ENST 594.02: The Greening of Religion

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THE GREENING OF RELIGION: RELIGION, NATURE, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

ENST 594_02
Spring, 2014, Room: LA338
MW3:10-4:30 pm
CRN: 34097

Dr. Dan Spencer
Rankin Hall 103, Tel. 243-6111
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COURSE STRUCTURE AND OBJECTIVES

Ethicist Larry Rasmussen has written that the biggest story of the twentieth century was the fundamental change in the relationship of the human world to the rest of the earth: never before have human technology and human numbers been powerful enough to alter and destroy planetary life systems. Rasmussen then quotes Daniel Maguire to pose a challenge: "If current trends continue, we will not. And that is qualitatively and epochally true. If religion does not speak to [this], it is an obsolete distraction."

This course reflects a world-wide movement -- variously called the “greening of religion,” ecotheology, ecospirituality, or simply religion and ecology – whose practitioners seek to respond to Rasmussen’s observation and Maguire’s challenge. Together we will explore a diversity of sources and traditions, keeping in mind the powerful role religion can play in shaping everyday habits and in addressing moral issues regarding the earth and our environments. We will focus on three primary religious traditions: North American Native American religions and spirituality, Christianity, and Buddhism, though contributions from other religious traditions will also be considered.

Goals of the course include:
1. To explore in depth three religious traditions as resources for ecological beliefs and practices;
2. To understand the important role of religion and spiritual values in everyday ecological choices;
3. To gain exposure to new interpretations of religious traditions and ecospiritual alternatives;
4. To investigate specific eco-religious concepts and practices as they might apply to one’s personal and community life.

REQUIRED TEXTS

ERES Readings (from: http://eres.lib.umt.edu/)
Useful Websites:
- Forum on Religion and Ecology: http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/
- National Religious Partnership for the Environment: www.nrpe.org
- Evangelical Environmental Network: http://www.creationcare.org/
- National Council of Churches EcoJustice Programs: http://nccecojustice.org/
- Earth Sangha/ Green Buddhism: http://www.earthsangha.org/depth/gb.html
- Working Group on Environmental Justice: http://ecojustice.net/
- Native Harvest / White Earth Land Recovery Project: http://nativeharvest.com/

Requirements
- Regular class attendance and participation that demonstrates a grasp of the reading assignments
- Self-Assessment essay
- Four critical response papers to the readings
- Facilitation of class discussion with 3-4 other students
- Religious tradition reflection/analysis final paper

Assignments and Classes

Class Day Session Topic and Assigned Readings [Recommended Reading in brackets]

**Introduction: Laying the Groundwork**  
*Student-led Discussions*

1/27 M 1  **Introduction: Laying out themes and structure of the course**

Class member introductions

1/29 W 2  **Setting the Context I: Progress Unraveling**

- Ch. 1: The Power of Vision: Worldviews Shape Progress
- Ch. 2: The Paradox of Progress in the 20th Century
- Ch. 3: Tools for Course Correction: Religions’ Contributions

Recommended:
- Mary Evelyn Tucker: “Religion and Ecology: Survey of the Field” (ERES #2)
- Roger Gottlieb: “Religion and Ecology – What is the Connection and Why Does It Matter?” (ERES #3)

Go over *Self-Assessment Essay guidelines*

2/3 M 3  **Setting the Context II: Progress Re-Rooted**

Gary Gardner: *Inspiring Progress*. Part Two: Progress Re-Rooted
- Ch. 4: New Vision: Nature, Then Economies
- Ch. 5: Nature as Sacred Ground
- Ch. 6: Warming to the Climate Challenge

Recommended:
Mary Evelyn Tucker: Selections from *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase* (ERES #4)
Larry Rasmussen: “Earth and Its Distress” (ERES #5)

2/5 W 4  **Setting the Context III: Progress Re-Imagined**

Ch. 7: New Vision: Nature, Then Economies  
Ch. 8: Hungry for More: The Consumption Challenge  
Ch. 9: Mindful Investments

**Recommended:**
Carolyn Merchant: “Dominion over Nature” (ERES #6)  
David Loy: “The Religion of the Market” (ERES #7)

*Go over Religious Traditions Analysis assignment*

**2/10 M 5 Setting the Context IV: Inspiring Progress**

Gary Gardner: *Inspiring Progress*. Part Four: Inspiring Progress  
Ch. 10: New Vision: Toward an Ethics of Progress  
Ch. 11: Getting to a New Progress

