

## **HB/NT 550: Social Justice and Sacred Texts**

*Spring 2023, Tuesdays 6-7:30 pm*

Rev. Dr. Valerie Bridgeman, [vbridgeman@mtso.edu](mailto:vbridgeman@mtso.edu)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87294358963>

Room L-200 (2<sup>nd</sup> floor in the library)

### **I. Course Description**

*This course provides students a survey of religious texts from a variety of traditions, including but not limited to, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions. While the course is heavily immersed in the Abrahamic traditions, it is not limited to these. This course highlights those traditions' scriptural understandings of justice. Students will engage the texts in comparative ways and consider the implications of how such texts guide or hinder the work of justice. [3 credit hours. Frequency: Every spring. Prerequisite: None.]*

### **II. Course Objectives**

At the end of this course, learners should be able on a beginning or competent level to:

*List three to four objectives of this course stated in terms of learning outcomes for the student. Outcomes may be related to certain knowledge, skills, or dispositions/attitudes.*

### **III. Contribution to MTSO's Educational Mission and Degree Outcomes**

At the end of this course, learners should be able on a beginning level to:

- 1) Identify how several religious traditions use sacred texts in their understanding of social justice or social principles for serving from their worldview
- 2) Identify how different traditions describe and/or define social justice based in their understandings of their sacred texts
- 3) Have a broad understanding of scripturalizing, both for sacred texts and for oral traditions
- 4) Be able to construct a credo of interreligious understanding of the power of scripture(s) to harm and to help the cause of human flourishing/social justice

### **III. Contribution to MTSO's Educational Mission and Degree Outcomes**

1. It addresses the MTSO Strategic Plan statement: "Reaching into a rapidly changing world, MTSO affirms its Christian identity as a seminary in the Wesleyan family, committed to conversation and interaction with people, communities and movements of many perspectives and faith traditions."
2. This course also contributes to MTSO's commitment "to cultivate learning for ministry and service by celebrating and appropriating the Scriptures."

### **Specific Degree Outcomes**

MASJ — Required for the degree

MDiv — Graduates will understand and interpret the Christian heritage in relationship to its neighbors

MTS — Have a broad understanding of sacred texts literature and scholars writing in the field

MAPT — Graduates will be able to negotiate human differences in the formative ecologies of faith communities in ways that foster liberating personal and corporate Christian faith.

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### **Aspects of the MTSO mission and/or MTSO's general theological curriculum**

This course contributes to MTSO's theological mission in the following ways:

1. It "prepares students to practice and lead theological reflection with others in ways that promote ministries of personal wholeness, faithful and hospitable community, and justice (MDiv)
2. It cultivates "abilities for negotiating the dynamic interplay in the (area) [of] ... the diversities of human and creaturely existence (MAPT)
3. It enables students to "gain skills for participating intelligently in public discourse about religious issues..." (MTS)
4. It contributes to students' capacities of "skill-building with critical analysis and reflection" (MASJ)

### **Connections the course has to other MTSO courses**

This course specifically adds to the body of knowledge for interreligious courses and cultural competencies in pastoral care and social justice. It also adds to biblical literacy.

### **IV. Textbooks**

#### **Required Texts**

1. Cohen, Aryeh. *Justice in the City: An Argument from the Sources of Rabbinic Judaism* (New Perspectives in Post-Rabbinic Judaism) (Academic Studies Press, 2013).
2. Grassi, Joseph A. *Informing the Future: Social Justice in the New Testament* (Paulist Press, 2003).
3. Kamali, Mohammad Hashim. *Freedom, Equality and Justice in Islam* (Fundamental Rights and Liberties in Islam) (Islamic Texts Society, 2002).
4. Articles as assigned and posted on the "syllabus" page and lessons in Populi for this course.

