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Original publication:

Gärtner, Claudia

Climate Crisis, Corona and Christianity. Religious Education for Sustainable Development in a Wounded World

in: Jan Niklas Collet/ Judith Gruber/ Wietske de Jong-Kumru/ Christian Kern/ Sebastian Pittl / Stefan Silber / Christian Tauchner (eds.), *Doing Climate Justice. Theological Explorations*, pp. 141–157 Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 2022 (Religion and Transformation in Contemporary European Society 21)

https://doi.org/10.30965/9783657795314_011

Access to the published version may require subscription.

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Climate Crisis, Corona and Christianity.

Religious Education for Sustainable Development in a wounded world

Abstract

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has set itself the goal of empowering adolescents to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) proclaimed by the UN. The following chapter discusses the extent to which Religious Education can be linked to ESD. It is shown that ESD sometimes does not make conflicts of interest or ideological blind spots transparent, which need to be critically analysed by RE. This reveals dilemmas that a politically oriented religious ESD has to deal with. How these dilemmas can be dealt with in Religious Education is finally illustrated by an example.

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1. Introduction

This chapter discusses what Religious Education (RE) can contribute to mitigating the climate crisis and to promoting climate justice. In many debates about the importance of (religious) education in dealing with the climate crisis, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the UN "Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development" are the horizon of the discussion. These 17 goals also represent my starting point: no poverty, no hunger, good health, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, clean energy, good jobs and economic growth, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption, protect the planet, life below water, life on land, peace and justice, and partnership for the goals.

These 17 SDGs are intended to lead to a sustainable global society by 2030. Quality Education is part of a sustainable world too. This fourth goal aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”¹ At the same time, education is assigned a key function in achieving the 17 SDGs. Target 4.7 aims to “ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development,

¹ UN, *Transforming Our World: The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development* A/RES/70/1 (2015), accessed February 15, 2021,

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>.

including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.” (Target 4.7)

Because the 17 SDGs are so prominent and widespread in the sustainability discourse, RE should reflect on how it wants to or can contribute to achieve target 4.7. To do this, it is necessary in a first step to take an in-depth, critical look at the conception of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (paragraph 2). In a further step, I will outline guiding principles for a politically oriented RE (paragraph 3), and I will discuss problems that are related to them on the basis of four dilemmas (chapter 4). Finally, I concretize my considerations by means of a religious learning arrangement (chapter 5).

2. Education for Sustainable Development – critical remarks

In order to implement the ambitious goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda, UNESCO was mandated to initiate, coordinate, implement and evaluate a wide range of measures and actions.² In this regard, the UNESCO “aims to improve access to quality education on sustainable development at all levels and in all social contexts, to transform society by reorienting education and by helping people to develop knowledge, skills, values and behaviours that are needed for sustainable development. It is about including sustainable development issues, such as climate change and biodiversity into teaching and learning. Individuals are encouraged to be responsible actors who resolve challenges, respect cultural diversity and contribute to creating a more sustainable world.”³ I will now highlight and reflect on several aspects of this objective.

UNESCO wants people to „develop knowledge, skills, values and behaviours needed for sustainable development.” Although – in contrast to AGENDA 2030 – the development of values are an aim, the competences remain purely formal. No normative orientation is given, except for vague references to concepts of diversity and sustainability. In this way, ESD ties in with concepts of competence-orientated didactics, which are often criticised, especially from the perspective of religious and political education, as being content-free and uncritical. This

² UNESCO, *Education 2030. Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4* (Incheon, Republic of Korea, 2015).

³ UNESCO: Education for Sustainable Development, accessed...<https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development>.

would “dilute education to ‘skills formulas’”⁴. Based on evaluated international ESD projects, Huckle and Wals conclude: „From the review it is quite clear that the ethical dimension is rather weak, if not absent, in most of the documents and cases reviewed.”⁵ In the following, we will show whether and how theology and RE in particular can offer more ethical guidance.

