

## **Environmental Theologies**

**Fall 2010**

REL 634 / FES 80042

Monday 3.30-5.20pm

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This course interprets theological responses to environmental problems and examines tensions in the relation of Christianity and ecology. We critically survey a range of theologies, each attempting to integrate some tradition of Christian thought and some notion of environmental responsibility. We seek to understand how each works in its own way to make environmental problems morally significant for some form of Christian life and/or a global public. What social and religious pressures shape a strategy? What moral vocabularies or ethical frameworks does it draw upon?

Participants will therefore learn to understand the diversity of Christian responses to environmental problems and to interpret what is at stake in its pluralism. We consider theological and environmental criteria for evaluating how well strategies succeed. As these strategies reclaim, redeploy, or revise theological traditions, which doctrines take priority and which are suppressed? As environmental problems are reframed by theology, how are do they reinterpret science and ethics?

Our survey encompasses strategies emerging from Catholic (including magisterial and liberationist), Protestant (including evangelical, mainstream, and anabaptist), and Eastern Orthodox traditions, as well as several attempts to reconstruct Christianity altogether. The seminar thus develops a pluralist overview of Christianity's changing relationships to its ecological context.

This interdisciplinary seminar has no prerequisites. Although most of the readings are theological, no prior course in theology is required. Although all of these texts engage with contemporary environmental studies, no prior environmental courses are required. (N.B., if you want a course in environmental ethics but are not interested in theology, you might want to wait for my Fall 2011 "Environmental Ethics" class.)

## **Requirements**

Participation in this seminar requires **careful reading** of about 150 pages per week.

**Reading responses:** Before each class, submit a brief comment on the assigned reading of no more than 300 words. Do not try to summarize. A good way to approach a response is to select a quotation that seems significant to you (because it is telling, or striking, or appalling, or importantly inexplicable), and say or ask something about it. You may relate your comment to other readings, but do not attempt to cover everything.

Go to the Classes v.2 site for REL 768/FES 80042, and click on “Discussion.” Then “Reply” to the topic posted for that week. (Do not post a new topic unless you mean to start a separate discussion thread.) Submit these to the course website by noon the day of class.

Responses must address that week’s reading. You cannot make up for missing a previous week and you may not submit a response for a class that you will not attend. However, you may skip any two reading responses. At the end of the semester you will have nine responses posted online.

Reading responses are not graded, so long as you engage the assigned reading with something near to thoughtfulness. Attending, participating, and submitting responses make up 30% of your course grade.

### **For papers you may choose one of three options:**

1. Complete **three short papers** of 1600-1800 words, focused on the readings of the week. These short papers are due by 8am the day of class, and they interpret one or several of that week’s readings. You do not need to address all of the readings, and you may criticize texts using outside disciplines and perspectives. These papers are short, so they must be concisely argued. (Do not exceed the word-limit; instead condense your argument.) You

To submit these papers: **a.) post an abstract (< 300 words) to the discussion site, and b.) attach the paper as a Word file to your post.**

2. Alternatively, you may choose to do a **research paper** of about 6000 words. A paper may discuss themes or texts from the seminar, or may work on topics and readings outside the syllabus. I am happy to help suggest readings. If you choose to do a research paper, you must discuss your topic with me beforehand, and send me an initial abstract by Nov 12<sup>th</sup>. The paper is due by email on Dec \_\_\_\_

3. Finally, you may pursue an independent **project of your own design**. These might be related to other research initiatives or community work. All media considered, but it must include some component of reflective prose. Projects must be discussed and approved by Nov 12<sup>th</sup>.

## **Grading**

Weekly discussion postings 30%

Paper(s): 70%

See the grading matrix for papers included as an appendix.

**Texts for Purchase** (available at Yale Divinity Bookstore; one copy on library reserve)

Boff, Leonardo      *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*

Jenkins, Willis      *Ecologies of Grace (EG)*

Hart, John      *What Are They Saying About Environmental Theology?*

Rasmussen, Larry      *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*

Yordy, Laura      *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God*

Optional:

Hessel, Dieter and Rosemary Radford Ruether      *Christianity and Ecology (C&E)*  
(We read five of about 30 chapters in this book, which are not posted on e-reserves. You can use the library's reserve copy, to share with others, or buy it to have a nice collection.)

### **Schedule**

Most readings are available as an electronic reserve (click on "course reserves" from the classes.v2 site, then click on the author's name). Other readings are in books available for purchase (or from the library's reserve shelf). There is also one copy of each of these on reserve in the YDS library.

*Please note that the syllabus may change over the semester and that you should*

### **1 Introduction**

*No reading or response required for first day. See two handouts online under "resources."*

### **2 Theology and Environmental Problems**

\* Lynn White "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" (pdf)

Thomas Berry *Dream of the Earth* (24-35)

Thomas Berry *The Great Work* (21-32)

\*Tucker & Grim "Series Forward" *Christianity and Ecology*, xv-xxxix

Johnson "Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition" in *C&E*, 3-21.

Northcott *The Environment and Christian Ethics* 124-63

\*Jenkins *EG*, ch. 1

\* Sittler "A Theology for Earth"      (pdf)

### **3 Environmental Sciences and Theologies of Nature**

Rolston "Value in Nature" 143-53

Sideris "Religion, Environmentalism and the Meaning of Ecology" 446-64.

