



## ENV/REL 345 Spiritual Ecologies

### Course Syllabus

### Spring Semester 2026

**Instructor:** Neto Leão, PhD

**Credits:** 3

**Contact Hours:** 45

**Prerequisites:** none

**Office Hours:** By appointment via email. Remote meetings take place at Jitsi on Moodle

**Course Type:** Standard Course

**Course Fee:** USD\$75

#### Course Description

In this course, we will explore the influence of religious traditions on human interactions with the natural world, and conversely, on how the environment can shape religious beliefs. We will delve into how religions have influenced our perception and connection with other species and the level of care or indifference we exhibit towards the natural environment. The course will offer a concise overview of the teachings of prominent religions regarding nature, as well as an examination of contemporary discussions and scholarly research from the late 20th and 21st centuries. These discussions will focus on the role of religion in either contributing to the environmental crisis or providing potential solutions to it.

To comprehend the significance of religion in addressing and resolving environmental problems, this course examines the diverse religious interpretations of the environment, ecology, and nature. It explores the historical, cultural, and spiritual aspects of various belief-systems pertinent to the environment and evaluates the reactions of different religious communities to present-day environmental challenges. By examining religious worldviews, we may find a way to correct the disenchantment and commodification of nature, viewing it instead as a source of inspiration and reverence.

#### Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. *understand* how religious beliefs and practices contribute (positively, negatively, or neutrally) to society's relationship with its ecological niche. To what extent are they likely to be "complicit" in or "responsible" for environmental crises?;
2. *deepen* the answers to "what religion is" and how it has changed in today's globalised world;
3. *compare* religious beliefs and practices that can offer alternatives to today's environmental problems;
4. *explore* the ways in which different religious groups deal with environmental issues today;
5. *analyse* how the environmental movement itself can be considered a religious movement.

#### Course Materials

##### Readings

A course reader, including all the indicated readings, will be available. The course's Moodle site is the primary location for readings and assignments.

##### Assessment

Attendance	10%
Weekly Moodle Quizzes	20%
Course Journal	15%

Field Notes Journal	15%
Reflective seminars	20%
Podcast Episode	20%

### Grading

Students are reminded that it is their responsibility to note the dates of exams and other assignments. No alternative exam dates will be offered and professors are not required to give partial credit for any late work (they do so at their discretion: the Institute's default policy is no extensions and a zero for any work turned in late). Students who book travel when they have an exam or other assessment will have to change their plans or accept a zero. Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

**Please note:** decimal numerals between 1-4 are rounded down while 5-9 are rounded up: e.g., expect 89.4 to be 89.0 while 89.5 to round up to 90.

### Course Requirements

Grades are based on a combination of participation, in-class assessments, project presentations, and exams.

*Attendance (10%)* Attendance is an essential part of this course. If you attend all the meetings, you will receive 10% for this part of your grade. There are no make-ups offered for attendance.

*Moodle Quizzes (20%)* Students will be assigned one short quiz, opened every Monday morning until the following Sunday. Students can take the same quiz as many times as they want. The quiz will be on Moodle. The quizzes will assess the students' understanding of the readings and discussions for that week.

*Field Note Journal (15%)* Field notes journal entries refer to the written account derived from data collected during observations at the visit to the city of Assisi. The entry should be written with full sentences in the Course Journal notebook. They will be graded on the week after the visit.

*Course Journal (15%)* Students will need a notebook, which they will use as a personal space in which to reflect on course material and ideas. In-class assignments (e.g. summaries of assigned readings, analyses of primary sources, mental maps, reflections, predictive exercises) will be regularly scheduled and graded twice throughout the semester, i.e. before the mid-semester break (Week 6) and at the end of the course (Week 12). Each of these checks is worth 10% of your grade, for a total of 20%.

*Reflective seminars (20%)* Students will collaborate in pairs to prepare a concise presentation, not exceeding 40 minutes, on a selected topic from the course curriculum. Each seminar will shortly present the central concepts of the topic readings and propose a reflection

for class discussion. The selection of topics and seminar pairs will be determined during class sessions between weeks 1 and 3. See a full prompt in Moodle.

