



McMaster Divinity
College

WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING: LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND TODAY

NT 3XA3
BS/CC/CW/PS

McMaster Divinity College
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Spring 2020
Tuesday & Thursday, 7:00–9:00pm, May 5–28
Final Assignments, June 23

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What does it mean to *lead* other people? Our culture longs for inspiring leaders. We are aimless and isolated, and we desperately want to trust people who seem to have a positive vision for us and for our communities. At the same time, however, we are jaded and suspicious of authority. We fear the corruption of power, and we are unable to forget the many (even Christian) leaders who have wittingly or unwittingly harmed people under their care.

This course will survey a number of significant New Testament passages that speak to the experience of following Jesus as a leader. We will explore stories of people who were “called” to lead, including Jesus’s baptism, his calling of the Twelve, and Saul’s experience on the Road to Damascus. We will examine cultural assumptions around qualifications for leadership (including education, eloquence, physical attractiveness and strength, gender, etc.) and discuss some New Testament passages that either share these assumptions or else challenge them. We will consider the tension that leaders navigate between leading *within* a community and being *set apart* for leadership, and we will look at some New Testament passages that illustrate this tension (e.g. Jesus’s rejection in his hometown, his loneliness in Gethsemane). We will stop to take seriously some of Jesus and Paul’s thoughts on marriage as distracting for leaders, and we will pause to ponder Jesus and Paul’s warnings about the effect that financial remuneration can have on a leader’s ability to maintain his or her integrity. We will remember that controversies flare up whenever bold responses are needed to unprecedented challenges, and will consider as a case-study the conflicts that erupted in the early Jesus-movement around the integration of non-Jewish people (including not only the tidy narrative of conflict resolution in Acts 15 but also Paul’s forceful denunciations of Jesus’s most trusted disciples as hypocrites and betrayers of Jesus’s good news). Finally, we will see how Paul responds to disappointed and even antagonistic congregants in 1 Cor 1–4 and 2 Cor 10–13, and we will reflect upon voluntary suffering for others—even in the face of judgement and rejection—as the Christian leader’s way of obediently following the leadership of Jesus.

We will do all of this together, with fear and trembling, mindful of the desperate needs of our own time and the terrible responsibility that is placed on those who are invited to lead.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through your active participation in this course, you will:

KNOWING

- Understand the social contexts within which early Christian leaders operated;
- Recognize the pervasiveness of leadership as a topic in the New Testament and have an awareness of some of the key passages that address it;
- Develop informed positions with regard to important issues pertaining to leadership.

BEING

- Be critical of common leadership ideals both in the New Testament period and today;
- Move beyond idealized portrayals in order to perceive early Christian leaders as historical people navigating complex and uncertain issues;
- Be self-critical with respect to matters of personal power and/or weakness;
- Develop a theological perspective in which leadership is a response to divine initiative.

DOING

- Be able to carefully exegete New Testament passages related to leadership;
- Be able to assess contemporary leadership in the light of the New Testament.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Note: Students are required to complete all of the following assignments. No unfinished assignments are permitted. *A penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all late assignments, including assignments submitted in incorrect file formats. Assignments cannot be submitted after June 23rd without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (strickpd@mcmaster.ca).*

PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE LECTURES AND BREAKOUT DISCUSSIONS (10%)

Each class will begin with a 1-hour, online lecture oriented towards specific New Testament passages. This will be followed by Q&A and then by online breakout discussions, with approx. 4–5 students working together to answer a specific question. Class will conclude with some reflections on contemporary leadership and ways that Christian leaders today can hear, understand, and embody the New Testament. You are expected to attend these online classes and to participate in the breakout discussions.

ASSIGNED READING (10%)

Class readings will be distributed electronically (see the schedule below). You will report your completion of the reading using a quiz on Avenue to Learn (A2L). This quiz will ask you to report both the quantity of reading you completed and the quality of your completed reading. The reading report must be completed by **June 4th at 11:59pm**.

