



McMaster Divinity  
College

## Cultural Interpretation of the Old Testament OT 6P1000

Programs: MAGC

Online (Asynchronous) | Winter Term (January 6—April 11, 2025)

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*The mission of McMaster Divinity College is to develop effective evangelical Christian leaders for the Church, academy, and society through graduate-level education, spiritual development, and vocational formation.*

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### I. Faculty Information



**Name:** Dr. Goran Zivkovic

**Office hours:** via Zoom  
by appointment

**Email:** goran.zivkovic@thh-friedensau.de

### II. Dr. Zivkovic's Christian Worldview and Teaching Philosophy

#### ***Christian Worldview***

God created human beings by embedding within them three fundamental aspects of existence that are inextricably connected and related: knowing (Gen 2:16–17), being (Gen 1:27), and doing (Gen 1:28; 2:15). Humanity was intended to develop holistically in all three dimensions with the ultimate purpose of glorifying God. However, the fall into sin disrupted this intended growth. Humans distorted their knowledge by acquiring the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:4, 22), corrupted their being by transitioning from the image of God to the image of man (Gen 5:3 cf. Gen 1:27), and engaged in malevolent actions instead of righteous deeds (e.g. Gen 4). Consequently, a principal objective of Christian education is to guide students in acquiring knowledge that fosters holistic development, encompassing growth in all three dimensions, thereby enabling them to live lives that glorify God, as originally intended in the creation narrative (Gen 1—2).

#### ***Teaching Philosophy***

It was in 1787, in the speech of J. P. Gabler at the University of Altdorf that the distinction between different theological disciplines has been officially made for the first time. A number of professors in the twenty-first century have unfortunately inherited this artificial division. I view the role of a professor of religion as someone who strives to bridge this artificially created gap between knowledge and practice.

In my holistic approach to teaching, I am committed to challenging and motivating my students to achieve academic excellence while also helping them to experience that the acquired academic knowledge is relevant and valuable for their everyday lives and the life of their church. If I have been successful, my student will have equally developed their intellectual, emotional, and spiritual capacities. They will be fully aware that knowing, being, and doing aspects of their lives are inextricably connected and mutually dependent.

In order to accomplish aforementioned goals my students are encouraged to do self-study exercises and research assignments, to participate in dynamic discussions and collaborative small group and large group learning, and to critically analyze and evaluate resources. I like to incorporate modern technologies in my teaching. This contributes to engaging variety of different students, such as students with visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic learning styles. I also encourage learning within a community. In my classrooms (online and/or in-person) I intend to build positive community where students respect each other, foster interpersonal connection, and grow by learning from one another's experience.

Teaching is highly challenging but also very rewarding job and that is especially case when the goals are multivalent and approach that has been taken is holistic as described above. It requires the constant relaying on God who can transform not only students but also professor as they both learn and grow. For me this is not job but rather calling.

### **III. Course Description**

As part of the Master of Arts in Global Christianity program, this course aims to equip students with tools for intercultural interpretation of the Old Testament. Within the broader goal of this program to evaluate the complexities of the Christian faith worldwide, this course explores how various cultural contexts can enrich the reading of Old Testament passages and contribute to the development of a culturally sensitive Old Testament theology. To achieve this, students will engage with select commentaries, articles, and essays where authors have employed culturally sensitive readings of the Old Testament. The course also examines how this culturally sensitive theology can challenge contemporary culture and promote positive social change. Special attention will be given to cultural hermeneutics, exegetical methods that incorporates cultural interpretation, and theological reflection, emphasizing how diverse cultures such as Asian, Latino/a, and African can provide valuable insights into the reading and understanding of the Old Testament.

### **IV. Course Delivery Mode**

The course will be delivered entirely online as an asynchronous course, with no required synchronous meetings via Zoom. This format allows you to access materials, complete assignments, and participate in discussions on your own schedule, without real-time interaction with the instructor or classmates. However, students must adhere to specific deadlines for submitting assignments and participating in activities. The course will be conducted using Avenue to Learn (A2L), provided to all students by MDC. Designed for flexibility, the course offers weekly activities released at the beginning of the week (Sunday at 12:00 AM) and requires their completion by the end of the week (Saturday at 11:59 PM). All assignment submissions must be made through A2L.

