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 roll 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 Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si – On Care for Our Common Home*, 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 fieldtrips to places of worship where they will hear religious leaders speak
about the environmental initiatives undertaken in their communities, see sacred spaces and be exposed to the work of faith-based environmental organizations.

**Quercus**

In consideration of the environment, all assignments must be submitted via Quercus. Weekly readings will be available online.

**Schedule and Readings**

*Please note that additional readings may be assigned*

**January 8 – Introduction – Three different introductions to Religion and Environment**


**January 15 – Religion and Environment from theory to practice**


**January 22 – Guest Lecture: Dr. Simon Appolloni, Christianity and Environment**

**January 29 – 1st Fieldtrip: St. Gabriel’s Passionist Parish (We will meet at St. Gabriel’s)**

**February 5 – Islamic approaches to wastefulness (Assignment 1 due)**


**February 12 – 2nd Fieldtrip: Jaffari Community Centre (We will meet at the JCC)**
February 19 – Reading Week (no class)

February 26 – Jewish approaches to wastefulness (Assignment 2 due)


March 4 – 3rd Fieldtrip: The First Narayever Congregation (We will meet at 187 Brunswick Ave.)

March 11 – Movie Day – Renewal – We will meet in the Media Commons at Robarts Library (Assignment 3 due)

March 18 – Voluntary Simplicity and Involuntary Simplicity


March 25 – Sumptuary Laws: Moralizing Consumption, Limiting Wastefulness


April 1 – Conclusion (Final paper due)

Fieldtrips

There are a total of 3 fieldtrips scheduled for this course. The fieldtrips are meant to enhance your learning experience and are important part of how the course is conceptualized. Attending fieldtrips, however, is not mandatory.

Evaluation

There has been a proliferation of faith-based statements/declarations on the state of the environment and on climate change in particular over the past decade. These declarations offer insight into the way their authors perceive the relationship between their faith and environmental responsibility. The fieldtrips are an opportunity for you to observe how communities/organizations use faith-based values as a launching pad for environmental engagement.
There are two different types of short assignments in this course, one for those who attend the fieldtrips and one for those who do not.

**Bonus:** Those who attend all 3 fieldtrips will have their lowest mark (of the three shorter assignments) not counted towards their final grade.

**Fieldtrip Reports** (1000 words) – 20% x 3 = 60% (Due Feb. 5, Feb. 26, Mar. 11)

For these assignments you will 1) give a summary of the fieldtrip 2) read a faith-based statement on environmental responsibility (Jewish, Christian, or Muslim depending on the week – **use one from the list provided**) 3) summarize the declaration, highlighting the values it emphasizes and 4) analyze the extent of its applicability (who wrote the statement? for whom did they write it? who do they speak for?) 5) relate your experience to the faith-based environmental statement (with a particular focus on values).

**If you miss a fieldtrip, you are not eligible to submit a fieldtrip report and instead must submit an organizational report.**

**Organizational Reports** (1000 words) – 20% x 3 = 60% (Due Feb. 5, Feb. 26, Mar. 11)

For these assignments you will 1) read a faith-based statement on environmental responsibility (Jewish, Christian, or Muslim depending on the week – **use one from the list provided**) 2) summarize the declaration, highlighting the values it emphasizes and 3) analyze the extent of its applicability (who wrote the statement? for whom did they write it? who do they speak for?) 4) find an active faith-based environmental organization 5) discuss the relationship between the environmental statement, the faith-based values listed in the mission statement of the environmental organization and the environmental activism in which that organization is engaged.

**Final Paper** (2000 words) – 40% - Due April 1

Write an argumentative essay on the central theme of the course, Abrahamic approaches to consumption/simplicity/wastefulness. You may choose one of two approaches:

1) Write a critical analysis of approaches to consumption/simplicity/wastefulness in any of the Abrahamic traditions discussed in class (theory).

2) Write a critical analysis of how communities from any of the Abrahamic traditions discussed in class are addressing issues of consumption/simplicity/wastefulness (in practice).

Whichever option you choose, 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.**

**TURNITIN**

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com 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 Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.

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

Recommended reading


Academic Integrity

At this point in your studies you are well aware of the guidelines regarding academic integrity. Nevertheless, I urge you to review the contents of the University of Toronto’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters, as you are responsible for upholding the contents therein.

See: http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm

Seek further guidance on academic integrity at: http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/students

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

Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

In papers and assignments:

- Using someone else’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement
- Copying material word-for-word from a source (including lecture and study group notes) and not placing the words within quotation marks
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor
- Making up sources or facts
- Including references to sources that you did not use
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment including:
  - working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work
  - having someone rewrite or add material to your work while “editing”
- Lending your work to a classmate who submits it as his/her own without your permission

**Accessibility Needs:** The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: https://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as

**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/