

University of Toronto, School of the Environment
ENV330: Waste Not: Faith-Based Environmentalism
Winter 2023, Wednesdays 10 am -12 pm

General Information

Time: Wednesdays 10 am - 12 pm

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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 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 field trips and Zoom trips where they will hear religious leaders and activists speak about the environmental initiatives undertaken in their communities.

Delivery

Weeks that we meet in-person will not be recorded. Weeks that we meet on Zoom will be recorded and posted on Quercus.

UC85 (in-person) – Jan. 11, 18, Feb. 15, Mar. 8, Apr. 5.

Zoom (online) – Jan. 25, Feb. 1, Mar. 1.

Field trips (in-person off-campus) – Feb. 8, Mar. 15

Robarts Media Commons (in-person) – Mar. 22, 29.

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**

January 11 (in-person, UC85) – Introduction – Different approaches to Religion and Environment

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

January 18 (in-person, UC85) – Religion and Environment from theory to practice

Readings: Khoersen, Jens, Julia Blanc, and Fabian Huber. “Tensions in Religious Environmentalism.” In *Religious Environmental Activism: Emerging Conflicts and Tensions in Earth Stewardship*. Edited by Jens Khoersen, 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.

January 25 (Zoom) – Greening of Religion Hypothesis; Faith-Based Environmentalism in the GTA

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.

February 1 (Zoom) – Christian Environmentalism with Prof. Christopher Hrynkow, University of Saskatchewan.

Readings: Pope Francis, *Laudato Si, On Care for Our Common Home*. (May 24, 2015).
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

February 8 (off-campus) – 1st Field trip to St. Gabriel's Passionist Parish (670 Sheppard Ave. East, Bessarion Station on the Sheppard line).

February 15 (in-person, UC85) – Muslim Environmentalism (*Assignment 1 due)

Readings: Kamali, Mohammad Hashim. "Environmental Care in Islam: A Qur'anic Perspective." *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* 3, no. 2 (2012): 261-283.

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>

February 22 – Reading Week (no class)

March 1 (Zoom) – 2nd Field trip – Panel on Muslim Environmentalism (guests to be confirmed)

March 8 (in-person, UC85) – Jewish Environmentalism (*Assignment 2 due)

Readings: Yoreh, Tanhum. "Compassion and Self-Concern in Environmental Decision-Making." *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* (published online ahead of print 2021).
doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685357-20210901>

March 15 (off-campus) – 3rd Field trip – First Narayever Congregation (187 Brunswick Ave. @ Harbord St.) (*Final paper proposal due)

March 22 (Robarts Media Commons) – Movie Day 1 – *Renewal* (*Assignment 3 due)

Select clips will be streamed. The movie is also available through Kanopy (www.kanopy.com)

March 29 (Robarts Media Commons) – A New Cosmology? Movie Day 2 – *Journey of the Universe*

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

April 5 (in-person, UC85) – 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 Prescripitor of Consumption – An Outline for a Sociology of Luxury." *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 13, no. 38 (Summer 2014): 172-194.

Field Trips

There are a total of 3 field trips scheduled for this course. The field trips are meant to enhance your learning experience and are important part of how the course is conceptualized. The content of these trips is essential for how you are evaluated. Two of the field trips will be in person and one will be online. Attending the field trips is optional. As an incentive, those who attend all 3 field trips can choose to drop the grade of their lowest field trip report. There are no exceptions to this incentive.

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 field trips are an opportunity for you to observe how communities/organizations use faith-based values as a launching pad for environmental engagement.

***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.**

Field Trip Reports (1000 words) – 20% x 3 = 60% (Due Feb. 15, Mar. 8, Mar. 22)

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) relate your experience of the field trip to the faith-based environmental statement (with a particular focus on values).

Anyone who did not attend a field trip may not submit a field trip report. An alternative assignment will be posted on Quercus.

Final Paper Proposal – Write a few sentences about what you plan argue in your paper. This should include your thesis. ***Submit no later than March 15***

Final Paper (2000 words) – 35% - Due April 5

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).**

Community Building – 5% - rolling due date

The course does not have a participation grade, but a big part of your experience will depend on how engaged you are with course content. Considering the inherent challenges with building our classroom community in a digital/hybrid environment, we will shift some of these efforts to the discussion boards. These marks are broken into 2 parts. 1% will be awarded to sharing content on the discussion board. This can be a news item, artwork, book, journal article, blogpost, personal reflection, etc. **The post must include your thoughts.** 4% will be awarded for 4 separate responses to your classmates' posts (1% awarded per post). To be awarded these marks your responses need to enhance the conversation and move it forward (in other words, they need to be deeper in content than "I agree" or "That's an interesting blogpost"). Note that to be awarded these marks your responses must be to other people's posts and not a response to other people's comments on your post (though of course you may respond). **Do not include material that you've submitted for other course assignments.** To avoid an inundation of the discussion board at the end of the semester, and to encourage the development of this discussion board throughout the course, you must submit your posts on a rolling basis (**1 post in January, 1 post in February, 2 posts in March, 1 post in April – you may submit more than the monthly minimum**). The board will be closed on **April 5**.

You are encouraged to go above and beyond and are welcome to continue being part of the conversation on the discussion board even once you complete your required quota.

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 Religion*, 3rd Edition. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press (2015). (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

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:
 - o working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work
 - o 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

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: 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/>