245-01 God, Creation, Ecology

Leon Chartrand

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THEO 245-01
GOD, CREATION, ECOLOGY

Spring, 2014
MWF, 2:00-2:50pm
101 Hailstones Hall

INSTRUCTOR:
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Xavier University
Cincinnati, OH 45227-4442
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email: chartrandl@xavier.edu

Office Hours:
MWF: 11:00am-1:00pm; WF 3:00pm-4:15pm
Or by appointment
(I am generally here all day on TR as well, but please call or text me to be sure I’m in my office)
(307) 690-2994 my cell open to student calls/txts

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

We are in trouble now because we are, as Thomas Berry says, in between stories. A new cosmogonic myth must be created. It is part of the great work of the human species as we transition from this terminal phase of the Cenozoic Era into an Ecozoic Era. This course aims to help us see the possibilities along the way by challenging and inspiring us to think about the relation between story and experience. Since religious consciousness awakened, man has been a storyteller. These stories give context or meaning to experience, while experience enhances the story. If my THEO 388 class (Theology & Ecology) primarily focuses on experience, than THEO 245 (God, Creation, and Ecology) must primarily focus on the role of story. Story helps us make sense of things. It helps us see how our ecological relation to the world is a manifestation of our theological relation to divine mystery and has so since the beginning of religious history. Throughout the semester, we will examine the fundamental role that religious imagination, from which stories come, fosters an intimate, viable relation between the human and the more-than-human world, so long as that story maintains its relevancy to the signs of the times. We will therefore examine how religious imagination shape perceptions and how a relevant story can help us resolve issues of disconnectedness that are the primary cause of many of the environmental issues we face today.

COURSE GOALS:

This course aims:
• To bring critical attention to the ethical and religious dimensions of ecologically significant issues.
• To present a worldview that is oriented towards responsible action that recognizes the primary relation between ecological and social justice.
• To foster wisdom, understanding, and justice by opening up a way for students to make connections between their religious and ecological identities.
• To enable students to understand their religious tradition as a living tradition that demands students see the crucial role that public theology plays in the on-going dialogue about ecological issues.
• To encourage students to be ecologically literate through a consciously theological point of view.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

At the end of this course, the student will be able:
• To describe the role that religious imagination plays in the human understanding of the world.
• To identify several ecologically critical issues that are also reflections of social injustices.
• To critically express how religious imagination can help resolve these critical issues.
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- To demonstrate a more comprehensive knowledge of the Judeo-Christian tradition, including how notions like “wilderness”, “incarnation,” and “transcendence” influence the way we live on the land.
- To describe the difference between microcosmic and macrocosmic views of ecological issues and the value that both views play in resolving the ecological crisis.
- To provide a phenomenological and theological description of the relation between the human and the other-than-human so as to demonstrate how ecological concepts are inherently theological.

**STUDENT STATUS:**

This course is offered to Xavier undergraduate students as a 3 credit hour course at undergraduate rates. As such, this course can serve as an E/RS elective at the 200 level, as well as a course to satisfy Peace Studies and Environmental Studies minors (see sections below).

**PEACE STUDIES MINOR:**

In keeping with the Jesuit tradition, Xavier believes that religious insights are complementary to the intellectual life, and that a continuing synthesis of the Christian perspective with all other forms of human knowledge is conducive to wisdom and understanding. Xavier shares in worldwide Jesuit commitment to a creative and intelligent engagement with questions of peace and justice. As such, this course can be taken for credit to satisfy requirements for a Peace Studies minor.

**ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES MAJOR/MINOR:**

With attention to the student as an individual, Jesuit education seeks to develop: 1. Intellectual skills for a full life in the human community and in service to the environment; 2. Critical attention to the underlying philosophical and theological implications of environmental issues; 3. A world view that is oriented to responsible action and recognizes the intrinsic value of the natural and human values; 4. An understanding and communication of the moral and religious values through personal concern and lived witness, as well as by precept of instruction; and 5. A sense of the whole person- body, mind, and spirit. That said, insofar as the whole person must address the relation between the human and the land, this course satisfies requirements for an Environmental Studies minor. Also, given the amount of ecological concepts to be presented throughout the lectures, this course is supported by Xavier University’s Biology Department and pre-med, pre-vet, and environmental studies students are encouraged to register.

