

Courses and Workshops Facilitated by Marvin L. Anderson, Ph.D.

All of the following available courses and workshops are based on or inspired by my teaching career over the past twenty years. This includes Master of Divinity and related courses in theological education offered at a dozen theological colleges and seminaries in Canada and the United States.

Prior to teaching full-time in the Chair of Town and Country Ministries at Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri (2002-2005), I offered a regular M. Div. (Master of Divinity) course, Doing Ministry in Rural Communities, at Emmanuel College, Knox College and the Toronto School of Theology (1989-2000). I offered comparable courses at the Rural Ministry Program at Queen's Theological College in Kingston, Ontario (1999-2002). In addition, my M. Div. course, Theology of the Land, has been offered at four different theological programs in Canada and the United States.

More recently, I offered a course for the STM (Master in Sacred Theology) program in Rural Ministry and Community Development for the CiRCLe M (Centre for Rural Community Leadership and Ministry), in partnership with St. Andrew's College and the Lutheran Theological Seminary in the Saskatoon Theological Union (2009). This course, Revitalizing Rural Ministries: From Survival to Sustainability, is based on my online congregational resource, Alive and Kicking: Revitalizing Rural Ministries, which can be downloaded at: www.united-church.ca/files/sales/publications/ch10522.pdf

I have designed and facilitated workshops on various aspects of ministry and leadership development in tandem with my teaching career and consulting work in congregational renewal and community development. Since 2008, I have been teaching as a Sessional Lecturer at the University of Toronto in the Department of History as well as for the Department and Centre for the Study of Religion. I am currently serving as a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies at Victoria University, University of Toronto.

The courses and workshops listed on the following pages also reflect my current research, writing projects, and professional and academic publications to date. For a detailed summary of the courses, workshops, presentations, public lectures, and interdisciplinary areas of research my insatiable curiosity has taken me, please refer to my curriculum vitae and link for Publications.

Inquiries to teaching or facilitating any one or more of the following courses or workshops can be directed to Dr. Anderson at marvin@ruraljustified.com, or 416.778.8046 by phone. Based on your request, any of these course or workshop offerings or public presentations can be adapted to your specific educational and programmatic needs. My fees and travel expenses are negotiated accordingly.

Thank you.

On the Practice of Congregational Ministry and Leadership Development

- 1) ALIVE AND KICKING: REVITALIZING RURAL MINISTRIES
- 2) THRIVE WHERE YOU ARE: THE ECOLOGY OF TOWN AND COUNTRY CONGREGATIONS
- 3) RURAL ROUTES: SUSTAINABILITY VS. GLOBALIZATION
- 4) LOSS IS MORE: LAMENT AS THE DOOR TO SPIRITUAL RENEWAL
- 5) RESOLVING CHURCH CONFLICT: HEALING GENERATIONAL AND CONGREGATIONAL RIFTS
- 6) REWEAVING OUR TAPESTRY: REVIEWING OUR LIVES AND LEGACIES
- 7) WHETTING OUR SPIRITUAL APPETITE: GROWING CONGREGATIONS BY FEEDING THEM

On the Historical Practice and Theology of Christian Spirituality

- 1) ALL ARE CALLED: RECLAIMING THE HISTORIC MINISTRY OF THE LAITY
- 2) THE BURNING FIRE OF HOLY DESIRE: THE MYSTICISM OF MEISTER ECKHART AND MARGUERITE PORETE
- 3) THE TRIUMPH OF VERNACULAR THEOLOGY AND THE "COMMON MAN": THE MYSTICISM OF ANDREAS KARLSTADT AND THOMAS MÜNTZER
- 4) CHRIS(T)-CROSSING CULTURAL BOUNDARIES: RELIGIOUS TOLERATION AMONG CHRISTIANS, JEWS, AND MUSLIMS IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

On the Spiritual Practice and Theology of Healing Creation

- 1) RE-MYTHOLOGIZING THE WORLD: AGRARIAN, ECOFEMINIST AND HISTORICAL NARRATIVES
- 2) THEOLOGY OF THE LAND: ABORIGINAL, BIBLICAL, AND CHRISTIAN NARRATIVES
- 3) REFRAMING RELIGIOUS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: THE GREENING OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

On the Practice of Congregational Ministry and Leadership Development

1) ALIVE AND KICKING: REVITALIZING RURAL MINISTRIES

This workshop is designed to introduce and animate the online congregational resource by the same title posted at the General Council Office website for the United Church of Canada: <http://www.united-church.ca/files/sales/publications/ch10522.pdf> It is usually offered for a full one-day format, but it has also been adapted for Presbytery and Conference meetings.

The focus of Alive and Kicking is helping rural congregations and pastoral charges make the paradigmatic shift from survival and maintenance to mission and transformation. Alive and Kicking uses seven lenses for assessing congregational life and vitality in the Canadian rural context: 1) Purpose and Identity, 2) Context, 3) Worship, 4) Caring and Generosity, 5) Learning, 6) Healing and Transformation, and 7) Sustainability.

Alive and Kicking is an up-to-date, practical, and ecumenical compendium on the diverse contexts of rural and small town ministries across Canada. This same diversity is found across the United States, where Alive and Kicking has also been used as a relevant resource for revitalizing rural congregations and pastoral charges in rural contexts ranging from Tennessee to Alaska.

Written as an accessible resource for congregants and leaders in rural and small membership congregations, Alive and Kicking functions as both a workbook and study guide. It provides a lively dialogue between the demands of rural congregational ministry and the practice of mission in those rural communities and small towns in which that ministry takes place. Click on the link for a Rationale for Alive and Kicking Workshop to better appreciate the hands-on outcomes from offering this workshop.

To date, this workshop has been offered primarily in rural and small town Presbyteries in six United Church of Canada Conferences: Montreal and Ottawa, London, Hamilton, Bay of Quinte, Toronto, and most recently, Alberta and Northwest. It is also suitable for urban and suburban Presbyteries where small membership congregations are the norm.

2) THRIVE WHERE YOU ARE: THE ECOLOGY OF TOWN AND COUNTRY CONGREGATIONS

This workshop was first offered at the Annual Town and Country Ministry Team Retreat for the newly-amalgamated Upper New York Conference of the United Methodist Church of America in the fall of 2010. Adapted from the Alive and Kicking online resource, it is designed to inspire Town and Country (rural) congregations to honor the local ministries to which God has called them, so they can thrive where they are.

Rural pastoral charges and small membership congregations are often seen by their denominational offices as inadequate and fated for closure or amalgamation, because of their declining numbers or size. This workshop reminds the faithful ministers and members of those same churches to be remain faithful to who God has called them to be, and to where God has called they to live and minister.

Drawing on the ecological paradigm, this workshop stresses the genius loci of each and every ecosystem to recognize the inherent gifts and worth of each place. Town and Country congregations can indeed flourish if they know who they are and where (context) God has called them to be in ministry – as disciples of Jesus Christ

“Town and Country” and small membership congregations are found in the countryside, in hamlets and villages, and in small towns and sparsely-populated resource-based communities across North America. Yet surely the multiple biological and social ecosystems that belong to the dense rain forests of British Columbia are as diverse and complex as the ecosystems that flourish in the arid, desert wilderness areas of New Mexico, or among the diverse grasslands and prairie ecosystems of Saskatchewan and Nebraska. Why do we value and venerate one form of ecosystem over all the others?

Is the mega-church formula for numerical church growth and success, based as it is on a metropolitan template, therefore normative for all congregations? Is this formula, well-touted in the church growth literature and on book table displays, a suitable criterion for assessing the health and viability of small membership and rural congregations? Finally, is this congregational growth at-all-costs model appropriate for most churches in small towns and rural areas, where the local population is static and real demographic growth is highly unlikely?

The bold and biblical premise of Thrive Where You Are – in the face of rapid climate change that is radically changing how we think and live about everything – is soundly ecological, not expansionist. It honors the inherent beauty of each place, unique to each ecosystem in the whole of Creation.

3) RURAL ROUTES: SUSTAINABILITY VS. GLOBALIZATION

This course draws on my M. Div. course, *The Church in Changing Rural Communities*, offered at Saint Paul School of Theology, and my more recent STM course for CiRCLe M, *Revitalizing Rural Ministries: From Survival to Sustainability*. It shares the same ecological and theological premise as the previous workshop, *Thrive Where You Are*.

When the same industrial formula of “bigger is better” that has decimated the traditional livelihoods and local economies of hundreds of small farming communities and resource-based towns across North America is then promoted as prescriptive for Town and Country churches, one has to wonder if this urban/suburban formula for growth fits those diverse rural and resource-based contexts, and the very people who live in them.

