

Ethics and Spirituality in the Old Testament

(OT/TH 3XE3/6XE6 Fall 2013)



McMaster Divinity College

August H. Konkel (Ph.D.) Professor of Old Testament

konkela@mcmaster.ca; 905 525 9140 ^{x23505}

mcmasterdivinity.ca/faculty/core/august-h-konkel

Course Description

Jesus and Pharisees derived their morality and spirituality from the Hebrew Bible. Yet Jesus would say, “If your righteousness is not better than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20). How could such diametrically opposed concepts of spirituality be derived from the same Scriptures? This course will develop the unchanging morality and spirituality taught in the Hebrew Scriptures, examining the many ways it has been misused and misunderstood.

Specializations:

Biblical Studies

Christian Thought and History

Christian Worldview

Course Objectives

Knowing

Paul’s prayer for the Colossians is that “you may be filled with the knowledge of his (God’s) will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that you may live worthily of the Lord so as to please him in everything, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, being enabled with all power according to the strength of his glory, with all patience and endurance” (1:9-11). There is no spirituality apart from knowledge of God’s will. This course will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Scriptures the apostle used to learn how to live according to the divine will.

Being

Paul’s exhortation to the Romans was to “give yourselves to God as a sacrifice, living, holy, and well pleasing to him, which is your natural service, not being conformed to this world but being transformed by a *renewing of your mind*, to examine what is the will of God, what is good, well pleasing and leads to a proper end” (12:1-2). An understanding of Biblical spirituality brings about a transformed way of thinking that leads to living by a whole different set of values as those renewed in the image of God.

Doing

Those renewed in mind according to the Scriptures are to serve as one body, each according to the gift given, so “if we have the gift of prophecy, then let us prophesy in accordance with the standard of faith, if the gift of practical service, then let us exercise such practical service, if teaching, then let us teach, if exhortation, let us encourage, if giving, then let it us do it without ulterior motive, if leadership, let us do it with diligence, if showing mercy let it be done cheerfully” (Rom. 1:6-8). Ethical and spiritual thinking with a transformed mind is the foundation of every gift we may exercise and task that we may do.

Course Schedule

September	10	Concept of the Holy (Leviticus)
September	17	Concept of Covenant (Deuteronomy)
September	24	Values of the Covenant Words (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5)
October	1	Ethical Responsibility in Tending the Garden (Creation Texts)
October	8	Spirituality in Anarchic Times (Joshua / Judges)
October	15	Spirituality under Monarchic Rule (Samuel / Kings)
October	22	Spirituality when living in Sodom (Isaiah)
October	29	Ethics in Political Crisis (Jeremiah)
November	5	Ethics in Moral Crisis (Ezekiel)
November	12	Social Ethics and Responsibility (Hosea, Joel, Amos)
November	19	Spirituality in Community Distress (Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra)
November	26	Ethics in Social Life (Proverbs, Job)
December	3	Spirituality in the Apocalyptic Vision (Isaiah 24-27, Daniel)
December	10	Biblical Values for Modern Ethical Issues (Exam Week)

Course Texts

M. Daniel Carroll R. (Rodas) and Jaqueline E. Lapsley, eds., *Character, Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture*, Westminster John Knox, 2007.

Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah. Reading the Old Testament Ethically*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000; idem., *Story as Torah. Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically*, Baker Academic, 2004.

Textbooks are available from the College's book service, READ ON Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. For advance purchase, contact READ ON Bookstore, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON, M9C 5K1: phone 416 620 2934; fax 416 622 2308; e-mail books@readon.ca.

Course Assignments and Grading

1. Establishing Biblical Spirituality and Ethics 20% (OT 3XE3) 15% (OT 6XE6)

Readings:

Gordon Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 1-108.

Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament: A Survey of Approaches," *TB* 43 (1992) 101-120; 203-31.

Paper (ca. 1500 words; due Sept. 24)

There are complicated hermeneutical questions in learning to understand the Scriptures to do the will of God on earth as it is in heaven. Using the above readings, and others of your choosing, provide your own summary of some of the fundamental methodological questions. Show what approaches have been taken in the past, and illustrate how Scripture in its variety of genres can guide us in understanding how we are to live.

2. Spirituality and Ethics as an Attribute of Persons 20% (OT 3XE3) 15% (OT 6XE6)

Readings

Carroll and Lapsley, *Character, Ethics and the Old Testament*, Part I (1-165).

