Scholarly Sustainability and Lifelong Learning

Melody Layton McMahon

Catholic Theological Union
Abstract

Scholarly sustainability is a useful term for the vital issues faced by theological educators today who are responsible for creating and providing resources for discovery and study. Developing lifelong learners among our students is an important aim; however, we still need to ask how we can aid these lifelong learners once they leave our institutions for an environment of constant change. The values of sustainable scholarship, what sustainability means, funding issues for sustainable projects particularly as they apply to those in religious education, theories of lifelong learning drawn from education, neuroscience, and theology, and intersection of the concepts of scholarly sustainability and lifelong learning are engaged in this paper.
Scholarly Sustainability and Lifelong Learning

To some, the term “sustainability” might seem a bit too trendy to warrant attention for publishing and academic communication issues. However, a case can be made that sustainability is, in fact, a quite useful term for the vital issues faced by theological educators today. Developing lifelong learners among our students is an important aim; however, we still need to ask how we can aid these lifelong learners once they leave our institutions for an environment of constant change. The values of sustainable scholarship, what sustainability means, funding issues for sustainable projects particularly as they apply to those in religious education, and intersection with the concept of lifelong learning will be engaged in this paper.

Definition of and Values of Sustainability

Exactly what is meant by sustainable scholarship? Scholarship is coming rather late to the sustainability bandwagon. An article by Charles V. Kidd (1992) on the “Evolution of Sustainability” suggests that though this is not a new idea, it has gained substantial ground in a very short time to become an “influential idea in the continuing debate over the future of the world.” He points out that there can be no precise definition because the term is used in so many realms of thought. He does demand, though, that those who use the term in the future should “always state precisely what they mean by the term” (p. 3). First an explanation of the general use of the term, then its use in academic scholarship, then the precise use in this article is provided.

The first use of sustainability was in 1972 in the context of man’s future (Kidd, 1992, p. 2). Those interested in the subject have often referred to the “Three Pillars of Sustainability.”
To achieve sustainable development, the concepts of the social, the economic, and the ecological must overlap as in this Venn diagram. This may also be called the “triple bottom line” and spoken of in terms of people, profit, and planet by some businesses.¹

In just a few years—after its initial 1972 use—the term had gained currency and was being used in economic, environmental, technological, and social discussions. In fact, Wikipedia has a page called “Index of Sustainability Articles” and there are over fifty entries from A-C alone. The Brundtland report, based on a conference convened by the UN to consider environmental and natural resource issues, defined sustainability in this way: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).
The term “sustainable” seems to have first been used for scholarly communication only as recently as 2003, though educators have been discussing the broader issues involved much longer (Zorich, 2003). A 2009 conference at Pacific University stated that scholarly sustainability is: “The precise confluence of faculty/author engagement and institutional support that results in created knowledge being shared as openly as possible and being available to serve as the genesis for new ideas” (Gilman, 2009). The first Ithaka conference (2009) on scholarly sustainability was convened for those most deeply invested in creating a healthy, innovative, and sustainable eco-system for scholarly communication in the future, and to provide examples and actionable ideas that could be used in many institutions and organizations as people plan and execute strategies relating to the creation, dissemination, preservation, and funding of scholarship and other content. (Sustainable Scholarship, 2009)

In 2008, a JISC-funded Ithaka report defined sustainability as “having a mechanism in place for generating, or gaining access to, the economic resources necessary to keep the intellectual property or the service available on an ongoing basis.” However, it was soon recognized that “just keeping the lights on” leads to irrelevance, so that a definition was called for that was cognizant of the reality that services would need to continue to benefit their users. Hence, Ithaka’s newer definition states that “sustainability is the ability to generate or gain access to the resources—financial or otherwise—needed to protect and increase the value of the content or service for those who use it” (Maron, Smith, & Loy, 2009). This seems like a useful definition and is adopted as the underlying definition for this article.

Values incorporated by sustainability might be:

- Community—being in this place together, with both burdens and benefits
• Fairness—an economy and policies that support all entities equally
• Opportunity—all can thrive
• Responsibility—stewarding our inheritance well

Although these values are cited on the website of the Sightline Institute, an organization whose mission is “to make the Northwest a global model of sustainability” (Sightline Institute, n.d.), they also serve very well to explain the kind of values many theological educators, whether teaching faculty, librarians, or administrators, espouse in their work and vocations.

