</sup> Conradie, “The Four Tasks of Christian Eco-theology: Revisiting the Current Debate” p.7

is mentioned earlier in the analysis of the Shyogwe Diocese's holistic mission, the socio-economic issues that include rampant poverty are still a big setback to the accomplishment of this mission. A part of its members and some members of the community around Shyogwe Diocese are still struggling to meet their basic needs notably with food shortage, unsafe water, inappropriate shelter, unclean energy, poor quality education, lack of access to health services, etc.

From this observation, it is reported that one of the factors that influence some believers including the *Balokole* members to view the world as hostile, is the precarious life situation they live in and more especially the extreme poverty that leaves people without a choice to negatively respond to the call to care for their environment. This situation requires pastoral presence that can create hope in hardships for Davidson; the church should accompany local community people in finding solutions to their problems using resources that God has given them in terms of thoughts, physical strengths, and available natural resources. And above all they should be helped to realize that through the Work of Christ who defeated death, "the world's suffering and bloodshed, dreadful as they remain, will not, in light of this event, be the final word about its situation."<sup>180</sup> From this discussion on eco-mission and engaging in the flourishing community the Shyogwe Diocese has the responsibility to start making some theological narratives accompanied by practical initiatives to deal with environmental issues. This responsibility entails the building of individual and collective conscience of its members including the *Balokole* and community to develop their little resources and improve their lifestyle. For example, as mentioned earlier in the Shyogwe Diocese's saving program people should be encouraged to think about acquiring clean energy in their homes that will solve the problem of deforestation,

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<sup>180</sup> Ivor J. Davidson, Murray A. Rae, *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective*, (Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), 11. Accessed on February 28, 2023, at <https://books.google.nl>



improve their gardening using organic fertilizers to avoid soil degradation, in another program like “Family Life” in the Shyogwe Diocese should encourage families to have a number of children that are corresponding to the available resources to solve the problem of overpopulation. Moreover, on top of this, the Shyogwe Diocese should address the spiritual need of people and make them disciples of Christ who follow his example to serve, heal, reconcile, build up, empty himself, and become a servant. This servant attitude helps people to realize that they are not above creation,”<sup>181</sup> and that they should trust God more than ever, caring for the socio-economic challenges that people are faced with is key to sustainable environmental care. From this perspective, the earlier mentioned Shyogwe church’s structure, with its 36 parishes, 156 sub-parishes, 632 active cell groups; 24 schools, and 4 health centers are good channels to disseminate all needed information and to empower church and community members for the work of mitigating the current ecological crisis in Rwanda.

### **5.5. The preliminary proposed eco-theological education for the Shyogwe Diocese**

For believers to effectively engage in the current ecological crisis, Conradie reveals the need to be ecologically literate which entails some knowledge about “earth sciences, planetary systems, the biosphere and what is happening, in general, to the planet.” To this end, an eco-theologian should understand the systemic issues such as “climate change, oceans, freshwater, soil, species extinctions, animal habitat, toxins and the eco and bio-dynamics of a few specific ecological problems.”<sup>182</sup> He further argues that theology is not enough for eco-theology and it should be supplemented by some knowledge of different methods result in distinct analyses; many diagnostic tools: ecological, economic, systemic injustices, poverty, and gender. In this

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<sup>181</sup> Conradie, “Stewards or Sojourners in the household of God,” p. 161

<sup>182</sup> Conradie, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology*, p. 205

regard, theology should move into multidisciplinary discussions to make sustainable ecological decisions bearing in mind that since science is not uniform and alone is not enough to discern bias and to convey values and ethics.<sup>183</sup>

Though Conradie mentioned the inefficiency of theology alone without engaging in multidisciplinary discussions, the case of the Shyogwe Diocese, as it was underlined in chapter three shows that effective eco-theology is still very far to be reached due to the lack of proper theological training for pastors and church leaders. This theological gap is at the heart of the problem of the lack of Christian narrative awareness in the community. The same gap is supplemented by the abandonment of the socio-religious practices that left Rwandan believers without alternatives to respond to the ecological issues. This gap in theological training also makes it hard to clearly understand the doctrine of creation and salvation among believers including the *Balokole* in the Shyogwe Diocese. Thus, this situation leads to the lack of appropriation of the earth-keeping responsibility.

