

# **The Environment in UK Theological Education Institutions:**

## **Report on the Environmental Consultation for Theological Educators (07-08 December 2020)**

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## **Executive Summary**

On the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2020 a group of 21 theological educators gathered to discuss the place of environmental teaching and learning within UK theological education institutions (TEIs).

These were the main conclusions:

- There is an urgent theological and missional imperative that TEIs should incorporate environmental teaching and learning within their syllabuses and practices.
- If the environment and creation care are to be taken seriously by TEIs, then they need to be made formation criteria by denominations for ministry training and should be a learning outcome for all students.
- Specialist modules on environmental theology and related topics are highly desirable, and a key recommendation is to aim for integration of an environmental perspective across the whole curriculum.
- The environmental crisis is multifaceted. Climate change, biodiversity loss and plastic pollution are now established concerns at popular level but there are a range of other serious issues that threaten life and planetary wellbeing. If students are to be equipped to reflect theologically and lead practical and missional responses to the environmental crisis, they will almost certainly need access to education on environmental issues.
- Ideally teaching should go beyond the classroom and experiential learning is desirable.
- There is a need for TEIs to model good environmental practice with their buildings, land, food, and use of transport. Environmental sustainability should become a core element of lifestyle formation.

## **Sponsorship**

The organising group would like to thank St Peter's Saltley Trust for providing the sponsorship for this consultation.

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## Introduction

*"It is my hope that our seminaries and houses of formation will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God's world, and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment."* (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* §214)<sup>1</sup>

As the 21st century progresses it becomes increasingly clear that we are in the midst of a social and environmental crisis, with severe effects on the most vulnerable in our world and impacts affecting every community and nation. We need to equip churches to be able to minister effectively in this context and ministers to lead discerningly in an uncertain and unstable world.

In early 2020 the John Ray Initiative (JRI) secured funding from St Peter's Saltley Trust for a consultation involving eco-theological educators in UK theological education institutions (TEIs). In discussion with Dave Bookless of A Rocha who, as part of the Church of England Environmental Working Group, has been working towards a network of Eco-Champions for ministerial training, we brought these two strands together in our consultation.

There has been relatively little work documenting environmental education in theological colleges, and it may be useful to highlight these resources at this point. As far as we are aware the first survey of theological colleges and their environmental work was carried out by Celia Deane-Drummond in 1992.<sup>2</sup> At that time very few institutions covered much on the environment, and only two out of 58 had specific defined courses in the area.

In 2006 an ecumenical group of environmental theology practitioners from across Europe gathered at the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS), then in Prague, to consider how to integrate the subject into the life and syllabus of TEIs. This led to the publication of a book, *The Place of Environmental Theology* edited by John Weaver and Margot R. Hodson (2007).<sup>3</sup> Although the production of specific modules on environmental theology was generally seen in a positive light, it was considered that the best approach is to integrate the material across the whole syllabus. Moreover, it was seen as highly desirable that environmentally friendly policies be introduced across the life of a TEI (buildings, food, land, transport etc.), thereby modelling good practice to the students. Within this book, Martin J. Hodson wrote a chapter in which he surveyed what was happening on

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (Vaticana, Italy: Libreria Editrice, 2015). <https://www.laudatosi.org/pope-francis/encyclical-letter/> (accessed 6 March 2021)

<sup>2</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond, 'The Green Theological Temperature: A Survey of Theological College Education in the UK', *Theology in Green* Issue 2 (1992), 22-26.

<sup>3</sup> John Weaver and Margot R. Hodson eds., *The Place of Environmental Theology. A guide for seminaries, colleges and universities*. (Oxford: Whitley Trust and Prague: IBTS 2007). [https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/book\\_place-of-environmental-theology.html](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/book_place-of-environmental-theology.html) (accessed 6 March 2021)

environmental theology in TEIs across Europe in 2006.<sup>4</sup> He found that there were four approaches:

- 1) Ignore the environment altogether.
- 2) Have a few lectures on environmental theology within a whole course.
- 3) Have one or more whole modules included in a course.
- 4) Integrate environmental theology across the whole syllabus.

Of these, probably the most popular at the time was to have a few lectures within a whole course. Where modules were available these were usually optional. Very few institutions attempted integration across the whole syllabus.

Taking a different approach, Rushton and Hodson surveyed the environmental attitudes of Church of England ordinands training for ministry in TEIs.<sup>5</sup> They found that the ordinands were generally moderate in their views of environmental theology, and there was some evidence that the evangelicals surveyed were less interested in environmental concerns. This work gave some insights into the attitudes of students at TEIs a little over ten years ago. We suspect, but have no data to prove this, that those attitudes may well have changed since then. Anecdotally, there is much more interest in environmental matters among ordinands now than there was.

In 2012, Durham University's bid was chosen by the Church of England for what became the Common Awards scheme.<sup>6</sup> It was intended that the majority of ordinands in Church of England TEIs would train under Common Awards, and delivery began in autumn 2014. Dave Bookless realised that there was an opportunity to include environmental concerns within the new scheme and spearheaded work to achieve this aim. On 9<sup>th</sup> January 2013, a group of environmental educators attended a large meeting of TEIs at Church House, London at which the new scheme was discussed.<sup>7</sup> The environmental group aimed to produce a number of new modules for the scheme and had a concern to influence the learning outcomes across the whole syllabus.