An article in *First Monday* discussed a more democratic form of knowledge exchange. The somewhat (maybe) jaundiced authors feel that academe is now “organized into specialist fiefdoms” and “academics are now gate-keepers of feudal knowledge castles” (Whitworth & Friedman, 2009). They argue that “journals become the gatekeepers of academic power rather than cultivators of knowledge” (Whitworth, 2009) and they repeatedly remind us that rigor is not to be equated with physically published books and journals. This belief is difficult to overcome even among theological educators whose ostensible mission has some connection to the dissemination of the word of God. All the same, it is clear that even religion and theology are not immune to the existence of “fiefdoms,” and it is naïve to assume that rigorous scholarship is manifested uniquely through established venues, such as the publication of prestigious reference works.

**Funding Issues for Sustainability**

The Ithaka document referred to earlier, *Sustaining Digital Resources*, has a section on key factors for sustainability, and surveys a variety of ways to fund projects by looking at specific online initiatives.
Currently, at seminaries, universities, and other educational institutions, the faculty and scholars both are the producers and consumers of scholarly communication. But in too many cases they still are not the disseminators of this scholarship. How many academics are becoming rich on their earnings for books they write, or journals they edit? How many universities and other scholarly institutions are subsidizing for-profit publishers by providing release time for journal editing, sabbaticals for research for books, secretarial staff to input the text of these, workplaces where all this work goes on, and on and on?

While focused for librarians, an Association of College and Research Libraries study, *Establishing A Research Agenda for Scholarly Communication*, rightly states:
With regard to public policy, universities and their libraries need to gauge their commitments to scholarly communication policy interventions and to make investment decisions about their advocacy efforts. This is necessary, for example, to differentiate the goal of “open access” from the policy compromises that may appropriately first enable “enhanced” or “sustainable” access. (ACRL Scholarly Communications Committee, 2007)

While this document takes a somewhat timid approach, constantly calling for more study, more data, it does point out that while the authors are calling for all this, the scholarship going on in many disciplines will not wait for librarians to catch up. They say, “new research, presentation, and dissemination methodologies are being used with resulting implications for libraries and their institutions seeking to balance investments in commercial publications with support for new research and publication models,” particularly for nascent interdisciplinary and inter-institutional collaborations. The article wisely concedes that there will still be room for multiple sustainable models of action—those devoted to increasing open access and those devoted to making for-profit models more sustainable (ACRL Scholarly Communications Committee, 2007).

A possible “key component” (according to Robert Schroeder, who speaks and writes on the topic of scholarly publishing) for successful sustainability is a sound not-for-profit business model—the cooperative business. This model which applies to many other types of business has been in existence for over 160 years and can be adapted for the business of scholarly publishing. He thinks that “these cooperative not-for-profit principles are the catalysts that will make academic publishing thrive” (Schroeder, 2009). Schroeder believes that SPARC is fairly close to successfully modeling this, but points to a German initiative, GAP, which is closer. He does not
mention Ithaka, but their not-for-profit model has some important similarities to the cooperative model (Schroeder and Siegel, 2006).

Open access is just one of the ways to promote sustainable scholarship. It may be especially well suited to a religious setting. It is estimated that around ten percent of Anglophone academic journals are now open access. And citation rates are higher from open access journals. Why wouldn’t scholars want to publish with an open access journal or reference work? Main answer—tenure committees still feel it is easier to equate quality with commercially produced journals and books. This will be changing as more faculty sit on editorial boards of open access journals, go through stringent peer-review with open access resources, and generally become more familiar with this model.

There are several strategies for fostering open access, but the one that seems to have the most promise in theological education is a “gold model,” where a resource makes an online edition free to all without charging author fees. This is the model being used by such journals as *Biblica, Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion, Theological Librarianship*, as well as the growing collection of open access, peer-reviewed journals of Sopher Press. This approach has much to commend it within the theological education community. There are many ways to fund such journals so that they can be open access—some journals depend on voluntary subscriptions, donations from individuals, sponsorships from companies and organizations whose logos will be displayed on their homepage, grant funding, or combinations of these types of funding. It is also used by many reference resources such as the prototype, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the Roman Catholic Denominational Group of the American Theological Library Association’s *Catholic Reference Resources*, the Catholic Research Resources Alliance’s (CRRA) “Catholic Portal” and many other highly useful research
websites. Another highly recommended reading is a SPARC report, Income Models for Open Access: An Overview of Current Practice by Raym Crow (2009). This report makes it clear that a variety of income models are available for publishers of open access journals and projects and remains to the publisher to decide which model best fits their own situation. It details aspects of demand-side and supply-side models for online open access resources.

