SYLLABUS

COURSE: ANTH/REL 444 SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY (Theory) 3 credits

TIME: 1:30-4:00 p.m., Wednesdays, Fall Semester 2018

PLACE: Webster Hall 113
       University of Hawai‘i @ Manoa

INSTRUCTOR:

Dr. Les Sponsel
Professor Emeritus
Department of Anthropology @ UHM

Office: Saunders Hall 321
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          http://spiritualecology.info

ORIENTATION

“Throughout history, it [religion] has expressed the deepest questions human beings can ask, and it has taken a central place in the lives of virtually all civilizations and cultures.... Religion persists and is on the rise, even as scientific and non-religious perspectives have become prominent” (American Academy of Religion, 2015, “Why Study Religion?,” www.aarweb.org).

“The notion that fact can be cleanly separated from value is absurd. The notion that our understanding of the material world can be cleanly separated from our experience of the spiritual world is impossible. The magisteria [science and religion] are mixed, shuffled, irremediably joined” (Bruno Guiderdoni, astrophysicist at the
“Contemporary spiritualities combine practices of particular religious traditions with concern for the global situation and the life of the planet.... are pluralistic and diverse; they search for a global ethic, are concerned with ecology, encourage the cultivation of healthy relationships, support feminism, and pursue peace.... Given the increasing scholarly attention in conferences and publications to the role of spirituality in contemporary culture, it is clear that the academy has recognized spirituality as a subject of study both within and independent of the study of religion” Mary N. MacDonald, 2005, “Spirituality,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (Second Edition), Lindsay Jones, Editor-in-Chief, New York, NY: Thomson Gale 13:8719, 8721.

“... the upsurge of Spirit is the only plausible way to stop the ecological destruction of our planet. Even people who have no interest in a communal solution to the distortions in our lives will have to face up [to] this ecological reality. Unless we transform our relationship with nature, we will destroy the preconditions for human life on this planet” (Rabbi Michael Lerner, 2000, *Spirit Matters*, Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Inc., p. 138).

“The Environmental crisis requires changes not only in public policy, but in individual behavior. The historical record makes clear that religious teaching, example, and leadership are powerfully able to influence personal conduct and commitment. As scientists, many of us have had profound experience of awe and reverence before the universe. We understand that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Our planetary home should be so regarded. Efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred” (statement from “Preserving the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion,” *Global Forum*, Moscow, January 1990).

*Spiritual ecology refers to scientific and scholarly studies of the vast, complex, diverse, and dynamic arena at the interfaces of religions and spiritualities with environments, ecologies, and environmentalisms.* The term spiritual ecology is used simply because it is most inclusive, referring to individual as well as organizational ideas and actions in this arena, and because it parallels the names of other major approaches within ecological anthropology like historical ecology and political ecology. Although it has deep roots, spiritual ecology is a most exciting and promising new interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary frontier for research, teaching, and practice that has been growing exponentially since the 1990s.

This advanced course pursues a systematic and thorough anthropological survey and critical analysis of spiritual ecology in historical and cross-cultural perspective through PowerPoint lectures, documentary films, discussion, and student panels. The
instructor will discuss his own research and publications on various aspects of this subject, including his continuing long-term fieldwork on the relationships among Buddhism, sacred places, ecology, and biodiversity conservation in Thailand, in recent years focused on sacred caves. A major special segment of the course focuses on religious responses to global climate change.

This course is cross-listed as Religion 444 Spiritual Ecology.

**FORMAT**

The course material will be surveyed by lectures with PowerPoint; discussion of readings; and an extensive succession of very carefully selected superb documentary films. *A unique feature of this course is its emphasis on an experiential as well as intellectual exploration of spiritual ecology, this accomplished through films.*

Students are required to be open minded as well as courteous and professional in class. *Students can say anything as long as it is relevant, concise, and polite.* The ideals of academic freedom and democracy apply in this class, even if they are restricted elsewhere. Being concise is very important because there is a wealth of course material to cover in the very limited time of each class meeting, and because everyone who wishes should have an opportunity to contribute to discussion, rather than one person or a few dominating the class for the entire semester.

In order to facilitate discussion by everyone and more penetrating discussion, every student is required to post on the Laulima course website one brief comment (about 3-4 sentences) and a brief response to another student’s comment each week. The instructor will read and respond to the accumulated comments each weekend. These posting are in lieu of weekly quizzes in class.

