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**Teaching Religion and Ecology: From the Abstract to the Personal, From Despair to Hope**

The ecological health of planet Earth is arguably the most crucial issue facing humankind in the twenty-first century. Proponents of ecoliteracy and the ecopedagogy movement are clear that the ecological knowledge and education that motivate students toward ecological justice are imperatives throughout all disciplines in the academy (e.g., Kahn 2010; Orr 2004). The following articles detail possibilities for teaching ecology within the disciplines of theological and religious studies at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Due to the assiduous effort and insight of these individual contributors — and especially of guest editor [Whitney Bauman](#) — this issue of Spotlight

offers a wide range of pedagogical techniques and course designs for numerous types of institutions in a variety of geographic settings.

The teaching strategies offered in this issue vary widely, from the introduction of new knowledge to inquiry-based learning, from kinesthetic learning to performative learning to service-learning, yet all have a few things in common. First, each article suggests a unique way to create a destabilizing experience intended to transform students' understanding of, and relation to, the natural world. Second, each instructor finds a way to make abstract issues of religion and ecology intensely personal. In most cases, the goal is a practical one that leads to new personal, professional, or political commitments. Whether located inside or outside the classroom, teaching about the environment in religious perspective accomplishes numerous learning goals simultaneously: it provides a lens through which to look at theological or religious issues, it challenges students to reorient themselves, and it raises ethical issues about our responsibility to the planet and to society. Simply providing knowledge about environmental issues and the current global crisis can discourage or even paralyze students, overwhelming them or fostering an attitude of despair (see Kaza 1999). Hence, the strategies offered here attempt to encourage hope and commitment to change by personalizing the environmental issues, connecting students emotionally to the natural world, and creating opportunities for them to formulate personal and communal solutions (on this issue, see especially [Bauman's Guest Editor Introduction](#) ).

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