McMaster Divinity College

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

NT 3P1120
BS/CC/CW/PS

McMaster Divinity College
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Winter 2025 (In Person / Livestream)
Monday 4:00–5:50pm

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 in the NT who were "called" to lead. We will examine ancient 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 serving as part of a community and being set apart from that community. 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 discuss how controversies flare up whenever bold responses are needed to unprecedented challenges (exploring not only the tidy narrative of conflict resolution in Acts 15 but also Paul's forceful denunciations of other Christian leaders as hypocrites and betrayers of Jesus's good news). 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. Finally, we will consider the fact that power and influence so often give rise to inappropriate self-justifications, whether of abuses of power or simply of self-gratification.

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 twenty-first 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 attempt all of the course assignments. Failure to attempt an assignment could serve as grounds for failure of the course. Written assignments must be uploaded to Avenue to Learn either as Word documents (.doc, .docx) or in Rich Text Format (.rtf). Unless alternative arrangements are

made in advance, a penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all late assignments. Late assignments (even ones with an extension) will not receive detailed comments from the professor and may not be returned as quickly. Assignments cannot be submitted after April 11th without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (mdcreg@mcmaster.ca).

WEEKLY READING AND DISCUSSIONS (10% + 10% = 20% TOTAL)

Each week, you must complete assigned reading prior to attending class and then report your completion of the reading on A2L. Overall, the reading is worth 10% of your final grade.

Attendance at weekly meetings is expected, because discussions will be a significant part of your overall learning experience. Overall, class participation is worth 10% of your final grade. Grading will consider attendance, attentiveness, and thoughtfulness. Personality is not a factor (i.e. shyness and introversion will not be penalized).

EXPLORATORY ACTIVITIES (5 X 10% = 50%)

For each weekly topic, I have developed a brief follow-up activity that is designed to get you thinking about the topic in relation to your own life. These activities are not meant to be arduous, but you should take them seriously as opportunities for thoughtful and critical reflection on either your own leadership practices or those of leaders around you.

There are <u>ten</u> modules, each of which has an accompanying follow-up activity that is designed to be completed after class. You need to **complete at least <u>five</u> of these**. There are no due dates for specific exercises. However, **at least <u>two</u> follow-up activities must be submitted by Reading Week** (i.e. two assignments from options 1–5 below must be uploaded before February 17th at 11:59pm). **Any remaining modules must be completed before the end of March** (i.e. at least five assignments in total must be uploaded before March 31st at 11:59pm). If you submit more than five exercises, **only your top five grades will be counted**.

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. You are expected to draw connections with the New Testament, using scriptural citations wherever possible to show that you are striving to think about leadership in ways that are self-consciously biblical in orientation. The goal is to encourage connections between your knowledge of the New Testament and your thoughts about contemporary issues surrounding the practice of leadership.

Here are the ten activities of which you must complete five:

1. <u>Discern Your Call</u>. 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? As you work through these questions, be sure to engage with relevant passages of scripture.
2. <u>Leadership Bios</u>. Look online at the leadership bios of some well-known Christian leaders. Then read Christianity Today's guide to writing a bio. Finally, write two bios (approx. 200 words each) for yourself or for some other leader with whom you are personally acquainted. One of these bios

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 and qualifications that should be expected from godly leaders. In an accompanying paragraph, reflect on socio-cultural expectations and the ways that they influence perceptions of who is qualified to lead.

3. <u>Pros and Cons</u>. 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. To conclude, produce a summary paragraph that reflects on the tensions that surround marriage and money and the ways that they complicate Christian leadership.

4. <u>What if God Was One of Us</u>. Spend some time reflecting on "incarnational" leadership and "servant" leadership with respect to some Christian leader whose leadership you have directly observed (or yourself, if you wish). List some of the ways that your chosen leader has resisted the impulse to lord themselves over others or to be acclaimed as special. Has following a downward path enabled them to be more effective as a leader? Has it in any way hindered their ability to exercise effective leadership? To conclude, reflect on the fact that "downward mobility" implies an elevated starting point. What does this reveal about servant leadership?

5. <u>Silencing the Prophets</u>. Spend some time reflecting on "cruciform" leadership with respect to some Christian leader whose leadership you have directly observed (or yourself, if you wish). List some of the ways that your chosen leader has suffered rejection or even persecution from people ostensibly under their authority and/or care. How did your leader respond to these situations? Is surrendering power always the "Christian" thing to do? Offer some reflections on the difference between crucifixion and powerlessness as it applies to Christian leadership.

6. <u>Changing Times</u>. Choose some belief or practice with respect to which the Christian community is currently experiencing some measure of uncertainty or debate. Pay particular attention to the active role that leaders play in shaping perceptions of faithfulness. Explain what you think good leadership means amidst uncertainty or debate.

7. <u>Expel the Wicked</u>. Throughout history, Christian communities have purified themselves by themselves by separating from other Christians. In a few paragraphs, reflect on this historical pattern. What is positive about it? What is negative about it? What do leaders need to consider when deciding how to evaluate the beliefs and/or practices of others? Be sure to engage with relevant New Testament passages.

8. <u>Power Audit</u>. Using the self-audit questions developed by [thirtyone:eight](#), undertake a review of some institution or organization of which you are a part. When you are finished, reflect on what you have learned from the process. Conclude by composing a brief exhortation, urging your community to be vigilant in creating a culture that safeguards against abuse. Use scripture to support your exhortation.

