ECO-JUSTICE ETHICS, THEOLOGY, AND MINISTRY  BTS Fall, 2007 Course. Portland Campus, Tuesday evenings, 6:00 - 8:50 p.m.

Prof. Dieter T. Hessel, Ph.D.

In the context of new global/local realities that challenge our ethics, beliefs and practices, we will explore how to think and act in a Christian ethical response to the ecological crisis and environmental movements. This course emphasizes norms and themes for constructive ethics and theology that embody eco-justice vision and values. Ethical principles of ecology + justice will inform our discussion of environmental issues or case studies. We will also read scripture with a view from outdoors, do some theological revisioning in a reflection paper, and consider what’s involved in becoming a greener community of faith that cares for earth community in a time of destructive globalization, consumerism, and global warming.

[This course opens a window on eco-justice ethics and praxis as a lifelong vocation. Let’s make it mutually enjoyable. Course grade will be based on
30 % class participation and
70 % assigned reports and papers
Final Paper expectations are at the end of this syllabus.]

Required Text Books:

*And the Leaves of the Tree are for the Healing of the Nations: Biblical and Theological Foundations for Eco-Justice*
  Carol Johnston (a 36 pp. pamphlet produced by the Presby. Church (U.S.A.)

*Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*

*Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach*
  James Martin-Schramm and Robert Stivers (Orbis, 2003)

*Earth Habitat: Eco-Injustice and the Church’s Response*
  Dieter Hessel and Larry Rasmussen, eds. (Fortress, 2001)

*Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*
  Vandana Shiva (South End Press, 2005)

*A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and our Planet’s Future*
  Roger Gottlieb (Oxford, 2006)
Articles on Library Reserve to utilize in 12 minute Class Reports (Each student chooses one of the following to review for the class on the date indicated):

[Prepare a 4 pp. typed double-spaced review to turn into the prof., but give your 12 minute report orally to the class. In your report:
Explicate the material from the author’s point of view.
Summarize key points. And raise questions for discussion.]

Following are the dates of class reports on library-reserved readings:


10/2 Report on Jim Schwab, “A Place at the Table” & “Detoxifying America,” in Deeper Shades of Green: Blue Collar and Minority Environmentalism in America (Sierra Club, 1994), pp. 383-419


Books for Supplementary Readings (optional, also on library reserve)

*An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming, and what we can do about it*
  Al Gore (Rodale, 2006)

*Super, Natural Christians: How we should love Nature*
  Sallie McFague (Fortress, 1997)

*Finding God in the Singing River: Christianity, Spirit, and Nature*
  Mark Wallace (Fortress, 2005).

*Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology*
  Denis Edwards (Orbis, 1995)

*Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility*

*Making Nature Sacred*

*Nature, Human Nature, and God*
  Ian C. Barbour (Fortress, 2002)

*Sustainability: Economics, Ecology, and Justice*
  John B. Cobb, Jr. (Orbis, 1992)

*Earth and Word: Classic Sermons on Saving the Planet*
  David Rhoads, ed. (Continuum, July, 2007)

  Peter Bakken, Joan Engel and J. Ronald Engel (Greenwood, 1995)

*Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*
  Rosemary Radford Ruether (Harper San Francisco, 1992)

*Food and Faith: Justice, Joy and Daily Bread*
  Michael Schut, (Living the Good News, 2002)

*Justice in a Global Economy: Strategiess for Home, Community, and World*
  Pamela K. Brubaker, Rebecca Todd Peters, Laura A. Stivers, eds (WJK, 2007)

WEEKLY SESSION TOPICS, REQUIRED READINGS, ASSIGNED REPORTS, AND EXPECTED PAPERS for sessions of the BTS Fall, 2007 Course #ET1702P on “Eco-Justice Ethics, Theology and Ministry”

Session I. 6:00 - 8:50 p.m.  Opening up the Subject

A. Review of Course syllabus
   After touring the syllabus, let’s discuss:
   What is expected of participants in utilizing readings, discussing case studies, making reports, & writing papers?

   What do class members hope to get out of this course?

B. What is the global/local reality being addressed?: Aspects of Eco-Injustice  [Prepare for first class session by reading pp. indicated below.]

   After Prof’s mini-lecture, class will discuss: “The Environmental Problem”, in Christian Environmental Ethics; pp. 9-31; and “Religion and the Human Meaning of the Environmental Crisis”, Introduction, A Greener Faith, pp. 3-18

Session II.  Eco-Justice Vision and Values

A. Sources of this vision for Christians
   Student report on Bill Gibson’s articles in For Creation’s Sake & in Eco-Justice – the Continuing Journey

   Biblical-theological foundations of the E-J vision
   Class discussion of Carol Johnston, And the Leaves of the Tree...

