COURSE GOALS
The ultimate goal of this course is to consider a new way of thinking about religion, a way which takes the natural world seriously. More specifically, the goal is to consider this new way of thinking in relation to the Bible, and to examine what role nature plays in biblical thought. At the end of the course, we hope all of us will know better how to take creation seriously in our biblical interpretation, in our linking of the Bible and ministry, and in our practice of ministry itself.

To achieve these ends, this course will examine the understanding of nature in the Bible and evaluate the implications of biblical values for contemporary thought. The perspective of the course is thus both historical and theological. On the one hand, the attitudes and values in the Bible will be examined through a close study of selected biblical texts in the light of the ancient physical, political, and religious environment in which they arose. On the other hand, the relationship between these biblical viewpoints and contemporary concepts of nature will be examined in order to assess the significance of biblical attitudes for modern environmental theology, ethics, and ministry.

We think this is such an important concern that we want to get the word out to the church more broadly, so we are considering writing a book about the issues in this course for a broader audience. And we would like you to help us think about what such a book would look like and what kind of book would be most helpful. We’ll be asking you, as leaders of the church, for your advice.

COURSE PROCEDURE
Class Participation: The course will be conducted as a seminar, in which we together share, debate, critique, defend, and evaluate ideas and perspectives from the Bible and interpretations of it. Thus attendance and active participation are essential to benefit from the course, and they will make up a significant part of the final grade. Students who miss more than one class will be graded pass/fail. The course is designed to promote active rather than passive learning, so discussion and analysis are central. Lectures will only be used for introduction and summary. Directions regarding preparation for each class session--background on the readings, questions to be considered, issues to be highlighted--will be given at the conclusion of the previous class.

Reading and Preparation: Because the course is a seminar focused on analysis by class members, preparation for class is essential. The value of the seminar to all will be directly dependent on the quality of the preparation which each of the class members brings to class. A
set of readings in the biblical text and in secondary sources is assigned for each class session. These assignments should be completed as preparation for the class session for which they are assigned, in light of the questions for discussion and analysis which accompany them.

BOOKS AND RESOURCES


Selected articles to be copied cooperatively by the class.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Exegetical Paper: A five page study of a biblical text, due April 29. The primary aim of this study is to describe the way in which the text reflects the ancient author’s attitudes toward nature, and a secondary aim is to evaluate the significance of these attitudes for contemporary thought and ministry.

Group Class Presentation: A class presentation and handout on a contemporary environmental issue, on a date to be negotiated. The handout will contain 1) biblical resources, 2) liturgical resources, and 3) practical and ethical resources, each three pages. The aim of the presentation and handout is to provide one another with resources for ministry.

Final Paper: A ten page paper which you may design and which may be research or ministry oriented, according to the instructions below. A proposal will be due April 5 and the final paper will be due May 5.

Instructions for Exegetical Work in All Written Assignments

Aim
The primary aim of exegetical work is to describe the way in which a text reflects its author’s attitude toward nature. The primary focus will be the ancient world: What was the original environmental setting of the text and how does its point of view reflect this setting? What attitudes toward nature were held by the author and how are they expressed in the context of this ancient setting?

In addition to this major historical aim of your exegesis, you are encouraged to comment also on the significance of the biblical attitudes you have identified in the text for our thought and behavior today. Does the Bible present us with an obstacle or a resource for constructing a healthy perspective on the environment?
In the exegetical paper, you might consider devoting about three fourths of your study and presentation to your primary aim, the historical sense of the text, and one fourth to your secondary aim, its relationship with the contemporary world. In your final paper, devote at least half of your work (five pages) to exegetical analysis.

Procedure

The Biblical Text

1. For the Exegetical Paper, select a text from the assignments on the course syllabus related to the topic of your study. A chapter or less, e.g. ten to twenty verses, is plenty for a short study such as this. Do not type out the text itself as part of your essay. You can assume your readers have the Bible in front of them. The selection of biblical texts for the other two assignments will depend on the topic selected.

2. Spend some time doing your own careful analysis of the text, looking primarily for answers in the concrete details of the text to two questions: What actual physical environment is reflected in these details? What attitudes toward nature are represented in the text? Trust yourself. Do not rely on “experts” alone to tell you what the text says.

3. As you write up your findings, always use concrete data—specific words and phrases—from the biblical text to illustrate your comments and to support your conclusions. Always give references, chapter and verse, to the part of the text you are describing.

4. If you have taken biblical Hebrew or Greek, please use it in your analysis as much as you can. There is no substitute for the real thing. Every translation is a new and different text from the original.

Secondary Sources

In addition to your own analysis of the biblical text, you should broaden your own perspective by considering the analysis and conclusions of other scholars, from the following sources in particular:

1. Take into consideration the analysis of the scholars assigned for reading on the topic related to the text you have selected. You may enlist these scholars in support of your interpretation, or you may wish to argue against them.

2. Use if possible the readings on the Bible’s ancient environment to assist you in describing the text’s natural setting. Also consider the relevance for your conclusions of the points of view represented in the essays on nature in the Bible assigned on February 8.

3. Incorporate the analysis of your text in scholarly commentaries on the biblical book from which your text is taken.

You may of course include any other secondary material you wish, in addition to these sources, to illustrate or support your analysis. Remember, these scholars may hold old ideas of nature in the Bible, but it is important to engage their arguments, build on their insights, and critique their
weaknesses.