The second aspect to be emphasized in target 4.7 is the focus on the individuals who “are encouraged to be responsible actors.” This individualizes the problem solving. “Instead of a critique of and sensitisation to the contradictions of global socialisation, the responsibility for balancing them is transferred to the subjects in the form of a ‘competence to shape’.”⁶ Ideland and Malmberg coin the term “eco-certified child.”⁷ In this way, they express that such education primarily places the responsibility for sustainability on the growing subject. “The individual becomes responsible for ‘everybody’s’ security and for the ecological system of the world. This individual focus tends to make conflicts of interests or ideological standpoints invisible.”⁸ In this way, ESD not only runs the risk of overwhelming children and young people and possibly overburdening them morally, but this can also be accompanied by a depoliticization of sustainability. „The political muscles are atrophied when the problems are placed on the shoulders of individual children who, despite their lack of income, suffrage, and established channels for making their voices heard in society, are expected to be able to change the world through rational, individual actions. This means

⁴ Peter Euler, “Nachhaltigkeit und Bildung: Plädoyer für ein sachhaltiges Verstehen herrschender Widersprüche,” in *Krisen- und Transformationsszenarios: Frühkindpädagogik, Resilienz & Weltaktionsprogramm*, ed. Umweltdachverband GmbH, Forum edition Jahrbuch (Wien: Forum Umweltbildung, 2014), 171. All German quotations in this article are translated by the author.

⁵ John Huckle and Arjen E.J. Wals, “The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development: Business as Usual in the End,” *Environmental Education Research* 21, no. 3 (2015): 500, accessed November 14, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2015.1011084>.

⁶ Yvonne Kehren *Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung: Zur Kritik eines pädagogischen Programms* (Baltmannsweiler, 2016), 135.

⁷ Malin Ideland and Claes Malmberg, “Governing ‘Eco-Certified Children’ Through Pastoral Power: Critical Perspectives on Education for Sustainable Development,” *Environmental Education Research* 21, no. 2, accessed December 7, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2013.879696>.

⁸ Ideland and Malmberg, “Governing ‘eco-certified children’ through pastoral power: critical perspectives on education for sustainable development,” 181.

that the possibilities for real change may perhaps disappear.”⁹ An ESD oriented in this way can then contribute to the stabilization of social conditions described by the concept of “sustainable non-sustainability”¹⁰.

Even a brief glance at teaching materials underlines this tendency:¹¹ saving water, buying second-hand or ecologically certified clothes, collecting rubbish or eating a low-meat diet are suggestions for action that are mostly discussed affirmatively in subject units on the preservation of creation. A (religious) ESD oriented in this way “helps to reassure and temporarily occupy children, but disguises the fact that the problems are bigger and thus overall reinforces a reassurance narrative.”¹²

The third aspect to be highlighted is the solution-oriented perspective of target 4.7. EDS encourages individuals to „resolve challenges, respect cultural diversity and contribute to creating a more sustainable world.“ Accordingly, Haan and Kamp, who developed one of the most influential conceptions of ESD, state: Students “identify and demonstrate procedures for reaching agreements on goals and processes of sustainable and equitable development in the face of normative and political differences (e.g. in the form of simulation games, mediations) [...and] can constructively manage differences of opinion and conflicts in relation to issues of (non-)sustainable development”¹³. Possible fundamental conflicts between the economic, ecological and social sustainability goals remain unnamed and tend to be concealed. Looking at the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), Huckle and Wals therefore conclude: “UNESCO has trimmed and tamed the Decade of Education for Sustainable

⁹ Malin Ideland *The Eco-Certified Child: Citizenship and Education for Sustainability and Environment* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), accessed December 7, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00199-5>, 136.

¹⁰ Ingolfur Blühdorn et al., eds., *Nachhaltige Nicht-Nachhaltigkeit: Warum die ökologische Transformation der Gesellschaft nicht stattfindet* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2019), <http://www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-4516-3>.

¹¹ Malin Ideland, *The Eco-Certified Child: Citizenship and Education for Sustainability and Environment* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), accessed December 7, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00199-5>.

¹² Ingo Reuter, „Fridays for Future“ – Über Klimaschwankungen Im Öffentlichen Diskurs Angesichts Des Widerstandes Junger Menschen Gegen Den Totalitarismus Der Sachzwänge,“ *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik und Theologie* 72, no. 3 (2020): 322, accessed December 18, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zpt-2020-0035>.

¹³ Gerhard de Haan and Georg Kamp, *Nachhaltigkeit Und Gerechtigkeit* (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2008), accessed September 13, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-85492-0>, 240.

