

Religion and Ecology

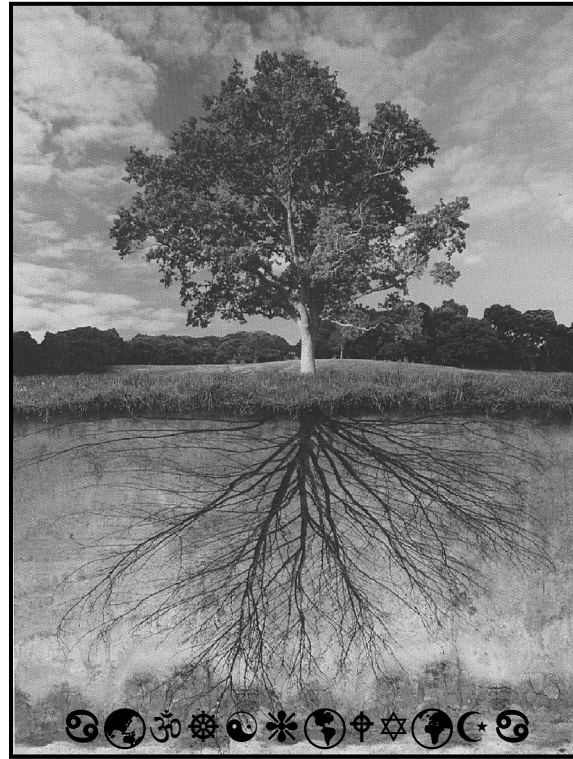
RELIGIOUS STUDIES 255, SPRING 2024

Professor Todd Lewis

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Office Hours: Mondays 5-6; Tuesday/Thursday 2-3; and by appointment

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T. Lewis, 2008

Course Description:

The human destruction of wilderness and natural resources at an unprecedented rate, combined with the reality of global climate disruption, has raised the question of their causes and the potential role of religion in addressing these interconnected crises. This course will begin by exploring various perspectives on nature arising from the world's religions. It will take as its premise that human-earth relations are based on particular cultural constructions — cosmologies and ethical orientations — that have shaped communities to understand the origin and development of the universe and humanity's place in it. In the second half of the term, we will survey how modern philosophers, religious writers, theologians, ecologists, and indigenous peoples have addressed global environmental problems. The term will end with an examination of religions and epidemics in human history and the role of outdoor spirituality in the environmental movement. The course will include a term-long case study in Tiger ecology, conservation, and religious cultures with Professor David Smith.

Course Requirements:

Read, reflect, attend. Be mindful, talk, listen, think, learn, deepen your understanding.

Question, express your own ideas, be considerate of others' views. This a "critical reflections" course. It entails reading a substantial body of material, with a dual challenge of mastering new topics for learning and pushing further to ponder their implications for understanding and potential action.

Showing up: attendance is essential.

Design and Guidelines:

This course is planned as an introductory exploration, subject to changes according to student/instructor interests. It will integrate a weekly lecture that should be viewed before our online Thursday live meeting when we will discuss that week's readings as well. The course journal is the place to record notes from readings and note questions and/or topics for weekly discussion; it is the place to record your engagement with other course assignments. It is the archive for post-meeting summaries and reflections; it will be submitted electronically at the end of the term. (Separate guidelines will be distributed.)

Lectures supplement required readings, not replace them. Attendance will be kept. Papers and the journal must be handed in on time to receive full credit. The latter should follow instructions exactly, be concise, and edited for clarity. Separate guidelines for each will be distributed. Bring texts to class, if indicated on the syllabus.

Grading:

Attendance/Participation.....	20
Paper #1	10
Paper #2	15
Reflection & Assignment Journal...	30
Oral Final Exam	<u>25</u>
	100 pts

Assessment of Writing Assignments

As a general rule, you should imagine that you are writing for an audience that is not familiar with your subject matter. Try to anticipate the questions that might arise in the minds of your readers as they read your work, and build the answers to those questions into you discussion. Be as clear and as thorough as you can possibly be. Be sure to PROOFREAD your paper before you turn it in.

