

# Religion/Women's Studies 313

## Environmental Theology and Ethics

### Course Rationale

The theological and ethical dimensions of the global ecological crisis have recently assumed a place of pivotal importance on the agenda of churches around the world. In response to the destruction of the ozone layer, acid rain, the greenhouse effect, the elimination of rainforests, and radioactive and toxic pollution worldwide, Christian theologians and ethicists are increasingly speaking out in favor of a new environmental theology and developing more precise environmental ethics. Women of color, in particular, have raised awareness regarding a new ethic of environmental justice which takes into account the relationships between race, class, gender, and environmental destruction.

Historically in Latin America, both traditional Roman Catholic social ethicists and liberation theologians have focused on ethical issues related to poverty and social inequality. "Liberation theologians," in particular, have been recognized for their "option for the poor" and for their unique emphasis on "doing theology" and "doing ethics" from the perspective of the poor. Today, however, that very "option for the poor" has caused them to recognize that poor, indigenous women are the ones most affected by the destruction of the environment in Latin America. Hence, Latin American theologians, ethicists, and lay people are currently contributing a new and distinctive voice to the theological discussion and debate about "the integrity of creation." Furthermore, Latin American women and feminist theologians throughout the Americas have taken the lead in developing theologically based environmental ethics.

Given the scale of environmental devastation in Latin America and the fact that Christian theologies have historically had a tremendous impact on Latin American culture and politics, it is extremely important for students who are studying in the region to develop an appreciation for the efforts of Latin American theologians and ethicists to address the current environmental crisis and the relationship between gender and the environment.

### Purpose of the Course

The purpose of this course is to gain a basic understanding of contemporary environmental theologies and approaches to environmental ethics, using case studies of environmental problems in Mexico and Central America. Due to the fact that the dominant religion in Latin America is Christianity and because of the enormous influence of Liberation Theology on contemporary Latin American culture and politics, special emphasis will be given to Christian approaches to environmental ethics. However, we will also explore other approaches, such as traditional indigenous ethics and ecofeminist ethics. Attention will also be given to the relationship between environmental destruction and social stratification, focusing on the disproportionate effects of environment destruction on women, particularly poor and indigenous women.

### Course Description

The course is taught in Cuernavaca, Morelos, in Central Mexico, where students will engage in an in-depth study of theological and ethical responses to the global ecological crisis. They will examine ethical case studies of specific environmental controversies in Mexico and meet with a variety of theologians, ethicists, and environmental activists to discuss the relationship between theology, ethics, and the environment. Near the end of the semester, students will participate in one-week-long intensive seminars in El Salvador and Guatemala, where they will have the opportunity to explore the similar issues in different social, political, and religious contexts.

## Teaching Methodology

The instructor uses an experiential and student-centered methodology. Students are given a course interest survey and an ungraded quiz or “pre-test,” to assess their prior knowledge as well their level of interest in specific course topics. Teaching and learning strategies include lectures; field trips to churches; Base Christian Communities (BCCs) and church-related organizations; discussions with individuals and organizations representing diverse theological and philosophical perspectives; required reading; films; analysis of artwork and music which express theological themes; journals; essays; individual and group projects; oral presentations; and small and large group discussions of experiences and required readings. The course will be taught in the following six units.

## Course Design

Unit I: Introduction to Environmental Theology and Ethics

Unit II: Creation Stories and Environmental Ethics: Indigenous, Christian, and Jewish Perspectives

Unit III: Social Ecology, Environmental Justice, and Latin American Liberationist Approaches to Environmental Ethics

Unit IV: Biocentric Ethics, Deep Ecology, and Ecofeminist Ethics

Unit V: Articulating One’s Own Environmental Theology and Ethics

Unit VI: Case Studies of Environmental Ethics in Guatemala and El Salvador

## Instructional Objectives/Learning Outcomes

Learners will:

1. Distinguish between different approaches to environmental ethics, such as utilitarian ethics, Christian social ethics, liberationist ethics, ecofeminist and feminist theological ethics, and traditional indigenous ethics.
2. Discuss the relationship between religious creation stories and environmental ethics.
3. Define key concepts in the Mesoamerican indigenous cosmovision.
4. Identify key concepts of contemporary Christian theocentric approaches to environmental ethics.
5. Discuss the relationship between Christian liberation theology and environmental activism in Latin America.
6. Debate the pros and cons of ecofeminist approaches to environmental theology, philosophy, and ethics.
7. Articulate the contributions women have made to the theological and philosophical discussion regarding environmental ethics.
8. List examples of environmental racism in the U.S. and Latin America.
9. Evaluate theological and ethical responses to environmental racism, sexism, and classism.
10. Formulate ethical conclusions regarding specific ethical case studies of environmental debates in Latin America and articulate the ethical criteria involved in the decision-making process.
11. Advocate their own ethical positions regarding specific environmental case studies in Latin America.
12. Articulate the relationship between their own theology or philosophy and environmental concerns.

## Required Reading (Books to purchase prior to arrival in Cuernavaca.)

Desjardins, Joseph R. *Environmental Ethics, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*. Wadsworth, 2001.

Gebara, Ivone and David Molineaux. *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*. Fortress Press, 1999.

Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Harvest of Cain*. EPICA, 2001.

## Please choose one of the following 2 books (you are encouraged to read it before the semester):

Kingsolver, Barbara. *Prodigal Summer*. Harper Collins, 2000.

Quinn, Daniel. *Ishmael*. Bantam Books, 1995.

## Course Requirements (100% = 400 points)

- 1. Class Participation (10% = 40 points) :** Effective class participation includes regular attendance, completion of required readings before class sessions, and a demonstrated effort to dialogue with speakers, ask probing questions, and relate assigned readings to class discussion topics. Students will demonstrate comprehension of assigned readings by actively participating in class discussions and by entering into informal dialogue with guest speakers. *Please note that class participation is required for a passing grade.* Because participation is essential to the learning process, any student who misses class activities for any reason must speak to the instructor, preferably prior to the class session. Absences due to illness are considered excused absences. However, students must still inform the instructor and make arrangements for making up the missed session(s). Students are also responsible for getting notes, handouts and announcements from other students if they arrive late to class or miss a class session. Absences for personal travel or to spend time with visiting family and friends are not excused absences, and points will be deducted from the students' class participation grade.
- 2. Oral Presentation of an Ethical Case Study (10% = 40 points):** Students will divide into four small groups, each of which will be responsible for collectively formulating an ethical conclusion for a given environmental case study and then presenting that conclusion and the reasons behind it to the rest of the class in a 15-20 minute oral presentation. Each group will address a different case study from a different theological or philosophical perspective in order to distinguish between different approaches to environmental ethics. For example, one group may be asked to use a feminist theological perspective to make an ethical decision regarding the use of civil disobedience to free wild animals from traders in Guyana. Class members will then discuss their reactions to the conclusion presented by the group and articulate their own ethical responses to the case study.
- 3. Critical Thinking Exercises (20% = 80 points):** Students will complete two 2-page Critical Thinking Exercises regarding required readings and two regarding speakers during the trip to El Salvador Guatemala. Each assignment will be due at the start of class and will serve as a source of class discussion and/or debate. Critical Thinking Exercises must be completed individually (not collectively) and may not be altered during the class discussion. Each exercise is worth 20 points.
- 4. Take-Home Exam on Environmental Ethics (15% = 60 points):** Students will complete a take-home essay exam in which they will address issues related to social ecology, environmental justice, and Latin American liberationist approaches to environmental ethics. They will be expected to draw upon Nellson-Pallmeyer's *Harvest of Cain*, Desjardins' *Environmental Ethics*, and other required readings.
- 5. Paper on Biocentric Ethics, Deep Ecology, and/or Ecofeminism (20% = 80 points):** Students will write a 1500-2000 word paper (6-8 typed pages) responding to key themes in Gebara's *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* and either *Prodigal Summer* by Barbara Kingsolver or *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn.
- 6. Independent Research Project and Oral Presentation (15% = 60 points)** Students will complete research on a subject of interest related to environmental theology or ethics. Subjects may include diverse topics such as environmental racism; eco-spiritualities; environmental ethics in Judaism, Buddhism, or other world religions; and ethical responses to issues such as animal rights, and population control, etc. Creative projects may include screenplays, dialogues, debates, an art-essay, or other creative formats, such as an illustrated children's book or a comic book articulating environmental ethics from the perspective chosen. Projects must be accompanied by a one-page outline of key concepts and a list of citations.