Development so that it does not challenge neoliberalism and fails to develop GESC [Global Education for Sustainability Citizenship].”¹⁴

It is insightful – and hopeful – that the latest UNESCO framework paper on ESD is unusually clear about the conflicting aspects of the SDGs, especially between individual sustainable actions and non-sustainable structures. „As much as attention is required for what is happening at the individual level in relation to transformative decisions and experience, there is a need for ESD to focus more on deep structural causes. The relationship between economic growth and sustainable development is one of the pertinent issues in this regard.”¹⁵ Here it becomes clear, at least to some extent, that the concept of sustainability as an *umbrella term* runs the risk of obscuring conflicting goals, which is probably why sustainability is currently met with such broad approval. Such a broad concept of sustainability is therefore compatible with the economy without necessarily implying socio-ecological objectives. Therefore, UNESCO calls for ESD to “raise critical and structural questions”¹⁶.

This brief analysis of target 4.7 already reveals sensitive aspects of ESD. Without going into these debates in detail here, general points of criticism of ESD can be summarised. ESD is the most widespread, influential concept that RE has to deal with. But the concept of sustainability that guides ESD has an economic origin.¹⁷ ESD does not always make the possible dominance of economic goals transparent. Ultimately, ESD has a strong anthropocentric alignment and views nature as a resource for (only a few) people. At the same time, ESD can also be seen as an attempt to transfer the solving of ecological and social problems to future generations. Significantly, it is an Education *for* (!) Sustainable Development and thus already points to a

¹⁴ Huckle and Wals, “The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development: business as usual in the end”, 497.

¹⁵ UNESCO, “Framework for the Implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Beyond 2019,” 2020, Annex II, Art. 4,8f, accessed December 7, 2020.

¹⁶ UNESCO, “Framework for the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) beyond 2019,” Annex II, Art. 5.7.

¹⁷ The concept of sustainability originated in forestry and is subject to an economic logic in that nature is primarily regarded as a resource to be preserved for the economic system. Cf. Thomas Prescher, *Das Nachhaltigkeitsdogma: Wie Wir Lassen, Was Wir Tun Sollen*, 1. Auflage, Versorgung gestalten (2019); Iris Pufé, *Nachhaltigkeit*, 3., überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage, utb 8705 (Konstanz, München: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH; UVK/Lucius, 2017), <http://www.utb-studi-e-book.de/9783838587059>; Ursula Kluwick and Evi Zemanek, eds., *Nachhaltigkeit Interdisziplinär: Konzepte, Diskurse, Praktiken Ein Kompendium*, utb Kulturwissenschaft (2019).

possible functionalization of education in the title. Thus, RE should not seamlessly continue ESD. The following chapter therefore analyzes which accentuations RE can or should contribute to ESD.

3. Political Religious Education for Sustainable Development

RE has a normative orientation and is value-based. Religious ESD is to be oriented in this respect. Within the framework of this essay, I cannot explore the question of how RE can be normatively oriented not only in the denominational, catechetical context, but also in the state school system, in detail.¹⁸ The following thoughts must therefore be reflected contextually in the respective education system.

Both biblical scriptures and Christian traditions offer great potential resources for overcoming the climate crisis. Since this potential has already been developed in other contributions to the multi-authored volume from a biblical, historical or systematic-theological perspective, I will content myself here with a few keywords on subjects that are particularly relevant for RE.¹⁹

- Christianity has many spiritual, liturgical and aesthetic resources. ESD often has a more cognitive orientation. However, attitudes that lead to changed, sustainable actions are hardly transformed by cognitive learning settings. What is needed here is experience-oriented, holistic learning. The spiritual, liturgical and aesthetic dimensions of Christianity offer rich learning opportunities.
- The Christian theology of poverty and fasting offers a link to current debates on sufficiency and *buen vivir*.²⁰ From the perspective of RE, it is particularly relevant that poverty in Christianity does not mean romanticizing the plight of the poor, stabilizing the gap between rich and poor or renouncing something, but rather freedom for something (new): to become free from abundance, from things that keep us from the essential, in order to become free for God and the world. Christian theology and

¹⁸ In Germany, this is possible because RE is taught as a confession-oriented subject. RE teachers teach the subject from the perspective of the respective denomination, whereby they have to present and discuss the respective topics in a multi-perspective and also in a controversial way. Students must not be overwhelmed by the content and have the right to opt out of RE. Notwithstanding this, the confessional orientation of RE is not uncontroversial in Germany.

¹⁹ Cf. Claudia Gärtner, *Klima, Corona Und Das Christentum: Religiöse Bildung Für Nachhaltige Entwicklung in Einer Verwundeten Welt* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2020), 83–106.