9. <u>Scandalous Stories</u>. Nobody plans to leave a legacy of disgrace. Yet stories abound of well-known leaders whose reputations were destroyed by avoidable failures involving sex and/or money. Reflect on the processes of self-justification that eventually lead to moral failure. How can biblical warnings prevent such outcomes, given that few leaders (if any) ever see *themselves* as the leader who is being denounced by scriptural warnings against false teachers.

10. <u>Performance Review</u>. Develop a rubric that could be used in a "performance review" for a specific religious leadership role. More importantly, draft an introduction to the rubric that explains, both to the reviewers and to the person who is being reviewed, how the process of performance evaluation should be approached for it to be both biblical and effective. Cite scripture to support your proposals.

Final Assignment (30%)

In the final written assignment for the course, you will produce a **3,000-word essay** about what it means to be a "biblical" leader. This final written assignment must be uploaded to Avenue to Learn either as a Word document (.doc, .docx) or in Rich Text Format (.rtf) no later than **April 6th at 11:59pm**.

Because this is a New Testament course, your essay must engage the New Testament. But of course, Old Testament passages are not out of bounds. Please be careful to do good research! Find academic resources that discuss key biblical texts, or cultural dynamics related to leadership, or the practice of leadership itself. You are expected to produce a bibliography that includes **at least <u>twelve</u> suitable academic sources**.

In keeping with the course objectives, the grading of your final essay will assess how well you accomplish three things (see below). However, the grading will be weighted to account for your course specialization, with half of your grade determined by a single task that is strongly associated with your specialization (see the parenthetical abbreviations). The remainder of your grade will be split equally between the remaining two tasks. A rubric on A2L will explain these tasks in greater detail.

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 to advocate for healthy practices in a specific contemporary context of leadership? (PS)

On the title page of your submission, please state your course specialization (i.e. BS, CC, CW, or PS) so that I can check it against my records from the Registrar. If you do not know your specialization, please contact Student Records to clarify your registration details. If you are an occasional student or an LOP student from another institution, you can freely choose a specialization—but you still need to state on your title page which specialization you have chosen.

Grading Summary

Reading & Discussions   20%
Follow-Up Activities   50%
<u>Final Essay   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
Jan 6		Introduction: Leadership in the NT	"Who leads you and whom do you lead?"
Jan 13	• 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	"Who initiates Christian leadership?" "Are reluctant, unexpected leaders better leaders?" "Is it still viable for a leader to claim divine authority?"
Jan 20	• 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, well-financed man the most qualified leader?"
Jan 27	• 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 of their leaders?" "Should church leaders be paid a salary?"
Feb 3	• Jesus's Hometown Rejection (Mark 6:1–6) • Foot Washing (John 13:1–17) • A Triumphal Entry (Matt 21:1–11)	Incarnation: Imitating the Life of Jesus	"Can leaders participate authentically in the communities they lead?" "How does servant leadership challenge the human tendency to follow only 'great men'?"
Feb 10	• Betrayal in Gethsemane (Matt 26) • A Request from James & John (Mark 10:35–45) • Peter's Re-commissioning (John 21) • The Rod of Discipline (1 Cor 4:8–21) • Resurrection Power (2 Cor 13:1–10)	Cruciformity: Imitating the Death of Jesus	"How should leaders stand apart from those whom they lead?" "How should Christian leaders respond when people turn against them or challenge their authority?"
Feb 17	Hybrid Week (No Class)		
Feb 24	• 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	"How does a good leader know when following the Spirit requires new ways of observing tradition?" "Is it inevitable that the church will divide amidst change?"
Mar 3	• Persuaded of Their Righteousness (Luke 18:9–14) • Woe to You, Teachers of the Law (Matt 23) • Do Not Even Eat with Such a Person (1 Cor 5) • Take Pride without Comparison (Gal 6:1–6)	Thank God We're Not Like Them: How to Be a Religious Hypocrite	"What role does/should religious purity play in the church today?" "How do ingroup/outgroup comparisons help/hurt churches?"
Mar 10	• Wolves in Sheep's Clothing (Matt 7:15–20) • Putting Up with Fools (2 Cor 11:1–21)	Thus Says the Lord: Religious Authority and the Problem of Spiritual Abuse	"Why has the church so often proven to be a safe haven for predators?" "How can churches prevent people from abusing positions of religious authority?"
Mar 17	• Warnings against False Teachers (2 Pet 2; Jude)	All Things Are Permissible: The Danger of Self-Justification	"Why do leaders so often end up justifying behaviours that others see as very obviously wrong?"
Mar 24	• An Initial Response to Criticisms in Corinth (1 Cor) • A Subsequent Response (2 Cor)	Measuring Success and Failure: How to Deal with Being a Disappointment	"Is popularity a good indicator of a leader's effectiveness?" "Does unpopularity indicate faithfulness?"

Mar 31	• No Longer Servants but Friends (John 15:9–17)	Christian Leadership as the Cultivation of Divine Friendship(s)	"If authority is a social construct and social structures are constantly changing, are there any good metaphors left for thinking about what it means to lead others?"
Apr 7		Concluding Reflections Course Evaluations	

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STATEMENT ON 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.

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

A useful guide to avoiding plagiarism is the Harvard Guide to Using Sources:
http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do

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 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.

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*:
https://www.mcmasterdivinwity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mdcstyleguide.pdf

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

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.

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