

Religion & Climate Change Teaching/Learning Resources

Overview: As the pandemic dominated Americans' attention in 2020, another crisis—climate change—worsened with alarming speed. The year 2020 brought the most active Atlantic hurricane season ever, the West Coast's worst fire season, and the hottest global temperatures (tied with 2016). All of this unfolded even as the Trump administration, in alliance with evangelical climate-change deniers, continued to thwart policies that would combat global warming. Now, with the election of Joe Biden, the U.S. has rejoined the Paris climate accord and environmentalism is regaining political momentum. What is religion's role in this new environment, and how does it shape Americans' understanding of climate change? What questions should scholars be pursuing on religion and climate? Join our expert panelists as they reflect on these and related questions.

March 2021 – [YouTube Link](#)

Cohosts

Lisa H. Sideris, Indiana University, Bloomington

Peter J. Thuesen, Indiana University, Indianapolis

Panelists

Amanda J. Baugh, California State University, Northridge

Evan Berry, Arizona State University

Show Notes & Major questions

Assignment Prompts & Questions

1. [Religion and Ecology Essay Assignment](#) by Amanda J. Baugh
2. Amanda J. Baugh on Ecological Footprint Assignments from webinar
3. Compare and contrast the environmental ethics of two or more different religious traditions.
4. Explore key scriptural passages or teachings from at least two different religious traditions (e.g., Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Indigenous spiritualities) that can be interpreted as:
 - a. Calls for stewardship, care, or protection of the environment.
 - b. Justifications for human dominion or exploitation of natural resources.
5. Can indigenous spiritual traditions offer unique insights or practices for sustainable living and environmental stewardship? How do these differ from or complement major world religions (Islam, Christianity, Judaism)?

6. Analyze the phenomenon of "climate denial" or "climate skepticism" within certain religious communities. What are the purported theological, political, or cultural underpinnings? Why?
7. Looking ahead: What is the most significant role religious communities can play in shaping a more sustainable and just future? How can religious narratives and symbols be effectively used to communicate the urgency of climate change and inspire hope and action?
8. How can academic study of religion and ecology contribute to practical environmental solutions?
9. Are there specific deities, spirits, or sacred entities associated with nature or environmental elements in different religious traditions? How does this influence respect for the environment?
10. How have interpretations of key religious texts regarding the environment evolved over time, especially in response to growing ecological awareness?
11. How do religious rituals, practices, or festivals connect adherents to the natural world or seasonal cycles? (e.g., harvest festivals, pilgrimage to natural sites)
12. What role can religious leaders and institutions play in:
 - a. Educating their communities about climate change?
 - b. Mobilizing for political action and policy change?
 - c. Promoting sustainable practices?

Debate/Discussion Questions

1. To what extent are contemporary religious environmental movements genuinely rooted in traditional teachings versus being modern reinterpretations influenced by secular environmentalism?
2. How do secular environmental ethics compare with religious environmental ethics? What can they learn from each other?
3. Discuss the potential conflicts or tensions between religious values and specific environmental policies or scientific recommendations.
4. What potential do religious traditions hold for fostering a global ecological ethos sufficient to address the scale of the climate crisis?
5. How do concepts of sin, harmony, balance, or cosmic order within religious frameworks relate to environmental degradation?
6. Explore eschatological views (beliefs about the 'end times') within different religions. How might these views influence attitudes towards long-term environmental sustainability and climate action?

Resources Mentioned in Webinar

David Haberman Professor Emeritus in Religious Studies at IU, Bloomington

- [*River of Love in an Age of Pollution: The Yamuna River of Northern India*](#) David L. Haberman

[Faith in Place](#) Environmental Justice Nonprofit

Laudato Si': Pope Francis' encyclical on caring for "our common home", the planet earth, calling for global dialogue about how we are shaping our planet and future.

- [Transcript](#)

Syllabi & Modules

[Buddhism and the Environment](#) by Sid Brown (Wabash Center)

[Religion & Science ARDA Teaching Module](#)

[Catholic Environmental Ethics: Sources, Norms, and Issues](#) Graduate Syllabus by Dawn M. Northwehr (Wabash Center)

[Religion and Nature in America Syllabus](#) by Brett Grainger

[Faith, Ethics & the Biodiversity Crisis Syllabus](#) by Keith Douglas Warner (Wabash Center)

[Religion, Ethics, and Nature](#) by Anna Peterson (Wabash Center)

Related Resources

[Consecrating Science: Wonder, Knowledge, and the Natural World](#) Lisa H. Sideris

