



RE 225: Religion and Ecology

Dr. Eliza Kent
Office: Ladd 212
Office phone: 580-5405
Office hours: Mon. 1-3 pm
and by appt.

Fall 2016
TR 2:10-3:30
Tisch 308
ekent@skidmore.edu

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course explores the critical connection between religion and the natural environment. How do religious beliefs, symbol systems and religious behaviors shape human perceptions of, and interactions with, the nonhuman environment? How might the primary models provided by Western, Eastern and indigenous religions help us to address specific local and global environmental concerns? Using primary texts drawn from a variety of sacred traditions, and writings from a broad spectrum of scholars and theologians, the course will cover such topics as ecotheology, ecofeminism, nature mysticism, new age religious movements, and religiously-engaged environmental activism. In addition, we will read several in-depth case studies that feature how people of faith have drawn on the ethical and theological resources of their traditions to reimagine our relationship to non-human nature – from David Haberman’s work on Hindu ecotheology and the restoration of the Yamuna river in India to Pope Francis’ landmark papal encyclical – *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- to acquire a technical vocabulary that will allow you to speak in a precise and informed way about religious belief and practice in general, and about Christianity, Lakota Religion, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam in particular;
- to gain a familiarity with religious hermeneutics, that is, the interpretation of received religious texts and traditions to meet the needs of a changed socio-historical situation;

- to understand how religious worldviews have shaped human interactions with the natural environment, in concert with other factors (technological capacity, economic conditions, natural conditions, land use policies, etc.);
- to develop a richly nuanced conception of religion that recognizes both the social and the personal dimensions of religious belief and practice;
- to examine, challenge and clarify one's own self-understanding, worldview and fundamental values.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- A. Attendance and participation
- B. Reading
- C. Writing

A. Attendance and Class Participation: Regular attendance and active participation are essential to your learning experience and success in this course. Because of this, no more than three unexcused absences will be tolerated without a direct impact on your course grade.

Missing class more than six times will constitute grounds for failing the course.

These are the baseline classroom etiquette rules necessary for creating a positive, respectful intellectual community during the limited time we have together:

- Plan to arrive on time and to stay in class the entire time.
- Feel free to bring a beverage or a light snack but not an entire meal.
- Be sure your cell phone is off and stowed out of sight the whole class period.
- Use of a laptop is prohibited, unless you can document a medical reason.

Beyond these, your regular, active participation is expected. Please come to class having read the assignments so that you are prepared to offer your thoughtful questions, comments, comparisons and suggestions for further areas of exploration. This kind of participation benefits the class enormously, as does your attentive listening to the comments and questions of others. Your class participation grade will depend not only on the consistency of attendance and basic classroom etiquette (which is the bare minimum expected), but also on how well you contribute positively to the overall class dynamic through your comments, questions, attentive listening, prompt arrival, leadership and cooperation in small group work, etc. Generally speaking, when an imbalance occurs in terms of who is speaking and how frequently, those who are shy need to exercise the virtue of courage and those who are loquacious need to exercise the virtue of restraint. I reserve the prerogative to call on students in order to even out the class dynamic.

In addition, at least twice during the semester, you will be asked to lead discussion for at least fifteen minutes. A good launching point for this will be the reading journal entries that you will be writing throughout the semester (see below).

Class participation will count for 10% of your course grade.

Events. There are two required events outside of class time. Attendance is expected.

1. Eliza Kent, Ethiopian Church Forests: Accidental Environmentalism? Oct. 30th, 5-7 pm. Place TBA
2. Peter Klepeis and Peter Scull, Colgate University, Ethiopian Church Forests: Environmental Stewardship and the Sacred. Nov. 2nd, 5:30-6:30 Emerson Auditorium

Religion and Ecology in the News. As the subject material for our course is a “hot topic” these days, please keep your eyes open for stories in the media and in the world around you that relate to the religion and ecology. We will set aside time every week for discussion of news stories involving the intersection of religion and ecology. **Your contribution to this part of the class, including bringing in memes, articles or video clips to share, and connecting them thoughtfully to the course material, will constitute 5% of your course grade.**

B. Reading: Nothing is more central to a course in the humanities than the careful, thorough, critical reading of texts, and that will certainly be the case here. I encourage you to take notes in the margins of your books or in a notebook designated for that purpose. To enhance your vocabulary, maintain word lists of new words or concepts and look up their definitions in a dictionary. Such active engagement with the reading will enhance your retention of the material and help you to think through the issues and questions raised by the texts.

