

**ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**  
**BIB 640/HIS642 Special Studies:**  
**The Formation of the Biblical Canon**

James D. Hernando

Fall, 2002

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will explore the phenomenon of the Christian biblical canon. It will focus not only on the Church's developing consensus as to the composition of the canon, but the historical, sociological and theological factors at work in the canonization process, leading to that consensus.

**OBJECTIVES**

At the successful completion of this course the student should be able to:

***Knowledge***

1. Outline the major historical developments in the formation of the Old and New Testament canons.
2. Discuss the relationship between a book's canonical status and its authority within a religious community, outlining the major steps through which a book might pass from its introduction into the community to its inclusion in a canonical list.
3. Discuss comparatively the "canonization process" for both testaments pointing out parallel developments and distinctives in relation to each.
4. Write a historical-theological apologetic for a "closed" biblical canon, incorporating a discussion of the criteria for canonization employed in the evaluation of both OT and NT writings.
5. Identify and discuss some of the divergent views regarding the development of the biblical canon.

***Skills***

1. Analyze the historical and theological presuppositions that are attendant in the various views regarding the biblical canon.
2. Perceive how various historical circumstances regarding their origin or the theological content of various biblical writings may have served to commend or malign them for inclusion in the biblical canon.

### *Attitudes*

1. Appreciate the complex nature of the process of "canonization" in its historical-sociological and theological aspects.
2. See the development of the Christian biblical canon within the context of ecclesiology and along with those human factors involved in its formation, appreciate it as a providentially orchestrated phenomenon.

### **TEXTBOOKS**

#### ***Required:***

Bruce, F.F. The Canon of Scripture. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1988.

Childs, Brevard S. The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984

Sanders, James A. From Sacred Story to Sacred Text. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

#### ***Recommended:***

Metzger, Bruce M. The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development and Significance. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1987

### **BASIC OUTLINE**

#### Prolegomena: Introductory Issues

1. Definition of Terms
2. Defining the Problem of the Biblical Canon
3. Survey of Interpretive Options

#### I. UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLICAL CANON: HISTORICAL SURVEY

- A. Old Testament
- B. New Testament

#### II. UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLICAL CANON: THE CANONIZATION PROCESS

- A. Canon and Community
- B. Canon Consciousness
- D. Canon Authority
- D. Canon Formation

### III. UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLICAL CANON: AS THEOLOGICAL WITNESS

- A. The Question of Content
- B. The Question of Criteria (Canonization)
- C. The Question of Closure

#### METHODOLOGY

In this source we will seek to meet our objectives through:

1. Classroom lecture.
2. Guided classroom discussion of issues related to assigned reading, lectures, and class assignments.
3. Individual reading, research, and writing.
4. Selected audio-visual material

#### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance at all class sessions is expected. Whenever possible absences should be announced beforehand to the professor. Excessive absenteeism is defined by the AGTS catalog and will be dealt with accordingly.
2. Completion of all reading assignments. (Credit will be given for the completion of all readings, which are an important component and prerequisite for meaningful class participation.
3. 1-2 page reading summaries of select readings.
4. Two 7-10 page papers or Oral Presentation option (See Project Descriptions)
5. Final Exam

Note: Work turned in late without the prior permission of the professor will receive a grade reduction of  $\frac{1}{2}$  letter grade for every day late.

#### GRADING PROCEDURE

##### 1. Grade Weights

Reading Assignments	100 pts	10%
Class Participation	50 pts	5%
Reading Summaries	150 pts	15%
Papers (2) - 200 pts ea.	400 pts	40%
Final Exam	<u>300 pts</u>	<u>30%</u>

2. The total number of possible points to be earned in the semester is 1000. Point totals at the end of the semester are tabulated and a grading curve plotted relative to the collective grade profile of the class.

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- Ferguson, E. "Canon Muratori: Date and Provenance." Studia Patristica 18,2(1982): 677-683.
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## **SPECIFIC DATA**

Prepared by James D. Hernando, Ph.D., July 5, 2002

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**Special Studies: Formation of the Biblical Canon**

**PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS**

Reading Summaries

1. The CONTENT GOAL is two-fold
  - a. Articulate the main thesis of the author, striving to state clearly his purpose for writing.
  - b. Describe and summarize the main points or major features of his work.
  
2. The ANALYSIS GOAL: Give your estimation of the importance or relevancy of this writing to the issue of the formation of the biblical canon. **NOTE: This aspect of your summary may require some outside reading if the issue is not clear or comprehensible to you from what is written. If the "analysis goal" is not met the student can expect no higher than an "acceptable" grade on his/her summary. See below.**
  
3. Grading for the Reading Summaries will be as follows:
  - a. Unacceptable    5 pts
  - b. Acceptable        7-8 pts
  - c. Superior          9-10 pts

Papers:

1. The student will write (2) 7-10 page papers on one contested canonical book, and one apocryphal/pseudepigraphal writing, either in the OT or NT.
  
2. The student must write a paper which discusses those writings in relation to the biblical canon. He or she must:
  - a. Briefly give a historical sketch of the writings in regards to their origin, occasion, authorship and acceptance or rejection in regard to the biblical canon.
  - b. Discuss the factors under consideration in the determination of their canonicity.
  - c. Provide your assessment of what was the deciding or determining factor(s) that cause the community of faith to either accept or reject it for inclusion into the biblical canon.
  
3. Papers should be formatted and documented according to the latest edition of Kate Turabian's A manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations.

Paper Option:

1. In place of one of the papers, (2) students may opt to write a 15-20 page "Reader's Theater Dialogue" between two fictional of historical characters in an era when either the writings of the OT or NT were being debated over as to their acceptance as "Scripture."
2. The dialogue will consist of a running debate which will:
  - a. Show historical accuracy of details mentioned in the debate.
  - b. Discuss issues that relate to the historical circumstances of a particular writing, its origin, occasion, authorship etc.
  - c. Reveal the points of debate that made the acceptance of that writing as Scripture a contested one. In doing so the "criteria" used to determine canonicity should be discussed.
  - d. Bring the debate to a conclusion where some issue or factor is shown to move the debating parties to a decision.
3. The dialogue should include APA footnoting and a full bibliography of all sources consulted in your research.
4. The dialogue will be presented orally in class during the last two weeks of classes.