



# ST. JEROME'S UNIVERSITY

Department of Religious Studies

**RS 285/ERS 294: The Sacred Earth: Religion and ecology**

Fall 2022

**MW, 1:00pm – 2:20pm, SJ2 2003**

*We acknowledge that much of our work takes place on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. The campus is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. We give thanks for the privilege to work on this land and we are committed to working toward healing and reconciliation through research, learning, teaching, and the building of community.*

## **INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

Instructor: Dr. Cristina Vanin  
Email: [cdvanin@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:cdvanin@uwaterloo.ca)  
Office: Sweeney Hall (SH) 2030  
Office Hours: By appointment

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

### **Calendar Description:**

An examination of the past and present effects of Christianity and other world religions on human treatment of the natural world. Historical background, recent debates, and contemporary approaches to the ethical issues will be investigated.

### **Detailed Description:**

This course aims to explore and understand the current discussion about the relationship between ecology and religion. How have religious traditions influenced human interactions with the natural world? How have religions shaped our human understanding of the meaning and value of other species and of the natural world? We will be looking at a number of the world's major religions and spiritual traditions in terms of their teachings on nature. We will also be examining the current discussion on the role that religion may have in contributing to the ecological crisis and / or in helping us find a way through the crisis.

In the face of the existential challenge of climate change, and of the ongoing pandemic / endemic, there are those calling for a reset of some of the dominant western / settler values and priorities. Can we look to the world's religions for some alternative visions of how to understand and relate to the natural world? Do the world's religions offer any resources for rethinking our values and our behaviours?

Here in Canada we need to deal with the TRC Calls to Action, the journey of healing and reconciliation between Indigenous peoples, Métis and Inuit, and conflicts over land and the resource extraction economy. So we will be looking at Indigenous voices on nature and the sacred and how our human relationship to the natural world is integral to this process of healing and reconciliation.

Our aim throughout the term is to develop a community of learning so prepare yourselves to read and

think actively and creatively, to communicate your ideas with all of us, and to ask lots of questions!

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES and /or Learning Outcomes**

- familiarize ourselves with the central issues and the vocabulary in the field of religion and ecology
- examine and understand key religious texts, and the interpretations and re-interpretations of those texts, that have taken place in response to the ecological crisis
- learn about some of the major tenets of the world's major religions and spiritual traditions regarding the natural world and human relationship to the natural world
- reflect critically on understand the impact and significance of religions and spiritual traditions in responding to the ecological crisis and climate change
- participate in a community of learners wherein you can engage in conversation, demonstrate respect for the ideas of others, and communicate your own insights and ideas clearly

### **REQUIRED TEXTS [AND OTHER REQUIRED READINGS]**

- readings for the course will be taken from a variety of sources and will be made available via LEARN and/or on reserve in the St. Jerome's Library

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT**

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Due Date</u>	<u>Weighting</u>
Active Participation + Citizenship	Course	10%
Leading Class Discussion	One Class (TBD)	15%
LEARN Discussions	Post: one time	10%
	Response: four times	20%
Research Project Proposal / Outline	November 7, 2022	10%
Research Presentation	TBD	
Research Paper	December 12, 2022	35%
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Total		100%

\*Please note that detailed assignment guidelines will be posted on LEARN. What follows are some general descriptions of the various assignments:

#### **Assignment 1: Active Participation + Citizenship**

All students are expected to come to class having completed the assigned readings and prepared to contribute to discussion. When we come to class prepared, it contributes to the good (or demise) of the whole. We will be learning with and from each other so it will help all of us if we have read thoughtfully and are prepared to dialogue with each other.

**Assignment 2: Leading Class Discussion**

Students will sign up to lead class discussion one time during the semester, for one of the Monday classes. The intention is to engage us in understanding and thinking together about the reading(s) assigned for the day; about the key insights presented; about the significance of what is being said; about how a given reading relates to what we have read previously or to things that you have read and learned about elsewhere. It is also about raising questions for us to consider and discuss.

