

University of Toronto, School of the Environment
ENV330: Waste Not: Faith-Based Environmentalism
Fall 2024, Mondays 10 am -12 pm

General Information

Time: Mondays 10 am - 12 pm

Instructor: Prof. Tanhum Yoreh

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Virtual office hours: Mondays, 12 pm -1 pm or by appointment

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Course Description

The environmental movement is often seen as secular, at odds with religious teachings and/or practice. This overlooks the long religious engagement with the natural world and the moral imperative of religion as a motivator of behaviour. This course explores religious environmentalism, its proponents and opponents, and its core values within three of the major Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Religious environmentalists have used teachings from sacred texts as exemplars of sustainability. Some, however, claim that these texts teach domination, anthropocentrism and hierarchical values. Looking at a broad range of worldviews, we focus on the topics of wastefulness, consumption, and simplicity. For instance, we look at ways in which religious communities in the past have taken measures to limit individual consumption through sumptuary laws and compare the moral arguments used historically to those used today by contemporary social movements such as the voluntary simplicity movement. Can we learn from the past? Are the arguments similar across time and place? Are they still relevant? Are they effective? What is the role of religious environmentalism in tackling the challenges of the 21st Century?

We look at a wide range of historical texts from sources such as the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Quran, Hadith, Talmud, legal codes, church sermons, and philosophical treatises, together with contemporary texts such as *Al-Mizan: Covenant for the Earth*, Pope Francis' *Laudate Deum* and other faith-based environmental statements calling for environmental action. What are the values emphasized in such teachings? How similar are they to general environmentalism? In what ways are they unique? And perhaps most importantly, how do they manifest themselves in the behaviour of adherents? Students are given a window into the complexities and heterogeneity of Toronto's environmentally engaged religious communities. Readings about the barriers, motivations, and values that inform environmental behaviour are complemented with field trips where they will hear religious leaders speak about the environmental initiatives undertaken in their communities.

Delivery

In class dates (room# is posted on Quercus) – Sept. 9, 16, 30, Oct. 7, Nov. 4, Nov. 25, Dec. 2, 3.
Field trips (off-campus) – Oct. 21, Nov. 11
Robarts Media Commons RL 3-025 (in-person) – Sept. 23, Nov. 18

Quercus

Quercus is integral to this course. Please login regularly. All assignments are to be submitted via the Quercus assignment portal.

Schedule and Readings

***Please note that additional readings may be assigned**

Week 1 - September 9 (In class) – Introduction – Different approaches to Religion and Environment

Readings: Gottlieb, Roger S., 'Introduction: Religion and Ecology—What Is the Connection and Why Does It Matter?', in Roger S. Gottlieb (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* (2006; online edn, Oxford Academic, 2 Sept. 2009), <https://doi-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195178722.003.0001>

Week 2 - September 16 (In class) – Religion and Environment from theory to practice

Readings: Koehrsen, Jens, Julia Blanc, and Fabian Huber. “Tensions in Religious Environmentalism.” In *Religious Environmental Activism: Emerging Conflicts and Tensions in Earth Stewardship*. Edited by Jens Koehrsen, Julia Blanc, and Fabian Huber, 1-25. New York: Routledge, 2023.

Veldman, Robin Globus, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay. “Introduction: Climate Change and Religion – A Review of Existing Research.” *Journal for the Study of Religion Nature and Culture* 6, no. 3 (2012): 255-275.

Week 3 - September 23 – (Robarts Media Commons RL 3-025) The Lynn White Jr. Hypothesis and the New Cosmology - Movie Day 1 – *Journey of the Universe*

The documentary is also available on Kanopy (www.kanopy.com)

Reading: White Jr., Lynn. “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.” *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207.

Sideris, Lisa H. "On Letting a Thousand Flowers Bloom: Religious Scholarship in a Time of Crisis." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83, no. 2, (2015): 356-372.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfv026>

Week 4 - September 30 (In class) – Greening of Religion Hypothesis; Faith-Based Environmentalism in the GTA

Reading: Taylor, Bron, Gretel van Wieren, and Bernard Zaleha. "Lynn White Jr and the Greening of Religion Hypothesis." *Conservation Biology* 30, no.5 (2016): 1000–1009.

Week 5 - October 7 (In class) - Jewish Environmentalism

Readings: Tirosch-Samuels, H. "Jewish Environmentalism in the United States: Achievements, Characteristics, and Challenges." *Religion and Development* 2, no. 3 (2024): 381–417.
<https://doi.org/10.30965/27507955-20230026>

Yoreh, T. "Compassion and Self-Concern in Halakhic Environmental Decision-Making." *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 26, no. 1-2 (2021): 29-54.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/15685357-20210901>

Week 6 - October 14 – Thanksgiving (no class – make up on Dec. 3)

Week 7 - October 21 – (off-campus) – Field trip – First Narayever Congregation (187 Brunswick Ave. @ Harbord St.)

Week 8 - October 28 – Reading Week (no class)

Week 9 - November 4 (In class) - Christian Environmentalism *In class midterm quiz

Readings: Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum: To All People of Good Will on the Climate Crisis*. (October 4, 2023).
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html

Week 10 - November 11 (off-campus) – Field trip to St. Gabriel’s Passionist Parish (670 Sheppard Ave. East, Bessarion Station on the Sheppard line)

Week 11 - November 18 (Robarts Media Commons RL 3-025) – Movie Day 2 – *Renewal or Faith is Green*

Select clips will be streamed.

