



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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Fall 2022 (Online)

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.

SPECIALIZATIONS

BIBLICAL STUDIES (BS)

Students taking this as a Biblical Studies course will be encouraged to focus on the historical and cultural setting in which early Christians discussed and practiced leadership, as well as scholarly debates concerning the interpretation of key leadership-related passages.

CHURCH AND CULTURE (CC) & CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND WORLDVIEW (CW)

Students taking this as a Church and Culture (CC) or Christian History and Worldview (CW) course will be encouraged to focus on the complexities of leadership as a culturally-embedded practice.

PASTORAL STUDIES (PS)

Students taking this as a Pastoral Studies (PS) course will be encouraged to explore how the ideas and exhortations of the New Testament are relevant to Christian leadership in the 21st century.

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 December 9th without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (strickpd@mcmaster.ca).

PARTICIPATION IN SYNCHRONOUS/ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSIONS (20%)

This is an asynchronous online course, and it can be completed without attendance at scheduled class meetings. However, the first and last weeks of the semester will include a synchronous Zoom meeting in which I will introduce/conclude the course and we will reflect together on our own involvement in Christian leadership. If you cannot attend these two Zoom meetings, there will be suitable “catch-up” work required online (e.g. watching my intro to the course, posting a self-introduction, etc.).

For most (but not all) of the weeks in the semester, there will be some assigned readings as well as some short online videos posted on A2L. You are expected to do the reading and to watch the videos, and then to report your completion of this work using a quiz on Avenue to Learn (A2L). The quiz will ask you to report both the quantity of reading/watching you completed and the quality of your completed reading/watching (i.e. how much attention you paid to what you were reading/watching). All of these reports must be completed by **December 9th at 11:59pm**.

Having read and watched the assigned material, you will discuss with fellow students some of the issues that they raise. There will be a discussion forum for this purpose within each online module. I am also willing to explore the potential for pre-arranged synchronous discussions between students, if there is strong interest in making such dialogues possible.

The final participation grade will be weighted so that 10% is derived from the reading/watching reports, and 10% is a general assessment of the *quality* of each student’s engagement in follow-up discussions.

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

For each class module, 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!*). These activities will form the initial seeds of our online follow-up discussions, but they will also be graded as submitted assignments. *To avoid data loss, you should compose your work somewhere where it will not be accidentally deleted, then copy/paste the final activity on the forum (along with any images or web-links that are relevant).*

There are seven modules, but you need only complete five of the follow-up activities. Three of them are due on **October 23rd at 11:59pm**, and the remaining two are due on **November 22 at 11:59pm**. Of course, if you post your activities during the relevant module, posting your activity to the forum will serve as part of the follow-up discussion. Also, you are less likely to fall behind.

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 contemporary issues surrounding the practice of leadership.

Here are the seven activities of which you must complete five.

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 caricature the type of self-advancement that is so often required of social media personalities today; the other should genuinely reflect your understanding of the qualities required of someone in the position of your chosen leader.
3. Pros and Cons. Do one of the following: (a) weigh the pros and cons of Christian leaders being married with children; 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.
4. 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*, *working with*, and *showing care*, and where do you see them *leading ahead*, *working over*, and *rebuking wrong*? 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?
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. Scandalous Stories. Nobody plans to leave a legacy of disgrace. Yet stories abound of well-known leaders whose reputations were destroyed by avoidable failures. Pick one area in which such failures occur (the obvious big three are money, sex, and power). Cite some leaders who have failed in that area, and then offer some reflections on possible causes/preventions.
7. 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.

FINAL ASSIGNMENT (30%)

In the final written assignment for the course, you will produce roughly 3,000 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 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 **December 4th at 11:59pm**.

GRADING SUMMARY

Modules & Discussions	20%
Follow-Up Activities	50%
<u>Final Assignment</u>	<u>30%</u>
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	Exemplary NT Passages	Online Lectures	Discussion Topics
Sept 12–18 Zoom Meeting (Sept 15 @ 2:00pm)		Introduction: Leadership in the NT	“Who leads you and whom do you lead?”

Sept 19–25	<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; Gal 1:1) • Warning Aspiring Leaders (Jas 3) 	Invited to Lead: Leadership as Response	<p>“Who initiates Christian leadership?”</p> <p>“Are reluctant, unexpected leaders better leaders?”</p> <p>“Is it still viable for a leader to claim divine authority?”</p>
Sept 26– Oct 2	<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?”
Oct 3–9	<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	<p>“Should churches demand celibacy of their leaders?”</p> <p>“Should church leaders be paid a salary?”</p>
Oct 10–16	<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	<p>“Can leaders participate authentically in the communities they lead?”</p> <p>“In what ways do leaders need to walk among those whom they lead?”</p> <p>“In what ways do leaders need to stand apart from those whom they lead?”</p>
Oct 17–23	<p>“Catch-Up & Plan Ahead” Week</p> <p>First Three Activities Due (Oct 23 @ 11:59pm)</p>		
Oct 24–30	Hybrid Week		
Oct 31– Nov 6	<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) 	Follow the Spirit’s Lead: Navigating Change and Conflict	<p>“How does a good leader know when following the Spirit requires new ways of observing tradition?”</p> <p>“Is it inevitable that the church will divide amidst change?”</p>
Nov 7–13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing (Matt 7:15–20) • Woe to You, Teachers of the Law (Matt 23) • Warnings against False Teachers (2 Pet 2; Jude) 	Legalism & Licentiousness: Avoiding Sin and Hypocrisy	<p>“Are strong moral principles adequate protection against moral failure?”</p> <p>“Why has the church so often proven to be a safe haven for predators?”</p>
Nov 14–20	<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	<p>“Is popularity a good indicator of a leader’s effectiveness?”</p> <p>“Does unpopularity indicate faithfulness?”</p>
Nov 21– Dec 4	<p>Final Two Activities Due (Nov 22 @ 11:59pm)</p> <p>Final Assignment Work</p> <p>Final Assignments Due (Dec 4 @ 11:59pm)</p>		
Dec 5–9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Longer Servants but Friends (John 15:9–17) 	Conclusion: Christian Leadership as the Cultivation of Divine Friendship(s)	

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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.