**Pertinent Policies:**

1). ABSENTEEISM: Attendance is 20% of the final grade. Absences do not excuse students from knowledge about the material discussed or about any announcements or syllabus changes or assigned work. For this course, students are allowed two (2) excused absences for the semester. A third absence, and any absence thereafter shall count as 20 pts off attendance/participation grades. For instance, a person who misses four days (less the two excused) will have a final attendance score of 160 (200 pts – (2x20pts)=160) and no more than a score of 160 for participation (since a student cannot receive a participation grade for classes unattended). This means that, on a scale of 1000 points, if a student misses four days, they can have no better than a final grade of 92 (1000 less 40 “attend” less 40 “partic” = 920), assuming that a perfect score is achieved on all other assignments. Chronic absence will result in recommendation of withdrawal or failure from the course. This is because much of the material covered in class is in addition to assigned readings and will not be covered elsewhere. Attendance (and participation) is the best way to prepare for a successful outcome in this class. I WILL REPPEAT: attendance (and participation) is the path to success in this class. If a student is absent on the day when a presentation, reflection paper, learning activity or assessment is due, the student must contact the instructor prior to the date assigned or make arrangements with professor to rectify the
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missed assignment. If working with team members, students must also contact their team members. Failure to inform the instructor will lower the student’s grade for that assignment.

3). PARTICIPATION: Naturally, attendance and participation go hand in hand. Participation is worth 20% of the final grade. There is no credit given on days of absence. Participation includes involvement in group work, class discussions, asking questions, initiating discussions, and/or attentiveness. While students can receive a perfect score on attendance by attending every class, participation is weighted according to involvement. This does not mean a student has to be outspoken during open discussions, but it does mean the student has to be engaged. How participation is weighted alongside attendance is discussed in item #2 above.

4). Cell Phones/Laptops: Laptops are reserved for those students with special needs, and if that is a necessity, said students must sit at the front of class. Cell phones are absolutely not permitted unless a reasonable excuse is given beforehand. Cell phones used during class time can result in 0% on participation for that particular class. As an avid texter myself, I am well aware of the ability to text under your desk. Please note that this will absolutely not be tolerated. Sorry for the harshness, but this has become a necessity in recent years.

4). ACADEMIC HONESTY: Work submitted for evaluation must be that of the student’s whose name is on the paper (for joint projects with classmates, please include their names). The direct and non-attributed use of another’s effort is prohibited. Penalties for violation will be in accordance with Xavier University policies as cited in the catalog. The Instructor reserves the right to instruct students to use “Turn It In” at will.

5). LANGUAGE: While Xavier is committed unreservedly to open and free inquiry, any abusive, discriminatory, harassing language will not be tolerated. Gender neutral language is expected.

6). WRITING FORMAT: Written papers should be typed in 12 point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with no smaller than 1” margins.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

In addition to free and open inquiry based on inclusive language, this instructor and Xavier University are committed to accommodating special needs. Any student who feels he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability, whether physical or learning or medical, should contact the Learning Assistance Center at 513-745-3280 on the 1st floor of Kuhlman Hall to accommodate reasonable accommodations. Students, if comfortable, are welcome to discuss concerns confidentially with the instructor. This instructor is committed to confidentiality and to fostering a safe, open, inclusive and positive learning environment.

DEPARTMENTAL GRADING SCALE:

A = 92 or above  B = 91-84  C = 83-76  D = 75-68
*Professor reserves the right to assign + or – to borderline grades based on student performance.