More recently, Howles et al. (2018) considered TEIs within the broader context of Christian environmental education.<sup>8</sup> By March 2018, they were able to report that six optional modules looking at the environment were now validated under the Common Awards scheme in the UK. Howles et al. concluded, "The main problems with these modules are

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<sup>4</sup> Martin J. Hodson, 'Environmental theology courses in Europe- Where are we now?', in *The Place of Environmental Theology: A guide for seminaries, colleges and universities*, ed. By John Weaver and Margot R. Hodson (Oxford: Whitley Trust, and Prague: IBTS, 2007) pp. 107-120.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth A.C. Rushton and Martin J. Hodson, 'Faith, environmental values and understanding: a case study involving Church of England ordinands', *JRI Briefing Paper 25* (2012), 1-24. <https://jri.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Rushton-Hodson-JRI-briefing-25.pdf> (accessed 6 March 2021)

<sup>6</sup> Common Awards (Theology, Ministry and Mission) Durham University. <https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/common-awards/> (accessed 20 March 2021)

<sup>7</sup> The environmental group attending were: John Bimson, Dave Bookless, Margot Hodson, Martin Hodson, Hilary Marlow and Ruth Valerio.

<sup>8</sup> Timothy Howles, John Reader and Martin J. Hodson, "Creating an Ecological Citizenship': Philosophical and Theological Perspectives on the Role of Contemporary Environmental Education.' *The Heythrop Journal* 59 (6) (2018), 997-1008.

that a college may lack suitable staff to teach them, and that optional modules can be avoided by students. A key factor is staffing. Often when a keen member of staff leaves the modules cease to run. But the fact that such modules exist is a major advance on the situation a few years ago.”

Finally, Buxton et al. (2021) consider training in TEIs around the world in one section of their chapter and give a number of examples of good practice.<sup>9</sup> These authors are in favour of an embodied pedagogy, using drama and the arts to give students a more holistic awareness of creation, and visits to off-campus creation care projects for practical hands-on learning.

We are grateful to the 21 heads, tutors and educators in TEIs for joining our environmental consultation. The consultation gave us a point where we could pause, and assess our approach to environment as TEIs, practically and theologically. Through the consultation, we were seeking to facilitate theological education institutes (TEIs) of all denominations to work through how they respond to this crisis. Our aim is to facilitate approaches that will equip emerging church leaders to lead communities in this very challenging century. There follow summaries of the two keynote presentations, and then the two sessions where participants met in groups. All discussions have been anonymised.

### **Keynote Presentation 1- Martin Hodson**

#### *Environmental Challenges*

Martin Hodson gave a short presentation entitled, ‘Environmental Challenges: What are we Facing?’ He began by looking at various lists of the environmental problems that we are facing, focussing on the ‘Planetary Boundaries’ first stated by Rockström and colleagues in 2009 and updated in 2015.<sup>10</sup> Of these, four are now giving us most cause for concern: biogeochemical flows (human interference with the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles); land system change (change in land use); biosphere integrity (biodiversity loss); and climate change. A number of other problems such as plastic pollution, soil degradation and ocean acidification were also mentioned.<sup>11</sup> In March 2021, a key paper summarising all these issues and the ways in which they interact was published by Folke et al. ahead of the Nobel Prize Summit in April 2021.<sup>12</sup>

The current pandemic has sometimes been presented as a chance occurrence or natural evil. In reality, it is an outcome of the social and ecological crisis, especially resulting from

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<sup>9</sup> Graham Buxton, Johannes M. Luetz and Sally Shaw, ‘Towards an Embodied Pedagogy in Educating for Creation Care’ in *Innovating Christian Education Research*, ed. by Johannes M. Luetz and Beth Green (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021) pp. 349-375.

<sup>10</sup> Will Steffen et al. ‘Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet’ *Science* 347, no. 6223, (2015) DOI: [science.sciencemag.org/content/347/6223/1259855](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1259855)

<sup>11</sup> For a simple introduction see: Martin J. Hodson and Margot R. Hodson, *A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues*, (Abingdon: BRF, 2021) *publication date, second edition: 23 April 2021.*

<sup>12</sup> Carl Folke et al. ‘Our future in the Anthropocene biosphere.’ *Ambio* 50 (2021), 834-869. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-021-01544-8>

land system change and abuse of biodiversity. The most likely hypothesis for the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic involves wild animal markets in Wuhan, China, and the virus appears to have originated in bats. Most recent pandemics have involved zoonoses (the transfer of virus from wild or domesticated animals to humans). Pandemics will continue to happen in the future in increasing numbers unless we learn to treat the natural environment in a better way.<sup>13</sup>

### *Frameworks for Solutions*

The second section of the talk was entitled 'Frameworks for Solutions', looking at possible ways forward. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include seven that are focussed partly or wholly on environmental concerns, and nine that are more human-centred.<sup>14</sup> Economist, Kate Raworth, has provided an integrated way forward with her 'Doughnut Economics' scheme.<sup>15</sup> Here she has the Planetary Boundaries forming the outer circle or Ecological Ceiling to her doughnut. If we transgress that ceiling we go into a dangerous overshoot. The Social Foundation forms the inner circle of the doughnut and is derived from the human-focussed SDGs. If we drop through the Social Foundation into shortfall then people suffer from poverty, lack of food, health, water and other basics. Our aim must be to find what Raworth calls 'the safe and just space for humanity' that neither leads to environmental damage nor human suffering.

### *Ecological conversion*

The final framework used was the famous God, humanity and Earth triangle first promoted by Old Testament theologian, Chris Wright, in 2000 and much modified and adapted since then.<sup>16</sup> It was argued that Christians in general, and theological colleges in particular, have tended to concentrate too much on the relationship between God and humans (which is good in itself!), and not on the God to Earth or human to Earth dimensions. Even the triangle itself can have the perceptual shortcoming of seeing people as separate from ecology rather than emphasising that we are part of the natural world. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* (§217) wrote, "So what they all need is an 'ecological conversion', whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them."<sup>17</sup> To achieve this ecological conversion Martin Hodson proposed that we needed to superimpose the Chris Wright triangle onto the Kate Raworth doughnut, and to look at how they interact. This acknowledges that ecological conversion requires a transformation of human society as well as a transformation of our relationship within the natural world. The presentation ended with a second quote from Pope Francis, setting out the challenge facing theological colleges, and which is given at the beginning of this paper.