For the Shyogwe Diocese, theological training and ecological literacy are essential to engage in the battle to mitigate the current ecological crisis. The theological training gap and scientific ecological knowledge put the Shyogwe Diocese in a position to rethink the theological training of its personnel and to engage in multidisciplinary discussions that provide supplementary insights necessary to face the local and global ecological challenges. For the sake of this study, this theological training and ecological literacy focuses on biblical understanding of creation care, the Rwandan people's culture, and eco-spirituality.

### **5.5.1. Biblical understanding of integrity of creation**

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<sup>183</sup> Conradie, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology*, p. 205

For the Shyogwe Diocese to help its members to effectively engage in ecological care the focus should be on creation and salvation doctrine. This is done to fix the reported lack of clarity in its theological position, thus, the task ahead should be to lay a biblical foundation that will help its members to reconstruct the symbols of the Christian faith and to look for a sense of new direction.<sup>184</sup> The starting point of this task is to lay a biblical understanding of the integrity and sacredness of creation that legitimately reinforce its care and protection on behalf of its inhabitants who should exhibit an ecological vision and attitude.

In reference to Conradie's view of eco-spirituality, Chitheka (a Malawian theologian), attests the Old Testament and New Testament experience of God's own presence in nature, insists that the earth should be seen as "a gift from God that has to be treasured and preserved because God's own presence may be detected in nature."<sup>185</sup> With emphasis on the covenantal tradition defined as a commitment to right relationships within the earth's community, Conradie explains this covenantal view with reference to the goal of Exodus in the Old Testament, namely that God will lead the people into a new land flowing with milk and honey, a land characterized by fertility and ecological abundance.<sup>186</sup> In this covenant entailed laws the regulation of individual life and actions but also relationship human-human, human-God and human and the rest of creation.<sup>187</sup> These laws were specifically allotted to each sphere of people's life first there were laws about the health of the land in relation to the laws pertaining to Sabbatical years (Ex. 23:10-11 and Lev 25), specific laws for the care of plants (Lev. 19:23-25 and Deut. 20:19-20) and animals (Ex. 20:8-11, 23:4, 5, 10-11 and Deut. 22:1-4,6-7). The prophetic books bring across

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<sup>184</sup> Conradie, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology*, 9

<sup>185</sup> Bossman Suzumile Chitheka, "Toward a Chewa Ecotheology with Special Reference to the thought of Ernst M. Conradie," Master of Theology (MTh) in Systematic Theology at the University of Stellenbosch (2015), 106

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p.106

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p.106

an interesting view of this relationship between God, humans and nature: first on the pronouncement of the judgment of the wicked is also found and the land, and the trees also rejoice (Isa. 14:3-8, see also Ps. 98); second on the foretelling the redemption of Israel, they described the natural world as sharing in that redemption (Isa. 11:6-9) 35:1-3, 5-7, Ezek. 36, 47:1-12, and Amos 9:11-15).<sup>188</sup> In this covenantal relationship, the Israelites were warned that failure to keep these laws would result in them being thrown off of the land (Lev. 26:14-45).<sup>189</sup>

In the fulfillment of God's foretold redemptive work, according to Conradie the New Testament portrays Jesus starting His ministry in the company of wild animals in the desert (Mk. 1:13) an event that provides a preliminary fulfillment of Isaiah's vision (Isa. 11:6-9). Moreover, it is reported that Jesus repeatedly withdrew Himself from the crowds to have private time for prayer. The same scenario happened before His crucifixion when He poured out his soul to His Father in Gethsemane. Furthermore, in His teaching, He confirmed God's care for creatures in the sayings about the lilies (Mt. 6:28-30) and the sparrows (Mt. 10:29-31). Jesus cursed an unfaithful fig tree; he used earth to heal the blind man. The healing of the sick takes place by use of soil, water (Luke 4:18-19).<sup>190</sup> From this biblical background, Conradie reminds people of the integrity of the land and argues that "the land does not belong to humanity, but humanity belongs to the land, humanity is not living on the earth, but humanity is part of the earth's biosphere. Humanity forms part of the land and lives on the earth. The well-being of the earth transcends all of humanity because it is something bigger than human interests."<sup>191</sup>

