

Religion and Environmentalism 2024 (HUJI 49605 and UHAIFA 195.1200)

Instructor: Dr. Tanhum Yoreh

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Course hours: Thursdays, 16:30-18:00 (Jerusalem time)

Office hours: by appointment

Course description

Religion and environment are two areas that are often viewed as being at odds with each other. For instance, religious individuals have made claims that environmentalism is secular, leftist, and pagan. Secular environmentalists have pointed to religion as being anthropocentric, patriarchal, hierarchical, and an impediment to pro-environmental behavior. Yet, over the past decades we have witnessed the rise of the religious environmental movement. Proponents of this movement have stressed the integral engagement of religion with the natural world and the moral imperative to protect the environment that is motivated by a deep sense of responsibility.

This course will introduce students to central ideas, thinkers, and theories in the field of religion and environment. We will look primary historical sources ranging from the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Quran, Talmud, Hadith, church sermons, and ethical treatises, and complement them with contemporary writings by religious leaders and activists. Together, we will explore the opportunities and barriers, and the proponents and opponents to religious expressions of environmentalism. We will look at the unique language and values that set religious environmentalism apart from other expressions of environmentalism and explore common ground. If possible, we will hear from activists in the field who speak about the environmental initiatives they are undertaking in their communities.

Evaluation

Participation (10%): Attendance is mandatory. You are expected to come to class ready to participate having read the weekly readings – you can miss one class without being penalized. Those who attend all 11 weeks will earn a 1% bonus.

Weekly readings (15%): There are 8 weeks with assigned readings. You will be responsible for completing a short (250-350 words) assignment for 5 out of the 8 weeks. The guidelines will be available during the first week of class and also posted on Moodle. Those who submit assignments will be granted bonus points of 2% per assignment for a maximum of 6%.

Midterm quiz (25%): An in-class multiple choice quiz will take place on June 13

Final essay (50%): You will write an argumentative essay on the central theme of the course: faith-based environmentalism in the Abrahamic context. The essay is due on the final day of classes. Complete instructions and an evaluation rubric will be discussed in class and posted on Moodle.

Delivery: The course will be delivered synchronously online in English on Zoom according to the weekly schedule. The order/content of the lectures may be changed. Students will be informed of these changes in advance. Students are free to converse in Hebrew in discussions.

Schedule:

Week 1 (May 9) – An Introduction to religion and environment

Week 2 (May 16) – Theory and practice in religion and environment

Khoersen, Jens, Julia Blanc, and Fabian Huber. “Tensions in Religious Environmentalism.” In *Religious Environmental Activism: Emerging Conflicts and Tensions in Earth Stewardship*. Edited by Jens Khoersen, Julia Blanc, and Fabian Huber, 1-25. New York: Routledge, 2023.

Week 3 (May 23) – The Lynn White Jr. Hypothesis

White Jr., Lynn. “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.” *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207.

Week 4 (May 30) – *Renewal* (film) – different expressions of religious environmental activism

Week 5 (June 6) – The Greening of Religion Hypothesis

Taylor, Bron, Gretel Van Wieren, and Bernard Zaleha. “Lynn White Jr and the Greening-of-Religion Hypothesis.” *Conservation Biology* 30 no. 5 (2016):1000–1009.

Week 6 (June 13) – Judaism and environmentalism

Yoreh, T. “Compassion and Self-Concern in Halakhic Environmental Decision-Making.” *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 26, no. 1-2 (2021): 29-54.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/15685357-20210901>

June 20 Eid al Adha – No classes

Week 7 (June 27) – Christianity and environmentalism

Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum: To All People of Good Will on the Climate Crisis*. (October 4, 2023).

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html

Week 8 (July 4) – Islam and environmentalism

Koehrsen, Jens. “Muslims and Climate Change: How Islam, Muslim Organizations, and Religious Leaders Influence Climate Change Perceptions and Mitigation Activities.” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* (2021) 12:e702. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.702>

Week 9 (July 11) – Journey of the Universe (film) – a new cosmology?

Sideris, Lisa H. "On Letting a Thousand Flowers Bloom: Religious Scholarship in a Time of Crisis." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83, no. 2, (2015): 356-372.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfv026>

Week 10 (July 18) – Typologies of Jewish religious activism in Israel (guest lecture)

Week 11 (July 25) –Moral tools to limiting consumption

"Consumption, Wastefulness, and Simplicity in Ultra-Orthodox Communities." *Studies in Judaism, Humanities and the Social Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2019): 137-152.