

**Christianity and Ecology – REL 969 / F&ES 769a**

**Yale Divinity School and Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies – Fall 2016**

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Class: Monday 1:30-3:20pm - Weekly meeting location: YDS, JE Dining Room (N126)

Office Hours: by appointment or immediately following class

**Course Description:** This course explores the ways in which Christianity is responding to environmental degradation. Environmental problems pose not just new challenges at the intersection of religion and science, or where humans connect with nature, but they also give rise to new social and spiritual problems as well. The environmental crisis raises, in other words, economic, social, biological, legal, moral, and theological concerns. Climate change, in this regard, sets the stage for reconsidering Christian faith not just in terms of practice and policies, but also in terms of the central doctrines of faith.

This course interprets Christian responses to ecological problems from an interdisciplinary perspective. In this course, we will draw upon insights from theology, ethics, the history of religion, the sociology of religion, and philosophy. While we will examine the role that religious ideas and values play in shaping Christian attitudes and actions towards the environment, we will also consider the lived-experiences of Christians facing environmental problems. Since Christianity, and the responses to environmental issues that it generates, are diverse and constantly evolving, we will read broadly not just in terms of academic disciplines, but also ecumenically and globally. This course will introduce students to the major theologies and strategies for action that Christians are creating while simultaneously assessing the effectiveness of such strategies and examining the growth of pragmatic, on-the-ground responses.

This is intended to be an introduction to a broad spectrum of issues residing at the intersection of Christianity and ecology. No prior experience is necessary.

**Objectives:** Students who complete this course will be able to:

- 1) Demonstrate knowledge of the major themes and perspectives that exist at the intersection of Christianity and ecology. Students will also be able to identify the key figures and movements that comprise the study of ecotheology.
- 2) Be able to recall, and to critically assess, the history and development of Christian thought on the environment both as it has unfolded over time and also as it spans multiple disciplines, denominations, and geographic borders.
- 3) Apply the methodologies and concepts learned in this course to environmental and religious problems in creative, pragmatic ways.
- 4) Develop the writing, research, and speaking skills needed to critically engage with academic discourse on Christianity and ecology.

**Course Format:** This course is offered to graduate students including, but not limited to, students in the Yale Divinity School and the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Undergraduate students are also welcome to attend. Class meetings will typically consist of a

short lecture by the instructor and a student presentation followed by class discussion and reflection. It meets once per week and is worth three credits.

**Course Requirements and Grading:** Students are expected to complete the following:

- 15-20 page Research Paper. (55% of final grade).
- In-class presentation / short paper. (20% of final grade).
- Reading of books and articles as demonstrated through weekly submission of Reading Responses. (15% of final grade).
- Active participation in class discussions. (10% of final grade).

**Grading Rubric**

H	95-100%	Work receiving a grade of “Honors” is exemplary scholarship which features clear writing, expression of nuanced arguments and insights, and has the originality and structure expected in publication quality work. This is work that uses an effective rhetorical structure nearing professional level writing and it is coherent and enjoyable to read from beginning to end. Honors work will have negligible issues with grammar and formatting.
H-	90-94%	Work receiving a grade of “Honors Minus” indicates outstanding work in the form of quality writing, well-considered arguments and insights, and which also shows a depth of thought and originality that nears that of publication quality work. Honors Minus work will often have minimal issues with grammar and formatting.
HP+	87-89%	Work receiving a grade of “Honors Pass Plus” indicates acceptable work which may include the following attributes: Clear but somewhat disorganized writing, arguments and insights that are cogent but which need further refinement, and a level of thought that is more descriptive than critical. Honors Pass Plus work will often have some issues with grammar and formatting.
HP	84-86%	Work receiving a grade of “Honors Pass” indicates acceptable work which should include many, but not all, of the following attributes: Clear but somewhat disorganized writing, arguments and insights that are cogent but which need further refinement, and a level of thought that is more descriptive than critical. Honors Pass work will often have some issues with grammar and formatting.
HP-	80-83%	Work receiving a grade of “Honors Pass Minus” indicates work which shows clear effort and intent to complete the assignment, but which may feature several of the following: Disorganized writing, an argument which conflicts itself or which is purely descriptive in nature, a

		misunderstanding of source materials, or it will have significant issues with grammar and formatting.
P	70-79%	Work receiving a grade of “Pass” indicates work that was turned in, but which minimally adheres to the standards of academic writing and critical thought.
F	0	Passing credit cannot be given for this work.
W	Withdrawal	Student withdrew from course.

**Reading Responses and Presentation:** Students are expected to post a weekly reading response to Canvas. Each response should be a critical engagement with the concepts and schools of thought explored in that particular week’s readings (approximately 400 words recommended). Your task is not to summarize the readings, but rather to explore the theoretical frameworks that they present. In other words, you should not be addressing an environmental *issue* that interests you, but rather a particular way of *thinking* about the relationship between Christianity and the environment. Then, read the posts of your classmates and comment on the posts of two other students in a thought-provoking or insightful way. The reading responses are due three days before class meets (Friday at 9pm) and comments on the posts of your peers are due the day before class (Sunday at 9pm). Students should come to class prepared to discuss their posts and responses.