**Assignment 3: LEARN Discussion [Post]**

Students will sign up to post to LEARN discussion one time during the semester. Posts must be submitted by Friday evening, 11:59pm. The posts will consist of a written critical reflection on the reading(s) assigned for the Monday class.

**Assignment 4: LEARN Discussion [Response]**

Students will respond to LEARN posts four times during the semester. Responses must be submitted by Monday morning, 9:00am. The response will indicate the further insights that the post has provided for you and you will pose at least two further questions that are raised for you by the post.

**Assignment 5: Research Project Proposal [DUE: November 7]**

This assignment gives you the opportunity to work with a partner and to research a group / organization with religious roots or affiliation that is committed to working on ecological issues. You will learn about the organization; its attitude and understanding of the natural world; the concrete ways in which it is responding to the local ecological issues; the basis of the organization's purpose, e.g., its principles, values, etc. You will also have an opportunity to evaluate the significance of the organization's contribution to meeting some aspect of the ecological crisis. Preparing the research project proposal allows you to try out your ideas and get feedback on them before you develop them into the final research presentation and essay. Feedback will be provided via a meeting with the instructor.

**Assignment 6: Research Presentation [tentatively — November 30 and December 5]**

Each group will sign up to present their research to the rest of the class. The presentation itself will take no more than 15 minutes. You will follow the presentation with generating 10-15 minutes of conversation / discussion.

**Assignment 7: Research Essay [DUE: December 12]**

Each group will write and submit a formal essay, in the sense that it should follow an accepted academic style, especially in terms of the proper citation of references and it should have a bibliography. The essay should be 3000-3750 words in length (12-15 pages), 12-point type [Times or Times Roman], double-spaced, one-inch margins.

**Submission**

Assignments must be submitted onto LEARN Dropbox.

## COURSE SCHEDULE (Subject to Change)

Week	Date	Topic	Readings Due
1	September 7	Introduction	
2	September 12  September 14	Religion and Ecology	Roger S. Gottlieb, "Religion and Ecology — what is the connection and why does it matter?"  Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology • "The Challenge of the Environmental Crisis" • "World Religions Overview Essay"
3	September 19  September 21	Judaic Tradition: Relationship	<i>Oxford Reader</i> , Tirosch-Samuelson, "Judaism"  Arthur Waskow, "And the Earth is filled with the Breath of Life," <i>Cross Currents</i> , 47, 3 (Fall 1997): 348-363
4	September 26  September 28	Islamic Tradition: Care and Justice	<i>Oxford Reader</i> , Foltz, "Islam"  <i>This Sacred Earth</i> , Anmar, "An Islamic Response to the Manifest Ecological Crisis: Issues of Justice"
5	October 3  October 5	Christian Traditions: Community  Protestant Traditions	Lynn White Jr., "The Historic Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," <i>Science</i> 155 (10 March 1967): 1203-1207  <i>Oxford Handbook</i> , chapter 4, "The World of Nature according to the Protestant Tradition"
	READING WEEK	October 8 - 16	None
6	October 17	Orthodox Christianity	John Chryssavgis

Week	Date	Topic	Readings Due
	October 19	Roman Catholicism	Pope Francis, <i>Laudato Si</i> encyclical
7	October 24  October 26	Re-Visioning of Christian Thinking	Sallie McFague Rosemary Radford Ruether Elisabeth Johnson Global South  Thomas Berry
8	October 31  November 2	Hindu Tradition: Immanence	Fowler-Smith, "Hindu Tree Veneration as a Mode of Environmental Encounter"  <i>This Sacred Earth</i> , "Hinduism and Deep Ecology" (Chapple)
9	November 7  November 9	Buddhist Tradition: Interconnectedness  Chinese Traditions: Harmony and Balance	<i>Oxford Handbook</i> , "The Greening of Buddhism: Promise and Perils"  Gross, "Toward a Buddhist Environmental Ethic"  Thich Nhat Hahn  Palmer, "Shintoism"  <i>Oxford Handbook</i> , "Daoism and Nature"
10	November 14  November 16	Indigenous Traditions: Embodiment	Melissa K. Nelson, "Native ecologies and cosmovisions renew treaties with the earth and fuel indigenous movements," <i>Routledge Handbook</i>  Blair Stonechild, <i>Loss of Indigenous Eden and the Fall of Spirituality</i>
11	November 21  November 23	Indigenous Traditions Continued	Robin Wall Kimmerer, <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i>  Jesuit Forum: Listening to Indigenous Voices

