

Bringing Religion and Development into the Curriculum: Moving toward a Focus on Sustainable Development at the University of the Western Cape

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Thesis

Religion and Development has become a flourishing field in the academy

Emphasis on Research & Publication, on the thematic, epistemological and methodological development of the subject field

Reflection on teaching has so far lagged behind

* But this does not mean RaD is missing from the academic curriculum

Place and make-up of RaD in the academic curriculum

What should be taught and **how** it should be taught to best advance the subject field

Several review articles in support

- Jones & Petersen, "Instrumental, Narrow, Normative? Reviewing recent work on religion and development" (*TWQ* 2011)
- Offutt, Probasco & Vaidyanathan, "Religion, Poverty and Development" (*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 2016)
- Swart & Nell, "Religion and Development: The Rise of a Bibliography" (*HTS Theological Studies*, 2016)
- Bompani, "Religion and Development: Tracing the Trajectories of an Evolving Sub-Discipline" (*Progress in Development Studies*, 2019)

Contribute towards meeting the so far lacking task of considering the advancement of RaD through teaching and its inclusion in the academic curriculum

Ultimately make this contribution from the vantage point of the international sustainable development agenda and RaD's turn toward this agenda

Aim

(1) Provide some orientation of RaD's evolvement as a teaching subject internationally and in South Africa

(2) Elaborate on the initial undertakings to establish RaD in the curriculum at UWC

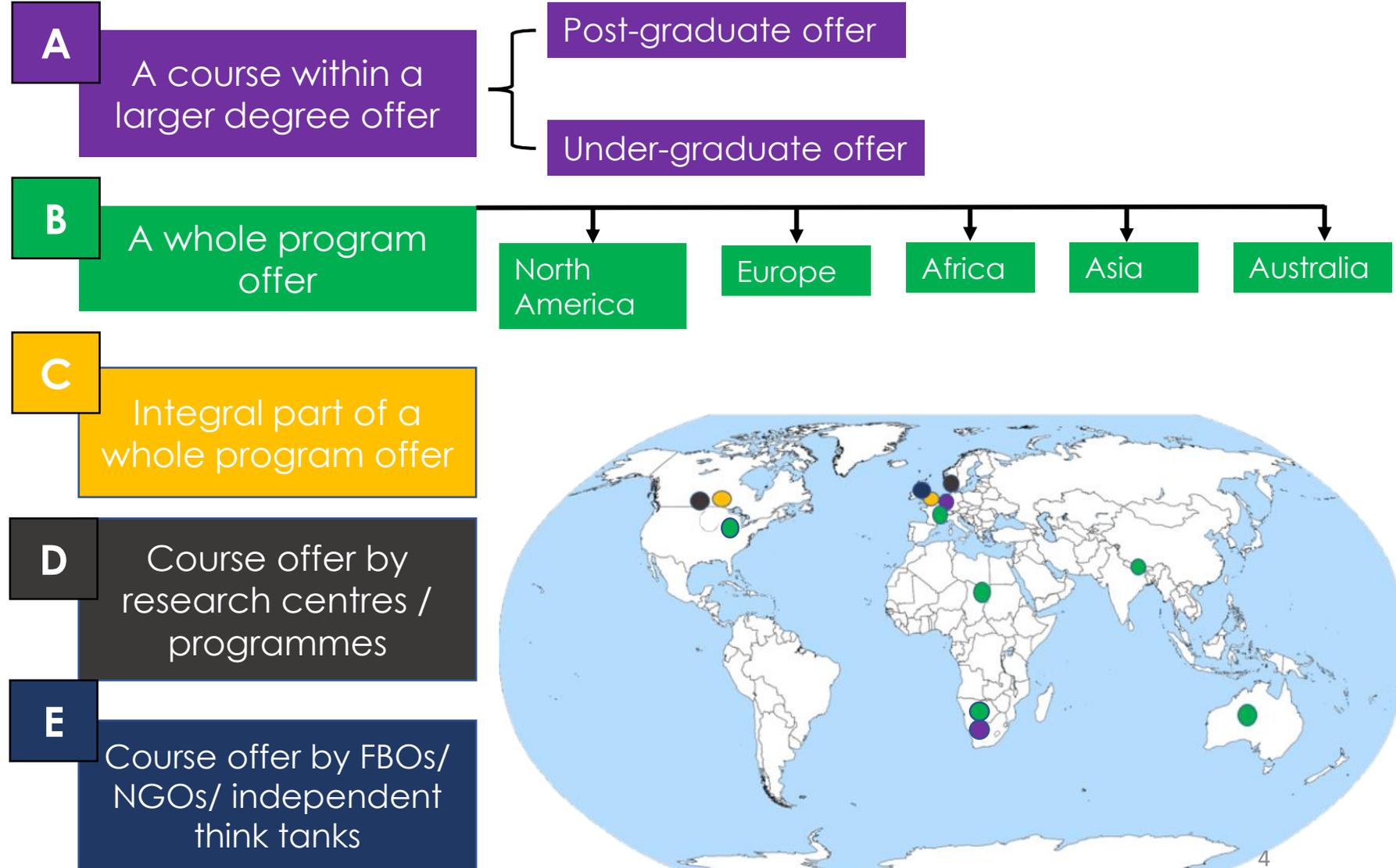
(3) Present the case of a new curriculum initiative to focus on sustainable development in the RaD offer at UWC

