Religion and Ecology
Dr. Charles Headington

The Main Issues and Questions of This Course
Do religions have a responsibility to take care of the earth? Do religions admonish their followers to take time, thought and energy in understanding the ways of nature and live harmoniously with it?

And if so, what would this mean? Would the teachers incorporate environmental issues into their religious curriculum, would the leaders present the earth story from the pulpit, and would committees be formed to petition the local government, begin a community garden, or take young people on nature hikes? Would nature be a part of their spiritual enlightenment and development? included in a plan of salvation? or included in a final consummation or redemption of all things?

Do religious people study nature as if their lives depended on it, as they study the sacred texts of their tradition? Does their tradition have ethical teachings about our relationship to animals and plants, or to the soil and water? Going further, would a religion be likely to believe that we as human beings are a part of the earth and bear a kinship with all that is alive? And, is nature more important to some religions than to others? Why would this be, and in what ways would this be?

We’ll explore these questions and issues in this course.

What We Will Do in This Course
First, we will get our bearings by watching Spirit and Nature, a video from the late 1980s that touches on the issues of this course. You’ll write a response paper (2-3 pages) worth 5 points.

Then we’ll chart our Eco-Identity, the depth of our present relationship to nature. You’ll take an Eco-Address quiz for 5 points, and read and respond to two books, Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit and The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature. Ishmael pertains to indigenous traditions and The Sacred Balance, written by the biologist, David Suzuki, presents the earth as an interdependent system of which we are a part.

After gauging our Eco-Identity, we’ll move on to a difficult topic for religionists, the Body of God. Our guides will be two women, a Hindu and a Christian: Vandana Shiva
in *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, and Sallie McFague in *The Body of God, An Ecological Theology*. Each of them will challenge you to view religious traditions as flexible and ready to embrace a more intimate, yet workable relationship with nature.

The final section of the course, The Great Work, will ask you draw some conclusions about changing a tradition’s relation to nature. This is the "great work" as explained in Thomas Berry’s *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*. Your assignment will be to create an audio-visual presentation.

Thus, your work, besides reading the books and responding to others’ posts, will be to complete small projects and write essays.

**Required books** (available in paperback and Kindle):

- *Ishmael*, Daniel Quinn ISBN 0553375407

**Grades**

1st two assignments, 5 points each = 10 pts

Each week, one book per week, 15 each = 60 pts

Final project/paper on My Great Work = 25 pts

Responses to other students, 1 point each = 5 pts

100 points possible