Terry Thomas in India in 1963

The archive consists in paper documents mainly connected one way or another with the work of the German-American philosophical theologian, Paul Tillich (1886-1965): for example, notes made by Terry from Tillich's papers, copies of Terry's papers given at associated conferences and correspondence with the Tillich Society.

There is also scattered wider correspondence (sometimes quite brief) including with Thomas J.J. Altizer, Mircea Eliade, Michael Pye and John Heywood Thomas. There is not much on Terry's later interests in methodology and disciplinary formation in the Study of Religions (Thomas 1984) and in the historical sociology of religious diversity (Thomas 1988) so the archive must be seen as a very particular slice of Terry's scholarship. A further shift in Terry's interests came after he retired from the Open University in 1996 and became increasingly interested in the new cognitive science of religion and in naturalist explanatory theories of religion. An autobiographical fragment in my possession poignantly documents this personal shift over the decades from the Tillichian theology of his early career to naturalism and atheism.

It's important to see this archive in context: in the first place, as the early fruits of a particular, 'local' (Welsh) biography - Terry was a Welsh speaker - within a UK history of the study of religion/s in the wake of the pivotal 'turn' at Lancaster and elsewhere in the late 1960s; secondly, as the early steps in an intellectual journey from a theology of culture and interfaith encounter, to historical sociology, and finally to a naturalistic model of religion. Along the way, like many other British contemporaries, Terry engaged enthusiastically with the international scene: for example, he was a participant at the select 1988 conference in Marburg on the disciplinary shape of the Study of Religion/s (Pye 1989) and he analysed the politics of late Victorian studies of religion at the IAHR congress in Mexico City (Thomas 2000).

This new archive therefore is a valuable resource which documents the early research formation of an important scholar in the Study of Religion/s at both UK and international levels. It provides a fascinating new piece in the complex jigsaw of our field and reminds us of the value of disciplinary historiography for understanding where we are now. And if we don't write our own history someone else may do it for us.

Acknowledgments
I am grateful to Huw Thomas for permission to reproduce the attached image of Terry and for sharing files of Terry's unpublished draft material as well as trusting me with the archive as a whole; to Dr Jo Miller, who created an initial catalogue of the contents; to Dr Russell Re Manning at Bath Spa University for putting me in touch with The New Library in Llantwit Major, and to Richard Parry, founder of the New Library, for accepting the material in March 2023.

Teaching about religion and the climate crisis:

A specifically religious studies approach

Clare Wanless

The climate emergency is one of the defining moral and social issues of our time. Proper understanding of it must involve appreciation of the role that religion(s) play(s) in where we are now, and in our responses to the crisis. It is therefore increasingly important for curricula of religious studies departments to find engaging and relevant ways of addressing both the climate crisis itself and related issues of human relationships with the natural world.

However, in designing religious studies curricula about the climate crisis, there are certain traps that are easy to fall into, and that mirror the wider challenges facing our discipline. First is the danger of leaning too heavily into engaging with religious arguments. It is easy to see how this can lead to discussions that are primarily theological and/or that privilege Christianity. Alternatively, in then focusing on the responses of non-Christian and/or non-Western religious communities, we can end up pivoting towards a world religions paradigm, or even a kind of tokenising orientialism. Either way, there is a danger of privileging top-down structures at the expense of personal religious experience. How best to approach teaching about religion and the environment in order to avoid these dangers?

Based on a course I taught at The University of Edinburgh, this article discusses three inter-related dimensions of teaching about religion and the climate crisis. These are: (1) modeling nature and the climate; (2) subjective responses to crisis: and (3) political, structural and social issues. A course can bring together a variety of case studies that focus on aspects of each of these three dimensions, highlighting the ways in which they interweave. This will provide a deep, inter-disciplinary but RS-led understanding of the intersection between religion and the climate crisis, which students can then develop in ways that are appropriate to them. The following sections provide some example suggestions on how each of these themes might be approached so as to emphasise the connections between them.

Modelling nature and the climate

This theme looks at the ways people in various contexts frame nature and the natural world, to make it something that they can understand on their own terms, relate to, and perhaps influence. Firstly, how do people respond to the inherent power of nature, both as a destructive force and as a sustainer of life? Case studies illustrate how anthropomorphising nature can provide a way of modelling its patterns as personality, and as a route to forming a constructive relationship with it. This can be compared with enlightenment trends towards rationalising and instrumentalizing nature through measurement and experimentation (Golinski 2019), and the later trend towards romanticisation that leant into radical acceptance of nature as an uncanny, dangerous and disruptive force that is intricately tied to our vulnerability as living beings (Mayer 2018).

