

Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies

Online Course Western Religions and Ecology F&ES 784a, REL 990H

Instructors: John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker

Fall 2014 – October 13 to December 5

Course Description:

This course introduces the Western religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam in relation to the emerging field of religion and ecology. This overview course identifies developments in the traditions that highlight their ecological implications into the contemporary period. In particular, it relates theological and religious concepts within the traditions to engaged, on-the-ground environmental projects. It investigates the symbolic and lived expressions in religious texts, ethics, and practices that can be defined as religious ecologies. Similarly, it identifies narratives in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that orient humans to the cosmos, namely, religious cosmologies. This interrelationship of narratives and religious environmentalism provides pathways into the study of religion and ecology.

Course Rationale:

For many years science, engineering, policy, law, and economics were considered indispensable for understanding and resolving environmental problems. We now have abundant knowledge from these disciplines about environmental issues, but still not sufficient will to engage in long-term change for the flourishing of the Earth community. Thus, there is a growing realization that religion, spirituality, ethics, and values can make important contributions, in collaboration with science and policy, to address complex ecological issues. We will examine those contributions, acknowledging both the problems and promise of religions. In addition, we view religion and ecology amid the broader emergence of environmental humanities, namely, the examination of the roles of humans in nature through the lens of history, literature, philosophy, music, and art.

Course Format:

This six-week online course is offered for Yale students, both graduate and undergraduate. In particular, it will engage students in the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, the Divinity School, and the Department of Religious Studies. Two credits will be offered for the course.

Course Requirements:

Students are expected to complete each week:

- 3 hours of viewing online lectures and videos
- 3 hours of reading books and articles
- online assignments posted to Canvas
- group discussions (online and in the classroom for one hour per week)

Course Grading:

Grades will be determined on the basis of the completion and quality of course readings, assignments, participation in postings, and group discussions online and in the classroom.

The software program Canvas is equipped to record completion of online readings and assignments and allows for faculty evaluation of written work. The following areas will be assigned for completion and grade evaluation each week:

- viewing online lectures and videos (3 hours viewing each week)
- reading online materials as well as required texts
- writing assignments relating independent and online readings (paragraph responses for posting)
- group discussions both online (by Canvas) and in classroom (1 hour each week)

Required Text - Online Journal / Daedalus:

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, eds., "**Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?**" **Daedalus, Fall 2001.** (<https://www.amacad.org/content/publications/publication.aspx?d=845>).

Encyclopedia of Religion articles on Judaism, Christianity and Islam - online;
articles on Religion and Ecology – online

Recommended Readings:

Background Texts for Western Religions:

John Esposito, Darrell Fasching, Todd Lewis, eds., **World Religions Today**. Oxford, 2013.
Chapters on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

F.E. Peters, **The Children of Abraham**. Princeton University Press, 2005.

Background Text for Western Religions and Ecology:

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, eds., *Worldviews & Ecology: Religion, Philosophy and the Environment*. Orbis Books, 2000.

Websites: **Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale**
(<http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/>).

Friends of the Earth Middle East
(<http://foeme.org/www/?module=home>).

Course Outline

Week 1: Introduction and Overview - Judaism

Readings: *Encyclopedia of Religion* article on Judaism by Michael Swartz, online

Daedalus: Religion and Ecology,
Hava Tirosch-Samuelsan, "Nature in the Sources of Judaism"
(<https://www.amacad.org/content/publications/pubContent.aspx?d=1294>).

Multimedia: **Online Lectures** – J Grim, "Formation and Founders,"
"Scriptures and Commentaries," "Beliefs and Practices"

Chautauqua Interview - Rabbi Lawrence Troster
(<http://fore.research.yale.edu/multimedia/conversations-on-religion-and-ecology/>).

Website: **Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale**
(<http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/judaism/>).

Assignments: Compare and contrast Tirosch-Samuelsan's and Troster's approaches to Judaism and ecology. What are the seminal features of Judaism that they emphasize and what are their ecological implications?

Post your response to this week's discussion forum on Canvas. Then read the posts of your classmates and formulate a question in response to one of them. Post your question for class discussion.

Week 2: Judaism and Ecology into the Present - Orienting, Grounding, Nurturing and Transforming

Readings: *Encyclopedia of Religion* article,
Hava Tirosch-Samuelsan, "Ecology and Judaism," online

Edward Kaplan, "Reverence and Responsibility: Abraham Joshua Heschel on Nature and the Self," in *Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed Word*. Edited by Hava Tirosch-Samuelson, Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions, 2002, online

Multimedia: **Online Lecture** - Tucker and Grim

Renewal film- "Ancient Roots"

Website: Rabbi Lawrence Troster, "10 Teachings on Judaism and the Environment" (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-lawrence-troster/10-teachings-on-judaism-a_b_844973.html).

Assignments: What elements of Jewish traditions and texts are highlighted by Tirosch-Samuelson, Kaplan, and Troster that also appear in the "Ancient Roots" video? That is, the counselors attempt to bring the children into a direct experience of Judaism and the natural world. Expand on and deepen your reflection on these characteristics of Jewish traditional religious ideas in modern environmental practice.