Conradie's biblical understanding of land resonates with the African/Rwandan traditional environmental philosophy that renounces anthropocentrism and promotes a holistic view of the

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<sup>188</sup> Chitheka, "Toward a Chewa Eco-theology", p. 107

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 107

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., P. 108

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 108

world and life and the participatory natural resources management that was inclusive and community-based.<sup>192</sup> In this regard, the cultural law governing intimate cultural connection with nature enabled an effective model for natural resource conservation. This conservation model encouraged the African/Rwandan community to have a close and intimate cultural connection with their land and all in it.<sup>193</sup> Close to the Old Testament teaching, African tradition executed punishments for whoever could contravene cultural law governing the land. This punishment was in the form of social isolation, misfortune, and even death. If people did not punish the offender, the invisible world will punish him. This view arises from the belief in the religious order of the universe, in which God and other invisible beings are actively engaged in the world of men.<sup>194</sup> These practices preserved the earth and its inhabitant, and the notion of God in traditional Africa result from God's Common grace. This responsibility for creation care and related punishment for those who fail to fulfill it are important information for the Shyogwe Diocese and its *Balokole* members to rightfully care for creation to avoid subsequent divine punishment. Moreover it is a good reason for the Shyogwe Diocese and its *Balokole* to start their mission to the community to share about the integrity and sacredness of creation to raise awareness for ecological actions.

### **5.5.2. Understanding Common Grace and the flourishing of culture**

The Shyogwe Diocese and its *Balokole* members have much to learn from the Reformed tradition, especially in the understanding of God's common grace and its manifestation in creation. Against the *Balokole* view that view that the world is corrupt as a result of sin and that it is beyond redemption, this Reformed understanding is highly needed in explaining how despite

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<sup>192</sup> Workineh Kelbessa, "African Environmental Philosophy, Injustice, and Policy," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, (2022), accessed June 20, 2023, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu>

<sup>193</sup> Kelbessa, "African Environmental Philosophy, Injustice, and Policy"

<sup>194</sup> John S Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion Second Edition*, 41

the effect of sin manifested through different forms of ecological crisis, creation is still good, and redeemable, and that people could continue to take of it. This is the same with retrieving some traditional religious practices that were meant to preserve creation and make use of some to contribute to the current ecological crisis. As mentioned earlier in chapter four, in his description of the Kuyperian view of God's common grace, Conradie describes its different aims and the two of them are: God's way of restraining, blocking, or redirecting the consequences of sin,<sup>195</sup> affirming the goodness that is still present in creation despite the impact of sin outside the Christian sphere of influence in terms of a widespread sense of moral conscience and in terms of religious practices that help to preserve identity and community. Furthermore, it is important for the *Balokole* church members who reject any cultural practice to be aware that common grace plays an unparalleled role in the formation of worldviews (life system) in different communities outside the Christian tradition, as portrayed in their artistic and intellectual achievements." It was discussed that such a life system provides insight to its adherents on our relationship with God, with fellow human beings, and with the world.<sup>196</sup>

Likewise, Bavinck's understanding of the doctrine of common grace is a good reason that Christians can think of responsible ecological cultural development based on the presence of the universal divine sovereignty in creation and providence, restraining the effects of sin and bestowing general gifts on all people, thus, making human society and culture possible even among the unredeemed. Cultural life is rooted in creation and common grace and thus has a life of its own apart from the church.<sup>197</sup> In the same way Kuyper underlines despite the impact of sin because of common grace, "there is so much to admire among those outside of the Christian

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<sup>195</sup> Conradie, *Creation and Salvation*, p. 101

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107

<sup>197</sup> Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics, Sin and salvation, Vol.3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 16, accessed June 29, 2023, <https://www.google.nl>

tradition, including their artistic and intellectual developments.”<sup>198</sup> This applies to the African/Rwandan culture and its religious practices that promoted the preservation of the earth.

