

FORUM ON RELIGION AND ECOLOGY AT YALE

The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale is the largest international multireligious project of its kind. With its conferences, publications, and website (<http://fore.research.yale.edu>), it is engaged in exploring religious worldviews, texts, and ethics in order to broaden understanding of the complex nature of current environmental concerns. The Forum recognizes that religions need to be in dialogue with other disciplines (e.g., science, economics, policy, gender studies) in seeking comprehensive solutions to both global and local environmental problems. The cofounders and codirectors of the Forum and the series editors for the World Religions and Ecology series are John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker.

The Forum arose from a series of ten conferences on the world's religions and ecology held at Harvard from 1996 to 1998, which resulted in ten volumes distributed by Harvard University Press. Several of these volumes have been translated into other languages, including Chinese. One of the principal objectives of the Forum was to help to create a new field of study that will assist environmental policy.

Twenty years ago, religion and ecology was neither a field of study nor a force for transformation. Over the past two decades, a new field of study has emerged within academia with courses being taught at colleges and high schools across North America and in some universities in Europe. Canada, Australia, and Europe now have their own forums on religion and ecology. Moreover, a new force of religious environmentalism is growing in churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques around the world. Now every major religion has statements on the importance of ecological protection, and hundreds of grassroots projects have emerged. The Forum on Religion and Ecology has played an active role in these developments.

The work of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale includes:

Joint master's degree program at Yale The Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies (F&ES) and Yale Divinity School (YDS) offer a joint master's degree program in religion and ecology. It is aimed at students who wish to integrate the study of environmental issues and religious communities in their professional careers and at those who wish to study the cultural and ethical dimensions of environmental problems. The joint degree is supported by co-appointed faculty and by the Forum.

This degree program provides an opportunity to study in two independent schools at Yale University, each with its own integrity. Students work toward both a Master of Environmental Management (M.E.M.) degree at F&ES and either a Master of Arts in Religion (M.A.R.) or Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree at YDS. Within these schools, they are encouraged to take courses in environmental ethics and in religion and ecology. Students have the opportunity to work with faculty in both schools, as well as with a number of co-appointed faculty members.

This joint degree in religion and ecology is the first program of its kind in North America. It aims to attract students to a growing field of study with far-reaching implications for the future of the Earth community. The Interdisciplinary Center for Bioethics at Yale and the Religious Studies department in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences enhance the degree program.

A new chair in Religion and Environmental Stewardship was announced in December 2010 at Yale Divinity School. This is the first chair of its kind in the world and marks an important milestone for the development of the field of religion and ecology.

Publications The Forum has helped to create a new field of research and teaching in religion and ecology that has implications for environmental policy.

- With its scholarly network it published the ten-volume World Religions and Ecology series from Harvard.
- It has supported the first journal in the field, *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*.
- It produced a *Daedalus* volume, *Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?*, which was the first discussion of world religions and the ethics of climate change.
- The Forum's founders have also served as editors for the twenty-volume Ecology and Justice series from Orbis Books.
- The encyclopedia *The Spirit of Sustainability* (Berkshire Publishers, September 2009), edited by Willis Jenkins of the University of Virginia and Whitney Bauman of Florida International University, was also a project of the Forum.
- The Forum has edited a number of volumes by the late cultural historian Thomas Berry: *The Sacred Universe* (Columbia University Press, 2009), *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth* (Orbis Books, 2009), *Evening Thoughts* (Sierra Club Books, 2006), and *The Great Work* (Random House, 1999).
- Most recently, the Forum published the book *Journey of the Universe* (Yale University Press, 2011).

Conferences The Forum has organized many conferences, including “Renewing Hope: Pathways of Grassroots Religious Environmentalism” (F&ES and YDS, Spring 2007), the Forum on Religion and Ecology’s 10th Anniversary Symposium (Yale Club of New York, Fall 2008), and the Thomas Berry Memorial (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York, Fall 2009). The Forum cosponsored the conference “Environmental Dis/locations: Environmental Justice and Climate Change” (F&ES & YDS, Spring 2010) and organized an interdisciplinary conference for the premiere of the film *Journey of the Universe* at F&ES (Spring 2011). It has also assisted in organizing the Thomas Berry Award and Lecture since 1998. The Forum organized with TERI University an interdisciplinary workshop focused on the Yamuna River and held in Delhi and Vrindavan in north India (January 2011). In June 2012 the Forum organized a conference between F&ES and YDS titled “Religion and Environmental Stewardship.”

In addition, the Forum participates in interdisciplinary conferences, both national and international, that are policy oriented. These include conferences with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); the Dialogue of Civilizations; the Earth Dialogues led by Gorbachev; the Earth Charter; the Religion, Science, and the Environment Symposia, led by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, Bartholomew; and the Parliament of World Religions.

Website The Forum’s website is a world-class international site for research, education, engagement, and outreach in the field of religion and ecology. It contains detailed information on the world’s religions and their ecological contributions, including introductory essays, annotated bibliographies, selections from sacred texts, environmental statements from religious communities, and engaged projects of religious grassroots environmental movements. To facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue, there are resources that address environmental issues related to ethics, economics, policy, gender, and evolutionary and ecological sciences. To enhance teaching, the site includes syllabi, lists of educational videos and CD-ROMs, links to programs and institutions related to environmental education, and a variety of other resources for educators. The site provides current information on news, publications, and events related to world religions and ecology. This is available in a monthly online newsletter that is distributed to some 12,000 people. See <http://fore.research.yale.edu>.

Films The Forum was a principal adviser for the film *Renewal: Inspiring Stories from America’s Religious Environmental Movement* (2007), and it collaborated with evolutionary philosopher Brian Swimme on the Emmy Award-winning film *Journey of the Universe* (2011), directed by Patsy Northcutt and David Kennard (director of the *Cosmos* series with Carl Sagan)

and broadcast on PBS and available on Netflix. The latter project included a book published by Yale University Press, a twenty-part DVD educational series, curricular materials, and a website, www.journeyoftheuniverse.org.