

RLG228 RELIGION, ETHICS, ENVIRONMENT – COURSE OUTLINE

Instructor: Simon Appolloni

When: June 6 to June 24, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday from 10am to 12pm

Location: BA 1230

Office Hours: 1 to 2pm Monday to Thursday or by appointment in Jackman Humanities Building, 170 St. George Street (exact location to be announced)

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Description:

The study of religion, environment and ethics is a relatively new field emerging within academia and beyond, raising many questions about what a religion can and cannot offer. Are religions sufficient alone to address our environmental crisis? Or, are religions part of a wider interdisciplinary approach for society in its drive to become more sustainable? Through a variety of media and learning approaches, this course will look at various traditional religions (as well as non-institutional forms of ‘green’ religion), in conjunction with specific environmental issues or dimensions (such as climate change, agricultural-food issues, Western consumerism, environmental racism, and science), with a view to providing the student opportunities for understanding and critical thinking on this complex and fascinating subject.

Important Dates:

- Last day to add/change sections: June 8
- Last day to cancel without academic penalty: June 20
- For courses which run June 6 to June 24 (that’s us!), the final examination period will be June 27 to June 30.

Goals of the Course:

- To acquire a familiarity with the many and various ways in which religions are addressing the environmental crisis
- To develop a critical understanding of what religions can and cannot do in addressing the environmental crisis
- To acquire a familiarity with some of the more central elements of the environmental crisis
- To hone analytical skills in research and accuracy in dissemination of findings

Deadline extensions:

This course is unique in that it is very compressed. Consequently, there is little to no room for putting off readings or assignments (and I put myself in the same boat with regard to marking). Extensions, for late assignments, therefore, will not be granted except in the gravest of personal circumstances. All requests deriving from grave personal circumstances must be accompanied by appropriate documentation (a doctor’s note, obituary/death certificate). Students are advised to begin work on assignments as soon as possible to avoid lateness owing to unavoidable situations. No extensions will be granted for workload considerations. If, however, you experience an unforeseen personal or medical emergency, you may request an extension (please include the

appropriate medical certificate in your request). In your request, you *must* include evidence of your work-in-progress. If the request is made close to the deadline and there is no evidence of work-to-date, no extension will be granted.

Course Reader

There will be a course reader for this course available for pick up and purchase. However, some of the readings will be available for free to download from the university library system as indicated on this outline.

Week One

DAY 1 (MONDAY, JUNE 6) – INTRODUCTION

- Understanding what we mean by ‘religion,’ the ‘environmental crises’ and ‘ethics’
- Discussing the theory and methodology undergirding this course; evaluation, expectations
- Screening: Video Clip “Religion and a New Environmental Ethic,” from The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University
- Required reading:
 - Lynn White Jr. “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.” In *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, edited by Richard C. Foltz. Belmont, California: Thomson Wadsworth, 2003. 30-37.
- Suggested reading:
 - Mary Evelyn Tucker. “Religion and Ecology.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. **Oxford Handbooks Online.**

Retrieval

DAY 2 (TUESDAY, JUNE 7) – INDIGENOUS TRADITION, ECOLOGY AND THE CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUE

- Required readings:
 - John A. Grim. “Indigenous Traditions.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. **Oxford Handbooks Online.**

DAY 3 (WEDNESDAY, JUNE 8) – ISLAM, ECOLOGY AND CULTURAL-GEO-POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Required readings:
 - Richard C. Foltz. “Islam.” *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. **Oxford Handbooks Online.**
- Suggested reading:
 - Seyyed Hossein Nasr. “Islam and the Environmental Crisis.” In *Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment is a Religious Issue*, edited by Steven C. Rockefeller and John C. Elder. Boston: Beacon, 1992. 85-108. ([GF80 .S65 1992](#))

Reevaluation

DAY 4 (THURSDAY, JUNE 9) – JAINISM, ECOLOGY AND AGRICULTURAL-FOOD ISSUES

- Screening of “Food Inc.,” documentary (2008)
- Required reading:
 - Chapple, Christopher Key. “Jainism and Ecology.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. **Oxford Handbooks Online.**

Week Two

DAY 5 (MONDAY, JUNE 13) – CHRISTIANITY AND ECOLOGY AND RE-ENVISIONING SACRED SPACES

- Tour of St. Gabriel’s Church (on site), hosted by Prof. Dennis O’Hara, of University of St. Michael’s College.
- Required reading:
 - Aldo Leopold. “The Land Ethic.” In *A Sand County Almanac (With Essays on Conservation from Round River)*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1970. 237-264.