Kidd suggested that most of the various views of sustainability (up to 1992) were ideologically driven and influenced by the “fundamentally optimistic or pessimistic personalities of prominent authors” (Kidd, 1992, p. 4). This seems likely; however, for most theological educators (at least those who are believing Christians) an added impetus for an optimistic view of sustainability can and should be based strongly on the Christian faith. If one of the presuppositions of academic work is that it is part of a continuum or cycle that demands some form of communication (usually publication of some sort), and one adds to that the value of Christianity to bring the reign of God to our world, then that demands that those who believe this do all we can to make this communication available to those around the world. North American and other western-based scholars may think that certain projects or publishers in our own sphere are sustainable, but would our brothers and sisters in Third World seminaries agree? Do they have the same access to scholarship? If open access can be sustainable, then for this global reason it is highly preferable. Christians have brought the news to a global market and now must not turn back from those wanting to move ahead as scholars of Christianity. We invite them to our institutions, we ask them to collaborate with us, we need to find ways to make the scholarly record available to them and from them in a sustainable fashion.
Lifelong Learning

Contemplation of these global issues with graduating students at Catholic Theological Union and an opportunity to work with our field education supervisors offer an opportunity to think about the intersection of lifelong learning and sustainability. Adult learners are not an homogenous group. Both students and those already working in the field are served at CTU. A growing distance education program, offering a degree or certificate, places the adult into the student group, though most of these students are indeed workers in the field already. However, they have a formal relationship with a teacher, access to resources, and are being assessed on coursework.

Richard Edwards’s book, *Changing Places? Flexibility, Lifelong Learning and a Learning Society* (1997) delineates a variety of issues surrounding lifelong learning, but his chapter on “Flexible Friends?” was particularly valuable in sorting out differences between a “student” and a “learner.” The population discussed in this paper are those who might be categorized as participants in adult education (having left higher education). Adult education has often been seen as a more formal way to bring vocational information to people who may be competing against others for better employment opportunities or for leisure, learning things that are of personal interest, a rather informal process where people will look for information that is of interest. However, there is clearly a need for a more structured approach to developing lifelong learners and doing a better job at providing them with resources than most theological and religious educators have done in the past.

Learning, conceived as a mindset, should also be seen as lifelong and life-wise, in other words occurring in every area of our lives and occurring in a range of places within and beyond the formal contexts offered by educational institutions. All learning really
becomes meaningful when there is some resonance with the everyday lifeworld of the learner. (Blewitt, 2006, p. 10)

An article by Wals and Jickling outlines the many shifts that may occur in a move to this kind of lifelong learning. They describe these as not only teacher-centered to learner-centered, as well as

From consumptive learning to discovery learning and creative problem solving; from theory dominated learning to praxis-oriented learning; from sheer knowledge accumulation to problematic issue orientation; from content-oriented learning to self-regulative learning. (2002, p. 229)

Three concepts, drawn from educational theory, neuroscience, and theology provide a basis for thinking about lifelong learning in a theological context.

First, the model of andragogy might provide some interesting insights. Andragogy, a concept that has been used since the mid-1800s, has been developed as a field of inquiry primarily mid-1950s. Andrew Knowles, who proposed and developed these theories (though not without many critics) put forth these assumptions:

1. Self-concept: *As a person matures his self concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being.*

2. Experience: *As a person matures he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.*

3. Readiness to learn: *As a person matures his readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles.*

4. Orientation to learning: *As a person matures his time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his*
orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem centredness.

5. Motivation to learn: *As a person matures the motivation to learn is internal.* (as cited in Smith, M. K., 2002, p. 3)

Students at CTU, who will become priests and lay ministers and who will be departing for service in other countries often demonstrate these qualities and ask how they can continue to learn when resources are unavailable to them in developing countries. Field education supervisors have also recently been found to demonstrate these qualities and surprisingly seem eager for resources that may be taken for granted by resident students and faculty at CTU. This demands some flexibility on the part of those who provide learning opportunities and access to resources. Relevance becomes a key factor for participation and educators and librarians must find a way to meet the needs of those who are desperate for resources to aid them in their work or their continuing theological investigations.

