

## **TS 867/967: Christianity and Ecology in Community Contexts**

Spring, 2010

John Hart

Office Hours: Tu, Th: 11-12; Th: 2-5

### Course Description

A study of Christian and Native American spiritual insights related to ecological perspectives, principles, and practices. Student classroom sessions, research, and analysis will be complemented by field work: engagement with members of faith traditions and environmental organizations in the Boston area. Writings of theologians and ecologists, statements from individual denominations and ecumenical associations, teachings of native elders, and the relationship of the proposed Earth Charter to religious teachings and current ecological issues will be discussed. Economics, ethics, and ecology will be integrated with the evolving School of Theology Green Vision statement, its implementation on campus, and its engagement in projects with community organizations and faith communities off-campus.

### Course Objectives

The course will provide students with opportunities to:

- analyze distinct ecological issues in classroom and community contexts
- relate Christian, Jewish, and Native American Indian insights
- reflect on biological, theological, and ethical perspectives on ecological issues
- develop their own and (if applicable) their faith tradition's ecological principles
- relate these principles to environment-related field work in community settings.

### Course Texts

Diane D. Glave and Mark Stoll. "To Love the Wind and the Rain" – African Americans and Environmental History. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006

John Hart. Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics. Rowman & Littlefield, 2006

Sallie McFague. Super, Natural Christians: How we should love nature. Fortress Press, 1997

Arthur Waskow, ed. Torah of the Earth. Vol. 1: Biblical Israel /Rabbinic Judaism. Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000

Jace Weaver, ed. Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice. Orbis Books, 1997

Edward O. Wilson. The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth. W.W. Norton, 2006

Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life statements.

Earth Charter [ [www.earthcharter.com](http://www.earthcharter.com) ]

Northwest U.S./Southwest Canada Catholic Bishops. The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good, 2001

Massachusetts Council of Churches statements, action proposals, and projects

National Association of Evangelicals. Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action. 2006

National Council of Churches. Faith Principles on Global Warming

Sierra Club: Faith in Action: Communities of Faith Bring Hope for the Planet, 2008

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Renewing the Earth

\_\_\_\_\_. Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good

### Course expectations

- Careful and critical reading of assigned texts in preparation for discussion in class.
- Full and fair participation in discussions.
- Papers on class and course topics should be submitted at the times designated in the schedule. The papers should demonstrate familiarity with and attentiveness to relevant matters in assigned readings and class discussions, and be supplemented by additional research.
- The main criteria for evaluation will be: understanding of the issue (reflective of careful and critical reading of texts and absorption of class discussions); accurate presentation of authors' and faith traditions' perspectives; soundness and depth of analysis of the issue and of others' responses to it; consistency and coherence; and appropriate attribution and documentation.
- Plagiarism—intentionally using another person's or party's words, ideas, or other intellectual property as one's own without proper acknowledgment—is, in essence, intellectual theft. It will be treated in accord with university rules.
- Deadlines: each reaction paper must be submitted at the class session to which it is related, and the reflection and research papers must be submitted on the date stipulated. All papers are subject to a loss of two points for each day they are late.

#### 1. **Reaction Papers** (TS 867: 2 pages each; TS 967: 3 pages each):

Prior written preparation of points for discussion—questions, or critiques or affirmations of the readings—for class sessions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

#### 2. **Reflection Paper** (TS 867: 10-12 pages; TS 967: 15-17 pages)

Construction of a conversation with three participants: two of the authors studied, and the student writer. The conversation will focus on one theme present in the writings studied. It should reveal the participants' positions on the issue; their critiques of the others' positions; suggested resolution of points of disagreement and integration of points of agreement; and an exploration of the resolution's potential for catalyzing ecological responsibility in a congregation or in the public at large, and for impacting public policy.

#### 3. **Research in Context**

Analysis, in conjunction with a Boston area theological school and/or community organization and/or local church, of a local or regional ecological issue; proposals for addressing that issue: by the school or organization and its members, state government, and area religious institutions. Fieldwork (to include at least four research sessions per semester, 3 hours per session) in order to Develop further the School of Theology "Green Vision" statement, and continue work to implement its principles, proposals, and projects through collaboration among students, congregations, community/environmental organizations, and Boston University personnel. . TS 867: 3-5 pages report; TS 967: 5-7 pages report.)

