

Sustainability in the Theology Curriculum

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Introduction

Theology derives from the Greek to mean 'discourse about God', and refers to the systematic study of the divine, and of the nature and implications of belief about the divine. In higher education in the UK, the teaching of theology is predominantly Christian in focus, with other religious traditions usually being studied under the discipline heading of **Religious Studies**.

Our focus in this chapter is on theology, the academic study of which has a strong tradition of delivering what can be seen as sustainability-related curriculum through preparing students for critical engagement with contemporary social and ethical issues. Theology has the potential, which is already realized in the areas we discuss in this chapter, to contribute to education for sustainable development (ESD) a critical understanding of the role of humanity in relation to creation. This can be done through uncovering the complex interconnections between ecology, society and economics which give rise to ethical questions of the inherent dignity and worth of the person in conflict, where it arises, with the needs and aspirations of other persons and the environment. In this way, theology can make a significant contribution to the development of holistic alternative visions for the future that inspire action at the personal, grassroots and institutional levels.

In this chapter we will examine the relationship between theology and sustainability, considering historical developments while focusing on those particular qualities that theology possesses that enable it to critically encounter sustainability in an academic setting. We will argue that while there is something of a discontinuity between theology and dominant sustainable development discourses, this provides theology with the opportunity to step back and critically assess the latter. We will further suggest that theology is in a position to do this because of the potential affinities it has with other discipline areas, and that it is therefore able to make a valuable contribution to a holistic multidisciplinary approach. We further propose that theology is well placed to fulfill this function partly as a result of there being a number of pedagogical approaches inherent to the discipline which themselves reflect the ethos of sustainability as something which should be inclusive, transformational, empowering and democratic; and we provide case studies that exemplify how these ideas are being put into action. As we develop this argument, we also consider the potential pitfalls of constructing orthodoxies around sustainability by emphasizing the need to critically reflect on both the content and delivery of curricula. First, however, we will set out how religious organizations have been active in the development of the sustainability movement and how this underlines theology's potential importance in

Theology and Sustainability

Christian organizations like the World Council of Churches (WCC)¹, an international ecumenical fellowship of Christian churches, claim to have been among those who introduced the concept of sustainability back in the early 1970s. David G. Hallman (2001, p126) traces the WCC's first official use of the concept of sustainability to their 1974 consultation in response to the Club of Rome's report, *The Limits to Growth*. This consultation led to the WCC's inception of a programme on 'Just, participatory and sustainable societies' which linked socio-economic justice to ecological sustainability.² Scharper (1999) goes even further back to Sittler's presentation, 'Called to Unity,' at the WCC assembly in 1961, in which he brought together environmental concerns and justice with Christian faith. The WCC has participated in and observed many major international sustainability initiatives and continues to be involved in critical discussions of the challenge of sustainability as an evolving concept.³

Explicit evangelical theological engagement with environmental concerns has been traced back to Shaeffer's *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* published in 1970 (Cheek, 2002). Cheek acknowledges the ongoing work of evangelicals⁴ in this area (e.g. Bouma-Prediger, 2001)⁵, but criticizes them for their limited impact outside evangelical circles. He also suggests that their understanding of creation care⁶ is too narrowly focused on scientific approaches to ecology at the expense of the theological dimensions and a holistic view. Whether this critique is justified or not, it is interesting to note that some prominent evangelical academics, such as McGrath⁷ in the UK and Calvin de Witt⁸ in the USA, have a background in both theology and science. Hence their emphasis on the physical aspects of sustainability should not come as a surprise.⁹

Another example of the combined pursuit of science and theology in the quest for an ecological theology can be found in the work of the Jesuit paleontologist and geologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955). His vision of a future worthy of the earth and the human community is sustained by the British and other national Teilhard associations, and by many academic theologians and scientists who interpret his thought in the light of the current challenges and contexts (e.g. Fabel and St. John, 2003). Teilhard's scientific understanding of evolution brought him into repeated conflict with his superiors within the Jesuit order and the Vatican.

Indeed, environmental concerns by Roman Catholics have not been sufficiently and continuously reflected at the highest level. It was as late as 1990 that Pope John Paul II's 'World Day of Peace' address focused on the 'ecological crisis as a moral problem'.¹⁰ This still stands as an isolated effort by the Vatican. For example, Hallman (2005, p31, 2001, p129), on behalf of the WCC, laments the lack of the Vatican's engagement in ecumenical work on climate change. Hallman (2001, p129) is especially disappointed since 'the Holy See is represented within the UN as a state, [and therefore] it has more direct access to the climate change negotiations than does the WCC, which participates in the category of nongovernmental organizations'. Notwithstanding this unrealized potential for international policy making, there are now an increasing number of organizations¹¹ and publications dedicated specifically to Roman Catholic engagement with ecology (see also Scharper, 1999).

