

**SYLLABUS for “ECO-JUSTICE NOW” Ethics Course at Bangor Theological Seminary, Portland Campus, weekly sessions, 3 credits.**

Prof. Dieter T. Hessel, Ph.D. (Syllabus updated January, 2011)

**What is the shape of a robust Christian ethical response to the deepening environmental crisis?** Key norms of ecological and social justice fostered by the ecumenical movement will guide our assessment of this crisis and of constructive ways to respond.

This course utilizes a flexible pedagogy designed to equip participants to meet the global / local realities of increased ecological harm mixing with wider social inequity. We will

- summarize and reflect on insightful writings of pioneering ethicists,
- review pertinent biblical themes, reading scripture with a view from outdoors,
- do some theological re-visioning of our human vocation and God’s purpose,
- unpack eco-justice values in their depth and breadth,
- wrestle with ethical dilemmas we continue to face, as posed in case studies.

To shed light on our lifelong vocation to do eco-justice, particular sessions of the course will also explore five basic Earth citizen responsibilities, which are to:

- ∞ seek environmental justice for vulnerable people,
- ∞ protect ecosystems and other species,
- ∞ foster food security at home and abroad,
- ∞ join the movement to halt global warming, and
- ∞ build just and sustainable community.

Together we can discern ways to resist destructive economic globalization, consumerism, and fatalism about climate change or species extinction, and follow an eco-just path of caring for creation and ministering (whatever our occupation) to people and place.

**Textbooks:**

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

Dieter Hessel and Rosemary Ruether eds. (paperback edition, Harvard, 2000)

*Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach*

James Martin-Schramm and Robert Stivers (Orbis, 2003)

*A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and our Planet’s Future*

Roger Gottlieb (Oxford, 2006)

*A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming*  
Sallie McFague (Fortress Press, 2008)

*Justice in a Global Economy: Strategies for Home, Community, and World*  
Pamela K. Brubaker, Rebecca Todd Peters, Laura A. Stivers eds.  
(Westminster / John Knox Press, 2006)

+ Selected Readings that are posted on [www.EcoJusticeNow.org](http://www.EcoJusticeNow.org)

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

[This course opens a window on eco-justice ethics and praxis deserving our lifelong attention. Let's make class time mutually enjoyable. Course grade will be based on 30 % class participation focusing on assigned readings, and 70 % assigned reports and papers.]

1. Read assigned chapters in the texts & on the wevbsite to prepare for each weekly session, to be conducted in seminar style. Also, plan to
2. Give a report (oral and written) on a key Supplementary Reading as assigned. Prepare 4 pp. typed double-spaced review to turn into the prof., but give the class a 12 minute oral version of the same report:  
Explicate the material from the author's point of view.  
Summarize key points. And raise questions for discussion.
3. Research a Maine environmental organization focused on eco-justice or sustainability. You select the organization and clear with professor.
4. Expect to write and submit a Reflection Paper in which you do some eco-theological revisioning, as explained in the syllabus, session VIII..
5. Turn in a Final Paper. Expectations for it are at the end of this syllabus.

### **Supplementary Reading** (optional, on library reserve)

#### **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.)

*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)
- 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).
- Green Christianity: Five Ways to a Sustainable Future*  
Mark Wallace (Fortress Press, 2010)
- Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology*  
Denis Edwards (Orbis, 1995)
- Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility*  
James A. Nash (Abingdon, 1991).
- 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)
- Ecology, Justice, and Christian Faith: A Critical Guide to the Literature*  
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)
- Sacred Longings: The Ecological Spirit and Global Culture*  
Mary C. Grey (Fortress, 2004)
- Food and Faith: Justice, Joy and Daily Bread*  
Michael Schut, (Living the Good News, 2002)
- Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*  
Bill McKibben (Times Books, 2010)
- Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit: Biblical Ethics and Climate Change*  
Carol S. Robb (Fortress Press, 2010)

## Key Articles

William E. Gibson, “Eco-Justice, New Perspective for a Time of Turning,” in D. Hessel, ed., *For Creation’s Sake: Preaching, Ecology, and Justice* (Geneva, 1985), pp. 15-31; & Gibson, “Concluding Considerations, Continuing Journey” in Gibson, ed., *Eco-Justice – The Unfinished Journey* (SUNY, 2004), pp. 295-304.

Holmes Rolston, III, “Wildlife and Wildlands: A Christian Perspective,” in D. Hessel, ed., *After Nature’s Revolt: Eco-Justice and Theology* (Fortress, 1992), pp. 122-43, 208.

Holmes Rolston, III, “Duties to Animals, Plants, Species, and Ecosystems: Challenges for Christians,” in William E. Gibson, *Eco-Justice – Unfinished Journey*, pp. 133-45

Norman Habel, “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” in Habel, *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth* (Pilgrim, 2000).

Mary C. Grey, “Eco-Feminist Theology: Challenge and Inspiration,” *Sacred Longings: The Ecological Spirit and Global Culture* (Fortress, 2004), pp. 121-48.

