

Ecological Spirituality (MN 3194)

Fall 2014

Trinity Lutheran Seminary

Lisa E. Dahill



ADD: <http://theprayinglife.com/2014/10/07/prayer-that-hurts/>

DESCRIPTION:

In a time of increasing distance from the natural world, re-connection to the (literal) ground of our human life becomes all the more important: a return to the One who is the very Ground of being itself. This course will include readings, field trips, and immersion experience geared toward sparking attentive presence to the creation, its Creator, and God's desire of abundance of life for all. In addition to class time at the seminary, we will visit sites around Columbus for immersion in the broader life of this place. The final piece of the seven-week course is participation in the Earth-Keeping Summit sponsored by Ohio Interfaith Power and Light and taking place at Ohio State University, October 12-13, 2014.

GOALS: This course is designed to invite students...

- into immersive encounter with God in the natural world
- into greater familiarity and intimacy with the creatures and landscapes of Ohio winter terrain: learning to "read" the Earth and its life in a particular place, *as a primary good*: a new form of language, an interspecies opening, a spiritual practice
- into primary themes and strands of Christian ecological theology and nature mysticism
- into greater awareness of the present ecological crisis: its economic and spiritual underpinnings, its scientific articulation, its implications for Christian prayer and activism
- into forms of prayer (personal and communal) with/in the fullness of creation
- into an experience of "life together" (Bonhoeffer) and of embodied spirituality – and into collaborative improvisation of this new course together...
- **thus:** into the fullest possible expression of *contextual* theology/ministry/liturgy/prayer.

Movements:

- from otherworldly Christianity to fully biologically grounded Christian spirituality: Word made *flesh...alive in/as all the cosmos*
- from captivity to anthropocentrism and theologies of human dominance into “new songs” in a “new key,” “new wine for new wineskins,” new vision and hearing and touching and tasting and feeling and relating to *reality* (and thus G*D) in increasing fullness
- from debilitating forms of life to regenerative forms of life together (with one another, with God, with our own bodies/hearts, and with creation)
- from denial and complicity and despair to truth-telling and discernment and action – as individuals, as a seminary community, as church leaders, as citizens – in addressing the greatest moral and spiritual challenge our species has *ever faced...*
- ... and thus into participation in the Great Work of our time (Thomas Berry)

STRUCTURE OF COURSE:

In-Term Class Time (Six Mondays, August-October, 2014): 8:00 – 9:45 AM

Weekly Outdoor Contemplative Time (one hour/week over seven weeks, August-October, 2014)

Food/Farm/Faith Visit to MTSO’s Seminary Hill Farm or Shepherd’s Corner’s Farm/Garden:

- <http://www.mtso.edu/academics/seminary-hill-farm/>
- <http://www.shepherds corner.org/>

Participation in Ohio Interfaith Power and Light (IPL) Earth-Keeping Summit, at OSU:

http://www.ohipl.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/SummitSchedule_2014_FINAL.pdf.

- **Timing:** Sunday afternoon, October 12, through Monday afternoon, October 13
- **Register** for the Summit (\$55) here: https://salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/50836/c/138/p/salsa/event/common/public/?event_KEY=1358
- *Middler ELCA students: please try to schedule your Endorsement Interview for Monday afternoon or Tuesday, October 13 or 14, keeping Monday morning available for participation in the Summit.*
- *In place of* the Earth-Keeping Summit, you may participate in the **People’s Climate March in New York City, Sunday, September 21, 2014:** <http://peoplesclimate.org/march/>. ELCA leaders in the Metro New York Synod are coordinating free or low-cost housing as well as all local transportation for visiting ELCA-related participants in the march. Any students choosing to attend the New York weekend are excused also from class on Monday, September 22, to accommodate your participation in the events of the day/weekend.

TEXTS:

Required:

Rasmussen, Larry L. *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Bohmbach, Karla, and Shauna Hannan, eds. *Eco-Lutheranism: Lutheran Perspectives on Ecology*. Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2013.

Recommended:

Tekiela, Stan. *Trees of Ohio: Field Guide*. Adventure Publications, 2004.



Big Walnut Creek, near Gahanna, OH (November 2013)

CALENDAR and ASSIGNMENTS

AUGUST 25, 2014: INTRODUCTION to Course and One Another

SEPTEMBER 1, 2014: LABOR DAY (no class)

READ for Today:

Burton-Christie, Douglas. “Feeling for the Natural World” (*hand-out*);

Burghardt, Walter, S.J. “Contemplation: A Long, Loving Look at the Real” (*hand-out*).