The only prerequisite for this course is Anth 152 Culture and Humanity or 200 Cultural Anthropology, although 415 Ecological Anthropology, 422 Anthropology of Religion, and related courses such as on religion, ecology, and environmental studies would be helpful background. However, most of all, one simply needs an *open mind* together with intellectual curiosity and serious commitment, attributes of any reputable scientist or scholar worthy of the title. Any prerequisites can be waived.

Even though electronic use also has an environmental impact, in order to help save paper, and therefore trees and forests, beyond Laulima postings online any other written exercises for this course, such as the final examination (reflective essay), should be submitted to the instructor via email ([sponsel@hawaii.edu](mailto:sponsel@hawaii.edu)) with the subject clearly marked as (444. ..).
OBJECTIVES

The three primary goals of this course are to:

1. provide a broad, systematic, and in-depth *cross-cultural* survey of the interrelationships between religion/spirituality and nature/environmentalism with an emphasis on an anthropological perspective;

2. allow each student to penetrate especially deeply into the ecology of the religion or other topic of her or his choice with an emphasis on its *cultural and natural contexts*; and

3. provide an inventory of *key resources* on spiritual ecology, including books, periodicals, articles, reference works, films, and internet sites for present and future study and research. (See Appendix IV in this syllabus, the 2016 syllabus posted on the Laulima course website, and the instructor’s website [http://spiritualecology.info](http://spiritualecology.info)).

The learning outcomes for achieving these three objectives will be measured by several graded exercises.

GRADING

The final course grade will be calculated as follows:

1. class attendance with active and meaningful *participation* in the individual and group discussions about lectures, readings, films, and other resources during class (10%);

2. a weekly entry in the Laulima course website of about 3-4 sentences of comments on key points in the course material covered that week plus a brief response to one other student’s entry (40%);

3. a panel discussion, ideally with a PowerPoint although optional, on a religious response to global climate change (30%); and

4. a *reflective essay* on the entire course of 4 pages typed single-spaced for the take-home final examination (20%).

Please see Appendix I in this syllabus for specific guidelines about the final examination.
If it is apparent from class discussions and Laulima postings that students are reading regularly, then there will not be any surprise quizzes or other tests. There is no mid-term examination. However, each student will receive a mid-term grade.

Student work will be evaluated for:

1. achieving the primary objectives of the course;

2. general knowledge of all required reading assignments and of all material presented by the instructor in lectures and from films, discussions in class and on Laulima;

3. clear, concise, logical, analytical, and critical thinking; and

4. regular, active, and meaningful participation in class discussions of assigned readings in class and on the course website.

Students striving for an A grade should do more than the minimum requirements; that is, pursue additional readings, extra films, and/or websites as recommended in the course Schedule and 2016 Syllabus.

Undergraduate and graduate student work will be graded separately, and greater sophistication is expected for the latter including a higher quantity and quality of work. Graduate students are expected to undertake extra readings of their choice in pursuing their own special topical and regional interests. They are also encouraged to lead subgroup discussions on required readings.

Attendance will be taken at every class meeting during the first five minutes of the period and then during the last five minutes. Thus, students are expected to arrive on time to class, stay and remain attentive throughout the entire period, and come to every single class meeting throughout the entire semester. An absence to be approved requires a convincing excuse, ideally with documentation such as a memo from an appropriate official like a physician. The final course grade will be reduced by one whole letter grade for every three unapproved absences.

Any students who wish to sleep, carry on private conversations, or engage in texting or other pursuits unrelated to the class should do so outside of the classroom to avoid distracting other students and the instructor. In short, like the instructor, students are expected to take this course very seriously. Anyone who does not do so is wasting their time and that of other students and the instructor; thus, they should drop the course immediately instead of waiting until the end of the semester to receive a poor or failing grade.
The use of any electronic devices in class is strictly prohibited, unless directly related to the class for note taking. Accordingly, notes should be emailed regularly to the instructor.

Extra credit may be earned by writing a one-page reaction (not summary) to a film, journal article, book chapter, lecture, or class discussion from any of the material covered in the syllabus or class. Five high quality extra credit papers can make the difference for a borderline course grade (e.g., B+ to A-), while ten such papers can elevate the course grade to the next higher level (e.g., B to A). Other alternatives for more extra credit include writing a review of an extra book, or a report based on library or field research; however, the specifics have to be approved in advance by the instructor. Thus, in principle, with enough high quality work any student can earn an A in this course. However, ultimately, the value of the course for serious students far exceeds any grade and credits.

Note that Chapters 13-16 in the Gottlieb textbook are not required reading, but may be read and commented on in one or more essays for extra credit.

