How do religious communities adapt to new social crises? Environmental problems challenge religious ethics to respond to unprecedented moral and political issues. This course interprets the Christian responses, which have been both peculiarly slow and peculiarly innovative. Because the responses vary with Christian diversity – ecclesial, theological, and geographical – we read ecumenically and globally to identify major strategies of theological response.

How do Christian communities generate new ethical capacities from their traditions of belief and practice? We pay particular attention to innovating frameworks like eco-justice and creation spirituality.

The course has two main objectives. First, we want to understand the multiple kinds of environmental theology, especially how each works in its own way to make environmental problems morally significant for (some form of) Christian life. Why does stewardship seem to work for some theological communities but not others? What social and theological pressures shape the development of its strategy? What moral vocabularies or ethical frameworks does it draw upon?

Second, we will evaluate how well these strategies succeed, on both theological and environmental criteria. As these strategies reclaim, redeploy, or revise theological traditions, which doctrines take priority and which are suppressed? As environmental problems are reframed by theology, which problems can a strategy engage and which does it distort or overlook? Are the changes in belief and practice theologically coherent? Are they environmentally adequate?

Those two objectives help raise a larger conceptual question for religious ethics: in the specific topic of Christian response to environmental problems lies the question of how religious traditions adapt to new social needs and political pressures. What formal and informal methods of change do moral communities develop? What pressures adaptation? What do the changes accomplish? By exploring the case of Christian environmental theologies, we gain particular vantage on a methodological question for religion and social practice.

Requirements

This class assumes no previous course in theology or environmental studies, although those backgrounds would enrich your experience. Readings are usually about 100 pages per week.

Reading responses: Before each class, submit a brief comment on the assigned reading of no more than 250 words. Do not try to summarize; instead select a quotation that seems significant to you (because it is telling, or striking, or appalling, or importantly inexplicable), and say or ask something about it. You may relate your comment to other readings, but do not attempt to cover everything.
Go to the Classes v.2 site for REL 768/FES 80042, and click on “Discussion.” Then “Reply” to the topic posted for that week. (Do not post a new topic unless you mean to start a separate discussion thread.) Submit these to the course website by noon the day of class.

Your responses are a record of your attendance. You may not submit one for a class you will not attend. Anyone may miss one class and/or response, for any reason (no need to tell me). After that, they affect your grade.

Attending, participating, and submitting responses make up 30% of your course grade. Your responses are not graded, so long as you engage the assigned reading with something near to thoughtfulness.

For papers you may choose one of two options:

1. Complete three response papers of 1500 words, and be ready to say something about the week’s texts in class.
   Response papers are due by email to me midnight the day before class (with grace until 8am). These are graded. They are short, so they must be concisely argued. (Do not exceed the word-limit; instead condense your argument.) These papers interpret one or several of the week’s readings, but you do not need to address all the readings or offer a comprehensive assessment of any one reading. You may criticize texts from theological, ecological, scientific, or social perspectives.
   You do not need to post a toolkit response on the weeks you submit a paper.

2. Alternatively, you may choose to do a 15-20 page (6000 word maximum) research paper on an independent topic or project. You may choose this option at any point up to Nov 14th.

When you write, papers should exhibit careful, charitable reading and a helpful, critical thesis. Avoid simple summarizing as well as total rejections. Good evaluative readings often emerge from using quotations to ask critical questions or open up new areas for discussion. The very best papers understand texts on their own terms, evaluate them fairly, make new and helpful connections, and bring discussion of the basic issue at stake to a new level.

Grading
Class and Group Participation, including weekly discussion postings  30%
Papers(s): 70%

Texts for Purchase (available at Yale Divinity School Bookstore)
Boff, Leonardo  Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor
Jenkins, Willis  Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology
Hart, John  What Are They Saying About Environmental Theology?
Rasmussen, Larry  Earth Community, Earth Ethics

Optional:
Hessel and Ruether  Christianity and Ecology
We read five of about 30 chapters in this book. They are not posted online, so you might choose to use the library’s reserve copy, to share with others, or buy it to have a nice collection.

**Reading Schedule**

Most readings are available as an electronic reserve from the library. (From the library homepage, go to “course reserves,” select instructor, click on the title and view pdf.) Those reading marked with (*) designate books available for purchase. There should be one copy of each of these on reserve in the YDS library.

**Sep 5 Introduction: Environmental Problems and Religious Ethics**

[No reading or response required for first day, but if you have a chance, take a look at Dean Speth’s article in the current issue of *Reflections* (the green YDS magazine available at the front door of the Div School).]

