

THEOLOGY 171 – FOUNDATIONS FOR ECOLOGICAL ETHICS

Spring 2008, MW 1-2:15 p.m., LL 140

Dr. Schaefer, Coughlin 115, x83742

Office Hours MW 11:45-12:45, 2:30-3:30, and by appointment

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Description and Objectives

Can religious traditions provide the impetus that will deter humans from accelerating the rate of species' extinction, degrading and destroying ecological systems, and threatening the integrity of Earth's biosphere? Ongoing abuse of the environment has prompted an increasing number of scholars of religions to pose this question and to explore ways of thinking that might motivate believers to act in ways that are more compatible with the well being of our planet and its many varied constituents. Students taking Theology 171 are afforded an opportunity to participate in this ongoing "greening of religion" by examining teachings of the world's major religions and discerning the extent to which they provide promising foundations for environmental ethics.

During the first part of the semester, we will examine Christian calls to address ecological concerns. Texts by Pope John Paul II, the United States Catholic bishops, and leaders of other Christian denominations will be examined. Emphasis will be placed subsequently on critically retrieving and reformulating notions in the Bible and works by eminent theologians in order to respond more relevantly to current ecological problems that concern you. Focus will shift during the second part of the semester to the ecologically promising orthopraxis suggested in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Stressed throughout is the need for religious discourse to be informed by broad scientific findings, particularly cosmology and biology. The semester will close with examining models of the human with a particular focus on one developed by a cutting-edge theologian.

Students in this course will aim to achieve the following: (1) Accurately identify and explain orally and in writing key concepts with corresponding principles in the Christian and other world religions that appear promising for addressing ecological degradation; (2) critically assess the extent to which these concepts/principles provide ways of thinking about and living more compatibly within the ecosystems of Earth and selecting one that appears most promising to you; (3) adequately research an ecological problem on which to test the viability of religious concepts/principles examined in this course; (4) work cooperatively with other students to critique assigned texts and evaluate religious ideas for their effectiveness; and, (5) critically evaluate models of the human that are suggested in the assigned readings and choose one that you think will be most helpful to guide your actions in the near future.

The major objective of this and other third-level courses is to refine your theological judgment so it will enable you to craft responsible positions on moral and religious questions. This objective is achieved by building upon the learning outcomes of the pre-requisite first and second level Theology courses that are aimed at describing theologically the basic content of the Catholic faith in relation to other Christian and religious traditions as well as other world views, interpreting theological texts and frameworks in their historical contexts, and articulating implications of Christian faith for growth in holiness and promotion of justice in the contemporary world.

Basis for Evaluation

Research report on an ecological problem (10%); in-class presentation of a theological theme or a set of principles from a world religion applied to the ecological problem researched (15%); class participation including substantive contribution to class discussion of assigned readings, bringing them to class, and news reporting (15%); five reflective journal entries on five different theological themes in the Christian tradition applied to the ecological problem researched and identification/explanation of one theme that appears most promising (20%); one world religions exam (15%); and, a cumulative final exam (25%).

Texts and Other Sources

Pope John Paul II, "The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility" (1990) (D2L)

United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, "Renewing the Earth" (1991)

J. Schaefer, Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics (2008) (D2L)

Dædalus 130.4 *Religion and Ecology* (Fall 2001)

S. McFague, *Super, Natural Christians* (Fortress 1997)

Forum on Religion and Ecology at Harvard University <<http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/>>

Handouts and Thematic Readings in Christianity, External Links, and Documents on Desire2Learn

Environmental Ethics Sources <http://www.mu.edu/library/subjects/environmental_ethics.html>

Recommended: R. S. Gottlieb, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* (Oxford U 2006)

Class Attendance Policy

Because presence in class is crucial to understanding and assessing assigned and presented materials, attendance is mandatory. After four absences, your class participation grade will be reduced by seven points; six absences will warrant your withdrawal from the course with a WA notation. Frequent tardiness will also reduce your grade.

Academic Honesty Policy

Each student is expected to represent his or her own efforts in all assignments and examinations. Penalties for academic dishonesty will be rigorously administered as indicated on pp. 49-52 of the *Undergraduate Bulletin* <<http://www.marquette.edu/rc/bulletin.shtml>>.

Tentative Schedule of Class Sessions, Assignments and Examinations

MODULE 1 Setting the Stage

January 14 -- Introduction to the Course

Overview of course and online enrollment; directions for identifying and reporting on ecological problems to which religious beliefs will be applied; review of environmental ethics research starting points; introductory lecture on various foundations for environmental ethics with emphasis on the distinctiveness of religious foundations; directions for assignment.

January 16 -- Should religious communities be responsive to ecological degradation?

Student answers; critical viewing and assessing of "Keeping the Earth" video (Union of Concerned Scientists); directions for reading assignment.

January 23 -- What do the Pope, the Patriarch, and your religious leader have to say?

Discussion of Pope John Paul II's "The Ecological Crisis" (D2L) and clarification of the often confused notion of human "dominion" over the rest of creation and humans as "*imago Dei*"; Patriarch Bartholomew on the "sinfulness" of degrading the natural environment; student sharing of position statements by leaders of their religious communities.
SUBMIT eco-problem declaration form.

January 28 -- What do the US Catholic Bishops think?

Discussion of "Renewing the Earth," the bishops' invitation to reflection and action in light of Catholic social teaching (Raynor e-Reserves); student reactions to the bishops' thinking about ourselves as "co-creators" and "stewards"; overview of other bishops' statements; lecture on the quest for models of the human in an age of ecological degradation.