Is globalization from above or from below? Whom does it benefit, and on whose backs and at whose expense does it work? With specific attention to Jennifer Sumner’s recent book on *Sustainability and the Civil Commons: Rural Communities in the Age of Globalization* (2005), this course will identify the systemic socio-economic challenges which rural communities and their respective congregations face in the wake of the economic downturn and the loss of traditional industries in resource-based communities, i.e., fishing, logging, farming, etc.

This course focuses on specific pastoral strategies as well as congregational and community-based resources that promote sustainability, as referenced in the final lens of *Alive and Kicking: Revitalizing Rural Ministries*. It identifies how these strategies and resources can be used to stimulate the local regeneration and revitalization of these rural communities and their respective congregations.

4) LOSS IS MORE: LAMENT AS THE DOOR TO SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

This workshop was first offered at the 116th Annual Conference of Queen's Theological College in Kingston, Ontario, in the fall of 2008. The same content has been specifically formatted for people diagnosed with cancer, through my course on Spiritual Growth at Wellspring in Toronto. This workshop or course is principally designed to help students/participants recognize how our aversion to change (Who likes change?) often masks our resistance to loss.

More and more of our United Church ministry personnel and ministers from other denominations are worried by declining membership and revenue. They are reporting higher rates of medical leaves due to fatigue and burn-out. Many of them, in rural and urban congregations, worry about their future. Along with many of the lay leaders with whom they work, they fear for the worst – the dreaded fate of closure or amalgamation. Either fate signals for them the ominous demise or death of their beloved and historic church.

Meanwhile, we are informed almost daily of severe weather systems, i.e., tsunamis, earthquakes, flooding, firestorms, etc. Some of us have been directly affected by them. In the wake of these global traumatic events and the tragedies that we experience locally, we are often left feeling overwhelmed and depressed in the magnitude of such loss. After the recent economic meltdown, for example, psychologists and financial advisors from Toronto to California reported on the deleterious psychological effects of losing capital and wealth. They observed that the sudden loss of wealth experienced by their affluent clientele often triggers the same scenario of psychological stages – denial, anger, remorse and acceptance – as other traumas.

But lament is not lame! Lament is the expressed anguish of loss. Loss is the rude awakening to the fact that we do not have as much control as we like to think we have, or would like to have. The well-known biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann has warned of the alarming absence of lament “as a form of speech and faith” in our churches today. If Brueggemann is right, then our psychological and communal capacity for processing and expressing human anguish through lament is effectively muted.

Without the capacity and faith to lament, we are rendered paralyzed and apathetic. To the extent that we are no longer capable of truly grieving and mourning as well as expressing responsible anger and indignation, we risk becoming powerless in the face of change and loss. We are often afraid to surrender to our anger, for fear of what it will do to us and tell us. Yet “righteous” anger and indignation is paramount in the biblical genre and liturgical practice of lament among the prophets and in the lament psalms.

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Who does Brueggemann cite in one of his commentaries on grief and the lament psalms, but the celebrated author of the best-selling book, *On Death and Dying*, by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross? The first stage, which we all remember, is denial and isolation: “No, not me, it cannot be me, this cannot be true.” Kubler-Ross’s classic book brings to mind another book published in the early seventies investigating the psychological role of denial, Ernest Becker’s *The Denial of Death*, which earned Becker the Pulitzer Prize.

The observations above are discussed in my chapter, "Living in Denial? Lament as a Liberative Act," in *Sacred Earth, Sacred Community: Jubilee, Ecology and Aboriginal People* (2000). (Click on the link for Publications). Within a consumer-driven society characterized by apathy and boredom, the subsequent indifference bred by this apathy makes it difficult, if not inconvenient, to pay attention to the growing loss and suffering of the natural and human world around us. I stressed the pervasive and systemic denial of the ecological severity posed by the rate of climate change then. It is worse now.

By consciously or unconsciously refusing to accept the suffering and emptiness of our loss, we forfeit our spiritual capacity of moving through and beyond the pain of that loss. This in turn can paralyze us, or leave us bitter and cynical. Unless and until that loss is ritually mourned and grieved in appropriate psychological and communal ways, the door to future personal growth and congregational spiritual renewal remains closed.

Furthermore, this course/workshop provides students/participants with a more critical theological and biblical understanding of what lament is, and how lament works. For ministry personnel and lay leaders, it is prerequisite to the spiritual revitalization of our congregations and pastoral charges, as stressed in the *Alive and Kicking* resource.

In summary, this course/workshop simply reframes how our personal energy for spiritual and congregational renewal can be primed and released – when significant personal and/or community losses are expressed ritually and sacramentally. Students/participants will also be given practical examples of innovative lament rituals and liturgies that can be used in their congregational settings.

5) RESOLVING CHURCH CONFLICT: HEALING GENERATIONAL AND CONGREGATIONAL RIFTS

The purpose of this course/workshop is to critically examine the nature of conflict in congregational settings, with emphasis on skills and strategies for healing and resolving "generational and congregational rifts." This course/workshop identifies some of the salient issues and frequent tensions that surface in the wake of congregational conflict, recognizing that there are different levels and interpretations of "conflict."

As a course, it would provide a summary review of various approaches for understanding and negotiating conflict between different generations and constituencies within congregations. This course would specifically analyze the role of blaming and shaming in the "family system" context of local congregational conflict, including lectures, plenary class discussion, and role play games on how malicious gossip, projection, triangulation and scapegoating work. The primary aim of this course is to help students/participants to develop a repertoire of viable conflict-management skills, including an enhanced self-awareness of how each one of us reacts to conflict, and best deals with conflict.

Specific attention is given to learning how to: 1) use psychological resources and spiritual disciplines for dealing with conflict, 2) understand, analyze and interpret conflictual situations in light of systems theory, 3) develop pastoral strategies and mediation for intervention, problem-solving and conflict resolution, and 4) model and mentor leadership skills among laity and clergy for dealing appropriately and creatively with conflict in the local congregational context.

This course/workshop is primarily based on my M.Div. course, Managing Church Conflict, offered at Saint Paul School of Theology (2003-2004). It has subsequently been offered as a workshop, Where Two or Three Are Gathered, There is Conflict, in Bay of Quinte Conference (2006). Furthermore, I draw explicitly on my extensive historical, sociological and anthropological research into the topic of gossip and orality, in which I lecture on "Gossip: The Lifeblood and Toxin of Community." The malicious practice of gossip is related to the sociological phenomenon of scapegoating, and in order to help students/participants better comprehend this phenomenon, I rely on role play games.

I have also used the acclaimed PBS video, Three Sovereigns for Sara, in tandem with this course and other courses. This film is a PBS historical re-enactment of the Salem witchcraft trials, starring Vanessa Redgrave in one of her most compelling dramatic roles. As an historical theologian as well as consultant, I have found history to be an effective pedagogical mirror for helping students/participants see what we do to ourselves and each other in the context of projection, triangulation and scapegoating.

Whether in one-day workshops or in seminary or university classrooms, my pedagogical rationale for using historical films and role play games is based on this observation: The more pernicious and darker side of projection, triangulation and scapegoating (which surface even in low levels of conflict) may often be more readily comprehended analytically by first seeing it dramatically presented in the above PBS film, and by then acting it out through participant learning and role play.

I have used "The Witch Hunt Game" designed by Dr. Nancy L. Locklin-Sofer, an early modern American historian, to help students better appreciate the sociological nature of triangulation and the group dynamics of scapegoating through role play. Dr. Locklin-Sofer, an Associate Professor of History at Maryville College, Tennessee, created "The Witch Hunt Game" for her History students. Dr. Locklin-Sofer may be contacted at: nancy.locklin@maryvillecollege.edu

"The Witch Hunt Game" not only concretizes abstract historical learning and systems theory for students, but it gives them immediate and experiential insight into the complex social dynamics of malicious gossip, scapegoating and triangulation that characterize the countless victims of religious conflict and violence in different historical contexts – not to mention the victims of less traumatic conflicts within congregational settings.

Rest assured, I promise every class or group before commencing this game that any final determination of a guilty verdict, in the course of playing it – will not result in the drowning or burning of suspected witches.

6) REWEAVING OUR TAPESTRY: REVIEWING OUR LIVES AND LEGACIES

The focus of this workshop is to engage participants in reflecting on the “tapestry” of their lived lives, and the legacies that they leave behind them. Regardless of our age, the ageing process usually forces us to think about the meaning of our lives and the life-changing events in our lives, such as losing a job, the collapse of a marriage, the death of a child, living with chronic illness, being diagnosed with cancer, etc.

