



McMaster Divinity  
College

## Social Justice and the Bible

MS/OT/NT 3XS3  
MDiv/MTS: BS/CC/CW/PS

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Thursdays 4:00–5:50 p.m.

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### Course Description:



In our current cultural contexts, now more than ever, there are few issues more controversial, important, and practical than biblical social justice. How do we implement God's justice on earth? This course has practical and urgent implications for the individual as well as the evangelical Church and its mission.

The urgent issues that we are confronting concerning racism, indigenous issues, and inequalities exposed and exacerbated during the pandemic are placed within the larger context of the themes of social justice in Scripture and biblical theology. We will bring the two horizons together of Scripture and the present (our current contexts and current events) and determine biblical teaching, biblical practice and relevant strategies that speak to the needs at hand.

This course will examine the biblical 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. Each student will integrate the biblical content, course activities and field experience with their specialization.

## **Specializations**

This course is an elective for specializations in Biblical Studies (BS), Church and Culture (CC), Christian Worldview (CW) and Pastoral Studies (PS).

### ***Biblical Studies***

Students taking this as a Biblical Studies (BS) course will be encouraged to explore biblical social justice through the research of biblical content and the development of a biblical theology that is exegetically responsible and interacts critically with scholarship that acknowledges the history of the discussion of biblical social justice, with applications that embrace the complexity of contemporary culture(s).

### ***Church and Culture***

Students taking this as a Church and Culture (CC) course are encouraged to explore biblical social justice in the interface of the Church and the contemporary world in the theology and its practice in your targeted context(s) such as missions, development, evangelism, the emerging church, cultural context, preaching, or worship.

### ***Christian History and Worldview (CW)***

Students taking this as a Christian Worldview (CW) course are encouraged to explore a biblical and theological foundation of biblical social justice as well as tools, methods and opportunity for the engagement and dialogue with other worldviews that are targeted in your specialization particularly historical contexts and cross-cultural contexts.

### ***Pastoral Studies***

Students taking this as a Pastoral Studies (PS) course are encouraged to explore how biblical social justice can be understood, practiced and transmitted in your target area(s) such as leadership strategies, ethical decisions, and pastoral care as well as worship, teaching and preaching.

Doctor of Practical Theology (DPT) students will have separate syllabi with requirements appropriate to their degree.

## **Course Objectives:**

Through the course work and assignments, the student will:

### **Knowing**

- Understand the biblical basis for the practice of social justice for the individual, the church, local and global contexts.
- Learn exegetical principles that bring the diverse horizons together of the Old Testament contexts, the New Testament contexts, and our contemporary contexts.

### **Being**

- Be a person committed to personal and communal righteousness
- Be a person who integrates tangible connections between Scripture, theology, and action.

## Doing

- Research a biblical topic/theme, passage or practice that is relevant to one's specialization and relates to the Church and current personal and communal practice.
- Interact critically with current biblical scholarship on social justice
- Develop a life map that discerns one's call to social justice
- Engage in field experience in which social justice is being enacted in local contexts and theologically reflect on that experience.

## Course Requirements

### *Class Participation* (10%)

There are three ways in which students may participate.

- In-class discussions (5%)
- News articles shared on Padlet, online, or brought to class (5%)
- Online discussion at A2L: Discussion: Forum (extra-credit)

### *Reading* (10%)

Complete the required reading for the course and submit a reading report of the percentage of reading completed on time on **11:59 p.m., April 6** and submit the total percentage to Assessment:Assignments:Reading Report.

### *Assignments*

#### *Field Experience and Theological Reflection* (20%)

The student will volunteer and/or observe social justice in an on-site location (suggestions distributed in class) write a 5 page theological reflection on the experience based on the MRS model for spiritual reflection. **It is due 11:59 p.m., March 31.** Submit to A2L Assessments:Assignments:Field Experience.

#### *Development of a Life Map Centred on Social Justice* (30%)

Summarize your personal theology concerning social justice, integrating content, activities and issues covered in class. **It is due 4 p.m. April 6.** Submit it to A2L Assessment:Assignments:Life Map. Each student will present their life map in class on **April 6.**

Utilizing the tools given in the video, design a map (model) with the following sections:

- Establish your own identity, which is the context for personal biblical social justice
- Identify your experience of biblical social justice through your life story
- Identify your areas of responsibility, circle of influence and passion
- Summarize your unique calling to social justice
- Clarify the biblical basis for Social Justice in your area(s) of interest
- Problem-solve any challenges and barriers
- Praxis: Plan to implement necessary changes.
- In summary, write your personal mission statement. Detailed instructions for the Life Map will be available in an online presentation.

The Life Map should be a minimum of 10 pages long and follow the MDC Style Guide <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>

*Choice of Project: Exegetical Paper, Research Paper or Portfolio Project (30%)*

The Research, Exegetical paper or Portfolio Project is **due 11:59 p.m., March 10**. Submit it in PDF form to Assessment:Assignments:Paper.

**Submit your choice of project, with a description of your topic of research paper, your passage for exegetical paper or a description of your portfolio project by Feb 10.**

Exegetical Papers should follow the Steps to Exegesis which are posted in A2L.

Research papers should be on the issue of social justice with the focus on Jesus or the early church—that is, you may select an Old Testament passage or motif instead of a passage or motif from the New Testament, but one must apply a Christological lens or focus on its connection with the early church or the New Testament in order to clarify its biblical basis.