B. Basic norms of Eco-Justice Ethics
   expressing E-J values (what we stand for, and how to move forward)

   Class discussion of the E-J norms following presentation by Hessel

   To prepare, read the “Introduction” to Christianity and Ecology plus Martin-Schramm & Stiver’s alternative statement of the same basic norms in their chapter (#2) on “Christian Resources and the Ethic of Ecological Justice.” in Christian Environmental Ethics.
Session III. Exploring the Breadth and Depth of E-J Ethics
We will tour the Earth Charter, issued in 2000. This statement of global ethics offers integrated ethical principles for sustainable living. Charter principles actually specify eco-justice ethics.

For background, google the Forum on Religion and Ecology website and go to disciplines/ethics/eco-justice to read Hessel’s essay posted on line.

To prepare for class, also read Rockefeller chapter (6) in Earth Habitat, plus The Earth Charter text reprinted in the Appendix of EH, pp. 207ff.

Ponder the commentary for case study (ch.4) in Christian Environmental Ethics that focuses on sufficiency as a consumption standard. Concentrate on “The Main Question” (pp. 71 ff) bringing biblical themes and Christian ethics to bear on the realities of over-consumption.

Session IV. Environmental Justice, a basic aspect of eco-justice

A. Student report on last sections of Schwab, Deeper Shades of Green

To prepare for this session, read Cone (ch.1) & Shepard (ch.9) in Earth Habitat; plus Vernice Miller Travis chapter in Xty & Ecology, section V.

Class discussion of the readings listed above.

B. Class Discussion of case study, “Skull Valley,” Ch. 10 in Christian Environmental Ethics.

[Also read “Guidelines for Case Briefs” in back of CEE. It offers guidance for approaching a case study in class discussion.]

Reading Week (No class session)

Session V. Our Duties to Otherkind
Focusing on ethical responsibility to ecosystems and wild animals

A. Student Report on Rolston’s essay (ch. 11) in Gibson’s book.
Followed by class discussion of chapters by Cowdin and DeWitt in *Xty & Ecology*. To prepare, read those chapters, and also Ch. 5 in Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith*.

B. Prepare for class discussion of the case study, “Saving Snake River Salmon,” Ch. 7, in *Christian Environmental Ethics*.

**Session VI. Grappling with Climate Change**

A. Student Report on McKibben’s articles about global warming.

To prepare for discussion of climate change and the church’s response, read the articles by David Hallman on the same subject in *Xty & Ecology* and in *Earth Habitat*. And if you haven’t seen or read *An Inconvenient Truth*, take a look before this session.

B. Also scan the Earth Charter for ethical principles that you would emphasize in leading others to act on global warming.

And, if you have time, surf the Web on ways to engage in Maine.

C. We will also discuss another case study, “Sustainable Energy Futures,” (ch. 9) in *Christian Environmental Ethics*.

**Session VII. Eco-Justice at the Center of the Church’s Mission**

A. To prepare, read: Conradie, et al (ch.8), and Rasmussen (Introduction) in *Earth Habitat*; Ruether, and NRPE chapters in of *Xty & Ecology* section V; plus Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith*, pp. 45-56, & Ch. 3.

B. After class discussion of this material, Hessel will summarize and assess the response of the mainline Churches in the U.S.

Where were/are the churches in meeting the environmental challenge? [Be sure to look at the web site of NCC Eco-Justice Working Group]

Notice the prominence of *Env. Justice, Food, and Energy Issues* (i.e., just eating; hunger action, combating global warming, etc.) on the NCC web site. Also Google MOFGA, a prominent Maine organization.]
C. The Ritual Life of Religious Environmentalism focused on Eco-Justice. To prepare for this discussion, read Gottlieb, AGF, Chapter 6. On Liturgy and Ritual: Read Messenger, Ch 10 in Earth Habitat.

[Let’s begin Sessions VIII – XIII with a student- led 10-min. eco-justice ritual or student commentary on a couple of authoritative readings, only one of which can be scripture.]

Session VIII. Guided by the Bible and other Authorities

A. Mini-lecture on Sources of authoritative knowledge to guide earth citizenship, followed by Q. & A. To prepare, read chs.2 & 5 in Gottlieb, A Greener Faith, and Pedersen (ch.2) in Earth Habitat.

From where, alongside the Bible, do you get authoritative knowledge? (What combination of readings would you utilize in worship?)

Consider what cosmology & ecology have to do with covenant theology. How does that affect your view of God’s saving work (soteriology)?

[Eastern Orthodox Icons offer another world view: See Chryssavgis, pp. 83-96 in Xty and Ecology.]