Building on these initial themes, we can then explore how people model and justify their sense of moral obligation toward nature. Notions of human dominion over nature can be discussed not only in terms of theological justifications but also in terms of their utilisation as a way of underpinning and justifying racist attitudes and colonial power. The paradigm of stewardship over nature that has more recently become prominent in religious environmentalism can be discussed as a way of recasting dominion as responsibility to better suit modernity and its environmentalist concerns (Chaplin 2016), while still maintaining something of its theological and anthropocentric core. These paradigms can be further explored by comparison with notions of kinship with nature, which provides an emphasis on interconnectivity and uses personhood as a way of developing an attitude of relational empathy with aspects of the natural world (Rountree 2012).

Subjective responses to nature and the crisis

This theme explores the place of personal, subjective and spiritual responses in mediating our feelings about nature and subsequently also our response to the climate emergency. I have found this an especially valuable theme, because of the opportunities it affords to use students' own subjective responses to nature to help them engage critically but also empathetically with a range of responses to nature and the climate crisis. Individual and group reflection on exercises like the Deep Time Walk and the Sit-Spot exercise have been especially valuable for this. They can help underpin exploration of a range of topics.

The Deep Time Walk
www.deeptimewalk.org

This "walking audio history of the living Earth" was developed by educators at Schumacher College. Participants walk 4.6km, while listening to an audio play through their mobile phone. This leads them through the 4.6 billion year history of the Earth at a rate of one million years per metre walked, while encouraging reflection on various aspects of deep time. Topics covered include the timescales of the earth in relation to human timescales, and how humans relate to and impact the natural world. The listener is also encouraged to empathise with various elements of the natural world.

Firstly, eco-spirituality can be thought of as a sense of profound and motivating personal connection with nature or particular elements of nature. Numerous aspects of eco-spirituality can be explored, including (for example) how the British road protesters formed a sense of embodied connection with nature in a kind of untutored grassroots eco-paganism that helped to underpin their protests (Harris 2014), and how surfers have developed a kind of informal aquatic religion based on a sense of personal connection with the ocean, that has in turn served to bring them together as a community (Taylor 2010).

But also, subjectivity is important in helping us to understand the profound impact that climate anxiety can have on people and communities, and the role of religion and spirituality in mediating responses to this. One response can be for communities to develop a kind of unspoken social contract to ignore the problem and carry on as normal (Pihkala 2018). Alternatively, a profound and debilitating sense of loss can develop (Albrecht 2019). Responses can develop predicated on (for example) hope, denial, radical acceptance, or attempting to develop a relationship of constructive empathy with nature (Haraway 2016).

Political and social issues

This theme explores some social and political aspects of our relationship with nature and environmentalism, especially with respect to gender, race, and indigeneity. It allows us to probe how relations of power can mirror and mutually reinforce how we construct our relationship with the natural world.

With respect to gender, one useful case study is the relationship of British ecofeminism with political protest movements of the late twentieth century and with the Goddess movement, and subsequent debates around essentialism (Gaard 2011). Another is the Chipko movement of 1970s India, which facilitates discussion of a grassroots conservation movement with collective women's leadership and built on sacrality of the local forest (Vandana 2016). Discussion of environmentalism in the United States allows us to explore not only how environmentalist narratives based around white experience can alienate and exclude other ethnicities (Carter 2020), but also how academia itself can overlook and deprivilege cultural environmentalism in non-white cultures (Baugh 2020). However, discussion of eco-Womanism enables exploration of the development of a radically inclusive spiritual ecological praxis from the lived experience of black women in the United States (Maparyan 2016), also linking to ideas of intersectionality.

The Sit-Spot Exercise
sacredearthland.co.uk/what-is-a-sit-spot-and-how-do-you-do-it/

This exercise was originally developed by Jon Young to help people develop and experience an empathetic relationship with specific elements of nature. It involves choosing an easily accessible personal space in which to sit for a short time every day to spend time with nature, cultivating a sense of mindful empathy with the elements of that space. Students can continue the practice for as long as feels useful to them and critically reflect on the experience. This provides useful subjective context for discussions around eco-spirituality.

Another important area is indigeneity, how we think about our relationship with the land, and various religion-related claims to land rights. Discussion might focus on how colonial narratives based on Christian ideas of dominion have facilitated the alienation of communities from their rights to their land (Berne Burow et al 2018), and how decolonization seeks the problematization and dismantling of such narratives. Comparative case studies can include the protests around the Alta Dam and the Dakota Pipeline (Kraft 2020).

Conclusion

Linking together these three themes using case studies such as the ones mentioned above provides an especially potent opportunity for exploring how religion and religious narratives mediate between individual spiritual experience, religious communities, and a wide range of social and political issues. This kind of specifically religious studies led approach helps students to critically reflect on their own experience, and also develop an empathetic yet critical personal response to climate justice, the natural world, and wider societal concerns.