

Department of Theology

UNDERGRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTION

Term: **Spring 2008**
Instructor: Dr. Jame Schaefer
Course #: THEO 171
Section: 1001
Course Title: Foundations for Ecological Ethics

Description:

Can religious traditions provide the impetus that deters humans from accelerating the rate of species' extinction, degrading and destroying ecological systems, and threatening the integrity of Earth's biosphere? Ongoing abuse of the environment has prompted an increasing number of scholars of religions to pose this question and to explore ways of thinking that might motivate believers to act in ways that are more compatible with the well being of our planet and its many varied constituents. Students taking Theology 171 are afforded an opportunity to participate in this ongoing "greening of religion" by examining teachings of the world's major religions and discerning the extent to which they provide promising foundations for environmental ethics.

During the first part of the semester, we will examine Christian calls to address ecological concerns. Texts by Pope John Paul II, the United States Catholic bishops, and leaders of other Christian denominations will be examined. Emphasis will be placed subsequently on critically retrieving and reformulating notions in the Bible and works by eminent theologians in order to respond more relevantly to current ecological problems that concern you. Focus will shift during the second part of the semester to the ecologically promising orthopraxis suggested in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Stressed throughout is the need for religious discourse to be informed by broad scientific findings, especially cosmology and biology. The semester will close with examining models of the human with a particular focus on one developed by a cutting-edge theologian.

Students in this course will aim to achieve the following: (1) Accurately identify and explain orally and in writing key concepts with corresponding principles in the Christian and other world religions that appear promising for addressing ecological degradation; (2) critically assess the extent to which these concepts/principles provide ways of thinking about and living more compatibly within the ecosystems of Earth and selecting one that appears most promising; (3) adequately research an ecological problem on which to test the viability of religious concepts/principles examined in this course; (4) work cooperatively with other students to critique assigned texts and evaluate religious ideas for their effectiveness; and, (5) critically evaluate models of the human that are suggested in the assigned readings and choose one that appears most helpful to guide human actions in the near future.

Required texts:

Pope John Paul II, "The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility" (1990)
United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, "Renewing the Earth" (1991)
Sallie McFague, *Body of God* (Fortress 1993)
Jame Schaefer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics* (2007)
Dædalus 130.2 *Religion and Ecology* (Fall 2001)