

Grounding the Sacred: Religion and Ecology in the United States (Verter)

Course Title Grounding the Sacred: Religion and Ecology in the United States
Env/Rel 276

Instructor(s) Bradford Verter
Visiting Assistant Professor in American Religion
Williams College

Discipline Religion

Subject(s) Environmental Studies; Religion

Pedagogical Level Undergraduate

Date Spring 2000

Presentation Williams College

Overview **Course Description**

Combining perspectives from environmental history, environmental ethics, and American studies, this course examines the spiritual dimensions of the relationship between the Earth and its human inhabitants in what is now the United States. First, we will examine the ways cultural and theological assumptions have shaped peoples' treatment of the natural world. Then we will look at the ways changes in the environment have influenced human social and cultural patterns. Finally, we will critically assess some of the major ethical responses to ecological issues.

Format This course is divided into two parts:

Part 1: Locating the Divine
Part 2: Locating the Human

Prerequisites None listed

Requirements **Requirements**

Attendance, Participation, Response Papers	25%
Short Papers	45%
Final Take-Home Exam	30%

1. **Attendance, Participation, Response Papers**

Regular attendance and active participation, including the preparation of very brief, one page response papers for each class.

2. **Short Papers**

Three short, 3–5 page, papers, due on February 25, March 17, and April 21. (Each paper is worth 15% of the total grade).

3. **Final Take-Home Exam**

Due on May 17

Evaluation See “Course Requirements.”

Texts **Required Reading**

Cooper, Susan. *Rural Hours*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1968.

Cronon, William. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1983.

Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1980.

Muir, John. *My First Summer in the Sierra*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Recommended Reading

Gottlieb, Roger S. *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Muir, John. *Nature Writings*. New York: Library of America, 1997.

Nash, Roderick. *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics*. Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

_____. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. 3d ed. New Haven, Conn.: Yale

University Press, 1982.

In addition, there is an extensive reading packet, available from the distribution center in the basement of Stetson Hall. A copy of the reading packet is also on reserve in Sawyer Library.

Schedule

Part 1: Locating the Divine

Feb 3 **Introduction: Constructing Nature**
Assigned Reading

- Wendell Berry, "On the Hill Late at Night," in *Farming: A Hand Book* (New York, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970) 27.

Week 1: European Dislocations

Feb 8 **The Long, Hard Fall from Eden**

Assigned Reading

- *Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Environmental Crisis," in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Toward Nature and Technology*, ed. Ian G. Barbour (Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley, 1973) 18–30.
- *Genesis 1–3
- *Yi-Fu Tuan, "Discrepancies between Environmental Attitude and Behavior: Examples from Europe and China," in *Ecology and Religion in History*, ed. David and Eileen Spring (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) 91–113.

Recommended Reading

- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 23–43.

Feb 10 **Gendering Nature**
Assigned Reading

- Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 1–41, 127–48.

Recommended Reading

- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 23–43.

Week 2: European Dislocations 2

Feb 15 **Mastering Nature**
Assigned Reading

- Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, 164–252, 290–95.

Feb 17 **Puritans in the Wilderness**

Assigned Reading

- *Richard Hakluyt (the Elder), “Inducements to the Liking of the Voyage Intended Towards Virginia . . .,” in *Envisioning America: English Plans for the Colonization of North America, 1580–1640*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1995) 33–44.
- *John Winthrop, “Reasons to be Considered for . . . the Intended Plantation in New England . . .,” in *Envisioning America*, 133–36.
- *William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966) 61–63.
- *Edward Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England, 1628–1651*, ed. J. Franklin Jameson (1910; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968) 111–15.

Recommended Reading

- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 23–43.

Week 3: Environmental Change in Colonial America

Feb 22 **Keepers of the Game**

Assigned Reading

- *Calvin Martin, “The European Impact on the Culture of a Northeastern Algonquin Tribe: An Ecological Interpretation,” *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 31 (1974) 3–26.
- *Shepard Krech III, “Buffalo,” in *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999) 123–49.
- William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, Chs 1–3.

Feb 24 **Changes in the Land**
Assigned Reading

- William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, Chs 4–8.

Feb 25 **No Class**
 Assignments Due

- Paper 1 Due (by 5:00 pm)

Week 4: Pastorals

Feb 29 **Agrarian Nationalism**
 Assigned Reading

- *Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill, Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va., by the University of North Carolina Press, 1955) 18–72, 157–65.

Mar 2 **Domestic Pastoral**
 Assigned Reading

- Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Rural Hours*, ed. Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1998) 4–58, 82–87 (June 23), 95–102 (July 3), 125–35 (July 28), 148–67 (Aug 8–23).

Week 5: Transcendent Landscapes

Mar 7 **The Sublime Landscape**
 Assigned Reading

- *Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. J. T. Boulton (London: Routledge, 1958) 57–87.
- *Henry D. Thoreau, selection from “Ktaadn,” in *The Maine Woods* (New York: Penguin, 1988) 70–95, 107–111.
- *William Cullen Bryant, “A Forest Hymn,” *The Poetical Works of William Cullen Bryant*, ed. Parke Godwin (vol. 1; New York: Appleton, 1883) 130–34.

Recommended Reading

- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 44–66.

Mar 9 **Transcendental Landscape**
Assigned Reading

- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1995) 1–10, 53–64, 84–90, 112–30.

Recommended Reading

- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 84–95.

Week 6: Gospels of Nature

Mar 14 **Gospels of Nature**
Assigned Reading

- *John Muir, Letter to Jeanne C. Carr, ca. 1870, in *The Life and Letters of John Muir*, by William Frederic Bade (vol. 2; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1923) 270–73.
- John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (Boston: Mariner/Houghton Mifflin, 1998) 75–85, 115–77, 232–53.

