

ICS Calendar Title: Christianity and Ecological Crisis

ICS Course Code: ICS 130509/230509 W11

Instructor: Dr. Ron Kuipers

Term and Year: Mondays, 1:30-4:30pm, Winter 2011

Last Updated: January 12, 2011

1. Course description

The attitudes to save the environment should be imbued with a vision of the sacred.

—David Suzuki at the Global Forum of the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 5 June, 1992

Christian culture is often criticized for its perceived silence concerning (and even its contribution to) the global ecological crisis. In this course, we shall examine some Christian responses to the ecological crisis that contest this characterization: these include responses that argue that the responsibility for the global ecological crisis is complex and multifaceted as well as responses that argue that Christianity has the resources to resist and undo the attitudes that have given rise to the crisis. To that end, we shall read and explore the 'agrarian' thought of Wendell Berry, and also explore contemporary theological reflection on the ecological crisis and humanity's role in it. In this discussion-intensive seminar, participants will also be asked to consider what role Christian faith should play in a strong environmental ethic through an examination of the work of several Christian thinkers who have sought to address this perceived gap in Christian practice and reflection.

Although there are a number of recurring themes in this area, this course is structured around two themes that are both historically and currently significant: a lay reflection on being at home in creation (focusing on the agrarian essays of Wendell Berry) and theological reflection on this world as God's creation and our place within it (focusing on the theology of Steven Bouma-Prediger and a selection of essays that triangulate postmodern philosophy, theology, and ecological reflection). Moreover, we shall consider analyses of what factors contribute to this crisis: ecologically negative strands in Christianity; a narrow, scientific, objective view of the environment; and a consumerist, expansionist view of nature.

This course is offered to students with a wide variety of backgrounds and so some material may seem redundant to students specializing in a particular field, whereas other material may seem very unfamiliar. Students are encouraged to learn from each other, to share knowledge and ideas out of their own experience and from their particular areas of expertise, to keep open minds about less familiar areas, and finally, above all, to be respectful of every member of the class. One of the goals of this course is to challenge you to think more comprehensively and integrally about faith, including one's own, and the world as God's creation. Students will be encouraged and expected to develop their own arguments and positions on these issues.

The assigned readings will require sustained attention and repeated reading. In addition to giving students an understanding of the range of positions on spiritual reflection about ecological issues, the requirements of this course are designed to develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills through the critical evaluation of these positions. Moreover, through the critical evaluation of these positions, this course will provide students with an opportunity to practice cross-disciplinary (i.e. theology, philosophy, cultural studies) dialogue.

In this course, student participation is encouraged and expected. Classes will consist of a mixture of presentations, discussions, podcasts, videos, etc. Since this course is not just about spiritual reflection on the environment but will provide an opportunity to dialogue across some disciplines (as well as to exercise and hone those critical thinking, reading, and writing skills), it is important to attend each class, to carefully read the assigned readings, and to be prepared to actively participate.

2. Reading Schedule

1: Jan. 10	Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Christianity and the Survival of Creation,” by Wendell Berry
2: Jan. 17 (45 pps.)	Wendell Berry’s <i>The Unsettling of America I</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chs. 1-4 (pp. 3-48)
3: Jan. 24 (44 pps.)	<i>The Unsettling of America II</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chs. 5-6 (pp. 51-95)
4: Jan. 31 (43 pps.)	<i>The Unsettling of America III</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ch. 7 (pp. 97-140)
5: Feb. 7 (52 pps.)	<i>The Unsettling of America IV</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ch. 9 (pp. 171-223)
6: Feb. 14 (53 pps.)	Steven Bouma-Prediger’s <i>For the Beauty of the Earth I</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intro-Ch. 2 (pp. 13-66)
Feb. 21-25	Reading Break-No Class
7: Feb. 28 (49 pps.)	<i>For the Beauty of the Earth II</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chs. 3-4 (pp. 67-116)
8: Mar. 7 (44 pps.)	<i>For the Beauty of the Earth III</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chs. 5-6 (pp. 117-160)
9: Mar. 14 (41 pps.)	<i>For the Beauty of the Earth IV / Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth I</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chs. 7-8 (pp. 161-187) ▪ Catherine Keller, “Talking Dirty: Ground is not Foundation” in <i>Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth</i>, 63-76

10: Mar. 21	<i>Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth</i> ▪ Selected Essays
11: Mar. 28	<i>Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth</i> ▪ Selected Essays
12: Apr. 4	<i>Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth</i> ▪ Selected Essays
13: Apr. 11	Conclusion ▪ Reading TBA

3. Course requirements:

Total reading: 1250 pages, including research for paper, of which approximately 30-50 pages per week is required to prepare for class.