(4) Conclude with a final reflection

1. Teaching RaD: an international and South African orientation

Towards a more informed picture: Results from a google search

International





➤ **Post-graduate offer:**

University of Edinburgh, Postgraduate module on **Religion and Development**, School of Social and Political Science Programme Offer, various topical foci in RaD

SOAS University of London, Postgraduate module on **Religions and Development**, various master's programme offering by the Dept. of Religions & Philosophies, School of history, Religions & Philosophies, module focusing on specific issues with regard to religions and development in SSA and South and Central Asia

Birbeck University of London, Course on **War, Conflict, Politics and Religion** as part of the MSc Programme Middle East in Global Politics: Islam, Conflict and Development

University of Leeds, Modules on **Gender, Globalisation and Development** and **Religions and Global Development** offered in the MA programme Religion, Politics and Society, Leeds Centre for Religion and Public Life

VID Specialized University, Norway, Postgraduate Module on **Religion, Poverty and Development**, elective within the interdisciplinary M.A. offer in Community Development and Social Innovation, Faculty of Theology, Diaconia and Leadership Studies

➤ **Under-graduate offer:**

University of South Florida, **Sustainable Development and Religion**, course forms part of the University of South Florida's General Education Curriculum (undergraduate). It is certified for Ethical Reasoning & Civic Engagement.

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Course on **Religion and Sustainable Development**, course forms part of the Faculty of Religion and Theology's international Bachelor's programme, offered by the Amsterdam Center for Religion and Sustainable Development



➤ **In Europe:**

Aachen University, Structured **M.A. in Theology and Global Development**, Institute of Catholic Theology, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, multi-disciplinary approach across Theology and Social Sciences / Humanities, several modules covering topical foci

University of Manchester, Structured **MA in Theology (Humanitarian Development and Social Justice)**, Nazarene Theological College, various modules within the theological offering

➤ **In Africa:**

Uganda Christian University, **M.A. in Theology and Development**, various modules offered in the School of Theology and Divinity

Africa International University, Kenya, **PhD in Theology and Development**, structured doctorate comprising course work across topical foci and dissertation over four years

Midlands State University (Zim), **M.A. in Religious Studies** specialising in **Religion and Sustainable Development**, Dep of Religious Studies, several modules covering topical foci

➤ **In Asia:**

Asia Graduate School of Theology, Philippines, **PhD in Transformational Development**

➤ **In Australia:**

Eastern College Australia, **Masters of Transformational Development**, various modules
The MTD was developed using the Open Seminary methodology and is the product of a rich collaboration between Eastern College Australia and TEAR Australia, with significant input from CBM, Interserve and World Vision Australia. In partnership with the Asian Graduate School of Theology (Alliance), Malaysia Care, Interserve International and the Uganda Christian University, intensives are offered in Melbourne, Kuala Lumpur, Cairo and Kampala.