Recommended Reading

- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 122–40.

Mar 16 **Gospels of Nature**
Assigned Reading

- *John Burroughs, “The Gospel of Nature,” in *Time and Change: The Writings of John Burroughs* (vol. 16; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912) 243–73.
- *Raymond Williams, “Ideas of Nature,” in *Problems of Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980) 67–85.

Mar 17 **No Class**

Assignments Due

- Paper 2 Due (by 5:00 pm)

Spring Break

Part Two: Locating the Human

Week 7: Preservation vs. Conservation

Apr 4

The Frontier

Assigned Reading

- *Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, ed. Harold P. Simonson (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1963) 27–58.
- *Owen Wister, “To the Reader,” in *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains* (New York: Macmillan, 1930) ix-xii.
- *Theodore Roosevelt, “Author’s Foreward,” in *A Book-Lover’s Holidays in the Open, The Works of Theodore Roosevelt*. National Ed. (vol. 3; New York: Scribner, 1926) 181–83.

Apr 6

Showdown at Hetch Hetchy

Assigned Reading

- *Stephen Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) 86–88, 97–147.
- *John Muir, “Hetch Hetchy Valley,” in *Nature Writings, ed. William Cronon* (New York: Library of America, 1997) 810–17.

Recommended Reading

- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 161–81.

Week 8: Land Ethics

Apr 11

A Land Ethic

Assigned Reading

- *Aldo Leopold, “The Upshot,” and “Thinking Like a Mountain,” in *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (1949; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 163–226, 129–33.

Recommended Reading

- Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 182–99.
- Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 44–66.

Apr 13

Another Land Ethic

Assigned Reading

- *Louis S. Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997) 21–47, 71–105.

Week 9: Pollution

Apr 18 **Environmental Apocalypses**
Assigned Reading

- Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962) 1–297.
- *Paul R. Ehrlich, “Eco-Catastrophe!” *Ramparts* 8 (September 1969) 24–28.

Recommended Reading

- Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 44–66.

Apr 20 **Environmental Justice**
Assigned Reading

- *Eileen Maura McGurty, “From NIMBY to Civil Rights: The Origins of the Environmental Justice Movement,” *Environmental History* 2 (1997) 301–23
- *The First National People of Color Leadership Conference, “Principles of Environmental Justice,” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1996) 230–37.

Apr 21 **No Class**

Assignments Due

- Paper 3 Due (by 5:00 pm)

Week 10: More Land Ethics

Apr 25 **Deep Ecology**
Assigned Reading

- *Arne Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary,” in *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*, ed. Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue (Berkeley, Calif.: North Atlantic, 1995) 3–9.

- *Arne Naess and George Sessions, “Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement,” in *The Deep Ecology Movement*, 49–53.
- *Dave Foreman, “The Plowboy Interview: Dave Forman: No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth,” *Mother Earth News* 91 (Jan/Feb 1985) 16–22.
- *Ramachandra Guha, “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique,” *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989) 71–83.

Recommended Reading

- Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 84–95, 96–107.

Apr 27

Ecofeminism

Assigned Reading

- *Marti Kheel, “From Heroic to Holistic Ethics: The Ecofeminist Challenge,” in *Earth Ethics: Environmental Ethics, Animal Rights, and Practical Applications*, ed. James P. Sterba (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1995) 217–30.
- *Janet Biehl, “Problems in Ecofeminism,” from *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1991) 9–27.

Week 11: Green Theologies

May 2

Greening God

Assigned Reading

- *Susan Power Bratton, “The Ecotheology of James Watt,” *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983) 225–36.
- *Al Gore, “Environmentalism of the Spirit,” in *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (New York: Plume, 1993) 238–65.
- *Pope John Paul II, “The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1996) 230–37.
- *Arthur Waskow, “What is Eco-Kosher?,” in *This Sacred Earth*, 297–300.

Recommended Reading

- Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 67–83.

May 4

Sacralizing the Earth

Assigned Reading

- *Sallie McFague, “The Scope of the Body: The Cosmic Christ,” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1996) 286–96.
- *David Spangler, “Imagination, Gaia, and the Sacredness of the Earth,” in *This Sacred Earth*, 611–19.
- *Starhawk, “Power, Authority, and Mystery: Ecofeminism and Earth-Based Spirituality,” in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. Irene Diamond and Gloria Ornstein (San Francisco, Calif.: Sierra Club, 1990) 73–86.

Week 12: Answers and Questions

May 9

Bioregionalism

Assigned Reading

- *Ernest Callenbach, “Chocco,” in *Future Primitive: The New Ecotopias*, ed. Kim Stanley Robinson (New York: TOR, 1994) 189–213.
- *Gary Snyder, “The Place, The Region, and the Commons,” in *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990) 25–47.
- *Leonard Charles, Jim Dodge, Lynn Milliman, and Victoria Stockley, “Where You At?-A Bioregional Quiz,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996) 369–70.

May 11

The Ramifications of Social Construction

Assigned Reading

- *Martin H. Krieger, “What’s Wrong with Plastic Trees?” *Science* 179 (1973) 446–55.
- *Douglas Weiner, “Demythologizing Environmentalism,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 25 (1992): 385–411.
- *Anna Peterson, “Environmental Ethics and the Social Construction of Nature,” *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999): 339–57.

May 17

No Class

Assignments Due

- Take-Home Final Exam Due (by 5:00 pm)

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