An Invitation

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 Encyclopaedia 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 of 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 mail to: society@religionandnature.com

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MARCH 2005

Religion and Nature News
Teilhard Events, 2005

Beginning in April 2005, the American Teilhard Association in collaboration with the French and British Teilhard Associations will hold a series of conferences collectively marked “Teilhard 2005: Concerning the 125th Anniversary of Teilhard’s Death.” These conferences will complement the Huxley Forum on Religion and Ecology, WIREC, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The commemoration will be launched with the独角兽 Forum on Religion and Ecology (EURC), UNRISD, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The commemoration will be launched with two major symposiums at the United Nations on April 14th and 15th in the Trusteeship Council Chamber. The first theme of these events is that a great challenge is the breach of a boundary representing an existential future for the Earth (Community of World Religions). This is the current theme of the research project titled “The Role of Religion in the Global Environment.” In addition, it has documented an exhibition on 300 religion-based grassroots environmental projects. It is a meeting with a film titled “Religion” that will highlight many of these projects.

Mary Evelyn Tucker, President of the Teilhard Association, editor-in-chief of the Journal on Religion and Ecology

New Horizons on Nature, Culture and Religion

In the fall of 2005, the University of California, Santa Barbara launched an exciting series of interdisciplinary events aimed at understanding, interpreting, and recontextualizing the concepts of nature, culture, and religion. The events, mark the first time in the dialogue between science and religion in the United States, aimed at establishing strong channels of dialogue among the various disciplines involved. The forum will examine how the key concepts that “nature” represents in these discussions. With funding provided by the Templeton Foundation, Professor Jim Proctor of the UCSB Department of Geography is directing the inter-disciplinary research project titled “Religion and Ecology: A New Horizon.” The project is designed to examine the role of religion and ecology in the transformation of culture.

Mary Evelyn Tucker, President of the Teilhard Association, editor-in-chief of the Journal on Religion and Ecology

Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature Released

Good news! As those who attended the Religion and Ecology meeting for business at the AAR in San Antonio are aware, the Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature is finally released. The project has been in the making for over a decade and is considered one of the most comprehensive works on the subject. The Encyclopedia includes over 1000 entries by scholars from around the world. The project is available online at relnotes.org, as well as in print. The Encyclopedia is divided into six volumes, covering topics such as the relationship between religion and nature, the impact of religious beliefs on environmental policies, and the role of nature in religious practices. The Encyclopedia is a valuable resource for researchers, educators, and anyone interested in the intersection of religion and nature.

Bruce Pollock, University of Florida, Editor-in-Chief of the EBN

Nation’s Independent Schools Strive Toward Sustainability

The United Nations has declared 2005 the International Year of the Environment. Following this theme, the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) has brought together a group of environmental activists to discuss strategies for sustainability in independent schools. As part of this initiative, the NAIS has created a new resource, the “Sustainability Guide for Independent Schools,” which provides tools and resources for schools to adopt more sustainable practices. The guide includes case studies of schools that have successfully implemented sustainability initiatives, as well as best practices for integrating sustainability into the curriculum and school culture. The guide is a valuable resource for schools looking to improve their sustainability performance and align with the goals of the United Nations.

Jim Proctor, Dept. of Geography, UC Santa Barbara

This project was financed by NAIS, with additional support from the Forum on Religion and Ecology. Members of NAIS and UCSB (Religious Studies in Secondary Schools) were located at the Templeton Foundation in Miami, Florida, while they worked on compiling the guide. The guide is available online at relnotes.org. A more complete online version will be available for free.
Religion and Ecology at Iowa State University

Iowa State is running a workshop in Religion and Ecology for students. The workshop is designed for faculty, students, and anyone interested in exploring the intersection of religion and ecology. It will provide a platform for sharing ideas and fostering interdisciplinary dialogue. The workshop aims to encourage participants to think critically about the role of religion in addressing environmental issues and to consider how religious beliefs and practices can inform sustainability efforts.

Other Programs Drawing on the Religion and Nature Trope

The University of Montana is offering a course on “The Gospel of the Church and Nature” which explores the theological and ecological implications of Christian teachings. Students will engage in discussions on topics such as stewardship, creation care, and the role of faith in addressing environmental challenges. The course aims to challenge students to reflect on their relationship with nature and to consider how religious perspectives can inform environmental stewardship.

Religion and Ecology at Drew University

Drew University has a long history of focusing on the intersections of religion and environmental issues. The university offers a variety of courses and programs that explore these connections, including a certificate in Environmental Anthropology and a master’s program in Environmental Studies. Drew’s Center for the Study of Religion and Environment is a hub for research and dialogue on these topics. The center hosts events and workshops that bring together scholars, activists, and religious leaders to discuss the role of religion in environmental action.

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 Florida Nature Conservation, has launched the F.O.R.E.S.T. program. This initiative focuses on the intersections of religion, environment, science, technology, and ethics. The program aims to educate students and the general public on how religious perspectives can inform and shape environmental policy and practice. It offers courses, workshops, and community engagement activities to explore these themes in depth.

News From the Canadian Forum on Ecology and Religion

The Canadian Forum on Religion and Ecology (CFORE) has been active in organizing events and publications that explore the relationships between religion, ecology, and ethics. Their work focuses on promoting a holistic approach to environmental stewardship that integrates spiritual and ecological perspectives. CFORE’s recent projects include the publication of a companion volume for EcoTheology and Environmental Ethics, a collection of essays that explores the intersections of religion, nature, and the environment. The forum also hosts regular events and workshops that bring together scholars, religious leaders, and activists to discuss these issues in depth.

In solitude lies the preservation of the world.
—Henry David Thoreau