In North America:

Emory University, **Dual Masters** degree (**MDP / MDiv**) in **Development Practice and Theology**, Candler School of Theology & Laney Graduate School, interdisciplinary work across several fields (global health, human rights, economics, governance, ecosystems, gender, energy and engineering, etc.)

Wycliff College, University of Toronto, **Master of Theological Studies in Development**, Programme consists of three streams, (1) Bible, Theology, History (2) Development Foundations, (3) Development Practice

Canada Christian College, **BTh in Leadership and Community Development**, No info to be found on modules / courses

In Europe:

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Master's programme in Theology and Religious Studies, **Religion and Development** could be pursued as a thematic focus (unclear in terms of further info)

Continuing...

1. Teaching RaD: an international and South African orientation

A

A course within a large degree offering

B

A whole program offering.

C

Integral part of a whole program offering

D

Course offered by research centres

E

Course offered by FBOs/ NGOs/ independent think tanks

D

Course offered by research centres

E

Course offered by FBOs/ NGOs/ independent think tanks

RaD as course offer by University Research Centres / Programmes (Europe)

GSDRC Applied Knowledge Services, Centre linked to International Development Department, University of Birmingham, Course on **Religion and Development**

Research Programme for Religious Communities and Sustainable Development, Humboldt University in Berlin, Master classes on **Religious Communities and Sustainable Development** for M & D students (international) since 2020; also postgraduate seminar's with the Faculty of Theology & Rel, University of Pretoria

RaD course offering by FBOs / NGOs / Independent Think-Tanks (Europe / NA)

Fabo, Denmark, course on **Religion and Development** consisting of 10 modules

Founded by members of the ACT Alliance and hosted by DanChurchAid

SDG Academy, **Ethics in Action**, a course that deals with religion and SD

SDG = Flagship Educational Platform of the Sustainable Solutions Network, a global initiative for the UN

Continue...

1.1. Teaching RaD: an international and South African orientation

South Africa:



Stellenbosch University, Faculty of Theology

Theology and Development offered as a specialisation in the Practical Theology & Missiology discipline group mostly through thesis work (M and D)



University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics
Theology and Development Programme, Theology and Development offered as specialisation at honours, M and D level



University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

University of Fort Hare, Centre for Theology and Religion

Undergraduate modules in **Religion and Development for Social Transformation & Church and Development for Social Transformation** for Theology Degree, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities



University of Pretoria, Faculty of Theology and Religion

Undergraduate practical theology modules in **Deaconate and Community Development & Community Engagement** for BTh degree



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

University of the Western Cape, Dept of Religion and Theology

Under- and postgraduate modules in **Theology and Development** (BTh & MTh degrees) and since 2016 **Religion and Development** as the focus in the undergraduate Ethics module "Religion, Ethics and Society" offered to students in the Faculty of Arts & Humanities

Module in **Religion and Development** as part of the post-graduate programme offer since 2017



Cornerstone Institute, Cape Town

BTh in Community Leadership majoring in Community Development and Sociology

1.2. Interpreting and making more informed sense of the results



Teaching RaD across the international spectrum may not be as dynamic and intensive as the drive for research and publication in the field but it is clear from the identified sample of modules, courses and programmes that a fair amount of teaching activity on the subject field does exist.



It is clear however that a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching RaD does not exist and that a great variety exists in teaching the subject field in terms of the mode of delivery. This varies between teaching RaD as single courses and modules in larger graduate and post-graduate programmes, teaching it as a whole programme offer, teaching it as an integral part of whole programme offerings, and teaching it as an independent course not linked to degree qualifications.