- Speth, “Avoiding the Great Collision” *Reflections*, 35-38
- Cases: What Would Jesus Drive?, South African Green Bishop, Thai monks, Muslim fishermen, Genesis Farm, African Earthkeepers

**Sep 12 Theological Strategies**

- Lynn White “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis” [link to pdf]
- Thomas Berry *Dream of the Earth* (24-35)
- *Tucker & Grim “Series Foreward” Christianity and Ecology, xv-xxxix
- Jenkins ch.1 *Ecologies of Grace* “Introduction” [website “resources”]
- NCC “Open Letter” [link to html]

Optional: Jenkins ch.2 “Practical Strategies in Environmental Ethics” *Ecologies of Grace* [online]

- Fowler “Bible as (Contested) Foundation” 28-44
- Clifford “The Bible and the Environment” 1-26

**Sep 19 Stewardship**

- “Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation” [link]
- *The Care of Creation*, 43-49 (Sider), 60-73 (DeWitt), 177-83 (conclusion)
- Zerbe “The Kingdom of God and the Stewardship of Creation” 73-92
- Reichenback and Anderson “Tensions in a Stewardship Paradigm” 112-25
- Palmer “Stewardship: A Case Study” 63-75
- Wirzba *The Paradise of God* 123-48

**Sep 26 Land and Discipleship**

- Brueggeman, *The Land*, 43-69
- Deloria *For This Land* 145-50
- Bean “Toward an Anabaptist/Mennonite Environmental Ethic” 183-205
- Finger “An Anabaptist/Mennonite Theology of Creation” 154-69
- Granberg-Michaelson “Covenant and Creation” (in *Liberating Life*), 27-36
- W. Berry “The Gift of Good Land” 293-304

Oct 3  Sacrament and Covenant
Inge  *Christian Theology of Place* 78-90
Tuwere  *Vanua: Toward a Fijian Theology of Place* 87-106
Irwin  “The Sacramentality of Creation” 105-46
Habgood  “A Sacramental Approach to Environmental Issues” 46-54
Lathrop  *A Liturgical Cosmology* 1-20, 125-35
Northcott  *The Environment and Christian Ethics* 164-98

- cf. David Brown  *God and Enchantment of Place*

[Oct 10 Reading Week]

Oct 17  Eco-Justice: Respecting Nature in Christian Community
*Rasmussen  *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* 90-110, 195-316
Siideris  *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology and Natural Selection*, 1-9

Oct 24 Catholic Social Thought, Natural Law, and the Common Good
*Hart  *What Are They Saying About Environmental Theology?*  7-58, 84-90, 100-28
*Nash  “Seeking Moral Norms” (in *Christianity and Ecology*), 227-250
*Cobb  “Christianity, Economics, and Ecology”  *Christianity and Ecology*, 497-511

Oct 31 Liberation Theology and Environmental Justice
*Boff,  *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, pp. 63-157
Hinga  “The Gikuyu Theology of Land and Environmental Justice” 172-84
*Miller-Travis,  “Social Transformation” (in *Christianity and Ecology*), 559-572

- consider Glave  “Black Env’l Lib’n Theology” in  *Love the Wind and the Rain*
- Cone  “Whose Earth is it anyway?”

Nov 7  Ecological Spirituality
Tinker  *Spirit and Resistance*, 1-27 [to be posted]
Fox  *Creation Spirituality*, 7-42
Fox  *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, 129-55
McFague  *The Body of God* 159-91

Nov 14 Ecofeminist Theology
*Ruether,  “Ecofeminism” (in *Christianity and Ecology*), 97-112
*Ruether  *New Woman, New Earth*, 186-211
Baker-Fletcher  *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit* 109-116, 15-20, 49-58
Gebara  *Longing for Running Water*, 83-96
Taylor  *Green Sisters*, 22-51
Wallace
Sittler

Comment [W11]:  And God Saw That It Was Good”  *ed.s Christiansen and Grazer*
Comment [W12]:  in  *Liberating Life*, ed.s Birch et al.
Comment [W13]:  In Ruether,  *Women Healing Earth*
Nov 28 Eastern Orthodoxy

Bartholomew I *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer*, 287-92
Ignatius IV “Three Sermons on the Environment” pp. 1-14
Zizioulas “Priest of Creation” 273-90
Staniloae *The Experience of God*, vol. 2, 1-7, 21-63
Theokritoff “Creation and Priesthood in Modern Orthodox Thinking” 344-63

Dec 5 Reinhabting Theology

*Jenkins *Ecologies of Grace*
read one of the following selections: ch.s 3, 6-7, 13; or 4, 8-9, 13; or 5, 11-13