**Self-Assessment Essay due in class**

**Faiths Scan: Religious Traditions and Ecology**

I. North American Native American Traditions and Ecology

2/12 W 6 **Introduction to Native American Traditions and Ecology**

Linda Robyn: Indigenous Knowledge and Technology: Creating Environmental Justice in the Twenty-First Century (ERES #8)  
Vine Deloria, Jr.: Reflection and Revelation: Knowing Places, Land and Ourselves (ERES #9)  
Vine Deloria, Jr.: Sacred Lands and Religious Freedom (ERES #10)

2/17 M  **Presidents’ Day: No Class**

2/19 W 7 **Lakota Perspectives: The Visions of Black Elk I**

*Black Elk Speaks*: Foreword; Chs. 1-5  
Bruce E. Johansen: “Black Elk” (ERES #11)  
[John James Collins: “The Plains Culture Area and Plains Religion” (ERES #12)]

2/24 M 8  **Lakota Perspectives: The Visions of Black Elk II**

*Black Elk Speaks*: [6], 7-8, [9], 10-18
Joseph Epes Brown: *The Sacred Pipe* (ERES #13)

2/26 W 9  **Lakota Perspectives: The Visions of Black Elk III**

*Black Elk Speaks:* Chs. 19-25; Author’s Postscript  
*Video:* “The Spirit of Crazy Horse”

3/3 M 10  **Recovering the Sacred: Sacred Lands and Sacred Places**

Winona LaDuke: “What is Sacred?” RS: 11-18  
Winona LaDuke: “God, Squirrels, and the Universe: The Mt. Graham International Observatory and the University of Arizona” RS: 19-32  

3/5 W 11  **Recovering the Sacred: Ancestors, Images, and Our Lives**

Winona LaDuke: “Klamath Land and Life” RS: 47-63  
Winona LaDuke: “Quilled Cradleboard Covers, Cultural Patrimony, and Wounded Knee” RS: 87-112  
**Recommended:** “Imperial Anthropology: The Ethics of Collecting” RS: 67-86

*DVD:* “Homeland: Four Portraits of Native Action

*3/10 M 12  **Recovering the Sacred: Seeds and Medicine**

Winona LaDuke: “Three Sisters: Recovery of Traditional Agriculture at Cayuga, Mohawk, and Oneida Communities” RS: 153-166  
Winona LaDuke: “Wild Rice: Maps, Genes, and Patents” RS: 167-190  
Winona LaDuke: “Food as Medicine: The Recovery of Traditional Foods to Heal the People” RS: 191-210

*3/12 W 13  **Recovering the Sacred: Relatives**

Winona LaDuke: “Return of the Horse Nation” RS: 213-226  
Winona LaDuke: “Namewag: Sturgeon and People in the Great Lakes Region” RS: 227-235  
Winona LaDuke: “Recovering Power to Slow Climate Change” RS: 237-253

II. Western Religious Traditions & Ecology: The Biblical Tradition & Christianity

3/17 M 14  **Biblical Perspectives on Creation and Nature**

Excerpts from *Genesis:* (ERES #14)  
Dan Spencer: “Seeing with God: Israel’s Poem of Creation” (ERES #15)  
Jean Larson: “Sermons on Creation” (ERES #24)

3/19 W 15  **Perspectives on Creation in the Book of Job Part I**

Stephen Mitchell: *The Book of Job* pp. 5-75  
Guest Speaker: Rev. Jean Larson, Our Savior’s Lutheran Church

3/24 M 16  Perspectives on Creation in the Book of Job Part II

Stephen Mitchell: *The Book of Job* pp. 77-91
[Recommended: Introduction: vii-xxx]
Diane Jacobson: “Creation, Birth, and the Radical Ecology of the
*Book of Job* pp. 6-11 (ERES #16)
Bill McKibben: Selections from “The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation” (ERES #17)

Religious Traditions paper project proposals due in class
Go over Black Elk / Job response essay assignment

3/26 W 17  Christianity, Ethics and Climate Change: I

Michael Northcott: *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*
Introduction and Chs. 1-2 [pp. 1-80]