Teaching RaD also greatly varies in terms of content and topical focus while it is accommodated and taught in the disciplinary domains of Christian theology, religious studies, the humanities and social sciences. Interesting examples of an inter- and cross-disciplinary approach also exist, such as the M.A. in Theology and Development at Aachen University involving a multi-disciplinary approach across Theology, the Social Sciences and Humanities; and the dual masters degree in Development Practice and Theology offered by the Candler School of Theology and Laney Graduate School at Emory University.



RaD is predominantly taught on **post-graduate** level although examples also exist of teaching it on undergraduate level. Teaching it on master's level is by far the most dominant offering. Interesting exceptions are the PhD in Theology and Development offered by the Africa International University in Kenya and the PhD in Transformational Development offered by the Asia Graduate School of Theology, both through course work delivery.

1.2. Interpreting and making more informed sense of the results



Continental Europe and its institutions of higher education are by far the dominant location where RaD is taught. The UK is in this respect by far the leading country followed by single examples from Germany and The Netherlands.



The sample from RaD offerings in **African** countries (including South Africa) suggest that the subject field is also seen as attractive and important in this part of the world. Probably far more examples exist than what was discovered through the internet search for this paper. This could easily identify Africa as the dominant location for teaching RaD.



Christian theology seems to be the dominant disciplinary domain in which RaD is accommodated, developed and valued as a teaching offer. This in particular includes institutions founded in the Evangelical Christian tradition, of whom a number seem to invest in the evangelical concept and paradigm of “**transformational development**”. It is predominantly through these evangelical oriented institutions that the reach of RaD as teaching subject seems to have expanded to Africa, Asia, Australia and North America.



As an explicit conceptual focus, “**sustainable development**” still seems to be confined to a minority of institutions. Examples of a major investment in this regard from the sample are the bachelor courses in Religion and Sustainable Development offered at Free University of Amsterdam and University of Florida (US), the master’s specialisation option in Religion and Sustainable Development offered at Midlands State University (Zim), the teaching offerings of the Research Programme for Religious Communities and Sustainable Development in Berlin, and the Ethics in Action course offered by the SDG Academy.

1.2. Interpreting and making more informed sense of the results



RaD has also been accommodated and developed as a teaching subject at a number of institutions in **South Africa**.



The mode of delivery has predominantly been in the form of single courses as part of larger programme offerings.

The exception has been the Theology and Development Programme at University of KwaZulu-Natal with its post-graduate programme offering in Theology and Development (honours and masters).

❖ See B. Haddad (2016), "Curriculum design in theology and development: Human agency and the prophetic role of the church." *HTS Theological Studies* 72(4), 694-701.



With the exception of the RaD offer at University of the Western Cape, Christian theology has been the exclusive disciplinary domain for teaching RaD in the South African context.

2. Establishing RaD in the Curriculum at the University of the Western Cape

RaD becomes a focus area in two of the three subject areas of the Dept of Rel & Theol: **Theology** and **Ethics**

RaD becomes one of the six research focus areas in the Department of Religion and Theology.



Notes on the curriculum design

Referring to the two modules presented:
Ethics 232 & the postgraduate TST 745/845

Approach

Ethics 232

- Students from across the Arts & Humanities Faculty including a minority in Theology
- Students from across the religious traditions
- Thus no (Christian) Theology and Development but RaD literature / content leaning toward **Religious Studies** and the **Social Sciences**
- Inclusivity of the religious traditions in the RaD focus albeit with a more pointed focus on Christianity and Islam

TST 745/845

- Predominantly students in Christian theology
- Thus bringing **Theology and Development** literature in as part of the literature mix
- A deliberate aim to make students conversant with international and South African scholarship in RaD
- As a result a far greater inclusion of South African scholarship
- A pedagogical approach defined by **student participation**

Content

Ethics 232

- Power of Development as Public Discourse & Practice
- Introduction to RaD
- Religious traditions and development
- Topical Issues:
 - Health
 - Gender
 - Environment
 - Economics
 - Education
 - African Spirituality
 - Corruption
 - FBOs & Development