B. Reading the Bible with an Earth Community perspective and the view from outdoors. Brief input from the prof. on reading Bible this way.

Student Report on “Guiding Ecojustice Principles, in Norman Habel, Readings From the Perspective of Earth

Consider the strengths and weaknesses of this hermeneutic

C. Class discussion of E-J Themes in Kahl (ch. 3 on Genesis) in Earth Habitat, and Rossing’s chapter interpreting Revelation in Xty & Ecology.

Session IX. Theological Revisioning and Reconstruction

A. Gottlieb, A Greener Faith, Ch. 1 provides a brief overview of the task. So does part of Hessel’s conclusion, in Earth Habitat, pp. 187-197.
B. Elizabeth Johnson, Ted Hiebert and Tom Berry chapters in *Xty & Ecology* will inform our discussion of: How does the quest for an eco-just future reframe the human vocation?

C. Is our doctrine of the Spirit earthy enough? To prepare, read ch. on the Spirit by Wallace, and ch. on the Logos by Burton-Christie in *Xty & Ecology*

There are other theological loci or “doctrines,” besides soteriology, anthropology and pneumatology, to re-envision and reconstruct. (Each student picks one, & writes a 3-4 pp. reflection paper due Dec. 4.)

[When doing some theo-revisioning in your reflection paper, pick one doctrine {theological locus) to focus on and in 3-4 pages, be clear about:
- the problem (problematic theological posture) you are addressing,
  (and be alert to previous interpretations of the doctrine that create or don’t address this problem);
- your alternative theological emphasis or approach;
- resources you’re drawing on to develop this reconstructive approach

**Thanksgiving Week** No class session)

Session X. **Attending to the challenge of Eco-Feminism**


Class discussion of that report and of Ruether & Eaton in *Xty & Ecology*

C. In the latter part of this session, we need to clarify:
   1. How students are doing on reflection papers assigned earlier? (Reflection paper is due ----)
   2. What kind of final paper is expected, and that students want to write, to complete this course? SEE MEMO at end of syllabus.

Session XI. **Just & Sustainable Community:**
**Alternative to Destructive Globalization**
A. To prepare, read *Earth Habitat*, Chapter 4 (Abu-Rabi), and Chapter 5 (Robra, et. al.)


B. Xian *Environmental Ethics*, Case 12 “Harvesting Controversy”

**Session XII. Continuing on the subject of Sustainable Community**

*Christianity & Ecology*, pp. 515-27 Rasmussen on Global Eco-Justice

A. Ian Barbour, “Perspectives on Sustainability”, C&E, pp. 385-401. What can Christians learn from environmental scientists? And what can environmentalists learn from the ecumenical movement?

Student Report on Toddie Peter’s chapter in *Search of the Good Life*

B. What vision and values articulated in Peter’s essay and in Earth Charter principles would lead toward just and sustainable community?

C. The view from India on sustainable community. In the rest of this session we will discuss Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy*

**Session XIII. Becoming a Church for Ecology and Justice**

On the task ahead, read the conclusion to *A Greener Faith* (ch. 8). (Among Supplemental Readings, note the NCC Theologian’s Open Letter appended to David Rhoads ed., *God’s Earth is Sacred*.)

On basic steps for leaders of congregations to take, read: Hessel’s conclusion to the book, *Earth Habitat*

Then ponder these questions:

Why do some faith groups and congregations engage (significantly) in creation care or eco-justice ministry, while many others don’t?
What should we expect of ourselves and of faith communities in a historic time of deepening environmental (or eco-injustice) crisis?

What are next steps for congregations in the U.S. to take?
Examples of faith groups and networks moving in this direction

Course wrap up.
Final paper deadline
Before departing, let’s be clear about your final paper topic.

Appendix:

Memo from Prof. to Eco-Justice Ethics, Theology & Ministry Class
(Supply a SASE, if you want me to return of a hard copy of your paper.)

Re: YOUR FINAL PAPER, 12-15 pp. double-spaced, due ----.
You choose the topic in consultation with me, and I will read the paper with the following expectations (my standard of evaluation):

1. Clarity about the topic, problem or basic question(s) you are discussing pertaining to church’ & culture’s environmental challenge.

2. Explaining (briefly) why you are writing about it in our current situation, on your particular path, after taking this course.

3. Reflecting on the topic in terms of eco-justice vision and values.

4. Incorporating theological and ethical insights, or learnings, you’ve gained from class readings and sessions, that apply to this topic.

(#3 & #4 need some footnoting that shows evidence of sources used.)

5. Drawing some implications for faith community leadership in this historic time of turning.

6. Voluntary Postscript: How your thinking and doing has changed from before taking this course to where you are now finishing this paper.