This workshop on Reweaving Our Tapestry urges those of us who are middle-aged and older to ponder the two questions we already may ask ourselves: 1) What does my life mean? (This is the re-creative and spiritual work of what is called “life-review” in gerontology circles.) 2) What am I leaving behind me, as I leave this world? (This is the work of naming the “legacy” each of us leaves.)

As with the image of a tapestry or quilt, this workshop urges participants to reflect back on their lived lives in order to reframe how they have interpreted those life-changing events and their future importance in forming who we have become and who we are today. It ties together the various, often disparate strands of our rich life experience, in order to reweave and retrieve those very strands which have seemed irreconcilable and incoherent, and most frustratingly, imperfect – to heal the whole of our lived tapestry.

As we complete each of our lives, we as elders can then consciously and creatively re-view, if not reread and rewrite, the many chapters of the rich and complex narratives of our life stories – for our own benefit and for the benefit of those who come after us.

The following books are recommended for reading in advance of this workshop: 1) James Hillman, *The Force of Character and the Lasting Life*, and 2) Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Ronald S. Miller, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Profound New Vision of Growing Older*. One of the suggested exercises from *Age-ing to Sage-ing* is “A Testimonial Dinner for the Severe Teachers.” This is an imaginative exercise in which participants are encouraged to invite those very people back into your life who may have formerly hurt you or fired you and for whom you may still feel some animosity or hurt.

By hosting them to a testimonial dinner, these “severe teachers” as Schachter-Shalomi and Miller aptly call them, are now recipients of your hospitality. Recognizing that we often learn more from our “severe teachers” than our favorite ones, this exercise helps participants to thank those people for the unexpected and unsolicited “good” that may have come from the apparent injustice that was done to them at the time.

This workshop was most recently offered by the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto as part of its Wellness Series for its professional staff (2010). It has also been offered for numerous classes through my course on Spiritual Growth at Wellspring in Toronto, specifically for people diagnosed and living with cancer.

7) WHETTING OUR SPIRITUAL APPETITE: GROWING CONGREGATIONS BY FEEDING THEM

The purpose of this workshop/course is to both inform and engage participants in the vast literature directly inspired by past poets, sages and mystics from the world's religious traditions. This workshop/course introduces participants to some of the wisdom and spiritual writings familiar to many Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, and Aboriginal people and other people from religious communities from around the world.

The upsurge of interest in the topic of "spirituality" shows no sign of abating. In fact, the mass media infatuation with spirituality, including Christian spirituality and the equally ambiguous topic of "mysticism," has become captive to one of the most sophisticated marketing strategies among booksellers and workshop retreats in both Canada and the United States.

Regardless of the multitude of ways in which this hot market for spirituality is driven and commercially exploited, there is no denial that the consumer demand for spirituality is significant. It shows a resurgence of interest in the personal meaning and appeal of religious faith in a largely secularized society. But it also reveals the voracious spiritual hunger today among people of all generations, churched and "unchurched."

Alongside the increasing visibility of interfaith dialogue, there is a yearning to learn more about spirituality among those who have no connections to any faith community as well among those who do, or once did. For those who consider themselves United Church of Canada or mainline Christian, this spiritual appetite has seldom been satisfied by their local church offerings – and we're not talking here about fish dinners or potluck suppers!

As an adult educator and consultant on congregational renewal, it has been my experience that people of different generations are more likely to become involved in faith communities – if they find that those same communities can provide them with hearty and substantive spiritual food that they can't find any place else! When congregations, no matter where they are, take seriously the intellectual and spiritual hunger of their own members as well as of those who live in their neighbourhoods and towns, congregations grow by feeding them spiritually.

Sadly enough, local congregations have seldom recognized the missional role of ministry and leadership development within their own neighbourhoods and communities as learning organizations. Whether through adult educational programming, preaching, Bible studies, retreats, lay preaching courses, etc., congregational leaders (both ministry personnel and lay ministers) can offer people what no one else can: the common wealth and wisdom of the sacred writings of our ancestral and historical religious traditions.

This literary and culinary canon not only includes the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures and growing research on them and the historical Jesus and Paul, etc. It also includes the vast corpus of sacred writings and devotional literature from the worlds' mystical and spiritual traditions. Past participants of my course, *Mysticism East and West*, for example, were invited to read aloud and listen to selected translated excerpts from the mystical writings, sermons, and ecstatic poetry of two Eastern mystics and two Western mystics – Rumi and Kabir, Meister Eckhart and Marguerite Porete. No one complained after the course each evening that they were still hungry!

This workshop, *Whetting Our Spiritual Appetite: Growing Congregations by Feeding Them*, was initially offered at Maritime Annual Conference of the United Church of Canada (2007). It was conceived and developed through adult education courses I was privileged to team teach with the late Deo Kernahan on *Mysticism East and West* (1999-2000). Deo was a former editor for Vision TV and a prominent Hindu spokesperson in the Greater Toronto Area. More recently, this workshop was offered as a Winter Smorgasbord at Scarboro Missions in Toronto, Ontario (2009). Scarboro Missions is recognized internationally for its groundbreaking work in interfaith dialogue; their website is found at: www.scarboromissions.ca

On the Historical Practice and Theology of Christian Spirituality

1) ALL ARE CALLED: RECLAIMING THE HISTORIC MINISTRY OF THE LAITY

The purpose of this course or lecture series is to reiterate the importance of the laity in the history of Christianity. In light of the promising role of lay leadership and lay ministry in the emergent church today, we need to retrieve the unknown history of lay ministry among both lay women and men, Protestant and Catholic, in centuries past and present. Inspired by my first course in this area, *A Spirituality for Today's Laity*, offered at the Institute of Pastoral Studies, Loyola University of Chicago (1990), it raises the necessary theological questions for engaging the active ministry and leadership of the laity, with practical strategies proposed for how we might work toward what Anne Rowthorn has termed the "the liberation of the laity" (in her book by the same title).

By the late Middle Ages many laymen were capable of writing religious and theological works with some degree of sophistication, but were still scorned by the clergy as 'illiterate' because they did not know Latin. The very term for 'lay person,' 'Laie,' which was derived from the Greek 'laos,' 'people,' was usually understood in the medieval period to refer to those were not clerics, but it also referred to those who were 'illiterate' in the above sense, that is, without a knowledge of Latin. Such theological distinctions helped maintain the élitism of the clerical profession throughout the whole of the Middle Ages. As late as the thirteenth century an Italian tried to argue that the term 'layman' (laicus) originated from the word for stone (lapis) because the layman is "rough and ignorant of letters."

At the same time, the paradigmatic shift in the status of the laity occurred well before the Reformation – in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. As a result of the democratization of education, translations of highly esteemed mystical writings were now available in the vernacular, including those of van Ruusbroec and the *Devotio Moderna* (Modern Devotion) and the famous Dominican friar and theologian, Meister Eckhart, and his disciples, Johannes Tauler and Henry Suso. The literary inroads made by this "vernacular theology" among religious and laity were significant, and would culminate in the widespread dissemination of mystical texts and teachings in fourteenth and fifteenth century Germany.

One of the most charismatic grassroots religious movements in thirteenth and fourteenth-century Europe, seldom mentioned in most church history courses, was the Beguine movement. The Beguines were lay women, including some who were married, who chose personal vows of apostolic poverty to live together in households and 'religious' communities on their own terms. Even though these communities of laywomen lived out their own religious vows under the supervision of the Dominicans (Eckhart and his disciples) and Franciscans, they eluded the direct control and surveillance of churchmen responsible for administering the female religious orders.

Salient literary strands of vernacular theology among the Beguines, the Friends of God and the Devotio Moderna can be found in the vernacular preaching and sermons of Meister Eckhart and his disciples, Tauler and Suso, as well as the in *Theologia Deutsch* (later translated by Martin Luther in 1516 and 1518). But the rapid growth of vernacular literature at this time and burgeoning of the Beguine movement at the same time was no mere coincidence. The increasing literary production of the so-called “vulgar” languages, i.e., Flemish, German, and French, converged with the founding of voluntary Christian communities of lay women living together in Beguine house or communities, called Beguinages.

The communal ethos of the Beguine movement virtually excluded males and shunned male authority *de facto*, thus transgressing every social norm prescribed by the medieval church and society. Furthermore, the lay character and spirituality of their “religious” vocation exposed the waning vitality of the professional religious orders, inevitably incurring the jealousy and suspicion of the latter. Not surprisingly, the phenomenal growth of this lay-inspired movement in the thirteenth century warranted the scrupulous eye of the ecclesiastical authorities. The mystique of the Beguines’ undefined status *vis-à-vis* cloistered ‘religious’ women and male ecclesiastical authority would factor in their condemnation for heresy by Pope Clement V in 1311.

