

Vancouver School of Theology
SP/ETH511 - Spirituality and Ethics: Aboriginal Wisdoms, Lives and Lands
Spring 2010
Instructor - Rev. Dr. Paula Sampson

Purpose and content:

The interconnection of spirituality and ethics is evident in the ancestral traditions of Aboriginal cultures. For thousands of years these traditions have provided spiritual practices and ethical guidelines to the cultures which developed them. This course will delve into a variety of original sources, including portions of the Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples, First Nations commentary and writing, environmental history and traditional ecological knowledges, to demonstrate how spiritual teachings inform environmental behaviours for Native peoples on this continent. Through the course, students will gain understanding of and appreciation for the astute and diverse insights Native civilizations have developed to sustain their relationships, human and nonhuman alike. The course will help students respectfully discover Aboriginal cultures without romanticizing them and appreciate the need for such cultures to adapt to current circumstances.

Through the cautious use of comparisons, the course will also facilitate student consideration of those elements in their own traditions which can contribute to relationship-based environmental ethics.

A further dimension of our work will concern the ethical dimensions and protocols of cross cultural “borrowing.” When, for example, is it appropriate to adopt spiritual practices and intellectual traditions not originally our own, especially when they derive from a land not originally ours? How do we discern authenticity? How do Aboriginal peoples determine what, if any, aspects of their sacred traditions they will disclose to others?

This is an elective in Spirituality.

Competencies:

To describe general themes common to most Aboriginal tribes in this hemisphere as they concern the relationship between humans and land, giving specific tribal examples.

To compare and contrast Aboriginal with non-Aboriginal spiritual attitudes relating to land use and value.

To draw connections between prayer practices and conduct concerning creation as embodied by Aboriginal peoples, giving specific examples.

To assess the viability/desirability of non-Aboriginal adaptation of Aboriginal

spiritualities in order to heighten ecological awareness.

To describe and analyze in detail a particular Aboriginal context, explaining the spiritual tradition and ecological posture which that group exemplifies.

Format:

One three-hour class session weekly consisting of lectures, discussions, video presentations and guest speakers.

Evaluation will be based on:

Attendance and full participation in class discussions, based on completed reading assignments.

A short class presentation on the original inhabitants of the students' birthplaces.

A 4000-word paper on one Aboriginal group's origin stories, spiritual traditions, standards of human relationship and ecological conduct.

(Details of both assignments will be available at the first class session).

Required reading:

Hayes, Ernestine. Blonde Indian: an Alaska Native Memoir. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006. (Selected chapters).

Pelltier, Wilfred. Childhood in an Indian Village. (Private collection, instructor will make available in class).

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Affairs. Elders' Perspectives. Ottawa: Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1998. (Available online at DINA website).

Jenkins, Philip. Dream Catchers: How mainstream America discovered Native Spirituality. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Thomas, Robert. Getting to the Heart of the Matter. Vancouver: Native Ministries Consortium, 1990.

Selected Bibliography:

Blackstock, Michael D. Faces in the Forest: First Nations Art Created on Living Trees. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001.

Booth, Annie and Harvey Jacobs. "Ties that Bind: Native American Beliefs as a Foundation for Environmental Consciousness." Environmental Ethics 18 (Spring 1990), 27-43.

- Brody, Hugh. The Other Side of Eden: hunters, farmers and the shaping of the world. Vancouver: Douglas and MacIntyre, 2000.
- Deloria, Vine, Jr. "If You Think About It, You Will See that it is True." Noetic Sciences Review (Autumn, 1993), pp. 62ff.
- _____ and Daniel Wildcat. Power and Place: Indian Education in America. Golden, Co: Fulcrum Resources, 2001.
- _____ God is Red: a Native View of Religion. (3rd ed.) Golden, Co: Fulcrum Resources, 2003.
- Dooling, D. M. and Paul Jordan-Smith. I Become Part of It: sacred dimensions in Native American life. San Francisco: Parabola Books, 1992.
- Friesen, John W. Aboriginal Spirituality and Biblical Theology. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 2000.
- Grim, John, ed. Indigenous Traditions and Ecology. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- McLuhan, T.C. Touch the Earth: a self-portrait of Indian Existence. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971.
- Martin, Joel W. The Land Looks After Us: a history of Native American religion. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Martin-Schramm and Robert L. Stivers. Christian Environmental Ethics: a case method approach. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003.
- Morey, Sylvester. Can the Red Man Help the White Man? A Denver Conference with the Indian Elders. New York: Myrin Institute, 1970.
- Nabokov, Peter. Where the Lightning Strikes: the Lives of American Indian Sacred Places. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.
- O'Meara, Sylvia and Douglas A. West. From Our Eyes: learning from indigenous people. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996.
- Nelson, Richard. Make Prayers to the Raven: a Koyukon View of the Northern Forest. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Thomas, R. Murray. Manitou and God: North American Indian Traditions and Christian Culture. Westport, Ct: Praeger, 2007.

Vecsey, Christopher and Robert W. Venables, eds. American Indian Environments: Ecological Issues in Native American History. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1980.

Waller, David. "Friendly Fire: When Environmentalists Dehumanize American Indians." American Indian Culture and Research Journal 20 (1996), 107-26.