

Drew Theological School, Drew University  
**CHSOC 450 Religion and the Earth**

Thursdays 1:15-3:45

Professor Laurel Kearns

Fall 2013

Sem Hall 108 [x3009/lkearns@drew.edu](mailto:x3009/lkearns@drew.edu)

What resources for an earth-friendly ethic are offered by different religious traditions? Is environmentalism just about animals and wilderness? Where do justice issues come in? What is the relationship between the beliefs and practices of the world religions, and their ecological potential? What are the major aspects of our societies, of our worldviews that need to be changed? How do we grapple with the environmental implications of our economic system? Where and how do ecological thinking, spirituality and religious thought come together? What can we do, and what are others doing, to respond to ecological concerns? How do we begin to think and act differently?

This course is designed to discuss these and many other questions about the intersection of religion and ecology, with a particular attention to the religious traditions of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Indigenous Traditions and contemporary nature spiritualities. As is already evident, it assumes that there is an environmental crisis, that the “way things are” needs to be changed, that religion has something to offer, and that you as a student have taken the class because you care about these issues. It also assumes that if things need to be changed, so does our educational model, so the course is also designed to depart from the pedagogical model of just discussing texts. Various assignments are meant to encourage different ways of learning. As the title indicates, the course is designed to explore both theology and practice, with a particular focus on issues of eco-justice. We will have guest speakers from some of these traditions, and field trips to enhance our learning.

It is also designed to meet all of the Drew Theological School M. Div objectives as listed below:

1. the ability to see the holy in all life –in the entirety of creation
2. the ability to read and interpret scripture and other sacred texts with cultural sensitivity, ethical awareness, and a critical understanding of their histories, interpretations, and applications in church and society
3. the ability to think theologically with imagination, openness, and analytical insight
4. the ability to interpret histories of Christian thought and practice critically and creatively, engaging the otherness of the past while also rendering it relevant to current contexts and emerging possibilities
5. the ability to hear God’s call to recognize and address injustice and inequality in the social structuring of gender, ethnicity, race, class, disabilities, and sexual identity
6. the capacity to exercise effective leadership in both ecclesial and public contexts through, for example, preaching, teaching, pastoral care, worship, and justice ministries
7. the development of communal and personal practices that nourish spiritual and moral well-being.

8. transformative engagement during the seminary years with religious pluralism and cultural difference in the classroom, and in community life

For students of the GDR, this course is designed to enhance your understanding of the breadth of perspectives within religion and ecology, as well as to equip you to teach such a course.

#### REQUIREMENTS:

**CLASS EDUCATION RESPONSIBILITY:** Each week, one person will be responsible for helping us in the transition from the busy-ness of lunch to the topic of the course. To do this, please be prepared with two things: a prayer, meditation, song, poem, exercise, etc. relevant to the course that you wish to share with others, **and** information on some environmental issue that you wish to educate the class about, from pesticide issues to endangered species, current legislative issues, environmental success stories, etc. In other words, each week it is your turn to teach the rest of us. If you are uncertain on either aspect, please consult with me. This should take 15 minutes combined.

**OUTSIDE LEARNING:** Three 10-15 minutes sessions per week spent outside in a (relatively) non-human environment. By the third week, pick a place to get to know throughout the semester. Two of the three weekly sessions should be at this spot. The third can be different each week. At least one of the sessions/week should be silent observation. Be still, attentive, learn to listen and observe. How does your “place” change? How is your place reflective of the larger area; how is it connected to the larger bio-region? What have you learned from this place? Once a week could be a more meditative time—quiet reflection on a scripture, theology, a poem, course reading. You can spend it reading, writing and journaling, but in a more “natural setting.” The third can be more active—hiking, walking, birding, gardening, drawing, etc. You should keep a journal of these sessions that is due twice during the semester. I will not read your complete journal, but you should indicate several entries that I may read with an asterisk/star. Reflection on your experiences is expected in class when appropriate. You will be surprised by how hard it is to carry out this assignment, and that in itself is part of the point.

**ENVIRONMENTAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY:** This assignment will be handed out on the first day of class and is due back the next week.