Akin to the Devotio Moderna, the spiritual practice and vernacular writing of the Beguines rebuffed the traditional aristocracy of mystical knowledge by making their message accessible to the lay audiences to whom they preached and taught. Both their spirituality and their vernacular literary output demonstrate what the Reformation historian Heiko Oberman called a “strong tendency towards democratization of mysticism.” The literary genius of Eckhart and his disciples as well as that of the Beguines and Devotio Moderna is evident in how poignantly they expressed themselves in the vernacular, and in how they accommodated their writings to the feelings and mundane experience of ordinary people. “Outside of the traditional monastic and clerical cadres,” the Catholic scholar Yves Congar states, “lay people began to affirm themselves as Christian and spiritual. These are the initial moments in which the affirmation of a laical sentiment awakens.”

The German medieval historian Herbert Grundmann was the first scholar to recognize the historical significance of the Beguine movement back in 1935, which he aptly described as a “religious movement by women” (*religiöse Frauenbewegung*) during the Middle Ages. Grundmann argued that the Beguines, like many other women of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, pursued the ideal of apostolic poverty that would in turn reinvigorate religious thought and life during the Middle Ages. Although the Beguines were only one form of the new styles of religious life adopted by women in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, they were likely the most creative in this unprecedented historical movement that German medievalists still refer to as the *Frauenbewegung* (i.e., women’s movement). This *religiöse Frauenbewegung* deserves its rightful historical place in the rise of vernacular theology and “democratization of the soul” in late medieval Rhineland Germany.

By the sixteenth century, the spread of humanism in lay circles made it possible to distinguish between the 'intelligent,' the 'kluge,' the laity who had Latin and the 'simple,' 'einfeltige,' laity, who at best could read German. By writing in the German language, reformers such as Martin Luther and Eberlin von Günzburg demonstrated that they were not 'ashamed' to do this. Reformation historian Peter Matheson has noted the historic significance of this shift in choosing the vernacular. Choosing to speak and write in the vulgar language meant a clean break with the traditional élitist view of education and language of the Church. In other words, there were no longer 'two kinds of Christians,' 'spiritual' and 'worldly,' using two different languages.

In the wake of the German Reformation, Luther's clarion call for the "the priesthood of all believers" eclipsed the once indispensable role of the clergy. The term 'anti-clericalism' often refers to the vocal criticism of the flagrant abuses and corruption of the Roman Catholic church in late medieval Europe. By the time of the Reformation, however, anti-clericalism culminated in the widespread demand that the clerical estate be abolished once and for all. Once venerated for his sacramental role in providing the means to salvation, the priest was now seen in the opposite light – as a hindrance to the salvation of the common believer.

In summary, this course or lecture series provides contemporary Christians with the historical precedent for reclaiming the biblical mandate that "all are called" to the practice of ministry as disciples of Jesus Christ. It offers a stimulating theological critique of the unwarranted historical images of the laity as spiritually and morally subordinate to the elevated and superior status of the clergy. From the spectacular growth of late medieval vernacular theology to the growing democratization of lay education and spirituality, this course or lecture series charts the catalytic role of anti-clericalism and mysticism in late medieval and early modern European Christendom, culminating in the German and English Reformations.

2) THE BURNING FIRE OF HOLY DESIRE: THE MYSTICISM OF MEISTER ECKHART AND MARGUERITE PORETE

The premise of this course or lecture series is a critical review of the mystical texts and treatises ascribed to the fourteenth-century Christian mystics Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart, and the subsequent charges of heresy leveled at them in view of their popular writings and sermons. Whether religious or lay, both male and female mystics posed a menace to the Roman Catholic church for whom traditional ecclesiastical authority was both sacred and paramount. This course or lecture series re-examines the reciprocal relationship of lay and religious women (i.e., the Beguine movement) in the late Middle Ages to the famous Dominican friar and theologian, Meister Eckhart, and his disciples, Johannes Tauler and Henry Suso, and the Friends of God movement.

As one of the first victims of the Inquisition in Paris, the solitary French Beguine Marguerite Porete was condemned for heresy and burned at the stake with her heretical manuscript, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, on June 1, 1310. Partly because of his decision to preach in German, the same language in which his listeners spoke and prayed – instead of Latin – Meister Eckhart would be condemned by Pope John XXII for heresy on March 27, 1329, accused of "preaching persistently to simple persons." Eckhart's own mystical theology was likely influenced by his familiarity with Porete's *Mirror*.

The unprecedented growth of lay spirituality and the burgeoning of 'experiential mysticism' among the common people during this time undoubtedly precipitated this confrontation between Porete and Eckhart and their ecclesiastical adversaries – albeit each under different circumstances. Regardless, both Porete's and Eckhart's explicit emphasis on the vernacular dissemination of their mystical teachings lent renewed legitimacy to popular mysticism and lay piety in anticipation of the German Reformation.

The acclaimed immediacy of mystical experience was seen as potentially dangerous and heretical by the late medieval church because it relativized their ultimate ecclesiastical authority in two major ways. First, it gave ultimate priority to the direct personal experience of God by way of mystical union. By its very nature, mysticism provides an impetus for completely circumventing the official authority of ecclesiastical institutions in no uncertain terms.

Second, the professed 'illumination' that comes by way of genuine mystical experience sees through the blinding facade of the church's infallible truth claims as the sole arbiter of divine revelation. Hence, mystical illumination exposes the scandalous monopoly of God's Word maintained by the prevailing clerical, ecclesiastical hierarchy. Mystical experience risks making the traditionally binding authority of the institutional church redundant. When solitary lay, uncloistered Beguine women who live by their own vows within their own religious communities claim the experiential veracity of their direct encounter with God, their gendered mystical experience becomes authoritative. For Beguine women like Marguerite Porete, this mystical union binds them to the same God to whom they are spiritually espoused.

In regards to Marguerite's condemnation for heresy, her interrogators' misinterpretations of selected passages of *The Mirror of Simple Souls* were wrenched from their literary contexts as a pretext for seemingly similar political motivations. *The Mirror*, was after all, written in the vernacular, not in the scholarly Latin, thus making it accessible to those whom Marguerite calls the 'little ones of Holy Church' or 'simple souls,' that is, common people without much formal learning. It is not surprising, therefore, that Marguerite enjoyed such a faithful following among such 'simple souls,' both male and female.

This course or lecture series draws on my extensive research for my doctoral thesis which traces the seminal influence of late medieval German mysticism on the radical reformers, Karlstadt and Müntzer. In particular, I examined the ways in which Eckhart's influence at large and practice of vernacular preaching helped vindicate the 'vulgar and common' language of the laity – not unlike Marguerite. In addition to designing and offering adult education courses on this and related topics, such as *Witches, Mystics and Free Spirits*, I have conceived and taught similar courses in adult education on medieval mysticism, comparing Eastern mysticism with Western mysticism.

I remain profoundly indebted to one of my mentors and teachers, Matthew Fox, a spiritual theologian and well-known lecturer on Creation Spirituality, for his substantive scholarly research on Meister Eckhart and the Beguine movement. I was thrilled to enroll and complete the first year of the Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality, which Fox founded at Mundelein College in Chicago in 1978. This fortuitously led to Fox's kind invitation to assist him with research for his new translation and commentary on Eckhart, as well as compiling the indices of both Scriptural references and spirituality themes for the 545 pages pre-publication manuscript for it – long before computers! Matthew Fox's new critical translation with his introduction and commentary, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation* (Doubleday & Company, 1980), has since been reprinted as the *Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 2000).

As mentioned in the above profile on 7) Whetting Our Spiritual Appetite, I was privileged to team teach *Mysticism East and West* (1999-2000) with the late Deo Kernahan, a former editor for Vision TV and a prominent Hindu spokesperson in the Greater Toronto Area. We offered *Mysticism East and West: Mirabai and Marguerite Porete* (1999), and *Mysticism East and West: Kabir and Meister Eckhart* (1999-2000). My first (and new) M. Div. courses in this area were offered at the Toronto School of Theology: *Spiritual Forerunners of the Reformation* (1990/91) and *Late Medieval Mysticism and the Roots of Dissent* (1992). One of my most gratifying courses on the mysticism of Eckhart and Porete was one I taught at Saint Paul School of Theology on *Late Medieval Mysticism* (2005). M. Div. students were not only assigned to critically read the English translation of Porete's densely mystical manuscript; they were asked to dramatically share and present their respective interpretations of *The Mirror of Simple Souls* in class. The creativity and diversity of presentations from the nearly forty students in this seminary class is still a poignant memory of mine to this day. As already implied in the above courses, we can no more underestimate the life-changing effect of ancient biblical narratives for Christians today than we can dismiss the same transformative power evoked by the account of a condemned woman burned at the stake for professing her ardent love of God seven centuries ago.

