

Consortium on Law and Values in Health, Environment & the Life Sciences 2010-11 Student Proposal Cover Page

Applicant Information

Applicant Name: Joshua Mabie Email: mabie003@umn.edu

Project Title: The Ecological Roots of a Religious Crisis: Holy Land Ecology, Religious Belief, and Environmental Policy

Department: English College: CLA

City & State: Minneapolis, MN

Home address: 4617 44th Ave S Zip: 55406

Faculty advisor name: Dr. Dan Philippon Email: danp@umn.edu Not applicable

Dept. Head's name: Dr. Ellen Messer-Davidow Dept. Head's email: emd@umn.edu

Dean's name: Dr. James Parente Dean's email: paren001@umn.edu

How did you hear about this funding opportunity? Official call for proposals by email.

Funding

Total amount of funding requested: **\$6,581** Is funding available within your center or dept for this project?

Executive summary (maximum 200 words)

Lynn White famously argued that the biblical concept of dominion has legitimated and encouraged centuries of ecological devastation and that western Christianity “bears a huge burden of guilt” for the environmental crisis now facing the earth. With this research project, Josh Mabie reverses White’s logic to consider how environmental degradation has affected religious belief, practice, and political activism. The project uses archival descriptions of travelers’ and pilgrims’ responses to the ecologically devastated Holy Land to engage religion’s role in the climate change debate. The historical account uncovered by the project both challenges the foundations of religious hostility to environmental protection and provides a case study for the implementation (or imposition) of environmental reforms in an underdeveloped region.

Approvals

Check all appropriate approvals required for your proposal. Approvals must be obtained prior to receipt of funding. If you have applied for approval but have not yet received it, indicate that below.

IRB Yes No Application pending

IACUC Yes No Application pending

Other Yes No Application pending

Checklist

- The proposal is 1000 words or less excluding budget, biographies, references and citations.
- The proposal includes a work plan with a specific timeline using months or quarters to identify work to be done and completion dates.
- The proposal includes a 1-2 paragraph biography of the applicant and all co-investigators.
- The budget form is complete including the funds sought for this project, other pending applications for this project, and the amount/source of matching or other funds.
- The applicant’s faculty advisor is copied on the application email. Professional students w/o advisors check NA.
- All necessary approvals are pending or received.

Joshua Mabie

Consortium Grant on the Societal Implications of the Life Sciences 2011-2012

The Ecological Roots of a Religious Crisis: Holy Land Ecology, Religious Belief, and International Climate Policy

Project Description

As my title indicates, my project takes Lynn White's 1967 *Science* article, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" as its starting point. In this landmark article, White argues that western Christianity "bears a huge burden of guilt" for the ecological crisis that had, in the late 1960s just begun to become apparent.¹ Specifically, White contends that the biblical command for humans to have dominion over all nature has legitimized and encouraged centuries of environmental devastation. The White Thesis, as the argument has come to be known in environmental history, remains a touchstone for most discussions of the relationship between religion and the environment. Though the thesis remains firmly entrenched in the public imagination, it has been roundly criticized in scholarly publications. Environmental historians point to a variety of negative attitudes towards the environment across religious orientations as evidence that Christianity is not the controlling variable.² Sociologists question the links between religious belief, lack of concern for the environment, and actual behaviors that affect the environment.³ Biblical scholars have questioned White's simplistic reading of the Genesis account.⁴ What has not yet been considered, and what I propose to examine with the support of a Consortium grant, is the possibility that environmental degradation and religion are intimately connected, but that White has the causal arrow pointing the wrong way. In short, I seek to understand how environmental degradation has affected religious belief, practice, and political activism.

Religious communities, especially American Evangelicals, have played a prominent role in contemporary environmental policy debates and exert a disproportionate amount of influence on climate change policy.⁵ While many American religious communities have embraced environmental conservation and sustainability, the most vocal and politically active groups continue to oppose environmental protection and international climate agreements. Evangelical opposition to environmental legislation proceeds completely unaware of a long history of Christian engagement with the ecology of the Holy Land. I am convinced that examination and

¹ Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1206.

² Lewis W. Moncrief, "The Cultural Basis of Our Environmental Crisis," *Science* 170 (1970): 508-12. Robin Attfield, "Social History, Religion, and Technology: An Interdisciplinary Investigation into Lynn White, Jr.'s 'Roots,'" *Environmental Ethics* 31.1 (2009): 31-50.

