

**School of Theology and Ministry  
Seattle University  
900 Broadway  
Seattle, WA 98122**

STMM 506  
Fall 2008  
Hunthausen 100  
1:30 – 4:20

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*Human beings are a part of the whole we call the Universe, a small region in time and space. They regard themselves, their ideas, and their feelings as separate and apart from all the rest. It is something like an optical illusion in their consciousness. This illusion is a sort of prison; it restricts us to our personal aspirations and limits our affective life to a few people very close to us. Our task should be to free ourselves from this prison, opening up our circle of compassion in order to embrace all living creatures and all of nature in its beauty.*

Albert Einstein

*“We are six billion humans and we need to learn to live with one another and with all the other ten trillion species of life in a mutually enhancing way. We fail at the present time precisely because we fail to see and understand what it is that surrounds us....”<sup>1</sup>*

Brian Swimme

*“If we do not change direction, we will end up where we are heading.”*

Ancient Chinese Proverb

*I dare us to THINK*

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will be a collaborative exploration into shaping Earth-honoring Christianities in the context of the ecological crisis facing humankind today. Particular attention will be given to the complex intertwining of ecological degradation and social injustice in its many forms. The methodological lens will be Christian ethics, and the religious lens Christian traditions. The course will approach Christian traditions with a hermeneutic of critique, retrieval, and reconstruction. Attention will be given to reading Scripture from “perspectives of the Earth. Participants will probe the connections between ideas about nature, understandings of “human,” faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ, science, and the human species’ relationship to our planetary home. Students will be encouraged to formulate or refine their working understanding

of normative Earth-human relations, and their understanding of human vocation in relationship to the rest of creation. The informing undercurrent of this course will be hope and moral-spiritual power in the face of the profound moral challenge posed by unsustainable Earth-human relations.

### **GOALS OF THE COURSE**

The overall goal is that participants will experience themselves as critical, constructive, collaborative, and hope-bearing theological ethicists capable of helping the church forge and follow paths toward Earth-honoring Christianities (eco-reformation), and will be better equipped to grow in that capacity. To those ends, the course aims at enabling all participants (students and professor) to develop their:

- understanding of the Earth crisis, the roles of Christian belief and practice in contributing to that crisis historically and contemporarily, and the roles of the political-economic structures in contributing to the same.
- awareness of and connections to the array of efforts toward eco-reformation, that currently are underway in Christian communities worldwide (theological reconstruction, biblical re-interpretation, reconstruction of Christian ethics, liturgical innovation, public policy advocacy, education, greening congregations, public witness, evangelical defiance, etc.)
- analysis of links between Earth's health and social justice.
- moral imagination regarding a spectrum of paths toward reversing the Earth crisis.
- hope and sense of agency for bringing faith to bear on the unprecedented challenge facing humankind today: unsustainable Earth-human relations wed to social injustice.
- capacity to hear the voice of the Earth and learn from it.
- working familiarity with the discipline of Christian Ethics: its methods, tools, "languages," vocabulary and concepts, vibrancy, contested areas, and multi-faceted diversity.
- skill in various modes of thinking (systematic and creative; analytical and synthetic; sympathetic and critical), and experience the value of so doing for the life of faith.
- capacity for asking good probing question about all of the above.

(Yes, it may sound ambitious, but I think we will do it -- and will have some fun as a community of theologically informed and critically conscious Christian ethicists working together!)

### **TEACHING/LEARNING METHODS**

1. Critical reading of texts, and varied forms of interaction with their authors. (Please consider yourselves dialogue partners with each other and with the authors read. Put your knowledge and experience in conversation with the knowledge of other people: other students, contemporaries whose perspectives will be read, faith forebearers, and the professor.)
2. Structured classroom question-asking and discussion.
3. Peer consultation groups
4. Small group project (presentation with accompanying written page)
5. Eco-centric self experiment

6. Earth Encounter Journal
7. Two short papers
8. Classroom “dialectures” with the professor
9. Students leading discussion of assigned reading
10. Ritual
11. Celebration

## **REQUIREMENTS**

Requirements are listed below. All will be explained fully in class. Requirements that are evaluated for a grade are listed in the subsequent section of the syllabus (“evaluation”).