**SPECIAL NEEDS**

If any student feels the need for reasonable accommodations because of the impact of a disability, then she or he should contact the KOKUA Program in QLCSS 013 (phones 956-7511 or 956-7612), and/or speak to the instructor in private to discuss specifics. The instructor is quite willing to collaborate with any student and KOKUA about needs related to a documented disability.

**READING**

Every student is required to discuss in class individually and in groups as well as on Laulima the common textbook:


Recommended, but not required, is the instructor’s book:

Sponsel, Leslie E., 2012, *Spiritual Ecology: A Quiet Revolution*, Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger. [New and used copies from Amazon.com are priced respectively at $48 and starting at $23]. [When a chapter from this book is required reading or
recommended reading then it will be posted on Laulima].

There will also be a few additional required readings posted onLaulima (see Schedule). Many of these are articles by the instructor who has published extensively on spiritual ecology and related subjects. They provide especially relevant background for lectures, discussions, and films.

An extensive list of additional resources is provided in Appendix IV and in the syllabus from Spring 2016 which is available on Laulima.

You are encouraged to pursue your individual interests in exploring some of the resources identified, including exploring websites and viewing extra films many available on YouTube. *Students who take advantage of as many of the resources provided here as feasible will obtain a systematic and thorough overview of the subject*. The syllabi (2016, 2018) and instructor’s website provide a wealth of information to pursue beyond this course. See Appendix IV in this syllabus as well.

Please alert the instructor if there is a problem with any of the websites.

**PARTS**

I. Introduction and Background
II. Religion, Spirituality, Ecology, and Environmentalism
III. Radical Environmentalism
IV. Spirituality in Nature
V. Buddhist Ecology and Environmentalism
VI. Religious Responses to Global Climate Change

**TOPICS**

August

22  Spiritual Ecology Overview
29  St. Francis and Lynn White Challenge Christianity

September

5   John Muir and National Parks
12  Thomas Berry’s Universe
19  Green Patriarch, Eastern Orthodox Church Environmentalist
26  Radical Environmentalism

October
3  Bron Taylor’s Dark Green Religion
10  Wangari Maathai’s Tree Planting Catches Fire
17  Spirits in Nature and Sacred Places
24  Kogi Indians and Balinese Temples
31  Buddhist Ecology and Environmentalism, Sacred Caves in Thailand

November
7  Can Poet’s Save Nature? W.S. Merwin
14  Tibet and Ecocide
21  Global Climate Change and Al Gore
28  Abrahamic Religions Respond

December
5  Asian Religions Respond

SCHEDULE

August 22

PART I: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction to course, instructor, and students

Lectures: Ecology and Spirituality, Spiritual Ecology Overview

Required Film:

Spirit and Nature (1991, 88 minutes) [Please view on your own outside of class via UH Manoa streaming video through the Hawai‘i Voyager Catalog of Hamilton Library].
Required Reading:


Recommended Reading


August 29

**PART II: RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTALISM**

*Lectures: St. Francis of Assisi and Lynne White Challenge Christianity*

*Film: A Celebration of Creation: The Blessing of the Animals* (59 minutes)

**Required Reading:**


September 5

*Lecture: Nature Prophet John Muir and the National Park System*

*Film: John Muir in the New World (85 minutes)*

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**


September 12

*Films: Thomas Berry: The Great Story (47 minutes), Journey of the Universe (56 minutes)*

**Required Reading:**


September 19

*Films: The Green Patriarch (42 minutes), Renewal Stories from America’s Religious-Environmental Movement (90 minutes)*

**Required Reading:**


Recommended Reading:


PART III: RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

September 26

Lecture: Radical Environmentalism

Film: Butterfly [Julia Butterfly Hill] (80 minutes, VHS 18644)

Required Reading


October 3

Lecture: Bron Taylor’s Dark Green Religion

Film: Theater in a Crowded Fire [Burning Man] (30 minutes)

Required Reading:

Taylor, Bron, 2006, “Religion and Environmentalism in America and Beyond,” in
October 10

Film: *Taking Root: The Vision of Wangari Maathai* [Kenya](80 minutes)

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


October 17

**PART IV: SPIRITUALITY IN NATURE**

Animism and Sacred Places

*Films: Cave of Forgotten Dreams* [Chauvet Upper Paleolithic Art](90 minutes), *The Quietest Place on Earth* [Haleakala, Maui](50 minutes?)

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:

October 24

Films: Aluna [Kogi Indians, Sierra Madre, Colombia] (86 minutes), Goddess and the Computer [Bali] (54 minutes)

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


October 31

PART V: BUDDHIST ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTALISM

Lectures: Natural Wisdom: Ecology and Environmentalism Inherent in Buddhism, Sacred Caves in Thailand and Biodiversity Conservation

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


November 7

Lecture: Can A Poet Save Nature?