³ Michelle Wolkowicz, et al. argue that religion has "very little real bearing on individuals' environmental concerns and behavior" in "Substantive Religious Belief and Environmentalism," *Social Science Quarterly* 78.1 (1997). Conrad L. Kanagy and Fern K. Willits found a negative correlation between church attendance and attitudes about the environment, but they were surprised to also find a positive correlation between church attendance and involvement in environmental activities. "A 'Greening' of Religion? Some Evidence from a Pennsylvania Sample" *Social Science Quarterly* 74.3 (1993): 679-80.

⁴ Gabriel Fackre, "Ecology and Theology," *Religion in Life* 40 (1971): 210-24. David Livingstone, "Myth 1: The Church is to Blame," *Christianity Today* 38.4 (1994)

⁵ I presented a paper entitled "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action" to the American Academy of Religion's regional meeting last May in Saint Paul that examined Evangelical influence on climate change policy. I am currently revising this paper for publication.

dissemination of the history of Christian responses to environmental degradation in Palestine has the potential to open up a portion of the climate debate and to pave the way for religious communities' support for the implementation of just and equitable international climate policies. To achieve this goal, my project is guided by two related questions. First, what do western Holy Land travelers' writings indicate about how they responded intellectually, religiously, and politically to the ecological degradation they witnessed in Palestine? Secondly, where can we see traces of this history exerting pressure on climate change discourse today?

I propose to answer the first question by examining archival accounts of the environmental degradation that visitors encountered in Palestine. My own preliminary research on some of these published responses suggests that diminished biodiversity and apparent desertification led to theological consternation if not outright religious crisis. For many visitors to Palestine, the very landscape (not merely the churches and shrines that are built on the land, but the plants, rivers, seas, and soil itself) is weighted with special meaning.⁶ The fact that, Palestine is not, for the most part, a verdant Promised Land "flowing with milk and honey," but often a ruined, rubbish-filled waste has been deeply troubling to visitors who expect the land to accord with biblical descriptions.

The problem of the gap between biblical descriptions of the landscape of the Holy Land and the environmental reality of the Palestinian desert led to a vigorous scientific debate at the turn of the twentieth century over the causes of the ecological change. One camp maintained that the climate of Palestine had changed over the course of the two thousand years that separate the biblical era from today and that the "present poverty-stricken condition of the country" was the result of greatly diminished rainfall.⁷ Opponents argued that the climate of Palestine is essentially unchanged and that "curse of the country is bad government and oppression."⁸ Both sides of the argument recognized the political consequences of their claims. Advocates for ancient climate change admitted that the degradation of the Palestinian environment was inevitable and irreversible while apologists for climate stability explicitly advocated for western restoration as a part of a colonial project.

The debate over the cause of Palestine's desolation is still played out in Israel today. Visitors to the Garden Tomb (an alternate site of Christ's resurrection that was discovered and excavated by British explorers and missionaries in 1867) in Palestinian East Jerusalem are directed to notice the difference between the lush British garden (an example of a "typical biblical garden") and the rubbish, smog, and concrete that characterizes East Jerusalem's main bus station which is adjacent to the Garden Tomb's one acre lot.⁹ According to its former caretaker, the Garden Tomb is "a cloistered oasis in a concrete jungle;" visiting it, he observes, is "like entry into the last outpost of the British Empire."¹⁰ I suspect that most contemporary visitors who form opinions about the climate and ecology of Palestine, draw them from this politically-charged juxtaposition.

⁶ William M. Thomson, a nineteenth century clergyman and Palestinian explorer wrote that the land itself is "one vast tablet whereupon God's messages to men have been drawn. . .to be seen and read of all to the end of time." To him, the land of Palestine and the Bible "constitute the entire and all-perfect text, and should be studied together." *The Land and the Book*, vol. I (New York: Harper 1859), xv.

⁷ Ellsworth Huntington, *Palestine and Its Transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 249-50.

⁸ Qtd. in J.W. Gregory, "Is the Earth Drying Up?" *The Geographic Journal* 43.2 (1914), 158.

⁹ Bill White, *A Special Place: The Story of the Garden Tomb, Jerusalem* (Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press, 1989), 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid* 75.

To this point, I have had access only to published accounts of encounters with the ecology of Palestine; these works are written primarily by major literary figures, ministers, scientists.¹¹ With support from a Consortium Grant I will extend my study to include analysis of unpublished and essentially unexamined primary source accounts of Palestine by ordinary visitors. I will consult the collections of journals and letters in the archives of the Garden Tomb Association in Bath, England and the Palestine Exploration Fund in London. Upon my return from England, I will research the collections of the Kautz Family YMCA archives at the University of Minnesota as well as the library of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois to mine its collection of travel journals written by participants in the Institute's annual Israel tour.¹²

After presenting an early form of my findings at the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment's biennial meeting from June 22-26, I will revise and expand the conference paper into an article-length essay. I plan to submit this article to *Environmental History* or *ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment)* by August 31, 2011.