**Recommended additional reading (Please NOTE: You do not need to purchase any of the books below; they are for your further studies going forward):**

1. Donahue, John R., *Seek Justice That You May Live: Reflections and Resources on the Bible and Social Justice* (Paulist Press, 2014).
2. Kaltner, John, Kendra G. Hotz, Micah Greenstein, *What Do Our Neighbors Believe? Second Edition: Questions and Answers on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 2019).
3. Levine, Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2nd Edition (Oxford University Press; 2nd Edition, 2017).
4. Prothero, Stephen, *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World* (HarperOne; Reprint Edition, 2011)
5. Wilson, Andrew, *World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts* (Paragon House, 1998).

### **V. Course Requirements and Assessment of Student Learning**

1. **Attendance and active in-class engagement:** Be present and prepared for every meeting of the course. You are allowed one "no questions asked" absence — choose wisely. You may only miss two classes total before absences with have a negative impact on your grade. **Online course participation is NOT OPTIONAL and impacts attendance.** This is a hybrid course and **posts not done by MONDAY at 11:59 pm of the following week** will count as a partial absence. **You will have one**

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**absence, after missing two posts.** All online lessons will close and not be reopened on Tuesdays prior to the next class meeting at 5:59 pm (example: Posts for January 31 course must be up by 5:59 pm February 7). I will only take posts on Populi; do not send posts to my email address. (20/100 points). **Due: Throughout semester**

2. **Pre-assessment paper: your personal definition of “social justice” and “sacred texts.”** This assignment assumes no reading or footnoting, but a thoughtful one-to two-page doubled spaced reflection on these two phrases. (10/100 points for completion). Upload into the grading tab on Populi. **Due: Posted February 7 by 5:59 pm**
3. **Course Leadership:** “If you teach, you learn twice.” This course is being taught in seminar style. That means that I will not lecture and you, as a future pastor or director of a nonprofit, will lead our discussions, separate from “participation” points. The goal is to see whether you are able to congeal ideas into a 10–15-minute assessment of the reading that includes an outline of your leadership (I will prompt, but you lead).
  - a. **GROUP 1: GB, CF**
  - b. **GROUP 2: DH, WH**
  - c. **GROUP 3: PT, DW**
  - d. **GROUP 4: NI, IJ-W, EL**
  - e. **GROUP 5: MJ, JM, JO**
  - f. **GROUP 6: CO, EP, MRC**
  - g. **GROUP 7: SR, SS**
  - h. **GROUP 8: KM, KS, RW**

You are in groups to lead, but you do NOT have to consult one another about the reading leadership. Here you will lead us dialogically (meaning the 3 of you will lead off one another). You will post your outline of your questions, insights, take-aways on Populi before the class begins. **DUE: As assigned (20/100 points)**

4. **Case Study:** You will be in a group for this work (the same group with which you lead the seminar). **WHY GROUP WORK?** Because you will be leaders who have to cooperate with others to lead, whether that is as a pastor, a nonprofit leader, or an activist. **WHAT IF SOMEONE IN THE GROUP DOESN'T DO THEIR WORK?** As group members, you will have an opportunity to report on the group's work, including who did what. If you are dishonest and don't report accurately, that is on you. Everyone will make the same grade on this assignment, regardless, if there is not an assessment that someone refused to pull their weight.
  - a. The group will write a 7-to-10- page long, double spaced case study for your co-learners to consider on a social justice issue that might involve two or more religious traditions in a community of your choice. This case study will be presented to your co-learners in class time. I will provide a basic outline for the case study, but you – as a group – will build out the details. Make use of the resource, “How to Write a Case Study” (the link is on the “links” on the Syllabus page).

