

“Merced River Happy Isles,” John Sexton



**Religion and Ecology**  
**REL 19-213, ENV 49-213**  
**Spring 2003—Southwestern University**  
**Mon/Wed 2:00-3:15, RAC 116**  
**Dr. Laura Hobgood-Oster**  
Office hours: Wed 10:30-11:30; Thurs 2:30-4:00

**AAR Syllabus Project Information:** This course is a 3-hour course; upper-level undergraduate seminar/lecture combination; Southwestern is an undergraduate, private, liberal arts institution; Spring 2003 there were 25 students enrolled in the course (it usually fills with a wait list).

**AAR Pedagogical Reflections:** In general this course generates energy (from the students and the instructor alike), so discussions are exciting and students are quite engaged. Current issues permeate the course discussion and connections to religious traditions/issues come easily. Last semester the course included a major symposium (for the entire university) – “Spiritualities of Resistance.” Winona LaDuke, James Cone, Karen Baker-Fletcher and Roger Gottlieb were all guests on campus for this 3-day event. Of course, that added another level to discussions throughout the semester. The primary pedagogical concern was the size of the class, 15 students would have been the optimum size, 25 is too many for good discussion (and that discussion really fuels this topic).

### **Course Description and Objectives**

What do religion and ecology have to do with each other? That is a question that is often posed. But they are intimately related. Worldviews (beliefs, perspectives, knowledges, understandings) how humans interact with others – other humans, other animals, other species in our environments. Worldviews are often shaped by religious beliefs. The purpose of this course is to examine the position of nature (ecology, the environment, the “earth”) in various religious belief systems. We will attempt to understand how these belief systems impact practices – and how religious practices impact belief systems.

### **Texts**

Richard Foltz, *Worldviews, Religion and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, Thomson: 2003.  
Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, Oxford UP: 1998.

### **Requirements**

**Attendance and Participation:** Both are mandatory! If you miss more than two classes, your grade will be impacted. But, more significantly, your perspective on the readings and topics is requisite for the class to have diverse, thoughtful and energetic conversations. There will be various ways to participate – sometimes we’ll break into smaller groups, sometimes we’ll have discussions among the entire class. At the end of the semester I’ll ask you to grade yourself on participation as well. This is the single most weighty component of your final grade. (25%)

**Current Issue Presentations/Group Assignment** (various dates): There will be five current issue presentations, each connected to a religious tradition or group of religious traditions. As a group you will identify and research a current ecological issue related to a place or people in the world that are connected to the particularly religious

tradition/traditions that you have selected. You will present this current ecological issue to the class, making any relevant connections (or lack thereof) to the religious tradition/culture. A group grade will be given for the presentation. Individual papers (see below) are also part of this overall assignment. (10%)

**Lecture/Readings Paper** (due Wednesday, February 5): 3-4 pages

What is a spirituality of resistance? This paper is based on both the readings and the lectures related to the Brown Symposium – “Spiritualities of Resistance”. (15%)

**Analysis Paper #1** (due Monday, February 17): 4-5 pages

What worldviews have led to (and dominate?) our current situation and what challenges are being offered? In the words of some of the authors, what is “the problem,” why is there an “absence of the sacred,” what happens with human “dominion over nature”? (15%)

**Analysis Paper #2** (due Wednesday, April 2): 4-5 pages

Based on the current issue that you researched and your general understanding of ecological issues in the related religious tradition/traditions, what is the impact of religious beliefs on environmental devastation or environmental protection/conversation? This is a huge question!! You can also include connections or lack thereof that you noticed in presentations by other groups. (15%)

**Analysis Paper #3** (due Wednesday, April 30): 5-7 pages

Explain some of the “religious” perspectives that are emerging in relationship to religion/ecology/nature at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (for example, radical biocentrism or the sacred quality of nature as expressed by Goodenough). Remember, these may not be “new” – but rediscovered or readopted. Are these perspectives even “religious” (some might argue that they are not)? What kind of impact might they have on globalization, ecojustice, environmental devastation, anthropocentric worldviews and lifestyle? In other words, is there validity and/or “hope” (to use a more religiously-loaded term) in these new perspectives? (20%)

**General Guidelines for Writing Papers**

The primary purpose for writing papers is to provide an opportunity for clarification and articulation of your thoughts. THINK and write about what you are thinking. The papers assigned should include your own ideas, along with a careful analysis of the ideas of others (particularly those whose articles you have read or whose voices you have heard). So papers should be both constructive (the development of your own ideas) and descriptive (the explanation and examination of the ideas of others). Always, always (to a fault) provide sources – that keeps any possibility of plagiarism at bay. Citation can take any form (footnotes, endnotes, in-text parenthetical), but be consistent and provide a complete bibliography. I also encourage you to make use of our excellent writing center. Papers should be double-spaced, with standard one-inch margins, and carefully proofread.