Second, recent cognitive neuroscience has shown that emotion is integral to the learning process. In a discussion of several well-known neuroscientists, Kathleen Rager states,

Zull (2006) explains that “Emotion is the foundation of learning. The chemicals of emotion act by modifying the strength and contribution of each part of the learning cycle. Their impact is directly on the signaling systems in each affected neuron” (p. 7). Wolfe 26 (2006) adds, “The brain, a pattern-finding organ, seeks to create meaning through establishing or refining existing neural networks; this is learning. Emotion affects what is learned and what is retained” (p. 35). In other words, there must be a strong enough emotional hook for the learner to notice something and begin the learning process. Further, the emotional component impacts the quality and strength of the neural trace or
imprint in the brain. This has important repercussions for the ability to recall what has been learned or experienced. (Rager, 2009, pp. 25-26)

The desire to serve the people of God ought to have an emotional component. Most of the CTU students and field education supervisors are clearly motivated by emotions of compassion and empathy, though others may be in evidence as well. Rager bases her study on health care patients who have a stake in their own care, but most of our people in ministry not only have the “cure of souls” as a part of their service, but also desire to make an impact on the here and now lives of those who need their service. While many workers will have a desire to be better at their occupations and have a need for vocational education, the ministerial worker has a vocation in another sense, that of being called by God to the work they do. For many this brings a higher level of devotion and higher stakes to their work than others in non-ministerial work may feel.

Third, another concept (evident within Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant faith communities alike) has been termed “divinization” or “deification”—the assertion that we are made in the image of God, and are called as worshipers to a process where we are to become more and more like God in this life, culminating in the resurrection. All of life is, to this way of seeing things, caught up in making choices to become more and more like God. Being like God can encompass so many things that it gives all Christians ways and means to use their special talents and gifts to mirror the image—creativity, healing, showing love. Gaining knowledge and intelligence are another, special way that learners mirror the image of God and gain in likeness to him.

These factors all emerge regularly in conversations with recent graduates and field education supervisors at the CTU. Every year, more students who will be leaving CTU to go to foreign countries, many to Third World countries where the information infrastructure is not
well-developed or might be non-existent, want to know how they will be able to continue to have access to the resources that are provided while they are at CTU. These students know that quality information resources will be needed for their work and are clearly passionate about their mission. Field education supervisors are motivated by the work they do within their own jobs, but also want to provide a useful experience for current students. They gain emotional satisfaction from these activities and most would say that they are striving to become more like God each day through their work.

**Sustainability and Lifelong Learning**

And this is the precise point at which sustainability and lifelong learning converge. The means of making resources sustainable and available to these ministers and lifelong learners must be found. In March of this year, the Vatican produced a statement on sustainable development (primarily about “green economy” issues) with a focus on the authentic human development of the whole person. “For development to be meaningful and sustainable it has to be human development, the development of each human in the totality of their humanity, directed towards the common good” (Permanent Observer Mission, 2011).

What role can theological educators possibly have in the pursuit of this lofty objective? Recently seminaries have been able to make the online database ATLAS for Alums available through a grant from the Lilly Foundation. JSTOR has also just started a program that allows its resources to be made available to alumni. However, JSTOR resources are still financially out of reach for many small seminaries. And it is unclear how ATLAS for Alums will be sustained if Lilly discontinues funding. Serious efforts are needed to develop resources that can be made freely available, or offered at the very least on a sliding scale, with the least possible cost to the poorest missions throughout the world.
Join Collaborative Projects

A surprising and intriguing article in The Atlantic Monthly called “Get Smarter” observed that there are heated debates in progress surrounding cognition and what technology is doing to our minds, drawing partly on ideas from the French Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin. Based on Teilhard’s concept of the Nöosphere, the writer of the article suggests:

Intelligence has a strong social component... we already provide crude cooperative information-filtering for each other. In time, our interactions through the use of such intimate technologies (he seems to be referring to Twitter and similar technologies) could dovetail with our use of collaborative knowledge systems (such as Wikipedia), to help us not just to build better data sets, but to filter them with greater precision...it becomes something akin to collaborative intuition. (Cascio, 2009)

However, Maron lists five objectives that must be achieved for a resources to be sustainable and the first on the list is the necessity of dedicated and entrepreneurial leadership (2009).