The preceding is a short survey of key contributions to theological thinking about sustainability to illustrate the wider context of theology as a subject area within HE and its relationship to ESD. Although theology's strong tradition of engagement with sustainability issues seems to be clear to some commentators who assess theology's contribution to ESD from outside the discipline (eg. Wylie et al, 1995), many theologians not directly involved in this discourse are less likely to recognize it.¹² This is a significant observation that highlights the discontinuity between an emerging dominant techno-scientific sustainability discourse and the ways in which theologians have come to define and address this contested complex of phenomena and concepts in their own terms. The common ignorance, be it witting or unwitting, resulting from this discontinuity of discourses, poses a challenge for HE institutions' efforts to make the integration of sustainability into curriculum design a requirement. There is a danger that such efforts, laudable as they are, might overlook existing provision if for example initial mapping exercises use criteria that are alien to theology or for that matter to any other subject area.¹³

We therefore suggest a learning process within and outside of theology for HE to become conversant across disciplinary boundaries. A possible alternative approach to disciplinarity, which also makes a practical contribution to the quest for solutions, is to make sustainability discourse truly multidisciplinary by allowing all disciplines to retain their identity and their unique means of approaching and articulating the issues. It is in this spirit that Wals and Jickling (2002, p229) 'seek more, not less diversity of thought' and 'less exclusive language'. This can be enriching if theologians and other marginal participants¹⁴ in this discourse are able to 'realise and exploit the relevance of their own disciplinary backgrounds, and the tools and dispositions they use' (O'Loughlin, 2008, p75). In other words, 'theologians ask theologians' questions' (O'Loughlin, 2008, p76) which are not usually considered relevant to ESD discourse, particularly when ESD is defined - erroneously - as education about the environment (see e.g. Roberts and Roberts, 2007, p4). Publications such as the one before you are one way of making the discourse more inclusive. The way forward lies in genuine collaboration through the provision of a greater number of opportunities for constructive dialogue through publications, events and networks.

For its part, theology has its distinctive tradition of thinking and teaching about **justice** as a discipline-specific way of relating to sustainability-related questions without necessarily making explicit links to the sustainability discourse. Theological keywords in the discussion of social, ecological and environmental sustainability include **eco-justice, creation care, stewardship** and the holistic formula **justice, peace and the integrity of creation**.¹⁵ It should not be assumed, however, that there is universal agreement among theologians about such terms and their meanings. For example the formula of **justice, peace and the integrity of creation** was used as the name of one of the WCC's programmes until 2007 when it was relaunched as 'Justice, diakonia and responsibility for creation'. Note the shift from 'integrity' to 'responsibility' which signals a revised understanding of human participation in the ongoing process of creation (creatio continua as opposed to a view of creation as a past event).¹⁶ Whereas the former ascribes human activity the responsibility for and the ability to save creation in a way that is only theologically acceptable for the creator/God, the latter limits human activity to co-operation in ongoing creation through e.g. conservation activities and attention to sustainability (**TRE** Band 30, 1999, 'Schöpfer/Schöpfung').

The understanding of human responsibility for creation care or stewardship follows from God's call for humans to have dominion over all living things (dominium terrae) in Genesis 1, 26-28. The guiding principle of stewardship is justice with the aim of establishing peace. However, the traditional link of justice to legal systems in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament can be seen as problematic for the development of creation care ethics. It has been suggested (TRE Band 30, 1999, 'Schöpfer/Schöpfung') that proposed social, economic and ecological interventions, what Butkus and Ko Imes (2008, p45) call 'the **ought** of policies and actions', have to be assessed individually to ascertain their potential impact on the entire non-human and human worlds. This precludes the establishment of absolute legal codes.¹⁷

Biblical and theological concepts of justice and dominion raise the problem of anthropocentrism which is certainly evident in theology in general and has been considered a weakness in theology's engagement with environmental sustainability (Berry, 2006, p.5). Berry takes this as the starting point for introducing critical perspectives on environmental stewardship with reference to the ongoing¹⁸ debate sparked off by White's paper 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis' first published in 1967. White, a cultural historian, accused Judeo-Christian anthropocentrism of being originally responsible for the ecological crisis. According to Scharper (1999), White's challenge led to wider Christian calls for the development of Christian ecological theology and for critical and constructive engagement with stewardship and environmental sustainability. Following on from White, some commentators trace the cause of all practices of exploitation and destruction - environmental and otherwise - to Judeo-Christian **androcentrism** and patriarchy. This forms the core of ecofeminists' critique and constructive response, including ecofeminist theologians like Rosemary Radford Ruether (Ruether, 2000), Sallie McFague (McFague, 1987) and Heather Eaton (Eaton, 2002).

Curricula

What exactly is sustainability-related curriculum in theology? This question is still open to debate as it is not universally agreed what we mean by sustainability, and consequently what should be the content of appropriate

curricula (Hopkins et al, 2004, Sterling, 1996). However, considerable work has been done to identify key areas where theology already contributes and where there is potential for further development. Dawe et al (2005) have compiled a list of 35 sustainability-related curriculum areas based on responses from HE practitioners in the UK. Although many of these curriculum areas seem to originate from science subject areas, some commentators have found 27 of them to have explicit or implicit relevance to theology.¹⁹ Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss them all in detail, some further comments should clarify the emerging picture.

What surfaces is the relevance of theology's tradition of 'deep debate about normative, ethical and spiritual convictions' and 'the destination of humankind and human responsibility' that Wals and Jickling (2002, p227) regard as essential for teaching about sustainability. Not surprisingly, theology has a very strong affinity with social and economic curriculum areas like intergenerational and intragenerational equity, but also with issues around individual responses to uncertainty, threats to wellbeing, and future-oriented ethics (Adam and Groves, 2007). What Dawe et al (2005) describe as 'techniques of **backcasting** and **forecasting**' has clear affinities with the study of historical and contemporary societies and their theological aspirations as well as the construction of **the best we can imagine** in ecclesiology (the study of the Church itself), soteriology (the theological doctrine of salvation), and with eschatology (the study of the last things or **what may be hoped for**).²⁰ Where some theologians see significant gaps in current thinking about curriculum is in the critical study of sustainability discourse as reflecting contested and conflicting values, motivations and agendas within states and between cultural traditions.²¹ Therefore, theological teaching might include reflection on the moral imperative for sustainability, and on theological models of reconciliation. Further, a sustainability-related curriculum should prepare students to reflect critically on processes such as media responses to climate change, and how to motivate different social groups to take action.²²

There are also a number of issues specific to teaching and learning in theology which have a significant bearing on the discipline's engagement with ESD. These include the debate over **insider/outsider** perspectives, the relationship between empiricism and reflection in disciplinary methodologies, the impact of the academic study of theology and religion on students' faith convictions, and the challenge of managing the fallout from the self-disclosure and emotion-arousing which occur in the theology classroom. These will now be considered.