7. **Integrative Semester Project and Oral Presentation (10% = 40 points)** Students will design and complete a creative project, accompanied by a 10-15 minute class presentation which articulates their own environmental theology/philosophy and ethics. Projects may include slide presentations, sermons, art exhibits, dramatic presentations, or other creative formats, but must be approved by the instructor and accompanied by an outline and list of citations.

### **Selected Bibliography on Environmental Theology and Ethics**

- Adams, Carol J., editor. *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*. Continuum, 1994.
- Barbour, Ian G. *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Technology, Environment, and Human Values*. Praeger, 1980.
- Bernstein, Ellen, ed. *Ecology and the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and the Sacred Meet*. Jewish Lights Publ., 2000.
- Birch, Charles, William Eakin, and Jay B. McDaniel, eds. *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*. Orbis Books, 1991.
- Boff, Leonardo. *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. Orbis Books, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ecology and Liberation*. Orbis Books, 1995.
- Bullard, Robert D., ed. *Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice and Communities of Color*. Sierra Club Books, 1997.
- Camacho, David E., et al., eds. *Environmental Injustices, Political Struggles: Race, Class, and the Environment*. Duke University Press, 1998.
- Chapple, Christopher Key and Mary Evelyn Tucker, eds. *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky and Water (Religions of the World and Ecology)*. Harvard U. Press, 2000.
- Center for Investigative Reporting and Bill Moyers. *Global Dumping Ground: The International Traffic in Hazardous Waste*. Seven Locks Press, 1990.
- Christ, Carol and Judith Plaskow. *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*. Harper San Francisco: 1992.
- Daly, Lois K., ed. *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.
- DesJardins, Joseph R. *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*. Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992.
- Diamond, Irene and Gloria Feman Orenstein, eds. *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Sierra Club Books, 1990.
- Fiorenza, Elizabeth Schussler, ed. *The Power of Naming: A Concilium Reader in Feminist Liberation Theology*. Orbis Books, 1996.
- Fiorenza, Elizabeth Schussler and Shawn Copeland. *Feminist Theology in Different Contexts*. Orbis Books, 1997.
- Foreman, Christopher H., Jr. *The Promise and Peril of Environmental Justice*. Brookings Institute, 2000.
- Gebara, Ivone and David Molineaux. *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*. Fortress Press, 1999.
- Hall, David G., ed. *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*. Orbis Books, 1995.
- Hessel, Dieter T. and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds. *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of the Earth and Humans (Religions of the World and Ecology)*. Harvard U. Press, 2000.
- Hill, Brennan H. *Christian Faith and the Environment: Making Vital Connections*. Orbis Books, 1998.
- Isaacs, Ronald H., ed. *The Jewish Sourcebook on the Environment and Ecology*. Jason Aronson, 1998.
- Isasi-Diaz, Ada Maria. *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Orbis Books, 1996.
- Kaza, Stephanie and Kenneth Kraft, eds. *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*. Shambhala Publishers, 2000.
- Kinsley, David. *Ecology and Religion*.
- May, Larry and Shari Collins Sharratt, eds. *Applied Ethics: A Multicultural Approach*. Prentice Hall, 1994.
- McFague, Sally. *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. 1993.
- Nelson, Lance E. *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India*. State University of New York Press, 1998.