Practice for This Week: Long, Loving Look somewhere out in creation (one hour, solo). *What do you see, hear, notice – on its own terms, in its own life? What do you notice of your own experience (of God, of yourself, of the world) during this solo hour in creation? If you wish, bring this noticing into prayer.*

Write for Today: Ecological Autobiography (6-8 pages). Include both the broad strokes of your relationship with the natural world (where you have lived, significant outdoor experience) and the narrative of a particular experience of God in the natural world, in as much detail – especially sensory detail – as possible.

Post this autobiography on class Sakai site by 8:00 PM Monday, September 1!

SEPTEMBER 8, 2014: SEEING, HEARING, SENSING REALITY: God Alive in the World

READ this Week:

Rasmussen, Larry. "Prelude" and Chapters 1-3 (pp. 3-110);
+ Rasmussen, "Asceticism and Consumerism" (pp. 239-54) – *optional, if time permits*
Your Classmates' Ecological Autobiographies (*Sakai*) – as many as you can.

Practice for This Week: *Lectio deforis* (outdoors): *Spend at least an hour this week (from Labor Day through our September 8 class session) reading outdoors. You can take the Rasmussen book outside, or your Bible, a devotional book you are using, a reading for some other class. What difference does it make to read outdoors? What – of Rasmussen or the Bible, in particular – comes out more strongly in the text because of being outside? How does your physical location either contribute to or distract from your reading experience? If reading a prayer text: How does *lectio divina* shift when the lectio expands also to the world around you?*

Write for Today: Poetic response to other classmates' Ecological Autobiographies (and your own), weaving in also at least *three quotes or insights or "Wow" lines from Rasmussen. No more than one page.*

Bring hard copy to class.

SEPTEMBER 15, 2014: FACING REALITY: Strangeness and the Wild

READ for Today:

Leopold, Aldo. "Thinking Like a Mountain";
Tinker, Tink. "American Indians and Ecotheology: Alterity and Worldview," *Eco-Lutheranism* 69-86;
Abram, David. "The Ecology of Magic";
Ross, Loretta. "The Praying Life" Blog (February 13, 2012):

<http://theprayinglife.com/2012/02/13/exploring-solitude-where-the-wild-things-are/>

If time permits: Burton-Christie, Douglas. "The Wild and the Sacred." *Anglican Theological Review* 85/3 (2003): 493-510.

Practice for This Week: Hospitality (or, Getting to Know Strangers by Name): *Use Tekiela, Trees of Ohio, to identify three trees you hadn't known before – ideally trees on or near Trinity's campus or your own home. Get to know these actual, particular trees... What of God's exquisite artistry is visible in each? **Post** a picture of each tree (three total), by 8 PM September 14, trying to convey something of God.*

SEPTEMBER 22, 2014: FACING REALITY: Silence, Awe, and Lament

READ for Today:

Nicholsen, Shierry Weber. "Many Silences";
Hessel-Robinson, Timothy. "All the Fish of the Sea Perish?";
Krause, Bernie. "The Sound of a Damaged Habitat";

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/29/opinion/sunday/listen-to-the-soundscape.html?_r=1&emc=eta1 -- especially listen to the great audio clips!

Practice for This Week: Contemplative Photography: *Go outdoors, to a place that feels peaceful or restful to you. Pay particular attention here to where you see **beauty** (one hour, solo or with others). Linger here as long as you wish. Return as often as you wish. **Post** 1-5 photographs of these icons of beauty to *Sakai* by 8 PM Sunday, September 21.*



SEPTEMBER 29, 2014: ADDRESSING REALITY: Baptism and Water

READ for Today:

McGann, Mary. "A Theopoetics of Water";

Sanders, Scott Russell. "After the Flood";

Sauer, Peter. "Water Under American Ground: West 78th Street";

Stewart, Benjamin. "Baptismal Water in Lutheran Worship and on the Earth" *Eco-Lutheranism* 87-99.

