



McMaster Divinity  
College

## Social Justice in the Bible

NT 3P1140 (BS/CC/CW/PS)  
NT P51110

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Winter 2025

Online Asynchronous Course

Optional Meet and Greet Thursday, January 9, 4:00–5:50 p.m.

Optional Sharing and Farewell Thursday, April 10, 4:00–5:50 p.m.

### 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 such as homelessness, racism, indigenous issues, and inequalities exposed and exacerbated during the pandemic and subsequent developments 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.

### DPT Course (NT 5P1080)

DPT students who wish to take the as an advanced elective will contact the professor ([westfal@mcmaster.ca](mailto:westfal@mcmaster.ca)) and together we will design a syllabus that fits your overall focus so that it will directly contribute to your practice-led research project.

## **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 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.

## **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 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

### *View Videos* (attendance)

Students are required to view the weekly videos online in advance of posting weekly.

### *Online Participation* (15%)

There will be a couple of venues in which you will be expected to participate in online activities and contribute to the course online:

- Post a brief video on A2L that introduces to you the class by **January 9, 11:59 p.m.**
- Complete the weekly “exercises” given in the videos and submit to A2L Content: Exercises by every Thursday, 11:59 p.m. starting January 16.
- Initiate one discussion thread a week based on the exercises under Communication: Discussion by every Thursday, 11:59 p.m., starting January 16, creating and embedding videos—have some creative fun with it!
- Comment with videos on a minimum of 3 other discussion threads per week
- Post one current event or article relevant to Biblical Social Justice per week on the course Padlet (total).

### *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 11** 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 on A2L) write a 5 page theological reflection on the experience based on the MRS model for spiritual reflection (in Content: Introductory Materials). **It is due 11:59 p.m., March 28.** Submit to A2L Assessments:Assignments:Field Experience.

### *Development of a Life Map Centred on Social Justice* (25%)

Summarize your personal theology and discern your calling concerning social justice, integrating content, activities and issues covered in class. **It is due 4 p.m. April 10.** Submit it to A2L Assessment:Assignments:Life Map. Each student, if able and willing, will have the opportunity to present and/or discuss their life map in the optional Sharing and Farewell session on **April 10.**

Utilizing the tools given in course 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 video.

The Life Map should be a minimum of 10 pages long and follow the MDC Style Guide <http://www.macdiv.ca/students/documents/MacStyleGuide.pdf>

*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 7**. 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 7.**

Exegetical Papers should follow the Steps to Exegesis which are posted in A2L, using the subheadings given for each section.

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	25%
Research Paper	30%
Theological Reflection on FE	20%
Reading	10%
Participation	15%

### **Textbooks and Materials**

#### ***Required***

Rhodes, Michael J. *Just Discipleship: Biblical Justice in an Unjust World*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2023

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 and recommended books for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca). The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

#### ***Additional Materials***

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

Further procedures and guidance for assignments will be given in course videos and in announcements on A2L.

### **Classroom Behavior**

#### ***Attendance***

- Students are expected to watch all course videos as attendance.

### ***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 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 11.**

### **MDC Policies**

#### **Bookstore**

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

#### **Academic Honesty**

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production, including AI) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

**A special note about AI:** You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

#### **AODA**

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

#### ***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, for example, the following: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

### **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.

### **Appointments**

Contact me if I can assist you in any way via e-mail (most effective): [westfal@mcmaster.ca](mailto:westfal@mcmaster.ca)

Or...friend me on Facebook and send me a message!

### **Office hours (Rm 242):**

Tuesday 11–2

Thursday 11–2

Thursday 4–6 online (open house)

### **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 6–10 Jan 9 Jan 9	Introduction to Course <b>Submit intro video by Jan 9</b> <b>Optional Meet &amp; Greet 4–6, Jan 9</b>		Getting acquainted
Jan 13–17	Overview of Social Justice Historical Contexts	Rhodes, 3–43	Develop a working definition of biblical social justice
Jan 20–24	OT Law	Westfall, 1–34 Rhodes, 47–75	Identify current legal issues/responses
Jan 27–31	OT Narratives	Readings in A2L	Tell stories
Feb 3–7	OT Wisdom Literature <b>Submit paper/project description, 11:59 p.m., Feb 7</b>	Westfall, 35–63 Rhodes, 99–127	News Practical information
Feb 10–14	OT Poetry	Rhodes, 76–98	Engage in song and poetry
Feb 17–21	<b>MDC READING WEEK</b>		
Feb 24–28	OT & Second Temple Prophecy & Apocalyptic Literature	Westfall, 64–83	Use of fiction/media
Mar 3–7	Jesus—life & teaching <b>Exegetical/Research Paper due. 11:59 p.m., March 7</b>	Westfall, 84–124 Rhodes, 155–203	Developing a personal mission statement
Mar 10–14	Early Church/Jewish Christianity	Westfall, 152–75 Rhodes, 128–52	Addressing church policy/mission and defining responsibility
Mar 17–21	Pauline Epistles <b>Theological Reflection on FE due 11:59 p.m., March 21</b>	Westfall, 125–51 Rhodes, 204–23	Cross-cultural practices
Mar 24–28	Early Christian Eschatology	Westfall, 176–197	Trajectories, probability, and prediction Strategize effective missions
Mar 31– April 4	The early church 100-300 C. E. Conclusion to the course	Readings from Stark on DTL Rhodes, 227–82	Developing alternative strategies
April 7–11	<b>Optional online sharing and farewell, April 10, 4-5:50 p.m</b> <b>Life Map due 4 p.m., April 10</b> <b>Reading Report due 11:59 p.m., April 11</b>		Sharing insights from your Life Maps, the course



*Select Bibliography*

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- Cone, James H. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. New York: Orbis, 2011.
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- 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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- 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.
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