### **5.5.3. Revisiting the Rwandan peoples’ culture**

Following the Reformed tradition’s understanding that culture flows from God’s grace, and with the fact that despite the effect of sin there is still much to admire outside the Christian tradition, it is important for the Shyogwe Diocese and its *Balokole* believers to actively and critically engage in the contextualization of some compatible aspects of *Ingobyi* and create new ways of sharing the Christian message about earth-keeping and the human role in God’s work of saving His creation. This contextualization should focus on the following aspects of *Ingobyi* view:

First, through the study of the concept of *Ingobyi*, the Rwandan culture as it is in the reformed tradition, lays much emphasis on the interrelationships between human beings and God the Creator nature. Chapter two described how the Rwandan people as it is in many other African communities, had the belief that humanity and God are so connected that one would cease to exist without the other. Despite God’s reverence and transcendence to human beings, it is also believed that His imprint is within the human beings, the reason why they acknowledge God’s existence and worship Him accordingly.”<sup>199</sup> This understanding resonates with the Reformed tradition’s view of human being created in God’s image and the related responsibility to worship Him and serve Him as stewards and coworkers (Genesis 1:26ff; 2:15ff).

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<sup>198</sup> Conradie, *Creation and Salvation*, 107

<sup>199</sup> Nkem Emeghara, “The Dignity of the Human Person in African Belief,” *Theology Annual vol.14* 1992-1993 p.126-137, accessed June 6, 2023, [https:// archive.hsscol.org](https://archive.hsscol.org)

Secondly, the *Ingobyi* view put much stress on the relationship between humans and fellow humans. According to this view, the existence of the individual “*umuntu*” is the existence of the corporate due to his/her *ubumuntu/Ubuntu* that provides essential human virtues that greatly contributes to the health wholeness of the community including the entire creation. Like in the Reformed tradition and the Christian teaching Christ in His priestly prayer emphasized the unity that involves love and solidarity of believers as the identity of His body (John 17:1-26).

Lastly, the Rwandan traditional view of nature as *Ingobyi* also privileged the preservation of the natural world through transmitting knowledge and skills from one generation to another using a traditional education system operated through some mentioned earlier appealing mediums such as symbols; proverbs, gods, nature and ancestral spirits, mythologies, totems, and taboos. Though time has changed from oral to writing and reading tradition with advanced technologies, The Shyogwe Diocese should consider and update this education system to stimulate some lost actions which were meant to preserve nature in the light of Christian values that are theocentric. For instance, the revival of totems can greatly contribute to the unity and reconciliation of the Rwandan people in the post-genocide community in terms of correcting the misunderstanding related to ethnic groups. Though it cannot be fully discussed in this study totems can bridge gaps between the so-called Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa ethnic groups which were economic classes of the Rwandan people. With one totem people from this group share the same totem as the identity of their ethnic group. If this aspect is revisited, there should be a change in the relationship between human-human and human and nature.

This insight is a good reminder for the Shyogwe Diocese and its *Balokole* members that the traditional ideas and practices hold deep meanings. Therefore, to make the Christian narrative more intelligible to people’s situation, as Hansen says, “Christian theology and its structures and



symbols have to speak meaningfully and critically to the burning issues of human life if they were to possess any public relevancy,” he further adds that there must be connection between faith and culture.<sup>200</sup> Thus the contextualization of the Christian message using the traditional mediums of which people are familiar can yield more desirable fruits.