#### *Podcast Episode (20%)*

The podcast episode will be based on the topics chosen by the students for their reflective seminar. Students will create a short podcast episode of up to 30 minutes. They will write a brief outline with an introduction, two or three key points, and a short conclusion. Recording of the audio will be done at Umbra facilities equipped with all the necessary material. Students will edit the material to present a final version of the episode. See a full prompt in Moodle.

#### **Extension & Submitting Late Work**

Work submitted after the deadline will receive a grade of zero, not partial credit. Each student is allowed one extension of 24 hours over the entire semester. This can be used for any assignment but the final project. Students need to email the instructor before the deadline and inform the instructor of their use of the extension. Any work submitted after the 24-hour extension will be marked zero. As for all policies, exceptions can be made by the Director for students with special accommodations or in case of medical emergencies, etc.

#### Attendance & Lateness Policy

Attendance is expected and mandatory for classroom times and co-curricular activities. Regular attendance is a critical component of academic success and students are expected to attend all scheduled classes unless there is a legitimate reason for absence. Students are also expected to be on time for all classes and co-curricular activities. Each unexcused absence will affect the final grade by 1.5% up to a maximum of 10%. Each incident of tardiness (late arrivals to or early departures from class) is 0.5% off the final grade. Excessive unexcused absences (8 or more) may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the number of absences or late arrivals for each course, and to ask the instructor when in doubt.

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. Any work missed in class because of an excused absence may be made up within one week of the return to the class. Any work missed that was a quiz or other test must be made up outside of class time and will, in the interest of intellectual honesty, be a slightly different test than the one given in class. Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important. Missing a mandatory field trip for a course, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will be considered the equivalent of two unexcused absences. As such, absence from the co-curricular field trip will lower students' final grade in that course by 3% (the equivalent of two unexcused absences).

Legitimate reasons for an excused absence or tardiness includes: death in immediate family, religious observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, medical appointments that cannot be rescheduled. Absences relating to illness may be excused by the Director but only if a medical certification is provided.

Students who request an approved absence to observe a religious holiday must submit a formal request to the Institute's Director within one week after the add/drop period when course schedules, including any field trips, are finalized. No exceptions will be made after this deadline.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason. Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

#### **Academic Integrity**

All forms of cheating (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorised use of notes) and plagiarism (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Utilizing ChatGPT or other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for the generation of content submitted by a student as their own as part of any assignment for academic credit at the Institute constitutes a form of plagiarism. Should the Institute become aware of a student's use of such platforms and services, the student will be subject to the same consequences and judicial proceedings as are in place for plagiarism (defined above).

#### Classroom & Laptop Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate respect for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that cell phones must be turned off before the beginning of each class. Computers and other electronic devices cannot be used during class lectures and discussions.

### Laptop/Smartphone Policy

An ever-increasing body of research shows that open laptops and telephones in the classroom create distraction (both visual and auditory) for those using them and those around them. You can type faster than you can write, and as a result you end up processing less when you're simply typing notes. For this reason, students are asked to keep computers and phones away and use a regular notebook. There are four exceptions: 1) if you have a vision or other accommodation; 2) if you are using a tablet to take notes, one which is not connected to the internet; 3) if we have an in-class tutorial about online research tools; or 4) if you make an office hours appointment with me to discuss the use of a computer.

### **U.N. Sustainable Development Goals**

This course contributes to the achievement of one or more goals of U. N. Agenda for Sustainable Development



## Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

### WEEK 1

#### **Introduction and Course Overview**

Meeting#1: Introduction to the course. What is religion? What is the intersection of religion and environment?

Meeting#2: What is Religion? Symbol Systems and Symbolic Knowing. Secularization and the disenchantment of the world.

#### Readings for the week:

Grim, John, and Mary Evelyn Tucker. "Introduction: Our Journey into Religion and Ecology" In *Ecology and Religion*, pp. 1-12.

