Religious Studies 250: Religious Traditions and Care of the Earth
(Online)
Summer Semester 2017
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course is a study of the relationship between religion and the natural environment. Major topics to be covered will include the relationship between religion and ecology, the potential problems that certain religious worldviews pose for valuing non-human nature, and the emerging role of religious perspectives in addressing issues of ecological concern. We will also assess various definitions of the terms religion, spirituality, and nature including ways in which these terms have been employed in both a historical and contemporary context as well as the ways in which interpretations of these terms lead to understandings of the human-nature relationship. The question that will serve as our orientation throughout the semester is the following: In a time of widespread ecological degradation, what is the potential for religion or the religious to offer a significant contribution toward the attainment of sustainable human cultures? This question will be explored with reference to conceptions of the natural environment from existing religious traditions as well as through an examination of whether concern and care for natural environments can be understood as a form of religious expression.

COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES
The goals for this course include but are not limited to the following:
1. To assess the relationship between religion and ecological science.
2. To identify the role, if any, that religious traditions have in addressing ecological crises.
3. To analyze understandings of religion, nature, and environment and how these understandings relate to the alleviation of ecological degradation.
4. To critically evaluate the ways in which our ecological context influences and contributes to the construction of religious belief and practice and, concurrently, the ways in which religious constructions potentially influence and affect the ecological communities of which we are inextricably a part.
5. To critically assess why the emerging field of “Religion and Ecology” is a subject that is worthy of study in an academic setting, which will involve an examination of the ways in which human cultures construct various understandings of religion and nature.

WRITING INTENSIVE STUDENT LEARNING GOALS

WI SLO 1: Students will be able to recognize and write in genres appropriate to the discipline(s) of the primary subject matter of the course.

WI SLO 2: Students will be able to use informal and formal approaches to writing and multiple drafts to deepen their mastery of the subject.

*These competencies will be developed through two paper writing workshops during the semester in addition to the availability of individual student conferences. Paper writing workshops will focus on all aspects of the writing process including the development of paper topics, thesis construction, and paper organization and coherence.
ONLINE COURSE OBJECTIVES
Since this is an online course, the course will be reading and writing intensive. In order to succeed in this course, it will be your responsibility to keep up with the assigned reading for each week and complete all of your assignments on time.

Because we will not meet in a traditional lecture format, content will be conveyed through guided reading assignments and lecture slides, which will be provided through the course Canvas site. Accountability for this content will be achieved through weekly writing assignments on questions related to course readings and two research papers. All writing assignments will be administered through Canvas.

Since the opportunity to meet in person with your course instructor is an important part of the learning process, I will be available throughout the semester for office hours. Office hours are by appointment so that I am available at a time that will accommodate your schedule.

ASSIGNED READING
1. Textbooks:
   Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Columbia University Press, 2009). (*An online copy of this text is available for FREE through the UNC-G Libraries web site.*)
2. Additional reading materials will be made available through the Course’s Canvas site.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
1. Current Events 10%
2. Reading Responses 30%
3. Test 30%
4. Research Paper 30%

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING SCALE
1. Current Events: Twice during the semester on a day of your choice, you will be required to post a copy of and provide a short report (200 words) on a current news story pertaining to the course content.

2. Reading Responses: Throughout the course of the semester, you will be required to post written responses to reading assignments. The criteria for each response are as follows: Each response must be at least 250 words and must contain one properly formatted reference to a particular day’s reading. For full credit, you must complete 10 of these responses. You are encouraged to use these short assignments to generate ideas and content for your final research paper. The assignments will due by midnight of the day of the assigned reading and will be available through the Discussion link on Canvas.

3. Test: The test will consist of material from readings and power point slides that will be posted on Canvas. A Study Guide will be posted on Canvas, and the test will be available through Canvas at the Quizzes link. You are allowed to consult course materials including notes and readings during your tests; however, having a solid grasp of the material will be imperative since you will be given a time limit for completion of the test.

