

# **Earth and Its Distress: Ecological Ethics in Christian Perspective**

Chicago Theological Seminary  
Janet Parker, Fall 2002

## **Course Goals**

- \* To attain familiarity with the breadth and depth of Christian theological reflection upon the ecological crisis, and to understand the resources of the Christian faith for responding creatively to this crisis.
- \* To develop an understanding of environmental issues as justice issues and as theological and ethical issues of deep concern to Christians.
- \* To learn about the environmental challenges of the Chicago region and some of the resources and groups working to address these challenges.
- \* To listen to unfamiliar voices from within and without the Christian tradition and to be educated by these voices from the margins about our responsibilities toward the creation and the other beings with whom we share the planet.
- \* To participate in the educative process by which the above goals will be met, through active involvement in class discussion and through teaching a class as part of a group research project.

## **Required Texts**

Adams, Carol J. (ed.). *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (Continuum, 1993)  
Greenberg, Joel. *A Natural History of the Chicago Region* (U. of Chicago, 2002). (Available more cheaply on Amazon.com than in the Seminary bookstore.)  
Hessel, Dieter and Larry Rasmussen (eds.). *Earth Habitat: Eco-Injustice and the Church's Response* (Fortress, 2001)  
Hessel, Dieter and Rosemary Radford Ruether (eds.). *Christianity and Ecology* (Harvard, 2000)  
\*Krueger, Frederick W. *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Deep Ecological Legacy of Christianity* (The Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation, 2002)  
Rasmussen, Larry. *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Orbis, 1996)  
Shiva, Vandana. *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (South End, 1997)  
The Worldwatch Institute. *State of the World 2002* (W.W. Norton, 2002)  
Weaver, Jace (ed.). *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice* (Orbis, 1996)

\*Only available on reserve at the library, or may be ordered by calling (707) 573-3162.

## **Recommended Texts**

\*\*Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force. *Words That Come Before All Else: Environmental Philosophies of the Haudenosaunee* (Native North American Travelling College, n.d.)  
Roberts, Elizabeth and Elias Amidon (eds.). *Earth Prayers From Around the World* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991)  
Spencer, Daniel T. *Gay and Gaia: Ethics, Ecology, and the Erotic* (Pilgrim, 1996)

\*\*Only available on reserve at the library

## **Requirements**

**Class Participation:** Participation in class discussions and research group presentations is expected. This assumes the student has read the required reading by class time and can work with it in discussions that are collaborative and constructive, with a view to the course goal. In assessing class participation, the degree to which the student participated actively and equitably in the group research project will also be taken into account.

**Environmental Autobiography Paper** A worksheet to guide you in this exercise will be handed out the first day of class. Guided by the worksheet, we will discuss our environmental autobiographies the following week, on September 11. Reflecting on the worksheet exercise and the class discussion, you will then write a five page environmental autobiography paper summarizing your insights. Due September 18.

**Group Research Project** Teams of 2-4 people will research a local environmental issue related to one of the four core areas of the syllabus; i.e. land, water, air and fire, or animals/biodiversity. Teams will be expected to make field visits to the relevant site(s) in Chicago or the surrounding area, and to interact with at least one environmental organization working on this issue. The purpose of this assignment is to contextualize our study of environmental ethics in the Chicagoland area and to educate one another about local environmental issues and organizations. An urban, suburban or rural environmental issue/site may be chosen as long as it is within the Chicagoland vicinity. The research teams will prepare both a class presentation and a final written report.

**Class Presentation** The class presentation should include the following elements in the order chosen by the group:

- 1) A ritual component in which we together participate in an embodiment, in symbol and practice, of the environmental issue selected by the group and the religious response to this issue (5-15 minutes)
- 2) A teaching component in which team members present the environmental issue or problem they have studied, the efforts of local environmental organization(s) or activists to address the problem, and a reflection/analysis of how Christian and/or other religious/cultural traditions (i.e. Native American, ecofeminist) could contribute to effecting a "conversion to the earth" that would bring about needed transformation in this area of environmental concern. This discussion should utilize and build upon course readings but may also be informed by outside reading done by the team (approx. 45 minutes).
- 3) An assessment by group members of new insights gained from working on this project and the experience of working together as a team. For example, what did you learn by doing an assignment that had a field research component and a group component that you do not typically learn by doing individual written assignments? What challenges or difficulties did you encounter? (approx. 15 minutes).
- 4) A suggested agenda for how religious communities such as churches and seminaries could creatively address and positively impact the issue under discussion using all of the means at their disposal; i.e., worship, education, activism, influence in the community, interfaith alliances,

coalition-building with community partners, etc. (approx. 15 minutes).

