

An Invitation



MARCH 2005

Religion and Nature News

For several generations scholars have focused attention on the complex relationships between human beings, their religions, and Earth's living systems. This area of inquiry intensified beginning in the 1960s. In 1990 David Barnhill and Eugene Bianchi proposed a "Religion and Ecology" group to the American Academy of Religion, which provided fertile ground for the increasing number of scholars gravitating to the field. By the end of the decade the World Religions and Ecology conferences were held at Harvard, followed closely in the subsequent years by the Harvard University press series based on them. This occurred as the number of scholarly books and articles devoted to such subject matter increased, and was complemented in the early 21st century with the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, published in early 2005.

These works drew on and engaged decades of scholarly and popular reflection on the nexus between religion, culture and ecology. The last decade and a half alone has been remarkable for this rapidly growing field.

At least as early as the mid-1990s scholars engaged in this work discussed whether there was more they could do, as scholars, to draw the

discipline together. The Forum on Religion and Ecology has played a significant positive role in this regard, and its Canadian offspring has already gained significant traction. Meanwhile, a European Network on Religion and Ecology is involved in similar landmark work in Europe.

All of this is to the good but there still is no scholarly, membership society to advocate for the field as a field. Apart from the religion and ecology sections (and a few others that capture religion, ecology, and nature themes) there are few occasions for scholars working on these issues to interact. The AAR has many constraints (there is no place for extended discussion of either issues, collaborative research, teaching challenges, and so on), and equally frustrating, there is little way to add to our conversation partners those whose primary disciplinary homes and insights come from beyond religious studies.

Many long for a more consistent, comprehensive, and interdisciplinary venue to present work and collaborate in ways that will catapult the field to each to its next level. If you share such feelings and desire more scholarly contact with those whose passions are aroused by this

fascinating and important new field, we would like to invite you to discuss with us the invention of a Society that would take up this challenge.

Professor Mark Wallace of Swarthmore College has graciously agreed to host such a discussion at his campus, which is only a short train ride away from the AAR convention site, on the day before the AAR. Meanwhile, the faculty and graduate students of the graduate program in "Religion and Nature" at the University of Florida would also welcome anyone interested to a planning meeting for this Swarthmore event, which could be held in April or May 2005 or even in September. Such free planning could occur over e-mail among interested parties, but would be both more pleasant and efficient face-to-face. The Religion and Nature program could take care of the on-site costs (and possibly some travel expenses) if interested scholars thought such a pre-meeting would make sense, and would commit the time to come. Please contact us soon to express your interest or intention to attend one of the two preliminary meetings by sending an email to:

society@religionandnature.com

Inside this issue:

An Invitation	1
Teihard Society Events	2
Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature	2
New Horizons on Nature, Culture and Religion	3
Independent Schools Sustainability	3
Religion and Ecology at Iowa State	4
Religion and Nature at Drew University	4

FOREST Launch	4
Other Religion and Nature Programs	5
Canadian Forum on Religion and Ecology	5

Teilhard Events, 2005

Beginning in April 2005, the American Teilhard Association in conjunction with the French and British Teilhard Associations will hold a series of conferences collectively called: "Teilhard 2005: Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of Teilhard's Death." These are cosponsored with the Harvard Forum on Religion and Ecology, UNESCO, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The commemoration will be launched with two major symposiums at the United Nations on April 7th and 8th in the Trusteeship Council Chamber. A principle theme of these events is that our present challenge is to activate a broader trusteeship for a sustainable future for the Earth Community. Speakers include the Nobel Laureate, Wangari Maathai, Steven Rockefeller, Chair, Earth Charter Drafting Committee, Michel Camdessus, former director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Bertrand Collomb, the director of the World Business Council on Sustainable Development.

A special celebration of Teilhard's thought and the Epic of Evolution will be held on

April 9th at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine with the music of Paul Winter. Speakers include Brian Swimme, author of *The Universe Story* and Sr. Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking*.

In addition to these events, other lectures and panel presentations will be held at Fordham University, Georgetown University, Iona College, Marist College, and Chestnut Hill College. For further information please see www.teilhard.cjb.net

FORUM ON RELIGION AND ECOLOGY

The Forum has completed the 10 volumes on World Religions and Ecology and the 10 annotated bibliographies of the world religions. It has also posted a major annotated bibliography of the holistic sciences. In addition it has documented on the web site information on 100 religiously based grassroots environmental projects. It is assisting with a film called "Renewal" that will highlight many of these projects.