Your written work must follow proper rules for research paper form as these are described in the McCormick Student Handbook on pp. 33-36. These rules are based on the sixth edition of Kate L Turabian’s A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, available in the bookstore. It must be accompanied by a bibliography of the secondary sources you have consulted.

Instructions for Final Paper
The Basic Design
For this writing assignment, you are encouraged to design a project that fits your own particular interests and aims. The only essential requirement is that the project concern itself primarily with biblical perspectives on nature and values toward it.

One of the two following approaches may be adopted for your work. These options are not intended to be exclusive options. In fact, you will probably wish, even need, to consider elements of both in your work. They are intended rather to provoke your thought and to provide some general guidelines for your projects.

The Historical Research Option
You may wish to do additional work on biblical attitudes toward nature by doing an extended study of a biblical text in which you are particularly interested and which we did not have the opportunity to deal with in class. Or you may want to pursue a theme on nature in the Bible (e.g. sacred space, the redemption of nature, agriculture, etc.) in greater detail. In such a study, you would devote your primary energies to uncovering the historical setting and attitudes of the Bible itself, but you could also reflect on the contemporary implications of these attitudes.

The Contemporary Ministry Option
You may wish to design a project in which you can explore the contemporary use of the Bible in environmental theology and ethics. For this kind of project you might wish to consider some of the following ideas.

* A sermon using biblical text, from the lectionary or of your own choice, to develop environmental themes.
* An evaluation of the use of the Bible in an existing religious education curriculum on the environment, or the writing of a new curriculum or Bible study series.
* An evaluation of the use of the Bible in public statements made by your denomination on environmental responsibility.
* An evaluation of the use of the Bible by a contemporary environmental theologian, ethicist, or popular writer.
* An evaluation of the use of the Bible by an influential pro- or anti-environmental group or movement and its importance for the church.
* A biblical and ethical rationale for supporting a particular political and social policy, such as the clean air act.
COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

February 1: Introduction—What Do the Bible and Christian Ministry Have to Do with Nature?

February 8: Did the Bible Get Us into This Fix?


Recommended:


February 15: Field Trip— The Environment We’re Living In
A toxic tour of south Chicago sponsored by the Southeast Environmental Task Force guided by Aaron Rosinski. The bus will arrive in the McCormick parking lot north of the McCormick building at 12:50 and will leave promptly at 1:00.

Read the information on the website of the Southeast Environmental Task Force: www.southeastenvironmental.org.

Mendelsohn, Betsy. “Rustbelt Hell or Redevelopment Heaven? Lake Calumet: Land of Contrasts.”

Locate and read your own denomination’s statement on the environment.

Recommended:

February 22: Eco-justice and Environmental Racism
Bible: Genesis 1; 1 Kings 21:1-16; Revelation 22

Declaration and Action Plan of the National Black Church Environmental and Economic Justice Summit. Washington, D.C., 1993


______. “Epiphany: It’s Time to See What Is, as it is—from Bethlehem to New Orleans.” The Lutheran Magazine (January, 2006). www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=5655&key=31979023


George Zechariah. “Towards a Subaltern Earth Ethics: the Narmada Bachao Andolan as


Recommended:


March 1: The Environment of the Bible: Family Farming
Primary Texts:
Bible: Genesis 1-4, 12-18; Exodus 21-23; Deuteronomy 14-15, 26; Leviticus 25; Luke 4, 8, 13, 15, 16.


Recommended:


Berry, Wendell. The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture, 3-14. San
March 8: Creation & Dominion: The Natural World and the Human Place within It

Bible: Genesis 1-3; Psalms 8, 74, 89, 104, 115, 118; Proverbs 8; 1 Corinthians 8-10.


Read about “Dominionism” at www.theocracywatch.org.


Recommended:


March 15: Reading Week—No Class

March 22: The Environment of the Bible: Urbanization and Empire
Bible: Genesis 12-14; 1 Samuel 8; 2 Samuel 5-7; 1 Kings 12, 16, 21; Psalms 46, 48, 87; Amos; Isaiah 1-5; Ezekiel 26-27; Habakkuk 1-2; Acts 2, 4, 17-19; Romans 15, 16; Revelation 13, 18.


Recommended:

March 29: Apocalyptic Perspectives on Nature: Escapist or Engaged?

Primary Texts:
Bible: Isaiah 24-27, 65-66; Zechariah 12-14; Daniel 7-12; Revelation 6, 12, 16, 21-22.


Hanson, Paul D. “Defining Old Testament Apocalyptic.” In Old Testament Apocalyptic, 25-


Recommended:

April 5: Apocalyptic Perspectives on Nature: Does Nature Need to Be Redeemed?

Bible: Isaiah 11, 24-27, 65-66; Zechariah 12-14; Daniel 7-12; Romans 8.


Recommended:

April 12: The World of Nature in Wisdom Literature
Bible: Proverbs 8, 10-15: Job 1-14, 38-42.


April 19: Sacred Geography, Worship, and the Liturgical Year
Bible: Genesis 12-13; Exodus 3, 12, 19-24, 34; Leviticus 23; Numbers 28-29; Deuteronomy 16; 1 Kings 5-8; Ezekiel 36, 47; Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122; Prov 3:13-18; Mark 4, John 15:1-11; Revelation 22.


Angelou, Maya. “On the Pulse of Morning.”


Recommended:


April 26—No Class

May 3: Jesus: Environmental Issues in the Gospels

Other readings to be announced.