One of the core skills to be acquired by theology students is 'an ability to understand how people have thought and acted in contexts other than ... [their] own' (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, 2007), 'Theology and Religious Studies Benchmark Statement', 3.2).²³ In the process of acquiring this skill, students face a fundamental challenge which is conceptualized in the literature as the **insider/outsider** problem. This problem relates to the question of which perspective should be given precedence in the study of religious phenomena and practices, that of the subjective religious believer or the **objective** academic researcher. More recently, this dichotomy has been criticized as untenable since both believers and researchers are insiders as well as outsiders in relation to religious experience (e.g. Knott, 2005). Instead, a more promising attitude is one of 'dialogical and reflexive engagement' (Knott, 2005, p255) between the scholar and the people they study.²⁴

The significance of this debate for ESD lies first in the way it raises questions 'about the extent and limits of our knowledge and understanding' (Knott, 2005, p243). Bawden (2007) and Wals and Jickling (2002, p229) rightly emphasize the importance of epistemological debate for teaching about sustainability. More specifically, Dawe et al (2005, p58) identify that ESD needs to enable students to think critically about 'the ways in which knowledge is produced and validated'. Theologians consider truth to be contestable, and regard argument as the route to knowledge. Although such a stance is by no means exclusive to theology, the insider/outsider debate shows how theology addresses the question of epistemology in a subject-relevant and self-reflexive manner.

Self-reflection is also identified by Dawe et al (2005, p58) as significant for ESD. This covers both professional as well as personal aspects. Personal self-reflection is a commonly used tool in formative and summative assessment in theology, especially in ministerial and Professional Doctorate training, but increasingly also as part of inquiry-based learning (IBL)²⁵ in undergraduate education (see **Approaches to learning and Case studies** sections below). It is

recognized by the QAA in their 'Theology and Religious Studies Benchmark Statement' (1.13) (QAA, 2007) that many theology students' existing faith commitments and beliefs²⁶ can become destabilized by the critical analysis practised in the academic study of theology. The challenge which the academic study of theology presents to this fundamental aspect of an individual's identity can lead to a situation where students experience a **faith crisis** in the classroom. Constructive and structured self-reflection as a tool for learning can be used to prevent such students rejecting a critical approach in order to protect their faith and beliefs (see Crosby et al, 2003; cited in O'Loughlin, 2008, p101).

A variation of the **faith crisis** that is also highly relevant to ESD is what Turpin (2008) calls the 'luxury of despair' when teaching justice and peace in privileged contexts. She has identified five characteristic 'temptations' for theology students who encounter fundamental challenges to their 'self-understandings, historical understandings of their religious tradition and national context, and inadequate theological and faith formation shaped by dominant narratives that ignore social realities of oppression' (Turpin, 2008, p141). These five characteristics are namely the temptations to run, to defensive anger, to neutralize conflict, to 'fix it', and to despair (Turpin, 2008, p144). Although this research comes out of the disciplinary context of teaching theology, it will surely resonate with most ESD practitioners well beyond higher education.

What Crosby et al (2003; cited in O'Loughlin, 2008, p101) as well as Turpin (2008) recognize to be at stake here is the potential for curriculum to enable transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000, O'Sullivan, 1999) that leads to action for social change. If students fall into Turpin's temptations without moving on to a constructive shift of perspective or conversion (Kennedy, 1984, p556), to use theological terminology, and to 'appropriate agency' (Turpin, 2008, p152) then this potential is lost.²⁷ However, the QAA's 'Theology and Religious Studies Benchmark Statement' (1.14) (QAA, 2007) argues that the more desirable outcome for theology students is that this destabilization 'may also stimulate real engagement with contemporary concerns', thus echoing ESD's function as transformative learning (Dawe et al, 2005, p58). Teaching and learning in theology that actively acknowledges students' emotions in the learning process and engages students existentially through action-reflection has much to offer here (Glennon, 2004; O'Donovan, 2003; Haynes, 2001).²⁸

To illustrate this point, a brief case study of religious education with adults is provided by Kennedy (1984) in the context of what he calls **education for a just and peaceful world**. He describes a learning activity that begins with students sharing past experiences of their emotional responses to events that either confirmed or challenged their ethical criteria. What Kennedy (1984, p556) suggests is that 'we learn when our adrenalin runs'. This is confirmed by O'Donovan (2003, p161) who describes an innovative assessment task that requires the creative expression of a self-selected element of curriculum content in relation to students' personal or contemporary experience. O'Donovan describes the results of students' passionate engagement with this task as often fascinating, highly instructive and memorable due to their multi-sensory forms.