## V. Course Objectives

### *Knowing*

- Describe the main cultural constructs that shape each culture and understand how past historical events influence present cultural norms and values.
- Explain your hermeneutical method for culturally sensitive reading of the Old Testament passages that remains faithful to your confession and includes rigorous exegesis of the biblical text.
- Analyze and critically evaluate prominent examples of culturally sensitive interpretation of biblical passages.

### *Being*

- Gain an in-depth understanding of your own culture and ethnic identity to recognize and appreciate how Bible could potentially inform it.
- Reflect on how a culturally sensitive reading of the Old Testament enhances its relevance for your everyday life.
- Identify how Old Testament theology, developed through intercultural reading, can be applied to our present context and transforms your culture into a more conducive environment for life.

### *Doing*

- Demonstrate a passion for further study of the Old Testament in personal and/or academic life and its application in ministry, recognizing its importance for everyday life.
- Appreciating and employ culturally sensitive interpretations of the Old Testament.
- Live out Old Testament theology to reinforce cultural norms and provide a sense of belonging and identity.

## VI. Course Resource Requirements and Recommendations

### *Required Technology*

As stated on the website of the McMaster Divinity College the following is a list of technical requirements for our asynchronous course:

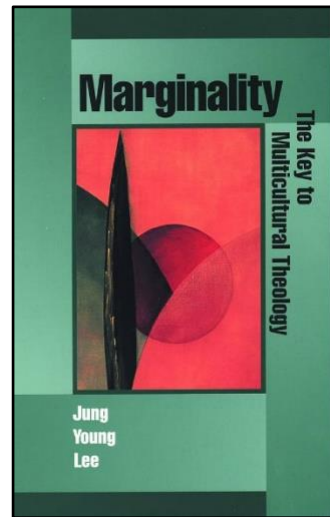
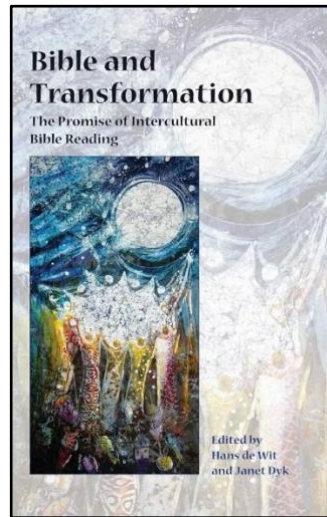
- **Reliable Laptop or Desktop Computer:** Ensure you have a functioning device capable of running necessary applications and accessing online platforms.
- **Microsoft Office Suite:** The latest version is available for MDC students to download and use for FREE. This includes essential programs like Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.
- **Web Browser:** Google Chrome or another reliable browser for accessing course materials and online resources.
- **Recording Software:** An App or software for recording screen and/or webcam videos for your video presentations (e.g., OBS Studio or similar).
- **Camera:** A camera with at least 720p resolution for video conferencing and presentations.
- **Microphone:** A good quality microphone for clear audio during video conferences and recordings.
- **High-Speed Broadband Internet Connection:** Reliable internet to support streaming, downloads, and online interactions.

For more details see: <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/educational-technology-help-page/>

### **Digital resources**

PDF versions of journal articles, essays, and selected chapters from books/monographs will be available online on A2L as part of your required reading. This curated reading list features material from scholars of diverse cultural backgrounds.

### **Required Texts**



de Wit, Hans, and Janet Dyk, eds. *Bible and Transformation: The Promise of Intercultural Bible Reading*. Society of Biblical Literature. Semeia Studies 81. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015.

Lee, Jung Young. *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995, pp. 1–76.

### **Recommended Texts**

Bevans, Stephen B. *Models of Contextual Theology*. Revised edition. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002.

Burrell, Kevin L. *Cushites in the Hebrew Bible: Negotiating Ethnic Identity in the Past and Present*. Biblical Interpretation Series 181. Leiden: Brill, 2020.

Campbell, Cynthia M. *A Multitude of Blessings: A Christian Approach to Religious Diversity*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007.

Carroll R., M. Daniel. "The Prophetic Text and the Literature of Dissent in Latin America: Amos, García Márquez, and Cabrera Infante Dismantle Militarism." *BibInt* 4 1 (1996): 76–100.