**General Guidelines for Reading and Discussion**

At the end of each section in WRE there are “discussion questions” – if might be helpful to ponder these in advance. We may use some of these in class to get discussions going. They will also provide you with a focus for your reading.

**Late Assignments & Plagiarism:** Assignments which are turned in late will receive a ½ grade deduction per day. This is in fairness to those who completed assignments at the scheduled time. Students should be aware of all aspects of the **Honor System** as presented in the Student Handbook. I encourage you to read the section on plagiarism carefully.

**Religious Observances/Holy Days:** Inform the instructor if you will be missing a class in order to fulfill a religious obligation or observe a holy day. These absences are excused.

**Students with Disabilities:** Southwestern University will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should register with the Office of Academic Services, located in Mood-Bridwell 311. Professors must be notified that documentation is on file no later than the end of the second week of class for the accommodation to be honored.

## Course Schedule

Mon., January 13 – Introductions

Wed., January 15 – Cosmologies – Creation Stories

Readings: Richard Foltz, “Understanding our Place in a Global Age” (WRE 1-8)

Thomas Berry, “The New Story” (WRE 525-531)

Mon., January 20 – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (no classes, see schedule of events for the week)

Wed., January 22 – Cosmologies – Creation Stories – dramatic presentations

Readings: Creation Story handouts

James Lovelock, “God and Gaia” (WRE 531-540)

**\*\*Thurs., January 23 – 4:00 MLK, Jr. Speaker – David Pellow (environmental justice)**

Mon., January 27 – The Religion of the Market

Reading: David Loy, “The Religion of the Market” (WRE 66-76)

Wed., January 29 – A Spirituality of Resistance

Readings: Roger Gottlieb, “A Spirituality of Resistance” (WRE 554-560)

Winona LaDuke, “All Our Relations” (handout)

Karen Baker-Fletcher, “Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit” (handout)

**Sun., February 2 – Tues., February 4 – Brown Symposium XXV**

(class meets with Brown Symposium, **must attend at least two** lectures/performances)

Sun., 7:30 The Girls Choir of Harlem

Mon., 9:30 Roger S. Gottlieb “Finding a Peaceful Heart and Protecting the Earth”

11:00 Winona LaDuke “Land-Based Thinking for a New Millennium”

2:00 James Cone “God and the Struggle for Black Freedom”

Tues., 9:30 Karen Baker-Fletcher “Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Resistance with Creation”

11:00 Panel Discussion

Wed., February 5 – Spiritualities of Resistance – Recap/Conversation

Readings: LaDuke, Gottlieb, Baker-Fletcher, Religion of the Market recap; connections

**\*\*Lecture/Readings Paper Due: What is a spirituality of resistance? (3-4 pages)**

Mon., February 10 – The Religion of the Market – recap

Readings: Carolyn Merchant, “Dominion Over Nature” (WRE 39-49)

Jerry Mander, “In the Absence of the Sacred” (WRE 58-66)

David Korten, “The Failures of Bretton Woods” (WRE 562-567)

Wed., February 12 – The Seeds of a Green Theology

Readings: Walter Lowdermilk, “The Eleventh Commandment” (WRE 12-16)

Joseph Sittler, “A Theology for Earth” (WRE 16-20)

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Problem” (WRE 20-30)

Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis” (WRE 30-37)

Mon., February 17 – “Powaqqatsi” (Life in Transformation) and “Koyaanisqatsi” (Life Out of

Balance) – Godfrey Reggio’s trilogy viewing

**\*\*Analysis Paper #1 Due (see description above)**

Wed., February 19 – First Peoples

Readings: Vine Deloria, “Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility” (WRE 81-88)

Mary Graham, “Some Thoughts...Aboriginal Worldviews” (WRE 89-96)