In-seminar leadership: Each student is required to make two in-class presentations, one that spurs discussion of the weekly assigned reading (presentation A), and one that critically discusses a cultural practice or artifact in order to bring out the relevance of the course theme (presentation B).

Presentation A should begin with a leading “pressing” question that the assigned reading raises for the student. This question might be pressing for intellectual, but also existential and religious reasons. After stating the question, the student will pinpoint the particular location(s) in the text where that question emerged for her or him, and then go on to offer a close reading of that limited portion of text. This close reading should take the form of a line-by-line analysis of the selected text, complete with suggested interpretation and explanation of why that portion of text raises the question it does. This interpretation may in turn radiate out from that selection and touch on other parts of the assigned text, but complete coverage is neither required nor requested.

Presentation B will be based on the student's selection of one among various types of cultural artifact, superlative or otherwise (e.g., movies, music, literature, architecture, cultural practices, etc.).

- Select and describe a particular current ecological problem and frame a practical response to it that is contoured by a possible Christian life pattern.
- Select and describe a particular current ecological problem and demonstrate how a Christian life pattern has contributed to its development and how that life pattern might be criticized or changed in the direction of seeking a resolution.
- Describe and analyze an individual change/choice that you have made or that one could make to respond to the ecological crisis, and explain what might motivate yourself or others to commit to this path.

Course paper: Students are required to submit one essay whose theme arises from in-class reading and discussion. Length requirement: MA: 3000-6000 words; PhD: 5000-8000 words. The essay may also build upon the research and writing put into presentations A and/or B, and students are in fact encouraged to do so.

A substantive outline, including tentative thesis statement (50-100 words), outline, and proposed extra reading is due on Monday, Feb. 28, 2011. The paper is due on Friday, May 27, 2011.

4. Description and weighting of elements to be evaluated:

Class Participation: 20%; Major Seminar Presentation: 30%; Paper: 50%.

5. Required readings

- Berry, Wendell. 1986. [*The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*](#). San Francisco: Sierra Club Books. 228 pp. [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: HD1761 .B47 1996 ; Pratt Library: HD1761 .B47 1986]
- Bouma-Prediger, Steven. 2001. [*For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. 234 pp. [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: BT695.5 .B69 2001]
- Keller, Catherine, and Laurel Kearns, eds. 2007. *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*. New York: Fordham University Press. Selected essays. [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: ON ORDER ; Robarts Library: BL65 .N35 E26 2007X]

6. Recommended Readings

- Berry, Robert James (ed.). 2000. *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action*. Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press. [Robarts Library: BT695.5 .C36 2000]
- Berry, Thomas. 2006. *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community* San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books. [Robarts: GF21 .B473 2006X]
- Brown, Edward R. 2006. *Our Father's World: Mobilizing the Church to Care for Creation*. South Hadley, MA: Doorlight Publications. [Trinity College Library: BT695.5 .B775 2008]
- DeWitt, Calvin B. 1994. [*Earth-wise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues*](#). Grand Rapids: CRC Publications. [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: BT695.5 .D49 2007]
- _____. 1998. [*Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork*](#). Grand Rapids: Baker Books. [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: BT695 .D47 1998]
- Edwards, Denis. 2006. *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. [Robarts Library: BT695.5 .E49 2006X]
- Foltz, Richard C. 2002. *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: A Global Anthology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing. [St. Michael's College Library: BL65 .E36 W67 2003]
- Gebara, Ivone. 1999. [*Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*](#). Minneapolis: Fortress. [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: BT695.5 .G43 1999]
- Gottlieb, Roger S. 2003. *A Spirituality of Resistance: Finding a Peaceful Heart and Protecting the Earth*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. [St. Michael's College Library: BL624 .G67 2003]
- _____. 2006. [*A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future*](#). New York: Oxford University Press. [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: BT695.5 .G69 2006 ; Robarts Library: BT695.5 .G69 2006X]