4. Research Paper: You will have one research paper that will be due on the last day of the semester. Your paper should be 4 double-spaced pages in length and written on a topic applicable to course content. Criteria will be
posted under the Paper Criteria folder on Canvas. The paper can be written either as a standard research paper or a report on the work of a local environmental organization that combines the areas of religion and environmental protection. For the latter project, you should include either an interview (phone or in-person) with a representative of this particular organization or a description of your visit to a function sponsored by the organization and an assessment of this particular organization’s efforts to alleviate environmental problems. The papers will be written on topics of your choice and will be due on June 21.

*This course will be graded using a plus/minus grading system. Grades are assigned according to the following scale:
A+ (98-100); A (93-97); A- (90-92); B+ (86-89); B (83-85); B- (80-82); C+ (76-79); C (73-75); C- (70-72); D+ (66-69); D (63-65); D- (60-62); F (<60).

COURSE POLICIES
1. Proper class preparation is expected. This entails completing the assigned readings and assignments on time.

2. Respect for your fellow classmates, your teacher, and the course material must be maintained at all times. Critical examination of the issues applicable to this course is allowed; derogatory language is not. A failure to adhere to this policy will result in points being deducted from your written assignments.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
All academic work for this class must conform to the standards of the UNC-Greensboro Academic Integrity Policy. If you are unfamiliar with the UNC-Greensboro Academic Integrity Policy, please visit the following link: http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu.

DROP POLICY
If you wish to drop the course, you must initiate the process yourself. If you drop before the midpoint deadline, you will receive a “W”.

DISABILITY SERVICES
UNCG seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students requesting accommodations must be registered with the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (OARS) in 215 Elliot University Center, 336-334-5440, https://ods.uncg.edu/, oars@uncg.edu.

I am happy to accommodate any special needs that you may require for the completion of this course. However, it is your responsibility to complete all of the applicable paper work with OARS and provide me with an explanation of the accommodations that you will need.

COURSE OUTLINE
Week One:
May 18: Read the syllabus carefully and begin the reading for next week’s assignments.

Week Two:
May 22: Reading: Ecology and Religion, Introduction and Chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-42)—Reading Response Due by Midnight
May 23: Reading: Bron Taylor (Canvas under Readings at the Pages Link)—Reading Response Due by Midnight
May 24: Reading: Ecology and Religion, Chapters 3-5 (pp. 43-95)—Reading Response Due by Midnight
May 25: Reading: Lynn White, Jr.’s “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (Canvas under Readings at the Pages link); Genesis 1:1-2:25—Reading Response Due by Midnight
Week Three:
May 29: No Assignment: Memorial Day Holiday
May 30: Reading: *Ecology and Religion*, Chapters 6-9 (pp. 96-153)—Reading Response Due by Midnight
May 31: Reading: Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, Chapters 6 and 7 (pp. 80-100)—Reading Response Due by Midnight
June 1: Reading: Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, Chapters 9 and 10 (pp. 117-138)—Reading Response Due by Midnight
June 2: Reading: Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, Chapters 8 and 11 (pp. 103-116, 141-151)—Reading Response Due by Midnight

Week Four:
June 5: Reading: Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, Chapters 12 and 13 (pp. 152-177)—Reading Response Due by Midnight
June 6: TEST
June 7: Reading: *The Creation*, Chapters 1-6 (pp. 1-61)—Reading Response Due by Midnight
June 8: Reading: *The Creation*, Chapters 7-11 (pp. 62-109)—Reading Response Due by Midnight

Week Five:
June 12: Film: *Of Ants and Men* (Canvas under Film Clips at the Pages link)—Reading Response Due by Midnight
June 13: Reading: *The Creation*, Chapters 12-17 (pp. 110-168)—Reading Response Due by Midnight
June 14: Reading: Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (ix-87)—Reading Response Due by Midnight
June 15: Reading: Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (89-141)—Reading Response Due by Midnight

Week Six:
June 19: Reading: Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (143-174)—Reading Response Due by Midnight
June 20: Reading: *Ecology and Religion*, Chapter 10 and Epilogue (pp. 154-170)—Reading Response Due by Midnight
June 21: PAPER DUE

*Further information concerning these matters will be given in class. In addition, the information contained within this syllabus is a general guide and may be subject to change. All changes will be announced in class.*