Evaluation of your written work will concentrate on 1) academic content of what you write, and 2) how you express it. 1. As to *What* you write: Is it accurate? Is it complete and comprehensive? Does it provide sufficient depth and detail in its exposition and assessment of the material? Does it provide examples from the readings and class discussions in order to illustrate and support statements and claims?
2. As to *How* you express it: Is it well organized? Is the discussion sharply focused? Is it clearly and convincingly written? Is it attentive to detail – free of errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, word usage, phrasing, etc.?

Required Textbooks:

John Grim, and Mary Evelyn Tucker. *Ecology and Religion*. Washington: Island Press, 2014.
Vernon Reynolds, Deborah Tanner, *The Social Ecology of Religion*. NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997.
D. Howard Smith, *The Wisdom of the Taoists*. New York: New Directions, 1980.
John Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*. Kearney: University of Nebraska, 1967.
Robert Bly, ed. *News of the Universe*. SF: Sierra Club Books, 1995
Ernest Callenbach, *Ecology: A Pocket Guide*. Berkeley: University of California, 2008
Joe Sacco, *Paying the Land NY*: Metropolitan Books; Illustrated edition, 2020

Course Readings on CANVAS web site [CR]

All the books above have been ordered from the Holy Cross bookstore.

Class Topics and Reading Assignments

I. Introductory Considerations

Week 1

**1/23: Course Overview: What is “Religious Tradition”? What is Ecology?
Where are we Today? What can/should a Course Do?**

Required Reading:

Reynolds and Tanner, *The Social Ecology of Religion*, 3-28
Black Elk Speaks, Part 1

Recommended Reading:

Ernest Callenbach, *Ecology: A Pocket Guide*.



1/25: Discussion

Required Reading:

Black Elk Speaks, Part 1



Week 2:

II. Religion & Ecology in Simple Subsistence Societies

**1/30: Lecture— Religion and Ecology in Human Origins
The Sacred Dimension of Hunting in Tribal Societies**

Required Reading:

Black Elk Speaks, Part II; Ecology and Religion, 13-42
Paying the Land, 1-23



2/1: Discussion—Session with Professor David Smith

Week 3:

**2/6: Lecture - The Land as Sacred Sphere in Subsistence Societies
The Geography of World Religions**

Required Reading:

Black Elk Speaks, Part III; Ecology and Religion, Chapter 8
Vine Deloria, “American Indians and Wilderness” [CR]
Leslie Sponsel, “Ecologically Noble or Ignoble” [CR]



Australian Aboriginal group ritual expressing clan connections to land and the Dreamtime

2/8: Discussion

III. The Major World Religions: Classical Views in Contemporary Interpretation and Practice

Week 4

2/13: Lecture— Judaism and the Ecology of Hebrew Biblical Traditions; Environment and Human Dominion: Christianity & Islam

Required Reading:

Ecology and Religion, Chapter 6

Readings from the Hebrew Bible in Translation; Readings from the *Qur'an* [CR]

Cara Wolinsky, "Islam and Marine Conservation" [CR]

Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, "Green Mosques" [CR]



St. Francis

2/15: Discussion

Week 5

2/20: Lecture—Indic Religions: Buddhism and Hinduism

Required Reading:

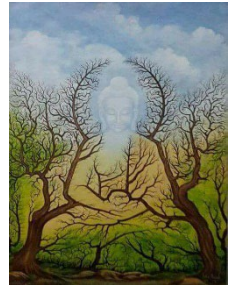
Ecology and Religion, Chapter 9

"*Buddhist Texts in Translation*", "Selections from the Mahayana Texts" [CR]

Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "The Home Culture of *Dhamma*..." [CR]

Sue Darlington, "The Tree Ordination Ceremony" [CR]

Readings from Hindu texts in Translation [CR]



2/22: Discussion



Week 6

2/27: Lecture—Religions of China: Daoism and Confucianism

Required Reading:

Ecology and Religion, Chapter 7

D. Howard Smith. *The Wisdom of the Taoists*

Jeffrey Meyer, "Salvation in the Garden: Daoism and Ecology," [CR]