3) THE TRIUMPH OF VERNACULAR THEOLOGY AND THE "COMMON MAN": THE MYSTICISM OF ANDREAS KARLSTADT AND THOMAS MÜNTZER

This particular course or lecture series re-examines two of the most fascinating yet largely misinterpreted dissenting voices from Luther: the 'radical reformers' Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt and Thomas Müntzer. Within two short centuries of the heretical condemnation of Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart, albeit in a vastly different historical context, it was charges of blasphemy and sedition, not heresy per se, that sealed the tragic fate of Müntzer. Within a fortnight of the bloody slaughter of more than 6,000 rebels by the princes' army of Hessian and Saxon mercenaries in the climactic battle at Frankenhausen of the German Peasants' War, Müntzer, who had managed to escape the battle, was soon captured, interrogated under torture, and beheaded on May 27, 1525.

Although both Karlstadt and his Orlamünde congregation adamantly denied backing Müntzer's call to revolution, Karlstadt's former association with Müntzer implicated him. Luther charged Karlstadt of having the same "rebellious and murderous spirit" as Müntzer in his sarcastic diatribe, *"Against the Heavenly Prophets"* (1525), which was partly to blame for Karlstadt's expulsion from Electoral Saxony. Like Müntzer, Karlstadt was subjected time and time again to the constant threat of exile and expulsion. Forced to seek refuge in city after city, Karlstadt finally found refuge at the University of Basel in 1534.

Until recently, Karlstadt has been generally denied his historic significance vis-à-vis the overarching figure of Luther. Meanwhile, Müntzer has been frequently dismissed if not demonized by Lutheran historiography, which has subsequently blamed him for instigating the German Peasants' War, beginning with Luther and Melancthon. Based on my extensive doctoral research on Karlstadt and Müntzer, this course takes as its premise the same one I determined for my doctoral thesis: that both Karlstadt and Müntzer were enamored by the 'vernacular theology' and spiritual teachings drawn from the German mysticism of Eckhart and his Dominican disciples, Tauler and Suso, as well as the *Theologia Deutsch* (which Luther himself translated in 1516 and 1518).

This course or lecture series looks at the reasons Karlstadt and Müntzer were so intrigued by late medieval German mysticism, more than their professed practice of mysticism. Yet there is no doubt among Radical Reformation historians that German mysticism indeed captivated Karlstadt and Müntzer. As we have already seen in the above two courses, the sheer momentum of late medieval lay movements and vernacular theology usurped the traditional hegemony and legitimacy of the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

The flourishing of lay spirituality in late medieval Rhineland Germany coincided with the growing public intolerance with the flagrant abuses of the Roman Catholic clergy and church in European Christendom. In many ways, the rise of lay mysticism fueled the smoldering fire of anticlerical dissent. This crescendo of late-medieval anticlericalism gave voice to the strident and widespread indignation at a corrupt church. Although it culminated dramatically in Luther's sustained polemic and reforms, it was hardly limited to Luther. In fact, without the vociferous anticlericalism of the common people, "the Reformation," according to the German Reformation historian, Hans-Jürgen Goertz, "would have re-mained a mere idea." In Goertz's words, anticlericalism thus proved to be "a force which fundamentally shaped and determined the direction of the Reformation."

Without pre-Reformation anticlericalism, the awakening of lay identity and spirituality among the common people from the late-medieval period to the German Reformation would have been unlikely. The turbulent historical transition from the Late Middle Ages to early modern period is epitomized by the inescapable tension between the truth claims of mysticism and those of the Roman institutional church. Whether transcribed in their own words by their own testimony, or ascribed to them by sympathizing clerics, the Spirit-infused voices of the *gemeine Mann* ('the common man') resounded with a new-found dignity in the wake of the German Reformation.

Although the evangelical impulse among the laity was ignited and legitimized by Luther and other reformers, the growing demands by commoners and aspiration for lay spirituality could not be satisfied. Other dissenting voices were heard besides Luther's. While initially welcoming Luther's prophetic protest at the Roman church, those dissident voices once enamored with Luther became disillusioned with Luther and his reforms, resulting in a bitter invective against Luther as well as the detested papists.

Contrary to Luther's emphasis on the sole biblical authority of God's 'outer Word,' Karlstadt, Müntzer and other radical reformers espoused the priority of the Holy Spirit's authority via the 'inner Word.' Karlstadt and Müntzer were convinced that 'the poor, little people' in Reformation Germany, that is, the lowly and lay gemeine Mann ('the common man') whose cause Luther had purportedly championed, had the capacity to hear and heed the 'inner Word.' Karlstadt's and Müntzer's theological outlook was thus shaped by their 'Spiritualist' interpretation of Scripture.

Though blamed for his role in instigating the German Peasants' War (or 'Revolution of the Common Man'), Müntzer's actual involvement in the uprising might be more accurately described as that of a charismatic military chaplain and spiritual leader for the insurgents' army. Although Luther's and Melancthon's infamous judgment of Müntzer was not historically founded, it has played perfectly into the hands of the victors of the Peasants' War by scapegoating their legendary ringleader. Nevertheless, Müntzer's most significant historical legacy can be seen in both his profound theological influence on south German and Austrian Anabaptism and radical Pietism as well as on the Spiritualists, namely, Hans Denck, Sebastian Franck, and on his own follower, Hans Hut.

On Christmas Day, 1521, Karlstadt broke radically with centuries of Catholic tradition by celebrating the first evangelical communion service of the Reformation at All Saints Church before two thousand people. Dressed in plain clothes, Karlstadt distributed the sacrament in both kinds (bread and wine). For the first time in the Reformation, the words of Eucharistic institution were spoken in the vernacular German instead of Latin.

Regardless of their differences and divergent fates, the powerful combination of anticlerical dissent and mysticism in both Karlstadt and Müntzer contributed to legitimizing the growing status of the evangelical layman and the laity in general. In fact, Karlstadt was the first reformer to implement the full equality of all believers, including the freedom of the laity to read and interpret Scripture for themselves. The predominant Protestant understanding of the Lord's Supper as a memorial can be largely attributed to Karlstadt's liturgical legacy. Like Luther, Karlstadt strongly affirmed the centrality of Scripture and the mediation of grace via the external word of God, yet Karlstadt never compromised the priority of the internal witness of the Spirit by way of the 'inner Word of God.'

4) CHRIS(T)-CROSSING CULTURAL BOUNDARIES: RELIGIOUS TOLERATION AMONG CHRISTIANS, JEWS, AND MUSLIMS IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

Given the politically volatile and religiously divisive world in which we now live, it is important to understand some of the historical antecedents in which religious toleration and its antithesis, religious violence, were alternately sanctioned or motivated by religious forces and ideologies. The explicit purpose of this course or lecture series is to provide a succinct overview of the pertinent issues and religious, cultural, and social tensions that existed between Christians and Jews, and between Christians and Muslims, in early modern Europe.

This course draws most recently on lecture material for my senior seminar undergraduate course on "Society, Culture, and Religion in Renaissance and Reformation Europe" for the Department of History, University of Toronto (2008/09). This same material includes further research expanding on my recent entry on "Toleration in the Reformation," in The New Westminster Dictionary of Church History. Volume One: The Early, Medieval and Reformation Eras (2008).

First of all, this course or lecture series provides a conceptual framework for examining what we now call 'religious toleration' among early modern Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Most of this period's writings on toleration, though, were focused exclusively on freedom of conscience, as championed by Luther at the Diet of Worms and by other humanist reformers influenced by Erasmus. Many of the same reformers who were predisposed towards some form of religious tolerance, however, argued strongly against it for political reasons. To a lesser degree toleration ensured the limited freedom of worship, yet freedom of religion never implied freedom from religion, as we often assume it did.

When Luther published his now classic statement on religious toleration, *On Secular Authority*, in 1523, he was adamant that civil authorities should under no circumstances try to fight heresy with the sword. Within only two years, however, Luther was forced to amend his original stance on toleration in response to the radical demands of Müntzer and Karlstadt and the outbreak of the German Peasants' War in 1524.

The other aspect of my research on which this course or lecture series is based is how the above notions of religious toleration laid the groundwork for what we now recognize as universalism, the belief in universal salvation. Despite the prevalence of religious and sectarian intolerance in sixteenth-century Europe, this course or lecture series situates the complex sociological and historical context out of which the idea of toleration emerges.

