

# **Ethics and Spirituality in the NT**

## **MS/NT 3XE3/6XE6**

McMaster Divinity College  
Dr. Christopher D. Land  
[landc@mcmaster.ca](mailto:landc@mcmaster.ca)

Winter 2015  
Tuesday 7:00–9:00pm

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Ethics and spirituality cannot be isolated from the study of theology and ministry any more than human health can be isolated from the study of medicine. After all, the goal of theology is the formation of human beings who are God-conscious and God-filled (i.e. spiritual), and the goal of ministry is the formation of human beings who live accordingly (i.e. ethically). In this course, we will explore what the New Testament has to say about living well. We will also ask difficult questions about the role of the Bible in the formation of ethical and spiritual communities in the twenty-first century.

### **SPECIALIZATIONS**

#### ***Biblical Studies (BS)***

Students taking this as a Biblical Studies course will be encouraged to explore the historical and cultural contexts in which the early church formulated its ideas about ethics and spirituality, and to exegete controversial texts responsibly with sensitivity to those contexts.

#### ***Church and Culture (CC)***

Students taking this as a Church and Culture course will be encouraged to think creatively about interactions (both positive and negative) between the Christian movement and the various cultures it inhabits today.

#### ***Christian Worldview (CW)***

Students taking this as a Christian Worldview course will be encouraged to explore similarities and differences between the worldview(s) of the New Testament and the worldviews of the twenty-first century, and to explore how those differences get worked out in everyday life.

#### ***Pastoral Studies (PS)***

Students taking this as a Pastoral Studies course will be encouraged to prepare themselves for the task of giving ethical and spiritual direction—and to develop the humility and courage that are required for this task.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course, students will be encouraged to:

### *Knowing*

- Identify texts in the NT that speak about the ethical and spiritual dimensions of life
- Become familiar with scholarly debates concerning the interpretation of key NT passages
- Recognize the different hermeneutical approaches that Christians employ in order to integrate the NT into their twenty-first century ideas about ethics and spirituality

### *Being*

- Appreciate the importance of participating in critical and respectful discussions concerning biblical texts and topics
- Become sensitive to the historical and cultural environment in which the early church first communicated the gospel
- Become a community-engaged interpreter who struggles to discern and incarnate the spirit of the New Testament

### *Doing*

- Read books that discuss NT ethics and spirituality in a careful and critical manner
- Take time to reflect on the role that the NT plays in the formation of contemporary ethics
- Engage in humble yet transparent conversations about what it means to live ethically and spiritually in the twenty-first century
- Articulate a clear and thoughtful position with respect to an ethical or spiritual question

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Note: Students are required to complete all of the following assignments. No unfinished assignments are permitted. *Each written assignment should be uploaded in PDF format to the designated Avenue to Learn dropbox. Assignments cannot be submitted after April 10 without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (thomn@mcmaster.ca).*

1. Reading and Class Participation (0%). Students are expected to attend class and to participate in small group discussions each week. No course credit will be given for this participation. However, each student must demonstrate kindness and humility in his or her dealings with other participants, and a grade penalty will be applied to any student who behaves in an unkind or disrespectful manner towards other participants.
2. Reflection Journal (15%). Over the course of the semester, each student will produce a journal in which he or she reflects theologically about the topic and content of the course. Ten entries are required before the final due date and the journal must include at least three entries in January, three in February, three in March, and one in April. Each journal entry should be dated, approximately one page in length, and no more than one entry

should be completed in any given week. You may discuss anything related to the course (e.g. readings, lectures, discussions, life experience, etc.), but you must not summarize the course content in your journal. Rather, you must use the journal in order to slow down and work through your own questions and thoughts. The point of this exercise is to ensure that you are engaged in the process of a spiritual engagement with scripture, so the journal will be evaluated primarily with a view towards self-consciousness (i.e. awareness of one's self as a product of diverse experiences and influences), other-consciousness (i.e. awareness of the ways in which other people approach the scriptures differently), and God-consciousness (i.e. awareness of the One who speaks through the scriptures and who judges our hearts as we read them). The journal is due at **9:00pm on Tuesday, April 7**. For students who are uncertain about what constitutes an effective reflection journal, a detailed grading rubric is available on A2L. If you wish to receive feedback early in the semester, you may email the professor a sample entry.

3. Reading Response #1 (20%). Each student will read either *Corporal Punishment in the Bible* or *The Powers That Be* and then submit a written response that answers five assigned questions (see below). Although the questions can be answered independently using a new heading for each, the thoughts included in each answer must be well organized and clearly presented in full paragraphs (i.e. these are to be formal responses). The entire reading response must be at least 1,500 words and must follow the “McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses.” It is due at **11:59pm on Friday, January 30**. For students who are uncertain about what constitutes an effective reading response, a detailed grading rubric is available on A2L.
4. Reading Response #2 (25%). Each student will read either *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* or *Kingdom Ethics* and then submit a second written response that answers the same five questions once again. This time, the reading response must be at least 2,000 words, and it is due at **11:59pm on Friday, February 27**.
5. Position Paper (30%). For the major written assignment in this course, each student will write a position paper that is approximately 3,000 words in length and that follows the “McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses.” The paper must take an informed and well-argued position with respect to an ethical or spiritual matter that is a pressing concern for the student. Because this is a New Testament course, it is expected that the paper will engage in a responsible manner with key New Testament passages and with scholarly publications pertaining to those passages. It is also expected that the paper will employ a transparent and self-conscious hermeneutic in order to move from “what the text says” to “how we now live.” Moreover, this paper must include a section in which the student outlines how he or she (together with his or her community) will engage with both fellow Christians and non-Christians who adopt an alternative position. Before beginning to write this paper, students should discuss their proposed topic with the professor in order to confirm its suitability. The final assignment is due at

**7:00pm on Tuesday, March 31.** For students who are uncertain about what constitutes an effective position paper, a detailed grading rubric is available on A2L.

6. Class Presentation (10%). During the final class session on **March 31**, each student will articulate the contents of their position paper in a ten-minute oral presentation. The presentation should include an orientation to the topic, an overview of the key NT passages, a discussion of hermeneutical complications, and an articulation of the position that has been adopted. Following each presentation, other students in the class will have five minutes to ask questions. For students who are uncertain about what constitutes effective class participation, a detailed grading rubric is available on A2L.

### GRADING SUMMARY

Reading & Class Participation	---
Reflection Journal	15%
Reading Response #1	20%
Reading Response #2	25%
Position Paper	30%
Class Presentation	10%
Total	100%

### TEXTBOOKS

Students are required to possess the following:

An English translation of the New Testament.

Fowl, Stephen E., and L. Gregory Jones. *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998.

Saunders, Stanley P. “‘Learning Christ’: Eschatology and Spiritual Formation in New Testament Christianity.” *Interpretation* 56 (2002) 155–67.

Students must also possess one of the following books for the first reading response:

Webb, William J. *Corporal Punishment in the Bible: A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic for Troubling Texts*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2011.

Wink, Walter. *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium*. New York: Doubleday, 1998.

As well as one of the following books for the second reading response:

Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.

Stassen, Glen Harold, and David P. Gushee. *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2003.

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 M9C 5K1: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

### COURSE SCHEDULE

Dates	Class Sessions	Assigned Readings
Jan 6	Introduction to the Course	
Jan 13	A Brief History of New Testament Ethics	Fowl & Jones, chs. 1–2
Jan 20	The Inseparability of Ethics and Spirituality in the NT	Fowl & Jones, chs. 3–4
Jan 27	Ethics and Spirituality for Us, Right Here, Right Now	Fowl & Jones, chs. 5–6
Feb 3	The Kingdom of God in the Sermon on the Mount	Saunders
Feb 10	The New Creation in the Pauline Letters	
Feb 17	Reading Week (No Class)	
Feb 24	Money	
Mar 3	Sex	
Mar 10	Power	
Mar 17	God-Consciousness and God-Empowerment in the NT	
Mar 24	Dealing with Disagreements	
Mar 31	Class Presentations	
Apr 7	Exam Week (No Class)	

**QUESTIONS FOR THE READING RESPONSES**

1. Which statements in the book were the most significant to you personally, as a reader? Select three quotations from the book that made you stop and think (or fume), briefly explaining your reasons for each choice.
2. How has this book deepened your understanding of the various ways in which the ethical and spiritual teachings of the Bible are culturally embedded? Give specific examples.
3. How has this book deepened your understanding of the hermeneutical complexities involved in reading and responding to the NT as a twenty-first century person? Give specific examples.
4. Do you agree or disagree with the overall orientation of the book? Why, or why not? (Note: Be sure to think deeply here. Be self-critical and discerning about your reaction to the book, whether positive or negative. It may help to read some online reviews of the book.)
5. Has this book affected your life? Has it changed the way you (hope to) live out the ethics and spirituality of Jesus and the NT? If so, give specific examples.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

For a lengthy and very useful bibliography of scholarly resources related to scripture and ethics, see the PDF available at:

<https://www2.bc.edu/james-bretzke/ScriptureAndEthicsBibliography.pdf>

A list of scholarly resources related to spirituality in the NT will be supplied once the course begins.

**STATEMENT ON 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 at:

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

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) for grading and plagiarism detection, and the student's continuation in the course represents his or her consent to the use of this service. If a student has objections to the use of this service, alternate arrangements for assignment submission must be made with the professor in advance of the assignment deadlines.

## **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/MDCStyleGuide.pdf>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

## **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.

**This syllabus is for information only and remains the property of the respective professor. This syllabus is prepared with the best information available, but the professor reserves the right to change the content and format of the course.**