

Course Description

What does your theology or worldview say about the earth?

How adaptable, flexible, and resilient are religions
in responding to earth-related issues?

Can science and religion work together in forming an ecological theology?

What “great work” lies ahead?

In the past 40 years all the major religious traditions have articulated eco-theologies and many have become active in environmental issues. It is an important and necessary response to the growing environmental crisis. Religions influence many people and institutions and it will be difficult to develop earth-friendly goals without their guidance and support.

Since religious language is metaphorical, it is flexible. Symbols have several meanings, and narratives beg for diverse interpretations. Traditions can begin to talk to one another and reach beyond themselves to other communities as well as the biological and social sciences

This course embarks upon such a journey: reinterpreting existing traditions, opening a dialogue with science, and constructing new narratives for an earth-friendly worldview.

Our study takes on three broad issues. “Ecological Identity” is concerned with how deeply humans identify with nature; we will read *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn, *The Way of Life*, a translation of the *Tao Te Ching*, and *The Sacred Balance* by David Suzuki. The second issue, “The Body of God,” examines how deeply we identify the sacred with nature; we will read *The Body of God* by Sallie McFague and *Staying Alive* by Vandana Shiva. Lastly, “The Great Work” refers to how deeply religions embrace sustainability; we will read *The Great Work* by Thomas Berry.

We will read these five books in seven weeks as well as post responses and respond to others. A 7-8 page paper is due the final week.

By taking this course you will gain insight into how our religions and worldviews can address real and pressing environmental issues. Your own worldview will be more informed, deep, and nuanced. You also will have examples of people who are making a difference.

Professor Bio

Charlie Headington's interest in the study of religion began when he concluded that the Bible was not inerrant and could be studied like any other great book. This insight led him to study other traditions and, in time, their relationship to nature. This issue became so important to him that he began to study natural ecosystems and work with them through ecological design and gardening.

Charlie teaches religion and ecology at UNCG and teaches sustainable design and Permaculture gardening in the community. He is practical enough to grow his own vegetables and idealistic enough to think that organic food could begin a revolution. To complete the cycle begun in the garden, he enjoys cooking and eating slow food, teaching young children in his Edible Schoolyards program, and with his wife Debby studies Italian and periodically works on a farm in Tuscany.

Syllabus

NOTE: This syllabus is posted ahead of time for your convenience. As a course is being planned, occasionally some requirements or texts may change. Please check the regular course syllabus that will be available shortly before the class starts.

Objectives

By the time you finish this course, you will:

1. Study the views of four religious traditions: Indigenous, Chinese Taoism, Hinduism and Christianity, on three ecological and theological issues: Ecological Identity, the Body of God, and the Great Work.
2. Have a better sense of how science and the scientific method can inform a religious worldview.
3. Better understand and define your own Ecological Theology.

Required Texts

Ishmael, Daniel Quinn
The Sacred Balance, David Suzuki
The Way of Life According to LaoTzu, trans. by Witter Bynum
The Body of God, Sallie McFague
Staying Alive, Vandana Shiva
The Great Work, Thomas Berry

Description of Course Work

Requirements:

1. By Friday of each lesson you will post your 2 page response to the lesson's reading (get started early; there is much to read). You may post the 2 pages in one or two postings; that is, you may break it up if you want to. During the weekend you will respond to at least three of your classmates' responses. This constitutes our weekly conversation. You will do this for seven weeks and I will mark the timeliness and quality of your written responses. Late responses will not receive credit. Likewise, flippant or shallow responses will receive less credit. Each lesson is worth 10% of your grade for a total of 70%.

2. During Unit Three, Lesson Two, you will post a 7-8 page paper on your ecological theology or worldview. It is to be based on the ideas of the authors we have read for this course. You will select the most powerful and persuasive ideas, weave them together into a coherent worldview or adaptation of your existing worldview, and present them to your classmates and me. The paper is to be coherent, concise, interesting and persuasive. It is to be posted by Friday

of the eighth week and again you are to respond to three papers. I will assign respondents for these papers. Worth 30%.

How Graded

As outlined above, 10% for each lesson's postings based on their depth of understanding and being posted on time. This counts for 70% of your grade.

Your ecological theology or worldview, of 7-8 pages counts for 30%.

Calendar

Week/Date	Lesson	Assignment
Week 1	Unit One: Ecological Identity Lesson 1: Our Origins and the Four (Five) Elements	<i>The Sacred Balance</i> (2 pp response) Chapters 1-6 Study Guide
Week 2	Lesson 2: A New Story and Nature's Way	<i>The Sacred Balance</i> (2 pp response) Chapters 7-9 Study Guide <i>The Way of Life</i> (1-2 pp response)
Week 3	Lesson 3: Two Stories and Two Ways of Being: The Indigenous Traditions	<i>Ishmael</i> (2 pp response) Read all 13 chapters. Study Guide
Week 4	Unit Two: Body of God Lesson 1: Bodies, Women, and Science	<i>The Body of God</i> (1 page response) Introduction and Chapters 1-3 <i>Staying Alive</i> (1 page response) Introduction and Chapters 1-3
Week 5	Lesson 2: Christ, the Body of God	<i>The Body of God</i> (2 pp response) Chapters 4-7
Week 6	Lesson 3: Women in the Web of Life	<i>Staying Alive</i> (2 pp response) Chapters 4 – 7.
Week 7	Unit Three: The Great Work Lesson 1: Thomas Berry and The Great Work	<i>The Great Work</i> (2 pp response) Chapters 1-5, 9-14, 17.
Week 8	Lesson 2: Writing Your Ecological Theology/Worldview	Essay (7-8 pp) and 3 Responses