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- b. Possible subject choices for the case studies:
- i. Police brutality/violence/reform
  - ii. Houseless veterans
  - iii. Immigration issue (response to deportations in the area)
  - iv. Environmental degradation (ex: city wants to put a dump near a low-income area inhabited by mostly people of color)
  - v. Fire bombings of black churches, Jewish synagogues, and mosques in an area
  - vi. It has come to light that children have been abused in a local school; local religious leaders want to “do something”
  - vii. City not compliant with ADA regulations and disability issues need to be addressed
  - viii. Human trafficking ring discovered
  - ix. Poor People’s Campaign asks local religious leaders to join in an action
  - x. **ANY OTHER TOPIC that you deem important from your group’s perspective**
- c. Each member of the group will write a one-page assessment/reflection on the group’s process, using members’ names. (NOTE: You will not receive the 25 points for the group work without uploading the one-age assessment/reflection. **(25/100 group presentation/paper; 5/100 self-assessment/reflection) DUE: March 28**)
5. **Post-assessment:** Write a 12–15-page assessment of your understanding of social justice and sacred texts, this time being sure to document and refer to resources you have engaged over the course of the semester. Use examples; class notes count, including engaging your case study. Consider this a research paper. You might decide to do an equivalency project (e.g., a 120-minute well-done video project, of interviews, that includes research; a 4-session teaching for a local group/congregation; artistic resources, etc.) (25/100 points). **DUE May 16**

**VI. Course Schedule and Format**

DATE	PREP/INCLASS	ONLINE
January 31	<p><b>IN Class:</b> Introductions/Expectations/Initial conversation on “what is social justice” and “what are sacred texts”</p> <p><b>Preparation for February 7:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <b>All students</b> read Introduction to <i>Justice in the City</i>.</li> <li>b. Group 1 (GB, CF) prepare to lead on Chapter 1</li> <li>c. Group 2 (DH, WH) prepare to lead discussion on Chapter 2</li> <li>d. Group 3 (PT, DW) prepare to lead discussion Chapter 3 &amp; 4</li> </ol>	<p>Watch Conversation with Nate DeGroot (will be posted February 2) on Syllabus page (right side of links) on Populi. Respond to prompts on Discussion for January 31 online portion of the class.</p>

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DATE	PREP/INCLASS	ONLINE
February 7	<p><b>DUE: Pre-assessment paper (by 5:59 pm)</b></p> <p><b>IN Class:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Discussion of Luke 10:25-37</li> <li>b. Discuss <i>Justice in the City</i>, Intro-Chapter 4</li> <li>c. Reflect on DeGroot/Bridgeman conversation</li> </ol> <p><b>PREP for Feb 14:</b> Read <i>Justice in the City</i>.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Group 4 (NI, IJ-W, EL) prepare to lead discussion on Chapter 5</li> <li>b. Group 5 (MJ, JM, JO) prepare to lead discussion on Chapter 6</li> <li>c. Group 6 (CO, EP, MRC) prepare to lead discussion on Chapter 7&amp;8</li> <li>d. <b>ALL Students:</b> read link, "Jewish Teachings on Social Justice"</li> <li>e. <b>ALL Students: Read Habakkuk 1:1 - 2:5</b></li> </ol>	<p>Watch both "Speak Torah to Power" videos on the "syllabus" tab of our course under "links" (approximately 46 minutes combined)</p> <p>Follow the prompts on the discussion board</p>
February 14	<p><b>IN CLASS:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Discuss Habakkuk 1:1-2:5</li> <li>b. Discuss <i>Justice in the City</i>, Chapters 5-8</li> <li>c. Discussion re: "Jewish Teachings on SJ"</li> <li>d. Discussion re: both "Speak Truth to Torah" and "Reading Noah's Ark" videos</li> </ol> <p><b>PREP for Feb 21:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Read "How to Write a Case Study" in the "links" on the Syllabus page on Populi</li> <li>b. Meet with your group re: case studies. You can use Microsoft Teams or google chat. Decide together which case study you will do and be prepared to let the class know what you will work on</li> </ol>	<p>Watch "Reading Noah's Ark..." by Rabbi Julia Watts Belser (on the syllabus tab under "links")</p> <p>Follow the prompts on the discussion board</p>