Approaches to learning

It is outside the scope of this chapter to discuss the possible pedagogical underpinnings of ESD at a fundamental level. This has already been done in a number of publications, for example in Gough and Scott (2007, especially chapter 15: 'Individual Learning in Higher Education' and chapter 16: 'Collective Learning in Higher Education'), Scott and Gough (2003 and 2004, especially chapters 8: 'Curriculum and Pedagogy' and 9: 'Measuring Learning: Aspects of Assessment' in both volumes), Leal Filho (2002) and Corcoran and Wals (2004), all presenting a range of international practitioner perspectives. Periodicals like **The International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education**²⁹ also keep the discussion open. However, the arts and humanities are not widely and systematically covered apart from several chapters in Blewitt and Cullingford (2004), and none of the above sources address ESD specifically in relation to theology. This should not come as a surprise since there is a general lack of pedagogical research by theologians (O'Loughlin, 2008), let alone into the pedagogical underpinnings of ESD in theology. We are therefore left with Dawe et al (2005), which is, to our knowledge, the only existing practitioner-led systematic study of ESD in HE that includes theology. Furthermore, while its data is restricted to the UK this does not invalidate its

findings and it is to be hoped that the current gap in the literature will be filled by further research.

Following Dawe et al (2005), there seem to be four key pedagogical considerations in teaching sustainability-related curriculum, namely critical thinking about the nature of, production and validation of knowledge, the empowerment of the learner, experiential learning, and learning for action. These four key considerations are reflected in four pedagogical approaches and methodologies which are widely used in teaching and learning in theology. They are first a variety of liberation pedagogies,³⁰ including Latin American (Freire, 1996) and feminist (hooks, 1994) pedagogies,³¹ which envision and employ education as a means of helping learners to reflect on and change the oppressive situation they perceive themselves to be in. Second, theological reflection is an inductive process of inquiry which emphasizes the primacy of lived experience. It utilizes theological and other sources to analyze and renew practice in a manner that echoes other models of the reflective practitioner (Graham et al, 2005). Interdisciplinarity, which is integral to theology as a multidisciplinary discipline, is harnessed to develop tools of inquiry that are appropriate to complex problems in order to shape ethical praxis and action (Butkus and Kolmes, 2008). Finally, IBL is a key method which is discussed in more detail below. Questions of epistemology have already been discussed earlier in the context of the *insider/outsider* debate. All four pedagogical approaches encourage critical engagement with epistemology. This is closely linked to the empowerment of the learner through the challenging of hegemonic classroom structures, which is a key political aim of all liberation pedagogies, and a key pedagogical method of IBL. Experiential learning through the critical analysis of real life problems and actual experiences is also at the heart of IBL. Learning for transformation and action, a key concern of all liberation pedagogies, is supported by interdisciplinarity and the linking of knowledge with learners' experience.³²

One of the chief advantages of IBL is that it has potential to promote inclusive teaching and learning, and this is something which is particularly important in the context of ESD (Wals and Jickling, 2002, p227). IBL works with a student-teacher model which is based more on mutuality and equality than is the case with transmission teaching. The student and the tutor are reconceptualized in IBL as co-researchers, rather than the tutor being regarded as the information-giver and the student as the receptacle. Furthermore, IBL employs non-traditional learning and assessment methods, such as collaborative research projects, assessed presentations, and online assessment. To a degree, students decide how to do their research, and they have a say in how, and by whom, they are assessed. IBL thus complements the widening participation and diversity agendas of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK.

Inquiry-based approaches share an affinity with the disciplinary culture, ethos and methods of theology and are well-established in many university departments of theology. Since it endorses and enshrines each of the four key pedagogical considerations that Dawe et al (2005) have related to ESD, IBL may be viewed as a bridge between theology and ESD, allowing theologians to engage in discourse about ESD in ways that are experienced by them as being appropriate to their discipline.

O'Loughlin (forthcoming) explores the practice of inquiry pedagogies in theology departments in case study UK higher education institutions and argues that these practices are relatively common when they are named, and more so when they are not.³³ Her study suggests that two different types of IBL are being practised in theology departments: entire modules based on IBL; and 'hybrid' IBL, where discrete IBL exercises/resources are integrated into traditional curricula. It also includes reports from students that they feel valued as part of a research community and empowered as learners as a result of inquiry methods. Students interviewed in the course of the research also said that IBL enables them to engage better with learning and to retain more knowledge, primarily because their inquiries have developed in response to a desire to really know something or to solve a real problem, and are likely to be of genuine relevance to other people, and to their own future careers. This has implications for ESD because it is evidence that students are expressing a desire to engage, through their theological learning, with real life problems and questions which have social, political, ethical and spiritual dimensions, and they have found that IBL has helped them to do this. This points to an affinity between theology and ESD discourse, since seeking effective ways to engage with real life problems and questions is the essence of ESD. It is to be hoped that this affinity will be recognized by those disciplines which have heretofore dominated the debates, thus helping to make sustainability debates truly

multidisciplinary.

According to O'Loughlin (forthcoming), epistemological and methodological affinities exist between IBL and theology that make IBL a particularly appropriate pedagogy for theology. O'Loughlin explored this in an earlier text (2008),³⁴ recalling that, in terms of methodology, according to Kolb's taxonomy, adapted by Becher and Trowler (Becher and Trowler, 2001), theology and religious studies is a 'soft' discipline (D.A. Kolb, 1981, p 232-55). Colbeck explains: 'In high paradigm consensus or "hard" disciplines, knowledge is perceived as cumulative and concerned with universals, quantification, and discovery' (Colbeck, 1998, p 651). Wareing develops this: "'hard" disciplines are characterized by widespread agreement about curriculum content, research collaboration, competition for recognition and funding, clearly defined intellectual boundaries, and the gate keeping of those boundaries by a powerful elite.' (Wareing, 2005, p11). To paraphrase Wareing, low paradigm consensus or soft disciplines consider knowledge as recursive; scholars use new lenses to explore intellectual territory already mapped out by others. Knowledge is also concerned with particulars, qualities and understanding. She says: "'Soft" disciplines are characterized by idiosyncratic curricula, weak boundaries, independent research efforts and tolerance for unusual ideas or methods.' (O'Loughlin, 2008, pp 72-3; citing Wareing, 2005, p11). The point here is that because it is a **soft** discipline, theology has a greater potential affinity with IBL than hard disciplines do because teaching and learning practices within theology are likely to be interpretive and constructive. Further to this, a culture of dialogue, inquiry, argument, critical reflection and arguably, support for the practical application of learning,³⁵ characterizes theology, and is similarly resonant in inquiry approaches. The point we can draw from this in relation to ESD is that the methods which IBL and theology have in common are common also in ESD, again giving rise to the conclusion that IBL offers theology a route into effective engagement with ESD.