The case for universal salvation was bolstered by Sebastian Castellio, whose pointed attack on John Calvin's doctrine of predestination was a boost to further arguments sympathetic to religious toleration. Castellio's argument can be summed up this way: to persecute anyone for the sake of religion is irreligious, since God desires the salvation of all humanity and has created no one for damnation. The belief in universalism, integral to the spread of religious toleration, was forged in particular by radical reformers Hans Denck and Sebastian Franck. Denck and Franck believed God was available to every spiritual person "without any mediation." Franck even stated boldly: "I have my brothers among the Turks, Papists, Jews, and all peoples."

Second, and more significantly, I concur with recent efforts by social and cultural historians in redefining religious toleration in the violence-ridden age of early modern Europe. Refer to my recent book review of Benjamin J. Kaplan's new book, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Harvard University Press, 2007) in my curriculum vitae (page three). I believe Kaplan's redefinition of toleration holds considerable promise for reframing the historical meaning of "toleration" in early modern Europe.

Besides mystifying the multiple ways in which all sorts of people practiced toleration, Kaplan recognizes the theoretical limits of the conventional belief that elites were the primary movers in determining policies and attitudes of toleration. "It asks only how much tolerance prevailed in a particular time and place, failing to acknowledge that qualitatively different kinds of tolerance may exist. In this way it distorts our vision of the past, as it narrows our thinking about ways to avoid or resolve conflict in the present."

The thrust of Kaplan's book is therefore focused on how early modern Christians of different confessions lived together in "peaceful coexistence" within the same village, town, or city – and how these people interacted daily with the very people they were taught to hate, which included, of course, Jews and Muslims. For people of different religious identities then, religious toleration was therefore not just an abstract concept or policy formulated by theologians and ruling elites. It was a practical form of behavior by which people who lived in religiously mixed communities could get along together without killing each other.

My historical research background uncovers the longstanding theological roots of religious intolerance mediated by the visceral and racist contempt of Jews as "infidels" by their enforced segregation to the ghetto, and by the vilification of Jews through anti-Jewish propaganda, i.e., the Judensau (Jewish Sow) visual motif. In the first instance, the pernicious historic legacy of Christian anti-Judaism in early modern Europe was palpably driven home to me when I recently toured the Jewish ghetto in Venice while giving a paper at the 2010 Renaissance Society of America.

In the second case, I draw on unpublished research to date on the above Judensau motif and the Christian censure of Jews as usurers and moneylenders in late medieval and early modern Europe. My fascination with this topic formally commenced with my SCSC paper on "The Judensau (Jewish Sow) as a Medium of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic" (1988); refer to curriculum vitae (page six). I was privileged to share some of this research on late medieval and early modern Christian anti-Judaism at the Rabbi's Seminar at Beth David B'Nai Israel Beth Am Synagogue, in Toronto (1995).

As a current Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies in Toronto, my research in this area includes the socio-historical phenomena of exile and expulsion, particularly in the early modern period of European Christendom. Refer to my curriculum vitae (page six) regarding my recent paper in Montreal for the Sixteenth Century Society and Conference (SCSC) on the radical reformers Andreas Karlstadt and Thomas Müntzer, "Fight or Flight: The Political Exigency of Earthly Exile for 'Heavenly Prophets,'" in a session I organized for the SCSC on the topic of Exile, Expulsion, and Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World.

This course or lecture series on Chris(t)-Crossing Cultural Boundaries is also inspired by collaborative research on exile and expulsion with faculty colleagues and graduate students this past year in an interdisciplinary Jackman Humanities Institute Working Group at the University of Toronto. Our explicit focus on exile and expulsion promises to expand the traditional emphasis on "Reformation" to include not just Catholics and Protestants, but also Jews and Muslims, indigenous groups in the Americas, and marginalized communities in Asia.

Furthermore, this course or lecture series examines how earlier advocates of religious toleration, Luther foremost among them, were also instrumental in fostering anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim sentiment. Luther epitomized the worst of religious intolerance by lending his anti-Jewish vitriolic to the renewed upsurge of anti-Semitism during the sixteenth century. In a Janus-like contrast to the Spiritualist Sebastian Franck's precursory ecumenism, Luther envisaged Satan's final, apocalyptic assault on the church led by the devil's legion of Jews, Romans, heretics, and Turks.

With respect to Muslims, “Luther viewed Islam as fundamentally a religion of works righteousness,” according to Reformation historian Gregory Miller. “In contrast to medieval writers, Luther avoided designating the faith of the Turks as heresy. According to Luther, Muslims worship a different God than Christians; they worship the devil himself,” citing Miller in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Church History. Volume One: The Early, Medieval and Reformation Eras* (2008).

In conclusion, this course or lecture series affords a critical look back to early modern Europe, in order to identify the diverse sociological and historical factors which precipitated religious hostilities and ethnic rivalries – of which many remain unresolved and contentious to this very day.

On the Spiritual Practice and Theology of Healing Creation

***1) RE-MYTHOLOGIZING THE WORLD: AGRARIAN, ECOFEMINIST, AND HISTORICAL NARRATIVES
2) THEOLOGY OF THE LAND: ABORIGINAL, BIBLICAL, AND CHRISTIAN NARRATIVES***

Both of the above courses or lecture series are based on the lecture material and research for two courses: my popular M. Div. course, *Theology of the Land*, first offered in 1992, and subsequently taught at several theological colleges or seminaries in both Canada and the U.S.A., and a related M. A. level course, *Re-mythologizing the World: Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism*, first offered in Chicago 1991. This course or lecture series focuses on the biblical and theological significance of land vis-à-vis our human longing to belong to a community through a sense of place.

I have combined the two course descriptions above because they are readily and thematically interchangeable, depending on the preferred focus of the lecture series or course. Because of the diverse range of narratives covered, it is simply not feasible to try and condense all six of them into one single course. We have seen enough of that kind of cultural assimilation in the course of Western history. As identified in the subtitles, the six narratives reviewed are agrarian and rural, ecofeminist, historical, aboriginal and First Nations, biblical, and Christian.

My theoretical and ideological stance is informed by each of these narratives, and in particular, by the various biblical and Christian theological traditions in which I have been nurtured in faith and to which I have been exposed in my thinking and reading. My thinking has been profoundly influenced by mentors like Rosemary Radford Ruether, the ecofeminist and historical theologian, and Wendell Berry, the Kentucky poet and author, who represent the ecofeminist and agrarian paradigms respectively. This course or lecture series, therefore, incorporates their agrarian and ecofeminist critiques with my own rural reflection and narrative.

My own narrative critique is based on my personal observations of the socio-economic and environmental costs of industrialized degradation of farmland in south central Nebraska. As a member of a small family farm where I farmed as an adult in the 1980s, I have witnessed firsthand the deleterious environmental effects of industrialized agriculture on rural communities and farmland across the Midwestern United States. Wendell Berry’s brilliant exposé, *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture* (1977), confirmed my own predilections and observations. Needless to say, my informed critique of the rapid changes brought about by the industrialization of traditional family farm agriculture since the late 70s has not always been welcome.

The agrarian and ecofeminist paradigm underlies my working premise for the promising role of community development in step with congregational renewal, in terms of practical strategies for revitalizing rural congregations and communities as outlined in my online publication, *Alive and Kicking: Revitalizing Rural Ministries*. Though modest in scope and dated, my most significant published work on the spiritual practice and theology of healing Creation is my above chapter, "Living in Denial? Lament as a Liberative Act" in *Sacred Earth, Sacred Community: Jubilee, Ecology and Aboriginal People* (2000). (Click on the link for Publications).

This chapter has been widely circulated and favorably reviewed (*Catholic New Times*, June 17, 2001). Appearing long before Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, it builds on Ed Ayres's prophetic and timely book, *God's Last Offer: Negotiating for a Sustainable Future* (1999), forecasting the inevitability of climate change a short decade ago. As the former editor of *World Watch* magazine, Ayres documents the pervasive information laundering in regards to the environmental crisis and "the huge market for denial" that has subsequently developed.

The focus of this chapter is illuminating the insidious role of crass consumerism in denying what is more and more on our minds these days: the grave ecological threat posed by climate change and global warming. This chapter stresses the imperative need among leaders of faith communities and religious traditions to purposively reverse the addictive denial of climate change perpetuated by the rampant consumerism of North American society. If any kind of spiritual practice can play a significant role in adapting ourselves to the seeming irreversible effects of climate change in the healing of Creation, it has to avail itself of the transformative and healing power of biblical lament.