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DATE	PREP/INCLASS	ONLINE
February 21	<p><b>THERE IS NO IN-CLASS MEETING (I will be at Proctor Conference)</b></p> <p><b>PREP for Feb 28:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. All Students read: Introduction of <i>Freedom, Equality and Justice in Islam</i></li> <li>b. Group 7 (SR, SS) lead Chapter 1</li> <li>c. Group 8 (KM, KS, RW ) lead Chapter 2</li> <li><b>d. Everyone reads Chapter 3/Conclusion</b></li> <li>e. Read "How to Write a Case Study" in the "links" on the Syllabus page on Populi</li> </ol>	<p>Watch conversation between Dr. Takiyah Amin and Bridgeman (under files)</p> <p>Watch "Islam, a Coherent Justice System"</p> <p>Follow the prompt on the discussion for this video</p>
February 28	<p><b>IN CLASS:</b> (we will be here only for an hour because you have extra work online)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Discuss my conversation with Dr. Amin</li> <li>b. Discuss <i>Freedom, Equality and Justice in Islam</i></li> </ol> <p><b>PREP for March 14:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Everyone read "On Interpreting Qur'an"</li> <li>b. Everyone read "Jewish/Islamic Feminist Exegesis"</li> <li>c. Read "Yoruba.Quran.Hadith.Bible" under "files" on the syllabus page</li> <li>d. Read "How to Write a Case Study" in the "links" on the Syllabus page on Populi</li> </ol>	<p>Watch conversation between (Atty) Syeed and Bridgeman (under files)</p> <p>Watch "Restorative Justice and Radical Love" (under links)</p> <p>Follow the prompts on the discussion</p>
March 7	<b>Spring Break</b>	Rest

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DATE	PREP/INCLASS	ONLINE
March 14	<b>IN CLASS:</b> Q & A about the Cass Study assignment Collegial Support of the Case Study Assignment	Revisit the lecture from Attorney Syeed and my conversation with her on the discussion/lesson page
March 21	<b>IN CLASS:</b> No in-class meeting <b>PREP for March 28</b> <b>Post Case Studies no later than 5:59 pm on March 28</b> <b>Post assessment of group process no later than 5:59 pm on March 28</b> <b>Prepare a succinct 10-minute presentation, leaving 5 minutes for your colleagues to ask questions</b>	Watch Ethics and Sacred Texts discussion among MTSO faculty under "links" on the syllabus page.  Respond to the prompts on the discussion board
March 28	<b>DUE:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case studies (groups will be randomly called to present, so everyone needs to be ready on March 28)</li> <li>Assessment of group process (consult page 4 of this syllabus for instructions)</li> </ol> <b>IN CLASS:</b> Group presentations of case studies (Groups will be pulled from a basket/15 minutes each)  <b>PREP for April 11:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read O'Brien, "The Hermeneutical Predicament"</li> <li>do online work; be prepared to engage remaining presentations.</li> </ol>	Watch the conversation between me and AJ Levine under "files" on the syllabus page.  Read her essay, "Supersessionism," under "files."  Follow the prompts on the discussion board.
April 4	<b>Holy Week</b>	See you next week