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<sup>13</sup> For more on this topic see: Ruth Valerio, Martin J. Hodson, Margot R. Hodson and Timothy Howles, *COVID-19: Environment, justice, and the future* (Cambridge: Grove, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> UN, *Sustainable development*. <https://sdgs.un.org/> (accessed 6 March 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics* (New York: Random House, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000) p 19.

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis (2015) op. cit. (§217)

## Discussion of Presentation 1

### *Understanding the breadth of the environmental crisis*

One participant asked why we hear so much more about climate change than the other serious matters mentioned in the talk (e.g. nitrogen pollution). The reasons for this are uncertain, but some of the issues require a greater knowledge of chemistry than others. Another person suggested that it would be interesting to compare the list of the main environmental issues with public perception of them. Is the focus on climate change and plastics because people can relate to these more in their lives? Is the climate emphasis because people are more concerned about human survival than with the survival of other creatures, and they don't always see the connection? A participant wondered whether there was scope for a retrospective study of how the public understanding of 'crisis' has developed during the Covid pandemic. One practitioner said that students in TEIs are hugely varied in the depth of their awareness of environmental issues, depending on their age and previous experience. Is there a place for a 'State of the Planet 101' course for new students? In this regard, it is interesting to note that when Harmannij surveyed theological books on environmental issues, whether they were written at a popular or academic level, he found: "But no matter how much time is spent on the science, all writers, without exception, start their introduction or first chapter with an overview or statement about the science. Before any examination or discussion of theology, bible verses or ethics there is always the science."<sup>18</sup> Whilst it is possible that Harmannij missed some books that ignore or downplay the science it is undoubtedly the case that most do begin in this way. If the books do this, should it not be reflected in our teaching? The six Common Award modules all have some level of environmental education in their aims and content and five have specific environmental understanding in their learning outcomes.<sup>19</sup>

A participant kindly provided links to the FAO report on soil biodiversity<sup>20</sup> and the IPBES report on pandemics<sup>21</sup>, both from 2020. One of the delegates considered that the issue of intersectionality was really important, and suggested attending some of the open events at the Laudato Si' Research Institute<sup>22</sup>, which have a theme of land rights and agricultural ethics in 2021-2022.

### *Relationship between environmental concerns and human justice and poverty*

One delegate asked about discussions taking place concerning environmental impacts caused by and affecting majority and minority world contexts differently. So, are

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<sup>18</sup> Derk J. Harmannij, 'Bringing Environmental Issues into Church Life & Bringing Faith-based motivations into the Environmental movement: What role can faith play in addressing environmental problems?' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2019). pp. 34-36.

<sup>19</sup> TMM3217, Environmental Theology, has environmental understanding in aims and content but currently not in learning outcomes.

<sup>20</sup> FAO, ITPS, GSBI, SCBD and EC. *State of knowledge of soil biodiversity – Status, challenges and potentialities*, Summary for policy makers. (Rome: FAO, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb1929en> (accessed 6 March 2021).

<sup>21</sup> Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) *Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Pandemics*. (2020) <https://ipbes.net/pandemics> (accessed 6 March 2021).

<sup>22</sup> Laudato Si' Research Institute, Campion Hall, University of Oxford. <https://lsri.campion.ox.ac.uk/> (accessed 9 March 2021)



environmental justice and tackling poverty talked about as conflicting by some, or in some contexts? The general thinking on this is that the situation has markedly improved in recent years. There was certainly some tension between environmental and world development organisations in the past, but now they often collaborate, particularly on climate change. World development agencies recognise that climate change has the potential to reverse progress made in poverty alleviation. It is probably true to say that these agencies are still less interested in other environmental issues, those that they perceive have less direct impact on poor people. Since our consultation Lowe et al. have produced a very detailed analysis of this topic area, with suggestions for ways forward.<sup>23</sup>

The Restorative Economy report produced by Tearfund in 2015 was raised by one delegate.<sup>24</sup> Did the subsequent process raise the profile of the environmental cost of economic growth as an approach to global poverty reduction? Are governments taking seriously the proposals by Kate Raworth (see above) and also Tim Jackson?<sup>25</sup> There are some recent suggestions that this might be the case. In April 2020, the municipality of Amsterdam decided to use the doughnut model for their public policy decisions, the first city in the world to take this forward.<sup>26</sup> The 2020 Reith Lectures given by economist Mark Carney also incorporated some of this sort of thinking.<sup>27</sup> Finally, the Dasgupta review, which was commissioned by the UK Treasury, and came out after our consultation, added to the feeling that economists are beginning to change their thinking on the environment.<sup>28</sup>

One delegate summed up by proposing that a Pauline theology of formation is not only about ‘pursuing holiness and being transformed into the likeness of Christ’ but also about ‘contending with sin’. In our current environmental crisis, there is a theological imperative to see our negative actions towards the environment as a major sin to be contended with. These two strands of formation are interdependent.

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<sup>23</sup> Benjamin S. Lowe, Rachel L. Lamb and Ruth Padilla DeBorst, ‘Reconciling Conservation and Development in an Era of Global Environmental Change.’ *Christian Relief, Development, and Advocacy: The Journal of the Accord Network* 2(2) (2021), 49-54. <https://crdajournal.org/index.php/crda/article/view/463> (accessed 15 March 2021)

<sup>24</sup> Tearfund (2015) *The Restorative Economy*. Authors: Alex Evans and Richard Gower. <https://www.tearfund.org/~media/Files/Main%20Site/Campaigning/OrdinaryHeroes/Restorative%20Economy%20Full%20Report.pdf> (accessed 9 March 2021)

<sup>25</sup> Tim Jackson, *Prosperity without Growth* (2nd edition) (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Boffey, ‘Amsterdam to embrace ‘doughnut’ model to mend post-coronavirus economy’ *The Guardian*, 8 April 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/08/amsterdam-doughnut-model-mend-post-coronavirus-economy> (accessed 9 March 2021)