TST 745/845

- Texts placing the field of RaD
- Researching RaD
- Religion and the SDGs
- Centering RaD
- From RaD to Theology and Development: Selected SA contributions
- Religion and Social Capital
- RaD in Post-Apartheid SA: Social justice perspectives
- Christianity in International Development – Human Development
- African Pentecostal and Independent Churches in development
- Topical issues – gender, women health

3. A new initiative to intensify the focus on sustainable development

- The experience of establishing RaD in the curriculum (2016-2020) has laid an important and necessary platform to intensify the focus on SD
- A new avenue for doing so
 - Teaching the post-graduate **Ethics 735 / 835** module on “Contemporary Issues in Ethics” for the first time in 2021 (first semester) and shaping it with my own course content – **RELIGION AND THE SUSTAINABLE TURN IN DEVELOPMENT**
- Not a case of redirecting but **intensifying** the focus
 - students have in previous offerings been introduced to the SDGs / Agenda 2030
 - SD has been included as one of the thematic foci
 - The inclusion of topical foci such as health, gender and environment has been in direct support of the SDG agenda

The Why's and What's of an intensified focus on sustainable development.

- Two questions that necessary follow:
 - **Why** intensifying the focus?
 - **What** should such an intensifying focus entail in terms of course content over a semester span of 14 weeks?



Why?

- Internationally a further opening of the “development space” for RaD since 2015
- A related noticeable or visible turn of RaD to the SD agenda
- SD is the new dominant international paradigm for development
- An opportunity to engage more intensively with the SD agenda and the wide spectrum of ideas, debates, perspectives and paradigmatic positions accompanied by this agenda
- A more favourable opportunity to bring alternative and post-development paradigms of thinking into the frame
- An opportunity to strengthen environmental and ecological concerns in the development discussion
- Education for the SDGs has become a critical mission of universities – as is the case at UWC
See SDSN (2020): Accelerating Education for the SDGs in Universities: A guide for universities, colleges, and tertiary and higher education institutions. New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).
- An imperative more than ever demanded as a result of the COVID pandemic

The Why's and What's

What?

- At UWC an offer in the Ethics stream and not Theology – thus rather a religious studies approach when focussing on the religious traditions
- Students representing a diverse religious profile and purpose of study – Christians and Muslims, students with respective specialisations in Ethics and Christian Theology
- An introduction to the subject field of RaD as before (Bompani 2019; Jones & Petersen 2011, etc.)
- Not only RaD literature but also a broader orientation in social scientific literature and debates related to SD
- No straightforward embracement of the SDG agenda but an exposure across the ideological and paradigmatic spectrum – critical and appreciative perspectives on the SDG agenda, covering the conceptual spectrum **from SD to deep ecology** in the RaD literature and broader social science literature
- A literature and thematic selection that also relates to the South African and wider African context
- A similar pedagogical approach involving student participation and continuous learning over a semester span of 14 weeks

A closer look at the **module design** and its **guiding themes** (ETH 745/845)

1. With the aim to introduce students to the subject field (1 week)

☐ **ORIENTATIONS IN R&D**

Selected literature as before

2. With the aim to provide students with a broader (social science) orientation to become conversant with the sustainable development debate (5 weeks)

☐ **THE GLOBAL SD AGENDA: THE 2030 AGENDA – APPRECIATIVE AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES (1)**

Sachs, "Achieving the sustainable development goals", *Jnl of International Business Ethics* (2015)

Langford, "Lost in Transformation? The politics of the sustainable development goals", *Ethics & International Affairs* (2016)

☐ **THE SDGs IN SOUTH AFRICA (2)**

Including: Cumming et al., "Achieving the national development agenda and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) through investment in ecological infrastructure: A case study of South Africa", *Ecosystem Services* (2017)

Mubecua & David, "So far so good? Tracking the poverty eradication goal of the SDGs in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa", *Jnl of public Affairs* (2019)

Struckmann, "A postcolonial feminist critique of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development: A South African application", *Agenda* (2018)

