

The Church and the Ecological Crisis

ST – 284
Dr. Greg Hitzhusen
Beth Norcross

Professors: Dr. Greg Hitzhusen – geh23@cornell.edu (607) 339-6419

Beth Norcross – BethNorcross1@aol.com, (703) 534-6419

Course Description/Objectives

Church leaders around the world are calling upon the faithful to address the moral dimensions of ecological degradation, and a growing community of theologians claims that the destruction of the earth is the “central moral imperative of our times.” Accordingly, this course seeks to explore the role of the church in addressing ecological concerns, and to equip pastors and other Christian leaders with the theological, spiritual, and practical tools they will need to lead their congregations in faithfully responding to this moral imperative.

Course Requirements

Readings: Students are expected to complete all of the required readings listed below. Students are expected to have read *For the Beauty of the Earth* by Steven Bouma-Prediger before the class begins.

Class Participation: Regular attendance and class participation are expected pursuant to Wesley policy stated below. Students and instructors will seek to model a commitment to creation in energy and materials use during class.

Ecological Autobiography: Each student will prepare a five page (double-spaced) autobiography describing your formative experiences in the outdoors, reflecting on your experience of God’s presence in the outdoors, and reflecting on how these experiences have shaped your understanding of the relationship between God, humanity, and non-human creation. This autobiography will be turned in the first day of class.

Daily Journaling: Each student is to find and adopt a convenient outdoor place conducive to reflection, and spend at least 15 minutes each day during the course journaling freely on your experiences there. Journals will be turned in the last day of class. They will not be graded, only checked for completion.

Field Trips: Students are expected to participate in two field trips: 1) a half-day tour of Synagogue Adat Shalom in Bethesda, MD on Thursday, 6/7, 1-4pm, and 2) a half-day end-of-session retreat to Pulpit Rock in Rock Creek Park from 1-4pm on Friday, 6/8.

Final Paper: Students are required to complete a 6-8 page (double-spaced) final paper, due July 9. More information will be provided on this assignment in class.

Pastoral/Church Leader Notebook: Using notes and assignments from the course as well as course handouts, you will prepare a notebook that will serve as a future reference guide for your churches. The notebooks will not be graded, only checked for completion.

Grading: A student's grade for the class will be determined by successful completion of the journal (10%) and the notebook (10%), as well as final grades on the ecological autobiography (20%), final paper (40%) and class participation (20%). Class participation grading will include both demonstrated familiarity with the assigned readings as well as active involvement in class discussions.

Schedule and Assignments

Pre-Class Assignment: Read Bouma-Prediger and prepare ecological autobiography to be turned in on Monday, June 4.

Monday, June 4 Introduction to the course. Ecological Imperative. Introduce the Question: What is the role of the church in responding to ecological degradation.

Assignment: Journal

Blackboard Reading: Tribble, Hiebert, Leopold, Peterson, White

Tuesday, June 5 Looking at the Word

Assignment: Journal

Blackboard Reading: Kearns, Santmire, Macy, Reuther, Dillard

Wednesday, June 6 Theology, Church History, Spirituality

Assignment: Journal

Blackboard Reading: Dewitt, Thomas Berry, Oelschlaeger, Lane

Thursday, June 7 The Role of the Church

Field Trip to Adat Shalom

Assignment: Journal

Blackboard Reading: Rudin, W. Berry, Barnett

Friday, June 8 The Role of the Church cont.; Wrap-up
Guest Speaker: Allison Fisher, Greater Washington Interfaith Power and Light
Field Trip to Rock Creek Park
Assignment: Turn in Journals, Notebooks

July 9 FINAL PAPERS DUE

Disability:

If you have a physical, psychological, or learning disability and might require accommodations in this course, contact Shelby Haggray the Associate Dean for Community Life at the beginning of the semester regarding Wesley's policies and procedures for documenting and accommodating disabilities, x 8614 or shaggray@wesleysem.edu.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is regarded as a serious offense and will result in substantial penalties, including the possibility of academic dismissal. The Faculty regards the following as forms of plagiarism or dishonesty:

- Copying from another student's paper
- Giving or receiving unauthorized assistance to or from another student during an examination
- Using unauthorized material during an examination
- Borrowing and presenting as one's own (i.e. without proper attribution) the composition or ideas of another.