Timeline for Award Use

- May 2011 – Using consortium funds, I will travel to London, England to conduct research at the British Library and at the archives of the Garden Tomb Association and the Palestine Exploration Fund.

- June 2011 – In Minneapolis, I will research Holy Land travel journals and narratives at the University of Minnesota's Kautz Family YMCA Archive. I will also write the conference paper that I will give at the biennial meeting of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (June 22-26, 2011). My proposal - "The Ecological Roots of a Theological Crisis: Melville, General Gordon, and the Land of Milk and Honey" - was accepted by the conference organizers on January 25, 2011.

- July - August 2011 – I will revise and expand my conference paper into an article that I plan to submit for publication by August 31, 2011.

Brief Biography

Joshua Mabie is a PhD candidate in the department of English at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. He is currently writing his dissertation "Modern Pilgrims: American Dwelling and Religious Travel in a Secular Age." This dissertation engages literature, religious studies and

¹¹ Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (New York: American Publishing Company, 1869). Herman Melville, *Clarel: A Poem and a Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1991). John Phillip Newman, *From Dan to Beersheba" or, The Land of Promise as it Now Appears* (New York, Harper, 1864). J.W. Gregory, "Palestine and the Stability of Climate in Historic Times," *The Geographical Journal* 76.6 (Dec. 1930), 487-94.

¹² Cf. "The Land and the Book: Moody Bible Institute Israel Tour 2010" Moody Bible Institute, <http://www.israel.moodyministries.net/>

environmental history to consider how urbanization and environmental change affected the ways that late nineteenth and early-twentieth century American writers constructed identity and oriented themselves to the religious commitments of their ancestors. In addition to this primary research project, Mr. Mabie has delivered conference papers on Himalayan glacier and mountain exploration, American evangelicals' climate policy, and on Herman Melville's encounter with the Holy Land to the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), the American Academy of Religion, and Interdisciplinary Nineteenth Century Studies (INCS). His research has previously been supported by a University of Minnesota Graduate Research Partnership Program grant, an English department fellowship, and a Gilder-Lehrman summer grant. As an undergraduate, he studied physical and political geography in Jerusalem, Israel.

Consortium on Law and Values in Health, Environment the Life Sciences
Budget for Student Proposals

Project Title - The Ecological Roots of a Religious Crisis: Holy Land Ecology, Religious Belief, and International Environn

Instructions provided below.		Requested funding	Matching/other funding		
	Personnel costs	Description & justification Salary = ___hrs x ___ hrly wage	Amount	Amount	Source
1	Your salary (stipend)	\$3406 = 190 hrs x \$17.93 (\$17.93 is the wage for my current appointment as a graduate instructor in the department of Writing Studies.	\$3,406		
2	Other personnel				
3	Other personnel				
4	Other personnel				
5	Personnel Subtotal		\$3,406.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
6	Speaker Honoraria	Number of speakers and amount of honoraria			
7	Supplies & Services	Photocopying and printing fees at the Palestine Exploration Fund Archive, The British Library, and the Garden Tomb Association Archive.	\$75		
8	Equipment	Identify and explain use.			
9	Travel	1) Archival Research in London, England, May 8-22, 2011 : RT Airfare MSP-LHR \$928, Lodging \$1428 (@ \$119 / day), Underground Pass \$81 2) ASLE Conference, Bloomington, IN, June 22-26, 2011 (5 Days): RT Airfare MSP \$323, Lodging \$300 (@ \$60 / day), RT Airport Shuttle \$40	\$2,437 \$663		
10	Subtotal research supplies, equipment, travel, other		\$3,175.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
11	TOTAL BUDGET		\$6,581.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

1. Stipend justification. You must justify the amount of stipend you are requesting by identifying the number of hours you plan to work on the project and the hourly wage used for research assistants in your department. Include fringe benefits.

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Budget for Student Proposals

- 2-4. Identify all other personnel to be paid from this grant including interpreters, travel guides, etc. and justify their salary by identifying the number of hours they will work and the hourly wage. What is the hourly wage based on?
6. For colloquia, identify the number of speakers and the amount of honoraria you will provide.
7. Supplies and services. List out all supplies and their estimated costs. Explain in line 7 or in the body of your proposal what the supplies will be used for.
8. Equipment costs are allowable only if the justification clearly shows that the equipment is necessary for the project. Include explanation of what will happen to equipment at completion of project.
9. Travel costs must include a description of the purpose of the travel, start and stop dates of travel, transportation costs, housing costs, and allowable per diem (use University rates found at [http:// travel/umn.edu](http://travel/umn.edu)).