**EVENT/FIELDTRIP:** Students are expected to attend one related event or lecture, and to write a three page summary. I will keep you informed of possibilities throughout the class. Please share other possibilities with the class. We will also be scheduling a field trip to the United Nations, which will require more than class time on Nov 14.

**FINAL PAPER:** Papers: One paper should be on a specific problem, such as air/water quality, toxic wastes, pesticide poisoning, incinerator waste disposal, energy conservation and a specific activist's, environmental, citizens or religious group's response. It could be a project—sermon plans, teaching module. Students will then write a second paper on a

religious/theological topic, tradition, book, or thinker that has stimulated your thinking during the course. This paper can include reflection related to your environmental autobiography and journaling as a way to explore how the course has stimulated your thinking. This second paper can relate to the first assignment, however, it does not have to tie in with the subject of the first (nor does it have to be second in terms of order). All paper topics should be cleared by the professor. The two papers can be combined into one final paper after discussion with the professor.

GDR/MA students may wish to work on a specific research topic related to their thesis. Theological School students may wish to work on liturgical resources, or a church study curriculum, a project, etc. Correct grammar and stylistic form are expected. Papers should show evidence of having been carefully proofread! If I have time, you are welcome to turn a paper in early in order for me to give you comments and suggestions, which can then be incorporated in the final.

#### OTHER CONCERNS:

**Standards of Academic Integrity and Honesty:** Please review the web pages concerning plagiarism and other instances of academic dishonesty. We take these very seriously at Drew, and students have been penalized in this course for breaking these policies: <http://www.drew.edu/theo-content.aspx?id=1138>

**Ecological Praxis:** I prefer everything to be handed in electronically. Please send to [lkearns@drew.edu](mailto:lkearns@drew.edu), and if I don't acknowledge receipt within 24 hours, please send a separate e-mail. If you want to hand in something in hard copy, please use both sides of the page, or print on the back of already used paper. Also, try to use the highest post-consumer waste recycled content as well as avoid bringing disposable paper coffee cups, plastic water bottles, etc. **Bring a mug or a reusable water bottle to class.**

**Cell Phones:** Unless it is an absolute emergency, you may not take a phone call during class time. Ringers should be put on vibrate. I will try to break near to 2:30 every class so that you may tell people that is when you can contact them. In return, I expect students to return promptly from break, and to be in the classroom when class is meeting.

**Course Readings** will include selections from:

- *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization and World Religions*, Rosemary Radford Ruether
- *A Greener Faith*, Roger Gottlieb
- *Living From the Center*, Jay McDaniel
- *Oxford Handbook on Religion and Ecology*, articles available online

Other texts will be added in consultation.

Moodle Readings or links are marked with an asterisk

## **Sept 5 Introduction**

\*Laurel Kearns, "The Context of Ecotheology" in *Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*

Roger Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith*, introduction

## **Sept 12**

\*Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden" -in *Uncommon Ground*.

\*Elizabeth Roberts, "Place and Spirit in Public Land Management "

\*Steven Bouma Prediger, "What's wrong with the world?" - *For the Beauty of the Earth*

\*David Kinsley, "Christianity as Ecologically Harmful" in *This Sacred Earth*

\*Lynn White, Jr., "Continuing the Conversation" in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics*

\*William Cronan, "The Trouble with Wilderness" - *Uncommon Ground*

## **Sept 19**

Roger Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith*, chs. 1-3

## **Sept 26 Religion and Environmentalism**

Finish reading *A Greener Faith*

## **Oct 3** (Guest Speaker: Sylvie Shaw, University of Queensland)

\*Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, ch. 2

\*Aaron Ghiloni and Sylvie Shaw, "Gumboot Religion: Religious Responses to an Australian Natural Disaster"

### *Recommended*

\*Evan Berry, "Nature Religion and the Problem of Authenticity" *Inherited Land*

\*Sylvie Shaw: "Reclaiming the Ecoerotic: Celebrating the Body and the Earth"

\*Ulrich Beck, "Climate for Change: or how to create a green modernity"

