

**The University of Toronto  
School of the Environment**

**ENV 1008H S  
Worldviews and Ecology**

Academic Term: Winter 2024  
Instructor: Prof. Stephen Bede Scharper  
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Time: Monday 2:10-4 p.m.  
Location: This is a Synchronous, On-line course via Zoom  
Office Hours: Via Zoom & by appt.

Course Description and Rationale

*Will religions assume a disengaged pose as species go extinct, forests are exterminated, soil, air, and water are polluted beyond restoration, and human health and well-being deteriorate?"* Mary Evelyn Tucker

The connection among worldviews, religion and ecology, while perplexing for many, has been of growing academic and pragmatic concern in recent years.

Scientists, policy makers, and activists have of late been frustrated with the long-term efficacy of their actions and have begun to reflect on the underlying worldviews and core values of their work. Is the neoliberal economic model a "worldview," for example? Is consumerism? This has led to a recrudescence of interest in religious worldviews as a source of environmental theory and practice.

The fact that certain religious groups are beginning to take ecological systems seriously is a distinctive, important emergence within environmentalism. Given that approximately eighty-five percent of the human family reads their reality through a religious lens, any environmental policy or ethic that does not relate to religious concerns potentially ignores dialogue with ethical and moral traditions held by the majority of the world's peoples.

Religions traditionally challenge their members to ask foundational questions of human existence; such as what is the place or role of the human in the universe? What are the ethical and moral imperatives of being human? What responsibilities do humans have, if any, to other aspects of creation? As the ecological challenge forces the human family to deeply query social, economic, political, cultural, and ethical traditions, many are beginning to argue that the reading assistance of the world's religious traditions in answering such queries might be helpful, and perhaps necessary, for an informed and effective response to the world's current ecological plight.

The participation of religions in environmental movements is of course not unproblematic. Certain religions have been fingered and faulted for their accent on transcendence, and for their patriarchal, hierarchical systems, which help engender a disregard for the earth and the women who have been historically associated with it- as ecofeminism suggests. Moreover, religions, as institutions, have not been at the vanguard of the environmental movement, and many potential pitfalls, such as sectarianism, apocalypticism, fundamentalism, and triumphalism, surround the involvement of the world's religions in environmental questions.

While much of the religious discourse around ecology has entailed ontological, doctrinal, and cosmological or "worldview" questions, there have also been religious responses that take issues of class, race, gender, poverty, and justice seriously. Indeed, many tensions have surfaced and continue to exist between these two broadly outlined ecological approaches. Thus, the question has emerged whether the ecological contributions of the world's religions are chiefly in the realm of worldviews, doctrine, and cosmology, or in the realm of a political and economic critique.

Through weekly seminars, we will probe sundry ecological worldviews, religious and otherwise, and how they help shape environmental discourse, practice, and theory.

### **Course Texts**

#### **Required:**

Stefanovic, Ingrid Leman and Stephen Bede Scharper, eds. *The Natural City: Re-envisioning the Built Environment*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012.

Scharper, Stephen Bede. *For Earth's Sake: Toward a Compassionate Ecology*. Ed. Simon Appolloni. Toronto: Novalis, 2013.

Also, selected readings which will be shared via Quercus.

#### **Recommended:**

Appolloni, Simon. *Convergent Knowing: Christianity and Science in Conversation with a Suffering Creation*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018.

Bekoff, Marc. *The Animal Manifesto: Six Reasons for Expanding Our Compassion Footprint*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2010.

Bekoff, Marc. *Rewilding Our Hearts: Building Pathways of Compassion and Coexistence*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2014.

Berry, Thomas. *Befriending the Earth*. Mystic, Conn.: 23<sup>rd</sup> Publications, 1991.

Berry, Thomas. *Essential Writings*. Ed. M. E. Tucker. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014.

Berry, Thomas. *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

- Berry, Thomas. 1990. *The Dream of the Earth*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Berry, Thomas. *The Great Work*. New York: Random House, 2000.
- Berry, Wendell. *The Unsettling of America*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977.
- Boff, Leonardo and M. Hathaway. *The Tao of Liberation*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2009.
- Brown, Peter G. and G. Garver. *Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008.
- Foltz, Richard C., ed., *Worldviews, Religion and Environment: A Global Anthology*. Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth. 2003.
- Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1962.
- Gottlieb, R. *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 1988. *A Theology of Liberation. History, Politics and Salvation*. Translated and edited by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books (revised edition).
- Grim, John and Mary Evelyn Tucker. *Ecology and Religion*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2014.
- Hallman, David G. *Spiritual Values for Earth Community*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000.
- Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis, Minn. Milkweed Editions, 2013.
- King, Thomas. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*. Toronto: Penguin, 2012.
- Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014.
- Leddy, Mary Jo. *Radical Gratitude*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002.
- Leduc, Tim. *Climate, Culture, Change: Inuit and Western Dialogues with a Warming North*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2011.
- McKibben, Bill. *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*. New York, Houghton-Mifflin, 2003.
- Rockefeller, S. and J.C. Elder. *Spirit and Nature*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.
- Saul, John Ralston. *The Comeback*. Toronto: Penguin, 2014.
- Scharper, Stephen. *Redeeming the Time: A Political Theology of the Environment*. New York: Continuum, 1998.
- Scharper, Stephen Bede and S. Appolloni. *The Green Bible*. Toronto: Novalis, 2022. World Religions and Ecology Series, Harvard University Press.
- Wright, Ronald. *A Short History of Progress*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2004.
- Yoreh, T. 2019. *Waste Not: A Jewish Environmental Ethic*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

A helpful website is that of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology  
<http://fore.research.yale.edu/>

### **Course Requirements**

**a) Class attendance and participation (10%)**

It is essential for the success of this course that students attend class regularly and participate in class discussions. (All of us are part of this learning process!) The doctoral students in the class will select a book of their choice which they will present on for 15 minutes in class.