In addition, the lack of an agreed methodology by which academics and students do theology helps to make the discipline receptive to new methods of learning, teaching and researching, including IBL and, in turn, ESD. Fearn and Francis (2004, p61) make the point that the absence of core subject matter in theology may be causally related to the absence of a universally agreed methodology. As they note, linguists, historians, sociologists, archaeologists, philosophers, and psychologists may all teach in theology departments. The QAA's 'Theology and Religious Studies Benchmark Statement' (2.2) affirms this: 'Much of the excitement of the discipline lies in its contested nature. What should or should not be regarded as belonging to the subject, what methods should be used, the different results that come from adopting different presuppositions - these are some of the issues.' (QAA, 2007). The fluidity of the discipline of theology allows it to engage creatively with newer pedagogies, including IBL, and newer discourses, including ESD.

Although there is no one method for doing theology, it is nonetheless possible to narrow learning, teaching and research in theology down to a few key methods, which happen to correspond with many methods used in IBL and, in turn, ESD. These include documentary analysis, qualitative research (primarily used in practical theology), interpretative methods, phenomenology, action research, and observational research. In addition, theology teaching is heavily seminar-based, thus suggesting that an affinity with collaborative working - a central feature of both IBL and ESD - characterizes the discipline.

What we may refer to as the special issues unique to theology and religious studies such as **insider/outsider** issues, potential challenges to faith engendered by the academic study of theology and religious studies, self-disclosure and emotion-arousing in the classroom and during unsupervised study, and encounter with people from different religious and cultural backgrounds to one's own, give rise to three particular foci in IBL. These foci are also key in ESD approaches: experiential inquiry (reflecting on, and subjecting to scrutiny, one's own values, beliefs and practices), practical or active learning, and a focus on the process of learning.

Active learning via practical theology may be one route into IBL, and from there into ESD, for theology tutors and students, since this form of doing theology is already established in the discipline, and encapsulates many of the values at the heart of both IBL and ESD. Experiential learning via working with faith-based and voluntary organizations is also common practice in theology. Reflection on the process of learning is also built into many

theology modules through the use of learning journals and self-evaluation questionnaires. The real life reflective learning which is a key feature of both IBL and ESD is, then, already being practised to a considerable degree in theology.³⁶

Case studies

The following three case studies are not representative, but rather indicative of the range of sustainability-related provision in theology that demonstrates a holistic vision, future-oriented ethics, alternative visions for action, and the critical study of human responses to global crisis. In the UK, there do not seem to be any single modules such as Theology and Sustainability that give equal weight to all aspects of sustainability. However, we take the view that currently ESD in theology is delivered by a range of modules with specific foci that, taken together over the duration of three years at undergraduate level, add up to a holistic form of provision. Sustainability-related curricula are more prevalent at post-graduate level study, but to focus on this is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, the case studies and examples of existing undergraduate provision are meant to serve as incentive for much-needed development and innovation.

For reasons of brevity, we were unable to include reference to modules on ecotheology, on other liberation theologies apart from feminist theology, and on public and political theology, political economy, globalization and ethics, but the reader should be made aware that these are well established in theology curriculums. Space constraints mean that we have also been unable to focus on modules that reflect on the Bible through the lens of ESD, such as *The Bible and Environmental Ethics* taught at the University of Exeter.³⁷

Provision at level one seems to be the most traditional in terms of curricula, pedagogy and assessment. Hence, the range of relevant modules for this case study was much more limited than at levels two and three. In addition to the case study below, other possible examples of sustainability-related curriculum at level one can be found at the University of Gloucestershire (*Christian Faith and the Environment*)³⁸, at the Wesley Centre, Oxford Brookes University (*Making Moral Choices and Liberation Theologies*, both of which make links to students' own values and life in the UK), at the University of Wales Trinity St David (*Christian Doctrine and Christian Ethics*, both of which examine the links between theory and contemporary issues), and further modules at the Queen's Foundation (*Introduction to Christian Theology* which assesses students' critical reflection on their own theological practice, and *Black and Asian Christian Theology* which establishes real life contexts in the UK).

More research is required to understand fully why provision is so restricted at this level. In terms of pedagogy, there are no intrinsic reasons why assessment should follow the traditional format of essay and exam at level one as it generally seems to do, before turning to more 'innovative' methods from year two. On the contrary, a research-based style of learning with frequent formative feedback should be introduced and nurtured right from the start when students are still adapting to higher education (Pyne, 2008, Nelson, 2007). It seems that more innovative work needs to be done here both in terms of curriculum as well as teaching, learning and assessment.

It is impossible to give a comprehensive account of the three chosen modules in the short case studies that follow. Rather, the focus is on those elements which relate most closely to the four key pedagogical considerations in ESD discussed earlier. Of those, learning for action through interdisciplinarity is incorporated into all three modules.