Week	Date	Topic	Readings Due
12	November 28	Spirituality for the Earth	Vanin book chapter
	November 30	Presentations	Visit to Ignatius Jesuit Centre, Guelph?
Last Class	December 5	Presentations	

### MANAGING UNCERTAIN TIMES

We're going to hope that conditions will be such that we will continue with in-person classes through the entire fall term, but the pandemic renders our best laid plans precarious, so let's be prepared for whatever may come.

If you find yourself unable to attend class due to an extenuating circumstance, lecture notes and/or slides can be made available to you upon request. Furthermore, we will discuss the idea of sharing the responsibility of creating notes that capture our meetings.

If we have to cancel in-person classes for a short period of time (e.g., one week), we will move either one or both of the class meetings online, via MS Teams, during the scheduled class times. These online class meetings will not be recorded.

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### COURSE POLICIES

#### Correspondence:

If you need to contact me by email, please use my [cdvanin@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:cdvanin@uwaterloo.ca) address. In most cases, I will respond to emails within 24 hours, although I can't guarantee that I will be looking at email on weekends. You should **use your UW email addresses** for all correspondences with me. Though our course does have an MS Team, I will not be checking the chat for messages. It's best to email me.

Class announcements generally will be posted on LEARN.

**Late Assignments:**

Late assignments will be penalized at the rate of three per cent (3%) per day, including weekends.

**Extensions:**

All extensions must be requested a minimum of one week before the assignment is due. Any requests after this week will be granted only if accommodations are secured through proper processes (e.g., self-declaration of illness, VIF, other relevant documentation). Without documentation, no extension will be granted after the original due date has passed.

**Attendance**

Students are responsible for attending and taking notes at all classes.

**Electronic Devices**

I request that there be no off-task use of technology while we are participating in our class meetings. Also, please turn off all sound on your devices when we are not discussing.

**Privacy and Permissions**

Materials, lectures, and all audio, video and written content on LEARN is absolutely not to be circulated or reproduced beyond LEARN and this course. Please be considerate and respectful of your colleagues and your instructor's privacy.

The instructor maintains copyright over this course. It is the intellectual property of the instructor and not to be copied or reproduced for any purposes without explicit permission.

**OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

**Academic Integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Check [www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/) for more information.

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read the St. Jerome's University Policy on [Student Petitions and Grievances](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the St. Jerome's Advising Specialist, Student Affairs Office, who will provide further assistance.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. Check [www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/) for more information. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on [Student Discipline](#). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties, check the [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

**Appeals:** A decision made or penalty imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to the St. Jerome's University Policy on [Student Appeals](#).

**Note for students with disabilities:** [AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall (Room 1401) at the University of Waterloo, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

### **Mental Health Support**

All of us need a support system. The faculty and staff at St. Jerome's encourage students to seek out mental health support if needed.

#### **On Campus**

Due to COVID-19 and campus closures, services may be available only online or by phone.

- Counselling Services: [counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca) / 519-888-4567 ext. 32655
- [MATES](#): one-to-one peer support program offered by the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) and Counselling Services
- SJU Wellness Coordinator: Lindsay Thompson ([Lindsay.thompson@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:Lindsay.thompson@uwaterloo.ca))

#### **Off campus, 24/7**

- [Good2Talk](#): Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454
- Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Phone: 519-749-4300 ext.6880
- [Here](#) 24/7: Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247
- [OK2BME](#): set of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning teens in Waterloo. Phone: 519-884-0000 ext. 213