<sup>27</sup> Mark Carney, ‘How We Get What We Value’, *The Reith Lectures* (2020). <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000py8v/episodes/guide> (accessed 9 March 2021)

<sup>28</sup> Partha Dasgupta, ‘Final Report - The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review’, HM Treasury (2021) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-the-economics-of-biodiversity-the-dasgupta-review> (accessed 25 March 2021)

## Keynote Presentation 2- Dave Bookless

Dave Bookless gave his presentation on 'Christian Leadership in a century of environmental crisis'. He saw the ecological crisis as a challenge to training Christian leaders under four headings:

**1) Ecological anthropology** (who we are, and our role in relation to the rest of creation). For much of its history the church has been anthropocentric (nature for people). The 1967 paper from Lynn White famously characterised Western Christianity as "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen."<sup>29</sup> White asserted that the seeds of ecological destruction lie in Genesis 1:26-28. This anthropocentric approach can still be seen in modern secular ideas such as Ecosystem Services<sup>30</sup> and the Natural Capital Initiative.<sup>31</sup>

An alternative view is ecocentric (nature for itself) where humans are seen as on a level with other organisms. Extreme versions of this view can see humans in a negative way, as viruses that need to be eliminated.

Both these conventional views can be justified by selective use of scripture, but neither capture the overall biblical breadth of understanding, which is clearly Theocentric. What is needed, therefore, is a model of 'people within nature', where humans are not either dominant or just one of many species but are there to give servant leadership within God's world.

So, the language we choose to use in terms of ecological anthropology is important. Conventional terms such as 'dominion' and 'stewardship' need to be interrogated carefully, and alternatives such as 'servants' and 'creative collaborators' should be explored.

**2) Ecological ecclesiology** (what is church *for* in terms of the wider creation?). Bookless began this section with a quote from Jürgen Moltmann: "It was a modern and a dangerous contraction when the church came to be narrowed down to the human world."<sup>32</sup> Do we see the church as just the human world? Is not the kingdom of God bigger than that? Things are changing faster in the theological academy than in the church in terms of recognising the significance of the created order within God's purposes and within the church's vocation. For instance, N.T. Wright: "The whole creation is waiting in eager longing not just for its own redemption, its liberation from corruption and decay, but for God's children to be revealed: in other words, for the unveiling of those redeemed humans through whose stewardship creation will at last be brought back into that wise order for which it was made."<sup>33</sup> Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* in 2015 was crucial in this regard.<sup>34</sup> Churches worldwide are waking up to the environment. For example in England and Wales there are now over 3000 churches registered for the Eco Church programme.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Lynn White Jr., 'The historical roots of our ecologic crisis' *Science* **155** (3767) (1967), 1203–1207.

<sup>30</sup> Ecosystem service. Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecosystem\\_service](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecosystem_service) (accessed 9 March 2021)

<sup>31</sup> Natural Capital Initiative. <https://www.naturalcapitalinitiative.org.uk/> (accessed 9 March 2021)

<sup>32</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*. (London: SCM Press, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> N. Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Pope Francis (2015) op. cit.

<sup>35</sup> Eco Church. <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/> (accessed 9 March 2021)

**3) Ecological missiology** (conveying an integral understanding that recognises the ‘Great Commission’ concerns making disciples rather than simply evangelism, and places the church’s mission within the *Mission Dei* and in a Kingdom / shalom context). Bookless saw the challenge to mission as involving the five distinct Divine initiatives within the biblical drama: Creation; Covenant; Christ; Church; and Completion.

Each of these Divine initiatives include not only humanity but the whole created order. It is all that God has made which is described as ‘very good’. The primary and foundational Covenant with Noah specifically includes living creatures of every kind and ‘the earth’ (Genesis 9:13). Christ’s incarnation as *sarx* (flesh) rather than *anthropos* (human) implies identification with creaturely life, and Pauline theology explicitly includes ‘all things’ in creation within the redemptive work of the cross and resurrection. The church is called to be the ‘body of Christ’ who is himself Lord of all creation, so, as Ephesians 1, Colossians 1 and Romans 8 all suggest, the church’s vocation is intertwined with re-establishing Christ’s Lordship within creation. Finally, the *telos* of all creation is caught up in the body of the risen Christ, the first fruits of the radical renewal of all creation that will come to fruition at Christ’s return.

Bookless therefore favoured a model which does not just see Christianity as about saving souls, but also seeks human thriving and creation’s flourishing: ‘unless we all flourish, no-one can flourish’. The Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion<sup>36</sup> genuinely capture the biblical scope of the *Missio Ecclesia* and should not be seen as five separate activities or emphases, but, similar to the fruit of the Spirit, as five aspects of one coherent and integrated missiology:

- 1) To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- 2) To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- 3) To respond to human need by loving service
- 4) To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
- 5) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the earth

A Rocha<sup>37</sup>, over many years and in many countries, has found in practice that an approach which focuses on the 5<sup>th</sup> Mark of Mission inevitably and successfully leads to fulfilling all the other four marks as well.<sup>38</sup>

**4) Pedagogical methodology** (how we teach; ‘heads, hands and hearts’ including hands-on exposure to creation). Bookless asked how did Jesus train leaders? He felt we needed:

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<sup>36</sup> Anglican Communion. Marks of Mission. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx> (accessed 9 March 2021)

<sup>37</sup> A Rocha. <https://www.arocha.org/en/> (accessed 9 March 2021)

<sup>38</sup> One participant suggested that the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Marks of Mission could equally lead to fulfilling all the others. Bookless responded: "Perhaps, though I would argue that creation is so foundational to who we are as human beings, as well as to the biblical grand narrative, that it most naturally (!) and obviously forms a basis upon which all the other four Marks of Mission can be built, whereas without it, all the others lack foundations in both a theological and practical sense."