²⁰ Cf. Alberto Acosta, "Das „Buen Vivir“: Die Schaffung Einer Utopie," *Juridikum*, no. 4 (2009).

spirituality can tie in with lifestyle movements such as *minimalism*, which seeks to reduce material possessions in order to achieve more freedom and quality of life.²¹

- Political theology, especially Johann Baptist Metz, has defined religion as “interruption”²². When adolescents are confronted with religious traditions or themes in RE, they can interrupt the daily life of the students. RE can invite students to try out looking at their lives from a different perspective. Religion can thus, at least temporarily, interrupt the usual view of the world and change familiar logics.
- At the Fridays for Future demonstrations there are posters that quote: “We are unstoppable! Another world is possible!” The conviction that the world can be different is a profoundly Christian hope, unfolded in theological concepts of otherness, eschatology and creation. The belief in God’s otherness, in his eschatological redemption of creation, can release power to fight for precisely this other world. RE can encourage students that the present society, economy and politics are not without any alternative. The TINA-word view²³ is a deeply un-Christian perspective.
- From a Christian perspective, RE not only aims at changing individual actions, but is fundamentally based on ideas of a different, more just world. Jesus’s message of the Kingdom of God calls Christians to engage in changing social, political, economic and cultural structures in order to preserve creation, even if in history and in the present, Christian practice does not always correspond to Jesus' message. RE has therefore always to be politically oriented and thus defies individualistic tendencies of ESD.

²¹ However, it cannot be overlooked that lifestyle minimalism has a materialistic and individualistic orientation that contrasts with a Christian theology of poverty. (Harma-Mae Smit, “Purpose-Driven Purging Minimalism Is Not the New Christian Approach to Managing Possessions,” *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 32, no. 5 (2019), accessed February 15, 2021, <http://www.touchstonemag.com/>). Minimalism is marketed extremely successfully in the media and thus also closely rooted in the economic system, as the following bestsellers show: Joshua Becker, *The More of Less: Finding the Life You Want Under Everything You Own* (Hove: Joosr Ltd, 2016); Courtney Carver, *Soulful simplicity: How living with less can lead to so much more* (New York: Tarcher Perigee, op. 2017); Marie Kondō, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing*, 1. American ed. (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2014).

²² Johann Baptist Metz, *Glaube in Geschichte Und Gesellschaft: Studien Zu Einer Praktischen Fundamentaltheologie*, 5. Aufl., unveränd. Nachdr. der 4. Aufl. 1984, Welt der Theologie (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verl., 1992), 166.

²³ The acronym TINA alludes to the slogan “There is no alternative” often used by Margaret Thatcher, who gave economics a quasi-religious status: »Deregulation’s good, if not God.« (Laura Flanders, “At Thatcher’s Funeral, Bury TINA, Too,” accessed May 5, 2020, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/thatchers-funeral-bury-tina-too/>).

However, political Religious ESD gives rise to a variety of areas of tension. Four of the most important fields will be outlined below.²⁴

4. Dilemmas of Political Religious Education for Sustainable Development

4.1. Between normativity and plurality

RE as well as Christianity and theology in general are challenged by a plurality of world views. RE must therefore ask itself if Christian concepts, traditions, values and beliefs are still relevant and plausible in a plural and (post-)secular society. RE must neither neglect this plurality nor overwhelm its students with these values and concepts. In this perspective RE can take up three ways of dealing with this tension between normativity and plurality: Firstly, the development of normative positions in RE contexts should be transparent, reflective and controversial in confrontation with other positions. Secondly, religious norms and themes can be translated into plural, connectable, secular discourses, as, for example, suggested by Jürgen Habermas.²⁵ And thirdly, as already outlined, religion can be offered as an interruption of non-religious discourses. However, it must always be examined to what extent the specifically religious logic is preserved by the three strategies. In RE, for example, it is possible to find learning arrangements in the field of creation theology that lead to saving water or collecting rubbish. This action-orientation can undoubtedly be justified in a secular logic and is broadly connectable. However, the social and political perspectives of the theology of creation are undermined here.

4.2. Between determinism and hope of change

Ecological issues are closely interdependent with economic, social, political and cultural ones. The lives of students as well as the Christian message of hope are also deeply embedded in these diverse structures. In terms of social analysis, however, a dominance of economic logics can be recognized or one can speak of a hegemonic neoliberalism or capitalism. The Christian message of hope, the ideas of a different, good life, as well as the many spiritual, liturgical and aesthetic dimensions of Christianity are interwoven in these hegemonic structures as well as the lives of the students who encounter RE. This field of tension cannot simply be resolved

²⁴ Cf. Gärtner, *Klima, Corona und das Christentum*, 131–35, where I elaborate six dilemmas.