Carroll R., M. Daniel. "Living between the Lines: Reading Amos 9:11-15 in Post-War Guatemala." *Religion & Theology* 6 1 (1999): 50–64.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Contexts for Amos: Prophetic Poetics in Latin American Perspective*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 132. Sheffield: JSOT, 1992.

- Cotterell, Peter, and Max Turner. *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989.
- De-Whyte, Janice P. *Wom(b)an: A Cultural-Narrative Reading of the Hebrew Bible Barrenness Narratives*. Biblical Interpretation Series 162. Leiden: Brill, 2018.
- de Wit, Hans, and Janet Dyk, eds. *Bible and Transformation: The Promise of Intercultural Bible Reading*. Society of Biblical Literature. Semeia Studies 81. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015.
- Dempsey, Carol J. "The 'Whore' of Ezekiel 16: The Impact and Ramifications of Gender-Specific Metaphors in Light of Biblical Law and Divine Judgment." Pages 57–78 in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*. Edited by Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson and Tikva Frymer-Kensky. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 262. Sheffield, Eng: Sheffield Academic, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Wilderness: Sacred Space, Endangered Homeland, Hope for Our Planet." Pages 62–80 in *Turning to the Heavens and the Earth: Theological Reflections on Cosmological Conversion (Essays in Honor Elizabeth A. Johnson)*. Edited by Julia Brumbaugh and Natalia Imperatori-Lee. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press (Michael Glazier), 2016.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "From Drought to Starvation (Jeremiah 14:1-9): A National Experience, a Global Reality." Pages 41–66 in *By Bread Alone: The Bible Through the Eyes of the Hungry*. Edited by Sheila E. McGinn, Lai Ling Elizabeth Ngan, and Ahida Calderón Pilarski. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014.
- During, Simon, ed. *The Cultural Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Groody, Daniel G. *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice: Navigating the Path to Peace*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007.
- Gunton, Colin E. *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997.
- Küster, Volker. "The Project of an Intercultural Theology." *Swedish Missiological Themes* 93, no. 3 (2005): 417–32.
- Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007.
- Pfoh, Emanuel, ed. *T&T Clark Handbook of Anthropology and the Hebrew Bible*. London: T. & T. Clark, 2022.
- Porter, Stanley E., and Jason C. Robinson. *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

Porter, Stanley E., and Beth M. Stovell. "Trajectories in Biblical Hermeneutics." In *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012.

Robert Allan Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today," Pages 93–104 in *Native and Christian*. Edited by James Treat. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997.

Smith, Philip. *Cultural Theory: An Introduction*. 21st Century Sociology. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001.

Storey, John, ed. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. 5th ed. London: Routledge, 2019.

Tate, W. Randolph. *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.

Wit, Hans de. *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible*. Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2004.

Wrogemann, Henning. *Intercultural Theology. Volume 1: Intercultural Hermeneutics*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Intercultural Theology. Volume 2: Theologies of Mission*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic 2017.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Intercultural Theology. Volume 3: A Theology of Interreligious Relations*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic 2019.

## VII. Course Grading Scale and Assignment Weights

Percent Grade	Letter Grade	Grade Point (12 pts)	Grade Point (4 pts)	Grading Guidelines
90–100	A+	12	4.0	For work displaying mastery of the subject-matter, creativity and individualized integration of insights and their relationship.
85–89	A	11	4.0	
80–84	A-	10	3.7	
77–79	B+	9	3.3	For work displaying a good level of competence and comprehension.
73–76	B	8	3.0	
70–72	B-	7	2.7	
67–69	C+	6	2.3	For work which meets basic course requirements but demonstrates a low level of comprehension.
63–66	C	5	2.0	
60–62	C-	4	1.7	
57–59	D+	3	1.3	For work that falls below minimum standards.
53–56	D	2	1.0	
50–52	D-	1	0.7	
0–49	F	0	0	Unsatisfactory work and/or failure to meet course requirements.