1. Contribute your particular gifts to building a trusting and exciting learning community out of this class.
  - Bring your relevant experience and knowledge “to the table of discourse” in the course.
  - Aim at not only your own learning but also your colleagues’ learning.
  - Participate fully and respectfully in small group discussion and in full class discussion.
2. Attend every class, arriving on time. See me if you think that you are not able to meet this requirement. If you *must* miss a session, you are required to submit an abstract of each reading for the day, and a set of questions and comments that you would have brought to the class discussion. The questions and comments must indicate that you have placed the authors read in dialogue with each other. This “make-up work should require about three hours of engagement with the material, matching the time that you would have engaged had you been in attendance. I recommend two complementary steps: ask a colleague in the class to tape the session for you, and ask two colleagues to take especially readable notes for you to copy, noting in particular any revisions made in the syllabus. PLEASE NOTE: There WILL be changes in the syllabus in response to the needs and gifts of the class. You, not I, are responsible for learning what those changes have been.
3. Read ALL assigned readings BEFORE class; have taken notes on them in a form that enables you to contribute your knowledge and questions in class discussion.
4. In a “peer consultation group,” serve as consultant to one another on your work in this class.
5. Small Group Project and Presentation of it. This presentation to the class (with a very brief complementary written piece) will enable your colleagues in class to draw upon your experience, research, and knowledge. Description and instructions will be handed out. FYI at this point, a draft of those instructions is attached in Appendix D.
8. Complete the two assigned papers.
9. Record entries in your Earth Log on a weekly basis. (To be explained in class.)

10. As part of your class participation:

- Present one of the class readings according to a format provided by the professor.
- Complete the “eco-centric self experiment.” (To be explained in class.)

## EVALUATION

Participation (30%)

Attendance; completion of all required reading and assignments on time; verbal and non-verbal contribution to a trusting learning community in class sessions (offering knowledge/ experience/ perspectives, listening attentively, respecting others’ opinions, being aware and supportive of others’ learning goals); eco-centric self experiment; leading discussion of assigned reading; behavior that is non-disruptive and respectful of self and others.

Small group project presentation with accompanying written page (20%).

First paper (20%)

Second paper (20%)

Earth Log (10%)

Presentation of an assigned reading (included in participation grade)

Eco-centric Self Experiment (included in participation grade)

## ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic honesty is assumed. Failure to adhere to the academic honesty policies of Seattle University may result in failing the course or the assignment involved. Few things are more painful for me as a teacher than encountering academic dishonesty. PLEASE see me if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism. Where plagiarism is unintentional, a little knowledge will prevent a great deal of pain on your part and mine!

## REQUIRED READINGS (and optional supplementary reading)

MaFague, Sallie	A New Climate for Theology	Fortress, 2008
McKibben, Bill	Deep Economy	Times Books/Henry Holt, 2007
Suzuki, David	The Sacred Balance	GreyStone Books, 2002
Gottlieb, Roger S.	A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism & Our Planet's Future	Oxford University Press, 2006
	Reflections (Spring 2007) Vol 94 # 1	Yale Divinity School, 2007

A Course Reader (To be purchased at Seattle University Reprographics.)

Optional Supplementary Reading

Habel, Norman, ed. *Readings from the Perspective of Earth: The Earth Bible*, vol. 1. Sheffield: Academic Press and Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000.

**COURSE SCHEDULE, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS**

*PLEASE NOTE: I advise reading the readings for each day in the order assigned. They are arranged intentionally to facilitate comprehension.*

**SEPT. 29 (Week 1)**

**The Cosmos Story and Where Is Home? AND  
What Has Religion to Do with Ecology?**

**OCT. 6 (Week 2)**

**The Earth Crisis and Political-Economy: Matters of Faith**

- "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity (on the web)
- "Reflections": Parker
- McFague: Intro and Ch 1 and Ch 2
- McKibben: Intro and Chap 1
- Gottlieb: Preface and Introduction