C.K. Omari, "African Land Ethics" (WRE 97-103)

Mon., February 24 – First Peoples

Readings: Gary Paul Nabhan, "Cultural Parallax...Habitats" (WRE 104-111)

**\*\*Current Issue Presentation #1**

Wed., February 26 – South Asian Traditions

Readings: Chris Chapple, "Contemporary Jaina & Hindu Responses..." (WRE 113-119)

O.P. Dwivedi, "Dharmic Ecology," (WRE 119-129)

Vasudha Narayanan, "Water, Wood, and Wisdom" (WRE 130-142)

**\*\*Thurs., February 27 – Fleming Lectures in Religion**

Mon., March 3 – South Asian Traditions

Readings: Kelly Alley, "Idioms of Degeneracy: Assessing Ganga..." (WRE 143-160)

**\*\*Current Issue Presentation #2**

Wed., March 5 – Buddhism

Readings: Rita Gross, "Toward a Buddhist Environmental Ethic" (WRE 163-170)

Ian Harris, "Ecological Buddhism" (WRE 171-180)

Donald Swearer, "The Hermeneutics of Buddhist Ecology..." (WRE 181-192)

Mon., March 10 – Wed., March 12 Spring Break

Mon., March 17 – Buddhism

Readings: Stephanie Kaza, "To Save All Beings" (WRE 193-207)

**\*\*Current Issue Presentation #3**

Wed., March 19 – Chinese and Japanese Traditions

Readings: Tu Weiming, "The Continuity of Being" (WRE 209-216)

Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Ecological Themes in Taoism & ..." (WRE 217-223)

Yuriko Saito, "Japanese Appreciation of Nature" (WRE 252-259)

Brian Bocking, "Japanese Religions" (WRE 247-251)

Mon., March 24 – Chinese and Japanese Traditions

Readings: Ole Bruun, "Fengshui and the Chinese Perception of Nature" (WRE 236-245)

Arne Kalland, "Culture in Japanese Nature" (WRE 260-267)

**\*\*Current Issue Presentation #4**

Wed., March 26 – Judaism and Islam

Readings: Steven Schwarzschild, "The Unnatural Jew" (WRE 296-305)

Arthur Waskow, "And the Earth is Filled ..." (WRE 306-317)

Fazlun Khalid, "The Disconnected People" (WRE 385-391)

Mon., March 31 – Judaism and Islam

Readings: Richard Foltz, "Islamic Environmentalism..." (WRE 358-365)

**\*\*Current Issue Presentation #5**

Wed., April 2 – Christianity

Readings: Anna Peterson, "In and Of the World?" (WRE 319-333)

John Chryssavgis, "The World of the Icon and Creation" (WRE 342-348)

**\*\*Analysis Paper #2 Due (see description above)**

Mon., April 7 – Christianity and Liberation Theologies; Christian Ecofeminism

Readings: Sallie McFague, "An Ecological Christology" (WRE 334-341)

Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Ecofeminism: The Challenge..." (WRE 464-471)

Leonardo Boff, "Science, Technology, Power, and Liberation..." (WRE 500-502)

Wed., April 9 – Voices from the Global South

Readings: B.D. Sharma, "On Sustainability" (WRE 495-496)

Marthinus L. Daneel, "Earthkeeping Churches, Africa..." (WRE 503-514)

Elaine Poriguara, "The Earth is the Indian's Mother, Nhandecy" (WRE 515-523)

Mon., April 14 – Ecocentrism and Radical Environmentalism

Readings: Aldo Leopold, "Excerpts from *A Sand County Almanac*" (WRE 431-434)  
Bill Devall and George Sessions, "Principles of Deep Ecology" (WRE 434-441)  
Graham Harvey, "Paganism and the Environment" (WRE 420-428)

Wed., April 16 – Ecocentrism and Ecofeminism

Readings: Bron Taylor, "Earth First!: From Primal Spirituality..." (WRE 447-455)  
Mary Mellor, "Ecofeminism and Ecosocialism" (WRE 481-492)

Mon., April 21 – Animals, Animal Rights and Anthropocentrism – what of speciesism?

Readings: Handout

Wed., April 23 – Religion, Science and the Environment

Reading: Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*

Mon., April 28 – Religion, Science and the Environment

Reading: Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*

Wed., April 30 –

\*\*Final Analysis Paper Due (see description above)