Group Report A ten to twelve page group report should summarize both the learnings from the research project as well as the insights gained from the experience of teaching the class. The report should include the four dimensions listed above under Class Presentation as well as provide information and analysis on the research process itself, such as how you identified your topic, which sites or organizations you visited, who your contacts were, what outside reading you did, etc. Every member of the group should participate in some aspect of the written report. An appendix describing the work of each group member on the entire project, including research, the class presentation, and the final report should be attached at the end of the paper. Due December 4.

Individual Paper A paper of approximately ten pages (for master's degree students) or fifteen pages (for doctoral degree students) should treat one dimension of the group research project at a deeper level than group presentation allows. Choose an area of the group project that sparks your interest and provide a treatment of that topic that involves more in-depth reading and investigation than required by the group project. In particular, focus upon bringing one aspect of the environmental issue you have studied into dialogue with a particular voice or set of voices speaking to this issue from a religious perspective. Further, how do religious scholars and activists bring theological and ethical analyses to this issue that secular activists do not employ? What does a religious perspective on this issue offer that is unique? Master's degree students should feel free to explore aspects of this topic relevant for current or anticipated work in ministry, while doctoral students are encouraged to write as though preparing an article for publication in a theological journal. The paper should draw upon course readings as well as outside readings. Due December 16.

### **Schedule of Classes and Assignments**

September 4:

Introductions

Video: "Keeping the Earth"

September 11: Earth and Its Distress

Greenberg, A Natural History of Chicago, ch. 1, "The Great Forces," 1-15.

Rasmussen, Earth Community, Earth Ethics, Preface, Introduction, Part I, "A Slow Womb,"

"Sweet Betsy and Her Avalanche," "Three Revolutions or Four?", 23-74

The Worldwatch Institute, State of the World 2002, Preface, xix-xxii; ch. 1, "The Challenge for Johannesburg: Creating a More Secure World," 1-23.

United Nations Environment Programme, "North America's Environment: A Thirty-Year State of the Environment and Policy Retrospective," Foreword, Preface, Key Conclusions, Executive Summary. On reserve.

Handouts on Johannesburg Summit 2002/World Summit on Sustainable Development

September 18: Points of Christian Moral Reference

\*Environmental Autobiography paper due

\*Sign-up sheet distributed to indicate interest for group projects.

Adams, Carol J., ed., *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, Adams, Introduction, Ruether, "Ecofeminism: Symbolic and Social Connections of the Oppression of Women and the Domination of Nature," and Williams, "Sin, Nature, and Black Women's Bodies," 1-29. Hessel and Rasmussen, eds., *Earth Habitat*, Preface, xi-xii; Rasmussen, Introduction "Eco-Justice: Church and Community Together," 1-19; Part I, Chapters 1-2: Cone, "Whose Earth Is It Anyway?" and Pedersen, "Inclusion and Exclusion: Reflections on Moral Community and Salvation," 23-52.

Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, Part II, "The Vine Languishes, the Merry-Hearted Sigh," 188-194.

Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), *A Small World After All: Women Assess the State of the Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*, Foreword, 5; Introduction, 6-7; "Women Shaping the Future," 8-9; "Sustainable Development and Peace," 12-13.

Recommended Reading:

Spencer, Gay and Gaia, "Starting the Journey: Initial Reflections," 3-18, and "Humanity: Rethinking Human Nature and the Natural," 56-75.

September 25: Earth

Video: In the Light of Reverence

\*Time allotted for research groups to meet the last hour of class.

Adams, Carol J., ed., *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, McFague, "An Earthly Theological Agenda," 84-98.