Post your response to this week's discussion forum on Canvas. Then read the posts of your classmates and formulate a question in response to one of them. Post your question for class discussion.

Week 3: Introduction and Overview - Christianity

Readings: *Encyclopedia of Religion* article on Christianity by Jaroslav Pelikan, online

John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Christianity as Orienting to the Cosmos," Ch 6 in *Ecology and Religion*, Island Press, 2014, online.

Multimedia: **Online Lectures** - Tucker and Grim, "Formation and Founders," "Scriptures and Commentaries," "Beliefs and Practices"

Chautauqua Interview - Heather Eaton

(<http://fore.research.yale.edu/multimedia/conversations-on-religion-and-ecology/>).

Video – "The Adriatic: A Sea at Risk," James Becket. Ojai, CA: BecketFilms

<http://www.Becketfilms.com> (DVD, 42 minutes).

(<https://vimeo.com/94672340>). Password: RSE

Website: **Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale**

(<http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/christianity/>).

Assignments: From your reading of Chapter 6 in *Ecology and Religion* and viewing the film on the Green Patriarch's symposium on the Adriatic Sea, respond to the following question: What are the theological contributions of the Patriarch and why are they ecologically significant? How do his Orthodox theological contributions compare with the schools of Christianity (Catholic or Protestant) that appear in the other readings?

Post your response to this week's discussion forum on Canvas. Then read the posts of your classmates and formulate a question in response to one of them. Post your question for class discussion.

Week 4: Christianity and Ecology into the Present - Orienting, Grounding, Nurturing and Transforming

Readings: *Daedalus: Religion and Ecology*, Sallie McFague, "New House Rules: Christianity, Economics, and Planetary Living" (<https://www.amacad.org/content/publications/pubContent.aspx?d=1295>).

Encyclopedia of Religion article, John Cobb, "Ecology and Christianity," online

Thomas Berry, "Christianity's Role in the Earth Project," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*. Edited by Dieter Hessel and Rosemary Radford Reuther, Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions, 2000, online

Multimedia: Online Lecture - Tucker and Grim

Renewal film- "A Crime Against Creation", "Interfaith Power and Light", "Going Green", "Sacred Celebration"

Websites: Interfaith Power & Light (<http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/>).

Green Faith (<http://greenfaith.org/>).

Assignments: What theological themes embedded in Christian traditions and texts highlighted by Cobb, McFague, and Berry also appear in the *Renewal* video? That is, the religious environmentalism featured in *Renewal* activates and motivates Christian environmental connections with the natural world. Expand on and deepen your reflection on these characteristics of Christian traditional religious ideas in modern environmental practice.

Post your response to this week's discussion forum on Canvas. Then read the posts of your classmates and formulate a question in response to one of them. Post your question for class discussion.

Week 5: Introduction and Overview – Islam

Readings: *Encyclopedia of Religion* article on Islam by Fazlur Rahman, online

Encyclopedia of Religion article, Richard Foltz, "Ecology and Islam," online

Multimedia: **Online Lectures** – J Grim, "Formation and Founders," "Scriptures and Commentaries," "Beliefs and Practices"

Chautauqua Interview - Safei al-Hamed

(<http://fore.research.yale.edu/multimedia/conversations-on-religion-and-ecology/>).

Website: **Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale**
(<http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/islam/>).

Assignments: Compare and contrast Foltz's and al-Hamed's approaches to Islam and ecology. What are the seminal features of Islam that they emphasize and what are their ecological implications? Discuss the significant role of the *Qur'an* in the features you identify.

Post your response to this week's discussion forum on Canvas. Then read the posts of your classmates and formulate a question in response to one of them. Post your question for class discussion.

Week 6: Islam and Ecology into the Present – Orienting, Grounding, Nurturing and Transforming

Readings: *Daedalus: Religion and Ecology*, S. Nomanul Haq, "Islam and Ecology: Toward Retrieval and Reconstruction"
(<https://www.amacad.org/content/publications/pubContent.aspx?d=1296>).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam, The Contemporary Islamic World and the Environmental Crisis," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*. Edited by Richard Foltz, Frederick Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin, Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions, 2003, online

Multimedia: **Online Lecture** - J Grim

Renewal film - "Food for Faith"

Website: **Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences**

[\(http://www.ifees.org.uk/\)](http://www.ifees.org.uk/).

Assignments: What legal (*shari'a*) themes embedded in Islamic traditions and texts are highlighted by Haq and Nasr that also appears in the *Renewal* video section, "Food for Faith?" What activates and motivates the Islamic religious environmentalism featured in *Renewal* that opens connections with the natural world? Expand on and deepen your reflection on these characteristics of Islamic traditional religious ideas in modern environmental practice.

Post your response to this week's discussion forum on Canvas. Then read the posts of your classmates and formulate a question in response to one of them. Post your question for class discussion.