²⁵ Cf. Jürgen Habermas, “Vorpolitische Grundlagen des demokratischen Rechtsstaates?,” in *Dialektik der Säkularisierung: Über Vernunft und Religion*, ed. Jürgen Habermas and Florian Schuller, 7. Aufl. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2007).

pedagogically. In fact, RE must deal with it. To do so, it is indispensable to know about the effectiveness of social and economic systems so as not to succumb to them blindly. Nevertheless, the awareness of problems does not yet lead to a permanently changed practice. This mind-behaviour-gap is a serious problem for ESD as well as for a social-ecological transformation of society.²⁶ A theologically reflected way of dealing with this tension can best be described in eschatological terms. According to this, RE has to, on the one hand, deal with the tension that human thinking, behaviour and attitude can be shaped by sustainability or a social-ecological practice. On the other hand, human beings will (presumably) not succeed in comprehensively realising socio-ecological justice or climate justice, because their thinking, behaviour and attitude are at the same time characterized by repeated failure due to freedom, sinfulness and structural human guilt. A redeemed creation will only be realised through God's saving action. RE thus moves between determinism and hope of change, it initiates a preliminary practice that is completed through God. At the same time, RE nudges a refigurative practice as a repetitive creation of an utopian present in a dynamic society.²⁷

4. 3. Between self-purpose and functionalization

As already outlined, ESD tends to reduce education instrumentally to the accomplishment of future tasks. The term "Education *for* Sustainable Development" points to that. Theologically and in terms of RE, this functionalisation of education can be rejected with reference to the openness and foreignness of future tasks as well as with reference to the eschatological proviso. And yet, a political religious ESD asks about the potential of religion to enable adolescents to deal with the challenges of the multiple crises. Especially with regard to spiritual resources, this tension between self-purpose and functionalisation can be clarified. Spirituality might empower us to deal with environmental catastrophes although it does not solely have the function of

²⁶ Cf. Udo Kuckartz, "Nicht Hier, Nicht Jetzt, Nicht Ich – Über Die Symbolische Bearbeitung Eines Ernsten Problems," in *KlimaKulturen: Soziale Wirklichkeiten Im Klimawandel*, ed. Harald Welzer, Hans-Georg Soeffner and Dana Giesecke, Sozialwissenschaften 2010 (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verl., 2010), accessed April 29, 2020, https://content-select.com/media/moz_viewer/519cc3ff-8178-484a-831e-29115dbbeaba#chapter=177035&page=1; Annett Entzian, *Denn sie tun nicht, was sie wissen: Eine Studie zu ökologischem Bewusstsein und Handeln*, Transformationen Band 2 (München: Oekom, 2015); Lenelis Kruse, "Vom Handeln zum Wissen - ein Perspektivwechsel für eine Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung," in *Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung: Aktuelle theoretische Konzepte und Beispiele praktischer Umsetzung*, ed. Norbert Pütz, Martin K. W. Schweer and Niels Logemann, 1st, New ed., Psychologie und Gesellschaft 11 (Frankfurt a.M: Peter Lang GmbH Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2013).

²⁷ Cf. Michael Deflorian, "Transformative Bewegungen? Nischenaktivismus zwischen Management und Überwindung der sozial-ökologischen Krise," in *Nachhaltige Nicht-Nachhaltigkeit: Warum die ökologische Transformation der Gesellschaft nicht stattfindet*, ed. Ingolfur Blühdorn et al. (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2019), 219.

strengthening the resilience²⁸ of believers. With regard to the political dimension of religion and RE, the question also arises to what extent religion can be functionalized for political purposes. Thus, both remain: the possibility of being able to cope with present and future tasks in a more powerful and participatory way through religion and RE, and at the same time the danger of instrumentalizing religion through this. The harmonization of spirituality or mysticism and politics represents a basic tension of political theology and political religious ESD.²⁹

4.4. Between truth claim and suspicion of ideology

Even if Christianity, in its self-understanding, no longer exclusively possesses the absolute truth, it still has a claim to truth that it can normatively bring into political religious ESD. In this way, it can, for example, relativize capitalist claims to absoluteness and break through structures that are supposedly without any alternative, which means that Christianity can certainly be seen as having ideology-critical potential. At the same time, this claim to truth raises suspicion at Christianity itself for being ideological. Thus, the dominion or “mastery over nature” interpretation of Genesis plays a significant role in the millennia-long exploitation of creation.³⁰ Only through constant self- and ideology-critical reflection can absolutist truth claims be avoided. This self- and ideology-critical reflection refers to theology, to Christian tradition, but also to the role of the RE-teacher and one’s own religious practice. Political religious ESD must therefore deal with the tension between utopias of a good creation for all, which draw their visionary power from precisely this claim to truth, and its own ideological entanglements.