Please refer to your Wesley Student Handbook (on-line) for more information about Wesley's academic policies or contact the office of Community Life, x8614.

Grading Overview:

Faculty members are responsible for grading students in their classes. They take this responsibility seriously and strive to act in a fair and conscientious manner. There is no standard grading scale for the Seminary. Grading standards for each course shall be specified from the outset, and papers and examinations shall be returned within a reasonable time, accompanied by constructive comments and specific grades where appropriate. Changes may be made after a grade is reported to the Registrar's Office only if the faculty member involved certifies that a clerical error was made. The Faculty and the Dean have affirmed that the faculty is the final evaluator and grader of all class assignments.

Grading System? At the time of initial registration, students in the M.Div., M.A., or M.T.S. degree programs may elect to be evaluated on either a letter-grade scale or on a Pass/Fail basis. A student is permitted to change status once after the initial choice. Such a change may occur only during a registration period.

M.Div., M.A., and M.T.S. students who have elected letter grading may register for a maximum of one course per semester on a Pass/Fail basis; that course must be an elective.

Grades assigned in the "conventional" system and compiled as quality points towards a GPA are:
A = 4.000?A- = 3.700?B+ = 3.300?B= 3.000?B- = 2.700?C+ = 2.300?C = 2.000?C- = 1.700?F = 0.000

Other symbols used are:

L = Audit (listener)

W = Withdrew after the second week of the semester

NR = Grade not reported at the time of posting

P = Pass (Quality of work no less than "C" on a conventional grading scale)

D.Min. and Special Students are graded only with "conventional" grades. The grade of "incomplete" is not given at Wesley (see Extension of Time). An incomplete in a Consortium school that permits them is recorded permanently as an "F" on the Wesley record, and an incomplete from any other school is not transferred at all. The grade "D" is not used at Wesley.

Wesley Classroom Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend all classes in their entirety. Faculty members have the authority to set attendance policies for particular courses and those policies will be included in the course syllabus. Deviation from the attendance policy may result in reduction of grade or loss of credit.

Reading List

ST-284 The Church and the Ecological Crisis

Major Texts

1. Barnett, Tanya, ed. Greening Congregations (Earth Ministry: 2002) (resource only)
2. Bouma-Prediger, Steven. For the Beauty of the Earth (Baker Academic: 2001) (to be read in its entirety before class)
3. Hamma, Robert. Earth Echo: Sacred Encounters With Nature (Sorin Books: 2002) (resource only)

Blackboard Readings

1. Berry, Thomas. Excerpt from *The Great Work*.
2. Berry, Wendell. Excerpt from *Home Economics*.
3. DeWitt, Cal. "Environmental Challenge to Evangelical Christianity."
4. Dillard, Annie. Excerpt from *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.
5. Kearns, Laurel. "The Context of Eco-theology."
6. Lane, Beldon. "Encounter at Ghost Ranch: Reflections on Desert Spirituality."
7. Leopold, Aldo. Excerpt from *Sand County Almanac*.
8. Macy, Joanna. "Working Through Environmental Despair."
9. National Council of Churches. *God's Earth is Sacred: An Open Letter to Church and Society in the United States*.
10. Ruether, Rosemary Radford. "Ecofeminism: Symbolic and Social Connections of the Oppression of Women and the Domination of Nature."
11. Hiebert . Excerpt from *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel*.
12. Oelschlaeger, Max. Excerpt from *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis*.
13. Peterson, Eugene. Excerpt from *The Mes sage of David: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians*.
14. Rudin, Andrew. "Energy, Religion and Lifestyle."
15. Santmire, Paul. "In God's Ecology: A Revisionist Theology of Nature."
16. Tribble, Phyllis. "Ancient Priests and Modern Polluters."
17. White, Lynn. "The Historical Roots of the Ecologic Crisis."