[Tornado God: American Religion and Violent Weather](#) by Peter J. Thuesen

Devoted to Nature

[The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism](#) by Evan Berry

[African Perspectives on Religion and Climate Change](#)

[Falling in Love with Nature: The Values of Latinx Catholic Environmentalism](#) Amanda J. Baugh

[Weather, Religion and Climate Change](#) by Sigurd Bergmann

[Churches and Cosmologies: Religion, Environment and Social Conflict in Latin America](#), Evan Berry

[Reconciling Islamic Ethics, Fossil Fuel Dependence, and Climate Change in the Middle East](#) by Saleem H. Ali

[Climate Politics and the Power of Religion](#) Edited by Evan Berry

[Islam and Environmental Ethics](#) by Muhammad Yaseen Gada

[The Faith Factor in Climate Change: How Religion Impacts American Attitudes on Climate and Environmental Policy](#) from PPRI

[Interview with Evan Berry](#) from Yale

[Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology](#)

[Religion and Energy: Introduction](#), Evan Berry

[God and the Green Divide: Religious Environmentalism in Black and White](#) by Amanda J. Baugh

[Muslims and climate change: How Islam, Muslim organizations, and religious leaders influence climate change perceptions and mitigation activities](#) by Jens Koehrsen

[Religion and climate change indifference: Linking the sacred to the social](#)

[Fossil fuel authoritarianism: oil, climate change and the Christian right in the United States](#) by Robert B. Horwitz

[Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection](#) Lisa H. Sideris

[Climate Change and the Significance of Religion](#) by Mike Hulme

[In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles Over Translating the Bible](#)
Peter J. Thuesen

[Religious Environmentalism and Environmental Religion](#) in America by Evan Berry

[The Nature and Nuance of Climate Change Skepticism in the United States](#) by Kristin Haltinner

[Religion and Climate Change Article](#) by Willis Jenkins, Evan Berry, and Luke Beck Kreider

ARDA Resources

[PPRI Climate Change Survey, 2023](#), ARDA

[Religion and the Environment](#), Ahead of the Trend

[Breaking Good: How religion and science can work together](#) by David Briggs, Ahead of the Trend

[Religion and Science](#), Ahead of the Trend

1. **Guest Speakers:** Invite local religious leaders, members of faith-based environmental organizations, or academics specializing in the field.
2. **Interfaith Dialogue:** Organize a panel or small group discussions with representatives from different faiths to share their perspectives on climate change and environmental stewardship.
3. **Media Analysis:** Use documentaries (e.g., "An Inconvenient Truth" alongside "Laudato Si'"), news articles, and social media campaigns to analyze how religion and climate change are portrayed.
4. **Site Visits (if possible):** Visit a local faith community with a strong environmental program (e.g., community garden, solar panels, conservation efforts).
5. **Creative Projects:**
 - Students create artwork, poetry, or short videos interpreting religious teachings on creation care.
 - Develop a social media campaign to raise awareness within a specific faith community.
 - Draft a "sermon" or "khutbah" on climate change from a chosen religious perspective.
6. **Debates & Mock Summits:**
 - Debate: "Resolved: Religious communities have a greater moral obligation than secular ones to address climate change."
 - Mock Interfaith Climate Summit: Students represent different faiths to negotiate a common action plan.
7. **Service-Learning Projects:** Partner with a local faith-based organization on an environmental project.

III. Specific Resource Ideas (Online & Print):

1. **Websites:**
 - **Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE):** Extensive resources, including sections for each major world religion.
 - **Interfaith Power & Light:** National and state-level organizations mobilizing faith communities.
 - **GreenFaith:** International, multi-faith climate and environmental justice organization.
 - **The Bhumi Project (Hinduism):** An international Hindu voice for environmental concerns.
 - **EcoSikh:** Sikh community's response to climate change.
 - **Global Catholic Climate Movement:** Mobilizing Catholics for climate action.
 - **Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL).**
2. **Key Documents:**
 - *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (Pope Francis)
 - The Islamic Declaration on Climate Change
 - Various Buddhist Declarations on Climate Change

3. Books:

- *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment* by Roger S. Gottlieb
- Books by theologians like Sallie McFague, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Leonardo Boff, Bill McKibben (who often writes from a faith-informed perspective).

4. Films/Documentaries:

- "The Letter: A Message for our Earth" (YouTube Originals - on *Laudato Si'*)
- "Renewal: Stories from America's Religious-Environmental Movement"