Practical Contextual Theology for Mission and Ministry, Queen's Foundation, Birmingham³⁹

The level one module *Practical Contextual Theology for Mission and Ministry* delivered by David Hewlett introduces students to contextual theology as a mode of practical theology by collecting and studying ethnographic, sociological and narrative accounts of both congregational life and the communities in which they are set. This module helps students to explore an alternative way of doing theology through experiential learning of the action-reflection

model that challenges the dominance of theory over practice. It employs a broad understanding of research data and emphasizes feelings as well as facts that are seen as constructed and therefore contested.

Experiential learning through investigation of real life problems and learner empowerment take on a specifically embodied character in the form of the IBL-based community engagement task. Students start the module on their own by **walking the walk** that takes them outside the classroom to investigate a small geographical area of their own choice. This is the first stage in their congregational survey for the purpose of informing and advising 'a new minister moving to the church to take up appointment there' (1PT2 Module handbook, personal email). The emphases on giving advice and consideration of the context for practice are used as tools of learning for action beyond the classroom in students' professional practice. Questions of community cohesion, which are central to the social aspect of sustainability, are investigated by attention to the congregation's expression of identity, conflict handling and resolution, authority and power, and the character of the congregation.

Religion, Culture and Gender, Religions and Theology, University of Manchester⁴⁰

The level two module **Religion, Culture and Gender** delivered by Elaine Graham and Katja Stuerzenhofecker, is understood by the course team to contribute to ESD through the study of values of equity and equality, empowerment and inclusivity. It addresses issues of social and economic justice in relation to gender in Judeo-Christian religion and culture. There is some consideration of ecofeminist critiques to establish a holistic context.⁴¹ The syllabus focuses on philosophical, ethical, moral, and emotional interpretations of sustainability rather than on scientific ones.⁴² Assessment offers students the opportunity to practice self-reflection, critical thinking, the application of theory to real life problems, and the development of a questioning attitude. The module encourages experiential learning of constructivist models of epistemology and existential engagement with the course topics.

The underlying feminist pedagogy emphasizes the active role of the learner in knowledge construction, and the link between theory and real life situations and experiences. To this end, seminars are designed as IBL-based student-led discussions which begin with a short presentation of academic analyses of case studies, followed by a student-facilitated discussion of the leading group's own questions arising from their presentation.⁴³ Further, students' own and their peers' experiences are harnessed for knowledge construction in structured learning journals which assess increasing depth and breadth of reflection without being prescriptive about the outcomes.⁴⁴ Balanced analysis of a real-life issue of students' choice related to religion, culture and gender in a British context is assessed in the briefing guide, an IBL task which replaces the standard essay format. Briefing guides have covered issues such as links between marriage vows and domestic violence, homophobia in the Roman Catholic Church, and Jewish masculinities.

Technology, Religion and Ethics, School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh⁴⁵

The level three module **Technology, Religion and Ethics** delivered by Michael Northcott examines the ecological, cultural, moral and spiritual significance of technology. This includes an investigation of technology as religion and an exploration of the religious origins of technological innovation. According to the module director, **Technology, Religion and Ethics** is relevant to ESD because it enables students to learn about the interaction between technology and the environment, and how to critique the unthinking use of technology. The module also discusses how technology misshapes the human relationship with the environment, often making it less sustainable. Key ESD aspects of the module include thinking about wilderness, democracy, participation, and technological shaping.

The critical evaluation of real-life problems is practiced on a number of case studies such as genetic engineering, electronic communication, and intensive farming. Case studies of traditional religious communities - such as the Amish and some indigenous peoples - who have resisted the technological reshaping of life on spiritual grounds are also examined. E-learning technology supports assessment in the form of individual and collaborative web blogs to give students the opportunity for active learning through reflection on their use of technology in education. The collaborative blog requires reflection on and critique of the readings, with students taking it in turn to initiate discussions.⁴⁶ The individual part of the blog is an autobiographical reflection on students' own use of particular

pieces of technology during the semester.

Conclusion

While theology is perhaps not an area that one would immediately equate as having a significant contribution to make to ESD, we have sought to show here that there is considerable potential for this to occur. In order to achieve this we suggest that theology needs to move towards achieving this potential, while ESD needs to be both reflexive and multidisciplinary in order to develop holistically within disciplines. We have sought to contribute to this process by highlighting the areas where theology can make this contribution, both in terms of curriculum content (especially, but not exclusively, around the concept of *justice*) and curriculum design (through such as IBL).

This is clearly not an easy outcome to achieve in practice. However, the very presence of this book suggests that disciplines are beginning to mature in their approach to ESD, and the next step must surely be the development of a more integrated methodology in teaching ESD. On the one hand this requires disciplines, including theology, to reflect on how their approach can be contextualized more broadly; while on the other hand considering how the design of the curriculum, including assessment, can reflect the fundamental values of ESD.

We argue, therefore, that by its very nature ESD should contain elements that are both vibrant and dynamic. Theology is well placed to contribute to this through both curriculum content and its affinity with pedagogical approaches that are inclusive, transformational, empowering and democratic. So by grounding ESD in this manner we may, in the longer term, achieve a shared approach that is in itself flexible and sustainable rather than being limited by the any single discipline or methodology.

Further Reading

Hessel, D.T. and Ruether, R.R. (2000) *Christianity and Ecology. Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA

This large volume contains 28 papers and responses by a wide range of theologians within an ecumenical framework. It covers key concepts and issues in Christian doctrine and practice that need to be revisited in the light of the current ecological challenges. The dialogical structure allows the reader to witness multiple, sometimes contradictory perspectives and to gain a sense of sustainability as process rather than as a fixed set of indicators. The extensive index allows for selective reading. As in Hallman (1994) below, none of the papers address pedagogical questions.