Rebecca Todd Peters, “Globalization as Localization,” *In Search of the Good Life: the Ethics of Globalization* (Continuum, 2004), pp. 105-38.

Mark Wallace, “Read the Bible with Green Eyes,” *Green Christianity*, (Fortress, 2010) pp. 27-47.

Dieter Hessel, “The Church Ecologically Reformed,” *Earth Habitat Eco-Injustice and the Church’s Response*, edited by Hessel and Rasmussen (Fortress, 2001), pp. 185-206.

## **SESSION TOPICS AND READINGS**

### **Session I. Opening up the Subject**

#### **A. Review of the 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; "Religion and the Human Meaning of the Environmental Crisis", Introduction, *A Greener Faith*, pp. 3-18

## Session II. **Eco-Justice Vision and Values**

First, the prof's mini-lecture on The Task of Ethics. Notice that "Eco-Justice Ethics: A Brief Overview" (posted on EcoJusticeNow website) shows how this approach to ethics developed contextually since the 1970s.

### A. Sources of this E-J 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

What would you point to as key biblical leads for E-J Ethics?

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

Class discussion of the four E-J norms.

To prepare for session II, read: Hessel's "Introduction" to *Christianity & Ecology*; then "Exploring Basic Norms of Eco-Justice Ethics" on the E-J Now website, plus Martin-Schramm & Stiver's alternative statement of biblical leads to the same basic E-J norms in "Christian Resources and the Ethic of Ecological Justice," ch. 2 in *Christian Environmental Ethics*,

## Session III. **Exploring the Breadth and Depth of E-J Ethics**

A. On website [www.ecojusticenow.org](http://www.ecojusticenow.org) read Larry Rasmussen's paper discussing **Environmental Justice as a basic aspect of eco-justice**.

Notice how this reshapes one's presentation of the Eco crisis narrative.

Also read Vernice Miller Travis, *Social Transformation through Environmental Justice*, in *Xty & Ecology*, and Waterhouse, "Engaging Environmental Justice" in *Justice in a Global Economy*.

[Related supplementary readings: James Cone (ch.1) & Peggy Shepard (ch.9) in *Earth Habitat*.] Class discussion of the readings listed above.

Case study, “Skull Valley,” Ch. 10 in *Christian Environmental Ethics* is about Environmental Racism experienced by Native Americans.

B. We will tour the Earth Charter, issued in 2000. This statement of global ethics offers integrated ethical principles for sustainable living. Charter principles carefully specify operating principles of eco-justice ethics.

Student report on S. Rockefeller chapter (6) “Global Interdependence, the Earth Charter, and Christian Faith,” in *Earth Habitat*.

Read the Earth Charter text reprinted in the Appendix of *EH*, pp. 207ff.

[You can also find the text of the Earth Charter at [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org).]

To begin living this ethic, let’s ponder the commentary for case study (ch.4) in *Christian Environmental Ethics*. It focuses on sufficiency as the standard for consumption. Concentrate on “The Main Question” (pp. 71 ff) to bring biblical themes and Christian ethical norms to bear on the realities of over-consumption.

[“Guidelines for Case Briefs” in back of *CEE* should shape the way we approach any case study in class discussion.]

#### Session IV. **Our Duties to Otherkind**

Focusing on ethical responsibility to ecosystems and wild animals

A. Student Reports needed on Holmes Rolston’s essays that illumine human obligations to otherkind in light of environmental science.

Followed by class discussion of chapters by Cowdin and DeWitt in *Christianity & Ecology*. To prepare, read those chapters, and also Chs. 1 & 5 in Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith*.

C. Browse the web for information and insights from the International Year of Biodiversity.

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

## Session V. **Grappling with Climate Change / Global Warming**

A. Student Reports on McKibben's articles and his recent book, *EAARTH*, about the reality of global warming. (It's effects are already upon us, and the planet is changing significantly!

To prepare for discussion of climate change and the church's response, also read the article by David Hallman on the same subject in *Xty & Ecology*. And if you haven't seen or read Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, take a look before this session. Another supplementary reading, Carol Robb, *Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit*, Parts One and Three, also provides important background information.

B. We will spend some time considering how to respond to people of faith and leaders in business or politics who deny the global warming evidence.

Why the resurgence of global warming denial in the U.S. and U.K.?

What do we know about ways to engage this issue in New England?

C. Let's scan the Earth Charter for ethical principles that you / we would emphasize in leading others to act on global warming.

D. Look at EJNow website section on Earth Citizenship to read a précis of James Martin-Schramm, *Climate Justice*, & the substantive paper, *Climate Change: A Challenge to the Churches in South Africa*.

As time permits, let's wrestle with another case study, "Sustainable Energy Futures," (ch. 9) in *Christian Environmental Ethics*.

## Session VI. **Theology that Comprehends and Responds to New Climate**

Entire session will be focused on questions raised and insights gained from reading Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology*

A. Given global warming, she focuses on **who are we** and **who is God?**  
i.e., McFague clarifies the human vocation and what God is doing now.