\*Due: April 20.

#### 4. **Research Paper**

\*Due: April 27, for in-class presentation and discussion.

## Course Policies

### A. Students with Disabilities

Any students in this course who have a disability that might prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should meet with the instructor as soon as possible: to initiate disability verification, and to discuss accommodations that may be necessary to ensure your full participation in the successful completion of course requirements.

### B. Doctoral-level Participation

Any students taking this course for doctoral credit are required to do all work at a doctoral level. Supplemental responsibilities for doctoral students are indicated in the syllabus descriptions of the requirements for course papers and presentations.

### C. STH Academic Code of Conduct

The STH Academic Code of Conduct may be found on the STH website at [www.bu.edu/sth/academic/academic-conduct](http://www.bu.edu/sth/academic/academic-conduct). All students are required to familiarize themselves with this Code, its definitions of misconduct, and its sanctions, and to abide by it. Students should especially familiarize themselves with the section on plagiarism.

## Course Grade

The grade for the course will be determined as follows: 10% on the quality of seminar participation and evidence of serious preparation, including reflections on the texts and responses to other students' perspectives; 40% for Reaction Papers (5 pts./paper); 20% for the Reflection Paper; 20% for the Research Project; 20% for the Research Paper. Each paper will lose 2 points for each day it is late.

Grading scale: A = 95-100%; A- = 90-94%; B+ = 85-89%; B = 80-84%; B- = 75-79%; C+ = 70-74%; C = 65-69%; C- = 60-64%; D = 55-59%; F = 0-54%.

## Course sessions

January 19

1. Introduction:

January 26

2. Foundations: Judaism and Ecology

Reading: Waskow

February 2

3. Environmental Theology/Ecological Ethics: Creation and Commons

Reading: Hart: Foreword, Introduction, Part I, Part II

February 9

4. Environmental Theology/Ecological Ethics: Community and Common Ground

Reading: Hart: Part III, Part IV, Afterword

February 16: No class; Monday class schedule

February 23

5. Feminism, Theology, and Ecology - 1

Reading: McFague, Introduction, chapters 1-4

March 2

6. Feminism, Theology, and Ecology - 2

Reading: McFague, Chapters 5-7

March 9: Spring break

March 16

7. African American Environmental Engagements -1

Reading: Glave and Stoll, Foreword; chapters 1-8

March 23

8. African American Environmental Engagements – 2

Reading: Glave and Stoll, Chapters 9-14

March 30

9. Native American Considerations - 1

Reading: Weaver, Foreword, Preface, chapters 1-5

April 6

10. Native American Considerations – 2

Reading: Weaver, 6-10, Afterword

April 13

11. Scientific Perspectives

Reading: Edward O. Wilson; Summary Report of IPCC

April 20

12. Religious and Humanist Responses to Ecological Issues

Readings: Columbia River Watershed Catholic Bishops; National Association of Evangelicals; Montana Association of Churches; National Council of Churches; other statements issued by Christian denominations; Earth Charter; Sierra Club: Faith in Action; Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life.

April 27

13. Presentation of Research Paper

Course in Congregation Contexts

This fieldwork is intended to develop workshops/educational sessions with the Theology club, one or two local congregations, community organizations, and environmental organizations, and

a cohesive community. The latter will surface local community concerns linked to economics and ecology (e.g., healthy food, energy needs and costs, public health concerns such as air and water pollution). Ideally, initially an organizational meeting/social will be announced by the local pastor(s) to their faith community. The participants will develop an informative, interactive educational process (students, faith community, community organization members, environmentalists) that will include use of DVDs and a conversational style. Church and other community members will suggest local needs that correspond to issues presented. The newly formed project community (congregation, community members, environmentalists, STH students and faculty) will work on one or two local projects, on at least two weekends and/or during class times, and lay the foundation for ongoing work on these and future projects.