²⁸ Cf. on the intertwining of the concept of resilience and neoliberalism Graefe, Stefanie, Resilienz im Krisenkapitalismus. Bielefeld: transcript 2020. "While the concept of resilience, as it is used today in neoliberal discourse, makes resilience an individual, learnable competence of individuals that enables them to survive in catastrophe, for Metz historical resilience means precisely the common struggle for all people to be able to be subjects. The decisive difference here is the link between becoming a subject and solidarity". (Lis, Julia, Subjektwerdung unter neoliberalen Bedingungen. Politische Theologie im Kampf um das Humane. In: Hans-Gerd Janßen, Julia D. E. Prinz und Michael J. Rainer (Hg.), Theologie in gefährdeter Zeit. Stichworte von nahen und fernen Weggefährten für Johann Baptist Metz zum 90. Geburtstag. Berlin, Münster: Lit-Verlag 2018, 288.

²⁹ Cf. Dorothee Sölle, *Mystik Und Widerstand: "Du Stilles Geschrei"*, 5. Aufl. (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1999); Ansgar Kreutzer, "Mystik Als Widerstand – Das Emanzipationspotenzial Von Dorothee Sölles Politisch-Mystischer Theologie Unter Den Bedingungen „Entgrenzter“ Arbeit," in *Kritisch-Emanzipatorische Religionspädagogik: Diskurse Zwischen Theologie, Pädagogik Und Politischer Bildung*, ed. Claudia Gärtner and Jan-Hendrik Herbst (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2020).

³⁰ Cf. Markus Vogt, *Christliche Umweltethik: Grundlagen Und Zentrale Herausforderungen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2021), 190–204.

5. Refigurative Religious Education in a monastery

In the previous chapters, I have highlighted that an ESD that is primarily strategically and formally oriented needs to be refined in terms of content. The outlined dilemmas of a political religious ESD also made it clear that these cannot be resolved theoretically, but must rather be dealt with in concrete practice. The following example of a monastery garden will therefore be used to illustrate how a political religious ESD can become concrete.³¹

At the beginning of 2020, the Federal Minister for the Environment awarded the Capuchin monastery garden in Münster a special prize of the UN Decade on Biological Diversity,³² recognizing the close link between social and ecological aspects of the monastery garden. In the middle of the city, the monastery is creating a biodiverse oasis that is a place of learning, encounter and recreation for the city's population. In addition, the monastery garden is managed inclusively by involving people with disabilities in the design and maintenance of the garden. But the experiences opened up by the monastery garden extend beyond biodiversity and social togetherness, for monastic life is also reflected there, as it also provides the nutritional basis for the monastery. This can lead to simple winter food, but also to surprisingly varied meals, as I was able to experience myself as a guest. In the middle of the week there was roast venison, donated by a forester from fallen game. The roast was prepared by a former hotel chef who prefers the monastery kitchen to the noble but hectic restaurant business. A life of poverty, living off what nature or fellow human beings give, can thus also be very opulent. Material poverty, as practised by the Capuchins, goes hand in hand with a good life for employees and the urban population as well. The monastery garden can thus be a starting point to get to know the lived poverty, community and spirituality of the Capuchins. For a Christian understanding of poverty, as it exists especially in the mendicant orders does not primarily aim at a sufficiency-based lifestyle that is ethically justified, but has a spiritual focus that understands poverty as freedom for God and the message of God's Kingdom. But at the same time, such a radical life

³¹ Cf. Gärtner, *Klima, Corona und das Christentum*, 138–42.

³² Beate Spindler, "Vereinte Nationen Zeichnen Klostergarten Der Kapuziner Aus," accessed March 20, 2020, http://www.kapuziner.de/nachrichten/nachricht-einzelansicht/news/vereinte-nationen-zeichnen-klostergarten-der-kapuziner-aus.html?tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=2056d90dfd936642a3ea1feff11f42a2.

as an other-place is also a deeply critical foil for social logics, routines and normalities and thus has political implications.