Visit the Forum's website at <http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/main.html> for information on their publications and on intersecting disciplines (science, ethics, gender, public policy and economics), and upcoming events.

-Mary Evelyn Tucker



Mary Evelyn Tucker, President of the Teilhard Association, and co-founder of the Forum on Religion and Ecology

Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature Released

Good news! As those of you who attended the Religion and Ecology meeting for business at the AAR in San Antonio are aware, the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* is being released (in March 2005 in Europe and May in the U.S. and the rest of the world). Such an enormous project has taken a truly collaborative effort among scholars and others who contributed their expertise to bring the two-volume encyclopedia to its final form. One of the truly remarkable facets of this encyclopedia is the diversity of materials it brings together. In addition to contributions from top religious scholars dealing with religions that span the globe, the encyclopedia also covers topics ranging from shamanism to bioregionalism, from anarchy to ecofeminism, from ecopsychology to environmental ethics, from biographical pieces to geographical and conceptual pieces. A list of all one

thousand entries can be found at www.religionandnature.com, as well as the volume's introduction and some sample entries. In many ways, the encyclopedia not only includes diverse representation topically, it also cuts across disciplines, highlighting many areas of exploration and broadening the conversation between scholarly fields. The Society for Religion, Nature, and Culture will no doubt serve to enrich this conversation, as well as point out areas that need further attention and research. As is evident in the more historically-oriented pieces in the encyclopedia, the multiple relationships between religion and the natural world have deep roots and lend themselves to interdisciplinary efforts. The encyclopedia is one additional step in putting this discussion in public view, so that this conversation can continue to bear fruit.

-Gavin Van Horn, University of Florida



Bron Taylor, University of Florida, Editor-in-Chief of the ERN

New Horizons on Nature, Culture and Religion

In the fall of 2003, the University of California, Santa Barbara launched an exciting series of interdisciplinary events aimed at understanding, interpreting, and re-envisioning concepts of nature, science, and religion. The program, entitled New Visions of Nature, Science, and Religion, seeks to establish strong channels of dialogue across traditional disciplinary boundaries that challenge the disparate ways that "nature" is understood. With generous funding from the Templeton Foundation, Professor Jim Proctor of the UCSB Department of Geography is directing the lectures, research projects, workshops, public dialogues, conferences, and publication efforts that together form the New Visions program.

Nature is a much-abused word today, conjuring up images of untrammelled wilderness far removed from both scientific research and religious institutions. In its reference to the biophysical world, nature has been invoked by scientists to reject religious or "supernaturalistic" explanation, but it also serves as a common sacred ground for theologians and scientists oriented toward "ecospirituality." In its reference to human nature, the concept has been used to explain everything from the theological

doctrine of sin to the biological basis of religion. The goal of the New Visions Program, then, is to create productive dialogue between a variety of disciplinary approaches to nature, finding commonalities, as well as differences, between languages used to engage nature throughout the academy. This attempt to generate interaction between disciplinary approaches to nature serves another purpose: to further the science religion dialogue. Working in a multidisciplinary context, the New Visions program seeks to critically examine the metaphors and concepts deployed by science and religion to take on their areas of inquiry.

The first formal event took place in October 2004, when 15 core participant scholars from around the world congregated in Santa Barbara to begin a collaborative writing project. The group included mathematicians, philosophers, primatologists, theologians, physicists, ecologists, geographers, ethicists, and historians, who will meet again in the fall of 2005 to solidify their efforts. This publication effort is bound to be exciting: the collection of essays will tackle issues including the malleability of nature, nature as culture, evolutionary images of nature, nature as emergent and

mathematically complex, and the sacrality of nature.

During the winter of 2004, the New Visions endeavor offered the first of several graduate level courses on an interdisciplinary study of metaphors for nature. An undergraduate course on the same topic is currently being offered, and is available to the public online. January and February of 2005 will see two public dialogues, the first featuring Princeton biologist Simon Levin and MIT science scholar Evelyn Fox Keller on the topic "Ecology, Complexity, and Metaphor." The second will feature York University cognitive scientist Evan Thompson and Emory primatologist Franz de Waal speaking to the topic "Primates, Monks, and the Mind." In addition to an annual graduate student research competition, the New Visions program also will host visiting professors in the winter and spring of 2005 and 2006. All of these events, each aimed at fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, will culminate in a major international conference in the spring of 2006. Further information is available online at: www.newvisions.ucsb.edu.

