ENST 594.03: The Greening of Religion

Daniel T. Spencer
University of Montana, daniel.spencer@umontana.edu

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

EVST 594_03
Spring, 2013, Room: LA338
MW3:10-4:30 pm
CRN: 35809

Dr. Dan Spencer
Rankin Hall 103; Tel. 243-6111
Office Hours: MWF 11:10 am – 12 pm; Tu 10 am – 12 pm
e-mail: daniel.spencer@umontana.edu

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.

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  
  www.esa-online.org/een
- Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature  
  http://www.religionandnature.com/em/
- 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 a class discussion with 1-2 other students
- Religious tradition reflection/analysis final paper

**ASSIGNMENTS AND CLASSES**

| Class Day | Session | Topic and Assigned Readings | *Student-led Discussions*
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<tr>
<td>1/28 M 1</td>
<td>Introduction: Laying the Groundwork</td>
<td>Introduction: Laying out themes and structure of the course</td>
<td><em>Student-led Discussions</em></td>
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<td>Class member introductions</td>
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<td>1/30 W 2</td>
<td>Starting Question: Why Examine Religion and Ecology?</td>
<td>Gary Gardner: Engaging Religion in the Quest for a Sustainable World (ERES #1)</td>
<td><em>Student-led Discussions</em></td>
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<td>Go over Self-Assessment Essay guidelines</td>
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<td>2/4 M 3</td>
<td>Setting the Context I: Environmentalism and Religion</td>
<td>Mary Evelyn Tucker: Selections from <em>Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase</em>” (ERES #4)</td>
<td><em>Student-led Discussions</em></td>
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<td>Larry Rasmussen: “Earth and Its Distress” (ERES #5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/6 W 4</td>
<td>Setting the Context II: Humans, Nature, and Modernity</td>
<td>Carolyn Merchant: “Dominion over Nature” (ERES #6)</td>
<td><em>Student-led Discussions</em></td>
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<td>David Loy: “The Religion of the Market” (ERES #7)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Go over Religious Traditions Analysis assignment</td>
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2/11 M 5 Myth & Religion: A Discussion of The Bacchae Part I
Euripides: The Bacchae pp. 1-37 (Scenes 1-3)
Hand out directions for Class 2 on The Bacchae

Self-Assessment Essay due in class

2/13 W 6 Myth & Religion: A Discussion of The Bacchae Part II
Euripides: The Bacchae pp. 37-55 (Scenes 4-5 & Exodus)
The Trial of Pentheus

2/18 M Presidents’ Day: No Class

Faiths Scan: Religious Traditions and Ecology

I. North American Native American Traditions and Ecology

2/20 W 7 Lakota Perspectives: The Visions of Black Elk I

Black Elk Speaks: Foreword; Chs. 1-4
Bruce E. Johansen: “Black Elk” (ERES #8)
[John James Collins: “The Plains Culture Area and Plains Religion” (ERES #9)

2/25 M 8 Lakota Perspectives: The Visions of Black Elk II

Black Elk Speaks: [5-6], 7-8, [9], 10-12
Joseph Epes Brown: The Sacred Pipe (ERES #10)

2/27 W 9 Lakota Perspectives: The Visions of Black Elk III

Black Elk Speaks: Chs. 13-18, [19-22], 23-25; Author’s Postscript

Video: “The Spirit of Crazy Horse”

3/4 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

DVD: “Homeland: Four Portraits of Native Action

3/6 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

*3/11 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

*3/13 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

3/18 M 14 Biblical Perspectives on Creation and Nature

Excerpts from Genesis: (ERES #11)
Ellen Davis: “Seeing with God: Israel’s Poem of Creation” (ERES #12)
Elizabeth Johnson: “Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition” (ERES #13)
Documentary: “Going Green” from Renewal: Stories from America’s Religious-Environmental Movement

Critical Response Essay to LaDuke text due in class

3/20 W 15 Perspectives on Creation in the Book of Job Part I
Stephen Mitchell: The Book of Job pp. 5-75

3/25 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]
Bill McKibben: Selections from “The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation” (ERES #15)

Religious Traditions paper project proposals due in class
Go over Black Elk / Bacchae / Job response essay assignment
3/27 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]

4/1 – 4/5  Spring Break: No Classes

4/8 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 / Bacchae / Job response essay due in class*

*4/10 W 19  Christianity, Ethics and Climate Change: III

Michael Northcott: *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*
Chs. 5-6 [pp. 157-212]

*4/15 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

4/17 W 21  Stephanie Kaza: “The Greening of Buddhism: Promise and Perils” (ERES #16)

Speaker: Brad Clough, Religious Studies and Liberal Studies

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

Thich Nhat Hanh: “The Sun My Heart” (ERES #17)
Sulak Sivaraksa: “Buddhism with a Small b” (ERES #18)
David Loy: “Healing Ecology” (ERES #19)
David Loy: “Socially Engaged Buddhism” (ERES #20)

*Critical Response Essay to Northcott text due in class*

4/24 W 23  Contemporary Interpretations of Buddhist Teachings: II

Alan Sponberg: “Green Buddhism and the Hierarchy of Compassion” (ERES #21)

Documentary: “Compassion in Action” from *Renewal*

4/29 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

*5/1 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

*5/6 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

5/8 W27  Wrap-up and Class Review

Critical Response Essay to Kaza text 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 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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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>points</th>
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<th>due date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Self-Assessment essay</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Critical Response essay to LaDuke</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td><em>Bacchae/Black Elk/Job</em> response essay</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Critical Response essay to Northcott</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Critical Response essay to Kaza</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Religious Traditions Analysis</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Class Facilitation on the Readings</td>
<td>25</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. Due Feb 11.

2. **Black Elk/Bacchae/Job response essay:** Pick two of the three texts -- *Black Elk Speaks*, Euripides’ *The Bacchae* or *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. 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 one of the sections of the class focusing on Native American (March 11 & 13), Christian (April 10 & 15), or Buddhist perspectives (May 1 &
6). The class should be organized as a discussion of the texts, not a presentation. Creativity of format is encouraged!

4. Critical Response Essay to the LaDuke, Northcott, and Kaza texts: 6-8 page critical response essays to the three primary course texts: Winona LaDuke’s *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming*; Michael Northcott’s, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*; and Stephanie Kaza’s *Hooked! Buddhist Writings on Greed, Desire, and the Urge to Consume*. The first part of each essay should be a thoughtful exposition (i.e. summary and explanation) of the main themes from the book. The second section should be your response to the issues the authors raise and argue: where do you agree, disagree, and why? Do the authors provide a helpful framework for assessing each religious tradition’s response to contemporary environmental issues? What do you see as the central contributions or limitations of each text to the intersection of religion and ecology? Due in Class Mar 18 (LaDuke), Apr 22 (Northcott), May 8 (Kaza).

7. Religious Traditions Analysis: Instructions will be handed out in class on Feb 6. Preliminary proposals and project outlines are due in class on Mar 25. The project itself is due during the final exam period **Tuesday, May 14, 3:20-5:20 pm** where each student will have the opportunity to give a brief synopsis of the project.

8. 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://www.umt.edu/registrar/calendar.aspx

**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.

**ERES READINGS, EVST 594_03, SPRING 2013**
**Dan Spencer, Environmental Studies**

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