Each week, 1-2 students will be assigned to do a short in-class presentation. The presentations are an extension of the reading responses. As such, rather than completing a short reading response for the week in which they are presenting, students should instead write a short paper of approximately 1,000 words which can then be read or summarized as a class presentation on the week’s topic (~10 minutes). These students will also take a leading role in discussion following their presentation along with the instructor and therefore should come prepared with a strong grasp of the week’s readings. These short 1,000 word “papers” should be emailed to the instructor by Sunday at 9pm on the day before class.

**Research Paper:** Each student is required to write a research paper on the topic of their choosing (with instructor approval) which is due at the end of the semester. Like the reading responses, your task is to engage with a particular way of *thinking* about Christianity as it relates to the environment. You may organize your paper around a particular environmental issue or aspect of the Christian tradition, but the main task of your paper is report on a particular way of thinking about religion and the environment, to critically examine it, and to draw it into conversation with the broader themes and theories presented in this course. Papers should be 15-20 pages, in the form of a Word document, use 12pt. font, have 1-inch margins, and should also have a works cited list in addition to the paper. Additional instructions will be provided in class. **The paper is due December 22nd.**

**Classroom Culture, Participation, and Academic Integrity:** This course is intended to be an intellectually challenging opportunity for personal growth and development. Since this is a shared learning environment, participants in this course are expected to be respectful of others.

This includes actively listening to one another, being respectful of the time and ideas of your classmates, and entering into the classroom with a desire to engage and learn in a collaborative fashion.

Students participating in this course must adhere to the standards of academic integrity. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, please consult the YDS Bulletin for guidelines regarding plagiarism and citing sources. When in doubt, consult the instructor of this course.

**Absences and Late Work:** Students are expected to attend classes and to turn work in on time. In the case of emergencies and extenuating circumstances, extensions may only be given with prior consent from the instructor. Late papers will have a portion of the final grade for that assignment deducted for each day that it is late (for example, an “H” paper that is one day late will receive a mark of “H-” and an “H” paper that is two days late will receive a mark of “HP+”).

**Special Accommodations:** Students with documented learning challenges, health conditions, or who are non-native speakers of English should meet with the instructor at the beginning of the semester. Students should also contact, and work with, the appropriate resources available to them on campus to aid in their learning. Your learning is important and I will make every reasonable effort to facilitate your success in this course. For more information, please consult the Student Handbook and the YDS website.

**Required Texts:** The following books can be purchased at the YDS Student Book Supply or via an online bookseller. Additional readings, such as articles, will be provided on Classes\*v2.

- Thomas Berry. 2009. *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*. Edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Roger Gottlieb. 2006. *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Roger Gottlieb. Editor. 2004. *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (1<sup>st</sup> Edition is acceptable, but not preferred). New York: Routledge.
- Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether. Editors. 2000. *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking Well-Being of Earth and Humans*. Cambridge, MA: Center for the Study of World Religions and Harvard University Press.

### **Course Schedule:**

**Sept. 14:** *Introduction to the Course – Central Concerns and Framing Questions: Why Christianity? And, the “Groaning” of Creation – The Climate Problem.*

**Readings:**

- White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.” *Science* 155: 3767 (1967), pp. 1203-1207.
- Bouma-Prediger, “Is Christianity to Blame?,” online, 57-80.

- Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism*, online, pp. 115-122.
- The Forum on Religion and Ecology website, read Hessel’s “Christianity and Ecology” (<http://fore.yale.edu/religion/christianity/>) and then choose and read three Christian statements on ecology (<http://fore.yale.edu/religion/christianity/statements/>).
- IPCC report, skim this for an overview, online.

**Sept. 21:** *The Historical Development of Christianity and Ecology.*

Readings:

- *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. xv-xlvi and 3-27.
- Lowdermilk, “The Eleventh Commandment,” pp. 10-16, online.
- Sittler, “A Theology for Earth,” pp. 16-19, online.
- Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith*, “Religion and the Human Meaning of the Environmental Crisis” and “Religion, Nature, Environment,” pp. 3-56.
- Jenkins and Chapple, “Religion and the Environment.” *Annual Review of Environmental Resources* 36 (1 August 2011), pp. 441-463.

**Sept. 28:** *Theological Grounding*

Readings:

- Kearns, “The Context of Eco-Theology,” (<http://users.drew.edu/lkearns/eco-theology.pdf>), pp. 466-481.
- Peterson, “In and of the World?,” in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 113-123.
- McFague, “The Scope of the Body: The Cosmic Christ,” in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 262-272.
- McDaniel, “A Process Approach to Ecology,” online, pp. 227-248.
- *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 51-72.

**Oct. 5:** *Biblical Strategies – Dominion, Stewardship, and the Kingdom of God in the Bible.*

Readings:

- Merchant, “Dominion Over Nature,” online, pp. 40-47.
- Riley, “A Spiritual Democracy of All God’s Creatures,” online, pp. 241-260.
- Cornwall Alliance, “The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship.” (<http://www.cornwallalliance.org/2000/05/01/the-cornwall-declaration-on-environmental-stewardship/>).
- Cornwall Alliance, “Protect the Poor.” (<http://www.cornwallalliance.org/2014/09/17/protect-the-poor-ten-reasons-to-oppose-harmful-climate-change-policies/>).