-Evan Berry, UCSB

Nation's Independent Schools Strive Toward Sustainability

The United Nations has declared "sustainability" as its theme for next decade. Following this thematic trend, the National Association of Independent Schools decided on "sustainability" as its theme for this year and this topic will be the focus of February's NAIS conference in San Diego. As David Streight, the director of CSEE (The Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education) explains, "Sustainability is an ethical and spiritual issue, in addition to its social and scientific implications". School communities can provide models for living more simply, in closer harmony with nature and in greater consideration for how one impacts the world. With this in mind, Streight envisioned creating a booklet with pragmatic suggestions for schools to implement as they consider how to practice sustainability more effectively. The goal was to ensure

that heads of schools left the conference with not only new knowledge, but with the ability to go beyond the theoretical rhetoric of sustainability and actually instigate changes in their institutions.

The degree to which independent schools have adopted practices that reflect a commitment to sustainability (on their campuses and in the curriculum) varies across the nation. But, no matter where a school falls along this continuum, there are always ways to make these communities more "green." This booklet suggests easy ways for schools to begin if they are just starting to consider this issue, but it also offers additional ideas to schools that would like to improve and build on their existing practices if they already have some of the basics in place.



Jim Proctor, Dept. of Geography, UC Santa Barbara

This project was financed by CSEE, with assistance from the Forum on Religion and Ecology. Members of CSEE and RSISS (Religious Studies in Secondary Schools) were hosted by the Palmer-Trinity School in Miami, FL while they worked to compile the 40 page guide that will be distributed to heads of independent schools at the February conference. A more complete on-line version will also be available for use.

-Bridgette O'Brien, University of Florida

Religion and Ecology at Iowa State University

Iowa State is moving forward with exciting environmental education programs. First, we have added two new courses this year Religion and Ecology and an interdisciplinary, team-taught course called Religion and Agricultural Sustainability. The latter is co-listed with Religious Studies and Ag. Systems Technology in the college of Agriculture. Second, Karen Kessel (Anthropology) and I hosted a symposium in April 2004 at ISU entitled *Environment: Personal as Political -- Women, Food and Environmental Ethics*. Third, formal "greening" at ISU started last year after a visit from Peggy

Barlett, an anthropologist from Emory who ran a seminar on greening the college campus. This group works with faculty, students and staff (as well as the surrounding community) toward campus sustainability. Our recent (and biggest) success was getting greening language inserted into ISU's mission statement. Finally, and most innovative, is the development of a program with our Outdoor Recreational Services program in which students can enroll in a summer program in something like backpacking, mountain biking, or kayaking that will be paired with a course such as Religion

and Ecology. This is based largely on the NOLS (National Outdoor Leadership School) concept, and will be a travel course. Students will receive credits in the academic course as well as a 'sport' and leadership course as well. We'll begin this summer 2006, and once we get the prototype and blueprint established other faculty can develop paired courses, depending on academic and outdoor interest.

-Whitney Sanford, Iowa State University

Religion and Ecology at Drew University

Drew University has several avenues for the study of religion and ecology. Doctoral students can apply to the Graduate Division of Religion of the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies in either the Religion and Society Area to work with Laurel Kearns, or to the Theology and Philosophy Area to work with Catherine Keller. In addition to these two scholars, many of the faculty have a commitment to working with students in religion and ecology. We currently have 10 doctoral students in various stages of their program working on religion and ecology-related topics in biblical studies, ethics, sociology of religion and theology. Laurel Kearns is currently co-chair of the Religion and Ecology Group of the American Academy of Religion.

In order to highlight this growing field, Drew hosts at least one ecology and religion speaker each semester. This spring both Elizabeth Johnson and Mark Wallace will be speaking at Drew and meeting with interested students. In the fall of 2005, Keller and Kearns will be hosting the 5th Annual **Drew Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquium**, this year focusing on EcoSophia: Religion, Democracy and Earth. This will be preceded by a one day public conference on September 30th featuring Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mary Evelyn Tucker and Jay McDaniel. Contact Rick Bohannon for further details at rbohanno@drew.edu. Within the Drew Theological School, students in the Masters of Theological Studies or the Doctor of Ministry program can choose to focus on the *G.O.O.D. Church*

(Getting out of Doors), formerly known as the *Greening the Church-environmental ministries* track. Students in any degree program can also apply for an internship to work with GreenFaith--Interfaith Partners for the Environment (www.greenfaith.org) or to work at a "green" church to help them understand the process of "greening the church." Toward this same end, Drew Theological School, in conjunction with the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and the General Board of Discipleship, offers a five-course certification program, Masters or D. Min, entitled *Common Ground* with a focus on Camp, Conference and Retreat Ministry.