3/31 – 4/4  Spring Break: No Classes

4/7 M 18  Christianity, Ethics and Climate Change: II

Michael Northcott: *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*
Chs. 3-4 [pp. 81-156]

Black Elk / Job response essay due in class

*4/9 W 19  Christianity, Ethics and Climate Change: III*
Michael Northcott: *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*
Chs. 5-6 [pp. 157-212]

*4/14 M 20  Christianity, Ethics and Climate Change: IV*
Michael Northcott: *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*
Chs. 7-9 [pp. 213-285]

III. Eastern Religious Traditions & Ecology: Buddhism

The Greening of Buddhism: An Introduction

4/16 W 21  Stephanie Kaza: “The Greening of Buddhism: Promise and Perils” (ERES #18)

Speaker: Brad Clough, Religious Studies and Liberal Studies

4/21 M 22  Contemporary Interpretations of Buddhist Teachings: I

Thich Nhat Hanh: “The Sun My Heart” (ERES #19)
Sulak Sivaraksa: “Buddhism with a Small b” (ERES #20)
Contemporary Interpretations of Buddhist Teachings: II

Alan Sponberg: “Green Buddhism and the Hierarchy of Compassion” (ERES #23)

Documentary: “Compassion in Action” from Renewal

Buddhist Responses to Consumerism: I

Part One: Getting Hooked: Desire and Attachment
Stephanie Kaza: “Introduction to Hooked?” pp. 1-13
Joseph Goldstein: “Desire, Delusion, and DVDs” pp. 17-26
Pema Chödrön: “How We Get Hooked, How We Get Unhooked” pp 27-33
Thubten Chödrön: “Marketing the Dharma” pp. 63-75

Buddhist Responses to Consumerism: II

Part Two: Practicing with Desire: Using Buddhist Tools
Judith Simmer-Brown: “Cultivating the Wisdom Gaze” pp. 89-103
Pracha Hutanuwatr: “No River Bigger than Tanha” pp. 104-121
Stephanie Kaza: “Penetrating the Tangle” pp. 139-151

Buddhist Responses to Consumerism: III

Part Three: Buddhist Ethics of Compassion
Ajahn Amaro: “Three Robes is Enough” pp. 183-197
Santikaro: “Practicing Generosity in a Consumer World” pp. 198-213
David Chappell: “Mutual Correction” pp. 237-249

Wrap-up and Class Review

Imaginative Critical Comparison Essay due in class


Grading Policy

Note Re Papers: Papers are due in class on or before the date listed in the syllabus. Unless you have made a prior agreement with me, I will take off one grade level (A becomes A-) for each class day an assignment is late. Papers with an undue number of errors of punctuation, spelling, or grammar will be marked down and may be returned ungraded for correction. Written work
will be evaluated in terms of your depth of critical analysis, thoughtfulness of reflection, clarity of writing, and ability to address issues raised in the text and in class on the topic at hand. Grades given reflect the following criteria of judgment:

F: Failure to meet minimum requirements  
D: Unsatisfactory, but some effort to meet minimum requirements  
C: Satisfactory; meets minimum requirements of assignment but not much more  
B: Good to Very Good: thoughtful reflection, good analysis, clear writing style  
A: Excellent depth of critical analysis, thoughtfulness of reflection, and writing style; demonstrate creativity and mature analytical skills in going beyond the primary requirements of the assignment

Attendance: Regular attendance and participation in the class is expected. More than three (3) absences will result in losing any benefit of the doubt on your final grade. More than five (5) absences will result in one grade reduction. More than seven (7) absences will result in a failing course grade. Late arrivals in class will count as an absence. (Note: If you have a valid reason for missing several classes, such as illness or other conflicting commitments, you still must speak with the instructor).

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism: All work submitted is expected to be the student's own. Any acts of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will result in automatic failure of the course, and may result in further academic punishment. If you have any doubts about definitions of plagiarism or academic dishonesty, please review the relevant sections of the University Catalog.

WEIGHT AND TIMELINE OF ASSIGNMENTS

The total number of points available for class assignments is 500 points. In order of due dates, the assignments are:

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Note: final grades will use pluses and minuses.