- O'Brien, Karen L. *Sacrificing the Forest: Environmental and Social Struggles in Chiapas*. 1998.
- Plant, Judith, ed. *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*. New Society Publishers, 1989.
- Pojman, Louis P. *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*. Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1994.
- Rae, Eleanor. *Women, the Earth, the Divine*. Orbis Books, 1994.
- Rasmussen, Larry L. *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*. Orbis Books, 1996.
- Rezende, Ricardo. *Rio Maria; Song of the Earth*. Orbis Books, 1994.
- Robb, Carol S. and Carl J. Casebolt. *Covenant for a New Creation: Ethics, Religion and Public Policy*. Orbis Books, 1991.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford, ed. *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*. Orbis Books, 1996.
- Shiva, Vandana. *Close to Home; Women Reconnect Ecology, Health and Development Worldwide*. New Society Publishers, 1994.
- Spencer, Daniel T. *Gay and Gaia: Ethics, Ecology, and the Erotic*. Pilgrim Press, 1996.
- Stivers, Robert L., Christine E. Gudorf, et al. *Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach*, 2nd ed. Orbis, 1995.
- Thistlewaite, Susan Brooks and Mary Potter Engle, eds. *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*. . Orbis Books, 1998.
- Tucker, Mary Evelyn and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds. *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnectedness of Dharma and Deeds*. Harvard U. Press, 1998.
- Tucker, Mary Evelyn and John A. Grim, ed. *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment*. Orbis Books, 1994.
- Tucker, Mary Evelyn and John H. Berthrong, eds. *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelatedness of Heaven, Earth, and Humans (Religions of the World and Ecology)*. Harvard U. Press, 2000.
- Villa-Vicencio, C. and John De Gruchy, eds. *Doing Ethics in Context*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994.
- Warren, Karen J, ed. *Ecofeminism; Women, Culture, Nature*. Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Waskow, Arthur, ed. *Torah of the Earth: Exploring 4,000 Years of Ecology in Jewish Thought*. Jewish Lights Publisher, 2000.

## Additional Comments

### Explanation of Grades

Augsburg College uses a numerical grading system using the following definitions:

| <b>Number</b> | <b>Letter Equivalent</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Augsburg Definition</b>                          |
|---------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---|
| 4.0           | A                        | 93-100%           | Achieves highest standards of excellence            |
| 3.5           | A-/B+                    | 88-92%            |   |
| 3.0           | B                        | 83-87%            | Achieves above basic course standards               |
| 2.5           | B-/C+                    | 78-82%            |   |
| 2.0           | C                        | 73-77%            | Meets basic standards for the course                |
| 1.5           | C-/D+                    | 68-72%            |   |
| 1.0           | D                        | 63-67%            | Performance below basic course standards            |
| 0.5           | D-                       | 60-62%            |   |
| 0.0           | F                        | Under 60%         | Unacceptable performance (no credit for the course) |

A "Pass" grade is 2.0 or above.

**Grading Policy and Late Assignments**

You must submit assignments on time. If you need an extension, you must talk to us **in advance** to negotiate a new deadline. If you have not been given an extension in advance and you turn in a late assignment, you will be docked half a grade (from a 4.0 to a 3.5 or 3.5 to a 3.0, 3.0 to a 2.5, 2.5 to a 2.0, etc.) If you are more than one week late, you will be docked a full grade. No assignments will be accepted more than two weeks after the original deadline; a "0" will be given after that. Assignments due near the end of the semester will not be accepted after the last day of the semester.

**Augsburg Honesty Policy**

You are expected to follow the Augsburg Honesty Policy which is printed in the program manual. We assume that you have read the honesty policy, understand it, and are following it. Except when the assignment expressly encourages group work, it is assumed that all course work will be your own. You may not copy other students' work. The first occurrence of plagiarism will result in the failure of the assignment. A student who commits plagiarism a second time will fail the course.

**Students' Rights and Responsibilities**

Students with formally diagnosed learning or physical differences have legal rights to course modifications. Those who qualify should identify themselves to the instructor as soon as possible in order to obtain extra assistance.