

CLIMATE CHANGE AND RELIGION TEACHING MODULE

AMANDA BAUGH, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

GOALS

- Introduce students to the idea that religion influences human understandings of and responses to climate change
- Explore varieties and complexities of religious responses to climate change

FRAMING RESOURCES FOR INSTRUCTORS

- My brief presentation on Religion and the Climate Crisis can provide background understandings for instructors leading a conversation on religion and climate change. https://www.academia.edu/39998940/Conference_Proceedings_Baugh
- For a detailed overview and analysis of extant scholarship on religion and climate change, see Jenkins, Willis, Evan Berry, and Luke Beck Kreider. 2018. "Religion and Climate Change." *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 43:85. doi: 10.1146/annurev-environ-102017-025855.

LESSON PLAN FOR DAY 1

CONTEXT: A lively debate within the study of religion and the environment is the question of whether and how various religions advance or hinder environmental ethics and activism. This lesson plan introduces students to that debate by featuring three popular media articles that offer different perspectives on that question, with a focus on different groups of Christians in the United States.

Reading assignment to complete before class:

**Note: instructor should explain to students that the articles will help them participate in a debate about whether and how religious groups can advance efforts to mitigate climate change and other environmental issues.

- Kendra Pierre-Louis, "[A Leader in the War on Poverty Opens a New Front: Pollution](#)" (*New York Times*)
- Dan Vergano, "[It's Starting to Look Like God Won't Save Us From Global Warming](#)" (BuzzFeed)
- Kate Yoder, "[Wait, 40 percent of white evangelicals support the Green New Deal?](#)" (Mother Jones)

In class:

- 1) Provide students with the context for the class discussion:

Religions are always embedded in culture and they never speak in a unified voice.* The same religion can support both climate action and climate inaction, so it is not accurate to say that one religion, as a whole, is “good” or “bad” for the environment. With that being said, scholars of religion and the environment have sought to understand how religions are interacting with human responses to the climate crisis and environmental problems more broadly, and the question of whether religions more often are helpful or harmful for environmental ethics is a matter of lively debate. In today’s class, we will participate in that debate.

**Note for instructors: Chapter 1 of Mallory Nye’s introductory textbook, [Religion: The Basics](#) offers a clear and succinct explanation of the ways that religion is always embedded in culture. A quick skim of that chapter could be helpful for instructors with little background in the study of religion. This could be helpful background reading for students as well.*

- 2) Divide class into groups of approximately four students. Each group is assigned to be a specialist on one of the three articles. **Based on the assigned article,**** students should identify relevant evidence to support each of the following arguments. Students may find evidence largely for only one or two of these arguments, or they might find evidence for all three. Each group can record their evidence on this table.

***It is important to emphasize that students are gathering evidence from the assigned article only. Some students will likely come up with anecdotal information to advance their own personal feelings on this topic. Requiring students to focus only on evidence from the text will help moderate some of those strong feelings.*

<p>Religion <u>supports</u> efforts to mitigate climate change/other environmental problems.</p>	<p>Religion <u>undermines</u> efforts to mitigate climate change/other environmental problems.</p>	<p>Religion <u>neither supports nor undermines</u> efforts to mitigate climate change/other environmental problems. It is mostly unrelated to these efforts.</p>
---	---	---

- 3) Instructor facilitates whole-class discussion on whether and how religions influence human responses to the climate crisis. The discussion initially should focus on evidence from the assigned articles. Then a skilled facilitator might choose to open the conversation to allow students to bring in other examples.