Required books to purchase:

1. David Haberman, *River of Love in an Age of Pollution* (Univ of California Press 2006)
ISBN: 978-0520247901
2. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: Care for our Common Home* (Our Sunday Visitor 2015)
ISBN: 978-1612783864
3. Richard C. Foltz, *Worldviews, Religion and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, First Edition (Cengage 2002) ISBN: 978-0534596071

Additional readings will be distributed via Blackboard electronic reserve (ER in syllabus), in class or via email.

C. Writing

Formal essays
Response papers
Reading journal

1. **Formal essays:** These are called “formal” because they will be evaluated for style--grammar, spelling, punctuation--as well as content. Even the most accomplished writer may benefit from having a second pair of eyes look over their paper. I encourage you to make the most of the support provided by the Writing Center. <https://www.skidmore.edu/writingcenter/>

See Appendix B for the citation guidelines for this class.

Note well: Late formal papers will not be accepted unless you have explained AHEAD OF TIME the reason for its being late. If you and I agree that you may turn a paper in late, we will negotiate whether points will be taken off for tardiness.

2. **Response Papers:** At regular intervals throughout the semester you will be responsible for a 1-1/2 to 2 page written paper in response to the required class readings. These papers will form a basis for classroom discussion of the material, and so are due in class on the day assigned.

You will be given general directions for each response paper in advance. At the same time, the response papers are an opportunity for you to engage the course material in a way that

enables you to achieve greater clarity concerning your own thoughts, and so there is no “right” or “wrong” response.

These assignments will not be graded for either content or style, but I will make comments on them. If you hand in a paper of sufficient length in class, you will receive a grade of 4. If the paper is late for any reason, except a documented reason such as a doctor’s appointment, away-game, illness (with a note), etc., you will be given a 1. Late response papers will be accepted for one week after the due date. If you do not hand in a paper, you will receive a grade of 0. If it is obvious that you have not read the assignment with much or any care, and are handing in a paper based on nothing but your own imagination and ingenuity, in all likelihood you will receive a 0.

You will not have to write a journal entry on those days a response paper is due.

3. Reading Journal: Studies have shown that any written reflection on an assigned reading aids in comprehension. Therefore, I’m asking that for each reading for each class, you identify two key quotes from the reading, and write two or three sentences explaining each quote (that is, what do you understand the main point of the quote to be, in your own words). In addition, what further questions were raised by the quote? What do you find illuminating/perplexing/thought-provoking/personally moving, etc. about each quote? **Your journals should be typed and brought into class each session. I will periodically spot check them and collect them as well at the middle and the end of the semester and respond to your reflections.**

Rationale: This exercise will help you be more organized in your daily preparation for class, will help to foster a useful habit that can aid you in all your classes and will foster comprehension especially for some of our more difficult readings. In addition, the journal is essential to quickly identifying a good place to begin on those days when you are asked to facilitate discussion of the reading.

IV. Evaluation:

A. Grading Summary

Assignment	Due Date	Percentage
First paper	9/30	15%
Second paper	11/22	20%
Reading journal	Ongoing	20%
Response papers	Ongoing	15%
Attendance and participation	Ongoing	10%
Religion & Ecology in the news	Ongoing	5%
Final Paper	12/21 1:30-4:30 pm	15%

B. Grading Standards: The following is designed to help you think about the level of participation you’re prepared to give to this course, and the final grade you would like to shoot for. (Obviously, there are finer gradations for each of the grades discussed below, e.g. A-, B+, C+)

1. “A” signifies outstanding. To earn that, you need to (a) maintain regular attendance and demonstrate excellence in discussion; (b) lead the class discussion ably on the day you are

picked to do so (e.g. be prepared with a question and quote to get us started, be familiar enough with the reading to navigate gracefully the questions and comments that other students raise) and contribute well-chosen examples of news stories to share (and comment thoughtfully on those of others); (c) keep up with your reading journal outside of class, demonstrating consistent care and thoughtfulness in your reflections on the issues and questions raised by the class; (d) demonstrate in the response papers a thorough understanding of the key terms, historical background and basic structural features of the religious traditions we are examining; (e) do a thorough, analytically acute job on the formal papers and get them in on time.

In addition, to merit an “A” your writing in the formal essays must reflect the following: a statement in the first paragraph of what you intend to accomplish; correct grammar and accurate spelling; depth and complexity in your engagement with the materials (readings, lectures, films, etc.); and an exceptionally creative original contribution--a new idea, a different way of thinking about the issue(s) you’re discussing--that takes you beyond the accurate presentation of someone else’s ideas.