## Important Notes:

- Letter grades are given for all courses. Plus and minus signs indicate work of higher or lower quality within the guidelines for each letter grade. Some courses, such as Ministry Formation, may be evaluated on a Pass/Fail basis.
- In the M.Div., M.T.S., Dip.Min. and Cert.C.S., and Occasional programs, any course below C- does not count for credit and must be repeated if it is a required course.
- In the M.A. and Ph.D. programs, any course below B- does not count for credit and must be repeated.
- Students who repeat a course and fail a second time will not be permitted to register in that course again, even in the case of a required course. If the failed course is an elective course, a substitute course may be permitted with the approval of the Academic Dean or designate.
- The absolute deadline for all course assignments is the last day of the examination schedule. Any missing assignments will receive a grade of "0".
- Once the final grade sheet has been submitted, the course instructor may not change a grade without consultation with the Academic Dean or designate.

## VIII. Course Requirements/Activities

### **(1) Presence, Participation, and Online Etiquette (Value: 10%)**

#### *–Presence and Meaningful Participation*

Presence and participation in this course are expected. Faculty know from many years of experience that a student's level of presence and participation in the course will impact how well she or he will score in the course. Although there are exceptions to this rule of thumb, low levels of presence and participation tend to translate to low grades; mediocre presence and participation tend to translate to mediocre grades; and high levels of presence and participation tend to translate to higher grades.

A word needs to be said about what constitutes "presence" (attendance) and "participation" in an asynchronous course. Students must establish a record of participation in academically related activities to meet the expected level of attendance and meaningful participation. Be aware that merely logging into the online class is not, by itself, sufficient as a demonstration of attendance and participation by the student. "Academically related activities" certainly includes participation in and completion of the course requirements that are described below. Additionally, just as students are expected to engage with the course content/materials throughout the week outside of the learning management system (A2L), so also students are expected to engage one another in formative dialogue "outside of class." This is an important part of belonging to and maintaining a community of learning and is a staple ingredient in what constitutes "presence."

#### *– Online Etiquette*

It is critical in any MDC class that students show respect for classmates and the instructor. This is even truer in the online environment because many of the non-verbal cues that we use to interpret what a person is communicating to us are not present online (except, perhaps in video posts). Therefore, it is especially critical that we be mindful of how our words will be interpreted by those who are reading them. As the instructor of the course, it is my responsibility to monitor communications to ensure that all students feel comfortable expressing their views in a respectful manner. Most if not all courses at MDC are devoted to the interpretation of Scripture. Invariably there will be disagreements; these

disagreements must be discussed and negotiated in a respectful manner. This applies to individual and group communications involving the instructor and the others enrolled in the course. The instructor will expect that you will give some thought to your postings. Excessive postings are also frowned upon because these amount to dominating the discussion. Please limit your postings to less than 200 words. Instructors reserve the right to ask students to take a step back to allow others discussion time if she or he feels that an individual is dominating the discussion. In your responses, please try to be clear which point your response refers to. Students who violate these guidelines may be dismissed from class.

### ***(2) Reading and Viewings (Value: 10%)***

Students are expected to upload written reviews of the assigned readings/viewings to A2L each week. These written reports should not exceed two pages (Times New Roman, 12 pts, double-spaced) and must demonstrate a critical engagement with the content. Rather than merely summarizing the material, students should reflect on it by articulating well-reasoned agreements and/or disagreements. All readings and viewings must be completed by the middle of each week and submitted to A2L by **Wednesday at 11:59 PM**. Engaging with these materials is essential for preparing students to complete their assignments effectively. It is highly likely that only those students who thoroughly engage with all assigned materials will be able to meet the expected standards in their other coursework.

### ***(3) Online Discussions (Value 20%)***

Active participation in online discussions is expected and constitutes 20% of your final grade. Each week, an asynchronous discussion forum will correspond to the assigned readings and video posts. The professor will post 1-2 critical questions related to these assignments. Students are required to write 150–200 word responses to each posed question and at least one respectful response to another student's post. These contributions should reflect a deep understanding of the material and demonstrate critical thinking.

Students should engage thoughtfully and respectfully with their peers, providing well-supported arguments, posing insightful questions, and responding meaningfully to others' contributions. Initial posts are due by **Wednesday at 11:59 PM each week**, with responses to peers due by **Saturday at 11:59 PM**. Participation in these discussions is crucial for developing a collaborative learning environment and enhancing your understanding of the course material.