Practice for This Week: Wade or swim in a natural body of water: *Alum Creek, a river or lake near your home, the watershed in which you were baptized...?? If possible, hike to a location not surrounded by people or trash or power boats... but any location will do. Go in as fully as you are able. See what life you notice – if any – in the water. Bring goggles or a mask so you can see underwater, if you wish – or a glass to look for micro-organisms. Bring water shoes so you can wade. Bring your tradition's baptismal rite to pray for all those who will be baptized into these actual waters, and all the creatures who depend on this water.*

Write: At or in the water, or as soon as possible thereafter, write down all your sensory impressions from being inside the physical life of this river/lake. What did you see, touch, smell, feel, hear, notice? Who lives here? From these notes, **choose as many words or creatures or descriptions** as you can to craft a short **poem to read aloud in class September 29:** a pair of haiku, perhaps... or a syllabic cinquain (five lines of: two syllables, four syllables, six syllables, eight syllables, two syllables)...or even a "butterfly cinquain" (2, 4, 6, 8, 2, 8, 6, 4, 2).

OCTOBER 6, 2014: ADDRESSING REALITY: Eucharist and Food

READ for Today:

Wirzba, Norman. *Living the Sabbath*, 11-29;

O'Donnell, Hugh. *Eucharist and the Living Earth*, 35-49;

Dahill, Lisa E. "Praying Indoors and Outdoors," *Eco-Lutheranism*, 113-18 [optional: pp. 119-24];

Ross, Loretta. <http://theprayinglife.com/2012/07/10/how-to-eat-a-piece-of-chocolate/>;

Bittman, Mark. "Now This is Natural Food." *New York Times* (October 23, 2013):

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/23/opinion/bittman-now-this-is-natural-food.html?emc=eta1&r=0>

Practice for This Week: Eating Mindfully, with *Grace Before and After Meals:* *You are (literally) what you eat: Jesus Christ, the flesh of other animals, the fruit and seed and living leaves of plants. Pesticides and herbicides, Splenda, plastics. You are (literally) the food of others: mosquitoes, ticks, bacteria, worms, the trees that will sprout in time from your corpse. Give thanks for it all, choosing food this week that opens you to gratitude/gratia and to the needs of those who are hungry, starving, or dying of malnutrition this day.*

Post by 8 PM October 5: As you contemplate Eucharist, *what is on the paten? What is in the chalice?*

PREPARING FOR EARTH-KEEPING SUMMIT: Living and Acting in Reality

READ Before Earth-Keeping Summit:

Martin-Schramm, Jim. "Bonhoeffer, the Church, and the Climate Question," *Eco-Lutheranism*, 55-68;
Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia. "Climate Injustice and Lutheran Resources for Climate Justice," *ibid.*, 157-62;
Macy, Joanna, and Molly Young Brown. "The Greatest Danger: Apathia, the Deadening of Mind and Heart" and "To Choose Life."

And, as you are able:

Dombek, Kristin. "Swimming Against the Rising Tide: Secular Climate-Change Activists Can Learn from Evangelical Christians." *New York Times* (August 10, 2014):

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/10/opinion/sunday/secular-climate-change-activists-can-learn-from-evangelical-christians.html?_r=1

On Tanzanian Lutheran bishop, Frederick Shoo, and his work in tree-planting and effects of climate change around Mt. Kilimanjaro: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/july-13-2012/kilimanjaro-trees/11790/#.UDizP7dbwc5.facebook>

Practice for This Week: Intercession for the Needs of the World.



READ for Final Paper:

Dahill, "Bio-Theoacoustics: Prayer Outdoors and the Reality of the Natural World." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 52/4 (Winter 2013): 297-306.

FINAL WRITING PROJECT (6-8 PAGES), due Monday, October 20, 2014:

*In dialogue with at least three assigned **texts** (Rasmussen, Dahill "Bio-Theoacoustics," and other assigned readings), narrate your learning for this course. What **questions** did you bring in, what new questions have arisen along the way, what **insights** have stretched or nourished you, and how did the **time outdoors** contribute to your learning? From all this, articulate your present sense of **vocation** toward/with/for Earth, as a human being, Christian, seminarian, church leader, and/or citizen. What desires do you want to bring with you?*

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

- 1) **Ecological Autobiography** (6-8 pages), due posted to Sakai by **8 PM on Labor Day, September 1, 2014**. See description in Calendar section, p. 3 of syllabus. **20% of Grade.**