- formation not information
- God's two books (nature and the Bible) – an immersive and contemplative approach towards using scripture within creation<sup>39</sup>
- experiential engagement involving the head, heart and hands
- getting our hands dirty – how can theological students understand Christ's many agricultural parables unless they have experience of dealing with planting, weeding and patiently waiting for growth?
- creation spirituality<sup>40</sup>

Finally, Bookless focussed on the practical issues of assessment criteria. Unless the natural environment is brought into the assessment criteria for students it will always be perceived as optional and peripheral.

### Group Discussions

On both days of the consultation participants were divided into smaller groups, to discuss the issues raised by the two keynote talks. In what follows we have attempted to feature the main themes of the discussions, and where these overlapped between groups the ideas have been merged.

#### *Opening thoughts and questions*

It can be helpful to start with the question: what is nature and what is it for? How do we understand ourselves as a species? How do we take people through an understanding of the seriousness of the situation, into action to meet it? But it can be a big shift to start thinking about what Catherine Keller calls our 'planetary entanglements'.<sup>41</sup> The theological training pathway tends, by contrast, to focus on a personally-focused narrative and on vocation. We see ourselves as separate from nature in both the secular world and as Christians - salvation as Jesus and me. How do we hold that all together with a more planetary vision? Much of our teaching can be so disembodied, and we need to emphasise the context. The intersectionality of all the environmental issues mentioned above teaches us about receptivity as part of our mission focus. For the last two decades there has been a high profile of the justice agenda in local churches. Has this had a wider impact on congregations

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<sup>39</sup> A participant responded positively to Bookless' suggestion of an 'immersive and contemplative approach towards using scripture within creation' but raised concerns that this could be misconstrued as placing nature on an equal footing with scripture. Bookless responded: "It's a fair point. Scripture is primary, but there is a long and honourable Christian tradition, based on biblical practice (think of Job, or Jesus going off to a quiet place), of seeking to spend time with God in nature and let God speak through nature: the Desert Fathers, Celtic Christians, Franciscans and the Natural Theology of John Ray and others are good examples."

<sup>40</sup> All of these points are covered in detail in the recent publication by Buxton et al. (2021) op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible. Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

with respect to environmental issues? Many ordinands have science degrees, but how often is this taken forward? Sooner or later something about the environment is going to come up in relation to local church ministry. What opportunities does the pandemic offer? Perhaps a space for reflection. What can we do differently?

### *What needs to change?*

Do we need to change the way we frame the issues? It is clear that the moral argument for creation care is overwhelming and yet it fails to convince people. Without being too anthropocentric, the impact of environmental problems on humans is often a persuasive starting point, including a focus on environmental justice for young people and for the Global South. Looking at our own survival as a species can seem very negative, so we need to find ways of connecting in a real, more 'positive' way. Breaking it down to local issues including food issues helps to deal with the overwhelming sense of helplessness. Maybe it is less about a curriculum lever and more about a culture lever. Can we create TEIs that model what Eco Churches are already doing? These issues are a priority for younger students, and we need to find a way of connecting this to leadership. Tearfund and Youthscape have undertaken research that highlights youth commitment to ecojustice and their frustration at the lack of engagement they see in the church.<sup>42</sup> The selection process for new ministers to begin training (BAP in the Church of England) is all about the individual and their particular gifts. How can we shift this expectation to formation in community to serve a church that serves the world?

We will need to present more nuanced, relational worldviews, which can respond to political issues and issues of power. In striving for what Pope Francis has called 'ecological conversion' we will need to move away from technological fixes. We should encourage the shift to longer-term thinking. Agrarian accounts and Orthodox theological views have much to teach us and can be new lenses for re-thinking human and corporate behaviours. We need to rediscover a sense that the church exists for the sake of the world, and that this is both an individual and a corporate struggle.

What attitude and structure should the leadership of TEIs seek to adopt in the light of the new pedagogy, and what changes might be envisaged within TEIs? How is change achieved within each TEI structure? What is driving the leadership to take certain decisions? The drivers often come from denominations.

### *Theology*

A lot of environmental theology is central to theology. What is the human place in creation? It is quite likely that some of that has already been said elsewhere in the curriculum. It is also important that tutors are ready with the resources on this issue within their subject

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<sup>42</sup> Youthscape and Tearfund. 'Burning Down the House, How the church could lose young people through climate inaction', The Youthscape Centre for Research (2021). <https://weare.tearfund.org/burning-down-the-house/> (accessed 25 March 2021)

area. We need to do some work around reworking our doctrines of 'sin' and 'hope' to grapple with ecological crisis. A robust but humble theology of hope is pretty urgently required.<sup>43</sup>

The theological paradigm and metanarrative needs changing. A historical analysis of western theology is important. Too often we have seen dualism, anthropocentrism, a sacred versus secular divide, and individualism. We need to contrast these ideas with more holistic and indigenous worldviews. We need dualities not dualism, and a broad range of student viewpoints, both theological and scientific. We should change how we teach doctrine and align this with practical training. What forms us is music and worship, but that rarely reflects an integral biblical worldview. Does our worship in colleges reflect these issues?