Case Study (In Class):

- Cornwall Alliance

**Oct. 12:** *Special Session.*

In Class:

- Viewing Laudato Si’ panel

Readings:

- Laudato Si'  
([http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)).
- Read 2 or more news articles on the FORE website on the subject of the encyclical (<http://fore.yale.edu/news-related-to-pope-francis-climate-change-and-the-environment>).

**Oct. 19:** YDS Reading Period, no class.

**Oct. 26:** *On the Ground Strategies – Christianity in Action*

Readings:

- Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith*, “Religious Environmentalism in Action,” pp. 111-146.
- Harper, “Religion and Earth on the Ground: The Experience of GreenFaith in New Jersey,” online, pp. 504-516.
- Djupe and Hunt, “Beyond the Lynn White Thesis: Congregational Effects on Environmental Concern.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48: 4 (2009), pp. 670-686.
- Guth et al, “Faith and the Environment: Religious Beliefs and Attitudes on Environmental Policy.” *American Journal of Political Science* 39: 2 (1995), pp. 364-382.

Case Study (In Class):

- GreenFaith

**Nov. 2:** *Where Place and Faith Connect – Land and Christian Covenant*

Readings:

- Muir, “from *Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*,” in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 34-35.
- Leopold, “from *A Sand County Almanac*,” in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 36-38.
- Hebrew Bible, “Selections,” in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 77-89.
- “Engaged Projects,” on the FORE website:  
<http://fore.yale.edu/religion/christianity/projects/>
- McFarland, “Reinhabiting Religion: Green Sisters, Ecological Renewal, and the Biogeography of Religious Landscape,” in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 613-633.
- Daneel, “Earthkeeping Churches at the African Grass Roots,” in *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 531-558.

Case Study (In Class):

- Genesis Farm.

**Nov. 9:** *Liberation and Nature: Institutionalized Systems of Oppression and the Liberation of Humans and the Earth.*

Readings:

- Walker, “African-American Resources for a More Inclusive Liberation Theology,” in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 277-284.
- Wallace, “Environmental Justice, Neopreservationism, and Sustainable Spirituality,” in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 596-612.
- *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 559-571 and 603-614.
- UCC, “Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty,” (<http://www.weact.org/Portals/7/toxic20.pdf>), pp. vii-xv, 1-15.

**Nov. 16:** *Ecofeminist and Ecowomanist Theology.*

Readings:

- Baker-Fletcher, “Something or Nothing: An Eco-Womanist Essay on God, Creation, and Indispensability,” in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 428-437.
- Riley, “Ecology is a Sistah’s Issue Too: The Politics of an Emergent Afrocentric Ecowomanism,” in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 412-427.
- Gebara, “The Trinity and Human Experience: An Ecofeminist Approach,” in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 400-411.
- *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 97-110 and 183-203.

Case Study (In Class):

- Catholic Sisters and Brazilian Cities.

**Nov. 23:** *Reading Period / Thanksgiving Recess, no class.*

**Nov. 30:** *Science, Religion, and Ecology – Why Sources Matter*

Readings:

- Joint Appeal in Religion and Science, in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 735-737.
- Kearns, “Cooking the Truth: Faith, Science, the Market, and Global Warming,” online, pp. 97-124.
- Bauman et al, “Ecology: What is it, Who gets to Decide, and Why Does it Matter?,” online, 49-62.
- Fredericks and O’Brien, “The Importance and Limits of Taking Science Seriously,” online, pp. 42-61.
- Sideris, “Religion, Environmentalism, and the Meaning of Ecology,” online, pp. 446-462.
- PRRI/AAR report on Religion, Science, and Climate Change, online, skim.
- *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 385-401.

Case Study (In Class):

- The Bible and Politics (film clip).

**Dec. 7:** *Cosmology and Creation*

Readings:

- Berry, “The New Story,” online ([http://thomasberry.org/assets/attachments/Thomas\\_Berry-The\\_New\\_Story.pdf](http://thomasberry.org/assets/attachments/Thomas_Berry-The_New_Story.pdf)).
- Berry, “The Wisdom of the Cross” and “The Universe as Cosmic Liturgy,” in *Christian Future*, pp. 82-116.

- Lovelock, “Gaia and God,” online, pp. 531-540.
- Grim and Tucker, “Christianity as Orienting to the Cosmos,” in *Ecology and Religion*, online, pp. 96-108.

Case Study:

- Video clips, in class.

**Dec. 9 [note that this class meets on Wednesday]:** *Looking Forward: Reflecting on Faith and Community in an Age of Climate Change*

Reading:

- Berry, “The Role of the Church in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Christian Future*, pp. 46-58.
- *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 205-226, 365-384, and 497-514.
- Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith*, “Obstacles, Prospects, Hope,” pp. 215-243.
- Thoreau, “from ‘Walking,’” in Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 29-31.

Case Study:

- Interfaith Power and Light, in class.