Linzey "So Near and Yet So Far: Animal Theology and Ecological Theology" 349-61

\*Nash "Seeking Moral Norms" (in *C&E*), 227-250

Finger "An Anabaptist/Mennonite Theology of Creation" 154-69

Southgate *The Groaning of Creation* 78-91, 116-33

\*Jenkins *EG* ch 3

#### **4 EcoJustice**

\*Rasmussen *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* 90-110, 195-316, 344-8

[NCC "Open Letter"](#)

#### **5 Environmental Justice**

Cone "Whose Earth is it anyway?" 23-32

Glave "Black Environmental Liberation Theology" 189-99

Hinga "The Gikuyu Theology of Land and Environmental Justice" 172-84

\*Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 63-157

\*Tinker "An American Indian Theological Response" 85-109 (pdf)

[Ecumenical Declaration on Rights of Mother Earth](#)

#### **6 Stewardship**

\*Jenkins *EG* ch 4

\*Yordy *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God* 18-78, 99-129, 146-60

Reichenback and Anderson "Tensions in a Stewardship Paradigm" 112-25

[Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation](#)

#### **7 Protestant Land Ethic**

Leopold "Land Ethic" 431-4

Palmer "Stewardship: A Case Study" 63-75

W. Berry "The Gift of Good Land" 293-304

Bean "Toward an Anabaptist/Mennonite Environmental Ethic" 183-205

Northcott *The Environment and Christian Ethics* 164-98

Gorringe "Decline of Nature and Built Environment" 203-220

Wirzba *The Paradise of God* 123-48

#### **8 Sacramental Land Ethic**

\*Columbia River Watershed Pastoral Letter [pdf]

\*Hart *What Are They Saying About Environmental Theology?* 7-58, 84-90, 100-7

Schaefer *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics* 65-120

O'Brien *Ethics of Biodiversity* 58-75, 94-109

Lathrop *Holy Ground* 1-20, 125-35

#### **9 Creation Spirituality**

\*Jenkins *EG* ch. 5

Fox *Creation Spirituality*, 7-42

Fox *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, 129-55

Wallace *Finding God in the Singing River* 57-80

#### **10 Ecofeminist Theologies**

\*Ruether, "Ecofeminism" (in *C&E*), 97-112

Warren "Power and Promise of Ecofeminism" 19-41

Baker-Fletcher *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit* 109-116, 15-20, 49-58

McFague *The Body of God* 159-91

Taylor *Green Sisters*, 22-51  
Deane-Drummond “Sophia” 11-31

## **11. Eastern Orthodox Theologies**

### [Green Patriarch at UNEP](#)

Bartholomew I *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer*, 287-92

Zizioulas “Priest of Creation” 273-90

Theokritoff “Creation and Priesthood in Modern Orthodox Thinking” 344-63

Staniloae *The Experience of God*, vol. 2, 1-7, 21-63

Theokritoff *Living in God’s Creation*, 93-116

## **12. God, Creation, and Climate Change**

\*Jenkins *EG* ch.s 10-11

[other readings TBA]

## Grading

All your writing, from posts to papers, should exhibit careful, charitable reading and a helpful, critical thesis. You should avoid merely summarizing an author's positions, and with rare exceptions, should avoid total rejections of another's argument. The exception: when a total rejection carefully explains what is at stake in accepting any part or concept of another text.

Good evaluative readings often emerge from using quotations to ask critical questions or open up new areas for discussion. The very best papers understand texts on their own terms, criticize them fairly, make new and helpful connections, and bring discussion to a new level.

A grade of H or H+ indicates that the paper approaches publication quality. In graduate school, publication quality is your standard because public scholarship of some sort is the goal of your professional education.

These papers will correctly understand and clearly explain the texts and arguments with which they interact;

- have an original, helpful thesis that develops new insights, directions, or connections (thus making it worthwhile reading to some public);
- make that thesis discipline the entire essay and especially the conclusion;
- anticipate criticisms and, insofar as possible, account for alternative positions;
- use an effective rhetorical structure, including an accountable method of argument and a clear flow of ideas;
- and they will be written enjoyably well.

A grade of HP+ indicates that you have successfully and competently written an essay. You demonstrate accurate understanding of texts and arguments and you have a clear thesis in a well-written paper. To develop into an Honors-level essay, it may need a more original thesis. Or you may have an excellent thesis that is not completely realized in the subsequent argument. Or the readings of others may be slightly distorted at points.

A grade of HP indicates acceptable completion of the assignment, with room for improvement in argument, and/or in understanding of other texts. This may be the grade for a reasonable essay that remains descriptive rather than critical, or that seems rushed in its consideration. It may be the grade for an exciting idea that suffers from sloppy writing and argumentation.

A grade of HP- indicates inadequate completion of the assignment but good faith effort in approaching it. The paper probably suffers from lack of a clear thesis and disorganized argument, and may incorrectly understand other arguments. However, this may also be the grade for a paper with a good thesis but confusing flow, undefended assumptions, or inappropriate reading of other arguments.

A grade of P acknowledges that something was submitted, and that it fails to approximate professional writing.

Please make sure that you understand and follow standards of academic integrity.