2. “B” signifies good; it is a solid, good grade. To earn that, you need to (a) maintain regular attendance and participation in discussion; (b) lead the class discussion ably on the day you are picked to do so (e.g. be prepared with a question and quote to get us started, be familiar enough with the reading to navigate the questions and comments that other students raise) and contribute well-chosen examples of news stories to share (and comment thoughtfully on those of others); (c) keep up with your reading journal outside of class, demonstrating care and thoughtfulness in your reflections on the issues and questions raised by the class, though you may skip a day or so, or be less consistently excellent in your entries; (d) demonstrate in the response papers a firm grasp of the key terms, historical background and basic structural features of the religions we are examining; (e) do a thorough job on the formal papers and get them in on time.

In addition, a “B” grade essay typically contains: a statement in the first paragraph of what you intend to accomplish; correct grammar and accurate spelling; solid engagement with the materials (readings, lectures, films, etc.); and an original contribution that takes you beyond the accurate presentation of someone else’s ideas.

3. “C” stands for satisfactory. To earn that, you need to (a) maintain regular attendance and participation in discussion; (b) lead the class discussion ably on the day you are picked to do so (e.g. be prepared with a question and quote to get us started, be familiar enough with the reading to navigate the questions and comments that other students raise) and contribute examples of news stories to share (and comment thoughtfully on those of others); (c) mostly keep up with your reading journal outside of class, but miss several days of the journal; (d) do a satisfactory job on the formal essays and response papers that meets the requirements of the assignment, and get them in on time.

In addition, “C” level essays contain no statement of intent, or a confused one; occasionally lapse into bad grammar or incorrect spelling; replace full sentences with fragments; misconstrue or distort key ideas; display no clear development leading to a supportable conclusion.

4. To fall below satisfactory (i.e. C-, D), you could fall way behind in your reading journal and response papers, be consistently unable to lead the class discussion when picked due to lack of preparation, skip several response papers, turn in one of the formal papers several days past the deadline, and/or be very irregular in attendance and discussion.

In addition, below “C” level essays do not adequately meet the requirements of the assignment. They typically also contain no statement of intent, or a confused one; frequently lapse into bad grammar or incorrect spelling; replace full sentences with fragments; misconstrue or distort key ideas; display no clear development leading to a supportable conclusion.

C. Guide to Instructor's Abbreviations in Marking Papers

Vertical line with check-mark = useful point, important idea, "yep"
 Double vertical line = good, strong idea or sentence
 Exclamation point = yes! excellent point
 Wavy underline = something is wrong with these words (e.g. syntax, logic, diction)
 Circle = error (typo, spelling, punctuation)
 WW = wrong word
 SF = sentence fragment – sentence lacks a subject or verb
 RO = run-on sentence
 Double-lined P = start a new paragraph

D. Students with documented disabilities: I strive to create an inclusive classroom that respects the fact that our eyes, ears, brains and bodies all work a little bit differently. If you have, or think you may have a learning disability, please work with the Office of Student Academic Services to determine what strategies and accommodations are appropriate for your situation, and then speak with me early on so that we may arrange appropriate accommodation. http://cmsauthor.skidmore.edu/academic_services/accessibility/

E. Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct Information and Resources. According to both NY State Law and Skidmore Policy, I am, like all faculty and staff at Skidmore, a mandated reporter of any sexual or gender-based misconduct. What this means is that if in the unlikely event that you share with me information that indicates that you or someone else has been the victim of sexual assault or misconduct, I'm compelled to pass on that information (i.e. your names) to the Title IX officer. While there is much about this policy I personally am uncomfortable with, it is an integral element of our commitment here at Skidmore to not push under the rug the kinds of sexual misconduct that have, regrettably, been a taken-for-granted aspect of college life too long.

E. Academic Honesty: Making references to the work of others strengthens your own work by granting you greater authority and by showing that you are part of a discussion located within a community. When you make references (by quotation or paraphrase) to the work of others, it is essential to provide proper attribution and citation. Failing to do so is considered academically dishonest, as is copying or paraphrasing someone else's work. Please consult Appendix B for the citation format I recommend for your work in this class.