The kinds of texts we use in teaching is an important issue. Everyone has their own favourite texts, but we have to be careful about the dating and the agendas of these. Moltmann addresses these issues but he is slightly out of favour today.<sup>44</sup> David Ford and David Clough have done some good work on retrieving the classics.<sup>45</sup>

Our theology should not be driven by anxiety, fear and gloom. We are used to news being bad news, but we are in the business of good news. There needs to be a shift in our theology to be more empowering: what is the good news we can speak into this situation? There is a need to respond to despair, and to bring together hope and grief. In this respect the recent book, *Words for a Dying World* edited by Hannah Malcolm is a useful resource.<sup>46</sup>

We also need to think about personal spirituality as well as theology. How does environmental theology intersect with your spiritual direction? We should help in the development of the spiritual disciplines and psychological practices that are required. Laura Yordy considers that patience is a key virtue for addressing the ecological crisis.<sup>47</sup>

### *Importance in Curriculum*

We need to ask the question: what are the environmental skills needed for clergy? Is there a limit to how far you can go in practice? For example, can we look at the complexity of natural systems, and how would you integrate that understanding? This needs to be brought in not just theoretically but regarded as practical skills for ministry. Ministers will probably encounter an environmental challenge in their communities or church(es), and they are going to need to be equipped to respond effectively.

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<sup>43</sup> Margot R. Hodson and Martin J. Hodson eds, *Environment and Hope*. *Anvil* 29(1) (2013) pp. 1–129. The whole journal is available to be downloaded free at <https://jri.org.uk/publications/environment-and-hope> (accessed 16 March 2021)

<sup>44</sup> e.g. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985).

<sup>45</sup> e.g. David Clough, *On Animals: Volume One - Systematic Theology*. (London: T & T Clark, 2012); David F. Ford, *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918 (The Great Theologians)* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> Hannah Malcolm, ed. *Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church*. (London: SCM Press, 2020).

<sup>47</sup> Laura R. Yordy, *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God*. (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2008).

We face difficult choices as to what we teach. What are we willing to let go of? There are competing priorities and finding the right balance between conventional and environmental approaches may be difficult. Durham assessment criteria can be changed to include environmental understanding. We are often addicted to particular styles of pedagogy and these too can be developed and enhanced when including an environmental dimension in our teaching.

We need to recognise that we cannot influence people that much in two or three years, and that what TEIs can do is part of a bigger continuum from what students have already absorbed through their prior church membership, for example from weeknight small groups, through to post-ordination training. If there is a person in each centre keeping an eye on eco-themes, does it need to be direct teaching, or can someone look at the broader picture so that there is not an 'eco-theme' but a reorientation of the whole curriculum? For this to happen tutors in all the different subject areas need to be on board with the idea.

Realistically major changes in the curriculum are likely to be slow, so what could happen now or within the next three years? If colleagues in TEIs were willing, with the leadership of centres, they should look across the curriculum at what elements are already constructive. They could then see what could be tweaked with relatively little effort.

An important issue that was mentioned a number of times during the consultation was that environmental teaching in TEIs needs to be addressed at denominational level. If the topic could be included in the formation criteria for ministerial training within each denomination that will go some way to dictating what is delivered and prioritised within TEIs. This will particularly be the case with the Church of England and will require Common Awards and specifications for ministry to reflect environmental concerns.

### *Integration within the Curriculum*

A key point raised by a number of participants and groups at the consultation was the need to integrate environmental material across the whole curriculum: liturgy and worship; church history; ethics; mission; doctrine; Old and New Testament; and spirituality. Just as we look at all modules and how they address black theology and gendered theology, we should be asking the same questions of the environment. Specialist modules are vitally important but need suitable teaching staff. These units are realistically the only places where students will be able to learn about the environmental issues that face us (see above). But more is needed and, whether or not specialist modules are currently available, integration across the whole syllabus should be attempted. We should use a grid or transversal approach where issues around creation care are addressed across the spectrum of courses offered within the college. We also need to think intentionally about what kind of placements we provide. Could we deliberately place students in Eco Churches? Dissertations and placements create an opportunity for integration, and supervisors can ensure that environmental impacts are considered in the context of themes such as business as mission and social entrepreneurship. What might a new pedagogy and missiology look like, that seeks to integrate environment into the curriculum of TEIs? This idea was at the core of the

environmental theology discussions at the consultation in Prague in 2006, and in the subsequent publication.<sup>48</sup> It may be that its time has finally come.

### *Experiential Learning*

Learning about the environment should be about formation and not just information. It could be a 'both and' approach, changing both hearts and minds, and all needs to work in a coordinated way. How do we connect up personal and corporate spiritual disciplines with our creatureliness and embeddedness in a Christian world? Worship outside when the weather allows should be encouraged. Direct experience and contact with the natural world is desirable, and outdoor teaching in creation, relating to land and farming are beneficial. Creative assessments to get students engaging with nature are possible. This is very much the approach suggested by Buxton et al. (2021).<sup>49</sup> One participant wholeheartedly agreed with this approach, but found that it was difficult to find time either in or outside of the timetable. They resorted to setting assignments which involved the students doing their own fieldwork on local environmental issues.

### *Embedded in College Practices*

Experiential learning leads on to formational lifestyle issues that could be modelled through the management of the college. Issues such as food, waste management, energy and use of resources are all areas where sustainable practices in college can become lifelong habits in ministry. We need to consider the environmental policy and ethos for institutions as a whole, so that in each sub-area it is assumed to be a part of the institutional agenda and focus. This agenda needs to be identified as a strategic priority and then owned by the Principal, Bursar, Facilities Manager, the Head Chef and others. We should address each part of the leadership structure, not just teaching, but operations and fabric. It needs to be woven into the structure and worked out across the whole estate of a TEI. Ministry training will then have a holistic approach, rather than it being corralled. Ideally, we need a taught and lived curriculum, developing thoughts, habits and an environmentally responsible lifestyle.

### *Environmental Mission*

It can be useful to ask in what ways can the Church make a contribution in this area? What are the Church's distinctive charisms? We should have a joined-up way of thinking about the spiritual, the environmental and human wellbeing. We should have a worldwide focus and a sense of equity of value across the globe for people and ecology. We should be both receptive and active. Moreover, we should go beyond thinking that 'education' will solve everything.

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<sup>48</sup> Weaver and Hodson (2007) op. cit.

<sup>49</sup> Buxton et al. (2021) op. cit.