Walter J. Houston, "The Character of God and the Ethics of the Old Testament: Is *Imitatio Dei* Appropriate?" *JTS* NS 58/1 (2007) 1-25.

Paper (ca. 1500 words; due Oct. 22)

The definition of being a person has come under serious attack especially in modern biology. The confusion of what it means to be a person results in very conflicting ethical values. According to the Scriptures, we are persons solely because of our relationship with God. However this unique function must be distinguished from personhood as it pertains to God. From the readings above and others of your choice, select an example of how the Scriptures must be used with understanding so that we may live in relationship with the earth and each other as ordained by God in order to represent his rule on earth.

3. Review of an Approach to Ethics 15%; due Nov. 5 (OT 3XE3)

Choose a volume from section 1 of the bibliography, or a volume of your choice which you clear with the professor. Do a review of the volume as you would for a journal or magazine (ca. 500 – 750 words).

4. Application of Biblical Ethics and Spirituality 35% (OT 3XE3) 30% (OT 6XE6)

Readings

Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 109-150.

Carroll and Lapsley, Part II (169-247).

Research Paper (ca. 2500 words; due Dec. 3; report Dec. 10)

Choose a topic in an area of ethical concern that is of particular interest to you (e.g. economics, justice, politics, family, environment, war etc.). You may choose a Scripture text and develop what it teaches us about the ethical values concerned and show how they relate

to the present, or you may choose a current ethical issue and show how the Scriptures may be applied to it. Each student will give a short report on the results of their research on the last day of class, which will account for 10% of the grade of this assignment. Samples of such studies will be made available to the class.

5. Research Paper 40%; due Dec. 10 (OT 6XE6)

Students doing the course at an advanced level will do a major research paper of about 5000 words. In preparation for this research about 5000 – 6000 pages of reading must be selected from the books listed in section 1. From this reading a topic of special interest in ethics and spirituality should be developed and defended. The readings and topic should be discussed with the professor.

Course Policies

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College.

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty.

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>

Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

Style

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/MDCStyleGuideMarch0413.pdf>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

Course Bibliography

1. Old Testament Ethics

Arndt, Emily. *Demanding Our Attention: The Hebrew Bible as a Source for Christian Ethics*. Eerdmans, 2011.

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Bartholomew, Craig G., et al., eds. *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan*. Paternoster, Zondervan, 2002.

Birch, Bruce C. *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life*. Westminster/John Knox, 1991.

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- Muilenburg, James. *The Way of Israel: Biblical Faith and Ethics*. Harper & Row, 1961.
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- Sloane, Andrew. *At Home in a Strange Land: Using the Old Testament in Christian Ethics*. Hendrickson, 2008.
- Soloveitchik, Joseph B. *The Emergence of Ethical Man*. Edited by Michael Berger. Ktav Publishing House, 2005.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*. InterVarsity, 2004.

2. Specialized Studies in Ethics

- Baker, David L. *Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law*. Eerdmans, 2009.
- Bauckham, Richard. *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically*. Westminster / John Knox Press, 1989.
- Coomber, Matthew J. M. *Re-reading the Prophets through Corporate Globalization: a Cultural-Evolutionary Approach to Economic Injustice in the Hebrew Bible*. Gorgias, 2010.
- Crouch, Carly L. *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in the Light of Cosmology and History*. Walter de Gruyter, 2009.
- De La Torre, Miguel. *Liberating Jonah: Forming an Ethics of Reconciliation*. Orbis Books, 2007.
- Gill, Robin. *A Textbook of Christian Ethics*. 3rd ed. T & T Clark, 2006.
- Green, Joel B., et al., eds. *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*. Baker Academic, 2011.
- Harrelson, Walter J. *The Ten Commandments for Today*. Westminster John Knox, 2006.
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- Nurmi, Janne J. *Die Ethik unter dem Druck des Alltags: die Impulse der gesellschaftlichen Änderungen und Situation zu der sozialkritischen Prophetie in Judaim 8. Jh v. Chr.* Åbo Akademi University Press, 2004.

Schlimm, Matthew R. *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Ethics of Anger in Genesis*. Eisenbrauns, 2011.

Trevaskis, Leigh M. *Holiness, Ethics and Ritual in Leviticus*. Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011.

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3. Old Testament Theologies

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4. Interpretation and Canonical Authority

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_____. *The Semantics of Biblical Language*. Oxford, 1961.

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7. Studies in Old Testament Theology

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