Grim, John, and Mary Evelyn Tucker. "The nature of religious ecology: orienting, grounding, nurturing, transforming" In *Ecology and Religion*, pp. 29-42.

### WEEK 2

#### **Religion and Ecology**

Meeting#3: What is the intersection of religion and environment? Religious environmentalism and environmental religion.

#### Readings:

Jenkins, Willis. "Whose Religion? Which Ecology? Religious studies in the environmental humanities" In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, pp. 22-32.

Meeting#4: Views of Nature in the West

#### Readings:

Grim, John, and Mary Evelyn Tucker. "Religious ecology and Views of Nature in the West" In *Ecology and Religion*, pp. 43-61.

### WEEK 3

#### **Abrahamic Religions and Monotheism**

Meeting#5: The religious roots of the current ecological crisis: the Lynn White thesis

#### Readings:

Lynn White Jr. "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis." *Science* 155 (10 March 1967): 1203-1207.

Meeting#6: Creation: why did the Bible start from the beginning?

#### Readings:

Elliott, Richard and Dolansky. "The Earth" In *The Bible Now*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp.149-176.

### WEEK 4

#### **Judaism & Islam**

Meeting#7: The creation and the breath of Life. The holistic view of Judaism.

#### Readings:

Arthur Waskow. "And the Earth is Filled with the Breath of Life." *Cross Currents*, 47, 3 (Fall 1997): 348-363.

Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. "Judaism." In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, pp. 60-69.

#### Recommended readings:

Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. "Nature in the Sources of Judaism." In *Daedalus*, 130, 4 (Fall 2001): 99-124.

Meeting#8: Islamic Environmental Ethics. What the Shariah, literally the source of life that contains both legal rules and ethical principles, has to say about environmental protection?

Readings:

Izzi-Deen, Mawil. "Islamic environmental ethics, law, and society" In *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, pp. 158-166.  
Abidin Bagir, Zainal and Martiam, Najiyah. "Islam: norms and practices." In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, pp. 79-87.

**WEEK 5**

**Christianity**

Meeting#9: St. Francis and the fraternity of beings. Did Cardinal Bergoglio honour the radicality of the Saint that named his papacy?

Readings:

Agamben, Giorgio. "Highest Poverty and Use" In *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, pp. 56-63.  
Conradie, Ernst. "Christianity: An ecological critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of ecological destruction." In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, pp. 70-78.

Recommended readings:

Encyclical letter of Pope Francis, May, 2015: *Laudato si'*  
([https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html))

Meeting#10: Christian statements and disputes: the flourishing movement of the eco-sisters and the rise of Evangelical anti-environmentalism.

Readings:

Taylor, Sarah. "Reinhabiting religion: green sisters, ecological renewal, and the biogeography of religious landscape" In *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, pp. 545-561.  
The *Cornwall Alliance* website and the video *Resisting the Green Dragon*.

**Friday, February 20**: Field Trip to Assisi. Itinerary will be provided earlier this week

**WEEK 6**

**Hinduism**

Meeting#11: What are the features of the Hindu religion which strengthen human respect for God's creation?

Readings:

Dwivedi, O. "Satyagraha for conservation: awakening the spirit of Hinduism" In *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, pp. 130-141.  
Haberman, David. "Hinduism: devotional love of the world." In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, pp. 35-42.

Meeting#12: The sacred and the profane: the waters of the Ganga between purity and pollution.

Readings:

Alley, Kelly. "Idioms of Degeneracy: Assessing Ganga's Purity and Pollution." In *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India*, pp. 297-330.

Students have until Friday to turn in the Field Notes Journal.

**Semester Break**

## WEEK 7

### **Buddhism & Confucianism**

Meeting#13: Buddhist views of nature: formulating responses to the climate crisis and other environmental problems

Readings:

Ives, Christopher. "Buddhism: A mixed Dharmic bag: Debates about Buddhism and ecology." In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, pp. 43-51.

Kaza, Stephanie. "To save all beings: Buddhist environmental activism" In *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 296-314.