**OCT. 13 (Week 3)**

**Theology and Roots of the Earth Crisis**

- Gottlieb : 19 – 24 (up through and including last full paragraph)
- Kinsley: 103-114 (Course Reader)

**Eco-theology and Roots of Earth-Honoring Christianity**

- Kinsley 115-119
- Gottlieb: 24 last paragraph - 56.
- Reflections: Grimm/Tucker- Reflections: Bouma-Prediger
- Reflections: Cizik
- Reflections: Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
- McFague: Ch. 4

**Oct. 20 (Week 4)**

**Who Are We? Theological and Scientific Anthropology**

- Suzuki: Intro, ch 1, and one of the following chapters (2,3,4,5,or 6)
- McFague: ch 3

**Oct. 27 (Week 5)**

## **Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice (Social Justice and the Integrity of Creation)**

### Readings:

- Sachs: 9-18 (Course Reader)
- Travis-Miller (Course Reader; note that the title page is : *Christianity and Ecology*)
- “Proceedings of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit” (on-line)
- “God’s Earth is Sacred: An Open Letter to Church and Society in the United States (written by National Council of Churches) On-line at:  
<http://www.ncccusa.org/news/14.02.05theologicalstatement.html>
- Moe-Lobeda: Christian Ethics Toward Earth-Honoring Faiths (by email)

## **Eco-Feminism**

### Readings:

- Gottlieb 48-9.
- Eaton (Course Reader)

## **Nov. 3 (Week 6)**

### **Earth Community, Earth’s Economy**

- Reflections: Rasmussen
- McFague: ch 5
- McKibben: Ch 2, 3, and 4.

## **Nov. 10 (Week 7)**

### **Eco- Reformation: Practice and Theological Reconstruction**

- Rasmussen and Moe-Lobeda, “The Reform Dynamic” (Course Reader)
- Gottlieb: ch 6 and 7
- McFague: ch 6

## **Nov. 17 (Week 8)**

### **Eco- Reformation: Practice and Theological Reconstruction**

- Gottlieb: Ch 3 and 4
- McFague: chap 7
- Reflections: Maathai

## **Nov. 24 (Week 9)**

### **Faith, Hope , and Moral-Spiritual Agency**

- Moe-Lobeda: Public Church ch 3 and 4 (Course Reader)

- Moe-Lobeda: Healing a Broken World, Ch 6 (Course Reader)
- McKibben: ch 5 and Afterword

### **Dec. 1 (Week 10)**

#### **Faith, Hope, and Moral-Spiritual Agency AND Celebration**

- Gottlieb: ch 8.
- McFague: ch 8 and 9.

## **APPENDICES**

- I. Guidelines for Responsible Collaborative Learning in this Learning Community/ Class.
- II. Moe-Lobeda's *Working* "Definition" of Christian Ethics.
- III. Group Project and Presentation (DRAFT only)

#### Guidelines for Responsible Collaborative Learning in this Learning Community/Class

1. One never sees clearly until one sees the world outside of one's inherited perspectives. This implies a commitment to enabling the perspectives of historically under-represented people and peoples to be heard. The course is designed to honor that commitment.
2. Knowledge is not what is produced and transmitted by experts, but has to do with how we know, learn, and engage our world. Learning happens more deeply when it is, at least in part: collaborative/relational, participatory/active, integrative, experiential, and embodied. Therefore, in this class we will strive to: 1) be collaborative in our inquiry; 2) actively interpret material; 3) make interdisciplinary connections even within the discipline of Christian ethics; 4) draw upon and honor the rich life experience brought by each student, and 5) attend to what is learned through the senses and the heart, as well as through the intellect.
3. Different students learn differently . We will engage in diverse modes of learning.
4. The ecological crises of our day and the imperative of forging sustainable Earth-human relations call for a shift from anthropocentric philosophical, theological, and scientific frameworks to eco-centric ones. This shift entails fascinating and difficult moves in language, conceptual frameworks, theory, and method. We will struggle toward those shifts, recalling, as we interact with the course material, that human being is part of a larger web of life.
5. Follow your intellectual passions. If you do you'll find yourself surrounded by a lovely community of friends--living and passed. If you become highly interested in particular moral situation, historical community, concept, figure, or dilemma, and wish to do further reading and work on it, see me.
6. Aim at questions and at provisional answers not at answers cast in concrete.