DAY 6 (TUESDAY, JUNE 14) – **FIRST TEST** (ONE HOUR)

- Screening of “What Would Jesus Buy?” documentary (2007) in second half of class.

DAY 7 (WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15) – CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM, ECOLOGY AND WESTERN CONSUMERISM

- Required reading:
 - David R. Loy. “The Religion of the Market.” In *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, edited by Richard C. Foltz. Belmont, California: Thomson Wadsworth, 2003. 66-75.
- **Assignment One due**

Reconstruction

DAY 8 (THURSDAY, JUNE 16) – ECOFEMINIST, AFRICAN-AMERICAN RELIGIOUS SPIRITUALITIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

- Screening of “Majora Carter: Greening the Ghetto,” (2006) Ted Talks Series. http://www.ted.com/talks/majora_carter_s_tale_of_urban_renewal.html
- Required reading:
 - Shamara Shantu Riley. “Ecology Is a Sistah's Issue Too: The Politics of Emergent Afrocentric Ecowomanism.” In *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb, 412-427. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Week Three

DAY 9 (MONDAY, JUNE 20) – SECOND TEST (ONE HOUR)

- Screening of “Tipping Point: The Age of the Oil Sands,” CBC documentary (2011)
<http://www.cbc.ca/documentaries/natureofthings/video.html?ID=1769597772>

DAY 10 (TUESDAY, JUNE 21) – FROM SUPERNATURAL TO NATURAL

- Required readings:
 - Bron Taylor. “Religion and Environmentalism in America and Beyond.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. **Oxford Handbooks Online.**
 - Henry David Thoreau. Excerpt from “Walking.” In *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb, 29-31. New York: Routledge, 2004.

DAY 11 (WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22) – RELIGION, ECOLOGY, SCIENCE AND COSMOLOGY

- Required reading:
 - Thomas Berry. “The Universe as Cosmic Liturgy.” In *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*. Edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, 96-116. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2009.

DAY 12 (THURSDAY, JUNE 23) – GROUP PRESENTATIONS IPCC REPORT | REVIEW | CONCLUSION

- **Assignments Two and Three due**

Course Grading

First Test	20%
Second Test	20%
Assignment One: Identifying and Comparing	10%
Assignment Two: Distilling and Conveying the Science	10%
Assignment Three: Mindfulness Exercise	5%
Participation in-class, Questions	5%
Final Exam	30%

Course Assignments

Two tests and one exam (70%)

The first and second test will deal with all material covered in class and the readings of the previous week only. The final exam will deal with all material covered in class and the readings from the beginning until the last day including the *IPCC Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report*.

Assignment One: Identifying and Comparing (10%)

The goals of this assignment are:

- To become aware of the quantity, as well as the depth and breadth of religious-affiliated environmental initiatives today
 - To develop skills in identifying features of a religious-based environmental initiative
 - To compare these features between two religions
1. Search the Internet for websites of religious-based environmental *initiatives* - not blogs or opinion pieces or write-ups by others, instead, a site describing actual ecological/environmental projects undertaken by a religious-based group where its mission, rationale for doing so is explained. (Finding them should not be difficult; however, if you are finding difficulty, I can supply you with assistance). Although many initiatives are ecumenical or interreligious, deal only with one religious-based approach to the environmental issue(s).
 2. Choose 6 initiatives where at least 3 are of a different religion and no more than 2 are of the same denomination, tradition, branch or sect. At least one must be of a religion we have not touched upon in class readings.
 3. For each initiative, obtain the following information (no less than half a page and no more than one page single spaced for each):
 - Part 1
 - a. What is the religion (and its particular tradition, group) in question?
 - b. What is the URL (home page will do)?
 - c. What environmental issue(s) are being addressed?
 - d. Why is this important to the religion?
 - e. What is being proposed by the religion in what it can do to address the situation?
 - f. What in your opinion is not being addressed?
 - g. Using Tucker's typology discussed in class, decide under which category you think this religious-based initiative best falls and explain your reasoning.
 - Part 2
 - h. Choose 2 religious initiatives from your list and compare your findings. (300 +/- 10%)
 - i. What similarities do you see?
 - ii. What differences do you see?
 - iii. Does any particular aspect stand out?
 - iv. What questions does this raise for you?
 4. The above information will be submitted in the form of a hard copy at the beginning of class Day 7.

Assignment Two: Distilling and Conveying the Science (10%)

The goals of this assignment are:

- To develop the skill of accurately distilling information from a scientific report and critically examining its methodology
- To become acquainted with the scientific literature on global climate change
- To accurately convey information on the report to fellow class member so that it can aid them in learning about the report

1. Class will be divided into groups of 4 or 5 (depending on enrolment)
2. Each group will read the entire *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report*, but will be responsible for distilling the salient findings from only sections of the report (to be assigned by me).
3. Each group will convey the information assigned to it in the form of a news report. The medium used (TV newscast, radio) is the choice of each group to make.
4. The final presentation of the report will be recorded and uploaded to the Blackboard Portal and shared with the whole class on the last day of classes and serve as a study aid for fellow students for the exam.
5. The reports will not be long (a video or radio presentation of no more than 5 minutes, +/- 10%). They are to be in the student's own words. Creativity is welcome, but it must not overshadow the goals cited above.

The report is accessible online: *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Edited by R.K Pachauri and A. Reisinger. Geneva, Switzerland: IPCC, 2007. Available at <http://www.ipcc.ch/>.

Assignment Three: Mindfulness Exercise (5%)

The goals of this exercise are:

- To provide the opportunity to experience first-hand a religious practice
- To reflect upon its application toward fostering environmentally friendly dispositions

The student will present a 600 (+/- 10%) word reflection based on the directions below by the last class.

1. Watch the video clip on mindfulness by Buddhist monk and writer, Thich Nhat Hanh: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aubF7v-MIMM&feature=related>
2. Read "Earth Gathas" also by Thich Nhat Hanh found in the reader.
Thich Nhat Hanh. "Earth Gathas." In *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb, 515-516. New York: Routledge, 2004.
3. Find a moment in your day, from 15-20 minutes. And find a relatively quiet place where you can sit or stand undisturbed by others (a park, a church, a temple or library) and do the following:

- a. Notice whatever you can sense: sounds, smells, hot or cold sensations, quality of air, colours, shapes, occurrences and so on. Do this and breathe deeply and nothing else for 15-20 minutes. Try to situate yourself so that you do not get disturbed by others (and that includes via electronic devices!). You can close your eyes if you wish to concentrate on sounds and other sensations.
- b. After you are done, record where you were and what you noticed and any observations that came to you (about 150 words)
- c. Repeat this same exercise, but this time in a location that is bustling (a mall, a city intersection – and just so we are clear, no, not *on* the road!)
- d. After you are done that, record where you were and what you noticed and any observations that came to you (again about 150 words)
- e. Finally, reflect on what you experienced in both instances and write (about 300 words) your reflections based on – but not limited to – some, or all of the questions below:
 - i. Were you able to experience mindfulness as defined by Thich Nhat Hanh?
 - ii. Perhaps you already practice mindfulness in some form. How was this different?
 - iii. What sensory experiences were common to the two exercises? Not in common?
 - iv. Does it matter where you are to be mindful?
 - v. Having read “Earth Gathas,” what further insights come to you?
 - vi. Did you find the exercise(s) easy or challenging? Why?
 - vii. In what way(s) can you see (or not see) mindfulness fostering an ecological consciousness?