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DATE	PREP/INCLASS	ONLINE
April 11	<p><b>IN CLASS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Group presentations of case studies (Groups will be pulled from a basket/15 minutes each)</li> <li>b. If we have time, discuss conversations with MTSO faculty and AJ Levine, and the Levine O'Brien essays.</li> </ul> <p><b>PREP for April 18</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Read "Religious and Social Principles" on the files on the syllabus page.</li> <li>b. Read "Responsibility, God, and Society" on the files on the syllabus page.</li> </ul>	<p>Watch my conversation with Bishop Leah Daughtry under "files" on the syllabus page. Watch the video, "Daughtry-Family Surrounded by Activism" under "links" on the syllabus page.</p> <p>Follow the prompts for discussion</p>
April 18	<p><b>IN CLASS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Engage our Class visitor, Bishop Johnathan E. Alvarado, <a href="http://johnathanalvarado.com/about.html">http://johnathanalvarado.com/about.html</a></li> <li>b. Discuss video with Bishop Daughtry in relation to conversation we had with Bishop Alvarado</li> <li>c. Discuss readings, as able.</li> </ul> <p><b>PREP for April 25</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <b>All students read Intro of <i>Informing the Future: Social Justice in the New Testament</i></b></li> <li>b. Group 1 (GB, CF) prepare to lead on Chapter 1</li> <li>c. Group 2 (DH, WH) prepare to lead discussion on Chapter 2</li> <li>d. Group 3 (PT, DW) prepare to lead discussion Chapter 3</li> <li>e. Group 4 (NI, IJ-W, EL) prepare to lead discussion on Prelude to Part II and Chapter 4</li> </ul>	<p>Watch my conversation with Dr. Monica Coleman</p> <p>Follow the prompts for the discussion</p>
April 25	<p><b>IN CLASS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Discuss Intro and Chapters 1-4 of Grassi (led by groups)</li> <li>b. Any insights on the Coleman conversation</li> </ul> <p><b>PREP for May 2:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <b>Group 5</b> (M, JO) prepare to lead discussion on Chapter 5</li> <li>b. <b>Group 6</b> (CO, EP, MRC) prepare to lead discussion on Chapter 6</li> <li>c. <b>Group 7</b> (SR, SS) prepare to lead on Chapter 7</li> </ul>	<p>Read UMC Social Principles document on "links" (<b>be sure to click on "read more" so that you are reading the entire document</b>)</p> <p>Follow the prompts on the discussion board</p>



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	d. <b>Group 8</b> (KM, KS, RW) prepare to lead discussion on Chapter 8	
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DATE	PREP/INCLASS	ONLINE
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May 2	<p><b>IN CLASS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Discussion of chapters 5- 8 of Grassi (led by groups)</li> <li>b. Any insight on the UMC Social Principles</li> </ul> <p><b>PREP for May 9</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Everyone reads Chapter 9 and Part III of Grassi</li> <li>b. Read the UUA Seven Principles on the links.</li> </ul>	<p>Read (in this order): "Clergy-16Jan1963"(under "link"); "MLK-Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (under "files"), and "clergybirminghamApril.12.1963" (under files)</p> <p>Follow the prompts on the discussion board</p>
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May 9	<p><b>IN CLASS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Discuss Chapter 9 and Part III of Grassi</li> <li>b. Discuss UUA Seven Principles</li> <li>c. Any conversation on the MLK letter and responses if needed.</li> </ul> <p><b>PREP for May 16</b> Come prepared to close out the semester well</p>	<p>Watch "For the Bible Tells Me So."</p> <p><b>You will need to find it at the library through Kanopy, Libby, or Hoopla (see p. 8 of this syllabus);</b> Follow discussion board.</p>
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May 16	<p><b>DUE: Post-assessment</b>, uploaded to Populi by 5:59 pm</p> <p><b>IN CLASS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Discussion on "For the Bible Tells Me So"</li> <li>b. Discussion about denominational differences in Christianity (led by Dr. V)</li> <li>c. Wrap up learnings, questions, going forward.</li> </ul>	<p>Post any resources you gathered over the course of the semester for your colleagues. These could be videos, books, essays, etc. Post any remaining questions or insights you have after our last face-to-face. Thank you for engaging this course.</p>
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**VII. MTSO Standard Syllabus Statements**

Carefully review these policies and refer to the MTSO Academic Catalog / Student Handbook for additional details.

All students in every degree program are expected to become familiar with MTSO policies as listed in the most current MTSO Academic Catalog and Student Handbook, connected here. The policies listed below are in the handbook and are highlighted here because of their importance to our academic lives together.