GRADING:

Attendance 20%
Participation 20%
Reflection Papers (4) 10%
Video Project 15%
Field Trip/Group Project 15%
Final Paper & Assessment 20%

Total 100%

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REQUIRED READINGS:

The only reading material necessary for purchase in this class is: Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, the Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring forth to the Ecozoic Era: A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos (San Francisco: HarperSanFran, 1998). All other resources we will use are hard to acquire or out-of-print (which doesn’t mean they’re not worth reading!). Required readings are provided below and must be completed before the lectures and discussions to be presented for that week. At the end of each class, the instructor will assign which readings are required for the proceeding class. Completing the readings prior to class is part of one’s participation grade. Proper preparation by keeping up on readings will make our learning experience more enriching. Thank you in advance!

ELECTRONIC RESERVES/BLACKBOARD:

Many of the resources we will use are hard to acquire or out-of-print. Thus, these will be made available through electronic reserves at the Xavier library or on the course page of Blackboard. You can access these resources through the library home page (e-reserves) and click on electronic reserves. You should be able to access the list under the title of the course (THEO-245 God, Creation, Ecology) and the instructor’s name (Chartrand). Whey you are asked for a password, please use the phrase: grizzly.

REFLECTION ESSAYS

Reflection essays are intended to challenge students to incorporate readings, discussion and lectures into a synthesis. In that way, they serve two purposes. Firstly, these essays will be used to assess the student’s completion of the assigned readings. Secondly, these essays are intended to encourage students to think more comprehensively about material presented that day. There will be four essays assigned. All essays will be due exactly one week after assigned unless otherwise noted.

YOUTUBE VIDEO PROJECTS

This project will involve students getting together to create a video on a particular theme (based on an assigned reading) with the potential for being posted on YouTube and Xavier Expeditions.com. The video will be assigned in addition to the Group Project assigned. Video projects will be assigned on Mar 21st. Video Projects will be presented on Apr 28th.

FIELD TRIP & GROUP PROJECTS

A field trip/group assignment will be assigned for Sunday, April 13 (seriously!). A question will be assigned and students will need to utilize what they have learned in this class, both individually and in groups, to provide a response based on the surroundings. This assignment, and the group preparation will be held off-site, weather permitting. Site and time will be determined and depend upon restrictions, river flow levels, or difficulties arranging student and instructor travel. Individual reflections will be assigned and due on the same day (Apr 13) while group presentations will be given April 23-24th. Group Projects will be assigned on Mar 21st, the same days that Video projects are assigned.

FINAL PAPER & ASSESSMENT

The Final Paper is an opportunity to integrate the insights in class to your future with the earth, creation and the more-than-human world. Prompts will be given three weeks in advance of the paper’s due date. The paper will be seven (7) pages, double-spaced, 12 pt font, 1 inch margins. Further details will be given when assigned and are subject to change. A final assessment will be given as scheduled on exam day.

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## WEEK 1

**Required Readings Prior to First Class**
- Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Introduction", *Gaia & God*, 1-12

### Jan 13
- Welcome & Course Overview

### Jan 15
- What is God? What is Creation?

### Jan 17
- What is Creation? What is Ecology?

## WEEK 2

**Required Readings Prior to First Class**

### Jan 20
- Martin Luther King Day—no class

### Jan 22
- Ecological Crisis as Krisis

### Jan 24
- Function of Myths

**REFLECTION PAPER #1 ASSIGNED**

## WEEK 3

**Required Readings Prior to First Class**

### Jan 27
- Morphology of Myths

### Jan 29
- *In the Beginning*-Genesis/Enuma Elish

### Jan 31
- *In the Beginning*—Genesis-Enuma Elish

**REFLECTION PAPER #1 DUE**

## WEEK 4

**Required Readings Prior to First Class**
- Creation Myth handouts.

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Feb 3  In the Beginning—Native American Myths
Feb 5  In the Beginning—Types of Creation Myths
Feb 7  Role of Myths in a Krisis

REFLECTION PAPER #2 ASSIGNED

WEEK 5

Required Readings Prior to First Class
- Swimme & Berry, “Galaxies,” Universe Story, 30-45.