Any confirmed instances of plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty (cheating, fabrication or facilitating academic dishonesty) in this course will result in the work in question receiving a zero. Assignments that receive a zero for this reason may not be rewritten or redone. As per the Skidmore College Honor Code, documentation of the infraction will be kept on file with Dean's office and may impair eligibility for honor societies, study abroad, etc.

Schedule of Assignments and Readings
(subject to change as the course progresses)

Readings and other assignments are due by class-time on the date assigned

Week One – Introduction to the Course

Th 9/8 – Worldviews and Cosmologies

Read: Richard C. Foltz, *Worldviews, Religion and the Environment: A Global Anthology* (henceforth, *Worldviews*), “Introduction,” p. 1-7 (sent via email 9/6/16)

Week Two – Christianity – Creation

9/13 – Genesis

Read: The Holy Bible, Gen. 1-3 in two translations (ER)

9/15 – The Roots of (Ecological) Crisis

Read: Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (1967) in *Worldviews*, pp. 30-37.

Read: Carolyn Merchant, excerpts from *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980), in *Worldviews*, pp. 38-49

Week Three – Changing Interpretations of the Creation Story

9/20 – Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

Read: Diané Collinson, “Bacon,” in *Fifty Major Philosophers* (ER)

Read: Steven Matthews, *Theology and Science in the Thought of Francis Bacon* (2008), pp. 59-68.

Read: Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, selections (ER)

9/22 – Christian Roots of Environmental Thought

Read: Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature: The Christian Roots of American Environmentalism* (2017), pp. 25-38 (ER)

Read: John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierras*, selections (ER)

Week Four – Secularization and Religious Responses

9/27 – Secularization and the Religion of Capitalism

Read: David Loy, “The Religion of the Market,” (2000) in *Worldviews*, pp. 66-75

Read: Pope Francis, preface, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, encyclical letter (2015), 7-16

Read: The Holy Bible, Gen. 5-11, the story of Noah and the Flood (ER)

9/29 - On Care for Our Common Home

Read: Francis, Chapters 1 and 2, *Laudato Si*, 17-68 (especially chap. 2)

9/30 – First paper due in Blackboard Dropbox by 5 pm

Week Five – The Papal Encyclical

10/4 – Ecological Education and Spirituality

Read: Francis, Chapters 3, 4, and 6, *Laudato Si*, 69-108 (skim), 133-160

10/6 – Ecomodernism

Read: The Ecomodernist Manifesto (ER)

Read: Hamilton, “Theodicy of a Good Anthropocene,” *Environmental Humanities* 7 (2015): 233-238 (ER)

Week Six – Indigenous Worldviews

10/11 – Cosmologies of the Lakota Peoples

Read: Foltz, “First Peoples,” *Worldviews*

Read: Nick Black Elk and John Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, selections (ER)

10/13 – Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility

Read: Vine Deloria, “Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility” (1994), *Worldviews*, pp. 81-89

Week Seven – Indigenous Worldviews

10/18 – Standing Rock Reservation vs. Enbridge Pipeline

Read: TBA

View: <http://www.kfyrtv.com/content/news/Law-enforcement-issues-statement-on-Dakota-Access-Pipeline-protest-392267271.html>

View:

http://www.democracynow.org/2016/9/4/dakota_access_pipeline_company_attacks_native

View: http://www.democracynow.org/2016/8/23/standing_rock_sioux_chairman_dakota_access

10/20 – Tour of Sustainability Initiatives at Skidmore by Levi Rogers

Week Eight - Indigenous Worldviews

10/25 – Indigenous Ecologies in Australia

Read: Mary Graham, “Some Thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews,” in *Worldviews*, pp. 89-96.

10/27 – Indigenous Ecologies in Australia

View: *Where the Green Ants Dream* (Werner Herzog, 1984, 1 hr 40 min.)

Read: Valerie Plumwood, “Surviving a Croc Attack,” *Utne Reader* (2000), pp. 1-7. (ER)

10/30 – Lecture by Eliza Kent, Ethiopian Church Forests: Accidental Environmentalists?

5-6 pm, location, TBA.

Week Nine – Islamic Worldviews**11/1 – Islamic Cosmologies**

Read: Islamic Creation Narratives (TBA)

Read: Foltz, “Islamic Environmentalism in Theory and Practice,” in *Worldviews*, 358-365.

