

**NT/MS 3XJ3/6XJ6**  
**“Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters”**  
**Social Justice in the Bible & the Early Church**

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Winter 2014  
Mondays 8:30-10:20 a.m.

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**I. Course Description:**



In our current cultural context, there are few issues more important and practical than social justice. How do we implement God’s justice on earth? This course has practical and urgent implications for the Church and its mission. This course will examine the foundation for the definition and practice of social

justice in the church, by exploring the Old Testament foundations, the theology and practice in the life of Jesus and the early church, and the challenges, opportunities and responsibilities for application in the contemporary Canadian, North American and global context. Content will be alternated with interactive activities of reflection and application.

**II. Course Objectives:**

**A. Knowing**

1. Understand the biblical basis for the practice of social justice individually, in the church, society and global contexts.
2. Learn exegetical principles that bring the diverse horizons together of the Old Testament contexts, the New Testament contexts and our contemporary contexts.

**B. Being**

1. A person committed to personal and community righteousness
2. A person who has and further develops tangible connections between Scripture, theology and action

**C. Doing**

1. Research a biblical topic/theme, passage or practice as it relates to the Church and current personal and communal practice.
2. Interact critically with current biblical scholarship on social justice
3. Develop a life map centered on social justice

### III. Course Requirements

#### A. Class Participation (10%)

#### B. Reading (10%)

Complete the required reading for the course and submit a reading report of the percentage of reading completed on time on **April 14**.

#### C. Assignments

##### 1. Development of a Life Map Centred on Social Justice (40%)

- a. Summarize your personal theology concerning social justice, integrating content, activities and issues covered in class. **It is due April 14**. Bring a hard copy to class.
- b. Utilizing the activities in the course, design a map (model) with the following sections
  - (1) Identify your calling to social justice through your life story
  - (2) Clarify the biblical basis for social justice in your area(s) of interest
  - (3) Identify your areas of responsibility, circle of influence and passion
  - (4) Problem-solve any challenges and barriers
  - (5) Plan to implement necessary changes.
- c. The style of the paper is negotiable as you are free to integrate the different genres modeled in biblical literature and use creativity. The paper should be a minimum of 10 pages long.

##### 2. Research or Exegetical Paper (40%)

- a. Each student will write a research or exegetical paper on the issue of social justice with the focus on Jesus or the early church—that is, you can select an Old Testament passage or motif, but apply a Christological lens or focus on its connection with the early church or the New Testament. **It is due March 10**. Submit it to the course drop box in PDF form. Late papers lose 2% each day.
- b. Length & style: It should be approximately 3000 words (about 12 pages) of text, excluding footnotes and bibliography. For all

matters of style and form, consult the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses:

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

There should be a minimum of 15 academic sources used in the footnotes and bibliography, and DeSilva does not qualify as one of those 15 sources.

- c. Approach: Choose a topic in Social Justice in the New Testament (or from the perspective of New Testament interpretation) with a contemporary application.

#### **E. Grading Summary**

Life Map	40%
Research Paper	40%
Reading	10%
Participation	10%

#### **IV. Textbooks and Materials**

##### **A. Required**

Enrique Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge: A Study of Justice in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 368 pp.

Book from Bingham 2012, provided by instructor in PDF form

Readings in the DropBox from Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. San Francisco: Harper, 1997.

##### **B. Recommended**

Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

##### **C. Textbook Purchase**

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact

READ On Bookstore, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9B 6E2: phone 416-620-2934; fax 416-622-2308; e-mail books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

**D. Additional Materials**

1. Any handouts for lectures and class discussion will be made available before class online in the course DropBox.
2. Further procedures and guidance for assignments will be given in class and/or online.

**V. Classroom Behavior**

**A. Attendance**

1. Attendance in all sessions is expected. Except in extreme circumstances, absence from class will result in grade penalties
2. Students should be on time to class or be prepared to offer an explanation to the professor (preferably in advance).
3. Students are expected to stay for the entire class session, unless arranged in advance.

**B. Participation**

1. Please respect the opinions of others without disrespect or ridicule, even if you do not agree with them. However, feel free to respond logically and critically in an orderly manner.
2. Students are not expected to be doing work on any other subject except that which is appropriate in the course outline.
3. Students are not to carry on off-topic conversations in class.
4. Students may eat or drink in class if they do not distract others and they clean up. Students who fail to respect these guidelines will be dismissed from the class with consequences.

**C. 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>

#### **D. 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, TNIV and CEB 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.

#### **E. Sexual Harrassment**

Sexual harassment is a violation of the integrity of persons in the form of unsolicited, unwelcome, verbal or physical behavior, which discriminates on the basis of gender about a person's body, attire, gender, marital status or economic status. Among faculty, staff, and students, sexual harassment of any kind will not be tolerated.

Office Hours: TBA and by appointment

**\*\*\*\* Disclaimer on Syllabi posted on the web and at the bottom of each syllabus:**

**Please Note: This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.**

## Course Schedule

<b>Date</b>	<b>Social Justice Topic</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Class Activity</b>
Jan 6	Introduction to Course		
Jan 13	Overview of Social Justice Historical Contexts	Nardoni, 1-41	Develop a working definition
Jan 20	OT Law	Nardoni, 68-94	Identify current issues/responses
Jan 27	OT Narratives	Nardoni, 42-67, 95-99 Evans, "Imagining Justice"	Tell stories
Feb 3	OT Poetry/Wisdom Literature	Nardoni, 99-151	News
Feb 10	OT Poetry/Wisdom Literature	Boda & Baines, "Wisdom's Cry"	Practical information
Feb 17	Reading Week		
Feb 24	OT Poetry	Nardoni, 122-32	Engage in song and poetry
March 3	OT & Second Temple Apocalyptic	Nardoni, 151-72	Use of fiction/media
March 10	Jesus—life & teaching <b>Exegetical/Research Paper due</b>	Nardoni, 173-262 Evans, "Social Justice or Personal Righteousness?" Dyer, "Good News to the Poor"	Developing a mission statement
March 17	Early Church/Jewish Christianity	Nardoni, 290-304 Westfall, "Continue to Remember the Poor"	Addressing church policy and defining responsibility
March 24	Pauline Epistles	Nardoni, 263-89 Porter, "Reframing Social Justice"	Cross-cultural practices
March 31	Early Christian Eschatology	Nardoni, 304-16 Matthewson, "Reading Revelation from Above"	Trajectories, probability, and prediction
April 7	The early church 100-300 C. E.	Readings from Stark in DropBox	Strategize effective missions
April 14	Interdisciplinary considerations and reflection. Conclusion <b>Life Map due (hard copy)</b> <b>Reading Report due</b>	Nardoni, 317-324	Presentations of Life Maps

*Select Bibliography*  
(in process)

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- Dempsey, Carol J. *Hope Amidst the Ruins: The Ethics of Israel's Prophets*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2000.
- Donahue, John R. *What does the Lord Require?: A Bibliographical Essay on the Bible and Social Justice*. Series IV--Study Aids on Jesuit Topics, 23. Revised ed. Saint Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2000.
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- Houston, Walter. *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament*. London: T&T Clark, 2008.
- Howard-Brook, Wes. *Becoming Children of God: John's Gospel and Radical Discipleship*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999.
- Janzen, Waldemar. *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.
- Karris, Robert J., OFM. *Jesus and the Marginalized in St. John's Gospel*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990.
- Keeran, Daniel. *Radical Christianity: Peace and Justice in the New Testament*. Victoria, BC: Counsellor Publishing, 2006.
- Lohfink, Norbert F. *Option for the Poor: The Basic Principle of Liberation Theology in the Light*

*of the Bible*. N. Richmond Hills, TX: BIBAL, 1987.

Malchow, Bruce V. *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996.

Malina, Bruce J., and Richard L. Rohrbaugh. *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998.

Marshall, Christopher D. *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment*. Studies in Peace and Scripture; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001.

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Paul, Greg. *God in the Alley: Being and Seeing Jesus in a Broken World*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2004.

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Ringe, Sharon. *Jesus, Liberation and the Biblical Jubilee*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.

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\_\_\_\_\_. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005.

Swartley, Willard M. *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006.

Talmez, Elsa. *The Scandalous Message of James: Faith Without Works Is Dead*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Co, 2002.

Weinfeld, Moshe. *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995.

Wink, Walter. *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. The Powers Trilogy, Vol. 3; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*. The Powers Trilogy, Vol. 1; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.



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