

Biblical and Theological Foundations of Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity (BTFJRD)

Westmont's statement on Biblical and Theological Foundations of Diversity articulates a commitment to the preeminence of Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's justice and reconciliation. His Earthly ministry proclaimed "good news to the poor" and "liberty to the captives"¹ in ways that affirmed the dignity and value of all persons as he ministered among men, women, Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, young, old, healthy, sick, able-bodied, disabled, wealthy, poor, powerful, and marginalized persons. Jesus called his followers to love their neighbors as themselves,² one another as Christ himself loved us,³ and our enemies profusely.⁴ His atoning death at the cross conclusively demonstrated the Father's initiative in seeking justice and reconciliation for every category of person.⁵ At the cross every human attempt at self-aggrandizement or justification (including in comparison with others) was shown to be inadequate,⁶ all persons were recognized as standing equally under sin,⁷ and God's mercy was offered to all.⁸ There Jesus broke the power of sin,⁹ overturned the curse of Babel in destroying the barriers of separation between diverse peoples,¹⁰ and provided for the incorporation of formerly hostile peoples into a single community of faith.¹¹ Called to experience increasing conformity to God's image through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, the Christian community is entrusted with proclaiming God's justice and reconciliation to the world, both verbally and by enacting it through the pursuit of relationships, practices, and structures that reflect the reconciliation God provides in Christ.¹² Since the embodiment of justice and reconciliation is a reflection of Christians' new identity in Christ, the investigation of issues of justice, reconciliation, and diversity is crucial for the mission of a Christian scholarly community.

¹ Luke 4:16-21 (cf. Isaiah 61:1-2).

² Matthew 19:19 Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-34, Luke 6:31, Luke 10:25-37, (cf. Leviticus 19:18, Romans 13:8-10, Galatians 5:13-15, James 2:8, 1 John 4:21)

³ Matthew 25:31-46, John 13:34-35 (cf. Acts 7:59-60, Romans 12:9-11, 1 John 3:8-18, 1 Peter 1:22, 1 John 4:7-21; 2 John 1:4-6).

⁴ Matthew 5:43-48, Luke 6:27-38 (cf. Exodus 23:4-5, Proverbs 24:17-20, Proverbs 25:21-22, Romans 12:14-20, 1 Thessalonians 5:15, 1 Peter 3:9-18)

⁵ Romans 5:7-8, Titus 3:5, 1 John 4:19.

⁶ Romans 3:26-28, Romans 10:1-13, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 John 1:8 (cf. Luke 18:9-14).

⁷ Romans 3:9-20, 23, Galatians 3:22.

⁸ Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15, John 3:16-17, John 6:47, Acts 2:21, Romans 1:16, Romans 10:13, 1 Timothy 2:4, Titus 2:11, 1 John 2:2

⁹ Romans 6:6:1-8:15 (cf. John 8:36, Galatians 5:16-26).

¹⁰ Acts 2:1-21, Ephesians 2:11-18.

¹¹ Ephesians 2:19-22, Galatians 3:26-29 (cf. Revelation 5:9-10, Revelation 7:9-12).

¹² Matthew 18:21-35, Luke 17:3-4, John 13:34-35, Romans 14:19-21, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Ephesians 2:14-22, Philippians 2:1-11, Hebrews 12:2, 14, 1 John 4:7-21 (cf. Deuteronomy 10: 17-19, Deuteronomy 16: 18-20, Psalm 10:17-18, Psalm 103:6-7, Psalm 146:7-9, Isaiah 59:14-20, Jeremiah 9:23-24, Jeremiah 20:13, Jeremiah 21:12, Jeremiah 22:15-16, Micah 6:8, Acts 10:28-43).