[https://www.mtso.edu/site/assets/files/2103/academic\\_catalog\\_-\\_student\\_handbook\\_20-21.pdf](https://www.mtso.edu/site/assets/files/2103/academic_catalog_-_student_handbook_20-21.pdf)

**Class Attendance**

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Regular attendance is expected in all classes. In campus extend (online and hyflex), **you are REQUIRED to show your face the entire class time, otherwise you will be considered “absent”**. You are expected to attend class as you would in a face-to-face classroom (not driving, cooking, folding clothes etc.). During asynchronous class time, faculty will monitor time used in the posting and responding to colleagues to track your participation. During unavoidable absences, students are responsible for missed work. An excessive number of absences may result in grade reduction or course failure, despite successful completion of all assigned work. In most cases, a student will fail a course if they are absent for 25% of the class sessions (including online meetings).

### **Electronic Devices**

As an institution dedicated to the advancement of learning, MTSO is firmly committed to a philosophy of mutual respect. When your use of electronic devices violates that respect instructors have the right to impose appropriate grading penalties. **Because of MTSO Campus Extend, a hyflex model, electronic devices are integral to learning.** However, the use of such devices should be restricted to course-related purposes. General browsing of the Internet or engaging in email or social networks during class time is inappropriate. Unless there is an emergency requiring immediate attention, phone calls should be returned during classroom breaks (even if you’re at your home) in an area that is not disruptive to others.

### **Title IX/504 ADA Statement**

MTSO is committed to providing a workplace and educational environment that are free from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. To ensure compliance with federal and state civil rights laws and regulations, and to affirm its commitment to promoting the goals of fairness and equity, MTSO has developed internal policies and procedures that provide a prompt, fair, and impartial process for those involved in an allegation of discrimination or harassment on the basis of protected class status, and for allegations of retaliation. More information about the University’s policy and grievance processes can be found at <https://www.mtso.edu/about-mtso/notice-nondiscrimination/>. Reports of misconduct can be made to the Title IX/504/ADA Coordinator, Kathy Dickson, [kdickson@mtso.edu](mailto:kdickson@mtso.edu).

### **ADA/Disability Services**

MTSO supports all students by encouraging self-advocacy and empowering students to help themselves, while providing a safe environment in which to do so. We commit to an inclusive learning environment and will support reasonable, documented requests for accommodations and learning adaptations. To request a reasonable accommodation, contact the director of student services, Dr. Jeremy Garber at [jgarber@mtso.edu](mailto:jgarber@mtso.edu).

### **Documenting written work at MTSO**

All written work submitted for courses at MTSO must conform to the Note-Bibliography style in the Chicago Manual of Style (17<sup>th</sup> edition). For a helpful discussion of how to avoid academic misconduct, see the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) website at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/02>. Students who commit academic misconduct will be subject to penalties up to and including expulsion from the Institution.

### **VIII. Supporting Materials**

If you do not already have one, you are required to obtain a personal library card in your local library system and to create your own accounts for free digital media services like [Libby](#), [Kanopy](#), and [Hoopla](#) in order to access various free resources that may be assigned for your coursework.

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### **Things You Can Do to Foster Your Success**

1. Remember that this is your theological education and take ownership of it. The Seminary and the instructor are here to guide and assist your learning, but ultimately your education is what you make of it with the help of the Holy Spirit. Take account of your education in your prayer life. Your instructors do.
2. Prepare for class. Read the assigned readings in preparation for each class session. Make notes and bring them and the book to class, so that you have at your ready what you were thinking at the time you were reading. When you cannot read everything, take a few minutes to scan through the readings. Identify the major topics and lines of argument. The assigned readings will prepare you to benefit from class discussions. An active learner learns more than a passive learner does.
3. Actively participate. Share your insights and take notes. Be sure to date your notes in case you want to quote from them. If you write down what a colleague says or what I say, note who said it so that you may credit appropriately. Take a few minutes after each class session to reflect. What were the major discussion points of this class session? Usually there are only a few – see if you can identify them. Perhaps discuss these points with a friend. Always ask: what is the big picture here?
4. Plan your writing before you write. Statistically speaking, students who finish assignments with time to spare do better than students who rush at the last minute. When you're preparing a short essay or reflection, think about your topic during every class session. Organize your thoughts before you begin to write. Sketch out your ideas and line of thought before you write a single word. Make sure you are ready to provide credit to the sources from which you glean ideas and information. Once you've completed a first draft, review it – and consider whether your work meets the criteria of assessment spelled out in the Syllabus.
5. Your success on written assignments is all about clarity, logic, and detail. This is a masters-level course, and it provides preparation for religious leadership: superficial engagement will not do. Make sure you engage the primary texts directly and specifically. Make sure you engage the assigned readings where they can be helpful. Make sure you provide a clear thesis (or claim) and a clear line of thought. Think about it from your instructor's point of view: if you could have written this same assignment without having taken this class, something is wrong.
6. On rare occasions it is necessary to ask for an extension of a particular assignment. Be aware that students tend to do much, much better when they stay on schedule.