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS

1. Self-Assessment essay. Instructions will be handed out in class. Due Feb 10.

2. Black Elk Job response essay. Examine Black Elk Speaks and The Book of Job from the Hebrew Bible – and write a 6-8 page critical comparison and response. Start by giving a clear
exposition of the main views of nature and the sacred found in each text. Then compare and contrast them, noting where they are similar, where different, and why. What is the underlying religious cosmology of each text, and how does it shape the text’s view of the world and humanity’s relationship to nature? Consider such questions as: How would you compare their respective views of nature, and nature’s relationship to both the sacred (God/gods) and to humanity? What are the central insights you gain from each text about humanity’s relationship to nature / the earth? What insights, if any, do you think these texts have for understanding our human relationship to nature / the environment today? Do they have any relevance for contemporary environmental ethics? Why or why not? (Note: Your essay must contain specific references to and relevant quotes from the texts to support your exposition and argument). Due in Class April 7.

3. Facilitation of Class Discussion: Each student will have the opportunity to facilitate class discussion of two sets of readings from the sections of the class focusing on Native American (March 10 & 12), Christian (April 9 & 14), or Buddhist perspectives (April 30 & May 5). The class should be organized as a discussion of the texts, not a presentation. Creativity of format is encouraged!

4. Short Response Papers to the Readings: Following each class facilitation, each student facilitator will write a short, 3-4 page response paper to the readings discussed in that class. The first part of the paper should briefly summarize the main points or arguments in the readings, and the second part should be the student’s thoughtful response to the issues raised. Due in class one week after the class facilitation.

5. Imaginative Critical Comparison Essay. The texts *Recovering the Sacred* by Winona LaDuke, *Moral Climate* by Michael Northcott, and *Hooked!* edited by Stephanie Kaza each address a range of contemporary environmental and social issues from within their respective religious traditions. Imagine that LaDuke, Northcott, and Kaza have been invited to be on a panel to address the following contemporary issues:
   - Food, Justice and Sustainability
   - Consumption and Sustainability
   - Energy Use and Climate Change

Pick one of these issues and write an essay about how each of these authors might address the issue [Or pick another contemporary issue of your choosing and clear the topic with me ahead of time]. Base your imaginative arguments on the texts we have read, drawing on relevant sections to develop each author’s likely position, and explaining *why* she or he is likely to respond that way [Note: you are welcome but not expected to use other writings by these authors if they are helpful to you]. At the end of your essay, respond to each author’s position, and tell us your own position: how you respond to the issue and why. Is your own position grounded in a spiritual or religious tradition or set of values? If so, discuss them in the paper. If not, what *does* ground your perspective? Your paper should be 8-10 pages. Due in class May 7. We will use part of this class to discuss the positions you develop in your papers.

6. Religious Traditions Analysis: Instructions will be handed out in class on Feb 5. Preliminary proposals and project outlines are due in class on Mar 24. The project itself is due during the final exam period Monday, May 12, 3:20-5:20 pm where each student will have the opportunity to give a brief synopsis of the project.
7. **Opening Prayer, Reading or Meditation:** We will begin each class period with a couple minutes of silent meditation, followed by a short opening prayer, reading, or meditation (2-5 min.) that is related to the topic or religious tradition that day. Each student will have the opportunity to sign up and facilitate this opening exercise for one class. This is a non-graded assignment that I hope each of us will engage in and enjoy!

**Important University Policies, Dates and Deadlines:** Please check Cyberbear at: http://events.umt.edu/?calendar_id=27&upcoming=upcoming&

**Credit/No Credit Grade option:** A minimum grade average of C- (70) is required for a CR grade in the CR/NC Grade option.

**Incomplete Grade:** Please see the criteria that must be met for an Incomplete in the University Catalog. No exceptions will be made for these criteria.

**ERES:** To access the ERES readings:
- Go into http://eres.lib.umt.edu/
- Click on Electronic Reserves and Course Materials
- Under Instructor, find and select SPENCER, Daniel
- Click on the course name (EVST 594).
- Enter the password, "green"
- The first entry, "Reading List," is a Table of Contents. The rest of the readings are entered in the order of the Table of Contents and are numbered on the first page of the reading. The readings are in PDF format.

**Note:** All of the ERES readings are also found on the Class Moodle site.

**ERES READINGS, EVST 594_02, SPRING 2014**


Dan Spencer, Environmental Studies


24. Larson, Jean. Sermons on Creation by the Rev. Jean Larson, Pastor, Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church, Bonner, MT.