☐ **Exploring the conceptual apparatus of sustainable development and its history (3)**

Thus acquainting students with the insight that SD is not merely a modernist concept but that it has a far longer history with different utopian themes shaping its history

Including: Du Pisani, "Sustainable development – historical roots of the concept", *Environmental Sciences* (2006)

Harlow et al., "A review of utopian themes in sustainable development discourse", *Sustainable Development* (2013)

2. With the aim to provide students with a broader (social science) orientation to become conversant with the sustainable development debate (5 weeks)

❑ **Coming to terms with environmental degradation and the impact OF THE COVID PANDEMIC (4)**

Thus acquainting students with more critical insight into how the challenges of contemporary environmental degradation (with specific focus on the Southern African context) and the socio-effects of the COVID pandemic hold deep implications for the prospects of Agenda 2030.

*Including: Darkoh, "An overview of environmental issues in Southern Africa", *African Jnl of Ecology* (2009)*

*Nicola et al., "The socio-economic implications of the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19)", *Intl Jnl of Surgery* (2020)*

*Editorial, "Will the Covid-19 pandemic threaten the SDGs?" *Lancet Public Health* (2020)*

❑ **FROM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TO DEEP ECOLOGY – PATHWAYS ALONG A CRITICAL TRAJECTORY (5)**

Thus exposing students to further conceptual and theoretical deepening in the SD debate whereby SD and deep ecology are upheld as binary ends of a critical trajectory of competing ideas, perspectives, ideological positions and traditions.

*Including: Hopwood et al., "Sustainable development: mapping different approaches", *Sustainable Development* (2005)*

*Jacob, "Sustainable development and deep ecology: an analysis of competing traditions", *Environmental Management* (1994)*

3. With the aim to make students conversant with the evolving focus on SD in RaD scholarship – **“The sustainable turn in RaD”** (7 weeks)

❑ **SELECTED CONTRIBUTIONS PRIOR TO AGENDA 2030 (1)**

Haynes (2007); Van Wensveen (2011); Narayanan (2013)

❑ **SELECTED CONTRIBUTIONS FROM TWO SPECIAL ISSUES ON RELIGION AND SD IN RESPONSE TO AGENDA 2030 (2/3)**

The Ecumenical Review 68(4), 2016: Werner & Van der Ven; Karam; Nitsche & Gabriel; Juul Petersen & Le Moigne

The Review of Faith & International Affairs 14(3), 2016: Sidibé; L Roux et al.; Tsimpo & Wodon

❑ **CONTRIBUTION FROM THE WORK OF EMMA TOMALIN AND HER COLLEAGUES (4)**

Derived from the project “Keeping Faith in 2030: Religions and the SDGs”

Tomalin, “Religion, poverty reduction and global development institutions”, *Palgrave Communications* (2018)

Tomalin et al., “Religion and the sustainable development goals”, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* (2019)

Haustein & Tomalin, “Religion, populism, and the politics of the sustainable development goals”, *Social Policy & Society* (2021)

3. With the aim to make students conversant with the evolving focus on SD in RaD scholarship – **“The sustainable turn in RaD”** (7 weeks)

❑ **SD AND THE CATHOLIC TRADITION (5)**

Christie et al., “Sustainability and the common good: Catholic social teaching and ‘Integral Ecology’ as contributions to a framework of social values for sustainability transitions”, *Ecosystems Services* (2019)

Sachs, “The sustainable development goals and *Laudato si’*: Varieties of post-development? *Third World Quarterly* (2017)

Tatay-Nieto, “Sustainability, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, and the Catholic Church’s ecological turn”, *Religions* (2020)

❑ **DEEP ECOLOGY PERSPECTIVES IN RaD (6)**

Moe-Lobeda & Helmiere, “Moral power at the religion-development-environment nexus”, in Clarke, *Handbook*

Golo, “Religious environmental stewardship, the Sabbath and sustainable futures in Africa: Implications for sustainability discourse”, *Consensus* (2020)