- Gottlieb, Roger S. (ed.). 1995. *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*. New York & London: Routledge. [St. Michael's College Library: GF80 .T49 2004]
- _____. 2006. *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA. [St. Michael's College Library: BL65 .E36 O94 2006]
- Goudzwaard, Bob, Mark Vander Vennen, and David Van Heemst. 2007. [*Hope in Troubled Times: A New Vision for Confronting Global Crises*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: BR115 .G59 G87 2007]
- Granberg-Michaelson, Wesley, ed. 1987. [*Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: BT695.5 .T45]
- Grey, Mary C. 2004. *Sacred Longings: The Ecological Spirit and Global Culture*. Minneapolis: Fortress. [Knox College Library: BL65 .G55 G74 2004]
- Hallman, David G. 1994. *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*. Geneva: WWC Publications. [Robarts Library: BT695.5 .E33 1994]
- Hart, John. 2004. *What Are They Saying About Environmental Theology?* Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press. [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: ON ORDER]
- _____. 2006. *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. [Robarts Library: BT695.5 .H36 2006X]
- Hessel, Dieter T. & Rosemary Radford Ruether. 2000. *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions. [Robarts Library: BT695.5 .C49 2000X]
- Kinsley, David. 1995. *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. [Robarts Library: GF80 .K54 1995X]
- MacKinnon, Mary Heather, and Moni McIntyre, eds. *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*. Kansas City: Sheed and Ward. [Robarts Library: HQ1233 .R43 1995X]
- Mahan, David C. Sheldon, Joseph K. & Brand, Raymond H. 1996. *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [Robarts Library: BT695.5 .R42 1996X]
- Maitland, Sara. 2002. [*A Joyful Theology: Creation, Commitment, and an Awesome God*](#). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers. [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: BT103 .M35 2002]
- Martin-Schramm, James B. & Stivers, Robert L. 2003. *Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. [St. Michael's College Library: BT695.5 .M37 2003]
- McFague, Sallie. 2001. *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. [Robarts Library: BR115 .E3 M315 2001X]
- McKibben, Bill. 2007. [*Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*](#). New York: Henry Holt and Company. [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: HD75 .M353 2008] (And anything else by him that you can get your hands on!)
- Nash, James A. 1991. *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility*. Nashville, TN: Abington Press. [Knox College Library: BT695.5 .N37 1991]
- Oelschlaeger, Max. 1996. *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis*. Princeton, NJ: Yale University Press. [Robarts Library: BT695.5 .O34 1994]
- Palmer, Martin & Victoria Finlay. 2003. *Faith in Conservation: New Approaches to Religions and the Environment*. Washington, DC: World Bank Publications. [Robarts Library: BL65 .E36 P35 2003]

- Peacock, Kent A., ed. 1996. *Living with the Earth: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*. Toronto: Harcourt.
- Peters, Rebecca Todd. 2004. *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization*. New York: Continuum. [Robarts Library: BR115 .G59 P48 2004X]
- Ponting, Clive. 1991. *A Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations*. New York: Penguin. [Robarts Library: GF75 .P65 1993X]
- Primavesi, Anne. 2004. *Making God Laugh: Human Arrogance and Ecological Humility*. Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press. [Knox College Library: BT695.5 .P74 2004]
- Robinson, Tri. 2006. *Saving God's Green Earth: Rediscovering the Church's Responsibility to Environmental Stewardship*. Norcross, GA: Ampelon Publishing.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. 1994. *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. San Francisco: Harper. [Knox College Library: BT695.5 .R83 1992]
- _____. 1996. *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. [Robarts Library: HQ1233 .W595 1996]
- _____. 2005. *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. [Robarts Library: BL65 .G55 R84 2005X]
- Scharper, Steven B., and Hillary Cunningham. 2002. *The Green Bible*. New York: Lantern Books. [St. Michael's College Library: BT695.5 .G75 2002]
- Sleeth, J. Matthew. 2006. *Serve God, Save the Planet: A Christian Call to Action*. White River Jct., VT: Chelsea Green.
- Taylor, Sarah McFarland. 2007. *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology*. Harvard University Press. [St. Michael's College Library: BX1795 .H82 T39 2007]
- Van Dyke, Fred, David C. Mahan, Joseph K. Sheldon, & Raymond H. Brand. 1996. *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [Robarts Library: BT695.5 .R42 1996X]
- White, Lynn. 1967. "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis." In *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207.
- Wilkinson, Loren, ed. 1991. [Earthkeeping in the Nineties: Stewardship of Creation](#). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: HC55 .E27 1991]
- Wirzba, Norman. 2003. [The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press. [ICS Library Reserve Shelf: BS680 .C69 W57 2003]