Hallman, D. (1994) *Ecotheology: Voices from the South and North*, Orbis, Maryknoll, WCC Publications, Geneva

Originating from WCC, *Ecotheology* is another collection of 26 papers that approach sustainability in a holistic, ecumenical and explicitly global manner. Questions of orthodoxy and knowledge creation in the sustainability discourse are challenged by adding sections on 'Insights from Ecofeminism' and 'Insights from Indigenous Peoples' to the traditional disciplines of biblical witness, theological reflection and Christian ethics. However, there is overlap in contributors with Hessel and Ruether (2000) that raises the question whether theology should look for ways of throwing the net wider by keeping the discourse open.

Scott, W. and Gough, S. (2004) *Key Issues in Sustainable Development and Learning. A Critical Review*, RoutledgeFalmer, London

This volume and its companion Scott and Gough (2003) present a comprehensive overview of issues in ESD in different educational settings. Although many of the (older) texts collected in the *Critical Review* address 'environmental education' in a narrow sense, as a whole the collection charts the territory for critical discussions about

ESD that need to be held in all subject areas. It is to be hoped that ongoing developments will be captured in similar publications.

Freire, P. (1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, Harmondsworth

A classic on liberation pedagogy that is widely used by theologians. It is foundational for the educational approaches discussed in this chapter. Freire's writing on the vital link between theory/knowledge and practice/action, on conscientização, an attitude of critical awareness required for authentic individual and social transformation, on problem-based learning and the dynamics of the teacher - student relationship is still inspiring and worth reading at source rather than in often-used quotes.

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Endnotes

- The current WCC programme that covers sustainability is 'Justice, Diakonia and Responsibility for Creation'. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation.html>
- Hallman (2001) provides a timeline for WCC's work on sustainable development through to their recent contributions to the Earth Charter initiative.
- More on sustainability as an evolving concept in the context of education e.g. in Hopkins et al (2004).
- Evangelicalism is an umbrella term that encompasses a number of Protestant Christian groups. Common beliefs which link these groups include: a commitment to the importance of a conversion experience for the Christian life (hence the term 'born again Christianity'); a commitment to social action based on the Gospel (the books of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John in the **New Testament**); a high value placed on Biblical authority; and a focus on the crucifixion of Jesus. Baptists and Pentecostal Christians are amongst the most well-known evangelical Christian groups.
- See also his earlier work *The Greening of Theology. The ecological models of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Joseph Sittler and Jürgen Moltmann* (Bouma-Prediger, 1995)
- **Creation care** is the term preferred by evangelicals to refer to environmentalism. It is also the name of the Evangelical Environmental Network's publication. <http://www.creationcare.org/magazine>

Professor of Theology, currently at King's College, London, previously at Wycliffe Hall, University of Oxford, McGrath holds degrees in the natural sciences and Divinity. He is also a signatory of the Evangelical Environmental Network's declaration on the care of creation (Evangelical Environmental Network and Creation Care Magazine, 2009).

- Professor at the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, with degrees in biology and zoology, and co-founder of the Evangelical Environmental Network.
- It would be wrong, however, to suggest that evangelical thinking about sustainability lacks social and economic dimensions, as can be seen in the Evangelical Alliance's support for the holistic vision of the Millennium Development Goals through the Micah Challenge, <http://www.micahchallenge.org.uk/>
- The text is available at:
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html
- E.g. the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission which is part of the Union of Superiors General

and the International Union of Superiors General.

- See e.g. Dawe et al (2005, p25) who report that the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies (PRS), which also includes support for learning and teaching in theology in its remit, has 'very high potential and a great enthusiasm for enacting ESD (...) but with little evidence of movement as yet'. Since this report was compiled, PRS has moved on significantly both in thought and action.
- We are aware of anecdotal evidence in the humanities where faculty officers in charge of mapping existing ESD provision struggled to find any relevant teaching because the criteria they used are best described as pertaining to environmental education in a narrow sense.
- Garrard (2007) seems to imply this for English as a HE subject area in the UK context.
- For detailed and critical discussions of theologians' preferred terms such as **eco-justice**, **creation care** and **stewardship** see **Further Reading**. See also Berry (2006) for critiques of Christian understandings of environmental stewardship. Hall (2004) provides a key exploration of the origins, and past and present applications of the Biblical symbol of stewardship.
- It seems that 'peace' has been replaced by 'diakonia' not due to theological debates, but because another WCC programme on 'Sharing and Service' (Greek: diakonia) has been merged with this programme.
- See also Bawden (2007, p306) on contingency.
- Several authors in Berry (2006) make direct reference to White's challenge. As another example, Bouma-Prediger (2001) devotes an entire chapter to his apologetic response to this critique.
- This is based on the response by PRS as published in Dawe et al (2005), and by participants of the Teaching Justice in Theology and Biblical Studies Colloquium organized by the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies. The Colloquium took place at Woodbrooke Study Centre on 15 September 2008.
- Out of the vast amount of available literature on these areas, we would like to highlight Volf and Katerberg (2004) and Sauter (1999) since they specifically address the question of hope from a Christian perspective.
- See also González-Gaudio (2004) who critiques essentialist tendencies in 'green discourse' (p122) and discusses alternative contextual paradigms. He specifically points to liberation pedagogies (pp125-126), including liberation theology, as providing open and fragmented proposals that have more potential for transformation than closed, essentialist ones. Another noteworthy contribution to this debate is Wals and Jickling (2002). Molderez (2007) suggests that ESD which is guided by principles of openness, inclusion and tolerance, and which problematizes potential solutions requires spirit (pneuma). Since **pneumatology** is a core area of theological study, her thesis is worth further theological exploration.
- See the case studies in this chapter for more details.
- QAA TRS benchmark statement (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/Theology.asp>) The QAA is an independent UK body which visits universities and colleges to check how well they are maintaining their academic standards. The QAA produces subject benchmark statements for a range of disciplines, including Theology and Religious Studies, which articulate the characteristics of each particular degree programme and the standards it should fulfill.
- A variation of the **insider/outsider** debate concerns the relative authority and sincerity of believer academics, i.e. those who are members of the faith communities and religious traditions they study, over non-believer academics. For an example of this debate in Biblical Studies see Thompson (2005).
- 'IBL' refers to a range of pedagogical approaches which have student-led research at their heart. The term 'IBL' also accommodates the more widely known 'problem-based learning' (PBL). Both IBL, and PBL within it, fall under the wider umbrella of 'active learning'. In its simplest expression, IBL is 'learning by doing'. Students learn by identifying and engaging with the questions and problems of their discipline, becoming participants in the research process. They direct their own lines of inquiry - which often means designing their own open-