Length & style: It should 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: <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>

- There should be a minimum of 15 academic sources used in the footnotes and bibliography, and course texts do not qualify as one of those 15 sources, though they may be cited.
- Approach: Choose a topic in Social Justice in the New Testament (or from the perspective of New Testament interpretation) with a contemporary application.

Portfolio projects should largely be determined by your specialization. Creativity is encouraged. You may choose to design an artifact: an art project, poetry or song, but in that case, you must also submit a written detailed description of exactly how your artifact utilizes, interprets and applies Scripture and the principles of biblical interpretation of the course. Marking will be based on:

- The primary goal is for the message and content to utilize and apply Scripture and the principles of Social Justice studied in the course.
- The appropriateness of the project for the identified target group,
- The quality and proficient use of the medium
- The estimated effort expended on the project (it should be nearly equal to the effort of a 15 pg. exegetical paper).

## **Grading Summary**

Life Map	30%
Research Paper	30%
Theological Reflection on FE	20%
Reading	10%
Participation	10%

## **Textbooks and Materials**

### ***Required***

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

Westfall, Cynthia Long and Bryan Dyer. *The Bible and Social Justice: Old Testament and New Testament Foundations for the Church's Urgent Call*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016.

Readings in A2L

### ***Recommended***

Sider, Ronald J. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015.

Tisby, Jemar. *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019.

### ***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, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts

### ***Additional Materials***

Any handouts for lectures and class discussion will be made available before class online in the course A2L.

Further procedures and guidance for assignments will be given in announcements online.

## **Classroom Behavior**

### ***Attendance***

- Students should be on time to class or be prepared to offer an explanation to the professor.
- Students are expected to stay for the entire class session, unless arranged in advance.
- Attendance in all sessions is expected. Notify the professor if you are not attending a session. Except in extreme circumstances, absence from more than 2 classes will result in grade penalties. Absence from 4 classes will result in failure of the course.

### ***Participation***

- 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.
- Students are not expected to be doing work on any other subject except that which is appropriate in the course outline.
- Students are not to carry on off-topic conversations in class.
- Students are not to access e-mail, send or receive text messages, surf the net, etc., while class is in session
- Students may eat or drink in class if they do not distract others and they clean up their desks.

Students who fail to respect these guidelines may lose participation points and/or be dismissed from the class.

**Late Assignments** lose 2% each day for 7 days, and then 5% a day up to 30%. However, no assignments will be accepted after **11:59 p.m., April 6.**

## **MDC 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 ~ <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/rules-regulations/> **All papers will be analysed for plagiarism by TurnItIn**

### ***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: <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

## **Office Hours**

3–4 p.m. Tuesdays

2–4 p.m. Thursdays

Also available by appointment in person or on Zoom

**Disclaimer**

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 12	Introduction to Course		
Jan 19	Overview of Social Justice Historical Contexts	Nardoni, 1–41	Develop a working definition of biblical social justice
Jan 26	OT Law	Nardoni, 68–94 Westfall, 1–34	Identify current issues/responses
Feb 2	OT Narratives	Nardoni, 42–67, 95–99	Tell stories
Feb 9	OT Wisdom Literature <b>Submit paper/project description, 11:59 p.m., Feb 10</b>	Nardoni, 99–151 Westfall, 35–63	News Practical information
Feb 16	OT Poetry <b>Bring examples of songs &amp; poetry</b>	Nardoni, 122–32	Engage in song and poetry
Feb 23	OT & Second Temple Prophecy & Apocalyptic Literature	Nardoni, 151-72 Westfall, 64–83	Use of fiction/media
<b>March 2: Hybrid Intensive Week</b>			
Mar 9	Jesus—life & teaching <b>Exegetical/Research Paper due. 11:59 p.m., March 10</b>	Nardoni, 173–262 Westfall, 84–124	Developing a personal mission statement
Mar 16	Early Church/Jewish Christianity	Nardoni, 290–304 Westfall, 152–75	Addressing church policy/mission and defining responsibility
Mar 23	Pauline Epistles	Nardoni, 263-89 Westfall, 125–51	Cross-cultural practices
Mar 30	Early Christian Eschatology The early church 100-300 C. E. <b>Theological Reflection on FE due 11:59 p.m., March 31</b>	Nardoni, 304–16 Westfall, 176–197 Readings from Stark on A2L	Trajectories, probability, and prediction Strategize effective missions
April 6	Conclusion to the course <b>Life Map due (hard copy) Reading Report due 11:59 p.m.</b>	Nardoni, 317–324	Presentations of Life Maps



*Select Bibliography*

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- \_\_\_\_\_. *What Does the Lord Require? The Old Testament Call to Social Witness*. Louis, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985.
- Cone, James H. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. New York: Orbis, 2011.
- Delgado, Teresa, et al. *Augustine and Social Justice*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015.
- Dempsey, Carol J. *Hope Amidst the Ruins: The Ethics of Israel's Prophets*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2000.
- Du Mez, Kristen Kobes. *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*. New York: Liveright, 2020.
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- \_\_\_\_\_. *Seek Justice That You May Live: Reflections and Resources on the Bible and Social Justice*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2014.
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