In this course or lecture series, the agrarian and rural narrative includes the relationship of African American farmers to the land, articulated in books like Charlene Gilbert's and Quinn Eli's *Homecoming: The Story of African-American Farmers*. The immigrant exodus and longstanding settlement of Hispanic, Latino and Mexican Americans in small towns and farming communities across the U.S., including my native Nebraska, is also included in the agrarian and rural narrative. Here I draw on the writings of liberation theologian, Virgilio Elizondo, and ecofeminist theologian, Ivone Gebara, among others.

I look forward to doing further research into both of these narratives and to further opportunities for networking strategically with colleagues in rural ministry and community development in African American, African Canadian, Hispanic, Latino and Mexican American and Canadian communities.

The Aboriginal and First Nations narrative includes their oral and written cosmologies in relation to the natural world. I draw here on the translated work of the Haida and other Native American myths by the internationally-renowned Canadian poet and linguist, Robert Bringhurst, in particular, his books, *The Tree of Meaning: Thirteen Talks* (2006) and *Everywhere Being is Dancing: Twenty Pieces of Thinking* (2007).

Both of my previous course offerings of Theology of the Land for the Francis Sandy Theological Centre (United Church of Canada) in Paris, Ontario, engaged the wisdom from the natural worldviews of the Hebrew (biblical) and First Nations (Aboriginal) traditions in tandem (1996/2002). For my Theology of the Land class at Saint Paul School of Theology, in Kansas City, Missouri (2004), our guest speaker, Janith K. English, Principal Chief of the Wyandot Nation of Kansas, narrated the migratory history of her ancestral people, the Wyandots. The Wyandots are descendants of the Tionnontates or Tobacco Nation of the Huron Confederacy; their website is located at <http://www.wyandot.org>.

The practical thrust of this course is to help local ministers and lay leaders discern how the quality of life and health of their rural communities is compromised by the nonrenewable environmental practices of industrialized agriculture and corporate globalization promoted throughout North America. It coincides with the priority of ensuring sustainability and viability, socio-economically and ecologically, as discussed in my online publication, *Alive and Kicking*, for the immediate and long-term future health of rural and resource-based communities across Canada and the United States.

In addition to my own narrative reflections, lecture material for this course is drawn from my cumulative sociological research on rural communities and small towns across Canada and the U.S. for over thirty years. This research entails a sociological framework for critiquing the unequal historic power relationship between metropolitan and suburban centers vis-à-vis small towns, rural and resource-based communities. In the course of naming this phenomenon, I have theoretically adapted Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger's (known for his concept of SRV – "social role valorization") sociological concept of "social devaluation" in naming the devalued status and image of most rural people and their local communities. (I first learned about SRV while working in local community development within the Greater Toronto Area in directly supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.)

The rationale for this ruraljustified website is in accord with this systemic and historical critique of the disproportionate and unjust power dynamic favoring urban and suburban constituencies over those residing in small towns, rural and resource-based communities. This socio-economic disparity is, in general, as descriptive of North America as it is of the systemic inequality and monopoly of wealth between developed and developing countries worldwide. The subsequent expropriation and 'devaluation' of rural labor, land, workers, and resources in the process has historically benefited metropolitan and suburban populations as well as those rural élites whose political clout and social position shelter them from the socio-economic marginalization and poverty that render many rural populations and communities vulnerable.

One of the lectures for *Re-Mythologizing the World or Theology of the Land* is based on the above research and my lecture delivered at the Faculty Forum at Saint Paul School of Theology, in Kansas City, Missouri: "Out of Sight, Out of Mind": The Relegation of Unwanted Wastes and Faces to Rural Spaces" (2005). This lecture identifies the symbolic and cultural factors that substantiate my sociological argument that the presumably 'empty spaces' of rural areas are frequently deemed ideal places for exactly what suburban and metropolitan centers do not want in their own backyard.

For the sake of alliteration, I note the increasing concentration of at least seven Ps in which 'undesirable' industries, resources and/or people are physically relegated to designated rural areas and communities across North America: 1) poultry and 2) pigs (both in CAFOs, i.e., concentrated animal feedlot operations), 3) pollution (garbage and waste landfill sites), 4) prisons and penitentiaries (correctional and detention facilities), 5) 'dirty' pharmaceuticals (meth production, epidemic in some rural areas), 6) pornography (adult bookstores) and 7) poker (gambling casinos).

For example, while residents along the U.S.-Canadian border frequently indulge in 'cross-border shopping,' my home town of Toronto has been guilty of 'cross-border dumping.' Until quite recently, tons of Toronto's residential garbage was trucked on a daily basis to landfills in Michigan's rural communities in return for their revenue.

Amid the above influx of corporate and profit-driven profit-industries, utilizing the low cost of labor in most rural areas, and the increasing number of school consolidations, failed local businesses, and church closures, bold and creative leadership among local ministers and/or leaders of rural congregations and communities is imperative. But well-informed and astute pastoral strategies will only come from building the community 'capacity' for this designated pool of local leadership. This course or lecture series precisely underscores the desperate need for educating and mentoring a pool of promising leaders at the grassroots community level.

Furthermore, the various historical, Christian and biblical narratives in either Re-Mythologizing the World or Theology of the Land often intersect with the agrarian and rural narrative in this course or lecture series. For example, I recount the ancestral historical struggle for women and men in farm families like my own family. Refer to my chapter, "'Reluctant Feminists': Rural Women and the Myth of the Farm Family" in *Religion, Feminism and the Family* (1996). (Click on the link for Publications.)

In sync with the initial lecture, "In Search of Canaan: Retracing Our Ancestors' Routes/Roots to the Promised Land," my own ancestral narrative is only one among others. As already mentioned, Gilbert's and Eli's Homecoming recounts the difficult historical plight of African-American farmers. In his book, *Honoring the Ancestors: An African Cultural Interpretation of Black Religion and Literature*, Donald H. Matthews reclaims the literary and cultural import of narrative theology and African-American spirituals in the very survival of African-American religion.

The first written assignment for M. Div. students in my Theology of the Land course is to write a narrative and/or autobiographical reflection on their own historical relationship to the land, relative to the religious, socio-economic and cultural background of their immediate family of origin. The text I have consistently used for explicating the biblical narrative is Norman C. Habel's *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (1995), which I reviewed for the *Toronto Journal of Theology* (1998).

First, based on their reading of Habel's biblical exegesis of six discrete 'ideologies' in the Hebrew Bible, students are asked to write papers on some of the following questions: Identify which one of Habel's six biblical land ideologies that best describes your biblical and theological understanding of the land, and God's covenant with the land and God's chosen people. Which one most accurately reflects your biblical understanding of God and land entitlement/stewardship, i.e., Sabbath and Jubilee?

Second, identify which one or two of the theological, historical, or cultural traditions studied in this class most poignantly describes your own theological understanding of the land, and God's covenant with the land and God's chosen people – especially in light of Jesus' mission and announcement of the coming kingdom of God. Which one most explicitly reflects your theological understanding of God and land entitlement/stewardship, especially in view of present agricultural policies and environmental practices that degrade the land instead of ones that promise to regenerate or sustain it?

3) REFRAMING RELIGIOUS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: THE GREENING OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

This course is predicated on the lecture material and content for a recent undergraduate course, Religious Ethics: The Environment, for the Department and Centre for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto (2010), and related material from the two above courses: 1) Re-Mythologizing the World: Agrarian, Ecofeminist, and Historical Narratives, and 2) Theology of the Land: Aboriginal, Biblical, and Christian Narratives. It identifies the salient religious and ethical issues posed by widespread environmental degradation and the accelerating rate of climate change. Furthermore, it introduces students to the greening of the world's religious traditions, i.e., Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, First Nations, Wicca, and other religious traditions, via their religious writings, teachings and spiritual practices – in working purposively on behalf of earth healing and ecological justice.

This course probes the specific religious and ethical implications of environmental degradation exacerbated by the following factors: clear-cutting and deforestation, overpopulation and the growing gap between the rich and the poor, underground and surface water pollution, drought and famine, oil spills and aquatic pollution, acid rain and air pollution, toxic waste, peak-oil, the depletion of natural and energy resources, etc. All of the above factors contribute in one way or another to the alarming rates of accelerated climate change and global warming. The documented rates not only exceed some of the most recent scientific projections; they tax the human capacity, scientific capability, and political will of developed and developing nations to actually reduce carbon emissions and learn how to successfully adapt to climate change in the foreseeable future.