Week 12 - November 25 (In class) – Muslim Environmentalism

Readings: Othman Llewellyn, Fazlun Khalid and others. *Al-Mizan: Covenant for the Earth*. The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Birmingham, UK, 2024.

https://www.almizan.earth/files/ugd/57dc1c_e32d3b0734f84d75b2ffbea8ee2037a8.pdf

Koehrsen, Jens. “Muslims and Climate Change: How Islam, Muslim Organizations, and Religious Leaders Influence Climate Change Perceptions and Mitigation Activities.” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* (2021) 12:e702. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.702>

Week 13 - December 2 (In class) – Moralizing Consumption, Limiting Wastefulness; Voluntary Simplicity and Involuntary Simplicity; Conclusion (*Final paper due)

Readings: Yoreh, Tanhum. “Consumption, Wastefulness, and Simplicity in Ultra-Orthodox Communities.” *Studies in Judaism, Humanities and the Social Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2019): 137-152.

Petcu, Marian. “The Church as a Prescriber of Consumption – An Outline for a Sociology of Luxury.” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 13, no. 38 (Summer 2014): 172-194.

Week 6 Thanksgiving makeup day - December 3 (In class, room tba) – Essay consultation, freestyle discussion

Field Trips

There are a total of 2 field trips scheduled for this course. The field trips are meant to enhance your learning experience and are an important part of how the course is conceptualized. The content of these trips is essential for how you are evaluated.

Evaluation

***The instructions in the syllabus are meant to give you an idea of the scope of the assignment. Finalized instructions can be found on Quercus.**

Weekly readings - 20% - There are 8 weeks with assigned readings. You will be responsible for completing a short (250-350 words) assignment for 5 out of the 8 weeks. The guidelines are posted on Quercus. ***Those who submit extra assignments, beyond the first five that are required, will be granted bonus points of up to 2% per assignment for a maximum of 6%.***

Midterm quiz – 20% – An in-class multiple choice quiz will take place on November 4. Grades will be posted by the end of the day in anticipation of the drop date.

Field Trip Report (1000 words) – 20% (Due Nov. 4 or Nov. 18)

Choose 1 of the 2 field trips for this report and address the following:

Summarize the field trip – What did you see, hear, and learn? What was the most interesting part of the field trip that you encountered? What surprised you? What are some ways in which the

classroom content relates to your experience? Write your assignment using a first person perspective. ***You may not submit a report for a field trip you did not attend.***

Final Paper Proposal (150 words) – Write a few sentences about what you plan to argue in your final paper. This should include your thesis. ***Submit no later than Nov. 18 – final paper will be docked for each late day – see late penalties***

Final Paper (2000 words) – 40% - Due December 9

Write an argumentative essay on the central theme of the course: faith-based environmentalism in the Abrahamic context. Your essay should include references to sacred texts and incorporate real-world examples from faith communities and/or environmental organizations.

Your paper must include a thesis statement, a clear introduction providing a brief overview of your paper, and a conclusion. You should clearly connect your paper to key course ideas, lectures, experiences, and readings with proper references. **You are required to have your topic approved by the instructor (see final paper proposal).**

Late Penalties

Unless you are granted an extension, all late assignments will be docked 1% per day (not including weekends). Extensions will only be granted under extenuating circumstances.

Useful resources

The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale

<http://fore.yale.edu>

The International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture (See journal)

<https://www.issrnc.org>

Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology

<http://www.brill.com/worldviews-global-religions-culture-and-ecology>

UN Environment Programme: Faith for Earth Initiative

<https://www.unep.org/about-un-environment/faith-earth-initiative>

Recommended reading

Jenkins, W., M. E. Tucker and J. Grim (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*. New York: Routledge (2017). (available online)

Oxtoby, W., R. Amore, A. Hussain, and A. Segal (eds.) *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*, 4th Edition. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press (2019). (Or any other introductory text to the global religions discussed in this course).

Veldman, Robin Globus, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay (eds.) *How the World's Religions Are Responding to Climate Change: Social Scientific Investigations*. New York: Routledge, 2014. (available online)

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of Toronto is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (<https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

In papers and assignments:

1. Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
2. Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
3. Making up sources or facts.
4. Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment.

On tests and exams:

1. Using or possessing unauthorized aids.
2. Looking at someone else's answers during an exam or test.
3. Misrepresenting your identity.

In academic work:

1. Falsifying institutional documents or grades.
2. Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from your instructor or from other institutional resources (see <https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/>).

See also: <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize/>

Artificial Intelligence

The use of generative artificial intelligence tools and apps is strictly prohibited in all course assignments unless explicitly stated otherwise by the instructor in this course. This includes ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Microsoft Copilot and other AI writing and coding assistants. Use of generative AI in this course may be considered use of an unauthorized aid, which is a form of cheating.

Plagiarism Detection Tool

“Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so,

students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://teaching.utoronto.ca/resources/plagiarism-detection/>).”

Accessibility Needs

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility: if you require accommodations for a disability, or have any other accessibility concerns about the course, please contact [Accessibility Services](#) as soon as possible.

Writing Assistance

If you find that you need some additional assistance with your writing, see this excellent resource that offers advice on academic writing: <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/>