Narayanan, “Where are the animals in sustainable development? Religion and the case for ethical stewardship in animal husbandry”, *Sustainable Development* (2016)

❑ **RELIGION AND SD IN PRACTICE (7)**

Moyer et al., “Working for God and sustainability: The activities of faith-based organisations in Kenya”, *Voluntas* (2012)

Websites including:

UN Environmental Programme

Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute (SAFCEI)

Earthkeeper (source about practitioners, e.g. Green Anglicans)

International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD)

Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (JLIFLC)

Youtube videos

CONCLUDING REFLECTION



I started off by arguing that the teaching aspect of RaD, i.e. paying closer attention to the indispensable task of bringing the subject field into the curriculum, to the **what** and **how** of teaching RaD, has so far not received the necessary attention.

The leading drive so far has been toward research and publication, which has led to the impressive rise of a new subject field.



Despite the emphasis on research and publication, I have however also upheld evidence that RaD is by no means absent from the academic curriculum today. A fair amount of teaching RaD does exist internationally, albeit of a considerable variety.

Yet, as the upheld sample of teaching evidence clearly suggests, a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching RaD does not exist. Teaching a course in “Transformational Development” at an evangelical oriented institution in Asia or another part of the world, for example, will for understandable reasons differ substantially in content from a course in RaD taught in a social science or theological programme at a mainstream university setting in Continental Europe. And what may for example be possible in teaching a single module or course in RaD, will for understandable reasons be far more limited in comparison to teaching RaD as a whole programme offer.

Against the backdrop of the orientation I have presented of RaD as a taught subject internationally and in South Africa, my main purpose was to give a more informed account of my own endeavour to establish RaD as a taught subject in the curriculum at UWC. To this extent my ultimate aim was to give an account of how my endeavour has on the basis of particular considerations now brought me to the point of developing the RaD offer to include a full-scale focus on sustainable development.



Indeed, the RaD offer at UWC can rightly claim to take its own unique place today among the potpourri of existing teaching offers in different parts of the world. The account that I have given of the UWC case gives evidence of how the teaching of RaD often if not always follow the research interests of the person who develops the curriculum content and teaches the subject, which necessarily leads to particular preferences in terms of thematic choice and overall curriculum design. Even more, however, this is an account that gives evidence of an own unique situatedness and context where factors such as the diverse religious profile of students and the location of RaD as teaching subject in different but at times also overlapping subject areas (Ethics and Christian Theology) in a larger Arts and Humanities environment need to be carefully considered when curriculum choices are made.



As the exploration of existing teaching initiatives in RaD for this paper suggests, **sustainable development** may still represent a limited conceptual focus. However, it is from this vantage point that the new focus on SD as a whole postgraduate module offer at UWC now counts among the relatively few examples of such conceptual investment. As a brand new initiative, taught for the first time in the first semester of 2021 and likewise marked by particular preferences, choices, considerations and confinements (such as the lack of exposure to the world of development practice), it may certainly not be without shortcomings or limitations. Yet, at the same time, the initiative can be seen as the opening of a new space allowing students and their teacher to grow in critical understanding of and engagement with the present-day “Sustainable Development Agenda”, in a way that also exposes them to ideas in alternative, post-development and utopian thinking across disciplinary boundaries challenging this very agenda.



As a lasting impression emerging from my exploration for this paper, I want to close by postulating that one of the biggest challenges for teaching RaD today may well be to overcome its current fragmentary nature. While the absence of a one-size-fits-all approach may be understandable and even desirable, there is also an important if not crucial need for greater synergy. It is with this recognition in mind, I want to contend, that a new creation such as the International Network for Religious Communities and Sustainable Development holds much promise. Utilising this platform for debate, exchange, learning and collaboration also in the area of teaching could make a significant contribution towards realising the ideal of greater synergy. It is within such an active network dynamic that I envisage the new RaD focus on sustainable development at UWC could grow and, ideally, become part of an imaginative larger programme initiative to teach RaD.