Courses satisfying the BTFJRD requirement explore issues of justice and reconciliation among diverse peoples in the context of the gospel. They explore God's call for people to satisfy the demands of love for others in a broken world in which men and women, families, tribes, races, and nations have been set against one another, with differences among people often serving as a pretext for the sinful mistreatment of individuals and groups. These courses affirm that God did not abandon the world but instead took the initiative to provide for its redemption and repair. His reconciliation of all things through the self-giving love of Christ should guide how Christians understand the world, act, relate to others, and engage with the wider culture.

Interpretive Statement

These courses equip students to express God's loving vision for shalom through the pursuit of justice and reconciliation in the context of human diversity. Through these courses students will develop their ability to engage issues of justice with knowledge, sensitivity, and Christian love. Since God's people are called to repent of sin and grow in grace, acknowledge truth, seek justice, and show mercy, these courses should model honest Christlike dialogue over issues of personal, historical, and institutional diversity. In so doing, the aim of these courses ultimately should be to encourage efforts to foster systems that are just and relationships that are joyful and loving.

Courses in this area should reflect God's special concern with justice for all image-bearers. Christian teaching affirms that all humans are created in the likeness and image of God.¹³ The imago dei is a reality that is not dependent on one's race/ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, social or economic status, capability, religion, or any other conceivable thing. So a fundamental aim of the Christian life is to promote justice and pursue relationships that honor the imago dei in all people.¹⁴

The effective pursuit of justice and reconciled relationships involves the consideration and in some cases renegotiation of condition. For example, the Bible condemns the oppression of the poor by the powerful,¹⁵ identifies the pursuit of wealth as an impediment to Christian discipleship,¹⁶ and presents some expressions of human

¹³ Genesis 1:26-27 (cf. Genesis 5:1-2, Genesis 9:6).

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (cf. Romans 12:18).

¹⁵ Exodus 23:6-7, Leviticus 19:13, Deuteronomy 24:14-15, Psalm 62:10-11, Proverbs 14:31, Isaiah 10:1-4, Isaiah 30:12-13, Isaiah 33:14-16, Jeremiah 22:13-17, Ezekiel 22:6-12, Amos 2:6-8, Amos 5:11-15, Zephaniah 3:1-5, Zechariah 7:10, Malachi 3:5, Luke 3:14, Luke 11:45-46, Colossians 4:1, Ephesians 6:9, James 5:1-6.

¹⁶ Matthew 6:19-24, Mark 10:23-27, Luke 16:13, Luke 18:24-27, 1 Timothy 6:9-10 (cf. Proverbs 11:28; Luke 12:15-21, 1 Timothy 6:17-19, 2 Timothy 3:1-2)

sexuality as inconsistent with the flourishing and reconciliation God intends for all people.¹⁷ For this reason, courses in this area should distinguish between human diversity as something to be welcomed, included, and celebrated as an opportunity to glorify God and the ways in which people navigate particular statuses and conditions as a response to that opportunity.

Affirming God's concern for justice and reconciliation for all categories of people is not the same as affirming how diverse people have been categorized. Human communities can construct and shape social categories of diversity in ways that benefit one group at the expense of others. For this reason, BTFJRD GE courses should provide students with the tools needed to evaluate categories of diversity biblically. In this they should recognize that biblical discourses do not encompass all possible social categories and relations, even though all can still be engaged by the Gospel and its demands of neighbor love and enemy love, albeit in ways that require careful discernment and dialogue.

The mutual engagement involved in pursuing justice and reconciliation provides opportunities for Christian embodiment of the gospel. This will involve engaging others graciously, honestly, and thoughtfully. These courses should foster an awareness that although all people are called to seek justice and reconciliation, the work of reconciliation occurs in the context of particular historical trajectories and amidst differences in power and culpability. Consequently, different parties and groups can have different responsibilities in the work of enacting justice, seeking forgiveness, and repairing wrongs.

