ENST 530.01: The Greening of Religion - Religion, Nature and the Environment

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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 life.

REQUITE TEXTS

Readings on the class Moodle site
Useful Websites:
- Forum on Religion and Ecology  
  [http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/](http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/)
- National Religious Partnership for the Environment  
  [www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org)
- Evangelical Environmental Network  
  [http://www.creationcare.org](http://www.creationcare.org)
- Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature  
- NCC Creation Justice Ministries  
  [http://www.creationjustice.org](http://www.creationjustice.org)
- Earth Sangha/ Green Buddhism  
  [http://www.earthsangha.org/depth/gb.html](http://www.earthsangha.org/depth/gb.html)
- Working Group on Environmental Justice  
  [http://ecojustice.net/](http://ecojustice.net/)
- Native Harvest / White Earth Land Recovery Project  

Requirements
- Regular class attendance and participation that demonstrates a grasp of the reading assignments
- Self-Assessment essay
- Three critical response papers to the readings
- Facilitation of a class discussion with 2-3 other students
- Religious tradition reflection/analysis final paper

Assignments and Classes

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<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Topic and Assigned Readings</th>
<th>[Recommended Reading in brackets]</th>
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<td>Introduction: Laying the Groundwork <em>Student-led Discussions</em></td>
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<td>Introduction: Laying out themes and structure of the course</td>
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<td>Class member introductions</td>
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<td>Introduction: Our Journey into Religion and Ecology</td>
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<td>Ch. 1: Problems and Promise of Religions: Limiting and Liberating</td>
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<td><em>Go over Self-Assessment Essay guidelines</em></td>
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<td>The Nature of Religious Ecology</td>
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<td>The Emerging Field of Religion and Ecology</td>
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<td>Ch. 4: Ecology, Conservation, and Ethics</td>
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Ch. 5: Emergence of the Field of Religion and Ecology
Roger Gottlieb: “Religion and Ecology – What is the Connection and Why Does It Matter?” (Moodle #1)

Go over Religious Traditions Analysis assignment

Faiths Scan: Surveying Religious Ecologies

I. North American Native American Traditions and Ecology

2/9 M 5 Introduction to Native American Traditions and Ecology

John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker: Ecology and Religion
Ch. 8: Indigenous Traditions and the Nurturing Powers of Nature
Vine Deloria, Jr.: Reflection and Revelation: Knowing Places, Land and Ourselves (Moodle #2)
Vine Deloria, Jr.: Sacred Lands and Religious Freedom (Moodle #3)

Self-Assessment Essay due in class

2/11 W 6 Lakota Perspectives: The Visions of Black Elk I

Black Elk Speaks: Foreword; Chs. 1-5
Bruce E. Johansen: “Black Elk” (Moodle #4)
[John James Collins: “The Plains Culture Area and Plains Religion” (Moodle #5)

2/16 M PRESIDENTS DAY – NO CLASSES

2/18 W 7 Lakota Perspectives: The Visions of Black Elk II

Black Elk Speaks: 6-18
Joseph Epes Brown: The Sacred Pipe (Moodle #6)

2/23 M 8 Lakota Perspectives: The Visions of Black Elk III

Black Elk Speaks: Chs. 19-25; Author’s Postscript

Documentary: “The Spirit of Crazy Horse”

2/25 W 9 Native American Religion, the Sacred and Environmental Justice

Linda Robyn: Indigenous Knowledge and Technology: Creating Environmental Justice in the Twenty-First Century (Moodle #7)
Readings from Winona LaDuke: Recovering the Sacred
“What is Sacred?” (Moodle #8)
“Klamath Land and Life” (Moodle #9)
Documentary: “Homeland: Four Portraits of Native Action”
• Gail Small, Northern Cheyenne
Winona LaDuke: Recovering the Sacred

Readings from Winona LaDuke: Recovering the Sacred
“Quilled Cradleboard Covers, Cultural Patrimony, & Wounded Knee” (Moodle #10)
“Wild Rice: Maps, Genes, and Patents” (Moodle #11)
“Recovering Power to Slow Climate Change” (Moodle #12)

Documentary: “Homeland: Four Portraits of Native Action”
• Evon Peter, Gwich’in, Alaska

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

3/4 W 11 Biblical Perspectives on Creation and Nature I
Excerpts from Genesis: (Moodle #13)
Dan Spencer: “Care for Creation” (Moodle #14)

3/9 M 12 Biblical Perspectives on Creation and Nature II
Ellen Davis: “Seeing with God: Israel’s Poem of Creation” (Moodle #15)
Norman C. Habel, Finding Wisdom in Nature: An Eco-Wisdom Reading of the Book of Job, “Introducing the Earth Bible Commentary Series” (Moodle #16)

3/11 W 13 Perspectives on Creation in the Book of Job Part I
Stephen Mitchell: The Book of Job pp. 5-75

