

ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY: GOD AND CREATION IN TRAVAIL

Instructor: Timothy R. Eberhart

Email: timothy.eberhart@garrett.edu

Course Description

This course is a survey of major figures and ideas in the field of Christian ecological theology over the past half century. Students will examine the development of contemporary theological reflection on the promises, dynamics, and sufferings of God and the creation by reading primary texts from a diversity of perspectives, including from Lutheran/Reformed, Trinitarian, Feminist, Catholic, Liberation, Evangelical, Womanist, and Process theologies.

Course Objectives

1. To gain familiarity with key figures, perennial questions, and prominent approaches in Christian ecological theology.
2. To deepen awareness of the philosophical, theological, and ideological worldviews contributing to the environmental crises we face today.
3. To understand how theological constructions about “nature,” “environment,” “body,” “creation,” “world,” etc. intersect with matters of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.
4. To increase proficiency communicating and engaging theologically and doctrinally for the sake of empowering individuals and communities to struggle for a more just and sustaining world.

Required Texts

Joseph Sittler, *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics* (Eerdmans, 2000)

Thomas Berry, *Thomas Berry: Selected Writings on the Earth Community* (Orbis Books, 2014)

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (Harper Collins, 1992)

Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (Fortress Press, 1993)

Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Fortress Press, 1999)

Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation* (Fortress Press, 1998)

Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Baker Academic, 2010)

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

Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Georgetown University Press, 2013)

Denominational Resources (TBD)

Pope Francis, *LAUDATO SI'* (www.laudatosi.com, 2015)

Course Requirements

- 1) Read all assigned literature and participate actively in class discussions. Because this course will be run as a seminar, your close reading of the texts and class engagement is crucial to its success.
- 2) Submit a background paper (5 pages) on one of the authors, providing biographical information, a summary of her key contributions to the field of ecological theology, and a critical assessment of her ideas in light of your present and/or future context of ministry.
- 3) Based on your background paper, present an introduction of the author to class (20 min).
- 4) Submit a final paper (15-18 pages) in which you articulate your constructive contribution to the field of ecological theological reflection by focusing upon a particular doctrinal loci (e.g. Christology, Creation, Anthropology, etc.) in light of an environmental crisis as it intersects with a particular manifestation of social injustice (e.g. poverty, racism, sexism).

Note: Background and final papers should be submitted in Microsoft Word format, double-spaced, Times Roman font, 12pt type, 1 inch margins.

Final Grading

1. Class Participation – 30%
2. Background Paper and Presentation – 20%
3. Final Paper – 50%

Grading Criteria for Class Participation

1. You attend every class period and are on time.
2. You demonstrate intimate familiarity with the assigned readings for the day.
3. You listen carefully to the instructor and to your classmates.
4. You are an active participant in the class discussions.
5. Your participation is edifying to others and contributes to the seminar as a whole.

Grading Criteria for Background and Final Paper

1. You accomplish what the assignment asks of you.
2. Your paper offers a clear thesis statement, follows a logical organization, is well developed, and is free of grammatical and spelling errors.
3. You enter into intelligent, critical conversation with the course texts and conversations.
4. You demonstrate a depth and creativity of theological and contextual insight.

Grading Criterion for Presentation

1. Your presentation is clear, substantive, and engaging.

Grading Scale

97-100	A+	77-79	C+
93-96	A	73-76	C
90-92	A-	70-72	C-
87-89	B+	67-69	D+
83-86	B	63-66	D
80-82	B-	<62	F

Course Schedule

1. August 27

No assigned readings

2. September 3

Sittler, 51-190

3. September 10

Berry, 11-194

4. September 17

Radford Ruether, 115-274

5. September 24

Moltmann, 1-19, 72-103, 158-184, 215-296

6. October 1

Gebara, 19-192

7. October 8

Baker-Fletcher, v-131

8. October 22

Bouma-Prediger, 57-183

9. October 29

Wallace, 26-158

10. November 5

Jenkins, 1-66, 190-281

11. November 12

Denominational Resources

12. November 19

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*

13. December 3

Final Paper Presentations

Please see Student Handbook for sections providing policy details on the following:

ADA—MTSO seeks to remove barriers to inclusion in its learning communities. Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs at the beginning of the semester. Please contact the Director of Student Services to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Any accommodation must be agreed upon prior to the due date of the affected course requirement.

Class attendance—Regular attendance is expected in all classes. During unavoidable absences, students are responsible for missed work. An excessive number of absences may result in grade reduction or course failure, despite successful completion of all assigned work. In most cases, a student will not be allowed credit for a course if he or she is absent for 25% of the class sessions. As it relates to blended courses, students may not be allowed credit if they are absent for 25% of class meetings or if 25% of online course work is not completed. Use of Skype or similar technology is not a substitute for attendance in class.

Electronic Devices—Turn mobile devices off or “vibrate only” during class. Browsing the Internet or engaging in email or social network conversations during class is discouraged. Instructors have the right to impose grading penalties for disruptions due to electronic devices.

Human Subjects Research—Research by MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel that collects non-public information from and/or about living individuals or contemporary organizations/groups for purposes of publication or public presentation (including class assignments) must be approved by the Human Subjects Research Committee. MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel should err on the side of caution and apply for committee approval of any activity that may fit this description.

Inclusive Language—In accordance with MTSO’s policy on inclusive language, all students are expected to use gender inclusive or gender neutral language in their writing and in the classroom discussions when referring to human beings.

Incompletes—To receive a course grade of Incomplete, students must submit the petition form from the Registrar with all signatures to the Dean’s Office before the last day of regularly scheduled classes. See Student Handbook for intensive term deadlines. Any petition submitted without a due date for outstanding work will be denied. If work is not complete by the due date the Registrar will record the grade of F for the course.

Pass/Fail—The decision to exercise this option must be made before the end of the second week of the course by completing the appropriate form available through the Registrar. To receive a grade of "pass" the student must do at least the equivalent of C minus work in the course.

Plagiarism—Plagiarism is a serious matter of academic, professional, and personal integrity. All students at the masters level are expected to understand the requirement to provide attribution when the work of others is used. Students are also expected to be familiar with and understand the school’s policy on Academic Misconduct found in the Student Handbook. If students have questions about attribution, citation, and how to avoid plagiarism they should consult the course instructor, the school’s writing instructor, or library staff. When in doubt it is better to provide attribution even if one is uncertain about the proper citation form. Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct that results in disciplinary actions per the Student Handbook that may range from failing an assignment or course to expulsion.

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