11/2 – REQUIRED PUBLIC LECTURE

Religious Stewardship of Ethiopian Church Forests

Peter Klepeis and Peter Scull, Colgate University

Emerson Auditorium, Palamountain

5:00-6:00 pm

REQUIRED

11/3 – Muslim Ecotheology and Climate Change in the Chours of Bangladesh

Naveeda Khan, “Dogs and Humans and What Earth Can Be: Filaments of Muslim Ecological Thought,” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* (2014): 245-264.

Week Ten – Hindu Worldviews**11/8 – Hindu Cosmologies**

Read: Narayanan, “Water, Wood and Wisdom: Ecological Perspectives from the Hindu Traditions,” in *Worldviews*, pp. 130-142.

11/10 – Hindu Environmentalism

Read: David Haberman, *River of Love in an Age of Pollution* (2006)

Week Eleven – Hindu Worldviews**11/15 – Hindu Environmentalism**

Read: David Haberman, *River of Love in an Age of Pollution* (2006)

11/17 – Hindu Environmentalism

Read: David Haberman, *River of Love in an Age of Pollution* (2006)

Week Twelve – A Well Deserved Break from Classes

11/22 - PROF. KENT AT AAR - no class

Due: SECOND PAPER DUE TODAY – SUBMIT VIA DROPBOX

11/25 - 27 NO CLASS THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week Thirteen – Buddhist Worldviews**11/29 – Buddhist Cosmologies**

Read: TBA

12/1 – Buddhist Environmentalism in Thailand

Read: Donald Swearer, “The Hermeneutics of Buddhist Ecology in Contemporary Thailand: Buddhadasa and Dhammapitaka,” in *Worldviews*, pp. 181-192

Read: Leslie Sponsel, “Illuminating Darkness: The Monk-Cave-Bat Ecosystem Complex in Thailand”

Week Fourteen – Environmentalism as a New Religious Movement**12/6 – Dark Green Religion**

Read: Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (2006)

12/8 Dark Green Religion

Read: Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (2006)

Week Fourteen – Radical Environmentalism as a New Religious Movement**12/13 - Dark Green Religion**

Read: Bron Taylor, “Earth First!: From Primal Spirituality to Ecological Resistance,” in *Worldviews*, pp. 447-455.

Final exam December 21st, 1:30-4:30 pm

Appendix B Citation Format

For this class, please use the MLA in-text citation system for citing quotations and ideas that you have arrived at from reading other authors. See Purdue University's OWL guide to citations, for a complete discussion of this system [<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/02/>].

Briefly, in this method of citation, one introduces the source in a signal phrase that gives the author's name (first and last at first mention, last name only thereafter). Parenthetical references following the cited material supply the page number or numbers. No abbreviations like p. or pp. precede the page number, unless the absence of them would cause confusion for the reader. These parenthetical references are keyed to a list of works cited, which is placed at the end of the paper. This list is arranged alphabetically and may bear the title "Works Cited," or "Bibliography."

If you want to comment on a citation but do not want to do so in the body of the paper, you may add a footnote, which is easily done with the footnote function of your word processing software.

CITATION EXAMPLE

In *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors*, Sudhir Kakar argues that Indian medical systems depend on a distinctive sense of "freedom." He writes, "Human freedom in the traditional Indian context, then, seems to imply an increase in the potential to experience different inner states while limiting action in the outer world" (272). This notion of freedom inhering in mental states rather than external conditions is corroborated by the philosophy of Yoga. Barbara Stoler Miller emphasizes this by titling the fourth section of Patanjali's *Yoga-Sutras*, "Absolute Freedom" (74). This is not to say that India lacks this-worldly thinkers who have worked hard to win political and social freedom by changing external conditions; rather, it is to emphasize the role that ascetic other-worldly thinkers have had in defining and shaping core Indian values.

[**Note:** It seems odd at first, but the concluding period or other punctuation mark must go outside the final quotation mark, and *after* the closing parenthesis].

Works Cited

Dinnage, Rosemary. Review of *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors*, by Sudhir Kakar. *The New York Review of Books* 17 February 1983: 15.

Heesterman, J.C. *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship and Society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985.

"Hinduism." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2010. Encyclopædia Britannica Online, 2010. Web. 25 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/266312/Hinduism>>.

Kakar, Sudhir. *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors: A Psychological Inquiry into India and Its Healing Traditions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.

_____. "Psychoanalysis and Religious Healing: Siblings or Strangers?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1985): 841-53.

Miller, Barbara Stoler. *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom*. New York: Bantam Books, 1986.

Smart, Ninian. "Soteriology: An Overview." *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by Mircea Eliade. New York: McMillan, 1987.