Furthermore, to effectively engage in the interrelationship between Christianity and the Rwandan culture concerning earth-keeping, the Shyogwe Diocese should seek appropriate theological methods to expose the Rwandan culture to the Gospel for transformation and acknowledgment of the redemptive work of Christ. Then, the new beliefs that will be transmitted through renewed appealing mediums will be important for the new intergenerational environmental ethics to local people.<sup>201</sup> After this effort to contextualize the gospel, the Shyogwe Diocese has an urgent task to engage in conversation with its *Balokole* members to have a common eco-mission with the Rwandan cultural touch for the glory of God. In addition, with regard to a lesson to be learned from the Rwandan socio-religious practices, the Shyogwe Diocese together with its *Balokole* members should find out what could be the right incentives in its eco-mission that help the church and community members to meet their basic needs in terms of spiritual, economic, esthetics, and cultural interest that can contribute to the collective involvement in creation care.<sup>202</sup> As knowledge and skills that undergird traditional practices that preserved creation were shared through traditional mediums, in this attempt to retrieve wisdom, it is important to explore God’s provisions of different gifts that can effectively contribute to the

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<sup>200</sup> Len D. Hansen, *Christian in Public: Aims, Methodologies and Issues in Public Theology*, (Stellenbosch University, Beyers Naude Centre, 2007), 155, accessed July 24, 2023, <https://www.google.nl>

<sup>201</sup> Anthony, Ikechukwu, Kanu, Osa. *African Eco-Theology: Meaning Forms and Expressions*, (Maryland, USA: APAS, 2021) 10.

<sup>202</sup> Emmanuel Munyaneza, “The Role of Cultural Practices in the Conservation of Biodiversity in Rwanda,” *Rwanda Cultural Heritage Academy (March 2009)*, accessed February 16, 2023, <https://www.researchgate.net>

large coverage of information to different generations of people in the church and community. For instance, the use of new technologies that include social media can serve on a large scale.

#### **5.5.4. God the Creator is the Omnipresent God- Eco-spirituality**

Conradie insists that the church must make the linking of mission with the work of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, the various facets of the mission of the church, which is the mission of Christ and includes eco-mission, may be seen as an expression of the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God. Moreover, this mission is expressed as “celebration and thanksgiving and as God-in-action” because God is the promoter of this mission. In this regard, the widespread recognition of an “eco-crisis” presents a substantial opportunity for practical public theology, or for what might be termed ‘mission in the public square.’<sup>203</sup> Conradie further notes that though the church may not engage in structures similar to those established by secular organizations to replicate their endeavors, its most important role is to make the Christian voice be heard within that wider forum. This is important for the church itself, for the integrity of the gospel it proclaims and for the environmental contribution it can make alongside other people of goodwill. This is because the change in behavior patterns that the church seeks is not for the sake of the church, but for the world.<sup>204</sup>

The link of the mission with the work of the Holy Spirit is observed right from the creation scene. While in the Genesis (1:2) account of creation, the Spirit *ruach* was moving over the surface of the chaotic waters, the wisdom literature gives a clear definition of His role in creation on behalf of the same Spirit the breathing of God, and the emergence and preservation of the living. In this regard, the Psalmist says: ‘When you send your life-giving breath, they are

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<sup>203</sup> Conradie, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology* , p. 155

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146

created, and you replenish the surface of the ground' (Ps. 104.30). The ecumenical creed which is cited at least once at every church service of the Anglican Church finally summarized such experiences in locating the Spirit as the Life-giver and the Life of the world to come. The point made by the Christian doctrine of the Spirit is that God's Holy Spirit can work in, with, and through all places, spaces, and scales of creation.<sup>205</sup>

From the current Rwandan context, the existing cultural and theological gap has caused the people's lack of friendly interaction with their environment and also made people confine God the Creator in church buildings. People supposedly see God's glory in the physical structure temple and miss it in nature. Traditionally, people made a step and kept some spaces for worship purposes. In this case, this belief helped people to friendly interact with their environment as a place to meet God and ancestral spirits. In the face of the current belief that does not see God outside the church building, it may be probably difficult to see Him in their homes. As a result, this absence of God in creation feeds beliefs that the current earth has lost its goodness and is going to be destroyed and replaced by a new one thus, prayers for salvation from it. For this reason, it is the responsibility of the Shyogwe Diocese to effectively respond to this situation and deepen its ecological spirituality. Therefore, as discussed above, the current ecological crisis presents an opportunity for the Shyogwe Diocese to retrieve and reconstruct its theological position about the doctrine of creation and salvation; it is equally an opportunity to share the gospel.