One of the prerequisites for reframing religious and environmental ethics is my emphasis on recognizing the deleterious environmental effects of the industrialization of agriculture on the production of food. The antagonistic relationship that has often pitted environmental activists against organic and sustainable agriculture, for example, is now dissipating, allowing for more collaboration among them in fighting the monopoly of corporation-government collusion favourable to the corporate interests of transnational agribusiness. Refer to Paul B. Thompson's *The Spirit of the Soil: Agriculture and Environmental Ethics* (1995), which I reviewed for the *Toronto Journal of Theology* (1998).

Interestingly enough, only five years ago the local food movement was roundly dismissed as nothing but a fad by agricultural experts. The growing demand for organic food and increasing public support for sustainable agriculture is now visible in the remarkable boom of farmers' markets. The sudden consumer demand for locally-raised and chemical-free food, and subsequent willingness of consumers to pay more for it, clearly demonstrates the growing consumer concern with nutrition, food safety, and the alleged complicity of factory farming practices in producing more and more greenhouse gases.

The lack of public and government scrutiny regarding our food until very recently is alarming. I suggest it not only shows a glaring naïveté and lack of public awareness about the economics and politics of food production; it shows a radical and disturbing disconnect between most urban and suburban consumers and the very people involved in producing food for them – that is, farm workers and farm families in rural communities. As an antidote to how disconnected most consumers are from the field and farm gate from which their food comes, one of my colleagues, Eric Skillings, and I were recently invited by the editor of Mandate magazine to design a workshop template on this topic: "From Field to Table: A Workshop on Appreciating the Gift of Food" (Mandate, The United Church of Canada, 2010).

As referenced in my course above on 4) Loss is More: Lament as the Door to Spiritual Renewal and related chapter, "Living in Denial? Lament as a Liberative Act," people are feeling more and more overwhelmed by the ominous prognosis of climate change, discernible in the severe and anomalous weather systems and volatile fluctuations of seasonal weather in general. In addition to learning more about the extent to which we need to adapt to climate change in the immediate and long-term future, this course or lecture series reiterates the same urgency as stressed in this previous course and in related courses on the Theology of the Land: we need to draw deeper from our own spiritual wells and religious traditions to help us deal with the unprecedented challenges and adversity brought by global warming and climate change.

In summary, this course will help students to reframe traditional religious and environmental ethics for this expressed purpose: to critically question and analyze the role religion plays in contributing to environmental degradation, and/or in resisting and condemning it. The latter role will be examined in relation to how the received traditional teachings and wisdom of the world's religions are reconciled or not with their recent advocacy on behalf of environmental justice and sustainability. Class lectures will be supplemented by a combination of audiovisual presentations, guest lectures, and plenary as well as small group class discussions.

As intimated by the heart-breaking title of James Wilson's book, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America* (2000), the knowledge of the historical pain and suffering endured by Native Americans and other Aboriginal people can easily make all of us cry – as it should. We should also lament, needless to say, the historical enslavement and brutal humiliation of African Americans, the planned genocide of Jews and other groups in the Shoah (Holocaust), and numerous other atrocities.

As I stress, however, in my course on the Theology of the Land among others, the earth and all of Creation, too, weeps and languishes. Hence, the desperate need for 're-mythologizing the world' as I have suggested above, is premised on how the very material world and world of matter, from the Latin for mater (mother), once considered and revered as sacred, is being profaned in ways that not only make us shudder. They make us literally, and more frequently, terminally ill, as seen in the prolific rise of cancers. But this desecration of mater also threatens to snuff out more and more species of vegetative and animal life, leaving the tragic legacy of losing forever their beauty, being and benefit to human and non-human life.

Finally, this course or lecture series on Reframing Religious and Environmental Ethics: The Greening of the World's Religious Traditions recognizes how incumbent it is on us that we sharpen our analytical and theological lenses as well as our pastoral strategies for engaging our respective faith communities in fighting for environmental justice. It recognizes, moreover, that critical thinking needs to partner with the critical 'heart' of compassion as taught by those same religious traditions, in exercising our prophetic calling as faithful stewards of Creation.

In his probing study of Plenty Coups, the last great Chief of the Crow Nation, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (2006), author and philosopher Jonathan Lear distinguishes the nature of 'radical hope' from 'mere optimism.' If we rely solely on our own resources, which are often premised more on our will and 'mere optimism,' we may easily succumb to the paralysis and despair described above in relation to lament. How do we live with 'radical hope' in the face of potential environmental devastation posed by climate change? Unless we can summon forth and harness the same kind of courage, wisdom and resiliency as a Plenty Coups for the restoration and healing of Creation, I fear the earth and all its inhabitants shall weep unabatedly.

ALIVE AND KICKING RATIONALE

Workshop on Alive and Kicking: Revitalizing Rural Ministries Proposed by facilitator and author, Marvin L. Anderson, Ph.D.

Based on the recent United Church of Canada resource, *Alive and Kicking: Revitalizing Rural Ministries*, Alive and Kicking workshops have been offered as a one-day event for rural Presbyteries in six United Church Conferences to date: Montreal and Ottawa, London, Hamilton, Bay of Quinte, Toronto and Alberta and Northwest.

For United Church Presbyteries or Districts thinking of hosting an Alive and Kicking workshop within their own region, there are several tangible outcomes to introducing this resource through a workshop venue for the benefit of lay members and ministry personnel of rural and small town pastoral charges. These outcomes include the following:

1) Introduction to and overview of the Alive and Kicking resource:

The workshop provides an accessible Powerpoint presentation to walk participants through the seven lenses discussed in it. This overview of the Alive and Kicking online resource familiarizes participants with its basic content and relevance to their own respective pastoral charges.

2) Learning about the World Café process:

In addition to introducing people to the Alive and Kicking resource, participants are engaged to reflect on how each of the lenses pertains to their own congregation by using the World Café group process (<http://www.theworldcafe.com>). This process resembles the same kind of table conversations people ordinarily have in their homes and local cafés, hence the name.

My observation is that participants who attend this workshop are much less tired by the end of the day, in part because they have been moving around and talking to each other during the course of the workshop, and have had meaningful conversations about subjects that matter to them. For those congregations in need of more honest communication and dialogue among themselves in discerning their future vision, the World Café group process can be a useful and practical template for participants who want to use it in their local Board, Session and Council meetings in their home congregation or pastoral charge.

3) Meeting and getting acquainted with other people:

Despite the ease with which people in small towns and rural communities relate socially to each other in their own locales, the increasing sense of isolation in rural communities and small towns means that people from one community probably do not know that many people in a neighboring small town or rural community. This Alive and Kicking workshop can help members of different congregations and pastoral charges not only get acquainted with each other, but allow them to share their common concerns and best practices with congregants and ministry personnel from other places.

4) Re-evaluating and re-imagining the spiritual life of their congregations:

Through both the World Café process and more formal presentations, participants are invited to think concretely and prayerfully about their own congregation and home pastoral charge in a relatively neutral and thoughtful learning space. This is carried out with the professional help of two facilitators, one being the guest facilitator and author of *Alive and Kicking*, Dr. Marvin L. Anderson, the other being a local leader. The latter facilitator could either be ministry personnel, a Conference or Presbytery staff person, designated lay minister or lay leader.

5) Modeling adult learning/reflection and lifelong education:

The intentional pairing of the guest facilitator with the local leader allows for mutual learning. Furthermore, teaming up is more fun and collaborative. Such collaboration requires that the local leader or facilitator is not only familiar with the seven lenses discussed in the *Alive and Kicking* resource, but is willing to follow up on the ideas and learning generated by the day-long workshop.

6) Networking opportunities:

Meeting and getting acquainted with other people, as cited above, is integral to community building. It is also prerequisite for networking. The process of networking is the formalized and explicit use of that community building process to strategically foster connections and contacts with other people we would normally not meet. Working for any kind of congregational renewal or community development requires this level of collaboration and networking, especially given the nature of distance and isolation so basic to rural ministries and communities.

7) Celebrating the Good News and the rural church:

As followers and disciples of Jesus Christ, the prophetic and transformative force of the Good News is often lost in our desperate and frenzied efforts to keep the doors of our congregations open. For this reason the focus of the *Alive and Kicking* resource is helping its readers to make the conceptual and practical shift from survival and maintenance to revitalization—even in the midst of rapid change and difficult times.

Members of small membership United Church and other congregations need the tools to reframe their present situation and re-evaluate their context. Also required is an intentional focus on learning and retrieving spiritual practices and disciplines, including worship, learning, and other activities outlined in the *Alive and Kicking* resource.

Given that these are hard times economically and socially, people need more opportunities to have fun. As various historical movements for social change have demonstrated in the midst of hard times, celebrating the Good News and our rural congregations is not only integral to keeping faith and hope, it is vital to sustaining the future of the rural church.