As Dave Bookless mentioned in his presentation, the 5<sup>th</sup> Mark of Mission of the Anglican Communion is, 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.'<sup>50</sup> We tend to treat the Five Marks as 'activities of mission' but if we treated them as 'marks' it would be more integrated. In this case 'when authentic mission happens, these five things occur'. But we might have to move the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Marks up the agenda for a season, to rebalance things. It would be a bold and prophetic act for a TEI to say that their strategic priority is the Fifth Mark of Mission, and that will be the lens through which they will do training. But this would need support of central Church!

### *Problems*

We have to acknowledge that there is resistance to the environmental agenda within TEIs as well. Some of this has to do with the theological position taken by the TEI, and some denominations can also provide challenges if they show little interest in environmental concerns. Often there is resistance to adding another topic to an already packed syllabus. A key problem mentioned by a number of participants was that the survival of the church often takes precedence. There can be obsession with numbers, decline and money. College principals are often too busy and are seeking to balance many competing agendas. There needs to be a radical change of the dominant narrative. We need to be liberated from a narrative of decline and anxiety and to recover the narrative of good news.

### *Examples of Good Practice*

One example of good practice that was mentioned by a number of participants was the appointment of champions within the faculty and on the leadership team to keep them alert and focussed. We need to ensure that there is a green voice in the room.

It is good to congratulate progress has already been made.<sup>51</sup> Things are happening in terms of content and in picking up these issues. The first TEI to gain an Eco Church Bronze award was St Hild College in July 2017.<sup>52</sup> Ripon College, Cuddesdon announced that they had a Bronze award on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021. We should also congratulate the nine TEIs that were granted 'Science for Seminaries' awards on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021.<sup>53</sup> Although the scope of these grants will be broad, including topics like artificial intelligence, cosmology and creation/evolution, we would hope that environmental science will also be among the topics considered. Trinity College, Bristol, has an Environmental Policy Implementation Group (EPIG). At both St. Mellitus and Ripon College Cuddesdon there is a green champion

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<sup>50</sup> Anglican Communion. Marks of Mission. op. cit.

<sup>51</sup> The editors are aware that this section is not comprehensive and would welcome information of initiatives in other TEIs.

<sup>52</sup> St Hild College. Eco Church Bronze Award 2017 (21st July 2017) <https://www.sthild.org/news/eco-church-bronze-award-2017> (accessed 1 April 2021)

<sup>53</sup> Helen Billam, 'Science for Seminaries Award Winners Announced', ECLAS (19 March 2021). <https://www.eclasproject.org/science-for-seminaries-award-winners-announced/> (accessed 23 March 2021)

on the senior leadership team. The green team at St. Mellitus is considering how to embed these issues in all modules. The curriculum already includes environmental ethics.

### *Further Resources*

A number of delegates suggested resources that might be useful in taking this work forward. A Rocha hosts a resource hub that includes videos, bible studies and talks.<sup>54</sup> The Lausanne Movement has a series of 12 short videos on creation care.<sup>55</sup> Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science (ECLAS) has some work which considers environmental issues and there is some overlap with their 'Science for Seminaries' initiative.<sup>56</sup> The John Ray Initiative has a useful resources page.<sup>57</sup> Tearfund have a good set of climate resources as part of the Reboot Campaign including The Climate Emergency Toolkit.<sup>58</sup> For interfaith work on seminaries see the work of The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development.<sup>59</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond's new book, *Theological Ethics through a Multispecies Lens. The Evolution of Wisdom, Volume 1*<sup>60</sup> has a useful video of the launch associated with it.<sup>61</sup>

There is a need for common drop-in resources (videos, TED talks, PDFs) that could be added into the Common Awards resources hub and similar locations for different denominations.

## **Conclusion**

As the environmental crisis deepens this century, it is vital that we provide training and formation for ministers to be effective leaders and ministers of the Gospel in the challenging contexts that they are likely to face. They will be ministering in communities who might be impacted by severe weather events, future pandemics, challenges of land use change and potential food shortages. They will be part of a global church with communities in low-income countries facing even more severe outcomes with few resources to meet them. They will be seeking to engage and support young people who are deeply committed to eco-justice. As community leaders, they will be asked to take forward initiatives to mitigate the

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<sup>54</sup> A Rocha International. At your service. <https://atyourservice.arocha.org/en/> (accessed 15 March 2021)

<sup>55</sup> Lausanne Movement. Lausanne Global Classroom: Creation Care. <https://www.lausanne.org/lausanne-global-classroom/creation-care-episode> (accessed 15 March 2021)

<sup>56</sup> ECLAS. Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science. <https://www.eclasproject.org/> (accessed 15 March 2021)

<sup>57</sup> The John Ray Initiative, Resources. <https://jri.org.uk/> (accessed 15 March 2021)

<sup>58</sup> Tearfund Reboot Campaign, [www.tearfund.org/campaigns/reboot-campaign](http://www.tearfund.org/campaigns/reboot-campaign) and the Climate Emergency Tool Kit, <https://www.climateemergencytoolkit.com> (accessed 25 March 2021)

<sup>59</sup> The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development. United Religions Initiative. Reflections on the Importance of Ecology in Seminary. (5 June 2017) <https://www.uri.org/uri-story/20170605-reflections-importance-ecology-seminary> (accessed 15 March 2021)

<sup>60</sup> Celia E. Deane-Drummond, *Theological Ethics through a Multispecies Lens. The Evolution of Wisdom, Volume 1*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>61</sup> Laudato Si' Research Institute, Campion Hall, University of Oxford, Book Launch: Celia Deane-Drummond, "Theological Ethics through a Multispecies Lens" (17 November 2020) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRot7efEzPE> (accessed 15 March 2021)

worst effects of the crisis by making huge shifts in lifestyle and community living. They will also find themselves needing to support others suffering from mental health issues triggered by these difficult circumstances. Our present and future ministers are going to need to be resourced theologically, missiologically and practically to live out an effective message of hope in this challenging and uncertain world.