LECTURE FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES (5 x 10% = 50%)

For each class lecture (apart from the course introduction), I have developed a brief follow-up activity that can be posted online to an Avenue to Learn (A2L) discussion forum (in *no more than 500 words!*). While you are encouraged to incorporate insights from the assigned reading (or from additional resources you find useful), there is no requirement to do additional research and you are not required to include a title page or bibliography. The goal is to stimulate your thinking about the passages we are examining and to encourage connections between your knowledge of the New Testament and your thoughts about leadership. You should compose your work somewhere where it will not be accidentally deleted, then copy/paste it on the forum (along with any images or web-links that are relevant). There are seven lectures, but you need only complete five of the proposed follow-up activities. They are not due until on **June 11th at 11:59pm**, but if you post them throughout the initial weeks of the course, it is much more likely that other students will read your work on the forum and engage in follow-up discussion.

Here are the seven activities. You must complete five of them.

1. Invitation. Briefly reflect on your own experience as regards the biblical notion of a “call” or “invitation” to leadership. Do you find this to be a helpful way of interpreting your own experience? Why or why not? Should it be an expectation placed on all Christian leaders? Why or why not?
2. Leadership Bios. Look online at the leadership bios of famous Christian leaders. Then read Christianity Today’s [guide to writing a bio](#). Finally, write two bios (approx. 200 words each) for yourself or some other contemporary Christian leader. One of them should reflect what people today typically want from leaders (i.e. contemporary cultural expectations); the other should reflect biblical concerns regarding leaders (i.e. NT expectations).
3. Constructive Critique. Drawing on the content of the class lecture, reflect on incarnation and cruciformity with respect to either yourself or some other Christian leader whose leadership you have directly observed (you may be anonymous or use a pseudonym, if you wish to obscure the person’s identity). In particular, where do you see this leader *leading among* and *working with*, and where do you see them *leading ahead* and *working over*? How do you think this leader needs to grow: (a) in greater humility and more authentic participation in the community; or (b) in greater boldness and more forceful direction of the community?
4. Pros and Cons. Do one of the following: (a) weigh the pros and cons of Christian leaders being “family men” and/or “family women”; or (b) weigh the pros and cons of Christian leaders receiving direct financial remuneration. Your points need not be full sentences; simply list bullet points under “Pros” and “Cons” headings.
5. Changing Times. Choose some belief or practice with respect to which the Christian community is currently experiencing some measure of uncertainty or debate. Explain what you think good leadership means amidst this uncertainty or debate. Pay particular attention to the active role that leaders play in negotiating what exactly faithfulness to scripture/tradition will look like.
6. Performance Review. Develop a rubric that could be used in a “performance review” for a specific leadership role of your choosing. Include a few sentences of introduction that explain, both to the reviewers and the person who is being reviewed, how the process should be approached.

7. Prayer. Craft a prayer concerning the specific things that this course has revealed to you about yourself as a leader. Your prayer need not be suitable for use in a formal liturgy, but it should be well-crafted and should clearly embody ways of thinking/being that reflect the New Testament passages discussed in the course. You should be able to imagine yourself praying your prayer regularly in order to re-align yourself with the Father and re-position yourself in relation to your work.

FINAL ASSIGNMENT (30%)

In the final written assignment for the course, you will produce between 3,000 and 4,000 words that explore a leadership topic in relation to some specific passage(s) in the New Testament. Your submission can take the form of an essay, but it can also be some other genre of your own choosing. I strongly suggest emailing me in advance in order to confirm the suitability of your specific project. Possible formats include (but are not limited to):

- an argumentative essay supporting a specific position;
- a series of blog posts;
- a set of devotions for leaders;
- a proposal to a church board regarding specific changes to current leadership practices;
- a sermon;
- a self-reflection essay assessing your own leadership;
- a brilliant idea that you come up with all on your own.

In keeping with the course objectives, the grading of your submission will assess how well you accomplish the following three things, with half of your grade determined by the task associated with your specialization (see the parenthetical abbreviations below) and the other half divided between the remaining two tasks. A detailed rubric on A2L will explain in detail what exactly is expected.