Feb 10  In the Beginning…the initial singularity
Feb 12  Fire and Stars
Feb 14  The Sky Gods

REFLECTION PAPER #2 DUE

WEEK 6

Required Readings Prior to First Class

Feb 17  The Sun and Sun Worship
Feb 19  The Moon and Its Mystique
Feb 21  Living Earth, Mother Earth

WEEK 7

Required Readings Prior to First Class
- Swimme & Berry, “Living Earth,” Universe Story, 80-95.

Feb 24  Living Earth, Mother Earth; SUSTAINABILITY HEROES, 4pm, Extra Credit
Feb 26  Life and Water

REFLECTION PAPER #3 ASSIGNED

Feb 28  Field Trip Exchange Day #1—no class

WEEK 8

Mar 3  Spring Break—no class
Mar 5  Spring Break—no class
Mar 7  Spring Break—no class

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WEEK 9

Required Readings Prior to First Class
- Swimme & Berry, "Eukarotes," *Universe Story*, 96-111.
- Swimme & Berry, "Plants and Animals," *Universe Story*, 112-141.

Mar 10  *Life and Water*
Mar 12  *Plants and Animals*
Mar 14  *Plants and Animals*

REFLECTION PAPER #3 DUE

WEEK 10

Required Readings Prior to First Class
- Swimme & Berry, "Plants and Animals," *Universe Story*, 112-141.

Mar 17  *Human Emergence*
Mar 19  *Paleolithic: Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon*
Mar 21  **Group Video Projects/Group Presentations Assigned**

- *Readings for project:
  - "University"; "New Political Alignment"; "Corporation Story"; "Extractive Economy"; "Petroleum Interval"; "Technology and a Healing of the Earth"; "Viable Human"; "Reinventing the Human"

WEEK 11

Required Readings Prior to First Class
- Swimme & Berry, "Human Emergence," *Universe Story*, 142-161.
- Teilhard de Chardin, "Deployment of the Noosphere," *Phenomenon of Man*, 190-209.
- Swimme & Berry, "Modern Revelation," *Universe Story*, 222-239.

Mar 24  *Human Emergence, Vernal Equinox and the New Moon as Metaphor*
Mar 26  *From the Paleolithic to the Neolithic*
Mar 28  *Rise of Nations and Modern Revelations*

WEEK 12

Required Readings Prior to First Class
- Cosmology of Religions.

Mar 31  *Noosphere and the Cosmology of Religions*
Apr 2   *Experience and Story—thing/world relation*
Apr 4   *Experience and Story—thing/world relation*
## WEEK 13

**Required Readings Prior to First Class**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr 7</td>
<td>Experience and Story—thing/world relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 9</td>
<td>Experience and Story—thing/world relation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 11</td>
<td>Field Trip Exchange #2—no class</td>
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**FIELD TRIP**—Story/Experience: Ways of Naming the Holy Time and Activity to be determined.

**REFLECTION PAPER #4 ASSIGNED AND DUE**

## WEEK 14

**Required Readings Prior to First Class**
- Berry, “Reinventing the Human,” *Great Work*, 159-165.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr 14</td>
<td>The Viable Human <strong>FINAL PAPER PROMPTS GIVEN</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 16</td>
<td>Field Trip Exchange Day #3—no class</td>
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<td>Apr 18</td>
<td>Easter Break—no class</td>
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## WEEK 15

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr 21</td>
<td>Easter Break—no class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 23</td>
<td>Group Presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 25</td>
<td>Group Presentations</td>
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## WEEK 16

**Required Readings Prior to First Class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr 28</td>
<td>Video Presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 30</td>
<td><em>The Holocene Epoch—Where do we go from here?</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2</td>
<td>Review Day; Evaluations</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 7</td>
<td><strong>FINAL PAPER/ASSESSMENT, 2:00-3:50 am, 101 Hailstones Hall</strong></td>
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</table>

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