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The History and Theology of the New Testament Canon

- A. **Course Description:** The formation of the New Testament canon is an area of historical research with profound theological ramifications. This course is designed especially for evangelical theological students and pastors and will present a revised history of the canon and the significance of the history of the canon for an evangelical theology of Scripture. The seminar will cover the emergence of the canon of the Pauline Epistles, the development of the fourfold gospel canon, the authorship of the Muratorian Fragment, the rise of the New Testament commentary, and the conciliar decisions on the New Testament canon. The lecturer will attempt to demonstrate that a revised history of the canon can provide the key for an evangelical retrieval of patristic theology.
- B. **Course Learning Objectives:**
- I. The student will be able to articulate the major milestones in the history of the formation of the Old and New Testament canons.
 - II. The student will acquire a working knowledge of the various methodologies used in researching the history of the New Testament canon.
 - III. The student will be able to analyze current issues concerning the inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility, and authority of the Scriptures in light of the history of the canon.
 - IV. The student will appreciate the diversity of the theological appraisals of the various New Testament books among the church fathers of the first five centuries.
- C. **Course Requirements:**
- I. **Required reading:**
 - a. Metzger, Bruce M. *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. (Only part II is required reading, "The Formation of the Canon," pp. 39–239).
 - b. Armstrong, Jonathan J. "Victorinus of Pettau as the Author of the Canon Muratori." *Vigiliae Christianae* 62 (2008): 1–34.
 - II. **Book review:**
 - a. Students are asked to write a 4–5 page book review of Geoffrey Mark Hahneman's book, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). The book review should be about evenly divided between description and evaluation.

III. **Research Paper:**

- a. Students shall submit an 8–10 page research paper by Friday, June 11, 2010. The research paper is to be written at the university level, and therefore it is expected that the paper will be free of grammatical and typographical errors. Students should cite according to the school's accepted format for footnotes. Students should cite no fewer than five traditional sources; internet sources may be consulted and cited, but at least five traditional sources should also be cited in the paper. Include a bibliography of works cited.
- b. The student should state his or her thesis clearly and present structured arguments that directly support the thesis. Students may develop their own research questions or they may choose from the following:
 1. When and how was the subcanon of the Pauline Epistles formed? Reflect on the theological implications of the historical conclusions.
 2. Was the fourfold Gospel canon a principle that Irenaeus established, or did he simply reiterate a standard teaching? In either case, what was Irenaeus' theological point?
 3. When and how was Revelation accepted into the canon (or, the Epistle to the Hebrews)?

D. **Attendance Policy:** The official school attendance policy will apply to this course. All students are to attend lectures and should come prepared to learn and participate in class discussion.

E. **Course Outline:**

Part One: The History of the Formation of the New Testament Canon

I. **The Quest for the Canon**

- a. Martin Luther and the Protestant Problem of Scripture
- b. Eusebius, Augustine, and Jerome on the Scriptures: the Canon as an Unresolved Patristic Problem
- c. Johann Solomo Semler to Albert C. Sundberg: a History of Modern New Testament Canon Research

II. **Three Research Methodologies**

- a. The Etymological Approach: the History of the Word "Canon" [κανὼν]
- b. The Documentary Approach: the History of New Testament Canon Lists
- c. The Citation Approach: the History of Quoting the New Testament

- III. **Canonical Authority and the Advent of Orthodoxy**
 - a. Developing a Working Definition of the Rule of Faith
 - b. The Role of the Rule of Faith in the History of the Canon

- IV. **Mapping the Contours of Canon Consciousness**
 - a. Jesus, Paul, and the New Testament Authors
 - b. The Apostolic Fathers, the Apologists and the New Testament Apocrypha
 - c. The Emergence of the a Canon of the Pauline Epistles
 - d. The Emergence of the Fourfold Gospel Canon

- V. **The Canon Muratori and the Earliest New Testament Canon Lists**
 - a. The Authorship and Provenance of the Muratorian Fragment
 - b. Directions for Future Research
 - c. The Canon Lists of Origen, Victorinus of Pettau, and Eusebius

- VI. **Factors Contributing to the Formation of the Canon**
 - a. The Rise of the New Testament Commentary
 - b. Parchment, Persecution, and Politics

Part Two: The Theological Significance of the New Testament Canon

- VII. **Scripture, Canon, and the Word of God**
 - a. Foundations in Protestant Theologies
 - b. Canonical Criticism: Reading the New Testament as Canon
 - c. Church Authority and the Formation of the Canon: Toward Recovering the Church Fathers for Evangelical Theology

- VIII. **Concluding Reflections: The Future of the Evangelical Theology of Scripture**
 - a. Trajectories in the Evangelical Theology of Scripture