Hessel and Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology*, Hiebert, "The Human Vocation: Origins and Transformations in Christian Traditions," 135-154.

The Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2002*, Halweil, ch. 3, "Farming in the Public Interest," 51-74.

Weaver, Jace, ed., *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice*, Weaver, Introduction "Notes from a Miner's Canary," 1-28. Fixico, ch. 1 "The Struggle for Our Homes: Indian and White Values and Tribal Lands," 29-46.

Krueger, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, "St. Anthony the Great," 54-57; "St. Athanasius," 63-70; "St. Gregory of Nazianzus," 94-99.

Recommended Reading:

Spencer, Gay and Gaia, "Earth: Rethinking Nature and the Nature/Culture Split," 76-104.

Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force, *Words That Come Before All Else*, Williams, "Creation," 1-7; and Benedict, "Mother Earth," 15-24.

October 2: Earth II

Guest speakers: Clare Butterfield and Bill Eyring from CNT

\*Time allotted for research groups to meet the last hour of class.

Adams, Carol J., ed., *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, Johnson, "New Moon over Roxbury," 251-260.

Choose one of the following two chapters of Greenberg, *A Natural History of Chicago*: Ch. 3, "In Quality Diminished: Prairie Settlement and Conservation", 37-63, or Ch. 10, "Lake Michigan's Rim: Beaches, Dunes and Bluffs," 242-271.

Hessel and Ruether, eds., *Christianity and Ecology*, Berry, "Christianity's Role in the Earth Project," 127-134; Chryssavgis, "The World of the Icon and Creation: An Orthodox Perspective on Ecology and Pneumatology," 83-96.

Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics, Part I*, "Environmental Apartheid," "Ecumenical Earth," and "Creation's Integrity," 75-110.

#### Recommended Reading:

Spencer, Gay and Gaia, "Shifting Our Grounding: From Social Location to Ecological Location," 293-320.

#### October 9: Water

Guest speaker: Rev. Dr. Mari E. Castellanos, Minister for the Justice and Peace Action Network, Justice and Witness Ministries, UCC.

\*A 1-2 page draft proposal for the group research projects should be submitted to the professor. Greenberg, *A Natural History of Chicago*, ch. 7, "The Last Wilderness: Lake Michigan," 140-176.

Hessel and Ruether, eds., *Christianity and Ecology*, Keller, "No More Sea: The Lost Chaos of the Eschaton," 183-198; Miller-Travis, "Social Transformation through Environmental Justice," 559-572; and Rossing, "River of Life in God's New Jerusalem: An Eschatological Vision for Earth's Future," 205-224.

Krueger, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, "St. Ambrose of Milan," 107-109; "St. Columba," 155-156. Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), *A Small World After All: Women Assess the State of the Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*, "Environmental Health," 16-17. On reserve.

#### Recommended Reading:

Spencer, Gay and Gaia, "God: Sensing the Divine in Right Relation," 105-127.

#### October 16: Water II

Adams, Carol J., ed., *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, Gupta, "Ganga: Purity, Pollution, and Hinduism," 99-116.

Patchett and Wilhelm, "The Ecology and Culture of Water," 1-13. On reserve.

Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics, Part I*, "The Big Economy and the Great Economy," "Message from Chiapas," "Message from Geneva," and "Fish Stories," 111-173.

Weaver, Jace, ed., *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice*, Young, ch. 5, "'Beyond the Water Line,'" and Sam-Cromarty, ch. 6, "Family Closeness," 85-106.

#### Recommended Reading:

Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force, *Words That Come Before All Else*, Ransom, "The Waters," 25-43; and Patterson, "The Fish," 44-50.

## October 23: Air and Fire

Adams, Carol J., ed., *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, Keller, "Talk about the Weather," 30-49.  
Hessel and Ruether, eds., *Christianity and Ecology*, Hallman, "Climate Change: Ethics, Justice, and Sustainable Community," 453-471; and French, "Ecological Security and Policies of Restraint," 473-491.  
Krueger, "St. Catherine of Siena," 262-265; "Patriarch Bartholomew," 454-460.  
The Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2002*, Dunn and Flavin, ch. 2, "Moving the Climate Change Agenda Forward," 24-50.  
United Nations Environmental Programme News Release, "Regional and Global Impacts of Vast Pollution Cloud Detailed in New Scientific Study," handout.