In this regard, from this discussion, people in the Shyogwe Diocese need to understand that humans cannot put limits on God's work. "All natural and human borders are always open

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<sup>205</sup> Conradie, *Christian Faith and the Earth Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Eco-theology*, p. 152

for the transcending Spirit. We can meet the Life-giver in the most unexpected places.”<sup>206</sup> The Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese can learn from its sister Anglican church St Clement Church in Brisbane that has converted a grassy slope into a native vegetation area to make a statement about the God of creation, another congregation has created a green space where people can wander and meditate; Biblical and spiritual prompts are strategically located at various points of the garden. For Conradie, initiatives such as these “are a powerful reminder of how people may be encouraged to relate life and faith to the natural world.”<sup>207</sup> Moreover, the Shyogwe Diocese can use this example and reinforce its eco-spirituality among its *Balokole* members who have now started to join their fellow charismatic group members to have prayers in particular and special places for their devotions. This experience can serve as a starting point to teach about God’s presence in His creation and to relate life and faith to the natural world.

## 5.6. Conclusion

On how can holistic view of creation and salvation, the role of stewards, and environment care of the Anglican church–Shyogwe Diocese be developed and renewed, this chapter focuses on the conversation between the representatives of the Shyogwe Diocese including the *Balokole*, and the Reformed theologians especially Ernst M. Conradie. This conversation was based on comparison and differences between the Shyogwe Diocese’s and the *Balokole*’s theological narrative and Conradie’s theological view of the doctrine of creation and salvation; and how the Rwandan traditional view of the earth as *ingobyi* can inspire the new eco-theology of the Shyogwe Diocese. The study found that for the Shyogwe Diocese to have an effective eco-theology which can contribute to the mitigation of the current ecological crisis there is a need to

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 44

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 152

first of all get its house in order, understand the relationship between the doctrine of creation and salvation, reforming Christian tradition, engaging conversation with its *Balokole* members, involvement in public sphere for the flourishing of the community and to organize an eco-theological education.

## **CHAPTER SIX: GENERAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1. GENERAL CONCLUSION**

This study has been carried out in the area of systematic theology under the title “The Anglican Church-Shyogwe Diocese’s Eco-theology in Conversation with Conradie’s View of the Doctrine of Creation and Salvation.” This study states that the lack of a clear theological position for the Shyogwe Diocese’s current holistic mission is a big gap in the current ecological crisis mitigation.

The current ecological crisis is a global phenomenon that threatens all global inhabitants who must work hand in hand to mitigate this threat. In the Rwandan context, though there are natural causes of this crisis, the study focused on its causes with reference to human activities which include overpopulation, deforestation, and pollution (air, water, and waste) that threaten the life of the biodiversity. The study revealed that Rwanda and Burundi are the most exposed countries due to the temperature increase of 1.4°C higher than the global average which will have negative effects on biodiversity. Since this ecological crisis is a global phenomenon, governments and non-governmental organizations have made their call to mobilize the world to work hand in hand to curb this crisis. So far, some of these institutions including the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese have played their role to mitigate the current ecological crisis over the last few years.

The Shyogwe Diocese’s initiatives include its intervention in the Carbon Project to reduce carbon emissions for sustainable environment care through the distribution of Improved Cook-stoves and Ceramic Water Filters; Investment in renewable energy (Supplying ‘Solar Home Systems’ in Off-grid areas) and training the local people for environment care especially about energy saving stoves and the installation of solar panels. Though the number of people

who have benefited from this initiative is still low, testimonies show that the Shyogwe Diocese and the Rural Development Inter-diocesan Service have greatly contributed to the reduction of consumed firewood.

According to this study, despite this important initiative of the Shyogwe Diocese to contribute to environmental care still, the attitude and practices of the Shyogwe Diocese's members including its *Balokole* members reflect the abuse and misunderstanding of the notion of stewardship. These practices are observed in terms of deforestation, pollution, overpopulation, and the theological narrative that encourages a world-flight mentality that stop people from assuming their responsibility as stewards in God's creation.