-Laurel Kearns, Drew University

Religion and Nature Program launches F.O.R.E.S.T.

The University of Florida's graduate program in Religion and Nature, in cooperation with the wider science, history, and ecology communities, are pleased to announce the creation of FOREST (The Florida Organization on Religion, Environmental Science, and Technology). FOREST is the recent recipient of a Metanexus Institute Local Societies Initiative grant. This new local scholarly and community society is an organization of interdisciplinary scholars, graduate students, secondary school teachers devoted to facilitating research, debate,

and the dissemination of diverse perspectives at the intersections of religion, nature, culture, science, technology, and ethics. The vision here is to contribute significantly to the public's understanding of the insights and challenges brought on by contemporary science, and how religion, science, and ethics are intertwined through a "Lunch and Lecture Series," working with local community groups, secondary school educators, workshops and possible conferences.

-Sam Snyder, The University of Florida

F O R E S T

Other Programs Drawing on the Religion and Nature Trope

*Dan Spencer at the University of Montana is again teaching a course on "The Greening of Religion: Religion, Nature and the Environment," and is also creating a summer course on "Ethics, Fire and Wilderness: Ethical Issues in Ecological Restoration."

*The University of Hawaii has an Ecological Anthropology Program (EAP) which offers special graduate certifi-

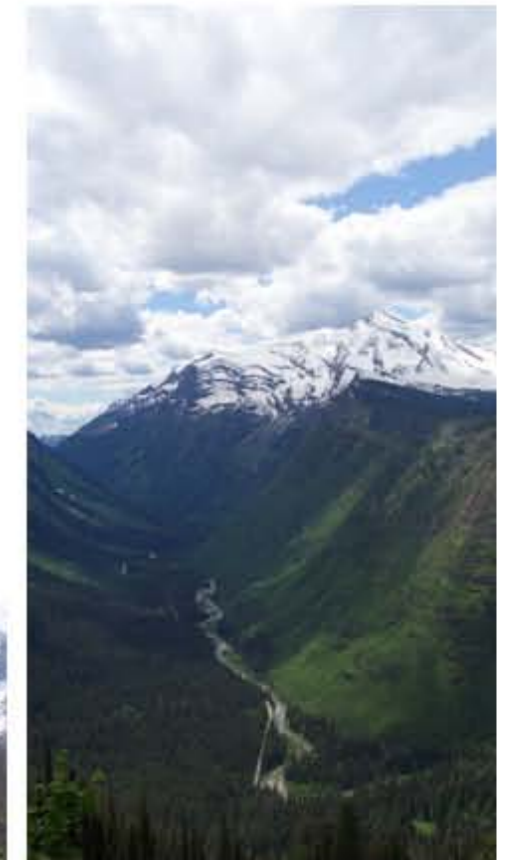
cates to students from several other area studies programs. Other relevant programs at UH include Global Environmental Science, Natural Resources and Environmental Management, Ocean and Earth Science and Technology, the Marine Options Program, Environmental Studies Certificate, Resource Management Certificate, Ethnobotany Program, and the Evolutionary Ecology and Conservation Biology Program. In addition, the program also offers a concentration in Spiritual Ecology.

* While not offering degrees specifically focused on "religion and ecology," or "religion and nature," Northwestern University, Syracuse University, and the University of California at Santa Barbara all have faculty that supervise students in these areas. Other theological institutions that allow such foci are Drew Divinity School and the Graduate Theological Union.

News From the Canadian Forum on Ecology and Religion

The Canadian Forum on Religion and Ecology (CFORE) has been busy with special events, including most recently presentations entitled **Earth Spirit: Conversations on Religion and Ecology**, featuring Heather Eaton, co-chair of CFORE, and **Eco-Nightmare: Culpability, Responsibility and the Environmental Crisis**, in which CFORE steering committee member Stephen Schaper discussed four perspectives on the crisis: scientific, Islamic, Deep Ecological, and Christian, at the University of Toronto. On Saturday March 19 at Halifax Grammar School, CFORE steering committee member **Anne Marie Dalton** will chair a panel on faith responses to environmental issues including representa-

tives from Hindu, First Nations, Baha'i, Catholic and Muslim faiths. For more information on any of these events, please visit the CFORE website at <http://www.cfore.ca>, or email them at cfore@sympatico.ca.



In wildness lies the preservation of the world...

-Henry David Thoreau