Meeting#14: Confucianism and environmental virtue ethics

Readings:

Huang, Yong. "Confucianism: Confucian environmental virtue ethics." In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, pp. 52-59.

Weiming, Tu. "Beyond the enlightenment mentality" In *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, pp. 283-295.

## WEEK 8

### **Indigenous Traditions I**

Meeting#15: North America

Readings:

Nelson, Melissa. "Native ecologies and cosmovisions renew treaties with the earth and fuel indigenous movements." In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, pp. 138-147.

Letter of Chief Seattle

Kaiser, Rudolph. "A Fifth Gospel, Almost: Chief Seattle's Speech(es): American Origins and European Reception." In *Indians and Europe: an interdisciplinary collection of essays*, pp. 505-526.

Meeting#16: Latin America

Readings:

Kopenawa, Davi. "The Spirit of the Forest", In *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*, pp. 381-400.

Astor-Aguilera, Miguel. "Indigenous cosmovision." In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, pp. 158-167.

## WEEK 9

### **Indigenous Traditions II**

Meeting#17: Arctic

Readings:

Laugrand, Frederic. "Ontology on the ice: Inuit traditions, ecology, and the problem of categories." In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, pp. 148-157.

Video: Becket, James, Green Patriarch, His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. nd. *The Arctic: The Consequences of Human Folly*. <https://vimeo.com/100178712>

Meeting#18: Pacific Region

Readings:

Laugrand, Frederic. "In search of harmony: Indigenous traditions of the Pacific and ecology." In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, pp. 129-137.

McKay, Stan. "An Aboriginal perspective on the integrity of creation," In *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 158-161.

## WEEK 10

### **Environmentalism as religion: Deep Ecology & Ecofeminism**

Meeting#19: Guest Lecturer Dara Molloy, Celtic Monk and author of *The Globalization of God* and *Reimagining the Divine*, will guide us through his journey from being a Catholic priest to becoming a Celtic monk in the Aran Islands, Ireland. He will explore the richness of Celtic spirituality and its close relation to ecology.

#### Readings:

Molloy, Dara. "Celtic Spirituality", In *Reimagining the Divine: a Celtic Spirituality of Experience*, pp. 200-223.

Meeting#20: Deep Ecology & Ecofeminism

#### Readings:

Radford Ruether, Rosemary. "Ecofeminism: Symbolic and Social Connections of the Oppression of Women and the Domination of Nature" In *This Sacred Earth*, 347-357.

Capra, Fritjof. "Deep Ecology: a New Paradigm", In *The Web of Life: a New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*, pp. 19-29.

#### Recommended readings:

Carolyn Merchant, "Nature as Female," in *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and The Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, 1980).

## WEEK 11

### **New Age & emerging spiritualities**

Meeting#21: No class (Pasquetta Holiday – Institute Closed)

Meeting#22: Neo-Pagan and Goddess

#### Readings:

Eisler, Riane. "Messages from the past: the world of the Goddess," In *This Sacred Earth*, pp. 401-412.

Christie, Douglas. "Nature Writing and Nature Mysticism." In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, pp. 229-236.

#### Recommended readings:

Harvey, Graham. "Paganism and Animism." In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, pp. 211-219.

McWhorter, Ladelle. "Enemy of the Species." In *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, edited by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, 73–101. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.

## WEEK 12

### **Interreligious Dialogue: Toward a Global Ethics**

Meeting#23: Expanding Care for the Earth Community - creating ecological cultures

#### Readings:

Grim, John, and Mary Evelyn Tucker. "Building on interreligious dialogue: toward a global ethics" In *Ecology and Religion*, pp. 154-163.

Grim, John, and Mary Evelyn Tucker. "Challenges ahead: creating ecological cultures" In *Ecology and Religion*, pp. 164-170.

#### Recommended readings:

Gillman, Neil. "How Will It All End? Eschatology in Science and Religion." *CrossCurrents* 57, no. 1 (2007): 38–50.

Meeting#24: Presentation of the podcast episodes.

## WEEK 13

### **Final Classes & Special Academic Events Week**

*Special Academic Events*