The redemptive and restorative power of Christ's atoning work, through which the power of sin has been broken, not only gives us hope in the world to come; it makes the crucial difference in our personal relationships, churches, workplaces, neighborhoods, and the world at large. BTFJRD courses should therefore equip students to evaluate perspectives of justice, reconciliation, and diversity biblically and theologically. This should include providing students with language and conceptual frameworks that illuminate the role of political, social, economic, religious, and cultural norms, policies, practices, and other systems that promote justice or perpetuate injustice.¹⁸ In this

¹⁷ Genesis 49:4, Exodus 20:14, Leviticus 18, Leviticus 20:10-21, Deuteronomy 27:20, 2 Samuel 13:7-14, Ezekiel 22:10-11, Matthew 5:27-28, Matthew 15:19, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 5:1-11, 1 Corinthians 6:9-19, 1 Corinthians 7:2, Ephesians 5:3, Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Timothy 1:10, Hebrews 13:4.

¹⁸ Psalm 72, Psalm 94:20-21, Ecclesiastes 4:1, Isaiah 1: 10-28, Isaiah 5:20-23, Isaiah 58, Jeremiah 22:1-17, Jeremiah 23:5, Ezekiel 22:25-29, Ezekiel 45:9-10, Amos 5:7-15, 21-24, Matthew 9:10-13, Matthew 12:9-14, Matthew 15:1-11, Matthew 21:12-13, Matthew 23:1-12, Mark 3:1-6, Mark 7:5-13, Mark 11:15-17, Luke 3:12-14, Luke 11:37-54, Luke 13:14-16, Luke 19:45-46, Luke 20:46-47, John 2:14-16, Revelation 18.

context, while BTFJRD GE courses should employ academic tools consistent with disciplinary rigor, they must be careful to ground exploration of issues of justice, reconciliation, and diversity in the gospel. This will include presenting justice, reconciliation, diversity, and Christian unity as concepts rooted in the Trinitarian character of God that should inform how Christ-followers are to live and to love others. Consequently, BTFJRD GE courses should equip students to recognize personal and systemic aspects of sin, rebellion, and brokenness as such. These courses should also affirm that reconciliation encompasses the acknowledgement and forgiveness of sin,¹⁹ support efforts to repair wrongs,²⁰ and encourage the pursuit of relationships of flourishing and shalom.

All BTFJRD GE courses should emphasize that Christian communities are called to embody (demonstrate and promote) justice and reconciliation in ways that reflect how Christ embodied justice and reconciliation for all people.²¹ Thus BTFJRD GE courses should help students to see their own responsibility to promote justice and reconciliation in their own communities, including the learning community of the course itself. Thus while these courses should seek to foster a supportive and respectful learning environment consistent with good pedagogy, it is even more crucial that they be characterized by a commitment to loving honesty and allow that, in the pursuit of others' flourishing, Christlike responses to injustice and suffering can include appropriately self-aware²² grief,²³ anger,²⁴ teaching,²⁵ comfort,²⁶ and rebuke.²⁷

God's provision of reconciliation in Christ envisions a global community of believers, a unity of diversity united under the servant-Lordship of Christ manifested in particular local churches.²⁸ Because of this, BTFJRD GE courses should present God's concern for justice and reconciliation as encompassing spheres ranging from the personal and local

¹⁹ Matthew 6:14-15, Matthew 18:15-20, Luke 17:3, Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13-14.

²⁰ Matthew 3:8, Luke 19:1-10, 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 (cf. Exodus 22:1-14, Leviticus 6:1-7)

²¹ Matthew 9:9-13, Matthew 11:28-30, Matthew 12:16-21, Luke 4:14-21, Luke 19:1-10, John 4:4-42, John 13:1-35, Romans 1:16-17, Romans 3:21-26.

²² Matthew 5:22, Matthew 7:1-6, 1 Corinthians 16:14, Galatians 6:1, 1 Timothy 5:1, James 5:20 (cf. Leviticus 19:17).

²³ Mark 3:5, John 11:33-38, John 16:22 (cf. Matthew 5:4, John 16:22, Revelation 21:4).

