

Religion and Nature

RELSTDS 162-001 / ES 162-001

Instructor: Michael Baltutis
Classroom: Halsey 202
Class times: MWF 10:20-11:20pm
Class Number: 42207/42126
Requirement Fulfilled: Humanities

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Course Description:

This course is ultimately based on two simple questions: “What is nature?” and “How do people live in space?”. Based on the difficulty of defining “nature”, we will observe how people live in cities – the opposite of nature – and the social, political, environmental, economic, artistic, and religious conditions that are both *required for* and that *result from* urban life. Since this is a Religious Studies course, we will focus on those religious elements – myths, rituals, texts, worldviews, etc. – that provide us insight into the interplay between urban life and nature.

Observing these two types of space from an Environmental Studies perspective, we will be interested in the environmental impact of cities on the people who live there – either by choice or of necessity – and the religious impact of the inevitable environmental degradation that results from the construction of cities.

To handle these related topics, our reading list will be rather diverse and will include: (1) translations from primary sources that describe, glorify, and problematize cities; (2) theoretical material on the sacred-ness of cities; (3) ethnographies on the lives of immigrants and their religious lives in urban America; (4) films and music that are products of and reflections on urban life; and (5) print and on-line readings dealing with the (sometimes awkward) relationships between world religions and environmental issues.

Class Policies:

1. *Office Hours:* In addition to my office hours listed above, I am available at *many* other times throughout the week. *Do not hesitate* to see me before or after class to set up another time if those don't work!
2. *Attendance:* Since lectures and in-class activities complement, rather than duplicate, reading materials, attendance and participation in class are crucial to your learning. If you have to miss a class, please find out from other students what we covered that day. Let me know if you have any follow-up questions.
3. *Assignments:* Please turn assignments in *on time*. I will deduct a point for each day that your assignment is late, and I will not accept assignments more than a week late.
4. *Plagiarism:* Academic honesty and integrity is expected at all times. Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated and will be handled according to university guidelines.
5. *Discussion:* Please be respectful towards your fellow students and the instructor. Diversity of opinion and constructive criticism are assets to the many and fruitful discussions that we will have during this course.
6. *Cell Phones:* I love my cell phone, and though I will not turn mine off during class, I will do my best to keep it away. I ask that you do the same. So, unless you are texting me the answer to a question, please leave your cell phones out of sight and out of mind. Thanks!

Required Texts:

1. *River of Love in an Age of Pollution: the Yamuna River of Northern India* (ROL). David L. Haberman. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. 9780520247985
2. *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (GOC). Robert A. Orsi (ed.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. 9780253212766
3. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Penguin Classics. 9780140441000

Assignments:

1. Attendance and Participation:

Many of the outcomes of this course – both concrete and abstract – will come from attending and participating in class on a regular basis. Everybody enrolled in this class already knows something about its main topics (religion, nature, and city life); participation will take a variety of oral and written forms that will allow all students to comfortably tell us what they already know or what's on their mind.

2. Response papers:

You will be responsible for submitting short response papers (usually two pages each) *via D2L* based on recent readings, lectures, films, music, and in-class conversation. For most responses, I will provide (in class and/or via e-mail) a question for you to respond to. Your response – double-spaced written in a standard font (Calibri or Times New Roman 12) – is due by the end of the day on the following Monday.

3. Religion & Ecology Presentation:

Groups of four students will present in-class reports on one particular religious tradition and its ecological position(s) as provided on the "Forum on Religion and Ecology" website <http://fore.research.yale.edu/information/index.html>. All students will be responsible for reading each introductory essay in preparation for each presentation; the presenting group will be responsible for presenting on all of the subsidiary materials as well.

4. Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature Entry:

Finally, you will be responsible for a 3-4 page report on a single primary source of your choosing that relates to an urban or environmental issue also of your choosing, a report that could find a home in a future edition of the newly published (and UWO directed!) *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (BL31 .E465 2005).

Grading:

The four components described above will factor into your final grade:

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|-----------------------------|-----|
| 1. Att and Part: | 20% |
| 2. Response papers: | 45% |
| 3. Religion & Ecology Pres: | 15% |
| 4. Encyclopedia Entry: | 20% |

Weekly Response Grading (3 pts each):

0 (F) = not submitted on time

1 (C-) = provides factual information but lacks sufficient analysis, simply quoting or summarizing ideas from the readings and films without analyzing the material, or has numerous grammatical mistakes

2 (B) = demonstrates ability to concisely summarize and analyze information from sources, with specific citations

3 (A) = shows exceptional ability to digest, analyze, and process the concepts in the readings from all sources with specific citations

The UWO Writing Center:

All UW Oshkosh students are eligible for one-to-one conferencing at the Writing Center. Their free, confidential tutoring is designed to help students work through assignments and gain additional writing skills. Trained peer consultants can assist students at any stage of the composition process, from brainstorming for topics to fine-tuning a final draft. The Writing Center now offers e-mail tutoring. More information can be found on their website at <http://www.uwosh.edu/wcenter>. The Writing Center is located in the Student Success Center (729 Elmwood Blvd., Ste. 102 • wcenter@uwosh.edu • 920-424-1152).

Weekly Reading Schedule:

Part One: Constructing and Locating the City

1. January 28. Introductions

- M: *Introductions*
W: Sacred Space (Eliade, D2L)
F: Introduction: Crossing the City Line (GOC, Orsi 1-3)

2. February 4. Urbanism

- M: Overview of World Religions & Ecology: <http://fore.research.yale.edu/information/index.html>
Religion and Ecology assignment given
W: Urbanism As a Way of Life (Wirth, D2L)
F: **Film: Tokyo! (Interior Design)** <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0976060/>

3. February 11. Biblical Cities, Part I

- M: I Kings 5-7: <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=i%20kings%205;&version=31>
Lamentations 1-5: <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Lamentations;&version=31>
Revelation 21: http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?book_id=73&chapter=21&version=31
W: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
F: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

Part Two: Immigration & the Urban Jungle

4. February 18. Biblical Cities, Part II

- M: Introduction: Crossing the City Line (GOC, Orsi 13-32)
W: Introduction: Crossing the City Line (GOC, Orsi 32-40)
Judaism and Ecology presentation
F: Introduction: Crossing the City Line (GOC, Orsi 40-58)
Film: Tokyo! (Merde) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0976060/>

5. February 25. The Urban Jungle I

- M: Moses of the South Bronx: Aging and Dying in the Old Neighborhood (GOC, Kugelmass 231)
W: "The Cathedral of the Open Air": The Salvation Army's Sacralization of Sacred Space, New York City (1880-1910) (GOC Winston 367)
Initial ERN assignment given
F: **Christianity and Ecology presentation**

6. March 4. The Urban Jungle II

- M: Transnationalism, Old and New: New York Immigrants (D2L)
Working (D2L)
W: A West Indian Life in Britain (D2L)
Office Work and the Crack Alternative (D2L)
F: **Islam and Ecology presentation**
Initial ERN assignment due

7. March 11. The Urban Jungle III

- M: **Public Policy / Science and Ecology presentation**
W: "We Go Where the Italians Live": Religious Processions as Ethnic and Territorial Markers in a Multi-ethnic Brooklyn Neighborhood (GOC, Sciorra 310)
F: **Film: Tokyo! (Shaking Tokyo)** <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0976060/>

8. March 18. Spring Break

Part Three: Lived Religion in New York City

9. March 25. Lived Religion in NYC I

- M: "Grand Theft Auto takes on New York": <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/28/arts/28auto.html>
W: Staying Grounded in a High-Rise Building: Ecological Dissonance ... in Haitian Vodou (GOC, Brown 79)
F: **Ethics / Economics and Ecology presentation**

10. April 1. Lived Religion in NYC II

- M: The Stations of the Cross: Christ, Politics, and Processions on NYC's Lower East Side (GOC, Ashley 341)
W: **Encyclopedia Entry round-table**
F: **no class today**; prepare for next week's film by checking out the following film sites:
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0383028/>
<http://www.sonyclassics.com/synecdocheny/>

11. April 8. Lived Religion in NYC III

- M-F: **Film: *Synecdoche, New York***

Part Four: Nature Religion and Ecological Degredation

12. April 15. A Religion of Nature

- M: Recap of *Synecdoche, NY*
***Synecdoche, New York* assignment due Monday, Week 12**
W: ***Indigenous Religions and Ecology* presentation**
F: Focus Introduction: Aquatic Nature Religion (Taylor, ATLA Religion)

13. April 22. Hinduism and Ecology I

- M: Pinned on Karma Rock: Whitewater Kayaking as Religious Experience (Sanford, ATLA Religion)
New Streams of Religion: Fly Fishing as a Lived Religion of Nature (Snyder, ATLA Religion)
Surfing into Spirituality and a New, Aquatic Nature Religion (Taylor, ATLA Religion)
W: Introduction (ROL, introduction)
F: A River of Delights, a River of Troubles (ROL, ch. 1)

14. April 29. Hinduism and Ecology II

- M: The Source: Mother of Life (ROL, ch. 2)
***Hinduism and Ecology* presentation**
W: River of Death (ROL, ch. 3)
F: Goddess of Love (ROL, ch. 4)
***Gender and Ecology* presentation**

15. May 6. Hinduism and Ecology III

- M: Signs of Hope (ROL, ch. 5)
***Buddhism and Ecology* presentation**
W: A Matter of Balance (ROL, ch. 6)
F: **Final in-class essay: *River of Love***
Encyclopedia Entry due