To be able to adequately understand the environmental crisis, we recommend that the incorporation of environmental teaching and learning within TEI syllabuses and practices is now an urgent issue. Some teaching on the environmental issues themselves will be very helpful. Specific modules on environmental theology and related topics are highly desirable and we hope their popularity will increase. The integration of an environmental perspective across the curriculum is essential to enable the world-view shift that is needed for future church leaders to engage effectively. Ideally teaching should go beyond the classroom and experiential learning is desirable. If the environment and creation care are to be taken seriously by TEIs, then they need to be made formation criteria by denominations for the training of ministers.

The shift in approach should not only be in the curriculum but also in management and lifestyle. There is a need for TEIs to model good environmental practice with their buildings, land, food, and use of transport. Environmental sustainability should become a core element of lifestyle formation. Outlooks and habits which students form in training continue on into ministry, creating a key opportunity to shape lifestyle modelling.

Finally, after all the very fruitful discussions above the group came together to consider the ways forward. There was much discussion about whether we should establish a formal network of theological educators who will help to equip TEIs to train ministers to meet the challenges of this century, in the light of the environmental crisis. It was decided not to do so immediately, but delegates were keen to keep meeting together to share good practice. Denominational networks might be developed as commitment grows. We could explore the potential of working with Eco Church – a number of colleges are now registered with them, and that would provide a ready-made route to keep up the momentum. It could be that all of these initiatives are needed.

## Participants

*The following people took part in the consultation:*

Les Batty, Lincoln School of Theology: Tutor in Environmental Theology

John Bimson, Trinity College Bristol: Emeritus Lecturer in Old Testament

Celia Deane Drummond, Laudato Si' Research Institute, Campion Hall, University of Oxford: Director and Senior Research Fellow in Theology

Chris Ducker, ForMission College: Principal

Steve Finamore, Bristol Baptist College: Principal

Dave Gregory, Baptist Union: Former President, Founder of BU Environmental Network (BUEN)

Gary Hall, The Queens Foundation Birmingham: Methodist Oversight Tutor and Lecturer in Practical Theology

Liz Hoare, Wycliffe Hall: Tutor in Spiritual Formation and Dean for Women

Ian McIntosh, Church of England: Head of Formation

Sarah Pawlett-Jackson, St Mellitus London: Tutor and Chair of the 'Green Team'

Matt Prior, St Mellitus: Tutor in Ethics

Paul Roberts, Trinity College Bristol: Tutor in Worship and Church History

Susie Snyder, Ripon College Cuddesdon: Director of Part time Pathway

Robert Song, Durham University: Professor of Theology and Ethics

Humphrey Southern, Ripon College Cuddesdon: Principal

## Team facilitating the Consultation

**Dave Bookless is Director of Theology for A Rocha International**, working to embed creation care into global and international Christian organizations, theological institutions, and mission movements. Dave is an Anglican minister, serving in multicultural parishes in Southall. He is a well-known speaker and writer on Creation Care.

**Martin Hodson is Operations Director with the John Ray Initiative (JRI)** and Principal Tutor for CRES (Christian Rural and Environmental Sciences) a distance learning course based at Cuddesdon and partnered by JRI and A Rocha UK. He is former Principal Lecturer in Environmental Biology at Oxford Brookes University and continues with some research and teaching. He specialises in making science accessible to Christian audiences especially in the context of the environmental crisis.

**Margot Hodson is Director of Theology and Education for JRI** and is an Anglican minister serving in rural parishes in West Oxfordshire. She is Associate Tutor for Environmental Theology and Rural Mission and Ministry at Ripon College Cuddesdon and is a member of

Grove Ethics editorial group. Margot has been Training Incumbent for five curates. The Hodsons have published several books together and speak widely on faith and environment.

**Ian Jones is Director of St Peter's Saltley Trust** and is a historian and social researcher specialising in Christianity and social change in modern and contemporary Britain.

**Andy and Carol Kingston-Smith, are co-founders of the JusTice Initiative**, and are experts in the interaction between socio-political issues, theology, environment and justice. Andy is Postgraduate Programme Director at ForMission College and previously Lecturer in Justice and Mission. Carol is a freelance lecturer, writer and researcher.

### Organisations

*The team facilitating the consultation are from the following organisations:*

**A Rocha** is a Christian organization engaging communities in nature conservation. A Rocha is present in 21 countries around the world and has a commitment to partnerships, cross cultural understanding, sustainability and equipping Christians and churches to care for the environment. <https://www.arocha.org/>

**St Peter's Saltley Trust** is a charity committed to supporting and developing innovative work in three main spheres: Christian learning, discipleship and theological education; the churches' work in, and contribution to, the FE and lifelong learning sectors; and religious education in schools. <https://www.saltleytrust.org.uk/>

**The Church of England Environmental Working Group** brings together experts to help oversee, advise and support the CofE Environment Programme, which aims to support, encourage, and enable the whole Church to pray, speak and act prophetically on environmental issues, which threaten the flourishing of the whole of creation. <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/policy-and-thinking/our-views/environment-and-climate-change/about-our-environment-1#na>

**The JusTice Initiative** was founded in 2010 to facilitate and focus Christian engagement with justice related socio-political, economic and environmental issues. <https://justiceadvocacyandmission.wordpress.com/>

**The John Ray Initiative (JRI)** is an educational charity with a vision to bring together scientific and Christian understandings of the environment in a way that can be widely communicated and lead to effective action. JRI's mission is to promote responsible environmental stewardship in accordance with Christian principles and the wise use of science and technology. <https://www.jri.org.uk/>

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- Grove Booklets. JRI has gathered over 20 Grove Booklets on environmental themes on to one webpage: <https://jri.org.uk/resources/green-grove/>