## **Oct 10 Judaism** - (Guest Lecturer: Rabbi Lawrence Troster)

Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Judaism" *Oxford Handbook on Religion and Ecology*

\*Lawrence Troster, "Four Biblical Voices on our Relationship to Creation"

\*Lawrence Troster, "The Promise of Creation"

\*Lawrence Troster, "Ethical Responsibility and Climate Change"

\*Lawrence Troster, "Ten Teachings on Judaism and Ecology"

\*Lawrence Troster: "The Meaning of this Hour"

### *Recommended*

\*Lawrence Troster, "Hearing the Outcry of Mute Things" from *EcoSpirit*

\*Lawrence Troster, "The Book of Black Fire"

\*Lawrence Troster, "God Must Love Beetles"

## **Oct 17 Break**

### **Oct 24 Islam** (Guest Speaker: Ibrahim Abdul-Matin)

\*Fazlun M. Khalid, "Islam and the Environment" *Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Change*

\*Richard C. Foltz, "Islamic Environmentalism in Theory and Practice" *Worldviews, Religion and the Environment*

\*Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen: What Islam Teaches about Protecting the Planet*, preface and introduction

\*Francesca De Chatel, "Prophet Mohammed: A Pioneer of the Environment"

#### *Recommended*

\*Ali Mohamed Al-Damkhi, "Environmental Ethics in Islam"

\*Various web resources, including audio, are also linked on Moodle

### **Oct 31 Buddhism**

Jay McDaniel, *Living from the Center*

Stephanie Kaza, "Buddhism" In *Oxford Handbook on Religion and Ecology*

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism*, pp. 57-67

#### *Recommended*

\*David Loy, "A Buddhist Critique of Transnational Corporations"

\*E. F. Schumacher, "Buddhist Economics"

### **Nov 7 Hindusim**

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism*, pp 47-57, 104-110

\*Christopher Key Chapple, "Hinduism, Jainism and Ecology"

\*Pankaj Jain, "Ten Key Hindu Teachings"

\*"What does Hinduism teach us about ecology?" from Alliance of Religions and Conservation

\*Vandana Shiva, *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution and Profit*, introduction and ch. 1

\*Lina Gupta, "Ganga" from *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*

### **Nov 14 United Nations visit**

Rosemary Radford Ruether *Integrating Ecofeminism*, chs. 1,3,4 and conclusion

#### *Recommended*

\*Ivone Gebara, "Ecofeminism: An Ethics of Life" and

\*Mary Judith Ress, "The Con-spirando Women's Collective" in *Ecofeminism and Globalization: Exploring Culture, Context, and Religion*

### **Nov 21 Indigenous Traditions/Food**

We will split today's class focus between learning from indigenous traditions and a focus on food. The readings below will change to include a perspective from Africa and Korea that reflect indigenous influences. Please bring to class something to share that contains as many local ingredients as possible.

John A. Grim, "Indigenous Traditions: Religions and Ecology" and \*Jacob Olupona, "Religion and Ecology in African Culture and Society" in *The Handbook of Religion and Ecology*

\*Jonna Higgins-Freese and Jeff Tomhave "Race, Sacrifice and Native Lands"

\*Jea Sophia Oh, *A Postcolonial Theology of Life*, introduction

\*Shannon Jung, "Eating Intentionally" in *Justice in a Global Economy*

\*Wendell Berry "The Pleasures of Eating"

*Recommended Food related*

\*Wendell Berry, "Two Economies"

\*Norman Wirzba, "Thinking Theologically About Food" from *Food and Faith*

\*Sarah McFarland Taylor, "Reinhabiting Religion: Green Sisters, Ecological Renewal, and the Biogeography of Religious Landscape"

*Recommended Indigenous related*

\*Winona LaDuke, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Environmental Futures" from *Liberating Faith*

\*Tom Greaves, "Contextualizing the Environmental Struggle" from *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology*

\*Mark I. Wallace, selected excerpts from *Finding God in the Singing River*

**Nov 27 Thanksgiving**

**Dec 5 Class Presentations**