ended questions - and identify appropriate methods and resources with which to address them. The tutor acts as a 'walking resource', guiding the students' inquiries without undermining the students' autonomy, which is crucial in inquiry approaches. Entire modules or programmes can be designed along inquiry lines, or discrete IBL activities can be incorporated into more traditional curricula.

- We would also consider secular and/or anti-religious positions as beliefs with reference to ESD in other disciplines where e.g. ideological and technological beliefs have considerable influence. See also the third case study in this chapter on technology as religion.
- Thomas (2007) discusses as a similar counter-transformative process in his case study of student responses to awareness raising of corporate and executive environmental 'wrong-doing'.
- Goodwin (2007) argues for the active fostering of intuition and feeling in science education.
- The International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education is available via:
<http://info.emeraldinsight.com/products/journals/journals.htm?PHPSESSID=d2cjbep22t41a8rvkhn29jluq7&id=ijsh>
- D. A. Kolb, 'Learning styles and disciplinary differences' in A. Chickering (ed.) *The Modern American College* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 1981), pp. 232-55; See also Wals and Jickling's (2002) discussion of what they call emancipatory views of education.
- For an exploration of gender issues and ESD see Blake (2007).
- For a corresponding account of appropriate didactic orientation when integrating sustainability into the curriculum, see Wals and Jickling (2002, p228-229).
- A point about language helps to explain this situation. The term **IBL** is used in Theology and Religious Studies communities with far less frequency than IBL itself is practised. This betokens a disciplinary suspicion of acronyms, and particularly those related to teaching and learning, and perhaps also an unwillingness to bracket one's teaching practices off in this way.
- By way of an explanation of what may appear to be an over-reliance on the work of O'Loughlin, we are unaware of any other work, additional to that of O'Loughlin, on pedagogical research in theology and on IBL specifically in its application in theology.
- Theology can be taught as an applied subject, hence the development of the discipline of practical theology. Although not all theology is applied, where it is, its praxis methodology echoes the methodologies of both IBL and ESD.
- The three case studies provide examples of all these approaches. For another example of problem-based learning in theology, see Howard Worsley (2005) where he outlines two problem-based scenarios for use in ministerial theological education. In one, candidates assume the role of a vicar who has to solve the problem of low levels of attendance at their church, and in the other, they assume the role of an inner city vicar who notices that a homeless project is attracting Christian volunteers who are meeting to pray, and that a local youth group is meeting for alternative worship (p76). For a detailed case study of the use of learning journals in sustainability-related teaching and learning see Gulwadi (2009).
- http://huss.exeter.ac.uk/theology/undergrad/module_description.php?code=THE3136&ayrc=2008/9
- A case study of this module is already available, see McKeown (2007).
- http://www.queens.ac.uk/programmes/progs.php?_actID=2&grp=2&prg=37&mod=15
- <http://courses.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/undergraduate/module.html?code=RELT20121>
- At the end of the module with a strong focus on social and cultural issues, students are confronted with the non-human world. They are asked to respond to Ruether's (2000) consideration (see 'Further Reading') of the compatibility of the preferential option for the poor, a key concept of liberation theologies, and an ethic of sustainability, in other words potentially conflicting concerns for human and non-human life. Ruether (2000, p97) defines ecofeminism as the examination 'of the interconnections between the domination of women and the domination of nature'. See also in the same volume the response by Eaton (2000). Ecofeminism and

postcolonial perspectives are combined for example in the work of Kwok (2005 and 1994,) which reflects recent developments in theology.

- These interpretations are discussed by Dawe et al, (2005, p31) as requirements of a generic ESD toolkit.
 - Hansmann et al (2009) describe issues of conformity in peer group processes which deserve further attention.
 - This is to make a clear distinction between assessing students' critical understanding of certain values and practices, and requiring students to internalize and adopt them. For discussion of ESD as indoctrination see Wals and Jickling (2002) and Jickling (2004). In contrast, Arbuthnott (2009) argues for ESD to support behaviour change more directly through specific mechanisms.
 - <http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/09-10/course.php?code=U03407>
 - According to Parvis and Paterson, this form of blogging has been found to enhance face-to-face teaching and discussion, and it allows students to develop new skills while also gaining the core skill of close textual analysis in an innovative form. See the abstract of their presentation at the PRS conference 'e-Learning in Dialogue', 14-15 May 2008, York (Parvis and Paterson, 2008).
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