- 2) **Weekly Writing and/or Posting of Photos.** Beginning Monday, September 8, 2014, you will be asked to post and/or bring to class some engagement with the *practice for each week*. These forms of engagement include (**6% each of final grade, or 30% total**):
 - a. **September 8 (Monday, in class):** Poetic response to other classmates' Ecological Autobiographies (and your own), weaving in also at least *three quotes or insights or "Won" lines from Rasmussen. No more than one page. Bring hard copy to class.*
 - b. **September 14 (8 PM Sunday, posted to Sakai):** *Post a picture of each of three trees you have been growing in acquaintance with (three photos), trying to convey something of God.*
 - c. **September 21 (8 PM Sunday, posted to Sakai):** *Post 1-5 photographs of places or "icons" of beauty that have nourished you outdoors this week.*
 - d. **September 29 (Monday, in class):** During or after your time in a river or lake, write down your sensory impressions from being inside the physical life of this body of water. What did you see, touch, smell, feel, hear, notice? Who lives here? From these notes, choose as many words or creatures or descriptions as you can to craft a short **poem to read aloud in class September 29:** a pair of haiku, perhaps... or a syllabic cinquain (*see description in Calendar*)... or even a "butterfly cinquain."
 - e. **October 5 (8 PM Sunday, posted to Sakai):** Having been eating mindfully and praying *grace* before and after meals this week... As you contemplate Eucharist, *what is on the paten? What is in the chalice?*

- 3) **Final Integrative Paper** (6-8 pages), due electronically by **Friday, October 20, 2014**. See description in Calendar section, p. 6 of syllabus. **20% of Grade.**

- 4) **Participation in Class Sessions, Farm Visit** (on your own or with others) **and the Earth-Keeping Summit** or New York Climate March. **30% of Grade.**

+ **TLS: Standard Information for Syllabi** +

The Academic Affairs Committee recommends that the following standard information be included on all syllabi:

Letter Grades

Students desiring a letter grade rather than pass-marginal-fail must make this request in writing to the instructor no later than the end of the second class session.

Care of the Earth

Students are encouraged to be good stewards of the earth's resources. Examples include judicious use of paper (double-sided printing), electronic submissions of assignments when appropriate, and turning off lights and closing windows at the end of class sessions.

Inclusive Language

A statement on the “Use of Inclusive Language at Trinity Lutheran Seminary” is included in the *Community Life Handbook*. Please consult it and adhere to it in the writing and speaking you do in this course.

Learning Disabilities

Students who feel that they may need an accommodation for this class based on the impact of a learning disability should contact the instructor privately, by the end of the add/drop period, to discuss specific needs. The Registrar can arrange as needed for the services of the Academic Assistance Coordinator, who can provide tutoring, books on tape, and similar resources.

Writing Assistance

Trinity Lutheran Seminary provides a limited amount of tutoring services to those who have been identified as needing to improve their writing skills. If you receive such feedback on papers in this course, or feel that you need assistance, please contact the seminary’s writing tutor, Ms. Mary Hockenbery (818-3958; dhockenb@insight.rr.com).

Incompletes

If you are unable, due to circumstances beyond your control, to complete work for the course by the end of the term, you must secure from the Registrar and complete a form requesting an “incomplete.” If the work will not be completed within four weeks of the end of the term, you must also secure the permission of the Academic Dean.

Class Attendance

Instructors expect regular attendance in all classes. The particular attendance policy, if any, for this course is stated elsewhere in the syllabus.

Plagiarism

All work must be original. The implications of this are spelled out in the section titled “Community Standards of Academic Honesty” in the *Community Life Handbook*. Please consult this statement, and note that plagiarism includes self-plagiarism—that is, you may not utilize work submitted for one class in another class.

Course Evaluations

The gathering of student feedback is a requirement of accrediting agencies for theological seminaries. It is also a helpful tool for the faculty as they reflect on the teaching and learning process and plan for the future. Therefore, it is expected that each student will complete a feedback survey for all core and option courses. With the exception of the administrator of the survey, no faculty members have access to individual surveys. Individual faculty and the office of the Academic Dean receive only completely anonymous, composite summaries of the results.

Major Concerns

If you have any major concerns about this course or the instructor, such as a violation of seminary policy or conduct that you believe is inappropriate to a seminary classroom, these should be expressed directly to the Academic Dean in person or in a signed statement at any time during or following the course. These concerns should not be expressed on the course evaluation form.

DIRECTIONS TO BYRD POLAR RESEARCH CENTER, OSU

Scott Hall
1090 Carmack Road.
Columbus, OH 43210
(614) 292-6531

From Highway 315 in Columbus, get off at Lane Avenue and go west (left, if heading north on 315). After 0.2 miles, turn left again (south) on Kenny Road. Go another 0.2 miles then turn right on Carmack Road. The Byrd Center/Scott Hall is in 0.3 miles.