Film: W.S. Merwin: Even Thought The Whole World Is Burning (55 minutes)

Required Reading:

November 14

Lecture: Tibet: What Happens when a Sacred Environment is Secularized?

Film: Devotion and Defiance (35 minutes)

Required Reading:

November 21

PART VI: RELIGIOUS RESPONSES TO GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

Film: An Inconvenient Truth Sequel [Al Gore on global climate change] (90 minutes)

Required Reading:

[See Resource Guide to Global Climate Change on Laulima]
November 28

Panels on Abrahamic Religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism)

Required Reading:

Gottlieb Chapters 1-4, 8 [the chapter for your panel]

December 5

Panels on Asian Religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism, Jainism)

Required Reading:

Gottlieb Chapters 5-7, 9-10 [the chapter for your panel]

December 12 - Final Examination Reflective Essay Due

APPENDIX I:
GUIDELINES FOR FINAL EXAMINATION REFLECTIVE ESSAY

One or more letter grades will be subtracted from the final essay examination grade for failure to adhere to the following guidelines.

Your final essay should reflect on the entire course based on your experience in class, class notes, Laulima course website, readings, films, resources, and other material. The primary matter to consider is the meaning, significance, achievements, potentials, and limitations of spiritual ecology. You may wish to simply address each of these in turn.

Your essay should be clear and concise, but also substantial and penetrating. Go
beyond generalizations to specifics including particular examples. Your essay should be limited to about 4 pages typed single-spaced. Be sure to include introductory and concluding paragraphs. Explicitly identify by number 3-5 main points.

Instead of quotes use paraphrasing, don’t waste space. Use the spelling and grammar check on your computer to try to catch any errors in the final draft of your essay, although the grade will be based solely on the relevance and quality of the contents.

You are most welcome to consult with any individual as well as any print and internet resources, although covering the required readings for the course is by far the most important. Just be careful to properly acknowledge any source for specific information, ideas, and the like. Also, be sure to include your own insights, comments, reactions, questions, and criticisms.

Ultimately your essay must be the product of your own individual scholarship and creativity. Any plagiarism will be rewarded with an automatic F for the final course grade and reported to the office of the Dean.

Be careful to cite particular sources for specific information including your course textbooks and other readings, lectures, films, case studies, websites, class discussions including on Laulima, and handouts. In each reading citation include the author and page (e.g., Gottlieb p. 60, or Gottlieb pp. 65-70). Other kinds of sources can be documented as follows: (lecture Aug. 22), (Laulima or in class discussion Oct. 10), (film title), or (personal communication with St. Francis of Assisi, date). It is not necessary to append a bibliography with the full citation of sources, if they are already in the course syllabus or textbooks.

The purpose of the essay is to: (1) convincingly demonstrate your familiarity with the course material; (2) present a critical analysis of it; and (3) discuss your own reactions to it. Your grade will be based on the extent to which you satisfy this threefold purpose plus the guidelines, grading criteria, and course objectives listed earlier in this syllabus.

The final reflective essay is due December 12 by 10:00 p.m. Please send it as an email attachment to the instructor with the subject clearly identified as 444 Final at sponsel@hawaii.edu.
APPENDIX II: GUIDELINES FOR PANEL DISCUSSIONS

1. PANEL SIZE AND COORDINATION   The optimum size for a student panel is around three individuals, a smaller or larger number can be awkward. One member of the panel should volunteer or be elected to serve as its coordinator. The coordinator should make a list of the names and email addresses of all members of the panel to set up a group email to facilitate effective communication and coordination of the panel as a whole outside of the classroom.

2. TWO MEETINGS   Each panel should meet outside of class at least twice in order to successively plan, integrate, and rehearse the whole presentation. It is especially important for the panel to rehearse the presentation before it is given in class in order to work out any problems, gauge timing, and make it run as smoothly as possible. In effect, panel meetings outside of class should be like a small seminar on the subject under consideration as part of the active and collaborative learning style emphasized in this course. The instructor will also schedule some class time for panels to get organized.

3. INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK   Ideally the entire panel or at least a representative should meet with the instructor during his office hours to outline the presentation and obtain feedback. Since the panel presentation comprises 30% of the final course grade feedback from the instructor can be especially helpful and important. The panel will be graded as a whole, although it will be noted if an individual panelist excels or falters.