1. How effectively do you employ biblical scholarship in order to develop responsible interpretations of some specific passage(s) in the NT? (BS)
2. How thoughtful and insightful are your NT-inspired observations regarding leadership, and how aware are you of the various cultural and biblical influences that shape people's understanding of leadership? (CW/CC)
3. How effectively do you draw upon the New Testament so as to facilitate real change in a specific contemporary context of leadership? (PS)

In your email, state your proposed topic, tell me the format in which you will produce 3,000–4,000 words, and explain how the project will contribute to your specialization (i.e. BS, CC, CW, or PS).

The final written assignment must be uploaded to Avenue to Learn either as a Word document (.doc, .docx) or in Rich Text Format (.rtf) by **June 23rd at 11:59pm**.

GRADING SUMMARY

| | |
|----------------------|-------------|
| Online Participation | 10% |
| Assigned Reading | 10% |
| Activities | 50% |
| Final Assignment | 30% |
| Total | 100% |

TEXTBOOKS

All students are required to possess an English translation of the Bible. All other course readings will be distributed electronically, in advance, via Avenue to Learn (A2L).

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

| Dates | NT Passages | Online Lectures | Online Discussions |
|---------|---|---|--|
| May 5 | | Introduction: Leadership in the NT | "Who leads you and whom do you lead?" |
| May 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus's Baptism (Mark 1:9–11) • Calling of the Disciples (Mark 1:16–20) • Calling of Saul (Acts 9; 1 Cor 15; 2 Cor 12) • Warning Aspiring Leaders (Jas 3) | Invited to Lead: Leadership as Response | "Are reluctant, unexpected leaders better leaders?" |
| May 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus's Surprising Authority (Mark 1:21–28) • The Church's Surprising Authority (Acts 4) • Forbidden Women (1 Tim 2) • Exceptional Women (Junia, Lydia, Pricilla, etc.) • Qualifications for Overseers (1 Tim 2; Titus 1) | Qualified to Lead: Cultural Assumptions about Leaders | "Is a well-educated, well-spoken man the most qualified leader?" |
| May 14 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus's Hometown Rejection (Mark 6:1–6) • A Request from James & John (Mark 10:35–45) • Peter's Re-commissioning (John 21) • Footwashing (John 13:1–17) • A Triumphant Entry (Matt 21:1–11) • Betrayal in Gethsemane (Matt 26) | Incarnation & Cruciformity: Imitating the Way of Jesus | "Can leaders participate authentically in the communities they lead?" |
| May 19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus Sends Out Disciples (Luke 9:1–6; 9:57–10:20) • Paul's Tentmaking (1 Thess 2:1–12; 1 Cor 9) • Eunuchs for the Kingdom (Matt 19:10–12) • Singleness as Undivided Devotion (1 Cor 7:25–38) | Paying the Price: Leadership Takes Its Toll | "Should churches demand celibacy? Should they pay salaries?" |
| May 21 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wine and Wineskins (Matt 9:14–17; Luke 5:33–39) • The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) • The Antioch Incident (Gal 1–2) • Paul's Strategy for Integration (Rom 14–15) • Warnings against False Teachers (2 Pet 2; Jude) | Follow the Spirit's Lead: Navigating Change and Conflict | "How does a good leader know when following the Spirit requires new ways of observing tradition?" |
| May 26 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Initial Response to Criticisms in Corinth (1 Cor) • A Subsequent Response (2 Cor) | Success and Failure: How to Deal with Being a Disappointment | "Is popularity a good indicator of a leader's effectiveness? Does unpopularity indicate faithfulness?" |
| May 28 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Longer Servants but Friends (John 15:9–17) | Conclusion: Christian Leadership as the Cultivation of Divine Friendship | "What are you planning for your final assignment?" |
| June 4 | Reading Due | | |
| June 11 | Activities Due | | |
| June 23 | Final Assignment Due | | |

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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 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.

A useful guide to avoiding plagiarism is the Harvard Guide to Using Sources:

<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do>

STYLE

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the latest edition of the McMaster Divinity College Style *Guidelines for Essays and Theses*, which is available on the MDC website.

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 its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

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.