### Recommended Reading:

Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force, *Words That Come Before All Else*, Benedict, "The Four Winds," 117-134.

## October 30: Animals

Adams, Carol J., ed., *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, Sanchez, "Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral," 207-228; Adams and Procter-Smith, "Taking Life or 'Taking On Life'? Table Talk and Animals," 295-310.  
Greenberg, *A Natural History of Chicago*, ch. 13, "Of Extinction and Resurrection," 347-370.  
Hessel and Ruether, eds., *Christianity and Ecology*, Cowdin, "The Moral Status of Otherkind in Christian Ethics," and DeWitt, "Behemoth and Batrachians in the Eye of God," 261-316.  
Pollan, "This Steer's Life: The Highly Unnatural Journey of No. 534, from Calf to Steak," *The New York Times Magazine*, 31 March 2002. Handout.

### Recommended Reading:

Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force, *Words That Come Before All Else*, Arquette, "The Animals," 82-101.

## November 6: Biodiversity

Krueger, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, "St. Augustine," 129-138; and "St. Francis of Assisi," 219-224.  
Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*, Introduction, chs. 1-3.  
Weaver, Jace, ed., *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice*, Tinker, ch. 10, "An American Indian Theological Response to Ecojustice," 153-176.

### Recommended Reading:

Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force, *Words That Come Before All Else*, Arquette, "The Small Plants and Grasses," 51-63; Cook, "Berry Plants," 64-68.

## November 13: Group Presentations/Biodiversity II

Krueger, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, "St. Hildegard of Bingen," 212-217; "St. Thomas of Aquinas,"

236-242.

Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*, chs. 4-7.

Recommended Reading:

Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force, *Words That Come Before All Else*, LaFrance, "The Three Sisters," 69-75; and Brant, "The Medicine Plants," 76-81.

November 20: Group Presentations/Population-Consumption Debates

Hessel and Ruether, eds., *Christianity and Ecology*, Maguire, "Population, Consumption, Ecology: The Triple Problematic," 403-427.

The Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2002*, Engelman, Halweil, and Nierenberg, "Rethinking Population, Improving Lives," 127-148.

Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), *A Small World After All: Women Assess the State of the Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*, "Population and Consumption," 18-19. On reserve.

November 27: Reading Week/Thanksgiving Recess

December 4: Conversion to Earth: The Constructive Tasks

\*Group Reports due

Hessel and Ruether, eds., *Christianity and Ecology*, Mische, "The Integrity of Creation: Challenges and Opportunities for Praxis," and Ruether, "Conclusion: Eco-Justice at the Center of the Church's Mission," 591-614.

Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, "Midges and Cosmologies," 181-187; "Adam, Where Are You?" 227-247; "Returning to Our Senses," and "The Cross of Reality," 270-294.

Weaver, *Defending Mother Earth*, Fassett, "Afterword: Where Do We Go From Here?" 177-191.

Recommended Reading:

Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, "Song of Songs," 295-316.

Spencer, Gay and Gaia, "Erotic Ecology: Interconnection and Right Relation at All Levels," and "Gay and Gaia: Features of an Erotic Ethic of Ecojustice," 321-361.

December 11: Conversion to Earth: The Constructive Tasks II

Greenberg, *A Natural History of Chicago*, Conclusion, "Entering the New Century: Prospects for the Future," 460-471.

Hessel and Rasmussen, eds., *Earth Habitat*, Hessel, "Conclusion: The Church Ecologically Reformed," 185-206.

Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, Part III, "Earth Action," 319-354.

Recommended Reading:

Hessel and Rasmussen, eds., *Earth Habitat*, Shepard, "Issues of Community Empowerment," and Messenger, "These Stones Shall Be God's House: Tools for Earth Liturgy," 159-183.

\*\*The Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2002*, French, "Reshaping Global Governance," 174-198. Strongly recommended.

December 16: Final Papers due in Professor Parker's faculty mailbox by noon.