4. CRITICAL ANALYSIS   The members of each panel should dialog among themselves in person and by email to identify three to five key points to explore in their class discussion. In this presentation panel members should engage together in a conversation about their individual conclusions from their own case study, perhaps focusing in turn on each of three to five main points on the subject. Avoid each panelist simply summarizing their own reading in succession. The panel must involve a dialog among panelists.

5. IDEAS AND DELIVERY   The panel should keep its presentation simple, just focus on discussing the primary argument and three to five main points. Try to accomplish this in a manner that attracts and holds the attention of the class. In other words, both the ideas and their delivery are important for an effective presentation. If feasible, it is desirable for the panelists to engage in a debate on the subject with different individuals taking opposing or alternative sides in a constructive argument. The panel presentation may be facilitated by a PowerPoint presentation, but keep it simple and relevant, don’t get lost with details and gimmicks.
APPENDIX III:
GUIDELINES FOR POWERPOINTS PRESENTATIONS

Limit the number of frames in your PowerPoint to about one frame for every one to two minutes according to the time available. For example, use about a dozen frames if you have only 15 minutes for your presentation, or about two dozen frames if you have 30 minutes.

When you start developing your PowerPoint presentation, carefully select a frame design and color combination that best reflects your subject matter. Be sure to use a strong contrast in the colors of the text and background. For instance, it is easy for your audience to read something like a yellow text on a dark blue background, or vice versa. Avoid using either a light or dark color for both text and background. Use a bold font in the largest size that will fit on the frame.

The goal is to design the PowerPoint so that it can be easily read by the audience without straining. It should also be aesthetically pleasing as well as informative.

Limit the text on each frame of the PowerPoint to a few key words or phrases avoiding too much detail. The text is simply a guide to help your memory as the speaker and an outline for the audience to help them follow the main points of your talk. Do not read the text on each frame to your audience; they are literate and will be more actively engaged in your presentation if they read the text on each frame for themselves. Instead, explain the key words and phrases on each frame to elaborate on the main points outlined. If you use a quote, then ask the audience to read it for themselves in order to involve them more actively in the presentation.

Use a few striking but relevant illustrations or images for most frames, but not necessarily on every one of them. Careful selection of images that are most relevant and highest quality will greatly enhance your PowerPoint. Pictures and other illustrations may be found at Google Images.

Sometimes special effects or gimmicks with the PowerPoint such as animation can enhance a presentation, but if they are not handled very carefully, then they can be distracting for the audience. Your primary goal is to inform your audience, rather than dazzle them with your technical skills and in the process sacrifice your message.

Video segments may be useful, but only if you have time and if they can be accessed easily and quickly (e.g., YouTube).

You should bring your PowerPoint file on a USB, flash drive, or other external storage device that can be installed easily and quickly in the computer provided in the
classroom, rather than wasting time installing your laptop, trying to download the PowerPoint from your email, or some other venue. Get to the class early to set up. Install this device well ahead of the time for your presentation for efficiency. Your PowerPoint file can be inserted on the desktop of the classroom computer, then extract and keep your USB to avoid forgetting and losing it. Be sure to test and rehearse with any equipment in advance in order to avoid any frustration with technical problems for you and your audience.

APPENDIX IV:
BRIEF RESOURCE GUIDE
FOR SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY

The first general textbook on the subject is:


The most recent general text is:


Among related complementary books are these:


By now there are also several major reference works:


There are also two academic journals focused on this subject:


*Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* (1997- ) [available electronically through Hawaii Voyager Catalog].

The *Forum on Religion and Ecology* at Yale University has extensive resources and publishes a monthly email newsletter:
“The Forum website is a premiere website for research, education, engagement, and outreach in the field of religion and ecology. The website contains detailed information on the religious traditions of the world and their ecological contributions including: introductory essays, annotated bibliographies, selections from sacred texts, environmental statements from religious communities, and engaged projects of religious grassroots environmental movements. To facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue, there are resources that address environmental issues related to ethics, economics, policy, gender, and evolutionary and ecological sciences. To enhance teaching, the website includes syllabi, lists of educational videos and CD-ROMs, links to programs and institutions related to environmental education, and a variety of other resources for educators. The website provides current information on news, publications, and events related to religion and ecology. This information is also available in a monthly e-newsletter…” (https://bioethics.yale.edu/resources/forum-religion-and-ecology).

(Incidentally, there are similar forums in Australia, Canada, and Europe).

There is a professional organization, the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture (2007- )

http://www.religionandnature.com

Finally, this article annotates a sample of 125 books from a survey of more than 1,000: