

OT 4165 – Bible and the Environment Fall, 2013 (half course)

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some
pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry,
for building up the body of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-12)

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 1:00-3:00
and by appointment

Class: Thursdays, 12:30-3:20 NW 231

DESCRIPTION

An examination of biblical texts that speak of creation and humanity's place in it. Special attention is paid to the topic of human vocation vis-à-vis creation, especially in light of contemporary environmental issues.

REQUIRED BOOKS (on book reserve at the library)

- A study Bible (Oxford Annotated; HarperCollins; etc.)
- Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- William P. Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder* (Oxford University Press, 2010)
- In addition, there are articles on e-reserve to be read, specified in the following schedule.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

All of the following requirements must be met to earn a passing grade.

1. Attendance and participation in class discussions. This is a seminar class, so all participants should be prepared to discuss the readings.
2. Acting as the recorder or respondent once during the course. The **recorder** will write a 1-2 page reflection on the previous week's discussion and readings, lifting up the major issues and themes from the discussion, and continuing questions about those issues. The recorder begins each week's conversation. The **respondent** writes a 1-2 page reflection on the current week's readings, lifting up two or three main issues, questions, or criticisms that come out of the readings. Here are some questions for the respondent to consider: What captured your imagination in the readings? What confused you? What did you find disturbing? Exciting? Puzzling? How would you summarize the main ideas/themes in the readings? What ideas/themes would you like to explore further? The respondent begins the discussion of the current week's topic(s).
3. A final project. You may choose between 2 options. Both are due **December 20**, in the instructor's mailbox or electronically as an email attachment. You will spend 5-10 minutes in class on December 5th talking about your final project/paper:

- An academic paper, 10-12 pages, double-spaced. Please consult with the instructor on your topic. The paper should demonstrate significant engagement with one or more biblical texts (OT or NT). Possible topics: theology of land, Sabbath, wilderness, cities, eschatology and environmentalism, place of humanity in creation, place of non-human creatures, etc. Note: Your paper should include a close reading of the biblical text and reference to secondary books/articles. Your paper needs to have a thesis, clearly stated near the beginning, and the whole paper should support that thesis.
- A congregational project, 10-12 pages, double-spaced. You have some flexibility with this option. You could do a Bible study on creation texts (with an overall outline and one session written out in detail). You could do a sermon based on biblical texts, with 3-5 pages of exegetical work. You could design a VBS with a “green” theme. Please consult with the instructor about your proposed project. Again, whatever the project, it should demonstrate significant engagement with biblical texts.

Class Schedule

Week #1: October 24

Introductions; assignment of recorder/respondent duties; discussion of articles

Required reading:

- Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967). Find it online at: <http://www.uvm.edu/~gflomenh/ENV-NGO-PA395/articles/Lynn-White.pdf>
 - Wendell Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation” (on e-reserve)
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Week #2: October 31: The Genesis creation accounts

Required reading:

- Gen. 1-3
 - Charles C. Mann, “Our Good Earth,” *National Geographic* 214:3 (Sept., 2008):88-106; online at <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/09/soil/mann-text>
 - Davis, 21-65
 - Brown, 33-114
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Week #3: November 7: Sabbath and a theology of the land.

Required reading:

- Exodus 16-23; 35; Leviticus 11; 17; 19; 25
- Barbara Brown Taylor, “Rest for the Land: Rogation Day” from *Earth and Word: Classic Sermons on Saving the Planet*, ed. David Rhoads (on e-reserve)
- Davis, 66-119

Week #4: November 14: Job's creation theology.

Required reading:

- Job 1-3, 29-31, 38-42
 - Kathryn Schifferdecker, "Conclusion" and "Postscript" from *Out of the Whirlwind: Creation Theology in the Book of Job* (on e-reserve)
 - Calvin DeWitt, "Seven Degradations of Creation" (on e-reserve)
 - Brown, 115-140
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Week #5: November 21: Psalms and Prophets

Required reading:

- Psalms 96, 98, 104, 141
 - Isaiah 40-55
 - Amos
 - Brown, 141-159, 197-220
 - Davis, 120-138
 - James Cone, "Whose Earth is it Anyway?" from *Earth and Word: Classic Sermons on Saving the Planet*, ed. David Rhoads (on e-reserve)
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THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week #6: December 5: The New Testament and eschatology

Student presentations on final projects.

Required reading:

- Romans 8; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4; Rev. 21
- N.T. Wright, "Jesus is Coming – Plant a Tree!" (on e-reserve)
- Davis, 155-178
- Wirzba, 47-59, 191-201
- George Tinker, "Spirituality, Native American Personhood, Sovereignty, and Solidarity" in *Native and Christian*, ed. James Treat (Routledge, 1996) (e-reserve)
- Bill McKibben, "Playing Offense," *The Christian Century* (Jan. 2, 2013), online at <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2012-12/playing-offense>

December 20 – Final paper/project due (in instructor's mailbox or by email).

Additional Bibliography (for further study):

- DeWitt, Calvin B. *Earth-Wise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues*. Faith Alive, 2007.
- Fretheim, Terence E. *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2005.
- Habel, Norman C. *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies*. Fortress Press, 1995.
- McKibben, Bill. *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job and the Scale of Creation*. Cowley, 2005.
- Rhoads, David. *Earth and Word: Classic Sermons on Saving the Planet*. Continuum, 2007.
- Schifferdecker, Kathryn. *Out of the Whirlwind: Creation Theology in the Book of Job*. Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Walker-Jones, Arthur. *The Green Psalter: Resources for an Ecological Spirituality*. Fortress Press, 2009.
- Wirzba, Norman. *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

Internet Resources for Faith-Based Environmental Groups (a sampling)

- Alternatives for Simple Living: <http://www.simpleliving.org/>
- Association for Religion and Ecology: <http://www.arecology.org/>
- Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life: <http://www.coejl.org/~coejlor/index.php>
- Evangelical Climate Initiative: <http://christiansandclimate.org/>
- Evangelical Environmental Network: <http://www.creationcare.org/>
- Live Green Twin Cities: <http://livegreentwincities.com/default.aspx> (not faith-based, but local!)
- Lutherans Restoring Creation: <http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/>
- Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light: <http://www.c3mn.net/>
- National Catholic Rural Life Conference: <http://www.ncrlc.com/>
- National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group: <http://www.ncrlc.com/>
- Web of Creation: <http://www.webofcreation.org/>

For an annotated list of these and other faith-based environmental organizations, see <http://www.webofcreation.org/links-to-eco-faith-groups>