From the website: The Center is located across the western-most footbridge over Carmack Road, north of the Greenhouse. Parking is located south of Scott Hall on the opposite side of Carmack Road. A footbridge above Carmack Road provides easy walking access between Scott Hall and the parking lot. OSU Transportation & Parking offers [Pay-N-Display machines](#) (electronic parking meters) which accept coins and credit cards. The machine will print you a temporary parking permit which will allow parking in any unrestricted parking spot. All-day visitors should contact the Center to request a daily parking pass.

DIRECTIONS TO EARTH-KEEPING SUMMIT

Nationwide and Ohio Farm Bureau 4-H Center (OSU)
2201 Fred Taylor Drive
Columbus, OH 43210

From Highway 315 in Columbus, get off at Lane Avenue and go east (right, heading north on 315). At the first light (Fred Taylor Drive), turn left = north. The 4-H Center is on the left.

Bike caravan as well from TLS – weather and enthusiasm permitting. Let me know if you would like help navigating to the event by bicycle from other locations...

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ASSIGNED HAND-OUTS and OTHERS NOT ASSIGNED:

- Abram, David. "The Ecology of Magic: A Personal Introduction to the Inquiry." In *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, 3-29. New York: Vintage, 1996.
- Berry, Wendell. "Christianity and the Survival of Creation." In *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community*, 93-116. New York: Random House, 1993. <http://www.crosscurrents.org/berry.htm>.
- Burton-Christie, Douglas. "A Feeling for the Natural World: Spirituality and the Appeal to the Heart in Contemporary Nature Writing." *Continuum* 2 (1992/1993): 154-80.
- _____. "The Wild and the Sacred." *Anglican Theological Review* 85/3 (2003): 493-510.
- Dahill, Lisa E. "Bio-Theoacoustics: Prayer Outdoors and the Reality of the Natural World." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 52/4 (Winter 2013): 297-306.
- _____. "New Creation: The Revised Common Lectionary and the Earth's Paschal Life." *Liturgy* 27/2 (April-June 2012): 3-16.
- ELCA Environment Task Force. "Basis for Our Caring." In *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment, second edition*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb, p. 221. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Hessel-Robinson, Timothy. "'The Fish of the Sea Perish': Lamenting Ecological Ruin." *Liturgy* 27/2 (April-June 2012): 40-48.
- Kingsolver, Barbara. "Knowing Our Place." In *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, ed. Bill McKibben, 939-47. New York: Library of America, 2008.
- Leopold, Aldo. "Thinking Like a Mountain." In *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, ed. Bill McKibben, 266-96. New York: Library of America, 2008.
- MacKinnon, J. B. "Appetite of Abundance: On the Benefits of Being Eaten." *Orion* (July/August 2013): 42-43.
- Macy, Joanna, and Molly Young Brown. "The Greatest Danger: Apatheia, the Deadening of Mind and Heart." In *Religion and the Environment: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb, volume IV: 365-78. Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2010.
- _____. "To Choose Life." In *Religion and the Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb, IV: 356-364.
- McGann, Mary. "A Theopolitics of Water: Celebrating Baptism in a Time of Global Water Crisis." Unpublished paper presented at the Ecology and Liturgy Seminar of the North American Academy of Liturgy (Montreal, Quebec), 2012.
- Merton, Thomas. *When the Trees Say Nothing: Writings on Nature*, ed. Kathleen Deignan. Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2003.
- Nicholsen, Shierry Weber. "Many Silences." *The Love of Nature and the End of the World: The Unspoken Dimensions of Environmental Concern*, 7-34. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.
- O'Donnell, Hugh. "Telling the New Story of Creation." In *Eucharist and the Living Earth*, new and revised edition, 35-49. Dublin, Ireland: Columba Press, 2012.
- Rasmussen, Larry L. "The Baptized Life." In *Holy Ground: A Gathering of Voices on Caring for Creation*, ed. Lyndsay Moseley, 182-92. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2008.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. "Ecofeminist Philosophy, Theology, and Ethics: A Comparative View." In *Eco-Spirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, ed. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller, 77-93. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.
- Sanders, Scott Russell. "After the Flood." In *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, ed. Bill McKibben, 781-89. New York: Library of America, 2008.
- Sauer, Peter. "Water Under American Ground: West 78th Street." In *At Home on the Earth: Becoming Native to Our Place: A Multicultural Anthology*, ed. David Landis Barnhill, 249-55. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Wirzba, Norman. *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.