From insights gained from literature, and interviews the study demonstrated the source of these challenges to the Shyogwe Diocese is mainly related to (1) the lack of theological training of pastors and church leaders that could help others understand God's purpose of creation, and revisit its holistic mission and makes it theologically grounded; (2) a lack of conversation with its *Balokole* members to have convergent ideas on issue of valuing material world, (3) a lack of contextualization of the Christian creation and salvation narrative in the language or customs of the Rwandan view of nature as *ingobyi* to be effective in its holistic mission (4) rampant socio-economic problems that make people see the earth as hostile.

For this reason, the study inquired about "What can be learned from a conversation between the representatives of the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese, the *Balokole* believers and Reformed theologians and especially Conradie concerning understanding God's plan and our human responsibility for the creation?"

With the Reformed theological position (especially Conradie), the emphasis was put on Conradie's argument that the essence of understanding the relationship between creation and salvation is to have faith in God as both Creator and Savior. In this faith a believer should understand that despite the fall, God did not abandon His creation and by His common grace in the form of providence, He expressed patience with a fallen but still beloved creation. Through the redemptive work of Christ, He sustains, nurtures, and engages with it anew to heal the broken relationship with Him and to restore creation to what it was intended to be. For this reason, humankind must play their role as God's image bearers as stewards, and God's coworkers in His work of saving His creation. Believers need to retain these words of Conradie that in terms of our privilege to have dominion over creation we should not forget that "we belong to the earth more than it belongs to us thus, depending on it than it is on us."<sup>208</sup> It is the responsibility of the church therefore to have an effective eco-theology.

## **6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

After the description and analysis of the current ecological crisis and the role of the Anglican Church-Shyogwe Diocese, followed a conversation between the representatives of the Anglican Church-Shyogwe Diocese, its *Balokole* members, and Reformed theologians especially Conradie on the holistic view of salvation of creation, the role of stewards, and environment care. This conversation aimed at finding out new strategies for the Anglican Church-Shyogwe Diocese to develop and renew its holistic mission thus. From this conversation, some insights were availed to help the Shyogwe Diocese to address the lack of a clear theological position in its current holistic mission about understanding the doctrine of creation and salvation. Therefore, the study makes the following recommendations for the Shyogwe Diocese eco-theology:

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<sup>208</sup> Conradie, "Stewards or Sojourners in the household of God" p. 159



To effectively engage its members including its *Balokole* believers, and members of the community in the battle against the current ecological crisis, as it is previously mentioned, the Anglican Church–Shyogwe Diocese should start with the heavy task “to get its own house in order.” This involves making corrections of the significant flaws in the Christian tradition and all theological sub-disciplines such as raising the standard of Bible study, helping people understand Christian histories, revisiting and understanding important Christian symbols, virtue ethics, applied ethics, ecclesial praxis, liturgical renewal, pastoral care, preaching, Christian formation and education, Christian mission, and eco-missionary projects.

It was found that the impetus for the Shyogwe Diocese’s action is its contribution to the current ecological crisis and not its theological rationale about earth-keeping. Therefore, the Shyogwe Diocese is an instrument of God’s purposes through which His mission in terms of reconciliation and renewal of creation is done; its eco-mission should be God-centered as it should be reflected in daily church life and service such as worship, teaching, and other developmental endeavors to the Rwandan population.

The Shyogwe Diocese should engage in specific conversations with its *Balokole* members and look for a way to have a common understanding of a clear theological position rooted in understanding the relationship between creation and salvation. This understanding is rooted in the Christian faith in God as both Creator and Savior with the story of God’s work and the relation between God’s work of salvation and human participation to save the planet.

The church as an agent of God’s Kingdom gives a task to the Shyogwe Diocese to practice eco-mission and the flourishing community for this reason it is imperative to work hand in hand with other churches, faith-based organizations, and various levels of government,

business, and industry on a range of concrete issues but also moral visions. This responsibility entails the building of individual and collective conscience of people in church and community to contribute to the current ecological crisis mitigation in Rwanda.

The Shyogwe Diocese should privilege eco-theological education that encompasses all the mentioned-above missions and programs to curb the current ecological crisis notably: ecological literacy, Bible study, acquaintance with church history to value important Christian symbols, virtue ethics, applied ethics, ecclesial praxis, liturgical renewal, pastoral care, preaching, local people's cultural aspects that eco-friendly, Christian formation and education, Christian mission, and eco-missionary projects.