What can be learned through political religious ESD in this place? On the one hand, the garden is open every day for the citizens as an ecological and spiritual oasis that they experience on an individual basis. Visitors will find spiritual (Franciscan) impulses in the garden, e.g. from the Canticum of the Sun of St. Francis. On the other hand, spiritual gardening courses for children, young people and adults are offered in cooperation with the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU) and the Institute for Theological Zoology. The offers are thus not exclusively aimed at Christian visitors, but at the heterogeneous public. The garden can thus become a meeting place: a meeting place of people, but also of Christian tradition and post-secular society, where sustainable ways of life can be sought and discussed together. The monastery garden and monastic life can be experienced as a heterotopia in a non-sustainable, capitalist society. The Capuchins lead a life that is good for them, sustainable, in community with each other and with nature, wanting to be free for God and the needs and concerns of fellow human beings. The monastery can be interpreted as a place of transformative, sustainable community that draws from a tradition that is thousands of years old. This life is provocative not only through its vow of poverty, but also by defying hegemonic aspirations for individualization and entrepreneurial acting. Instead of a bricolage identity, a lifelong vow of *stabilitas loci* is chosen.³³ Renouncing material wealth does not only represent renunciation, but also liberates for social, ecological and spiritual wealth. Transformation research emphasizes the relevance of such sustainable forms of life, even if they exist in the niches of society. For it is there that alternative forms of life would be discovered or preserved, which can be inspiring for a sustainable transformation society. But can this radical otherness, this monastic heterotopia be productively introduced into learning processes, since too much foreignness can also prevent learning processes?

The monastery garden is an encouraging example of how sustainable living can succeed. Encouraging learning settings are more likely to lead to learning successes than so-called

³³ The innovative function of monasteries was already underlined by Johan Baptist Metz when he described them as productive role models of the Church, which, however, are themselves always faced with the challenge of radically and consistently living the discipleship of Christ. (Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, *Zeit Der Orden? Zur Mystik U. Politik D. Nachfolge*, 6. Aufl. (Freiburg: Herder, 1986), S. 10).

“disaster didactics”³⁴, which can lead to reactance. In addition, visiting a monastery garden follows principles of holistic learning. The garden invites to discover and marvel at biodiversity and is a local place of sustainable living situated in the lifeworld. The ecological practice is impressive, possibly detached from its religious context. Accordingly, nature conservation associations are also offering learning arrangements here. But the monastery garden can open a bridge to spiritual perception and religious traditions as well. Thus, low-threshold offers for spiritual gardening are made for young people, and the religious roots of the monastery community can also be experienced through participation in liturgy, prayer or pastoral opportunities – and this not in a purely cognitive mode, but through (voluntary) participation in a lived spiritual practice. In the monastery garden, it is thus possible to learn on a bodily-aesthetic or spiritual-liturgical level how sustainable life is lived in religious tradition.

But is a visit to a monastery garden interesting at all for children and young people today? Doesn't monastic life stand in such stark contrast to the lifeworld of adolescents that the sustainable life of the Capuchins cannot be a model for sustainable life outside the monastery walls? To what extent can a visit to the monastery garden therefore enable sustainable thinking and action?

Such a learning setting cannot be designed as model learning or learning by example, according to which the pupils learn about a sustainable way of life during their visit to the monastery, which they should imitate or adapt. This is because the Capuchin way of life contrasts with society in many ways. For example, it is based centrally on the *stabilitas loci*, which is diametrically opposed to the fragmented, fluid and individualistic lifestyles of most milieus.³⁵ In addition, pitfalls are known from diverse RE research on (biographical) learning on models. For example, “great” unattainable role models often offer little orientation for young people. These role models are too alien, too strenuous and often too moral for adolescents to want to emulate them. However, adolescents often deal productively with other people's biographies and life plans if conflicts or difficult dilemma situations are accessible.³⁶ They open up

³⁴ Walter Gagel, “Untiefen Der Katastrophendidaktik: Von Der Ambivalenz Des Begriffs “Schlüsselprobleme”, *Politische Bildung. Beiträge zur wissenschaftlichen Grundlegung und zur Unterrichtspraxis* 27, no. 2 (1994).