#### Moe-Lobeda's *Working* "Definition" of Christian Ethics:

Christian Ethics is the art-science enabling Christian communities to draw critically upon their traditions and read "the signs of the times," in order to shape ways of living consistent with faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ and experienced in the Spirit. Said differently, Christian

Ethics is the disciplined art of coming to know ever more fully the mystery that is God and the historical realities of life on Earth, and holding these two in one breath, so that we may shape ways of living consistent with and empowered by God being with, in, among, and for creation. “Knowing” here refers not merely to “knowledge of,” but to “being in relationship with.”<sup>ii</sup> Where vision and knowledge of God and of life’s realities are obscured or distorted, a task of Christian Ethics is *to know and see differently*, so that we might *live differently*. Where dominant forces distort historical realities by describing them falsely, ethics must “redescribe the world.”<sup>iii</sup>

### Small Group Project and Presentation (DRAFT)

*Content of small group project:* Your small group project will explore and elaborate one piece of one path toward Earth-honoring Christianities. That “piece” will be a step that a particular faith community could take to move forward on the path toward becoming more Earth-honoring, and, thus, to assist the broader web of Christian communities in the US in that direction. (The faith community should be an actual community to which at least one member of your group is connected. The “step” selected should be--in some way--relevant to the faith contexts of all group members.) Presentation or subsequent discussion should touch on the following content areas. (You will need to distribute them among group members.)

- Describe the step
- Locate it in the “ten fingers”
- Locate this step in the broader array of steps toward eco-reformation
- Identify obstacles
- Identify ways around those obstacles (and, if you so choose, sources of moral-spiritual power for overcoming the obstacles)
- Identify ambiguities or paradoxes inherent in this step
- Drawing upon the assigned texts for intellectual tools, describe what moral anthropology is presupposed or reinforced by this move, and what theological anthropology is proscribed or challenged by it
- How could one important insight of McKibben be of service to the community in living toward this step.
- Drawing upon the course material (readings, dialectures, discussions, site visits), describe a dimension of commonly accepted political-economic theory that this step challenges, a currently in-place political-economic public policy that it challenges, and a commonly accepted economic practice that it challenges.
- Optional: Sketch further the contours of theo-ethical rational in terms of :
  - over-all theological convictions
  - norms as principles that lead to realizing the overall theological convictions
  - norms as rules that lead to realizing the principles
- Optional: Identify resources available to enable on-going effort in this area (i.e. organizations, on-line resources, literature, etc.)

*Process for small group project:*

- The “presentation” could be (or could include a combination of) group discussion, narrative, video clip, drama, lecture, baptismal or eucharistic rites, other dimensions of

liturgy or worship, a congregational or community educational program, a program of “public witness,” a faith-based legislative action agenda around a particular issue (i.e. green taxes, ...), a proposal for a “greening congregation,” ....

- Each group member will submit a one-page summary (narrative or outline form) of your contribution to the project *in terms of the “content of small group project” requirements above.*

- You have approximately one half hour. If you think that you will need more time, please so inform me.

- You may choose to have your presentation in the classroom or elsewhere as long as the elsewhere is accessible for all.

- The project will not require substantive reading outside of assigned readings. Instead your sources of knowledge will be: the assigned readings; classroom work; and your research into resources available to enable on-going effort in this area.

Evaluation criteria for the project will be passed out in class.

***THANK YOU FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF WORKING WITH YOU!!!!***

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<sup>1</sup>. Brian Swimme, *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 26.

<sup>ii</sup> This distinction is made clear in the Spanish language. Two Spanish words translate the English “to know.” One, “*saber*,” refers to cognitive knowledge of something. The other, “*conocer*,” refers to knowing as being in relationship with.

<sup>iii</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Voices of the Night--Against Justice,” in Walter Brueggemann, Thomas H. Groome, and Sharon Parks, *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, and Walk Humbly* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 17.