3/16 M 14 Perspectives on Creation in the Book of Job Part II
Stephen Mitchell: The Book of Job pp. 77-91
[Recommended: Introduction: vii-xxx]
Norman C. Habel, Finding Wisdom in Nature: An Eco-Wisdom Reading of the Book of Job, pp. 97-118 (Moodle #18)
Diane Jacobson: “Creation, Birth, and the Radical Ecology of the Book of Job” (Moodle #19)
Bill McKibben: Selections from “The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation” (Moodle #20)

Go over Black Elk / Job response essay assignment

3/18 W 15 Christianity and Ecology
John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker: Ecology and Religion
Ch. 6: Christianity as Orienting to the Cosmos
Rosemary Ruether: “Ecojustice at the Center of the Church’s Mission” (Moodle #21)
Elizabeth Johnson: “Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition”
(Moodle #22)

**Documentary:** Selections from *Renewal: Stories from America’s Religious-Environmental Movement*

*Religious Traditions paper project proposals due in class*

**3/23 M 16**  
**Christianity, Ethics and Climate Change: I**

Michael Northcott: *A Political Theology of Climate Change*  
Ch. 1: The Geopolitics of Slow Catastrophe

**3/25 W 17**  
**Christianity, Ethics and Climate Change: II**

Michael Northcott: *A Political Theology of Climate Change*  
Ch. 2: Coal, Cosmos, and Creation  
Ch. 3. Engineering the Air

*SPRING BREAK MARCH 30 – APRIL 3*

**4/6 M 18**  
**Christianity, Ethics and Climate Change: III**

Michael Northcott: *A Political Theology of Climate Change*  
Ch. 4: Carbon Indulgences, Ecological Debt, and Metabolic Rift  
Ch. 5. The Crisis of Cosmopolitan Reason

**4/8 W 19**  
**Christianity, Ethics and Climate Change: IV**

Michael Northcott: *A Political Theology of Climate Change*  
Ch. 6: The *Nomos* of the Earth and Governing the Anthropocene

*Black Elk / Job response essay due in class*

**4/13 M 20**  
**Christianity, Ethics and Climate Change: V**

Michael Northcott: *A Political Theology of Climate Change*  
Ch. 7: Revolutionary Messianism and the End of Empire

**III. Eastern Religious Traditions & Ecology: Buddhism**

**4/15 W 21**  
**The Greening of Buddhism and Hinduism: An Introduction**

John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker: *Ecology and Religion*  
Ch. 9: Hinduism and the Transforming Affect of Devotion  
Stephanie Kaza: “The Greening of Buddhism: Promise and Perils” (Moodle #23)

*Speaker:* Brad Clough, Religious Studies and Liberal Studies

**4/20 M 22**  
**Contemporary Interpretations of Buddhist Teachings: I**
Thich Nhat Hanh: “The Sun My Heart” (Moodle #24)
Sulak Sivaraksa: “Buddhism with a Small b” (Moodle #25)
David Loy: “Healing Ecology” (Moodle #26)
David Loy: “Socially Engaged Buddhism” (Moodle #27)

4/22 W 23  **Contemporary Interpretations of Buddhist Teachings: II**

Alan Sponberg: “Green Buddhism and the Hierarchy of Compassion” (Moodle #28)

Documentary: “Compassion in Action” from *Renewal*

4/27 M 24  **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

4/29 W 25  **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
David Loy & Linda Goodhew: “Consuming Time” pp. 166-179

5/4 M 26  **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
David Loy: “The Religion of the Market” (Moodle #29)

5/6 W 27  Wrap-up and Class Review

*Imaginative Critical Comparison Essay due in class*

**Final Exam Period:** *Religious Traditions* essays due. *Thursday, May 14, 3:20-5:20 pm.*

**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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<th>points</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Self-Assessment essay</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Black Elk/Job</em> response essay</td>
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<td>Class Facilitation on the Readings</td>
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<td>Critical Response essay to Readings</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Imaginative Critical Comparison essay</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Religious Traditions Analysis</td>
<td>125</td>
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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 and posted on Moodle. Due Feb 9.

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 8.

3. Facilitation of Class Discussion: Each student will have the opportunity to facilitate class discussion of one set of readings from the sections of the class focusing on Native American (March 2), Christian (April 8), or Buddhist perspectives (April 29 & May 4). The class should be organized as a discussion of the texts, not a presentation. Creativity of format is encouraged!

4. Response Paper to the Readings: Following the class facilitation, each student facilitator will write a 5-6 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, A Political Theology of Climate Change 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 (or additional texts by these authors), 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?
paper should be 8-10 pages. Due in class May 6. 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 4 and posted on Moodle. Preliminary proposals and project outlines are due in class on Mar 18. The project itself is due during the final exam period Thursday, May 14, 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.

ELECTRONIC READINGS ON MOODLE, EVST 530_01, SPRING 2015
Dan Spencer, Environmental Studies