### **On Inclusive/Expansive Language for Humans and for God**

As a part of our time together, I expect students to use respectful, inclusive/expansive language regarding the deity and humans. "The language we use represents who we are and for what we stand as theologians and ministers" (now retired Dr. Gale A. Yee, syllabus, circa 2004). The following statement, "The Language of Community," is borrowed with permission from (now retired) Memphis Theological

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Seminary OT professor, Dr. Steven Parrish (circa 2006). He usually put some version of this statement in all his syllabi. I could not say it better.

From its opening chapter, the bible affirms the worth of community. Both male and female in the human community bear the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). The bible values children as a part of human community (Exodus 12:26; Deut. 6:20; Luke 9:46-48). The oppressed are given special consideration by the Bible, e.g., strangers, orphans, and widow are important people in God's community (Deut. 24:17, 19, 21). Further, Jonah discovered that even those he regarded as enemies are cherished by God and are important individuals in the world community. The faith of the Bible is an inclusive faith.

Further, the biblical language about God is also far more expansive and inclusive than we have often recognized. Exodus 3 maintains that God is essentially unnamable and free to remain who God wants to be. First Samuel 4-6 and 2 Samuel 6 testify to God's unwillingness to be "boxed in" by human formulations of what God "ought" to be. The metaphorical language of the bible is diverse indeed, describing God by images that range from the battlefield (e.g., Psalm 18, 24) to images that depict God as the one who gives birth to the mountains Psalm 90:2 and the ice (Job 38:29). One of the aims of this course is to grow in the ways we think and speak of one another and of God.

### **CONSULT YOUR SYLLABUS OR POPULI REGULARLY**

#### **General Guidelines for Writing Papers & Submitting Written Work**

These two insights come from Dr. Greg Cary, NT professor at Lancaster Seminary, and are used with his permission.

1. **Plan your writing before you write.** Statistically speaking, students who finish assignments with time to spare do better than students who rush at the last minute. When you're preparing a short essay or reflection, think about your topic during every class session. **Organize your thoughts before you begin to write.** Sketch out your ideas and line of thought before you write a single word. **Make sure you are ready to provide credit to the sources from which you glean ideas and information.** Once you've completed a first draft, review it – and consider whether your work meets the criteria of assessment spelled out in the Syllabus.
2. **Your success on written assignments is all about clarity, logic, and detail.** This is a masters-level course, and it provides preparation for religious leadership: superficial engagement will not do. Make sure you engage the primary texts directly and specifically. Make sure you engage the assigned readings where they can be helpful. Make sure you provide a clear thesis (or claim) and a clear line of thought. Think about it from your instructor's point of view: if you could have written this same assignment without having taken this class, something is wrong.