### ***(4) Hermeneutical Position Essay (Value 20%)***

For this assignment, students are required to write a 5-7 page essay articulating their hermeneutical position regarding the cultural interpretation of the Old Testament. The paper should consist of four distinct but interrelated sections:

- **Introduction:** Provide a brief overview of your essay, outlining the main points and objectives.
- **Orientation to Hermeneutical Approaches:** Discuss various hermeneutical approaches to interpreting the biblical text, including The World Behind the Text, The World Within the Text, and The World In Front of the Text. Position the intercultural reading of the Old Testament within one of these frameworks.
- **Personal Hermeneutical and Exegetical Approach:** Present your own hermeneutical and exegetical approach to the intercultural reading of the Old Testament. Explain how you integrate cultural perspectives into your interpretation while maintaining fidelity to the biblical text.



- **Conclusion:** Summarize the key insights and implications of your hermeneutical position, reflecting on its relevance and application.

The essay should demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of hermeneutical theories and their application to intercultural biblical interpretation. It should also show critical engagement with the material, presenting well-argued positions supported by scholarly sources. This assignment accounts for 20% of your final grade and should be submitted via A2L by **Saturday, February 1, 23:59 PM**.

**(5) Sermon based on Cultural Interpretation of an Old Testament Text (40%)**

Students are required to write and record a sermon based on a selected Old Testament passage. The sermon should be uploaded to an online platform (preferably YouTube) and the link submitted to the professor via A2L. Students must inform the professor of their chosen passage via email by the end of the fourth week (**Saturday, February 1, 11:59 PM**). The sermon, 17–20 minutes in length, should build on the insights gained throughout the course. Although this is not a traditional exegetical exercise using the historical-grammatical method, it should include key elements of exegesis such as presentation of literary boundaries of the passage, evidence of semantic and syntactical analysis, and insights into theological observations.

The sermon should be structured as follows:

- **Introduction:** Begin with a clear introduction outlining the objectives and structure of the sermon.
- **Description of Cultural Phenomena:** Describe a cultural construct (e.g., patriarchy, community, poverty, oppression, etc) associated with a particular culture, providing a detailed account of the chosen cultural phenomenon.
- **Examination of Old Testament Passage:** Investigate the selected Old Testament passage thoroughly, focusing on the cultural construct identified in the first part. This should include an analysis of the Hebrew text and highlight relevant theological points.
- **Application of Exegetical Findings:** Address how the exegetical findings can be applied to the cultural construct discussed earlier in the sermon. Offer suggestions on how the interpretation of the biblical passage can inform and potentially transform the culture for the better.
- **Conclusion:** Summarize the key insights and implications of your sermon.

An excellent example of how this sermon should be structured is found in the article "Living between the Lines: Reading Amos 9:11-15 in Post-War Guatemala" by Carroll R., M. Daniel. The grading of the sermon will be based on three criteria: delivery, content, and argumentation. This assignment accounts for 40% of the final grade and must demonstrate comprehensive and critical engagement with both the cultural phenomenon and the biblical text. The recorded sermon must be uploaded to A2L by **Saturday, March 15, 23:59 PM**. Adherence to this deadline is essential, as the first two classes in the final section of this course will be directly connected to the video material you submit. You will be expected to engage critically by listening to and providing thoughtful comments on the sermons of your classmates.

**IX. Tentative Course Schedule**

Week		Topic
<b>Part I: Method</b>		
<b>01.</b>	January 6–11	Introduction to the Course

02.	January 12–18	Brief History of Hermeneutical Approaches
03.	January 19–25	Key Concepts in Cultural Hermeneutics
04.	January 26–February 1	Cultural Themes in the Old Testament
<b>Part II: Application</b>		
05.	February 2–8	African Interpretation of the Old Testament
06.	February 9–15	Latino Interpretation of the Old Testament
07.	<b>February 16–22</b>	<b>Reading Week: No Class</b>
08.	February 23–March 1	Asian Interpretation of the Old Testament
09.	March 2–8	Postcolonial Interpretation of the Old Testament
10.	March 9–15	Feminist and Gendered Interpretation of the Old Testament
11.	March 16–22	Ecological Interpretation of the Old Testament
<b>Part III: Critical Workshops</b>		
12.	March 23–29	Evaluation of Sermons part 1
13.	March 30–April 5	Evaluation of Sermons part 2
14.	April 6–12	Final Reflections and Synthesis

## X. Course Policies

### ***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) 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.

### ***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.

### ***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).