



McMaster Divinity
College

Social Justice and the Bible

MS/OT/NT 5XS5
DPT

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Thursdays 4:00–5:50

Biography

Dr. Cindy Westfall is the Associate Professor of New Testament at McMaster Divinity College. Her research interests are wide-ranging including Greek, linguistics and discourse analysis, the book of Hebrews, Revelation and the Catholic Epistles, Bible Translation, Gender and Ministry, and most relevant for this course, Biblical Social Justice. She is the author of *A Discourse Analysis of Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning* and *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ* and co-edited *The Bible and Social Justice: Old Testament and New Testament Foundations for the Church's Urgent Call* and *Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural and Practical Perspectives*. She has been committed to crossing the boundaries in church planting and participation in the growth of urban church ministry. She is married to Glenn and lives in Dundas, ON.

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.

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, society 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 through practice-led research.

Doing

- Engage in issues of social justice through participation in different genres.
- Through reading and a paper, engage in practice-led theology that addresses your research question in social justice, and informs your practice of ministry in the area of social justice.

Course Requirements

Participation (15%)

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%)

The required reading for the course is 4,000 pages. The student will read the core texts and select appropriate reading on social justice (particularly as it relates to their research question) and submit on A2L a bibliographic list of books read, the number of pages read in each book, and the total number of pages read by **11:59 p.m. on April 6.**

Core Texts

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 the A2L Content: Cynthia Long Westfall, "Male and Female: One in Christ: Galatians 3:26–29."

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

The bookstore will be open for in-person shopping by appointment only. Textbooks can be ordered ahead of time with free delivery by contacting Bernice at books@readon.ca.

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.

Written Assignments

Preliminary Annotated Bibliography & Presentation (15%)

The student will develop an annotated bibliography of approximately 5–10 resources (at least 1,500 pages) that are the most informative related to your specific interest/category of social justice in the area of your research interest (see schedule for categories) and write a 100-150 word annotation for each resource. Relevant resources previously read for other courses may be submitted (mark with *). This is your summary of the best sources available in your area of interest. **Submit this assignment to A2L on 11:59 p.m. on Friday, February 10. Present your annotated bibliography to the class on February 16.**

Consult the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for bibliographies:

<http://www.macdiv.ca/students/documents/MacStyleGuide.pdf>

Summary of Biblical and Theological Foundations (20%)

Utilizing material from the class sessions and reading the student will describe the biblical and theological basis for *their specific practice-led research* in social justice. **The paper will be approximately 3,000 words (12 pages), and due 11:59 p.m. on Friday, February 24, submitted to A2L in PDF form.** This contents of this paper may be used in the major paper.

Include footnotes and bibliography appropriate for the dissertation level. For all matters of style and form, consult the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses:

<http://www.macdiv.ca/students/documents/MacStyleGuide.pdf>

Major Paper on Practice-Led Research in Social Justice (40%)

The student will demonstrate practice-led research through a particular focus/interest in social justice and be prepared to discuss their research with the class on June 5. Their paper will include an introduction, five sections and a conclusion (subheadings are advised):

- Clearly explain how the paper is rooted based in your identity, experiences and practice
- Explore the challenges and problems that provoke this study (i.e. Why does this ministry practice need to be addressed?)
- Identify and develop a procedure for a methodology suitable for researching this topic.
- Integrate the biblical and theological foundations for practice from your previous paper with appropriate revisions
- A consideration of new approaches to address and improve ministry practice (local and beyond) and reflection on the application to your own ministry.

The paper will be approximately 8,000 words. Submit to A2L in PDF form on March 31 at 11:59 p.m.

Include footnotes and bibliography. For all matters of style and form, consult the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses:

<http://www.macdiv.ca/students/documents/MacStyleGuide.pdf>

Class Presentation

Present/summarize your research to the class on **April 6**.

Course Assessment Summary

Participation	15%
Reading	10%
Annotated Bibliography & Presentation	15%
Biblical and Theological Foundations	20%
Major Paper & Presentation	40%

Classroom Behavior

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. Similarly content in all papers should be irenic while it may critique alternate positions.

Students are not to carry on off-topic conversations on the phone, chat or on the internet during online sessions.

Students who fail to respect these guidelines will be dismissed from the class with consequences.

Late Assignments lose 2% each day for 7 days, and then 5% a day up to 30%. However, no assignments will be accepted after **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. [All papers will be analysed for plagiarism by TurnItIn](#)

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

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

Appointments & office hours

3–4 p.m. Tuesdays in office

2–4 p.m. Thursdays in office

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

Date	Social Justice Topic	Reading	Class Activity
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 Annotated bibliography due Feb 10	Nardoni, 99–151 Westfall, 35–63	News Practical information
Feb 16	OT Poetry Bring examples of songs & poetry Presentation of Annotated Bibliography	Nardoni, 122–32	Engage in song and poetry
Feb 23	OT & Second Temple Prophecy & Apocalyptic Literature Biblical and Theological Foundations due Feb 24	Nardoni, 151–72 Westfall, 64–83	Use of fiction/media
March 2: Hybrid Intensive Week			
Mar 9	Jesus—life & teaching	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. Major Paper due March 31	Nardoni, 304–16 Westfall, 176–197 Readings from Stark on A2L	Trajectories, probability, and prediction Strategize effective missions
April 6	Conclusion to the course Presentation of Research Reading Report due 11:59 p.m.	Nardoni, 317–324	Presentations of Life Maps

Select Bibliography

- Birch, Bruce C. *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament Ethics and Christian Life*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1991.
- _____. *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.
- 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.
- _____. *Seek Justice That You May Live: Reflections and Resources on the Bible and Social Justice*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2014.
- Edwards, Dennis R. *Might from the Margins: The Gospel's Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice*. Harrisonburg, VA: Harold Press, 2020.
- Elliott, J. H. *A Home for the Homeless: A Social-Scientific Criticism of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005.
- Epzstein, Léon. *Social Justice in the Ancient Near East and the People of the Bible*. Trans. by J. Bowden; London: SCM, 1986.
- Gasaway, Brantley W. *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014.
- Georgeson, Edward S. *Social Justice Jesus: Justice, Mercy, and Faith as Presented in the Sermon on the Mount*. Freedom, CA: Avinu Publishing, 2021.
- Hamilton, Jeffries M. *Social Justice and Deuteronomy: The Case of Deuteronomy 15*. Atlanta: Scholars, 1992.

- Hart, Drew G. I. *Who Will Be A Witness? Igniting Activism for God's Justice, Love, and Deliverance*. Harrisonburg, VA: Harold Press, 2020.
- Henriot, Peter J., Edward P. DeBerri, and Michael J. Schultheis. *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998.
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- Houston, Walter. *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament*. London: T&T Clark, 2008.
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- Keeran, Daniel. *Radical Christianity: Peace and Justice in the New Testament*. Victoria, BC: Counsellor Publishing, 2006.
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- Marshall, Christopher D. *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment*. Studies in Peace and Scripture; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001.
- McCaulley, Esau. *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020.

- McKnight, Scot. *The Jesus Creed : Loving God, Loving*. Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2009.
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- Parker, Angela N. *If God Still Breathes, Why Can't I : Black Lives Matter and Biblical Authority*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021.
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- Pierce, Yolanda. *In My Grandmother's House. Black Women, Faith, and the Stories We Inherit*. Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2021.
- Pleins, J. David. *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction*. Westminster John Knox, 2001.
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