*The following information is adapted from a handout written by MTSO's Ethics Professor, Dr. Yvonne Zimmerman. It is so edited and used by permission.*

**NOTE: Please take advantage of the resource person provided through student services, especially if you have been out of school for a while, or if you have rarely written formal papers. You are a masters' level student and must be able to articulate your ideas in writing.**

**HB/NT 550: Social Justice and Sacred Texts**  
*Spring 2023, Tuesdays 6-7:30 pm*

1. In effort to practice environmental stewardship, please submit all written assignments electronically. Please post them on the appropriate assignment on **Populi in the gradebook**. Do not send them directly to my MTSO email address. **I will not grade papers sent to my email address.** Your paper should be submitted in a **word document** only. **I will not grade papers submitted in any other program** (including .pdf or pages).
2. All papers should be appropriately identified internally and saved appropriately: (Your name, the class, the assignment, the date), for example:

Valerie Bridgeman  
February 7, 2023  
HB/NT 550 Spring 2023  
Case Study

And be saved in the appropriate way (when you save your paper, choose "save as"):  
Your Last Name-Assignment-Date (Example: Bridgeman-CaseStudy-3.21.23; or Bridgeman-Leadership-4.11.23)

**I will not accept papers otherwise presented and the assignment will be marked 0. No exceptions.**

3. **All papers should be typed and double-spaced with 1-inch margins.** Please use Times, Times New Roman, Book Antiqua, Garamond, or Ariel with font-size 12-point and no larger or smaller. These fonts and this size are the only ones I will accept.
4. Basic rules of grammar, punctuation, and sentence and paragraph structure must be followed meticulously. Contractions (e.g., "can't," "don't," "shouldn't," etc.) are never appropriate in formal papers. Poor grammatically constructed papers will receive a lower grade.
5. **Every paragraph must have at least 3 sentences.** One-sentence paragraphs are otherwise known as a thought. A thought is not the same thing as a paragraph. Two-sentence paragraphs are likewise incomplete paragraphs. Conversely, your paragraphs should not run on for more than a page in length. Aim for about one-fourth or a half a page in length. If you have a paragraph that exceeds  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a page, consider splitting it into two paragraphs. If you have a paragraph that is 1 full page or longer in length, there is no question that you ought to split it into at least 2 shorter paragraphs.
6. In graduate level writing, paragraphs should not end with direct quotes, but with your own words. A couple of helpful devices for avoiding this include adding the following after a direct quote:
  - a. In other words, \_\_\_\_\_. [Restate in your own words the main point of the quotation you've just used]
  - b. Here, [author] argues that [state in your own words the point you want your readers to understand in the quotation you've just used]
  - c. [Author's name's concern is to show \_\_\_\_ [in your own words, state what you want your readers to understand from the quotation you've just used].
7. The best way to move forward in writing is to make an outline of your thinking, based on your research. This outline should include:

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- a. A strong introductory paragraph that indicates WHAT the paper will cover (e.g., I believe the prophet Isaiah ate turkey. In this paper, **I will argue** that \_\_\_\_\_ indicates that turkey was a staple of ancient cultures' diets. Some texts, both in the bible and in extant publications show that prophets ate turkey in order to get in touch with the gods. **I will further demonstrate** that several passages in Isaiah line up with this tradition....). **I will end/conclude with some implications** of turkey-eating prophets. **"I feel" are not words for persuasive papers.** "I think", "I imagine," "I maintain," "I argue," "I believe," etc. are ways to put forth an argument.
  - i. Such a strong intro will guide your writing so that you will know what should follow what. This outline also will help you order your quotes, which will be used to STRENGTHEN and MAKE your case (see #5 above).
  - ii. Such an intro will also cue the reader for what to look. It will signal that the writing is not "stream of consciousness, but rather that the writer has considered the writing before beginning.
- b. Every paragraph between opening and closing should be making the case set out in your introductory paragraph(s). This instruction is basic essay writing. You, the writer, should EDIT all work to see whether you have extraneous thoughts unrelated to your primary argument. NO PAPER should be turned in without having been edited closely.
- c. No paper is complete without a conclusion that not only sums up your argument from the preceding paragraphs (preferably in different words, BUT ALSO offers YOUR ideas about the implication of your research, what you've learned, and what you think might be studied, implemented, or considered about your topic going forward.