³⁵ This is also a central challenge for the religious orders, which are looking for new, more flexible social forms in the face of shrinking membership. (Cf. Ulrich Engel, “Jetztzeit der Orden: Plädoyer für eine “Vita consecrata situata” unter postmodernen Bedingungen,” *Ordenskorrespondenz* 54, no. 3 (2013), S. 348).

³⁶ Cf. Hans Mendl, *Modelle - Vorbilder - Leitfiguren: Lernen an außergewöhnlichen Biografien*, 1. Auflage, Religionspädagogik innovativ 8 (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2015).

cognitive dissonances and areas of identification for their own searchings, so that experiences of difference can become relevant for their own lives.³⁷ A political religious ESD should therefore also question monastic life for possible points of conflict, failure and dilemmas. Precisely because sustainable other-places are part of an unsustainable society, they are in tension with this society both structurally-institutionally and biographically-individually. For students, it is important to perceive that religious orders also experience a “complex layering of asynchronies”³⁸ that produce diverse “experiences of irritation”³⁹. Monastic forms of life face the challenge of “facing these conflicts and practising living with dissonance”⁴⁰. In doing so, dilemma situations can become apparent that are also accessible to learners. Religious also study and work beyond the walls of the monastery. How can the demands of study and work, e.g. with regard to digitalization and internationalization, be combined with a resource-poor life? What can be done when the financial resources are not sufficient to renovate buildings to make them more energy-efficient? Or when the cherished monastery facilities are too large for the shrinking community and vacancy also entails ecological costs? At these and comparable dilemmas and questions, the boundaries between the monastery as a sustainable religious other-place and the non-sustainable living environments of young people dissolve. At these points it becomes clear that a sustainable life in a non-sustainable society is hardly possible. Monastic life is also entangled in different social, economic, ecological and religious logics. Therefore, even monastic life and monastic gardens cannot ultimately be interpreted as a prefiguration of a sustainable society, but rather as a refiguration, as the constant attempt to live sustainably in a non-sustainable society. “The existence of the order under postmodern conditions would then be understood as a *vita consecrata situialis* [...]. The first task of such a *vita consecrata situialis* would be to look for best-practice places where a different order of things can already be seen

³⁷ Cf. Konstantin Lindner, *In Kirchengeschichte verstrickt: Zur Bedeutung biographischer Zugänge für die Thematisierung kirchengeschichtlicher Inhalte im Religionsunterricht*, Arbeiten zur Religionspädagogik 31 (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2007), Zugl.: Regensburg, Univ., Diss., 2006).

³⁸ Rainer Bucher, “Die Ordensgemeinschaften in der aktuellen Transformationskrise der katholischen Kirche: Vortrag am 20. November 2012 beim Österreichischen Ordenstag in Wien-Lainz,” *Ordensnachrichten* 51, no. 6 (2012), S. 18.

³⁹ Bucher, “Die Ordensgemeinschaften in der aktuellen Transformationskrise der katholischen Kirche: Vortrag am 20. November 2012 beim Österreichischen Ordenstag in Wien-Lainz” S. 19.

⁴⁰ Ulrich Engel, “Das Andere in der alltäglichen Ordnung ansichtig machen: Zur Pastoral der Orden in einer säkularen/religionsaffinen Welt Ulrich Engel,” *Ordenskorrespondenz* 54, no. 1 (2013), S. 84.

here and now.”⁴¹ The monastery garden described could be such a place where a sustainable order of things becomes perceptible. On the one hand, this view is entirely consistent with the described spirit of eschatological hope that permeates a theology of sustainability: “Another world is possible!” On the other hand, such a situational and at the same time refigurative practice offers RE connecting factors. For monastic life itself faces the second described field of tension between determinism and hope for change (chapter 4.2), in that the religious keep trying to live differently in the non-sustainable structures of this world. In the monastery, students can recognize that religious find orientation and hope in the messianic message of the Kingdom of God, of a good creation aiming at redemption. They strive for a different, good life, and at the same time they can fail again and again. The Capuchins have to figure out again and again, contextually, situationally and also biographically, how such a life is possible in a non-sustainable society. If it is thus possible to engage in conversation with Christians about these tensions and dilemmas in religious other-places such as the monastery, then these become places where political religious ESD is initiated in the form of a refigurative RE.

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⁴¹ Engel, “Jetztzeit der Orden: Plädoyer für eine "Vita consecrata situialis" unter postmodernen Bedingungen”, S. 348.

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