²⁴ Mark 3:5 (cf. Psalm 2:12, Psalm 4:4, Mark 11:15-17, John 2:15-17, Ephesians 4:26-27).

²⁵ Jesus is recorded as teaching in at least 45 verses in the gospels and acts. On Christlike teaching see Matthew 28:19-20, 1 Corinthians 14:26, 1 Timothy 4:4-14, 2 Timothy 2:2, 2 Timothy 4:2-3, 1 Timothy 4:13, Titus 1:9, Titus 2:3.

²⁶ Mark 5:36, Mark 6:47-51, Luke 8:50, John 6:20-21, John 14:1, 27, John 16:33, Revelation 1:17, Revelation 21:4 (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:3-6, 2 Corinthians 13:11, 1 Thessalonians 4:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:11-24, Hebrews 3:13, Hebrews 10:24-25).

²⁷ Matthew 16:23, Matthew 23:13-39, Mark 10:13-16, Mark 11:12-14, Mark 16:14 (cf. Proverbs 1:23-26, Proverbs 3:12, Proverbs 6:23, Matthew 18:15, Luke 17:3-4, Acts 8:20-23, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, 1 Timothy 5:20, 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Timothy 4:2-3, Titus 1:9, Titus 2:15, Hebrews 12:5, Revelation 3:14-19).

²⁸ John 17:20-21, Acts 2, Acts 10:34-48, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 2:11-22.

to those themes of justice, reconciliation, and diversity which resonate around the globe and, ultimately, the entire created universe. However, in recognizing both the locality, globality, and cosmic universality of God's concern for justice and reconciliation, BTFJRD GE courses must not neglect issues which are of particular timely concern in Westmont's local context. At present this means that BTFJRD GE courses should address race and racism in at least one context involving the United States. This stipulation should not be taken to mean that BTFJRD GE courses must address race and racism in the United States as a primary focus. They may primarily consider other aspects of diversity as long as they also consider how principles of Christ-centered unity, justice, and reconciliation apply to race, racism, and life in the United States. Conversely, BTFJRD GE courses which primarily consider race and racism in the United States should also emphasize the breadth of God's concern for justice and reconciliation.

Given the range of persons and issues encompassed in God's plan for justice and reconciliation in human communities, faculty teaching courses in this area may be from any department. However, as they will be expected to possess an extensive range of competencies special care will be taken to ensure that faculty are equipped with a range of biblically and theologically informed understandings of justice, reconciliation, and diversity that inform an understanding of the social norms, systemic practices, and historic patterns of belonging and marginalization which shape conversations about race and racism in the United States. To support this aim, special care will also be taken to ensure they possess an understanding of those norms, practices, and patterns themselves.

Certification Criteria

Courses satisfying the Biblical and Theological Foundations of Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity GE should

1. develop biblically and theologically informed understandings of justice, reconciliation, and diversity. These should be robust enough to enable students to understand justice and reconciliation as gospel-driven issues, recognize sin, rebellion, and brokenness as such, and acknowledge their responsibility in the work of justice and reconciliation among diverse people within their own communities;
2. examine social norms and systemic practices; their relationship to present and historic patterns of enfranchisement and disenfranchisement, belonging and marginalization; and how historical particularities and differences in power

shape the responsibilities different parties have in the work of justice and reconciliation.

3. facilitate critical application of biblical frameworks for engaging issues of justice, reconciliation, and diversity to contemporary life in at least one local or global context involving race and racism in the United States;
4. emphasize and model justice and reconciliation through Christlike dialogue reflective of God's desire for justice and reconciled relationships among all image-bearers, especially when confronting challenging or sensitive issues.

Courses meeting this requirement should include the following student learning outcomes:

BTFJRD SLOs:

1. Students will be able to articulate connections between the character of God's loving reign expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and Christians' responsibility to pursue justice in relationships, practices, and structures.
2. Students will be able to analyze diverse experiences of justice and injustice in the United States using biblically and theologically-informed conceptions of justice and reconciliation.