2/29: Discussion

Spring Break 🏖️🌴🏡🌳🌸🌺

IV. The Ecology of Religious Practices

Week 7

3/12: Lecture—The Ecology of Religious Rituals [1]

Required Reading:

Marvin Harris, “Mother Cow,” and “Pig Lovers and Pig Haters” [CR]
Tanner, *The Social Ecology of Religion*, 53-148;
Ecology and Religion, Chapter 5

3/14: Discussion

Week 8

3/19: Lecture— The Ecology of Religious Rituals [2]

The Impacts of Praxis; Pandemics and Communities

Required Reading:

Tanner, *The Social Ecology of Religion*, 149-304
Scott Sanders, “Wilderness as Sabbath for the Land,” [CR]

3/21: Discussion



V. Formative Early Modern Traditions

Week 9

3/26: Lecture—The [Western] Enlightenment on Nature; Lynn White Hypothesis; The Romantic Philosophical Tradition

Required Reading:

Ecology and Religion, Chapter 3; *The Social Ecology of Religion*, 29-52
Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis” [CR]
Robert Bly, ed. *News of the Universe*. SF: Sierra Club Books, 1995

3/28 No Class

Week 10

4/2: North American Eco-Spiritualities— Transcendentalists; Edward Abbey John Muir, Aldo Leopold

Required Reading:

Ecology and Religion, Chapter 4
Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature”; Henry David Thoreau, “Walking”; John Muir, “Selections from *My First Summer in the Sierra...*”; Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic”; Edward Abbey, “The First Morning” [CR]

4/4: Discussion



VI. Modern Religious Teachings on Environmentalism: Contemporary Case Studies

Week 11

4/9: Class 12— Christian Eco-Theology and Eco-Feminism; Gaia Hypothesis

Required Viewing: “Adam’s World”

Required Reading:

Ecology and Religion, Chapter 6

Albert Schweitzer, “Reverence for Life”; Pope Francis, “*Laudato-Si*”; Orthodox Patriarch Statement; Sallie McFague, “The Scope of the Body: The Cosmic Christ”; Rosemary Ruether, “Eco-feminism: Symbolic and Social Connections of the Oppression of Women and the Domination of Nature” [CR]

Recommended Reading

The Island of the Animals [CR]

4/11: Discussion

Week 12

4/16: Lecture—; Deep Ecology; “Eco-visionaries”

Gary Snyder and E.O. Wilson

Required Reading/Viewing:

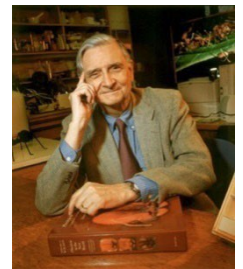
Ecology and Religion, Chapters 10, 11, Epilogue

The Social Ecology of Religion, 305-312

Gary Snyder, “*Good, Wild, Social*”

E.O. Wilson, “*Readings*” [CR];

VIEW: “E.O. Wilson, “*Half-Earth: How to Save the Natural World*” [CR]



4/18: Discussion—Land Art: Eco-Religious Gestures

“Lightning Field”, “Storm King Wall”, “Spiral Jetty”

Required Viewing:

Film: “*Rivers and Tides*” [CR]



Random act of Earth Art, Flagler Beach, Fla



Andy Goldsworthy Wall, Storm King Park, NY



Spiral Jetty, Great Salt Lake,



Week 13

4/23: Lecture— Religion on Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples, Eco-Spirituality,

Discussion: Paying the Land

Required Reading:

“Pantheism” [CR]

L. Sponsel, “ ‘Indigenous’ Ecologically Noble or Ignoble” [CR]

Paying the Land, completed



**4/25: Tigers and Religious Traditions
Plenary Session Presentations**

4/25, 6 PM: Lecture by Professor David Smith

Rehm Library “Will Tigers Survive in the Wild? Why It Matters”

Week 14

4/30: Discussion— Outdoor Spirituality

<https://outdoorspirituality.com/> Discussion of your

Journaling experiences

5/2: Final Class

Paper #2 Summaries

EXAM PERIOD: ORAL/Take-home FINAL