The Rwandan view of nature as *Ingobyi* should be revisited inspire some of the Shyogwe Diocese's efforts to create relevant Christian channels of transmitting knowledge and skills that help the church and community members to preserve nature and participate in the Redemptive work of God.

Finally, this study was not exhaustive. It only focused on the Shyogwe Diocese's Eco-theology. Therefore, it is felt that further research around this same subject but with an addition of deep Christian eco-theological education to explore more about how the church can engage in the public square and help to build collective conscience to ensure environmental sustainability.

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## APPENDICES

### **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

This questionnaire was designed to evaluate the Shyogwe Diocese's holistic mission in mitigating the current ecological crisis in Rwanda. Please answer freely the following questions:

#### **I. Understanding the ecological crisis**

- In last few years have you ever heard or experienced natural disasters in your community? If yes, how did you feel
- What are the main causes of the current natural disasters in our country?
- What are effects of these natural disasters on people's life in your area?

#### **II. Believers' attitude to environment**

- What do you understand by the world as God's creation?
- What should be our position as creatures in God's creation?
- What is the meaning of stewardship?
- What should be our responsibility for the creation / environment?

#### **III. Believers' responses to the current ecological crisis**

- How do different members of the Shyogwe diocese respond to the current ecological crisis?

#### **IV. Church's holistic mission to mitigate the ecological crisis?**

- To what extent is the church holistically helping its members to be involved in environment care? Are there any deficits to be addressed?
- What would be the new and holistic strategies for the church to respond to the current ecological crisis?

Thank you so much for your valuable contribution.

Edouard Nyituriki

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## Appendix B. Identification codes of respondents

Code	Age	Category	Place
1. M.AU	68	Pastor (M)	Gitarama Parish
2. A.M	44	Mulokole (F)	Shyogwe Parish
3. M.V	51	Ordinary member (F)	Shyogwe Parish
4. EMG	66	Pastor/ Mulokole (M)	Gitarama Parish
5. V.N	36	Pastor (M)	Gitarama Parish
6. S.E	30	Ordinary member (M)	Gasharu Parish
7. M.C	45	Pastor (F)	Gahogo Parish
8. M.VI	55	Ordinary member (F)	Gitarama Parish
9. M.AG	50	Mulokole (F)	Ntenyo Parish

## Appendix C. Themes and codes by research questions

Themes	Codes	Explanation
<b>Understanding the ecological crisis</b>	Destabilized Environment	Loss of human animal lives, extinction of plants, loss of property, extreme poverty, shortage of food, diseases, increase of temperature, floods and landslides, prolonged drought, etc
<b>Believers' attitude to environment</b>	Different from the rest of creation	Participation in the destruction of creation (deforestation, pollution, Lack of knowledge about stewardship
<b>Believers' responses to the current ecological crisis</b>	-Signs of end times -The church should find an answer	Prayers for sanctification and rescue, blames to ungodly people who provoke God's anger Waiting for pastor's guidance Some individual initiative and the lack of collective action
<b>Church's holistic mission to mitigate the ecological crisis</b>	1. Investment in renewable energy 2. Carbon project  3. Training people in saving	Installation of solar panels to reduce kerosene use as source of light but also source of carbon emission  Distribution of cook-stoves to reduce deforestation and carbon emissions; distribution of ceramic water filters to access clean water and reduce firewood to boil water, and to reduce water borne diseases.  To help people with limited resources to work together to utilize available resources and investing in small income generating activities
<b>New and holistic strategies for</b>	Theological training of church leaders	Understanding whose is creation and obey His rule Knowledge about the role of believers as stewards Ecological awareness in church and community

<p><b>the church to respond to the current ecological crisis</b></p>		<p>Continued advocacy for clean energy  Mass participation in sharing information about environmental care,  To help those who are still behind to change their attitude  Harmonization of the church's different programs for the cause of environmental care  To privilege pastoral presence in the community</p>
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