

**RGT3351HF L0101**

**Eco-Theology, Faith and Practice**

Offered in Summer 2010- New Course

**Schedule:** Tuesday, Thursday, 19:00 to 21:00

**Schedule Notes:** May 4, 6, 11, 13, 18, 20, 25, 27; June 1, 3, 8, 10

**Course Syllabus**

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**Course Description:**

Christians are called to respond to the current ecological crisis and related issues of eco-justice. This course provides a comprehensive foundation in eco-theology and eco-spirituality to ground an effective faith response in today's world.

**Goals:**

To provide students with

- an overview of the new cosmology as articulated by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme and its implications for the development of spirituality in today's world;
- an historical overview of the eco-theological motif present throughout the Christian tradition;
- a critical survey of contemporary eco-theological perspectives;
- a survey of current ecclesial initiatives calling for a Christian response to the ecological challenges of today;
- the background knowledge and critical thinking skills to appreciate the inter-relationship between ecological destruction, human poverty and issues of justice.

**Objectives:**

The course will enable students to

- articulate links between the new cosmology, theology and contemporary understandings of spirituality;
- articulate the foundations of eco-theology in the Christian tradition;
- critically evaluate contemporary eco-theological movements in relation to the ecological challenges evident today;
- relate the "cry of the earth" to the "cry of the poor";
- evaluate ecclesial initiatives and relate this to their own faith and pastoral practice.

**Pre-requisites:** Preferable - Foundations of Theology

**Evaluation:**

Student evaluations will reflect integrated learning, relevant for pastoral practice.

- Two short reflection papers, one with pastoral application (approx. 5 pages) 15% each,
- Participation in class discussion with evidence of reading prescribed texts 10%
- Leadership of one seminar 15%
- Final research paper (15-20 pages) 45%.

**Readings:**

A course reader will be available at cost for printing. Books will be on reserve.

**Authors include:** Denis Edwards, H. Paul Santmire, John Hart, Elizabeth Johnson, Sallie McFague, Ivone Gebara, Leonardo Boff, Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Bishops' Pastoral Letters

**Course Outline:****Session 1 Course Introduction**

Overview of the course. What is eco-theology and eco-spirituality?  
Naming the ecological challenges of today.

**Session 2 The New Cosmology**

Traditional worldviews and overview of the new universe story.  
The work of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme and its relevance for theology. How does the new cosmology inform our understandings of theology and spirituality?

**Session 3 The Ecological Motif in the Christian Tradition I**

Historical overview; the early church and incarnational theology (St. Irenaeus, St. Augustine), the Celtic era.

**Session 4 The Ecological Motif in the Christian Tradition II**

Historical overview; the mystical tradition, Aquinas on creation, St. Francis, patron saint of ecology, Reformation perspectives.

**\* First Short Paper Due**

**Session 5 The Ambiguous Religious Tradition**

Critique of the Christian Tradition (Biblical misunderstandings and Christian anthropocentrism). How has Christian spirituality contributed to the development of the ecological crisis?

**Session 6 Reading the Bible in an Ecological Light: Recovering Sacred Earth in Scripture**

An exploration of the Hebrew Scriptures: rereading the Genesis Story, understandings of Covenant, Shalom and the call to Sabbath living. Jesus and the New Story.

- Session 7 Scientific developments, notions of human progress and the intersection with theology.**  
The continuing impact of Enlightenment philosophy, conceptions and misconceptions of human progress; promising partnerships between science and religion.  
**\* Second Short Paper Due**
- Session 8 The Cry of the Earth is the Cry of the Poor**  
The inter-relationship between ecology and justice issues. Oppression of earth, oppression of the poor – a troubling dynamic. The contributions of liberation theology and eco-feminism.
- Session 9 Ecclesial Initiatives: the Call of the Church**  
Responses of the churches to the ecological crisis, ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue. How are we, as people of faith, being called today?
- Session 10 Eco-theology and Eco-spirituality: The Foundation for Pastoral Practice I**  
Contemplative responses, the earth as sacred, eco-theology, sacrament, prayer and public worship. The notion of “sacramental commons.”
- Session 11 Eco-theology and Eco-spirituality: The Foundation for Pastoral Practice II**  
Ascetic and Prophetic Responses, “cruciform living” and the paschal mystery. Keeping Sabbath in today’s world. Theology as counter-cultural response – challenges to consumerism and materialism.  
**\* Final Research Paper Due**
- Session 12 Developing A Spirituality for Healing Earth**  
Visioning our theological foundations and spiritual values for earth healing. Final questions and course summary.

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