Elizabeth Johnson, Ted Hiebert and Tom Berry chapters in *Xty & Ecology* should also inform our discussion of the Q; How does the quest for an eco-just future reframe the human vocation? So, how then shall we live?

When it comes too rethinking how God is at work in the world, concentrate on McFague, chapter 4. She theologizes with full awareness of current cosmology & ecology, as well as the biblical story. How does her approach affect your view of God's active presence and saving work (soteriology)?

**B. What Theological Revisioning and Reconstruction are you doing?**

E.g., is your doctrine of the Spirit earthy enough? Scan chapter on the Spirit by Wallace, and chapter on the Logos by Burton-Christie in *Xty & Ecology*.

[There are several other theological loci or “doctrines,” in addition to anthropology and pneumatology, to re-envision or reconstruct (covenant, Christology, eschatology, etc). Each class participant picks one locus of theology, and writes a 4-5 pp. reflection paper. For details see Session VIII.]

**Session VII 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*.

From what sources do we actually get authoritative guidance? (We will unpack John Wesley's Quadrilateral for our times.)

- B. Let's do some Bible reading with an Earth Community perspective and the view from outdoors. Mini-lecture on reading Bible this way.

Student Report on “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” in Norman Habel, *Readings From the Perspective of Earth* (in the Earth Bible Series).

Consider the strengths and weaknesses of this hermeneutic.

Also need a student report on “Bible Reading with Green Eyes,” Mark Wallace, *Green Christianity*, chapter II.

**Session VIII. Theological Re-visioning and Reconstruction**

Each student does 4-5 pp. reflection paper and submits it after off week. Pick one doctrine {i.e., theological locus) to focus on in your paper. Plan to share highlights of your reflection paper with the class.

[When doing theological revisioning in your reflection paper, clarify:

- the problem (problematic theological posture) you are addressing, (and be alert to previous interpretations of the doctrine that create, or just don't address this problem);
- your alternative theological emphasis or approach;
- resources you're drawing on to develop this reconstructive move.]

B. Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith*, Ch. 1 provides a brief overview of the task of theological reconstruction. So does Hessel's conclusion to *Earth Habitat*, pp. 187-197.

**C. Another option for a reflection paper that does theo-revisioning is to focus on The Challenge of Eco-Feminism**

Preparatory reading on this topic: Chapters by Rosemary Ruether & Heather Eaton on eco-feminist thought in *Xty & Ecology*  
+ Grey, *Sacred Longings*, "The Inspiration of Feminist theology."

**Session IX. Fostering Food Security at Home and Abroad**

A. Scan EcoJustice Now web site postings on Hunger Action and Food Security, and read chapters by Peters, Jung and Cobb in *Justice in a Global Economy* to discern basic issues posed by industrial agriculture.

B. And plan to discuss *Xian Environmental Ethics*, Case 12 "Harvesting Controversy".

C. What alternative model of agriculture do we want to support?

Toward an alternative food system, with examples in the region.

[Also, be sure to look at the NCC Eco-Justice Program web site.] 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.]

**Session X. Just & Sustainable Community:  
Alternative to Destructive Globalization**

A. To prepare, read *Christianity & Ecology* chapters by Maguire, pp.403-27; French, 473-95; & Cobb, 498-511. Also see in *Christianity & Ecology*, Rasmussen chapter on “Global Eco-Justice” and Ian Barbour chapter exploring “Perspectives on Sustainability”.

In addition, *Justice in a Global Economy*, Introduction & chapters 5, 9, 10 & 12 begin to point the way ahead. (EJNow website has a review of this book.)

Student Reports on chapters 5 & 6 of Peters *In Search of the Good Life* would also help to focus the discussion of

B. What vision and values articulated in above readings and in Earth Charter principles lead toward just and sustainable community?

[In this next to last session, let’s clarify: What kind of final paper the prof. expects and that students want to write will complete this course?  
SEE MEMO at the end of this syllabus.]

**Session XI, Becoming a Church for Ecology and Justice**

A. On the task ahead, read chapters 4 & 8 of Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith*, and look back at Gottlieb, pp. 45-56.

(Among Supplemental Readings, also note the NCC Theologians’ Open Letter to Church and Society, “Gods Earth is Sacred,” published as an appendix in David Rhoads ed., *Earth & Word*.)

B. On basic approach to eco-justice leadership of the church see *Christianity & Ecology* NRPE reports and concluding chapter by Rosemary Ruether.

After class discussion of this material, Hessel will summarize insights gained from years of work on this subject, and assess the response of the mainline Churches in the U.S., i.e.,

Where were/are the churches in meeting the environmental challenge?

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 crisis and eco-justice engagement? Examples of engaged faith groups & networks.

---

MEMO To Eco-Justice Now Ethics Class

Re: YOUR FINAL PAPER, 12-15 pp. double-spaced, due ----.  
(Supply a SASE, if you want Prof. to return of a hard copy of your paper.)

You choose the topic in consultation with me, and I will read the paper with the **following expectations** (i.e., 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.