Collaboration works, but firm leadership is essential. The work of the Catholic Research Resources Alliance clearly illustrates this—under the leadership of Jennifer Younger, formerly the library director of Notre Dame University, this collaboration has developed into an open access resource that has over twenty members and has recently made participation more affordable to small institutions like CTU. Members of the Alliance pay a fee to participate by contributing resources to the portal, but the portal itself is free to any researcher who has need of it. Many other groups of scholars are building resources in this collaborative way.

Sponsor Journals and Online Resources

Scholarly societies would do well to explore ways to fund journals and publications in a sustainable fashion. Recently the Catholic Biblical Association sold its journal to Sage
Publications—if they had asked the libraries who subscribe to it to join in sponsorship, perhaps *Biblical Theology Bulletin* would not have tripled in price only to provide profit for shareholders. Institutions can provide infrastructure for open access resources—they already do this in many ways for faculty who contribute to for-profit publishers. Institutions and scholarly societies in the field of theology should consider their mission to bring the Gospel to the world and creatively find ways to make resources available to all who seek to collaborate in this mission.

**Develop Institutional Repositories**

Though not all types of digital scholarship are amenable to being preserved in an institutional repository, it is one thing that institutions can do much to help get started. Selecting scholarship for repositories will not only validate it as having scholarly worth for the future and at least make a move toward preservation needs, but will also make scholarly information available to those who might otherwise have not access to papers and journal articles, for example. If this is not possible, individual authors may make their papers available on websites such as Academia.edu (keeping in mind copyright restrictions).

**Inform Our Administrations and Other Educators About These Issues**

There is a term for the “overconsumption of a good by a consumer who is insulated from the good’s cost”—economists call it a “moral hazard” (Shieber, 2009, p. 1). This moral hazard is something librarians and educators have been dodging for too long. Educators should be aware of the cost of the journals they contribute to, aware of the availability of these to Third World countries. They should think about whether the cost of a monograph will make it prohibitive to all but the fewest research libraries or would a different publisher price it to be affordable to small institutions and those in underdeveloped countries.
Going back to the four points from the Sightline community—these four themes bring together the values that should be inherent in striving to bring the kingdom of God through the acquisition of knowledge.

- **Community**—being in this place together, with both burdens and benefits. The lifelong learners we have created need the benefit of resources that can help them fulfill their missions. The burden is on those who have the financial and technological resources to ensure that those who do not have the resources gain access to the scholarly and pastoral material necessary to do their work in the fields, whether they are in a Third World country or the streets of Chicago.

- **Fairness**—an economy and policies that support all entities equally. Sliding scales or an economy where those who are financially able pay for those who have nothing is both a Christian value and sustainability value. If all humans are to have the right to authentic human development, then those who can promote this development through lifelong learning must do so, rather than at the expense of the poor.

- **Opportunity**—all can thrive. Learning that leads to knowledge is a way to thrive in the image of God. Lifelong learning enables workers in the field, whether they be educators, health care professionals, social workers, or pastors, to foster human dignity and development to the marginalized who do not have the resources to thrive.

- **Responsibility**—stewarding our inheritance well. Christians throughout the world have an inheritance of knowledge and wisdom that must be preserved and made available to those lifelong learners who desire to grow in knowledge and wisdom. Librarians and educators have always been stewards of this inheritance and must remain steadfast as stewards and
develop sustainable measures to create and disseminate scholarly resources that make wonderment of growing in the image of God available to all.
References


http://commons.pacificu.edu/sustainableschol/program/oct20/11/


Sustainable Scholarship, Ithaka conference announcement. (2009). Retrieved from


Footnotes

1 Thanks to my husband for this reference from his own firm’s use of the term.


5 My own thinking about “adult education” and “lifelong learning” has undergone some change, as it has in the theorists who study this topic: see Edwards. I used to be a firm believer that we needed required CE for priests (I am not saying that we no longer do), but now I believe that it is much more important to do our best to develop independent, lifelong learners while they are studying with us in seminaries and universities.
I recently provided the first instruction session (really just a short introduction to resources we could provide) to field education supervisors and was surprised at the level of interest and apparent lack of resources that these supervisors (in the fields of medical care, social work and education) have available to them. Further assessment must be done to discern if they indeed are bereft of resources or just unaware that resources are available to them through their workplaces or other venues. However, over 90% of the attendees indicated that they would use the electronic resources we could provide to them.

In just a few months time, I have had articles on my Academia.edu page accessed by scholars from Peru, Australia, Romania, and the Philippines.