January 30 -- Can Christianity help or hinder the ecological crisis?

Lecture-discussion on theological impediments to addressing ecological concerns; introduction to promising theological themes in light of the "common creation story" humans have with other species and constituents of Earth; overview of assignments in this module.
SUBMIT ecological problem report.

MODULE 2 Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics

February 4 -- The Goodness of Creation

Review biblical texts and discuss chap. 1, "The Goodness of Creation and Ethics of Intrinsic-Instrumental Valuing"; review directions for journal entries.

February 11 -- The Beauty of Creation

Application of Goodness/Valuing to ecological problems and discussion of chap. 2, "The Beauty of Creation and Ethics of Aesthetic Appreciation."

SUBMIT "Goodness" journal entry as one of five due.

February 13 -- The Sacramentality of Creation

Student presentation on the Beauty/Appreciation theme applied to the ecological problem researched; lecture on/discussion of chap. 3, "The Sacramentality of Creation and Ethics of Reverence."

SUBMIT "Beauty" journal entry.

February 18 -- Creation's Praise for God

Student presentation on the Sacramentality/Reverence theme applied to the ecological problem researched; lecture on/discussion of chap. 4, "Creation's Praise for God and the Ethics of Respect."

SUBMIT "Sacramentality" journal entry.

February 20 -- The Functional Unity of Creation

Student on Praising/Respect theme; lecture on/discussion of chap. 5, "The Functional Unity of Creation and Ethics of Cooperation."

SUBMIT "Praising" journal entry.

February 25 -- The Kinship of Creatures

Student on Unity/Cooperation; lecture on/discussion of chap. 6, "The Kinship of Creatures and Ethics of Companionship."

SUBMIT "Unity" journal entry.

February 27 -- The Restrained and Grateful Use of God's Blessings

Student on Kinship/Cooperation; lecture on/discussion of chap. 7, "The Restrained and Grateful Use of God's Blessings."

SUBMIT "Kinship" journal entry.

March 3 -- Living Virtuously in the Ecologically Endangered World

Students on Restrained Use theme; lecture on/discussion of chap 8. "Living Virtuously" with emphasis on the moral virtues of prudence and justice.

SUBMIT "Restrained Use" journal entry.

March 5 -- Loving Creation

Students on Living Virtuously; discussion of chap. 9, "Loving Creation"; and, assessment of themes.

SUBMIT "Living Virtuously" journal entry.

MODULE 3 Mining Other World Religions in Response to Ecological Degradation

March 10 -- Worldwide Efforts and Judaism

Student presentation on the "Loving" theme; lecture on efforts to address ecological concerns from the perspective of other religions; and, introduction to Judaism and discussion of Tirosh-Samuels' "Nature in the Sources of Judaism" *Dædalus* pp. 99-124.

SUBMIT "Loving" and final journal entry

March 12 -- Judaism and Ecology

Student presentation on beliefs/practices of Judaism applied to the ecological problem researched.

EASTER & SPRING BREAK March 13-24

March 26 -- Islam and Ecology

Background lecture on Islam, students on revered Islamic texts, and discussion of Haq's "Islam and Ecology: Toward Retrieval and Reconstruction" *Dædalus* pp. 141-178.

March 31 -- Islam and Ecology

Student presentation on beliefs/practices of Islam applied to ecological problem; lecture by Islamic environmental activist **Huda Alkaff**.

April 2 -- Hinduism and Ecology

Background lecture on Hinduism, students on revered Hindu writings, and discussion of Narayanan's "Water, Wood, and Wisdom: Ecological Perspectives from the Hindu Traditions" in *Dædalus* pp. 179-206.

April 7 -- Hinduism and Ecology

Student presentation on Hindi beliefs/practices applied to ecological problem; lecture by MU Law Professor **Dr. Alan Madry** on promising notions in the Hindu tradition that he follows.

April 9 -- Buddhism and Ecology

Background lecture on Buddhism, students on revered writings, and discussion of Swearer's "Principles and Poetry, Places and Stories: The Resources of Buddhist Ecology" *Dædalus* pp. 225-242.

April 14 -- Buddhism and Ecology

Student application of Buddhist principles/practices; examination of statement by the Dalai Lama (handout); directions for world religions exam.

April 16 -- World Religions Examination

April 21 -- Small group identification of principles shared by world religions and those that differ; discussion of the pros/cons of a global system of ethics as proposed by Callicott in "Multicultural Environmental Ethics" *Dædalus* pp. 77-94.

MODULE 4: Modeling the Human in an Age of Ecological Degradation

April 23 -- Criteria for Modeling and McFague's "Super, Natural Christian" Model

Lecture on criteria for modeling (handout); student identification of models from religious themes; and, discussion of McFague's model of Christians as "super, natural" from reading assignment.

April 28 -- McFague's Model

Discussion of chapters in *Super, Natural Christians* as assigned.

April 30 -- McFague's Model and Course Summation

Discussion of chapters in *Super, Natural Christians* as assigned; evaluation of the various models of the human; course evaluation; and, directions for final examination.

FINAL EXAMINATION on Monday, May 5, 9:30-10 a.m.

Grading

A=93-100% 186-200 points

AB=92-87% 174-185

B=86-80% 160-173

BC=79-74% 148-159

C=73-65% 130-147

CD=64-59% 118-129

D=58-51% 101-117

F=50% 100-