**b) One-page written reflections for each class (40%)**

Students will bring with them a one-page, double-spaced, typed paper, outlining the thesis or main point of the article or chapter assigned for the week, and one fully developed critical question of the author's thesis. Please note that the question section of the assignment is not a "questions for discussion" item. Rather, these are fully developed, probing, critical questions directed at the author's thesis.

**c) Research Paper /Major Assignment (50%)**

**DUE: last day of class**

The research paper must address an environmental issue from a worldview/religious perspective. Students will get a flavor of such perspectives and potential topics from the course subject matter and readings. It is imperative, however, that by **late February** each student clears his/her paper topic with the instructor by presenting a one-page assignment with the proposed title, thesis statement, and preliminary bibliography. This will afford an opportunity to discuss pertinent readings, format, and any problems that may be surfacing with the assignment.

The paper, **8-10 pages double-spaced, typewritten**, must include a "thesis statement," and argue that "thesis" or particular perspective in a clear and comprehensive fashion. In other words, the assignment requires not merely a description of a particular environmental issue, but rather a constructed argument based on the students' critical reflection upon collected data, and creative grappling with the religious, theological or ethical issues involved. Additional guidelines and expectations for the paper will be provided in class. Late papers, without a legitimate excuse, will be returned without comments, and a late penalty assigned.

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Students may wish to opt for a 40-minute **class presentation** instead of a research paper, but must inform the instructor of their choice to do so **by the end of February**. Students may also explore other projects for their major assignment with the instructor.

**Bibliography**

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Boff, Leonardo and Virgil Elizondo, eds. 1995. *Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor. Concilium 5*. Maryknoll and London: SCM Press and Orbis Books.

Boff, Leonardo. 1994. "Social Ecology: Poverty and Misery." In *Eco-theology: Voices from South and North*. Edited by David G. Hallman, 235-47. Geneva and Maryknoll, N.Y.: WCC Publications and Orbis Books.

Boff, Leonardo. 1995a. *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*. Trans. John Cumming. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Boff, Leonardo. 1995b. "Liberation Theology and Ecology: Alternative, Confrontation, or Complementarity?" In *Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor. Concilium 5*. Edited by Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, 67-77. Maryknoll and London: SCM Press and Orbis Books.

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, "Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis," December 22, 1982 (Reprinted in *Do Justice!: The Social Teaching of the Canadian Catholic Bishops*. Ed. E.F. Sheridan, S.J.Sherborrke, P.Q. and Toronto: Editions Paulines and the Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice, 1987, par. 15, p. 417.

Cohn, Martin Regg. 2004. "Death Stalks Bhopal 20 Years Later: 15, 300 Killed in Wake of Disaster." *The Toronto Star*. November 27. pp. 1; 22.

Conlon, James. *At the Edge of Our Longing: Unspoken Hunger for Sacredness and Depth*. Toronto: Novalis, 2004.

Cormie, Lee. 2004 "Movements in the Spirit of History," in Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare and Gabriella Miranda García, eds. *Talitha cum! The Grace of Solidarity in a Globalized World*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Student Christian Federation Publications, 238-260.

Cunningham, Hilary and Stephen B. Scharper. 1996. "Patenting the Primitive: Reflections on the Human Genome Project." *Third World Resurgence* No. 65/66 1996: 2-5.

Cunningham, Hilary and Stephen B. Scharper. 2017. "Social Ecologies and Structural Violence: Boundary-Making as Nature-Making in a Gated Globe." *The Social Ecology of Border Landscapes*. Ed. Anna Gritching and Michele Zebich-Knos. New York: Anthem Press, 53-68

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Darlington , Susan. "Tree Ordination in Thailand" in *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*. eds. Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2000): 198–205.

- Dorr, Donal. 1992. *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching*. Dublin and Maryknoll, N.Y.: Gill and Macmillan and Orbis Books (revised edition).
- Dorr, Donal. 1991. *The Social Justice Agenda: Justice, Ecology, Power and the Church*. Dublin and Maryknoll, N.Y. Gill and Macmillan and Orbis Books, 1991.
- Dussel, Enrique. 1995. *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of the "Other" and the Myth of Modernity*. Trans. Michael D. Barber. New York: Continuum.
- Dussel, Enrique. 1996. *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor and the Philosophy of Liberation*. Trans. and ed. Eduardo Mendieta. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press.
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- Eaton, Heather and Lois Ann Lorentzen, eds., 2003. *Ecofeminism and Globalization: Exploring Culture, Context, and Religion*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield.
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- Frank, Andre Gunder. 1969. *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution? Essays on the Development of Underdevelopment and the Immediate Enemy*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
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